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1937

## 810TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING.

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,  
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, APRIL 19TH, 1937,  
AT 4.30 P.M.

SIR CHARLES MARSTON, J.P., F.S.A., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed and signed and the HON. SECRETARY announced the election of H. H. Collette, Esq., as an Associate.

The CHAIRMAN then called on the Rev. D. E. Hart-Davies, M.A., D.D., to read his paper entitled "The Book of Jonah in the Light of Assyrian Archæology."

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### *THE BOOK OF JONAH IN THE LIGHT OF ASSYRIAN ARCHÆOLOGY.*

By THE REV. D. E. HART-DAVIES, M.A., D.D.  
(Rector of St. Thomas's Church, Edinburgh.)

THE Book of Jonah has been described by an eminent novelist as "the most beautiful story ever written in so small a compass." It is a narrative which is full of dramatic incident; it contains elements of a strikingly supernatural character; and it closes with an interlocution between Jonah and Jehovah which, advanced critics admit, touches the high-water mark of the revelation of the character of God in the old Testament Scriptures.

But is it true? That is the paramount question. Is the prophecy of Jonah an allegory, or a piece of religious fiction, of value because of the moral and spiritual lessons which it conveys; or is it the veritable record of a series of events, phenomenal in their nature, which, by their actual occurrence, provided a type and foreshadowing of the still more stupendous events associated with the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ?

The allegorical interpretation of the book is to-day widespread. Many treat the narrative as a fiction, with or without a very

slight framework of history to rest upon. By many the non-historical character of the book is regarded as indisputable. A problem of considerable magnitude, however, which confronts the modern critic is to explain how it has come to pass that, for at least twenty-one centuries, the Church of God has believed implicitly in the historical character of Jonah's mission. The place of the prophecy in the canon of the Old Testament is, in itself, proof that the ancient Jewish Church believed it to be historical and Jonah himself to be its author. In the Greek Septuagint Version, made early in the third century B.C., it occupies the same position as in the Hebrew Bible. It could not have been where it is had not the Jews who lived at least three centuries before Christ believed it to be historical. That is a fact which must not be lightly disregarded. Moreover, it is strongly supported by collateral evidence.

Philo, the Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, who was born about 20 B.C., believed, as his writings testify, in the historicity of the book. Josephus describes Jonah's mission very much as it appears in our canonical scripture. Of its historical character he evidently has no doubt. Now it is surely a great assumption on the part of certain modern scholars, without any indubitable evidence to depend upon, that Philo and Josephus, together with the translators of the Septuagint, and the compilers of the canon, were all mistaken in regarding Jonah and his mission as historical. They almost certainly had access to sources of information which have long since perished. Their testimony is surely of greater weight than any modern conjecture can be.

The Christian Church, moreover, has confirmed the Jewish tradition. From its earliest days and for eighteen centuries following, it has shown a striking consensus of belief in the historicity of this O.T. narrative. Only in quite recent years has it been seriously questioned, save by the scoffer and the sceptic. The catacombs in Rome bear striking evidence of the belief of the early Christians. No Biblical subject was more popular for mural representation in those underground cemeteries of the disciples of Jesus than that of Jonah's submergence and deliverance, as a symbol of faith and hope in the resurrection. Jerome, the greatest Bible scholar of the early Church, wrote a commentary on the book; and the sermons and writings of Irenaeus, Augustine, Chrysostom, and other Fathers abound in references which show conclusively that their belief in the historicity of

Jonah was unquestioned. Calvin, Luther, and the great Bible scholars of the Reformation period never questioned it. It is only within the past half-century that Christian theologians and preachers have arisen to do so; and that, I submit, on very slender grounds. Here, surely, it is apposite to quote the weighty words of the learned Bishop Lightfoot: "It may be that the historical sense of seventeen or eighteen centuries is larger and truer than the critical insight of a section of men in our late half-century."

But for many the most powerful testimony to the historical character of the Book of Jonah is that which proceeds directly from the lips of Jesus Christ. Towards the close of His earthly ministry it is recorded that certain unbelieving Jews came, demanding from our Lord the performance of some miracle which would once for all authenticate unmistakably His claim to Messiahship. For three years he had given signal proofs that He was sent from God. But they refused to acknowledge Him. In response to their insistent demand He uttered these extremely significant words: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet: for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea-monster; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."\* The only additional sign or portent that would be vouchsafed to them as a credential of His Divine mission would be His resurrection from the dead! In that declaration our Lord endorsed the historical character of Jonah's recorded entombment and deliverance, and pointed to the prophet's experience as a type and foreshadowing of His own death and resurrection. But a still more emphatic attestation by Jesus Christ of this Old Testament narrative follows. In reference to the persistent unbelief of the Jews, He uttered this most solemn warning: "The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it! for they repented at the preaching of Jonah: and behold, a greater than Jonah is here."†

This testimony, coming from Christ Himself, is for many quite conclusive. But several ingenious reasons have been formulated in order to dispose of its unique value. It is suggested by some

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\* St. Matt. xii, 39-49.

