

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF JEREMIAH.

JEREMIAH XII. 5.

'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And though in a land of peace thou art secure, yet how wilt thou do in the pride of Jordan?'—R.V.

EXPOSITION.

'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?'—In this and the following verse Jehovah rebukes Jeremiah's impatience, showing him by two proverbial sayings that there were still greater trials of faith in store for him. The sight of prosperous wickedness is, after all, a mere ordinary trial, a mere running with the footmen. The time is coming when he will have to exert far greater powers of endurance.—PAYNE SMITH.

THE attacks of the men of Anathoth may have galled him, but the treachery set on foot against him includes men of his own family, and so is yet more wounding and bitter than he supposes. He must not therefore think of being impatient at anything that he may hitherto have been called upon to undergo, but feel that he has need of all his resolution to meet the trouble which shall presently be disclosed.—STREANE.

'And though in a land of peace thou art secure, yet how wilt thou do in the pride of Jordan?'—The pride of Jordan does not mean its rapid overflow, as the A.V. takes it (and so Ewald, Umbreit, etc.), but the luxuriant thickets along its banks, famous as the haunt of lions. What will the prophet do when he has to tread the tangled maze of a jungle, with the lions roaring round him, if he can feel secure only in the midst of tranquillity?—PAYNE SMITH.

THE thickets on the banks of the Jordan were notorious as the haunts of lions (ch. 49¹⁹ 50⁴⁴, Zec 11⁸). Lions' bones have been found by Dr. Roth in the gravel of the Jordan. Lions are seldom or never found now west of the Euphrates, although they occasionally cross the river.—CHEYNE.

THE SERMON.

The Swelling of Jordan.

By the Rev. John Thomas, M.A.

At first sight the words of our text seem to have been spoken by God to Jeremiah, but when we look at them more carefully we see that they were rather an inspired self-communing of the prophet. Jeremiah is reviewing past trials that had called into exercise all his powers of endurance; dangers, however, which were assigned him under favourable

circumstances. But now there lies before him a harder struggle, not in a 'land of peace,' his own little village of Anathoth, but amid the stormy scenes of Jerusalem.

In these words there is first the human element, the vivid memory of past dangers. Then there is a prevision of perils ahead, a prevision sent by God, and a conviction that his message is divine, and must be proclaimed. There is also a natural shrinking from these perils. I have run with the footmen, I must now contend with horses. Can I not escape it? But then there comes one more element, the inner compulsion which compels him to go forward. God's message burns within him as a fire, and must be delivered.

i. The first thought suggested by this self-communing of the prophet is the inexorableness of the divine voice which called him from danger to greater danger. Here is a solitary man come into this world of ours, and God lays hold of him and says, 'You are not to take your ease or drift with the stream for the sake of securing happiness. You must be strong in your opposition to the world. You must go from danger into deeper danger.' And these conditions were voluntarily undergone by Jeremiah. If he had remained in Anathoth and proclaimed peace, his life would have been easy and tranquil; but he made straight for Jerusalem, and his enemy, Pashhur the priest, was there. And the message which he delivered was one of woe.

We are not all singled out for the special mission Jeremiah had, but we are all God's prophets in the sense that we must follow duty even though it leads us into trouble.

ii. Let us notice the inner working of the soul of Jeremiah. He has been scornfully called the weeping prophet, but any prophet living in his time must have been a weeping prophet. He must feel the woes of his people, otherwise how can he proclaim his gospel so passionately that men are compelled to listen to it. And Jeremiah delivered his message boldly, but he only arrived at that point after much shrinking. Triumphantly, Christ cried on the cross, 'It is finished'; but before that He had been prostrate in the garden, sweating

great drops of blood, and pleading, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.'

iii. Our last thought is the splendidly illogical nature of spiritual power. It cannot be measured or calculated. If the footmen have wearied you, to contend with horses is manifestly impossible. And yet Jeremiah was bolder in the swelling of Jordan than he was in the land of peace. You cannot pass from premise to conclusion, because you are dealing with an infinite quantity, and the amount of your power simply depends on the amount of capacity you possess to receive from God. Touch His infinite hand, and you can do anything.

The Dark River.

By the Very Rev. C. J. Vaughan, D.D.

The Bible has sanctioned our regarding Canaan as a type of heaven, and the Red Sea as a type of baptism into life; so it follows that the wilderness is a type of the present life, and the passage of Jordan a type of death.

Death is called by some the debt of nature, but more truly by others the debt of the Fall; but whether immortality was never given, or, after being given in creation, was revoked and forfeited by reason of sin, certainly now death is the common lot of all men. Let us look at four of its aspects.

i. The *loneliness* of death. There is a ring of comfort in the common phrase 'We must all die.' There is a sense of companionship about it. But the truth is, each of us must die—alone and solitary. Though a thousand fall at once in battle, every death is a solitary one. Standing beside a deathbed there always comes a time when you are no longer with the dying, though still you may be holding his hand, and uttering words of cheering and comfort.

ii. The *mysteriousness* of death. We all know something about the symptoms of its approach, about the circumstances of its completion. But who can tell us what death itself is? It is the dropping of the body, the separation of mind from matter, of thought from brain, of enjoyment from sense. We shrink from our own definition in amazement.

iii. The mysteriousness of death is, for wonder; a more practical topic is its *solemnity*. There is a seriousness about the close of anything, whether it be some work that has occupied our energies for many years, or simply a passing from one age of

natural life to another—from youth to manhood, from middle age to old age. How much more solemn, then, is the change which ends all these, when we go into a state of which we know scarcely anything except by negatives. But that is not all. This change is the crisis of our destiny, the summing up of all accounts and the entrance into an everlasting state of happiness or misery, according to the use we made of the talents entrusted to us.

iv. The last thought about death is its *truthfulness*. It strips off all masks and shows a man as he is, not as he seemed to be, not as he professed, not as he wished to be, but according to truth.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee.—It is said that Bilney, a holy martyr in Queen Mary's days, tried his finger in the candle before he tried his whole body in the fire at the stake. If he could not have stood the burning of his finger, how could he have endured the burning of his whole body?

