

But a simpler and thoroughly Greek rendering is that which the American Revision Committee add in the margin, "unto a different gospel which is nothing else save that there are some that . . . would pervert the gospel of Christ:"¹ in other words, "another gospel, which is merely a perversion of the gospel." This avoids the unusual and perhaps precarious emphasis on the contrast between *ἄλλος* and *ἕτερος*, and would certainly be preferable in a classical Greek writer. It also gives a sense which is quite Pauline; and probably most scholars will prefer it. I confess, however, that the harsh and strained use of the words on the other interpretation, and the close packed meaning that is forced into the words, almost beyond what they can bear, seems to me—so far as I may judge—more characteristic of Paul's style; and I incline towards it, unless the verdict of scholars be that it strains the sense of the words too far. In that event, the interpretation of the American Revisers would be the only possible one.

W. M. RAMSAY.

JEREMIAH: THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE.

IV. DEGENERATION.

THE average man in every age is tolerably content with the world as he finds it and looks upon the institutions and customs by which he is surrounded as belonging to an order of things which has always existed and never can be materially changed. But there are exceptional individuals who, either through fuller information or on account of a gift of nature, carry in their minds an ideal image of what human life ought to be, with which they are continually contrasting, to their disadvantage, existing conditions and

¹ Dr. Thayer, of Harvard, told me that he had always urged this to be the correct translation. It, of course, implies a slighter punctuation after *ἄλλο*.

arrangements. In some this sense of contrast grows so hot that they are forced to speak out, and in speech or writing they expose the deficiencies and the excesses of the times in which they live. From our own literature many examples of this might be cited. In his *Latter-day Pamphlets* and other writings Carlyle scourged the low ideals of the age and the neglect of the poor, while in a different vein Thackeray exposed the lovelessness of the marriage market, the pretensions of upstarts, and the shams of society. In the ancient world Roman literature was especially fertile in productions of this type, Horace and Juvenal being the immortal masters of satire. The latter has given to the world a detailed picture of the moral condition of imperial Rome, in which every vice is depicted with remorseless truthfulness and the rotten condition of society fully exposed. Horace touches the same theme with a lighter pen, ridiculing the folly rather than condemning the guilt of his age. In modern times the majority of satiric writers have adopted this less obnoxious way of delivering an earnest message, and they have made use of every artistic device to insinuate the truth. Some, like Swift, have got their generation to laugh at its own vices by representing these as the manners and customs of an imaginary world, while others, like Goethe in *Reinecke Fuchs*, have exposed human selfishness under the form of the behaviour to one another of different members of the animal world.

The writings of the Hebrew prophets are largely composed of complaints against the degeneration and the vices of the times. Especially is this the case with Jeremiah, whose book is filled with little else from beginning to end. But the prophets rarely resort to the literary devices of the satirists of other nations. Their purpose is too earnest to allow them to tickle selfishness and pretence on their ridiculous side. They look upon the practices against

which they speak not as weaknesses to be laughed at, but as sins to be punished. It is true that all through the Old Testament sin is spoken of as folly; but this seldom leads to a humorous way of treating it. Perhaps the Jewish genius was deficient in wit and humour, although in Heine and others in modern times the Hebrew race has exhibited these qualities in ample measure. But the real explanation is that just given: it was the solemnity of their divine call and the consciousness of speaking as the organs of inspiration that kept them forever in the serious mood.

Jeremiah especially has hardly a gleam of humour. In one passage, indeed, when speaking of idols, he allows himself a laugh at the fact that the idol worshipper lights his fire with the fragments of the same log of wood out of which he has fashioned his god; but this mood only lasts for a moment, and even in this case he does not allow himself the broad and ringing laughter which the same thought brings again and again from Isaiah. There is a more than Puritanic moroseness about Jeremiah; he reiterates the same charges again and again with wearisome uniformity of expression; the language of denunciation has become so familiar to him that it lacks the edge and distinctness found in some of the other prophets. Still the outstanding features of the time are depicted in his pages with terrible realism, and, when we have learned what they are, we do not wonder at the depression which weighs down the prophet's pen or at the monotony of colour with which he has sketched the condition of his country.