† xii, 41.

that the passage in the Gospels is an interpolation. Christ, they affirm, never uttered the words; they were introduced into the Gospel narrative from some extraneous source which is utterly unknown. But the manuscript evidence is of the highest character. St. Matthew's record appears also in the third Gospel with no substantial difference; and no historian of antiquity stands on a higher platform of trustworthiness than St. Luke. Both his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles will bear the strictest scrutiny by the modern historical critic. And the statements themselves are of such a nature that only the Divine Lord, we believe, could have uttered them. The theory of interpolation is destitute of a shred of evidence.

It is said again that our Lord was only speaking parabolically. Dr. Plummer, in his comment on the passage in St. Matthew, reasons thus: "Our Lord's mention of Jonah as preaching to the Ninevites does not require us to believe that the story of Jonah is history. . . . If our Lord had said, 'As the rich man killed the poor man's ewe lamb, so ye rob the fatherless and the widow,' would that have proved that Nathan's parable was literally true?" The obvious reply is to point to the significance of the "if." The fact is that our Lord never did make such a solemn asseveration upon such a flimsy foundation.

Another common plea is that Christ was making use of a piece of historical fiction, only as we might quote out of a scene in *Macbeth* or a chapter in *Pilgrim's Progress*. But it is difficult to believe that any modern preacher would court the ridicule of a congregation by uttering a warning based upon a purely fictitious example. Archdeacon Perowne put the case concisely and convincingly in the words: "Is it possible to understand a reference like this on the non-historic theory of the book of Jonah? The future Judge is speaking words of solemn warning to those who shall hereafter stand convicted at His bar. Intensely real He would make the scene in anticipation to them as it was real, as if then present, to Himself. And yet we are to suppose Him to say that imaginary persons who at the imaginary preaching of an imaginary prophet repented in imagination, shall rise up in that day and condemn the actual impenitence of those His actual hearers, that the fictitious characters of a parable shall be arraigned at the same bar with the living men of that generation."\*

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\* *Cambridge Bible*: Jonah.

A far more serious objection is presented when resort is had to the *Kenosis* theory, which deprives our Lord Christ of His authority as an absolutely trustworthy Teacher. This is a branch of the subject, however, which cannot be adequately discussed within the limits of the present paper. Those interested will find a reference to it and to other objections, such as those which relate to the linguistic peculiarities of the Hebrew text, in a book entitled *Jonah : Prophet and Patriot*,\* which I wrote a few years ago, and which has since been translated into Chinese and Arabic.

Let us now proceed to examine the O.T. narrative in the light of the precise historic background which modern Archæology affords. The book opens with the arresting statement: "Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."

Two questions immediately arise. One has reference to the historical character of the prophet himself, and the other to the precise reason for his flight "from the presence of the Lord."

As to the former let it be emphasised that Jonah was unquestionably an historical personage. He was no more a myth than was Elijah or Elisha. Only a glimpse is given us into the nature and scope of his ministry; but it suffices to provide a foundation in actual history upon which to build our argument and interpretation. In 2 Kings xiv. 25, it is written: "Jeroboam restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel which he spake by the hand of His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet which was of Gath-hepher." Here is a distinct reference to the conquests of the king in intimate connection with the ministry of the prophet. The one is as historical as the other. Whatever be the date of the composition of the book, there can be little doubt as to the time of the prophet's ministry.

Jeroboam II was the greatest sovereign who, since the days of Solomon, had occupied a throne in the midst of God's ancient people. He reigned over Northern Israel for the long period of forty-one years. Religiously, he followed in the idolatrous foot-

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\* Published by Thynne & Co., Ltd.

steps of his namesake Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin ; but from the standpoint of military achievement he was surprisingly successful. He enlarged his domains so that the kingdom became almost as extensive as was that of David.

Now this remarkable extension of territory was, it is recorded, a direct fulfilment of a prophecy uttered by Jonah, who apparently stood to Jeroboam II in a relation corresponding to that occupied by Elisha to Joash, his father. That the prophet whose ministry is thus described in 2 Kings is the same as that mentioned in the prophetic book which bears his name cannot seriously be questioned. Nowhere else in the Old Testament does the name Jonah or the name Amittai occur. Gath-hepher, situated about an hour's journey to the north of Nazareth in Zebulun, is identified with the modern village of El Meshed, where, according to a well-founded tradition, which dates from the time of Jerome, the tomb of Jonah is pointed out.

