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EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE: THE
BOOK OF JEREMIAH,
CHAPTERS XXI.-LII.

William Bennett
Expositor's Bible: The Book of
Jeremiah, Chapters XXI.-LII.

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PREFACE

The present work deals primarily with Jeremiah xxi. – lii., thus forming a supplement to the volume of the *Expositor's Bible* on Jeremiah by the Rev. C. J. Ball, M.A. References to the earlier chapters are only introduced where they are necessary to illustrate and explain the later sections.

I regret that two important works, Prof. Skinner's *Ezekiel* in this series, and Cornill's *Jeremiah* in Dr. Haupt's *Sacred Books of the Old Testament*, were published too late to be used in the preparation of this volume.

I have again to acknowledge my indebtedness to the Rev. T. H. Darlow, M.A., for a careful reading and much valuable criticism of my MS.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

In the present stage of investigation of Old Testament Chronology, absolute accuracy cannot be claimed for such a table as the following. Hardly any, if any, of these dates are supported by a general consensus of opinion. On the other hand, the range of variation is, for the most part, not more than three or four years, and the table will furnish an approximately accurate idea of sequences and synchronisms. In other respects also the data admit of alternative interpretations, and the course of events is partly a matter of theory – hence the occasional insertion of (?).

CLASSICAL SYNCHRONISMS	JUDAH AND JEREMIAH	ASSYRIA	EGYPT
Traditional date of the foundation of	MANASSEH (?)		
		Esarhaddon, 681 Assurbanipal, 668	
			XXVth Dynasty Psammetichus I., 666
	Jeremiah born, probably between 655 and 645 AMON, 640 JOSIAH, 638		
	Jeremiah's call in the 13th year of Josiah, 626 Scythian inroad into Western Asia	Last kings of Assyria, number and names uncertain, 626-607-6	Psammetichus besieges Ashdod for twenty-nine years
	Habakkuk Zephaniah Publication of Deuteronomy, 621	BABYLON. Nabopolassar, 626	
	Josiah slain at Megiddo, 608 JEHOIAHAZ, 608 (xxii. 10-12, Ch. I.) Deposed by Necho, who appoints JEHOIAKIM, 608 (xxii. 13-19, xxxvi. 30, 31, VI.) Jeremiah predicts ruin of Judah and is tried for blasphemy (xxvi., II.)	FALL OF NINEVEH, 607-6	Necho, 612
	FOURTH YEAR OF JEHOIAKIM, 605-4	BATTLE OF CARCHEMISH (xvi., XVII.)	
	Nebuchadnezzar: advances into Syria, is suddenly recalled to Babylon —before subduing Judah (?)	Nebuchadnezzar, 604	
	Baruch writes Jeremiah's prophecies in a roll, which is read successively to the people, the nobles, and Jehoiakim, and destroyed by the king (xxvi., III.; xlv., V.)		
	Nebuchadnezzar invades Judah (?), the Rechabites take refuge in Jerusalem (?), the Jews rebuked by their example (xxxv., IV.)		
	Jehoiakim submits to Nebuchadnezzar, revolts after three years, is attacked by various "bands," but dies before Nebuchadnezzar arrives		
	JEHOIACHIN, 597 (xxii. 20-30, VII.) Continues revolt, but surrenders to Nebuchadnezzar on his arrival; is deposed and carried to Babylon with many of his subjects. Nebuchadnezzar appoints		
	ZEDEKIAH, 596		Psammetichus II., 596
	Jeremiah attempts to keep Zedekiah loyal to Nebuchadnezzar, and contends with priests and prophets who support Egyptian party (xxiii., xxiv., VIII.)	Ezekiel	
Solon's legislation, 594	Proposed confederation against Nebuchadnezzar denounced by Jeremiah, but supported by Hananiah; proposal abandoned; Hananiah dies (xxvii., xxviii., IX.), 593-2		
	Controversy by letter with hostile prophets at Babylon (xxix., X.)		
	Judah revolts, encouraged by Hophra. Jerusalem is besieged by Chaldeans. There being no prospect of relief by Egypt, Jeremiah regains his influence and pledges the people by covenant to release their slaves.		
	On the news of Hophra's advance, the Chaldeans raise the siege; the Egyptian party again become supreme and annul the covenant (xxi. 1-10, xxxiv., xxxvii. 1-10, XI.)		
	Jeremiah attempts to leave the city, is arrested and imprisoned		
	Hophra retreats into Egypt and the Chaldeans renew the siege (xxxvii. 11-21, xxxviii., xxxix. 15-18, XII.)		
	While imprisoned Jeremiah buys his kinsman's inheritance (xxxii., XXX.)		
	DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM, 586	Siege of Tyre	
	Jeremiah remains for a month a prisoner amongst the other captives. Nebuzaradan arrives; arranges for deportation of bulk of population; appoints Gedaliah governor of residue; releases Jeremiah, who elects to join Gedaliah at Mizpah. Gedaliah murdered. Jeremiah carried off, but rescued by Johanan (xxxix. — xli., li., XIII.)		
	Johanan, in spite of Jeremiah's protest, goes down to Egypt and takes Jeremiah with him (xli., xlii., XIV.)		

Примечание 1¹

¹ For spelling see note, page [4](#)

BOOK I

PERSONAL UTTERANCES AND NARRATIVES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY: ² *JEHOAHAZ*

xxii. 10-12

"Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more." – Jer. xxii. 10

As the prophecies of Jeremiah are not arranged in the order in which they were delivered, there is no absolute chronological division between the first twenty chapters and those which follow. For the most part, however, chapters xxi. – lii. fall in or after the fourth year of Jehoiakim (b. c. 605). We will therefore

² Cf. Preface.

briefly consider the situation at Jerusalem in this crisis. The period immediately preceding b. c. 605 somewhat resembles the era of the dissolution of the Roman Empire or of the Wars of the French Revolution. An old-established international system was breaking in pieces, and men were quite uncertain what form the new order would take. For centuries the futile assaults of the Pharaohs had only served to illustrate the stability of the Assyrian supremacy in Western Asia. Then in the last two decades of the seventh century b. c. the Assyrian Empire collapsed, like the Roman Empire under Honorius and his successors. It was as if by some swift succession of disasters modern France or Germany were to become suddenly and permanently annihilated as a military power. For the moment, all the traditions and principles of European statesmanship would lose their meaning, and the shrewdest diplomatist would be entirely at fault. Men's reason would totter, their minds would lose their balance at the stupendous spectacle of so unparalleled a catastrophe. The wildest hopes would alternate with the extremity of fear; everything would seem possible to the conqueror.

Such was the situation in b. c. 605, to which our first great group of prophecies belongs. Two oppressors of Israel – Assyria and Egypt – had been struck down in rapid succession. When Nebuchadnezzar³ was suddenly recalled to Babylon by

³ We know little of Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns. In 2 Kings xxiv. 1 we are told that Nebuchadnezzar "came up" in the days of Jehoiakim, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years. It is not clear whether Nebuchadnezzar "came up" immediately after the battle of Carchemish, or at a later time after his return to Babylon. In either

the death of his father, the Jews would readily imagine that the Divine judgment had fallen upon Chaldea and its king. Sanguine prophets announced that Jehovah was about to deliver His people from all foreign dominion, and establish the supremacy of the Kingdom of God. Court and people would be equally possessed with patriotic hope and enthusiasm. Jehoiakim, it is true, was a nominee of Pharaoh Necho; but his gratitude would be far too slight to override the hopes and aspirations natural to a Prince of the House of David.

In Hezekiah's time, there had been an Egyptian and an Assyrian party at the court of Judah; the recent supremacy of Egypt had probably increased the number of her partisans. Assyria had disappeared, but her former adherents would retain their antipathy to Egypt, and their personal feuds with Jews of the opposite faction; they were as tools lying ready to any hand that cared to use them. When Babylon succeeded Assyria in the overlordship of Asia, she doubtless inherited the allegiance of the anti-Egyptian party in the various Syrian states. Jeremiah, like Isaiah, steadily opposed any dependence upon Egypt; it was probably by his advice that Josiah undertook his ill-fated expedition against Pharaoh Necho. The partisans of Egypt would be the prophet's enemies; and though Jeremiah never became a mere dependent and agent of Nebuchadnezzar, yet the friends of

case the impression made by his hasty departure from Syria would be the same. Cf. Cheyne, *Jeremiah* (Men of the Bible), p. 132. I call the Chaldean king Nebuchadnezzar – not Nebuchadrezzar – because the former has been an English household word for centuries.

Babylon would be his friends, if only because her enemies were his enemies.

We are told in 2 Kings xxiii. 37 that Jehoiakim did evil in the sight of Jehovah according to all that his father had done. Whatever other sins may be implied by this condemnation, we certainly learn that the king favoured a corrupt form of the religion of Jehovah in opposition to the purer teaching which Jeremiah inherited from Isaiah.

When we turn to Jeremiah himself, the date "the fourth year of Jehoiakim" reminds us that by this time the prophet could look back upon a long and sad experience; he had been called in the thirteenth year of Josiah, some twenty-four years before. With what sometimes seems to our limited intelligence the strange irony of Providence, this lover of peace and quietness was called to deliver a message of ruin and condemnation, a message that could not fail to be extremely offensive to most of his hearers, and to make him the object of bitter hostility.

Much of this Jeremiah must have anticipated, but there were some from whose position and character the prophet expected acceptance, even of the most unpalatable teaching of the Spirit of Jehovah. The personal vindictiveness with which priests and prophets repaid his loyalty to the Divine mission and his zeal for truth came to him with a shock of surprise and bewilderment, which was all the greater because his most determined persecutors were his sacerdotal kinsmen and neighbours at Anathoth. "Let us destroy the tree," they said,

"with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered."⁴

He was not only repudiated by his clan, but also forbidden by Jehovah to seek consolation and sympathy in the closer ties of family life: "Thou shalt not take a wife, thou shalt have no sons or daughters."⁵ Like Paul, it was good for Jeremiah "by reason of the present distress" to deny himself these blessings. He found some compensation in the fellowship of kindred souls at Jerusalem. We can well believe that, in those early days, he was acquainted with Zephaniah, and that they were associated with Hilkiyah and Shaphan and King Josiah in the publication of Deuteronomy and its recognition as the law of Israel. Later on Shaphan's son Ahikam protected Jeremiah when his life was in imminent danger.

The twelve years that intervened between Josiah's Reformation and his defeat at Megiddo were the happiest part of Jeremiah's ministry. It is not certain that any of the extant prophecies belong to this period. With Josiah on the throne and Deuteronomy accepted as the standard of the national life, the prophet felt absolved for a season from his mission to pluck up and break down, and perhaps began to indulge in hopes that the time had come to build and to plant. Yet it is difficult to believe that he had implicit confidence in the permanence of the Reformation or the influence of Deuteronomy. The silence of

⁴ xi. 19.

⁵ xvi. 2.

Isaiah and Jeremiah as to the ecclesiastical reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah stands in glaring contrast to the great importance attached to them by the Books of Kings and Chronicles. But, in any case, Jeremiah must have found life brighter and easier than in the reigns that followed. Probably, in these happier days, he was encouraged by the sympathy and devotion of disciples like Baruch and Ezekiel.

But Josiah's attempt to realise a Kingdom of God was short-lived; and, in a few months, Jeremiah saw the whole fabric swept away. The king was defeated and slain; and his religious policy was at once reversed either by a popular revolution or a court intrigue. The people of the land made Josiah's son Shallum king, under the name of Jehoahaz. This young prince of twenty-three only reigned three months, and was then deposed and carried into captivity by Pharaoh Necho; yet it is recorded of him, that he did evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his fathers had done.⁶ He – or, more probably, his ministers, especially the queen-mother⁷ – must have been in a hurry to undo Josiah's work. Jeremiah utters no condemnation of Jehoahaz; he merely declares that the young king will never return from his exile, and bids the people lament over his captivity as a more grievous fate than the death of Josiah: —

"Weep not for the dead,

⁶ 2 Kings xxiii. 30-32.

⁷ Cf. xxii. 26.

Neither lament over him:
But weep sore for him that goeth into captivity;
For he shall return no more,
Neither shall he behold his native land."⁸

Ezekiel adds admiration to sympathy: Jehoahaz was a young lion skilled to catch the prey, he devoured men, the nations heard of him, he was taken in their pit, and they brought him with hooks into the land of Egypt.⁹ Jeremiah and Ezekiel could not but feel some tenderness towards the son of Josiah; and probably they had faith in his personal character, and believed that in time he would shake off the yoke of evil counsellors and follow in his father's footsteps. But any such hopes were promptly disappointed by Pharaoh Necho, and Jeremiah's spirit bowed beneath a new burden as he saw his country completely subservient to the dreaded influence of Egypt.

Thus, at the time when we take up the narrative, the government was in the hands of the party hostile to Jeremiah, and the king, Jehoiakim, seems to have been his personal enemy. Jeremiah himself was somewhere between forty and fifty years old, a solitary man without wife or child. His awful mission as the herald of ruin clouded his spirit with inevitable gloom. Men resented the stern sadness of his words and looks, and turned from him with aversion and dislike. His unpopularity had made

⁸ xxii. 10-12.

⁹ Ezek. xix. 3, 4.

him somewhat harsh; for intolerance is twice curst, in that it inoculates its victims with the virus of its own bitterness. His hopes and illusions lay behind him; he could only watch with melancholy pity the eager excitement of these stirring times. If he came across some group busily discussing the rout of the Egyptians at Carchemish, or the report that Nebuchadnezzar was posting in hot haste to Babylon, and wondering as to all that this might mean for Judah, his countrymen would turn to look with contemptuous curiosity at the bitter, disappointed man who had had his chance and failed, and now grudged them their prospect of renewed happiness and prosperity. Nevertheless Jeremiah's greatest work still lay before him. Jerusalem was past saving; but more was at stake than the existence of Judah and its capital. But for Jeremiah the religion of Jehovah might have perished with His Chosen People. It was his mission to save Revelation from the wreck of Israel. Humanly speaking, the religious future of the world depended upon this stern solitary prophet.

