

since in all weary heavy-laden hearts. It will sound on through all the ages, till all, through many ways, by various discipline, have found their burden intolerable, have confessed their weariness, have taken at last his yoke, have found rest and peace in Him.

J. J. STEWART PEROWNE.

SHORT PAPERS UPON THE PROPHET
JEREMIAH.

NO. 2.—THE OPENING VISIONS.

THE visions vouchsafed to Jeremiah are destitute of the sublimity and the awful magnificence of those by which Isaiah and Ezekiel were called to the prophetic office, but they are full of meaning. And it is remarkable that while those glorious visions seemed to foreshew a career of splendour and power for those to whom they were granted, the simple allegories which unfolded themselves to Jeremiah's view were discouraging. They spoke of difficulty chiefly, and shewed that it was a hard work, and one well nigh hopeless, to which he was summoned. Perhaps that was what Jeremiah needed. There are some natures to which danger and difficulty bring strength. Mid the soft breezes of the south they are listless and indifferent, but when the keen east wind blows they are braced for exertion, and will do battle with the fierce storm. And so it was difficulty, hardship, ill-success, that were set before Jeremiah's eyes.

The first vision was merely a rod, *i. e.*, a branch of an almond tree. Now the almond tree is as full of meaning to the people of Judæa as the snowdrop is to

us. Like the peach tree in our shrubberies — and the almond belongs to the same family of trees — it puts forth its pale pink blossoms before the leaves open ; and Dr. Tristram, in his “ Natural History of the Bible,” says that he gathered it in Bethany in full bloom in January. The leaves follow almost immediately upon the blossoms, and thus, while other trees are still wrapt in the torpor of winter, it gives the first sign of the approach of spring. It has two names in the Bible, the more common one being *Luz*, the old name for Bethel, *the almond city*, but called by Jacob *the house of God*, after he had seen there his dream of the ladder mounting up to heaven. The other name of the almond tree is that used here by Jeremiah, *shâkêd*. In our version it is taken to mean *make haste*. Jehovah asks, “ What seest thou ? ” Jeremiah answers, “ A branch of a Shâkêd tree.” And the Lord said, “ Thou hast well seen : for I am *hastening* my word to perform it,” the Hebrew for hastening being *shôkêd*. This gives a very good sense. The almond is the tree *in haste*, which cannot wait, but hurries into flower before the spring has come. But more literally the verb means *to be awake*, and so the almond is the tree awake, while other trees sleep.

And this probably is the true meaning. God was awake, and up for judgment. Long time He seems to be inactive. His purposes mature slowly. For this world is a state of probation and trial ; and were God ever to be immediate in his dealings with us, were punishments ever to follow quick upon sins, and rewards to be bestowed at once upon the righteous, probation would be of little account. It is the difficulty of our probation here which gives it its value. But at

length God seems to arouse Himself from this quiescent state, and events march on with startling rapidity.

So with the Jewish nation. During the fifty-five years of Manasseh's reign God had seemed to remain inactive. He permitted that king to reverse all his father's acts, and then He chastised him, and brought him to repentance. But after that the land had a long rest. Those many years were its allotted period of probation, and so we always find the reign of Manasseh spoken of as the time when Judah finally apostatized from God: for its conduct then made it a moral impossibility that it should heartily accept Josiah's reforms. Yet was the attempt made: for it was not an actual impossibility, and with God mercy is ever triumphing over justice. And so that simple almond branch told of a more eventful time coming. Judah had had its calm quiet period of probation. One more attempt to rescue it must be made under sharper and sterner circumstances. If Judah would be saved, it must rouse itself at once to repentance; for God's justice was awake, and the results of past actions would now quickly shew themselves.

But was there not also a more comforting lesson? God wakes to reward his people as well as to punish the impenitent. And again, He wakes to perform his word, *i. e.*, to carry on his purpose of saving man. The reign of Josiah and the ministry of Jeremiah were indispensable for the salvation of the Jewish Church. Without the work of these two men, the return from the Babylonian exile would, humanly speaking, have been impossible. The almond branch therefore spake of a watchful Providence ever ordering and controlling and directing to its appointed end the tangled maze of

cross purposes and conflicting aims which form the outward garb of human history. And Jeremiah was unfit to be a prophet till he had learnt the lesson of belief in a watchful Providence; and he learned it by the sight of a plant. And if the name of the plant spake of watchfulness, its blossom spake of *trust*. The almond tree putting forth its tender and delicate flowers in January, our own snowdrop lifting up its pale head mid the rigours of winter, both tell the same tale. They trust in the God of nature, trust that He is about to send warm and genial weather to mature their seeds; and in April the ripe almonds may be gathered in the valley of the Jordan. And so Jeremiah must trust in a higher power that slumbereth not; and amid all the grief and trouble that were about to fall upon Judæa, that power would ever watch over the Church, and would order all things for the general good of man.

Jeremiah's second vision was of a more special character. God next shewed him a seething pot, *i. e.*, a caldron boiling furiously, and rapidly settling down upon the heap of blazing fuel burning beneath it, and certain soon to overturn, and pour its scalding contents upon all around.