We have in this historical reference in 2 Kings a clear indication of the date of Jonah's ministry. Jeroboam II reigned from 823-782 B.C. We may then, with considerable assurance, fix the date of Jonah's ministry as near the close of the ninth and the beginning of the eighth century B.C. He was thus the direct successor of Elijah and Elisha as a prophet of Northern Israel, and the senior contemporary of Amos and Hosea.

Now with respect to the second question referred to above, my conviction is that the pivot of the problem of the true interpretation of this narrative lies in the reason for the prophet's flight to Tarshish ? The character of Jonah has been maligned. He is commonly regarded as one who was disobedient to the heavenly vision through cowardice. Many false notions are traceable to misunderstanding of the prophet's motive. It is therefore necessary to determine definitely what the motive was. And, happily, we are not left to wander in a maze of probability. The book itself gives us the clue. As so often happens in the devout study of the Bible, the key to the solution of the problem is found embedded in the Scripture itself. Let us then first decide what was *not* the motive of the prophet's flight.

(i) The flight of Jonah was not occasioned by the fear that he would be hanged, decapitated, or impaled for his temerity in pronouncing the doom of the guilty city. Such a view widely prevails. But there is not a phrase in the book to suggest that fear for his own safety ever stirred the mind of the prophet. On



the contrary, so little regard had he for his own preservation that it is recorded that he it was who suggested to the heathen sailors that his presence on the ship was the occasion of the tempest, and that if he were cast overboard, the storm would cease.

(ii) The flight of the prophet was not due to the prompting of a spirit of religious exclusiveness. It is frequently argued that Jonah, like the Jewish opponents of St. Paul, was jealous lest the privileges which belonged to Israel as the children of Abraham, should be extended to the Gentiles. No material evidence for such a presumption can be found within the book itself. Jonah's attitude to the heathen sailors is governed by a spirit of compassion. While he recognises the gulf that separates him from them as idol-worshippers, he realises that they are innocent ; that he himself is the guilty one ; and he is unwilling that they should perish because of his sin. There is no ground for the suggestion that Jonah refused to go to Nineveh because he was a religious monopolist. For it is manifest that he was not commissioned to proclaim a gospel ; he was not sent to be a light to illumine the heathen darkness ; he was sent only to be a messenger of judgment.

(iii) It has further been suggested that the reason of Jonah's disobedience was personal jealousy. The Rev. H. C. Lanchester, *e.g.*, following Ewald, says : " Jonah is represented as a selfish man, jealous for his own reputation. . . . His preaching had created such an impression, that from entirely selfish motives he dreads the reaction."\* These statements imply that Jonah had won esteem in the court of Jeroboam II as the seer who had predicted the extension of the borders of the kingdom ; but that when the command reached him to go to Nineveh and pronounce its doom he foresaw that the threatened judgment would not take place, and therefore his fame as a prophet would suffer. Jonah is thus likened to a modern preacher who courts popularity at the cost of fidelity ! Some stronger motive, surely, was at work in Jonah's heart.

The precise reason for Jonah's signal act of disobedience is, I believe, indicated within the narrative itself. It needs only that we visualise the historic background in order to appreciate it fully. Jonah's refusal sprang from a two-fold dread. As a

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\* *Cambridge Bible : Jonah* (New Series).

patriot, he was full of fear of the ruthless ferocity of the Assyrians, as the world-power destined to destroy Israel. As a prophet, he was acquainted with the ways of Jehovah. Therefore he was fearful of the tenderness in the heart of God, who, he reasoned, might spare Nineveh should the Ninevities repent after hearing the proclamation of their doom. And, for Israel's sake, Jonah resolves that Nineveh shall have no chance of repentance.

For some years prior to the appearance of Jonah, as described in the fourteenth chapter of 2 Kings, Assyria had been the dominant world-power. Nineveh, the capital, and the metropolis of the world, is described in the book as "a great and wicked city". The wickedness of Nineveh was of long continuance; and its evil report universal. Nahum, the prophet of Judah, writing close upon the time of Nineveh's destruction, says, "Where is the den of the lions, where the lion and the lioness walked, the lion's whelp, and none made then afraid? The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lioness, and filled his caves with prey and his dens with ravin." Beast-like ferocity characterised Assyria's treatment of subject nations and peoples.

