

of Rome are not obscurely indicated. Had Gammarus lived to see the reign of Paul IV., and to witness the tragedy of the Caraffa, he might have seen a sad illustration of the necessity of removing a Pope who had handed over the government of the Church to men who were guilty of the most horrible crimes, and who expiated them by their lives under the worthier Pontificate of Pius IV.

R. C. JENKINS.



ART. II.—"THE LAST WORDS OF DAVID."

2 Sam. xxiii. 3-6 : "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God : And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds ; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God, yet hath He made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure : for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow."

FEW portions of the Old Testament are more interesting than those fragments of ancient prophecy and song, which shine out here and there like sparkling gems from the narrative of the historical books. Many such are found in the Books of Samuel : the thanksgiving of Hannah over her newborn child, re-echoing day by day for us in the Holy Virgin's song ; the lamentation over Saul and Jonathan ; Nathan's prophecy of the everlasting kingdom, and David's prayer for its fulfilment ; his thanksgiving for deliverance from his enemies, found also in the 18th Psalm—these are some of the voices of Hebrew poetry, which a Samuel and a Nathan and a Gad, all prophets themselves, have been careful to preserve in their writings.

But in none of these relics of sacred song are poetry and prophecy more richly combined, in none is the sense of natural beauty more closely mingled with the breath of holy inspiration, than in these "last words of David." That title need not mean that these words were spoken in the last hours of David's life and reign ; for the history goes on to tell of later words and deeds : but these were his last words of prophecy and song, his last testimony for God, which he would hold fast unto his latest breath—his final confession of faith, in which he wished to die and depart out of this world. For here, as in a last will and testament, he sets, as it were, his hand and seal to all that he had sung and prophesied before concerning the eternal continuance of his kingdom, and the Son who should sit upon his throne for ever.

It is neither to be expected nor desired that such a passage should be exempt from the closest examination of modern criticism. For under the preliminary and sometimes tedious discussions of the grammatical sense and literary style, and date and authenticity, there lies the deeper question of a Divine revelation, whether holy men of old have indeed spoken as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and whether those ancient Scriptures, in which their prophecies were recorded, do indeed testify of Christ, and help to prove the cardinal doctrine of our faith, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."

In regard to the passage before us, it has sometimes been said that the language is difficult and obscure. That it is brief, abrupt and archaic, as becomes so ancient a prophecy, is very true; but complaints of its obscurity come chiefly from such as either refuse to see in it any prophecy at all, or, on the other hand, desire to find in its words a more direct prediction than they in fact contain.

It is satisfactory therefore to be assured by such a Hebraist as Ewald, that "The sense of the single words is not so doubtful as it seems without an accurate knowledge of the language": and for the encouragement of any who, like myself, have no such knowledge to rely on independently, I may add that some of the chief experts in Hebrew scholarship have furnished us with such abundant help, that with care and patience it is not difficult to ascertain for one's self that exact grammatical sense which is the indispensable basis of all sound interpretation; and on that basis, the more simply we interpret such a passage, the more likely we shall be to find its true prophetic import, if prophecy it be.

The inspired utterance, for such, at least, it distinctly claims to be, is introduced by a remarkable description of the author: "The oracle of David the son of Jesse, and the oracle of the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel." Whether we should regard this description of David as proceeding from himself, or from the historian who has recorded his "last words," is perhaps a question not of the greatest importance. It has been urged that if David were the writer he would seem to lavish too much praise upon himself. But, in fact, his language is as clearly marked by personal humility as by a lofty consciousness of a divine commission. For we observe how modestly he is first described as "David the son of Jesse." The old man, full of honours, goes back to the name by which he was known in his youth, as the keeper of his father's sheep.

