

the Gospels. The torment of Mary in hell shows signs of the influence of the genealogy in Luke, and almost takes the miraculous birth for a fact ; otherwise why the torment, and why the hinge of hell in her ear? So that if we do not extract the history of events, we make a real contribution to the history of opinions.

J. RENDEL HARRIS.

*JEREMIAH: THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE.*

V. RETRIBUTION.

JEREMIAH may be said to have been the conscience of his generation. The consciences of his contemporaries were blunted and seared, and this was the reason of their ruin ; but, as in an ill-doing family there may be a brother or sister in whose gentle heart all the shame and pain accumulate which the others do not feel, so the prophet was the sensitive centre in which the sin of the age was fully felt.

One function of the conscience is to reveal the moral ideal ; and Jeremiah held up to his fellow-countrymen the image of their own life as God intended it to be. Another function of conscience is, when the ideal is infringed, to insist on the wrong which has been committed ; and Jeremiah was so incessantly pointing to the particular faults by which the law of God was contravened that we can still see in his pages all the abuses of the time. But conscience has a further function : when sin has been committed, it gives warning of punishment ; and perhaps the most prominent feature in the work of Jeremiah is the denunciation of Divine retribution about to fall on those who have sinned.

The truth is written on every human conscience that

suffering will be the consequence of sin, while peace and prosperity must accompany obedience. Persons in whom conscience is naturally dull, and still more those in whom it has been impaired by constant abuse, may feel the force of this truth but feebly; but it is one of the marks of a living conscience that it makes this faith the guide of life; and men of ethical genius have their whole thinking dominated by it. Thus Isaiah gives it expression in the broadest possible terms: "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked; it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him." So in the first Psalm the principle is laid down as a kind of key to hundreds of expressions which follow in the Psalter, that the man who obeys the voice of God shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water; "but the ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind carrieth away."

It is possible, indeed, to interpret this principle too narrowly and literally. The entire book of Job is a protest against too hastily drawing from it the inference that, if a man is seen to be a great sufferer, it may be concluded that he has been an exceptionally great sinner. In the same sense our Lord Himself, when spoken to about those on whom the tower in Siloam had fallen, gave warning against tracing specific calamities to specific sins; and His own experience, as the Man of Sorrows, is the conclusive proof that we must not indiscriminately connect sin and suffering.

Yet the principle itself cannot be rejected. The transgressor is haunted with the dread of retribution, while the upright man feels confident that, however dark the present may be, God will vindicate him; and these instincts of conscience are the reflex of the divine will and the divine law, which is embedded in the nature of things and reaches down to the very roots of the universe. Is any one, in secret or in public, making sin his aim? then, as

sure as God exists, there is retribution in store for him ; but is a man, in defiance of consequences, doing what he knows to be right ? then, though earth and hell should combine to prevent it, for him light is sown. The non-fulfilment of this law only means delay, not abrogation. Job suffered long, but his vindication came. Jesus Christ died the death of a criminal, but God highly exalted Him, and gave Him a name which is above every name.

Such is the principle of which Jeremiah was the servant and interpreter. He not only believed in it, but it burned in his bones ; he was in intense sympathy with it. All around him sin was rampant ; he characterized its various forms in terms of imperishable truth ; but he also foretold the misery which was to be its retribution.

Jeremiah's function, however, as a prophet of retribution, was not restricted to the mere proclamation of the general principle that sin would be punished some time ; he was, further, endowed to a remarkable degree with the gift of predicting when and in what forms the punishment was to fall.

At present it is the fashion to depreciate the predictive element in prophecy ; and some interpreters of the prophetic writings appear to take special delight in pointing to instances in which the predictions of the prophets were not fulfilled. This is a reaction from an opposite extreme. A generation ago the predictive element in prophecy received exaggerated prominence. The prophets were spoken of as if their principal function had been the foretelling of future events, and as if the value of any prophetic book had to be measured by the number of coincidences which could be counted between its predictions and subsequent history, Daniel, on this account, for example, being studied more than Isaiah. This was an exaggeration. Prediction was not the sole function of the prophets ; it was not even their

principal function. They were not sent to foretell the future condition of the world, but to alter its existing condition; to grapple with the people of their own generation about their duty and their sin; to declare the will of the living God for living men. To read the prophets from this point of view is to see them with new eyes; and it is hardly too much to say that our generation, reading them thus, has rediscovered the most valuable section of the Old Testament.

But in scholarship, as in everything else, there is always a temptation to push an advantage too far; and, if the predictive element in prophecy was exaggerated in last generation, we are in danger at present of swinging round to the opposite extreme. For prediction was a function of the prophets, and a very extraordinary one. The greatest of them, such as Isaiah, appeal to it with proud self-consciousness as evidence of their divine mission.

