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A table of contents for Bibliotheca Sacra can be found here:

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BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

ARTICLE I.

ISRAEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY.

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THE prophets and psalmists of Israel were no theologians, yet their attitude toward God was a practical statement of a great theology. In like manner the teaching of the prophets respecting God's dealing with the nations was practically a philosophy of history. This philosophy of history was therefore due to their religion; and Christianity, which has the same conception of God, has the same philosophy of history. It contributed to the spiritual power of the religion of Israel; it is an important part of the spiritual power of Christianity, which is the inevitable fulfillment of Israel's religion. It therefore belongs to all time, and it is especially worthy to be considered at this time. Inasmuch as this philosophy of history is found most fully in the Old Testament, the Old Testament presentation of it is chiefly to be considered.

I.

The prime feature of the philosophy of history was Jehovah's purpose in history. He had a definite purpose in history toward which all events were made to tend. This purpose was the establishment of an ideal state of society

Vol. LXXII. No. 287, 1

which should include all nations. This was to come to pass through a long period of development. The fortunes of Israel and this development were inextricably bound together. The future of Israel was to be prosperous and all-glorious. Israel's future was to be an ideal future. The earlier statements of the ideal gave few explicit details, and little as regards their ethical character. Experience taught the prophets that evil in any form was destructive of an ideal state of society. It became more and more evident that the misery of any part of society prevents the realization of a perfect society. Yet the future belongs to those idealists who believe in the coming of a society from which human misery shall be wholly absent.

It was in this way that Israel's philosophy of history and religion came into vital contact. Moral evil is at the root ofall social evils. Injustice to one's fellow man is the cause of the largest share of the sufferings of men. For this reason the prophets wax eloquent in denunciation of evils:--

"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 goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land. There is nought but swearing and breaking faith, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery; they break out, and blood toucheth blood " (Hos. iv. 1, 2).

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow... Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; every one loveth bribes, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them" (Isa. i. 16-17, 23).

The prophets go to the very root of the matter. They teach that these evils are due to godlessness. It is because Israel forsakes the true service of Jehovah that injustice

Men will do justly only when they love mercy, and comes. walk humbly with their God. This was clearly perceived by the great prophets. The only safeguard against unjust conduct in a man was the fear of Jehovah. It must be a fear of God that could not tolerate wicked balances, deceitful weights, extortion from the weak and defenseless, oppression of the widow and fatherkess, and selfish luxury. It must be a fear of God which makes a man forever grieve whenever he sees human wrong or calamity, which makes him rejoice when justice and righteousness prevail. The great sorrow of Israel's teachers was that Israel gave itself so largely to those things which could have no place in a perfect society. We find in Israel's philosophy the conviction that God purposes to bring to pass in Israel a perfect state of society. We find the clear recognition that the Israel then present was far short of the ideal which God meant to realize in the Israel of the future. Further, the root of the failure to realize the ideal lay in the lack of true religion. How shall this true religion which is the indispensable condition for the perfect society prevail? Such religion is lacking because Israel did not know that it was Jehovah who gave her corn and wine and oil, and who multiplied her gold and silver. How should this knowledge be brought to Israel? She was to be taught by affliction.

11.

A secondary feature of the philosophy of history is the function of the great world powers, such as Assyria. They were used by Jehovah to teach Israel to remember Jehovah as the Giver of all blessing. Hence prophecies of calamities which should be a punishment for those who forgot God and turned to idolatry and consequent immoralities and social injustice. The ideal society will surely come to pass in the latter days. But there is a straight and narrow gate into these latter days. All elements in Israel's life discordant with God's ideal society must be purified out of her life. This great purification is known among the prophets as the "day of Jehovah." It is a great historical crisis, when the forces quietly working in human history come into clear and even spectacular manifestation. The condition of Europe during the past year has been a prophetic day of Jehovah. One prophet sketched it thus:—

"The great day of Jehovah is near, it is near and hasteth greatly. even the voice of the day of Jehovah; the mighty man crieth there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess. a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm, against the fortified cities, and against the high battlements" (Zepl. 1. 14-15).

