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# THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.

*Editor of "The Expositor"*

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

CHAPTERS XXI.—LII.

BY

W. H. BENNETT, M.A.

London

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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THE  
BOOK OF JEREMIAH  
CHAPTERS XXI.—LII.

BY  
W. H. BENNETT, M.A.

PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE  
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## P R E F A C E

THE present work deals primarily with Jeremiah xxi.—lii., thus forming a supplement to the volume of the *Expositor's Bible* on Jeremiah by the Rev. C. J. Ball, M.A. References to the earlier chapters are only introduced where they are necessary to illustrate and explain the later sections.

I regret that two important works, Prof. Skinner's *Ezekiel* in this series, and Cornill's *Jeremiah* in Dr. Haupt's *Sacred Books of the Old Testament*, were published too late to be used in the preparation of this volume.

I have again to acknowledge my indebtedness to the Rev. T. H. Darlow, M.A., for a careful reading and much valuable criticism of my MS.



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# CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

In the present stage of investigation of Old Testament Chronology, absolute accuracy cannot be claimed for such a table as the following. Hardly any, if any, of these dates are supported by a general consensus of opinion. On the other hand, the range of variation is, for the most part, not more than three or four years, and the table will furnish an approximately accurate idea of sequences and synchronisms. In other respects also the data admit of alternative interpretations, and the course of events is partly matter of theory—hence the occasional insertion of (?).

CLASSICAL SYNCHRONISMS	JUDAH AND JEREMIAH	ASSYRIA	EGYPT
Traditional date of the foundation of Rome, 753	<p style="text-align: center;">MANASSEH (?)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Esarhaddon, 681 Assurbanipal, 668</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">XXVIth Dynasty Psammetichus I., 666</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Jeremiah born, probably between 655 and 645 AMON, 640 JOSIAH, 638</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Last kings of Assyria, number and names uncertain, 626—607-6</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Psammetichus besieges Ashdod for twenty-nine years</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Habakkuk Zephaniah</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">BABYLON. Nabopolassar, 626</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center;">Publication of Deuteronomy, 621</p>		

CLASSICAL SYNCHRONISMS	JUDAH AND JEREMIAH	BABYLON	EGYPT
	<p>Josiah slain at Megiddo, 608            JEHOIAHAZ, 608            (xxii. 10-12, Ch. I.)            Deposed by Necho, who appoints            JEHOIAKIM, 608            (xxii. 13-19, xxxvi. 30, 31, VI.)            Jeremiah predicts ruin of Judah and is tried for blasphemy (xxvi., II.)</p> <p><i>FOURTH YEAR OF JEHOIAKIM, 605-4</i></p> <p>Nebuchadnezzar<sup>1</sup> advances into Syria, is suddenly recalled to Babylon—<i>before</i> subduing Judah (?)</p> <p>Baruch writes Jeremiah's prophecies in a roll, which is read successively to the people, the nobles, and Jehoiakim, and destroyed by the king (xxxvi., III.; xlv., V.)</p> <p>Nebuchadnezzar invades Judah (?), the Rechabites take refuge in Jerusalem (?), the Jews rebuked by their example (xxxv., IV.)</p> <p>Jehoiakim submits to Nebuchadnezzar, revolts after three years, is attacked by various "bands," but dies before Nebuchadnezzar arrives</p>	<p><i>FALL OF NINEVEH, 607-6</i></p> <p><i>BATTLE OF CARCHEMISH</i>            (xlvi., XVII.)</p> <p><b>Nebuchadnezzar,</b>            604</p>	<p><b>Necho, 612</b></p>

<sup>1</sup> For spelling see note, page 4

CLASSICAL SYNCHRONISMS	JUDAH AND JEREMIAH	BABYLON	EGYPT
<p>Solon's legisla- tion, 594</p>	<p>JEHOIACHIN, 597 (xxii. 20-30, VII.)</p> <p>Continues revolt, but surrenders to Nebuchadnezzar on his arrival; is deposed and carried to Babylon with many of his subjects. Nebuchadnezzar appoints</p> <p>ZEDEKIAH, 596</p> <p>Jeremiah attempts to keep Zedekiah loyal to Ncbuchadnezzar, and contends with priests and prophets who support Egyptian party (xxiii, xxiv, VIII.)</p> <p>Proposed confederation against Nebuchadnezzar denounced by Jeremiah, but supported by Hananiah; proposal abandoned; Hananiah dies (xxvii, xxviii, IX.), 593-2</p> <p>Controversy by letter with hostile prophets at Babylon (xxix, X.)</p> <p>Judah revolts, encouraged by Hophra. Jerusalem is besieged by Chaldeans. There being no prospect of relief by Egypt, Jeremiah regains his influence and pledges the people by covenant to release their slaves.</p> <p>On the news of Hophra's advance, the Chaldeans raise the siege; the Egyptian party again become supreme and annul the covenant (xxi. 1-10, xxxiv, xxxviii. 1-10, XI.)</p> <p>Jeremiah attempts to leave the city, is arrested and imprisoned</p>	<p>Ezekiel</p>	<p><b>Psammetichus II.,</b> 596</p> <p><b>Hophra, 591</b></p>

CLASSICAL SYNCHRONISMS	JUDAH AND JEREMIAH	BABYLON	EGYPT
<p>Pisistratus, 560-527</p>	<p>Hophra retreats into Egypt and the Chaldeans renew the siege (xxxvii. 11-21, xxxviii., xxxix. 15-18, XII.)</p> <p>While imprisoned Jeremiah buys his kinsman's inheritance (xxxii., XXX.)</p> <p><i>DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM, 586</i></p> <p>Jeremiah remains for a month a prisoner amongst the other captives. Nebuzaradan arrives; arranges for deportation of bulk of population; appoints Gedaliah governor of residue; releases Jeremiah, who elects to join Gedaliah at Mizpah. Gedaliah murdered. Jeremiah carried off, but rescued by Johanan (xxxix.-xli., li., XLIII.)</p> <p>Johanan, in spite of Jeremiah's protest, goes down to Egypt and takes Jeremiah with him (xlii., xliii., XIV.)</p> <p>Jews in Egypt hold festival in honour of Queen of Heaven. Ineffectual protest of Jeremiah (xliv., XV.)</p>	<p>Siege of Tyre</p>	<p>Amasis, 570</p> <p>Nebuchadnezzar invades Egypt, (?) 568</p> <p>Evil-Merodach, 561</p>
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<p style="padding-left: 40px;">“Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from amongst thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken.”—DEUT. xviii. 15</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“Jesus . . . asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah: and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”—MATT. xvi. 13, 14</p>		

BOOK I

*PERSONAL UTTERANCES AND NARRATIVES*



## CHAPTER I

### *INTRODUCTORY: <sup>1</sup> JEHOAHAZ*

xxii. 10-12.

“Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more.”—*JER.* xxii. 10.

**A**S the prophecies of Jeremiah are not arranged in the order in which they were delivered, there is no absolute chronological division between the first twenty chapters and those which follow. For the most part, however, chapters xxi.—lii. fall in or after the fourth year of Jehoiakim (B.C. 605). We will therefore briefly consider the situation at Jerusalem in this crisis. The period immediately preceding B.C. 605 somewhat resembles the era of the dissolution of the Roman Empire or of the Wars of the French Revolution. An old-established international system was breaking in pieces, and men were quite uncertain what form the new order would take. For centuries the futile assaults of the Pharaohs had only served to illustrate the stability of the Assyrian supremacy in Western Asia. Then in the last two decades of the seventh century B.C. the Assyrian Empire collapsed, like the Roman Empire under Honorius and his successors. It was as if by some swift succession of disasters modern France or Germany were to become

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Preface.

suddenly and permanently annihilated as a military power. For the moment, all the traditions and principles of European statesmanship would lose their meaning, and the shrewdest diplomatist would be entirely at fault. Men's reason would totter, their minds would lose their balance at the stupendous spectacle of so unparalleled a catastrophe. The wildest hopes would alternate with the extremity of fear; everything would seem possible to the conqueror.

Such was the situation in B.C. 605, to which our first great group of prophecies belongs. Two oppressors of Israel—Assyria and Egypt—had been struck down in rapid succession. When Nebuchadnezzar<sup>1</sup> was suddenly recalled to Babylon by the death of his father, the Jews would readily imagine that the Divine judgment had fallen upon Chaldea and its king. Sanguine prophets announced that Jehovah was about to deliver His people from all foreign dominion, and establish the supremacy of the Kingdom of God. Court and people would be equally possessed with patriotic hope and enthusiasm. Jehoiakim, it is true, was a nominee of Pharaoh Necho; but his gratitude would be far too slight to override the hopes and aspirations natural to a Prince of the House of David.

In Hezekiah's time, there had been an Egyptian

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<sup>1</sup> We know little of Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns. In 2 Kings xxiv. 1 we are told that Nebuchadnezzar "came up" in the days of Jehoiakim, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years. It is not clear whether Nebuchadnezzar "came up" immediately after the battle of Carchemish, or at a later time after his return to Babylon. In either case the impression made by his hasty departure from Syria would be the same. Cf. Cheyne, *Jeremiah* (Men of the Bible), p. 132. I call the Chaldean king Nebuchadnezzar—not Nebuchadnezzar—because the former has been an English household word for centuries.



and an Assyrian party at the court of Judah; the recent supremacy of Egypt had probably increased the number of her partisans. Assyria had disappeared, but her former adherents would retain their antipathy to Egypt, and their personal feuds with Jews of the opposite faction; they were as tools lying ready to any hand that cared to use them. When Babylon succeeded Assyria in the overlordship of Asia, she doubtless inherited the allegiance of the anti-Egyptian party in the various Syrian states. Jeremiah, like Isaiah, steadily opposed any dependence upon Egypt; it was probably by his advice that Josiah undertook his ill-fated expedition against Pharaoh Necho. The partisans of Egypt would be the prophet's enemies; and though Jeremiah never became a mere dependent and agent of Nebuchadnezzar, yet the friends of Babylon would be his friends, if only because her enemies were his enemies.

We are told in 2 Kings xxiii. 37 that Jehoiakim did evil in the sight of Jehovah according to all that his father had done. Whatever other sins may be implied by this condemnation, we certainly learn that the king favoured a corrupt form of the religion of Jehovah in opposition to the purer teaching which Jeremiah inherited from Isaiah.

When we turn to Jeremiah himself, the date "the fourth year of Jehoiakim" reminds us that by this time the prophet could look back upon a long and sad experience; he had been called in the thirteenth year of Josiah, some twenty-four years before. With what sometimes seems to our limited intelligence the strange irony of Providence, this lover of peace and quietness was called to deliver a message of ruin and condemnation, a message that could not fail to be

extremely offensive to most of his hearers, and to make him the object of bitter hostility.

Much of this Jeremiah must have anticipated, but there were some from whose position and character the prophet expected acceptance, even of the most unpalatable teaching of the Spirit of Jehovah. The personal vindictiveness with which priests and prophets repaid his loyalty to the Divine mission and his zeal for truth came to him with a shock of surprise and bewilderment, which was all the greater because his most determined persecutors were his sacerdotal kinsmen and neighbours at Anathoth. "Let us destroy the tree," they said, "with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered."<sup>1</sup>

He was not only repudiated by his clan, but also forbidden by Jehovah to seek consolation and sympathy in the closer ties of family life: "Thou shalt not take a wife, thou shalt have no sons or daughters."<sup>2</sup> Like Paul, it was good for Jeremiah "by reason of the present distress" to deny himself these blessings. He found some compensation in the fellowship of kindred souls at Jerusalem. We can well believe that, in those early days, he was acquainted with Zephaniah, and that they were associated with Hilkiyah and Shaphan and King Josiah in the publication of Deuteronomy and its recognition as the law of Israel. Later on Shaphan's son Ahikam protected Jeremiah when his life was in imminent danger.

The twelve years that intervened between Josiah's Reformation and his defeat at Megiddo were the happiest part of Jeremiah's ministry. It is not certain that any

<sup>1</sup> xi. 19.

<sup>2</sup> xvi. 2.

of the extant prophecies belong to this period. With Josiah on the throne and Deuteronomy accepted as the standard of the national life, the prophet felt absolved for a season from his mission to pluck up and break down, and perhaps began to indulge in hopes that the time had come to build and to plant. Yet it is difficult to believe that he had implicit confidence in the permanence of the Reformation or the influence of Deuteronomy. The silence of Isaiah and Jeremiah as to the ecclesiastical reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah stands in glaring contrast to the great importance attached to them by the Books of Kings and Chronicles. But, in any case, Jeremiah must have found life brighter and easier than in the reigns that followed. Probably, in these happier days, he was encouraged by the sympathy and devotion of disciples like Baruch and Ezekiel.

But Josiah's attempt to realise a Kingdom of God was short-lived; and, in a few months, Jeremiah saw the whole fabric swept away. The king was defeated and slain; and his religious policy was at once reversed either by a popular revolution or a court intrigue. The people of the land made Josiah's son Shallum king, under the name of Jehoahaz. This young prince of twenty-three only reigned three months, and was then deposed and carried into captivity by Pharaoh Necho; yet it is recorded of him, that he did evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his fathers had done.<sup>1</sup> He—or, more probably, his ministers, especially the queen-mother<sup>2</sup>—must have been in a hurry to undo Josiah's work. Jeremiah utters no condemnation of Jehoahaz; he merely declares that the young king will

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xxiii. 30-32.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. xxii. 26.

never return from his exile, and bids the people lament over his captivity as a more grievous fate than the death of Josiah :—

“Weep not for the dead,  
Neither lament over him :  
But weep sore for him that goeth into captivity ;  
For he shall return no more,  
Neither shall he behold his native land.”<sup>1</sup>

Ezekiel adds admiration to sympathy : Jehoahaz was a young lion skilled to catch the prey, he devoured men, the nations heard of him, he was taken in their pit, and they brought him with hooks into the land of Egypt.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah and Ezekiel could not but feel some tenderness towards the son of Josiah ; and probably they had faith in his personal character, and believed that in time he would shake off the yoke of evil counsellors and follow in his father’s footsteps. But any such hopes were promptly disappointed by Pharaoh Necho, and Jeremiah’s spirit bowed beneath a new burden as he saw his country completely subservient to the dreaded influence of Egypt.

Thus, at the time when we take up the narrative, the government was in the hands of the party hostile to Jeremiah, and the king, Jehoiakim, seems to have been his personal enemy. Jeremiah himself was somewhere between forty and fifty years old, a solitary man without wife or child. His awful mission as the herald of ruin clouded his spirit with inevitable gloom. Men resented the stern sadness of his words and looks, and turned from him with aversion and dislike. His unpopularity had made him somewhat harsh ; for intolerance is twice curst, in that it inoculates its victims with the virus

<sup>1</sup> xxii. 10-12.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. xix. 3, 4.

of its own bitterness. His hopes and illusions lay behind him ; he could only watch with melancholy pity the eager excitement of these stirring times. If he came across some group busily discussing the rout of the Egyptians at Carchemish, or the report that Nebuchadnezzar was posting in hot haste to Babylon, and wondering as to all that this might mean for Judah, his countrymen would turn to look with contemptuous curiosity at the bitter, disappointed man who had had his chance and failed, and now grudged them their prospect of renewed happiness and prosperity. Nevertheless Jeremiah's greatest work still lay before him. 7 Jerusalem was past saving ; but more was at stake than the existence of Judah and its capital. But for Jeremiah the religion of Jehovah might have perished with His Chosen People. It was his mission to save Revelation from the wreck of Israel. Humanly speaking, the religious future of the world depended upon this stern solitary prophet.

## CHAPTER II

### *A TRIAL FOR HERESY*

-xxvi. : cf. vii.—x.

“When Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that Jehovah had commanded him to speak unto all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold on him, saying, Thou shalt surely die.”—*JER.* xxvi. 8.

THE date of this incident is given, somewhat vaguely, as the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim. It was, therefore, earlier than B.C. 605, the point reached in the previous chapter. Jeremiah could offer no political resistance to Jehoiakim and his Egyptian suzerain; yet it was impossible for him to allow Josiah's policy to be reversed without a protest. Moreover, something, perhaps much, might yet be saved for Jehovah. The king, with his court and prophets and priests, was not everything. Jeremiah was only concerned with sanctuaries, ritual, and priesthoods as means to an end. For him the most important result of the work he had shared with Josiah was a pure and holy life for the nation and individuals. Renan—in some passages, for he is not always consistent—is inclined to minimise the significance of the change from Josiah to Jehoiakim; in fact, he writes very much as a cavalier might have done of the change from Cromwell to Charles II. Both the Jewish kings worshipped Jehovah, each in his own fashion: Josiah was inclined to a narrow

puritan severity of a life ; Jehoiakim was a liberal, practical man of the world. Probably this is a fair modern equivalent of the current estimate of the kings and their policy, especially on the part of Jehoiakim's friends ; but then, as unhappily still in some quarters, " narrow puritan severity " was a convenient designation for a decent and honourable life, for a scrupulous and self-denying care for the welfare of others. Jeremiah dreaded a relapse into the old half-heathen ideas that Jehovah would be pleased with homage and service that satisfied Baal, Moloch, and Chemosh. Such a relapse would lower the ethical standard, and corrupt or even destroy any beginnings of spiritual life. Our English Restoration is an object-lesson as to the immoral effects of political and ecclesiastical reaction ; if such things were done in sober England, what must have been possible to hot Eastern blood ! In protesting against the attitude of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah would also seek to save the people from the evil effects of the king's policy. He knew from his own experience that a subject might trust and serve God with his whole heart, even when the king was false to Jehovah. What was possible for him was possible for others. He understood his countrymen too well to expect that the nation would continue to advance in paths of righteousness which its leaders and teachers had forsaken ; but, scattered here and there through the mass of the people, was Isaiah's remnant, the seed of the New Israel, men and women to whom the Revelation of Jehovah had been the beginning of a higher life. He would not leave them without a word of counsel and encouragement.

At the command of Jehovah, Jeremiah appeared before the concourse of Jews, assembled at the Temple



for some great fast or festival. No feast is expressly mentioned, but he is charged to address "all the cities of Judah"<sup>1</sup>; *all* the outlying population would only meet at the Temple on some specially holy day. Such an occasion would naturally be chosen by Jeremiah for his deliverance, just as Christ availed Himself of the opportunities offered by the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, just as modern philanthropists seek to find a place for their favourite topics on the platform of M<sup>ay</sup> Meetings.

→ The prophet was to stand in the court of the Temple and repeat once more to the Jews his message of warning and judgment, "all that I have charged thee to speak unto them, thou shalt not keep back a single word." The substance of this address is found in the various prophecies which expose the sin and predict the ruin of Judah. They have been dealt with in the former volume<sup>2</sup> on Jeremiah in this series, and are also referred to in Book III.

→ According to the universal principle of Hebrew prophecy, the predictions of ruin were conditional; they were still coupled with the offer of pardon to repentance, and Jehovah did not forbid his prophet to cherish a lingering hope that "perchance they may hearken and turn every one from his evil way, so that I may repent Me of the evil I purpose to inflict upon them because of the evil of their doings." Probably the phrase "every one from his evil way" is primarily

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<sup>1</sup> The expression is curious; it usually means all the cities of Judah, except Jerusalem; the LXX. reading varies between "all the Jews" and "all Judah."

<sup>2</sup> See especially the exposition of chaps. vii.—x., which are often supposed to be a reproduction of Jeremiah's utterance on this occasion.



collective rather than individual, and is intended to describe a national reformation, which would embrace all the individual citizens; but the actual words suggest another truth, which must also have been in Jeremiah's mind. The nation is, after all, an aggregate of men and women; there can be no national reformation, except through the repentance and amendment of individuals. ←

Jeremiah's audience, it must be observed, consisted of worshippers on the way to the Temple, and would correspond to an ordinary congregation of church-goers, rather than to the casual crowd gathered round a street preacher, or to the throngs of miners and labourers who listened to Whitfield and Wesley. As an acknowledged prophet, he was well within his rights in expecting a hearing from the attendants at the feast, and men would be curious to see and hear one who had been the dominant influence in Judah during the reign of Josiah. Moreover, in the absence of evening newspapers and shop-windows, a prophet was too exciting a distraction to be lightly neglected. From Jehovah's charge to speak all that He had commanded him to speak and not to keep back a word, we may assume that Jeremiah's discourse was long: it was also avowedly an old sermon<sup>1</sup>; most of his audience had heard it before, all of them were quite familiar with its main topics. They listened in the various moods of a modern congregation "sitting under" a distinguished preacher. Jeremiah's friends and disciples welcomed the ideas and phrases that had become part of their spiritual life. Many enjoyed the speaker's earnestness and eloquence, without troubling them-

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew apparently implies that the discourse was a repetition of former prophecies.

selves about the ideas at all. There was nothing specially startling about the well-known threats and warnings; they had become

“A tale of little meaning tho’ the words were strong.”

Men hardened their hearts against inspired prophets as easily as they do against the most pathetic appeals of modern evangelists. Mingled with the crowd were Jeremiah’s professional rivals, who detested both him and his teaching—priests who regarded him as a traitor to his own caste, prophets who envied his superior gifts and his force of passionate feeling. To these almost every word he uttered was offensive, but for a while there was nothing that roused them to very vehement anger. He was allowed to finish what he had to say, “to make an end of speaking all that Jehovah had commanded him.” But in this peroration he had insisted on a subject that stung the indifferent into resentment and roused the priests and prophets to fury.

“Go ye now unto My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith Jehovah, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not: therefore will I do unto the house, that is called by My name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> vii. 12-14. Even if chaps. vii.—x. are not a report of Jeremiah’s discourse on this occasion, the few lines in xxvi. are evidently a mere summary, and vii. will best indicate the substance of his utterance. The verses quoted occur towards the beginning of vii.—x.,

The Ephraimite sanctuary of Shiloh, long the home of the Ark and its priesthood, had been overthrown in some national catastrophe. Apparently when it was destroyed it was no mere tent, but a substantial building of stone, and its ruins remained as a permanent monument of the fugitive glory of even the most sacred shrine.

The very presence of his audience in the place where they were met showed their reverence for the Temple: the priests were naturally devotees of their own shrine; of the prophets Jeremiah himself had said, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule in accordance with their teaching."<sup>1</sup> Can we wonder that "the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold on him, saying, Thou shalt surely die"? For the moment there was an appearance of religious unity in Jerusalem; the priests, the prophets, and the pious laity on one side, and only the solitary heretic on the other. It was, though on a small scale, as if the obnoxious teaching of some nineteenth-century prophet of God had given an unexpected stimulus to the movement for Christian reunion; as if cardinals and bishops, chairmen of unions, presidents of conferences, moderators of assemblies, with great preachers and distinguished laymen, united to hold monster meetings and denounce the Divine message as heresy and blasphemy. In like manner Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians found a basis of common action in their hatred of Christ, and Pilate and Herod were reconciled by His cross.

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but from the emphatic reference to Shiloh in the brief abstract in xxvi., Jeremiah must have dwelt on this topic, and the fact that the outburst followed his conclusion suggests that he reserved this subject for his peroration.

<sup>1</sup> v. 31.

Meanwhile the crowd was increasing: new worshippers were arriving, and others as they left the Temple were attracted to the scene of the disturbance. Doubtless too the mob, always at the service of persecutors, hurried up in hope of finding opportunities for mischief and violence. Some six and a half centuries later, history repeated itself on the same spot, when the Asiatic Jews saw Paul in the Temple and "laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people and the law and this place, . . . and all the city was moved, and the people ran together and laid hold on Paul."<sup>1</sup>

Our narrative, as it stands, is apparently incomplete: we find Jeremiah before the tribunal of the princes, but we are not told how he came there; whether the civil authorities intervened to protect him, as Claudius Lysias came down with his soldiers and centurions and rescued Paul, or whether Jeremiah's enemies observed legal forms, as Annas and Caiaphas did when they arrested Christ. But, in any case, "the princes of Judah, when they heard these things, came up from the palace into the Temple, and took their seats as judges at the entry of the new gate of the Temple." The "princes of Judah" play a conspicuous part in the last period of the Jewish monarchy: we have little definite information about them, and are left to conjecture that they were an aristocratic oligarchy or an official clique, or both; but it is clear that they were a dominant force in the state, with recognised constitutional status, and that they often controlled the king himself. We are also ignorant as to the "new

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<sup>1</sup> Acts xxi. 27-30.

gate"; it may possibly be the upper gate built by Jotham<sup>1</sup> about a hundred and fifty years earlier.

Before these judges, Jeremiah's ecclesiastical accusers brought a formal charge; they said, almost in the very words which the high priest and the Sanhedrin used of Christ, "This man is worthy of death, for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears"—*i.e.* when he said, "This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without inhabitant." Such accusations have been always on the lips of those who have denounced Christ and His disciples as heretics. One charge against Himself was that He said, "I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another that is made without hands."<sup>2</sup> Stephen was accused of speaking incessantly against the Temple and the Law, and teaching that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the Temple and change the customs handed down from Moses. When he asserted that "the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands," the impatience of his audience compelled him to bring his defence to an abrupt conclusion.<sup>3</sup> Of Paul we have already spoken.

How was it that these priests and prophets thought that their princes might be induced to condemn Jeremiah to death for predicting the destruction of the Temple? A prophet would not run much risk nowadays by announcing that St. Paul's should be made like Stonehenge, or St. Peter's like the Parthenon. Expositors of Daniel and the Apocalypse habitually fix the end of the world a few years in advance of

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xv. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xiv. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Acts vi. 13, 14, vii. 48.

the date at which they write, and yet they do not incur any appreciable unpopularity. It is true that Jeremiah's accusers were a little afraid that his predictions might be fulfilled, and the most bitter persecutors are those who have a lurking dread that their victims are right, while they themselves are wrong. But such fears could not very well be evidence or argument against Jeremiah before any court of law.

In order to realise the situation we must consider the place which the Temple held in the hopes and affections of the Jews. They had always been proud of their royal sanctuary at Jerusalem, but within the last hundred and fifty years it had acquired a unique importance for the religion of Israel. First Hezekiah, and then Josiah, had taken away the other high places and altars at which Jehovah was worshipped, and had said to Judah and Jerusalem, "Ye shall worship before this altar."<sup>1</sup> Doubtless the kings were following the advice of Isaiah and Jeremiah. These prophets were anxious to abolish the abuses of the local sanctuaries, which were a continual incentive to an extravagant and corrupt ritual. Yet they did not intend to assign any supreme importance to a priestly caste or a consecrated building. Certainly for them the hope of Israel and the assurance of its salvation did not consist in cedar and hewn stones, in silver and gold. And yet the unique position given to the Temple inevitably became the starting-point for fresh superstition. Once Jehovah could be worshipped not only at Jerusalem, but at Beersheba and Bethel and many other places where He had chosen to set His name. Even then, it was felt that the Divine Presence must afford some

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xviii. 4, xxiii. ; Isa. xxxvi. 7.

protection for His dwelling-places. But now that Jehovah dwelt nowhere else but at Jerusalem, and only accepted the worship of His people at this single shrine, how could any one doubt that He would protect His Temple and His Holy City against all enemies, even the most formidable? Had He not done so already?

When Hezekiah abolished the high places, did not Jehovah set the seal of approval upon his policy by destroying the army of Sennacherib? Was not this great deliverance wrought to guard the Temple against desecration and destruction, and would not Jehovah work out a like salvation in any future time of danger? The destruction of Sennacherib was essential to the religious future of Israel and of mankind; but it had a very mingled influence upon the generations immediately following. They were like a man who has won a great prize in a lottery, or who has, quite unexpectedly, come into an immense inheritance. They ignored the unwelcome thought that the Divine protection depended on spiritual and moral conditions, and they clung to the superstitious faith that at any moment, even in the last extremity of danger and at the eleventh hour, Jehovah might, nay, even *must*, intervene. The priests and the inhabitants of Jerusalem could look on with comparative composure while the country was ravaged, and the outlying towns were taken and pillaged; Jerusalem itself might seem on the verge of falling into the hands of the enemy, but they still trusted in their Palladium. Jerusalem could not perish, because it contained the one sanctuary of Jehovah; they sought to silence their own fears and to drown the warning voice of the prophet by vociferating their watchword: "The Temple of Jehovah! the Temple



of Jehovah! The Temple of Jehovah is in our midst!"<sup>1</sup>

In prosperous times a nation may forget its Palladium, and may tolerate doubts as to its efficacy; but the strength of the Jews was broken, their resources were exhausted, and they were clinging in an agony of conflicting hopes and fears to their faith in the inviolability of the Temple. To destroy their confidence was like snatching away a plank from a drowning man. When Jeremiah made the attempt, they struck back with the fierce energy of despair. It does not seem that at this time the city was in any immediate danger; the incident rather falls in the period of quiet submission to Pharaoh Necho that preceded the battle of Carchemish. But the disaster of Megiddo was fresh in men's memories, and in the unsettled state of Eastern Asia no one knew how soon some other invader might advance against the city. On the other hand, in the quiet interval, hopes began to revive, and men were incensed when the prophet made haste to nip these hopes in the bud, all the more so because their excited anticipations of future glory had so little solid basis. Jeremiah's appeal to the ill-omened precedent of Shiloh naturally roused the sanguine and despondent alike into frenzy.

Jeremiah's defence was simple and direct: "Jehovah sent me to prophesy all that ye have heard against this house and against this city. Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and hearken unto the voice of Jehovah your God, that He may repent Him of the evil that He hath spoken against you. As for me, behold, I am in your hands: do unto me as it seems

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<sup>1</sup> vii. 4.



good and right unto you. Only know assuredly that, if ye put me to death, ye will bring the guilt of innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city and its inhabitants: for of a truth Jehovah sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears." There is one curious feature in this defence. Jeremiah contemplates the possibility of two distinct acts of wickedness on the part of his persecutors: they may turn a deaf ear to his appeal that they should repent and reform, and their obstinacy will incur all the chastisements which Jeremiah had threatened; they may also put him to death and incur additional guilt. Scoffers might reply that his previous threats were so awful and comprehensive that they left no room for any addition to the punishment of the impenitent. Sinners sometimes find a grim comfort in the depth of their wickedness; their case is so bad that it cannot be made worse, they may now indulge their evil propensities with a kind of impunity. But Jeremiah's prophetic insight made him anxious to save his countrymen from further sin, even in their impenitence; the Divine discrimination is not taxed beyond its capabilities even by the extremity of human wickedness.

But to return to the main feature in Jeremiah's defence. His accusers' contention was that his teaching was so utterly blasphemous, so entirely opposed to every tradition and principle of true religion—or, as we should say, so much at variance with all orthodoxy—that it could not be a word of Jehovah. Jeremiah does not attempt to discuss the relation of his teaching to the possible limits of Jewish orthodoxy. He bases his defence on the bare assertion of his prophetic mission—Jehovah had sent him. He assumes that there is no room for evidence or discussion; it is

a question of the relative authority of Jeremiah and his accusers, whether he or they had the better right to speak for God. The immediate result seemed to justify him in this attitude. He was no obscure novice, seeking for the first time to establish his right to speak in the Divine name. The princes and people had been accustomed for twenty years to listen to him, as to the most fully acknowledged mouthpiece of Heaven; they could not shake off their accustomed feeling of deference, and once more succumbed to the spell of his fervid and commanding personality. “Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and the prophets, This man is not worthy of death; for he hath spoken to us in the name of Jehovah our God.” For the moment the people were won over and the princes convinced; but priests and prophets were not so easily influenced by inspired utterances; some of these probably thought that they had an inspiration of their own, and their professional experience made them callous.

At this point again the sequence of events is not clear; possibly the account was compiled from the imperfect recollections of more than one of the spectators. The pronouncement of the princes and the people seems, at first sight, a formal acquittal that should have ended the trial, and left no room for the subsequent intervention of “certain of the elders,” otherwise the trial seems to have come to no definite conclusion, and the incident simply terminated in the personal protection given to Jeremiah by Ahikam ben Shaphan. Possibly, however, the tribunal of the princes was not governed by any strict rules of procedure; and the force of the argument used by the elders does not depend on the exact stage of the trial at which it was introduced.

Either Jeremiah was not entirely successful in his attempt to get the matter disposed of on the sole ground of his own prophetic authority, or else the elders were anxious to secure weight and finality for the acquittal, by bringing forward arguments in its support. The elders were an ancient Israelite institution, and probably still represented the patriarchal side of the national life; nothing is said as to their relation to the princes, and this might not be very clearly defined. The elders appealed, by way of precedent, to an otherwise unrecorded incident of the reign of Hezekiah. Micah the Morasthite had uttered similar threats against Jerusalem and the Temple: "Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."<sup>1</sup> But Hezekiah and his people, instead of slaying Micah, had repented, and the city had been spared. They evidently wished that the precedent could be wholly followed in the present instance; but, at any rate, it was clear that one of the most honoured and successful of the kings of Judah had accepted a threat against the Temple as a message from Jehovah. Therefore the mere fact that Jeremiah had uttered such a threat was certainly not *primâ facie* evidence that he was a false prophet. We are not told how this argument was received, but the writer of the chapter, possibly Baruch, does not attribute Jeremiah's escape either to his acquittal by the princes or to the reasoning of the elders. The people apparently changed sides once more, like the common people in the New Testament, who heard Christ gladly

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<sup>1</sup> Micah iii. 12. As the quotation exactly agrees with the verse in our extant Book of Micah, we may suppose that the elders were acquainted with his prophecies in writing.

and with equal enthusiasm clamoured for His crucifixion. At the end of the chapter we find them eager to have the prophet delivered into their hands that they may put him to death. Apparently the prophets and priests, having brought matters into this satisfactory position, had retired from the scene of action; the heretic was to be delivered over to the secular arm. The princes, like Pilate, seemed inclined to yield to popular pressure; but Ahikam, a son of the Shaphan who had to do with the finding of Deuteronomy, stood by Jeremiah, as John of Gaunt stood by Wyclif, and the Protestant Princes by Luther, and the magistrates of Geneva by Calvin; and Jeremiah could say with the Psalmist:—

“I have heard the defaming of many,  
 Terror on every side:  
 While they took counsel together against me,  
 They devised to take away my life.  
 But I trusted in Thee, O Jehovah:  
 I said, Thou art my God.  
 My times are in Thy hand:  
 Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them  
 that persecute me.

Let the lying lips be dumb,  
 Which speak against the righteous insolently,  
 With pride and contempt.  
 Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up  
 for them that fear Thee,  
 Which Thou hast wrought for them that put their trust in  
 Thee, before the sons of men.”<sup>1</sup>

We have here an early and rudimentary example of religious toleration, of the willingness, however reluctant,

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm xxxi. 13-15, 18, 19. The Psalm is sometimes ascribed to Jeremiah, because it can be so readily applied to this incident. The reader will recognise his characteristic phrase “Terror on every side” (Magor-missabib).

to hear as a possible Divine message unpalatable teaching, at variance with current theology; we see too the fountain-head of that freedom which since has "broadened down from precedent to precedent."

But unfortunately no precedent can bind succeeding generations, and both Judaism and Christianity have sinned grievously against the lesson of this chapter. Jehoiakim himself soon broke through the feeble restraint of this new-born tolerance. The writer adds an incident that must have happened somewhat later,<sup>1</sup> to show how real was Jeremiah's danger, and how transient was the liberal mood of the authorities. A certain Uriah ben Shemaiah of Kirjath Jearim had the courage to follow in Jeremiah's footsteps and speak against the city "according to all that Jeremiah had said." With the usual meanness of persecutors, Jehoiakim and his captains and princes vented upon this obscure prophet the ill-will which they had not dared to indulge in the case of Jeremiah, with his commanding personality and influential friends. Uriah fled into Egypt, but was brought back and slain, and his body cast out unburied into the common cemetery. We can understand Jeremiah's fierce and bitter indignation against the city where such things were possible.

This chapter is so full of suggestive teaching that we can only touch upon two or three of its more obvious lessons. The dogma which shaped the charge

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<sup>1</sup> This incident cannot be part of the speech of the elders; it would only have told against the point they were trying to make. The various phases—prophesy, persecution, flight, capture, and execution—must have taken some time, and can scarcely have preceded Jeremiah's utterance "at the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim."

against Jeremiah and caused the martyrdom of Uriah was the inviolability of the Temple and the Holy City. This dogma was a perversion of the teaching of Isaiah, and especially of Jeremiah himself,<sup>1</sup> which assigned a unique position to the Temple in the religion of Israel. The carnal man shows a fatal ingenuity in sucking poison out of the most wholesome truth. He is always eager to discover that something external, material, physical, concrete—some building, organisation, ceremony, or form of words—is a fundamental basis of the faith and essential to salvation. If Jeremiah had died with Josiah, the “priests and prophets” would doubtless have quoted his authority against Uriah. The teaching of Christ and His apostles, of Luther and Calvin and their fellow-reformers, has often been twisted and forged into weapons to be used against their true followers. We are often tempted in the interest of our favourite views to lay undue stress on secondary and accidental statements of great teachers. We fail to keep the due proportion of truth which they themselves observed, and in applying their precepts to new problems we sacrifice the kernel and save the husk. The warning of Jeremiah’s persecutors might often “give us pause.” We need not be surprised at finding priests and prophets eager and interested champions of a perversion of revealed truth. Ecclesiastical office does not necessarily confer any inspiration from above. The hereditary priest follows the traditions of his caste, and even the prophet may become the mouthpiece of the passions and prejudices of those who accept and applaud him. When men will not endure sound doctrine, they heap to themselves

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<sup>1</sup> Assuming his sympathy with Deuteronomy.

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teachers after their own lusts; having itching ears, they turn away their ears from the truth and turn unto fables.<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah's experience shows that even an apparent consensus of clerical opinion is not always to be trusted. The history of councils and synods is stained by many foul and shameful blots; it was the Œcumenical Council at Constance that burnt Huss, and most Churches have found themselves, at some time or other, engaged in building the tombs of the prophets whom their own officials had stoned in days gone by. We forget that *Athanasius contra mundum* implies also *Athanasius contra ecclesiam*.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 3.



## CHAPTER III

### *THE ROLL*

xxxvi.

“Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee.”—JER. xxxvi. 2.

THE incidents which form so large a proportion of the contents of our book do not make up a connected narrative; they are merely a series of detached pictures: we can only conjecture the doings and experiences of Jeremiah during the intervals. Chapter xxvi. leaves him still exposed to the persistent hostility of the priests and prophets, who had apparently succeeded in once more directing popular feeling against their antagonist. At the same time, though the princes were not ill-disposed towards him, they were not inclined to resist the strong pressure brought to bear upon them. Probably the attitude of the populace varied from time to time, according to the presence among them of the friends or enemies of the prophet; and, in the same way, we cannot think of “the princes” as a united body, governed by a single impulse. The action of this group of notables might be determined by the accidental preponderance of one or other of two opposing parties. Jeremiah’s only real assurance of safety lay in the personal protection extended to him by Ahikam ben Shaphan. Doubtless other princes



associated themselves with Ahikam in his friendly action on behalf of the prophet.

Under these circumstances, Jeremiah would find it necessary to restrict his activity. Utter indifference to danger was one of the most ordinary characteristics of Hebrew prophets, and Jeremiah was certainly not wanting in the desperate courage which may be found in any Mohammedan dervish. At the same time he was far too practical, too free from morbid self-consciousness, to court martyrdom for its own sake. If he had presented himself again in the Temple when it was crowded with worshippers, his life might have been taken in a popular tumult, while his mission was still only half accomplished. Possibly his priestly enemies had found means to exclude him from the sacred precincts.

Man's extremity was God's opportunity; this temporary and partial silencing of Jeremiah led to a new departure, which made the influence of his teaching more extensive and permanent. He was commanded to commit his prophecies to writing. The restriction of his active ministry was to bear rich fruit, like Paul's imprisonment, and Athanasius' exile, and Luther's sojourn in the Wartburg. A short time since there was great danger that Jeremiah and the Divine message entrusted to him would perish together. He did not know how soon he might become once more the mark of popular fury, nor whether Ahikam would still be able to protect him. The roll of the book could speak even if he were put to death.

But Jeremiah was not thinking chiefly about what would become of his teaching if he himself perished. He had an immediate and particular end in view. His tenacious persistence was not to be baffled by the

prospect of mob violence, or by exclusion from the most favourable vantage-ground. Renan is fond of comparing the prophets to modern journalists; and this incident is an early and striking instance of the substitution of pen, ink, and paper for the orator's tribune. Perhaps the closest modern parallel is that of the speaker who is howled down at a public meeting and hands his manuscript to the reporters.

In the record of the Divine command to Jeremiah, there is no express statement as to what was to be done with the roll; but as the object of writing it was that "perchance the house of Judah might hear and repent," it is evident that from the first it was intended to be read to the people.

There is considerable difference of opinion<sup>1</sup> as to the contents of the roll. They are described as: "All that I have spoken unto thee concerning<sup>2</sup> Jerusalem<sup>3</sup> and Judah, and all the nations, since I (first) spake unto thee, from the time of Josiah until now." At first sight this would seem to include all previous utterances, and therefore all the extant prophecies of a date earlier than B.C. 605, *i.e.* those contained in chapters i.—xii. and some portions of xiv.—xx. (we cannot determine which with any exactness), and probably most of those dated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, *i.e.* xxv. and parts of xlv.—xlix. Cheyne,<sup>4</sup> however, holds that the roll simply contained the striking and comprehensive prophecy in chapter xxv. The whole series of chapters

<sup>1</sup> See Cheyne, Giesebrecht, Orelli, etc.

<sup>2</sup> R.V. "against." The Hebrew is ambiguous.

<sup>3</sup> So Septuagint. The Hebrew text has Israel, which is a less accurate description of the prophecies, and is less relevant to this particular occasion.

<sup>4</sup> *Jeremiah* (Men of the Bible), p. 132.

might very well be described as dealing with Jerusalem, Judah, and the nations; but at the same time xxv. might be considered equivalent, by way of summary, to all that had been spoken on these subjects. From various considerations which will appear as we proceed with the narrative, it seems probable that the larger estimate is the more correct, *i.e.* that the roll contained a large fraction of our Book of Jeremiah, and not merely one or two chapters. We need not, however, suppose that every previous utterance of the prophet, even though still extant, must have been included in the roll; the "all" would of course be understood to be conditioned by relevancy; and the narratives of various incidents are obviously not part of what Jehovah had spoken.

Jeremiah dictated his prophecies, as St. Paul did his epistles, to an amanuensis; he called his disciple Baruch<sup>1</sup> ben Neriah, and dictated to him "all that Jehovah had spoken, upon a book, in the form of a roll."

It seems clear that, as in xxvi., the narrative does not exactly follow the order of events,<sup>2</sup> and that verse 9, which records the proclamation of a fast in the ninth month of Jehoiakim's fifth year, should be read before verse 5, which begins the account of the circumstances leading up to the actual reading of the roll. We are not told in what month of Jehoiakim's fourth year Jeremiah received this command to write his prophecies in a roll, but as they were not read till the ninth month of the fifth year, there must have been an interval of at least ten months or a year between the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chap. V. on "Baruch."

<sup>2</sup> Verses 5-8 seem to be a brief alternative account to 9-26.

Divine command and the reading by Baruch. We can scarcely suppose that all or nearly all this delay was caused by Jeremiah and Baruch's waiting for a suitable occasion. The long interval suggests that the dictation took some time, and that therefore the roll was somewhat voluminous in its contents, and that it was carefully compiled, not without a certain amount of revision.

When the manuscript was ready, its authors had to determine the right time at which to read it; they found their desired opportunity in the fast proclaimed in the ninth month. This was evidently an extraordinary fast, appointed in view of some pressing danger; and, in the year following the battle of Carchemish, this would naturally be the advance of Nebuchadnezzar. As our incident took place in the depth of winter, the months must be reckoned according to the Babylonian year, which began in April; and the ninth month, Kisleu, would roughly correspond to our December. The dreaded invasion would be looked for early in the following spring, "at the time when kings go out to battle."<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah does not seem to have absolutely determined from the first that the reading of the roll by Baruch was to be a substitute for his own presence. He had probably hoped that some change for the better in the situation might justify his appearance before a great gathering in the Temple. But when the time came he was "hindered"<sup>2</sup>—we are not told how—and could not go into the Temple. He may

<sup>1</sup> 1 Chron. xx. i.

<sup>2</sup> 'ĀCŪR: A.V., R.V., "shut up"; R.V. margin, "restrained." The term is used in xxxiii. 1, xxxix. 15, in the sense of "imprisoned," but here Jeremiah appears to be at liberty. The phrase 'ĀCŪR W ĀZŪBH, A.V. "shut up or left" (Deut. xxxii. 36, etc.), has been

have been restrained by his own prudence, or dissuaded by his friends, like Paul when he would have faced the mob in the theatre at Ephesus ; the hindrance may have been some ban under which he had been placed by the priesthood, or it may have been some unexpected illness, or legal uncleanness, or some other passing accident, such as Providence often uses to protect its soldiers till their warfare is accomplished.

Accordingly it was Baruch who went up to the Temple. Though he is said to have read the book "in the ears of all the people," he does not seem to have challenged universal attention as openly as Jeremiah had done ; he did not stand forth in the court of the Temple,<sup>1</sup> but betook himself to the "chamber" of the scribe,<sup>2</sup> or secretary of state, Gemariah ben Shaphan, the brother of Jeremiah's protector Ahikam. This chamber would be one of the cells built round the upper court, from which the "new gate"<sup>3</sup> led into an inner court of the Temple. Thus Baruch placed himself formally under the protection of the owner of the apartment, and any violence offered to him would have been resented and avenged by this powerful noble with his kinsmen and allies. Jeremiah's disciple and representative took his seat at the door of the chamber, and, in full view of the crowds who passed and

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understood, those under the restraints imposed upon ceremonial uncleanness and those free from these restraints, *i.e.* everybody ; the same meaning has been given to 'ĀĈÛR here.

<sup>1</sup> xxvi. 2.

<sup>2</sup> So Cheyne ; the Hebrew does not make it clear whether the title "scribe" refers to the father or the son. Giesebrecht understands it of Shaphan, who appears as scribe in 2 Kings xxii. 8. He points out that in verse 20 Elishama is called the scribe, but we cannot assume that the title was limited to a single officer of state.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. xxvi. 10.



repassed through the new gate, opened his roll and began to read aloud from its contents. His reading was yet another repetition of the exhortations, warnings, and threats which Jeremiah had rehearsed on the feast day when he spake to the people "all that Jehovah had commanded him"; and still both Jehovah and His prophet promised deliverance as the reward of repentance. Evidently the head and front of the nation's offence had been no open desertion of Jehovah for idols, else His servants would not have selected for their audience His enthusiastic worshippers as they thronged to His Temple. The fast itself might have seemed a token of penitence, but it was not accepted by Jeremiah, or put forward by the people, as a reason why the prophecies of ruin should not be fulfilled. No one offers the very natural plea: "In this fast we are humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God, we are confessing our sins, and consecrating ourselves afresh to service of Jehovah. What more does He expect of us? Why does He still withhold His mercy and forgiveness? Wherefore have we fasted, and Thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and Thou takest no knowledge?" Such a plea would probably have received an answer similar to that given by one of Jeremiah's successors: "Behold, in the day of your fast ye find your own pleasure, and oppress all your labourers. Behold, ye fast for strife and contention, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye fast not this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I have chosen? the day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and a day acceptable to Jehovah?"

“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy healing shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of Jehovah shall be thy rearward.”<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah's opponents did not grudge Jehovah His burnt-offerings and calves of a year old; He was welcome to thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil. They were even willing to give their firstborn for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul; but they were not prepared “to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God.”<sup>2</sup>

We are not told how Jeremiah and the priests and prophets formulated the points at issue between them, which were so thoroughly and universally understood that the record takes them for granted. Possibly Jeremiah contended for the recognition of Deuteronomy, with its lofty ideals of pure religion and a humanitarian order of society. But, in any case, these incidents were an early phase of the age-long struggle of the prophets of God against the popular attempt to make ritual and sensuous emotion into excuses for ignoring morality, and to offer the cheap sacrifice of a few unforbidden pleasures, rather than surrender the greed of grain, the lust of power, and the sweetness of revenge.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lviii. 3-8.

<sup>2</sup> Micah vi. 6-8.



When the multitudes caught the sound of Baruch's voice and saw him sitting in the doorway of Gemariah's chamber, they knew exactly what they would hear.

To them he was almost as antagonistic as a Protestant evangelist would be to the worshippers at some great Romanist feast; or perhaps we might find a closer parallel in a Low Church bishop addressing a ritualistic audience. For the hearts of these hearers were not steeled by the consciousness of any formal schism. Baruch and the great prophet whom he represented did not stand outside the recognised limits of Divine inspiration. While the priests and prophets and their adherents repudiated his teaching as heretical, they were still haunted by the fear that, at any rate, his threats might have some Divine authority. Apart from all theology, the prophet of evil always finds an ally in the nervous fears and guilty conscience of his hearer.

The feelings of the people would be similar to those with which they had heard the same threats against Judah, the city and the Temple, from Jeremiah himself. But the excitement aroused by the defeat of Pharaoh and the hasty return of Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon had died away. The imminence of a new invasion made it evident that this had not been the Divine deliverance of Judah. The people were cowed by what must have seemed to many the approaching fulfilments of former threatenings; the ritual of a fast was in itself depressing; so that they had little spirit to resent the message of doom. Perhaps too there was less to resent: the prophecies were the same, but Baruch may have been less unpopular than Jeremiah, and his reading would be tame and ineffective compared to the fiery eloquence of his master. Moreover the powerful protection which shielded him was indicated



not only by the place he occupied, but also by the presence of Gemariah's son, Micaiah.

The reading passed off without any hostile demonstration on the part of the people, and Micaiah went in search of his father to describe to him the scene he had just witnessed. He found him in the palace, in the chamber of the secretary of state, Elishama, attending a council of the princes. There were present, amongst others, Elnathan ben Achbor, who brought Uriah back from Egypt, Delaiah ben Shemaiah, and Zedekiah ben Hananiah. Micaiah told them what he had heard. They at once sent for Baruch and the roll. Their messenger, Jehudi ben Nethaniah, seems to have been a kind of court-usher. His name signifies "the Jew," and as his great-grandfather was Cush, "the Ethiopian," it has been suggested that he came of a family of Ethiopian descent, which had only attained in his generation to Jewish citizenship.<sup>1</sup>

When Baruch arrived, the princes greeted him with the courtesy and even deference due to the favourite disciple of a distinguished prophet. They invited him to sit down and read them the roll. Baruch obeyed; the method of reading suited the enclosed room and the quiet, interested audience of responsible men, better than the swaying crowd gathered round the door of Gemariah's chamber. Baruch now had before him ministers of state who knew from their official information and experience how extremely probable it was that the words to which they were listening would find a speedy and complete fulfilment. Baruch must almost have seemed to them like a doomster who announces to a condemned criminal the ghastly details of his

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<sup>1</sup> So Orelli, *in loco*.

coming execution. They exchanged looks of dismay and horror, and when the reading was over, they said to one another,<sup>1</sup> "We must tell the king of all these words." First, however, they inquired concerning the exact circumstances under which the roll had been written, that they might know how far responsibility in this matter was to be divided between the prophet and his disciple, and also whether all the contents rested upon the full authority of Jeremiah. Baruch assured them that it was simply a case of dictation: Jeremiah had uttered every word with his own mouth, and he had faithfully written it down; everything was Jeremiah's own.<sup>2</sup>

The princes were well aware that the prophet's action would probably be resented and punished by Jehoiakim. They said to Baruch: "Do you and Jeremiah go and hide yourselves, and let no one know where you are." They kept the roll and laid it up in Elishama's room; then they went to the king. They found him in his winter room, in the inner court of the palace, sitting in front of a brasier of burning charcoal. On this fast-day the king's mind might well be careful and troubled, as he meditated on the kind of treatment that he, the nominee of Pharaoh Necho, was likely to receive from Nebuchadnezzar. We cannot tell whether he contemplated resistance or had already resolved to submit to the conqueror. In either case he would wish to act on his own initiative, and might be anxious lest a Chaldean party should get the upper hand in Jerusalem and surrender him and the city to the invader.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrew text "to Baruch," which LXX. omits.

<sup>2</sup> In verse 18 the word "with ink" is not in the LXX., and may be an accidental repetition of the similar word for "his mouth."

When the princes entered, their number and their manner would at once indicate to him that their errand was both serious and disagreeable. He seems to have listened in silence while they made their report of the incident at the door of Gemariah's chamber and their own interview with Baruch.<sup>1</sup> The king sent for the roll by Jehudi, who had accompanied the princes into the presence chamber; and on his return the same serviceable official read its contents before Jehoiakim and the princes, whose number was now augmented by the nobles in attendance upon the king. Jehudi had had the advantage of hearing Baruch read the roll, but ancient Hebrew manuscripts were not easy to decipher, and probably Jehudi stumbled somewhat; altogether the reading of prophecies by a court-usher would not be a very edifying performance, or very gratifying to Jeremiah's friends. Jehoiakim treated the matter with deliberate and ostentatious contempt. At the end of every three or four columns,<sup>2</sup> he put out his hand for the roll, cut away the portion that had been read, and threw it on the fire; then he handed the remainder back to Jehudi, and the reading was resumed till the king thought fit to repeat the process. It at once appeared that the audience was divided into two parties. When Gemariah's father, Shaphan, had read Deuteronomy to Josiah, the king rent his clothes; but now the writer tells us, half aghast, that neither Jehoiakim nor any of his servants were afraid or rent

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<sup>1</sup> The A.V. and R.V. "all the words" is misleading: it should rather be "everything"; the princes did not recite all the contents of the roll.

<sup>2</sup> The English tenses "cut," "cast," are ambiguous, but the Hebrew implies that the "cutting" and "casting on the fire" were repeated again and again,

their clothes, but the audience, including doubtless both court officials and some of the princes, looked on with calm indifference. Not so the princes who had been present at Baruch's reading : they had probably induced him to leave the roll with them, by promising that it should be kept safely ; they had tried to keep it out of the king's hands by leaving it in Elishama's room, and now they made another attempt to save it from destruction. They entreated Jehoiakim to refrain from open and insolent defiance of a prophet who might after all be speaking in the name of Jehovah. But the king persevered. The alternate reading and burning went on ; the unfortunate usher's fluency and clearness would not be improved by the extraordinary conditions under which he had to read ; and we may well suppose that the concluding columns were hurried over in a somewhat perfunctory fashion, if they were read at all. As soon as the last shred of parchment was shrivelling on the charcoal, Jehoiakim commanded three of his officers<sup>1</sup> to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch. But they had taken the advice of the princes and were not to be found : "Jehovah hid them."

Thus the career of Baruch's roll was summarily cut short. But it had done its work ; it had been read on three separate occasions, first before the people, then before the princes, and last of all before the king and his court. If Jeremiah had appeared in person, he might have been at once arrested, and put to death like Uriah. No doubt this threefold recital was, on the whole, a failure ; Jeremiah's party among the

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<sup>1</sup> One is called Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech (A.V.), or "the king's son" (R.V.) ; if the latter is correct we must understand merely a prince of the blood-royal and not a son of Jehoiakim, who was only thirty.

princes had listened with anxious deference, but the appeal had been received by the people with indifference and by the king with contempt. Nevertheless it must have strengthened individuals in the true faith, and it had proclaimed afresh that the religion of Jehovah gave no sanction to the policy of Jehoiakim: the ruin of Judah would be a proof of the sovereignty of Jehovah and not of His impotence. But probably this incident had more immediate influence over the king than we might at first sight suppose. When Nebuchadnezzar arrived in Palestine, Jehoiakim submitted to him, a policy entirely in accordance with the views of Jeremiah. We may well believe that the experiences of this fast-day had strengthened the hands of the prophet's friends, and cooled the enthusiasm of the court for more desperate and adventurous courses. Every year's respite for Judah fostered the growth of the true religion of Jehovah.

The sequel showed how much more prudent it was to risk the existence of a roll rather than the life of a prophet. Jeremiah was only encouraged to persevere. By the Divine command, he dictated his prophecies afresh to Baruch, adding besides unto them many like words. Possibly other copies were made of the whole or parts of this roll, and were secretly circulated, read, and talked about. We are not told whether Jehoiakim ever heard this new roll; but, as one of the many like things added to the older prophecies was a terrible personal condemnation of the king,<sup>1</sup> we may be sure that he was not allowed to remain in ignorance, at any rate, of this portion of it.

The second roll was, doubtless, one of the main

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<sup>1</sup> For verses 29-31 see Chap. VI., where they are dealt with in connection with xxii. 13-19.

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sources of our present Book of Jeremiah, and the narrative of this chapter is of considerable importance for Old Testament criticism. It shows that a prophetic book may not go back to any prophetic autograph at all; its most original sources may be manuscripts written at the prophet's dictation, and liable to all the errors which are apt to creep into the most faithful work of an amanuensis. It shows further that, even when a prophet's utterances were written down during his lifetime, the manuscript may contain only his recollections<sup>1</sup> of what he said years before, and that these might be either expanded or abbreviated, sometimes even unconsciously modified, in the light of subsequent events. Verse 32 shows that Jeremiah did not hesitate to add to the record of his former prophecies "many like words": there is no reason to suppose that these were all contained in an appendix; they would often take the form of annotations.

Ed. 7 The important part played by Baruch as Jeremiah's secretary and representative must have invested him with full authority to speak for his master and expound his views; such authority points to Baruch as the natural editor of our present book, which is virtually the "Life and Writings" of the prophet. The last words of our chapter are ambiguous, perhaps intentionally. They simply state that many like words were added, and do not say by whom; they might even include additions made later on by Baruch from his own reminiscences.

In conclusion, we may notice that both the first and second copies of the roll were written by the direct

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<sup>1</sup> The supposition that Jeremiah had written notes of previous prophecies is not an impossible one, but it is a pure conjecture,

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Divine command, just as in the Hexateuch and the Book of Samuel we read of Moses, Joshua, and Samuel committing certain matters to writing at the bidding of Jehovah. We have here the recognition of the inspiration of the scribe, as ancillary to that of the prophet. Jehovah not only gives His word to His servants, but watches over its preservation and transmission.<sup>1</sup> But there is no inspiration to *write* any new revelation: the spoken word, the consecrated life, are inspired; the book is only a record of inspired speech and action.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Orelli, *in loco*.



## CHAPTER IV

### *THE RECHABITES*

xxxv.

“Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever.”—*JER.* xxxv. 19.

**T**HIS incident is dated “in the days of Jehoiakim.” We learn from verse 11 that it happened at a time when the open country of Judah was threatened by the advance of Nebuchadnezzar with a Chaldean and Syrian army. If Nebuchadnezzar marched into the south of Palestine immediately after the battle of Carchemish, the incident may have happened, as some suggest, in the eventful fourth year of Jehoiakim; or if he did not appear in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem till after he had taken over the royal authority at Babylon, Jeremiah’s interview with the Rechabites may have followed pretty closely upon the destruction of Baruch’s roll. But we need not press the words “Nebuchadnezzar . . . came up into the land”; they may only mean that Judah was invaded by an army acting under his orders. The mention of Chaldeans and Assyrians suggests that this invasion is the same as that mentioned in 2 Kings xxiv. 1, 2, where we are told that Jehoiakim served Nebuchadnezzar three years and then rebelled against him, whereupon Jehovah sent against him bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, and sent them against Judah to destroy it.



If this is the invasion referred to in our chapter it falls towards the end of Jehoiakim's reign, and sufficient time had elapsed to allow the king's anger against Jeremiah to cool, so that the prophet could venture out of his hiding-place.