This description by the Hebrew prophet is confirmed and illustrated by the vivid representations of the monuments. The Assyrians were the Huns of ancient days. Their ruthlessness in victory they themselves gloried in. Assyrian monarchs, instead of concealing it, took pains to exhibit their inhuman treatment of vanquished foes, in order that their own and future generations might be impressed. A bas-relief in the British Museum represents Tiglath Pileser III standing proudly with one foot on the neck of a prostrate foe as he receives the submission of the enemy. Another bas-relief represent an Assyrian monarch standing erect, with spear in hand, with which he puts out the eyes of captives kneeling in pairs before him.

"The barbarities," says Professor Sayce, "which followed the capture of a town would be almost incredible, were they not a subject of boast in the inscriptions which record them. Assurnatsirpal's cruelties were especially revolting. Pyramids of human heads marked the path of the conqueror; boys and girls were burnt alive or reserved for a worse fate; men were impaled, flayed alive, blinded, or deprived of their hands and feet, of their ears and noses, while the women and children were carried into slavery, the captured city plundered and reduced to ashes, and

the trees in its neighbourhood cut down. During the second Assyrian Empire warfare was a little more humane, but the most horrible tortures were still exercised upon the vanquished. How deeply seated was the thirst for blood and vengeance on an enemy is exemplified in a bas-relief which represents Assurbani-pal and his queen feasting in their garden while the head of the conquered Elamite king hangs from a tree above.\*

Layard, in his *Nineveh and Babylon*, describing the sculptures panelling the walls of a great palace hall which he unearthed at Kouyunjik, writes: "On one side of the stream was the king in his chariot, surrounded by his bodyguard and followed by his led horses. . . . Assyrian warriors were bringing human heads to the registrars, to show the numbers of the slain. The spoil, consisting of furniture, arms, and vessels of elegant form, was being registered by the scribes, to be divided amongst the victorious troops. . . . Sennacherib in his gorgeous war chariot, and surrounded by his guards, received the captives, the heads of the slain, and the spoil. . . . The captives, bearing skins probably containing water and flour to nourish them during a long and distressing march, were fettered in pairs and urged onwards by their guards. Mothers were represented holding the water-skins for their young ones to quench their thirst, whilst in some instances fathers had placed their weary children on their shoulders, for they were marching during the heat of a Mesopotamian summer, as the sculptor had shown by introducing large clusters of dates on the palms. Thus were driven the inhabitants of Samaria through the desert to Halah and Habor, by the river of Gozan and the cities of the Medes, and we may see in these bas-reliefs a picture of the hardships and sufferings to which the captive people of Israel were exposed when their cities fell into the hands of the Assyrian king, and their inhabitants were sent to colonise the distant provinces of his empire.†

Now it was to a nation with such an appalling character that the son of Amittai was commissioned to convey the message of doom. Of the bloodthirstiness and ruthlessness of the Ninevites he could not be ignorant; for his home was in a border town. Very probably he had been already a witness of Assyrian barbarity in several small raids across the frontier. And he can

\* *Assyria: Its Princes, Priests and People*, p. 127.

† Pp. 239-241.

read the signs of the times. If one may venture a modern parallel, it would not be inexact to say that what Belgium was to Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century, that Israel was to Assyria in the eighth century B.C. Hosea, a contemporary prophet, had prophesied that Israel would eat unclean things in Assyria. Jonah therefore knows that Northern Israel is in peril of devastation because of its apostasy; he is not unaware of the instrument that is to accomplish it; he foresees that the Assyrian wolf is destined to come down upon the fold to devour the sheep. And he realises that the time of accomplishment is near.

It was in that dark and fateful hour that the word of the Lord came to Jonah saying: "Arise, go to Nineveh that great city and cry against it and say, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown' for their wickedness is come up before me." The prophet, at the first, must have rejoiced greatly at the news that Nineveh was doomed. For if Nineveh were destroyed Israel might be saved. But as Jonah meditated upon the tremendous event, the occurrence of which had been Divinely predicted, and the part assigned to him as the herald of Assyrian overthrow, it began to dawn upon him that there was a possibility, yea a probability, that the message of warning might prove to be a message of mercy; that, should Nineveh repent, Jehovah might repent and Nineveh be spared! What, then, must he do? Shall he go to Nineveh and tell its inhabitants that within forty days their city is to be destroyed? He dare not. He is afraid of the Divine compassion. For Israel's sake he will not give the Ninevites the message of warning, fearing the loving-kindness of the Lord. "Was not this my saying," he expostulates, after Nineveh had been spared, "when I was yet in my country. Therefore I hastened to flee unto Tarshish; for I knew that Thou art a gracious God and full of compassion, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and repentest Thee of the evil."\*

Whether this key fits the lock I must leave you to examine for yourselves by a careful reading of the entire Old Testament narrative. Time does not permit of my doing so here and now. Those interested will find the story detailed in the light of what I have submitted in the volume, *Jonah: Prophet and Patriot*, to which reference has already been made.