CHAPTER II

A TRIAL FOR HERESY

xxvi.: cf. vii. – x

"When Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that Jehovah had commanded him to speak unto all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold on him, saying, Thou shalt surely die." – Jer. xxvi. 8

The date of this incident is given, somewhat vaguely, as the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim. It was, therefore, earlier than b. c. 605, the point reached in the previous chapter. Jeremiah could offer no political resistance to Jehoiakim and his Egyptian suzerain; yet it was impossible for him to allow Josiah's policy to be reversed without a protest. Moreover, something, perhaps much, might yet be saved for Jehovah. The king, with his court and prophets and priests, was not everything. Jeremiah was only concerned with sanctuaries, ritual, and priesthoods as means to an end. For him the most important result of the work he had shared with Josiah was a pure and holy life for the

nation and individuals. Renan – in some passages, for he is not always consistent – is inclined to minimise the significance of the change from Josiah to Jehoiakim; in fact, he writes very much as a cavalier might have done of the change from Cromwell to Charles II. Both the Jewish kings worshipped Jehovah, each in his own fashion: Josiah was inclined to a narrow puritan severity of a life; Jehoiakim was a liberal, practical man of the world. Probably this is a fair modern equivalent of the current estimate of the kings and their policy, especially on the part of Jehoiakim's friends; but then, as unhappily still in some quarters, "narrow puritan severity" was a convenient designation for a decent and honourable life, for a scrupulous and self-denying care for the welfare of others. Jeremiah dreaded a relapse into the old half-heathen ideas that Jehovah would be pleased with homage and service that satisfied Baal, Moloch, and Chemosh. Such a relapse would lower the ethical standard, and corrupt or even destroy any beginnings of spiritual life. Our English Restoration is an object-lesson as to the immoral effects of political and ecclesiastical reaction; if such things were done in sober England, what must have been possible to hot Eastern blood! In protesting against the attitude of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah would also seek to save the people from the evil effects of the king's policy. He knew from his own experience that a subject might trust and serve God with his whole heart, even when the king was false to Jehovah. What was possible for him was possible for others. He understood his countrymen too well to expect that the nation would continue to

advance in paths of righteousness which its leaders and teachers had forsaken; but, scattered here and there through the mass of the people, was Isaiah's remnant, the seed of the New Israel, men and women to whom the Revelation of Jehovah had been the beginning of a higher life. He would not leave them without a word of counsel and encouragement.

At the command of Jehovah, Jeremiah appeared before the concourse of Jews, assembled at the Temple for some great fast or festival. No feast is expressly mentioned, but he is charged to address "all the cities of Judah"¹⁰; *all* the outlying population would only meet at the Temple on some specially holy day. Such an occasion would naturally be chosen by Jeremiah for his deliverance, just as Christ availed Himself of the opportunities offered by the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, just as modern philanthropists seek to find a place for their favourite topics on the platform of May Meetings.

The prophet was to stand in the court of the Temple and repeat once more to the Jews his message of warning and judgment, "all that I have charged thee to speak unto them, thou shalt not keep back a single word." The substance of this address is found in the various prophecies which expose the sin and predict the ruin of Judah. They have been dealt with in the former volume¹¹

¹⁰ The expression is curious; it usually means all the cities of Judah, except Jerusalem; the LXX. reading varies between "all the Jews" and "all Judah."

¹¹ See especially the exposition of chaps. vii. – x., which are often supposed to be a reproduction of Jeremiah's utterance on this occasion.

on Jeremiah in this series, and are also referred to in Book III.

According to the universal principle of Hebrew prophecy, the predictions of ruin were conditional; they were still coupled with the offer of pardon to repentance, and Jehovah did not forbid his prophet to cherish a lingering hope that "perchance they may hearken and turn every one from his evil way, so that I may repent Me of the evil I purpose to inflict upon them because of the evil of their doings." Probably the phrase "every one from his evil way" is primarily collective rather than individual, and is intended to describe a national reformation, which would embrace all the individual citizens; but the actual words suggest another truth, which must also have been in Jeremiah's mind. The nation is, after all, an aggregate of men and women; there can be no national reformation, except through the repentance and amendment of individuals.

Jeremiah's audience, it must be observed, consisted of worshippers on the way to the Temple, and would correspond to an ordinary congregation of church-goers, rather than to the casual crowd gathered round a street preacher, or to the throngs of miners and labourers who listened to Whitfield and Wesley. As an acknowledged prophet, he was well within his rights in expecting a hearing from the attendants at the feast, and men would be curious to see and hear one who had been the dominant influence in Judah during the reign of Josiah. Moreover, in the absence of evening newspapers and shop-windows, a prophet was too exciting a distraction to be lightly neglected. From Jehovah's

charge to speak all that He had commanded him to speak and not to keep back a word, we may assume that Jeremiah's discourse was long: it was also avowedly an old sermon¹²; most of his audience had heard it before, all of them were quite familiar with its main topics. They listened in the various moods of a modern congregation "sitting under" a distinguished preacher. Jeremiah's friends and disciples welcomed the ideas and phrases that had become part of their spiritual life. Many enjoyed the speaker's earnestness and eloquence, without troubling themselves about the ideas at all. There was nothing specially startling about the well-known threats and warnings; they had become

"A tale of little meaning tho' the words were strong."

Men hardened their hearts against inspired prophets as easily as they do against the most pathetic appeals of modern evangelists. Mingled with the crowd were Jeremiah's professional rivals, who detested both him and his teaching – priests who regarded him as a traitor to his own caste, prophets who envied his superior gifts and his force of passionate feeling. To these almost every word he uttered was offensive, but for a while there was nothing that roused them to very vehement anger. He was allowed to finish what he had to say, "to make an end of speaking all that Jehovah had commanded him." But in this peroration he had insisted on a subject that stung the indifferent into resentment and roused the priests and prophets to fury.

¹² The Hebrew apparently implies that the discourse was a repetition of former prophecies.

"Go ye now unto My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith Jehovah, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not: therefore will I do unto the house, that is called by My name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh."¹³

The Ephraimite sanctuary of Shiloh, long the home of the Ark and its priesthood, had been overthrown in some national catastrophe. Apparently when it was destroyed it was no mere tent, but a substantial building of stone, and its ruins remained as a permanent monument of the fugitive glory of even the most sacred shrine.

The very presence of his audience in the place where they were met showed their reverence for the Temple: the priests were naturally devotees of their own shrine; of the prophets Jeremiah himself had said, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule in accordance with their teaching."¹⁴ Can we wonder that "the priests and the prophets and all the people laid

¹³ vii. 12-14. Even if chaps. vii. – x. are not a report of Jeremiah's discourse on this occasion, the few lines in xxvi. are evidently a mere summary, and vii. will best indicate the substance of his utterance. The verses quoted occur towards the beginning of vii. – x., but from the emphatic reference to Shiloh in the brief abstract in xxvi., Jeremiah must have dwelt on this topic, and the fact that the outburst followed his conclusion suggests that he reserved this subject for his peroration.

¹⁴ v. 31.

hold on him, saying, Thou shalt surely die"? For the moment there was an appearance of religious unity in Jerusalem; the priests, the prophets, and the pious laity on one side, and only the solitary heretic on the other. It was, though on a small scale, as if the obnoxious teaching of some nineteenth-century prophet of God had given an unexpected stimulus to the movement for Christian reunion; as if cardinals and bishops, chairmen of unions, presidents of conferences, moderators of assemblies, with great preachers and distinguished laymen, united to hold monster meetings and denounce the Divine message as heresy and blasphemy. In like manner Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians found a basis of common action in their hatred of Christ, and Pilate and Herod were reconciled by His cross.

Meanwhile the crowd was increasing: new worshippers were arriving, and others as they left the Temple were attracted to the scene of the disturbance. Doubtless too the mob, always at the service of persecutors, hurried up in hope of finding opportunities for mischief and violence. Some six and a half centuries later, history repeated itself on the same spot, when the Asiatic Jews saw Paul in the Temple and "laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people and the law and this place, ... and all the city was moved, and the people ran together and laid hold on Paul."¹⁵

Our narrative, as it stands, is apparently incomplete: we find

¹⁵ Acts xxi. 27-30.

Jeremiah before the tribunal of the princes, but we are not told how he came there; whether the civil authorities intervened to protect him, as Claudius Lysias came down with his soldiers and centurions and rescued Paul, or whether Jeremiah's enemies observed legal forms, as Annas and Caiaphas did when they arrested Christ. But, in any case, "the princes of Judah, when they heard these things, came up from the palace into the Temple, and took their seats as judges at the entry of the new gate of the Temple." The "princes of Judah" play a conspicuous part in the last period of the Jewish monarchy: we have little definite information about them, and are left to conjecture that they were an aristocratic oligarchy or an official clique, or both; but it is clear that they were a dominant force in the state, with recognised constitutional status, and that they often controlled the king himself. We are also ignorant as to the "new gate"; it may possibly be the upper gate built by Jotham¹⁶ about a hundred and fifty years earlier.

Before these judges, Jeremiah's ecclesiastical accusers brought a formal charge; they said, almost in the very words which the high priest and the Sanhedrin used of Christ, "This man is worthy of death, for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears" —*i. e.* when he said, "This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without inhabitant." Such accusations have been always on the lips of those who have denounced Christ and His disciples as

¹⁶ 2 Kings xv. 35.

heretics. One charge against Himself was that He said, "I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another that is made without hands."¹⁷ Stephen was accused of speaking incessantly against the Temple and the Law, and teaching that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the Temple and change the customs handed down from Moses. When he asserted that "the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands," the impatience of his audience compelled him to bring his defence to an abrupt conclusion.¹⁸ Of Paul we have already spoken.

How was it that these priests and prophets thought that their princes might be induced to condemn Jeremiah to death for predicting the destruction of the Temple? A prophet would not run much risk nowadays by announcing that St. Paul's should be made like Stonehenge, or St. Peter's like the Parthenon. Expositors of Daniel and the Apocalypse habitually fix the end of the world a few years in advance of the date at which they write, and yet they do not incur any appreciable unpopularity. It is true that Jeremiah's accusers were a little afraid that his predictions might be fulfilled, and the most bitter persecutors are those who have a lurking dread that their victims are right, while they themselves are wrong. But such fears could not very well be evidence or argument against Jeremiah before any court of law.

In order to realise the situation we must consider the place

¹⁷ Mark xiv. 58.

¹⁸ Acts vi. 13, 14, vii. 48.

which the Temple held in the hopes and affections of the Jews. They had always been proud of their royal sanctuary at Jerusalem, but within the last hundred and fifty years it had acquired a unique importance for the religion of Israel. First Hezekiah, and then Josiah, had taken away the other high places and altars at which Jehovah was worshipped, and had said to Judah and Jerusalem, "Ye shall worship before this altar."¹⁹ Doubtless the kings were following the advice of Isaiah and Jeremiah. These prophets were anxious to abolish the abuses of the local sanctuaries, which were a continual incentive to an extravagant and corrupt ritual. Yet they did not intend to assign any supreme importance to a priestly caste or a consecrated building. Certainly for them the hope of Israel and the assurance of its salvation did not consist in cedar and hewn stones, in silver and gold. And yet the unique position given to the Temple inevitably became the starting-point for fresh superstition. Once Jehovah could be worshipped not only at Jerusalem, but at Beersheba and Bethel and many other places where He had chosen to set His name. Even then, it was felt that the Divine Presence must afford some protection for His dwelling-places. But now that Jehovah dwelt nowhere else but at Jerusalem, and only accepted the worship of His people at this single shrine, how could any one doubt that He would protect His Temple and His Holy City against all enemies, even the most formidable? Had He not done so already?

¹⁹ 2 Kings xviii. 4, xxiii.; Isa. xxxvi. 7.

When Hezekiah abolished the high places, did not Jehovah set the seal of approval upon his policy by destroying the army of Sennacherib? Was not this great deliverance wrought to guard the Temple against desecration and destruction, and would not Jehovah work out a like salvation in any future time of danger? The destruction of Sennacherib was essential to the religious future of Israel and of mankind; but it had a very mingled influence upon the generations immediately following. They were like a man who has won a great prize in a lottery, or who has, quite unexpectedly, come into an immense inheritance. They ignored the unwelcome thought that the Divine protection depended on spiritual and moral conditions, and they clung to the superstitious faith that at any moment, even in the last extremity of danger and at the eleventh hour, Jehovah might, nay, even *must*, intervene. The priests and the inhabitants of Jerusalem could look on with comparative composure while the country was ravaged, and the outlying towns were taken and pillaged; Jerusalem itself might seem on the verge of falling into the hands of the enemy, but they still trusted in their Palladium. Jerusalem could not perish, because it contained the one sanctuary of Jehovah; they sought to silence their own fears and to drown the warning voice of the prophet by vociferating their watchword: "The Temple of Jehovah! the Temple of Jehovah! The Temple of Jehovah is in our midst!"²⁰

In prosperous times a nation may forget its Palladium, and

²⁰ vii. 4.

may tolerate doubts as to its efficacy; but the strength of the Jews was broken, their resources were exhausted, and they were clinging in an agony of conflicting hopes and fears to their faith in the inviolability of the Temple. To destroy their confidence was like snatching away a plank from a drowning man. When Jeremiah made the attempt, they struck back with the fierce energy of despair. It does not seem that at this time the city was in any immediate danger; the incident rather falls in the period of quiet submission to Pharaoh Necho that preceded the battle of Carchemish. But the disaster of Megiddo was fresh in men's memories, and in the unsettled state of Eastern Asia no one knew how soon some other invader might advance against the city. On the other hand, in the quiet interval, hopes began to revive, and men were incensed when the prophet made haste to nip these hopes in the bud, all the more so because their excited anticipations of future glory had so little solid basis. Jeremiah's appeal to the ill-omened precedent of Shiloh naturally roused the sanguine and despondent alike into frenzy.