His own name had long since become so famous as to make the mention of his father needless; yet he calls to mind the

low estate of his early years, and the goodness of God in taking him from the sheepfolds to feed His people Israel. And if, in his next words, "the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of God," begins to lift up his head, it is in thankfulness, and not in pride. If he speaks as another David, exalted far above "the son of Jesse," it is because he regards his kingly power as a gift bestowed on him not for his own merit, but for the good of his people, a mercy and a blessing for which he was bound to give God the glory.

Many years before he had been taught by the mouth of Nathan to regard his exaltation in this light: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I took thee from the sheepecote, from following the sheep, to be ruler of My people, over Israel." And long after David himself lay at rest with his fathers another psalmist re-echoed those words, and bore witness to their abiding truth: "Thou spakest sometime in visions unto Thy saints, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David My servant: with My holy oil have I anointed him." "My hand shall hold him fast, and My arm shall strengthen him."

The greatness of David, as he well knew, lay in this, that as the king of God's own choice, he was to be the progenitor of One greater than himself, of whose kingdom there should be no end.

And now another title is added to that of "the anointed of the God of Jacob:" for the experience of God's love had filled His servant's heart with songs of praise, and made him the sweet psalmist of Israel. Had he not good reason to rejoice in this also, that in his songs he had been able to gladden the hearts of God's chosen people by showing them of His mercy and truth? But here again he claims not the work for himself: he calls them not *his* psalms, but the psalms of Israel. "He will have them received on the authority of Israel, that is, as Luther says, the Church of God; for "he would in this way unite himself with the Church, acknowledging her as the great teacher, and God's gift as bestowed on him for her benefit and through her ministry." He testifies that the God whom he worships is the God of Jacob, and the hope in which he trusts is the blessing which had been promised to the fathers, "to Abraham and his seed for ever." Again, he calls his Psalms "the songs of Israel," because he had written them for the service of the sanctuary, and therefore spake in them as the great congregation might speak before God, and because he trusted that these songs of praise might live in the remembrance of Israel as long as the same Spirit, which had moved

him to sing, should dwell in the Church, and stir the hearts of God's people to show forth his praise.

Accordingly, in his next sentence, David commends these his "last words" to future ages by a still holier Name than Israel, and by a higher sanction than even that of the Church: "The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and *His* Word was upon my tongue." Here we are taught by the best Hebrew scholars of our time that the phrase "spake by me" is never used of man speaking with his fellow, but only of God, or His angel, speaking in the closest and most intimate converse with man as His instrument or minister—speaking, in fact, by way of revelation to that inner ear which God Himself awakeneth in man's heart.

It is thus evident that David claims the highest degree of inspiration for this his last prophecy: speaking as one who has heard the words of God, and with those very words upon his tongue, he uses the same, or even stronger terms than those that are elsewhere applied exclusively to the living oracles which God "spake by the mouth of His holy prophets since the world began." And further, as if to show that the truth which he is about to declare is firm as the everlasting hills, and eternal as God Himself, he adds: "The God of Israel spake, the Rock of Israel said to me."

I cannot understand how a critic like Reuss can think that the language of this introduction is intended by a *less lofty* style to throw into relief the Divine utterance itself. The *Divine* utterance needs no foil to set it off: and David's words might more truly be said to resemble Isaiah's lofty style when, speaking of Jehovah as "the Rock of Israel," he adds that "the Lord shall make the glory of His voice to be heard."

After a preface so fitted to raise expectation and to strengthen belief, we may wonder what great revelation is to follow, what Divine utterance worthy of an introduction so sublime. And perhaps our expectation will hardly be satisfied when we read the next words in our Authorised Version: "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." No doubt the maxim is a wise and true one, and such as might naturally occur to an aged monarch looking back over a long and eventful reign. We cannot call it a trivial thought that all authority worthy to be upheld, respected, and obeyed, must rest upon those eternal principles of justice which, if written nowhere else, would still be written on the tablets of man's heart.