The marauding bands of Chaldeans and their allies had driven the country people in crowds into Jerusalem, and among them the nomad clan of the Rechabites. According to 1 Chron. ii. 55, the Rechabites traced their descent to a certain Hemath, and were a branch of the Kenites, an Edomite tribe dwelling for the most part in the south of Palestine. These Kenites had maintained an ancient and intimate alliance with Judah, and in time the allies virtually became a single people, so that after the Return from the Captivity all distinction of race between Kenites and Jews was forgotten, and the Kenites were reckoned among the families of Israel. In this fusion of their tribe with Judah, the Rechabite clan would be included. It is clear from all the references both to Kenites and to Rechabites that they had adopted the religion of Israel and worshipped Jehovah. We know nothing else of the early history of the Rechabites. The statement in Chronicles that the father of the house of Rechab was Hemath perhaps points to their having been at one time settled at some place called Hemath near Jabez in Judah. Possibly too Rechab, which means "rider," is not a personal name, but a designation of the clan as horsemen of the desert.

These Rechabites were conspicuous among the Jewish farmers and townfolk by their rigid adherence to the habits of nomad life ; and it was this peculiarity that attracted the notice of Jeremiah, and made them a suitable object-lesson to the recreant Jews. The

traditional customs of the clan had been formulated into positive commands by Jonadab, the son of Rechab, *i.e.* the Rechabite. This must be the same Jonadab who co-operated with Jehu in overthrowing the house of Omri and suppressing the worship of Baal. Jehu's reforms concluded the long struggle of Elijah and Elisha against the house of Omri and its half-heathen religion. Hence we may infer that Jonadab and his Rechabites had come under the influence of these great prophets, and that their social and religious condition was one result of Elijah's work. Jeremiah stood in the true line of succession from the northern prophets in his attitude towards religion and politics; so that there would be bonds of sympathy between him and these nomad refugees.

The laws or customs of Jonadab, like the Ten Commandments, were chiefly negative: "Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye nor your sons for ever: neither shall ye build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land wherein ye are strangers."

Various parallels have been found to the customs of the Rechabites. The Hebrew Nazarites abstained from wine and strong drink, from grapes and grape juice and everything made of the vine, "from the kernels even to the husk."<sup>1</sup> Mohammed forbade his followers to drink any sort of wine or strong drink. But the closest parallel is one often quoted from Diodorus Siculus,<sup>2</sup> who, writing about B.C. 8, tells us that the Nabatean Arabs were prohibited under the penalty of death from sowing corn or planting fruit trees, using

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<sup>1</sup> Num. vi. 2.

<sup>2</sup> xix. 94.

wine or building houses. Such abstinence is not primarily ascetic; it expresses the universal contempt of the wandering hunter and herdsman for tillers of the ground, who are tied to one small spot of earth, and for burghers, who further imprison themselves in narrow houses and behind city walls. The nomad has a not altogether unfounded instinct that such acceptance of material restraints emasculates both soul and body. A remarkable parallel to the laws of Jonadab ben Rechab is found in the injunctions of the dying highlander, Ranald of the Mist, to his heir: "Son of the Mist! be free as thy forefathers. Own no lord—receive no law—take no hire—give no stipend—build no hut—enclose no pasture—sow no grain."<sup>1</sup> The Rechabite faith in the higher moral value of their primitive habits had survived their alliance with Israel, and Jonadab did his best to protect his clan from the taint of city life and settled civilisation. Abstinence from wine was not enjoined chiefly, if at all, to guard against intoxication, but because the fascinations of the grape might tempt the clan to plant vineyards, or, at any rate, would make them dangerously dependent upon vine-dressers and wine-merchants.

Till this recent invasion, the Rechabites had faithfully observed their ancestral laws, but the stress of circumstances had now driven them into a fortified city, possibly even into houses, though it is more probable that they were encamped in some open space within the walls.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah was commanded to go and bring them into the Temple, that is, into one of the rooms in the Temple buildings, and offer them

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, *Legend of Montrose*, chap. xxii.

<sup>2</sup> The term "house of the Rechabites" in verse 2 means "family" or "clan," and does not refer to a building.

wine. The narrative proceeds in the first person, "I took Jaazaniah," so that the chapter will have been composed by the prophet himself. In somewhat legal fashion he tells us how he took "Jaazaniah ben Jeremiah, ben Habaziah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and all the clan of the Rechabites." All three names are compounded of the Divine name Iah, Jehovah, and serve to emphasise the devotion of the clan to the God of Israel. It is a curious coincidence that the somewhat rare name Jeremiah<sup>1</sup> should occur twice in this connection. The room to which the prophet took his friends is described as the chamber of the disciples of the man of God<sup>2</sup> Hanan ben Igdaliah, which was by the chamber of the princes, which was above the chamber of the keeper of the threshold, Maaseiah ben Shallum. Such minute details probably indicate that this chapter was committed to writing while these buildings were still standing and still had the same occupants as at the time of this incident, but to us the topography is unintelligible. The "man of God" or prophet Hanan was evidently in sympathy with Jeremiah, and had a following of disciples who formed a sort of school of the prophets, and were a sufficiently permanent body to have a chamber assigned to them in the Temple buildings. The keepers of the threshold were Temple officials of high standing. The "princes" may have been the princes of Judah, who might very well have a chamber in the Temple courts; but the term is general, and may simply refer to other Temple officials. Hanan's disciples seem to have been in good company.

These exact specifications of person and place are

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<sup>1</sup> Eight Jeremiahs occur in O.T.

<sup>2</sup> Literally "sons of Hanan."

probably designed to give a certain legal solemnity and importance to the incident, and seem to warrant us in rejecting Reuss' suggestion that our narrative is simply an elaborate prophetic figure.<sup>1</sup>

After these details Jeremiah next tells us how he set before his guests bowls of wine and cups, and invited them to drink. Probably Jaazaniah and his clansmen were aware that the scene was intended to have symbolic religious significance. They would not suppose that the prophet had invited them all, in this solemn fashion, merely to take a cup of wine; and they would welcome an opportunity of showing their loyalty to their own peculiar customs. They said: "We will drink no wine: for our father Jonadab the son of Rechab commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye nor your sons for ever." They further recounted Jonadab's other commands and their own scrupulous obedience in every point, except that now they had been compelled to seek refuge in a walled city.

Then the word of Jehovah came unto Jeremiah; he was commanded to make yet another appeal to the Jews, by contrasting their disobedience with the fidelity of the Rechabites. The Divine King and Father of Israel had been untiring in His instruction and admonitions: "I have spoken unto you, rising up early and speaking." He had addressed them in familiar fashion through their fellow-countrymen: "I have sent also unto you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them." Yet they had not hearkened unto the God of Israel or His prophets. The Rechabites had received no special revelation; they had not been

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah, according to this view, had no interview with the Rechabites, but made an imaginary incident a text for his discourse.

appealed to by numerous prophets. Their Torah had been simply given them by their father Jonadab; nevertheless the commands of Jonadab had been regarded and those of Jehovah had been treated with contempt.

Obedience and disobedience would bring forth their natural fruit. "I will bring upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered." But because the Rechabites obeyed the commandment of their father Jonadab, "Therefore thus saith Jehovah Sabaoth, Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever."

Jehovah's approval of the obedience of the Rechabites is quite independent of the specific commands which they obeyed. It does not bind us to abstain from wine any more than from building houses and sowing seed. Jeremiah himself, for instance, would have had no more hesitation in drinking wine than in sowing his field at Anathoth. The tribal customs of the Rechabites had no authority whatever over him. Nor is it exactly his object to set forth the merit of obedience and its certain and great reward. These truths are rather touched upon incidentally. What Jeremiah seeks to emphasise is the gross, extreme, unique wickedness of Israel's disobedience. Jehovah had not looked for any special virtue in His people. His Torah was not made up of counsels of perfection. He had only expected the loyalty that Moab paid to Chemosh, and Tyre and Sidon to Baal. He would have been satisfied if Israel had observed His laws as faithfully as the nomads of the desert kept up

their ancestral habits. Jehovah had spoken through Jeremiah long ago and said: "Pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be any such thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit."<sup>1</sup> Centuries later Christ found Himself constrained to upbraid the cities of Israel, "wherein most of His mighty works were done": "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. . . . It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you."<sup>2</sup> And again and again in the history of the Church the Holy Spirit has been grieved because those who profess and call themselves Christians, and claim to prophesy and do many mighty works in the name of Christ, are less loyal to the gospel than the heathen to their own superstitions.

Buddhists and Mohammedans have been held up as modern examples to rebuke the Church, though as a rule with scant justification. Perhaps material for a more relevant contrast may be found nearer home. Christian societies have been charged with conducting their affairs by methods to which a respectable business firm would not stoop; they are said to be less scrupulous in their dealings and less chivalrous in their honour than the devotees of pleasure; at their gatherings they are sometimes supposed to lack the mutual courtesy of members of a Legislature or a Chamber of Commerce. The history of councils and

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<sup>1</sup> ii. 10, 11,

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xi. 21, 22.



synods and Church meetings gives colour to such charges, which could never have been made if Christians had been as jealous for the Name of Christ as a merchant is for his credit or a soldier for his honour.

And yet these contrasts do not argue any real moral and religious superiority of the Rechabites over the Jews or of unbelievers over professing Christians. It was comparatively easy to abstain from wine and to wander over wide pasture lands instead of living cooped up in cities—far easier than to attain to the great ideals of Deuteronomy and the prophets. It is always easier to conform to the code of business and society than to live according to the Spirit of Christ. The fatal sin of Judah was not that it fell so far short of its ideals, but that it repudiated them. So long as we lament our own failures and still cling to the Name and Faith of Christ, we are not shut out from mercy; our supreme sin is to crucify Christ afresh, by denying the power of His gospel, while we retain its empty form.

The reward promised to the Rechabites for their obedience was that "Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever"; to stand before Jehovah is often used to describe the exercise of priestly or prophetic ministry. It has been suggested that the Rechabites were hereby promoted to the status of the true Israel, "a kingdom of priests"; but this phrase may merely mean that their clan should continue in existence. Loyal observance of national law, the subordination of individual caprice and selfishness to the interests of the community, make up a large part of that righteousness that establisheth a nation.

Here, as elsewhere, students of prophecy have been anxious to discover some literal fulfilment; and have



searched curiously for any trace of the continued existence of the Rechabites. The notice in Chronicles implies that they formed part of the Jewish community of the Restoration. Apparently Alexandrian Jews were acquainted with Rechabites at a still later date. Psalm lxxi. is ascribed by the Septuagint to "the sons of Jonadab." Eusebius<sup>1</sup> mentions "priests of the sons of Rechab," and Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish traveller of the twelfth century, states that he met with them in Arabia. More recent travellers have thought that they discovered the descendants of Rechab amongst the nomads in Arabia or the Peninsula of Sinai that still practised the old ancestral customs.

But the fidelity of Jehovah to His promises does not depend upon our unearthing obscure tribes in distant deserts. The gifts of God are without repentance, but they have their inexorable conditions; no nation can flourish for centuries on the virtues of its ancestors. The Rechabites may have vanished in the ordinary stream of history, and yet we can hold that Jeremiah's prediction has been fulfilled and is still being fulfilled. No scriptural prophecy is limited in its application to an individual or a race, and every nation possessed by the spirit of true patriotism shall "stand before Jehovah for ever."

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<sup>1</sup> *Ch. Hist.*, ii. 23.

## CHAPTER V

### *BARUCH*

xliv.

“Thy life will I give unto thee for a prey.”—JER. xlv. 5.

THE editors of the versions and of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament have assigned a separate chapter to this short utterance concerning Baruch ; thus paying an unconscious tribute to the worth and importance of Jeremiah's disciple and secretary, who was the first to bear the familiar Jewish name, which in its Latinised form of Benedict has been a favourite with saints and popes. Probably few who read of these great ascetics and ecclesiastics give a thought to the earliest recorded Baruch, nor can we suppose that Christian Benedicts have been named after him. One thing they may all have in common : either their own faith or that of their parents ventured to bestow upon a “man born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward” the epithet “Blessed.” We can scarcely suppose that the life of any Baruch or Benedict has run so smoothly as to prevent him or his friends from feeling that such faith has not been outwardly justified and that the name suggested an unkind satire. Certainly Jeremiah's disciple, like his namesake Baruch Spinoza, had to recognise his blessings disguised as distress and persecution.

Baruch ben Neriah is said by Josephus<sup>1</sup> to have belonged to a most distinguished family, and to have been exceedingly well educated in his native language. These statements are perhaps legitimate deductions from the information supplied by our book. His title "scribe"<sup>2</sup> and his position as Jeremiah's secretary imply that he possessed the best culture of his time; and we are told in li. 59 that Seraiah ben Neriah, who must be Baruch's brother, was chief chamberlain (R.V.) to Zedekiah. According to the Old Latin Version of the Apocryphal Book of Baruch (i. 1) he was of the tribe of Simeon, a statement by no means improbable in view of the close connection between Judah and Simeon, but needing the support of some better authority.

Baruch's relation to Jeremiah is not expressly defined, but it is clearly indicated in the various narratives in which he is referred to. We find him in constant attendance upon the prophet, acting both as his "scribe," or secretary, and as his mouthpiece. The relation was that of Joshua to Moses, of Elisha to Elijah, of Gehazi to Elisha, of Mark to Paul and Barnabas, and of Timothy to Paul. It is described in the case of Joshua and Mark by the term "minister," while Elisha is characterised as having "poured water on the hands of Elijah." The "minister" was at once personal attendant, disciple, representative, and possible successor of the prophet. The position has its analogue in the service of the squire to the mediæval knight, and in that of an unpaid private secretary to a modern cabinet minister. Squires expected to become knights, and private secretaries hope for a seat in future cabinets.

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<sup>1</sup> *Antt.*, x. 9, 1.

<sup>2</sup> xxxvi. 26, 32.

Another less perfect parallel is the relation of the members of a German theological "seminar" to their professor.

Baruch is first<sup>1</sup> introduced to us in the narrative concerning the roll. He appears as Jeremiah's amanuensis and representative, and is entrusted with the dangerous and honourable task of publishing his prophecies to the people in the Temple. Not long before, similar utterances had almost cost the master his life, so that the disciple showed high courage and devotion in undertaking such a commission. He was called to share with his master at once the same cup of persecution—and the same Divine protection.

We next hear of Baruch in connection with the symbolic purchase of the field at Anathoth.<sup>2</sup> He seems to have been attending on Jeremiah during his imprisonment in the court of the guard, and the documents containing the evidence of the purchase were entrusted to his care. Baruch's presence in the court of the guard does not necessarily imply that he was himself a prisoner. The whole incident shows that Jeremiah's friends had free access to him; and Baruch probably not only attended to his master's wants in prison, but also was his channel of communication with the outside world.

We are nowhere told that Baruch himself was either beaten or imprisoned, but it is not improbable that he shared Jeremiah's fortunes even to these extremities.

→ We next hear of him as carried down to Egypt<sup>3</sup> with Jeremiah, when the Jewish refugees fled thither after the murder of Gedaliah. Apparently he had remained with Jeremiah throughout the whole interval, had con-

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<sup>1</sup> In order of time, ch. xxxvi.

<sup>2</sup> xxxii.

<sup>3</sup> xlili.

tinued to minister to him during his imprisonment, and had been among the crowd of Jewish captives whom Nebuchadnezzar found at Ramah. Josephus probably makes a similar conjecture<sup>1</sup> in telling us that, when Jeremiah was released and placed under the protection of Gedaliah at Mizpah, he asked and obtained from Nebuzaradan the liberty of his disciple Baruch. At any rate Baruch shared with his master the transient hope and bitter disappointment of this period; he supported him in dissuading the remnant of Jews from fleeing into Egypt, and was also compelled to share their flight. According to a tradition recorded by Jerome, Baruch and Jeremiah died in Egypt. But the Apocryphal Book of Baruch places him at Babylon, whither another tradition takes him after the death of Jeremiah in Egypt.<sup>2</sup> These legends are probably mere attempts of wistful imagination to supply unwelcome blanks in history.

It has often been supposed that our present Book of Jeremiah, in some stage of its formation, was edited or compiled by Baruch, and that this book may be ranked with biographies—like Stanley's *Life of Arnold*—of great teachers by their old disciples. He was certainly the amanuensis of the roll, which must have been the most valuable authority for any editor of Jeremiah's prophecies. And the amanuensis might very easily become the editor. If an edition of the book was compiled in Jeremiah's lifetime, we should naturally expect him to use Baruch's assistance; if it first took shape after the prophet's death, and if Baruch survived, no one would be better able to compile the "*Life and Works of Jeremiah*" than his

<sup>1</sup> *Antt.*, x. 9, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bissell's Introduction to Baruch in Lange's Commentary.

favourite and faithful disciple. The personal prophecy about Baruch does not occur in its proper place in connection with the episode of the roll, but is appended at the end of the prophecies,<sup>1</sup> possibly as a kind of subscription on the part of the editor. These data do not constitute absolute proof, but they afford strong probability that Baruch compiled a book, which was substantially our Jeremiah. The evidence is similar in character to, but much more conclusive than, that adduced for the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews by Apollos.

Almost the final reference to Baruch suggests another aspect of his relation to Jeremiah. The Jewish captains accused him of unduly influencing his master against Egypt and in favour of Chaldea. Whatever truth there may have been in this particular charge, we gather that popular opinion credited Baruch with considerable influence over Jeremiah, and probably popular opinion was not far wrong. Nothing said about Baruch suggests any vein of weakness in his character, such as Paul evidently recognised in Timothy. His few appearances upon the scene rather leave the impression of strength and self-reliance, perhaps even self-assertion. If we knew more about him, possibly indeed if any one else had compiled these "*Memorabilia*," we might discover that much in Jeremiah's policy and teaching was due to Baruch, and that the master leaned somewhat heavily upon the sympathy of the disciple. The qualities that make a successful man of action do not always exempt their possessor from being directed or even controlled by his followers. It would be interesting to discover how much of Luther is Melanch-

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<sup>1</sup> So LXX., which here probably gives the true order.

thon. Of many a great minister, his secretaries and subordinates might say safely, in private, *Cujus pars magna fuimus*.

The short prophecy which has furnished a text for this chapter shows that Jeremiah was not unaware of Baruch's tendency to self-assertion, and even felt that sometimes it required a check. Apparently chapter xlv. once formed the immediate continuation of chapter xxxvi., the narrative of the incident of the roll. It was "the word spoken by Jeremiah the prophet to Baruch ben Neriah, when he wrote these words in a book at the dictation of Jeremiah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim." The reference evidently is to xxxvi. 32, where we are told that Baruch wrote, at Jeremiah's dictation, all the words of the book that had been burnt, and many like words.

Clearly Baruch had not received Jeremiah's message as to the sin and ruin of Judah without strong protest. It was as distasteful to him as to all patriotic Jews and even to Jeremiah himself. Baruch had not yet been able to accept this heavy burden or to look beyond to the brighter promise of the future. He broke out into bitter complaint: "Woe is me now! for Jehovah hath added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and find no rest."<sup>1</sup> Strong as these words are, they are surpassed by many of Jeremiah's complaints to Jehovah, and doubtless even now they found an echo in the prophet's heart. Human impatience of suffering revolts desperately against the conviction that calamity is inevitable; hope whispers that some unforeseen Providence will yet disperse the storm-clouds, and the portents of ruin will dissolve like some

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<sup>1</sup> The clause "I am weary with my groaning" also occurs in Psalm vi. 6.



evil dream. Jeremiah had, now as always, the harsh, unwelcome task of compelling himself and his fellows to face the sad and appalling reality. "Thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I am breaking down that which I built, I am plucking up that which I planted."<sup>1</sup> This was his familiar message concerning Judah, but he had also a special word for Baruch: "And as for thee, dost thou seek great things for thyself?" What "great things" could a devout and patriotic Jew, a disciple of Jeremiah, seek for himself in those disastrous times? The answer is at once suggested by the renewed prediction of doom. Baruch, in spite of his master's teaching, had still ventured to look for better things, and had perhaps fancied that he might succeed where Jeremiah had failed and might become the mediator who should reconcile Israel to Jehovah. He may have thought that Jeremiah's threats and entreaties had prepared the way for some message of reconciliation. Gemariah ben Shaphan and other princes had been greatly moved when Baruch read the roll. Might not their emotion be an earnest of the repentance of the people? If he could carry on his master's work to a more blessed issue than the master himself had dared to hope, would not this be a "great thing" indeed? We gather from the tone of the chapter that Baruch's aspirations were unduly tinged with personal ambition. While kings, priests, and prophets were sinking into a common ruin from which even the most devoted servants of Jehovah would not escape, Baruch was indulging himself in visions of the honour to be obtained from a glorious mission, successfully accomplished.

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<sup>1</sup> The concluding clause of the verse is omitted by LXX., and is probably a gloss added to indicate that the ruin would not be confined to Judah, but would extend "over the whole earth." Cf. Kautzsch.



Jeremiah reminds him that he will have to take his share in the common misery. Instead of setting his heart upon "great things" which are not according to the Divine purpose, he must be prepared to endure with resignation the evil which Jehovah "is bringing upon all flesh." Yet there is a word of comfort and promise: "I will give thee thy life for a prey in all places whither thou goest." Baruch was to be protected from violent or premature death.

According to Renan,<sup>1</sup> this boon was flung to Baruch half-contemptuously, in order to silence his unworthy and unseasonable importunity:—

"Dans une catastrophe qui va englober l'humanité tout entière, il est beau de venir réclamer de petites faveurs d'exception! Baruch aura la vie sauve partout où il ira; qu'il s'en contente!"

We prefer a more generous interpretation. To a selfish man, unless indeed he clung to bare life in craven terror or mere animal tenacity, such an existence as Baruch was promised would have seemed no boon at all. Imprisonment in a besieged and starving city, captivity and exile, his fellow-countrymen's ill-will and resentment from first to last—these experiences would be hard to recognise as privileges bestowed by Jehovah. Had Baruch been wholly self-centred, he might well have craved death instead, like Job, nay, like Jeremiah himself. But life meant for him continued ministry to his master, the high privilege of supporting him in his witness to Jehovah. If, as seems almost certain, we owe to Baruch the preservation of Jeremiah's prophecies, then indeed the life that was given him for a prey must have been precious to him as the devoted

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<sup>1</sup> *Hist. of Israel*, iii., 293.

servant of God. Humanly speaking, the future of revealed religion and of Christianity depended on the survival of Jeremiah's teaching, and this hung upon the frail thread of Baruch's life. After all, Baruch was destined to achieve "great things," even though not those which he sought after; and as no editor's name is prefixed to our book, he cannot be accused of self-seeking. So too for every faithful disciple, his life, even if given for a prey, even if spent in sorrow, poverty, and pain, is still a Divine gift, because nothing can spoil its opportunity of ministering to men and glorifying God, even if only by patient endurance of suffering.

We may venture on a wider application of the promise, "Thy life shall be given thee for a prey." Life is not merely continued existence in the body: life has come to mean spirit and character, so that Christ could say, "He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." In this sense the loyal servant of God wins as his prey, out of all painful experiences, a fuller and nobler life. Other rewards may come in due season, but this is the most certain and the most sufficient. For Baruch, constant devotion to a hated and persecuted master, uncompromising utterance of unpopular truth, had their chief issue in the redemption of his own inward life.

## CHAPTER VI

### *THE JUDGMENT ON JEHOIAKIM*

xxii. 13-19, xxxvi. 30, 31.

"Jehoiakim . . . slew him (Uriah) with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people."—*JER.* xxvi. 23.

"Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning Jehoiakim, . . . He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."—*JER.* xxii. 18, 19.

"Jehoiakim . . . did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his fathers had done."—*2 KINGS* xxiii. 36, 37.

OUR last four chapters have been occupied with the history of Jeremiah during the reign of Jehoiakim, and therefore necessarily with the relations of the prophet to the king and his government. Before we pass on to the reigns of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, we must consider certain utterances which deal with the personal character and career of Jehoiakim. We are helped to appreciate these passages by what we here read, and by the brief paragraph concerning this reign in the Second Book of Kings. In Jeremiah the king's policy and conduct are specially illustrated by two incidents, the murder of the prophet Uriah and the destruction of the roll. The historian states his judgment of the reign, but his brief record<sup>1</sup> adds little to our knowledge of the sovereign.

Jehoiakim was placed upon the throne as the nominee

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<sup>1</sup> *2 Kings* xxiii. 34—xxiv. 7.

and tributary of Pharaoh Necho; but he had the address or good fortune to retain his authority under Nebuchadnezzar, by transferring his allegiance to the new suzerain of Western Asia. When a suitable opportunity offered, the unwilling and discontented vassal naturally "turned and rebelled against" his lord. Even then his good fortune did not forsake him; although in his latter days Judah was harried by predatory bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, yet Jehoiakim "slept with his fathers" before Nebuchadnezzar had set to work in earnest to chastise his refractory subject. He was not reserved, like Zedekiah, to endure agonies of mental and physical torture, and to rot in a Babylonian dungeon.

Jeremiah's judgment upon Jehoiakim and his doings is contained in the two passages which form the subject of this chapter. The utterance in xxxvi. 30, 31, was evoked by the destruction of the roll, and we may fairly assume that xxii. 13-19 was also delivered after that incident. The immediate context of the latter paragraph throws no light on the date of its origin. Chapter xxii. is a series of judgments on the successors of Josiah, and was certainly composed after the deposition of Jehoiachin, probably during the reign of Zedekiah; but the section on Jehoiakim must have been uttered at an earlier period. Renan indeed imagines<sup>1</sup> that Jeremiah delivered this discourse at the gate of the royal palace at the very beginning of the new reign. The nominee of Egypt was scarcely seated on the throne, his "new name" Jehoiakim—"He whom Jehovah establisheth"—still sounded strange in his ears, when the prophet of Jehovah publicly menaced the king with

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<sup>1</sup> iii. 274.

condign punishment. Renan is naturally surprised that Jehoiakim tolerated Jeremiah, even for a moment. But, here as often elsewhere, the French critic's dramatic instinct has warped his estimate of evidence. We need not accept the somewhat unkind saying that picturesque anecdotes are never true, but, at the same time, we have always to guard against the temptation to accept the most dramatic interpretation of history as the most accurate. The contents of this passage, the references to robbery, oppression, and violence, clearly imply that Jehoiakim had reigned long enough for his government to reveal itself as hopelessly corrupt. The final breach between the king and the prophet was marked by the destruction of the roll, and xxii. 13-19, like xxxvi. 30, 31, may be considered a consequence of this breach.

Let us now consider these utterances. In xxxvi. 30a we read, "Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah, He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David." Later on,<sup>1</sup> a like judgment was pronounced upon Jehoiakim's son and successor Jehoiachin. The absence of this threat from xxii. 13-19 is doubtless due to the fact that the chapter was compiled when the letter of the prediction seemed to have been proved to be false by the accession of Jehoiachin. Its spirit and substance were amply satisfied by the latter's deposition and captivity after a brief reign of a hundred days.

The next clause in the sentence on Jehoiakim runs: "His dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost." The same doom is repeated in the later prophecy:—

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<sup>1</sup> xxii. 30.

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“They shall not lament for him,  
 Alas my brother! Alas my brother!  
 They shall not lament for him,  
 Alas lord! Alas lord!<sup>1</sup>  
 He shall be buried with the burial of an ass,  
 Dragged forth and cast away without the gates of  
 Jerusalem.”

Jeremiah did not need to draw upon his imagination for this vision of judgment. When the words were uttered, his memory called up the murder of Uriah ben Shemaiah and the dishonour done to his corpse. Uriah's only guilt had been his zeal for the truth that Jeremiah had proclaimed. Though Jehoiakim and his party had not dared to touch Jeremiah or had not been able to reach him, they had struck his influence by killing Uriah. But for their hatred of the master, the disciple might have been spared. And Jeremiah had neither been able to protect him, nor allowed to share his fate. Any generous spirit will understand how Jeremiah's whole nature was possessed and agitated by a tempest of righteous indignation, how utterly humiliated he felt to be compelled to stand by in helpless impotence. And now, when the tyrant had filled up the measure of his iniquity, when the imperious impulse of the Divine Spirit bade the prophet speak the doom of his king, there breaks forth at last the long pent-up cry for vengeance: “Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saint”—let the persecutor suffer the agony and shame which he inflicted on God's martyr, fling out the murderer's corpse unburied, let it lie and rot upon the dishonoured grave of his victim.

Can we say, Amen? Not perhaps without some

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<sup>1</sup> R.V., “Ah my brother! or Ah sister! . . . Ah lord! or Ah his glory!” The text is based on an emendation of Graetz, following the Syriac. (Giesebrecht.)

hesitation. Yet surely, if our veins run blood and not water, our feelings, had we been in Jeremiah's place, would have been as bitter and our words as fierce. Jehoiakim was more guilty than our Queen Mary, but the memory of the grimmest of the Tudors still stinks in English nostrils. In our own days, we have not had time to forget how men received the news of Han-nington's murder at Uganda, and we can imagine what European Christians would say and feel if their missionaries were massacred in China.

And yet, when we read such a treatise as Lactantius wrote *Concerning the Deaths of Persecutors*, we cannot but recoil. We are shocked at the stern satisfaction he evinces in the miserable ends of Maximin and Galerius, and other enemies of the true faith. Discreet historians have made large use of this work, without thinking it desirable to give an explicit account of its character and spirit. Biographers of Lactantius feel constrained to offer a half-hearted apology for the *De Morte Persecutorum*. Similarly we find ourselves of one mind with Gibbon,<sup>1</sup> in refusing to derive edification from a sermon in which Constantine the Great, or the bishop who composed it for him, affected to relate the miserable end of all the persecutors of the Church. Nor can we share the exultation of the Covenanters in the Divine judgment which they saw in the death of Claverhouse; and we are not moved to any hearty sympathy with more recent writers, who have tried to illustrate from history the danger of touching the rights and privileges of the Church. Doubtless God will avenge His own elect; nevertheless *Nemo me impune lacessit* is no seemly motto for the

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<sup>1</sup> Chap. xiii.



Kingdom of God. Even Greek mythologists taught that it was perilous for men to wield the thunderbolts of Zeus. Still less is the Divine wrath a weapon for men to grasp in their differences and dissensions, even about the things of God. Michael the Archangel, even when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing judgment, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.<sup>1</sup>

How far Jeremiah would have shared such modern sentiment, it is hard to say. At any rate his personal feeling is kept in the background; it is postponed to the more patient and deliberate judgment of the Divine Spirit, and subordinated to broad considerations of public morality. We have no right to contrast Jeremiah with our Lord and His proto-martyr Stephen, because we have no prayer of the ancient prophet to rank with, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," or again with, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Christ and His disciple forgave wrongs done to themselves: they did not condone the murder of their brethren. In the Apocalypse, which concludes the English Bible, and was long regarded as God's final revelation, His last word to man, the souls of the martyrs cry out from beneath the altar: "How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"<sup>2</sup>

Doubtless God will avenge His own elect, and the appeal for justice may be neither ignoble nor vindictive. But such prayers, beyond all others, must be offered in humble submission to the Judge of all. When our righteous indignation claims to pass its own sentence, we do well to remember that our halting

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<sup>1</sup> Jude 9.

<sup>2</sup> Apc. vi. 10.



intellect and our purblind conscience are ill qualified to sit as assessors of the Eternal Justice.

When Saul set out for Damascus, "breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," the survivors of his victims cried out for a swift punishment of the persecutor, and believed that their prayers were echoed by martyred souls in the heavenly Temple. If that ninth chapter of the Acts had recorded how Saul of Tarsus was struck dead by the lightnings of the wrath of God, preachers down all the Christian centuries would have moralised on the righteous Divine judgment. Saul would have found his place in the homiletic Chamber of Horrors with Ananias and Sapphira, Herod and Pilate, Nero and Diocletian. Yet the Captain of our salvation, choosing His lieutenants, passes over many a man with blameless record, and allots the highest post to this blood-stained persecutor. No wonder that Paul, if only in utter self-contempt, emphasised the doctrine of Divine election. Verily God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

Still, however, we easily see that Paul and Jehoiakim belong to two different classes. The persecutor who attempts in honest but misguided zeal to make others endorse his own prejudices, and turn a deaf ear with him to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, must not be ranked with politicians who sacrifice to their own private interests the Revelation and the Prophets of God.

This prediction which we have been discussing of Jehoiakim's shameful end is followed in the passage in chapter xxxvi. by a general announcement of universal judgment, couched in Jeremiah's usual comprehensive style:—

“I will visit their sin upon him and upon his children and upon his servants, and I will bring upon them and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah all the evil which I spake unto them and they did not hearken.”

In chapter xxii. the sentence upon Jehoiakim is prefaced by a statement of the crimes for which he was punished. His eyes and his heart were wholly possessed by avarice and cruelty; as an administrator he was active in oppression and violence.<sup>1</sup> But Jeremiah does not confine himself to these general charges; he specifies and emphasises one particular form of Jehoiakim's wrong-doing, the tyrannous exaction of forced labour for his buildings. To the sovereigns of petty Syrian states, old Memphis and Babylon were then what London and Paris are to modern Ameers, Khedives, and Sultans. Circumstances, indeed, did not permit a Syrian prince to visit the Egyptian or Chaldean capital with perfect comfort and unrestrained enjoyment. Ancient Eastern potentates, like mediæval suzerains, did not always distinguish between a guest and a hostage. But the Jewish kings would not be debarred from importing the luxuries and imitating the vices of their conquerors.

Renan says<sup>2</sup> of this period: “L’Egypte était, à cette époque, le pays où les industries de luxe étaient le plus développées. Tout le monde raffolaient, en particulier, de sa carrosserie et de ses meubles ouvragés. Joiaquin et la noblesse de Jérusalem ne songeaient qu’à se procurer ces beaux objets, qui réalisaient ce qu’on avait vu de plus exquis en fait de goût jusque-là.”

<sup>1</sup> xxii. 17. The exact meaning of the word translated “violence” (so A.V., R.V.) is very doubtful.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist.*, etc., iii. 266.

The supreme luxury of vulgar minds is the use of wealth as a means of display, and monarchs have always delighted in the erection of vast and ostentatious buildings. At this time Egypt and Babylon vied with one another in pretentious architecture. In addition to much useful engineering work, Psammetichus I. made large additions to the temples and public edifices at Memphis, Thebes, Sais, and elsewhere, so that "the entire valley of the Nile became little more than one huge workshop, where stone-cutters and masons, bricklayers and carpenters, laboured incessantly."<sup>1</sup> This activity in building continued even after the disaster to the Egyptian arms at Carchemish.

Nebuchadnezzar had an absolute mania for architecture. His numerous inscriptions are mere catalogues of his achievements in building. His home administration and even his extensive conquests are scarcely noticed; he held them of little account compared with his temples and palaces—"this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling-place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty."<sup>2</sup> Nebuchadnezzar created most of the magnificence that excited the wonder and admiration of Herodotus a century later.

Jehoiakim had been moved to follow the notable example of Chaldea and Egypt. By a strange irony of fortune, Egypt, once the cynosure of nations, has become in our own time the humble imitator of Western civilisation, and now boulevards have rendered the suburbs of Cairo "a shabby reproduction of modern Paris." Possibly in the eyes of Egyptians and Chaldeans Jehoiakim's efforts only resulted in a

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<sup>1</sup> Rawlinson, *Ancient Egypt* (Story of the Nations).

<sup>2</sup> Dan. iv. 30.

“shabby reproduction” of Memphis or Babylon. Nevertheless these foreign luxuries are always expensive; and minor states had not then learnt the art of trading on the resources of their powerful neighbours by means of foreign loans. Moreover Judah had to pay tribute first to Pharaoh Necho, and then to Nebuchadnezzar. The times were bad, and additional taxes for building purposes must have been felt as an intolerable oppression. Naturally the king did not pay for his labour; like Solomon and all other great Eastern despots, he had recourse to the *corvée*, and for this in particular Jeremiah denounced him.

“Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness  
 And his chambers by injustice;  
 That maketh his neighbour toil without wages,  
 And giveth him no hire;  
 That saith, ‘I will build me a wide house  
 And spacious chambers,’  
 And openeth out broad windows, with woodwork of cedar  
 And vermilion painting.”

Then the denunciation passes into biting sarcasm:—

“Art thou indeed a king,  
 Because thou strivest to excel in cedar?”<sup>1</sup>

Poor imitations of Nebuchadnezzar’s magnificent structures could not conceal the impotence and dependence of the Jewish king. The pretentiousness of Jehoiakim’s buildings challenged a comparison which only reminded men that he was a mere puppet, with its strings pulled now by Egypt and now by Babylon. At best he was only reigning on sufferance.

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<sup>1</sup> I have followed R.V., but the text is probably corrupt. Cheyne follows LXX. (A) in reading “because thou viest with Ahab”: LXX. (B) has “Ahaz” (so Ewald). Giesebrecht proposes to neglect the accents and translate, “viest in cedar buildings with thy father” (*i.e.* Solomon).

Jeremiah contrasts Jehoiakim's government both as to justice and dignity with that of Josiah:—

“Did not thy father eat and drink?”<sup>1</sup>

(He was no ascetic, but, like the Son of Man, lived a full, natural, human life.)

“And do judgment and justice?  
Then did he prosper.  
He judged the cause of the poor and needy,  
Then was there prosperity.  
Is not this to know Me?  
Jehovah hath spoken it.”

Probably Jehoiakim claimed by some external observance, or through some subservient priest or prophet, to “know Jehovah”; and Jeremiah repudiates the claim.

Josiah had reigned in the period when the decay of Assyria left Judah dominant in Palestine, until Egypt or Chaldea could find time to gather up the outlying fragments of the shattered empire. The wisdom and justice of the Jewish king had used this breathing space for the advantage and happiness of his people; and during part of his reign Josiah's power seems to have been as extensive as that of any of his predecessors on the throne of Judah. And yet, according to current theology, Jeremiah's appeal to the prosperity of Josiah as a proof of God's approbation was a startling anomaly. Josiah had been defeated and slain at Megiddo in the prime of his manhood, at the age of thirty-nine. None but the most independent and enlightened spirits could believe that the Reformer's premature death, at the

<sup>1</sup> According to Giesebrecht (cf. however the last note) this clause is an objection which the prophet puts into the mouth of the king. “My father enjoyed the good things of life—why should not I?” The prophet rejoins, “Nay, but he did judgment,” etc.

moment when his policy had resulted in national disaster, was not an emphatic declaration of Divine displeasure. Jeremiah's contrary belief might be explained and justified. Some such justification is suggested by the prophet's utterance concerning Jehoahaz: "Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away." Josiah had reigned with real authority, he died when independence was no longer possible; and therein he was happier and more honourable than his successors, who held a vassal throne by the uncertain tenure of time-serving duplicity, and were for the most part carried into captivity. "The righteous was taken away from the evil to come."<sup>1</sup>

The warlike spirit of classical antiquity and of Teutonic chivalry welcomed a glorious death upon the field of battle:—

"And how can man die better  
Than facing fearful odds,  
For the ashes of his fathers,  
And the temples of his Gods?"

No one spoke of Leonidas as a victim of Divine wrath. Later Judaism caught something of the same temper. Judas Maccabæus, when in extreme danger, said, "It is better for us to die in battle, than to look upon the evils of our people and our sanctuary"; and later on, when he refused to flee from inevitable death, he claimed that he would leave behind him no stain upon his honour.<sup>2</sup> Islam also is prodigal in its promises of future bliss to those soldiers who fall fighting for its sake.

But the dim and dreary Sheôl of the ancient

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lvii. (English Versions).

<sup>2</sup> Macc. ii. 59, ix. 10.

Hebrews was no glorious Valhalla or houri-peopled Paradise. The renown of the battle-field was poor compensation for the warm, full-blooded life of the upper air. When David sang his dirge for Saul and Jonathan, he found no comfort in the thought that they had died fighting for Israel. Moreover the warrior's self-sacrifice for his country seems futile and inglorious, when it neither secures victory nor postpones defeat. And at Megiddo Josiah and his army perished in a vain attempt to come

"Between the pass and fell incensed points  
Of mighty opposites."

We can hardly justify to ourselves Jeremiah's use of Josiah's reign as an example of prosperity as the reward of righteousness; his contemporaries must have been still more difficult to convince. We cannot understand how the words of this prophecy were left without any attempt at justification, or why Jeremiah did not meet by anticipation the obvious and apparently crushing rejoinder that the reign terminated in disgrace and disaster.

Nevertheless these difficulties do not affect the terms of the sentence upon Jehoiakim, or the ground upon which he was condemned. We shall be better able to appreciate Jeremiah's attitude and to discover its lessons if we venture to reconsider his decisions. We cannot forget that there was, as Cheyne puts it, a duel between Jeremiah and Jehoiakim; and we should hesitate to accept the verdict of Hildebrand upon Henry IV. of Germany, or of Thomas à Becket on Henry II. of England. Moreover the data upon which we have to base our judgment, including the unfavourable estimate in the Book of Kings, come to us from



Jeremiah or his disciples. Our ideas about Queen Elizabeth would be more striking than accurate if our only authorities for her reign were Jesuit historians of England. But Jeremiah is absorbed in lofty moral and spiritual issues; his testimony is not tainted with that sectarian and sacerdotal casuistry which is always so ready to subordinate truth to the interests of "the Church." He speaks of facts with a simple directness which leaves us in no doubt as to their reality; his picture of Jehoiakim may be one-sided, but it owes nothing to an inventive imagination.

Even Renan, who, in Ophite fashion, holds a brief for the bad characters of the Old Testament, does not seriously challenge Jeremiah's statements of fact. But the judgment of the modern critic seems at first sight more lenient than that of the Hebrew prophet: the former sees in Jehoiakim "un prince libéral et modéré,"<sup>1</sup> but when this favourable estimate is coupled with an apparent comparison with Louis Philippe, we must leave students of modern history to decide whether Renan is really less severe than Jeremiah. Cheyne, on the other hand, holds<sup>2</sup> that "we have no reason to question Jeremiah's verdict upon Jehoiakim, who, alike from a religious and a political point of view, appears to have been unequal to the crisis in the fortunes of Israel." No doubt this is true; and yet perhaps Renan is so far right that Jehoiakim's failure was rather his misfortune than his fault. We may doubt whether any king of Israel or Judah would have been equal to the supreme crisis which Jehoiakim had to face. Our scanty information seems to indicate a man of strong will, determined character, and able

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<sup>1</sup> iii, 269.

<sup>2</sup> P. 142.



statesmanship. Though the nominee of Pharaoh Necho, he retained his sceptre under Nebuchadnezzar, and held his own against Jeremiah and the powerful party by which the prophet was supported. Under more favourable conditions he might have rivalled Uzziah or Jeroboam II. In the time of Jehoiakim, a supreme political and military genius would have been as helpless on the throne of Judah as were the Palæologi in the last days of the Empire at Constantinople. Something may be said to extenuate his religious attitude. In opposing Jeremiah he was not defying clear and acknowledged truth. Like the Pharisees in their conflict with Christ, the persecuting king had popular religious sentiment on his side. According to that current theology which had been endorsed in some measure even by Isaiah and Jeremiah, the defeat at Megiddo proved that Jehovah repudiated the religious policy of Josiah and his advisers. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit enabled Jeremiah to resist this shallow conclusion, and to maintain through every crisis his unshaken faith in the profounder truth. Jehoiakim was too conservative to surrender at the prophet's bidding the long-accepted and fundamental doctrine of retribution, and to follow the forward leading of Revelation. He "stood by the old truth" as did Charles V. at the Reformation. "Let him that is without sin" in this matter "first cast a stone at" him.

Though we extenuate Jehoiakim's conduct, we are still bound to condemn it; not however because he was exceptionally wicked, but because he failed to rise above a low spiritual average: yet in this judgment we also condemn ourselves for our own intolerance, and for the prejudice and self-will which

have often blinded our eyes to the teachings of our Lord and Master.

But Jeremiah emphasises one special charge against the king—his exaction of forced and unpaid labour. This form of taxation was in itself so universal that the censure can scarcely be directed against its ordinary and moderate exercise. If Jeremiah had intended to inaugurate a new departure, he would have approached the subject in a more formal and less casual fashion. It was a time of national danger and distress, when all moral and material resources were needed to avert the ruin of the state, or at any rate to mitigate the sufferings of the people; and at such a time Jehoiakim exhausted and embittered his subjects—that he might dwell in spacious halls with woodwork of cedar. The Temple and palaces of Solomon had been built at the expense of a popular resentment, which survived for centuries, and with which, as their silence seems to show, the prophets fully sympathised. If even Solomon's exactions were culpable, Jehoiakim was altogether without excuse.

His sin was that common to all governments, the use of the authority of the state for private ends. This sin is possible not only to sovereigns and secretaries of state, but to every town councillor and every one who has a friend on a town council, nay, to every clerk in a public office and to every workman in a government dockyard. A king squandering public revenues on private pleasures, and an artisan pilfering nails and iron with an easy conscience because they only belong to the state, are guilty of crimes essentially the same. On the one hand, Jehoiakim as the head of the state was oppressing individuals; and although modern states have grown comparatively tender as to the rights

of the individual, yet even now their action is often cruelly oppressive to insignificant minorities. But, on the other hand, the right of exacting labour was only vested in the king as a public trust; its abuse was as much an injury to the community as to individuals. If Jeremiah had to deal with modern civilisation, we might, perchance, be startled by his passing lightly over our religious and political controversies to denounce the squandering of public resources in the interests of individuals and classes, sects and parties.

## CHAPTER VII

### *JEHOIACHIN*<sup>1</sup>

xxii. 20-30.

"A despised broken vessel."—*JER.* xxii. 28.

"A young lion. And he went up and down among the lions, he became a young lion and he learned to catch the prey, he devoured men."—*EZEK.* xix. 5, 6.

"Jehoiachin . . . did evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his father had done."—*2 KINGS* xxiv. 8, 9.

**W**E have seen that our book does not furnish a consecutive biography of Jeremiah; we are not even certain as to the chronological order of the incidents narrated. Yet these chapters are clear and full enough to give us an accurate idea of what Jeremiah did and suffered during the eleven years of Jehoiakim's reign. He was forced to stand by while the king lent the weight of his authority to the ancient corruptions of the national religion, and conducted his home and foreign policy without any regard to the will of Jehovah, as expressed by His prophet. His position was analogous to that of a Romanist priest under Elizabeth or a Protestant divine in the reign of James II. According to some critics, Nebuchadnezzar was to Jeremiah what Philip of Spain was to the priest and William of Orange to the Puritan.

During all these long and weary years, the prophet

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<sup>1</sup> Also called Coniah and Jeconiah.

watched the ever multiplying tokens of approaching ruin. He was no passive spectator, but a faithful watchman to the house of Israel; again and again he risked his life in a vain attempt to make his fellow-countrymen aware of their danger.<sup>1</sup> The vision of the coming sword was ever before his eyes, and he blew the trumpet and warned the people; but they would not be warned, and the prophet knew that the sword would come and take them away in their iniquity. He paid the penalty of his faithfulness; at one time or another he was beaten, imprisoned, proscribed, and driven to hide himself; still he persevered in his mission, as time and occasion served. Yet he survived Jehoiakim, partly because he was more anxious to serve Jehovah than to gain the glorious deliverance of martyrdom; partly because his royal enemy feared to proceed to extremities against a prophet of Jehovah, who was befriended by powerful nobles, and might possibly have relations with Nebuchadnezzar himself. Jehoiakim's religion—for like the Athenians he was probably "very religious"—was saturated with superstition, and it was only when deeply moved that he lost the sense of an external sanctity attaching to Jeremiah's person. In Israel prophets were hedged by a more potent divinity than kings.

Meanwhile Jeremiah was growing old in years and older in experience. When Jehoiakim died, it was nearly forty years since the young priest had first been called "to pluck up and to break down, and to destroy and to overthrow; to build and to plant"; it was more than eleven since his brighter hopes were buried in Josiah's grave. Jehovah had promised that He would

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<sup>1</sup> Considerable portions of chaps. i.—xx. are referred to the reigns of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin: see previous volume on Jeremiah.

make His servant into "an iron pillar and brasen walls."<sup>1</sup> The iron was tempered and hammered into shape during these days of conflict and endurance, like—

". . . iron dug from central gloom,  
And heated hot with burning fears  
And dipt in baths of hissing tears,  
And battered with the shocks of doom,  
To shape and use."

He had long lost all trace of that sanguine youthful enthusiasm which promises to carry all before it. His opening manhood had felt its happy illusions, but they did not dominate his soul and they soon passed away. At the Divine bidding, he had surrendered his most ingrained prejudices, his dearest desires. He had consented to be alienated from his brethren at Anathoth, and to live without home or family; although a patriot, he accepted the inevitable ruin of his nation as the just judgment of Jehovah; he was a priest, imbued by heredity and education with the religious traditions of Israel, yet he had yielded himself to Jehovah, to announce, as His herald, the destruction of the Temple, and the devastation of the Holy Land. He had submitted his shrinking flesh and reluctant spirit to God's most unsparing demands, and had dared the worst that man could inflict. Such surrender and such experiences wrought in him a certain stern and terrible strength, and made his life still more remote from the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows of common men. In his isolation and his inspired self-sufficiency he had become an "iron pillar." Doubtless he seemed to many as hard and cold as iron; but this pillar of the

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<sup>1</sup> i. 18.

faith could still glow with white heat of indignant passion, and within the shelter of the "brassen walls" there still beat a human heart, touched with tender sympathy for those less disciplined to endure.

We have thus tried to estimate the development of Jeremiah's character during the second period of his ministry, which began with the death of Josiah and terminated with the brief reign of Jehoiachin. Before considering Jeremiah's judgment upon this prince we will review the scanty data at our disposal to enable us to appreciate the prophet's verdict.

Jehoiakim died while Nebuchadnezzar was on the march to punish his rebellion. His son Jehoiachin, a youth of eighteen,<sup>1</sup> succeeded his father and continued his policy. Thus the accession of the new king was no new departure, but merely a continuance of the old order; the government was still in the hands of the party attached to Egypt, and opposed to Babylon and hostile to Jeremiah. Under these circumstances we are bound to accept the statement of Kings that Jehoiakim "slept with his fathers," *i.e.* was buried in the royal sepulchre.<sup>2</sup> There was no literal fulfilment of the prediction that he should "be buried with the burial of an ass." Jeremiah had also declared concerning Jehoiakim: "He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David."<sup>3</sup> According to popular super-

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<sup>1</sup> The Chronicler's account of Jehoiakim's end (2 Chron. xxviii. 6-8) is due to a misunderstanding of the older records. According to Chronicles Jehoiachin was only eight, but all our data indicate that Kings is right.

<sup>2</sup> In LXX. of 2 Chron. xxxvi. 8, Jehoiakim, like Manasseh and Amon, was "buried in the garden of Uzza": B, Ganozæ; A, Ganozan. Cheyne is inclined to accept this statement, which he regards as derived from tradition.

<sup>3</sup> xxxvi. 30.

stitution, the honourable burial of Jehoiakim and the succession of his son to the throne further discredited Jeremiah and his teaching. Men read happy omens in the mere observance of ordinary constitutional routine. The curse upon Jehoiakim seemed so much spent breath: why should not Jeremiah's other predictions of ruin and exile also prove a mere *vox et præterea nihil*? In spite of a thousand disappointments, men's hopes still turned to Egypt; and if earthly resources failed they trusted to Jehovah Himself to intervene, and deliver Jerusalem from the advancing hosts of Nebuchadnezzar, as from the army of Sennacherib.

Ezekiel's elegy over Jehoiachin suggests that the young king displayed energy and courage worthy of a better fortune:—

“He walked up and down among the lions,  
 He became a young lion;  
 He learned to catch the prey,  
 He devoured men.  
 He broke down<sup>1</sup> their palaces,  
 He wasted their cities;  
 The land was desolate, and the fulness thereof,  
 At the noise of his roaring.”<sup>2</sup>

However figurative these lines may be, the hyperbole must have had some basis in fact. Probably before the regular Babylonian army entered Judah, Jehoiachin distinguished himself by brilliant but useless successes against the marauding bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, who had been sent to pre-

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<sup>1</sup> So A. B. Davidson in Cambridge Bible, etc., by a slight conjectural emendation; there have been many other suggested corrections of the text. The Hebrew text as it stands would mean literally “he knew their widows” (R.V. margin); A.V., R.V., by a slight change, “he knew their (A.V. desolate) palaces.”

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. xix. 5-7.



pare the way for the main body. He may even have carried his victorious arms into the territory of Moab or Ammon. But his career was speedily cut short: "The servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up to Jerusalem and besieged the city." Pharaoh Necho made no sign, and Jehoiachin was forced to retire before the regular forces of Babylon, and soon found himself shut up in Jerusalem. Still for a time he held out, but when it was known in the beleaguered city that Nebuchadnezzar was present in person in the camp of the besiegers, the Jewish captains lost heart. Perhaps too they hoped for better treatment, if they appealed to the conqueror's vanity by offering him an immediate submission which they had refused to his lieutenants. The gates were thrown open; Jehoiachin and the Queen Mother, Nehushta, with his ministers and princes and the officers of his household, passed out in suppliant procession, and placed themselves and their city at the disposal of the conqueror. In pursuance of the policy which Nebuchadnezzar had inherited from the Assyrians, the king and his court and eight thousand picked men were carried away captive to Babylon.<sup>1</sup> For thirty-seven years Jehoiachin languished in a Chaldean prison, till at last his sufferings were mitigated by an act of grace, which signalled the accession of a new king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's successor Evil Merodach, "in the year when he began to reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison, and spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon. And Jehoiachin changed his prison garments, and ate at

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xxiv. 8-17.

the royal table continually all the days of his life, and had a regular allowance given him by the king, a daily portion, all the days of his life."<sup>1</sup> At the age of fifty-five, the last survivor of the reigning princes of the house of David emerges from his dungeon, broken in mind and body by his long captivity, to be a grateful dependent upon the charity of Evil Merodach, just as the survivor of the house of Saul had sat at David's table. The young lion that devoured the prey and caught men and wasted cities was thankful to be allowed to creep out of his cage and die in comfort—"a despised broken vessel."

We feel a shock of surprise and repulsion as we turn from this pathetic story to Jeremiah's fierce invectives against the unhappy king. But we wrong the prophet and misunderstand his utterance if we forget that it was delivered during that brief frenzy in which the young king and his advisers threw away the last chance of safety for Judah. Jehoiachin might have repudiated his father's rebellion against Babylon; Jehoiakim's death had removed the chief offender, no personal blame attached to his successor, and a prompt submission might have appeased Nebuchadnezzar's wrath against Judah and obtained his favour for the new king. If a hot-headed young rajah of some protected Indian state revolted against the English suzerainty and exposed his country to the misery of a hopeless war, we should sympathise with any of his counsellors who condemned such wilful folly; we have no right to find fault with Jeremiah for his severe censure of the reckless vanity which precipitated his country's fate.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xxv. 27-30; Jer. lii. 31-34.

Jeremiah's deep and absorbing interest in Judah and Jerusalem is indicated by the form of this utterance; it is addressed to the "Daughter of Zion"<sup>1</sup>:—

"Go up to Lebanon, and lament,  
And lift up thy voice in Bashan,  
And lament from Abarim,<sup>2</sup>  
For thy lovers are all destroyed!"

Her "lovers," her heathen allies, whether gods or men, are impotent, and Judah is as forlorn and helpless as a lonely and unfriended woman; let her bewail her fate upon the mountains of Israel, like Jephthah's daughter in ancient days.

"I spake unto thee in thy prosperity;  
Thou saidst, I will not hearken.  
This hath been thy way from thy youth,  
That thou hast not obeyed My voice.  
The tempest shall be the shepherd to all thy shepherds."

Kings and nobles, priests and prophets, shall be carried off by the Chaldean invaders, as trees and houses are swept away by a hurricane. These shepherds who had spoiled and betrayed their flock would themselves be as silly sheep in the hands of robbers.

"Thy lovers shall go into captivity.  
Then, verily, shalt thou be ashamed and confounded  
Because of all thy wickedness.  
O thou that dwellest in Lebanon!  
O thou that hast made thy nest in the cedar!"

The former mention of Lebanon reminded Jeremiah of Jehoiakim's halls of cedar. With grim irony he

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew verbs are in 2 s. fem.; the person addressed is not named, but from analogy she can only be the "Daughter of Zion," *i.e.* Jerusalem personified.

<sup>2</sup> Identified with the mountains of Moab,

links together the royal magnificence of the palace and the wild abandonment of the people's lamentation.

“How wilt thou groan<sup>1</sup> when pangs come upon thee,  
Anguish as of a woman in travail!”

The nation is involved in the punishment inflicted upon her rulers. In such passages the prophets largely identify the nation with the governing classes—not without justification. No government, whatever the constitution may be, can ignore a strong popular demand for righteous policy, at home and abroad. A special responsibility of course rests on those who actually wield the authority of the state, but the policy of rulers seldom succeeds in effecting much either for good or evil without some sanction of public feeling. Our revolution which replaced the Puritan Protectorate by the restored Monarchy was rendered possible by the change of popular sentiment. Yet even under the purest democracy men imagine that they divest themselves of civic responsibility by neglecting their civic duties; they stand aloof, and blame officials and professional politicians for the injustice and crime wrought by the state. National guilt seems happily disposed of when laid on the shoulders of that convenient abstraction “the government”; but neither the prophets nor the Providence which they interpret recognise this convenient theory of vicarious atonement: the king sins, but the prophet's condemnation is uttered against and executed upon the nation.

Nevertheless a special responsibility rests upon the ruler, and now Jeremiah turns from the nation to its king.

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<sup>1</sup> R.V. margin, with LXX., Vulg., and Syr.

“As I live—Jehovah hath spoken it—  
Though Coniah ben Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet  
ring upon My right hand——”

By a forcible Hebrew idiom Jehovah, as it were, turns and confronts the king and specially addresses him :—

“Yet would I pluck thee thence.”

A signet ring was valuable in itself, and, as far as an inanimate object could be, was an “*alter ego*” of the sovereign ; it scarcely ever left his finger, and when it did, it carried with it the authority of its owner. A signet ring could not be lost or even cast away without some reflection upon the majesty of the king. Jehoiachin’s character was by no means worthless ; he had courage, energy, and patriotism. The heir of David and Solomon, the patron and champion of the Temple, dwelt, as it were, under the very shadow of the Almighty. Men generally believed that Jehovah’s honour was engaged to defend Jerusalem and the house of David. He Himself would be discredited by the fall of the elect dynasty and the captivity of the chosen people. Yet everything must be sacrificed—the career of a gallant young prince, the ancient association of the sacred Name with David and Zion, even the superstitious awe with which the heathen regarded the God of the Exodus and of the deliverance from Sennacherib. Nothing will be allowed to stand in the way of the Divine judgment. And yet we still sometimes dream that the working out of the Divine righteousness will be postponed in the interests of ecclesiastical traditions and in deference to the criticisms of ungodly men !

“And I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life,  
Into the hand of them of whom thou art afraid,  
Into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the  
Chaldeans.

And I will hurl thee and the mother that bare thee into another  
land, where ye were not born :  
There shall ye die.  
And unto the land whereunto their soul longeth to return,  
Thither they shall not return."

Again the sudden change in the person addressed emphasises the scope of the Divine proclamation ; the doom of the royal house is not only announced to them, but also to the world at large. The mention of the Queen Mother, *Nehushta*, reveals what we should in any case have conjectured, that the policy of the young prince was largely determined by his mother. Her importance is also indicated by *xiii. 18*, usually supposed to be addressed to *Jehoiachin* and *Nehushta* :—

"Say unto the king and the queen mother,  
Leave your thrones and sit in the dust,  
For your glorious diadems are fallen."

The Queen Mother is a characteristic figure of polygamous Eastern dynasties, but we may be helped to understand what *Nehushta* was to *Jehoiachin* if we remember the influence of *Eleanor of Poitou* over *Richard I.* and *John*, and the determined struggle which *Margaret of Anjou* made on behalf of her ill-starred son.

The next verse of our prophecy seems to be a protest against the severe sentence pronounced in the preceding clauses :—

"Is then this man *Coniah* a despised vessel, only fit to be broken ?  
Is he a tool, that no one wants ?"