Jeremiah's defence was simple and direct: "Jehovah sent me to prophesy all that ye have heard against this house and against this city. Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and hearken unto the voice of Jehovah your God, that He may repent Him of the evil that He hath spoken against you. As for me, behold, I am in your hands: do unto me as it seems good and right unto you. Only know assuredly that, if ye put me to death, ye will bring the guilt of innocent blood upon yourselves, and

upon this city and its inhabitants: for of a truth Jehovah sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears." There is one curious feature in this defence. Jeremiah contemplates the possibility of two distinct acts of wickedness on the part of his persecutors: they may turn a deaf ear to his appeal that they should repent and reform, and their obstinacy will incur all the chastisements which Jeremiah had threatened; they may also put him to death and incur additional guilt. Scoffers might reply that his previous threats were so awful and comprehensive that they left no room for any addition to the punishment of the impenitent. Sinners sometimes find a grim comfort in the depth of their wickedness; their case is so bad that it cannot be made worse, they may now indulge their evil propensities with a kind of impunity. But Jeremiah's prophetic insight made him anxious to save his countrymen from further sin, even in their impenitence; the Divine discrimination is not taxed beyond its capabilities even by the extremity of human wickedness.

But to return to the main feature in Jeremiah's defence. His accusers' contention was that his teaching was so utterly blasphemous, so entirely opposed to every tradition and principle of true religion – or, as we should say, so much at variance with all orthodoxy – that it could not be a word of Jehovah. Jeremiah does not attempt to discuss the relation of his teaching to the possible limits of Jewish orthodoxy. He bases his defence on the bare assertion of his prophetic mission – Jehovah had sent him. He assumes that there is no room for evidence or

discussion; it is a question of the relative authority of Jeremiah and his accusers, whether he or they had the better right to speak for God. The immediate result seemed to justify him in this attitude. He was no obscure novice, seeking for the first time to establish his right to speak in the Divine name. The princes and people had been accustomed for twenty years to listen to him, as to the most fully acknowledged mouthpiece of Heaven; they could not shake off their accustomed feeling of deference, and once more succumbed to the spell of his fervid and commanding personality. "Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and the prophets, This man is not worthy of death; for he hath spoken to us in the name of Jehovah our God." For the moment the people were won over and the princes convinced; but priests and prophets were not so easily influenced by inspired utterances; some of these probably thought that they had an inspiration of their own, and their professional experience made them callous.

At this point again the sequence of events is not clear; possibly the account was compiled from the imperfect recollections of more than one of the spectators. The pronouncement of the princes and the people seems, at first sight, a formal acquittal that should have ended the trial, and left no room for the subsequent intervention of "certain of the elders," otherwise the trial seems to have come to no definite conclusion, and the incident simply terminated in the personal protection given to Jeremiah by Ahikam ben Shaphan. Possibly, however, the tribunal of the

princes was not governed by any strict rules of procedure; and the force of the argument used by the elders does not depend on the exact stage of the trial at which it was introduced.

Either Jeremiah was not entirely successful in his attempt to get the matter disposed of on the sole ground of his own prophetic authority, or else the elders were anxious to secure weight and finality for the acquittal, by bringing forward arguments in its support. The elders were an ancient Israelite institution, and probably still represented the patriarchal side of the national life; nothing is said as to their relation to the princes, and this might not be very clearly defined. The elders appealed, by way of precedent, to an otherwise unrecorded incident of the reign of Hezekiah. Micah the Morasthite had uttered similar threats against Jerusalem and the Temple: "Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."²¹ But Hezekiah and his people, instead of slaying Micah, had repented, and the city had been spared. They evidently wished that the precedent could be wholly followed in the present instance; but, at any rate, it was clear that one of the most honoured and successful of the kings of Judah had accepted a threat against the Temple as a message from Jehovah. Therefore the mere fact that Jeremiah had uttered such a threat was certainly not *primâ facie* evidence that he was a false prophet. We are not told

²¹ Micah iii. 12. As the quotation exactly agrees with the verse in our extant Book of Micah, we may suppose that the elders were acquainted with his prophecies in writing.

how this argument was received, but the writer of the chapter, possibly Baruch, does not attribute Jeremiah's escape either to his acquittal by the princes or to the reasoning of the elders. The people apparently changed sides once more, like the common people in the New Testament, who heard Christ gladly and with equal enthusiasm clamoured for His crucifixion. At the end of the chapter we find them eager to have the prophet delivered into their hands that they may put him to death. Apparently the prophets and priests, having brought matters into this satisfactory position, had retired from the scene of action; the heretic was to be delivered over to the secular arm. The princes, like Pilate, seemed inclined to yield to popular pressure; but Ahikam, a son of the Shaphan who had to do with the finding of Deuteronomy, stood by Jeremiah, as John of Gaunt stood by Wyclif, and the Protestant Princes by Luther, and the magistrates of Geneva by Calvin; and Jeremiah could say with the Psalmist: —

"I have heard the defaming of many,
Terror on every side:
While they took counsel together against me,
They devised to take away my life.
But I trusted in Thee, O Jehovah:
I said, Thou art my God.
My times are in Thy hand:
Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them
that persecute me.

Let the lying lips be dumb,
Which speak against the righteous insolently,
With pride and contempt.
Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for
them that fear Thee,
Which Thou hast wrought for them that put their trust in
Thee, before the sons of men."²²

We have here an early and rudimentary example of religious toleration, of the willingness, however reluctant, to hear as a possible Divine message unpalatable teaching, at variance with current theology; we see too the fountain-head of that freedom which since has "broadened down from precedent to precedent."

But unfortunately no precedent can bind succeeding generations, and both Judaism and Christianity have sinned grievously against the lesson of this chapter. Jehoiakim himself soon broke through the feeble restraint of this new-born tolerance. The writer adds an incident that must have happened somewhat later,²³ to show how real was Jeremiah's danger, and how transient was the liberal mood of the authorities. A certain Uriah ben Shemaiah of Kirjath Jearim had the courage to follow

²² Psalm xxxi. 13-15, 18, 19. The Psalm is sometimes ascribed to Jeremiah, because it can be so readily applied to this incident. The reader will recognise his characteristic phrase "Terror on every side" (Magor-missabib).

²³ This incident cannot be part of the speech of the elders; it would only have told against the point they were trying to make. The various phases – prophesy, persecution, flight, capture, and execution – must have taken some time, and can scarcely have preceded Jeremiah's utterance "at the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim."

in Jeremiah's footsteps and speak against the city "according to all that Jeremiah had said." With the usual meanness of persecutors, Jehoiakim and his captains and princes vented upon this obscure prophet the ill-will which they had not dared to indulge in the case of Jeremiah, with his commanding personality and influential friends. Uriah fled into Egypt, but was brought back and slain, and his body cast out unburied into the common cemetery. We can understand Jeremiah's fierce and bitter indignation against the city where such things were possible.

This chapter is so full of suggestive teaching that we can only touch upon two or three of its more obvious lessons. The dogma which shaped the charge against Jeremiah and caused the martyrdom of Uriah was the inviolability of the Temple and the Holy City. This dogma was a perversion of the teaching of Isaiah, and especially of Jeremiah himself,²⁴ which assigned a unique position to the Temple in the religion of Israel. The carnal man shows a fatal ingenuity in sucking poison out of the most wholesome truth. He is always eager to discover that something external, material, physical, concrete – some building, organisation, ceremony, or form of words – is a fundamental basis of the faith and essential to salvation. If Jeremiah had died with Josiah, the "priests and prophets" would doubtless have quoted his authority against Uriah. The teaching of Christ and His apostles, of Luther and Calvin and their fellow-reformers,

²⁴ Assuming his sympathy with Deuteronomy.

has often been twisted and forged into weapons to be used against their true followers. We are often tempted in the interest of our favourite views to lay undue stress on secondary and accidental statements of great teachers. We fail to keep the due proportion of truth which they themselves observed, and in applying their precepts to new problems we sacrifice the kernel and save the husk. The warning of Jeremiah's persecutors might often "give us pause." We need not be surprised at finding priests and prophets eager and interested champions of a perversion of revealed truth. Ecclesiastical office does not necessarily confer any inspiration from above. The hereditary priest follows the traditions of his caste, and even the prophet may become the mouthpiece of the passions and prejudices of those who accept and applaud him. When men will not endure sound doctrine, they heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; having itching ears, they turn away their ears from the truth and turn unto fables.²⁵ Jeremiah's experience shows that even an apparent consensus of clerical opinion is not always to be trusted. The history of councils and synods is stained by many foul and shameful blots; it was the Œcumenical Council at Constance that burnt Huss, and most Churches have found themselves, at some time or other, engaged in building the tombs of the prophets whom their own officials had stoned in days gone by. We forget that *Athanasius contra mundum* implies also *Athanasius contra ecclesiam*.

²⁵ 2 Tim. iv. 3.

CHAPTER III

THE ROLL

xxxvi

"Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee." – Jer. xxxvi. 2

The incidents which form so large a proportion of the contents of our book do not make up a connected narrative; they are merely a series of detached pictures: we can only conjecture the doings and experiences of Jeremiah during the intervals. Chapter xxvi. leaves him still exposed to the persistent hostility of the priests and prophets, who had apparently succeeded in once more directing popular feeling against their antagonist. At the same time, though the princes were not ill-disposed towards him, they were not inclined to resist the strong pressure brought to bear upon them. Probably the attitude of the populace varied from time to time, according to the presence among them of the friends or enemies of the prophet; and, in the same way, we cannot think of "the princes" as a united body, governed by a single impulse. The action of this group of notables might be

determined by the accidental preponderance of one or other of two opposing parties. Jeremiah's only real assurance of safety lay in the personal protection extended to him by Ahikam ben Shaphan. Doubtless other princes associated themselves with Ahikam in his friendly action on behalf of the prophet.

Under these circumstances, Jeremiah would find it necessary to restrict his activity. Utter indifference to danger was one of the most ordinary characteristics of Hebrew prophets, and Jeremiah was certainly not wanting in the desperate courage which may be found in any Mohammedan dervish. At the same time he was far too practical, too free from morbid self-consciousness, to court martyrdom for its own sake. If he had presented himself again in the Temple when it was crowded with worshippers, his life might have been taken in a popular tumult, while his mission was still only half accomplished. Possibly his priestly enemies had found means to exclude him from the sacred precincts.

Man's extremity was God's opportunity; this temporary and partial silencing of Jeremiah led to a new departure, which made the influence of his teaching more extensive and permanent. He was commanded to commit his prophecies to writing. The restriction of his active ministry was to bear rich fruit, like Paul's imprisonment, and Athanasius' exile, and Luther's sojourn in the Wartburg. A short time since there was great danger that Jeremiah and the Divine message entrusted to him would perish together. He did not know how soon he might become once more the mark of popular fury, nor whether Ahikam would still be

able to protect him. The roll of the book could speak even if he were put to death.

But Jeremiah was not thinking chiefly about what would become of his teaching if he himself perished. He had an immediate and particular end in view. His tenacious persistence was not to be baffled by the prospect of mob violence, or by exclusion from the most favourable vantage-ground. Renan is fond of comparing the prophets to modern journalists; and this incident is an early and striking instance of the substitution of pen, ink, and paper for the orator's tribune. Perhaps the closest modern parallel is that of the speaker who is howled down at a public meeting and hands his manuscript to the reporters.

In the record of the Divine command to Jeremiah, there is no express statement as to what was to be done with the roll; but as the object of writing it was that "perchance the house of Judah might hear and repent," it is evident that from the first it was intended to be read to the people.

There is considerable difference of opinion²⁶ as to the contents of the roll. They are described as: "All that I have spoken unto thee concerning²⁷ Jerusalem²⁸ and Judah, and all the nations, since I (first) spake unto thee, from the time of Josiah until now." At first sight this would seem to include all previous utterances,

²⁶ See Cheyne, Giesebrecht, Orelli, etc.

²⁷ R. V. "against." The Hebrew is ambiguous.

²⁸ So Septuagint. The Hebrew text has Israel, which is a less accurate description of the prophecies, and is less relevant to this particular occasion.

and therefore all the extant prophecies of a date earlier than b. c. 605, *i. e.* those contained in chapters i. – xii. and some portions of xiv. – xx. (we cannot determine which with any exactness), and probably most of those dated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, *i. e.* xxv. and parts of xlv. – xlix. Cheyne,²⁹ however, holds that the roll simply contained the striking and comprehensive prophecy in chapter xxv. The whole series of chapters might very well be described as dealing with Jerusalem, Judah, and the nations; but at the same time xxv. might be considered equivalent, by way of summary, to all that had been spoken on these subjects. From various considerations which will appear as we proceed with the narrative, it seems probable that the larger estimate is the more correct, *i. e.* that the roll contained a large fraction of our Book of Jeremiah, and not merely one or two chapters. We need not, however, suppose that every previous utterance of the prophet, even though still extant, must have been included in the roll; the "all" would of course be understood to be conditioned by relevancy; and the narratives of various incidents are obviously not part of what Jehovah had spoken.

Jeremiah dictated his prophecies, as St. Paul did his epistles, to an amanuensis; he called his disciple Baruch³⁰ ben Neriah, and dictated to him "all that Jehovah had spoken, upon a book, in the form of a roll."

It seems clear that, as in xxvi., the narrative does not exactly

²⁹ *Jeremiah* (Men of the Bible), p. 132.

³⁰ Cf. Chap. V. on "Baruch."

follow the order of events,³¹ and that verse 9, which records the proclamation of a fast in the ninth month of Jehoiakim's fifth year, should be read before verse 5, which begins the account of the circumstances leading up to the actual reading of the roll. We are not told in what month of Jehoiakim's fourth year Jeremiah received this command to write his prophecies in a roll, but as they were not read till the ninth month of the fifth year, there must have been an interval of at least ten months or a year between the Divine command and the reading by Baruch. We can scarcely suppose that all or nearly all this delay was caused by Jeremiah and Baruch's waiting for a suitable occasion. The long interval suggests that the dictation took some time, and that therefore the roll was somewhat voluminous in its contents, and that it was carefully compiled, not without a certain amount of revision.

