

ART. VI.—WITNESS OF THE JEWS TO CHRIST.

IT was a glorious scene on which our Lord was looking when He pronounced the memorable and pathetic words: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."¹ The city burst suddenly into view as the road from Bethany rounded a shoulder of the hill. Through the clear atmosphere, rising on its sloping plateau 2,500 feet above the level of the sea, more than 3,700 feet above the Dead Sea, visible from its higher levels far below to the west, soaring high and steep over the deep shady valleys below its cliffs, valleys green with gardens, and everywhere well watered, "the city of ten thousand memories shone clear before Him; and the morning sunlight, as it blazed on the marble pinnacles and gilded roofs of Herod's magnificent new temple, was reflected—so Josephus tells us—in a very fiery splendour which made the gazer turn away his eyes as he would from the sun itself."² We are told by Tacitus, the old Roman historian, that the Jerusalem of that day, "with its imperial mantle of proud towers," was regarded as one of the wonders of the world.

Incomparably strange is the difference between that entrancing prospect and the melancholy view which greets the modern traveller. The hills are still there, but they are dry and dusty; the irrigation, the pools, the water, are all gone. "*Beautiful for situation*" is still the city of the Great King; but it is no longer *the joy of the whole earth*. Her valleys are filled with rubbish; she herself has dwindled and contracted into a crowded mass of filthy, mouldering streets, a congested area of the little gray concave roofs and brown walls of a Mussulman town. One beautiful building indeed there is, carrying to other ages, on the same spot, the traditional splendour of the Temple, the lovely mosque called after the Kaliph Omar, said to be the noblest building in the world next to the Taj Mahal; but the rest is indescribably miserable and ruinous. "Jerusalem," says Conder, "is (now) a very ugly city. It is badly built of mean stone houses, perched on the slope of the watershed. Beautiful bits of architecture are to be admired here and there—the Gothic façade of the Holy Sepulchre, the grand walls of the Temple, the glowing interior of the mosque . . . yet the city is not

¹ St. Matt. xxiii. 37.² Farrar's "Life of Christ," p. 534.

beautiful; the flat-roofed houses and dirty lanes are neither pleasing nor healthy, and the surrounding chalk hills are barren and shapeless."¹ "The old city itself," says Stanley, "lies buried twenty, thirty, forty feet below the wretched shops and receptacles for modern conveniences."

Is this thy place, sad city, this thy throne,
Where the lone desert rears the craggy stone,
Where suns unblest their angry lustre fling,
And wayworn pilgrims seek the scanty spring?
Where now thy pomp, which kings with envy viewed?
Where now thy power, which all those kings subdued?
No martial myriads muster in thy gates,
No suppliant nation at thy temple waits,
No prophet bard, thy glittering courts among,
Wakes the full lyre, and swells the tide of song;
But lawless force and meagre want is there,
And the quick-darting eye of restless fear;
While cold oblivion, 'mid the ruins laid,
Hides his dark wing amid the ivy shade.²

The "City of Peace" has indeed probably seen more wars and bloodshed than any spot on earth. Rightly did Ezekiel call it the "*Bloody City*." Stubborn, cruel, rebellious, it has attracted the interest of mankind by those whom it has killed and rejected rather than by any intrinsic character of its own. Our Lord in His first lament gives the reason of the downfall: "*Ye would not.*" In His second He puts it still more plainly: "When He was come near, He beheld the city and wept over it, saying, *If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee: because thou knowest not the time of thy visitation.*"

The one chance for Jerusalem was to lay aside her arrogant self-satisfaction, her hollow and sinful externalism, and to bow humbly before the message of God given by God manifest at length in the flesh, Him of whom the Law and the Prophets spoke. She would indeed have become a city of peace and righteousness. Under her stiff-necked and blind leaders, the priests, scribes, and Pharisees, she chose to remain in her ancient age-long condition of hard, dull, contemptuous opposition to the teaching of God's servants.

"Sternly, literally, terribly," says the Dean of Canterbury,³ "within fifty years was that prophecy fulfilled by the Romans.

¹ Gidney's "Sites and Scenes," Part II., p. 49.

² Bishop Heber's "Palestine."

³ "Life of Christ," p. 535.

Four years before the war began, while as yet the city was in the greatest peace and prosperity, a melancholy maniac traversed its streets with the repeated cry, 'A voice from the East, a voice from the West, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegroom and the brides, and a voice against this whole people; nor could any scourgings or tortures wring from him any other words, except, 'Woe, woe to Jerusalem! woe to the city! woe to the people! woe to the holy house!' until some years afterwards, during that appalling siege, he was killed by a stone from a catapult. His voice was but the renewed echo of the voice of prophecy."

