

on the other hand, which arose among the Semites. I cannot agree with the view that the character of the other Semitic religions is adequately expressed by calling them "polytheistic": the term "multiplicity-in-unity" seems to express their nature better. I have attempted in a work that will appear almost immediately<sup>1</sup> to collect, point by point, all the facts that can be found about the ancient religion of Asia Minor, *i.e.*, the religion of the Hittites; and if my results be right, Prof. Smith's contrast would have to be modified. I hope he will subject the work to the same rigorous criticism which I have applied to his *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*.

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## *JEREMIAH: THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE.*

### I. HIS CALL.

IN ordinary biographies no part is more fascinating than the first—if details are given of the childhood of the hero or heroine—for in the sayings and adventures of a gifted child there are singular prognostications of future greatness, and the very beginning of life is a miniature of all that is to follow. The Scripture is not lavish of such details. Of Jeremiah, for example, before his appearance as a public character, we receive hardly any information, except that he was a native of Anathoth, a town a mile or two to the north of Jerusalem, and that he belonged to a priestly family.

But on one particular of what may be called the ante-public life of its heroes the Bible is wonderfully communicative: it describes with great fulness how they were led to abandon private life and come forward as public witnesses

<sup>1</sup> *The Local History of Phrygia*, of which Vol. I. will be ready probably next month.

for God. These scenes are among the most remarkable passages of the divine record. Of this nature was the appearance of Jehovah at the burning bush, when Moses was called to his great life-work. The night scene in which the boy Samuel was called by the voice of God, as he slumbered in the tabernacle, is one of unapproachable beauty. Isaiah has described his own call in the sixth chapter of his prophecy—the scene in the temple when he saw Jehovah on a throne, high and lifted up, and around Him the seraphim, chanting, “Holy, holy, holy.” The account of Ezekiel’s call fills several chapters at the beginning of the book of his prophecies. The call of St. Paul, on the way to Damascus, is related no fewer than three times in the Book of Acts. In every one of these cases the call is not only an incident full of spiritual grandeur, but it also throws a great deal of light on the life which follows.

Jeremiah also received a special call to the work of the prophet, and he has described it with his own pen.<sup>1</sup> It does not, perhaps, in beauty or sublimity come up to some of those just alluded to; but it is indispensable as the key to the life of the prophet.

## I.

The description begins without any of the picturesque accessories supplied in other cases of the kind. We are not informed where the event took place, whether in his native Anathoth or, like Isaiah’s call, in the temple at Jerusalem. Nor is it clear whether Jeremiah already knew the Lord or whether, as in the case of Samuel, the call to God’s work synchronized with the first acquaintance with God Himself; although perhaps the impression left by the narrative is that this was not the first time Jeremiah was in communication with God. We do not know what was his age at the time. In reply to God, indeed, he called himself “a child”; but

<sup>1</sup> Ch. i. 4–10.

this is an elastic term, and in the sense in which he used it, a person of any age might say, "I am but a child."

Although on this occasion God not only spoke to Jeremiah, but even touched him, the prophet does not, like Isaiah, give any account of His appearance or of the sound of His voice;<sup>1</sup> he merely tells what He said: "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."

No mystery is greater than that touched upon in these words. Before birth, in the secret laboratory of nature, the gifts are already distributed on which depend the station and degree to which everyone can attain and the work which he is fitted to do in the world. Some theorists have, indeed, held that all children are born with equal capacities, and that the differences which subsequently appear are entirely due to training; but who can believe it? The size of the brain, the fineness of the organization, the sensitiveness of the nervous system—such circumstances as these determine beforehand the amount of talent or genius which each is to possess.

We discover by degrees, at the beginning of life, what is the share which has fallen to us. The specially gifted soon find out, for many flatterers are ready to whisper to them the delightful secret. The result sometimes is the development of egotism: they are filled with conceit of their powers and look down on those less highly favoured; they see the prizes of life just within their grasp and start forth in pursuit of them—to win wealth and position or to write their names in the book of fame. Sometimes the knowledge of their superiority leads to their own undoing; for, trusting to their genius, they neglect their opportunities and are outstripped in the race by persons who have added to their

<sup>1</sup> See Giesebrecht, *Jeremia*, in *loc.*

more moderate abilities industry and perseverance ; or the flattery called forth by their talents leads them into company where their gifts are wasted and their candle burns out before the time.

But the awakening to the consciousness of possessing great powers may have a different effect : it may breed a sense of responsibility. If God bestows great gifts, it is reasonable to suppose that He will prescribe a great task on which to employ them. It was in this manner that Jeremiah's mind worked. When it was revealed to him that he had been born with unusual gifts, at the same moment the conviction was borne in upon him that they were to be expended in declaring to his fellow-men the will and purposes of the Most High.

## II.

The natural effect of the divine intimation which had been made to Jeremiah would have been the rush of all that was in him to the point indicated, in eager desire to be engaged in God's work ; and this no doubt came later. But it was not the first result. On the contrary, the first feeling was a recoil from the course indicated. His reply to the voice which had addressed him was not, like Isaiah's, "Here am I; send me," but, "Ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child."

This has been the first feeling of many of the servants of God at the same critical juncture. Moses received the call of God in the same way ; and so far did he carry his refusal as to arouse the anger of Jehovah. When John Knox was called to be a preacher by the acclamation of his fellow-prisoners in the church of St. Andrew's, he was so overwhelmed that, after an ineffectual attempt to address the congregation, he burst into tears, rushed out, and shut himself up in his chamber, persuaded that he could never appear in the pulpit again.