The sin to which Jeremiah most frequently refers, and which he obviously regards as the origin and fountain of all the rest is Idolatry.

In Jeremiah's youth the good king Josiah had extirpated the false gods and, in accordance with the provisions of the book of the law found in the Temple by Hilkiah, restricted

the offering of sacrifices to Jerusalem. But very soon, under the worthless kings who followed, the entire evil system came back again. Jeremiah says that according to the number of the cities of Judah were its gods, and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem were the altars erected to Baal. We hear of many of the worst excesses introduced by Manasseh being again in vogue, such as the exercise of other cults in the Temple itself and the burning of children to Moloch in the Valley of Hinnom. In the last scene preserved to us from Jeremiah's life we obtain a vivid glimpse of the devotion of the people at large to these forbidden forms of worship and the strength of the habits against which the prophet had to contend. The remnant of the people left in the land by their Babylonian conquerors had fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them; but even there, in spite of the divine discipline through which they had passed, they were still, perhaps behind the prophet's back, indulging in their idolatrous customs. We see him, when he has perhaps surprised them in one of their orgies. He rises up, like a new Elijah, to reproach them; but the women present turn upon him, describing with obvious relish their worship of the Queen of Heaven and boasting that in serving her they had been far happier and more prosperous than when serving Jehovah. This gay worship was, they said, in accordance with the customs of their fathers and of the kings and princes of their native land; and they told the prophet to his face that they would not obey his voice. There could have been no worse sign of the depth of the evil than this fanaticism and effrontery on the part of the female sex.¹

These foreign cults seem to have been accompanied with forms of ritual, such as incense, processions, holidays and the like, which were showy and diverting; and in contrast

¹ Ch. xliv.

with these the worship of Jehovah appeared monotonous and austere. But there was a still more dangerous fascination. In imitation of Hosea, Jeremiah very frequently characterises idolatry as adultery, the nation being represented as a faithless wife who has left her husband Jehovah and sought in the idols other lovers. This is a perilous figure of speech, and the prophet follows it out to lengths which to our modern minds are in the last degree repulsive. But he had too good reason for the use of such language. The worship of the idols was associated with sensual excesses which to us are now inconceivable. The most revolting acts were not only permitted but made a part of religion, and the idol shrines were styes of impurity. Herein lies the true explanation of the constant lapses of the nation from the worship of Jehovah, which to the unsophisticated reader of the Bible are so perplexing. These were not intellectual aberrations, but victories of passion. When idolatry was in full swing, the atmosphere was reeking with unholy suggestion; and a public speaker who wished to make an impression naturally fell into a rudeness and even grossness of imagery which is happily alien to the religious vocabulary of our time.¹

There is no truer maxim than "Like God like worshipper." A nation cannot in its own character rise above the being to whom it looks up as the ideal of greatness and goodness. It may be possible to believe in a holy God and yet live in unholiness; but it is not possible to worship Baal and the Queen of Heaven and yet remain pure and good. Therefore Jeremiah was justified in placing the worship of such deities in the forefront of his attack on contemporary morals and treating the condition of his

¹ Compare the remark of Duhm (*Theologie der Propheten*) that the spirituality of Jeremiah's book is lowered by the plainness with which he has to speak to degraded people; they would not have understood had he spoken the native language of a sanctified heart.

countrymen as hopeless as long as they failed to apply their minds to know the true God.

The second main article in the prophet's arraignment of his times is that his countrymen not only were in ignorance of the true God but rejected the light.