Thus *Jeremiah* imagines the citizens and warriors of *Jerusalem* crying out against him, for his sentence of doom against their darling prince and captain. The prophetic utterance seemed to them monstrous and

incredible, only worthy to be met with impatient scorn. We may find a mediæval analogy to the situation at Jerusalem in the relations of Clement IV. to Conradin, the last heir of the house of Hohenstaufen. When this youth of sixteen was in the full career of victory, the Pope predicted that his army would be scattered like smoke, and pointed out the prince and his allies as victims for the sacrifice. When Conradin was executed after his defeat at Tagliacozzo, Christendom was filled with abhorrence at the suspicion that Clement had countenanced the doing to death of the hereditary enemy of the Papal See. Jehoiachin's friends felt towards Jeremiah somewhat as these thirteenth-century Ghibellines towards Clement.

Moreover the charge against Clement was probably unfounded; Milman<sup>1</sup> says of him, "He was doubtless moved with inner remorse at the cruelties of 'his champion' Charles of Anjou." Jeremiah too would lament the doom he was constrained to utter. Nevertheless he could not permit Judah to be deluded to its ruin by empty dreams of glory:—

"O land, land, land,  
Hear the word of Jehovah."

Isaiah had called all Nature, heaven and earth to bear witness against Israel, but now Jeremiah is appealing with urgent importunity to Judah. "O Chosen Land of Jehovah, so richly blessed by His favour, so sternly chastised by His discipline, Land of prophetic Revelation, now at last, after so many warnings, believe the word of thy God and submit to His judgment. Hasten not thy unhappy fate by shallow confidence in the genius and daring of Jehoiachin: he is no true Messiah."

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<sup>1</sup> Milman's *Latin Christianity*, vi. 392.



“For saith Jehovah,  
Write this man childless,  
A man whose life shall not know prosperity :  
For none of his seed shall prosper ;  
None shall sit upon the throne of David,  
Nor rule any more over Judah.”

Thus, by Divine decree, the descendants of Jehoiakim were disinherited ; Jehoiachin was to be recorded in the genealogies of Israel as having no heir. He might have offspring,<sup>1</sup> but the Messiah, the Son of David, would not come of his line.

Two points suggest themselves in connection with this utterance of Jeremiah ; first as to the circumstances under which it was uttered, then as to its application to Jehoiachin.

A moment's reflection will show that this prophecy implied great courage and presence of mind on the part of Jeremiah—his enemies might even have spoken of his barefaced audacity. He had predicted that Jehoiakim's corpse should be cast forth without any rites of honourable sepulture ; and that no son of his should sit upon the throne. Jehoiakim had been buried like other kings, he slept with his fathers, and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead. The prophet should have felt himself utterly discredited ; and yet here was Jeremiah coming forward unabashed with new prophecies against the king, whose very existence was a glaring disproof of his prophetic inspiration. Thus the friends of Jehoiachin. They would affect towards Jeremiah's message the same indifference which the present generation feels for the expositors of Daniel and the Apocalypse, who confidently announce the end of the

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<sup>1</sup> I Chron. iii. 17 mentions the “sons” of Jeconiah, and in Matt. i. 12 Shealtiel is called his “son,” but in Luke iii. 27 Shealtiel is called the son of Neri.



world for 1866, and in 1867 fix a new date with cheerful and undiminished assurance. But these students of sacred records can always save the authority of Scripture by acknowledging the fallibility of their calculations. When their predictions fail, they confess that they have done their sum wrong and start it afresh. But Jeremiah's utterances were not published as human deductions from inspired data; he himself claimed to be inspired. He did not ask his hearers to verify and acknowledge the accuracy of his arithmetic or his logic, but to submit to the Divine message from his lips. And yet it is clear that he did not stake the authority of Jehovah or even his own prophetic status upon the accurate and detailed fulfilment of his predictions. Nor does he suggest that, in announcing a doom which was not literally accomplished, he had misunderstood or misinterpreted his message. The details which both Jeremiah and those who edited and transmitted his words knew to be unfulfilled were allowed to remain in the record of Divine Revelation—not, surely, to illustrate the fallibility of prophets, but to show that an accurate forecast of details is not of the essence of prophecy; such details belong to its form and not to its substance. Ancient Hebrew prophecy clothed its ideas in concrete images; its messages of doom were made definite and intelligible in a glowing series of definite pictures. The prophets were realists and not impressionists. But they were also spiritual men, concerned with the great issues of history and religion. Their message had to do with *these*: they were little interested in minor matters; and they used detailed imagery as a mere instrument of exposition. Popular scepticism exulted when subsequent facts did not exactly corre-

spond to Jeremiah's images, but the prophet himself was unconscious of either failure or mistake. Jehoiakim might be magnificently buried, but his name was branded with eternal dishonour; Jehoiachin might reign for a hundred days, but the doom of Judah was not averted, and the house of David ceased for ever to rule in Jerusalem.

Our second point is the application of this prophecy to Jehoiachin. How far did the king deserve his sentence? Jeremiah indeed does not explicitly blame Jehoiachin, does not specify his sins as he did those of his royal sire. The estimate recorded in the Book of Kings doubtless expresses the judgment of Jeremiah, but it may be directed not so much against the young king as against his ministers. Yet the king cannot have been entirely innocent of the guilt of his policy and government. In chapter xxiv., however, Jeremiah speaks of the captives at Babylon, those carried away with Jehoiachin, as "good figs"; but we scarcely suppose he meant to include the king himself in this favourable estimate, otherwise we should discern some note of sympathy in the personal sentence upon him. We are left, therefore, to conclude that Jeremiah's judgment was unfavourable; although, in view of the prince's youth and limited opportunities, his guilt must have been slight compared to that of his father.

And, on the other hand, we have the manifest sympathy and even admiration of Ezekiel. The two estimates stand side by side in the sacred record to remind us that God neither tolerates man's sins because there is a better side to his nature, nor yet ignores his virtues on account of his vices. For ourselves we may be content to leave the last word on this matter with Jeremiah. When he declares God's

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sentence on Jehoiachin, he does not suggest that it was undeserved, but he refrains from any explicit reproach. Probably if he had known how entirely his prediction would be fulfilled, if he had foreseen the seven-and-thirty weary years which the young lion was to spend in his Babylonian cage, Jeremiah would have spoken more tenderly and pitifully even of the son of Jehoiakim.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *BAD SHEPHERDS AND FALSE PROPHETS*

xxiii, xxiv.

“Woe unto the shepherds that destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!”—*JER.* xxiii. 1.

“Of what avail is straw instead of grain? . . . Is not My word like fire, . . . like a hammer that shattereth the rocks?”—*JER.* xxiii. 28, 29.

THE captivity of Jehoiachin and the deportation of the flower of the people marked the opening of the last scene in the tragedy of Judah and of a new period in the ministry of Jeremiah. These events, together with the accession of Zedekiah as Nebuchadnezzar's nominee, very largely altered the state of affairs in Jerusalem. And yet the two main features of the situation were unchanged—the people and the government persistently disregarded Jeremiah's exhortations. “Neither Zedekiah, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of Jehovah which He spake by the prophet Jeremiah.”<sup>1</sup> They would not obey the will of Jehovah as to their life and worship, and they would not submit to Nebuchadnezzar. “Zedekiah . . . did evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that Jehoiakim had done; . . . and Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> xxxvii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings xxiv. 18-20.

It is remarkable that though Jeremiah consistently urged submission to Babylon, the various arrangements made by Nebuchadnezzar did very little to improve the prophet's position or increase his influence. The Chaldean king may have seemed ungrateful only because he was ignorant of the services rendered to him—Jeremiah would not enter into direct and personal co-operation with the enemy of his country, even with him whom Jehovah had appointed to be the scourge of His disobedient people—but the Chaldean policy served Nebuchadnezzar as little as it profited Jeremiah. Jehoiakim, in spite of his forced submission, remained the able and determined foe of his suzerain, and Zedekiah, to the best of his very limited ability, followed his predecessor's example.

Zedekiah was uncle of Jehoiachin, half-brother of Jehoiakim, and own brother to Jehoahaz. Possibly the two brothers owed their bias against Jeremiah and his teaching to their mother, Josiah's wife Hamutal, the daughter of another Jeremiah, the Libnite. Ezekiel thus describes the appointment of the new king: "The king of Babylon . . . took one of the seed royal, and made a covenant with him; he also put him under an oath, and took away the mighty of the land: that the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his covenant it might stand."<sup>2</sup> Apparently Nebuchadnezzar was careful to choose a feeble prince for his "base kingdom"; all that we read of Zedekiah suggests that he was weak and incapable. Henceforth the sovereign counted for little

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Chron. xxxvi. 10 makes Zedekiah the brother of Jehoiachin, possibly using the word in the general sense of "relation." Zedekiah's age shows that he cannot have been the son of Jehoiakim.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. xvii. 13, 14.

in the internal struggles of the tottering state. Josiah had firmly maintained the religious policy of Jeremiah, and Jehoiakim, as firmly, the opposite policy; but Zedekiah had neither the strength nor the firmness to enforce a consistent policy and to make one party permanently dominant. Jeremiah and his enemies were left to fight it out amongst themselves, so that now their antagonism grew more bitter and pronounced than during any other reign.

But whatever advantage the prophet might derive from the weakness of the sovereign was more than counterbalanced by the recent deportation. In selecting the captives Nebuchadnezzar had sought merely to weaken Judah by carrying away every one who would have been an element of strength to the "base kingdom." Perhaps he rightly believed that neither the prudence of the wise nor the honour of the virtuous would overcome their patriotic hatred of subjection; weakness alone would guarantee the obedience of Judah. He forgot that even weakness is apt to be foolhardy—when there is no immediate prospect of penalty.

One result of his policy was that the enemies and friends of Jeremiah were carried away indiscriminately; there was no attempt to leave behind those who might have counselled submission to Babylon as the acceptance of a Divine judgment, and thus have helped to keep Judah loyal to its foreign master. On the contrary Jeremiah's disciples were chiefly thoughtful and honourable men, and Nebuchadnezzar's policy in taking away "the mighty of the land" bereft the prophet of many friends and supporters, amongst them his disciple Ezekiel and doubtless a large class of whom Daniel and his three friends might be taken as

types. When Jeremiah characterises the captives as "good figs" and those left behind as "bad figs,"<sup>1</sup> and the judgment is confirmed and amplified by Ezekiel,<sup>2</sup> we may be sure that most of the prophet's adherents were in exile.

We have already had occasion to compare the changes in the religious policy of the Jewish government to the alternations of Protestant and Romanist sovereigns among the Tudors; but no Tudor was as feeble as Zedekiah. He may rather be compared to Charles IX. of France, helpless between the Huguenots and the League. Only the Jewish factions were less numerous, less evenly balanced; and by the speedy advance of Nebuchadnezzar civil dissensions were merged in national ruin.

The opening years of the new reign passed in nominal allegiance to Babylon. Jeremiah's influence would be used to induce the vassal king to observe the covenant he had entered into and to be faithful to his oath to Nebuchadnezzar. On the other hand a crowd of "patriotic" prophets urged Zedekiah to set up once more the standard of national independence, to "come to the help of the Lord against the mighty." Let us then briefly consider Jeremiah's polemic against the princes, prophets, and priests of his people. While Ezekiel in a celebrated chapter<sup>3</sup> denounces the idolatry of the princes, priests, and women of Judah, their worship of creeping things and abominable beasts, their weeping for Tammuz, their adoration of the sun, Jeremiah is chiefly concerned with the perverse policy of the government and the support it receives from priests and prophets, who profess to speak in the name

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<sup>1</sup> xxiv.<sup>2</sup> vii.—xi.<sup>3</sup> viii.



of Jehovah. Jeremiah does not utter against Zedekiah any formal judgment like those on his three predecessors. Perhaps the prophet did not regard this impotent sovereign as the responsible representative of the state, and when the long-expected catastrophe at last befell the doomed people, neither Zedekiah nor his doings distracted men's attention from their own personal sufferings and patriotic regrets. At the point where a paragraph on Zedekiah would naturally have followed that on Jehoiachin, we have by way of summary and conclusion to the previous sections a brief denunciation of the shepherds of Israel.

“Woe unto the shepherds that destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! . . . Ye have scattered My flock, and driven them away, and have not cared for them; behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings.”

These “shepherds” are primarily the kings, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin, who have been condemned by name in the previous chapter, together with the unhappy Zedekiah, who is too insignificant to be mentioned. But the term shepherds will also include the ruling and influential classes of which the king was the leading representative.

The image is a familiar one in the Old Testament and is found in the oldest literature of Israel,<sup>1</sup> but the denunciation of the rulers of Judah as unfaithful shepherds is characteristic of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and one of the prophecies appended to the Book of Zechariah.<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel xxxiv. expands this figure and enforces its lessons:—

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. xlix. 24, J. from older source. Micah v. 5.

<sup>2</sup> ix.—xi., xiii. 7-9.



"Woe unto the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves!  
 Should not the shepherds feed the sheep? Ye eat the fat, and  
 ye clothe you with the wool.  
 Ye kill the fatlings; but ye feed not the sheep.  
 The diseased have ye not strengthened,  
 Neither have ye healed the sick,  
 Neither have ye bound up the bruised,  
 Neither have ye brought back again that which was driven away,  
 Neither have ye sought for that which was lost,  
 But your rule over them has been harsh and violent.  
 And for want of a shepherd, they were scattered,  
 And became food for every beast of the field."<sup>1</sup>

So in Zechariah ix., etc., Jehovah's anger is kindled against the shepherds, because they do not pity His flock.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah speaks of the kings of all nations as shepherds, and pronounces against them also a like doom. All these passages illustrate the concern of the prophets for good government. They were neither Pharisees nor formalists; their religious ideals were broad and wholesome. Doubtless the elect remnant will endure through all conditions of society; but the Kingdom of God was not meant to be a pure Church in a rotten state. This present evil world is no manure heap to fatten the growth of holiness: it is rather a mass for the saints to leaven.

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel turn from the unfaithful shepherds whose "hungry sheep look up and are not fed" to the true King of Israel, the "Shepherd of Israel that led Joseph like a flock, and dwelt between the Cherubim." In the days of the Restoration He will raise up faithful shepherds, and over them a righteous Branch, the real Jehovah Zidqenu, instead of the sapless twig who disgraced the name "Zedekiah." Similarly

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xxxiv. 2-5.

<sup>2</sup> Zech. x. 3, xi. 5.

<sup>3</sup> xxv. 34-38.

Ezekiel promises that God will set up one shepherd over His people, "even My servant David." The pastoral care of Jehovah for His people is most tenderly and beautifully set forth in the twenty-third Psalm. Our Lord, the root and the offspring of David, claims to be the fulfilment of ancient prophecy when He calls Himself "the Good Shepherd." The words of Christ and of the Psalmist receive new force and fuller meaning when we contrast their pictures of the true Shepherd with the portraits of the Jewish kings drawn by the prophets. Moreover the history of this metaphor warns us against ignoring the organic life of the Christian society, the Church, in our concern for the spiritual life of the individual. As Sir Thomas More said, in applying this figure to Henry VIII., "Of the multitude of sheep cometh the name of a shepherd."<sup>1</sup> A shepherd implies not merely a sheep, but a flock; His relation to each member is tender and personal, but He bestows blessings and requires service in fellowship with the Family of God.

By a natural sequence the denunciation of the unfaithful shepherds is followed by a similar utterance "concerning the prophets." It is true that the prophets are not spoken of as shepherds; and Milton's use of the figure in *Lycidas* suggests the New Testament rather than the Old. Yet the prophets had a large share in guiding the destinies of Israel in politics as well as in religion, and having passed sentence on the shepherds—the kings and princes—Jeremiah turns to the ecclesiastics, chiefly, as the heading implies, to the prophets. The priests indeed do not escape, but Jeremiah seems to feel that they are adequately dealt

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<sup>1</sup> Froude, i. 205.

with in two or three casual references. We use the term "ecclesiastics" advisedly; the prophets were now a large professional class, more important and even more clerical than the priests. The prophets and priests together were the clergy of Israel. They claimed to be devoted servants of Jehovah, and for the most part the claim was made in all sincerity; but they misunderstood His character, and mistook for Divine inspiration the suggestions of their own prejudice and self-will.

Jeremiah's indictment against them has various counts. He accuses them of speaking without authority, and also of time-serving, plagiarism, and cant.

First, then, as to their unauthorised utterances: Jeremiah finds them guilty of an unholy licence in prophesying, a distorted caricature of that "liberty of prophesying" which is the prerogative of God's accredited ambassadors.

"Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you.

They make fools of you:

The visions which they declare are from their own hearts,  
And not from the mouth of Jehovah.

Who hath stood in the council of Jehovah,  
To perceive and hear His word?

Who hath marked His word and heard it?

I sent not the prophets—yet they ran;

I spake not unto them—yet they prophesied."

The evils which Jeremiah describes are such as will always be found in any large professional class. To use modern terms—in the Church, as in every profession, there will be men who are not qualified for the vocation which they follow. They are indeed not

called to their vocation ; they "follow," but do not overtake it. They are not sent of God, yet they run ; they have no Divine message, yet they preach. They have never stood in the council of Jehovah ; they might perhaps have gathered up scraps of the King's purposes from His true councillors ; but when they had opportunity they neither "marked nor heard" ; and yet they discourse concerning heavenly things with much importance and assurance. But their inspiration, at its best, has no deeper or richer source than their own shallow selves ; their visions are the mere product of their own imaginations. Strangers to the true fellowship, their spirit is not "a well of water springing up unto eternal life," but a stagnant pool. And, unless the judgment and mercy of God intervene, that pool will in the end be fed from a fountain whose bitter waters are earthly, sensual, devilish.

We are always reluctant to speak of ancient prophecy or modern preaching as a "profession." We may gladly dispense with the word, if we do not thereby ignore the truth which it inaccurately expresses. Men lived by prophecy, as, with Apostolic sanction, men live by "the gospel." They were expected, as ministers are now, though in a less degree, to justify their claims to an income and an official status, by discharging religious functions so as to secure the approval of the people or the authorities. Then, as now, the prophet's reputation, influence, and social standing, probably even his income, depended upon the amount of visible success that he could achieve.

In view of such facts, it is futile to ask men of the world not to speak of the clerical life as a profession. They discern no ethical difference between a curate's dreams of a bishopric and the aspirations of a junior

barrister to the woolsack. Probably a refusal to recognise the element common to the ministry with law, medicine, and other professions, injures both the Church and its servants. One peculiar difficulty and most insidious temptation of the Christian ministry consists in its mingled resemblances to and differences from the other professions. The minister has to work under similar worldly conditions, and yet to control those conditions by the indwelling power of the Spirit. He has to "run," it may be twice or even three times a week, whether he be sent or no: how can he always preach only that which God has taught him? He is consciously dependent upon the exercise of his memory, his intellect, his fancy: how can he avoid speaking "the visions of his own heart"? The Church can never allow its ministers to regard themselves as mere professional teachers and lecturers, and yet if they claim to be more, must they not often fall under Jeremiah's condemnation?

It is one of those practical dilemmas which delight casuists and distress honest and earnest servants of God. In the early Christian centuries similar difficulties peopled the Egyptian and Syrian deserts with ascetics, who had given up the world as a hopeless riddle. A full discussion of the problem would lead us too far away from the exposition of Jeremiah, and we will only venture to make two suggestions.

The necessity, which most ministers are under, of "living by the gospel," may promote their own spiritual life and add to their usefulness. It corrects and reduces spiritual pride, and helps them to understand and sympathise with their lay brethren, most of whom are subject to a similar trial.

Secondly, as a minister feels the ceaseless pressure

of strong temptation to speak from and live for himself—his lower, egotistic self—he will be correspondingly driven to a more entire and persistent surrender to God. The infinite fulness and variety of Revelation is expressed by the manifold gifts and experience of the prophets. If only the prophet be surrendered to the Spirit, then what is most characteristic of himself may become the most forcible expression of his message. His constant prayer will be that he may have the child's heart and may never resist the Holy Ghost, that no personal interest or prejudice, no bias of training or tradition or current opinion, may dull his hearing when he stands in the council of the Lord, or betray him into uttering for Christ's gospel the suggestions of his own self-will or the mere watchwords of his ecclesiastical faction.

But to return to the ecclesiastics who had stirred Jeremiah's wrath. The professional prophets naturally adapted their words to the itching ears of their clients. They were not only officious, but also time-serving. Had they been true prophets, they would have dealt faithfully with Judah; they would have sought to convince the people of sin, and to lead them to repentance; they would thus have given them yet another opportunity of salvation.

"If they had stood in My council,  
They would have caused My people to hear My words;  
They would have turned them from their evil way,  
And from the evil of their doings."

But now :—

"They walk in lies and strengthen the hands of evildoers,  
That no one may turn away from his sin.

. . . . .

They say continually unto them that despise the word of  
 Jehovah,<sup>1</sup>  
 Ye shall have peace;  
 And unto every one that walketh in the stubbornness of his  
 heart they say,  
 No evil shall come upon you."

Unfortunately, when prophecy becomes professional in the lowest sense of the word, it is governed by commercial principles. A sufficiently imperious demand calls forth an abundant supply. A sovereign can "tune the pulpits"; and a ruling race can obtain from its clergy formal ecclesiastical sanction for such "domestic institutions" as slavery. When evildoers grow numerous and powerful, there will always be prophets to strengthen their hands and encourage them not to turn away from their sin. But to give the lie to these false prophets God sends Jeremiahs, who are often branded as heretics and schismatics, turbulent fellows who turn the world upside-down.

The self-important, self-seeking spirit leads further to the sin of plagiarism:—

"Therefore I am against the prophets, is the utterance of Jehovah,  
 Who steal My word from one another."

The sin of plagiarism is impossible to the true prophet, partly because there are no rights of private property in the word of Jehovah. The Old Testament writers make free use of the works of their predecessors. For instance, Isaiah ii. 2-4 is almost identical with Micah iv. 1-3; yet neither author acknowledges his indebtedness to the other or to any third prophet.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LXX. See R.V. margin.

<sup>2</sup> Possibly, however, the insertion of this passage in one of the books may have been the work of an editor, and we cannot be sure that, in Jeremiah's time, collections entitled Isaiah and Micah both included this section,



Uriah ben Shemaiah prophesied according to all the words of Jeremiah,<sup>1</sup> who himself owes much to Hosea, whom he never mentions. Yet he was not conscious of stealing from his predecessor, and he would have brought no such charge against Isaiah or Micah or Uriah. In the New Testament 2 Peter and Jude have so much in common that one must have used the other without acknowledgment. Yet the Church has not, on that ground, excluded either Epistle from the Canon. In the goodly fellowship of the prophets and the glorious company of the apostles no man says that the things which he utters are his own. But the mere hireling has no part in the spiritual communism wherein each may possess all things because he claims nothing. When a prophet ceases to be the messenger of God, and sinks into the mercenary purveyor of his own clever sayings and brilliant fancies, then he is tempted to become a clerical Autolycus, "a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles." Modern ideas furnish a curious parallel to Jeremiah's indifference to the borrowings of the true prophet, and his scorn of the literary pilferings of the false. We hear only too often of stolen sermons, but no one complains of plagiarism in prayers. Doubtless among these false prophets charges of plagiarism were bandied to and fro with much personal acrimony. But it is interesting to notice that Jeremiah is not denouncing an injury done to himself; he does not accuse them of thieving from him, but from one another. Probably assurance and lust of praise and power would have overcome any awe they felt for Jeremiah. He was only free from their depredations, because—from their point of view—his words were not worth stealing.

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<sup>1</sup> xxvi. 20.



There was nothing to be gained by repeating his stern denunciations, and even his promises were not exactly suited to the popular taste.

These prophets were prepared to cater for the average religious appetite in the most approved fashion—in other words, they were masters of cant. Their office had been consecrated by the work of true men of God like Elijah and Isaiah. They themselves claimed to stand in the genuine prophetic succession, and to inherit the reverence felt for their great predecessors, quoting their inspired utterances and adopting their weighty phrases. As Jeremiah's contemporaries listened to one of their favourite orators, they were soothed by his assurances of Divine favour and protection, and their confidence in the speaker was confirmed by the frequent sound of familiar formulæ in his unctuous sentences. These had the true ring; they were redolent of sound doctrine, of what popular tradition regarded as orthodox.

The solemn attestation *NE'UM YAHWE*, "It is the utterance of Jehovah," is continually appended to prophecies, almost as if it were the sign-manual of the Almighty. Isaiah and other prophets frequently use the term *MASSA* (A.V., R.V., "burden") as a title, especially for prophecies concerning neighbouring nations. The ancient records loved to tell how Jehovah revealed Himself to the patriarchs in dreams. Jeremiah's rivals included dreams in their clerical apparatus:—

"Behold, I am against them that prophesy lying dreams—

*Ne'um Yahwe—*

And tell them, and lead astray My people

By their lies and their rodomontade;

It was not I who sent or commanded them,

Neither shall they profit this people at all,

*Ne'um Yahwe'*

These prophets "thought to cause the Lord's people to forget His name, as their fathers forgot His name for Baal, by their dreams which they told one another."

Moreover they could glibly repeat the sacred phrases as part of their professional jargon:—

"Behold, I am against the prophets,  
It is the utterance of Jehovah (*Ne'um Yahwe*),  
That use their tongues  
To utter utterances (*Wayyin'amu Ne'um*)."

"To utter utterances"—the prophets uttered them, not Jehovah. These sham oracles were due to no Diviner source than the imagination of foolish hearts. But for Jeremiah's grim earnestness, the last clause would be almost blasphemous. It is virtually a caricature of the most solemn formula of ancient Hebrew religion. But this was really degraded when it was used to obtain credence for the lies which men prophesied out of the deceit of their own heart. Jeremiah's seeming irreverence was the most forcible way of bringing this home to his hearers. There are profanations of the most sacred things which can scarcely be spoken of without an apparent breach of the Third Commandment. The most awful taking in vain of the name of the Lord God is not heard among the publicans and sinners, but in pulpits and on the platforms of religious meetings.

But these prophets and their clients had a special fondness for the phrase "The burden of Jehovah," and their unctuous use of it most especially provoked Jeremiah's indignation:—

"When this people, priest, or prophet shall ask thee,  
What is the burden of Jehovah?"

Then say unto them, Ye are the burden,<sup>1</sup>  
But I will cast you off, *Ne'um Yahwe*.  
If priest or prophet or people shall say, The burden of  
    Jehovah,  
I will punish that man and his house.  
And ye shall say to one another,  
What hath Jehovah answered? and, What hath Jehovah  
    spoken?  
And ye shall no more make mention of the burden of  
    Jehovah:  
For (if ye do) men's words shall become a burden to  
    themselves.

        .        .        .        .        .  
Thus shall ye inquire of a prophet,  
What hath Jehovah answered thee?  
What hath Jehovah spoken unto thee?  
But if ye say, The burden of Jehovah,  
Thus saith Jehovah: Because ye say this word, The burden  
    of Jehovah,  
When I have sent unto you the command,  
Ye shall not say, The burden of Jehovah,  
Therefore I will assuredly take you up,  
And will cast away from before Me both you and the city  
    which I gave to you and to your fathers.  
I will bring upon you everlasting reproach  
And everlasting shame, that shall not be forgotten."

Jeremiah's insistence and vehemence speak for themselves. Their moral is obvious, though for the most part unheeded. The most solemn formulæ, hallowed by ancient and sacred associations, used by inspired teachers as the vehicle of revealed truths, may be debased till they become the very legend of Antichrist, blazoned on the *Vexilla Regis Inferni*. They are like a motto of one of Charles's Paladins flaunted by his unworthy descendants to give distinction to cruelty and vice. The Church's line of march is strewn with

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<sup>1</sup> So LXX. and modern editors: see Giesebrecht, *in loco*. R.V.  
"What burden!"

such dishonoured relics of her noblest champions. Even our Lord's own words have not escaped. There is a fashion of discoursing upon "the gospel" which almost tempts reverent Christians to wish they might never hear that word again. Neither is this debasing of the moral currency confined to religious phrases; almost every political and social watchword has been similarly abused. One of the vilest tyrannies the world has ever seen—the Reign of Terror—claimed to be an incarnation of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity."

Yet the Bible, with that marvellous catholicity which lifts it so high above the level of all other religious literature, not only records Jeremiah's prohibition to use the term "Burden," but also tells us that centuries later Malachi could still speak of "the burden of the word of Jehovah." A great phrase that has been discredited by misuse may yet recover itself; the tarnished and dishonoured sword of faith may be baptised and burnished anew, and flame in the forefront of the holy war.

Jeremiah does not stand alone in his unfavourable estimate of the professional prophets of Judah; a similar depreciation seems to be implied by the words of Amos: "I am neither a prophet nor of the sons of the prophets."<sup>1</sup> One of the unknown authors whose writings have been included in the Book of Zechariah takes up the teaching of Amos and Jeremiah and carries it a stage further:—

"In that day (it is the utterance of Jehovah Sabaoth) I will  
cut off the names of the idols from the land,  
They shall not be remembered any more ;

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<sup>1</sup> vii. 14; but cf. R.V., "I was," etc.

Also the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness  
 Will I expel from the land,  
 When any shall yet prophesy,  
 His father and mother that begat him shall say unto him,  
 Thou shalt not live, for thou speakest lies in the name of  
 Jehovah :  
 And his father and mother that begat him shall thrust him  
 through when he prophesieth.  
 In that day every prophet when he prophesieth shall be  
 ashamed of his vision ;  
 Neither shall any wear a hairy mantle to deceive :  
 He shall say, I am no prophet ;  
 I am a tiller of the ground,  
 I was sold for a slave in my youth." <sup>1</sup>

No man with any self-respect would allow his fellows to dub him prophet ; slave was a less humiliating name. No family would endure the disgrace of having a member who belonged to this despised caste ; parents would rather put their son to death than see him a prophet. To such extremities may the spirit of time-serving and cant reduce a national clergy. We are reminded of Latimer's words in his famous sermon to Convocation in 1536: "All good men in all places accuse your avarice, your exactions, your tyranny. I commanded you that ye should feed my sheep, and ye earnestly feed yourselves from day to day, wallowing in delights and idleness. I commanded you to teach my law ; you teach your own traditions, and seek your own glory." <sup>2</sup>

Over against their fluent and unctuous cant Jeremiah sets the terrible reality of his Divine message. Compared to this, their sayings are like chaff to the wheat ; nay, this is too tame a figure—Jehovah's word is like

<sup>1</sup> Zech. xiii. 2-5. Post-exilic, according to most critics (Driver's *Introduction, in loco*).

<sup>2</sup> Froude, ii. 474.

fire, like a hammer that shatters rocks. He says of himself:—

“My heart within me is broken; all my bones shake:  
I am like a drunken man, like a man whom wine hath overcome,  
Because of Jehovah and His holy words.”

Thus we have in chapter xxiii. a full and formal statement of the controversy between Jeremiah and his brother-prophets. On the one hand, self-seeking and self-assurance winning popularity by orthodox phrases, traditional doctrine, and the prophesying of smooth things; on the other hand, a man to whom the word of the Lord was like a fire in his bones, who had surrendered prejudice and predilection that he might himself become a hammer to shatter the Lord's enemies, a man through whom God wrought so mightily that he himself reeled and staggered with the blows of which he was the instrument.

The relation of the two parties was not unlike that of St. Paul and his Corinthian adversaries: the prophet, like the Apostle, spoke “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power”; he considered “not the word of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” In our next chapter we shall see the practical working of this antagonism which we have here set forth.

## CHAPTER IX

### *HANANIAH*

xxvii., xxviii.

“Hear now, Hananiah; Jehovah hath not sent thee, but thou makest this people to trust in a lie.”—*JER.* xxviii. 15.

THE most conspicuous point at issue between Jeremiah and his opponents was political rather than ecclesiastical. Jeremiah was anxious that Zedekiah should keep faith with Nebuchadnezzar, and not involve Judah in useless misery by another hopeless revolt. The prophets preached the popular doctrine of an imminent Divine intervention to deliver Judah from her oppressors. They devoted themselves to the easy task of fanning patriotic enthusiasm, till the Jews were ready for any enterprise, however reckless.

During the opening years of the new reign, Nebuchadnezzar's recent capture of Jerusalem and the consequent wholesale deportation were fresh in men's minds; fear of the Chaldeans together with the influence of Jeremiah kept the government from any overt act of rebellion. According to li. 59, the king even paid a visit to Babylon, to do homage to his suzerain.

It was probably in the fourth year of his reign<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The close connection between xxvii. and xxviii. shows that the date in xxviii. 1, “the fourth year of Zedekiah,” covers both chapters. “Jehoiakim” in xxvii. 1 is a misreading for “Zedekiah”: see R.V. margin.

that the tributary Syrian states began to prepare for a united revolt against Babylon. The Assyrian and Chaldean annals constantly mention such combinations, which were formed and broken up and reformed with as much ease and variety as patterns in a kaleidoscope. On the present occasion the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Zidon sent their ambassadors to Jerusalem to arrange with Zedekiah for concerted action. But there were more important persons to deal with in that city than Zedekiah. Doubtless the princes of Judah welcomed the opportunity for a new revolt. But before the negotiations were very far advanced, Jeremiah heard what was going on. By Divine command, he made "bands and bars," *i.e.* yokes, for himself and for the ambassadors of the allies, or possibly for them to carry home to their masters. They received their answer, not from Zedekiah, but from the true King of Israel, Jehovah Himself. They had come to solicit armed assistance to deliver them from Babylon; they were sent back with yokes to wear as a symbol of their entire and helpless subjection to Nebuchadnezzar. This was the word of Jehovah:—

"The nation and the kingdom that will not put its neck beneath  
the yoke of the king of Babylon,  
That nation will I visit with sword and famine and pestilence  
until I consume them by his hand."

The allied kings had been encouraged to revolt by oracles similar to those uttered by the Jewish prophets in the name of Jehovah; but:—

"As for you, hearken not to your prophets, diviners, dreams,  
soothsayers and sorcerers,  
When they speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the  
king of Babylon.



They prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land ;  
That I should drive you out, and that you should perish.  
But the nation that shall bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him,  
That nation will I maintain in their own land (it is the utterance of Jehovah), and they shall till it and dwell in it."

When he had sent his message to the foreign envoys, Jeremiah addressed an almost identical admonition to his own king. He bids him submit to the Chaldean yoke, under the same penalties for disobedience—sword, pestilence, and famine for himself and his people. He warns him also against delusive promises of the prophets, especially in the matter of the sacred vessels.

The popular doctrine of the inviolable sanctity of the Temple had sustained a severe shock when Nebuchadnezzar carried off the sacred vessels to Babylon. It was inconceivable that Jehovah would patiently submit to so gross an indignity. In ancient days the Ark had plagued its Philistine captors till they were only too thankful to be rid of it. Later on a graphic narrative in the Book of Daniel told with what swift vengeance God punished Belshazzar for his profane use of these very vessels. So now patriotic prophets were convinced that the golden candlestick, the bowls and chargers of gold and silver, would soon return in triumph, like the Ark of old ; and their return would be the symbol of the final deliverance of Judah from Babylon. Naturally the priests above all others would welcome such a prophecy, and would industriously disseminate it. But Jeremiah "spake to the priests and all this people, saying, Thus saith Jehovah :—

“Hearken not unto the words of your prophets, which prophesy unto you,  
Behold, the vessels of the house of Jehovah shall be brought back from Babylon now speedily :  
For they prophesy a lie unto you.”

How could Jehovah grant triumphant deliverance to a carnally minded people who would not understand His Revelation, and did not discern any essential difference between Him and Moloch and Baal ?

“Hearken not unto them ; serve the king of Babylon and live.  
Why should this city become a desolation ? ”

Possibly, however, even now, the Divine compassion might have spared Jerusalem the agony and shame of her final siege and captivity. God would not at once restore what was lost, but He might spare what was still left. Jeremiah could not endorse the glowing promises of the prophets, but he would unite with them to intercede for mercy upon the remnant of Israel.

“If they are prophets and the word of Jehovah is with them,  
Let them intercede with Jehovah Sabaoth, that the rest of the vessels of the Temple, the Palace, and the City may not go to Babylon.”

The God of Israel was yet ready to welcome any beginning of true repentance. Like the father of the Prodigal Son, He would meet His people when they were on the way back to Him. Any stirring of filial penitence would win an instant and gracious response.

We can scarcely suppose that this appeal by Jeremiah to his brother-prophets was merely sarcastic and denunciatory. Passing circumstances may have brought Jeremiah into friendly intercourse with some

of his opponents ; personal contact may have begotten something of mutual kindness ; and hence there arose a transient gleam of hope that reconciliation and co-operation might still be possible. But it was soon evident that the "patriotic" party would not renounce their vain dreams ; Judah must drink the cup of wrath to the dregs : the pillars, the sea, the bases, the rest of the vessels left in Jerusalem must also be carried to Babylon, and remain there till Jehovah should visit the Jews and bring them back and restore them to their own land.

Thus did Jeremiah meet the attempt of the government to organise a Syrian revolt against Babylon, and thus did he give the lie to the promises of Divine blessing made by the prophets. In the face of his utterances, it was difficult to maintain the popular enthusiasm necessary to a successful revolt. In order to neutralise, if possible, the impression made by Jeremiah, the government put forward one of their prophetic supporters to deliver a counter-blast. The place and the occasion were similar to those chosen by Jeremiah for his own address to the people and for Baruch's reading of the roll—the court of the Temple where the priests and "all the people" were assembled. Jeremiah himself was there. Possibly it was a feast-day. The incident came to be regarded as of special importance, and a distinct heading is attached to it, specifying its exact date, "in the same year"—as the incidents of the previous chapter—"in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month."

On such an occasion, Jeremiah's opponents would select as their representative some striking personality, a man of high reputation for ability and personal

character. Such a man, apparently, they found in Hananiah ben Azzur of Gibeon. Let us consider for a moment this mouthpiece and champion of a great political and ecclesiastical party, we might almost say of a National Government and a National Church. He is never mentioned except in chapter xxviii., but what we read here is sufficiently characteristic, and receives much light from the other literature of the period. As Gibeon is assigned to the priests in Joshua xxi. 17, it has been conjectured that, like Jeremiah himself, Hananiah was a priest. The special stress laid on the sacred vessels would be in accordance with this theory.

In our last chapter we expounded Jeremiah's description of his prophetic contemporaries, as self-important and time-serving, guilty of plagiarism and cant. Now from this dim, inarticulate crowd of professional prophets, an individual steps for a moment into the light of history and speaks with clearness and emphasis. Let us gaze at him, and hear what he has to say.

If we could have been present at this scene immediately after a careful study of chapter xxvii. even the appearance of Hananiah would have caused us a shock of surprise—such as is sometimes experienced by a devout student of Protestant literature on being introduced to a live Jesuit, or by some budding secularist when he first makes the personal acquaintance of a curate. We might possibly have discerned something commonplace, some lack of depth and force in the man whose faith was merely conventional; but we should have expected to read "liar and hypocrite" in every line of his countenance, and we should have seen nothing of the sort. Conscious of the enthusiastic support of his fellow-countrymen and especially of his

own order, charged—as he believed—with a message of promise for Jerusalem, Hananiah's face and bearing, as he came forward to address his sympathetic audience, betrayed nothing unworthy of the high calling of a prophet. His words had the true prophetic ring, he spoke with assured authority:—

“Thus saith Jehovah Sabaoth, the God of Israel,  
I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.”

His special object was to remove the unfavourable impression caused by Jeremiah's contradiction of the promise concerning the sacred vessels. Like Jeremiah, he meets this denial in the strongest and most convincing fashion. He does not argue—he reiterates the promise in a more definite form and with more emphatic asseveration. Like Jonah at Nineveh, he ventures to fix an exact date in the immediate future for the fulfilment of the prophecy. “Yet forty days,” said Jonah, but the next day he had to swallow his own words; and Hananiah's prophetic chronology met with no better fate:—

“Within two full years will I bring again to this place all the vessels of the Temple, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away.”

The full significance of this promise is shown by the further addition:—

“And I will bring again to this place the king of Judah, Jeconiah ben Jehoiakim, and all the captives of Judah that went to Babylon (it is the utterance of Jehovah); for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.”

This bold challenge was promptly met:—

“The prophet Jeremiah said unto the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people that

stood in the Temple." Not "the true prophet" and "the false prophet," not "the man of God" and "the impostor," but simply "the prophet Jeremiah" and "the prophet Hananiah." The audience discerned no obvious difference of status or authority between the two—if anything the advantage lay with Hananiah; they watched the scene as a modern churchman might regard a discussion between ritualistic and evangelical bishops at a Church Congress, only Hananiah was their ideal of a "good churchman." The true parallel is not debates between atheists and the Christian Evidence Society, or between missionaries and Brahmins, but controversies like those between Arius and Athanasius, Jerome and Rufinus, Cyril and Chrysostom.

These prophets, however, display a courtesy and self-restraint that have, for the most part, been absent from Christian polemics.

"Jeremiah the prophet said, Amen: may Jehovah bring it to pass; may He establish the words of thy prophecy, by bringing back again from Babylon unto this place both the vessels of the Temple and all the captives."

With that entire sincerity which is the most consummate tact, Jeremiah avows his sympathy with his opponents' patriotic aspirations, and recognises that they were worthy of Hebrew prophets. But patriotic aspirations were not a sufficient reason for claiming Divine authority for a cheap optimism. Jeremiah's reflection upon the past had led him to an entirely opposite philosophy of history. Behind Hananiah's words lay the claim that the religious traditions of Israel and the teaching of former prophets guaranteed the inviolability of the Temple and the Holy City.

Jeremiah appealed to their authority for his message of doom :—

“The ancient prophets who were our predecessors prophesied war and calamity and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms.”

It was almost a mark of the true prophet that he should be the herald of disaster. The prophetic books of the Old Testament Canon fully confirm this startling and unwelcome statement. Their main burden is the ruin and misery that await Israel and its neighbours. The presumption therefore was in favour of the prophet of evil, and against the prophet of good. Jeremiah does not, of course, deny that there had been, and might yet be, prophets of good. Indeed every prophet, he himself included, announced some Divine promise, but :—

“The prophet which prophesieth of peace shall be known as truly sent of Jehovah when his prophecy is fulfilled.”

It seemed a fair reply to Hananiah's challenge. His prophecy of the return of the sacred vessels and the exiles within two years was intended to encourage Judah and its allies to persist in their revolt. They would be at once victorious, and recover all and more than all which they had lost. Under such circumstances Jeremiah's criterion of “prophecies of peace” was eminently practical. “You are promised these blessings within two years : very well, do not run the terrible risks of a rebellion ; keep quiet and see if the two years bring the fulfilment of this prophecy—it is not long to wait.” Hananiah might fairly have replied that this fulfilment depended on Judah's faith and loyalty to the Divine promise ; and their faith and loyalty would be best shown by rebelling against their



oppressors. Jehovah promised Canaan to the Hebrews of the Exodus, but their carcasses mouldered in the desert because they had not courage enough to attack formidable enemies. "Let us not," Hananiah might have said, "imitate their cowardice, and thus share alike their unbelief and its penalty."

Neither Jeremiah's premises nor his conclusions would commend his words to the audience, and he probably weakened his position by leaving the high ground of authority and descending to argument. Hananiah at any rate did not follow his example: he adheres to his former method, and reiterates with renewed emphasis the promise which his adversary had contradicted. Following Jeremiah in his use of the parable in action, so common with Hebrew prophets, he turned the symbol of the yoke against its author. As Zedekiah ben Chenaanah made him horns of iron and prophesied to Ahab and Jehoshaphat, "Thus saith Jehovah, With these shalt thou push the Syrians until thou have consumed them,"<sup>1</sup> so now Hananiah took the yoke off Jeremiah's neck and broke it before the assembled people and said:—

"Thus saith Jehovah, Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within two full years."

Naturally the promise is "for all nations"—not for Judah only, but for the other allies.

"And the prophet Jeremiah went his way." For the moment Hananiah had triumphed; he had had the last word, and Jeremiah was silenced. A public debate before a partisan audience was not likely to issue in victory for the truth. The situation may have even

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xxii, 11.



shaken his faith in himself and his message ; he may have been staggered for a moment by Hananiah's apparent earnestness and conviction. He could not but remember that the gloomy predictions of Isaiah's earlier ministry had been followed by the glorious deliverance from Sennacherib. Possibly some similar sequel was to follow his own denunciations. He betook himself anew to fellowship with God, and awaited a fresh mandate from Jehovah.

“Then the word of Jehovah came unto Jeremiah, . . . Go and tell Hananiah : Thou hast broken wooden yokes ; thou shalt make iron yokes in their stead. For thus saith Jehovah Sabaoth, the God of Israel : I have put a yoke of iron upon the necks of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.”<sup>1</sup>

We are not told how long Jeremiah had to wait for this new message, or under what circumstances it was delivered to Hananiah. Its symbolism is obvious. When Jeremiah sent the yokes to the ambassadors of the allies and exhorted Zedekiah to bring his neck under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, they were required to accept the comparatively tolerable servitude of tributaries. Their impatience of this minor evil would expose them to the iron yoke of ruin and captivity.

Thus the prophet of evil received new Divine assurance of the abiding truth of his message and of the reality of his own inspiration. The same revelation convinced him that his opponent was either an impostor or woefully deluded :—

“Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto the prophet

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<sup>1</sup> The rest of this verse has apparently been inserted from xxvii, 6 by a scribe. It is omitted by the LXX.

Hananiah, Hear now, Hananiah; Jehovah hath not sent thee, but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith Jehovah: I will cast thee away from off the face of the earth; this year thou shalt die, because thou hast preached rebellion against Jehovah."

By a judgment not unmixed with mercy, Hananiah was not left to be convicted of error or imposture, when the "two full years" should have elapsed, and his glowing promises be seen to utterly fail. He also was "taken away from the evil to come."

"So Hananiah the prophet died in the same year in the seventh month"—*i.e.* about two months after this incident. Such personal judgments were most frequent in the case of kings, but were not confined to them. Isaiah<sup>1</sup> left on record prophecies concerning the appointment to the treasurership of Shebna and Eliakim; and elsewhere Jeremiah himself pronounces the doom of Pashhur ben Immer, the governor of the Temple; but the conclusion of this incident reminds us most forcibly of the speedy execution of the apostolic sentence upon Ananias and Sapphira.

The subjects of this and the preceding chapter raise some of the most important questions as to authority in religion. On the one hand, on the subjective side, how may a man be assured of the truth of his own religious convictions; on the other hand, on the objective side, how is the hearer to decide between conflicting claims on his faith and obedience?

The former question is raised as to the personal convictions of the two prophets. We have ventured to assume that, however erring and culpable Hananiah

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<sup>1</sup> xxii. 15-25.

may have been, he yet had an honest faith in his own inspiration and in the truth of his own prophecies. The conscious impostor, unhappily, is not unknown either in ancient or modern Churches; but we should not look for edification from the study of this branch of morbid spiritual pathology. There were doubtless Jewish counterparts to "Mr. Sludge the Medium" and to the more subtle and plausible "Bishop Blougram"; but Hananiah was of a different type. The evident respect felt for him by the people, Jeremiah's almost deferential courtesy and temporary hesitation as to his rival's Divine mission, do not suggest deliberate hypocrisy. Hananiah's "lie" was a falsehood in fact but not in intention. The Divine message "Jehovah hath not sent thee" was felt by Jeremiah to be no mere exposure of what Hananiah had known all along, but to be a revelation to his adversary as well as to himself.

The sweeping condemnation of the prophets in chapter xxiii. does not exclude the possibility of Hananiah's honesty, any more than our Lord's denunciation of the Pharisees as "devourers of widows' houses" necessarily includes Gamaliel. In critical times, upright, earnest men do not always espouse what subsequent ages hold to have been the cause of truth. Sir Thomas More and Erasmus remained in the communion which Luther renounced: Hampden and Falkland found themselves in opposite camps. If such men erred in their choice between right and wrong, we may often feel anxious as to our own decisions. When we find ourselves in opposition to earnest and devoted men, we may well pause to consider which is Jeremiah and which Hananiah.

The point at issue between these two prophets was

exceedingly simple and practical—whether Jehovah approved of the proposed revolt and would reward it with success. Theological questions were only indirectly and remotely involved. Yet, in face of his opponent's persistent asseverations, Jeremiah—perhaps the greatest of the prophets—went his way in silence to obtain fresh Divine confirmation of his message. And the man who hesitated was right.

Two lessons immediately follow, one as to practice, the other as to principle. It often happens that earnest servants of God find themselves at variance, not on simple practical questions, but on the history and criticism of the remote past, or on abstruse points of transcendental theology. Before any one ventures to denounce his adversary as a teacher of deadly error, let him, like Jeremiah, seek, in humble and prayerful submission to the Holy Spirit, a Divine mandate for such denunciation.

But again Jeremiah was willing to reconsider his position, not merely because he himself might have been mistaken, but because altered circumstances might have opened the way for a change in God's dealings. It was a bare possibility, but we have seen elsewhere that Jeremiah represents God as willing to make a gracious response to the first movement of compunction. Prophecy was the declaration of His will, and that will was not arbitrary, but at every moment and at every point exactly adapted to conditions with which it had to deal. Its principles were unchangeable and eternal; but prophecy was chiefly an application of these principles to existing circumstances. The true prophet always realised that his words were for men as they were when he addressed them. Any moment might bring a change which would abrogate or modify

the old teaching, and require and receive a new message. Like Jonah, he might have to proclaim ruin one day and deliverance the next. A physician, even after the most careful diagnosis, may have to recognise unsuspected symptoms which lead him to cancel his prescription and write a new one. The sickening and healing of the soul involve changes equally unexpected. The Bible does not teach that inspiration, any more than science, has only one treatment for each and every spiritual condition and contingency. The true prophet's message is always a word in season.

We turn next to the objective question: How is the hearer to decide between conflicting claims on his faith and obedience? We say the right was with Jeremiah; but how were the Jews to know that? They were addressed by two prophets, or, as we might say, two accredited ecclesiastics of the national Church; each with apparent earnestness and sincerity claimed to speak in the name of Jehovah and of the ancient faith of Israel, and each flatly contradicted the other on an immediate practical question, on which hung their individual fortunes and the destinies of their country. What were the Jews to do? Which were they to believe? It is the standing difficulty of all appeals to external authority. You inquire of this supposed divine oracle and there issues from it a babel of discordant voices, and each demands that you shall unhesitatingly submit to its dictates on peril of eternal damnation; and some have the audacity to claim obedience, because their teaching is "*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.*"

One simple and practical test is indeed suggested—the prophet of evil is more likely to be truly inspired than the prophet of good; but Jeremiah naturally does

not claim that this is an invariable test. Nor can he have meant that you can always believe prophecies of evil without any hesitation, but that you are to put no faith in promises until they are fulfilled. Yet it is not difficult to discern the truth underlying Jeremiah's words. The prophet whose words are unpalatable to his hearers is more likely to have a true inspiration than the man who kindles their fancy with glowing pictures of an imminent millennium. The divine message to a congregation of country squires is more likely to be an exhortation to be just to their tenants than a sermon on the duty of the labourer to his betters. A true prophet addressing an audience of working men would perhaps deal with the abuses of trades unions rather than with the sins of capitalists.

But this principle, which is necessarily of limited application, does not go far to solve the great question of authority in religion, on which Jeremiah gives us no further help.

There is, however, one obvious moral. No system of external authority, whatever pains may be taken to secure authentic legitimacy, can altogether release the individual from the responsibility of private judgment. Unreserved faith in the idea of a Catholic Church is quite consistent with much hesitation between the Anglican, Roman, and Greek communions; and the most devoted Catholic may be called upon to choose between rival anti-popes.

Ultimately the inspired teacher is only discerned by the inspired hearer; it is the answer of the conscience that authenticates the divine message.

## CHAPTER X

### *CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE EXILES*

xxix.

“Jehovah make thee like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire.”—*JER.* xxix. 22.

NOTHING further is said about the proposed revolt, so that Jeremiah's vigorous protest seems to have been successful. In any case, unless irrevocable steps had been taken, the enterprise could hardly have survived the death of its advocate, Hananiah. Accordingly Zedekiah sent an embassy to Babylon, charged doubtless with plausible explanations and profuse professions of loyalty and devotion. The envoys were Elasah ben Shaphan and Gemariah ben Hilkiah. Shaphan and Hilkiah were almost certainly the scribe and high priest who discovered Deuteronomy in the eighteenth year of Josiah, and Elasah was the brother of Ahikam ben Shaphan, who protected Jeremiah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, and of Gemariah ben Shaphan, in whose chamber Baruch read the roll, and who protested against its destruction. Probably Elasah and Gemariah were adherents of Jeremiah, and the fact of the embassy, as well as the choice of ambassadors, suggests that, for the moment, Zedekiah was acting under the influence of the prophet. Jeremiah took the oppor-



tunity of sending a letter to the exiles at Babylon. Hananiah had his allies in Chaldea : Ahab ben Kolaiah, Zedekiah ben Maaseiah, and Shemaiah the Nehelamite, with other prophets, diviners, and dreamers, had imitated their brethren in Judah ; they had prophesied without being sent and had caused the people to believe a lie. We are not expressly told what they prophesied, but the narrative takes for granted that they, like Hananiah, promised the exiles a speedy return to their native land. Such teaching naturally met with much acceptance, the people congratulating themselves because, as they supposed, "Jehovah hath raised us up prophets in Babylon." The presence of prophets among them was received as a welcome proof that Jehovah had not deserted His people in their house of bondage.

Thus when Jeremiah had confounded his opponents in Jerusalem he had still to deal with their friends in Babylon. Here again the issue was one of immediate practical importance. In Chaldea as at Jerusalem the prediction that the exiles would immediately return was intended to kindle the proposed revolt. The Jews at Babylon were virtually warned to hold themselves in readiness to take advantage of any success of the Syrian rebels, and, if opportunity offered, to render them assistance. In those days information travelled slowly, and there was some danger lest the captives should be betrayed into acts of disloyalty, even after the Jewish government had given up any present intention of revolting against Nebuchadnezzar. Such disloyalty might have involved their entire destruction. Both Zedekiah and Jeremiah would be anxious to inform them at once that they must refrain from any plots against their Chaldean masters. Moreover the



prospect of an immediate return had very much the same effect upon these Jews as the expectation of Christ's Second Coming had upon the primitive Church at Thessalonica. It made them restless and disorderly. They could not settle to any regular work, but became busybodies—wasting their time over the glowing promises of their popular preachers, and whispering to one another wild rumours of successful revolts in Syria; or were even more dangerously occupied in planning conspiracies against their conquerors.

Jeremiah's letter sought to bring about a better state of mind. It is addressed to the elders, priests, prophets, and people of the Captivity. The enumeration reminds us how thoroughly the exiled community reproduced the society of the ancient Jewish state—there was already a miniature Judah in Chaldea, the first of those Israels of the Dispersion which have since covered the face of the earth.

This is Jehovah's message by His prophet:—

“Build houses and dwell in them;  
Plant gardens and eat the fruit thereof;  
Marry and beget sons and daughters;  
Marry your sons and daughters,  
That they may bear sons and daughters,  
That ye may multiply there and not grow few.  
Seek the peace of the city whither I have sent you into  
captivity:  
Pray for it unto Jehovah;  
For in its peace, ye shall have peace.”

There was to be no immediate return; their captivity would last long enough to make it worth their while to build houses and plant gardens. For the present they were to regard Babylon as their home. The prospect of restoration to Judah was too distant to make any practical difference to their conduct of

ordinary business. The concluding command to "seek the peace of Babylon" is a distinct warning against engaging in plots, which could only ruin the conspirators. There is an interesting difference between these exhortations and those addressed by Paul to his converts in the first century. He never counsels them to marry, but rather recommends celibacy as more expedient for the present necessity. Apparently life was more anxious and harassed for the early Christians than for the Jews in Babylon. The return to Canaan was to these exiles what the millennium and the Second Advent were to the primitive Church. Jeremiah having bidden his fellow-countrymen not to be agitated by supposing that this much-longed event might come at any moment, fortifies their faith and patience by a promise that it should not be delayed indefinitely.

"When ye have fulfilled seventy years in Babylon I will visit you, And will perform for you My gracious promise to bring you back to this place."<sup>1</sup>

Seventy is obviously a round number. Moreover the constant use of seven and its multiples in sacred symbolism forbids us to understand the prophecy as an exact chronological statement.

We should adequately express the prophet's meaning by translating "in about two generations." We need not waste time and trouble in discovering or inventing two dates exactly separated by seventy years, one of which will serve for the beginning and the other for the end of the Captivity. The interval between the destruction of Jerusalem and the Return was fifty

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<sup>1</sup> Doubts have been expressed as to whether this verse originally formed part of Jeremiah's letter, or was ever written by him; but in view of his numerous references to a coming restoration those doubts are unnecessary.

years (B.C. 586—536), but as our passage refers more immediately to the prospects of those already in exile, we should obtain an interval of sixty-five years from the deportation of Jehoiachin and his companions in B.C. 601. But there can be no question of approximation, however close. Either the "seventy years" merely stands for a comparatively long period, or it is exact. We do not save the inspiration of a date by showing that it is only five years wrong, and not twenty. For an inspired date must be absolutely accurate; a mistake of a second in such a case would be as fatal as a mistake of a century.

Israel's hope is guaranteed by God's self-knowledge of His gracious counsel:—

"I know the purposes which I purpose concerning you, is the utterance of Jehovah,  
Purposes of peace and not of evil, to give you hope for the days to come."

In the former clause "I" is emphatic in both places, and the phrase is parallel to the familiar formula "by Myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah." The future of Israel was guaranteed by the divine consistency. Jehovah, to use a colloquial phrase, knew His own mind. His everlasting purpose for the Chosen People could not be set aside. "Did God cast off His people? God forbid."

Yet this persistent purpose is not fulfilled without reference to character and conduct:—

"Ye shall call upon Me, and come and pray unto Me,  
And I will hearken unto you.  
Ye shall seek Me, and find Me,  
Because ye seek Me with all your heart.  
I will be found of you—it is the utterance of Jehovah.

I will bring back your captivity, and will gather you from all nations and places whither I have scattered you—it is the utterance of Jehovah.

I will bring you back to this place whence I sent you away to captivity.”<sup>1</sup>

As in the previous chapter, Jeremiah concludes with a personal judgment upon those prophets who had been so acceptable to the exiles. If verse 23 is to be understood literally, Ahab and Zedekiah had not only spoken without authority in the name of Jehovah, but had also been guilty of gross immorality. Their punishment was to be more terrible than that of Hananiah. They had incited the exiles to revolt by predicting the imminent ruin of Nebuchadnezzar. Possibly the Jewish king proposed to make his own peace by betraying his agents, after the manner of our own Elizabeth and other sovereigns.

They were to be given over to the terrible vengeance which a Chaldean king would naturally take on such offenders, and would be publicly roasted alive, so that the malice of him who desired to curse his enemy might find vent in such words as:—

“Jehovah make thee like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted alive.”

We are not told whether this prophecy was fulfilled, but it is by no means unlikely. The Assyrian king Assurbanipal says, in one of his inscriptions concerning a viceroy of Babylon who had revolted, that Assur and the other gods “in the fierce burning fire they threw

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew Text inserts a paragraph (vv. 16-20) substantially identical with other portions of the book, especially xxiv. 8-10, announcing the approaching ruin and captivity of Zedekiah and the Jews still remaining in Judah. This section is omitted by the LXX., and breaks the obvious connection between verses 15 and 21.

him and destroyed his life"—possibly through the agency of Assurbanipal's servants.<sup>1</sup> One of the seven brethren who were tortured to death in the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes is said to have been "fried in the pan."<sup>2</sup> Christian hagiology commemorates St. Lawrence and many other martyrs, who suffered similar torments. Such punishments remained part of criminal procedure until a comparatively recent date; they are still sometimes inflicted by lynch law in the United States, and have been defended even by Christian ministers.