We have endured a generation of mawkish sentimentalizing about the crude Hebraistic conception of Jehovah which could talk about his wrath, his fury, his jealousy. What the prophet meant by it is now seen written larger than ever before in human history. In the holy love of God there is a wrath at human sin; and Jehovah gives the nations over to the results of their sin, in order to purify them. Just as Israel's conception of God's character gave character to the ideal society of the future, so Israel's conception of God's relation to the world dominated Israel's conception of the progress of history. Israel and other nations might work to bring to pass this purpose of God, or they might attempt to bring their own purposes to pass. They would contribute willingly or unwillingly to God's purpose. Jehovah the God of history is using the nations of this world to bring to pass his sovereign purpose of reigning over all the earth in righteousness and peace. It is not in the mind of human rulers to be used by a divine ruler. Israel's teachers gained the knowledge of the fact that, willing or unwilling, the mightiest kings were but Jehovah's servants. A Pharaoh might say, "Who is Jehovah, that I should hearken unto his voice to let Israel go?" He was made to feel the might of Jehovah, and then he was told: "In very deed for this cause have I made thee to stand, to show thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Ex. ix. 16). This, then, was the significance in history of the Pharaoh of the days of Moses. The principle is thus given: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the residue of wrath shalt thou gird upon thee" (Ps. .lxxvi. 10).

What is the significance of Assyria in human history? For a thousand years it existed a great kingdom. During a thousand years it domineered and plundered neighbors in all directions. Its meaning for all time is thus declared:—

"Ho Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, the staff in whose hand is mine indignation! I will send him against a profane nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbelt he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few. For he saith. Are not my princes all of them kings? Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?

"Wherefore it shall come to pass, that, when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he hath said, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I have understanding: and I have removed the bounds of the peoples, and have robbed their treasures, and like a valiant man I have brought down them that sit on thrones: and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the peoples; and as one gathereth eggs that are forsaken, have I gathered all the earth: and there was none that moved the wing, or that opened the mouth, or chirped.

"Shall the axe boast itself against him that he weth therewith? shall the saw magnify itself against him that wieldeth it? as if a rod should wield them that lift it up, or as if a staff should lift up him that is not wood?" (Isa. x. 5-15).

Here is the warning for every people that rely upon brute force. What was the divine estimate of Babylon?

"Sit thou silent, and get thee into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for thou shalt no more be called the mistress of kingdoms. I was wroth with my people, I profaned mine inheritance, and gave them into thy hand: thou didst show them no mercy; upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke. And thou saidst, I shall be mistress for ever; so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end thereof.

"Now therefore hear this, thou that art given to pleasures, that sittest securely, that sayest in thy heart, I am, and there is none else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: but these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood; in their full measure shall they come upon thee, in the multitude of thy sorceries, and the great abundance of thine enchantments. For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness; thou hast said, None seeth me; thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thy heart, I am, and there is none else besides me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know the dawning thereof: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it away: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou knowest not" (Isa. xivii. 5-11).

Jehovah uses the nations of the earth, even the mightiest, as his instruments to accomplish his ends. If they do evil, they will be punished. So far as they serve his purpose he uses them. When that purpose is accomplished he flings them aside, turns their energies to their own destruction. Drunk with success, the great empires Assyria and Babylon indulged in awful cruelties. Their bas-reliefs flaunt them before the eyes of our generation. These empires knew no power above them. It is conceivable that men in them had some misgivings about their practices. But their power was such that sentence against their evil works was not executed speedily, and their heart was fully set in them to do evil. Nevertheless, Israel's philosophy of history became so completely wrought into the thought of Israel that even the pessimist Qoheleth could say:—

"If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and the violent taking away of justice and righteousness in a province, marvel not at the matter; for one higher than the high regardeth, and there are higher than they" (Eccl. v. 8).

Hear the ring of triumph in the words "and there are higher than they"!

Judgment on the great world empires and their ruin is not the final word of Hebrew prophecy. Israel and they are alike to become parts of the kingdom of Jehovah after their discipline.

"The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and they that vex Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim" (Isa. xi. 13).

"In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; for that Jehovah of hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance" (Isa. xix. 24 f.).

"And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountains of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And he will judge between the nations, and will decide concerning many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. ii. 2-4).