When the manuscript was ready, its authors had to determine the right time at which to read it; they found their desired opportunity in the fast proclaimed in the ninth month. This was evidently an extraordinary fast, appointed in view of some pressing danger; and, in the year following the battle of Carchemish, this would naturally be the advance of Nebuchadnezzar. As our incident took place in the depth of winter, the months must be reckoned according to the Babylonian year, which began in April; and the ninth month, Kislev, would roughly correspond to our December. The dreaded

³¹ Verses 5-8 seem to be a brief alternative account to 9-26.

invasion would be looked for early in the following spring, "at the time when kings go out to battle."³²

Jeremiah does not seem to have absolutely determined from the first that the reading of the roll by Baruch was to be a substitute for his own presence. He had probably hoped that some change for the better in the situation might justify his appearance before a great gathering in the Temple. But when the time came he was "hindered"³³— we are not told how — and could not go into the Temple. He may have been restrained by his own prudence, or dissuaded by his friends, like Paul when he would have faced the mob in the theatre at Ephesus; the hindrance may have been some ban under which he had been placed by the priesthood, or it may have been some unexpected illness, or legal uncleanness, or some other passing accident, such as Providence often uses to protect its soldiers till their warfare is accomplished.

Accordingly it was Baruch who went up to the Temple. Though he is said to have read the book "in the ears of all the people," he does not seem to have challenged universal attention as openly as Jeremiah had done; he did not stand forth in the

³² 1 Chron. xx. i.

³³ 'ĀÇÛR: A.V., R.V., "shut up"; R.V. margin, "restrained." The term is used in xxxiii. 1, xxxix. 15, in the sense of "imprisoned," but here Jeremiah appears to be at liberty. The phrase 'ĀÇÛR W ĀZÛBH, A.V. "shut up or left" (Deut. xxxii. 36, etc.), has been understood, those under the restraints imposed upon ceremonial uncleanness and those free from these restraints, *i. e.* everybody; the same meaning has been given to 'ĀÇÛR here.

court of the Temple,³⁴ but betook himself to the "chamber" of the scribe,³⁵ or secretary of state, Gemariah ben Shaphan, the brother of Jeremiah's protector Ahikam. This chamber would be one of the cells built round the upper court, from which the "new gate"³⁶ led into an inner court of the Temple. Thus Baruch placed himself formally under the protection of the owner of the apartment, and any violence offered to him would have been resented and avenged by this powerful noble with his kinsmen and allies. Jeremiah's disciple and representative took his seat at the door of the chamber, and, in full view of the crowds who passed and repassed through the new gate, opened his roll and began to read aloud from its contents. His reading was yet another repetition of the exhortations, warnings, and threats which Jeremiah had rehearsed on the feast day when he spake to the people "all that Jehovah had commanded him"; and still both Jehovah and His prophet promised deliverance as the reward of repentance. Evidently the head and front of the nation's offence had been no open desertion of Jehovah for idols, else His servants would not have selected for their audience His enthusiastic worshippers as they thronged to His Temple. The fast itself might have seemed a token of penitence, but it was

³⁴ xxvi. 2.

³⁵ So Cheyne; the Hebrew does not make it clear whether the title "scribe" refers to the father or the son. Giesebrecht understands it of Shaphan, who appears as scribe in 2 Kings xxii. 8. He points out that in verse 20 Elishama is called the scribe, but we cannot assume that the title was limited to a single officer of state.

³⁶ Cf. xxvi. 10.

not accepted by Jeremiah, or put forward by the people, as a reason why the prophecies of ruin should not be fulfilled. No one offers the very natural plea: "In this fast we are humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God, we are confessing our sins, and consecrating ourselves afresh to service of Jehovah. What more does He expect of us? Why does He still withhold His mercy and forgiveness? Wherefore have we fasted, and Thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and Thou takest no knowledge?" Such a plea would probably have received an answer similar to that given by one of Jeremiah's successors: "Behold, in the day of your fast ye find your own pleasure, and oppress all your labourers. Behold, ye fast for strife and contention, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye fast not this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I have chosen? the day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and a day acceptable to Jehovah?"

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy healing shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee;

the glory of Jehovah shall be thy rearward."³⁷

Jeremiah's opponents did not grudge Jehovah His burnt-offerings and calves of a year old; He was welcome to thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil. They were even willing to give their firstborn for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul; but they were not prepared "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God."³⁸

We are not told how Jeremiah and the priests and prophets formulated the points at issue between them, which were so thoroughly and universally understood that the record takes them for granted. Possibly Jeremiah contended for the recognition of Deuteronomy, with its lofty ideals of pure religion and a humanitarian order of society. But, in any case, these incidents were an early phase of the age-long struggle of the prophets of God against the popular attempt to make ritual and sensuous emotion into excuses for ignoring morality, and to offer the cheap sacrifice of a few unforbidden pleasures, rather than surrender the greed of grain, the lust of power, and the sweetness of revenge.

When the multitudes caught the sound of Baruch's voice and saw him sitting in the doorway of Gemariah's chamber, they knew exactly what they would hear. To them he was almost as antagonistic as a Protestant evangelist would be to

³⁷ Isa. lviii. 3-8.

³⁸ Micah vi. 6-8.

the worshippers at some great Romanist feast; or perhaps we might find a closer parallel in a Low Church bishop addressing a ritualistic audience. For the hearts of these hearers were not steeled by the consciousness of any formal schism. Baruch and the great prophet whom he represented did not stand outside the recognised limits of Divine inspiration. While the priests and prophets and their adherents repudiated his teaching as heretical, they were still haunted by the fear that, at any rate, his threats might have some Divine authority. Apart from all theology, the prophet of evil always finds an ally in the nervous fears and guilty conscience of his hearer.

The feelings of the people would be similar to those with which they had heard the same threats against Judah, the city and the Temple, from Jeremiah himself. But the excitement aroused by the defeat of Pharaoh and the hasty return of Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon had died away. The imminence of a new invasion made it evident that this had not been the Divine deliverance of Judah. The people were cowed by what must have seemed to many the approaching fulfilments of former threatenings; the ritual of a fast was in itself depressing; so that they had little spirit to resent the message of doom. Perhaps too there was less to resent: the prophecies were the same, but Baruch may have been less unpopular than Jeremiah, and his reading would be tame and ineffective compared to the fiery eloquence of his master. Moreover the powerful protection which shielded him was indicated not only by the place he occupied, but also by the

presence of Gemariah's son, Micaiah.

The reading passed off without any hostile demonstration on the part of the people, and Micaiah went in search of his father to describe to him the scene he had just witnessed. He found him in the palace, in the chamber of the secretary of state, Elishama, attending a council of the princes. There were present, amongst others, Elnathan ben Achbor, who brought Uriah back from Egypt, Delaiah ben Shemaiah, and Zedekiah ben Hananiah. Micaiah told them what he had heard. They at once sent for Baruch and the roll. Their messenger, Jehudi ben Nethaniah, seems to have been a kind of court-usher. His name signifies "the Jew," and as his great-grandfather was Cush, "the Ethiopian," it has been suggested that he came of a family of Ethiopian descent, which had only attained in his generation to Jewish citizenship.³⁹

When Baruch arrived, the princes greeted him with the courtesy and even deference due to the favourite disciple of a distinguished prophet. They invited him to sit down and read them the roll. Baruch obeyed; the method of reading suited the enclosed room and the quiet, interested audience of responsible men, better than the swaying crowd gathered round the door of Gemariah's chamber. Baruch now had before him ministers of state who knew from their official information and experience how extremely probable it was that the words to which they were listening would find a speedy and complete fulfilment. Baruch must almost have seemed to them like a doomster who

³⁹ So Orelli, *in loco*.

announces to a condemned criminal the ghastly details of his coming execution. They exchanged looks of dismay and horror, and when the reading was over, they said to one another,⁴⁰ "We must tell the king of all these words." First, however, they inquired concerning the exact circumstances under which the roll had been written, that they might know how far responsibility in this matter was to be divided between the prophet and his disciple, and also whether all the contents rested upon the full authority of Jeremiah. Baruch assured them that it was simply a case of dictation: Jeremiah had uttered every word with his own mouth, and he had faithfully written it down; everything was Jeremiah's own.⁴¹

The princes were well aware that the prophet's action would probably be resented and punished by Jehoiakim. They said to Baruch: "Do you and Jeremiah go and hide yourselves, and let no one know where you are." They kept the roll and laid it up in Elishama's room; then they went to the king. They found him in his winter room, in the inner court of the palace, sitting in front of a brasier of burning charcoal. On this fast-day the king's mind might well be careful and troubled, as he meditated on the kind of treatment that he, the nominee of Pharaoh Necho, was likely to receive from Nebuchadnezzar. We cannot tell whether he contemplated resistance or had already resolved to submit to

⁴⁰ Hebrew text "to Baruch," which LXX. omits.

⁴¹ In verse 18 the word "with ink" is not in the LXX., and may be an accidental repetition of the similar word for "his mouth."

the conqueror. In either case he would wish to act on his own initiative, and might be anxious lest a Chaldean party should get the upper hand in Jerusalem and surrender him and the city to the invader.

When the princes entered, their number and their manner would at once indicate to him that their errand was both serious and disagreeable. He seems to have listened in silence while they made their report of the incident at the door of Gemariah's chamber and their own interview with Baruch.⁴² The king sent for the roll by Jehudi, who had accompanied the princes into the presence chamber; and on his return the same serviceable official read its contents before Jehoiakim and the princes, whose number was now augmented by the nobles in attendance upon the king. Jehudi had had the advantage of hearing Baruch read the roll, but ancient Hebrew manuscripts were not easy to decipher, and probably Jehudi stumbled somewhat; altogether the reading of prophecies by a court-usher would not be a very edifying performance, or very gratifying to Jeremiah's friends. Jehoiakim treated the matter with deliberate and ostentatious contempt. At the end of every three or four columns,⁴³ he put out his hand for the roll, cut away the portion that had been read, and threw it on the fire; then he handed the remainder back to Jehudi,

⁴² The A.V. and R.V. "all the words" is misleading: it should rather be "everything"; the princes did not recite all the contents of the roll.

⁴³ The English tenses "cut," "cast," are ambiguous, but the Hebrew implies that the "cutting" and "casting on the fire" were repeated again and again.

and the reading was resumed till the king thought fit to repeat the process. It at once appeared that the audience was divided into two parties. When Gemariah's father, Shaphan, had read Deuteronomy to Josiah, the king rent his clothes; but now the writer tells us, half aghast, that neither Jehoiakim nor any of his servants were afraid or rent their clothes, but the audience, including doubtless both court officials and some of the princes, looked on with calm indifference. Not so the princes who had been present at Baruch's reading: they had probably induced him to leave the roll with them, by promising that it should be kept safely; they had tried to keep it out of the king's hands by leaving it in Elishama's room, and now they made another attempt to save it from destruction. They entreated Jehoiakim to refrain from open and insolent defiance of a prophet who might after all be speaking in the name of Jehovah. But the king persevered. The alternate reading and burning went on; the unfortunate usher's fluency and clearness would not be improved by the extraordinary conditions under which he had to read; and we may well suppose that the concluding columns were hurried over in a somewhat perfunctory fashion, if they were read at all. As soon as the last shred of parchment was shrivelling on the charcoal, Jehoiakim commanded three of his officers⁴⁴ to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch. But they had taken the advice of the

⁴⁴ One is called Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech (A.V.), or "the king's son" (R.V.); if the latter is correct we must understand merely a prince of the blood-royal and not a son of Jehoiakim, who was only thirty.

princes and were not to be found: "Jehovah hid them."

Thus the career of Baruch's roll was summarily cut short. But it had done its work; it had been read on three separate occasions, first before the people, then before the princes, and last of all before the king and his court. If Jeremiah had appeared in person, he might have been at once arrested, and put to death like Uriah. No doubt this threefold recital was, on the whole, a failure; Jeremiah's party among the princes had listened with anxious deference, but the appeal had been received by the people with indifference and by the king with contempt. Nevertheless it must have strengthened individuals in the true faith, and it had proclaimed afresh that the religion of Jehovah gave no sanction to the policy of Jehoiakim: the ruin of Judah would be a proof of the sovereignty of Jehovah and not of His impotence. But probably this incident had more immediate influence over the king than we might at first sight suppose. When Nebuchadnezzar arrived in Palestine, Jehoiakim submitted to him, a policy entirely in accordance with the views of Jeremiah. We may well believe that the experiences of this fast-day had strengthened the hands of the prophet's friends, and cooled the enthusiasm of the court for more desperate and adventurous courses. Every year's respite for Judah fostered the growth of the true religion of Jehovah.

The sequel showed how much more prudent it was to risk the existence of a roll rather than the life of a prophet. Jeremiah was only encouraged to persevere. By the Divine command, he dictated his prophecies afresh to Baruch, adding besides unto

them many like words. Possibly other copies were made of the whole or parts of this roll, and were secretly circulated, read, and talked about. We are not told whether Jehoiakim ever heard this new roll; but, as one of the many like things added to the older prophecies was a terrible personal condemnation of the king,⁴⁵ we may be sure that he was not allowed to remain in ignorance, at any rate, of this portion of it.

The second roll was, doubtless, one of the main sources of our present Book of Jeremiah, and the narrative of this chapter is of considerable importance for Old Testament criticism. It shows that a prophetic book may not go back to any prophetic autograph at all; its most original sources may be manuscripts written at the prophet's dictation, and liable to all the errors which are apt to creep into the most faithful work of an amanuensis. It shows further that, even when a prophet's utterances were written down during his lifetime, the manuscript may contain only his recollections⁴⁶ of what he said years before, and that these might be either expanded or abbreviated, sometimes even unconsciously modified, in the light of subsequent events. Verse 32 shows that Jeremiah did not hesitate to add to the record of his former prophecies "many like words": there is no reason to suppose that these were all contained in an appendix; they would

⁴⁵ For verses 29-31 see Chap. [VI.](#), where they are dealt with in connection with xxii. 13-19.

⁴⁶ The supposition that Jeremiah had written notes of previous prophecies is not an impossible one, but it is a pure conjecture.

often take the form of annotations.

The important part played by Baruch as Jeremiah's secretary and representative must have invested him with full authority to speak for his master and expound his views; such authority points to Baruch as the natural editor of our present book, which is virtually the "Life and Writings" of the prophet. The last words of our chapter are ambiguous, perhaps intentionally. They simply state that many like words were added, and do not say by whom; they might even include additions made later on by Baruch from his own reminiscences.

In conclusion, we may notice that both the first and second copies of the roll were written by the direct Divine command, just as in the Hexateuch and the Book of Samuel we read of Moses, Joshua, and Samuel committing certain matters to writing at the bidding of Jehovah. We have here the recognition of the inspiration of the scribe, as ancillary to that of the prophet. Jehovah not only gives His word to His servants, but watches over its preservation and transmission.⁴⁷ But there is no inspiration to *write* any new revelation: the spoken word, the consecrated life, are inspired; the book is only a record of inspired speech and action.