If in the smaller ills of life my spirit yields to fear,
What shall I do in that last strife, which brings the
judgment near?
O Lord, on me Thy strength bestow in every trying
hour,
That in death's struggles I may show Thy all victorious
power.

The Swelling of Jordan.—A good Christian soul said to me the other day, 'They said I was dying, dying out; but I knew it was not death, for in the dark, empty space I had strength enough left to look and feel around, and no one had come to meet me; I knew it could not be death.' And she was right; she would not have been alone, she would have heard and seen Him.—B. J. SNELL, in the *Christian World Pulpit*, vol. xiv. p. 313.

Now, I further saw, that between them and the Gate was a river, but there was no bridge to go over, and the river was very deep. At the sight, therefore, of this river, the pilgrims were much stunned; but the men that went with them said, 'You must go through, or you cannot come at the Gate.'

Then they addressed themselves to the water, and, entering, Christian began to sink; and, crying out to his good friend Hopeful, he said, 'I sink in deep waters; the billows go over my head; all the waves go over me.'

Then I saw in my dream that Christian was in a muse a while; to whom also Hopeful added these words—'Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole'; and, with that, Christian brake out with a loud voice, 'Oh! I see Him again! and He tells me, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."' Then they both took courage, and the enemy was, after that, as still as a stone, until they were gone over.—*The Pilgrim's Progress* (Venables's ed., pp. 142, 143).

TRUST in God, and remember that when He brings you to the swelling of Jordan—not necessarily death, but some awful flood of sorrow—that then, for the first time perhaps, you will meet the ark, and the Priest whose feet, when they dip in the margin of the river, will cause it to part, and you will go over dry-shod. When Jordan overflows its banks, God brings His chosen people to the brink, and it is then that He cleaves the path through the heart of the river, so that they are not touched by its descending torrent.—MEYER'S *Jeremiah*, p. 65.

The Jordan.—And now we have reached the Jordan, the most remarkable river on the face of the globe. It has been my good fortune to visit and see some of the great and historic rivers of the world. I have crossed and recrossed the Seine at Paris, and have walked by the side of the Arno at Florence. I have gazed upon the Tiber at Rome, and have seen the Hudson River of America. I have visited the Niagara in Canada, and have sailed on the noble St. Lawrence River. I have glided over the surface of the ancient Nile in Egypt, and have sat by the banks of the beautiful Abana at Damascus. But not any nor all of these gave such pleasure, nor awakened such gratitude and feeling of devotion, as my first sight of the Jordan. The Christian who for the first time stands by its banks, or walks into its waters, has kindled within him such emotions as the sight of no other river in the universe can awaken. How is this?

It is not remarkable for its greatness. In this it is far excelled by our own Old Father Thames. For beauty it is not to be compared to the Abana. No great cities adorn its banks, nor is it made attractive by the beautiful residences of the rich. The commerce of nations is not carried on its bosom, as on our own muddy Mersey or Humber. Its sanctity lies in the fact that its waters have been made for ever sacred by the feet of Him who was by John declared to be the Lamb of God, and who was proclaimed by a voice from heaven to be the Son of God.—LEACH'S *Old Yet Ever New*, p. 179.

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The White Stone and the 'Gladiatorial' Tessera.

BY PROFESSOR W. M. RAMSAY, D.C.L., LL.D., LITT.D.

VARIOUS commentators on Rev 2¹⁷ have sought to explain the 'white stone,' or tessera, with a new name written upon it, which is there promised to the victorious Christian, by comparing it with the tessera which was given, according to the current and accepted theory, to gladiators who had received their honourable dismissal from service after a victorious career. When one thinks of the nature of the gladiatorial service, and the rude, brutal kind of career that a gladiator of long and successful service had gone through, the comparison seems unsavoury. But still, if it suited in other important respects, we should have to accept it, and to understand that familiarity had dulled the mind even of a Jewish Christian like the composer of the Seven Letters to the unpleasant and repellent character of the illustration which he was using. The writers who advocated this explanation of the white tessera given to the Christian victor pointed out that a title *Spectatus*, i.e. 'approved,' was engraved, according to a theory held by some scholars,

upon the gladiator's tessera, and might fairly be regarded as 'a new name.' If this were correct, the analogy would certainly be a remarkably strong one.

In my *Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 302 f., I have tried to show that the comparison and explanation must be rejected, on the ground that the gladiatorial tesserae and the letters SP engraved upon them are interpreted in a different way by Mommsen, who eliminated entirely the title from them. On Mommsen's interpretation these tesserae are deprived of the most striking point of analogy to the 'white stone.'

It was therefore a case of balancing rival theories of interpretation of those tesserae, no theory being as yet proved to be correct and accepted by the world of scholars; and there the question had to rest. But I also sought to corroborate my rejection of the gladiatorial comparison by pointing out that gladiatorial exhibitions and the gladiatorial profession were an importation from Rome into the East, and not very common there, nor much