When we pass to consider the miraculous or supernatural element in the story we shall, I think, realise again how the historic background of modern archæology illuminates, demonstrating the consistency of the entire narrative, and the remarkable harmony which is discernible, not only within the book itself but also between it and the New Testament references; providing an illuminating example of that blending of the Old and the New in the Biblical revelation which is the sure credential of the Divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture.

If its historical character be conceded there are three great miracles in the book which demand consideration. They are the preservation of Jonah, the conversion of Nineveh and the revelation of God. One is in the realm of the physical, the second in the realm of the moral, and the third in the realm of the spiritual. It will be my endeavour to show that these three miracles are closely related and interdependent.

With regard to the first, the Scripture nowhere states that it was a whale which swallowed Jonah; but, even if the Scripture had so stated, there are whales with a throat capacity so immense that they are capable of swallowing not one only, but half a dozen men. In the O.T. record the Hebrew words mean literally "a great fish"; in the N.T. reference to the event the Greek word employed may be accurately translated, as in the margin of the Revised Version, a "sea-monster."

There is no difficulty surely in accepting the possibility of some mighty monster of the deep swallowing a man whole. The miraculous feature lies rather in the preservation of the prophet and his ejection alive after "three days and three nights"—a phrase, let me digress to say, which does not of necessity mean a period of seventy-two hours.\* Some thoughtful people believe that Jonah actually died and was raised to life again,—a perfect type of Our Lord's death and resurrection. But it is needless to introduce into the region of the argument what can only be speculative. All we have to determine here is whether the recorded event is such as we can, without straining faith or loyalty to truth, accept as historical, or, on the other hand, must reject as absolutely incredible. Common sense alone suggests that if a man can invent a mechanical submarine capable of preserving fifty men alive, surely it is not difficult to believe that

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\* Vide *Jonah: Prophet and Patriot*, pp. 122-5.

the Almighty could, if He chose, adapt an animal submarine to be capable of holding one.

How such a preservation was effected I am not inclined to hazard a guess. Let us be content to regard it as miraculous, and so, for the present, inexplicable. But it may help some to remember that there is a modern miracle inviting explanation, which far exceeds in mystery the one we are now considering, and which affects not a single Hebrew but an entire race. The preservation of the Jews is a phenomenon far more miraculous than the preservation of Jonah. Without a land, without a king, without a temple, without a sacrifice, and scattered throughout the earth, God's chosen people have been preserved, and their distinct nationality maintained, for well-nigh two thousand years, contrary to all the laws which govern the rise and fall of nations. This is a miracle which is manifest before our eyes.

The second greater miracle of the book is that of the conversion of Nineveh through the preaching of Jonah. This phenomenon far transcends the first in wonderment. But there is an intimate relationship between the two. Without the first miracle the second could not have been accomplished. One prepared the way for the other. How widespread the repentance of the Ninevites was, is revealed by the description: "And the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."\* The conversion of Nineveh began among the masses of the people; but did not end there. For it is recorded: "And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water: but let them be covered with sackcloth both man and beast, and let them cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knoweth whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"†

Now this immense religious upheaval was brought about, be it remembered, by the preaching of a single foreign missionary.

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\* iii, 5.

† iii, 6-9.

In that fact is a stupendous phenomenon which far exceeds the miracle of the preservation of the prophet. How can it be accounted for? What unique gift did Jonah possess for the accomplishment of such a stupendous reformation? It is this part of the narrative which most arrests my attention. It has been suggested that the political condition of Assyria at the time was such as to create a feeling of fearful apprehension among its citizens. The political situation alone; however, while it may have predisposed the Ninevites to hearken to the prophet's message, could never have accounted for so powerful an effect upon their hearts and consciences as to produce an instantaneous religious transformation almost without parallel.