⁴⁷ Cf. Orelli, *in loco*.

CHAPTER IV

THE RECHABITES

XXXV

"Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever." – Jer. xxxv. 19

This incident is dated "in the days of Jehoiakim." We learn from verse 11 that it happened at a time when the open country of Judah was threatened by the advance of Nebuchadnezzar with a Chaldean and Syrian army. If Nebuchadnezzar marched into the south of Palestine immediately after the battle of Carchemish, the incident may have happened, as some suggest, in the eventful fourth year of Jehoiakim; or if he did not appear in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem till after he had taken over the royal authority at Babylon, Jeremiah's interview with the Rechabites may have followed pretty closely upon the destruction of Baruch's roll. But we need not press the words "Nebuchadnezzar ... came up into the land"; they may only mean that Judah was invaded by an army acting under his orders. The mention of Chaldeans and Assyrians suggests that this invasion

is the same as that mentioned in 2 Kings xxiv. 1, 2, where we are told that Jehoiakim served Nebuchadnezzar three years and then rebelled against him, whereupon Jehovah sent against him bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, and sent them against Judah to destroy it. If this is the invasion referred to in our chapter it falls towards the end of Jehoiakim's reign, and sufficient time had elapsed to allow the king's anger against Jeremiah to cool, so that the prophet could venture out of his hiding-place.

The marauding bands of Chaldeans and their allies had driven the country people in crowds into Jerusalem, and among them the nomad clan of the Rechabites. According to 1 Chron. ii. 55, the Rechabites traced their descent to a certain Hemath, and were a branch of the Kenites, an Edomite tribe dwelling for the most part in the south of Palestine. These Kenites had maintained an ancient and intimate alliance with Judah, and in time the allies virtually became a single people, so that after the Return from the Captivity all distinction of race between Kenites and Jews was forgotten, and the Kenites were reckoned among the families of Israel. In this fusion of their tribe with Judah, the Rechabite clan would be included. It is clear from all the references both to Kenites and to Rechabites that they had adopted the religion of Israel and worshipped Jehovah. We know nothing else of the early history of the Rechabites. The statement in Chronicles that the father of the house of Rechab was Hemath perhaps points to their having been at one time settled at some place called Hemath

near Jabez in Judah. Possibly too Rechab, which means "rider," is not a personal name, but a designation of the clan as horsemen of the desert.

These Rechabites were conspicuous among the Jewish farmers and townsfolk by their rigid adherence to the habits of nomad life; and it was this peculiarity that attracted the notice of Jeremiah, and made them a suitable object-lesson to the recreant Jews. The traditional customs of the clan had been formulated into positive commands by Jonadab, the son of Rechab, *i. e.* the Rechabite. This must be the same Jonadab who co-operated with Jehu in overthrowing the house of Omri and suppressing the worship of Baal. Jehu's reforms concluded the long struggle of Elijah and Elisha against the house of Omri and its half-heathen religion. Hence we may infer that Jonadab and his Rechabites had come under the influence of these great prophets, and that their social and religious condition was one result of Elijah's work. Jeremiah stood in the true line of succession from the northern prophets in his attitude towards religion and politics; so that there would be bonds of sympathy between him and these nomad refugees.

The laws or customs of Jonadab, like the Ten Commandments, were chiefly negative: "Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye nor your sons for ever: neither shall ye build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land wherein ye are strangers."

Various parallels have been found to the customs of the Rechabites. The Hebrew Nazarites abstained from wine and strong drink, from grapes and grape juice and everything made of the vine, "from the kernels even to the husk."⁴⁸ Mohammed forbade his followers to drink any sort of wine or strong drink. But the closest parallel is one often quoted from Diodorus Siculus,⁴⁹ who, writing about b. c. 8, tells us that the Nabatean Arabs were prohibited under the penalty of death from sowing corn or planting fruit trees, using wine or building houses. Such abstinence is not primarily ascetic; it expresses the universal contempt of the wandering hunter and herdsman for tillers of the ground, who are tied to one small spot of earth, and for burghers, who further imprison themselves in narrow houses and behind city walls. The nomad has a not altogether unfounded instinct that such acceptance of material restraints emasculates both soul and body. A remarkable parallel to the laws of Jonadab ben Rechab is found in the injunctions of the dying highlander, Ranald of the Mist, to his heir: "Son of the Mist! be free as thy forefathers. Own no lord – receive no law – take no hire – give no stipend – build no hut – enclose no pasture – sow no grain."⁵⁰ The Rechabite faith in the higher moral value of their primitive habits had survived their alliance with Israel, and Jonadab did his best to protect his clan from the taint of city life and settled

⁴⁸ Num. vi. 2.

⁴⁹ xix. 94.

⁵⁰ Scott, *Legend of Montrose*, chap. xxii.

civilisation. Abstinence from wine was not enjoined chiefly, if at all, to guard against intoxication, but because the fascinations of the grape might tempt the clan to plant vineyards, or, at any rate, would make them dangerously dependent upon vine-dressers and wine-merchants.

Till this recent invasion, the Rechabites had faithfully observed their ancestral laws, but the stress of circumstances had now driven them into a fortified city, possibly even into houses, though it is more probable that they were encamped in some open space within the walls.⁵¹ Jeremiah was commanded to go and bring them into the Temple, that is, into one of the rooms in the Temple buildings, and offer them wine. The narrative proceeds in the first person, "I took Jaazaniah," so that the chapter will have been composed by the prophet himself. In somewhat legal fashion he tells us how he took "Jaazaniah ben Jeremiah, ben Habaziniyah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and all the clan of the Rechabites." All three names are compounded of the Divine name Iah, Jehovah, and serve to emphasise the devotion of the clan to the God of Israel. It is a curious coincidence that the somewhat rare name Jeremiah⁵² should occur twice in this connection. The room to which the prophet took his friends is described as the chamber of the disciples of the man of God⁵³

⁵¹ The term "house of the Rechabites" in verse 2 means "family" or "clan," and does not refer to a building.

⁵² Eight Jeremiahs occur in O.T.

⁵³ Literally "sons of Hanan."

Hanan ben Igdaliah, which was by the chamber of the princes, which was above the chamber of the keeper of the threshold, Maaseiah ben Shallum. Such minute details probably indicate that this chapter was committed to writing while these buildings were still standing and still had the same occupants as at the time of this incident, but to us the topography is unintelligible. The "man of God" or prophet Hanan was evidently in sympathy with Jeremiah, and had a following of disciples who formed a sort of school of the prophets, and were a sufficiently permanent body to have a chamber assigned to them in the Temple buildings. The keepers of the threshold were Temple officials of high standing. The "princes" may have been the princes of Judah, who might very well have a chamber in the Temple courts; but the term is general, and may simply refer to other Temple officials. Hanan's disciples seem to have been in good company.

These exact specifications of person and place are probably designed to give a certain legal solemnity and importance to the incident, and seem to warrant us in rejecting Reuss' suggestion that our narrative is simply an elaborate prophetic figure.⁵⁴

After these details Jeremiah next tells us how he set before his guests bowls of wine and cups, and invited them to drink. Probably Jaazaniah and his clansmen were aware that the scene was intended to have symbolic religious significance. They would not suppose that the prophet had invited them all, in

⁵⁴ Jeremiah, according to this view, had no interview with the Rechabites, but made an imaginary incident a text for his discourse.

this solemn fashion, merely to take a cup of wine; and they would welcome an opportunity of showing their loyalty to their own peculiar customs. They said: "We will drink no wine: for our father Jonadab the son of Rechab commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye nor your sons for ever." They further recounted Jonadab's other commands and their own scrupulous obedience in every point, except that now they had been compelled to seek refuge in a walled city.

Then the word of Jehovah came unto Jeremiah; he was commanded to make yet another appeal to the Jews, by contrasting their disobedience with the fidelity of the Rechabites. The Divine King and Father of Israel had been untiring in His instruction and admonitions: "I have spoken unto you, rising up early and speaking." He had addressed them in familiar fashion through their fellow-countrymen: "I have sent also unto you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them." Yet they had not hearkened unto the God of Israel or His prophets. The Rechabites had received no special revelation; they had not been appealed to by numerous prophets. Their Torah had been simply given them by their father Jonadab; nevertheless the commands of Jonadab had been regarded and those of Jehovah had been treated with contempt.

Obedience and disobedience would bring forth their natural fruit. "I will bring upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard;

and I have called unto them, but they have not answered." But because the Rechabites obeyed the commandment of their father Jonadab, "Therefore thus saith Jehovah Sabaoth, Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever."

Jehovah's approval of the obedience of the Rechabites is quite independent of the specific commands which they obeyed. It does not bind us to abstain from wine any more than from building houses and sowing seed. Jeremiah himself, for instance, would have had no more hesitation in drinking wine than in sowing his field at Anathoth. The tribal customs of the Rechabites had no authority whatever over him. Nor is it exactly his object to set forth the merit of obedience and its certain and great reward. These truths are rather touched upon incidentally. What Jeremiah seeks to emphasise is the gross, extreme, unique wickedness of Israel's disobedience. Jehovah had not looked for any special virtue in His people. His Torah was not made up of counsels of perfection. He had only expected the loyalty that Moab paid to Chemosh, and Tyre and Sidon to Baal. He would have been satisfied if Israel had observed His laws as faithfully as the nomads of the desert kept up their ancestral habits. Jehovah had spoken through Jeremiah long ago and said: "Pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be any such thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit."⁵⁵ Centuries

⁵⁵ ii. 10, 11.

later Christ found Himself constrained to upbraid the cities of Israel, "wherein most of His mighty works were done": "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes... It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you."⁵⁶ And again and again in the history of the Church the Holy Spirit has been grieved because those who profess and call themselves Christians, and claim to prophesy and do many mighty works in the name of Christ, are less loyal to the gospel than the heathen to their own superstitions.

Buddhists and Mohammedans have been held up as modern examples to rebuke the Church, though as a rule with scant justification. Perhaps material for a more relevant contrast may be found nearer home. Christian societies have been charged with conducting their affairs by methods to which a respectable business firm would not stoop; they are said to be less scrupulous in their dealings and less chivalrous in their honour than the devotees of pleasure; at their gatherings they are sometimes supposed to lack the mutual courtesy of members of a Legislature or a Chamber of Commerce. The history of councils and synods and Church meetings gives colour to such charges, which could never have been made if Christians had been as jealous for the Name of Christ as a merchant is for his credit or a soldier for his honour.

⁵⁶ Matt. xi. 21, 22.

And yet these contrasts do not argue any real moral and religious superiority of the Rechabites over the Jews or of unbelievers over professing Christians. It was comparatively easy to abstain from wine and to wander over wide pasture lands instead of living cooped up in cities – far easier than to attain to the great ideals of Deuteronomy and the prophets. It is always easier to conform to the code of business and society than to live according to the Spirit of Christ. The fatal sin of Judah was not that it fell so far short of its ideals, but that it repudiated them. So long as we lament our own failures and still cling to the Name and Faith of Christ, we are not shut out from mercy; our supreme sin is to crucify Christ afresh, by denying the power of His gospel, while we retain its empty form.

The reward promised to the Rechabites for their obedience was that "Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever"; to stand before Jehovah is often used to describe the exercise of priestly or prophetic ministry. It has been suggested that the Rechabites were hereby promoted to the status of the true Israel, "a kingdom of priests"; but this phrase may merely mean that their clan should continue in existence. Loyal observance of national law, the subordination of individual caprice and selfishness to the interests of the community, make up a large part of that righteousness that establisheth a nation.

Here, as elsewhere, students of prophecy have been anxious to discover some literal fulfilment; and have searched curiously for any trace of the continued existence of the Rechabites. The

notice in Chronicles implies that they formed part of the Jewish community of the Restoration. Apparently Alexandrian Jews were acquainted with Rechabites at a still later date. Psalm lxxi. is ascribed by the Septuagint to "the sons of Jonadab." Eusebius⁵⁷ mentions "priests of the sons of Rechab," and Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish traveller of the twelfth century, states that he met with them in Arabia. More recent travellers have thought that they discovered the descendants of Rechab amongst the nomads in Arabia or the Peninsula of Sinai that still practised the old ancestral customs.

But the fidelity of Jehovah to His promises does not depend upon our unearthing obscure tribes in distant deserts. The gifts of God are without repentance, but they have their inexorable conditions; no nation can flourish for centuries on the virtues of its ancestors. The Rechabites may have vanished in the ordinary stream of history, and yet we can hold that Jeremiah's prediction has been fulfilled and is still being fulfilled. No scriptural prophecy is limited in its application to an individual or a race, and every nation possessed by the spirit of true patriotism shall "stand before Jehovah for ever."

⁵⁷ *Ch. Hist.*, ii. 23.

CHAPTER V

BARUCH

xlv

"Thy life will I give unto thee for a prey." – Jer. xlv. 5

The editors of the versions and of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament have assigned a separate chapter to this short utterance concerning Baruch; thus paying an unconscious tribute to the worth and importance of Jeremiah's disciple and secretary, who was the first to bear the familiar Jewish name, which in its Latinised form of Benedict has been a favourite with saints and popes. Probably few who read of these great ascetics and ecclesiastics give a thought to the earliest recorded Baruch, nor can we suppose that Christian Benedicts have been named after him. One thing they may all have in common: either their own faith or that of their parents ventured to bestow upon a "man born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward" the epithet "Blessed." We can scarcely suppose that the life of any Baruch or Benedict has run so smoothly as to prevent him or his friends from feeling that such faith has not been outwardly justified and that the name

suggested an unkind satire. Certainly Jeremiah's disciple, like his namesake Baruch Spinoza, had to recognise his blessings disguised as distress and persecution.