Jeremiah's letter caused great excitement and indignation among the exiles. We have no rejoinder from Ahab and Zedekiah; probably they were not in a position to make any. But Shemaiah the Nehelamite tried to make trouble for Jeremiah at Jerusalem. He, in his turn, wrote letters to "all the people at Jerusalem and to the priest Zephaniah ben Maaseiah and to all the priests" to this effect:—

"Jehovah hath made thee priest in the room of Jehoiada the priest, to exercise supervision over the Temple, and to deal with any mad fanatic who puts himself forward to prophesy, by placing him in the stocks and the collar. Why then hast thou not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth, who puts himself forward to prophesy unto you? Consequently he has sent unto us at Babylon: It (your captivity) will be long; build houses and dwell in them, plant gardens and eat the fruit thereof."

Confidence in a speedy return had already been exalted into a cardinal article of the exiles' faith, and Shemaiah claims that any one who denied this com-

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<sup>1</sup> Smith's *Assurbanipal*, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Macc. vii. 5.

fortable doctrine must be *ipso facto* a dangerous and deluded fanatic, needing to be placed under strict restraint. This letter travelled to Jerusalem with the returning embassy, and was duly delivered to Zephaniah. Zephaniah is spoken of in the historical section common to Kings and Jeremiah as "the second priest,"<sup>1</sup> Seraiah being the High Priest; like Pashhur ben Immer, he seems to have been the governor of the Temple. He was evidently well disposed to Jeremiah, to whom Zedekiah twice sent him on important missions. On the present occasion, instead of acting upon the suggestions made by Shemaiah, he read the letter to Jeremiah, in order that the latter might have an opportunity of dealing with it.

Jeremiah was divinely instructed to reply to Shemaiah, charging him, in his turn, with being a man who put himself forward to prophesy without any commission from Jehovah, and who thus deluded his hearers into belief in falsehoods. Personal sentence is passed upon him, as upon Hananiah, Ahab, and Zedekiah; no son of his shall be reckoned amongst God's people or see the prosperity which they shall hereafter enjoy. The words are obscure: it is said that Jehovah will "visit Shemaiah and his seed," so that it cannot mean that he will be childless; but it is further said that "he shall not have a man to abide amongst this people." It is apparently a sentence of excommunication against Shemaiah and his family.

Here the episode abruptly ends. We are not told whether the letter was sent, or how it was received, or whether it was answered. We gather that, here also, the last word rested with Jeremiah, and that at

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<sup>1</sup> lii, 24; 2 Kings xxv. 18.

this point his influence became dominant both at Jerusalem and at Babylon, and that King Zedekiah himself submitted to his guidance.

Chapters xxviii., xxix., deepen the impression made by other sections of Jeremiah's intolerance and personal bitterness towards his opponents. He seems to speak of the roasting alive of the prophets at Babylon with something like grim satisfaction, and we are tempted to think of Torquemada and Bishop Bonner. But we must remember that the stake, as we have already said, has scarcely yet ceased to be an ordinary criminal punishment, and that, after centuries of Christianity, More and Cranmer, Luther and Calvin, had hardly any more tenderness for their ecclesiastical opponents than Jeremiah.

Indeed the Church is only beginning to be ashamed of the complacency with which she has contemplated the fiery torments of hell as the eternal destiny of unrepentant sinners. One of the most tolerant and catholic of our religious teachers has written: "If the unlucky malefactor, who in mere brutality of ignorance or narrowness of nature or of culture has wronged his neighbour, excite our anger, how much deeper should be our indignation when intellect and eloquence are abused to selfish purposes, when studious leisure and learning and thought turn traitors to the cause of human well-being and the wells of a nation's moral life are poisoned."<sup>1</sup> The deduction is obvious: society feels constrained to hang or burn "the unlucky malefactor"; consequently such punishments are, if anything, too merciful for the false prophet. Moreover the teaching which Jeremiah denounced was no mere

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<sup>1</sup> *Ecce Homo*, xxi.



dogmatism about abstruse philosophical and theological abstractions. Like the Jesuit propaganda under Elizabeth, it was more immediately concerned with politics than with religion. We are bound to be indignant with a man, gifted in exploiting the emotions of his docile audience, who wins the confidence and arouses the enthusiasm of his hearers, only to entice them into hopeless and foolhardy ventures.

And yet we are brought back to the old difficulty, how are we to know the false prophet? He has neither horns nor hoofs, his tie may be as white and his coat as long as those of the true messenger of God. Again, Jeremiah's method affords us some practical guidance. He does not himself order and superintend the punishment of false prophets; he merely announces a divine judgment, which Jehovah Himself is to execute. He does not condemn men by the code of any Church, but each sentence is a direct and special revelation from Jehovah. How many sentences would have been passed upon heretics, if their accusers and judges had waited for a similar sanction?



## CHAPTER XI

### *A BROKEN COVENANT*

xxi. 1-10, xxxiv., xxxvii. 1-10.

"All the princes and people . . . changed their minds and reduced to bondage again all the slaves whom they had set free."—*JER.* xxxiv. 10, 11.

**I**N our previous chapter we saw that, at the point where the fragmentary record of the abortive conspiracy in the fourth year of Zedekiah came to an abrupt conclusion, Jeremiah seemed to have regained the ascendancy he enjoyed under Josiah. The Jewish government had relinquished their schemes of rebellion and acquiesced once more in the supremacy of Babylon. We may possibly gather from a later chapter<sup>1</sup> that Zedekiah himself paid a visit to Nebuchadnezzar to assure him of his loyalty. If so, the embassy of Elasah ben Shaphan and Gemariah ben Hilkiah was intended to assure a favourable reception for their master.

The history of the next few years is lost in obscurity, but when the curtain again rises everything is changed and Judah is once more in revolt against the Chaldeans. No doubt one cause of this fresh change of policy was the renewed activity of Egypt. In the account of the

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<sup>1</sup> li. 59, Hebrew Text. According to the LXX., Zedekiah sent another embassy and did not go himself to Babylon. The section is apparently a late addition.

conspiracy in Zedekiah's fourth year, there is a significant absence of any reference to Egypt. Jeremiah succeeded in baffling his opponents partly because their fears of Babylon were not quieted by any assurance of Egyptian support. Now there seemed a better prospect of a successful insurrection.

About the seventh year of Zedekiah, Psammetichus II. of Egypt was succeeded by his brother Pharaoh Hophra, the son of Josiah's conqueror, Pharaoh Necho. When Hophra—the Apries of Herodotus—had completed the reconquest of Ethiopia, he made a fresh attempt to carry out his father's policy and to re-establish the ancient Egyptian supremacy in Western Asia; and, as of old, Egypt began by tampering with the allegiance of the Syrian vassals of Babylon. According to Ezekiel,<sup>1</sup> Zedekiah took the initiative: "he rebelled against him (Nebuchadnezzar) by sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people."

The knowledge that an able and victorious general was seated on the Egyptian throne, along with the secret intrigues of his agents and partisans, was too much for Zedekiah's discretion. Jeremiah's advice was disregarded. The king surrendered himself to the guidance—we might almost say, the control—of the Egyptian party in Jerusalem; he violated his oath of allegiance to his suzerain, and the frail and battered ship of state was once more embarked on the stormy waters of rebellion. Nebuchadnezzar promptly prepared to grapple with the reviving strength of Egypt in a renewed contest for the lordship of Syria. Probably Egypt and Judah had other allies, but they are not

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<sup>1</sup> xvii. 15.

expressly mentioned. A little later Tyre was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar; but as Ezekiel<sup>1</sup> represents Tyre as exulting over the fall of Jerusalem, she can hardly have been a benevolent neutral, much less a faithful ally. Moreover, when Nebuchadnezzar began his march into Syria, he hesitated whether he should first attack Jerusalem or Rabbath Ammon:—

“The king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, . . . to use divination: he shook the arrows to and fro, he consulted the teraphim, he looked in the liver.”<sup>2</sup>

Later on Baalis, king of Ammon, received the Jewish refugees and supported those who were most irreconcilable in their hostility to Nebuchadnezzar. Nevertheless the Ammonites were denounced by Jeremiah for occupying the territory of Gad, and by Ezekiel<sup>3</sup> for sharing the exultation of Tyre over the ruin of Judah. Probably Baalis played a double part. He may have promised support to Zedekiah, and then purchased his own pardon by betraying his ally.

Nevertheless the hearty support of Egypt was worth more than the alliance of any number of the petty neighbouring states, and Nebuchadnezzar levied a great army to meet this ancient and formidable enemy of Assyria and Babylon. He marched into Judah with “all his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth that were under his dominion, and all the peoples,” and “fought against Jerusalem and all the cities thereof.”<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of the siege Zedekiah’s heart began to fail him. The course of events seemed to confirm Jeremiah’s threats, and the king, with pathetic incon-

<sup>1</sup> xxvi. 2.<sup>2</sup> Ezek. xxi. 21.<sup>3</sup> xxv. 1-7.<sup>4</sup> xxi. 1-10. The exact date of this section is not given, but it is closely parallel to xxxiv. 1-7, and seems to belong to the same period.

sistency, sought to be reassured by the prophet himself. He sent Pashhur ben Malchiah and Zephaniah ben Maaseiah to Jeremiah with the message :—

“Inquire, I pray thee, of Jehovah for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us : peradventure Jehovah will deal with us according to all His wondrous works, that he may go up from us.”

The memories of the great deliverance from Sennacherib were fresh and vivid in men's minds. Isaiah's denunciations had been as uncompromising as Jeremiah's, and yet Hezekiah had been spared. “Peradventure,” thought his anxious descendant, “the prophet may yet be charged with gracious messages that Jehovah repents Him of the evil and will even now rescue His Holy City.” But the timid appeal only called forth a yet sterner sentence of doom. Formidable as were the enemies against whom Zedekiah craved protection, they were to be reinforced by more terrible allies ; man and beast should die of a great pestilence, and Jehovah Himself should be their enemy :—

“I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans. . . . I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a strong arm, in anger and fury and great wrath.”

The city should be taken and burnt with fire, and the king and all others who survived should be carried away captive. Only on one condition might better terms be obtained :—

“Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence ; but he that goeth out, and falleth to the besieging Chaldeans,

shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey." <sup>1</sup>

On another occasion Zephaniah ben Maaseiah with a certain Tehucal ben Shelemiah was sent by the king to the prophet with the entreaty, "Pray now unto Jehovah our God for us." We are not told the sequel to this mission, but it is probably represented by the opening verses of chapter xxxiv. This section has the direct and personal note which characterises the dealings of Hebrew prophets with their sovereigns. Doubtless the partisans of Egypt had had a severe struggle with Jeremiah before they captured the ear of the Jewish king, and Zedekiah was possessed to the very last with a half-superstitious anxiety to keep on good terms with the prophet. Jehovah's "iron pillar and brasen wall" would make no concession to these royal blandishments: his message had been rejected, his Master had been slighted and defied, the Chosen People and the Holy City were being betrayed to their ruin; Jeremiah would not refrain from denouncing this iniquity because the king who had sanctioned it tried to flatter his vanity by sending deferential deputations of important notables. This is the Divine sentence:—

"I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon,  
And he shall burn it with fire.  
Thou shalt not escape out of his hand;  
Thou shalt assuredly be taken prisoner;  
Thou shalt be delivered into his hand.  
Thou shalt see the king of Babylon, face to face;  
He shall speak to thee, mouth to mouth,  
And thou shalt go to Babylon."

Yet there should be one doubtful mitigation of his punishment:—

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<sup>1</sup> xxi. 1-10.

“Thou shalt not die by the sword ;  
Thou shalt die in peace :  
With the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were  
before thee,  
So shall they make a burning for thee ;  
And they shall lament thee, saying, Alas lord !  
For it is I that have spoken the word—it is the utterance of  
Jehovah.”

King and people were not proof against the combined terrors of the prophetic rebukes and the besieging enemy. Jeremiah regained his influence, and Jerusalem gave an earnest of the sincerity of her repentance by entering into a covenant for the emancipation of all Hebrew slaves. Deuteronomy had re-enacted the ancient law that their bondage should terminate at the end of six years,<sup>1</sup> but this had not been observed: “Your fathers hearkened not unto Me, neither inclined their ear.”<sup>2</sup> A large proportion of those then in slavery must have served more than six years;<sup>3</sup> and partly because of the difficulty of discrimination at such a crisis, partly by way of atonement, the Jews undertook to liberate all their slaves. This solemn reparation was made because the limitation of servitude was part of the national Torah, “the covenant that Jehovah made with their fathers in the day that He brought them forth out of the land of Egypt”—*i.e.* the Deuteronomic Code. Hence it implied the renewed recognition of Deuteronomy, and the restoration of the ecclesiastical order established by Josiah’s reforms.

Even Josiah’s methods were imitated. He had assembled the people at the Temple and made them

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. xv. 12. Cf. Exod. xxi. 2, xxiii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> xxxiv. 14.

<sup>3</sup> xxxiv. 13.

enter into "a covenant before Jehovah, to walk after Jehovah, to keep His commandments and testimonies and statutes with all their heart and soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people entered into the covenant."<sup>1</sup> So now Zedekiah in turn caused the people to make a covenant before Jehovah, "in the house which was called by His name,"<sup>2</sup> "that every one should release his Hebrew slaves, male and female, and that no one should enslave a brother Jew."<sup>3</sup> A further sanction had been given to this vow by the observance of an ancient and significant rite. When Jehovah promised to Abraham a seed countless as the stars of heaven, He condescended to ratify His promise by causing the symbols of His presence—a smoking furnace and a burning lamp—to pass between the divided halves of a heifer, a she-goat, a ram, and between a turtle-dove and a young pigeon.<sup>4</sup> Now, in like manner, a calf was cut in twain, the two halves laid opposite each other, and "the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land, . . . passed between the parts of the calf."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, after the death of Alexander the Great, the contending factions in the Macedonian army ratified a compromise by passing between the two halves of a dog. Such symbols spoke for themselves: those who used them laid themselves under a curse; they prayed that if they violated the covenant they might be slain and mutilated like the divided animals.

This covenant was forthwith carried into effect, the princes and people liberating their Hebrew slaves

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xxiii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> xxxiv. 15.

<sup>3</sup> xxxiv. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. xv.

<sup>5</sup> xxxiv. 19.



according to their vow. We cannot, however, compare this event with the abolition of slavery in British colonies or with Abraham Lincoln's Decree of Emancipation. The scale is altogether different: Hebrew bondage had no horrors to compare with those of the American plantations; and moreover, even at the moment, the practical results cannot have been great. Shut up in a beleaguered city, harassed by the miseries and terrors of a siege, the freedmen would see little to rejoice over in their new-found freedom. Unless their friends were in Jerusalem they could not rejoin them, and in most cases they could only obtain sustenance by remaining in the households of their former masters, or by serving in the defending army. Probably this special ordinance of Deuteronomy was selected as the subject of a solemn covenant, because it not only afforded an opportunity of atoning for past sin, but also provided the means of strengthening the national defence. Such expedients were common in ancient states in moments of extreme peril.

In view of Jeremiah's persistent efforts, both before and after this incident, to make his countrymen loyally accept the Chaldean supremacy, we cannot doubt that he hoped to make terms between Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar. Apparently no tidings of Pharaoh Hophra's advance had reached Jerusalem; and the non-appearance of his "horses and much people" had discredited the Egyptian party, and enabled Jeremiah to overthrow their influence with the king and people. Egypt, after all her promises, had once more proved herself a broken reed; there was nothing left but to throw themselves on Nebuchadnezzar's mercy.

But the situation was once more entirely changed by the news that Pharaoh Hophra had come forth out



of Egypt "with a mighty army and a great company."<sup>1</sup> The sentinels on the walls of Jerusalem saw the besiegers break up their encampment, and march away to meet the relieving army. All thought of submitting to Babylon was given up. Indeed, if Pharaoh Hophra were to be victorious, the Jews must of necessity accept his supremacy. Meanwhile they revelled in their respite from present distress and imminent danger. Surely the new covenant was bearing fruit. Jehovah had been propitiated by their promise to observe the Torah; Pharaoh was the instrument by which God would deliver His people; or even if the Egyptians were defeated, the Divine resources were not exhausted. When Tirhakah advanced to the relief of Hezekiah, he was defeated at Eltekeh, yet Sennacherib had returned home baffled and disgraced. Naturally the partisans of Egypt, the opponents of Jeremiah, recovered their control of the king and the government. The king sent, perhaps at the first news of the Egyptian advance, to inquire of Jeremiah concerning their prospects of success. What seemed to every one else a Divine deliverance was to him a national misfortune; the hopes he had once more indulged of averting the ruin of Judah were again dashed to the ground. His answer is bitter and gloomy:—

"Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you,  
Shall return to Egypt into their own land.  
The Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city;  
They shall take it, and burn it with fire.  
Thus saith Jehovah:  
Do not deceive yourselves, saying,  
The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us:

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<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xvii. 17.

They shall not depart.  
Though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans  
that fight against you,  
And there remained none but wounded men among them,  
Yet should they rise up every man in his tent,  
And burn this city with fire."

Jeremiah's protest was unavailing, and only confirmed the king and princes in their adherence to Egypt. Moreover Jeremiah had now formally disclaimed any sympathy with this great deliverance, which Pharaoh—and presumably Jehovah—had wrought for Judah. Hence it was clear that the people did not owe this blessing to the covenant to which they had submitted themselves by Jeremiah's guidance. As at Megiddo, Jehovah had shown once more that He was with Pharaoh and against Jeremiah. Probably they would best please God by renouncing Jeremiah and all his works—the covenant included. Moreover they could take back their slaves with a clear conscience, to their own great comfort and satisfaction. True, they had sworn in the Temple with solemn and striking ceremonies, but then Jehovah Himself had manifestly released them from their oath. "All the princes and people changed their mind, and reduced to bondage again all the slaves whom they had set free." The freedmen had been rejoicing with their former masters in the prospect of national deliverance; the date of their emancipation was to mark the beginning of a new era of Jewish happiness and prosperity. When the siege was raised and the Chaldeans driven away, they could use their freedom in rebuilding the ruined cities and cultivating the wasted lands. To all such dreams there came a sudden and rough awakening: they were dragged back to their former hopeless bondage—a

happy augury for the new dispensation of Divine protection and blessing!

Jeremiah turned upon them in fierce wrath, like that of Elijah against Ahab when he met him taking possession of Naboth's vineyard. They had profaned the name of Jehovah, and—

“Therefore thus saith Jehovah:

Ye have not hearkened unto Me to proclaim a release every one to his brother and his neighbour:

Behold, I proclaim a release for you—it is the utterance of Jehovah—unto the sword, the pestilence, and the famine;

And I will make you a terror among all the kingdoms of the earth.”

The prophet plays upon the word “release” with grim irony. The Jews had repudiated the “release” which they had promised under solemn oath to their brethren, but Jehovah would not allow them to be so easily quit of their covenant. There should be a “release” after all, and they themselves should have the benefit of it—a “release” from happiness and prosperity, from the sacred bounds of the Temple, the Holy City, and the Land of Promise—a “release” unto “the sword, the pestilence, and the famine.”

“I will give the men that have transgressed My covenant into the hands of their enemies. . . .

Their dead bodies shall be meat for the fowls of heaven and for the beasts of the earth.

Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of . . . the host of the king of Babylon, which are gone up from you.

Behold, I will command—it is the utterance of Jehovah—and will bring them back unto this city:

They shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire.

I will lay the cities of Judah waste, without inhabitant.”

Another broken covenant was added to the list of

Judah's sins, another promise of amendment speedily lost in disappointment and condemnation. Jeremiah might well say with his favourite Hosea :—

“O Judah, what shall I do unto thee ?  
Your goodness is as a morning cloud,  
And as the dew that goeth early away.”<sup>1</sup>

This incident has many morals ; one of the most obvious is the futility of the most stringent oaths and the most solemn symbolic ritual. Whatever influence oaths may have in causing a would-be liar to speak the truth, they are very poor guarantees for the performance of contracts. William the Conqueror profited little by Harold's oath to help him to the crown of England, though it was sworn over the relics of holy saints. Wulfnoth's whisper in Tennyson's drama—

“Swear thou to-day, to-morrow is thine own”—

states the principle on which many oaths have been taken. The famous “blush of Sigismund” over the violation of his safe-conduct to Huss was rather a token of unusual sensitiveness than a confession of exceptional guilt. The Christian Church has exalted perfidy into a sacred obligation. As Milman says <sup>2</sup>:—

“The fatal doctrine, confirmed by long usage, by the decrees of Pontiffs, by the assent of all ecclesiastics, and the acquiescence of the Christian world, that no promise, no oath, was binding to a heretic, had hardly been questioned, never repudiated.”

At first sight an oath seems to give firm assurance to a promise ; what was merely a promise to man is

<sup>1</sup> Hosea vi. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Milman's *Latin Christianity*, viii. 255.

made into a promise to God. What can be more binding upon the conscience than a promise to God? True; but He to whom the promise is made may always release from its performance. To persist in what God neither requires nor desires because of a promise to God seems absurd and even wicked. It has been said that men "have a way of calling everything they want to do a dispensation of Providence." Similarly, there are many ways by which a man may persuade himself that God has cancelled his vows, especially if he belongs to an infallible Church with a Divine commission to grant dispensations. No doubt these Jewish slaveholders had full sacerdotal absolution from their pledge. The priests had slaves of their own. Failing ecclesiastical aid, Satan himself will play the casuist—it is one of his favourite parts—and will find the traitor full justification for breaking the most solemn contract with Heaven. If a man's whole soul and purpose go with his promise, oaths are superfluous; otherwise, they are useless.

However, the main lesson of the incident lies in its added testimony to the supreme importance which the prophets attached to social righteousness. When Jeremiah wished to knit together again the bonds of fellowship between Judah and its God, he did not make them enter into a covenant to observe ritual or to cultivate pious sentiments, but to release their slaves. It has been said that a gentleman may be known by the way in which he treats his servants; a man's religion is better tested by his behaviour to his helpless dependents than by his attendance on the means of grace or his predilection for pious conversation. If we were right in supposing that the government supported Jeremiah because the act of emancipation would furnish

recruits to man the walls, this illustrates the ultimate dependence of society upon the working classes. In emergencies, desperate efforts are made to coerce or cajole them into supporting governments by which they have been neglected or oppressed. The sequel to this covenant shows how barren and transient are concessions begotten by the terror of imminent ruin. The social covenant between all classes of the community needs to be woven strand by strand through long years of mutual helpfulness and goodwill, of peace and prosperity, if it is to endure the strain of national peril and disaster.

## CHAPTER XII

### *JEREMIAH'S IMPRISONMENT*

xxxvii. 11-21, xxxviii., xxxix. 15-18.

“Jeremiah abode in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken.”—*JER.* xxxviii. 28.

“**W**HEN the Chaldean army was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army, Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin” to transact certain family business at Anathoth.<sup>1</sup>

He had announced that all who remained in the city should perish, and that only those who deserted to the Chaldeans should escape. In these troubled times all who sought to enter or leave Jerusalem were subjected to close scrutiny, and when Jeremiah wished to pass through the gate of Benjamin he was stopped by the officer in charge—Irijah ben Shelemiah ben Hananiah—and accused of being about to practise himself what he had preached to the people: “Thouallest away to the Chaldeans.” The suspicion was natural enough; for, although the Chaldeans had raised the siege and marched away to the south-west, while the gate of Benjamin was on the north of the city, Irijah might reasonably suppose that they had left detachments in the neighbourhood, and that this

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. xxxii. 6-8.

zealous advocate of submission to Babylon had special information on the subject. Jeremiah indeed had the strongest motives for seeking safety in flight. The party whom he had consistently denounced had full control of the government, and even if they spared him for the present any decisive victory over the enemy would be the signal for his execution. When once Pharaoh Hophra was in full march upon Jerusalem at the head of a victorious army, his friends would show no mercy to Jeremiah. Probably Irijah was eager to believe in the prophet's treachery, and ready to snatch at any pretext for arresting him. The name of the captain's grandfather—Hananiah—is too common to suggest any connection with the prophet who withstood Jeremiah; but we may be sure that at this crisis the gates were in charge of trusty adherents of the princes of the Egyptian party. Jeremiah would be suspected and detested by such men as these. His vehement denial of the charge was received with real or feigned incredulity; Irijah "hearkened not unto him."

The arrest took place "in the midst of the people."<sup>1</sup> The gate was crowded with other Jews hurrying out of Jerusalem: citizens eager to breathe more freely after being cooped up in the overcrowded city; countrymen anxious to find out what their farms and homesteads had suffered at the hands of the invaders; not a few, perhaps, bound on the very errand of which Jeremiah was accused, friends of Babylon, convinced that Nebuchadnezzar would ultimately triumph, and hoping to find favour and security in his camp. Critical events of Jeremiah's life had often been transacted before a great assembly; for instance, his own address

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<sup>1</sup> xxxvii. 12; so R.V., Streane (Camb. Bible), Kautzsch, etc.



and trial in the Temple, and the reading of the roll. He knew the practical value of a dramatic situation. This time he had sought the crowd, rather to avoid than attract attention ; but when he was challenged by Irijah, the accusation and denial must have been heard by all around. The soldiers of the guard, necessarily hostile to the man who had counselled submission, gathered round to secure their prisoner ; for a time the gate was blocked by the guards and spectators. The latter do not seem to have interfered. Formerly the priests and prophets and all the people had laid hold on Jeremiah, and afterwards all the people had acquitted him by acclamation. Now his enemies were content to leave him in the hands of the soldiers, and his friends, if he had any, were afraid to attempt a rescue. Moreover men's minds were not at leisure and craving for new excitement, as at Temple festivals ; they were preoccupied, and eager to get out of the city. While the news quickly spread that Jeremiah had been arrested as he was trying to desert, his guards cleared a way through the crowd, and brought the prisoner before the princes. The latter seem to have acted as a Committee of National Defence ; they may either have been sitting at the time, or a meeting, as on a previous occasion,<sup>1</sup> may have been called when it was known that Jeremiah had been arrested. Among them were probably those enumerated later on :<sup>2</sup> Shephatiah ben Mattan, Gedaliah ben Pashhur, Jucal ben Shelemiah, and Pashhur ben Malchiah. Shephatiah and Gedaliah are named only here ; possibly Gedaliah's father was Pashhur ben Immer, who beat Jeremiah and put him in the stocks. Both Jucal and Pashhur ben

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<sup>1</sup> xxvi. 10.<sup>2</sup> xxxviii. 1.

Malchiah had been sent by the king to consult Jeremiah. Jucal may have been the son of the Shelemiah who was sent to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch after the reading of the roll. We note the absence of the princes who then formed Baruch's audience, some of whom tried to dissuade Jehoiakim from burning the roll; and we especially miss the prophet's former friend and protector, Ahikam ben Shaphan. Fifteen or sixteen years had elapsed since these earlier events; some of Jeremiah's adherents were dead, others in exile, others powerless to help him. We may safely conclude that his judges were his personal and political enemies. Jeremiah was now their discomfited rival: a few weeks before he had been master of the city and the court. Pharaoh Hophra's advance had enabled them to overthrow him. We can understand that they would at once take Irijah's view of the case. They treated their fallen antagonist as a criminal taken in the act: "they were wroth with him," *i.e.* they overwhelmed him with a torrent of abuse; "they beat him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the secretary." But this imprisonment in a private house was not mild and honourable confinement under the care of a distinguished noble, who was rather courteous host than harsh gaoler. "They had made that the prison," duly provided with a dungeon and cells, to which Jeremiah was consigned and where he remained "many days." Prison accommodation at Jerusalem was limited; the Jewish government preferred more summary methods of dealing with malefactors. The revolution which had placed the present government in power had given them special occasion for a prison. They had defeated rivals whom they did not venture to execute publicly, but who might be more safely starved and tortured to

death in secret. For such a fate they destined Jeremiah. We shall not do injustice to Jonathan the secretary if we compare the hospitality which he extended to his unwilling guests with the treatment of modern Armenians in Turkish prisons. Yet the prophet remained alive "for many days"; probably his enemies reflected that even if he did not succumb earlier to the hardships of his imprisonment, his execution would suitably adorn the looked-for triumph of Pharaoh Hophra.

Few however of the "many days" had passed. before men's exultant anticipations of victory and deliverance began to give place to anxious forebodings, They had hoped to hear that Nebuchadnezzar had been defeated and was in headlong retreat to Chaldea; they had been prepared to join in the pursuit of the routed army, to gratify their revenge by massacring the fugitives and to share the plunder with their Egyptian allies. The fortunes of war belied their hopes; Pharaoh retreated, either after a battle or perhaps even without fighting. The return of the enemy was announced by the renewed influx of the country people to seek the shelter of the fortifications, and soon the Jews crowded to the walls as Nebuchadnezzar's vanguard appeared in sight and the Chaldeans occupied their old lines and re-formed the siege of the doomed city.

There was no longer any doubt that prudence dictated immediate surrender. It was the only course by which the people might be spared some of the horrors of a prolonged siege, followed by the sack of the city. But the princes who controlled the government were too deeply compromised with Egypt to dare to hope for mercy. With Jeremiah out of the way, they were able to induce the king and the people to maintain their resistance, and the siege went on.

But though Zedekiah was, for the most part, powerless in the hands of the princes, he ventured now and then to assert himself in minor matters, and, like other feeble sovereigns, derived some consolation amidst his many troubles from intriguing with the opposition against his own ministers. His feeling and behaviour towards Jeremiah were similar to those of Charles IX. towards Coligny, only circumstances made the Jewish king a more efficient protector of Jeremiah.

At this new and disastrous turn of affairs, which was an exact fulfilment of Jeremiah's warnings, the king was naturally inclined to revert to his former faith in the prophet—if indeed he had ever really been able to shake himself free from his influence. Left to himself he would have done his best to make terms with Nebuchadnezzar, as Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin had done before him. The only trustworthy channel of help, human or divine, was Jeremiah. Accordingly he sent secretly to the prison and had the prophet brought into the palace. There in some inner chamber, carefully guarded from intrusion by the slaves of the palace, Zedekiah received the man who now for more than forty years had been the chief counsellor of the kings of Judah, often in spite of themselves. Like Saul on the eve of Gilboa, he was too impatient to let disaster be its own herald; the silence of Heaven seemed more terrible than any spoken doom, and again like Saul he turned in his perplexity and despair to the prophet who had rebuked and condemned him. "Is there any word from Jehovah? And Jeremiah said, There is: . . . thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon."

The Church is rightly proud of Ambrose rebuking Theodosius at the height of his power and glory, and

of Thomas à Becket, unarmed and yet defiant before his murderers; but the Jewish prophet showed himself capable of a simpler and grander heroism. For "many days" he had endured squalor, confinement, and semi-starvation. His body must have been enfeebled and his spirit depressed. Weak and contemptible as Zedekiah was, yet he was the prophet's only earthly protector from the malice of his enemies. He intended to utilise this interview for an appeal for release from his present prison. Thus he had every motive for conciliating the man who asked him for a word from Jehovah. He was probably alone with Zedekiah, and was not nerved to self-sacrifice by any opportunity of making public testimony to the truth, and yet he was faithful alike to God and to the poor helpless king—"Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon."

And then he proceeds, with what seems to us inconsequent audacity, to ask a favour. Did ever petitioner to a king preface his supplication with so strange a preamble? This was the request:—

"Now hear, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou do not cause me to return to the house of Jonathan the secretary, lest I die there.

"Then Zedekiah the king commanded, and they committed Jeremiah into the court of the guard, and they gave him daily a loaf of bread out of the bakers' street."

A loaf of bread is not sumptuous fare, but it is evidently mentioned as an improvement upon his prison diet: it is not difficult to understand why Jeremiah was afraid he would die in the house of Jonathan.

During this milder imprisonment in the court of the

guard occurred the incident of the purchase of the field at Anathoth, which we have dealt with in another chapter. This low ebb of the prophet's fortunes was the occasion of Divine revelation of a glorious future in store for Judah. But this future was still remote, and does not seem to have been conspicuous in his public teaching. On the contrary Jeremiah availed himself of the comparative publicity of his new place of detention to reiterate in the ears of all the people the gloomy predictions with which they had so long been familiar: "This city shall assuredly be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon." He again urged his hearers to desert to the enemy: "He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence; but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live." We cannot but admire the splendid courage of the solitary prisoner, helpless in the hands of his enemies and yet openly defying them. He left his opponents only two alternatives, either to give up the government into his hands or else to silence him. Jeremiah in the court of the guard was really carrying on a struggle in which neither side either would or could give quarter. He was trying to revive the energies of the partisans of Babylon, that they might overpower the government and surrender the city to Nebuchadnezzar. If he had succeeded, the princes would have had a short shrift. They struck back with the prompt energy of men fighting for their lives. No government conducting the defence of a besieged fortress could have tolerated Jeremiah for a moment. What would have been the fate of a French politician who should have urged Parisians to desert to the Germans during the siege of 1870? <sup>1</sup> The princes' former attempt to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Renan, iii. 333.

deal with Jeremiah had been thwarted by the king ; this time they tried to provide beforehand against any officious intermeddling on the part of Zedekiah. They extorted from him a sanction of their proceedings.

“Then the princes said unto the king, Let this man, we pray thee, be put to death : for he weakeneth the hands of the soldiers that are left in this city, and of all the people, by speaking such words unto them : for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt.” Certainly Jeremiah’s word was enough to take the heart out of the bravest soldiers ; his preaching would soon have rendered further resistance impossible. But the concluding sentence about the “welfare of the people” was merely cheap cant, not without parallel in the sayings of many “princes” in later times. “The welfare of the people” would have been best promoted by the surrender which Jeremiah advocated. The king does not pretend to sympathise with the princes ; he acknowledges himself a mere tool in their hands. “Behold,” he answers, “he is in your power, for the king can do nothing against you.”

“Then they took Jeremiah, and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah ben Hammelech, that was in the court of the guard ; and they let Jeremiah down with cords. And there was no water in the cistern, only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.”

The depth of this improvised oubliette is shown by the use of cords to let the prisoner down into it. How was it, however, that, after the release of Jeremiah from the cells in the house of Jonathan, the princes did not at once execute him ? Probably, in spite of all that had happened, they still felt a superstitious dread of actually shedding the blood of a prophet. In some mysterious way they felt that they would be less guilty



if they left him in the empty cistern to starve to death or be suffocated in the mud, than if they had his head cut off. They acted in the spirit of Reuben's advice concerning Joseph, who also was cast into an empty pit, with no water in it: "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him."<sup>1</sup> By a similar blending of hypocrisy and superstition, the mediæval Church thought to keep herself unstained by the blood of heretics, by handing them over to the secular arm; and Macbeth having hired some one else to kill Banquo was emboldened to confront his ghost with the words:—

"Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake  
Thy gory locks at me."

But the princes were again baffled; the prophet had friends in the royal household who were bolder than their master: Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, an eunuch, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the cistern. He went to the king, who was then sitting in the gate of Benjamin, where he would be accessible to any petitioner for favour or justice, and interceded for the prisoner:—

"My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the cistern; and he is like to die in the place where he is because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city."

Apparently the princes, busied with the defence of the city and in their pride "too much despising" their royal master, had left him for a while to himself. Emboldened by this public appeal to act according to the dictates of his own heart and conscience, and possibly

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxxvii. 22-24.



by the presence of other friends of Jeremiah, the king acts with unwonted courage and decision.

“The king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take with thee hence thirty men, and draw up Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern, before he die. So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the palace under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the cistern to Jeremiah. And he said to Jeremiah, Put these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. So they drew him up with the cords, and took him up out of the cistern: and he remained in the court of the guard.”

Jeremiah's gratitude to his deliverer is recorded in a short paragraph in which Ebed-melech, like Baruch, is promised that “his life shall be given him for a prey.” He should escape with his life from the sack of the city—“because he trusted” in Jehovah. As of the ten lepers whom Jesus cleansed only the Samaritan returned to give glory to God, so when none of God's people were found to rescue His prophet, the dangerous honour was accepted by an Ethiopian proselyte.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the king was craving for yet another “word of Jehovah.” True, the last “word” given him by the prophet had been, “Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.” But now that he had just rescued Jehovah's prophet from a miserable death (he forgot that Jeremiah had been consigned to the cistern by his own authority), possibly there might be some more encouraging message from God. Accord-

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<sup>1</sup> xxxix. 15-18.

ingly he sent and took Jeremiah unto him for another secret interview, this time in the "corridor of the bodyguard,"<sup>1</sup> a passage between the palace and the Temple.

Here he implored the prophet to give him a faithful answer to his questions concerning his own fate and that of the city: "Hide nothing from me." But Jeremiah did not respond with his former prompt frankness. He had had too recent a warning not to put his trust in princes. "If I declare it unto thee," said he, "wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, thou wilt not hearken unto me. So Zedekiah the king sware secretly to Jeremiah, As Jehovah liveth, who is the source and giver of our life, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life.

"Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith Jehovah, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If thou wilt go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, thy life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned, and thou and thine house shall live; but if thou wilt not go forth, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.

"Zedekiah said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that have deserted to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me."

He does not, however, urge that the princes will hinder any such surrender; he believed himself sufficiently master of his own actions to be able to escape to the Chaldeans if he chose.

But evidently, when he first revolted against Babylon,

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<sup>1</sup> So Giesebrecht, *in loco*; A.V., R.V., "third entry." In any case it will naturally be a passage from the palace to the Temple.

and more recently when the siege was raised, he had been induced to behave harshly towards her partisans : they had taken refuge in considerable numbers in the enemy's camp, and now he was afraid of their vengeance. Similarly, in *Quentin Durward*, Scott represents Louis XI. on his visit to Charles the Bold as startled by the sight of the banners of some of his own vassals, who had taken service with Burgundy, and as seeking protection from Charles against the rebel subjects of France.

Zedekiah is a perfect monument of the miseries that wait upon weakness : he was everybody's friend in turn—now a docile pupil of Jeremiah and gratifying the Chaldean party by his professions of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, and now a pliant tool in the hands of the Egyptian party persecuting his former friends. At the last he was afraid alike of the princes in the city, of the exiles in the enemy's camp, and of the Chaldeans. The mariner who had to pass between Scylla and Charybdis was fortunate compared to Zedekiah. To the end he clung with a pathetic blending of trust and fearfulness to Jeremiah. He believed him, and yet he seldom had courage to act according to his counsel.

Jeremiah made a final effort to induce this timid soul to act with firmness and decision. He tried to reassure him : "They shall not deliver thee into the hands of thy revolted subjects. Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of Jehovah, in that which I speak unto thee : so it shall be well with thee, and thy life shall be spared." He appealed to that very dread of ridicule which the king had just betrayed. If he refused to surrender, he would be taunted for his weakness and folly by the women of his own harem :—

"If thou refuse to go forth, this is the word that

Jehovah hath showed me : Behold, all the women left in the palace shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say, Thy familiar friends have duped thee and got the better of thee ; thy feet are sunk in the mire, and they have left thee in the lurch." He would be in worse plight than that from which Jeremiah had only just been rescued, and there would no Ebed-melech to draw him out. He would be humiliated by the suffering and shame of his own family : " They shall bring out all thy wives and children to the Chaldeans." He himself would share with them the last extremity of suffering : " Thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon."

And as Tennyson makes it the climax of Geraint's degeneracy that he was not only—

" Forgetful of his glory and his name,"

but also—

" Forgetful of his pryncedom and its cares,"

so Jeremiah appeals last of all to the king's sense of responsibility for his people : " Thou wilt be the cause of the burning of the city."

In spite of the dominance of the Egyptian party, and their desperate determination, not only to sell their own lives dearly, but also to involve king and people, city and temple, in their own ruin, the power of decisive action still rested with Zedekiah ; if he failed to use it, he would be responsible for the consequences.

Thus Jeremiah strove to possess the king with some breath of his own dauntless spirit and iron will.

Zedekiah paused irresolute. A vision of possible deliverance passed through his mind. His guards and

the domestics of the palace were within call. The princes were unprepared ; they would never dream that he was capable of anything so bold. It would be easy to seize the nearest gate, and hold it long enough to admit the Chaldeans. But no ! he had not nerve enough. Then his predecessors Joash, Amaziah, and Amon had been assassinated, and for the moment the daggers of the princes and their followers seemed more terrible than Chaldean instruments of torture. He lost all thought of his own honour and his duty to his people in his anxiety to provide against this more immediate danger. Never was the fate of a nation decided by a meaner utterance. "Then said Zedekiah to Jeremiah, No one must know about our meeting, and thou shalt not die. If the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and come and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king ; hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death : declare unto us what the king said unto thee : then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication unto the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house, to die there.

"Then all the princes came to Jeremiah, and asked him ; and he told them just what the king had commanded. So they let him alone, for no report of the matter had got abroad." We are a little surprised that the princes so easily abandoned their purpose of putting Jeremiah to death, and did not at once consign him afresh to the empty cistern. Probably they were too disheartened for vigorous action ; the garrison were starving, and it was clear that the city could not hold out much longer. Moreover the superstition that had shrunk from using actual violence to the prophet would suspect a token of Divine displeasure in his release.

Another question raised by this incident is that of the prophet's veracity, which, at first sight, does not seem superior to that of the patriarchs. It is very probable that the prophet, as at the earlier interview, had entreated the king not to allow him to be confined in the cells in Jonathan's house, but the narrative rather suggests that the king constructed this pretext on the basis of the former interview. Moreover, if the princes let Jeremiah escape with nothing less innocent than a *suppressio veri*, if they were satisfied with anything less than an explicit statement that the place of the prophet's confinement was the sole topic of conversation, they must have been more guileless than we can easily imagine. But, at any rate, if Jeremiah did stoop to dissimulation, it was to protect Zedekiah, not to save himself.

Zedekiah is a conspicuous example of the strange irony with which Providence entrusts incapable persons with the decision of most momentous issues; It sets Laud and Charles I. to adjust the Tudor Monarchy to the sturdy self-assertion of Puritan England, and Louis XVI. to cope with the French Revolution. Such histories are after all calculated to increase the self-respect of those who are weak and timid. Moments come, even to the feeblest, when their action must have the most serious results for all connected with them. It is one of the crowning glories of Christianity that it preaches a strength that is made perfect in weakness.

Perhaps the most significant feature in this narrative is the conclusion of Jeremiah's first interview with the king. Almost in the same breath the prophet announces to Zedekiah his approaching ruin and begs from him a favour. He thus defines the true attitude of the believer towards the prophet.

Unwelcome teaching must not be allowed to interfere with wonted respect and deference, or to provoke resentment. Possibly if this truth were less obvious men would be more willing to give it a hearing and it might be less persistently ignored. But the prophet's behaviour is even more striking and interesting as a revelation of his own character and of the true prophetic spirit. His faithful answer to the king involved much courage, but that he should proceed from such an answer to such a petition shows a simple and sober dignity not always associated with courage. When men are wrought up to the pitch of uttering disagreeable truths at the risk of their lives, they often develop a spirit of defiance, which causes personal bitterness and animosity between themselves and their hearers, and renders impossible any asking or granting of favours. Many men would have felt that a petition compromised their own dignity and weakened the authority of the divine message. The exaltation of self-sacrifice which inspired them would have suggested that they ought not to risk the crown of martyrdom by any such appeal, but rather welcome torture and death. Thus some amongst the early Christians would present themselves before the Roman tribunals and try to provoke the magistrates into condemning them. But Jeremiah, like Polycarp and Cyprian, neither courted nor shunned martyrdom; he was as incapable of bravado as he was of fear. He was too intent upon serving his country and glorifying God, too possessed with his mission and his message, to fall a prey to the self-consciousness which betrays men, sometimes even martyrs, into theatrical ostentation.



## CHAPTER XIII

### GEDALIAH

xxxix.—xli., lii.<sup>1</sup>

“Then arose Ishmael ben Nethaniah, and the ten men that were with him, and smote with the sword and slew Gedaliah ben Ahikam ben Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon had made king over the land.”  
—JER. xli. 2.

WE now pass to the concluding period of Jeremiah's ministry. His last interview with Zedekiah was speedily followed by the capture of Jerusalem. With that catastrophe the curtain falls upon another act in the tragedy of the prophet's life. Most of the chief *dramatis personæ* make their final exit; only Jeremiah and Baruch remain. King and princes, priests and prophets, pass to death or captivity, and new characters appear to play their part for a while upon the vacant stage.

We would gladly know how Jeremiah fared on that night when the city was stormed, and Zedekiah and his army stole out in a vain attempt to escape beyond Jordan. Our book preserves two brief but inconsistent narratives of his fortunes.

One is contained in xxxix. 11-14. Nebuchadnezzar,

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter lii. = 2 Kings xxiv. 18—xxv. 30, and xxxix. 1-10 = lii. 4-16, in each case with minor variations which do not specially bear upon our subject. Cf. Driver, *Introduction, in loco*. The detailed treatment of this section belongs to the exposition of the Book of Kings.



we must remember, was not present in person with the besieging army. His headquarters were at Riblah, far away in the north. He had, however, given special instructions concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzaradan, the general commanding the forces before Jerusalem: "Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do with him even as he shall say unto thee."

Accordingly Nebuzaradan and all the king of Babylon's princes sent and took Jeremiah out of the court of the guard, and committed him to Gedaliah ben Ahikam ben Shaphan, to take him to his house.<sup>1</sup> And Jeremiah dwelt among the people.

This account is not only inconsistent with that given in the next chapter, but it also represents Nebuzaradan as present when the city was taken, whereas later on<sup>2</sup> we are told that he did not come upon the scene till a month later. For these and similar reasons, this version of the story is generally considered the less trustworthy. It apparently grew up at a time when the other characters and interests of the period had been thrown into the shade by the reverent recollection of Jeremiah and his ministry. It seemed natural to suppose that Nebuchadnezzar was equally preoccupied with the fortunes of the great prophet who had consistently preached obedience to his authority. The section records the intense reverence which the Jews of the Captivity felt for Jeremiah. We are more likely, however, to get a true idea of what happened by following the narrative in chapter xl.

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<sup>1</sup> Literally "the house"—either Jeremiah's or Gedaliah's, or possibly the royal palace.

<sup>2</sup> lii. 6, 12.

According to this account, Jeremiah was not at once singled out for any exceptionally favourable treatment. When Zedekiah and the soldiers had left the city, there can have been no question of further resistance. The history does not mention any massacre by the conquerors, but we may probably accept Lamentations ii. 20, 21, as a description of the sack of Jerusalem:—

“Shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?

The youth and the old man lie on the ground in the streets;

My virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword:

Thou hast slain them in the day of Thine anger;

Thou hast slaughtered, and not pitied.”

Yet the silence of Kings and Jeremiah as to all this, combined with their express statements as to captives, indicates that the Chaldean generals did not order a massacre, but rather sought to take prisoners. The soldiers would not be restrained from a certain slaughter in the heat of their first breaking into the city; but prisoners had a market value, and were provided for by the practice of deportation which Babylon had inherited from Nineveh. Accordingly the soldiers' lust for blood was satiated or bridled before they reached Jeremiah's prison. The court of the guard probably formed part of the precincts of the palace, and the Chaldean commanders would at once secure its occupants for Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah was taken with other captives and put in chains. If the dates in lii. 6, 12, be correct, he must have remained a prisoner till the arrival of Nebuzaradan, a month later on. He was then a witness of the burning of the city and the destruction of the fortifications, and was carried with the other captives to Ramah. Here the Chaldean general found leisure to inquire

into the deserts of individual prisoners and to decide how they should be treated. He would be aided in this task by the Jewish refugees from whose ridicule Zedekiah had shrunk, and they would at once inform him of the distinguished sanctity of the prophet and of the conspicuous services he had rendered to the Chaldean cause.

Nebuzaradan at once acted upon their representations. He ordered Jeremiah's chains to be removed, gave him full liberty to go where he pleased, and assured him of the favour and protection of the Chaldean government :—

“If it seem good unto thee to come with me into Babylon, come, and I will look well unto thee; but if it seem ill unto thee to come with me into Babylon, forbear: behold, all the land is before thee; go whithersoever it seemeth to thee good and right.”

These words are, however, preceded by two remarkable verses. For the nonce, the prophet's mantle seems to have fallen upon the Chaldean soldier. He speaks to his auditor just as Jeremiah himself had been wont to address his erring fellow-countrymen :—

“Thy God Jehovah pronounced this evil upon this place: and Jehovah hath brought it, and done according as He spake; because ye have sinned against Jehovah, and have not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing is come unto you.”

Possibly Nebuzaradan did not include Jeremiah personally in the “ye” and “you”; and yet a prophet's message is often turned upon himself in this fashion. Even in our day outsiders will not be at the trouble to distinguish between one Christian and another, and will often denounce a man for his supposed share in Church abuses he has strenuously combated.

We need not be surprised that a heathen noble can talk like a pious Jew. The Chaldeans were eminently religious, and their worship of Bel and Merodach may often have been as spiritual and sincere as the homage paid by most Jews to Jehovah. The Babylonian creed could recognise that a foreign state might have its own legitimate deity and would suffer for disloyalty to him. Assyrian and Chaldean kings were quite willing to accept the prophetic doctrine that Jehovah had commissioned them to punish this disobedient people. Still Jeremiah must have been a little taken aback when one of the cardinal points of his own teaching was expounded to him by so strange a preacher ; but he was too prudent to raise any discussion on the matter, and too chivalrous to wish to establish his own rectitude at the expense of his brethren. Moreover he had to decide between the two alternatives offered him by Nebuzaradan. Should he go to Babylon or remain in Judah ?

According to a suggestion of Gratz, accepted by Cheyne,<sup>1</sup> xv. 10-21 is a record of the inner struggle through which Jeremiah came to a decision on this matter. The section is not very clear, but it suggests that at one time it seemed Jehovah's will that he should go to Babylon, and that it was only after much hesitation that he was convinced that God required him to remain in Judah. Powerful motives drew him in either direction. At Babylon he would reap the full advantage of Nebuchadnezzar's favour, and would enjoy the order and culture of a great capital. He would meet with old friends and disciples, amongst the rest Ezekiel.

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<sup>1</sup> *Pulpit Commentary, in loco.* Cf. the previous volume on Jeremiah in this series.

He would find an important sphere for ministry amongst the large Jewish community in Chaldea, where the flower of the whole nation was now in exile. In Judah he would have to share the fortunes of a feeble and suffering remnant, and would be exposed to all the dangers and disorder consequent on the break-up of the national government—brigandage on the part of native guerilla bands and raids by the neighbouring tribes. These guerilla bands were the final effort of Jewish resistance, and would seek to punish as traitors those who accepted the dominion of Babylon.

On the other hand, Jeremiah's surviving enemies, priests, prophets, and princes, had been taken *en masse* to Babylon. On his arrival he would find himself again plunged into the old controversies. Many if not the majority of his countrymen there would regard him as a traitor. The *protégé* of Nebuchadnezzar was sure to be disliked and distrusted by his less fortunate brethren. And Jeremiah was not a born courtier like Josephus. In Judah, moreover, he would be amongst friends of his own way of thinking; the remnant left behind had been placed under the authority of his friend Gedaliah, the son of his former protector Ahikam, the grandson of his ancient ally Shaphan. He would be free from the anathemas of corrupt priests and the contradiction of false prophets. The advocacy of true religion amongst the exiles might safely be left to Ezekiel and his school.

But probably the motives that decided Jeremiah's course of action were, firstly, that devoted attachment to the sacred soil which was a passion with every earnest Jew; and, secondly, the inspired conviction that Palestine was to be the scene of the future development of revealed religion. This conviction was

coupled with the hope that the scattered refugees who were rapidly gathering at Mizpah under Gedaliah might lay the foundations of a new community, which should become the instrument of the divine purpose. Jeremiah was no deluded visionary, who would suppose that the destruction of Jerusalem had exhausted God's judgments, and that the millennium would forthwith begin for the special and exclusive benefit of his surviving companions in Judah. Nevertheless, while there was an organised Jewish community left on native soil, it would be regarded as the heir of the national religious hopes and aspirations, and a prophet, with liberty of choice, would feel it his duty to remain.

Accordingly Jeremiah decided to join Gedaliah.<sup>1</sup> Nebuzaradan gave him food and a present, and let him go.

Gedaliah's headquarters were at Mizpah, a town not certainly identified, but lying somewhere to the north-west of Jerusalem, and playing an important part in the history of Samuel and Saul. Men would remember the ancient record which told how the first Hebrew king had been divinely appointed at Mizpah, and might regard the coincidence as a happy omen that Gedaliah would found a kingdom more prosperous and permanent than that which traced its origin to Saul.

Nebuzaradan had left with the new governor "men, women, and children, . . . of them that were not carried away captive to Babylon." These were chiefly of the

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<sup>1</sup> The sequence of verses 4 and 5 has been spoilt by some corruption of the text. The versions diverge variously from the Hebrew. Possibly the original text told how Jeremiah found himself unable to give an immediate answer, and Nebuzaradan, observing his hesitation, bade him return to Gedaliah and decide at his leisure.

poorer sort, but not altogether, for among them were "royal princesses" and doubtless others belonging to the ruling classes. Apparently after these arrangements had been made the Chaldean forces were almost entirely withdrawn, and Gedaliah was left to cope with the many difficulties of the situation by his own unaided resources. For a time all went well. It seemed at first as if the scattered bands of Jewish soldiers still in the field would submit to the Chaldean government and acknowledge Gedaliah's authority. Various captains with their bands came to him at Mizpah, amongst them Ishmael ben Nethaniah, Johanan ben Kareah and his brother Jonathan. Gedaliah swore to them that they should be pardoned and protected by the Chaldeans. He confirmed them in their possession of the towns and districts they had occupied after the departure of the enemy. They accepted his assurance, and their alliance with him seemed to guarantee the safety and prosperity of the settlement. Refugees from Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, and all the neighbouring countries flocked to Mizpah, and busied themselves in gathering in the produce of the oliveyards and vineyards which had been left ownerless when the nobles were slain or carried away captive. Many of the poorer Jews revelled in such unwonted plenty, and felt that even national ruin had its compensations.

Tradition has supplemented what the sacred record tells us of this period in Jeremiah's history. We are told<sup>1</sup> that "it is also found in the records that the prophet Jeremiah" commanded the exiles to take with them fire from the altar of the Temple, and further exhorted them to observe the law and to abstain from

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Macc. ii. 1-8.



idolatry; and that "it was also contained in the same writing, that the prophet, being warned of God, commanded the tabernacle and the ark to go with him, as he went forth unto the mountain, where Moses climbed up, and saw the heritage of God. And when Jeremiah came thither, he found an hollow cave, wherein he laid the tabernacle and the ark and the altar of incense, and so stopped the door. And some of those that followed him came to mark the way, but they could not find it: which when Jeremiah perceived he blamed them, saying, As for that place, it shall be unknown until the time that God gather His people again together and receive them to His mercy."

A less improbable tradition is that which narrates that Jeremiah composed the Book of Lamentations shortly after the capture of the city. This is first stated by the Septuagint; it has been adopted by the Vulgate and various Rabbinical authorities, and has received considerable support from Christian scholars.<sup>1</sup> Moreover as the traveller leaves Jerusalem by the Damascus Gate, he passes great stone quarries, where Jeremiah's Grotto is still pointed out as the place where the prophet composed his elegy.

Without entering into the general question of the authorship of Lamentations, we may venture to doubt whether it can be referred to any period of Jeremiah's life which is dealt with in our book; and even whether it accurately represents his feelings at any such period. During the first month that followed the capture of Jerusalem the Chaldean generals held the city and its inhabitants at the disposal of their king. His decision

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Professor Adeney's *Canticles and Lamentations* in this series.



was uncertain ; it was by no means a matter of course that he would destroy the city. Jerusalem had been spared by Pharaoh Necho after the defeat of Josiah, and by Nebuchadnezzar after the revolt of Jehoiakim. Jeremiah and the other Jews must have been in a state of extreme suspense as to their own fate and that of their city, very different from the attitude of Lamentations. This suspense was ended when Nebuzaradan arrived and proceeded to burn the city. Jeremiah witnessed the fulfilment of his own prophecies when Jerusalem was thus overtaken by the ruin he had so often predicted. As he stood there chained amongst the other captives, many of his neighbours must have felt towards him as we should feel towards an anarchist gloating over the spectacle of a successful dynamite explosion ; and Jeremiah could not be ignorant of their sentiments. His own emotions would be sufficiently vivid, but they would not be so simple as those of the great elegy. Probably they were too poignant to be capable of articulate expression ; and the occasion was not likely to be fertile in acrostics.

Doubtless when the venerable priest and prophet looked from Ramah or Mizpah towards the blackened ruins of the Temple and the Holy City, he was possessed by something of the spirit of Lamentations. But from the moment when he went to Mizpah he would be busily occupied in assisting Gedaliah in his gallant effort to gather the nucleus of a new Israel out of the flotsam and jetsam of the shipwreck of Judah. Busy with this work of practical beneficence, his unconquerable spirit already possessed with visions of a brighter future, Jeremiah could not lose himself in mere regrets for the past.

He was doomed to experience yet another disappointment. Gedaliah had only held his office for about two months,<sup>1</sup> when he was warned by Johanan ben Kareah and the other captains that Ishmael ben Nethaniah had been sent by Baalis, king of the Ammonites, to assassinate him. Gedaliah refused to believe them. Johanan, perhaps surmising that the governor's incredulity was assumed, came to him privately and proposed to anticipate Ishmael: "Let me go, I pray thee, and slay Ishmael ben Nethaniah, and no one shall know it: wherefore should he slay thee, that all the Jews which are gathered unto thee should be scattered, and the remnant of Judah perish? But Gedaliah ben Ahikam said unto Johanan ben Kareah, Thou shalt not do this thing: for thou speakest falsely of Ishmael."

Gedaliah's misplaced confidence soon had fatal consequences. In the second month, about October, the Jews in the ordinary course of events would have celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, to return thanks for their plentiful ingathering of grapes, olives, and summer fruit. Possibly this occasion gave Ishmael a pretext for visiting Mizpah. He came thither with ten nobles who, like himself, were connected with the royal family and probably were among the princes who persecuted Jeremiah. This small and distinguished company could not be suspected of intending to use violence. Ishmael seemed to be reciprocating Gedaliah's confidence by putting himself in the governor's power.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. lii. 12, "fifth month," and xli. 1, "seventh month." Cheyne however points out that no year is specified in xli. 1, and holds that Gedaliah's governorship lasted for over four years, and that the deportation four years (lii. 30) after the destruction of the city was the prompt punishment of his murder.

Gedaliah feasted his guests. Johanan and the other captains were not present; they had done what they could to save him, but they did not wait to share the fate which he was bringing on himself.

“Then arose Ishmael ben Nethaniah and his ten companions and smote Gedaliah ben Ahikam . . . and all the Jewish and Chaldean soldiers that were with him at Mizpah.”

Probably the eleven assassins were supported by a larger body of followers, who waited outside the city and made their way in amidst the confusion consequent on the murder; doubtless, too, they had friends amongst Gedaliah's *entourage*. These accomplices had first lulled any suspicions that he might feel as to Ishmael, and had then helped to betray their master.

Not contented with the slaughter which he had already perpetrated, Ishmael took measures to prevent the news getting abroad, and lay in wait for any other adherents of Gedaliah who might come to visit him. He succeeded in entrapping a company of eighty men from Northern Israel: ten were allowed to purchase their lives by revealing hidden stores of wheat, barley, oil, and honey; the rest were slain and thrown into an ancient pit, “which King Asa had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel.”