Is any other explanation forthcoming? Yes, and it is one which completely satisfies. Our Divine Lord Himself has solved the problem. By the use of one word He has illumined and harmonised, in a manner quite unsuspected by most, the Old Testament record and the New. When the impenitent and unbelieving Jews demanded from Him some signal manifestation of power, which should authenticate His Messianic claim, saying, "Master we would see a sign from thee," Jesus replied: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet."\*

Now what is a sign? A sign is an occurrence which, because it manifests the presence and operation of supernatural power, arrests the attention and disposes men to believe. A sign may therefore be defined as the sure credential of a Divine commission. In Athens Paul preached "Jesus and the resurrection"; emphasising the rising from the tomb as the Divine attestation of the Saviourhood of Christ, and therefore a sign which should dispose men to believe. Now what was the idea which our Lord meant to convey when He said, "No sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet?" Godet's comment suggests the answer: "It was as one who had miraculously escaped from death that Jonah presented himself before the Ninevites, summoning them to anticipate the danger which threatened them."†

The news of Jonah's unique experience may have preceded his arrival in Nineveh. His appearance, moreover, must have borne unmistakable marks of his entombment. It is very

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\* St. Matt. xii, 38-9.

† *Commentary on St. Luke*, xi, 30.

probable that when Jonah appeared in the streets of Nineveh, his face and hair and hands were unnaturally bleached, with the whiteness of a man escaped from the tomb. A weird figure suggesting Death itself stalked through the city proclaiming aloud in no uncertain tone : " Thus saith Jehovah the Lord God of Hosts, who hath made the earth, the sea, and the dry land, within forty days Nineveh, because of its wickedness, is doomed to be destroyed ! "

Like the mystic writing on the wall of the banqueting chamber in Babylon which brought Belshazzar to his knees, it was not merely the threat of the impending judgment, but the fact that the threat was accompanied by an unmistakable sign that the messenger had indeed been sent from God, which brought the Ninevites to repentance ; so that throughout the proud capital, all, from the king on his throne to the beasts in the field, joined in the national humiliation. The miracle of Jonah's preservation prepared the way, and provides the explanation, of Nineveh's conversion.

A further reason has been suggested and one which I, personally, would like to have discussed. Here is the question : How far did the religion of the Assyrians predispose them to hearken to a prophet who came to them after such an experience in the mighty deep ? Or, to put it more simply : Did the citizens of Nineveh worship a divinity that could be characterised as a fish-god ?

Professor Sayce, in his book *Assyria : Its Princes, Priests, and People*,\* tells us that the religion of the Assyrians was derived principally from Babylonia. " Polytheism was rampant ; but there were three deities who held the position of pre-eminence. They were Anu, ' the sky ; ' Mul-ge, ' the earth ; ' and Ea, ' the deep. ' " Concerning the last named, Prof. Sayce writes : " As god of the great deep, he was often figured as a man with the tail of a fish, and in this form was known to the Greeks under the name of Oannes or ' Ea the fish. ' Sometimes the skin of a fish was suspended behind his back. "

There are good reasons, moreover, for the belief that in Dagon of the Philistines we have the counterpart of the divinity worshipped by the Babylonians and Assyrians. For " Dag, " the first syllable of Dagon, is the word which appears in the O.T. text of the Book of Jonah, as the Hebrew word for fish. So



widespread was the worship of this fish-god divinity that many suppose that the episcopal mitre of to-day, which is becoming increasingly fashionable in Anglican ecclesiastical circles, is to be traced through the papal mitre to this pagan source.

Describing the excavations at Kouyunjik of one of the palace chambers, "which appear to have contained the decrees of the Assyrian kings and the archives of the empire," Layard writes: "On the north side were two doorways leading into separate apartments. Each entrance was formed by two colossal bas-reliefs of the fish-god. These figures combine the human shape with that of the fish. The head of the fish forms a kind of mitre for the head of the man, whilst its scaly back and fan-like tail fall behind, leaving the human limbs and feet exposed. They wear a fringed tunic, and bear the two sacred emblems, the basket and the cone. The god Dagon of the Philistines and of the inhabitants of the Phoenician coast appears to have been worshipped under nearly the same form. . . . His worship appears to have extended over Syria, as well as Mesopotamia and Chaldeae."\*

That the worship of this divinity was widespread is further evidenced by Layard's discovery at Nimroud of a temple within which "at right angles to the entrance, were sculptured fish-gods, somewhat differing in form from those at Kouyunjik. The fish's head formed part of the three-horned cap usually worn by the winged figures. The tail only reached a little below the waist of the man, who was dressed in a tunic and long-furred robe."† A specimen of this figure is now in the British Museum.

Assuming, then, that in Nineveh a divinity like Dagon the fish-god was widely worshipped, we might find in that fact an additional reason for the craven fear engendered in the hearts of Nineveh's populace on hearing their doom pronounced by a Hebrew prophet, who had so marvellously emerged from the dominion of a deity whom they revered as the god of the mighty deep.

