

divine enthusiasm. And so the Will that required Jesus to drink the awful cup was a beneficent Will—purposed that the One should suffer that the many might be saved. For the suffering that revealed man's sin perfected man's Saviour. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things that He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him." "Inasmuch as He suffered, He Himself having been tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."

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*JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY OF THE NEW
COVENANT.*

JEREMIAH XXXI. 31-34.

THIS prophetic oracle could not fail to strike all readers as very remarkable were they not so familiar with its phrases, and with the interpretation we have learned to put upon these in the light of New Testament fulfilment. It is one of the most outstanding utterances in the whole range of prophetic literature; and it is an interesting and not unprofitable inquiry what precisely it meant for the Prophet himself. We propose to enter on such an inquiry in this paper; and we hope to make it appear that this word concerning a new covenant between God and Israel was a very great and noble one, pregnant with deep far-reaching thought, even when we endeavour as far as possible to shut out the light thrown upon it by the New Testament, and to read it as a spiritually-minded contemporary of Jeremiah might have read it. To do this requires

an effort—a greater effort than most commentators seem inclined to make. The remarks to be found in commentaries on this notable passage are for the most part very perfunctory and very dull; only here and there do we find a fresh suggestive thought on the subject. It seems as if familiarity with the New Testament sense had blunted the keenness of exegetical vision. The sunlight of the era of fulfilment has robbed the prophetic light, shining in a dark place, of its brightness, and made it to the interpreter's eye a pale faded moon, giving no light, and only dimly visible in the heavens. The remark, indeed, applies more or less to all Old Testament prophecies, but to none perhaps more than the one now to be considered.

This prophecy, so remarkable in itself, is preceded by one equally remarkable, which has for its theme the restoration of Israel and of Judah from captivity to their native land; wherein the happy future is represented in a series of scenes which together compose a vision beheld by the Prophet in a dream by night. We are introduced, as it were, into a picture gallery, where we behold, in successive *tableaux*, the whole process of restoration, from its initial stage to the final settlement, amid peace and plenty, in the land of promise. First comes the decree of restoration; then follows the homeward journey—a great company returning to Zion, among them the blind and the lame and the women with child, no one left behind, weeping as they go for their former sins, yet in God's mercy surely finding their way to the place of rest; ¹ next, we witness a harvest-home feast celebrated by the returned exiles, when the voice of song is heard, and the virgin

¹ Jer. xxxi. 1-7.

rejoices in the dance, and all, young and old, forget their sorrow because of the goodness of the Lord in filling their barns and causing their flocks to multiply.¹ The next scene shews us a woman weeping bitterly and uttering doleful lamentations, and one standing beside her seeking to comfort her. It is Rachel weeping for her dead children, and her God saying to her, "Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears, for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy."² Last comes the most pathetic scene of all. What we look upon now is not Rachel weeping for her children, but her children weeping for themselves—Ephraim repenting, smiting on his thigh in the poignancy of his grief over his youthful folly, confessing that he had been as a beast, a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, and acknowledging that the severe treatment he had received had been fully deserved; and, at some distance from the penitent, the Divine Father overhearing the contrite words of his prodigal child and relenting, and saying, "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him. I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."³ No wonder the Prophet felt happy when he awoke after a dream which brought such lovely visions before his eyes. "Upon this I awaked," he says, "and beheld, and my sleep was sweet unto me."⁴ Yes, sweeter far than his waking hours, for these brought back the rude reality—a dreary spectacle of sin, impenitence, and misery; while in the

¹ Jer. xxxi. 10-14.

³ *Ibid.* Verses 18-20.

² *Ibid.* Verses 15-17.

⁴ *Ibid.* Verse 26.

vision of the night he had been in an ideal world of holiness and happiness, of penitence for past errors, and returning peace and joy in the love of a reconciled God.

But the joy of the Prophet might be checked not merely by thoughts of the *present*, but by the intrusion of a doubt as to the stability of that happy *future* which had been revealed to him in vision. He could hardly help asking himself the question: What is the use of restoring Israel, if the old tragic disappointing history is to repeat itself? God in ancient times constituted Israel a people in close fellowship with Himself; but that original constitution turned out a miserable failure. The old Sinaitic covenant had its code of moral law inscribed on tables of stone and deposited in the ark for safe custody and in token of its sacredness; it had its ordinances of service concerning "meats and drinks and diverse washings," in reference to which the people got instruction from the priests before they were written in a book; it had its provision for cancelling the sins of the past year, so that the congregation might make a new start, in the institution of the great day of atonement which procured for Israel an annual salvation. But the old covenant, so provided with conditions of communion between God and his people, had not been kept. Israel in her successive generations had utterly failed to perform her part, and so had made it impossible for God to do what He had promised; until at length He loathed the people with whom He was in covenant,¹ and