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Consider now the remarkable fact that it was Israel which gained this philosophy of history. It was one of the weakest of nations. On the one side of it was Egypt, which had been one of the mightiest of world powers of even thousands of vears. North of Israel were the remains of the Hittite Empire. A little farther east, and the successor to the old Hittite Empire, was the Assyrian Empire, then the Babylonian, and later that of the Medes and Persians. Before these peoples, Israel seemed, relatively, as helpless as Belgium alone against Germany. Yet in Israel was the religion of the future, the faith that its Jehovah was the true God, that he alone ruled the nations, that the gods named and worshiped by the mightiest world powers had no power, that the only God who had power was the God of this tiny people, scorned and sometimes crushed by the great empires; and that this God was using the greatest of these nations as his tools, the greatest kings as his bond servants. Israel's philosophy of history was wholly a spiritual one. The goal of the development of Israel was spiritual. Beginning in the bosom of a materialistic polytheism it gradually dropped one unspiritual element of religion after another until it culminated in the person of Jesus Christ. It is this spiritual character of the religion of Israel which has made Israel the most significant people in the history of the world. Does any one doubt this statement? Let him remove from the life of the world everything due to Israel, and then estimate the relative value of what remains. What is the meaning of Israel's significance in the world's history? It is that spiritual power is the one power which makes a nation great.

Extent of territory, physical bulk, material wealth, brute force, never made any contribution of appreciable value to the power of Israel or to its value in the world's history. On the contrary, they are at times in startling contrast to the forces in Israel's history which were contributing to the development of its true greatness. The power of Israel, then, is spiritual. What gave it this power? It was not territorial greatness. The people of Israel had a smaller country than either Holland or Belgium, little if any larger than New Hampshire. Under David they subjected additional territory, not more than four times as great as their own. This was held little more than a generation, and then the empire of David disintegrated, losing all conquests, and it was divided into two hostile kingdoms.

Was it because of great influence on contemporary peoples? The history of the peoples adjacent to ancient Israel record or show but slight influence from Israel. Israel's direct influence upon the world has been almost wholly through its matured form, i.e. through Christianity.

Was it because of a history filled with great national achievements, such as men love to glorify? Israel's external history had comparatively few achievements of this sort. Israel had a race history of more than a thousand years. The achievements of the establishment of the Davidic kingdom, which lasted two scant generations, a few successful campaigns against invaders, and the glory of the Maccabean heroic age do not sum up enough national achievements to entitle Israel to great power upon contemporaries or subsequent generations. On the contrary, Israel existed some generations as a collection of scattered tribes without national spirit, later it lived in two mutually hostile kingdoms side by side, harried more or less constantly by neighbors, until first the larger kingdom was conquered and a large part of the race taken away into exile, and a hundred years later the smaller kingdom underwent the same fate. For four hundred years the race was subjected to the rule of world monarchies whose significance was chiefly that of brute force. The flame of national life blazed up in the Maccabean time, dying down within a generation, and in the embers little was left but the heat of sordid ambitions.

The great value of Israel lay in the fact that it made Christianity possible. It was the preparatory stage, the preliminary stage; in its very nature it ever pointed forward to Christianity, which was the only possible fulfillment of it. Without Israel there would have been no spiritual preparation for the Gospel.

What, then, is the value of material bulk, of force, if the most significant race in the world's history has all its significance apart from those forms of greatness which appeal to the senses, except in those struggles to perpetuate its physical existence? What is the meaning of physical greatness if Israel has so secure a place in the life of the world that it cannot be lost even though the physical descendants of old Israel were obliterated from the human race? Indeed, its spiritual power is such that if it could be obliterated from human knowledge and memory we should lapse into barbarism. Material bulk, physical force, bigness, have no value in themselves, but simply from the spiritual ends of which they may be servants.

The value of the spirit in nations is seen elsewhere also. Two other peoples have left a profound impress on modern civilization. Their homes were Greece and Italy. The centers of their life were Athens and Rome.

The significance of Greece did not culminate in the conquests of Alexander. These enlarged the sphere in which Greek culture was operative. They also gave the first great illustration in human history of the intensity of the power which the development of the free spirit of man could place in the hand of a man who was able to coördinate diverse and even discordant elements. The force and power of the free spirit of man was seen at Marathon; devotion to duty and country, at Thermopylæ. Salamis told the world of the might of free men when arrayed against brute masses under the control of a despot. The freedom which was the breath of life to a Greek was merely that expression of the human spirit which was indispensable for his varied self-expression in art and in thought and literature. This freedom was not created at Marathon, it was not improvised at Salamis. Already for centuries, as seen from Homer to Archilochus and Simonides, the Greek spirit was one of free and unfettered self-expres-Salamis was the reply of Greece to the Persian's desion. mand that Greece surrender her liberties. Then came that flowering of Greek genius in art, literature and thought which ceased when Greek culture was subordinated to the Macedonian phalanxes. The literature of Greece from Æschvlus to Demosthenes and Aristotle, and her art, are expressions of the human soul beside which all Greek empires or kingdoms have but the slightest significance for human history.