Baruch ben Neriah is said by Josephus⁵⁸ to have belonged to a most distinguished family, and to have been exceedingly well educated in his native language. These statements are perhaps legitimate deductions from the information supplied by our book. His title "scribe"⁵⁹ and his position as Jeremiah's secretary imply that he possessed the best culture of his time; and we are told in li. 59 that Seraiah ben Neriah, who must be Baruch's brother, was chief chamberlain (R.V.) to Zedekiah. According to the Old Latin Version of the Apocryphal Book of Baruch (i. 1) he was of the tribe of Simeon, a statement by no means improbable in view of the close connection between Judah and Simeon, but needing the support of some better authority.

Baruch's relation to Jeremiah is not expressly defined, but it is clearly indicated in the various narratives in which he is referred to. We find him in constant attendance upon the prophet, acting both as his "scribe," or secretary, and as his mouthpiece. The relation was that of Joshua to Moses, of Elisha to Elijah, of Gehazi to Elisha, of Mark to Paul and Barnabas, and of Timothy to Paul. It is described in the case of Joshua and Mark by the term "minister," while Elisha is characterised as having "poured water on the hands of Elijah." The "minister" was at

⁵⁸ *Antt.*, x. 9, 1.

⁵⁹ xxxvi. 26, 32.

once personal attendant, disciple, representative, and possible successor of the prophet. The position has its analogue in the service of the squire to the mediæval knight, and in that of an unpaid private secretary to a modern cabinet minister. Squires expected to become knights, and private secretaries hope for a seat in future cabinets. Another less perfect parallel is the relation of the members of a German theological "seminar" to their professor.

Baruch is first⁶⁰ introduced to us in the narrative concerning the roll. He appears as Jeremiah's amanuensis and representative, and is entrusted with the dangerous and honourable task of publishing his prophecies to the people in the Temple. Not long before, similar utterances had almost cost the master his life, so that the disciple showed high courage and devotion in undertaking such a commission. He was called to share with his master at once the same cup of persecution – and the same Divine protection.

We next hear of Baruch in connection with the symbolic purchase of the field at Anathoth.⁶¹ He seems to have been attending on Jeremiah during his imprisonment in the court of the guard, and the documents containing the evidence of the purchase were entrusted to his care. Baruch's presence in the court of the guard does not necessarily imply that he was himself a prisoner. The whole incident shows that Jeremiah's friends

⁶⁰ In order of time, ch. xxxvi.

⁶¹ xxxii.

had free access to him; and Baruch probably not only attended to his master's wants in prison, but also was his channel of communication with the outside world.

We are nowhere told that Baruch himself was either beaten or imprisoned, but it is not improbable that he shared Jeremiah's fortunes even to these extremities. We next hear of him as carried down to Egypt⁶² with Jeremiah, when the Jewish refugees fled thither after the murder of Gedaliah. Apparently he had remained with Jeremiah throughout the whole interval, had continued to minister to him during his imprisonment, and had been among the crowd of Jewish captives whom Nebuchadnezzar found at Ramah. Josephus probably makes a similar conjecture⁶³ in telling us that, when Jeremiah was released and placed under the protection of Gedaliah at Mizpah, he asked and obtained from Nebuzaradan the liberty of his disciple Baruch. At any rate Baruch shared with his master the transient hope and bitter disappointment of this period; he supported him in dissuading the remnant of Jews from fleeing into Egypt, and was also compelled to share their flight. According to a tradition recorded by Jerome, Baruch and Jeremiah died in Egypt. But the Apocryphal Book of Baruch places him at Babylon, whither another tradition takes him after the death of Jeremiah in Egypt.⁶⁴ These legends are probably

⁶² xliii.

⁶³ *Antt.*, x. 9, 1.

⁶⁴ Bissell's Introduction to Baruch in Lange's Commentary.

mere attempts of wistful imagination to supply unwelcome blanks in history.

It has often been supposed that our present Book of Jeremiah, in some stage of its formation, was edited or compiled by Baruch, and that this book may be ranked with biographies – like Stanley's *Life of Arnold* – of great teachers by their old disciples. He was certainly the amanuensis of the roll, which must have been the most valuable authority for any editor of Jeremiah's prophecies. And the amanuensis might very easily become the editor. If an edition of the book was compiled in Jeremiah's lifetime, we should naturally expect him to use Baruch's assistance; if it first took shape after the prophet's death, and if Baruch survived, no one would be better able to compile the "*Life and Works of Jeremiah*" than his favourite and faithful disciple. The personal prophecy about Baruch does not occur in its proper place in connection with the episode of the roll, but is appended at the end of the prophecies,⁶⁵ possibly as a kind of subscription on the part of the editor. These data do not constitute absolute proof, but they afford strong probability that Baruch compiled a book, which was substantially our Jeremiah. The evidence is similar in character to, but much more conclusive than, that adduced for the authorship of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* by Apollos.

Almost the final reference to Baruch suggests another aspect of his relation to Jeremiah. The Jewish captains accused him

⁶⁵ So LXX., which here probably gives the true order.

of unduly influencing his master against Egypt and in favour of Chaldea. Whatever truth there may have been in this particular charge, we gather that popular opinion credited Baruch with considerable influence over Jeremiah, and probably popular opinion was not far wrong. Nothing said about Baruch suggests any vein of weakness in his character, such as Paul evidently recognised in Timothy. His few appearances upon the scene rather leave the impression of strength and self-reliance, perhaps even self-assertion. If we knew more about him, possibly indeed if any one else had compiled these "Memorabilia," we might discover that much in Jeremiah's policy and teaching was due to Baruch, and that the master leaned somewhat heavily upon the sympathy of the disciple. The qualities that make a successful man of action do not always exempt their possessor from being directed or even controlled by his followers. It would be interesting to discover how much of Luther is Melanchthon. Of many a great minister, his secretaries and subordinates might say safely, in private, *Cujus pars magna fuimus*.

The short prophecy which has furnished a text for this chapter shows that Jeremiah was not unaware of Baruch's tendency to self-assertion, and even felt that sometimes it required a check. Apparently chapter xlv. once formed the immediate continuation of chapter xxxvi., the narrative of the incident of the roll. It was "the word spoken by Jeremiah the prophet to Baruch ben Neriah, when he wrote these words in a book at the dictation of Jeremiah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim." The reference evidently is to

xxxvi. 32, where we are told that Baruch wrote, at Jeremiah's dictation, all the words of the book that had been burnt, and many like words.

Clearly Baruch had not received Jeremiah's message as to the sin and ruin of Judah without strong protest. It was as distasteful to him as to all patriotic Jews and even to Jeremiah himself. Baruch had not yet been able to accept this heavy burden or to look beyond to the brighter promise of the future. He broke out into bitter complaint: "Woe is me now! for Jehovah hath added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and find no rest."⁶⁶ Strong as these words are, they are surpassed by many of Jeremiah's complaints to Jehovah, and doubtless even now they found an echo in the prophet's heart. Human impatience of suffering revolts desperately against the conviction that calamity is inevitable; hope whispers that some unforeseen Providence will yet disperse the storm-clouds, and the portents of ruin will dissolve like some evil dream. Jeremiah had, now as always, the harsh, unwelcome task of compelling himself and his fellows to face the sad and appalling reality. "Thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I am breaking down that which I built, I am plucking up that which I planted."⁶⁷ This was his familiar message concerning Judah, but he had also a special word for Baruch: "And as for

⁶⁶ The clause "I am weary with my groaning" also occurs in Psalm vi. 6.

⁶⁷ The concluding clause of the verse is omitted by LXX., and is probably a gloss added to indicate that the ruin would not be confined to Judah, but would extend "over the whole earth." Cf. Kautzsch.

thee, dost thou seek great things for thyself?" What "great things" could a devout and patriotic Jew, a disciple of Jeremiah, seek for himself in those disastrous times? The answer is at once suggested by the renewed prediction of doom. Baruch, in spite of his master's teaching, had still ventured to look for better things, and had perhaps fancied that he might succeed where Jeremiah had failed and might become the mediator who should reconcile Israel to Jehovah. He may have thought that Jeremiah's threats and entreaties had prepared the way for some message of reconciliation. Gemariah ben Shaphan and other princes had been greatly moved when Baruch read the roll. Might not their emotion be an earnest of the repentance of the people? If he could carry on his master's work to a more blessed issue than the master himself had dared to hope, would not this be a "great thing" indeed? We gather from the tone of the chapter that Baruch's aspirations were unduly tinged with personal ambition. While kings, priests, and prophets were sinking into a common ruin from which even the most devoted servants of Jehovah would not escape, Baruch was indulging himself in visions of the honour to be obtained from a glorious mission, successfully accomplished. Jeremiah reminds him that he will have to take his share in the common misery. Instead of setting his heart upon "great things" which are not according to the Divine purpose, he must be prepared to endure with resignation the evil which Jehovah "is bringing upon all flesh." Yet there is a word of comfort and promise: "I will give thee thy life for a prey in all

places whither thou goest." Baruch was to be protected from violent or premature death.

According to Renan,⁶⁸ this boon was flung to Baruch half-contemptuously, in order to silence his unworthy and unseasonable importunity: —

"Dans une catastrophe qui va englober l'humanité tout entière, il est beau de venir réclamer de petites faveurs d'exception! Baruch aura la vie sauve partout où il ira; qu'il s'en contente!"

We prefer a more generous interpretation. To a selfish man, unless indeed he clung to bare life in craven terror or mere animal tenacity, such an existence as Baruch was promised would have seemed no boon at all. Imprisonment in a besieged and starving city, captivity and exile, his fellow-countrymen's ill-will and resentment from first to last — these experiences would be hard to recognise as privileges bestowed by Jehovah. Had Baruch been wholly self-centred, he might well have craved death instead, like Job, nay, like Jeremiah himself. But life meant for him continued ministry to his master, the high privilege of supporting him in his witness to Jehovah. If, as seems almost certain, we owe to Baruch the preservation of Jeremiah's prophecies, then indeed the life that was given him for a prey must have been precious to him as the devoted servant of God. Humanly speaking, the future of revealed religion and of Christianity depended on the survival of Jeremiah's teaching, and this hung upon the frail thread of Baruch's life. After all, Baruch was destined to achieve "great

⁶⁸ *Hist. of Israel*, iii., 293.

things," even though not those which he sought after; and as no editor's name is prefixed to our book, he cannot be accused of self-seeking. So too for every faithful disciple, his life, even if given for a prey, even if spent in sorrow, poverty, and pain, is still a Divine gift, because nothing can spoil its opportunity of ministering to men and glorifying God, even if only by patient endurance of suffering.

We may venture on a wider application of the promise, "Thy life shall be given thee for a prey." Life is not merely continued existence in the body: life has come to mean spirit and character, so that Christ could say, "He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." In this sense the loyal servant of God wins as his prey, out of all painful experiences, a fuller and nobler life. Other rewards may come in due season, but this is the most certain and the most sufficient. For Baruch, constant devotion to a hated and persecuted master, uncompromising utterance of unpopular truth, had their chief issue in the redemption of his own inward life.

CHAPTER VI

THE JUDGMENT ON JEHOIAKIM

xxii. 13-19, xxxvi. 30, 31

"Jehoiakim ... slew him (Uriah) with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people." – Jer. xxvi. 23

"Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning Jehoiakim, ... He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." – Jer. xxii. 18, 19

"Jehoiakim ... did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his fathers had done." – 2 Kings xxiii. 36, 37

Our last four chapters have been occupied with the history

of Jeremiah during the reign of Jehoiakim, and therefore necessarily with the relations of the prophet to the king and his government. Before we pass on to the reigns of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, we must consider certain utterances which deal with the personal character and career of Jehoiakim. We are helped to appreciate these passages by what we here read, and by the brief paragraph concerning this reign in the Second Book of Kings. In Jeremiah the king's policy and conduct are specially illustrated by two incidents, the murder of the prophet Uriah and the destruction of the roll. The historian states his judgment of the reign, but his brief record⁶⁹ adds little to our knowledge of the sovereign.

Jehoiakim was placed upon the throne as the nominee and tributary of Pharaoh Necho; but he had the address or good fortune to retain his authority under Nebuchadnezzar, by transferring his allegiance to the new suzerain of Western Asia. When a suitable opportunity offered, the unwilling and discontented vassal naturally "turned and rebelled against" his lord. Even then his good fortune did not forsake him; although in his latter days Judah was harried by predatory bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, yet Jehoiakim "slept with his fathers" before Nebuchadnezzar had set to work in earnest to chastise his refractory subject. He was not reserved, like Zedekiah, to endure agonies of mental and physical torture, and to rot in a Babylonian dungeon.

⁶⁹ 2 Kings xxiii. 34-xxiv. 7.

Jeremiah's judgment upon Jehoiakim and his doings is contained in the two passages which form the subject of this chapter. The utterance in xxxvi. 30, 31, was evoked by the destruction of the roll, and we may fairly assume that xxii. 13-19 was also delivered after that incident. The immediate context of the latter paragraph throws no light on the date of its origin. Chapter xxii. is a series of judgments on the successors of Josiah, and was certainly composed after the deposition of Jehoiachin, probably during the reign of Zedekiah; but the section on Jehoiakim must have been uttered at an earlier period. Renan indeed imagines⁷⁰ that Jeremiah delivered this discourse at the gate of the royal palace at the very beginning of the new reign. The nominee of Egypt was scarcely seated on the throne, his "new name" Jehoiakim – "He whom Jehovah establisheth" – still sounded strange in his ears, when the prophet of Jehovah publicly menaced the king with condign punishment. Renan is naturally surprised that Jehoiakim tolerated Jeremiah, even for a moment. But, here as often elsewhere, the French critic's dramatic instinct has warped his estimate of evidence. We need not accept the somewhat unkind saying that picturesque anecdotes are never true, but, at the same time, we have always to guard against the temptation to accept the most dramatic interpretation of history as the most accurate. The contents of this passage, the references to robbery, oppression, and violence, clearly imply that Jehoiakim had reigned long enough for his government to

⁷⁰ iii. 274.

reveal itself as hopelessly corrupt. The final breach between the king and the prophet was marked by the destruction of the roll, and xxii. 13-19, like xxxvi. 30, 31, may be considered a consequence of this breach.

Let us now consider these utterances. In xxxvi. 30*a* we read, "Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah, He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David." Later on,⁷¹ a like judgment was pronounced upon Jehoiakim's son and successor Jehoiachin. The absence of this threat from xxii. 13-19 is doubtless due to the fact that the chapter was compiled when the letter of the prediction seemed to have been proved to be false by the accession of Jehoiachin. Its spirit and substance were amply satisfied by the latter's deposition and captivity after a brief reign of a hundred days.