These men were pilgrims, who came with shaven chins and torn clothes, “and having cut themselves, bringing meal offerings and frankincense to the house of Jehovah.” The pilgrims were doubtless on their way to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles: with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, all the joy of that festival would be changed to mourning and its songs to wailing. Possibly they were going to lament on the site of the ruined temple. But Mizpah itself

had an ancient sanctuary. Hosea speaks of the priests, princes, and people of Israel as having been "a snare on Mizpah." Jeremiah may have sanctioned the use of this local temple thinking that Jehovah would "set His name there" till Jerusalem was restored, even as He had dwelt at Shiloh before He chose the City of David. But to whatever shrine these pilgrims were journeying, their errand should have made them sacrosanct to all Jews. Ishmael's hypocrisy, treachery, and cruelty in this matter go far to justify Jeremiah's bitterest invectives against the princes of Judah.

But after this bloody deed it was high time for Ishmael to be gone and betake himself back to his heathen patron, Baalis the Ammonite. These massacres could not long be kept a secret. And yet Ishmael seems to have made a final effort to suppress the evidence of his crimes. In his retreat he carried with him all the people left in Mizpah, "soldiers, women, children, and eunuchs," including the royal princesses, and apparently Jeremiah and Baruch. No doubt he hoped to make money out of his prisoners by selling them as slaves or holding them to ransom. He had not ventured to slay Jeremiah: the prophet had not been present at the banquet and had thus escaped the first fierce slaughter, and Ishmael shrank from killing in cold blood the man whose predictions of ruin had been so exactly and awfully fulfilled by the recent destruction of Jerusalem.

When Johanan ben Kareah and the other captains heard how entirely Ishmael had justified their warning, they assembled their forces and started in pursuit. Ishmael's band seems to have been comparatively small, and was moreover encumbered by the disproportionate number of captives with which they had burdened

themselves. They were overtaken "by the great waters that are in Gibeon," only a very short distance from Mizpah.

However Ishmael's original following of ten may have been reinforced, his band cannot have been very numerous and was manifestly inferior to Johanan's forces. In face of an enemy of superior strength, Ishmael's only chance of escape was to leave his prisoners to their own devices—he had not even time for another massacre. The captives at once turned round and made their way to their deliverer. Ishmael's followers seem to have been scattered, taken captive, or slain, but he himself escaped with eight men—possibly eight of the original ten—and found refuge with the Ammonites.

Johanan and his companions with the recovered captives made no attempt to return to Mizpah. The Chaldeans would exact a severe penalty for the murder of their governor Gedaliah, and their own fellow-countryman: their vengeance was not likely to be scrupulously discriminating. The massacre would be regarded as an act of rebellion on the part of the Jewish community in Judah, and the community would be punished accordingly. Johanan and his whole company determined that when the day of retribution came the Chaldeans should find no one to punish. They set out for Egypt, the natural asylum of the enemies of Babylon. On the way they halted in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem at a caravanserai<sup>1</sup> which bore the name of Chimham,<sup>2</sup> the son of David's

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<sup>1</sup> The reading is doubtful; possibly the word (*geruth*) translated "caravanserai," or some similar word to be read instead of it, merely forms a compound proper name with Chimham.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Sam. xix. 31-40.

generous friend Barzillai. So far the fugitives had acted on their first impulse of dismay; now they paused to take breath, to make a more deliberate survey of their situation, and to mature their plans for the future.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *THE DESCENT INTO EGYPT*

xlii., xliii.

“They came into the land of Egypt, for they obeyed not the voice of Jehovah.”—*JER.* xliii. 7.

**T**HUS within a few days Jeremiah had experienced one of those sudden and extreme changes of fortune which are as common in his career as in a sensational novel. Yesterday the guide, philosopher, and friend of the governor of Judah, to-day sees him once more a helpless prisoner in the hands of his old enemies. To-morrow he is restored to liberty and authority, and appealed to by the remnant of Israel as the mouthpiece of Jehovah. Johanan ben Kareah and all the captains of the forces, “from the least even unto the greatest, came near” and besought Jeremiah to pray unto “Jehovah thy God,” “that Jehovah thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing we may do.” Jeremiah promised to make intercession and to declare faithfully unto them whatsoever Jehovah should reveal unto him.

And they on their part said unto Jeremiah: “Jehovah be a true and faithful witness against us, if we do not according to every word that Jehovah thy God shall send unto us by thee. We will obey the voice of Jehovah our God, to whom we send thee, whether

it be good or evil, that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of Jehovah our God."

The prophet returned no hasty answer to this solemn appeal. As in his controversy with Hananiah, he refrained from at once announcing his own judgment as the Divine decision, but waited for the express confirmation of the Spirit. For ten days prophet and people were alike kept in suspense. The patience of Johanan and his followers is striking testimony to their sincere reverence for Jeremiah.

On the tenth day the message came, and Jeremiah called the people together to hear God's answer to their question, and to learn that Divine will to which they had promised unreserved obedience. It ran thus:—

"If you will still abide in this land,  
I will build you and not pull you down,  
I will plant you and not pluck you up."

The words of Jeremiah's original commission seem ever present to his mind:—

"For I repent Me of the evil I have done unto you."

They need not flee from Judah as an accursed land; Jehovah had a new and gracious purpose concerning them, and therefore:—

"Be not afraid of the king of Babylon,  
Of whom ye are afraid;  
Be not afraid of him—it is the utterance of Jehovah—  
For I am with you,  
To save you and deliver you out of his hand.  
I will put kindness in his heart toward you,  
And he shall deal kindly with you,  
And restore you to your lands."

It was premature to conclude that Ishmael's crime



finally disposed of the attempt to shape the remnant into the nucleus of a new Israel. Hitherto Nebuchadnezzar had shown himself willing to discriminate; when he condemned the princes, he spared and honoured Jeremiah, and the Chaldeans might still be trusted to deal fairly and even generously with the prophet's friends and deliverers. Moreover the heart of Nebuchadnezzar, like that of all earthly potentates, was in the hands of the King of Kings.

But Jeremiah knew too well what mingled hopes and fears drew his hearers towards the fertile valley and rich cities of the Nile. He sets before them the reverse of the picture: they might refuse to obey God's command to remain in Judah; they might say, "No, we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor hunger for bread, and there will we dwell." As of old, they craved for the flesh-pots of Egypt; and with more excuse than their forefathers. They were worn out with suffering and toil, some of them had wives and children; the childless prophet was inviting them to make sacrifices and incur risks which he could neither share nor understand. Can we wonder if they fell short of his inspired heroism, and hesitated to forego the ease and plenty of Egypt in order to try social experiments in Judah?

"Let what is broken so remain.

The Gods are hard to reconcile:

'Tis hard to settle order once again.

•                   •                   •                   •  
Sore task to hearts worn out by many wars."

But Jeremiah had neither sympathy nor patience with such weakness. Moreover, now as often, valour was the better part of discretion, and the boldest

course was the safest. The peace and security of Egypt had been broken in upon again and again by Asiatic invaders; only recently it had been tributary to Nineveh, till the failing strength of Assyria enabled the Pharaohs to recover their independence. Now that Palestine had ceased to be the seat of war the sound of Chaldean trumpets would soon be heard in the valley of the Nile. By going down into Egypt, they were leaving Judah where they might be safe under the broad shield of Babylonian power, for a country that would soon be afflicted by the very evils they sought to escape:—

“If ye finally determine to go to Egypt to sojourn there,  
The sword, which ye fear, shall overtake you there in the land  
of Egypt,  
The famine, whereof ye are afraid, shall follow hard after you  
there in Egypt,  
And there shall ye die.”

The old familiar curses, so often uttered against Jerusalem and its inhabitants, are pronounced against any of his hearers who should take refuge in Egypt:—

“As Mine anger and fury hath been poured forth upon the  
inhabitants of Jerusalem,  
So shall My fury be poured forth upon you, when ye shall  
enter in Egypt.”

They would die “by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence”; they would be “an execration and an astonishment, a curse and a reproach.”

He had set before them two alternative courses, and the Divine judgment upon each: he had known beforehand that, contrary to his own choice and judgment, their hearts were set upon going down into Egypt; hence, as when confronted and contradicted by Hananiah, he had been careful to secure divine

confirmation before he gave his decision. Already he could see the faces of his hearers hardening into obstinate resistance or kindling into hot defiance; probably they broke out into interruptions which left no doubt as to their purpose. With his usual promptness, he turned upon them with fierce reproof and denunciation :—

“Ye have been traitors to yourselves.  
 Ye sent me unto Jehovah your God, saying,  
 Pray for us unto Jehovah our God;  
 According unto all that Jehovah our God shall say,  
 Declare unto us, and we will do it.  
 I have this day declared it unto you,  
 But ye have in no wise obeyed the voice of Jehovah your God.  
 Ye shall die by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence,  
 In the place whither ye desire to go to sojourn.”

His hearers were equally prompt with their rejoinder; Johanan ben Kareah and “all the proud men” answered him :—

“Thou liest! It is not Jehovah our God who hath sent thee to say, Ye shall not go into Egypt to sojourn there; but Baruch ben Neriah setteth thee on against us, to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they may slay us or carry us away captive to Babylon.”

Jeremiah had experienced many strange vicissitudes, but this was not the least striking. Ten days ago the people and their leaders had approached him in reverent submission, and had solemnly promised to accept and obey his decision as the word of God. Now they called him a liar; they asserted that he did not speak by any Divine inspiration, but was a feeble impostor, an oracular puppet, whose strings were pulled by his own disciple.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. chapter on “Baruch.”

Such scenes are, unfortunately, only too common in Church history. Religious professors are still ready to abuse and to impute unworthy motives to prophets whose messages they dislike, in a spirit not less secular than that which is shown when some modern football team tries to mob the referee who has given a decision against its hopes.

Moreover we must not unduly emphasise the solemn engagement given by the Jews to abide Jeremiah's decision. They were probably sincere, but not very much in earnest. The proceedings and the strong formulæ used were largely conventional. Ancient kings and generals regularly sought the approval of their prophets or augurs before taking any important step, but they did not always act upon their advice. The final breach between Saul and the prophet Samuel seems to have been due to the fact that the king did not wait for his presence and counsel before engaging the Philistines.<sup>1</sup> Before the disastrous expedition to Ramoth Gilead, Jehoshaphat insisted on consulting a prophet of Jehovah, and then acted in the teeth of his inspired warning.<sup>2</sup>

Johanan and his company felt it essential to consult some divine oracle; and Jeremiah was not only the greatest prophet of Jehovah, he was also the only prophet available. They must have known from his consistent denunciation of all alliance with Egypt that his views were likely to be at variance with their own. But they were consulting Jehovah—Jeremiah was only His mouthpiece; hitherto He had set His face against any dealings with Egypt, but circumstances were entirely changed, and Jehovah's purpose might change

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings xxii.

with them, He might "repent." They promised to obey, because there was at any rate a chance that God's commands would coincide with their own intentions. Butler's remark that men may be expected to act "not only upon an even chance, but upon much less," specially applies to such promises as the Jews made to Jeremiah. Certain tacit conditions may always be considered attached to a profession of willingness to be guided by a friend's advice. Our newspapers frequently record breaches of engagements that should be as binding as that entered into by Johanan and his friends, and they do so without any special comment. For instance, the verdicts of arbitrators in trade disputes have been too often ignored by the unsuccessful parties; and—to take a very different illustration—the most unlimited professions of faith in the infallibility of the Bible have sometimes gone along with a denial of its plain teaching and a disregard of its imperative commands. While Shylock expected a favourable decision, Portia was "a Daniel come to judgment": his subsequent opinion of her judicial qualities has not been recorded. Those who have never refused or evaded unwelcome demands made by an authority whom they have promised to obey may cast the first stone at Johanan.

After the scene we have been describing, the refugees set out for Egypt, carrying with them the princesses and Jeremiah and Baruch. They were following in the footsteps of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Jeroboam and many another Jew who had sought protection under the shadow of Pharaoh. They were the forerunners of that later Israel in Egypt which, through Philo and his disciples, exercised so powerful an influence on the doctrine, criticism, and exegesis of the early Christian Church.

Yet this exodus in the wrong direction was by no means complete. Four years later Nebuzaradan could still find seven hundred and forty-five Jews to carry away to Babylon.<sup>1</sup> Johanan's movements had been too hurried to admit of his gathering in the inhabitants of outlying districts.

When Johanan's company reached the frontier, they would find the Egyptian officials prepared to receive them. During the last few months there must have been constant arrivals of Jewish refugees, and rumour must have announced the approach of so large a company, consisting of almost all the Jews left in Palestine. The very circumstances that made them dread the vengeance of Nebuchadnezzar would ensure them a hearty welcome in Egypt. Their presence was an unmistakable proof of the entire failure of the attempt to create in Judah a docile and contented dependency and outpost of the Chaldean Empire. They were accordingly settled at Tahpanhes and in the surrounding district.

But no welcome could conciliate Jeremiah's implacable temper, nor could all the splendour of Egypt tame his indomitable spirit. Amongst his fellow-countrymen at Bethlehem, he had foretold the coming tribulations of Egypt. He now renewed his predictions within the very precincts of Pharaoh's palace, and enforced them by a striking symbol. At Tahpanhes—the modern Tell Defenneh—which was the ancient Egyptian frontier fortress and settlement on the more westerly route from Syria, "the word of Jehovah came to Jeremiah, saying, Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in mortar in the brick pavement, at the entry of Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes, in the presence of

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<sup>1</sup> lii. 30.

the men of Judah ; and say unto them, Thus saith Jehovah Sabaoth, the God of Israel :—

“Behold, I will send and take My servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon :

I will set his throne upon these stones which I have hid,  
And he shall spread his state pavilion over them.”

He would set up his royal tribunal, and decide the fate of the conquered city and its inhabitants.

“He shall come and smite the land of Egypt ;  
Such as are for death shall be put to death,  
Such as are for captivity shall be sent into captivity,  
Such as are for the sword shall be slain by the sword.  
I will kindle a fire in the temples of the gods of Egypt ;  
He shall burn their temples, and carry them away captive :  
He shall array himself with the land of Egypt,  
As a shepherd putteth on his garment.”

The whole country would become a mere mantle for his dignity, a comparatively insignificant part of his vast possessions.

“He shall go forth from thence in peace.”

A campaign that promised well at the beginning has often ended in despair, like Sennacherib's attack on Judah, and Pharaoh Necho's expedition to Carchemish. The invading army has been exhausted by its victories, or wasted by disease and compelled to beat an inglorious retreat. No such misfortunes should overtake the Chaldean king. He would depart with all his spoil, leaving Egypt behind him subdued into a loyal province of his empire.

Then the prophet adds, apparently as a kind of afterthought :—

“He also shall break the obelisks of Heliopolis, in the land of Egypt ”  
(so styled to distinguish this Beth-Shemesh from Beth-Shemesh in Palestine),

“And shall burn with fire the temples of the gods of Egypt.”



The performance of this symbolic act and the delivery of its accompanying message are not recorded, but Jeremiah would not fail to make known the divine word to his fellow-countrymen. It is difficult to understand how the exiled prophet would be allowed to assemble the Jews in front of the main entrance of the palace, and hide "great stones" in the pavement. Possibly the palace was being repaired,<sup>1</sup> or the stones might be inserted under the front or side of a raised platform, or possibly the symbolic act was only to be described and not performed. Mr. Flinders Petrie recently discovered at Tell Defenneh a large brickwork pavement, with great stones buried underneath, which he supposed might be those mentioned in our narrative. He also found there another possible relic of these Jewish *émigrés* in the shape of the ruins of a large brick building of the twenty-sixth dynasty—to which Pharaoh Hophra belonged—still known as the "Palace of the Jew's Daughter." It is a natural and attractive conjecture that this was the residence assigned to the Jewish princesses whom Johanan carried with him into Egypt.

But while the ruined palace may testify to Pharaoh's generosity to the Royal House that had suffered through its alliance with him, the "great stones" remind us that, after a brief interval of sympathy and co-operation, Jeremiah again found himself in bitter antagonism to his fellow-countrymen. In our next chapter we shall describe one final scene of mutual recrimination.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> So Orelli, *in loco*.

<sup>2</sup> For the prophecy against Egypt and its fulfilment see further chapter XVII.



## CHAPTER XV

### *THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN*

xliv.

“Since we left off burning incense and offering libations to the Queen of Heaven, we have been in want of everything, and have been consumed by the sword and the famine.”—JER. xliv. 18.

THE Jewish exiles in Egypt still retained a semblance of national life, and were bound together by old religious ties. Accordingly we read that they came together from their different settlements—from Migdol and Tahpanhes on the north-eastern frontier, from Noph or Memphis on the Nile south of the site of Cairo, and from Pathros or Upper Egypt—to a “great assembly,” no doubt a religious festival. The list of cities shows how widely the Jews were scattered throughout Egypt.

Nothing is said as to where and when this “great assembly” met; but for Jeremiah, such a gathering at all times and anywhere, in Egypt as at Jerusalem, became an opportunity for fulfilling his Divine commission. He once again confronted his fellow-countrymen with the familiar threats and exhortations. A new climate had not created in them either clean hearts or a right spirit.

Recent history had added force to his warnings. He begins therefore by appealing to the direful con-

sequences which had come upon the Holy Land, through the sins of its inhabitants :—

“Ye have seen all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, and upon all the cities of Judah.  
Behold, this day they are an uninhabited waste,  
Because of their wickedness which they wrought to provoke Me to anger,  
By going to burn incense and to serve other gods whom neither they nor their fathers knew.”

The Israelites had enjoyed for centuries intimate personal relations with Jehovah, and knew Him by this ancient and close fellowship and by all His dealings with them. They had no such knowledge of the gods of surrounding nations. They were like foolish children who prefer the enticing blandishments of a stranger to the affection and discipline of their home. Such children do not intend to forsake their home or to break the bonds of filial affection, and yet the new friendship may wean their hearts from their father. So these exiles still considered themselves worshippers of Jehovah, and yet their superstition led them to disobey and dishonour Him.

Before its ruin, Judah had sinned against light and leading :—

“Howbeit I sent unto you all My servants the prophets,  
Rising up early and sending them, saying,  
Oh do not this abominable thing that I hate.  
But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ears, so as to turn from their evil,  
That they should not burn incense to other gods.  
Wherefore My fury and My anger was poured forth.”

Political and social questions, the controversies with the prophets who contradicted Jeremiah in the name of Jehovah, have fallen into the background; the poor pretence of loyalty to Jehovah which permitted His

worshippers to degrade Him to the level of Baal and Moloch is ignored as worthless : and Jeremiah, like Ezekiel, finds the root of the people's sin in their desertion of Jehovah. Their real religion was revealed by their heathenish superstitions. Every religious life is woven of many diverse strands ; if the web as a whole is rotten, the Great Taskmaster can take no account of a few threads that have a form and profession of soundness. Our Lord declared that He would utterly ignore and repudiate men upon whose lips His name was a too familiar word, who had preached and cast out devils and done many mighty works in that Holy Name. These were men who had worked iniquity, who had combined promising externals with the worship of "other gods," Mammon or Belial or some other of those evil powers, who place

" Within His sanctuary itself their shrines,  
Abominations ; and with cursed things  
His holy rites and solemn feasts profane ;  
And with their darkness dare affront His light."

This profane blending of idolatry with a profession of zeal for Jehovah had provoked the divine wrath against Judah : and yet the exiles had not profited by their terrible experience of the consequences of sin ; they still burnt incense unto other gods. Therefore Jeremiah remonstrates with them afresh, and sets before their eyes the utter ruin which will punish persistent sin. This discourse repeats and enlarges the threats uttered at Bethlehem. The penalties then denounced on disobedience are now attributed to idolatry. We have here yet another example of the tacit understanding attaching to all the prophet's predictions. The most positive declarations of doom are often warnings and not final sentences. Jehovah does

not turn a deaf ear to the penitent, and the doom is executed not because He exacts the uttermost farthing, but because the culprit perseveres in his uttermost wrong. Lack of faith and loyalty at Bethlehem and idolatry in Egypt were both symptoms of the same deep-rooted disease.

On this occasion there was no rival prophet to beard Jeremiah and relieve his hearers from their fears and scruples. Probably indeed no professed prophet of Jehovah would have cared to defend the worship of other gods. But, as at Bethlehem, the people themselves ventured to defy their aged mentor. They seem to have been provoked to such hardihood by a stimulus which often prompts timorous men to bold words. Their wives were specially devoted to the superstitious burning of incense, and these women were present in large numbers. Probably, like Lady Macbeth, they had already in private

“Poured their spirits in their husbands’ ears,  
And chastised, with the valour of their tongues,  
All that impeded”

those husbands from speaking their minds to Jeremiah. In their presence, the men dared not shirk an obvious duty, for fear of more domestic chastisement. The prophet’s reproaches would be less intolerable than such inflictions. Moreover the fair devotees did not hesitate to mingle their own shrill voices in the wordy strife.

These idolatrous Jews—male and female—carried things with a very high hand indeed:—

“We will not obey thee in that which thou hast spoken unto us in the name of Jehovah. We are determined to perform all the vows we have made to

burn incense and offer libations to the Queen of Heaven, exactly as we have said and as we and our fathers and kings and princes did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem.”<sup>1</sup>

Moreover they were quite prepared to meet Jeremiah on his own ground and argue with him according to his own principles and methods. He had appealed to the ruin of Judah as a proof of Jehovah’s condemnation of their idolatry and of His power to punish: they argued that these misfortunes were a divine *spretæ injuria formæ*, the vengeance of the Queen of Heaven, whose worship they had neglected. When they duly honoured her,—

“Then had we plenty of victuals, and were prosperous and saw no evil; but since we left off burning incense and offering libations to the Queen of Heaven, we have been in want of everything, and have been consumed by the sword and the famine.”

Moreover the women had a special plea of their own:—

“When we burned incense and offered libations to the Queen of Heaven, did we not make cakes to symbolise her and offer libations to her with our husbands’ permission?”

A wife’s vows were not valid without her husband’s sanction, and the women avail themselves of this principle to shift the responsibility for their superstition on the men’s shoulders. Possibly too the unfortunate Benedicts were not displaying sufficient zeal in the good cause, and these words were intended to goad them into greater energy. Doubtless they cannot be entirely exonerated of blame for tolerating their wives’

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<sup>1</sup> Combined from verses 16, 17, and 25.

sins, probably they were guilty of participation as well as connivance. Nothing however but the utmost determination and moral courage would have curbed the exuberant religiosity of these devout ladies. The prompt suggestion that, if they have done wrong, their husbands are to blame for letting them have their own way, is an instance of the meanness which results from the worship of "other gods."

But these defiant speeches raise a more important question. There is an essential difference between regarding a national catastrophe as a divine judgment and the crude superstition to which an eclipse expresses the resentment of an angry god. But both involve the same practical uncertainty. The sufferers or the spectators ask what god wrought these marvels and what sins they are intended to punish, and to these questions neither catastrophe nor eclipse gives any certain answer.

Doubtless the altars of the Queen of Heaven had been destroyed by Josiah in his crusade against heathen cults; but her outraged majesty had been speedily avenged by the defeat and death of the iconoclast, and since then the history of Judah had been one long series of disasters. Jeremiah declared that these were the just retribution inflicted by Jehovah because Judah had been disloyal to Him; in the reign of Manasseh their sin had reached its climax:—

"I will cause them to be tossed to and fro among all the nations of the earth, because of Manasseh ben Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup>

His audience were equally positive that the national

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<sup>1</sup> xv. 4.

ruin was the vengeance of the Queen of Heaven. Josiah had destroyed her altars, and now the worshippers of Istar had retaliated by razing the Temple to the ground. A Jew, with the vague impression that Istar was as real as Jehovah, might find it difficult to decide between these conflicting theories.

To us, as to Jeremiah, it seems sheer nonsense to speak of the vengeance of the Queen of Heaven, not because of what we deduce from the circumstances of the fall of Jerusalem, but because we do not believe in any such deity. But the fallacy is repeated when, in somewhat similar fashion, Protestants find proof of the superiority of their faith in the contrast between England and Catholic Spain, while Romanists draw the opposite conclusion from a comparison of Holland and Belgium. In all such cases the assured truth of the disputant's doctrine, which is set forth as the result of his argument, is in reality the premiss upon which his reasoning rests. Faith is not deduced from, but dictates an interpretation of history. In an individual the material penalties of sin may arouse a sleeping conscience, but they cannot create a moral sense: apart from a moral sense the discipline of rewards and punishments would be futile :—

“Were no inner eye in us to tell,  
Instructed by no inner sense,  
The light of heaven from the dark of hell,  
That light would want its evidence.”

Jeremiah, therefore, is quite consistent in refraining from argument and replying to his opponents by reiterating his former statements that sin against Jehovah had ruined Judah and would yet ruin the exiles. He spoke on the authority of the “inner sense,” itself instructed by Revelation. But, after the manner of



the prophets, he gave them a sign—Pharaoh Hophra should be delivered into the hand of his enemies as Zedekiah had been. Such an event would indeed be an unmistakable sign of imminent calamity to the fugitives who had sought the protection of the Egyptian king against Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>1</sup>

We have reserved for separate treatment the questions suggested by the references to the Queen of Heaven.<sup>2</sup> This divine name only occurs again in the Old Testament in vii. 18, and we are startled, at first sight, to discover that a cult about which all other historians and prophets have been entirely silent is described in these passages as an ancient and national worship. It is even possible that the “great assembly” was a festival in her honour. We have again to remind ourselves that the Old Testament is an account of the progress of Revelation and not a History of Israel. Probably the true explanation is that given by Kuenen. The prophets do not, as a rule, speak of the details of false worship; they use the generic “Baal” and the collective “other gods.” Even in this chapter Jeremiah begins by speaking of “other gods,” and only uses the term “Queen of Heaven” when he quotes the reply made to him by the Jews. Similarly when Ezekiel goes into detail concerning

<sup>1</sup> As to the fulfilment of this prophecy see Chap. XVII.

<sup>2</sup> MELEKHETH HASHSHAMAYIM. The Masoretic pointing seems to indicate a rendering “service” or work of heaven, probably in the sense of “host of heaven,” *i.e.* the stars, מְלַכֶּת being written defectively for מְלַכֶּת, but this translation is now pretty generally abandoned. Cf. C. J. Ball, Giesebrecht, Orelli, Cheyne, etc., on vii. 18, and especially Kuenen’s treatise on the Queen of Heaven—in the *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, translated by Budde—to which this section is largely indebted.



idolatry<sup>1</sup> he mentions cults and ritual<sup>2</sup> which do not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament. The prophets were little inclined to discriminate between different forms of idolatry, just as the average churchman is quite indifferent to the distinctions of the various Nonconformist bodies, which are to him simply "dissenters." One might read many volumes of Anglican sermons and even some English Church History without meeting with the term Unitarian.

It is easy to find modern parallels—Christian and heathen—to the name of this goddess. The Virgin Mary is honoured with the title *Regina Cæli*, and at Mukden, the Sacred City of China, there is a temple to the Queen of Heaven. But it is not easy to identify the ancient deity who bore this name. The Jews are accused elsewhere of worshipping "the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven," and one or other of these heavenly bodies—mostly either the moon or the planet Venus—has been supposed to have been the Queen of Heaven.

Neither do the symbolic cakes help us. Such emblems are found in the ritual of many ancient cults: at Athens cakes called *σελήναι* and shaped like a full-moon were offered to the moon-goddess Artemis; a similar usage seems to have prevailed in the worship of the Arabian goddess Al-Uzza, whose star was Venus, and also in connection with the worship of the sun.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover we do not find the title "Queen of Heaven" as an ordinary and well-established name of any neighbouring divinity. "Queen" is a natural title for any goddess, and was actually given to many

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<sup>1</sup> Ezek. viii.

<sup>2</sup> The worship of Tammuz and of "creeping things and abominable beasts" etc.

<sup>3</sup> Kuenen, 208.

ancient deities. Schrader<sup>1</sup> finds our goddess in the Atar-samain (Athar-Astarte) who is mentioned in the Assyrian ascriptions as worshipped by a North Arabian tribe of Kedarenes. Possibly too the Assyrian Istar is called Queen of Heaven.<sup>2</sup>

Istar, however, is connected with the moon as well as with the planet Venus.<sup>3</sup> For the present therefore we must be content to leave the matter an open question,<sup>4</sup> but any day some new discovery may solve the problem. Meanwhile it is interesting to notice how little religious ideas and practices are affected by differences in profession. St. Isaac the Great, of Antioch, who died about A.D. 460, tells us that the Christian ladies of Syria—whom he speaks of very ungallantly as “fools”—used to worship the planet Venus from the roofs of their houses, in the hope that she would bestow upon them some portion of her own brightness and beauty. This experience naturally led St. Isaac to interpret the Queen of Heaven as the luminary which his countrywomen venerated.<sup>5</sup>

The episode of the “great assembly” closes the history of Jeremiah’s life. We leave him (as we so often met with him before) hurling ineffective denunciations at a recalcitrant audience. Vagrant fancy, holding this to be a lame and impotent conclusion, has woven romantic stories to continue and complete the narrative. There are traditions that he was stoned to death at Tahpanhes, and that his bones were removed

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<sup>1</sup> Schrader (Whitehouse’s translation), ii. 207.

<sup>2</sup> Kuenen, 206.

<sup>3</sup> Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, etc., 80.

<sup>4</sup> So Giesebrecht on vii. 18. Kuenen argues for the identification of the Queen of Heaven with the planet Venus.

<sup>5</sup> Kuenen, 211.

to Alexandria by Alexander the Great; that he and Baruch returned to Judea or went to Babylon and died in peace; that he returned to Jerusalem and lived there three hundred years,—and other such legends. As has been said concerning the Apocryphal Gospels, these narratives serve as a foil to the history they are meant to supplement: they remind us of the sequels of great novels written by inferior pens, or of attempts made by clumsy mechanics to convert a bust by some inspired sculptor into a full-length statue.

For this story of Jeremiah's life is not a torso. Sacred biography constantly disappoints our curiosity as to the last days of holy men. We are scarcely ever told how prophets and apostles died. It is curious too that the great exceptions—Elijah in his chariot of fire and Elisha dying quietly in his bed—occur before the period of written prophecy. The deaths of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, Peter, Paul, and John, are passed over in the Sacred Record, and when we seek to follow them beyond its pages, we are taught afresh the unique wisdom of inspiration. If we may understand Deuteronomy xxxiv. to imply that no eye was permitted to behold Moses in the hour of death, we have in this incident a type of the reticence of Scripture on such matters. Moreover a moment's reflection reminds us that the inspired method is in accordance with the better instincts of our nature. A death in opening manhood, or the death of a soldier in battle or of a martyr at the stake, rivets our attention; but when men die in a good old age, we dwell less on their declining years than on the achievements of their prime. We all remember the martyrdoms of Huss and Latimer, but how many of those in whose

mouths Calvin and Luther are familiar as household words know how those great Reformers died?

There comes a time when we may apply to the aged saint the words of Browning's *Death in the Desert*:—

“So is myself withdrawn into my depths,  
The soul retreated from the perished brain  
Whence it was wont to feel and use the world  
Through these dull members, done with long ago.”

And the poet's comparison of this soul to

“A stick once fire from end to end;  
Now, ashes save the tip that holds a spark.”

Love craves to watch to the last, because the spark may

“Run back, spread itself  
A little where the fire was. . . .  
And we would not lose  
The last of what might happen on his face.”

Such privileges may be granted to a few chosen disciples, probably they were in this case granted to Baruch; but they are mostly withheld from the world, lest blind irreverence should see in the aged saint nothing but

“Second childishness, and mere oblivion;  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.”

BOOK II

*PROPHECIES CONCERNING FOREIGN  
NATIONS*



## CHAPTER XVI

### *JEHOVAH AND THE NATIONS*

xxv. 15-38.

“Jehovah hath a controversy with the nations.”—*JER.* xxv. 31.

AS the son of a king only learns very gradually that his father's authority and activity extend beyond the family and the household, so Israel in its childhood thought of Jehovah as exclusively concerned with itself.

Such ideas as omnipotence and universal Providence did not exist; therefore they could not be denied; and the limitations of the national faith were not essentially inconsistent with later Revelation. But when we reach the period of recorded prophecy we find that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the prophets had begun to recognise Jehovah's dominion over surrounding peoples. There was, as yet, no deliberate and formal doctrine of omnipotence, but, as Israel became involved in the fortunes first of one foreign power and then of another, the prophets asserted that the doings of these heathen states were overruled by the God of Israel. The idea of Jehovah's Lordship of the Nations enlarged with the extension of international relations, as our conception of the God of Nature has expanded with the successive discoveries of science. Hence, for the most part, the prophets

devote special attention to the concerns of Gentile peoples. Hosea, Micah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are partial exceptions. Some of the minor prophets have for their main subject the doom of a heathen empire. Jonah and Nahum deal with Nineveh, Habbakuk with Chaldea, and Edom is specially honoured by being almost the sole object of the denunciations of Obadiah. Daniel also deals with the fate of the kingdoms of the world, but in the Apocalyptic fashion of the Pseudepigrapha. Jewish criticism rightly declined to recognise this book as prophetic, and relegated it to the latest collection of canonical scriptures.

Each of the other prophetic books contains a longer or shorter series of utterances concerning the neighbours of Israel, its friends and foes, its enemies and allies. The fashion was apparently set by Amos, who shows God's judgment upon Damascus, the Philistines, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. This list suggests the range of the prophet's religious interest in the Gentiles. Assyria and Egypt were, for the present, beyond the sphere of Revelation, just as China and India were to the average Protestant of the seventeenth century. When we come to the Book of Isaiah, the horizon widens in every direction. Jehovah is concerned with Egypt and Ethiopia, Assyria and Babylon.<sup>1</sup> In very short books like Joel and Zephaniah we could not expect exhaustive treatment of this subject. Yet even these prophets deal with the fortunes of the Gentiles: Joel, variously held one of the latest or one of the earliest of the canonical books, pronounces a divine judgment on Tyre and Sidon and the Philistines, on Egypt and Edom; and Zephaniah, an elder con-

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<sup>1</sup> Doubts however have been raised as to whether any of the sections about Babylon are by Isaiah himself.



temporary of Jeremiah, devotes sections to the Philistines, Moab and Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria.

The fall of Nineveh revolutionised the international system of the East. The judgment on Asshur was accomplished, and her name disappears from these catalogues of doom. In other particulars Jeremiah, as well as Ezekiel, follows closely in the footsteps of his predecessors. He deals, like them, with the group of Syrian and Palestinian states—Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, and Damascus.<sup>1</sup> He dwells with repeated emphasis on Egypt, and Arabia is represented by Kedar and Hazor. In one section the prophet travels into what must have seemed to his contemporaries the very far East, as far as Elam. On the other hand, he is comparatively silent about Tyre, in which Joel, Amos, the Book of Isaiah,<sup>2</sup> and above all Ezekiel display a lively interest. Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns were directed against Tyre as much as against Jerusalem; and Ezekiel, living in Chaldea, would have attention forcibly directed to the Phœnician capital, at a time when Jeremiah was absorbed in the fortunes of Zion.

But in the passage which we have chosen as the subject for this introduction to the prophecies of the nations, Jeremiah takes a somewhat wider range :—

“Thus saith unto me Jehovah, the God of Israel :  
Take at My hand this cup of the wine of fury,  
And make all the nations, to whom I send thee, drink it.  
They shall drink, and reel to and fro, and be mad,  
Because of the sword that I will send among them.”

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<sup>1</sup> Doubts have been expressed as to the genuineness of the Damascus prophecy.

<sup>2</sup> The Isaianic authorship of this prophecy (Isa. xxiii.) is rejected by very many critics.

First and foremost of these nations, pre-eminent in punishment as in privilege, stand "Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with its kings and princes."

This bad eminence is a necessary application of the principle laid down by Amos<sup>1</sup> :—

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth:  
Therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities."

But as Jeremiah says later on, addressing the Gentile nations,—

"I begin to work evil at the city which is called by My name.

Should ye go scot-free? Ye shall not go scot-free."

And the prophet puts the cup of God's fury to their lips also, and amongst them, Egypt, the *bête noir* of Hebrew seers, is most conspicuously marked out for destruction: "Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants and princes and all his people, and all the mixed population of Egypt."<sup>2</sup> Then follows, in epic fashion, a catalogue of "all the nations" as Jeremiah knew them: "All the kings of the land of Uz, all the kings of the land of the Philistines; Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod;<sup>3</sup> Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites; all the kings<sup>4</sup> of Tyre, all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of their colonies<sup>5</sup> beyond the sea; Dedan and Tema and Buz, and all that have the

<sup>1</sup> Amos iii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> So Giesebrecht, Orelli, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Psammetichus had recently taken Ashdod, after a continuous siege of twenty-nine years.

<sup>4</sup> The plural may refer to dependent chiefs or may be used for the sake of symmetry.

<sup>5</sup> Lit. "the coasts" (*i.e.* islands and coastland) where the Phœnicians had planted their colonies.

corners of their hair polled ;<sup>1</sup> and all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mixed populations that dwell in the desert ; all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes." Jeremiah's definite geographical information is apparently exhausted, but he adds by way of summary and conclusion : "And all the kings of the north, far and near, one after the other ; and all the kingdoms of the world, which are on the face of the earth."

There is one notable omission in the list. Nebuchadnezzar, the servant of Jehovah,<sup>2</sup> was the divinely appointed scourge of Judah and its neighbours and allies. Elsewhere<sup>3</sup> the nations are exhorted to submit to him, and here apparently Chaldea is exempted from the general doom, just as Ezekiel passes no formal sentence on Babylon. It is true that "all the kingdoms of the earth" would naturally include Babylon, possibly were even intended to do so. But the Jews were not long content with so veiled a reference to their conquerors and oppressors. Some patriotic scribe added the explanatory note, "And the king of Sheshach (*i.e.* Babylon) shall drink after them."<sup>4</sup> Sheshach is obtained from Babel by the cypher 'Athbash, according to which an alphabet is written out and a reversed alphabet written out underneath it, and the letters of the lower row used for those of the upper and *vice versa*. Thus

Aleph	B	.	.	.	.	K	L
T	SH	.	.	.	.	L	K

<sup>1</sup> See on xlix. 28-32.

<sup>2</sup> xxv. 9.

<sup>3</sup> xxvii. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Sheshach (Sheshakh) for Babel also occurs in li. 41. This explanatory note is omitted by LXX.

The use of cypher seems to indicate that the note was added in Chaldea during the Exile, when it was not safe to circulate documents which openly denounced Babylon. Jeremiah's enumeration of the peoples and rulers of his world is naturally more detailed and more exhaustive than the list of the nations against which he prophesied. It includes the Phœnician states, details the Philistine cities, associates with Elam the neighbouring nations of Zimri and the Medes, and substitutes for Kedar and Hazor Arabia and a number of semi-Arab states, Uz, Dedan, Tema, and Buz.<sup>1</sup> Thus Jeremiah's world is the district constantly shown in Scripture atlases in a map comprising the scenes of Old Testament history, Egypt, Arabia, and Western Asia, south of a line from the north-east corner of the Mediterranean to the southern end of the Caspian Sea, and west of a line from the latter point to the northern end of the Persian Gulf. How much of history has been crowded into this narrow area! Here science, art, and literature won those primitive triumphs which no subsequent achievements could surpass or even equal. Here, perhaps for the first time, men tasted the Dead Sea apples of civilisation, and learnt how little accumulated wealth and national splendour can do for the welfare of the masses. Here was Eden, where God walked in the cool of the day to commune with man; and here also were many Mount Moriahs, where man gave his firstborn for his transgression, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul, and no angel voice stayed his hand.

And now glance at any modern map and see for how little Jeremiah's world counts among the great

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<sup>1</sup> As to Damascus cf. note on p. 213.

Powers of the nineteenth century. Egypt indeed is a bone of contention between European states, but how often does a daily paper remind its readers of the existence of Syria or Mesopotamia? We may apply to this ancient world the title that Byron gave to Rome, "Lone mother of dead empires," and call it :—

"The desert, where we steer  
Stumbling o'er recollections."

It is said that Scipio's exultation over the fall of Carthage was marred by forebodings that Time had a like destiny in store for Rome. Where Cromwell might have quoted a text from the Bible, the Roman soldier applied to his native city the Homeric lines :—

"Troy shall sink in fire,  
And Priam's city with himself expire."

The epitaphs of ancient civilisations are no mere matters of archæology ; like the inscriptions on common graves, they carry a *Memento mori* for their successors.

But to return from epitaphs to prophecy : in the list which we have just given, the kings of many of the nations are required to drink the cup of wrath, and the section concludes with a universal judgment upon the princes and rulers of this ancient world under the familiar figure of shepherds, supplemented here by another, that of the "principal of the flock," or, as we should say, "bell-wethers." Jehovah would break out upon them to rend and scatter like a lion from his covert. Therefore :—

"Howl, ye shepherds, and cry!  
Roll yourselves in the dust, ye bell-wethers !  
The time has fully come for you to be slaughtered.  
I will cast you down with a crash, like a vase of porcelain.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This line is somewhat paraphrased. Lit. "I will shatter you, and ye shall fall like an ornamental vessel" (KELI HEMDA).

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Ruin hath overtaken the refuge of the shepherds,  
And the way of escape of the bell-wethers."

Thus Jeremiah announces the coming ruin of an ancient world, with all its states and sovereigns, and we have seen that the prediction has been amply fulfilled. We can only notice two other points with regard to this section.

First, then, we have no right to accuse the prophet of speaking from a narrow national standpoint. His words are not the expression of the Jewish *adversus omnes alios hostile odium*;<sup>1</sup> if they were, we should not hear so much of Judah's sin and Judah's punishment. He applied to heathen states as he did to his own the divine standard of national righteousness, and they too were found wanting. All history confirms Jeremiah's judgment. This brings us to our second point. Christian thinkers have been engrossed in the evidential aspect of these national catastrophes. They served to fulfil prophecy, and therefore the squalor of Egypt and the ruins of Assyria to-day have seemed to make our way of salvation more safe and certain. But God did not merely sacrifice these holocausts of men and nations to the perennial craving of feeble faith for signs. Their fate must of necessity illustrate His justice and wisdom and love. Jeremiah tells us plainly that Judah and its neighbours had filled up the measure of their iniquity before they were called upon to drink the cup of wrath; national sin justifies God's judgments. Yet these very facts of the moral failure and decadence of human societies perplex and startle us. Individuals grow old and feeble and die, but saints and heroes do not become slaves of vice and

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *History*, v. 5.

sin in their last days. The glory of their prime is not buried in a dishonoured grave. Nay rather, when all else fails, the beauty of holiness grows more pure and radiant. But of what nation could we say :—

“Let me die the death of the righteous,  
Let my last end be like his”?

Apparently the collective conscience is a plant of very slow growth ; and hitherto no society has been worthy to endure honourably or even to perish nobly. In Christendom itself the ideals of common action are still avowedly meaner than those of individual conduct. International and collective morality is still in its infancy, and as a matter of habit and system modern states are often wantonly cruel and unjust towards obscure individuals and helpless minorities. Yet surely it shall not always be so ; the daily prayer of countless millions for the coming of the Kingdom of God cannot remain unanswered.

## CHAPTER XVII

### EGYPT

xlili. 8-13, xlv. 30, xlvi.

“I will visit Amon of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with their gods and their kings; even Pharaoh, and all them that trust in him.”—  
JER. xlvi. 25.

THE kings of Egypt with whom Jeremiah was contemporary—Psammetichus II., Pharaoh Necho, and Pharaoh Hophra—belonged to the twenty-sixth dynasty. When growing distress at home compelled Assyria to loose her hold on her distant dependencies, Egypt still retained something of her former vigorous elasticity. In the rebound from subjection under the heavy hand of Sennacherib, she resumed her ancient forms of life and government. She regained her unity and independence, and posed afresh as an equal rival with Chaldea for the supremacy of Western Asia. At home there was a renaissance of art and literature, and, as of old, the wealth and devotion of powerful monarchs restored the ancient temples and erected new shrines of their own.

But this revival was no new growth springing up with a fresh and original life from the seeds of the past; it cannot rank with the European Renaissance of the fifteenth century. It is rather to be compared with the reorganisations by which Diocletian and Constantine prolonged the decline of the Roman Empire, the



rally of a strong constitution in the grip of mortal disease. These latter-day Pharaohs failed ignominiously in their attempts to recover the Syrian dominion of the Thothmes and Rameses; and, like the Roman Empire in its last centuries, the Egypt of the twenty-sixth dynasty surrendered itself to Greek influence and hired foreign mercenaries to fight its battles. The new art and literature were tainted by pedantic archaism. According to Brugsch,<sup>1</sup> "Even to the newly created dignities and titles, the return to ancient times had become the general watchword. . . . The stone door-posts of this age reveal the old Memphian style of art, mirrored in its modern reflection after the lapse of four thousand years." Similarly Meyer<sup>2</sup> tells us that apparently the Egyptian state was reconstituted on the basis of a religious revival, somewhat in the fashion of the establishment of Deuteronomy by Josiah.

Inscriptions after the time of Psammetichus are written in archaic Egyptian of a very ancient past; it is often difficult to determine at first sight whether inscriptions belong to the earliest or latest period of Egyptian history.

The superstition that sought safety in an exact reproduction of a remote antiquity could not, however, resist the fascination of Eastern demonology. According to Brugsch,<sup>3</sup> in the age called the Egyptian Renaissance the old Egyptian theology was adulterated with Græco-Asiatic elements—demons and genii of whom the older faith and its purer doctrine had scarcely an idea; exorcisms became a special science, and are favourite themes for the inscriptions of this period.

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<sup>1</sup> Second edition, ii. 291, 292.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer, *Geschichte des alten Ägypten*, 371, 373.

<sup>3</sup> ii. 293.

Thus, amid many differences, there are also to be found striking resemblances between the religious movements of the period in Egypt and amongst the Jews, and corresponding difficulties in determining the dates of Egyptian inscriptions and of sections of the Old Testament.

This enthusiasm for ancient custom and tradition was not likely to commend the Egypt of Jeremiah's age to any student of Hebrew history. He would be reminded that the dealings of the Pharaohs with Israel had almost always been to its hurt; he would remember the Oppression and the Exodus—how, in the time of Solomon, friendly intercourse with Egypt taught that monarch lessons in magnificent tyranny, how Shishak plundered the Temple, how Isaiah had denounced the Egyptian alliance as a continual snare to Judah. A Jewish prophet would be prompt to discern the omens of coming ruin in the midst of renewed prosperity on the Nile.

Accordingly at the first great crisis of the new international system, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, either just before or just after the battle of Carchemish—it matters little which—Jeremiah takes up his prophecy against Egypt. First of all, with an ostensible friendliness which only masks his bitter sarcasm, he invites the Egyptians to take the field:—

“Prepare buckler and shield, and draw near to battle.  
Harness the horses to the chariots, mount the chargers, stand  
forth armed cap-à-pie for battle;  
Furbish the spears, put on the coats of mail.”

This great host with its splendid equipment must surely conquer. The prophet professes to await its triumphant return; but he sees instead a breathless mob of panic-

stricken fugitives, and pours upon them the torrent of his irony :—

“How is it that I behold this? These heroes are dismayed  
and have turned their backs;  
Their warriors have been beaten down;  
They flee apace, and do not look behind them:  
Terror on every side—is the utterance of Jehovah.”

Then irony passes into explicit malediction :—

“Let not the swift flee away, nor the warrior escape;  
Away northward, they stumble and fall by the river Euphrates.”

Then, in a new strophe, Jeremiah again recurs in imagination to the proud march of the countless hosts of Egypt :—

“Who is this that riseth up like the Nile,  
Whose waters toss themselves like the rivers?  
Egypt riseth up like the Nile,  
His waters toss themselves like the rivers.  
And he saith, I will go up and cover the land”

(like the Nile in flood);

“I will destroy the cities and their inhabitants”

(and, above all other cities, Babylon).

Again the prophet urges them on with ironical encouragement :—

“Go up, ye horses; rage, ye chariots;  
Ethiopians and Libyans that handle the shield,  
Lydians that handle and bend the bow”

(the tributaries and mercenaries of Egypt).

Then, as before, he speaks plainly of coming disaster :

“That day is a day of vengeance for the Lord Jehovah Sabaoth,  
whereon He will avenge Him of His adversaries”

(a day of vengeance upon Pharaoh Necho for Megiddo and Josiah).

“The sword shall devour and be sated, and drink its fill of their blood :

For the Lord Jehovah Sabaoth hath a sacrifice in the northern land, by the river Euphrates.”

In a final strophe, the prophet turns to the land left bereaved and defenceless by the defeat at Carchemish :—

“Go up to Gilead and get thee balm, O virgin daughter of Egypt :

In vain dost thou multiply medicines ; thou canst not be healed.

The nations have heard of thy shame, the earth is full of thy cry :

For warrior stumbles against warrior ; they fall both together.”

Nevertheless the end was not yet. Egypt was wounded to death, but she was to linger on for many a long year to be a snare to Judah and to vex the righteous soul of Jeremiah. The reed was broken, but it still retained an appearance of soundness, which more than once tempted the Jewish princes to lean upon it and find their hands pierced for their pains. Hence, as we have seen already, Jeremiah repeatedly found occasion to reiterate the doom of Egypt, of Necho's successor, Pharaoh Hophra, and of the Jewish refugees who had sought safety under his protection. In the concluding part of chapter xlvi., a prophecy of uncertain date sets forth the ruin of Egypt with rather more literary finish than in the parallel passages.

This word of Jehovah was to be proclaimed in Egypt, and especially in the frontier cities, which would have to bear the first brunt of invasion :—

“Declare in Egypt, proclaim in Migdol, proclaim in Noph and Tahpanhes :

Say ye, Take thy stand and be ready, for the sword hath devoured round about thee.

Why hath Apis<sup>1</sup> fled and thy calf not stood? Because Jehovah overthrew it."

Memphis was devoted to the worship of Apis, incarnate in the sacred bull; but now Apis must succumb to the mightier divinity of Jehovah, and his sacred city become a prey to the invaders.

'He maketh many to stumble; they fall one against another. Then they say, Arise, and let us return to our own people and to our native land, before the oppressing sword.'

We must remember that the Egyptian armies were largely composed of foreign mercenaries. In the hour of disaster and defeat these hirelings would desert their employers and go home.

"Give unto Pharaoh king of Egypt the name<sup>2</sup> Crash; he hath let the appointed time pass by."

The form of this enigmatic sentence is probably due to a play upon Egyptian names and titles. When the allusions are forgotten, such paronomasia naturally results in hopeless obscurity. The "appointed time" has been explained as the period during which Jehovah gave Pharaoh the opportunity of repentance, or as that within which he might have submitted to Nebuchadnezzar on favourable terms.

"As I live, is the utterance of the King, whose name is Jehovah Sabaoth,  
One shall come like Tabor among the mountains and like Carmel by the sea."

It was not necessary to name this terrible invader; it could be no other than Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>1</sup> Giesebrecht, with LXX.

<sup>2</sup> Giesebrecht, Orelli, Kautzsch, with LXX., Syr., and Vulg., by an alteration of the pointing.

“Get thee gear for captivity, O daughter of Egypt, that dwellest  
in thine own land :

For Noph shall become a desolation, and shall be burnt up  
and left without inhabitants.

Egypt is a very fair heifer, but destruction is come upon her  
from the north.”

This tempest shattered the Greek phalanx in which  
Pharaoh trusted :—

“Even her mercenaries in the midst of her are like calves of  
the stall ;

Even they have turned and fled together, they have not stood :  
For their day of calamity hath come upon them, their day  
of reckoning.”

We do not look for chronological sequence in such  
a poem, so that this picture of the flight and destruction  
of the mercenaries is not necessarily later in time than  
their overthrow and contemplated desertion in verse 15.  
The prophet is depicting a scene of bewildered con-  
fusion ; the disasters that fell thick upon Egypt crowd  
into his vision without order or even coherence. Now  
he turns again to Egypt herself :—

“Her voice goeth forth like the (low hissing of) the serpent ;

For they come upon her with a mighty army, and with axes  
like woodcutters.”

A like fate is predicted in Isaiah xxix. 4 for “Ariel,  
the city where David dwelt” :—

“Thou shalt be brought low and speak from the ground ;

Thou shalt speak with a low voice out of the dust ;

Thy voice shall come from the ground, like that of a familiar  
spirit,

And thou shalt speak in a whisper from the dust.”

Thus too Egypt would seek to writhe herself from  
under the heel of the invader ; hissing out the while  
her impotent fury, she would seek to glide away  
into some safe refuge amongst the underwood. Her

dominions, stretching far up the Nile, were surely vast enough to afford her shelter somewhere; but no! the "woodcutters" are too many and too mighty for her:—

"They cut down her forest—it is the utterance of Jehovah—  
for it is impenetrable;

For they are more than the locusts, and are innumerable."

The whole of Egypt is overrun and subjugated; no district holds out against the invader, and remains unsubjugated to form the nucleus of a new and independent empire.

"The daughter of Egypt is put to shame; she is delivered into the hand of the northern people."

Her gods share her fate; Apis had succumbed at Memphis, but Egypt had countless other stately shrines whose denizens must own the overmastering might of Jehovah:—

"Thus saith Jehovah Sabaoth, the God of Israel:  
Behold, I will visit Amon of No,  
And Pharaoh, and Egypt, and all her gods and kings,  
Even Pharaoh and all who trust in him."

Amon of No, or Thebes, known to the Greeks as Ammon and called by his own worshippers Amen, or "the hidden one," is apparently mentioned with Apis as sharing the primacy of the Egyptian divine hierarchy. On the fall of the twentieth dynasty, the high priest of the Theban Amen became king of Egypt, and centuries afterwards Alexander the Great made a special pilgrimage to the temple in the oasis of Ammon and was much gratified at being there hailed son of the deity.

Probably the prophecy originally ended with this general threat of "visitation" of Egypt and its human and divine rulers. An editor, however, has added,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LXX. omits verse 26. Verses 27, 28 = xxx. 10, 11, and probably are an insertion here.

from parallel passages, the more definite but sufficiently obvious statement that Nebuchadnezzar and his servants were to be the instruments of the Divine visitation.

A further addition is in striking contrast to the sweeping statements of Jeremiah :—

“Afterward it shall be inhabited, as in the days of old.”

Similarly, Ezekiel foretold a restoration for Egypt :—

“At the end of forty years, I will gather the Egyptians, and will cause them to return . . . to their native land ; and they shall be there a base kingdom : it shall be the basest of the kingdoms.”<sup>1</sup>

And elsewhere we read yet more gracious promises to Egypt :—

“Israel shall be a third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the land : whom Jehovah Sabaoth shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance.”<sup>2</sup>

Probably few would claim to discover in history any literal fulfilment of this last prophecy. Perhaps it might have been appropriated for the Christian Church in the days of Clement and Origen. We may take Egypt and Assyria as types of heathendom, which shall one day receive the blessings of the Lord's people and of the work of His hands. Of political revivals and restorations Egypt has had her share. But less interest attaches to these general prophecies than to more definite and detailed predictions ; and there is much curiosity as to any evidence which monuments and other profane witnesses may furnish as to a conquest of Egypt and capture of Pharaoh Hophra by Nebuchadnezzar.

According to Herodotus,<sup>3</sup> Apries (Hophra) was de-

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xxix. 13-15.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xix. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Herodotus, II. clxix.



feated and imprisoned by his successor Amasis, afterwards delivered up by him to the people of Egypt, who forthwith strangled their former king. This event would be an exact fulfilment of the words, "I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of them that seek his life,"<sup>1</sup> if it were not evident from parallel passages<sup>2</sup> that the Book of Jeremiah intends Nebuchadnezzar to be the enemy into whose hands Pharaoh is to be delivered. But Herodotus is entirely silent as to the relations of Egypt and Babylon during this period; for instance, he mentions the victory of Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo—which he miscalls Magdolium—but not his defeat at Carchemish. Hence his silence as to Chaldean conquests in Egypt has little weight. Even the historian's explicit statement as to the death of Apries might be reconciled with his defeat and capture by Nebuchadnezzar, if we knew all the facts. At present, however, the inscriptions do little to fill the gap left by the Greek historian; there are, however, references which seem to establish two invasions of Egypt by the Chaldean king, one of which fell in the reign of Pharaoh Hophra. But the spiritual lessons of this and the following prophecies concerning the nations are not dependent on the spade of the excavator or the skill of the decipherers of hieroglyphics and cuneiform script; whatever their relation may be to the details of subsequent historical events, they remain as monuments of the inspired insight of the prophet into the character and destiny alike of great empires and petty states. They assert the Divine government of the nations, and the subordination of all history to the coming of the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup> xliv. 30.<sup>2</sup> xli. vi.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *THE PHILISTINES*

xlvii.

“O sword of Jehovah, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard; rest, and be still.”—JER. xlvii. 6.

ACCORDING to the title placed at the head of this prophecy, it was uttered “before Pharaoh smote Gaza.” The Pharaoh is evidently Pharaoh Necho, and this capture of Gaza was one of the incidents of the campaign which opened with the victory at Megiddo and concluded so disastrously at Carchemish. Our first impulse is to look for some connection between this incident and the contents of the prophecy: possibly the editor who prefixed the heading may have understood by the northern enemy Pharaoh Necho on his return from Carchemish; but would Jeremiah have described a defeated army thus?

“Behold, waters rise out of the north, and become an overflowing torrent;

They overflow the land, and all that is therein, the city and its inhabitants.

Men cry out, and all the inhabitants of the land howl,

At the sound of the stamping of the hoofs of his stallions,

At the rattling of his chariots and the rumbling of his wheels.”

Here as elsewhere the enemy from the north is Nebuchadnezzar. Pharaohs might come and go, winning victories and taking cities, but these broken reeds count for little; not they, but the king of Babylon is the

instrument of Jehovah's supreme purpose. The utter terror caused by the Chaldean advance is expressed by a striking figure:—

“The fathers look not back to their children for slackness of hands.”

Their very bodies are possessed and crippled with fear, their palsied muscles cannot respond to the impulses of natural affection; they can do nothing but hurry on in headlong flight, unable to look round or stretch out a helping hand to their children:—

“Because of the day that cometh for the spoiling of all the Philistines,

For cutting off every ally that remaineth unto Tyre and Zidon :  
For Jehovah spoileth the Philistines, the remnant of the coast  
of Caphtor.<sup>1</sup>

Baldness cometh upon Gaza ; Ashkelon is destroyed :

O remnant of the Anakim,<sup>2</sup> how long wilt thou cut thyself ?”

This list is remarkable both for what it includes and what it omits. In order to understand the reference to Tyre and Zidon, we must remember that Nebuchadnezzar's expedition was partly directed against these cities, with which the Philistines had evidently been allied. The Chaldean king would hasten the submission of the Phœnicians, by cutting off all hope of succour from without. There are various possible reasons why out of the five Philistine cities only two—Ashkelon and Gaza—are mentioned; Ekron, Gath, and Ashdod may have been reduced to comparative insignificance. Ashdod had recently been taken by Psammetichus after a twenty-nine years' siege. Or

<sup>1</sup> Referring to their ancient immigration from Caphtor, probably Crete.

<sup>2</sup> Kautzsch, Giesebrecht, with LXX., reading 'Nqm for the Masoretic 'Mqm; Eng. Vers., “their valley.”

the names of two of these cities may be given by way of paronomasia in the text : Ashdod may be suggested by the double reference to the *spoiling* and the *spoiler*, *Shdod* and *Shoded* ; Gath may be hinted at by the word used for the mutilation practised by mourners, *Tithgoddadi*, and by the mention of the Anakim, who are connected with Gath, Ashdod, and Gaza in Joshua xi. 22.

As Jeremiah contemplates this fresh array of victims of Chaldean cruelty, he is moved to protest against the weary monotony of ruin :—

“O sword of Jehovah, how long will it be ere thou be quiet?  
Put up thyself into thy scabbard ; rest, and be still.”

The prophet ceases to be the mouthpiece of God, and breaks out into the cry of human anguish. How often since, amid the barbarian inroads that overwhelmed the Roman Empire, amid the prolonged horrors of the Thirty Years' War, amid the carnage of the French Revolution, men have uttered a like appeal to an unanswering and relentless Providence ! Indeed, not in war only, but even in peace, the tide of human misery and sin often seems to flow, century after century, with undiminished volume, and ever and again a vain “How long” is wrung from pallid and despairing lips. For the Divine purpose may not be hindered, and the sword of Jehovah must still strike home.