¹ In the last clause of Verse 32 the words rendered in English version, "I was an husband unto them," may also be rendered I was disgusted with them. The Hebrew verb שָׂטַף means either to have dominion over, or to loathe. The Septuagint follows the second sense in its rendering $\kappa\acute{\alpha}\gamma\omega\ \eta\mu\acute{\iota}\lambda\eta\sigma\alpha\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omega\upsilon\upsilon$.

rejected them, and cast them forth out of their land. What if all this should happen over again in the history of our children as it happened in the days of our fathers? Was such a result not all too likely? Such doubting thoughts were most natural to one in Jeremiah's position, and they constituted, we may be sure, one of his direst spiritual trials. But faith's trials are but the precursors of new triumphs. Job despairs of relief in the present life, and his very despair causes faith to reach out beyond the tomb in search of the deliverance which, in spite of all present appearances, it believes will surely come. Even so Jeremiah, justly despairing of permanent prosperity for Israel on the basis of the old covenant, by a sublime act of Heaven-inspired faith, dares to predict the advent of a time when the old discredited and bankrupt constitution or covenant shall be superseded by a new one furnished with conditions that shall insure it against failure. We have now to consider what are the more auspicious conditions of the new and better covenant on which restored Israel is to be constituted in the good time coming.

Of two things we may be sure beforehand. The Prophet's hope of permanent well-being in the future will not be based on any expectation of the people doing better, but rather on the faith that God in his grace will do more for them and in them. The new covenant, we can predict, will be a covenant in which God's love will be the conspicuous all-determining factor; in familiar phrase, a covenant of grace. Jeremiah knows human nature too well to expect radical and abiding improvement in men left to themselves. His only hope, therefore, is in God. The action of

Divine love may, nay, doubtless will, transform human nature so as to make the people of the new covenant veritable sons of God ; but the initiative will lie with God, not with men ; and just on that account the new covenant will be stable as the ordinances of the sun and moon and stars. The other thing that may be taken for granted is that, since the new constitution is to be introduced on the express ground of dissatisfaction with the old, its provisions will be found to have a pointed reference to those of the latter, and to be of such a character as to supply the needful remedy for their defects.

Looking now into the prophecy itself, we find that the description which it gives of the peculiarities of the new covenant exactly answers to these expectations. In the first place, God appears most conspicuously throughout as the Agent. He is the Doer, man is the passive subject of His gracious action. He is the Giver, man is but the receiver. The old covenant ran: "Now therefore, *if* ye will obey my voice in deed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people ; for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." ¹ In the new covenant there is no "if," suspending Divine blessing and favour on man's good behaviour. God promises absolutely to be their God, and to regard them as his people, and to insure the relation against all risk of rupture by Himself making the people what He wishes them to be. Then, secondly, there is an obvious reference to the defects of the old covenant in the provisions of the new. Whereas, in the case of the old, the law of duty

¹ Exod. xix. 5.

was written on *tables of stone*; in the case of the new, the law is to be written on the *heart*; whereas, under the old, owing to the ritual character of the worship, the knowledge of God and his will was a complicated affair in which men generally were helplessly dependent on a professional class, under the new, the worship of God would be reduced to the simplest spiritual elements, and it would be in every man's power to know God at first hand, the sole requisite for such knowledge as would then be required being a pure heart. Finally, whereas, under the old, the provisions for the cancelling of sin were very unsatisfactory, and utterly unfit to perfect the worshipper as to conscience, by dealing thoroughly with the problem of guilt—of which no better evidence could be desired than the institution of the great day of atonement, in which a remembrance of sin was made once a year, and by which nothing more than an annual and putative forgiveness was procured—under the new, on the contrary, God would grant to his people a real, absolute, and perennial forgiveness, so that the abiding relation between Him and them should be as if sin had never existed.

We have thus briefly stated our view respecting the conditions of the new covenant as specified in the prophecy, in the hope that the mere statement may suffice to commend our exposition to the minds of many. We cannot hope, however, that no one will dispute the accuracy of the interpretation, and therefore we must enter a little into detail by way of further explanation and defence. That the contrast is rightly taken in the first of the three conditions will be disputed by few, if any. One cannot read the words,