Thus with Rome. In the days of the Republic, oligarchical though it was, there was a sort of freedom. Its choicest fruit was the ideal of justice — impartial law, impartial justice. No choicer contribution than this has come to us from Rome. Her breadth of territory, the strength of her legions — the roads upon which they marched from the Firth of Forth to Upper Egypt, from the Euphrates to the Atlantic in both Europe and Africa, from the Danube and Rhine rivers to the Desert of Sahara — these may kindle our admiration. They all belong to past history. Her idea of law belongs to all time. Here our generation is her debtor, and so must be every generation to come. Even as her language is woven into ours, so is her great thought of law an abiding legacy in European civilization. The real significance of Rome, of Greece, was spiritual. The material framework of life had its value in the fact that it gave the spiritual forces room and protection for their development. Does not the magnificence of the Roman Empire, its extent and power, count for greatness? No more than the forgotten greatness of the Assyrian Empire, with its deification of brute force. The great glory of the Roman Empire is not even its law, but the fact that, in spite of its own will, it gave an opportunity for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to run to and fro until it had encircled the Mediterranean from the Euphrates to the Atlantic.

Physical force achieves greatness only when it is the direct expression of a great spiritual reality. Such was the intensity of force with which Israel defended the purity of its religion, not least in the heroic age of the Maccabees. Such was the might of freedom when the Greeks shattered the forces of the Persian kings. Such was the spiritual value of the physical energies of the Hollanders when they began their eighty years' war to defend their spiritual freedom and ended by securing their civil liberty. When that contest began, the oppressor, Spain, not only bulked the largest of all the nations, but also controlled greater resources than those of any other nation on the globe. Spain was the exponent of the militarism of that century. In very truth God has written into human history, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith Jehovah." No empire was ever mighty enough to make itself secure by unrighteous methods. It is a superficial Christianity which fails to hold strongly Israel's Philosophy of History. It fails to apprehend God. Because

Israel's ideal of a perfect society is derided as Utopian, because the truth of Israel's conception of the valuelessness of brute force is denied, immeasurable calamity has befallen Christendom.

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It is not to the present purpose to discuss the sins and calamities of any nation which has bowed down to the false god of brute force. That is not the only form of materialism by which Israel's philosophy of history is set at naught. A false god is served in our land. Its worship is made evident by the spirit that denounces Israel's ideal of society as unpractical. This spirit is blind, so that it fails to see that nothing is practical in this world except those ideals which are God's purpose for mankind. Let us measure America by this standard, i.e. by Israel's philosophy of history. By naught else can the greatness of nations be truly estimated. Are we so conforming to God's purpose that we are a great nation? We must think seriously. This is one of the great days of Jehovah. Across the ocean nations are drinking from the hand of Jehovah the cup of his wrath, the goblet cup of staggering, and they are draining it. Fifty years ago we were draining that same cup. So shall we do again unless we take anew to our heart Israel's philosophy of history. The extent of our territory is neither greatness nor a guarantee of permanent existence. Wealth in material resources is merely an opportunity for a people to show greatness by the right use of them. The development of material resources may show great qualities in a people, but cannot make a nation great. Many times the acquisition of a great amount of money simply increases the opportunity to manifest the littleness and even meanness of soul, which is the only real poverty of a man. That is what gives the sting to the phrase nouveoux riches.

369

Thus the seeming greatness of America will simply make more extensive a display of our real littleness if we be not great in the devotion to God's purpose. If we do not hold ourselves in line with that purpose, we shall be flung aside and become a mere memory in history, like Assyria and Babylon. All our magnificent resources will go for naught unless they be used to carry on the redemptive work of God by which alone the perfect society of the future shall be brought to pass. We need to come to the cross of Christ as the key to the life and philosophy of Israel. We need to keep constantly before us the ideal of the prophets and poets of Israel, who taught that there shall be nothing hurtful or destructive in the earth, for the knowledge of Jehovah shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea; that righteousness alone exalts a nation; that truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

Look down from this ideal to that commercialism which has made itself so manifest in the life of this country. It regards business as war, and leaves in its wake the dead, crippled, widowed and orphaned as ruthlessly as war in the fields of Europe has done. It drags the child into the factory before he has begun to know any of the joy of existence, and it renders it impossible for him to find out what it means to grow up into God's image. It takes the girl and crushes out the possibility of normal motherhood. It takes the mother and condemns her to long exhausting hours of labor, so that she cannot give the child, born or unborn, its rightful due. It seizes the man and compels him to work for too small a share. of the fruit of his toil, in order to build up colossal fortunes. In these fortunes how much is the proper recompense for service rendered to mankind, and how much is loot extorted by advantage of position and in seeming conformity to law?