It was the demented stubbornness of the Jews which insured the thoroughness of their overthrow. "Titus," continues Farrar, "had not wished to encompass the city, but he was forced, by the despair and obstinacy of the Jews, to surround it first with a mound, then with a wall of masonry. He did not wish to sacrifice the Temple—nay, he made every possible effort to save it—but he was forced to leave it in ashes. He did not intend to be cruel to the inhabitants, but the deadly fanaticism of their opposition so extinguished all desire to spare them that he undertook the task of well-nigh exterminating the race—of crucifying them by hundreds, of exposing them in the amphitheatre by thousands, of selling them into slavery by myriads." Josephus tells us that, even immediately after the siege of Titus, no one in the desert waste around him would have recognised the beauty of Judæa; and that if any Jew had come upon the city of a sudden, however well he had known it before, he would have asked what place it was.

Jerusalem has indeed been the victim of untold horrors and punishments. Some enumerate seventeen sieges, others twenty-seven or twenty-eight.¹ Eight cities—Canaanite, Davidic, post-Exilic, Herodian, Roman, Mohammedan, Christian, and Turkish—have been successively reared upon one and the same spot. From the death of Solomon degeneration rapidly set in. Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and the prophets were unable, except for a brief period, to check its ever-growing tendency to idolatry. The kingdom was finally destroyed by Assyria, and the Jews taken to the banks of the Euphrates. Passing for a time under the dominion of the kings of Babylon, a remnant was at length restored by the Persians. Then the city fell to the lot of Alexander the Great, and passed under the sway of his successors—the Ptolemies and Seleucidæ. For a hundred years the heroic Maccabees

¹ Gidney's "Sites and Scenes," Part II., p. 2.

established an independent kingdom, but the old story of internecine feuds and jealousies was repeated, and sixty-three years before the birth of our Lord Pompey annexed it to the Roman Empire.

The last national struggle was in the second century, in the reign of the Emperor Hadrian. Hadrian had determined to annihilate Judaism, and promulgated a decree forbidding the reading of the law, circumcision, and the observation of the Sabbath. He also announced his intention of making Jerusalem a Roman colony, and building a heathen temple to Jupiter on the site of the Temple. The Jews revolted under an impostor, Bar-Cochba, Son of a Star. Julius Severus reduced the country once more. The Roman buildings that had arisen on what was once the Holy City were razed to the ground. The plough passed over Mount Zion. The last siege of the campaign was that of Bithur, where the horses waded up to their bridles in blood, and the stream of blood carried the bodies of the slaughtered to the sea. We are told by Dion Cassius, the historian, that more than half a million of Jews perished during this disastrous war. The rest were expelled from Palestine.

It is said that Lord Rochester, the witty courtier of Charles II., once remarked that he could never get over the argument in favour of Christianity which was drawn from the then existing state of the Jewish people.¹ The prophetic testimony is not affected by any of the theories of the origin and dates of the books of the Old Testament which are now prevalent. Whatever their date may be, there must always intervene many centuries between them and the events in the history of the Jews which they predict. As Davison, the ablest writer on the subject, has said: "Place the prophecy in any imaginable age—after the fall of the kingdom of Israel or after the Babylonian conquest—the phenomenon of its fulfilment remains."

There are two great points in the prophecies about Israel which are well worthy of notice: (1) The absolute permanence of the race under all circumstances; (2) their disasters if they shall disobey God.

On the first, read Jer. xxxi. 35-37: "*Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night; which stirreth up the sea that the waves thereof roar; the Lord of Hosts is His name: If these ordinances depart from before Me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from*

¹ "Present-Day Tracts," vol. xiii. (R.T.S.): "The Jews' Witness to the Bible."

being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the Lord: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I also cast off the seed of Israel for all they have done, saith the Lord." Again, in Jer. xxxiii. 25, 26: "*If My covenant of day and night stand not, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I also cast away the seed of Jacob . . . for I will cause their captivity to return, and will have mercy on them."*

The sons of Israel are still dispersed from their own land; but there are eight millions in all parts of the world, and amongst them are the most influential men in the most civilized of the Western nations. It was even a Jew who virtually founded the Papacy itself: that obscure Ebionite forger, who, in his hatred of St. Paul, invented the false Clementine Homilies, and so created once for all the extraordinary delusion that St. Peter was ever Bishop of Rome.