There is in modest and healthy minds a natural shyness against going into a position where one must attract the attention of all. In Jeremiah's mind there must, besides, have been an instinctive fear of the opposition which he would have to encounter; for the state of the times was such that anyone could foresee, even at the first glance, that a true prophet would have to lift up his voice against the whole course of society and bring down on his head the maledictions of high and low.<sup>1</sup> But the chief dread of a position such as that to which Jeremiah was being summoned always is responsibility for the souls of men. "What am I to stand up among my fellow-creatures as the representative and spokesman of God, to reprove their modes of life and point them upward to the heights of holiness? What about my own holiness? What about my own sins? Am I so certain of being in the way myself that I can take it upon me to offer myself as a guide to others?"

These are legitimate fears, and those who are called upon in any way to testify for God ought not to suppress them too soon. They make a man examine his foundations; they keep him from trusting to his own talents or his own goodness; they cast him back upon God, who, if He really wants him, will soothe his fears and renew His prompting, as He did to Jeremiah: "Say not," He told him, "I am a child; for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak."

Not infrequently those who are most timorous at the first, when they are called, are the bravest at the last. When it

<sup>1</sup> It is a common thing to say here, as in the case of Isaiah, that some elements of the introductory scene are due to Jeremiah's later experiences. This is a kind of remark which one writer makes and others repeat after him, as sheep follow their leader. But to say nothing of conscientiousness in recording what happened, the artistic instinct would have preserved these prophets from introducing anachronisms into these solemn scenes. Many writers have no sense for the divinatory power which belongs to great moments in experience.

is made perfectly clear to them that it is their duty to go, they are all the more fearless because they are sure that they are going, not in obedience to their own fancy or vanity, but because they cannot disobey a divine command. The best antidote to the fear of man is the fear of God. Knox shed tears and trembled and fled, when first called to preach, but over his open grave this witness was borne, "There lies one who never feared the face of man." So Jeremiah's was naturally a sensitive and shrinking nature, but God made him to his age "a defenced city and an iron pillar and brazen walls,"<sup>1</sup> that is, a heart which no task could tire and no opposition terrify.

### III.

The final feature of the call of Jeremiah was the touching of his mouth by the divine hand—"Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth."

This reminds us of a trait in the call of Isaiah: one of the seraphim flew and, taking a live coal from off the altar, laid it on his mouth, saying, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged." The vision of God had awakened in Isaiah an overwhelming sense of sin; and for some reason his sin was felt to be lying particularly on his lips. The burning coal laid there was to burn the sin away, and so open a free course for the testimony which it obstructed.

The laying of the divine hand on the mouth of Jeremiah might be thought at first sight to have a similar meaning. He had complained that he was unable to speak—that he was tongue-tied. The touch of the divine hand signified that the restraining cord was loosed and a free passage made for whatever he had to say.

The words which accompanied the touch suggest, how-

<sup>1</sup> Ch. i. 18.

ever, a different idea—"The Lord said, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth." Perhaps the difficulty of Jeremiah was not exactly that of Moses. When Moses complained that he could not speak, he meant that, never having acquired facility in the art of expressing himself, he could not utter what was in his mind, even though he was full of matter. This was naturally the difficulty of an elderly man, as Moses already was, because the art of expression has to be acquired in youth. The difficulty, on the other hand, of a young man, as Jeremiah was, is apt to be deeper: it is not the lack of power to utter what is in his mind, but the fear lest there should be nothing in his mind worth uttering—in short, it is the lack not of words, but of ideas. The touching of his lips signified, therefore, that God was putting His own words into his mouth. It was an assurance that the well of ideas would never run dry, but that God would furnish him with such a revelation of His mind and will that he should never be without an ample message to his age.

In accordance with this is the faith in the power of the word which pervades the entire writings of Jeremiah. He speaks of it as a fire and a hammer breaking the hard rock in pieces.<sup>1</sup> So in the introductory vision it is spoken of as that which will root out and pull down and destroy and throw down, and which at the same time will build and plant.<sup>2</sup> Words appear the lightest and feeblest things that exist; as, indeed, they often are. Yet there are words which are as explosive as gunpowder and as destructive as invading armies. Luther's words, someone said, were half battles. The words of Voltaire and Rousseau brought down the French monarchy and destroyed the Bastille. And words can do better work than this: they can build institutions and plant beneficent customs and nurture holy lives. Jeremiah knew that his word could perform such

<sup>1</sup> xxiii. 29.

<sup>2</sup> i. 10.

miracles, both destructive and constructive, because it was the word of the Lord.

But we need not determine too mathematically what was intended by the laying of the Lord's hand on the mouth of the young prophet. It was a symbol which might have many meanings. If God touches the mouth, it cannot be dumb; it must testify for Him and His Christ. Yet it will be dumb. God's hand closes the door against the boasting which would mar the message and the inconsiderate speaking which would misrepresent the truth. There is a correctness which the grammarian can teach and a charm like the tongues of men and angels which the rhetorician can impart; but there is a grace poured into the lips which is as far above these as the heaven is above the earth; and it is only communicated by the touch of the hand of God.

JAMES STALKER.

### IDEALS AND GRACE.

WE who are the messengers of God, stewards of the message and mysteries, and upon whom is laid the tremendous responsibility of awakening dormant faith, of quieting bewildered conscience, of soothing broken hearts, of helping men to die, and what is more difficult, to live; we who have to deal with little children and feed the "little sheep" of the flock, we who know our ignorance and our helplessness and lack of inner harmony with the slowly evolving purposes of the living God concerning the world, we who are often startled with our sickening insincerity and our mixture of motive in doing our Father's will, need almost more than any other living creatures to get near to the eternal, into close quarters with God Himself. We have to speak of Him, we must therefore know Him for ourselves, we must be sure not only of His Being, but of His character, must achieve this