This boiling pot was Assyria, whose history explains the full significance of the vision. From the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, when the army of Sennacherib was destroyed by a pestilential blast, up to the end of Josiah's reign, Judæa, with one slight exception, had remained unmolested by the Assyrians. That exception had been when Esar-haddon, the son of Sennacherib, on his way to invade Egypt, had captured Jerusalem, and taken Manasseh prisoner. But Manasseh made his submission, and became Esar-haddon's vassal; and

during the remainder of his long reign, and the reigns of his son Amon and his grandson Josiah, the armies of Nineveh appeared no more in the land, and the people grew in numbers, and increased in wealth and power.

Now by the mysterious providence of God the histories of Nineveh and Babylon have been preserved to our days, buried deep beneath those vast mounds which cover the sites of the great cities which once stood upon the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates. Excavations have been made there, and the palaces of Sennacherib and Esar-haddon and Sargon and of other monarchs have been laid open, and their libraries found, full of historical memorials written in a very beautiful character, formed by the arrangement of arrow-heads in various shapes. Now if their books had been written like ours, on paper, or even like those of the Greeks and Romans, on skins, they would have perished; for they have lain beneath the ground for two thousand years. But the Assyrians either carved their records in stone, or stamped them on clay and burned them. The former was the primitive method of writing. "Oh," says Job, "that my words were graven with an iron pen (*i.e.*, a chisel), and filled up with lead, that they might last for ever" (Chap. xix. 24). So the ten commandments were inscribed on tables of stone, while for less permanent memorials plaster sufficed (Deut. xxvii. 4; Joshua viii. 32). The printing, however, of inscriptions on cylinders of clay, and then burning them, to make them imperishable, was peculiar to the Assyrians, and they carried it on to so great an extent that thousands of these clay books are laid up in the British Museum, and in the libraries of other European

states, and everywhere learned men have set themselves to decipher the contents.

At first this was no easy task, for the very letters were unknown; but they were at length made out by the help of an inscription carved upon a rock in Behistun, which it was happily conjectured might be one of those put up by Darius in various parts of his dominions, and of which the contents were pretty well known. As it consisted chiefly of a catalogue of the names of the countries over which Darius ruled, most of the letters of the alphabet were settled by its aid, and by slow degrees the knowledge of the language has grown, until now in London there are classes for studying the old Assyrian or Accadian tongue. A dictionary has been published, grammars are in progress, and the translation of these old writings is a matter, with occasional difficulties, as trustworthy as of inscriptions in Greek.

It is with no common interest that Biblical students watch the deciphering of these books of burnt clay, for they give us an accurate knowledge of nations whose history was interwoven with that of the Jews. As the Bible is the oldest book in the world, so too do these printed bricks carry us back to very ancient times. A most curious Babylonian tradition, embodying a legend of the Flood, was deciphered and published by the late Mr. G. Smith, a gentleman whose loss is most severely felt by all who take an interest in Assyrian literature. But the most valuable portion of their contents is the contemporaneous history they give us of kings like Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, of whom before we knew little except what is contained in the Bible. Now we have long records of them, presenting

their acts and characters to us from an Assyrian point of view. So full often are these narratives, that the history, for instance, of Merodach-baladan, whose name is mentioned in Isaiah xxxix. as having sent an embassy to King Hezekiah, occupies no less than fifty pages of moderately close type in Lenormant's "Premières Civilizations," published at Paris in 1874.

Now in these records we find that Nineveh and Babylon were rivals, and that while Babylon was the older and nobler of the two cities, yet that Nineveh long oppressed it, and held it in subjection. And what gave Judæa so long a respite after the destruction of Sennacherib's army was the growing turbulence of Babylon. First Merodach-baladan, and after his death his sons, in alliance with the kings of Elam, were in constant revolt against Nineveh. To keep Babylon in subjection, Esar-haddon was compelled to take up his residence there, and though a determined and warlike king, his unruly subjects gave him so much trouble at home that his neighbours had peace. At his death his son, Assur-bani-pal, went back to Nineveh, and though he made many great wars, yet he could not prevent the upgrowth near him of the new empire of the Medes, destined in course of time to swallow up both Nineveh and Babylon. And so now we can see the full significance of that boiling caldron of perpetual war. For in Mesopotamia there was a fierce struggle. Constant revolts of Babylon, constant battles with Elam, a never-ending contest with the Medes, kept the kings of Nineveh too busy for them to make expeditions against Judæa. After all, its importance politically consisted in its being on the route to Egypt; and after Esar-haddon's breaking up of that country

into little states, it too became quiet enough, and lay outside the circle of Assyrian interests. But on the Tigris the strife daily grew more intense, till at last, just towards the end of Josiah's reign, Nineveh fell. Some years before, Babylon had won for itself independence under the rule of one of its nobles, Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar. But independence was not enough. The hate engendered by long years of subjection could be satiated only by Nineveh's ruin; and so, making an alliance with the Medes, Nabopolassar captured the rival city in the very way described by Nahum. That prophet had foretold that "with an overflowing flood Jehovah would make an end of it" (Chap. i. 8), and that "the gates of the rivers should be opened, and the palace be dissolved" (Chap. ii. 6). Now Nineveh was situated at a point where two other rivers pour their waters into the Tigris. During the siege a great flood happened, which burst open the defences erected to prevent an enemy entering the city by boats, and which Nahum calls "the gates of the rivers." It also undermined the wall of the royal palace upon the river's bank, built, as was the custom, of bricks dried only in the sun, and which when long soaked in water lost all their consistency. And so the Medes and Babylonians entered and captured the city, which otherwise might for many years have withstood their arms.