The third and the supreme miracle in the book is the phenomenon of its Divine inspiration. The character of God which is exhibited, especially in the final portion, reaches the very summit of the divine revelation. Cornill, a modern critic, pays his tribute to its exalted nature in words which I gladly quote :

\* *Nineveh and Babylon*, p. 168.

† *Ibid.*, pp. 177-8.

“ One of the deepest and grandest things ever written. I should like to exclaim to anyone who approaches it: Put thy shoes from off thy feet for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” Dr. Peake, likewise, is compelled to recognise its sublimity, and says: “ That out of the stony heart of Judaism such a book should come is nothing less than a marvel of divine grace.”

Here we have a miracle of inspiration. The revelation of the character of God in the Book of Jonah corresponds precisely to the portrayal of the Eternal Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The characteristic feature of the revelation in Jonah is the all-embracing compassion and love of God; an anticipation of the wideness of His mercy, to be proclaimed in the holy Gospel to every creature.

Two questions remain. First, who lit the torch of divine illumination in the soul of the author of the Book of Jonah? There is but one satisfying answer. It was God the Holy Spirit. And the second question is this: Who was the chosen vessel of this sublime revelation? The most reasonable supposition surely is, what all tradition testifies, that the pearl of divine revelation, which is enshrined in this Old Testament book, was conveyed through the medium of the prophet whose name it bears. On the contrary, says the modern critic, the pure substance of divine truth, which the book undoubtedly contains, was compounded in the soul of some unknown author, living in an unknown territory, at an unknown date, who adopted the name of Jonah for an unknown reason, and wrote the story as a piece of historical fiction for a problematic purpose. Let them who can accept such a theory. The critical problem is extremely complicated. The traditional belief, strengthened by the testimony of Christ, is immeasurably more reasonable. Let every one be persuaded in his own mind—not by prejudice or predisposition, but by the evidence carefully considered.

#### DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (SIR CHARLES MARSTON) expressed his appreciation of the valuable contribution which the Rev. Dr. Hart-Davies had made to the Institute concerning the book of Jonah. He pointed out that Farrer Fenton's version of the book of Jonah represented the Great Fish which swallowed Jonah to be the name of a ship.

But, he went on to say, since the Great War a fish with a mouth as big as a hut, capable of holding several people, had been on exhibition as a side-show in various parts of the world.

In the last fifty years, there had been several reports in the Press of men alleged to have been swallowed by fish monsters and vomited up again. It would be interesting to ascertain whether any of them can be verified.

When the name of Tarshish occurred in the Bible he always wondered whether it was a port on the coast of Asia Minor or on the coast of Spain.

Rev. ARTHUR W. PAYNE thanked most heartily the writer of the paper for his very valuable and interesting message. Since hearing a sermon as a schoolboy on the Book of Jonah, by C. H. Spurgeon, his then Pastor, he had never had a qualm concerning its absolute historicity. Dr. Adolph Saphir, that gifted and gracious Hebrew Christian, once asserted "Jesus and the Holy Scripture are both Jewish and Universal." The result is that this story, while having its interpretation for Israel their deliverance from the oppression of the Gentile World Empire of that day, of which Nineveh was the capital, may typify the promise of similar blessing, where there is similar repentance, even in our own much-loved and favoured Empire.

Lt.-Colonel F. A. MOLONY said: I have met with many who deny the historicity of the book of Jonah, and who say, "Seeing that we all agree that the teaching is sound and wholesome, what does it matter whether the book is history or allegory?" That may be a teacher's view, but nobody who has been in any public service would endorse it. Army officers *study* their Field Service Regulations because they say, "This is issued by Authority, and I am bound to act upon it." But when they read similar books on tactics they say, "So that is what this author thinks, but I shall keep an open mind about it." If the book of Jonah is history, it is part of the evidence for the most important truth imaginable, namely, that Almighty God seeks to bring men to repentance, and will pardon those who truly repent. But if the book is not historical, then it is only the opinion of some singularly broadminded Jew that God ought to pardon even Gentiles

if they truly repent. And the wonder that the book was received is even greater than the wonder that it was written. For the strong prejudice against God caring for the Gentiles persisted until Christ's day. For when Jesus reminded the people of Nazareth that God had on at least two occasions shown mercy to Gentiles, they were so angry that they sought to kill Him.

But if the book is history then what happened is clear. The Jews said "God has acted, and though we do not like what He has done, yet we dare not suppress the record."

Mr. SIDNEY COLLETT said: I am sure we always enjoy listening to Dr. Hart-Davies. He has such a robust faith in the inspiration of the Bible!