How many fortunes are built up, and how many great enterprises are run, on the *practical* theory that a dollar is worth more than a man!

Once again are the words fitting:

"Jehovah will enter into judgment with the elders of his people, and the princes thereof: It is ye that have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses: what mean ye that ye crush my people, and grind the face of the poor? saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts" (Isa. iii. 14-15).

"For the vineyard of Jebovah of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness, but, behold, a cry.

"Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land!....

".... Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" (Isa. v. 7-8, 20-21).

How much need is there to heed the old Hebrew statute:

"And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not do him wrong. The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the homeborn among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were sojourners in the land of Egypt: I am Jehovah your God" (Lev. xix. 33-34)?

Thank God that not everywhere in our land is the theory held that business is war. Rather the Gospel, the good news, is proclaimed that it is mutual service, mutual helpfulness. Thank God, this land is one of free speech, and the voice of the prophet is not smothered. Indeed, so highly do we prize our freedom of speech that we permit its abuse to become frightful before it will be checked. However much commercialism may get into the councils of government, it cannot become intrenched as militarism across the ocean, and it cannot get many of the teachers in our great educational institutions to plead its cause.

In this time of need the Old Testament might render us greater service than it does. True, it has been held before us during the generation past, but too largely only in an academic way. The use of the Old Testament often reminds one of the child's recitation in geography concerning the Arctic Ocean. She innocently said it was chiefly of use for exploration. So the chief use of the Old Testament has often seemed for many scholars as a field for the exhibition of ingenuity for literary and historical reconstruction. Too much we have busied ourselves with superficial and secondary questions. Whatever else we did, we should not have failed to keep before us those primary and more important features of the Old Testament religion here under consideration. The New Testament incorporates these teachings of the Old Testament into itself and does not repeat overmuch. It looks forward to a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. With the kingdoms of this earth it does not concern itself overmuch, for it bases itself on the Old Testament teaching, and declares that the powers that be are ordained of God. It leaves the Old Testament to speak for it more fully. Its apocalyptic utterances restate Israel's philosophy of history. That philosophy is more plainly declared, and more readily understood, in the utterances of the Old Testament prophets.

Never in the life of mankind has the need of a sound philosophy of history been more manifest or seemed more urgent than now. Individual men and nations alike need to lay to heart the lesson, that righteousness is the only thing that will secure a nation any greatness worthy of the name. Not until the teachings of the Hebrew prophets are given their rightful place in human life will a golden age come for men. Then will commercialism cease out of business, and the spirit of mutual helpfulness replace it. Then will the nations of the earth put aside militarism and cultivate the greater heroisms of peace. Then will they put away their jealousies and envies. Then will they each learn to esteem the excellences of the other, instead of cherishing that provincialism which thinks that what is different from self is worthy of contempt, and so will they cultivate friendship and mutual esteem. Never until these elementary features of the Christian life become national as well as individual will the world become free from the well-grounded fear of the recurrence of such carnivals of brutality as recent months have witnessed.

The history of the past ten years is an adequate demonstration that nations need to be born again. Nominal Christianity is a failure. The real evangelical new birth of nations is the most urgent need of the world, for without it the philosophy of history taught by the Hebrew prophets, and essential to Christianity itself, will never be heeded. Nothing less will lead the nations to accept a true ideal of national greatness, nothing less will secure an adequate sense of national responsibility to God, nothing less will lead them to lav aside jealousies of their neighbors and overreaching policies toward them, nothing less will secure an honest attempt to practice the golden rule in international relations. Nothing less will bring to pass within nations humanitarian standards for business and in all industries, nothing less will bring about that sense of human brotherhood that is required to eliminate those social and class feelings which are destructive to the well-being of society. The present condition of the world sets the task of the minister of Christ, and challenges him as never before :---

"Who is wise, that he may understand these things? prudent, that he may know them? for the ways of Jehovah are right, and the just shall walk in them; but transgressors shall fall therein" (Hos. xiv. 9).

Vol. LXXII. No. 287. 2