The second point in the long roll of the prophecies is this—the character of the punishments of the Jews for wilful rejection of the messages of God. Over and over again Holy Scripture states that if they disobey the Almighty they shall be in misery, the land shall be brought into desolation, and they themselves scattered among all people from the one end of the earth to the other. There is not room to quote the whole twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus; it is like an epitome of the far-off after-history which I have been briefly sketching. Here are two verses (the 32nd and 33rd): "*I will bring the land into desolation; and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste."* There is not room for chapters xxviii. and xxix. of Deuteronomy; they describe with literal exactness what is being done in Russia at the present day: "*The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: . . . thou shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth: . . . thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee . . . thou shalt betroth a wife, and another shall have her: thou shalt build a house, and shalt not dwell therein . . . thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look and fail with longing for them all the day long."* Look at Jer. xxiv. 9: "*I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, and to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them."* Look at Ezek. xxii. 15: "*I will scatter thee among the heathen, and will disperse thee in the countries, and will consume thy filthiness out of thee."*

Look at Amos ix. 8: "*Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth: saving that I will not utterly destroy the face of Jacob, saith the Lord. For lo! I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve.*" So our Lord takes up and continues the prophecy in St. Luke xxi. 22 and 24, where He says that the Jews "*shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled.*" And St. Paul gives as the condition of their continued dispersion and misery the continuance of their unbelief, the obstinate persistence of their rejection of the last and best message of God to their people, as they had rejected so many more all through the long course of their wonderful and mysterious history: "*God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, unto this very day . . . by their unbelief were they broken off, and thou standest by thy faith. . . . And they also, if they continue not in their unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.*"

In the contrasted blessings and curses in Leviticus and Deuteronomy the curses largely predominate: it is evidently implied that in the latter days Israel will in some signal way, by unfaithfulness to the messages of Jehovah, draw down upon themselves His heaviest judgments. Calamities of every kind are foretold as arising from oppression, poverty, disruption of family ties, bodily sickness, distressing anxiety, and the fear of death. "*Among these nations thou shalt find no ease, and there shall be no rest for the sole of thy foot: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and pining of soul; and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear night and day, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: in the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were evening! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of heart which thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see.*"

No ordinary antecedents would have produced the permanence of the Jews as a race under such conditions. There they are as distinct, as unique as ever, eight millions in all parts of the earth, far more numerous than they ever were in Palestine. It is because of their connection with the revealed will of God, because of their adherence, however partial, to the Divine oracles which they received.

No human foresight could have described the persistence of their alienation from God, the exact nature and description

of their age-long suffering. There is nothing reasonable in accepting the books of the Old Testament as a revelation if we reject the supernatural vision in prophecy. The whole series is full of it. There is no possibility of receiving the New Testament as the final declaration of God's message to man if we do not believe that the prophets foretold what was to come. It was part of God's providential system of education of the world through the illumination of a special people. The New Testament is founded throughout on the Old; the fibres of the two are inextricably intertwined—pictures, it is impossible to doubt, the prophets were permitted to see of that which was to come. The outlines were given 3,000 years ago; medieval and modern history have been filling in the details. After their expulsion from Palestine by Hadrian, they were persecuted from Persia in the East to England and Spain in the West. Their lives were never safe. Throughout the Middle Ages, as now in Persia, they were compelled to wear a distinguishing badge on their clothes. From the Peninsula they were exiled in thousands. In Germany they were the prey of every riotous band of marauding Crusaders. Everywhere the sport of the populace and the chattels of kings, they have had one long weary existence of terror and distress. In the present day there are two great exceptions: the general respect paid to kings of finance in all countries, and the absolute freedom of the Jews in Britain. Elsewhere things are as they were centuries ago. "Jews," says a modern writer, "are still the scorn of Gentiles, ill-treated where they are not feared. The anti-Semitism of Germany and France is but a surface-play of a current that runs deep, and the warning of a mighty storm ever ready to break. Except in Britain and the United States, there is no peace for the Jews even of to-day. They may enjoy here and there a respite from their troubles; but there is no sign that the nations regard them more favourably than of old, no sign that their lot in the future, so long as they are still scattered, will be sensibly alleviated. The predictions in Scripture of their unhappiness are still being fulfilled." The rejection of the Messiah, foreseen in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, is but the culminating point of their long series of acts of disobedience to God.

It is recorded that when Rabbi Akiba¹ and some other Rabbis were walking through the ruins of Jerusalem, Akiba smiled, though the others wept. They were naturally surprised to see their companion smile, and inquired the reason. "Nay, rather," said Akiba, "let me ask why you weep."

¹ "Present-Day Tracts," vol. xiii. (R.T.S.): "The Jews' Witness to the Bible," p. 37.