Jeremiah possessed the gift in a remarkable degree. In his very first vision, the direction from which the retribution was to come on his country was indicated—"out of the north"; that is, from Mesopotamia. And this was remarkable, for it might just as well have come from Egypt on the south. The Babylonish power had not risen to predominance when Jeremiah began to prophecy; but, as soon as it did emerge, his eyes turned to it with wistful foreboding; and in the very first year of Nebuchadnezzar, he designated this young warrior of the new power as the instrument with which God was to chastise His people: "Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Lord, and Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment and an hissing, and perpetual desolations." As time went on, the prophet's sensitiveness

to the approach of coming events seemed to grow more keen, and he was able to predict many particulars. One of the most remarkable was the death of the false prophet Hananiah, which occurred within the year. Another was that the exile would last for seventy years, instead of being finished in two, as the false prophets were alleging. But the most remarkable instance was Jeremiah's steadfast certainty that the city, with its temple, and the state were for the time to perish. How was he certain of this? The wonder of it is brought home to us when we remember how, in exactly similar circumstances, with a besieging army encircling Jerusalem, Isaiah confidently assured his countrymen that the city would not perish. How did Isaiah know, in the one case, that Jerusalem would be delivered, and Jeremiah, in the other, that it would fall? No doubt the two men stood at different points of the providential development; there was a profound moral reason, in the one case, why the city should be saved and its inhabitants receive another chance, and in the other why there should be no further postponement, because the cup of iniquity was full. But it exceeded the wit of man to measure these distinctions, and in the one case and in the other the tallying of events with the preceding predictions was clear proof of supernatural knowledge in the prophet.

Another feature of Jeremiah's work as the prophet of retribution was the extent of his commission.

In his original call God had expressly designated him "a prophet unto the nations,"<sup>1</sup> thus indicating that his word was intended not for Israel only but also for the neighbouring peoples. How far this may have influenced the prophet's way of life, we cannot tell with precision. One would like to know whether he travelled among the neighbouring nations, in the exercise of his vocation, as

<sup>1</sup> i. 6.

Jonah went to Nineveh; but the indications are not sufficient to determine.<sup>1</sup> At all events he did not forget the extent of his call. He looked across the frontiers of his own country, and took the deepest interest in the condition and the fortunes of the neighbouring states. The extent of his information about some of them, especially Moab, would almost lead us to conclude that he had been there.

When the Babylonian power rose in its magnificence and was about to precipitate itself on the West, Jeremiah foresaw that the destruction was not intended for his own country only, but would take into its sweep the neighbouring states also. The ambassadors of five of these—Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon—happening to be in Jerusalem, where they had come to form a league with the king against the common enemy, Jeremiah, by Divine direction, appeared before them, wearing about his neck a wooden yoke, with a copy of which he presented each, requesting him to carry it to his master along with the assurance that the recipient would be brought under the yoke of the king of Babylon.<sup>2</sup>

A considerable section of the writings of the prophet is occupied with prophecies addressed to foreign nations, and it is natural to think that he may have sent them to the rulers of the different nations in ways resembling that in which he sent these yokes. The drift of most of them is the same as that which the yokes embodied.

It was no wonder, perhaps, that the prophet was accused by his opponents of Babylonizing. But how far this was from his real sentiment is shown by his great prophecy of the destruction of Babylon itself. Although Babylon was the rod in the hands of Jehovah for the chastisement of His people, and Nebuchadnezzar was, in the same sense, called His servant, Jeremiah was not ignorant that Babylon

<sup>1</sup> In xiii. 7 it is proposed to read "Ephratah" instead of "Euphrates."

<sup>2</sup> xxvii.

and its princes were even more guilty than those upon whom they executed the divine vengeance. The law of retribution would, therefore, he was certain, have free course against them too, and it is in the oracle against Babylon that the great word occurs: "The Lord God of recompences shall surely requite."

It was as the prophet of retribution that Jeremiah was brought into the sharpest conflict with the false prophets.

He asserted that the cup was full and retribution imminent; they replied that things were not so bad, and that no serious evil would happen. They said, "Peace, peace"; and he replied: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

Jeremiah has put on record some of his collisions with these men. At the time when he was wearing round his neck the wooden yoke as a sign, one of them, Hananiah by name, approached him one day in the temple in the presence of the priests and all the people and, seizing the yoke, broke it in pieces, asserting at the same time that in two years the yoke of the king of Babylon would be broken from the necks of the nations, and the vessels of the house of the Lord which were in the heathen capital returned to their place in the temple of Jerusalem. Apparently Jeremiah did not find words with which to answer this bold pretender at the moment; but soon he was sent to face him and to announce that, though the yoke of wood had been broken, God had fashioned in its stead a yoke of iron; and to Hananiah himself he was authorized to deliver this message: "Hear now, Hananiah, the Lord hath not sent thee, but thou makest the people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold I will cast thee from off the face of the earth; this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord." "So," it is added, "Hananiah died the same year in the seventh

month." A still heavier doom was predicted against two more of these opponents—Ahab, the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah, the son of Masseiah—they were to be roasted in the fire by the king of Babylon.