The next clause in the sentence on Jehoiakim runs: "His dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost." The same doom is repeated in the later prophecy: —

"They shall not lament for him,
Alas my brother! Alas my brother!
They shall not lament for him,
Alas lord! Alas lord!⁷²
He shall be buried with the burial of an ass,
Dragged forth and cast away without the gates of Jerusalem."

⁷¹ xxii. 30.

⁷² R.V., "Ah my brother! or Ah sister!.. Ah lord! or Ah his glory!" The text is based on an emendation of Graetz, following the Syriac. (Giesebrecht.)

Jeremiah did not need to draw upon his imagination for this vision of judgment. When the words were uttered, his memory called up the murder of Uriah ben Shemaiah and the dishonour done to his corpse. Uriah's only guilt had been his zeal for the truth that Jeremiah had proclaimed. Though Jehoiakim and his party had not dared to touch Jeremiah or had not been able to reach him, they had struck his influence by killing Uriah. But for their hatred of the master, the disciple might have been spared. And Jeremiah had neither been able to protect him, nor allowed to share his fate. Any generous spirit will understand how Jeremiah's whole nature was possessed and agitated by a tempest of righteous indignation, how utterly humiliated he felt to be compelled to stand by in helpless impotence. And now, when the tyrant had filled up the measure of his iniquity, when the imperious impulse of the Divine Spirit bade the prophet speak the doom of his king, there breaks forth at last the long pent-up cry for vengeance: "Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saint" – let the persecutor suffer the agony and shame which he inflicted on God's martyr, fling out the murderer's corpse unburied, let it lie and rot upon the dishonoured grave of his victim.

Can we say, Amen? Not perhaps without some hesitation. Yet surely, if our veins run blood and not water, our feelings, had we been in Jeremiah's place, would have been as bitter and our words as fierce. Jehoiakim was more guilty than our Queen Mary, but the memory of the grimmest of the Tudors still stinks in English

nostrils. In our own days, we have not had time to forget how men received the news of Hannington's murder at Uganda, and we can imagine what European Christians would say and feel if their missionaries were massacred in China.

And yet, when we read such a treatise as Lactantius wrote *Concerning the Deaths of Persecutors*, we cannot but recoil. We are shocked at the stern satisfaction he evinces in the miserable ends of Maximin and Galerius, and other enemies of the true faith. Discreet historians have made large use of this work, without thinking it desirable to give an explicit account of its character and spirit. Biographers of Lactantius feel constrained to offer a half-hearted apology for the *De Morte Persecutorum*. Similarly we find ourselves of one mind with Gibbon,⁷³ in refusing to derive edification from a sermon in which Constantine the Great, or the bishop who composed it for him, affected to relate the miserable end of all the persecutors of the Church. Nor can we share the exultation of the Covenanters in the Divine judgment which they saw in the death of Claverhouse; and we are not moved to any hearty sympathy with more recent writers, who have tried to illustrate from history the danger of touching the rights and privileges of the Church. Doubtless God will avenge His own elect; nevertheless *Nemo me impune lacessit* is no seemly motto for the Kingdom of God. Even Greek mythologists taught that it was perilous for men to wield the thunderbolts of Zeus. Still less is the Divine wrath a weapon

⁷³ Chap. xiii.

for men to grasp in their differences and dissensions, even about the things of God. Michael the Archangel, even when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing judgment, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.⁷⁴

How far Jeremiah would have shared such modern sentiment, it is hard to say. At any rate his personal feeling is kept in the background; it is postponed to the more patient and deliberate judgment of the Divine Spirit, and subordinated to broad considerations of public morality. We have no right to contrast Jeremiah with our Lord and His proto-martyr Stephen, because we have no prayer of the ancient prophet to rank with, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," or again with, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Christ and His disciple forgave wrongs done to themselves: they did not condone the murder of their brethren. In the Apocalypse, which concludes the English Bible, and was long regarded as God's final revelation, His last word to man, the souls of the martyrs cry out from beneath the altar: "How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"⁷⁵

Doubtless God will avenge His own elect, and the appeal for justice may be neither ignoble nor vindictive. But such prayers, beyond all others, must be offered in humble submission to the

⁷⁴ Jude 9.

⁷⁵ Apc. vi. 10.

Judge of all. When our righteous indignation claims to pass its own sentence, we do well to remember that our halting intellect and our purblind conscience are ill qualified to sit as assessors of the Eternal Justice.

When Saul set out for Damascus, "breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," the survivors of his victims cried out for a swift punishment of the persecutor, and believed that their prayers were echoed by martyred souls in the heavenly Temple. If that ninth chapter of the Acts had recorded how Saul of Tarsus was struck dead by the lightnings of the wrath of God, preachers down all the Christian centuries would have moralised on the righteous Divine judgment. Saul would have found his place in the homiletic Chamber of Horrors with Ananias and Sapphira, Herod and Pilate, Nero and Diocletian. Yet the Captain of our salvation, choosing His lieutenants, passes over many a man with blameless record, and allots the highest post to this blood-stained persecutor. No wonder that Paul, if only in utter self-contempt, emphasised the doctrine of Divine election. Verily God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

Still, however, we easily see that Paul and Jehoiakim belong to two different classes. The persecutor who attempts in honest but misguided zeal to make others endorse his own prejudices, and turn a deaf ear with him to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, must not be ranked with politicians who sacrifice to their own private interests the Revelation and the Prophets of God.

This prediction which we have been discussing of Jehoiakim's shameful end is followed in the passage in chapter xxxvi. by a general announcement of universal judgment, couched in Jeremiah's usual comprehensive style: —

"I will visit their sin upon him and upon his children and upon his servants, and I will bring upon them and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah all the evil which I spake unto them and they did not hearken."

In chapter xxii. the sentence upon Jehoiakim is prefaced by a statement of the crimes for which he was punished. His eyes and his heart were wholly possessed by avarice and cruelty; as an administrator he was active in oppression and violence.⁷⁶ But Jeremiah does not confine himself to these general charges; he specifies and emphasises one particular form of Jehoiakim's wrong-doing, the tyrannous exaction of forced labour for his buildings. To the sovereigns of petty Syrian states, old Memphis and Babylon were then what London and Paris are to modern Ameer, Khedives, and Sultans. Circumstances, indeed, did not permit a Syrian prince to visit the Egyptian or Chaldean capital with perfect comfort and unrestrained enjoyment. Ancient Eastern potentates, like mediæval suzerains, did not always distinguish between a guest and a hostage. But the Jewish kings would not be debarred from importing the luxuries and imitating the vices of their conquerors.

⁷⁶ xxii. 17. The exact meaning of the word translated "violence" (so A.V., R.V.) is very doubtful.

Renan says⁷⁷ of this period: "L'Egypte était, à cette époque, le pays où les industries de luxe étaient le plus développées. Tout le monde raffolaient, en particulier, de sa carrosserie et de ses meubles ouvragés. Joiaquin et la noblesse de Jérusalem ne songeaient qu'à se procurer ces beaux objets, qui réalisaient ce qu'on avait vu de plus exquis en fait de goût jusque-là."

The supreme luxury of vulgar minds is the use of wealth as a means of display, and monarchs have always delighted in the erection of vast and ostentatious buildings. At this time Egypt and Babylon vied with one another in pretentious architecture. In addition to much useful engineering work, Psammetichus I. made large additions to the temples and public edifices at Memphis, Thebes, Sais, and elsewhere, so that "the entire valley of the Nile became little more than one huge workshop, where stone-cutters and masons, bricklayers and carpenters, laboured incessantly."⁷⁸ This activity in building continued even after the disaster to the Egyptian arms at Carchemish.

Nebuchadnezzar had an absolute mania for architecture. His numerous inscriptions are mere catalogues of his achievements in building. His home administration and even his extensive conquests are scarcely noticed; he held them of little account compared with his temples and palaces – "this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling-place, by the might of

⁷⁷ *Hist.*, etc., iii. 266.

⁷⁸ Rawlinson, *Ancient Egypt* (Story of the Nations).

my power and for the glory of my majesty."⁷⁹ Nebuchadnezzar created most of the magnificence that excited the wonder and admiration of Herodotus a century later.

Jehoiakim had been moved to follow the notable example of Chaldea and Egypt. By a strange irony of fortune, Egypt, once the cynosure of nations, has become in our own time the humble imitator of Western civilisation, and now boulevards have rendered the suburbs of Cairo "a shabby reproduction of modern Paris." Possibly in the eyes of Egyptians and Chaldeans Jehoiakim's efforts only resulted in a "shabby reproduction" of Memphis or Babylon. Nevertheless these foreign luxuries are always expensive; and minor states had not then learnt the art of trading on the resources of their powerful neighbours by means of foreign loans. Moreover Judah had to pay tribute first to Pharaoh Necho, and then to Nebuchadnezzar. The times were bad, and additional taxes for building purposes must have been felt as an intolerable oppression. Naturally the king did not pay for his labour; like Solomon and all other great Eastern despots, he had recourse to the *corvée*, and for this in particular Jeremiah denounced him.

"Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness
And his chambers by injustice;
That maketh his neighbour toil without wages,
And giveth him no hire;

⁷⁹ Dan. iv. 30.

That saith, 'I will build me a wide house
And spacious chambers,'
And openeth out broad windows, with woodwork of cedar
And vermilion painting."

Then the denunciation passes into biting sarcasm: —

"Art thou indeed a king,
Because thou strivest to excel in cedar?"⁸⁰

Poor imitations of Nebuchadnezzar's magnificent structures could not conceal the impotence and dependence of the Jewish king. The pretentiousness of Jehoiakim's buildings challenged a comparison which only reminded men that he was a mere puppet, with its strings pulled now by Egypt and now by Babylon. At best he was only reigning on sufferance.

Jeremiah contrasts Jehoiakim's government both as to justice and dignity with that of Josiah: —

"Did not thy father eat and drink?"⁸¹

⁸⁰ I have followed R.V., but the text is probably corrupt. Cheyne follows LXX. (A) in reading "because thou viest with Ahab": LXX. (B) has "Ahaz" (so Ewald). Giesebrecht proposes to neglect the accents and translate, "viest in cedar buildings with thy father" (*i. e.* Solomon).

⁸¹ According to Giesebrecht (cf. however the last note) this clause is an objection which the prophet puts into the mouth of the king. "My father enjoyed the good things of life – why should not I?" The prophet rejoins, "Nay, but he did judgment," etc.

(He was no ascetic, but, like the Son of Man, lived a full, natural, human life.)

"And do judgment and justice?
Then did he prosper.
He judged the cause of the poor and needy,
Then was there prosperity.
Is not this to know Me?
Jehovah hath spoken it."

Probably Jehoiakim claimed by some external observance, or through some subservient priest or prophet, to "know Jehovah"; and Jeremiah repudiates the claim.

Josiah had reigned in the period when the decay of Assyria left Judah dominant in Palestine, until Egypt or Chaldea could find time to gather up the outlying fragments of the shattered empire. The wisdom and justice of the Jewish king had used this breathing space for the advantage and happiness of his people; and during part of his reign Josiah's power seems to have been as extensive as that of any of his predecessors on the throne of Judah. And yet, according to current theology, Jeremiah's appeal to the prosperity of Josiah as a proof of God's approbation was a startling anomaly. Josiah had been defeated and slain at Megiddo in the prime of his manhood, at the age of thirty-nine. None but the most independent and enlightened spirits could believe that the Reformer's premature death, at the moment when his policy had resulted in national disaster, was not an

emphatic declaration of Divine displeasure. Jeremiah's contrary belief might be explained and justified. Some such justification is suggested by the prophet's utterance concerning Jehoahaz: "Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away." Josiah had reigned with real authority, he died when independence was no longer possible; and therein he was happier and more honourable than his successors, who held a vassal throne by the uncertain tenure of time-serving duplicity, and were for the most part carried into captivity. "The righteous was taken away from the evil to come."⁸²

The warlike spirit of classical antiquity and of Teutonic chivalry welcomed a glorious death upon the field of battle: —

"And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his Gods?"

No one spoke of Leonidas as a victim of Divine wrath. Later Judaism caught something of the same temper. Judas Maccabæus, when in extreme danger, said, "It is better for us to die in battle, than to look upon the evils of our people and our sanctuary"; and later on, when he refused to flee from inevitable death, he claimed that he would leave behind him no stain upon

⁸² Isa. lvii. (English Versions).

his honour.⁸³ Islam also is prodigal in its promises of future bliss to those soldiers who fall fighting for its sake.

But the dim and dreary Sheôl of the ancient Hebrews was no glorious Valhalla or houri-peopled Paradise. The renown of the battle-field was poor compensation for the warm, full-blooded life of the upper air. When David sang his dirge for Saul and Jonathan, he found no comfort in the thought that they had died fighting for Israel. Moreover the warrior's self-sacrifice for his country seems futile and inglorious, when it neither secures victory nor postpones defeat. And at Megiddo Josiah and his army perished in a vain attempt to come

"Between the pass and fell incensed points
Of mighty opposites."

We can hardly justify to ourselves Jeremiah's use of Josiah's reign as an example of prosperity as the reward of righteousness; his contemporaries must have been still more difficult to convince. We cannot understand how the words of this prophecy were left without any attempt at justification, or why Jeremiah did not meet by anticipation the obvious and apparently crushing rejoinder that the reign terminated in disgrace and disaster.

Nevertheless these difficulties do not affect the terms of the sentence upon Jehoiakim, or the ground upon which he was condemned. We shall be better able to appreciate Jeremiah's attitude and to discover its lessons if we venture to reconsider

⁸³ Macc. ii. 59, ix. 10.

his decisions. We cannot forget that there was, as Cheyne puts it, a duel between Jeremiah and Jehoiakim; and we should hesitate to accept the verdict of Hildebrand upon Henry IV. of Germany, or of Thomas à Becket on Henry II. of England. Moreover the data upon which we have to base our judgment, including the unfavourable estimate in the Book of Kings, come to us from Jeremiah or his disciples. Our ideas about Queen Elizabeth would be more striking than accurate if our only authorities for her reign were Jesuit historians of England. But Jeremiah is absorbed in lofty moral and spiritual issues; his testimony is not tainted with that sectarian and sacerdotal casuistry which is always so ready to subordinate truth to the interests of "the Church." He speaks of facts with a simple directness which leaves us in no doubt as to their reality; his picture of Jehoiakim may be one-sided, but it owes nothing to an inventive imagination.