I think there is a great deal in his suggestion, that the conversion of the whole populace of Nineveh, at the preaching of Jonah, was due in large measure to their worship of the Fish-god. A remarkable modern parallel of this is found in the Fall of Jerusalem in 1917. When the Mohammedan garrison of Jerusalem heard that General "Allenby" was coming, they immediately connected the name "Allenby" with their name for God—"Allah"; and, in that fatalistic spirit for which they are well known, they said, "It is no use fighting against Allah!" Accordingly, some of the garrison came out of the city, carrying a white flag, and handed the keys of the gates to the first batch of British soldiers they met, without firing a shot!

Mr. GEORGE BREWER said: I feel that we are greatly indebted to Dr. Hart-Davies for his very interesting and illuminating paper.

After paying tribute to the beautiful and supernatural character of the book of Jonah, he puts the all-important question: Is it true? I think we shall all agree that he has very clearly and convincingly answered this by proving the authenticity of the facts recorded. It is characteristic of modernist critics to treat everything supernatural as merely an allegory; but as such, as Dr. Hart-Davies has shown, this book would at once lose its actual value. The fact that Jonah's experience provided a type of the death and resurrection of our Lord, as stated by our Lord Himself in His most solemn warning to the unrepentant Jews, is sufficient to stamp the events recorded as reliable history.

Dr. NORMAN S. DENHAM said : We are grateful to the Author for the convincing vindication of the integrity of the Book of Jonah and of its writer. I regret, therefore, to sound one dissonant note. May I first affirm that of which most must be aware, that not only great fish, but species of whales feed on submarine monsters such as the giant squid, which they absorb in huge masses. There is the generally accepted story of James Bartley of the whaler *Southern Star*, being for awhile entombed in a whale, and later emerging alive. It is the habit of the sperm whale, states Frank Bullen, in his *Cruise of the Cachalot*, when near death, to eject the contents of its stomach.

Dr. Hart-Davies stresses rightly the consistency and harmony of the entire Bible narrative. This, in spite of the author's apparent dissent in one instance in Jonah i, 17, is nevertheless illustrated in a remarkable way. It has been stated authoritatively that "when the number of 'nights' is stated as well as the number of 'days,' then the expression ceases to be an idiom, and becomes a literal statement of fact." The complete period, about 72 hours, is referred to both in I Sam. xxx, 12 and Est. iv, 16.

I would connect with this what has been clearly demonstrated, for instance, by Dr. Stewart, in May, 1934, when he read here a paper on "The Dates of Our Lord's Life and Ministry," that our Lord suffered on Wednesday, 14th Nisan. I would supplement this by affirming that our Lord rose from the dead at sunset of Saturday, the 17th Nisan. This is seen by careful attention to the original of Matthew xxviii, 1. Our Lord was buried as the Sabbath—the Paschal, not weekly, Sabbath—drew on. Thus three days and three nights elapsed between sunset of Wednesday, and the sunset of Saturday, during which our Lord was, as He said, "in the heart of the earth."

#### AUTHOR'S REPLY.

The time allotted for discussion is far spent, and it is impossible for me, therefore, to reply to the various questions raised as fully as might be desired. I must confess a measure of disappointment. I had hoped that in the discussion some helpful information would have been forthcoming in regard to the connection suggested between the fish-god worshipped by the Assyrians and the widespread religious upheaval in Nineveh which the story of Jonah's experience created.

In reply to Sir Charles Marston, I am content to regard Tarshish as the name of a port on the coast of Spain. It is evident that the prophet wished to journey as far west as possible, determined as he was to get far away from Nineveh in the east. The stories which one hears from time to time as to the swallowing of men by certain sea monsters, and vomited up again, do not impress me. One which has been referred to is, I believe, fictitious. The swallowing of Jonah by a great fish was not very remarkable. What was remarkable and miraculous was his preservation during a period of about three days. That cannot be paralleled by any modern event. It was obviously a miraculous occurrence, as was the Resurrection of Christ from the dead.

As to the precise length of the period referred to as "three days and three nights," I cannot agree with Dr. Denham that we are bound to regard it as literally a period of seventy-two hours. My reasons are fully stated in my book *Jonah, Prophet and Patriot*. The reference in Esther iv, 16, when carefully read in the context, appears to support my interpretation.

Finally, I would like to say how much I appreciate the remarks of Lieut.-Col. Molony. He has added a very powerful argument for the historicity of the O.T. narrative. It was comparatively new to me ; and I am glad to be able to make a note of it for future use.