"We weep," they replied, "because we behold these heathens, who worship false gods, living at ease and in peace, and our holy temple laid waste, foxes going in and out at their pleasure." "All this," rejoined Akiba, "is the very reason why I smile; I see, as you do, how sure God's threatenings have proved, but I learn also how true must be His promises. He said, '*Zion for your sake shall be ploughed as a field*' (Mic. iii. 12), and He has brought it to pass; but He also said, '*There shall yet old men and old women dwell in Jerusalem*' (Zech. viii. 4). Shall we not believe His word?"

It is part of our religion to look to the same comfort which Akiba had of old. "*Lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will turn again the captivity of My people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord; and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. . . . Fear thou not, O Jacob, My servant, saith the Lord; neither be dismayed, O Israel; for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity*" (Jer. xxx. 3, 10). And in Amos we read: "*I will bring again the captivity of My people Israel, and they shall build the waste places and inhabit them*" (ch. ix. 14). "*Their seed shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed*" (Isa. lxi. 9).

Whether the movement of the Jews towards Palestine at the present day is of the nature of a national return, it is impossible to say. Societies for colonizing Palestine, formed originally among the very poorest, have now so spread that even the richest Jews have become members, and take a lively interest in their prosperity. There are some fifteen colonies now in Palestine, where the colonists are taught to till the land and grow produce of every kind. During the last few years the population of the country has enormously increased. Some twenty years ago there were not more than 12,000 Jews in Jerusalem, not more than 30,000 in all the Holy Land. Now there are 43,000 in Jerusalem alone, and over 100,000 in Palestine. Between 70,000 and 80,000 have gone there in the last few years, nearly double the number that returned with Zerubbabel. There can be no doubt, too, that the faith of Christ is making way with the educated Jews in this country.

In the far-off future some great blessing is in store for Christianity through the reconciliation of the Jews with the Divine messenger of God, the Incarnate Word, the Messiah whom their ancestors rejected. "*If the fall of them,*" says St. Paul, "*be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles: how much more their fulness?*"

. . . For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (Rom. xi 12, 15). Jerusalem—not Rome, Constantinople, or Canterbury—is the natural mother of Christendom. Centuries hence it may be that a pure and Apostolic form of Christianity will be revived in a restored Patriarchate of Jerusalem. To the voice of such a Patriarchate it might be possible even for Rome to listen, to divest herself of her exclusiveness, her infallibility, her accretions, and her groundless pretensions, even where human weakness is too strong to permit her to hear the voice of her sister of Constantinople, or her excommunicated daughter of Canterbury.

At present it is difficult for the Jews to accept Christianity after eighteen centuries of persecution—a persecution still continued in most of the countries where they are scattered. It is for us—by our brotherly friendliness, our sympathy, our justice, our consistent practice of our own religion—to recommend it to them as the natural and predestined completion of theirs.

Our eyes have been turned once more to that shrine of extraordinary memories in these last weeks by the pilgrimage of the German Emperor, and the consecration of a new and beautiful church to represent English Christianity. Whatever is done to ameliorate the condition of the Jews, to promote the spread of the Gospel, to increase the peace and mutual understanding of rival Churches, cannot but be for good. It may be that the young Emperor, with his bright imagination, his far-sighted and effective policy, and his penetrating words, may strike a spark of Christian sympathy and enthusiasm which will be better than antiquarian zeal or historical disquisition. In the confused and conflicting loyalty of the Churches of Christendom to that strange gray old city for which the latest writer in the New Testament has nothing more to say than that "*it is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified,*" it is desirable that the purer, the most enlightened, the most intelligent aspects of Christianity should make themselves felt. The English Church is rousing herself to fresh efforts. God grant that the returning thousands may learn to know the Prince of Peace!

Meantime, the contemplation of God's mysterious providence for the world in the destinies of His chosen people must fill us with awe, reverence, and faith. The Jews, scattered, yet permanently distinct; the gradual removal of barriers between them and ourselves in Britain; the miseries of that unfortunate race elsewhere which we are powerless to avert; the marvellous prosperity and progress of the countries that own the Kingdom of Christ; the fact that the truer and purer the

Christianity is, so much the greater the national vitality—all these things bring us once more, with gratitude and humility, to the foot of the Cross. We join the voice of many angels, round about the throne, ten thousand times ten thousand, who cry with the loud tones of perfect knowledge: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." With every creature which is in heaven and on the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, we sing: "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." And when we think of the 144,000—the ideal, perfect, emblematical number of those that were sealed, not only of Judæa, but of all the tribes of the children of Israel—we wait with patience the gradual unfolding of God's eternal purpose; and once more we sing, in the jubilant strains of Wesley's anthem: "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!"

WILLIAM SINCLAIR.

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