Nor is the further thought unworthy of a place in the last words of David, that human justice itself must be administered, and power exercised, in the fear of God. It is evident, however, that such a general and abstract principle savours more

of proverbial wisdom than of prophetic inspiration. And though we might well say in David's case that

Old experience doth attain
To something of prophetic strain,

yet any such interpretation of the passage falls far beneath the lofty claim with which it is prefaced: “The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and *His* Word was upon my tongue.”

When we find that a critic who puts this lower meaning upon the passage is careful to remind us that the words “must be put into the mouth of *God*, according to the express statement going before,” we cannot help suspecting some tendency, conscious or unconscious, to disparage the claims of Hebrew prophecy as a Divine revelation.

While the Authorised Version thus seems to fall short of a worthy interpretation of the passage, we must be careful, on the other hand, not to read into it a more literal and direct prediction of Christ than its words of necessity express. The fact is that the difficulty of determining its exact meaning arises from the singularly brief and abrupt style, which is part of the evidence of its great antiquity. In the first sentences there are no finite verbs, nor any certain indications of their logical connection. They sound like the description of a vision, told in brief disjointed words, just as each scene passes before the mind's eye. And what the prophet seems to see is this: “One ruling over men, righteous, ruling in the fear of God: and as the light of morning, the sun arising, a morning without clouds, from brightness after rain, tender grass out of the earth.”

Though the general meaning of such a passage may be clear, the particular turn of thought will evidently depend upon the words which a translator may supply in order to make the connection more definite and complete. The variations thus introduced may seem to be slight and unimportant, but they lend themselves, in fact, to very different applications of the passage, according to the bias of each man's mind. While some, as we have seen, can discover nothing more than a wise maxim of human government, others prefer such renderings as “The Just One shall rule over men,” or “There shall arise a righteous ruler,” and thus frame a *direct* prediction of Christ as the King of righteousness. I do not think we need resort to any such method of interpretation in order to find in the passage a less direct but not less real prophecy, such as we may suppose to have been granted to David ere he died.

If we look at the words in the barest possible rendering, without any addition, their general meaning cannot be doubt-

ful. There is first the description of one who rules over men righteously, and in the fear of God; and then immediately the blessings of his reign are presented in a fair picture—as the light of a cloudless morning, when sunshine following upon rain makes the tender grass spring up out of the earth. If we would know what the picture means we have but to pass on to the explanation which David has given in his next words.

In the Authorised Version they run thus: "Although my house be not so with God, yet hath He made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although He make it not to grow."

In the Revised Version the marginal rendering, supported by the best modern scholars, gives a different turn to the thought: "For is not my house thus with God? For He hath made an everlasting covenant with me, ordered in all things and secured. For all my salvation, and all my delight, will He not make it to grow?"

In either version the main thought of the passage is the same—at the close of life David's heart and mind are fixed upon a solemn covenant which God has established with him and with his house for ever. The chief difference is, that in the Authorised Version David seems to be looking back upon the many troubles caused by his own sins and those of his sons, confessing that the fair ideal of a kingdom of righteousness has not been realized in his house; and though clinging to God's promise as all his salvation and all his desire, he is yet saddened by the thought that, so far, he sees no sign of its fulfilment. In the more recent, and, I think we may say, the better rendering, there is no such mournful reflection to dim the bright vision of the righteous Ruler and the blessings of his reign. On the contrary, the revelation now made by the Spirit of Jehovah is given to David to cheer him in his latter days; and however conscious he may be of failure and unworthiness this solemn renewal of a former promise to his house fills him with confident and grateful hope that God will bring it to pass.