“ I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts,” without thinking of the tables of stone which occupy so prominent a place in the history of the Sinaitic covenant. And the writing on the heart suggests very forcibly the defects of the ancient covenant, in so far as it had the fundamental laws of life written on *stone*. Writing on stone may be very durable. The slabs on which the ten words are inscribed may abide as a lasting monument, proclaiming what God requires of man, saying to successive generations : Remember to do this and to avoid doing that. But while the stone slabs may avail to keep men in mind of their duty, they are utterly impotent to dispose them to perform it ; in witness whereof we need only refer to Israel's behaviour at the foot of the mount of law-giving. At the very time the tables were being prepared, they danced around their golden calf ; at the very moment Moses was descending with the two tables in his hand, with the ten words written on them, the first of which said, “ Thou shalt have none other God before me,” they had chosen another God ; inasmuch that the legislator in disgust dashed them to pieces, as if to say, What is the use of making laws for such a people ? Manifestly the writing on the heart is sorely wanted in order that the law may be kept, not merely in the ark, but in human conduct. And that, accordingly, is what Jeremiah puts in the forefront in his account of the new covenant, on which restored Israel is to be constituted. How the mystic writing is to be achieved he does not say, perhaps he does not know ; but he believes that God can and will achieve it somehow ; and he understands full well its aim and its certain result in a holy life.

Dispute is most likely to arise in connection with the second condition, referred to in the words, "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord." The commentators throw little light on this part of the prophecy, for the most part putting their readers off with vague generalities which convey no definite ideas. Almost the only fresh and tangible thought we have met with in the course of our reading is one thrown out by Otto Pfeiderer in his able work on Religion.¹ This writer finds in the words above cited the idea that in the days of the new covenant, God will reveal Himself to the individual spirit; in other words, that in the new time individual personality will come to its rights, in contrast to the old time in which not the individual but the nation only was of importance. This is undoubtedly a valuable suggestion; but it appears to us not the truth directly taught in the passage, but only an inference that may legitimately be drawn from the primary lesson. That primary lesson we take to be, that *spiritual* knowledge in the new time will take the place occupied by *ritual* under the old. Spiritual knowledge is a kind of knowledge which can be communicated to each man at first hand, and which indeed can be communicated in no other way. God, as a Spirit, reveals Himself to each human spirit, to each individual man who has a pure heart and who worships in spirit and in truth. On the other hand, the knowledge of positive precepts, such as those contained in the ritual system, can be only obtained at second hand. One man, who

¹ *Die Religion*, Band ii. p. 327.

has himself been taught, must teach others. The reason, the conscience, or the heart could never reveal God's will as embodied in such carnal ordinances. And only on supposition that a tacit reference to the ritual system is intended can the full force of the words, "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour" be perceived. For what was it in the Sinaitic covenant that made men dependent on their neighbour for the knowledge of God? Surely it was the ritual system. So long as that system obtained, the knowledge of God, the right way of worshipping God, was so complicated and elaborate that none but a professional class could master it; and ordinary people, the laity, had to be dependent on them for information and guidance. The priests' lips kept knowledge, and men had to seek the *Torah*, the needful instruction in religious ritual, at his mouth.¹ And it was a grievous bondage, a sure index that the old covenant could not be the final form of God's relation with men, but was destined one day to be antiquated and replaced by a better covenant with better promises. And surely it is not crediting Jeremiah with too much spiritual insight to assume that he was aware that that feature of the old covenant was one of its defects, and had proved a hindrance to the true sanctification of the people, making them too dependent on men, keeping them far from God in fear, and tempting them to substitute ritual for morality, the paper notes of sacrifice for the genuine gold of obedience. And if he saw this, what more likely than that he would make mention of this grievous defect of the old covenant as a thing to be removed when that which was perfect came? For

¹ Mal. ii. 7.

these reasons, we find in this part of the oracle concerning the new covenant the prediction that the ritual law would form no part of the final covenant between God and His people, and that in the good time coming men should not be kept dependent on priests and far from God by an elaborate ceremonial; but, taught of the Spirit, should worship God as Father, offering unto Him the spiritual rational service of devout thoughts and gracious affections. So it was understood by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who gives prominence to the ritual of the old covenant as one of the things most urgently demanding antiquation. "Then verily," he says, "the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a cosmic sanctuary."¹ He goes on to describe the sanctuary and its worship, the substance of what he says being: The *furniture* was golden, but the *service* was poor, with its meats, and drinks, and diverse washings, and carnal ordinances, and so forth, imposed on them until the time of reformation, utterly unfit to perfect the worshipper as to conscience.