“How can it be quiet, seeing that Jehovah hath given it a charge ?

Against Ashkelon and against the sea-shore, there hath He appointed it.”

Yet Ashkelon survived to be a stronghold of the Crusaders, and Gaza to be captured by Alexander

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and even by Napoleon. Jehovah has other instruments besides His devastating sword; the victorious endurance and recuperative vitality of men and nations also come from Him.

“Come, and let us return unto Jehovah:  
For He hath torn, and He will heal us;  
He hath smitten, and He will bind us up.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea vi. 1.

## CHAPTER XIX

### MOAB

xlvi.

"Moab shall be destroyed from being a people, because he hath magnified himself against Jehovah."—*JER.* xlvi. 42.

"Chemosh said to me, Go, take Nebo against Israel . . . and I took it . . . and I took from it the vessels of Jehovah, and offered them before Chemosh."—*MOABITE STONE.*

"Yet will I bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days."—*JER.* xlvi. 47.

THE prophets show a very keen interest in Moab. With the exception of the very short Book of Joel, all the prophets who deal in detail with foreign nations devote sections to Moab. The unusual length of such sections in Isaiah and Jeremiah is not the only resemblance between the utterances of these two prophets concerning Moab. There are many parallels<sup>1</sup> of idea and expression, which probably indicate the influence of the elder prophet upon his successor; unless indeed both of them adapted some popular poem which was early current in Judah.<sup>2</sup>

It is easy to understand why the Jewish Scriptures

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<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* xlvi. 5, "For by the ascent of Luhith with continual weeping shall they go up; for in going down of Horonaim they have heard the distress of the cry of destruction," is almost identical with *Isa.* xv. 5. Cf. also xlvi. 29-34 with *Isa.* xv. 4, xvi. 6-11.

<sup>2</sup> Verse 47 with the subscription, "Thus far is the judgment of Moab," is wanting in the LXX.

should have much to say about Moab, just as the sole surviving fragment of Moabite literature is chiefly occupied with Israel. These two Terahite tribes—the children of Jacob and the children of Lot—had dwelt side by side for centuries, like the Scotch and English borderers before the accession of James I. They had experienced many alternations of enmity and friendship, and had shared complex interests, common and conflicting, after the manner of neighbours who are also kinsmen. Each in its turn had oppressed the other; and Moab had been the tributary of the Israelite monarchy till the victorious arms of Mesha had achieved independence for his people and firmly established their dominion over the debatable frontier lands. There are traces, too, of more kindly relations: the House of David reckoned Ruth the Moabitess amongst its ancestors, and Jesse, like Elimelech and Naomi, had taken refuge in Moab.

Accordingly this prophecy concerning Moab, in both its editions, frequently strikes a note of sympathetic lamentation and almost becomes a dirge.

“Therefore will I howl for Moab ;  
Yea, for all Moab will I cry out.  
For the men of Kir-heres shall they mourn.  
With more than the weeping of Jazer  
Will I weep for thee, O vine of Sibmah.

Therefore mine heart soundeth like pipes for Moab,  
Mine heart soundeth like pipes for the men of Kir-heres.”

But this pity could not avail to avert the doom of Moab; it only enabled the Jewish prophet to fully appreciate its terrors. The picture of coming ruin is drawn with the colouring and outlines familiar to us in the utterances of Jeremiah—spoiling and destruc-

tion, fire and sword and captivity, dismay and wild abandonment of wailing.

“Chemosh shall go forth into captivity, his priests and his princes together.

Every head is bald, and every beard clipped ;

Upon all the hands are cuttings, and upon the loins sackcloth.

On all the housetops and in all the streets of Moab there is everywhere lamentation ;

For I have broken Moab like a useless vessel—it is the utterance of Jehovah.

How is it broken down! Howl ye! Be thou ashamed!

How hath Moab turned the back!

All the neighbours shall laugh and shudder at Moab.

The heart of the mighty men of Moab at that day  
Shall be like the heart of a woman in her pangs.”

This section of Jeremiah illustrates the dramatic versatility of the prophet's method. He identifies himself now with the blood-thirsty invader, now with his wretched victims, and now with the terror-stricken spectators ; and sets forth the emotions of each in turn with vivid realism. Hence at one moment we have the pathos and pity of such verses as we have just quoted, and at another such stern and savage words as these :—

“Cursed be he that doeth the work of Jehovah negligently,  
Cursed be he that stinteth his sword of blood.”

These lines might have served as a motto for Cromwell at the massacre of Drogheda, for Tilly's army at the sack of Magdeburg, or for Danton and Robespierre during the Reign of Terror. Jeremiah's words were the more terrible because they were uttered with the full consciousness that in the dread Chaldean king<sup>1</sup> a

<sup>1</sup> The exact date of the prophecy is uncertain, but it must have been written during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.



servant of Jehovah was at hand who would be careful not to incur any curse for stinting his sword of blood. We shrink from what seems to us the prophet's brutal assertion that relentless and indiscriminate slaughter is sometimes the service which man is called upon to render to God. Such sentiment is for the most part worthless and unreal; it does not save us from epidemics of war fever, and is at once ignored under the stress of horrors like the Indian Mutiny. There is no true comfort in trying to persuade ourselves that the most awful events of history lie outside of the Divine purpose, or in forgetting that the human scourges of their kind do the work that God has assigned to them.

In this inventory, as it were, of the ruin of Moab our attention is arrested by the constant and detailed references to the cities. This feature is partly borrowed from Isaiah. Ezekiel too speaks of the Moabite cities which are the glory of the country;<sup>1</sup> but Jeremiah's prophecy is a veritable Domesday Book of Moab. With his epic fondness for lists of sonorous names—after the manner of Homer's catalogue of the ships—he enumerates Nebo, Kiriathaim, Heshbon, and Horonaim, city after city, till he completes a tale of no fewer than twenty-six,<sup>2</sup> and then summarises the rest as "all the cities of the land of Moab, far and near." Eight of these cities are mentioned in Joshua<sup>3</sup> as part of the inheritance of Reuben and Gad. Another, Bozrah, is usually spoken of as a city of Edom.<sup>4</sup>

The Moabite Stone explains the occurrence of

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<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xxv. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the names, however, may be variants.

<sup>3</sup> Josh. xiii. 15-28 (possibly on JE. basis).

<sup>4</sup> xlix. 13, possibly this is not the Edomite Bozrah.

Reubenite cities in these lists. It tells us how Mesha took Nebo, Jahaz, and Horonaim from Israel. Possibly in this period of conquest Bozrah became tributary to Moab, without ceasing to be an Edomite city. This extension of territory and multiplication of towns points to an era of power and prosperity, of which there are other indications in this chapter. "We are mighty and valiant for war," said the Moabites. When Moab fell "there was broken a mighty sceptre and a glorious staff." Other verses imply the fertility of the land and the abundance of its vintage.

Moab in fact had profited by the misfortunes of its more powerful and ambitious neighbours. The pressure of Damascus, Assyria, and Chaldea prevented Israel and Judah from maintaining their dominion over their ancient tributary. Moab lay less directly in the track of the invaders; it was too insignificant to attract their special attention, perhaps too prudent to provoke a contest with the lords of the East. Hence, while Judah was declining, Moab had enlarged her borders and grown in wealth and power.

And even as Jeshurun kicked, when he was waxen fat,<sup>1</sup> so Moab in its prosperity was puffed up with unholy pride. Even in Isaiah's time this was the besetting sin of Moab; he says in an indictment which Jeremiah repeats almost word for word:—

"We have heard of the pride of Moab, that he is very proud,  
Even of his arrogancy and his pride and his wrath."<sup>2</sup>

This verse is a striking example of the Hebrew method of gaining emphasis by accumulating derivatives of the same and similar roots. The verse in Jeremiah runs thus: "We have heard of the pride (Ge'ON) of

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xvi. 6.

Moab, that he is very proud (GE'EH); his loftiness (GABHeHO), and his pride (Ge'ONO), and his proudfulness (GA'aWATHO)."

Jeremiah dwells upon this theme :—

"Moab shall be destroyed from being a people,  
Because he hath magnified himself against Jehovah."

Zephaniah bears like testimony<sup>1</sup> :—

"This shall they have for their pride,  
Because they have been insolent, and have magnified themselves  
Against the people of Jehovah Sabaoth."

Here again the Moabite Stone bears abundant testimony to the justice of the prophet's accusations; for there Mesha tells how in the name and by the grace of Chemosh he conquered the cities of Israel; and how, anticipating Belshazzar's sacrilege, he took the sacred vessels of Jehovah from His temple at Nebo and consecrated them to Chemosh. Truly Moab had "magnified himself against Jehovah."

Prosperity had produced other baleful effects beside a haughty spirit, and pride was not the only cause of the ruin of Moab. Jeremiah applies to nations the dictum of Polonius—

"Home-keeping youths have ever homely wits,"

and apparently suggests that ruin and captivity were necessary elements in the national discipline of Moab :—

"Moab hath been undisturbed from his youth;  
He hath settled on his lees;  
He hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel;  
He hath not gone into captivity:  
Therefore his taste remaineth in him,  
His scent is not changed.

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<sup>1</sup> ii. 10.

Wherefore, behold, the days come—it is the utterance of Jehovah—

That I will send men unto him that shall tilt him up;  
They shall empty his vessels and break his<sup>1</sup> bottles.”

As the chapter, in its present form, concludes with a note—

“I will bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days—it is the utterance of Jehovah”—

we gather that even this rough handling was disciplinary; at any rate, the former lack of such vicissitudes had been to the serious detriment of Moab. It is strange that Jeremiah did not apply this principle to Judah. For, indeed, the religion of Israel and of mankind owes an incalculable debt to the captivity of Judah, a debt which later writers are not slow to recognise. “Behold,” says the prophet of the Exile,—

“I have refined thee, but not as silver;  
I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.”<sup>2</sup>

History constantly illustrates how when Christians were undisturbed and prosperous the wine of truth settled on the lees and came to taste of the cask; and—to change the figure—how affliction and persecution proved most effectual tonics for a debilitated Church. Continental critics of modern England speak severely of the ill-effects which our prolonged freedom from invasion and civil war, and the unbroken continuity of our social life have had on our national character and manners. In their eyes England is a perfect Moab, concerning which they are ever ready to prophesy after the manner of Jeremiah. The Hebrew Chronicler

<sup>1</sup> Kautzsch, Giesebrecht, with LXX.; A.V., R.V., with Hebrew Text, “their bottles.”

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xlviii 10.

blamed Josiah because he would not listen to the advice and criticism of Pharaoh Necho. There may be warnings which we should do well to heed, even in the acrimony of foreign journalists.

But any such suggestion raises wider and more difficult issues; for ordinary individuals and nations the discipline of calamity seems necessary. What degree of moral development exempts from such discipline, and how may it be attained? Christians cannot seek to compound for such discipline by self-inflicted loss or pain, like Polycrates casting away his ring or Browning's Caliban, who in his hour of terror,

“Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!  
'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,  
Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month  
One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape.”

But though it is easy to counsel resignation and the recognition of a wise loving Providence in national as in personal suffering, yet mankind longs for an end to the period of pupilage and chastisement and would fain know how it may be hastened.

## CHAPTER XX

### AMMON

xlix. 1-6.

“Hath Israel no sons? hath he no heir? why then doth Moloch possess Gad, and his people dwell in the cities thereof?”—JER. xlix. 1

THE relations of Israel with Ammon were similar but less intimate than they were with his twin-brother Moab. Hence this prophecy is, *mutatis mutandis*, an abridgment of that concerning Moab. As Moab was charged with magnifying himself against Jehovah, and was found to be occupying cities which Reuben claimed as its inheritance, so Ammon had presumed to take possession of the Gadite cities, whose inhabitants had been carried away captive by the Assyrians. Here again the prophet enumerates Heshbon, Ai, Rabbah, and the dependent towns, “the daughters of Rabbah.” Only in the territory of this half-nomadic people the cities are naturally not so numerous as in Moab; and Jeremiah mentions also the fertile valleys wherein the Ammonites gloried. The familiar doom of ruin and captivity is pronounced against city and country and all the treasures of Ammon; Moloch,<sup>1</sup> like Chemosh, must go into captivity with his priests and princes. This prophecy also concludes with a promise of restoration:—

“Afterward I will bring again the captivity of the children of Ammon—it is the utterance of Jehovah.”

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<sup>1</sup> xlix. 3: A.V., “their king”; R.V., “Malcam,” which here and in verse 1 is a form of Moloch.

## CHAPTER XXI

### EDOM

xlix. 7-22.

“Bozrah shall become an astonishment, a reproach, a waste, and a curse.”—JER. xlix. 13.

THE prophecy concerning Edom is not formulated along the same line as those which deal with the twin children of Lot, Moab and Ammon. Edom was not merely the cousin, but the brother of Israel. His history, his character and conduct, had marked peculiarities, which received special treatment. Edom had not only intimate relations with Israel as a whole, but was also bound by exceptionally close ties to the Southern Kingdom. The Edomite clan Kenaz had been incorporated in the tribe of Judah;<sup>1</sup> and when Israel broke up into two states, Edom was the one tributary which was retained or reconquered by the House of David, and continued subject to Judah till the reign of Jehoram ben Jehoshaphat.<sup>2</sup>

Much virtuous indignation is often expressed at the wickedness of Irishmen in contemplating rebellion against the dominion of England: we cannot therefore be surprised that the Jews resented the successful revolt

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the designation of Caleb “ben Jephunnah the Kenizzite,” Num. xxxii. 12, etc., with the genealogies which trace the descent of Kenaz to Esau, Gen. xxxvi. 11, etc. Cf. also *Expositor's Bible, Chronicles*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 1 Kings xxii. 47 with 2 Kings viii. 20.

of Edom, and regarded the hostility of Mount Seir to its former masters as ingratitude and treachery. In moments of hot indignation against the manifold sins of Judah Jeremiah might have announced with great vehemence that Judah should be made a "reproach and a proverb"; but when, as Obadiah tells us, the Edomites stood gazing with eager curiosity on the destruction of Jerusalem, and rejoiced and exulted in the distress of the Jews, and even laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity, and occupied the roads to catch fugitives and deliver them up to the Chaldeans,<sup>1</sup> then the patriotic fervour of the prophet broke out against Edom. Like Moab and Ammon, he was puffed up with pride, and deluded by baseless confidence into a false security. These hardy mountaineers trusted in their reckless courage and in the strength of their inaccessible mountain fastnesses.

"Men shall shudder at thy fate,<sup>2</sup> the pride of thy heart hath deceived thee,

O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill:

Though thou shouldest make thy nest as high as the eagle,<sup>3</sup>

I will bring thee down from thence—it is the utterance of Jehovah."

Pliny speaks of the Edomite capital as "oppidum

<sup>1</sup> Obadiah 11-15. The difference between A.V. and R.V. is more apparent than real. The prohibition which R.V. gives must have been based on experience. The short prophecy of Obadiah has very much in common with this section of Jeremiah: Obad. 1-6, 8, are almost identical with Jer. xlix. 14-16, 9, 10a, 7. The relation of the two passages is matter of controversy, but probably both use a common original. Cf. Driver's *Introduction* on Obadiah.

<sup>2</sup> Lit. "thy terror," *i.e.* the terror inspired by thy fate. A.V., R.V., "thy terribleness," suggests that Edom trusted in the terror felt for him by his enemies, but we can scarcely suppose that even the fiercest highlanders expected Nebuchadnezzar to be terrified at them.

<sup>3</sup> Obad. 4: "Though thou set thy nest among the stars."



circumdatum montibus inaccessis,"<sup>1</sup> and doubtless the children of Esau had often watched from their eyrie Assyrian and Chaldean armies on the march to plunder more defenceless victims, and trusted that their strength, their good fortune, and their ancient and proverbial wisdom would still hold them scatheless. Their neighbours—the Jews amongst the rest—might be plundered, massacred, and carried away captive, but Edom could look on in careless security, and find its account in the calamities of kindred tribes. If Jerusalem was shattered by the Chaldean tempest, the Edomites would play the part of wreckers. But all this shrewdness was mere folly: how could these Solons of Mount Seir prove so unworthy of their reputation?

“Is wisdom no more in Teman?  
Has counsel perished from the prudent?  
Has their wisdom vanished?”

They thought that Jehovah would punish Jacob whom He loved, and yet spare Esau whom He hated. But:—

“Thus saith Jehovah:

Behold, they to whom it pertained not to drink of the cup shall assuredly drink.

Art thou he that shall go altogether unpunished?

Thou shalt not go unpunished, but thou shalt assuredly drink” (12).

Ay, and drink to the dregs:—

“If grape-gatherers come to thee, would they not leave gleanings? If thieves came by night, they would only destroy till they had enough. But I have made Esau bare, I have stripped him stark naked; he shall not be able to hide himself.

His children, and his brethren, and his neighbours are given up to plunder, and there is an end of him” (9, 10).

“I have sworn by Myself—is the utterance of Jehovah—

That Bozrah shall become an astonishment, a reproach, a desolation, and a curse;

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. Nat.*, vi. 28. Orelli.

All her cities shall become perpetual wastes.

I have heard tidings from Jehovah, and an ambassador is sent among the nations, saying,

Gather yourselves together and come against her, arise to battle" (13, 14).

There was obviously but one leader who could lead the nations to achieve the overthrow of Edom and lead her little ones away captive, who could come up like a lion from the thickets of Jordan, or "flying like an eagle and spreading his wings against Bozrah" (22) —Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who had come up against Judah with all the kingdoms and peoples of his dominions.<sup>1</sup>

In this picture of chastisement and calamity, there is one apparent touch of pitifulness:—

"Leave thine orphans, I will preserve their lives;  
Let thy widows put their trust in Me" (11).

At first sight, at any rate, these seem to be the words of Jehovah. All the adult males of Edom would perish, yet the helpless widows and orphans would not be without a protector. The God of Israel would watch over the lambs of Edom,<sup>2</sup> when they were dragged away into captivity. We are reluctant to surrender this beautiful and touching description of a God, who, though He may visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, yet even in such judgment ever remembers mercy. It is impossible, however, to ignore the fact that such ideas are widely different from the tone and sentiment of the rest of the section. These words may be an immediate sequel to the previous verse, "No Edomite survives to say to his dying brethren, Leave thine orphans to me," or possibly they may be quoted, in

<sup>1</sup> xxxiv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Verse 20.

bitter irony, from some message from Edom to Jerusalem, inviting the Jews to send their wives and children for safety to Mount Seir. Edom, ungrateful and treacherous Edom, shall utterly perish—Edom that offered an asylum to Jewish refugees, and yet shared the plunder of Jerusalem and betrayed her fugitives to the Chaldeans.

There is no word of restoration. Moab and Ammon and Elam might revive and flourish again, but for Esau, as of old, there should be no place of repentance. For Edom, in the days of the Captivity, trespassed upon the inheritance of Israel more grievously than Ammon and Moab upon Reuben and Gad. The Edomites possessed themselves of the rich pastures of the south of Judah, and the land was thenceforth called Idumea. Thus they earned the undying hatred of the Jews, in whose mouths Edom became a curse and a reproach, a term of opprobrium. Like Babylon, Edom was used as a secret name for Rome, and later on for the Christian Church.

Nevertheless, even in this prophecy, there is a hint that these predictions of utter ruin must not be taken too literally:—

“For, behold, I will make thee small among the nations,  
Despised among men” (15).

These words are scarcely consistent with the other verses, which imply that, as a people, Edom would utterly perish from off the face of the earth. As a matter of fact, Edom flourished in her new territory till the time of the Maccabees, and when the Messiah came to establish the Kingdom of God, instead of “saviours standing on Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau,”<sup>1</sup> an Edomite dynasty was reigning in Jerusalem.

<sup>1</sup> Obadiah 21.

## CHAPTER XXII

### *DAMASCUS*

xlix. 23-27.

"I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall devour the palaces of Benhadad."—JER. xlix. 27.

WE are a little surprised to meet with a prophecy of Jeremiah concerning Damascus and the palaces of Benhadad. The names carry our minds back for more than a couple of centuries. During Elisha's ministry, Damascus and Samaria were engaged in their long, fierce duel for the supremacy over Syria and Palestine. In the reign of Ahaz these ancient rivals combined to attack Judah, so that Isaiah is keenly interested in Damascus and its fortunes. But about B.C. 745, about a hundred and fifty years before Jeremiah's time, the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser<sup>1</sup> overthrew the Syrian kingdom and carried its people into captivity. We know from Ezekiel,<sup>2</sup> what we might have surmised from the position and later history of Damascus, that this ancient city continued a wealthy commercial centre; but Ezekiel has no oracle concerning Damascus, and the other documents of the period and of later times do not mention the capital of Benhadad. Its name does not even occur in Jeremiah's

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xvi. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. xxvii. 18.

exhaustive list of the countries of his world in xxv. 15-26. Religious interest in alien races depended on their political relations with Israel; when the latter ceased, the prophets had no word from Jehovah concerning foreign nations. Such considerations have suggested doubts as to the authenticity of this section, and it has been supposed that it may be a late echo of Isaiah's utterances concerning Damascus.

We know, however, too little of the history of the period to warrant such a conclusion. Damascus would continue to exist as a tributary state, and might furnish auxiliary forces to the enemies of Judah or join with her to conspire against Babylon, and would in either case attract Jeremiah's attention. Moreover, in ancient as in modern times, commerce played its part in international politics. Doubtless slaves were part of the merchandise of Damascus, just as they were among the wares of the Apocalyptic Babylon. Joel<sup>1</sup> denounces Tyre and Zidon for selling Jews to the Greeks, and the Damascenes may have served as slave-agents to Nebuchadnezzar and his captains, and thus provoked the resentment of patriot Jews. So many picturesque and romantic associations cluster around Damascus, that this section of Jeremiah almost strikes a jarring note. We love to think of this fairest of Oriental cities, "half as old as time," as the "Eye of the East" which Mohammed refused to enter—because "Man," he said, "can have but one paradise, and my paradise is fixed above"—and as the capital of Nouredin and his still more famous successor Saladin. And so we regret that, when it emerges from the obscurity of centuries into the light of Biblical narrative, the brief reference

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<sup>1</sup> Joel iii. 4.

should suggest a disaster such as it endured in later days at the hands of the treacherous and ruthless Tamerlane.

“Damascus hath grown feeble:  
She turneth herself to flee;  
Trembling hath seized on her.

How is the city of praise forsaken,<sup>1</sup>  
The city of joy!  
Her young men shall fall in the streets,  
All the warriors shall be put to silence in that day.”

We are moved to sympathy with the feelings of Hamath and Arpad, when they heard the evil tidings, and were filled with sorrow, “like the sea that cannot rest.”

Yet even here this most uncompromising of prophets may teach us, after his fashion, wholesome though perhaps unwelcome truths. We are reminded how often the mystic glamour of romance has served to veil cruelty and corruption, and how little picturesque scenery and interesting associations can do of themselves to promote a noble life. Feudal castles, with their massive grandeur, were the strongholds of avarice and cruelty; and ancient abbeys which, even in decay, are like a dream of fairyland, were sometimes the home of abominable corruption.

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<sup>1</sup> So Giesebrecht, with most of the ancient versions. A.V., R.V., with Masoretic Text, “not forsaken . . . my joy,” possibly meaning, “Why did not the inhabitants forsake the doomed city?”

## CHAPTER XXIII

### *KEDAR AND HAZOR*

xlix. 28-33.

“Concerning Kedar, and the kingdoms of Hazor which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon smote.”—*JER.* xlix. 28.

FROM an immemorial seat of human culture, an “eternal city” which antedates Rome by centuries, if not millenniums, we turn to those Arab tribes whose national life and habits were as ancient and have been as persistent as the streets of Damascus. While Damascus has almost always been in the forefront of history, the Arab tribes—except in the time of Mohammed and the early Caliphs—have seldom played a more important part than that of frontier marauders. Hence, apart from a few casual references, the only other passage in the Old Testament which deals, at any length, with Kedar is the parallel prophecy of Isaiah. And yet Kedar was the great northern tribe, which ranged the deserts between Palestine and the Euphrates, and which must have had closer relations with Judah than most Arab peoples.

“The kingdoms of Hazor” are still more unknown to history. There were several “Hazors” in Palestine, besides sundry towns whose names are also derived from *Hāçēr*, a village; and some of these are on or beyond the southern frontier of Judah, in the wilderness

of the Exodus, where we might expect to find nomad Arabs. But even these latter cities can scarcely be the "Hazor" of Jeremiah, and the more northern are quite out of the question. It is generally supposed that Hazor here is either some Arabian town, or, more probably, a collective term for the district inhabited by Arabs, who lived not in tents, but in *Hāçērîm*, or villages. This district would be in Arabia itself, and more distant from Palestine than the deserts over which Kedar roamed. Possibly Isaiah's "villages (*Hāçērîm*) that Kedar doth inhabit" were to be found in the Hazor of Jeremiah, and the same people were called Kedar and Hazor respectively according as they lived a nomad life or settled in more permanent dwellings.

The great warlike enterprises of Egypt, Assyria, and Chaldea during the last centuries of the Jewish monarchy would bring these desert horsemen into special prominence. They could either further or hinder the advance of armies marching westward from Mesopotamia, and could command their lines of communication. Kedar, and possibly Hazor too, would not be slack to use the opportunities of plunder presented by the calamities of the Palestinian states. Hence their conspicuous position in the pages of Isaiah and Jeremiah.

As the Assyrians, when their power was at its height, had chastised the aggressions of the Arabs, so now Nebuchadnezzar "smote Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor." Even the wandering nomads and dwellers by distant oases in trackless deserts could not escape the sweeping activity of this scourge of God. Doubtless the ravages of Chaldean armies might serve to punish many sins besides the wrongs they were sent to



revenge. The Bedouin always had their virtues, but the wild liberty of the desert easily degenerated into unbridled licence. Judah and every state bordering on the wilderness knew by painful experience how large a measure of rapine and cruelty might coexist with primitive customs, and the Jewish prophet gives Nebuchadnezzar a Divine commission as for a holy war :—

“Arise, go up to Kedar ;  
 Spoil the men of the east.  
 They (the Chaldeans) shall take away their tents and flocks ;  
 They shall take for themselves their tent-coverings,  
 And all their gear and their camels :  
 Men shall cry concerning them,  
 Terror on every side.”<sup>1</sup>

Then the prophet turns to the more distant Hazor with words of warning :—

“Flee, get you far off, dwell in hidden recesses of the land,  
 O inhabitants of Hazor—  
 It is the utterance of Jehovah—  
 For Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon hath counselled a  
 counsel and purposed a purpose against you.”

But then, as if this warning were a mere taunt, he renews his address to the Chaldeans and directs their attack against Hazor :—

“Arise, go up against a nation that is at ease, that dwelleth  
 without fear—it is the utterance of Jehovah—  
 Which abide alone, without gates or bars”—

like the people of Laish before the Danites came, and like Sparta before the days of Epaminondas.

Possibly we are to combine these successive “utterances,” and to understand that it was alike Jehovah’s will that the Chaldeans should invade and lay waste

<sup>1</sup> Magor-missabib : cf. xlv. 5.

Hazor, and that the unfortunate inhabitants should escape—but escape plundered and impoverished: for

“Their camels shall become a spoil,  
The multitude of their cattle a prey:  
I will scatter to every wind them that have the corners of  
their hair polled;<sup>1</sup>  
I will bring their calamity upon them from all sides.  
Hazor shall be a haunt of jackals, a desolation for ever:  
No one shall dwell there,  
No soul shall sojourn therein.”

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<sup>1</sup> *I.e.* cut off.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### *ELAM*

xlix. 34-39

“I will break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might.”—*JER.*  
xlix. 35.

WE do not know what principle or absence of principle determined the arrangement of these prophecies; but, in any case, these studies in ancient geography and politics present a series of dramatic contrasts. From two ancient and enduring types of Eastern life, the city of Damascus and the Bedouin of the desert, we pass to a state of an entirely different order, only slightly connected with the international system of Western Asia. Elam contended for the palm of supremacy with Assyria and Babylon in the farther east, as Egypt did to the south-west. Before the time of Abraham Elamite kings ruled over Chaldea, and Genesis xiv. tells us how Chedorlaomer with his subject-allies collected his tribute in Palestine. Many centuries later, the Assyrian king Ashur-bani-pal (B.C. 668—626) conquered Elam, sacked the capital Shushan, and carried away many of the inhabitants into captivity. According to Ezra iv. 9, 10, Elamites were among the mingled population whom “the great and noble Asnapper” (probably Ashur-bani-pal) settled in Samaria.

When we begin to recall even a few of the striking facts concerning Elam discovered in the last fifty years, and remember that for millenniums Elam had played the part of a first-class Asiatic power, we are tempted to wonder that Jeremiah only devotes a few conventional sentences to this great nation. But the prophet's interest was simply determined by the relations of Elam with Judah; and, from this point of view, an opposite difficulty arises. How came the Jews in Palestine in the time of Jeremiah to have any concern with a people dwelling beyond the Euphrates and Tigris, on the farther side of the Chaldean dominions? One answer to this question has already been suggested: the Jews may have learnt from the Elamite colonists in Samaria something concerning their native country; it is also probable that Elamite auxiliaries served in the Chaldean armies that invaded Judah.

Accordingly the prophet sets forth, in terms already familiar to us, how Elamite fugitives should be scattered to the four quarters of the earth and be found in every nation under heaven, how the sword should follow them into their distant places of refuge and utterly consume them.

"I will set My throne in Elam;  
I will destroy out of it both king and princes—  
It is the utterance of Jehovah."

In the prophecy concerning Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar was to set his throne at Tahpanhes to decide the fate of the captives; but here Jehovah Himself is pictured as the triumphant and inexorable conqueror, holding His court as the arbiter of life and death. The vision of the "great white throne" was not first accorded to John in his Apocalypse. Jeremiah's eyes were opened to see beside the tribunals of heathen conquerors the

judgment-seat of a mightier Potentate ; and his inspired utterances remind the believer that every battle may be an Armageddon, and that at every congress there is set a mystic throne from which the Eternal King overrules the decisions of plenipotentiaries.

But this sentence of condemnation was not to be the final "utterance of Jehovah" with regard to Elam. A day of renewed prosperity was to dawn for Elam, as well as for Moab, Ammon, Egypt, and Judah :—

"In the latter days I will bring again the captivity of Elam—  
It is the utterance of Jehovah."

The Apostle Peter<sup>1</sup> tells us that the prophets "sought and searched diligently" concerning the application of their words, "searching what time and what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto." We gather from these verses that, as Newton could not have foreseen all that was contained in the law of gravitation, so the prophets often understood little of what was involved in their own inspiration. We could scarcely have a better example than this prophecy affords of the knowledge of the principles of God's future action combined with ignorance of its circumstances and details. If we may credit the current theory, Cyrus, the servant of Jehovah, the deliverer of Judah, was a king of Elam. If Jeremiah had foreseen how his prophecies of the restoration of Elam and of Judah would be fulfilled, we may be sure that this utterance would not have been so brief, its hostile tone would have been mitigated, and the concluding sentence would not have been so cold and conventional.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter i. 10, 11.

## CHAPTER XXV

### *BABYLON*

l, li.

“Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces.”—*JER.* l. 2.

THESE chapters present phenomena analogous to those of Isaiah xl.—lxvi., and have been very commonly ascribed to an author writing at Babylon towards the close of the Exile, or even at some later date. The conclusion has been arrived at in both cases by the application of the same critical principles to similar data. In the present case the argument is complicated by the concluding paragraph of chapter li., which states that “Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that should come upon Babylon, even all these words that are written against Babylon,” in the fourth year of Zedekiah, and gave the book to Seraiah ben Neriah to take to Babylon and tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates.

Such a statement, however, cuts both ways. On the one hand, we seem to have—what is wanting in the case of Isaiah xl.—lxvi.—a definite and circumstantial testimony as to authorship. But, on the other hand, this very testimony raises new difficulties. If l. and li. had been simply assigned to Jeremiah, without any specification of date, we might possibly have accepted the tradition according to which he spent his last years

at Babylon, and have supposed that altered circumstances and novel experiences account for the differences between these chapters and the rest of the book. But Zedekiah's fourth year is a point in the prophet's ministry at which it is extremely difficult to account for his having composed such a prophecy. If, however, li. 59-64 is mistaken in its exact and circumstantial account of the origin of the preceding section, we must hesitate to recognise its authority as to that section's authorship.

A detailed discussion of the question would be out of place here,<sup>1</sup> but we may notice a few passages which illustrate the arguments for an exilic date. We learn from Jeremiah xxvii.—xxix. that, in the fourth year of Zedekiah,<sup>2</sup> the prophet was denouncing as false teachers those who predicted that the Jewish captives in Babylon would speedily return to their native land. He himself asserted that judgment would not be inflicted upon Babylon for seventy years, and exhorted the exiles to build houses and marry, and plant gardens, and to pray for the peace of Babylon.<sup>3</sup> We can hardly imagine that, in the same breath almost, he called upon these exiles to flee from the city of their captivity, and summoned the neighbouring nations to execute Jehovah's judgment against the oppressors of His people. And yet we read:—

“There shall come the Israelites, they and the Jews together:  
They shall weep continually, as they go to seek Jehovah their  
God;

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<sup>1</sup> See against the authenticity Driver's *Introduction, in loco*; and in support of it *Speaker's Commentary*, Streane (C.B.S.). Cf. also Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, etc., pp. 484-486.

<sup>2</sup> In xxvii. 1 we must read, “In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah,” not Jehoiakim. <sup>3</sup> xxix. 4-14.

They shall ask their way to Zion, with their faces hitherward"<sup>1</sup> (l. 4, 5).

"Remove from the midst of Babylon, and be ye as he-goats before the flock" (l. 8).

These verses imply that the Jews were already in Babylon, and throughout the author assumes the circumstances of the Exile. "The vengeance of the Temple," *i.e.* vengeance for the destruction of the Temple at the final capture of Jerusalem, is twice threatened.<sup>2</sup> The ruin of Babylon is described as imminent:—

"Set up a standard on the earth,  
Blow the trumpet among the nations,  
Prepare the nations against her."

If these words were written by Jeremiah in the fourth year of Zedekiah, he certainly was not practising his own precept to pray for the peace of Babylon.

Various theories have been advanced to meet the difficulties which are raised by the ascription of this prophecy to Jeremiah. It may have been expanded from an authentic original. Or again, li. 59-64 may not really refer to l. 1—li. 58; the two sections may once have existed separately, and may owe their connection to an editor, who met with l. 1—li. 58 as an anonymous document, and thought he recognised in it the "book" referred to in li. 59-64. Or again, l. 1—li. 58 may be a hypothetical reconstruction of a lost prophecy of Jeremiah; li. 59-64 mentioned such a prophecy and none was extant, and some student and disciple of Jeremiah's school utilised the material and

<sup>1</sup> "Hitherward" seems to indicate that the writer's local standpoint is that of Palestine.

<sup>2</sup> l. 28, li. 11.



ideas of extant writings to supply the gap. In any case, it must have been edited more than once, and each time with modifications. Some support might be obtained for any one of these theories from the fact that l. 1—li. 58 is *primâ facie* partly a cento of passages from the rest of the book and from the Book of Isaiah.<sup>1</sup>

In view of the great uncertainty as to the origin and history of this prophecy, we do not intend to attempt any detailed exposition. Elsewhere whatever non-Jeremianic matter occurs in the book is mostly by way of expansion and interpretation, and thus lies in the direct line of the prophet's teaching. But the section on Babylon attaches itself to the new departure in religious thought that is more fully expressed in Isaiah xl.—lxvi. Chapters l., li., may possibly be Jeremiah's swan-song, called forth by one of those Pisgah visions of a new dispensation sometimes granted to aged seers; but such visions of a new era and a new order can scarcely be combined with earlier teaching. We will therefore only briefly indicate the character and contents of this section.

It is apparently a mosaic, compiled from lost as well as extant sources; and dwells upon a few themes with a persistent iteration of ideas and phrases hardly to be paralleled elsewhere, even in the Book of Jeremiah. It has been reckoned<sup>2</sup> that the imminence of the attack on Babylon is introduced afresh eleven times, and its conquest and destruction nine times. The advent of an enemy from the north is announced four times.<sup>3</sup>

The main theme is naturally that dwelt upon most

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. l. 8, li. 6, with Isa. xlvi. 20; l. 13 with xlix. 17; l. 41-43 with vi. 22-24; l. 44-46 with xlix. 19-21; li. 15-19 with x. 12-16.

<sup>2</sup> Budde ap. Giesebrecht, *in loco*.

<sup>3</sup> l. 3, 9, li. 41, 48.

frequently, the imminent invasion of Chaldea by victorious enemies who shall capture and destroy Babylon. Hereafter the great city and its territory will be a waste, howling wilderness :—

“Your mother shall be sore ashamed,  
 She that bare you shall be confounded ;  
 Behold, she shall be the hindmost of the nations,  
 A wilderness, a parched land, and a desert.  
 Because of the wrath of Jehovah, it shall be uninhabited ;  
 The whole land shall be a desolation.  
 Every one that goeth by Babylon  
 Shall hiss with astonishment because of all her plagues.”<sup>1</sup>

The gods of Babylon, Bel and Merodach, and all her idols, are involved in her ruin, and reference is made to the vanity and folly of idolatry.<sup>2</sup> But the wrath of Jehovah has been chiefly excited, not by false religion, but by the wrongs inflicted by the Chaldeans on His Chosen People. He is moved to avenge His Temple<sup>3</sup> :—

“I will recompense unto Babylon  
 And all the inhabitants of Chaldea  
 All the evil which they wrought in Zion,  
 And ye shall see it—it is the utterance of Jehovah” (li. 24).

Though He thus avenge Judah, yet its former sins are not yet blotted out of the book of His remembrance :—

“Their adversaries said, We incur no guilt,  
 Because they have sinned against Jehovah, the Pasture of  
 Justice,  
 Against the Hope of their fathers, even Jehovah” (l. 7).

Yet now there is forgiveness :—

“The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none ;

<sup>1</sup> l. 12, 13 : cf. l. 39, 40, li. 26, 29, 37, 41-43.

<sup>2</sup> li. 17, 18.

<sup>3</sup> l. 28,

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And he sins of Judah, and they shall not be found :  
For I will pardon the remnant that I preserve" (l. 20).

The Jews are urged to flee from Babylon, lest they should be involved in its punishment, and are encouraged to return to Jerusalem and enter afresh into an everlasting covenant with Jehovah. As in Jeremiah xxxi., Israel is to be restored as well as Judah :—

"I will bring Israel again to his Pasture :  
He shall feed on Carmel and Bashan ;  
His desires shall be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and  
in Gilead" (l. 19).



BOOK III

*JEREMIAH'S TEACHING CONCERNING  
ISRAEL AND JUDAH*



## CHAPTER XXVI

### INTRODUCTORY

"I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people."—JER. xxxi. 1.

IN this third book an attempt is made to present a general view of Jeremiah's teaching on the subject with which he was most preoccupied—the political and religious fortunes of Judah. Certain<sup>1</sup> chapters detach themselves from the rest, and stand in no obvious connection with any special incident of the prophet's life. These are the main theme of this book, and have been dealt with in the ordinary method of detailed exposition. They have been treated separately, and not woven into the continuous narrative, partly because we thus obtain a more adequate emphasis upon important aspects of their teaching, but chiefly because their date and occasion cannot be certainly determined. With them other sections have been associated, on account of the connection of subject. Further material for a synopsis of Jeremiah's teaching has been collected from chapters xxi.—xlix. generally, supplemented by brief<sup>2</sup> references to the previous chapters. Inasmuch as the prophecies of our book do not form an ordered

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<sup>1</sup> xxx., xxxi., and, in part, xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Brief, in order not to trespass more than is absolutely necessary upon the ground covered by the previous *Expositor's Bible* volume on Jeremiah,

treatise on dogmatic theology, but were uttered with regard to individual conduct and critical events, topics are not exclusively dealt with in a single section, but are referred to at intervals throughout. Moreover, as both the individuals and the crises were very much alike, ideas and phrases are constantly reappearing, so that there is an exceptionally large amount of repetition in the Book of Jeremiah. The method we have adopted avoids some of the difficulties which would arise if we attempted to deal with these doctrines in our continuous exposition.

Our general sketch of the prophet's teaching is naturally arranged under categories suggested by the book itself, and not according to the sections of a modern treatise on Systematic Theology. No doubt much may legitimately be extracted or deduced concerning Anthropology, Soteriology, and the like; but true proportion is as important in exposition as accurate interpretation. If we wish to understand Jeremiah, we must be content to dwell longest upon what he emphasised most, and to adopt the standpoint of time and race which was his own. Accordingly in our treatment we have followed the cycle of sin, punishment, and restoration, so familiar to students of Hebrew prophecy.

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## NOTE

### SOME CHARACTERISTIC EXPRESSIONS OF JEREMIAH

This note is added partly for convenience of reference, and partly to illustrate the repetition just mentioned as characteristic of Jeremiah. The instances are chosen from expressions occurring in chapters xxi.—lii. The reader will find fuller lists dealing with the whole book in the *Speaker's Commentary* and the



*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges.* The Hebrew student is referred to the list in Driver's *Introduction*, upon which the following is partly based.

1. *Rising up early*: vii. 13, 25; xi. 7; xxv. 3, 4; xxvi. 5; xxix. 19; xxxii. 33; xxxv. 14, 15; xlv. 4. This phrase, familiar to us in the narratives of Genesis and in the historical books, is used here, as in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, of God addressing His people on sending the prophets.

2. *Stubbornness of heart* (A.V. imagination of heart): iii. 17; vii. 24; ix. 14; xi. 8; xiii. 10; xvi. 12; xviii. 12; xxiii. 17; also found Deut. xxix. 19 and Ps. lxxxix. 15.

3. *The evil of your doings*: iv. 4; xxi. 12; xxiii. 2, 22; xxv. 5; xxvi. 3; xlv. 22; also Deut. xxviii. 20; 1 Sam. xxv. 3; Isa. i. 16; Hos. ix. 15; Ps. xxviii. 4; and in slightly different form in xi. 18 and Zech. i. 4.

*The fruit of your doings*: xvii. 10; xxi. 14; xxxii. 19; also found in Micah vii. 13.

*Doings, your doings*, etc., are also found in Jeremiah and elsewhere.

4. *The sword, the pestilence, and the famine*, in various orders, and either as a phrase or each word occurring in one of three successive clauses: xiv. 12; xv. 2; xxi. 7, 9; xxiv. 10; xxvii. 8, 13; xxix. 17, 18; xxxii. 24, 36; xxxiv. 17; xxxviii. 2; xlii. 17, 22; xlv. 13.

*The sword and the famine*, with similar variations: v. 12; xi. 22; xiv. 13, 15, 16, 18; xvi. 4; xviii. 21; xlii. 16; xlv. 12, 18, 27.

Cf. similar lists, etc., "death . . . sword . . . captivity" in xliii. 11; "war . . . evil . . . pestilence," xxviii. 8.

5. *Kings . . . princes . . . priests . . . prophets*, in various orders and combinations: ii. 26; iv. 9; viii. 1; xiii. 13; xxiv. 8; xxxii. 32.

Cf. *Prophet . . . priest . . . people*, xxiii. 33, 34. *Prophets . . . divines . . . dreamers . . . enchanters . . . sorcerers*, xxvii. 9.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### *SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CORRUPTION*

“Very bad figs, . . . too bad to be eaten.”—JER. xxiv. 2, 8, xxix. 17.

PROPHETS and preachers have taken the Israelites for God's helots, as if the Chosen People had been made drunk with the cup of the Lord's indignation, in order that they might be held up as a warning to His more favoured children throughout after ages. They seem depicted as “sinners above all men,” that by this supreme warning the heirs of a better covenant may be kept in the path of righteousness. Their sin is no mere inference from the long tragedy of their national history, “because they have suffered such things”; their own prophets and their own Messiah testify continually against them. Religious thought has always singled out Jeremiah as the most conspicuous and uncompromising witness to the sins of his people. One chief feature of his mission was to declare God's condemnation of ancient Judah. Jeremiah watched and shared the prolonged agony and overwhelming catastrophes of the last days of the Jewish monarchy, and ever and anon raised his voice to declare that his fellow-countrymen suffered, not as martyrs, but as criminals. He was like the herald who accompanies a condemned man on the way to execution, and proclaims his crime to the spectators.

What were these crimes? How was Jerusalem a

sink of iniquity, an Augean stable, only to be cleansed by turning through it the floods of Divine chastisement? The annalists of Egypt and Chaldea show no interest in the morality of Judah; but there is no reason to believe that they regarded Jerusalem as more depraved than Tyre, or Babylon, or Memphis. If a citizen of one of these capitals of the East visited the city of David he might miss something of accustomed culture, and might have occasion to complain of the inferiority of local police arrangements, but he would be as little conscious of any extraordinary wickedness in the city as a Parisian would in London. Indeed, if an English Christian familiar with the East of the nineteenth century could be transported to Jerusalem under King Zedekiah, in all probability its moral condition would not affect him very differently from that of Cabul or Ispahan.

When we seek to learn from Jeremiah wherein the guilt of Judah lay, his answer is neither clear nor full: he does not gather up her sins into any complete and detailed indictment; we are obliged to avail ourselves of casual references scattered through his prophecies. For the most part Jeremiah speaks in general terms; a precise and exhaustive catalogue of current vices would have seemed too familiar and commonplace for the written record.

The corruption of Judah is summed up by Jeremiah in the phrase "the evil of your doings,"<sup>1</sup> and her punishment is described in a corresponding phrase as "the fruit of your doings," or as coming upon her "because of the evil of your doings." The original of "doings" is a peculiar word<sup>2</sup> occurring most frequently

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<sup>1</sup> Characteristic Expressions (1), p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> מעלל.

in Jeremiah, and the phrases are very common in Jeremiah, and hardly occur at all elsewhere. The constant reiteration of this melancholy refrain is an eloquent symbol of Jehovah's sweeping condemnation. In the total depravity of Judah, no special sin, no one group of sins, stood out from the rest. Their "doings" were evil altogether.

The picture suggested by the scattered hints as to the character of these evil doings is such as might be drawn of almost any Eastern state in its darker days. The arbitrary hand of the government is illustrated by Jeremiah's own experience of the bastinado<sup>1</sup> and the dungeon,<sup>2</sup> and by the execution of Uriah ben Shemaiah.<sup>3</sup> The rights of less important personages were not likely to be more scrupulously respected. The reproach of shedding innocent blood is more than once made against the people and their rulers;<sup>4</sup> and the more general charge of oppression occurs still more frequently.<sup>5</sup>

The motive for both these crimes was naturally covetousness;<sup>6</sup> as usual, they were specially directed against the helpless, "the poor,"<sup>7</sup> "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow"; and the machinery of oppression was ready to hand in venal judges and rulers. Upon occasion, however, recourse was had to open violence—men could "steal and murder," as well as "swear falsely";<sup>8</sup> they lived in an atmosphere of falsehood, they "walked in a lie."<sup>9</sup> Indeed the word "lie" is one of the keynotes of these pro-

<sup>1</sup> xx. 2, xxxvii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> xxxvii., xxxviii.

<sup>3</sup> xxvi. 20-24.

<sup>4</sup> ii. 34, xix. 4, xxii. 17.

<sup>5</sup> v. 25, vi. 6, vii. 5.

<sup>6</sup> vi. 13.

<sup>7</sup> ii. 34.

<sup>8</sup> vii. 5-9.

<sup>9</sup> xxiii. 14.

phesies.<sup>1</sup> The last days of the monarchy offered special temptations to such vices. Social wreckers reaped an unhallowed harvest in these stormy times. Revolutions were frequent, and each in its turn meant fresh plunder for unscrupulous partisans. Flattery and treachery could always find a market in the court of the suzerain or the camp of the invader. Naturally, amidst this general demoralisation, the life of the family did not remain untouched: "the land was full of adulterers."<sup>2</sup> Zedekiah and Ahab, the false prophets at Babylon, are accused of having committed adultery with their neighbours' wives.<sup>3</sup> In these passages "adultery" can scarcely be a figure for idolatry; and even if it is, idolatry always involved immoral ritual.

In accordance with the general teaching of the Old Testament, Jeremiah traces the roots of the people's depravity to a certain moral stupidity; they are "a foolish people, without understanding," who, like the idols in Psalm cxv. 5, 6, "have eyes and see not" and "have ears and hear not."<sup>4</sup> In keeping with their stupidity was an unconsciousness of guilt which even rose into proud self-righteousness. They could still come with pious fervour to worship in the temple of Jehovah and to claim the protection of its inviolable sanctity. They could still assail Jeremiah with righteous indignation because he announced the coming destruction of the place where Jehovah had chosen to set His name.<sup>5</sup> They said that they had no sin, and met the

<sup>1</sup> Characteristic Expressions (2), p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> xxiii. 10, 14.

<sup>3</sup> xxix. 23.

<sup>4</sup> v. 21, quoted by Ezekiel, xii. 2. The verse is also the foundation of the description of Israel as "the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears," in Isa. xlii. 18 ff., xliii. 8. Cf. Giesebrecht on Jer. v. 21.

<sup>5</sup> vii., xxvi.

prophet's rebukes with protests of conscious innocence :  
"Wherefore hath Jehovah pronounced all this great  
evil against us? or what is our iniquity? or what is  
our sin that we have committed against Jehovah our  
God?"<sup>1</sup>

When the public conscience condoned alike the abuse  
of the forms of law and its direct violation, actual legal  
rights would be strained to the utmost against debtors,  
hired labourers, and slaves. In their extremity, the  
princes and people of Judah sought to propitiate the  
anger of Jehovah by emancipating their Hebrew slaves ;  
when the immediate danger had passed away for a  
time, they revoked the emancipation.<sup>2</sup> The form of  
their submission to Jehovah reveals their consciousness  
that their deepest sin lay in their behaviour to their  
helpless dependents. This prompt repudiation of a  
most solemn covenant illustrated afresh their callous  
indifference to the well-being of their inferiors.

The depravity of Judah was not only total, it was  
also universal. In the older histories we read how  
Achan's single act of covetousness involved the whole  
people in misfortune, and how the treachery of the  
bloody house of Saul brought three years' famine upon  
the land ; but now the sins of individuals and classes  
were merged in the general corruption. Jeremiah  
dwells with characteristic reiteration of idea and phrase  
upon this melancholy truth. Again and again he  
enumerates the different classes of the community :  
"kings, princes, priests, prophets, men of Judah and  
inhabitants of Jerusalem." They had all done evil and  
provoked Jehovah to anger ; they were all to share the  
same punishment.<sup>3</sup> They were all arch-rebels, given to

<sup>1</sup> xvi. 10.

<sup>2</sup> xxxiv.

<sup>3</sup> xxxii. 26-35 : cf. p. 269, *Characteristic Expressions* (3).

slander ; nothing but base metal ;<sup>1</sup> corrupters, every one of them.<sup>2</sup> The universal extent of total depravity is most forcibly expressed when Zedekiah with his court and people are summarily described as a basket of "very bad figs, too bad to be eaten."

The dark picture of Israel's corruption is not yet complete—Israel's corruption, for now the prophet is no longer exclusively concerned with Judah. The sin of these last days is no new thing ; it is as old as the Israelite occupation of Jerusalem. "This city hath been to Me a provocation of My anger and of My fury from the day that they built it even unto this day" ; from the earliest days of Israel's national existence, from the time of Moses and the Exodus, the people have been given over to iniquity. "The children of Israel and the children of Judah have done nothing but evil before Me from their youth up."<sup>3</sup> Thus we see at last that Jeremiah's teaching concerning the sin of Judah can be summed up in one brief and comprehensive proposition. Throughout their whole history all classes of the community have been wholly given over to every kind of wickedness.

This gloomy estimate of God's Chosen People is substantially confirmed by the prophets of the later monarchy, from Amos and Hosea onwards. Hosea speaks of Israel in terms as sweeping as those of Jeremiah. "Hear the word of Jehovah, ye children of Israel ; for Jehovah hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. Swearing and lying and killing and stealing and committing adultery,

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<sup>1</sup> Literally "copper and iron."

<sup>2</sup> vi. 28.

<sup>3</sup> xxxii. 26-35.



they cast off all restraint, and blood toucheth blood.”<sup>1</sup> As a prophet of the Northern Kingdom, Hosea is mainly concerned with his own country, but his casual references to Judah include her in the same condemnation.<sup>2</sup> Amos again condemns both Israel and Judah: Judah, “because they have despised the law of Jehovah, and have not kept His commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers walked”; Israel, “because they sold the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes, and pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor and turn aside the way of the meek.”<sup>3</sup> The first chapter of Isaiah is in a similar strain: Israel is “a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers”; “the whole head is sick, the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores.” According to Micah, “Zion is built up with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money.”<sup>4</sup>

Jeremiah's older and younger contemporaries, Zephaniah and Ezekiel, alike confirm his testimony. In the spirit and even the style afterwards used by Jeremiah, Zephaniah enumerates the sins of the nobles and teachers of Jerusalem. “Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves. . . . Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea iv. 1, 2; also Hosea's general picture of the kingdom of Samaria.

<sup>2</sup> The A.V. translation of xi. 12 (“Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints”) must be set aside. The sense is obscure and the text doubtful.

<sup>3</sup> Amos ii. 4-8.

<sup>4</sup> Micah iii. 10, 11.



have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law."<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xx. traces the defections of Israel from the sojourn in Egypt to the Captivity. Elsewhere Ezekiel says that "the land is full of bloody crimes, and the city is full of violence";<sup>2</sup> and in xxii. 23-31 he catalogues the sins of priests, princes, prophets, and people, and proclaims that Jehovah "sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none."

We have now fairly before us the teaching of Jeremiah and the other prophets as to the condition of Judah: the passages quoted or referred to represent its general tone and attitude; it remains to estimate its significance. We should naturally suppose that such sweeping statements as to the total depravity of the whole people throughout all their history were not intended to be interpreted as exact mathematical formulæ. And the prophets themselves state or imply qualifications. Isaiah insists upon the existence of a righteous remnant. When Jeremiah speaks of Zedekiah and his subjects as a basket of very bad figs, he also speaks of the Jews who had already gone into captivity as a basket of very good figs. The mere fact of going into captivity can hardly have accomplished an immediate and wholesale conversion. The "good figs" among the captives were presumably good before they went into exile. Jeremiah's general statements that "they were all arch-rebels" do not therefore preclude the existence of righteous men in the community. Similarly, when he tells us that the city and people have always been given over to iniquity, Jeremiah is not

<sup>1</sup> Zeph. iii. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. vii. 23: cf. vii. 9, xxii. 1-12.

ignorant of Moses and Joshua, David and Solomon, and the kings "who did right in the eyes of Jehovah"; nor does he intend to contradict the familiar accounts of ancient history. On the other hand, the universality which the prophets ascribe to the corruption of their people is no mere figure of rhetoric, and yet it is by no means incompatible with the view that Jerusalem, in its worst days, was not more conspicuously wicked than Babylon or Tyre; or even, allowing for the altered circumstances of the times, than London or Paris. It would never have occurred to Jeremiah to apply the average morality of Gentile cities as a standard by which to judge Jerusalem; and Christian readers of the Old Testament have caught something of the old prophetic spirit. The very introduction into the present context of any comparison between Jerusalem and Babylon may seem to have a certain flavour of irreverence. We perceive with the prophets that the City of Jehovah and the cities of the Gentiles must be placed in different categories. The popular modern explanation is that heathenism was so utterly abominable that Jerusalem at its worst was still vastly superior to Nineveh or Tyre. However exaggerated such views may be, they still contain an element of truth; but Jeremiah's estimate of the moral condition of Judah was based on entirely different ideas. His standards were not relative but absolute, not practical but ideal. His principles were the very antithesis of the tacit ignoring of difficult and unusual duties, the convenient and somewhat shabby compromise represented by the modern word "respectable." Israel was to be judged by its relation to Jehovah's purpose for His people. Jehovah had called them out of Egypt, and delivered them from a thousand dangers. He had raised up for them judges

and kings, Moses, David, and Isaiah. He had spoken to them by Torah and by prophecy. This peculiar munificence of Providence and Revelation was not meant to produce a people only better by some small percentage than their heathen neighbours.

The comparison between Israel and its neighbours would no doubt be much more favourable under David than under Zedekiah, but even then the outcome of Mosaic religion as practically embodied in the national life was utterly unworthy of the Divine ideal; to have described the Israel of David or the Judah of Hezekiah as Jehovah's specially cherished possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,<sup>1</sup> would have seemed a ghastly irony even to the sons of Zeruah, far more to Nathan, Gad, or Isaiah. Nor had any class, as a class, been wholly true to Jehovah at any period of the history. If for any considerable time the numerous order of professional prophets had had a single eye to the glory of Jehovah, the fortunes of Israel would have been altogether different, and where prophets failed, priests and princes and common people were not likely to succeed.

Hence, judged as citizens of God's Kingdom on earth, the Israelites were corrupt in every faculty of their nature: as masters and servants, as rulers and subjects, as priests, prophets, and worshippers of Jehovah, they succumbed to selfishness and cowardice, and perpetrated the ordinary crimes and vices of ancient Eastern life.

The reader is perhaps tempted to ask: Is this all that is meant by the fierce and impassioned denunciations of Jeremiah? Not quite all. Jeremiah had had

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<sup>1</sup> Exod. xix. 6.

the mortification of seeing the great religious revival under Josiah spend itself, apparently in vain, against the ingrained corruption of the people. The reaction, as under Manasseh, had accentuated the worst features of the national life. At the same time the constant distress and dismay caused by disastrous invasions tended to general licence and anarchy. A long period of decadence reached its nadir.

But these are mere matters of degree and detail; the main thing for Jeremiah was not that Judah had become worse, but that it had failed to become better. One great period of Israel's probation was finally closed. The kingdom had served its purpose in the Divine Providence; but it was impossible to hope any longer that the Jewish monarchy was to prove the earthly embodiment of the Kingdom of God. There was no prospect of Judah attaining a social order appreciably better than that of the surrounding nations. Jehovah and His Revelation would be disgraced by any further association with the Jewish state.

Certain schools of socialists bring a similar charge against the modern social order; that it is not a Kingdom of God upon earth is sufficiently obvious; and they assert that our social system has become stereotyped on lines that exclude and resist progress towards any higher ideal. Now it is certainly true that every great civilisation hitherto has grown old and obsolete; if Christian society is to establish its right to abide permanently, it must show itself something more than an improved edition of the Athens of Pericles or the Empire of the Antonines.

All will agree that Christendom falls sadly short of its ideal, and therefore we may seek to gather instruction from Jeremiah's judgment on the shortcomings

of Judah. Jeremiah specially emphasises the universality of corruption in individual character, in all classes of society and throughout the whole duration of history. Similarly we have to recognise that prevalent social and moral evils lower the general tone of individual character. Moral faculties are not set apart in watertight compartments. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all," is no mere forensic principle. The one offence impairs the earnestness and sincerity with which a man keeps the rest of the law, even though there may be no obvious lapse. There are moral surrenders made to the practical exigencies of commercial, social, political, and ecclesiastical life. Probably we should be startled and dismayed if we understood the consequent sacrifice of individual character.

We might also learn from the prophet that the responsibility for our social evils rests with all classes. Time was when the lower classes were plentifully lectured as the chief authors of public troubles; now it is the turn of the capitalist, the parson, and the landlord. The former policy had no very marked success, possibly the new method may not fare better.

Wealth and influence imply opportunity and responsibility which do not belong to the poor and feeble; but power is by no means confined to the privileged classes; and the energy, ability, and self-denial embodied in the great Trades Unions have sometimes shown themselves as cruel and selfish towards the weak and destitute as any association of capitalists. A necessary preliminary to social amendment is a General Confession by each class of its own sins.