There is a modern theory of the history of Israel which represents the monotheistic faith as having been slowly evolved from a gross mode of belief common to all the families of the Semitic race. For generations even in Canaan Israel's view of Jehovah was scarcely different from Moab's of Chemosh or Ammon's of Moloch. This, however, is not Jeremiah's conception of the history of his country. He contends, indeed, that from the very time of entering Canaan Israel had gone astray after gross forms of worship; but these had from the first been lapses from better knowledge. Away behind the centuries of backsliding there had been a great blaze of revelation; and age after age God had never ceased to raise up prophets to reiterate the ancient truth in the ears of the people. Again and again Jeremiah employs a standing phrase for this: "Jehovah," he says, "sent His servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them." It is as if every new generation, or every new century, were conceived of as a new day dawning, and at the beginning of every such period Jehovah sent a messenger to guide His people in the right path. And, besides these living messengers, there were the messages of the written page; for Jeremiah speaks again and again of the law as a means of instruction accessible to the people during the generations of their history.

Thus God kept on speaking; but they would not hear. This is Jeremiah's continual complaint; and in his own person he experienced to the full the hostility which the bringing of light excited. His countrymen hated, im-

prisoned, perhaps at last killed him, because he told them the truth. It is the same complaint that Jesus was forever making: "Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life"; "Woe unto thee, Bethsaida, woe unto thee, Chorazin"; "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Worse, however, far than the rejection of the truth by the multitude was the perversion of it by the false prophets, against whom Jeremiah discharges his keenest arrows. Ever and anon we see him in collision with them—with men like Hananiah, Ahab, Zedekiah and Shemiah. They appear to have been numerous, and they were popular. While Jeremiah was rejected by his countrymen, these men, who contradicted his weightiest announcements, were accepted as the genuine oracles of truth. This is a fact which may well awaken the gravest reflections. Jeremiah's standing complaint against them is that they healed the wound slightly, saying, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace. That is to say, they were shallow—shallow especially in their views of sin and its consequences. They could not believe that a merciful God could do anything severe. They lived on the popular breath, and they dared not utter a word which would give offence. In every age this has been the badge of all the tribe.

The third leading feature of Jeremiah's indictment is Injustice.

In our day there are those who contend that morality does not need the support of religion—that men and women may be pure, truthful and unselfish, without any sense of responsibility to the God of purity, truth and love. It is probable, however, that they greatly underrate the strength of human passion. Self is a tremendously strong motive in the average man; and even in the most refined there

slumber passions before which, when opportunity has thoroughly released them, fine-spun theories are no more than flax before the flame. At all events, in Jeremiah's day the lack of religion proved extremely detrimental to morality, and the corruption of religion entailed as a consequence the corruption of morals. Men who had no intercourse with a holy God or regard for His authority, and who addicted themselves to cults in which the principal motive was pleasure, became hardened and coarsened. He who himself lives for pleasure has seldom much regard for the comfort and pleasure of others; and, if his neighbour stands between him and his desires, he ruthlessly pushes him aside. Jeremiah describes a state of society in which there is no charity or ruth; everyone seeks to overreach his neighbour, and no man can trust another's word—a society deeply stained with murder, oppression and violence.

One specimen may be given. When the invading army was before the walls of Jerusalem, the king, the nobles and the wealthy agreed to manumit their slaves of Hebrew birth. This may have been in obedience to a summons from Jeremiah, or it may have been for military reasons; but at least it was in propitiation for a transgression of which they were sensible. The law ordained that a Hebrew or Hebrewess could not be held in bondage more than six years, but must be set free the seventh year. This law had been allowed to fall into desuetude, and the wealthy were keeping their own flesh and blood in perpetual bondage. The resolution to enfranchise was taken with great solemnity: there was a meeting in the temple, with the king at the head of his people; in accordance with an ancient custom an animal was slaughtered, and those who were entering into the agreement or "covenant," as they called it, passed between the pieces of the divided carcase, the meaning of this symbolic action being,