It was this decline of the power of Nineveh which led to the expedition of Pharaoh-nechoh, in opposing whom Josiah lost his life. Esar-haddon had divided Egypt into twelve little states, which spent their strength in making war upon one another. But when, by the aid of Greek mercenaries, Psammetichus had

welded them once again together, Egypt returned to its old ambition, and the time seemed favourable for that struggle with Assyria which was, they hoped, to give to the inhabitants of the Nile valley the empire of the world. Pharaoh-nechoh, no doubt, knew of the siege of Nineveh, and expected that the great Mesopotamian powers would there exhaust their strength, and leave him an easy victor. He collected, therefore, a large fleet, and landing his troops in the bay of Acre, commenced the conquest of the regions which lay on the western side of the Euphrates. For some reason or other, after the defeat of Josiah he returned to Egypt, possibly to recruit his army after the battle of Megiddo. Meanwhile Nineveh fell, and Nebuchadnezzar began to display that extraordinary military skill which raised Babylon to such vast power, but a power as transient as it was overwhelming. With Nebuchadnezzar it rose: its decline followed at once upon his death. But now he was in the first flush of success, and when Nechoh renewed the attempt four years afterwards, he was utterly defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish, and yielded to the Chaldees the empire of the East.

Such, then, was the period described in the vision as the seething caldron. In the plains of Mesopotamia four great powers were struggling for empire—the Medes, the Elamites, the Assyrians of Nineveh, and the Chaldæans of Babylon. And this caldron, as the words are rightly translated in the margin, had its face turned away from the north, and looked towards the south, *i. e.*, towards Judæa. It was settling down: the fierce elements which caused so great an uproar were being consumed, but unevenly. Victory was inclining to the Chaldæan side, and if it prevailed, the raging forces

whose violence had been confined to Mesopotamia would quickly be poured over Judæa, like the scalding contents of an overturned furnace.

And such was the result. Babylon first destroyed Ninéveh, and that so completely, that that great city, peopled by half a million inhabitants, absolutely ceased to exist. Never, elsewhere, was so vast a town brought to such utter ruin. And Nebuchadnezzar treated Judæa in a similar way. For seventy years it lay in entire desolation. He brought no settlers from elsewhere to fill the place of those whom he had swept away, as the Assyrians had planted colonies in Samaria. He left a void and empty region, and the land kept her Sabbaths, which the unrighteous people had neglected to observe.

Such was the outlook into the future when Jeremiah was called to the prophetic office. The justice of God was awake for chastisement, and the kingdoms of the north were about to set their thrones solemnly round about Jerusalem, to try her cause and punish her guilt. And now, therefore, we can see the significance of the words spoken to the prophet. He was to be made "a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls." These things are valueless except in a bitter war carried on remorselessly to the very end. God makes nothing in vain, and this iron strength was given to the prophet because he would need it all. It was no pleasant prospect to be made thus a besieged city, needing ramparts of iron and brass, to protect it from the violence of the onslaught. Yet Jeremiah hesitated not. He would be this one strong fortress, to make the last resistance in Jehovah's cause to the powers of sin.

We shall hereafter see how Jeremiah discharged the

office intrusted to him, but I repeat that it was not one to be envied, and that in spite of the young king's earnestness, and the apparent success of his reforms, these visions pointed to a darker side, and spoke chiefly or entirely of chastisement and endurance.

R. PAYNE SMITH.

DID CHRIST SPEAK GREEK?—A REJOINDER.

I AM sorry that Dr. Roberts should think the difference between us greater than I had supposed it to be. It is true that I wished to make as little of it as I could. At the same time I thought the reader would see precisely in what respect the difference seemed capable of being minimized, viz., so far as it related to the purely critical and historical question to what extent and in what proportion Greek and Aramaic respectively were spoken in Palestine at the time of our Lord.

I purposely excluded other considerations, from the fear that they might prevent the question from being decided upon its own merits, and excite a prejudice which it ought to be our object rather to allay. The question is one of fact and evidence, not of feeling; and if feeling is introduced, it is only too apt to make "the wish father to the thought."

And yet even here I think Dr. Roberts is inclined to overstate his case. Even supposing that the discourses in the Gospels were all originally delivered in Greek, there would still be the most serious difficulties in the way of supposing that we had received an exact transcript of them. But even if we could put these difficulties on one side, it might still be asked whether to insist upon such syllabic exactness was not