The third blessing of the new covenant, the complete and perpetual forgiveness of sin, is so clearly defined that no dispute can arise as to its nature; the only point open to debate is the feature of the old covenant, to which it contains a tacit reference. In our exposition we have assumed that the mental reference is to the provision in the Levitical system for the cancelling of sin, especially the great day of atonement. We are willing to allow that it may fairly be questioned whether so specific an allusion as that to the institution just mentioned was intended. But there

¹ Heb. ix. 1.

can be no reasonable doubt, we think, that the Prophet has in view the general provisions of the old covenant for the removal of guilt, the whole ritual and sacrificial system, including the annual atonement. Jeremiah evidently speaks as one who feels that the old Sinaitic covenant, at this point as at others, was seriously defective. It made elaborate arrangements for cancelling the sins of ignorance and precipitancy committed by the people, so that these might not interrupt their fellowship with God; and yet there was no real effective forgiveness. For many of the more grievous offences there was not even an atonement of any kind provided. The sins dealt with under the ritual law were, for the most part, of a minor character; some of them might almost be called artificial—breaches of positive precepts committed by persons ignorant of the statute—hence very properly denominated “ignorances” by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews.¹ The Levitical forgiveness was thus both partial and shadowy; the problem of human sin was not thoroughly grappled with. All this Jeremiah felt; and therefore, in his picture of the ideally perfect covenant, he assigns a place to a forgiveness worthy of the name—a forgiveness covering the whole of Israel’s sins: her *iniquities* as well as her *errors*; and not merely covering them, but blotting them out of the very memory of Heaven.

Assuming that we are right in finding in this third blessing an allusion to the defects of the Levitical provision for the cancelling of moral debts, the exposition of this part of the prophecy confirms the view we have advocated in regard to the import of the second

¹ Heb. ix. 7: τῶν τοῦ λαοῦ ἀγνοημάτων.

condition of the new covenant. It will be observed that the third benefit is connected with the second by the particle "for." If we assume that the second benefit consists in the replacement of ritual religion by a purely spiritual religion, the "for" has a very definite meaning. It means: The Levitical ritual will then be superfluous; for then God will freely, fully, and absolutely forgive his people, so that there will be no longer any need for sacrifices such as those prescribed in the law.

But on what does this free, full, and absolute forgiveness of the new covenant rest? The Levitical forgivenesses were founded on Levitical sacrifices. Is the forgiveness of the new covenant to be founded on a sacrifice "of nobler name"? That is a question which the student familiar with his New Testament will very naturally answer in the affirmative; and we all know the answer given in the Epistle to the Hebrews. But if it be asked, What is Jeremiah's answer to the question? we must reply, None. In this wondrous oracle of the new covenant, we find no mention of a Perfect Sacrifice which is to replace the rude sacrifices of the law; no hint of a sacrifice in which the victim is no brute beast, but the Celebrant Himself, offering Himself by the eternal Spirit of holy love an atonement for the sins of the world. That such a sacrifice is needed, and will be provided, is not denied; the truth is simply not present to the mind of the Prophet. The glorious thought that the ideals of priesthood and of sacrifice can then only be realized when priest and victim meet in one person, does not seem as yet to have risen above the horizon. And yet one may well hesitate to make an assertion when he reads the fifty-third chapter of

Isaiah, or even those significant words of Jeremiah himself, "I was like a lamb that is brought to the slaughter." The idea that a man, and not a beast, is the true sin-bearer is struggling into the prophetic consciousness. If the sun of this great doctrine is not yet risen, its dawn may be discerned on the eastern sky.

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BIBLICAL NOTES.

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON ST. PAUL'S USE OF ΘΡΙΑΜΒΕΥΩ.—A friend has pointed out an omission in my Paper on this subject in THE EXPOSITOR for December last, which may possibly have the appearance of a *suppressio veri*.

I have said (pp. 412, 414) that θριαμβεύω is not found in any Greek author of an earlier date than St. Paul, and that "the classical usage on which our translation is based is confined to Plutarch, Appian, and Herodian." This statement refers, of course, to the classical usage of *the verb itself*, and, if correct, is a fact that perhaps deserves distinctly stating. Such a use of the derivative verb is, however, obviously dependent on a preëstablished use of *the noun* θριαμβος in a corresponding sense, and this I have subsequently implied and taken for granted. It would have been better to have explicitly stated at the outset that the use of θριαμβος as equivalent to *triumphus* dates as far back as Polybius (167 B.C.), in whose Books of Roman History it naturally occurs pretty frequently.¹ I do not see that this fact, which I had kept in view all along, in any way militates against the position taken up in my Paper. Unquestionably every Greek writer of St. Paul's time who had occasion to speak of the Roman triumph (as Josephus, for instance) used this word and no other; and unquestionably the Roman triumph was known by report, and spoken of under this name throughout the wide Greek-speaking regions of the Empire. It may also be freely allowed that the period of time that elapsed between Polybius and St. Paul was long enough for *triumphus* to have become naturalized in Greek. What I ventured to argue was, that there is no proof of such a

¹ For *triumpho* this writer has θριαμβον ἄγειν, and for the *passive*, ἐν θριάμβῳ ἄγεσθαι. See Polybius xvi. 23. 5, 6; xxii. 7. 17; as well as vi. 15. 8, previously referred to.