“Such be the fate of him who breaks this covenant.” Yet when, soon after, through the departure of the Babylonian army to meet an Egyptian force which had appeared on the southern border, the danger seemed to be at an end, they recalled their action and reasserted their rights over their servants. Anything more cynically defiant of both the honour due to God and the rights of man it would be impossible to conceive; and Jeremiah indignantly spoke out his mind about it, declaring that those who would not allow their brethren to be delivered were themselves delivered over to sword, famine and pestilence.¹

Thus in the mind and conduct of the prophet religion and morality were united. His zeal for God made him zealous for the rights of man, and he stood forth as the champion of the weak and oppressed. On another occasion he went even further, denouncing the king himself personally for employing labour in the building of his palace without giving proper remuneration.²

With what scorn would such a prophet have regarded the rule sometimes imposed on ministers to preach the gospel but let practical questions alone. There is nothing so damaging to religion as the spectacle of men and women who in the church and on Sabbath can engage devoutly in the exercises of worship, but on Monday and in business are regardless of justice and mercy; it is this which makes religion stink in the nostrils of the young and the honest. And shall teachers of religion consent to have their mouths shut on such inconsistencies? It is true that teachers of religion are not always wise; they sometimes speak about practical affairs without understanding them. It is true, also, that it is more their business to enforce the general principles of righteousness than to enlarge on their detailed application. But no minister worthy to stand in the succession of prophets and apostles will surrender the right to

¹ Ch. xxxiv.

² xx. 13 ff.

hit straight out at any practice which is obviously unjust to men and subversive of the kingdom of God. If he does, he places himself in the succession of the false prophets, who thought first of their own comfort and reputation and never said anything which would compromise their popularity.

It will be observed that the sins denounced by Jeremiah are, for the most part, those of the influential classes—as of the master against the slave, or the rich against the poor. He is continually referring with asperity to such public figures as kings, princes, priests, prophets; but of the mass of the people he speaks with compassion as of those misled by their natural leaders rather than deserving of severe censure.

This hangs together with the habit, alluded to in a former paper, of looking at the nation, and not the individual, as the unit. The prophetic message was addressed to the people as a whole. Therefore the officials, who had the making and the administration of the laws, and the influential classes, who set the fashions, attracted the attention of the prophets, who regarded them as responsible for the conduct of the common people.

This point of view has its eternal truth. Indeed, it is a truth which the Church is at the present moment recovering after long neglect. But it is one of the chief merits of Jeremiah that he advanced a little beyond this point of view, which was that of his order and his age. He saw that the national idea might be carried too far. He heard men urging in defence of their sins the plea that they were committed to evil by the providential position in which they were placed: they were heirs of an inevitable system and victims of circumstances. But he would not allow this; he held that evil springs out of the heart's own love of it—"the heart is deceitful above all things and desper-

ately wicked"—and that every man is responsible for his own sin only.¹

He was not able, however, to advance far in this direction. His great successor, Ezekiel, advanced much further, recognising not only that the seat of evil is in the individual heart, but that the hope of righteousness lies in a change of heart—that the only cure for degeneration is regeneration. It is only, however, in the New Testament that we find the perfect balance of both sides of the truth. In the teaching of Jesus the individual is always the *prius*; he stands apart from all and transacts directly with God; a single soul is more precious than the whole world; and there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. Yet religion, though it begins, does not end here. Christians are members one of another; together they form one body; and the founding of the kingdom of God, by the regeneration of society, is the common task of the Christian society.

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HORT'S LECTURES ON "JUDAISTIC CHRISTIANITY." ²

It is not too much to say that, from Eusebius to Neander, Church historians, generally, treated "Judaistic Christianity" as a topic which scarcely demanded notice. It was enough to know that the "Fathers" regarded this phase of Christian development as heretical. It was no part of the original inheritance, but a pretentious and troublesome intrusion into it.

Neander, and his pupil F. C. Baur, however, brought this despised section of original Christendom into notable

¹ xxxi. 29, 30.

² *Judaistic Christianity*, a course of Lectures by the late F. J. A. Hort, D.D. London: Macmillan, 1894.