With faith thus strengthened and renewed, the aged king looks onward to the future as one "whose eyes are opened," and sees as in a vision the fulfilment of God's covenant with him and with his house. Of what covenant he is thinking there can be no doubt; for if, as Ewald says, "we had only such Scriptures as the 7th chapter of the 2nd Book of Samuel and the 110th Psalm, we could at once understand from them what David here means, and what right he had so to express himself." We have but to remember how in years long past, when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him

rest for a time from his enemies round about, he desired to build a house for the ark of God. That pious purpose, though not to be accomplished by David, was rewarded with a gracious promise: “I will set up thy seed after thee, and I will establish his kingdom; he shall build me a house, and I will establish his throne for ever. I will be his Father and he shall be My Son: And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before Me: thy throne shall be established for ever.” Here was a new unfolding of that great purpose of redemption, which had been growing clearer ever since the world began. The seed, in which all nations shall be blessed, is David’s promised seed. He shall build a house for God’s name more glorious and more lasting than David had designed; for in *this* house of God, and in the kingdom of God, His throne shall be set up for ever. What wonder, if from such a promise there grew up in David’s soul the image of a greater King than David? What wonder that he had clung to that promise through all the trials and sorrows of his later years?

Let but this last prophetic vision be seen as he saw it in the light of that earlier promise, or rather as we see it in the light thrown back from subsequent events, and all its dimness disappears. We see in it a King who rules not only over Israel, but over man, “the Adam,” as it stands in the original, the whole human race. He is “righteous, ruling in the fear of God”: for of Him it is said, “He is of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord,” and “as a King shall He reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.”

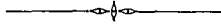
The reign of this King of righteousness was imaged before David in the brightest and purest scene that earth and sky can show—“the light of morning, when the sun ariseth, a morning without clouds.” We know that the morning never shines so fresh and fair as after a night of plenteous rain, when daylight dawns and the shadows flee away, and the sunbeams catch each sparkling drop on flower and tree, and the morning breeze comes rustling by,

Wakening each little leaf to sing.

At such an hour all nature seems to burst at once into new life and beauty, and we can almost see in fact what David saw in thought, “the tender grass grow up out of the earth.” We do not say that David knew the full meaning of his vision, or the time and mode of its fulfilment: but we do say that he foresaw an ideal Ruler, a King of righteousness and a reign of blessing, such as were and could be realized in none but Christ and in His kingdom. And for us, who have been taught by the fulfilment, *that* “light of the morning” is “the Day-spring from on high,” *that* rain is the refreshing grace of God’s Holy

Spirit, *that* sunshine is the brightness of God's love in the face of Jesus Christ, and the springing of "the tender grass" is the new life of righteousness growing up in the heart upon which the light of that love has shone. It is thus that Isaiah teaches us to interpret the like image: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up among the grass, as willows by the water-courses."

Such, we believe, were the spiritual blessings prefigured in "the last words of David the son of Jesse," seen, it may be, by himself but dimly and far off, yet not the less surely believed by him, and secured to his seed by "an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure." May God grant us grace to realize these blessings, as seen no longer from afar, but present with us in Christ's kingdom upon earth: and may His Holy Spirit kindle in our hearts that fervent longing with which David exclaims, "This is all my salvation and all my desire"; and that undoubting faith in which he asks, "Shall He not make it to grow?"



ART. III.—ARCHBISHOP MAGEE.

PART II.

THE measure of the gift of prophecy is the measure of the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, and the predictions of Jeremiah, of Haggai, or of Malachi were neither obscure nor indistinct, nor did they arise out of some trivial cause or transient complication; nor, we may add, were they the utterances of mere statesmen or politicians, serving a temporary purpose. The life of the Jewish nation differed from that of other nations in that it rested upon the combined foundation of religious faith and hope—faith in a miraculous past, hope in a Divinely-ordered future—and the great work of prophecy was to sustain this life of faith and hope. The prophets, it is true, discharged this function mainly by instruction and by announcements many of which may be obscure and indistinct to us, but not necessarily so to them. Some were couched in terms homely and to us undignified, but not so to them; and in many cases they had reference to immediate circumstances, then important, however trivial in the distant retrospect. But neither trivial nor obscure were the prophecies of Jeremiah, as he spoke of "the King who should reign in righteousness," and "whose name should be