Finally, the Divine Spirit had taught Jeremiah that Israel had always been sadly imperfect. He did not

deny Divine Providence and human hope by teaching that the Golden Age lay in the past, that the Kingdom of God had been realised and allowed to perish. He was under no foolish delusion as to "the good old times"; in his most despondent moods he was not given over to wistful reminiscence. His example may help us not to become discouraged through exaggerated ideas about the attainments of past generations.

In considering modern life it may seem that we pass to an altogether different quality of evil to that denounced by Jeremiah, that we have lost sight of anything that could justify his fierce indignation, and thus that we fail in appreciating his character and message. Any such illusion may be corrected by a glance at the statistics of congested town districts, sweated industries, and prostitution. A social reformer, living in contact with these evils, may be apt to think Jeremiah's denunciations specially adapted to the society which tolerates them with almost unruffled complacency.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### *PERSISTENT APOSTASY*

"They have forsaken the covenant of Jehovah their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them."—JER. xxii. 9.

"Every one that walketh in the stubbornness of his heart."—JER. xxiii. 17.

THE previous chapter has been intentionally confined, as far as possible, to Jeremiah's teaching upon the moral condition of Judah. Religion, in the narrower sense, was kept in the background, and mainly referred to as a social and political influence. In the same way the priests and prophets were mentioned chiefly as classes of notables—estates of the realm. This method corresponds with a stage in the process of Revelation; it is that of the older prophets. Hosea, as a native of the Northern Kingdom, may have had a fuller experience and clearer understanding of religious corruption than his contemporaries in Judah. But, in spite of the stress that he lays upon idolatry and the various corruptions of worship, many sections of his book simply deal with social evils. We are not explicitly told why the prophet was "a fool" and "a snare of a fowler," but the immediate context refers to the abominable immorality of Gibeah.<sup>1</sup> The priests are not reproached

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea ix. 7-9: cf. Judges xix. 22.



with incorrect ritual, but with conspiracy to murder.<sup>1</sup> In Amos, the land is not so much punished on account of corrupt worship, as the sanctuaries are destroyed because the people are given over to murder, oppression, and every form of vice. In Isaiah again the main stress is constantly upon international politics and public and private morality.<sup>2</sup> For instance, none of the woes in v. 8-24 are directed against idolatry or corrupt worship, and in xxviii. 7 the charge brought against Ephraim does not refer to ecclesiastical matters; they have erred through strong drink.

In Jeremiah's treatment of the ruin of Judah, he insists, as Hosea had done as regards Israel, on the fatal consequences of apostasy from Jehovah to other gods. This very phrase "other gods" is one of Jeremiah's favourite expressions, and in the writings of the other prophets only occurs in Hosea iii. 1. On the other hand, references to idols are extremely rare in Jeremiah. These facts suggest a special difficulty in discussing the apostasy of Judah. The Jews often combined the worship of other gods with that of Jehovah. According to the analogy of other nations, it was quite possible to worship Baal and Ashtaroth, and the whole heathen Pantheon, without intending to show any special disrespect to the national Deity. Even devout worshippers, who confined their adorations to the one true God, sometimes thought they did honour to Him by introducing into His services the images and all the paraphernalia of the splendid cults of the great heathen empires. It is not always easy to determine whether statements about idolatry imply

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea vi. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah xl.—lxvi. is excluded from this statement.



formal apostasy from Jehovah, or merely a debased worship. When the early Mohammedans spoke with lofty contempt of image-worshippers, they were referring to the Eastern Christians; the iconoclast heretics denounced the idolatry of the Orthodox Church, and the Covenanters used similar terms as to prelacy. Ignorant modern Jews are sometimes taught that Christians worship idols.

Hence when we read of the Jews, "They set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to defile it," we are not to understand that the Temple was transferred from Jehovah to some other deities, but that the corrupt practices and symbols of heathen worship were combined with the Mosaic ritual. Even the high places of Baal, in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, where children were passed through the fire unto Moloch, professed to offer an opportunity of supreme devotion to the God of Israel. Baal and Melech, Lord and King, had in ancient times been amongst His titles; and when they became associated with the more heathenish modes of worship, their misguided devotees still claimed that they were doing homage to the national Deity. The inhuman sacrifices to Moloch were offered in obedience to sacred tradition and Divine oracles, which were supposed to emanate from Jehovah. In three different places, Jeremiah explicitly and emphatically denies that Jehovah had required or sanctioned these sacrifices: "I commanded them not, neither came it into My mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin."<sup>1</sup> The Pentateuch preserves an ancient ordinance which the Moloch-worshippers

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<sup>1</sup> xxxii. 34, 35, repeating vii. 30, 31, with slight variations. A similar statement occurs in xix. 4, 5. Cf. 2 Kings xvi. 3, xxi. 6, xxiii. 10; also Giesebrecht and Orelli *in loco*.

probably interpreted in support of their unholy rites, and Jeremiah's protests are partly directed against the misinterpretation of the command "the first-born of thy sons shalt thou give Me." The immediate context also commanded that the firstlings of sheep and oxen should be given to Jehovah. The beasts were killed; must it not be intended that the children should be killed too? <sup>1</sup> A similar blind literalism has been responsible for many of the follies and crimes perpetrated in the name of Christ. The Church is apt to justify its most flagrant enormities by appealing to a misused and misinterpreted Old Testament. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" and "Cursed be Canaan" have been proof-texts for witch-hunting and negro-slavery; and the Book of Joshua has been regarded as a Divine charter, authorising the unrestrained indulgence of the passion for revenge and blood.

When it was thus necessary to put on record reiterated denials that inhuman rites of Baal and Moloch were a divinely sanctioned adoration of Jehovah, we can understand that the Baal-worship constantly referred to by Hosea, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah <sup>2</sup> was not generally understood to be apostasy. The worship of "other gods," "the sun, the moon, and all the host of heaven," <sup>3</sup> and of the "Queen of Heaven," would be more difficult to explain as mere syncretism, but the assimilation of Jewish worship to heathen ritual and the confusion of the Divine Name with the titles of heathen deities masked the transition from the religion of Moses and Isaiah to utter apostasy.

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<sup>1</sup> Exod. xxii. 29 (J.E.). Exod. xxxiv. 20 is probably a later interpretation intended to guard against misunderstandings.

<sup>2</sup> Baal is not mentioned in the other prophetic books.

<sup>3</sup> vii. 2.

Such assimilation and confusion perplexed and baffled the prophets.<sup>1</sup> Social and moral wrongdoing were easily exposed and denounced ; and the evils thus brought to light were obvious symptoms of serious spiritual disease. The Divine Spirit taught the prophets that sin was often most rampant in those who professed the greatest devotion to Jehovah and were most punctual and munificent in the discharge of external religious duties. When the prophecy in Isaiah i. was uttered it almost seemed as if the whole system of Mosaic ritual would have to be sacrificed, in order to preserve the religion of Jehovah. But the further development of the disease suggested a less heroic remedy. The passion for external rites did not confine itself to the traditional forms of ancient Israelite worship. The practices of unspiritual and immoral ritualism were associated specially with the names of Baal and Moloch and with the adoration of the host of heaven ; and the departure from the true worship became obvious when the deities of foreign nations were openly worshipped.

Jeremiah clearly and constantly insisted on the distinction between the true and the corrupt worship. The worship paid to Baal and Moloch was altogether unacceptable to Jehovah. These and other objects of adoration were not to be regarded as forms, titles, or manifestations of the one God, but were "other gods," distinct and opposed in nature and attributes ; in serving them the Jews were forsaking Him. So far from recognising such rites as homage paid to Jehovah,

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<sup>1</sup> Here and elsewhere, "prophet," unless specially qualified by the context, is used of the true prophet, the messenger of Divine Revelation, and does not include the mere professional prophets. Cf. Chap. VIII.

Jeremiah follows Hosea in calling them "backsliding,"<sup>1</sup> a falling away from true loyalty. When they addressed themselves to their idols, even if they consecrated them in the Temple and to the glory of the Most High, they were not really looking to Him in reverent supplication, but with impious profanity were turning their backs upon Him: "They have turned unto Me the back, and not the face."<sup>2</sup> These proceedings were a violation of the covenant between Jehovah and Israel.<sup>3</sup>

The same anxiety to discriminate the true religion from spurious imitations and adulterations underlies the stress which Jeremiah lays upon the Divine Name. His favourite formula, "Jehovah Sabaoth is His name,"<sup>4</sup> may be borrowed from Amos, or may be an ancient liturgical sentence; in any case, its use would be a convenient protest against the doctrine that Jehovah could be worshipped under the names of and after the manner of Baal and Moloch. When Jehovah speaks of the people forgetting "My name," He does not mean either that the people would forget all about Him, or would cease to use the name Jehovah; but that they would forget the character and attributes, the purposes and ordinances, which were properly expressed by His Name. The prophets who "prophesy lies in My name" "cause My people to forget My name."<sup>5</sup> Baal and Moloch had sunk into fit titles for a god who could be worshipped with cruel, obscene, and idolatrous rites, but the religion of Revelation had been for ever

<sup>1</sup> ii. 19, etc.

<sup>2</sup> xxxii. 33, etc.

<sup>3</sup> xxii. 9: cf. xi. 10, xxxi. 32, and Hosea vi. 7, viii. 1.

<sup>4</sup> x. 16: cf. Amos iv. 13.

<sup>5</sup> xxiii. 25-27: cf. Giesebrecht, *in loco*.

associated with the one sacred Name, when "Elohim said unto Moses, Thou shalt say unto the Israelites: Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is My name for ever, and this is My memorial unto all generations." All religious life and practice inconsistent with this Revelation given through Moses and the prophets—all such worship, even if offered to beings which, as Jehovah, sat in the Temple of Jehovah, professing to be Jehovah—were nevertheless service and obedience paid to other and false gods. Jeremiah's mission was to hammer these truths into dull and unwilling minds.

His work seems to have been successful. Ezekiel, who is in a measure his disciple,<sup>1</sup> drops the phrase "other gods," and mentions "idols" very frequently.<sup>2</sup> Argument and explanation were no longer necessary to show that idolatry was sin against Jehovah; the word "idol" could be freely used and universally understood as indicating what was wholly alien to the religion of Israel.<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah was too anxious to convince the Jews that all syncretism was apostasy to distinguish it carefully from the avowed neglect of Jehovah for other gods. It is not even clear that such neglect existed in his day. In chap. xlv. we have one detailed account of false worship to the Queen of Heaven. It was offered by the Jewish refugees in Egypt; shortly before, these refugees had unanimously entreated Jeremiah to pray for them to Jehovah, and had promised to obey His commands. The punishment of their false

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<sup>1</sup> Cheyne, *Jeremiah: Life and Times*, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah hardly mentions idols.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. on this whole subject, Cheyne, *Jeremiah: Life and Times*, p. 319.

worship was that they should no longer be permitted to name the Holy Name. Clearly, therefore, they had supposed that offering incense to the Queen of Heaven was not inconsistent with worshipping Jehovah. We need not dwell on a distinction which is largely ignored by Jeremiah; the apostasy of Judah was real and widespread, it matters little how far the delinquents ventured to throw off the cloak of orthodox profession.<sup>1</sup> The most lapsed masses in a Christian country do not utterly break their connection with the Church; they consider themselves legitimate recipients of its alms, and dimly contemplate as a vague and distant possibility the reformation of their life and character through Christianity. So the blindest worshippers of stocks and stones claimed a vested interest in the national Deity, and in the time of their trouble they turned to Jehovah with the appeal "Arise and save us."<sup>2</sup>

Jeremiah also dwells on the deliberate and persistent character of the apostasy of Judah. Nations have often experienced a sort of satanic revival when the fountains of the nether deep seemed broken up, and flood-tides of evil influence swept all before them. Such, in a measure, was the reaction from the Puritan Commonwealth, when so much of English society lapsed into reckless dissipation. Such too was the carnival of wickedness into which the First French Republic was plunged in the Reign of Terror. But these periods were transient, and the domination of lust and cruelty soon broke down before the reassertion of an outraged national conscience. But we noticed, in the previous chapter, that Israel and Judah alike steadily failed to

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<sup>1</sup> The strongest expressions are in chap. ii, for which see previous volume on Jeremiah.

<sup>2</sup> ii. 27.

attain the high social ideal of the Mosaic dispensation. Naturally, this continuous failure is associated with persistent apostasy from the religious teaching of the Mosaic and prophetic Revelation. Exodus, Deuteronomy and the Chronicler agree with Jeremiah that the Israelites were a stiff-necked people;<sup>1</sup> and, in the Chronicler's time at any rate, Israel had played a part in the world long enough for its character to be accurately ascertained; and subsequent history has shown that, for good or for evil, the Jews have never lacked tenacity. Syncretism, the tendency to adulterate true teaching and worship with elements from heathen sources, had been all along a morbid affection of Israelite religion. The Pentateuch and the historical books are full of rebukes of the Israelite passion for idolatry, which must for the most part be understood as introduced into or associated with the worship of Jehovah. Jeremiah constantly refers to "the stubbornness of their evil heart":<sup>2</sup> "they . . . have walked after the stubbornness of their own heart and after the Baalim." This stubbornness was shown in their resistance to all the means which Jehovah employed to wean them from their sin. Again and again, in our book, Jehovah speaks of Himself as "rising up early"<sup>3</sup> to speak to the Jews, to teach them, to send prophets to them, to solemnly adjure them to submit themselves to Him; but they would not hearken either to Jehovah or to His prophets, they would not accept His teaching or obey His commands, they made themselves stiff-necked and would not bow to His will. He had subjected them to the discipline of affliction, instruction

<sup>1</sup> xvii. 23: cf. Exod. xxxii. 9, etc. (J.E.); Deut. ix. 6; 2 Chron. xxx. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Characteristic Expressions, p. 269.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.



had become correction; Jehovah had wounded them "with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one"; but as they had been deaf to exhortation, so they were proof against chastisement—"they refused to receive correction." Only the ruin of the state and the captivity of the people could purge out this evil leaven.

Apostasy from the Mosaic and prophetic religion was naturally accompanied by social corruption. It has recently been maintained that the universal instinct which inclines man to be religious is not necessarily moral, and that it is the distinguishing note of the true faith, or of religion proper, that it enlists this somewhat neutral instinct in the cause of a pure morality. The Phœnician and Syrian cults, with which Israel was most closely in contact, sufficiently illustrated the combination of fanatical religious feeling with gross impurity. On the other hand, the teaching of Revelation to Israel consistently inculcated a high morality and an unselfish benevolence. The prophets vehemently affirmed the worthlessness of religious observances by men who oppressed the poor and helpless. Apostasy from Jehovah to Baal and Moloch involved the same moral lapse as a change from loyal service of Christ to a pietistic antinomianism. Widespread apostasy meant general social corruption. The most insidious form of apostasy was that specially denounced by Jeremiah, in which the authority of Jehovah was more or less explicitly claimed for practices and principles which defied His law. The Reformer loves a clear issue, and it was more difficult to come to close quarters with the enemy when both sides professed to be fighting in the King's name. Moreover the syncretism which still recognised Jehovah was able without any



violent revolution to control the established institutions and orders of the state—palace and temple, king and princes, priests and prophets. For a moment the Reformation of Josiah, and the covenant entered into by king and people to observe the law as laid down in the newly discovered Book of Deuteronomy, seemed to have raised Judah from its low estate. But the defeat and death of Josiah and the deposition of Jehoahaz followed to discredit Jeremiah and his friends. In the consequent reaction it seemed as if the religion of Jehovah and the life of His people had become hopelessly corrupt.

We are too much accustomed to think of the idolatry of Israel as something openly and avowedly distinct from and opposed to the worship of Jehovah. Modern Christians often suppose that the true worshipper and the ancient idolater were as contrasted as a pious Englishman and a devotee of one of the hideous images seen on missionary platforms; or, at any rate, that they were as easily distinguishable as a native Indian evangelist from his unconverted fellow-countrymen.

This mistake deprives us of the most instructive lessons to be derived from the record. The sin which Jeremiah denounced is by no means outside Christian experience; it is much nearer to us than conversion to Buddhism—it is possible to the Church in every stage of its history. The missionary finds that the lives of his converts continually threaten to revert to a nominal profession which cloaks the immorality and superstition of their old heathenism. The Church of the Roman Empire gave the sanction of Christ's name and authority to many of the most unchristian features of Judaism and Paganism; once more the rites of strange gods were associated with the worship of Jehovah, and a

new Queen of Heaven was honoured with unlimited incense. The Reformed Churches in their turn, after the first "kindness of their youth," the first "love of their espousals," have often fallen into the very abuses against which their great leaders protested; they have given way to the ritualistic spirit, have put the Church in the place of Christ, and have claimed for human formulæ the authority that can only belong to the inspired Word of God. They have immolated their victims to the Baals and Molochs of creeds and confessions, and thought that they were doing honour to Jehovah thereby.

Moreover we have still to contend like Jeremiah with the continual struggle of corrupt human nature to indulge in the luxury of religious sentiment and emotion without submitting to the moral demands of Christ. The Church suffers far less by losing the allegiance of the lapsed masses than it does by those who associate with the service of Christ those malignant and selfish vices which are often canonised as Respectability and Convention.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### RUIN

xxii. 1-9, xxvi. 14.

"The sword, the pestilence, and the famine."—JER. xxi. 9 *and passim*.<sup>1</sup>

"Terror on every side."—JER. vi. 25, xx. 10, xlvi. 5, xlix. 29; also as *proper name*, MAGOR-MISSABIB, xx. 3.

WE have seen, in the two previous chapters, that the moral and religious state of Judah not only excluded any hope of further progress towards the realisation of the Kingdom of God, but also threatened to involve Revelation itself in the corruption of His people. The Spirit that opened Jeremiah's eyes to the fatal degradation of his country showed him that ruin must follow as its swift result. He was elect from the first to be a herald of doom, to be set "over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, and to destroy and to overthrow."<sup>2</sup> In his earliest vision he saw the thrones of the northern conquerors set over against the walls of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah.<sup>3</sup>

But Jeremiah was called in the full vigour of early manhood;<sup>4</sup> he combined with the uncompromising severity

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<sup>1</sup> Characteristic Expressions, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> i. 10.

<sup>3</sup> i. 15.

<sup>4</sup> i. 7. The word for "child" (na'ar) is an elastic term, equalling "boy" or "young man," with all the range of meaning possible in English to the latter phrase.

of youth its ardent affection and irrepressible hope. The most unqualified threats of Divine wrath always carried the implied condition that repentance might avert the coming judgment;<sup>1</sup> and Jeremiah recurred again and again to the possibility that, even in these last days, amendment might win pardon. Like Moses at Sinai and Samuel at Ebenezer, he poured out his whole soul in intercession for Judah, only to receive the answer, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight and let them go forth."<sup>2</sup> The record of these early hopes and prayers is chiefly found in chapters i.—xx., and is dealt with in the previous volume on Jeremiah. The prophecies in xiv. 1—xvii. 18 seem to recognise the destiny of Judah as finally decided, and to belong to the latter part of the reign of Jehoiakim,<sup>3</sup> and there is little in the later chapters of an earlier date. In xxii. 1-5 the king of Judah is promised that if he and his ministers and officers will refrain from oppression, faithfully administer justice, and protect the helpless, kings of the elect dynasty shall still pass with magnificent retinues in chariots and on horses through the palace gates to sit upon the throne of David. Possibly this section belongs to the earlier part of Jeremiah's career. But there were pauses and recoils in the advancing tide of ruin, alternations of hope and despair; and these varying experiences were reflected in the changing moods of the court, the people, and the prophet himself. We may well believe that Jeremiah hastened to greet any apparent zeal for reformation with a renewed declaration that sincere and radical amend-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Book of Jonah

<sup>2</sup> xv. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Driver, *Introduction*, p. 242.

ment would be accepted by Jehovah. The proffer of mercy did not avert the ruin of the state, but it compelled the people to recognise that Jehovah was neither harsh nor vindictive. His sentence was only irrevocable because the obduracy of Israel left no other way open for the progress of Revelation, except that which led through fire and blood. The Holy Spirit has taught mankind in many ways that when any government or church, any school of thought or doctrine, ossifies so as to limit the expansion of the soul, that society or system must be shattered by the forces it seeks to restrain. The decadence of Spain and the distractions of France sufficiently illustrate the fruits of persistent refusal to abide in the liberty of the Spirit.

But, until the catastrophe is clearly inevitable, the Christian, both as patriot and as churchman,<sup>1</sup> will be quick to cherish all those symptoms of higher life which indicate that society is still a living organism. He will zealously believe and teach that even a small leaven may leaven the whole mass. He will remember that ten righteous men might have saved Sodom; that, so long as it is possible, God will work by encouraging and rewarding willing obedience rather than by chastising and coercing sin.

Thus Jeremiah, even when he teaches that the day of grace is over, recurs wistfully to the possibilities of salvation once offered to repentance.<sup>2</sup> Was not this the message of all the prophets: "Return ye now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that Jehovah hath given unto your fathers"?<sup>3</sup> Even at the beginning of

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<sup>1</sup> "Church" is used, in the true Catholic sense, to embrace all Christians.

<sup>2</sup> xxvii. 18.

<sup>3</sup> xxv. 5, xxxv. 15.

Jehoiakim's reign Jehovah entrusted Jeremiah with a message of mercy, saying: "It may be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way; that I may repent Me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings."<sup>1</sup> When the prophet multiplied the dark and lurid features of his picture, he was not gloating with morbid enjoyment over the national misery, but rather hoped that the awful vision of judgment might lead them to pause, and reflect and repent. In his age history had not accumulated her now abundant proofs that the guilty conscience is panoplied in triple brass against most visions of judgment. The sequel of Jeremiah's own mission was added evidence for this truth.

Yet it dawned but slowly on the prophet's mind. The covenant of emancipation<sup>2</sup> in the last days of Zedekiah was doubtless proposed by Jeremiah as a possible beginning of better things, an omen of salvation, even at the eleventh hour. To the very last the prophet offered the king his life and promised that Jerusalem should not be burnt, if only he would submit to the Chaldeans, and thus accept the Divine judgment and acknowledge its justice.

Faithful friends have sometimes stood by the drunkard or the gambler, and striven for his deliverance through all the vicissitudes of his downward career; to the very last they have hoped against hope, have welcomed and encouraged every feeble stand against evil habit, every transient flash of high resolve. But, long before the end, they have owned, with sinking heart, that the only way to salvation lay through the ruin of health, fortune, and reputation. So, when the edge of youthful

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<sup>1</sup> xxvi. 3, xxxvi. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. XI.

hopefulness had quickly worn itself away, Jeremiah knew in his inmost heart that, in spite of prayers and promises and exhortations, the fate of Judah was sealed. Let us therefore try to reproduce the picture of coming ruin which Jeremiah kept persistently before the eyes of his fellow-countrymen. The pith and power of his prophecies lay in the prospect of their speedy fulfilment. With him, as with Savonarola, a cardinal doctrine was that "before the regeneration must come the scourge," and that "these things will come quickly." Here again, Jeremiah took up the burden of Hosea's utterances. The elder prophet said of Israel, "The days of visitation are come";<sup>1</sup> and his successor announced to Judah the coming of "the year of visitation."<sup>2</sup> The long-deferred assize was at hand, when the Judge would reckon with Judah for her manifold infidelities, would pronounce sentence and execute judgment.

If the hour of doom had struck, it was not difficult to surmise whence destruction would come or the man who would prove its instrument. The North (named in Hebrew the hidden quarter) was to the Jews the mother of things unforeseen and terrible. Isaiah menaced the Philistines with "a smoke out of the north,"<sup>3</sup> *i.e.* the Assyrians. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both speak very frequently of the destroyers of Judah as coming from the north. Probably the early references in our book to northern enemies denote the Scythians, who invaded Syria towards the beginning of Josiah's reign; but later on the danger from the north is the restored Chaldean Empire, under its king Nebuchadnezzar. "North" is even less accurate geographically

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea ix. 7.<sup>2</sup> xxiii, 12.<sup>3</sup> Isa. xiv. 31.



for Chaldea than for Assyria. Probably it was accepted in a somewhat symbolic sense for Assyria, and then transferred to Chaldea as her successor in the hegemony of Western Asia.

Nebuchadnezzar is first<sup>1</sup> introduced in the fourth year of Jehoiakim ; after the decisive defeat of Pharaoh Necho by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish, Jeremiah prophesied the devastation of Judah by the victor ; it is also prophesied that he is to carry Jehoiachin away captive,<sup>2</sup> and similar prophecies were repeated during the reign of Zedekiah.<sup>3</sup> Nebuchadnezzar and his Chaldeans very closely resembled the Assyrians, with whose invasions the Jews had long been only too familiar ; indeed, as Chaldea had long been tributary to Assyria, it is morally certain that Chaldean princes must have been present with auxiliary forces at more than one of the many Assyrian invasions of Palestine. Under Hezekiah, on the other hand, Judah had been allied with Merodach-baladan of Babylon against his Assyrian suzerain. So that the circumstances of Chaldean invasions and conquests were familiar to the Jews before the forces of the restored empire first attacked them ; their imagination could readily picture the horrors of such experiences.

But Jeremiah does not leave them to their unaided imagination, which they might preferably have employed

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<sup>1</sup> xxv. 1-14 : "first," *i.e.*, in time, not in the order of chapters in our Book of Jeremiah.

<sup>2</sup> xxii. 25. Jehoiachin (Kings, Chronicles, and Jer. lii. 31) is also called Coniah (Jer. xxii. 24, 28, xxxvii. 1) and Jeconiah (Chronicles, Esther, Jer. xxiv. 1, xxvii. 20, xxviii. 4, xxix. 2). They are virtually forms of the same name, the "Yah" of the Divine Name being prefixed in the first and affixed in the last two.

<sup>3</sup> xxi. 7, xxviii. 14.



upon more agreeable subjects. He makes them see the future reign of terror, as Jehovah had revealed it to his shuddering and reluctant vision. With his usual frequency of iteration, he keeps the phrase "the sword, the famine, and the pestilence" ringing in their ears. The sword was the symbol of the invading hosts, "the splendid and awful military parade" of the "bitter and hasty nation" that were "dreadful and terrible."<sup>1</sup> "The famine" inevitably followed from the ravages of the invaders, and the impossibility of ploughing, sowing, and reaping. It became most gruesome in the last desperate agonies of besieged garrisons, when, as in Elisha's time and the last siege of Jerusalem, "men ate the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and ate every one the flesh of his friend."<sup>2</sup> Among such miseries and horrors, the stench of unburied corpses naturally bred a pestilence, which raged amongst the multitudes of refugees huddled together in Jerusalem and the fortified towns. We are reminded how the great plague of Athens struck down its victims from among the crowds driven within its walls during the long siege of the Peloponnesian war.

An ordinary Englishman can scarcely do justice to such prophecies; his comprehension is limited by a happy inexperience. The constant repetition of general phrases seems meagre and cold, because they carry few associations and awaken no memories. Those who have studied French and Russian realistic art, and have read Erckmann-Chatrain, Zola, and Tolstoï, may be stirred somewhat more by Jeremiah's grim rhetoric. It will not be wanting in suggestiveness to those who have known battles and sieges. For students

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<sup>1</sup> Habakkuk i. 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup> xix. 9.

of missionary literature we may roughly compare the Jews, when exposed to the full fury of a Chaldean attack, to the inhabitants of African villages raided by slave-hunters.

The Jews, therefore, with their extensive, first-hand knowledge of the miseries denounced against them, could not help filling in for themselves the rough outline drawn by Jeremiah. Very probably, too, his speeches were more detailed and realistic than the written reports. As time went on, the inroads of the Chaldeans and their allies provided graphic and ghastly illustrations of the prophecies that Jeremiah still reiterated. In a prophecy, possibly originally referring to the Scythian inroads and afterwards adapted to the Chaldean invasions, Jeremiah speaks of himself: "I am pained at my very heart; my heart is disquieted in me; I cannot hold my peace; for my soul heareth<sup>1</sup> the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. . . . How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?"<sup>2</sup> Here, for once, Jeremiah expressed emotions that throbbed in every heart. There was "terror on every hand"; men seemed to be walking "through slippery places in darkness,"<sup>3</sup> or to stumble along rough paths in a dreary twilight. Wormwood was their daily food, and their drink maddening draughts of poison.<sup>4</sup>

Jeremiah and his prophecies were no mean part of the terror. To the devotees of Baal and Moloch Jeremiah must have appeared in much the same light as the fanatic whose ravings added to the horrors of the Plague of London, while the very sanity and sobriety of his utterances carried a conviction of their fatal truth.

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<sup>1</sup> R. V. margin.

<sup>2</sup> iv. 21.

<sup>3</sup> xxiii. 12.

<sup>4</sup> xxiii. 15.

When the people and their leaders succeeded in collecting any force of soldiers or store of military equipment, and ventured on a sally, Jeremiah was at once at hand to quench any reviving hope of effective resistance. How could soldiers and weapons preserve the city which Jehovah had abandoned to its fate? "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel: Behold, I will turn back the weapons in your hands, with which ye fight without the walls against your besiegers, the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans, and will gather them into the midst of this city. I Myself will fight against you in furious anger and in great wrath, with outstretched hand and strong arm. I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence."<sup>1</sup>

When Jerusalem was relieved for a time by the advance of an Egyptian army, and the people allowed themselves to dream of another deliverance like that from Sennacherib, the relentless prophet only turned upon them with renewed scorn: "Though ye had smitten the whole hostile army of the Chaldeans, and all that were left of them were desperately wounded, yet should they rise up every man in his tent and burn this city."<sup>2</sup> Not even the most complete victory could avail to save the city.

The final result of invasions and sieges was to be the overthrow of the Jewish state, the capture and destruction of Jerusalem, and the captivity of the people. This unhappy generation were to reap the harvest of centuries of sin and failure. As in the last siege of Jerusalem there came upon the Jews "all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the

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<sup>1</sup> xxi. 3-6.<sup>2</sup> xxxvii. 10.

blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah,"<sup>1</sup> so now Jehovah was about to bring upon His Chosen People all the evil that He had spoken against them<sup>2</sup>—all that had been threatened by Isaiah and his brother-prophets, all the curses written in Deuteronomy. But these threats were to be fully carried out, not because predictions must be fulfilled, nor even merely because Jehovah had spoken and His word must not return to Him void, but because the people had not hearkened and obeyed. His threats were never meant to exclude the penitent from the possibility of pardon.

As Jeremiah had insisted upon the guilt of every class of the community, so he is also careful to enumerate all the classes as about to suffer from the coming judgment: "Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes";<sup>3</sup> "the people, the prophet, and the priest."<sup>4</sup> This Last Judgment of Judah, as it took the form of the complete overthrow of the State, necessarily included all under its sentence of doom. One of the mysteries of Providence is that those who are most responsible for national sins seem to suffer least by public misfortunes. Ambitious statesmen and bellicose journalists do not generally fall in battle and leave destitute widows and children. When the captains of commerce and manufacture err in their industrial policy, one great result is the pauperism of hundreds of families who had no voice in the matter. A spendthrift landlord may cripple the agriculture of half a county. And yet, when factories are closed and farmers ruined, the manufacturer and the landlord

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiii. 35.

<sup>2</sup> xxxv. 17: cf. xix. 15, xxxvi. 31.

<sup>3</sup> xxxiv. 21.

<sup>4</sup> xxiii. 33, 34.

are the last to see want. In former invasions of Judah, the princes and priests had some share of suffering; but wealthy nobles might incur losses and yet weather the storm by which poorer men were overwhelmed. Fines and tribute levied by the invaders would, after the manner of the East, be wrung from the weak and helpless. But now ruin was to fall on all alike. The nobles had been flagrant in sin, they were now to be marked out for most condign punishment—"To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required."

Part of the burden of Jeremiah's prophecy, one of the sayings constantly on his lips, was that the city would be taken and destroyed by fire.<sup>1</sup> The Temple would be laid in ruins like the ancient sanctuary of Israel at Shiloh.<sup>2</sup> The palaces<sup>3</sup> of the king and princes would be special marks for the destructive fury of the enemy, and their treasures and all the wealth of the city would be for a spoil; those who survived the sack of the city would be carried captive to Babylon.<sup>4</sup>

In this general ruin the miseries of the people would not end with death. All nations have attached much importance to the burial of the dead and the due performance of funeral rites. In the touching Greek story Antigone sacrificed her life in order to bury the remains of her brother. Later Judaism attached exceptional importance to the burial of the dead, and the Book of Tobit lays great stress on this sacred duty. The angel Raphael declares that one special reason why the Lord had been merciful to Tobias was that he had buried dead bodies, and had not delayed to rise

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<sup>1</sup> xxxiv. 2, 22, xxxvii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> vii. and xxvi.

<sup>3</sup> vi. 5.

<sup>4</sup> xx. 5.

up and leave his meal to go and bury the corpse of a murdered Jew, at the risk of his own life.<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah prophesied of the slain in this last overthrow: "They shall not be lamented, neither shall they be buried; they shall be as dung on the face of the ground; . . . their carcasses shall be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth."

When these last had done their ghastly work, the site of the Temple, the city, the whole land would be left silent and desolate. The stranger, wandering amidst the ruins, would hear no cheerful domestic sounds; when night fell, no light gleaming through chink or lattice would give the sense of human neighbourhood. Jehovah "would take away the sound of the millstones and the light of the candle."<sup>2</sup> The only sign of life amidst the desolate ruins of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah would be the melancholy cry of the jackals round the traveller's tent.<sup>3</sup>

The Hebrew prophets and our Lord Himself often borrowed their symbols from the scenes of common life, as they passed before their eyes. As in the days of Noah, as in the days of Lot, as in the days of the Son of Man, so in the last agony of Judah there was marrying and giving in marriage. Some such festive occasion suggested to Jeremiah one of his favourite formulæ; it occurs four times in the Book of Jeremiah, and was probably uttered much oftener. Again and again it may have happened that, as a marriage procession passed through the streets, the gay company were startled by the grim presence of the prophet, and shrank back in dismay as they found themselves made the text for a stern homily of ruin: "Thus saith Jehovah Sabaoth, I will take away from them the voice

<sup>1</sup> Tobit xii. 13: cf. ii.

<sup>2</sup> xxv. 10.

<sup>3</sup> ix. 11, x. 22.

of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride." At any rate, however, and whenever used, the figure could not fail to arrest attention, and to serve as an emphatic declaration that the ordinary social routine would be broken up and lost in the coming calamity.

Henceforth the land would be as some guilty habitation of sinners, devoted to eternal destruction, an astonishment and a hissing and a perpetual desolation.<sup>1</sup> When the heathen sought some curse to express the extreme of malignant hatred, they would use the formula, "God make thee like Jerusalem."<sup>2</sup> Jehovah's Chosen People would become an everlasting reproach, a perpetual shame, which should not be forgotten.<sup>3</sup> The wrath of Jehovah pursued even captives and fugitives. In chapter xxix. Jeremiah predicts the punishment of the Jewish prophets at Babylon. When we last hear of him, in Egypt, he is denouncing ruin against "the remnant of Judah that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to sojourn there." He still reiterates the same familiar phrases: "Ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence"; they shall be "an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach."

We have now traced the details of the prophet's message of doom. Fulfilment followed fast upon the heels of prediction, till Jeremiah rather interpreted than foretold the thick-coming disasters. When his book was compiled, the prophecies were already, as they are now, part of the history of the last days of Judah. The book became the record of this great tragedy, in which these prophecies take the place of the choric odes in a Greek drama.

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<sup>1</sup> xxv. 9, 10.<sup>2</sup> xxvi. 6.<sup>3</sup> xxiii. 40.



## CHAPTER XXX

### *RESTORATION—I. THE SYMBOL*

xxxii

“And I bought the field of Hanameel.”—*JER.* xxxii. 9.

WHEN Jeremiah was first called to his prophetic mission, after the charge “to pluck up and to break down, and to destroy and to overthrow,” there were added—almost as if they were an afterthought—the words “to build and to plant.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout a large part of the book little or nothing is said about building and planting; but, at last, four consecutive chapters, xxx.—xxxiii., are almost entirely devoted to this subject. Jeremiah’s characteristic phrases are not all denunciatory; we owe to him the description of Jehovah as “the Hope of Israel.”<sup>2</sup> Sin and ruin, guilt and punishment, could not quench the hope that centred in Him. Though the day of Jehovah might be darkness and not light,<sup>3</sup> yet, through the blackness of this day turned into night, the prophets beheld a radiant dawn. When all other building and planting were over for Jeremiah, when it might seem that much that he had planted was being rooted up again in the overthrow of Judah, he was yet permitted to plant shoots in the garden of the Lord, which have since

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<sup>1</sup> i. 10.

<sup>2</sup> xiv. 8, xvii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Amos v. 18, 20.



become trees whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

The symbolic act dealt with in this chapter is a convenient introduction to the prophecies of restoration, especially as chapters xxx., xxxi., have no title and are of uncertain date.

The incident of the purchase of Hanameel's field is referred by the title to the year 587 B.C., when Jeremiah was in prison and the capture of the city was imminent. Verses 2-6 are an introduction by some editor, who was anxious that his readers should fully understand the narrative that follows. They are compiled from the rest of the book, and contain nothing that need detain us.

When Jeremiah was arrested and thrown into prison, he was on his way to Anathoth "to receive his portion there,"<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, as we gather from this chapter, to take possession of an inheritance that devolved upon him. As he was now unable to attend to this business at Anathoth, his cousin Hanameel came to him in the prison, to give him the opportunity of observing the necessary formalities. In his enforced leisure Jeremiah would often recur to the matter on which he had been engaged when he was arrested. An interrupted piece of work is apt to intrude itself upon the mind with tiresome importunity; moreover his dismal surroundings would remind him of his business—it had been the cause of his imprisonment. The bond between an Israelite and the family inheritance was almost as close and sacred as that between Jehovah and the Land of Promise. Naboth had died a martyr to the duty he owed to the land. "Jehovah forbid that I should give

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<sup>1</sup> xxxvii. 12 (R.V.).

thee the inheritance of my fathers,"<sup>1</sup> said he to Ahab. And now, in the final crisis of the fortunes of Judah, the prophet whose heart was crushed by the awful task laid upon him had done what he could to secure the rights of his family in the "field" at Anathoth.

Apparently he had failed. The oppression of his spirits would suggest that Jehovah had disapproved and frustrated his purpose. His failure was another sign of the utter ruin of the nation. The solemn grant of the Land of Promise to the Chosen People was finally revoked; and Jehovah no longer sanctioned the ancient ceremonies which bound the households and clans of Israel to the soil of their inheritance.

In some such mood, Jeremiah received the intimation that his cousin Hanameel was on his way to see him about this very business. "The word of Jehovah came unto him: Behold, thine uncle Shallum's son Hanameel is coming to thee, to say unto thee, Buy my field in Anathoth, for it is thy duty to buy it by way of redemption." The prophet was roused to fresh perplexity. The opportunity might be a Divine command to proceed with the redemption. And yet he was a childless man doomed to die in exile. What had he to do with a field at Anathoth in that great and terrible day of the Lord? Death or captivity was staring every one in the face; land was worthless. The transaction would put money into Hanameel's pocket. The eagerness of a Jew to make sure of a good bargain seemed no very safe indication of the will of Jehovah.

In this uncertain frame of mind Hanameel found his cousin, when he came to demand that Jeremiah should buy his field. Perhaps the prisoner found his kinsman's

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xxi. 3.

presence a temporary mitigation of his gloomy surroundings, and was inspired with more cheerful and kindly feelings. The solemn and formal appeal to fulfil a kinsman's duty towards the family inheritance came to him as a Divine command: "I knew that this was the word of Jehovah."

The cousins proceeded with their business, which was in no way hindered by the arrangements of the prison. We must be careful to dismiss from our minds all the associations of the routine and discipline of a modern English gaol. The "court of the guard" in which they were was not properly a prison; it was a place of detention, not of punishment. The prisoners may have been fettered, but they were together and could communicate with each other and with their friends. The conditions were not unlike those of a debtors' prison such as the old Marshalsea, as described in *Little Dorrit*.

Our information as to this right or duty of the next-of-kin to buy or buy back land is of the scantiest.<sup>1</sup> The leading case is that in the Book of Ruth, where, however, the purchase of land is altogether secondary to the levirate marriage. The land custom assumes that an Israelite will only part with his land in case of absolute necessity, and it was evidently supposed that some member of the clan would feel bound to purchase. On the other hand, in Ruth, the next-of-kin is readily allowed to transfer the obligation to Boaz. Why Hanameel sold his field we cannot tell; in these days of constant invasion, most of the small landowners must have been reduced to great distress, and would gladly have found purchasers for their property. The kinsman to whom land was offered would pretty generally refuse

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<sup>1</sup> Lev. xxv. 25, Law of Holiness; Ruth iv.

to pay anything but a nominal price. Formerly the demand that the next-of-kin should buy an inheritance was seldom made, but the exceptional feature in this case was Jeremiah's willingness to conform to ancient custom.

The price paid for the field was seventeen shekels of silver, but, however precise this information may seem, it really tells us very little. A curious illustration is furnished by modern currency difficulties. The shekel, in the time of the Maccabees, when we are first able to determine its value with some certainty, contained about half an ounce of silver, *i.e.* about the amount of metal in an English half-crown. The commentaries accordingly continue to reckon the shekel as worth half-a-crown, whereas its value by weight according to the present price of silver would be about fourteence. Probably the purchasing power of silver was not more stable in ancient Palestine than it is now. Fifty shekels seemed to David and Araunah a liberal price for a threshing-floor and its oxen, but the Chronicler thought it quite inadequate.<sup>1</sup> We know neither the size of Hanameel's field nor the quality of the land, nor yet the value of the shekels;<sup>2</sup> but the symbolic use made of the incident implies that Jeremiah paid a fair and not a panic price.

The silver was duly weighed in the presence of witnesses and of all the Jews that were in the court of the guard, apparently including the prisoners; their position as respectable members of society was not

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Sam. xxiv. 24; cf. 1 Chron. xxi. 25, where the price is six hundred shekels of *gold*. It is scarcely necessary to point out that "threshing-floor" (Sam.) and "place of the threshing-floor" (Chron.) are synonymous.

<sup>2</sup> By *value* here is meant purchasing power, to which the weight denoted by the term shekel is now no clue.

affected by their imprisonment. A deed or deeds were drawn up, signed by Jeremiah and the witnesses, and publicly delivered to Baruch to be kept safely in an earthen vessel. The legal formalities are described with some detail; possibly they were observed with exceptional punctiliousness; at any rate, great stress is laid upon the exact fulfilment of all that law and custom demanded. Unfortunately, in the course of so many centuries, much of the detail has become unintelligible. For instance, Jeremiah the purchaser signs the record of the purchase, but nothing is said about Hanameel signing. When Abraham bought the field of Machpelah of Ephron the Hittite there was no written deed, the land was simply transferred in public at the gate of the city.<sup>1</sup> Here the written record becomes valid by being publicly delivered to Baruch in the presence of Hanameel and the witnesses. The details with regard to the deeds are very obscure, and the text is doubtful. The Hebrew apparently refers to two deeds, but the Septuagint for the most part to one only. The R.V. of verse 11 runs: "So I took the deed of the purchase, both that which was sealed, according to the law and the custom, and that which was open." The Septuagint omits everything after "that which was sealed"; and, in any case, the words "the law and the custom"—better, as R.V. margin, "*containing* the terms and the conditions"—are a gloss. In verse 14 the R.V. has: "Take these deeds, this deed of the purchase, both that which is sealed, and this deed which is open, and put *them* in an earthen vessel." The Septuagint reads: "Take this book of the purchase and this book that has been read,<sup>2</sup> and thou shalt put

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxiii. (P.).

<sup>2</sup> ἀνεγνωσμένον, probably a corruption of ἀνεωγμένον.

*it* in an earthen vessel.”<sup>1</sup> It is possible that, as has been suggested, the reference to two deeds has arisen out of a misunderstanding of the description of a single deed. Scribes may have altered or added to the text in order to make it state explicitly what they supposed to be implied. No reason is given for having two deeds. We could have understood the double record if each party had retained one of the documents, or if one had been buried in the earthen vessel and the other kept for reference, but both are put into the earthen vessel. The terms “that which is sealed” and “that which is open” may, however, be explained of either of one or two documents<sup>2</sup> somewhat as follows: the record was written, signed, and witnessed; it was then folded up and sealed; part or the whole of the contents of this sealed-up record was then written again on the outside or on a separate parchment, so that the purport of the deed could easily be ascertained without exposing the original record. The Assyrian and Chaldean contract-tablets were constructed on this principle; the contract was first written on a clay tablet, which was further enclosed in an envelope of clay, and on the outside was engraved an exact copy of the writing within. If the outer writing became indistinct or was tampered with, the envelope could be broken and the exact terms of the contract ascertained from the first tablet. Numerous examples of this method can be seen in the British Museum. The Jews had been vassals of Assyria and Babylon for about a century, and thus must have had ample opportunity to become acquainted with their legal procedure; and, in this

<sup>1</sup> The text varies in different MSS. of the LXX.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cheyne, etc., *in loco*.

instance, Jeremiah and his friends may have imitated the Chaldeans. Such an imitation would be specially significant in what was intended to symbolise the transitoriness of the Chaldean conquest.

The earthen vessel would preserve the record from being spoilt by the damp; similarly bottles are used nowadays to preserve the documents that are built up into the memorial stones of public buildings. In both cases the object is that "they may continue many days."

So far the prophet had proceeded in simple obedience to a Divine command to fulfil an obligation which otherwise might excusably have been neglected. He felt that his action was a parable which suggested that Judah might retain its ancient inheritance,<sup>1</sup> but Jeremiah hesitated to accept an interpretation seemingly at variance with the judgments he had pronounced upon the guilty people. When he had handed over the deed to Baruch, and his mind was no longer occupied with legal minutiae, he could ponder at leisure on the significance of his purchase. The prophet's meditations naturally shaped themselves into a prayer; he laid his perplexity before Jehovah.<sup>2</sup> Possibly, even from the court of the guard, he could see something of

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<sup>1</sup> Verse 15 anticipates by way of summary verses 42-44, and is apparently ignored in verse 25. It probably represents Jeremiah's interpretation of God's command at the time when he wrote the chapter. In the actual development of the incident, the conviction of the Divine promise of restoration came to him somewhat later.

<sup>2</sup> What was said of verse 15 partly applies to verses 17-23 (with the exception of the introductory words: "Ah, Lord Jehovah!"). These verses are not dealt with in the text, because they largely anticipate the ideas and language of the following Divine utterance. Kautzsch and Cornill, following Stade, mark these verses as a later addition; Giesebrecht is doubtful. Cf. v. 20 ff. and xxvii. 5 f.



the works of the besiegers; and certainly men would talk constantly of the progress of the siege. Outside the Chaldeans were pushing their mounds and engines nearer and nearer to the walls, within famine and pestilence decimated and enfeebled the defenders; the city was virtually in the enemy's hands. All this was in accordance with the will of Jehovah and the mission entrusted to His prophet. "What thou hast spoken of is come to pass, and, behold, thou seest it." And yet, in spite of all this, "Thou hast said unto me, O Lord Jehovah, Buy the field for money and take witnesses—and the city is in the hands of the Chaldeans!"

Jeremiah had already predicted the ruin of Babylon and the return of the captives at the end of seventy years.<sup>1</sup> It is clear, therefore, that he did not at first understand the sign of the purchase as referring to restoration from the Captivity. His mind, at the moment, was preoccupied with the approaching capture of Jerusalem; apparently his first thought was that his prophecies of doom were to be set aside, and at the last moment some wonderful deliverance might be wrought out for Zion. In the Book of Jonah, Nineveh is spared in spite of the prophet's unconditional and vehement declaration: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Was it possible, thought Jeremiah, that after all that had been said and done, buying and selling, building and planting, marrying and giving in marriage, were to go on as if nothing had happened? He was bewildered and confounded by the idea of such a revolution in the Divine purposes.

Jehovah in His answer at once repudiates this idea. He asserts His universal sovereignty and omnipotence;

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<sup>1</sup> xxv. 12, xxix. 10.



these are to be manifested, first in judgment and then in mercy. He declares afresh that all the judgments predicted by Jeremiah shall speedily come to pass. Then He unfolds His gracious purpose of redemption and deliverance. He will gather the exiles from all lands and bring them back to Judah, and they shall dwell there securely. They shall be His people and He will be their God. Henceforth He will make an everlasting covenant with them, that He will never again abandon them to misery and destruction, but will always do them good. By Divine grace they shall be united in purpose and action to serve Jehovah; He Himself will put His fear in their hearts.

And then returning to the symbol of the purchased field, Jehovah declares that fields shall be bought, with all the legal formalities usual in settled and orderly societies, deeds shall be signed, sealed, and delivered in the presence of witnesses. This restored social order shall extend throughout the territory of the Southern Kingdom, Benjamin, the environs of Jerusalem, the cities of Judah, of the hill country, of the Shephelah and the Negeb. The exhaustive enumeration partakes of the legal character of the purchase of Hanameel's field.

Thus the symbol is expounded: Israel's tenure of the Promised Land will survive the Captivity; the Jews will return to resume their inheritance, and will again deal with the old fields and vineyards and oliveyards, according to the solemn forms of ancient custom.

The familiar classical parallel to this incident is found in Livy, xxvi. 11, where we are told that when Hannibal was encamped three miles from Rome, the ground he occupied was sold in the Forum by public auction, and fetched a good price.

Both at Rome and at Jerusalem the sale of land was a symbol that the control of the land would remain with or return to its original inhabitants. The symbol recognised that access to land is essential to all industry, and that whoever controls this access can determine the conditions of national life. This obvious and often forgotten truth was constantly present to the minds of the inspired writers: to them the Holy Land was almost as sacred as the Chosen People; its right use was a matter of religious obligation, and the prophets and legislators always sought to secure for every Israelite family some rights in their native soil.

The selection of a legal ceremony and the stress laid upon its forms emphasise the truth that social order is the necessary basis of morality and religion. The opportunity to live healthily, honestly, and purely is an antecedent condition of the spiritual life. This opportunity was denied to slaves in the great heathen empires, just as it is denied to the children in our slums. Both here and more fully in the sections we shall deal with in the following chapters, Jeremiah shows that he was chiefly interested in the restoration of the Jews because they could only fulfil the Divine purpose as a separate community in Judah.

Moreover, to use a modern term, he was no anarchist; spiritual regeneration might come through material ruin, but the prophet did not look for salvation either in anarchy or through anarchy. While any fragment of the State held together, its laws were to be observed; as soon as the exiles were re-established in Judah, they would resume the forms and habits of an organised community. The discipline of society, like that of an army, is most necessary in times of difficulty and danger, and, above all, in the crisis of defeat.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### *RESTORATION—II. THE NEW ISRAEL*

xxiii. 3-8, xxiv. 6, 7, xxx., xxxi., xxxiii.<sup>1</sup>

"In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name whereby she shall be called."—*JER.* xxxiii. 16.

THE Divine utterances in chapter xxxiii. were given to Jeremiah when he was shut up in the "court of the guard" during the last days of the siege. It may, however, have been committed to writing at a later date, possibly in connection with chapters xxx. and xxxi., when the destruction of Jerusalem was already past. It is in accordance with all analogy that the final record of a "word of Jehovah" should include any further light which had come to the prophet through his inspired meditations on the original message. Chapters xxx., xxxi., and xxxiii. mostly expound and enforce leading ideas contained in xxxii. 37-44 and in

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<sup>1</sup> Vatke and Stade reject chapters xxx., xxxi., xxxiii., but they are accepted by Driver, Cornill, Kautzsch (for the most part). Giesebrecht assigns them partly to Baruch and partly to a later editor. It is on this account that the full exposition of certain points in xxxii. and elsewhere has been reserved for the present chapter. Moreover, if the cardinal ideas come from Jeremiah, we need not be over-anxious to decide whether the expansion, illustration, and enforcing of them is due to the prophet himself, or to his disciple Baruch, or to some other editor. The question is somewhat parallel to that relating to the discourses of our Lord in the Fourth Gospel.

earlier utterances of Jeremiah. They have much in common with II. Isaiah. The ruin of Judah and the captivity of the people were accomplished facts to both writers, and they were both looking forward to the return of the exiles and the restoration of the kingdom of Jehovah. We shall have occasion to notice individual points of resemblance later on.

In xxx. 2 Jeremiah is commanded to write in a book all that Jehovah has spoken to him; and according to the present context the "all," in this case, refers merely to the following four chapters. These prophecies of restoration would be specially precious to the exiles; and now that the Jews were scattered through many distant lands, they could only be transmitted and preserved in writing. After the command "to write in a book" there follows, by way of title, a repetition of the statement that Jehovah would bring back His people to their fatherland. Here, in the very forefront of the Book of Promise, Israel and Judah are named as being recalled together from exile. As we read twice<sup>1</sup> elsewhere in Jeremiah, the promised deliverance from Assyria and Babylon was to surpass all earlier manifestations of the Divine power and mercy. The Exodus would not be named in the same breath with it: "Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that it shall no more be said, As Jehovah liveth, that brought up the Israelites out of the land of Egypt; but, As Jehovah liveth, that brought up the Israelites from the land of the north, and from all the countries whither He had driven them." This prediction has waited for fulfilment to our own times: hitherto the Exodus has occupied men's minds much more than the

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<sup>1</sup> xvi. 14, 15, xxiii. 7, 8.

Return; we are now coming to estimate the supreme religious importance of the latter event.

Elsewhere again Jeremiah connects his promise with the clause in his original commission "to build and to plant":<sup>1</sup> "I will set My eyes upon them (the captives) for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up."<sup>2</sup> As in xxxii. 28-35, the picture of restoration is rendered more vivid by contrast with Judah's present state of wretchedness; the marvellousness of Jehovah's mercy is made apparent by reminding Israel of the multitude of its iniquities. The agony of Jacob is like that of a woman in travail. But travail shall be followed by deliverance and triumph. In the second Psalm the subject nations took counsel against Jehovah and against His Anointed:—

"Let us break their bands asunder,  
And cast away their cords from us";

but now this is the counsel of Jehovah concerning His people and their Babylonian conqueror:—

"I will break his yoke from off thy neck,  
And break thy bands asunder."<sup>3</sup>

Judah's lovers, her foreign allies, Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and all the other states with whom she had intrigued, had betrayed her; they had cruelly chastised her, so that her wounds were grievous and her bruises incurable. She was left without a champion to plead her cause, without a friend to bind up her wounds, without balm to allay the pain of her bruises. "Because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto

<sup>1</sup> i. 10.

<sup>2</sup> xxiv. 6.

<sup>3</sup> xxx. 5-8.

thee, saith Jehovah." Jerusalem was an outcast, of whom men said contemptuously: "This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after."<sup>1</sup> But man's extremity was God's opportunity; because Judah was helpless and despised, therefore Jehovah said, "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds."<sup>2</sup>

While Jeremiah was still watching from his prison the progress of the siege, he had seen the houses and palaces beyond the walls destroyed by the Chaldeans to be used for their mounds; and had known that every sally of the besieged was but another opportunity for the enemy to satiate themselves with slaughter, as they executed Jehovah's judgments upon the guilty city. Even at this extremity He announced solemnly and emphatically the restoration and pardon of His people. "Thus saith Jehovah, who established the earth, when He made and fashioned it—Jehovah is His name: Call upon Me, and I will answer thee, and will show thee great mysteries, which thou knowest not."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> xxx. 12-17.

<sup>2</sup> The two verses xxx. 10, 11, present some difficulty here. According to Kautzsch, and of course Giesebrecht, they are a later addition. The ideas can mostly be paralleled elsewhere in Jeremiah. Verse 11 *b*, "I will correct thee with judgment, and will in no wise leave thee unpunished," seems inconsistent with the context, which represents the punishment as actually inflicted. Still, the verses might be a genuine fragment misplaced. Driver (*Introduction*, 246) says: "The title of honour 'My servant' . . . appears to have formed the basis upon which II. Isaiah constructs his great conception of Jehovah's ideal Servant."

<sup>3</sup> xxxiii. 2, 3; "earth" is inserted with the LXX. Many regard these verses as a later addition, based on II. Isaiah: cf. Isa. xlvi. 6. The phrase "Jehovah is His name" and the terms "make" and "fashion" are specially common in II. Isaiah. xxxiii. so largely repeats the ideas of xxx. that it is most convenient to deal with them together.

“I will bring to this city healing and cure, and will cause them to know all the fulness of steadfast peace. . . . I will cleanse them from all their iniquities, and will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned and transgressed against Me.”<sup>1</sup>

The healing of Zion naturally involved the punishment of her cruel and treacherous lovers.<sup>2</sup> The Return, like other revolutions, was not wrought by rose-water; the yokes were broken and the bands rent asunder by main force. Jehovah would make a full end of all the nations whither He had scattered them. Their devourers should be devoured, all their adversaries should go into captivity, those who had spoiled and preyed upon them should become a spoil and a prey. Jeremiah had been commissioned from the beginning to pull down foreign nations and kingdoms as well as his native Judah.<sup>3</sup> Judah was only one of Israel's evil neighbours who were to be plucked up out of their land.<sup>4</sup> And at the Return, as at the Exodus, the waves at one and the same time opened a path of safety for Israel and overwhelmed her oppressors.

Israel, pardoned and restored, would again be governed by legitimate kings of the House of David. In the dying days of the monarchy Israel and Judah had received their rulers from the hands of foreigners. Menahem and Hoshea bought the confirmation of their usurped authority from Assyria. Jehoiakim was ap-

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<sup>1</sup> xxxiii. 6-8, slightly paraphrased and condensed.

<sup>2</sup> xxx. 8, II, 16, 20. Cf. also the chapters on the prophecies concerning foreign nations.

<sup>3</sup> i. 10.

<sup>4</sup> xii. 14. xxx. 23, 24, is apparently a gloss, added as a suitable illustration of this chapter, from xxiii. 19, 20, which are almost identical with these two verses.



pointed by Pharaoh Necho, and Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar. We cannot doubt that the kings of Egypt and Babylon were also careful to surround their nominees with ministers who were devoted to the interests of their suzerains. But now "their nobles were to be of themselves, and their ruler was to proceed out of their midst,"<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* nobles and rulers were to hold their offices according to national custom and tradition.

Jeremiah was fond of speaking of the leaders of Judah as shepherds. We have had occasion already<sup>2</sup> to consider his controversy with the "shepherds" of his own time. In his picture of the New Israel he uses the same figure. In denouncing the evil shepherds, he predicts that, when the remnant of Jehovah's flock is brought again to their folds, He will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them,<sup>3</sup> shepherds according to Jehovah's own heart, who should feed them with knowledge and understanding.<sup>4</sup>

Over them Jehovah would establish as Chief Shepherd a Prince of the House of David. Isaiah had already included in his picture of Messianic times the fertility of Palestine; its vegetation,<sup>5</sup> by the blessing of Jehovah, should be beautiful and glorious: he had also described the Messianic King as a fruitful Branch<sup>6</sup> out of the root of Jesse. Jeremiah takes the idea of the latter passage, but uses the language of the former. For him the King of the New Israel is, as it were, a Growth (çemaḥ) out of the sacred soil, or perhaps more definitely from the roots of the House of David, that

<sup>1</sup> xxx. 21.

<sup>3</sup> xxiii. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chap. VIII.

<sup>4</sup> iii. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Isa. iv. 2, çemaḥ; A.V. and R.V. Branch, R.V. margin Shoot or Bud.

<sup>6</sup> Isa. xi. 1.



ancient tree whose trunk had been hewn down and burnt. Both the Growth (çemaḥ) and the Branch (neçer) had the same vital connection with the soil of Palestine and the root of David. Our English versions exercised a wise discretion when they sacrificed literal accuracy and indicated the identity of idea by translating both "çemaḥ" and "neçer" by "Branch."