The argument which these prophets of smooth things used against the prophet of retribution was that the dwelling-place of Jehovah could not be violated, and it was an impiety to believe that it could. Would it not, they demanded, be a proof that Jehovah was less than almighty, if He permitted His sanctuary to be degraded by the presence of foreign soldiery? This argument they backed up with another—that Isaiah had stood on this principle; at the time when the inhabitants of Jerusalem were quaking with terror lest the city and the temple should be taken, he had told them not to fear, because Jehovah would defend His own dwelling-place. How sorely Jeremiah felt himself pressed by arguments such as these may be inferred from an outburst of impatience like this addressed to God Himself: "Ah, Lord God, surely Thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, There shall be peace, whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul."

Yet he did not suffer himself to be turned aside by the force of such objections from loyalty to facts and the clear intimations within his soul. He knew that the promises of God were conditioned upon the behaviour of men, and that what might at one time look like everlasting truth might at another, when the circumstances had changed, prove, if clung to, a mere deception. His opponents were lamentably defective in character; he could, therefore, have no faith in their alleged revelations, for God does not communicate with men of ungodly life; themselves the slaves of sin, they very naturally refused to believe that sin could be so very dangerous; self-interest blinded them to the justice and severity of God. So Jeremiah had to pursue his lonely path, despised and derided, but sure of



his own inspiration, till the events came which established his reputation forever as the prophet of truth.

Not only were the predictions of Jeremiah fulfilled, but he lived to see their fulfilment. He lived through one of the most fearful calamities ever experienced by any nation, when Judah was overrun by the fierce soldiery of Babylon and its inhabitants were exiled, Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple burned. A hundred and thirty-three years before, Isaiah had witnessed the fall of the northern kingdom; but he was not, like Jeremiah on this occasion, on the spot; nor was there the same horror in the fall of Samaria as in the destruction of the ancient capital and especially of the temple.

All his life Jeremiah had been dreading the blow. He often tells us how, in his dreams or his waking visions, he had witnessed beforehand the scenery of destruction—the enemy descending upon the country like a cloud, their chariots rushing like a whirlwind, their horses swifter than eagles—and heard “the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.” At last it all came to pass as he had anticipated. The invaders advanced from place to place, sweeping everything before them, till at last they settled down to the siege of Jerusalem. The siege lasted for eighteen months, but ultimately starvation finished the work, and the death throes of the nation ended. From amidst the ruins of their homes and the embers of the temple those that were left of the miserable inhabitants were marched off to exile in a distant country, their king going at their head, but, as Jeremiah had predicted, after first having seen his children slain, and then had his own eyes put out.

In the *Lamentations* the whole situation is depicted with a pen dipped in blood and tears:—

How is the gold become dim! and the most fine gold changed!  
the stones of the sanctuary are poured out at the top of every street.

The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold,  
how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands  
of the potter

Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their  
young ones;

the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in  
the wilderness.

The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth  
for thirst,

the young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them.

They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets,

they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills.

For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is  
greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom,

that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her.

Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk,  
they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of  
sapphire.

Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the  
streets,

their skin cleaveth to their bones, it is withered, it is become like  
a stick.

They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be  
slain with hunger,

for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the  
field.

The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children;  
they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my  
people.

\* \* \* \*

They ravished the women in Zion,  
and the maids in the cities of Judah.

Princes are hanged up by their hand,  
the faces of the elders were not honoured.

They took the young men to grind,  
and the children fell under the wood.

The elders have ceased from the gate,  
the young men from their music.

The joy of our heart is ceased,  
our dance is turned into mourning.

The crown is fallen from our head,  
woe unto us that we have sinned.

All that pass by clap their hands at thee;  
they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem, say-  
ing,

“Is this the city that men called the Perfection of Beauty, the Joy of the whole world?”

All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee:

they say, “We have swallowed her up;

certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it.”

\* \* \* \*

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?

Behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me,

Wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger.

JAMES STALKER.

### ST. PAUL IN ATHENS.

THE generally accepted interpretation of the remarkable incident narrated in *Acts* xvii. 18-33 seems to be that Paul was conducted away from the Agora to the Mars Hill in order to address an audience, who thought they would have a better opportunity of hearing him on the Hill than in the Agora. Perhaps I am not fairly and adequately stating the current view, for, when I try to elicit from the works of Conybeare and Howson, Farrar, and Meyer-Wendt (taking them as fairly indicative of common and widely accepted views) what is their view of motives and action, I fail to get any connected and consistent theory; and when I try to express in clear, brief terms their meaning, I find that anything I say on the authority of one page is contradicted by some sentence on a different page.

Dean Farrar, who always has the merit of putting in a clear and simple form the most sensible tendency of current opinion, brings the innate want of consistency of the common view into prominence, when he says, “as the Areopagus (*i.e. the Hill*) would furnish a convenient area for an harangue, and as it was there that the court met which had the cognizance of all matters affecting the State religion, it was perhaps with some sense of burlesque that