"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will raise up unto David a righteous Branch; and He shall be a wise and prudent King, and He shall execute justice and maintain the right. In His days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell securely, and His name shall be Jehovah 'Çidqenu,' Jehovah is our righteousness."<sup>1</sup> Jehovah Çidqenu might very well be the personal name of a Jewish king, though the form would be unusual; but what is chiefly intended is that His character shall be such as the "name" describes. The "name" is a brief and pointed censure upon a king whose character was the opposite of that described in these verses, yet who bore a name of almost identical meaning—Zedekiah, Jehovah is my righteousness. The name of the last reigning Prince of the House of David had been a standing condemnation of his unworthy life, but the King of the New Israel, Jehovah's true Messiah, would realise in His administration all that such a name promised. Sovereigns delight to accumulate sonorous epithets in their official designations—Highness, High and Mighty, Majesty, Serene, Gracious. The glaring contrast between character and titles often only serves to advertise the worthlessness of those who are labelled with such epithets: the Majesty of James I.,

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<sup>1</sup> xxv. 5, 6; repeated in xxxiii. 15, 16, with slight variations.

the Graciousness of Richard III. Yet these titles point to a standard of true royalty, whether the sovereign be an individual or a class or the people; they describe that Divine Sovereignty which will be realised in the Kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

The material prosperity of the restored community is set forth with wealth of glowing imagery. Cities and palaces are to be rebuilt on their former sites with more than their ancient splendour. "Out of them shall proceed thanksgiving, and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small. And the children of Jacob shall be as of old, and their assembly shall be established before Me."<sup>2</sup> The figure often used of the utter desolation of the deserted country is now used to illustrate its complete restoration: "Yet again there shall be heard in this place . . . the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride." Throughout all the land "which is waste, without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof," shepherds shall dwell and pasture and fold their flocks; and in the cities of all the districts of the Southern Kingdom (enumerated as exhaustively as in xxxii. 44) shall the

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<sup>1</sup> In xxxiii. 14-26 the permanence of the Davidic dynasty, the Levitical priests, and the people of Israel is solemnly assured by a Divine promise. These verses are not found in the LXX., and are considered by many to be a later addition; see Kautzsch, Giesebrecht, Cheyne, etc. They are mostly of a secondary character—15, 16, = xxiii. 5, 6; here Jerusalem and not its king is called Jehovah *Çidqenu*, possibly because the addition was made when there was no visible prospect of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. Verse 17 is based on the original promise in 2 Sam. vii. 14-16, and is equivalent to Jer. xxii. 4, 30. The form and substance of the Divine promise imitate xxxi. 35-37.

<sup>2</sup> xxx. 18-20.

flocks again pass under the shepherd's hands to be told.<sup>1</sup>

Jehovah's own peculiar flock, His Chosen People, shall be fruitful and multiply according to the primæval blessing; under their new shepherds they shall no more fear nor be dismayed, neither shall any be lacking.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah recurs again and again to the quiet, the restfulness, the freedom from fear and dismay of the restored Israel. In this, as in all else, the New Dispensation was to be an entire contrast to those long weary years of alternate suspense and panic, when men's hearts were shaken by the sound of the trumpet and the alarm of war.<sup>3</sup> Israel is to dwell securely at rest from fear of harm.<sup>4</sup> When Jacob returns, he "shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid."<sup>5</sup> Egyptian, Assyrian, and Chaldean shall all cease from troubling; the memory of past misery shall become dim and shadowy.

The finest expansion of this idea is a passage which always fills the soul with a sense of utter rest. "He shall dwell on high: his refuge shall be the inaccessible rocks: his bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold a far-stretching land. Thine heart shall muse on the terror: where is he that counted, where is he that weighed the tribute? where is he that counted the towers? Thou shalt not see the fierce people, a people of a deep speech that thou canst not perceive; of a strange tongue that thou canst not understand. Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet

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<sup>1</sup> xxxiii. 10-13.

<sup>2</sup> xxiii. 3, 4.

<sup>3</sup> iv. 19.

<sup>4</sup> xxiii. 6.

<sup>5</sup> xxx. 10.

habitation, a tent that shall not be removed, the stakes whereof shall never be plucked up, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. There Jehovah will be with us in majesty, a place of broad rivers and streams ; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.”<sup>1</sup>

For Jeremiah too the presence of Jehovah in majesty was the only possible guarantee of the peace and prosperity of Israel. The voices of joy and gladness in the New Jerusalem were not only those of bride and bridegroom, but also of those that said, “Give thanks to Jehovah Sabaoth, for Jehovah is good, for His mercy endureth for ever,” and of those that “came to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving in the house of Jehovah.”<sup>2</sup> This new David, as the Messianic King is called,<sup>3</sup> is to have the priestly right of immediate access to God : “I will cause Him to draw near, and He shall approach unto Me : for else who would risk his life by daring to approach Me ?”<sup>4</sup> Israel is liberated from foreign conquerors to serve Jehovah their God and David their King ; and the Lord Himself rejoices in His restored and ransomed people.

The city that was once a desolation, an astonishment, a hissing, and a curse among all nations shall now be to Jehovah “a name of joy, a praise and a glory, before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them, and shall tremble with fear for all the good and all the peace that I procure unto it.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Isa. xxxiii. 16-21 : cf. xxxii. 15-18.

<sup>2</sup> xxxiii. 11.                   <sup>4</sup> xxx. 21, as Kautzsch.

<sup>3</sup> xxx. 9.

<sup>5</sup> xxxiii. 9.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### RESTORATION—III. REUNION

xxxii.

“I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast.”—JER. xxxi. 27.

IN his prophecies of restoration, Jeremiah continually couples together Judah and Israel.<sup>1</sup> Israel, it is true, often stands for the whole elect nation, and is so used by Jeremiah. After the disappearance of the Ten Tribes, the Jewish community is spoken of as Israel. But Israel, in contrast to Judah, will naturally mean the Northern Kingdom or its exiled inhabitants. In this chapter Jeremiah clearly refers to this Israel; he speaks of it under its distinctive title of Ephraim, and promises that vineyards shall again be planted on the mountains of Samaria. Jehovah had declared that He would cast Judah out of His sight, as He had cast out the whole seed of Ephraim.<sup>2</sup> In the days to come Jehovah would make His new covenant with the House of Israel, as well as with the House of Judah. Amos,<sup>3</sup> who was sent to declare the captivity of Israel, also prophesied its return; and similar promises are found in Micah and Isaiah.<sup>4</sup> But, in his attitude towards Ephraim, Jeremiah, as in so much

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<sup>1</sup> xxxiii., 7, etc.

<sup>2</sup> vii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Amos ix. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Micah ii. 12; Isa. xi. 10-16.

else, is a disciple of Hosea. Both prophets have the same tender, affectionate interest in this wayward child of God. Hosea mourns over Ephraim's sin and punishment: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee to thine enemies, O Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim?"<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah exults in the glory of Ephraim's restoration. Hosea barely attains to the hope that Israel will return from captivity, or possibly that its doom may yet be averted. "Mine heart is turned within Me, My compassions are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger, I will not again any more destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee."<sup>2</sup> But Jehovah rather longs to pardon than finds any sign of the repentance that makes pardon possible; and similarly the promise—"I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon"—is conditioned upon the very doubtful response to the appeal "O Israel, return unto Jehovah thy God."<sup>3</sup> But Jeremiah's confidence in the glorious future of Ephraim is dimmed by no shade of misgiving. "They shall be My people, and I will be their God," is the refrain of Jeremiah's prophecies of restoration; this chapter opens with a special modification of the formula, which emphatically and expressly includes both Ephraim and Judah—"I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be My people."

The Assyrian and Chaldean captivities carried men's

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea xi. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Hosea xi. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Hosea xiv.

thoughts back to the bondage in Egypt; and the experiences of the Exodus provided phrases and figures to describe the expected Return. The judges had delivered individual tribes or groups of tribes. Jeroboam II. had been the saviour of Samaria; and the overthrow of Sennacherib had rescued Jerusalem. But the Exodus stood out from all later deliverances as the birth of the whole people. Hence the prophets often speak of the Return as a New Exodus.

This prophecy takes the form of a dialogue between Jehovah and the Virgin of Israel, *i.e.* the nation personified. Jehovah announces that the Israelite exiles, the remnant left by the sword of Shalmaneser and Sargon, were to be more highly favoured than the fugitives from the sword of Pharaoh, of whom Jehovah sware in His wrath "that they should not enter into My rest; whose carcasses fell in the wilderness." "A people that hath survived the sword hath found favour in the wilderness; Israel hath entered into his rest,"<sup>1</sup>—*hath* found favour—*hath* entered—because Jehovah regards His purpose as already accomplished.

Jehovah speaks from His ancient dwelling-place in Jerusalem, and, when the Virgin of Israel hears Him in her distant exile, she answers:—

"From afar hath Jehovah appeared unto me (saying),  
With My ancient love do I love thee;  
Therefore My lovingkindness is enduring toward thee."<sup>2</sup>

His love is as old as the Exodus, His mercy has

<sup>1</sup> So *Giesebrecht*, reading with Jerome and Targum *l'margō'ō* for the obscure and obviously corrupt *l'hargi'ō*. The other versions vary widely in their readings.

<sup>2</sup> R.V. "with lovingkindness have I drawn thee," R.V. margin "have I continued lovingkindness unto thee"; the word for "drawn" occurs also in Hosea xi. 4, "I drew them . . . with bands of love."



endured all through the long, weary ages of Israel's sin and suffering.

Then Jehovah replies :—

“Again will I build thee, and thou shalt be built, O Virgin of Israel;

Again shalt thou take thy tabrets, and go forth in the dances of them that make merry;

Again shalt thou plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria, while they that plant shall enjoy the fruit.”

This contrasts with the times of invasion when the vintage was destroyed or carried off by the enemy. Then follows the Divine purpose, the crowning mercy of Israel's renewed prosperity :—

“For the day cometh when the vintagers<sup>1</sup> shall cry in the hill-country of Ephraim,

Arise, let us go up to Zion, to Jehovah our God.”

Israel will no longer keep her vintage feasts in schism at Samaria and Bethel and her countless high places, but will join with Judah in the worship of the Temple, which Josiah's covenant had accepted as the one sanctuary of Jehovah.

The exultant strain continues stanza after stanza :—

“Thus saith Jehovah :

Exult joyously for Jacob, and shout for the chief of the nations ;

Make your praises heard, and say, Jehovah hath saved His people,<sup>2</sup> even the remnant of Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> So Giesebrecht's conjecture of *bocerim* (vintages), for the *nocerim* (watchmen, R.V.). The latter is usually explained of the watcher who looked for the appearance of the new moon, in order to determine the time of the feasts. The practice is stated on negative grounds to be post-exilic, but seems likely to be ancient. On the other hand “vintagers” seems a natural sequel to the preceding clauses.

<sup>2</sup> According to the reading of the LXX. and the Targum, the Hebrew Text has (as R.V.) “O Jehovah, save Thy people.”



Behold, I bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the uttermost ends of the earth ;

Among them blind and lame, pregnant women and women in travail together."

None are left behind, not even those least fit for the journey.

"A great company shall return hither.

They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them."

Of old, weeping and supplication had been heard upon the heights of Israel because of her waywardness and apostasy;<sup>1</sup> but now the returning exiles offer prayers and thanksgiving mingled with tears, weeping partly for joy, partly for pathetic memories.

"I will bring them to streams of water, by a plain path, wherein they cannot stumble :

For I am become once more a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born son."

Of the two Israelite states, Ephraim, the Northern Kingdom, had long been superior in power, wealth, and religion. Judah was often little more than a vassal of Samaria, and owed her prosperity and even her existence to the barrier which Samaria interposed between Jerusalem and invaders from Assyria or Damascus. Until the latter days of Samaria, Judah had no prophets that could compare with Elijah and Elisha. The Jewish prophet is tenacious of the rights of Zion, but he does not base any claim for the ascendancy of Judah on the geographical position of the Temple ; he does not even mention the sacerdotal tribe of Levi. Jew and priest as he was, he acknowledges the political and religious hegemony of Ephraim. The fact is a

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<sup>1</sup> iii. 21.

striking illustration of the stress laid by the prophets on the unity of Israel, to which all sectional interests were to be sacrificed. If Ephraim was required to forsake his ancient shrines, Jeremiah was equally ready to forego any pride of tribe or caste. Did we, in all our different Churches, possess the same generous spirit, Christian reunion would no longer be a vain and distant dream. But, passing on to the next stanza,—

“Hear the word of Jehovah, O ye nations, and make it known in the distant islands.

Say, He that scattered Israel doth gather him, and watcheth over him as a shepherd over his flock.

For Jehovah hath ransomed Jacob and redeemed him from the hand of him that was too strong for him.

They shall come and sing for joy in the height of Zion ;

They shall come in streams to the bounty of Jehovah, for corn and new wine and oil and lambs and calves.”

Jeremiah does not dwell, in any grasping sacerdotal spirit, on the contributions which these reconciled schismatics would pay to the Temple revenues, but rather delights to make mention of their share in the common blessings of God's obedient children.

“They shall be like a well-watered garden ; they shall no more be faint and weary :

Then shall they rejoice—the damsels in the dance—the young men and the old together.

I will turn their mourning into gladness, and will comfort them, and will bring joy out of their wretchedness.

I will fill the priests with plenty, and My people shall be satisfied with My bounty—

It is the utterance of Jehovah.”

It is not quite clear how far, in this chapter, Israel is to be understood exclusively of Ephraim. If the foregoing stanza is, as it seems, perfectly general, the priests are simply those of the restored community, ministering at the Temple ; but if the reference is

specially to Ephraim, the priests belong to families involved in the captivity of the ten tribes, and we have further evidence of the catholic spirit of the Jewish prophet.

Another stanza :—

“Thus saith Jehovah :

A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping,  
Rachel weeping for her children.

She refuseth to be comforted for her children, for they are not.”

Rachel, as the mother of Benjamin and Joseph, claimed an interest in both the Israelite kingdoms. Jeremiah shows special concern for Benjamin, in whose territory his native Anathoth was situated.<sup>1</sup>

“Her children” would be chiefly the Ephraimites and Manassites, who formed the bulk of the Northern Kingdom; but the phrase was doubtless intended to include other Jews, that Rachel might be a symbol of national unity.

The connection of Rachel with Ramah is not obvious; there is no precedent for it. Possibly Ramah is not intended for a proper name, and we might translate “A voice is heard upon the heights.” In Gen. xxxv. 19, Rachel’s grave is placed between Bethel and Ephrath,<sup>2</sup> and in 1 Sam. x. 2, in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; only here has Rachel anything to do with Ramah. The name, however, in its various forms, was not uncommon. Ramah, to the north of Jerusalem, seems to have been a frontier town, and debatable territory<sup>3</sup> between the two kingdoms; and Rachel’s appearance there might symbolise her relation to both.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah does not mention Benjamin.

<sup>2</sup> “Which is Bethlehem,” in Genesis, is probably a later explanatory addition; and the explanation is not necessarily a mistake. Cf. Matt. ii. 18.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings xv. 17.

This Ramah was also a slave depôt for the Chaldeans<sup>1</sup> after the fall of Jerusalem, and Rachel might well revisit the glimpses of the moon at a spot where her descendants had drunk the first bitter draught of the cup of exile. In any case, the lines are a fresh appeal to the spirit of national unity. The prophet seems to say: "Children of the same mother, sharers in the same fate, whether of ruin or restoration, remember the ties that bind you and forget your ancient feuds." Rachel, wailing in ghostly fashion, was yet a name to conjure with, and the prophet hoped that her symbolic tears could water the renewed growth of Israel's national life. Christ, present in His living Spirit, lacerated at heart by the bitter feuds of those who call Him Lord, should temper the harsh judgments that Christians pass on servants of their One Master. The Jewish prophet lamenting the miseries of schismatic Israel contrasts with the Pope singing *Te Deums* over the massacre of St. Bartholomew.

Then comes the answer:—

"Thus saith Jehovah:

Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears.

Thou shalt have wages for thy labour—it is the utterance of Jehovah—they shall return from the enemy's land.

There is hope for thee in the days to come—it is the utterance of Jehovah—thy children shall return to their own border."<sup>2</sup>

The Niobe of the nation is comforted, but now is heard another voice:—

"Surely I hear Ephraim bemoaning himself: Thou hast chastised me; I am chastised like a calf not yet broken to the yoke. Restore me to Thy favour, that I may return unto Thee, for Thou art Jehovah my God.

<sup>1</sup> xl. i.

<sup>2</sup> LXX. omits verse 17 *b*, *i.e.* from "Jehovah" to "border."

In returning unto Thee, I repent; when I come to myself, I smite upon my thigh in penitence."<sup>1</sup>

The image of the calf is another reminiscence of Hosea, with whom Israel figures as a "backsliding heifer" and Ephraim as a "heifer that has been broken in and loveth to tread out the corn"; though apparently in Hosea Ephraim is broken in to wickedness. Possibly this figure was suggested by the calves at Bethel and Dan.

The moaning of Ephraim, like the wailing of Rachel, is met and answered by the Divine compassion. By a bold and touching figure, Jehovah is represented as surprised at the depth of His passionate affection for His prodigal son:—

"Can it be that Ephraim is indeed a son that is precious to Me?  
is he indeed a darling child?

As often as I speak against him, I cannot cease to remember him,<sup>2</sup>

Wherefore My tender compassion is moved towards him: verily  
I will have mercy on him—

It is the utterance of Jehovah."

As with Hosea, Israel is still the child whom Jehovah loved, the son whom He called out of Egypt. But now Israel is called with a more effectual calling:—

"Set thee up pillars of stone,<sup>3</sup> to mark the way; make thee guide-posts: set thy heart toward the highway whereby thou wentest.

Return, O Virgin of Israel, return unto these thy cities."

<sup>1</sup> Slightly paraphrased.

<sup>2</sup> More literally as R.V., "I do earnestly remember him still."

<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew Text has the same word, "tamrurim," here that is used in verse 15 in the phrase "bekhi tamrurim," "weeping of bitternesses" or "bitter weeping." It is difficult to believe that the coincidence is accidental, and Hebrew literature is given to paronomasia; at the same time the distance of the words and the complete

The following verse strikes a note of discord, that suggests the revulsion of feeling, the sudden access of doubt, that sometimes follows the most ecstatic moods :—

“How long wilt thou wander to and fro, O backsliding daughter ?  
Jehovah hath created a new thing in the earth—a woman  
shall compass a man.”

It is just possible that this verse is not intended to express doubt of Israel's cordial response, but is merely an affectionate urgency that presses the immediate appropriation of the promised blessings. But such an exegesis seems forced, and the verse is a strange termination to the glowing stanzas that precede. It may have been added when all hope of the return of the ten tribes was over.<sup>1</sup>

The meaning of the concluding enigma is as profound a mystery as the fate of the lost tribes, and the solutions rather more unsatisfactory. The words apparently denote that the male and the female shall interchange functions, and an explanation often given is that, in the profound peace of the New Dispensation, the women will protect the men. This portent seems to be the sign which is to win the Virgin of Israel from her vacillation and induce her to return at once to Palestine.

In Isaiah xliii. 19 the “new thing” which Jehovah

absence of point in this particular instance are remarkable. The LXX., not understanding the word, represented it *more suo* by the similar Greek word *τιμωριαν*, which may indicate that the original reading was “timorim,” and the assimilation to “tamrurim” may be a scribe's caprice. In any case, the word here connects with “tamar,” a palm, the post being made of or like a palm tree. Cf. Giesebrecht, Orelli, Cheyne, etc.

<sup>1</sup> Giesebrecht treats verses 21-26 as a later addition, but this seems unnecessary.

does is to make a way in the untrodden desert and rivers in the parched wilderness. A parallel interpretation, suggested for our passage, is that women should develop manly strength and courage, as abnormal to them as roads and rivers to a wilderness. When women were thus endowed, men could not for shame shrink from the perils of the Return.

In Isaiah iv. 1 seven women court one man, and it has been suggested<sup>1</sup> that the sense here is "women shall court men," but it is difficult to see how this would be relevant. Another parallel has been sought for in the Immanuel and other prophecies of Isaiah, in which the birth of a child is set forth as a sign. Our passage would then assume a Messianic character; the return of the Virgin of Israel would be postponed till her doubts and difficulties should be solved by the appearance of a new Moses.<sup>2</sup> This view has much to commend it, but does not very readily follow from the usage of the word translated "compass." Still less can we regard these words as a prediction of the miraculous conception of our Lord.

The next stanza connects the restoration of Judah with that of Ephraim, and, for the most part, goes over ground already traversed in our previous chapters; one or two points only need be noticed here. It is in accordance with the catholic and gracious spirit which characterises this chapter that the restoration of Judah is expressly connected with that of Ephraim. The combination of the future fortunes of both in a single prophecy emphasises their reunion. The heading of this stanza, "Thus saith Jehovah Sabaoth, the God of Israel," is different from that hitherto used, and

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<sup>1</sup> So Kautzsch.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Streane, Cambridge Bible.



has a special significance in its present context. It is "the God of Israel" to whom Ephraim is a darling child and a first-born son, the God of that Israel which for centuries stood before the world as Ephraim; it is this God who blesses and redeems Judah. Her faint and weary soul is also to be satisfied with His plenty; Zion is to be honoured as the habitation of justice and the mountain of holiness.

"Hereupon," saith the prophet, "I awaked and looked about me, and felt that my sleep had been pleasant to me." The vision had come to him, in some sense, as a dream. Zechariah<sup>1</sup> had to be aroused, like a man wakened out of his sleep, in order to receive the Divine message; and possibly Zechariah's sleep was the ecstatic trance in which he had beheld previous visions. Jeremiah, however, shows scant confidence<sup>2</sup> in the inspiration of those who dream dreams, and it does not seem likely that this is a unique exception to his ordinary experience. Perhaps we may say with Orelli that the prophet had become lost in the vision of future blessedness as in some sweet dream.

In the following stanza Jehovah promises to recruit the dwindled numbers of Israel and Judah; with a sowing more gracious and fortunate than that of Cadmus, He will scatter<sup>3</sup> over the land, not dragons' teeth, but the seed of man and beast. Recurring<sup>4</sup> to Jeremiah's original commission, He promises that as He watched over Judah to pluck up and to break

<sup>1</sup> Zech. iv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> xxiii. 25-32, xxvii. 9, xxix. 8: cf. Deut. xiii. 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hosea ii. 23, "I will sow her unto Me in the earth" (or land), in reference to *Jezreel*, understood as "Whom God soweth" (R.V. margin).

<sup>4</sup> i. 10-12.



down, to overthrow and to destroy and to afflict, so now He will watch over them to build and to plant.

The next verse is directed against a lingering dread, by which men's minds were still possessed. More than half a century elapsed between the death of Manasseh and the fall of Jerusalem. He was succeeded by Josiah, who "turned to Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might."<sup>1</sup> Yet Jehovah declared to Jeremiah that Manasseh's sins had irrevocably fixed the doom of Judah, so that not even the intercession of Moses and Samuel could procure her pardon.<sup>2</sup> Men might well doubt whether the guilt of that wicked reign was even yet fully expiated, whether their teeth might not still be set on edge because of the sour grapes which Manasseh had eaten. Therefore the prophet continues: "In those days men shall no longer say, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge; but every man shall die for his own transgression, all who eat sour grapes shall have their own teeth set on edge." Or to use the explicit words of Ezekiel, in the great chapter in which he discusses this permanent theological difficulty: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."<sup>3</sup> With the fall of Jerusalem, a chapter in the history of Israel was concluded for ever; Jehovah blotted out the damning record of the past, and turned over a new leaf in the annals of His people. The account

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xxiii. 25.

<sup>2</sup> xv. 1-4.

<sup>3</sup> Ezek. xviii. 20: cf. Cheyne, *Jeremiah* (Men of the Bible), p. 150.

between Jehovah and the Israel of the monarchy was finally closed, and no penal balance was carried over to stand against the restored community.

The last portion of this chapter is so important that we must reserve it for separate treatment, but we may pause for a moment to consider the prophecy of the restoration of Ephraim from two points of view—the unity of Israel and the return of the ten tribes.

In the first place, this chapter is an eirenicon, intended to consign to oblivion the divisions and feuds of the Chosen People. After the fall of Samaria, the remnant of Israel had naturally looked to Judah for support and protection, and the growing weakness of Assyria had allowed the Jewish kings to exercise a certain authority over the territory of northern tribes. The same fate—the sack of the capital and the deportation of most of the inhabitants—had successively befallen Ephraim and Judah. His sense of the unity of the race was too strong to allow the prophet to be satisfied with the return of Judah and Benjamin, apart from the other tribes. Yet it would have been monstrous to suppose that Jehovah would bring back Ephraim from Assyria, and Judah from Babylon, only that they might resume their mutual hatred and suspicion. Even wild beasts are said not to rend one another when they are driven by floods to the same hill-top.

Thus various causes contributed to produce a kindlier feeling between the survivors of the catastrophes of Samaria and Jerusalem; and from henceforth those of the ten tribes who found their way back to Palestine lived in brotherly union with the other Jews. And, on the whole, the Jews have since remained united both as a race and a religious community. It is true that the relations of the later Jews to Samaria were

somewhat at variance both with the letter and spirit of this prophecy, but that Samaria had only the slightest claim to be included in Israel. Otherwise the divisions between Hillel and Shammai, Sadducees and Pharisees, Karaites, Sephardim and Ashkenazim, Reformed and Unreformed Jews, have rather been legitimate varieties of opinion and practice within Judaism than a rending asunder of the Israel of God.

Matters stand very differently with regard to the restoration of Ephraim. We know that individual members and families of the ten tribes were included in the new Jewish community, and that the Jews reoccupied Galilee and portions of Eastern Palestine. But the husbandmen who had planted vineyards on the hills of Samaria were violently repulsed by Ezra and Nehemiah, and were denied any part or lot in the restored Israel. The tribal inheritance of Ephraim and Manasseh was never reoccupied by Ephraimites and Manassites who came to worship Jehovah in His Temple at Jerusalem. There was no return of the ten tribes that in any way corresponded to the terms of this prophecy or that could rank with the return of their brethren. Our growing acquaintance with the races of the world seems likely to exclude even the possibility of any such restoration of Ephraim. Of the two divisions of Israel, so long united in common experiences of grace and chastisement, the one has been taken and the other left.

Christendom is the true heir of the ideals of Israel, but she is mostly content to inherit them as counsels of perfection. Isaiah<sup>1</sup> struck the keynote of this chapter when he prophesied that Ephraim should not

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<sup>1</sup> Isa. xi. 13.

envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim. Our prophet, in the same generous spirit, propounds a programme of reconciliation. It might serve for a model to those who construct schemes for Christian Reunion. When two denominations are able to unite on such terms that the one admits the other to be the first-born of God, His darling child and precious in His sight, and the latter is willing to accept the former's central sanctuary as the headquarters of the united body, we shall have come some way towards realising this ancient Jewish ideal. Meanwhile Ephraim remains consumed with envy of Judah; and Judah apparently considers it her most sacred duty to vex Ephraim.

Moreover the disappearance of what was at one time the most flourishing branch of the Hebrew Church has many parallels in Church History. Again and again religious dissension has been one of the causes of political ruin, and the overthrow of a Christian state has sometimes involved the extinction of its religion. Christian thought and doctrine owe an immense debt to the great Churches of Northern Africa and Egypt. But these provinces were torn by the dissensions of ecclesiastical parties; and the quarrels of Donatists, Arians, and Catholics in North Africa, the endless controversies over the Person of Christ in Egypt, left them helpless before the Saracen invader. To-day the Church of Tertullian and Augustine is blotted out, and the Church of Origen and Clement is a miserable remnant. Similarly the ecclesiastical strife between Rome and Constantinople lost to Christendom some of the fairest provinces of Europe and Asia, and placed Christian races under the rule of the Turk.

Even now the cause of Christians in heathen and Mohammedan countries suffers from the jealousy of

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Christian states, and modern Churches sometimes avail themselves of this jealousy to try and oust their rivals from promising fields for mission work.

It is a melancholy reflection that Jeremiah's effort at reconciliation came too late, when the tribes whom it sought to reunite were hopelessly set asunder. Reconciliation, which involves a kind of mutual repentance, can ill afford to be deferred to the eleventh hour. In the last agonies of the Greek Empire, there was more than one formal reconciliation between the Eastern and Western Churches; but they also came too late, and could not survive the Empire which they failed to preserve.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### *RESTORATION—IV. THE NEW COVENANT*

xxx. 31-38: cf. Hebrews viii.

“I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”—*JER.* xxxi. 31.

THE religious history of Israel in the Old Testament has for its epochs a series of covenants: Jehovah declared His gracious purposes towards His people, and made known the conditions upon which they were to enjoy His promised blessings; they, on their part, undertook to observe faithfully all that Jehovah commanded. We are told that covenants were made with Noah, after the Flood; with Abraham, when he was assured that his descendants should inherit the land of Canaan; at Sinai, when Israel first became a nation; with Joshua, after the Promised Land was conquered; and, at the close of Old Testament history, when Ezra and Nehemiah established the Pentateuch as the Code and Canon of Judaism.

One of the oldest sections of the Pentateuch, Exodus xx. 20—xxiii. 33, is called the “Book of the Covenant,”<sup>1</sup> and Ewald named the Priestly Code the “Book of the Four Covenants.” Judges and Samuel record no covenants between Jehovah and Israel; but the promise of permanence to the Davidic dynasty is spoken of as an

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<sup>1</sup> *Exod.* xxiv. 7.

everlasting covenant. Isaiah,<sup>1</sup> Amos, and Micah make no mention of the Divine covenants. Jeremiah, however, imitates Hosea<sup>2</sup> in emphasising this aspect of Jehovah's relation to Israel, and is followed in his turn by Ezekiel and II. Isaiah.

Jeremiah had played his part in establishing covenants between Israel and its God. He is not, indeed, even so much as mentioned in the account of Josiah's reformation; and it is not clear that he himself makes any express reference to it; so that some doubt must still be felt as to his share in that great movement. At the same time indirect evidence seems to afford proof of the common opinion that Jeremiah was active in the proceedings which resulted in the solemn engagement to observe the code of Deuteronomy. But yet another covenant occupies a chapter<sup>3</sup> in the Book of Jeremiah, and in this case there is no doubt that the prophet was the prime mover in inducing the Jews to release their Hebrew slaves. This act of emancipation was adopted in obedience to an ordinance of Deuteronomy,<sup>4</sup> so that Jeremiah's experience of former covenants was chiefly connected with the code of Deuteronomy and the older Book of the Covenant upon which it was based.

The Restoration to which Jeremiah looked forward was to throw the Exodus into the shade, and to constitute a new epoch in the history of Israel more remarkable than the first settlement in Canaan. The nation was to be founded anew, and its regeneration

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<sup>1</sup> *I.e.* in the sections generally acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup> Hosea ii. 18, vi. 7, viii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> xxxiv.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. xxxiv. 14 with Deut. xv. 12 and Exod. xxi. 2.



would necessarily rest upon a New Covenant, which would supersede the Covenant of Sinai.

“Behold, the days come—it is the utterance of Jehovah—when I will enter into a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah: not according to the covenant into which I entered with your fathers, when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.”

The Book of the Covenant and Deuteronomy had both been editions of the Mosaic Covenant, and had neither been intended nor regarded as anything new. Whatever was fresh in them, either in form or substance, was merely the adaptation of existing ordinances to altered circumstances. But now the Mosaic Covenant was declared obsolete, the New Covenant was not to be, like Deuteronomy, merely a fresh edition of the earliest code. The Return from Babylon, like the primitive Migration from Ur and like the Exodus from Egypt, was to be the occasion of a new Revelation, placing the relations of Jehovah and His people on a new footing.

When Ezra and Nehemiah established, as the Covenant of the Restoration, yet another edition of the Mosaic ordinances, they were acting in the teeth of this prophecy—not because Jehovah had changed His purpose, but because the time of fulfilment had not yet come.<sup>1</sup>

The rendering of the next clause is uncertain, and, in any case, the reason given for setting aside the old covenant is not quite what might have been expected. The Authorised and Revised Versions translate: “Which My covenant they brake, although

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Prof. Adeney's *Ezra, Nehemiah*, etc., in this series.



I was an husband unto them";<sup>1</sup> thus introducing that Old Testament figure of marriage between Jehovah and Israel which is transferred in Ephesians and the Apocalypse to Christ and the Church. The margin of the Revised Version has: "Forasmuch as they brake My covenant, although I was lord over them." There is little difference between these two translations, both of which imply that in breaking the covenant Israel was setting aside Jehovah's legitimate claim to obedience. A third translation, on much the same lines, would be "although I was Baal unto *or* over them";<sup>2</sup> Baal or ba'al being found for lord, husband, in ancient times as a name of Jehovah, and in Jeremiah's time as a name of heathen gods. Jeremiah is fond of paronomasia, and frequently refers to Baal, so that he may have been here deliberately ambiguous. The phrase might suggest to the Hebrew reader that Jehovah was the true lord or husband of Israel, and the true Baal or God, but that Israel had come to regard Him as a mere Baal, like one of the Baals of the heathen. "Forasmuch as they, on their part, set at nought My covenant; so that I, their true Lord, became to them as a mere heathen Baal." The covenant and the God who gave it were alike treated with contempt.

The Septuagint, which is quoted in Hebrews viii. 9, has another translation: "And I regarded them not."<sup>3</sup> Unless this represents a different reading,<sup>4</sup> it is

<sup>1</sup> So also Kautzsch, Reuss, Sugfried, and Stade. The same phrase is thus translated in iii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> "I was Baal" = "ba'alti."

<sup>3</sup> ἡμέλησα.

<sup>4</sup> נעלתי; נעל occurs in xiv. 19, and is translated by A.V. and R.V. "loathed."

probably due to a feeling that the form of the Hebrew sentence required a close parallelism. Israel neglected to observe the covenant, and Jehovah ceased to feel any interest in Israel. But the idea of the latter clause seems alien to the context.

In any case, the new and better covenant is offered to Israel, after it has failed to observe the first covenant. This Divine procedure is not quite according to many of our theories. The law of ordinances is often spoken of as adapted to the childhood of the race. We set children easy tasks, and when these are successfully performed we require of them something more difficult. We grant them limited privileges, and if they make a good use of them the children are promoted to higher opportunities. We might perhaps have expected that when the Israelites failed to observe the Mosaic ordinances, they would have been placed under a narrower and harsher dispensation; yet their very failure leads to the promise of a better covenant still. Subsequent history, indeed, qualifies the strangeness of the Divine dealing. Only a remnant of Israel survived as the people of God. The Covenant of Ezra was very different from the New Covenant of Jeremiah; and the later Jews, as a community,<sup>1</sup> did not accept that dispensation of grace which ultimately realised Jeremiah's prophecy. In a narrow and unspiritual fashion the Jews of the Restoration observed the covenant of external ordinances; so that, in a certain sense, the Law was fulfilled before the new Kingdom of God was inaugurated. But if

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<sup>1</sup> We usually underrate the proportion of Jews who embraced Christianity. Hellenistic Judaism disappeared as Christianity became widely diffused, and was probably for the most part absorbed into the new faith.

Isaiah and Jeremiah had reviewed the history of the restored community, they would have declined to receive it as, in any sense, the fulfilling of a Divine covenant. The Law of Moses was not fulfilled, but made void, by the traditions of the Pharisees. The fact therefore remains, that failure in the lower forms, so to speak, of God's school is still followed by promotion to higher privileges. However little we may be able to reconcile this truth with *a priori* views of Providence, it has analogies in nature, and reveals new depths of Divine love and greater resourcefulness of Divine grace. Boys whose early life is unsatisfactory nevertheless grow up into the responsibilities and privileges of manhood; and the wilful, disobedient child does not always make a bad man. We are apt to think that the highest form of development is steady, continuous, and serene, from good to better, from better to best. The real order is more awful and stupendous, combining good and evil, success and failure, victory and defeat, in its continuous advance through the ages. The wrath of man is not the only evil passion that praises God by its ultimate subservience to His purpose. We need not fear lest such Divine overruling of sin should prove any temptation to wrongdoing, seeing that it works, as in the exile of Israel, through the anguish and humiliation of the sinner.

The next verse explains the character of the New Covenant; once Jehovah wrote His law on tables of stone, but now:—

“This is the covenant which I will conclude with the House of Israel after those days—it is the utterance of Jehovah—  
I will put My law within them, and will write it upon their heart;  
And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

These last words were an ancient formula for the immemorial relation of Jehovah and Israel, but they were to receive new fulness of meaning. The inner law, written on the heart, is in contrast to Mosaic ordinances. It has, therefore, two essential characteristics: first, it governs life, not by fixed external regulations, but by the continual control of heart and conscience by the Divine Spirit; secondly, obedience is rendered to the Divine Will, not from external compulsion, but because man's inmost nature is possessed by entire loyalty to God. The new law involves no alteration of the standards of morality or of theological doctrine, but it lays stress on the spiritual character of man's relation to God, and therefore on the fact that God is a spiritual and moral being. When man's obedience is claimed on the ground of God's irresistible power, and appeal is made to material rewards and punishments, God's personality is obscured and the way is opened for the deification of political or material Force. This doctrine of setting aside of ancient codes by the authority of the Inner Law is implied in many passages of our book. The superseding of the Mosaic Law is set forth by a most expressive symbol,<sup>1</sup> "When ye are multiplied and increased in the land, 'The Ark of the Covenant of Jehovah' shall no longer be the watchword of Israel: men shall neither think of the ark nor remember it; they shall neither miss the ark nor make another in its place." The Ark and the Mosaic Torah were inseparably connected; if the Ark was to perish and be forgotten, the Law must also be annulled.

Jeremiah moreover discerned with Paul that there

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<sup>1</sup> iii. 16, slightly paraphrased.

was a law in the members warring against the Law of Jehovah: "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of their altars."<sup>1</sup>

Hence the heart of the people had to be changed before they could enter into the blessings of the Restoration: "I will give them an heart to know Me, that I am Jehovah: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto Me with their whole heart."<sup>2</sup> In the exposition of the symbolic purchase of Hanameel's field, Jehovah promises to make an everlasting covenant with His people, that He will always do them good and never forsake them. Such continual blessings imply that Israel will always be faithful. Jehovah no longer seeks to ensure their fidelity by an external law, with its alternate threats and promises: He will rather control the inner life by His grace. "I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me for ever; . . . I will put My fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from Me."<sup>3</sup>

We must not, of course, suppose that these principles—of obedience from loyal enthusiasm, and of the guidance of heart and conscience by the Spirit of Jehovah—were new to the religion of Israel. They are implied in the idea of prophetic inspiration. When Saul went home to Gibeah, "there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched."<sup>4</sup> In Deuteronomy, Israel is commanded to "love Jehovah thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul,

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<sup>1</sup> xvii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> xxiv. 7.

<sup>3</sup> xxxii. 39, 40.

<sup>4</sup> I Sam. x. 26.

and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart.”<sup>1</sup>

The novelty of Jeremiah's teaching is that these principles are made central in the New Covenant. Even Deuteronomy, which approaches so closely to the teaching of Jeremiah, was a new edition of the Covenant of the Exodus, an attempt to secure a righteous life by exhaustive rules and by external sanctions. Jeremiah had witnessed and probably assisted the effort to reform Judah by the enforcement of the Deuteronomic Code. But when Josiah's religious policy collapsed after his defeat and death at Megiddo, Jeremiah lost faith in elaborate codes, and turned from the letter to the spirit.

The next feature of the New Covenant naturally follows from its being written upon men's hearts by the finger of Jehovah:—

“Men shall no longer teach one another and teach each other saying, Know ye Jehovah!

For all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest—it is the utterance of Jehovah.”

In ancient times men could only “know Jehovah” and ascertain His will by resorting to some sanctuary, where the priests preserved and transmitted the sacred tradition and delivered the Divine oracles. Written codes scarcely altered the situation; copies would be few and far between, and still mostly in the custody of the priests. Whatever drawbacks arise from attaching supreme religious authority to a printed book were multiplied a thousandfold when codes could only be copied. But, in the New Israel, men's spiritual life

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. vi. 5, 6.

would not be at the mercy of pen, ink, and paper, of scribe and priest. The man who had a book and could read would no longer be able, with the self-importance of exclusive knowledge, to bid his less fortunate brethren to know Jehovah. He Himself would be the one teacher, and His instruction would fall, like the sunshine and the rain, upon all hearts alike.

And yet again Israel is assured that past sin shall not hinder the fulfilment of this glorious vision :—

“For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.”

Recurring to the general topic of the Restoration of Israel, the prophet affixes the double seal of two solemn Divine asseverations. Of old, Jehovah had promised Noah : “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”<sup>1</sup> Now He promises that while sun and moon and stars and sea continue in their appointed order, Israel shall not cease from being a nation. And, again, Jehovah will not cast off Israel on account of its sin till the height of heaven can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gen. viii. 22 (J.).

<sup>2</sup> Verses 35-37 occur in the LXX. in the order 37, 35, 36. They are considered by many critics to be a later addition. The most remarkable feature of the paragraph is the clause translated by the Authorised Version “which divideth [Revised Version, text “stirreth up,” margin “stilleth”] the sea when the waves thereof roar ; The Lord of Hosts is His name.” This whole clause is taken word for word from Isa. li. 15, “I am Jehovah thy God, which stirreth up,” etc. It seems clear that either this clause or 35-37 as a whole were added by an editor acquainted with II. Isaiah. The prophecy, as it stands in the Masoretic text, is concluded by a detailed description of the site of the restored Jerusalem. The contrast between the glorious vision of the New Israel and these architectural specifications is almost grotesque.



Verses 38-40 are regarded by many as a later addition ; and even if they are by Jeremiah, they form an independent prophecy and have no connection with the rest of the chapter. Our knowledge of the geographical points mentioned is not sufficient to enable us to define the site assigned to the restored city. The point of verse 40 is that the most unclean districts of the ancient city shall partake of the sanctity of the New Jerusalem.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### *RESTORATION—V. REVIEW*

xxx.—xxxiii.

IN reviewing these chapters we must be careful not to suppose that Jeremiah knew all that would ultimately result from his teaching. When he declared that the conditions of the New Covenant would be written, not in a few parchments, but on every heart, he laid down a principle which involved the most characteristic teaching of the New Testament and the Reformers, and which might seem to justify extreme mysticism. When we read these prophecies in the light of history, they seem to lead by a short and direct path to the Pauline doctrines of Faith and Grace. Constraining grace is described in the words: "I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me."<sup>1</sup> Justification by faith instead of works substitutes the response of the soul to the Spirit of God for conformity to a set of external regulations—the writing on the heart for the carving of ordinances on stone. Yet, as Newton's discovery of the law of gravitation did not make him aware of all that later astronomers have discovered, so Jeremiah did not anticipate Paul and Augustine, Luther and Calvin: he was only their forerunner. Still less did he intend to

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<sup>1</sup> xxxii. 40.

affirm all that has been taught by the Brothers of the Common Life or the Society of Friends. We have followed the Epistle to the Hebrews in interpreting his prophecy of the New Covenant as abrogating the Mosaic code and inaugurating a new departure upon entirely different lines. This view is supported by his attitude towards the Temple, and especially the Ark. At the same time we must not suppose that Jeremiah contemplated the summary and entire abolition of the previous dispensation. He simply delivers his latest message from Jehovah, without bringing its contents into relation with earlier truth, without indeed waiting to ascertain for himself how the old and the new were to be combined. But we may be sure that the Divine writing on the heart would have included much that was already written in Deuteronomy, and that both books and teachers would have had their place in helping men to recognise and interpret the inner leadings of the Spirit.

In rising from the perusal of these chapters the reader is tempted to use the prophet's words with a somewhat different meaning: "I awaked and looked about me, and felt that I had had a pleasant dream."<sup>1</sup> Renan, with cynical frankness, heads a chapter on such prophecies with the title "Pious Dreams." While Jeremiah's glowing utterances rivet our attention, the gracious words fall like balm upon our aching hearts, and we seem, like the Apostle, caught up into Paradise. But as soon as we try to connect our visions with any realities, past, present, or in prospect, there comes a rude awakening. The restored community attained to no New Covenant, but was only found worthy of a

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<sup>1</sup> xxxi. 26.

fresh edition of the written code. Instead of being committed to the guidance of the ever-present Spirit of Jehovah, they were placed under a rigid and elaborate system of externals—"carnal ordinances, concerned with meats and drinks and divers washings, imposed until a time of reformation."<sup>1</sup> They still remained under the covenant "from Mount Sinai, bearing children unto bondage, which is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to the Jerusalem that now is: for she is in bondage with her children."<sup>2</sup>

For these bondservants of the letter, there arose no David, no glorious Scion of the ancient stock. For a moment the hopes of Zechariah rested on Zerubbabel, but this Branch quickly withered away and was forgotten. We need not underrate the merits and services of Ezra and Nehemiah, of Simon the Just and Judas Maccabæus; and yet we cannot find any one of them who answers to the Priestly King of Jeremiah's visions. The new Growth of Jewish royalty came to an ignominious end in Aristobulus, Hyrcanus, and the Herods, Antichrists rather than Messiahs.

The Reunion of long-divided Israel is for the most part a misnomer; there was no healing of the wound, and the offending member was cut off.

Even now, when the leaven of the Kingdom has been working in the lump of humanity for nearly two thousand years, any suggestion that these chapters are realised in Modern Christianity would seem cruel irony. Renan accuses Christianity of having quickly forgotten the programme which its Founder borrowed from the prophets, and of having become a religion like other religions, a religion of priests and sacrifices, of external

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ix. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. iv. 24, 25.

observances and superstitions.<sup>1</sup> It is sometimes asserted that Protestants lack faith and courage to trust to any law written on the heart, and cling to a printed book, as if there were no Holy Spirit—as if the Branch of David had borne fruit once for all, and Christ were dead. The movement for Christian Reunion seems thus far chiefly to emphasise the feuds that make the Church a kingdom divided against itself.

But we must not allow the obvious shortcomings of Christendom to blind us to brighter aspects of truth. Both in the Jews of the Restoration and in the Church of Christ we have a real fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecies. The fulfilment is no less real because it is utterly inadequate. Prophecy is a guide-post and not a mile-stone; it shows the way to be trodden, not the duration of the journey. Jews and Christians have fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecies because they have advanced by the road along which he pointed towards the spiritual city of his vision. The "pious dreams" of a little group of enthusiasts have become the ideals and hopes of humanity. Even Renan ranks himself among the disciples of Jeremiah: "The seed sown in religious tradition by inspired Israelites will not perish; all of us who seek a God without priests, a revelation without prophets, a covenant written in the heart, are in many respects the disciples of these ancient fanatics (*ces vieux égarés*)."<sup>2</sup>

The Judaism of the Return, with all its faults and shortcomings, was still an advance in the direction Jeremiah had indicated. However ritualistic the Pentateuch may seem to us, it was far removed from exclusive trust in ritual. Where the ancient Israelite had relied upon correct observance of the forms of his sanctuary,

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire du Peuple d'Israel*, iii., 340.

<sup>2</sup> Renan, iii., 340.

the Torah of Ezra introduced a large moral and spiritual element, which served to bring the soul into direct fellowship with Jehovah. "Pity and humanity are pushed to their utmost limits, always of course in the bosom of the family of Israel."<sup>1</sup> The Torah moreover included the great commands to love God and man, which once for all placed the religion of Israel on a spiritual basis. If the Jews often attached more importance to the letter and form of Revelation than to its substance, and were more careful for ritual and external observances than for inner righteousness, we have no right to cast a stone at them.

It is a curious phenomenon that after the time of Ezra the further developments of the Torah were written no longer on parchment, but, in a certain sense, on the heart. The decisions of the rabbis interpreting the Pentateuch, "the fence which they made round the law," were not committed to writing, but learnt by heart and handed down by oral tradition. Possibly this custom was partly due to Jeremiah's prophecy. It is a strange illustration of the way in which theology sometimes wrests the Scriptures to its own destruction, that the very prophecy of the triumph of the spirit over the letter was made of none effect by a literal interpretation.

Nevertheless, though Judaism moved only a very little way towards Jeremiah's ideal, yet it did move, its religion was distinctly more spiritual than that of ancient Israel. Although Judaism claimed finality and did its best to secure that no future generation should make further progress, yet in spite of, nay, even by means of, Pharisee and Sadducee, the Jews were pre-

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<sup>1</sup> Renan, iii., 425.

pared to receive and transmit that great resurrection of prophetic teaching which came through Christ.

If even Judaism did not altogether fail to conform itself to Jeremiah's picture of the New Israel, clearly Christianity must have shaped itself still more fully according to his pattern. In the Old Testament both the idea and the name of a "New Covenant,"<sup>1</sup> superseding that of Moses, are peculiar to Jeremiah, and the New Testament consistently represents the Christian dispensation as a fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy. Besides the express and detailed application in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ instituted the Lord's Supper as the Sacrament of His New Covenant-- "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood";<sup>2</sup> and St. Paul speaks of himself as "a minister of the New Covenant."<sup>3</sup> Christianity has not been unworthy of the claim made on its behalf by its Founder, but has realised, at any rate in some measure, the visible peace, prosperity, and unity of Jeremiah's New Israel, as well as the spirituality of his New Covenant. Christendom has its hideous blots of misery and sin, but, on the whole, the standard of material comfort and intellectual culture has been raised to a high average throughout the bulk of a vast population. Internal order and international concord have made enormous strides since the time of Jeremiah. If an ancient Israelite could

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<sup>1</sup> We have the idea of a spiritual covenant in Isa. lix. 21, "This is My covenant with them: . . . My spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, . . . from henceforth and for ever"; but nothing is said as to a *new* covenant.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxii. 20; I Cor. xi. 25. The word "new" is omitted by Codd. Sin. and Vat. and the R.V. in Matt. xxvi. 28 and Mark xiv. 24.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 6.

witness the happy security of a large proportion of English workmen and French peasants, he would think that many of the predictions of his prophets had been fulfilled. But the advance of large classes to a prosperity once beyond the dreams of the most sanguine only brings out in darker relief the wretchedness of their less fortunate brethren. In view of the growing knowledge and enormous resources of modern society, any toleration of its cruel wrongs is an unpardonable sin. Social problems are doubtless urgent because a large minority are miserable, but they are rendered still more urgent by the luxury of many and the comfort of most. The high average of prosperity shows that we fail to right our social evils, not for want of power, but for want of devotion. Our civilisation is a Dives, at whose gate Lazarus often finds no crumbs.

Again Christ's Kingdom of the New Covenant has brought about a larger unity. We have said enough elsewhere on the divisions of the Church. Doubtless we are still far from realising the ideals of chapter xxxi., but, at any rate, they have been recognised as supreme, and have worked for harmony and fellowship in the world. Ephraim and Judah are forgotten, but the New Covenant has united into brotherhood a worldwide array of races and nations. There are still divisions in the Church, and a common religion will not always do away with national enmities; but in spite of all, the influence of our common Christianity has done much to knit the nations together and promote mutual amity and goodwill. The vanguard of the modern world has accepted Christ as its standard and ideal, and has thus attained an essential unity, which is not destroyed by minor differences and external divisions.



And, finally, the promise that the New Covenant should be written on the heart is far on the way towards fulfilment. If Roman and Greek orthodoxy interposes the Church between the soul and Christ, yet the inspiration claimed for the Church to-day is, at any rate in some measure, that of the living Spirit of Christ speaking to the souls of living men. On the other hand, a predilection for Rabbinical methods of exegesis sometimes interferes with the influence and authority of the Bible. Yet in reality there is no serious attempt to take away the key of knowledge or to forbid the individual soul to receive the direct teaching of the Holy Ghost. The Reformers established the right of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures; and the interpretation of the Library of Sacred Literature, the spiritual harvest of a thousand years, affords ample scope for reverent development of our knowledge of God.

One group of Jeremiah's prophecies has indeed been entirely fulfilled. In Christ, God has raised up a Branch of Righteousness unto David, and through Him judgment and righteousness are wrought in the earth.

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## EPILOGUE



## CHAPTER XXXV

### *JEREMIAH AND CHRIST*

"Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from amongst thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken."—DEUT. xviii. 15.

"Jesus . . . asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah: and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."—MATT. xvi. 13, 14.

ENGLISH feeling about Jeremiah has long ago been summed up and stereotyped in the single word "jeremiad." The contempt and dislike which this word implies are partly due to his supposed authorship of Lamentations; but, to say the least, the Book of Jeremiah is not sufficiently cheerful to remove the impression created by the linked wailing, long drawn out, which has been commonly regarded as an appendix to its prophecies. We can easily understand the unpopularity of the prophet of doom in modern Christendom. Such prophets are seldom acceptable, except to the enemies of the people whom they denounce; and even ardent modern advocates of Jew-baiting would not be entirely satisfied with Jeremiah—they would resent his patriotic sympathy with sinful and suffering Judah. Most modern Christians have ceased to regard the Jews as monsters of iniquity, whose chastisement should give profound satisfaction to every sincere believer. History has recorded but few of the

crimes which provoked and justified our prophet's fierce indignation, and those of which we do read repel our interest by a certain lack of the picturesque, so that we do not take the trouble to realise their actual and intense wickedness. Ahab is a by-word, but how many people know anything about Ishmael ben Nethaniah? The cruelty of the nobles and the unctuous cant of their prophetic allies are forgotten in—nay, they seem almost atoned for by—the awful calamities that befell Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah's memory may even be said to have suffered from the speedy and complete fulfilment of his prophecies. The national ruin was a triumphant vindication of his teaching, and his disciples were eager to record every utterance in which he had foretold the coming doom. Probably the book, in its present form, gives an exaggerated impression of the stress which Jeremiah laid upon this topic.

Moreover, while the prophet's life is essentially tragic, its drama lacks an artistic close and climax. Again and again Jeremiah took his life in his hand, but the good confession which he witnessed for so long does not culminate in the crown of martyrdom. A final scene like the death of John the Baptist would have won our sympathy and conciliated our criticism.

We thus gather that the popular attitude towards Jeremiah rests on a superficial appreciation of his character and work; it is not difficult to discern that a careful examination of his history establishes important claims on the veneration and gratitude of the Christian Church.

For Judaism was not slow to pay her tribute of admiration and reverence to Jeremiah as to a Patron Saint and Confessor. His prophecy of the Restoration of Israel is appealed to in Ezra and Daniel; and the

Hebrew Chronicler, who says as little as he can of Isaiah, adds to the references made by the Book of Kings to Jeremiah. We have already seen that apocryphal legends clustered round his honoured name. He was credited with having concealed the Tabernacle and the Ark in the caves of Sinai.<sup>1</sup> On the eve of a great victory, he appeared to Judas Maccabæus, in a vision, as "a man distinguished by grey hairs, and a majestic appearance; but something wonderful and exceedingly magnificent was the grandeur about him," and was made known to Judas as a "lover of the brethren, who prayeth much for the people and for the holy city, to wit, Jeremiah the prophet of God. And Jeremiah stretching forth his right hand delivered over to Judas a sword of gold."<sup>2</sup> The Son of Sirach does not fail to include Jeremiah in his praise of famous men;<sup>3</sup> and there is an apocryphal epistle purporting to be written by our prophet.<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy that in the New Testament Jeremiah is only mentioned by name in the Judaistic Gospel of St. Matthew.

In the Christian Church, notwithstanding the lack of popular sympathy, earnest students of the prophet's life and words have ranked him with some of the noblest characters of history. A modern writer enumerates as amongst those with whom he has been compared Cassandra, Phocion, Demosthenes, Dante, Milton, and Savonarola.<sup>5</sup> The list might easily be enlarged, but another parallel has been drawn which has supreme claims on our consideration. The Jews in New Testa-

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Macc. ii. 1-8.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Macc. xv. 12-16.

<sup>3</sup> Ecclus. xlix. 6, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Sometimes appended to the Book of Baruch as a sixth chapter.

<sup>5</sup> *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Jeremiah."

ment times looked for the return of Elijah or Jeremiah to usher in Messiah's reign; and it seemed to some among them that the character and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth identified him with the ancient prophet who had been commissioned "to root out, pull down, destroy and throw down, to build and to plant." The suggested comparison has often been developed, but undue stress has been laid on such accidental and external circumstances as the prophet's celibacy and the statement that he was "sanctified from the womb." The discussion of such details does not greatly lend itself to edification. But it has also been pointed out that there is an essential resemblance between the circumstances and mission of Jeremiah and his Divine Successor, and to this some little space may be devoted.

Jeremiah and our Lord appeared at similar crises in the history of Israel and of revealed religion. The prophet foretold the end of the Jewish monarchy, the destruction of the First Temple and of ancient Jerusalem; Christ, in like manner, announced the end of the restored Israel, the destruction of the Second Temple and of the newer Jerusalem. In both cases the doom of the city was followed by the dispersion and captivity of the people. At both eras the religion of Jehovah was supposed to be indissolubly bound up with the Temple and its ritual; and, as we have seen, Jeremiah, like Stephen and Paul and our Lord Himself, was charged with blasphemy because he predicted its coming ruin. The prophet, like Christ, was at variance with the prevalent religious sentiment of his time and with what claimed to be orthodoxy. Both were regarded and treated by the great body of contemporary religious teachers as dangerous and intolerable heretics; and

their heresy, as we have said, was practically one and the same. To the champions of the Temple, their teaching seemed purely destructive, an irreverent attack upon fundamental doctrines and indispensable institutions. But the very opposite was the truth; they destroyed nothing but what deserved to perish. Both in Jeremiah's time and in our Lord's, men tried to assure themselves of the permanence of erroneous dogmas and obsolete rites by proclaiming that these were of the essence of Divine Revelation. In either age to succeed in this effort would have been to plunge the world into spiritual darkness: the light of Hebrew prophecy would have been extinguished by the Captivity, or, again, the hope of the Messiah would have melted away like a mirage, when the legions of Titus and Hadrian dispelled so many Jewish dreams. But before the catastrophe came, Jeremiah had taught men that Jehovah's Temple and city were destroyed of His own set purpose, because of the sins of His people; there was no excuse for supposing that He was discredited by the ruin of the place where He had once chosen to set His Name. Thus the Captivity was not the final page in the history of Hebrew religion, but the opening of a new chapter. In like manner Christ and His Apostles, more especially Paul, finally dissociated Revelation from the Temple and its ritual, so that the light of Divine truth was not hidden under the bushel of Judaism, but shone forth upon the whole world from the many-branched candlestick of the Universal Church.

Again, in both cases, not only was ancient faith rescued from the ruin of human corruption and commentary, but the purging away of the old leaven made room for a positive statement of new teaching. Jeremiah announced a new covenant—that is, a formal and com-

plete change in the conditions and method of man's service to God and God's beneficence to men. The ancient Church, with its sanctuary, its clergy, and its ritual, was to be superseded by a new order, without sanctuary, clergy, or ritual, wherein every man would enjoy immediate fellowship with his God. This great ideal was virtually ignored by the Jews of the Restoration, but it was set forth afresh by Christ and His Apostles. The "New Covenant" was declared to be ratified by His sacrifice, and was confirmed anew at every commemoration of His death. We read in John iv. 21-23: "The hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father. . . . The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth."

Thus when we confess that the Church is built upon the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, we have to recognise that to this foundation Jeremiah's ministry supplied indispensable elements, alike by its positive and in its negative parts. This fact was manifest even to Renan, who fully shared the popular prejudices against Jeremiah. Nothing short of Christianity, according to him, is the realisation of the prophet's dream: "Il ajoute un facteur essentiel à l'œuvre humaine; Jérémie est, avant Jean-Baptiste, l'homme qui a le plus contribué à la fondation du Christianisme; il doit compter, malgré la distance des siècles, entre les précurseurs immédiats de Jésus." <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Hist.*, iii., 251, 305.