Even Renan, who, in Ophite fashion, holds a brief for the bad characters of the Old Testament, does not seriously challenge Jeremiah's statements of fact. But the judgment of the modern critic seems at first sight more lenient than that of the Hebrew prophet: the former sees in Jehoiakim "un prince libéral et modéré,"⁸⁴ but when this favourable estimate is coupled with an apparent comparison with Louis Philippe, we must leave students of modern history to decide whether Renan is really

⁸⁴ iii. 269.

less severe than Jeremiah. Cheyne, on the other hand, holds⁸⁵ that "we have no reason to question Jeremiah's verdict upon Jehoiakim, who, alike from a religious and a political point of view, appears to have been unequal to the crisis in the fortunes of Israel." No doubt this is true; and yet perhaps Renan is so far right that Jehoiakim's failure was rather his misfortune than his fault. We may doubt whether any king of Israel or Judah would have been equal to the supreme crisis which Jehoiakim had to face. Our scanty information seems to indicate a man of strong will, determined character, and able statesmanship. Though the nominee of Pharaoh Necho, he retained his sceptre under Nebuchadnezzar, and held his own against Jeremiah and the powerful party by which the prophet was supported. Under more favourable conditions he might have rivalled Uzziah or Jeroboam II. In the time of Jehoiakim, a supreme political and military genius would have been as helpless on the throne of Judah as were the Palæologi in the last days of the Empire at Constantinople. Something may be said to extenuate his religious attitude. In opposing Jeremiah he was not defying clear and acknowledged truth. Like the Pharisees in their conflict with Christ, the persecuting king had popular religious sentiment on his side. According to that current theology which had been endorsed in some measure even by Isaiah and Jeremiah, the defeat at Megiddo proved that Jehovah repudiated the religious policy of Josiah and his advisers. The inspiration of the Holy

⁸⁵ P. 142.

Spirit enabled Jeremiah to resist this shallow conclusion, and to maintain through every crisis his unshaken faith in the profounder truth. Jehoiakim was too conservative to surrender at the prophet's bidding the long-accepted and fundamental doctrine of retribution, and to follow the forward leading of Revelation. He "stood by the old truth" as did Charles V. at the Reformation. "Let him that is without sin" in this matter "first cast a stone at" him.

Though we extenuate Jehoiakim's conduct, we are still bound to condemn it; not however because he was exceptionally wicked, but because he failed to rise above a low spiritual average: yet in this judgment we also condemn ourselves for our own intolerance, and for the prejudice and self-will which have often blinded our eyes to the teachings of our Lord and Master.

But Jeremiah emphasises one special charge against the king – his exaction of forced and unpaid labour. This form of taxation was in itself so universal that the censure can scarcely be directed against its ordinary and moderate exercise. If Jeremiah had intended to inaugurate a new departure, he would have approached the subject in a more formal and less casual fashion. It was a time of national danger and distress, when all moral and material resources were needed to avert the ruin of the state, or at any rate to mitigate the sufferings of the people; and at such a time Jehoiakim exhausted and embittered his subjects – that he might dwell in spacious halls with woodwork of cedar. The Temple and palaces of Solomon had been built at the

expense of a popular resentment, which survived for centuries, and with which, as their silence seems to show, the prophets fully sympathised. If even Solomon's exactions were culpable, Jehoiakim was altogether without excuse.

His sin was that common to all governments, the use of the authority of the state for private ends. This sin is possible not only to sovereigns and secretaries of state, but to every town councillor and every one who has a friend on a town council, nay, to every clerk in a public office and to every workman in a government dockyard. A king squandering public revenues on private pleasures, and an artisan pilfering nails and iron with an easy conscience because they only belong to the state, are guilty of crimes essentially the same. On the one hand, Jehoiakim as the head of the state was oppressing individuals; and although modern states have grown comparatively tender as to the rights of the individual, yet even now their action is often cruelly oppressive to insignificant minorities. But, on the other hand, the right of exacting labour was only vested in the king as a public trust; its abuse was as much an injury to the community as to individuals. If Jeremiah had to deal with modern civilisation, we might, perchance, be startled by his passing lightly over our religious and political controversies to denounce the squandering of public resources in the interests of individuals and classes, sects and parties.

CHAPTER VII

JEHOIACHIN ⁸⁶

xxii. 20-30

"A despised broken vessel," – Jer. xxii. 28

"A young lion. And he went up and down among the lions, he became a young lion and he learned to catch the prey, he devoured men." – Ezek. xix. 5, 6

"Jehoiachin ... did evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his father had done." – 2 Kings xxiv. 8, 9

We have seen that our book does not furnish a consecutive biography of Jeremiah; we are not even certain as to the chronological order of the incidents narrated. Yet these chapters

⁸⁶ Also called Coniah and Jeconiah.

are clear and full enough to give us an accurate idea of what Jeremiah did and suffered during the eleven years of Jehoiakim's reign. He was forced to stand by while the king lent the weight of his authority to the ancient corruptions of the national religion, and conducted his home and foreign policy without any regard to the will of Jehovah, as expressed by His prophet. His position was analogous to that of a Romanist priest under Elizabeth or a Protestant divine in the reign of James II. According to some critics, Nebuchadnezzar was to Jeremiah what Philip of Spain was to the priest and William of Orange to the Puritan.

During all these long and weary years, the prophet watched the ever multiplying tokens of approaching ruin. He was no passive spectator, but a faithful watchman to the house of Israel; again and again he risked his life in a vain attempt to make his fellow-countrymen aware of their danger.⁸⁷ The vision of the coming sword was ever before his eyes, and he blew the trumpet and warned the people; but they would not be warned, and the prophet knew that the sword would come and take them away in their iniquity. He paid the penalty of his faithfulness; at one time or another he was beaten, imprisoned, proscribed, and driven to hide himself; still he persevered in his mission, as time and occasion served. Yet he survived Jehoiakim, partly because he was more anxious to serve Jehovah than to gain the glorious deliverance of martyrdom; partly because his royal enemy feared

⁸⁷ Considerable portions of chaps. i. – xx. are referred to the reigns of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin: see previous volume on Jeremiah.

to proceed to extremities against a prophet of Jehovah, who was befriended by powerful nobles, and might possibly have relations with Nebuchadnezzar himself. Jehoiakim's religion – for like the Athenians he was probably "very religious" – was saturated with superstition, and it was only when deeply moved that he lost the sense of an external sanctity attaching to Jeremiah's person. In Israel prophets were hedged by a more potent divinity than kings.

Meanwhile Jeremiah was growing old in years and older in experience. When Jehoiakim died, it was nearly forty years since the young priest had first been called "to pluck up and to break down, and to destroy and to overthrow; to build and to plant"; it was more than eleven since his brighter hopes were buried in Josiah's grave. Jehovah had promised that He would make His servant into "an iron pillar and brasen walls."⁸⁸ The iron was tempered and hammered into shape during these days of conflict and endurance, like —

" ... iron dug from central gloom,
And heated hot with burning fears
And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
And battered with the shocks of doom,
To shape and use."

He had long lost all trace of that sanguine youthful enthusiasm which promises to carry all before it. His opening manhood had

⁸⁸ i. 18.

felt its happy illusions, but they did not dominate his soul and they soon passed away. At the Divine bidding, he had surrendered his most ingrained prejudices, his dearest desires. He had consented to be alienated from his brethren at Anathoth, and to live without home or family; although a patriot, he accepted the inevitable ruin of his nation as the just judgment of Jehovah; he was a priest, imbued by heredity and education with the religious traditions of Israel, yet he had yielded himself to Jehovah, to announce, as His herald, the destruction of the Temple, and the devastation of the Holy Land. He had submitted his shrinking flesh and reluctant spirit to God's most unsparing demands, and had dared the worst that man could inflict. Such surrender and such experiences wrought in him a certain stern and terrible strength, and made his life still more remote from the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows of common men. In his isolation and his inspired self-sufficiency he had become an "iron pillar." Doubtless he seemed to many as hard and cold as iron; but this pillar of the faith could still glow with white heat of indignant passion, and within the shelter of the "brasen walls" there still beat a human heart, touched with tender sympathy for those less disciplined to endure.

We have thus tried to estimate the development of Jeremiah's character during the second period of his ministry, which began with the death of Josiah and terminated with the brief reign of Jehoiachin. Before considering Jeremiah's judgment upon this prince we will review the scanty data at our disposal to enable us

to appreciate the prophet's verdict.

Jehoiakim died while Nebuchadnezzar was on the march to punish his rebellion. His son Jehoiachin, a youth of eighteen,⁸⁹ succeeded his father and continued his policy. Thus the accession of the new king was no new departure, but merely a continuance of the old order; the government was still in the hands of the party attached to Egypt, and opposed to Babylon and hostile to Jeremiah. Under these circumstances we are bound to accept the statement of Kings that Jehoiakim "slept with his fathers," *i. e.* was buried in the royal sepulchre.⁹⁰ There was no literal fulfilment of the prediction that he should "be buried with the burial of an ass." Jeremiah had also declared concerning Jehoiakim: "He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David."⁹¹ According to popular superstition, the honourable burial of Jehoiakim and the succession of his son to the throne further discredited Jeremiah and his teaching. Men read happy omens in the mere observance of ordinary constitutional routine. The curse upon Jehoiakim seemed so much spent breath: why should not Jeremiah's other predictions of ruin and exile also prove a mere *vox et præterea nihil*? In spite of a thousand

⁸⁹ The Chronicler's account of Jehoiakim's end (2 Chron. xxviii. 6-8) is due to a misunderstanding of the older records. According to Chronicles Jehoiachin was only eight, but all our data indicate that Kings is right.

⁹⁰ In LXX. of 2 Chron. xxxvi. 8, Jehoiakim, like Manasseh and Amon, was "buried in the garden of Uzza": B, Ganozæ; A, Ganozan. Cheyne is inclined to accept this statement, which he regards as derived from tradition.

⁹¹ xxxvi. 30.

disappointments, men's hopes still turned to Egypt; and if earthly resources failed they trusted to Jehovah Himself to intervene, and deliver Jerusalem from the advancing hosts of Nebuchadnezzar, as from the army of Sennacherib.

Ezekiel's elegy over Jehoiachin suggests that the young king displayed energy and courage worthy of a better fortune: —

"He walked up and down among the lions,
He became a young lion;
He learned to catch the prey,
He devoured men.
He broke down⁹² their palaces,
He wasted their cities;
The land, was desolate, and the fulness thereof,
At the noise of his roaring."⁹³

However figurative these lines may be, the hyperbole must have had some basis in fact. Probably before the regular Babylonian army entered Judah, Jehoiachin distinguished himself by brilliant but useless successes against the marauding bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, who had been sent to prepare the way for the main body. He may even have carried his victorious arms into the territory of Moab

⁹² So A. B. Davidson in Cambridge Bible, etc., by a slight conjectural emendation; there have been many other suggested corrections of the text. The Hebrew text as it stands would mean literally "he knew their widows" (R.V. margin); A.V., R.V., by a slight change, "he knew their (A.V. desolate) palaces."

⁹³ Ezek. xix. 5-7.

or Ammon. But his career was speedily cut short: "The servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up to Jerusalem and besieged the city." Pharaoh Necho made no sign, and Jehoiachin was forced to retire before the regular forces of Babylon, and soon found himself shut up in Jerusalem. Still for a time he held out, but when it was known in the beleaguered city that Nebuchadnezzar was present in person in the camp of the besiegers, the Jewish captains lost heart. Perhaps too they hoped for better treatment, if they appealed to the conqueror's vanity by offering him an immediate submission which they had refused to his lieutenants. The gates were thrown open; Jehoiachin and the Queen Mother, Nehushta, with his ministers and princes and the officers of his household, passed out in suppliant procession, and placed themselves and their city at the disposal of the conqueror. In pursuance of the policy which Nebuchadnezzar had inherited from the Assyrians, the king and his court and eight thousand picked men were carried away captive to Babylon.⁹⁴ For thirty-seven years Jehoiachin languished in a Chaldean prison, till at last his sufferings were mitigated by an act of grace, which signalled the accession of a new king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's successor Evil Merodach, "in the year when he began to reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison, and spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon. And Jehoiachin changed his prison garments, and ate at the royal table continually all the

⁹⁴ 2 Kings xxiv. 8-17.

days of his life, and had a regular allowance given him by the king, a daily portion, all the days of his life."⁹⁵ At the age of fifty-five, the last survivor of the reigning princes of the house of David emerges from his dungeon, broken in mind and body by his long captivity, to be a grateful dependent upon the charity of Evil Merodach, just as the survivor of the house of Saul had sat at David's table. The young lion that devoured the prey and caught men and wasted cities was thankful to be allowed to creep out of his cage and die in comfort – "a despised broken vessel."

We feel a shock of surprise and repulsion as we turn from this pathetic story to Jeremiah's fierce invectives against the unhappy king. But we wrong the prophet and misunderstand his utterance if we forget that it was delivered during that brief frenzy in which the young king and his advisers threw away the last chance of safety for Judah. Jehoiachin might have repudiated his father's rebellion against Babylon; Jehoiakim's death had removed the chief offender, no personal blame attached to his successor, and a prompt submission might have appeased Nebuchadnezzar's wrath against Judah and obtained his favour for the new king. If a hot-headed young rajah of some protected Indian state revolted against the English suzerainty and exposed his country to the misery of a hopeless war, we should sympathise with any of his counsellors who condemned such wilful folly; we have no right to find fault with Jeremiah for his severe censure of the reckless vanity which precipitated his country's fate.

⁹⁵ 2 Kings xxv. 27-30; Jer. lii. 31-34.

Jeremiah's deep and absorbing interest in Judah and Jerusalem is indicated by the form of this utterance; it is addressed to the "Daughter of Zion"⁹⁶: —

"Go up to Lebanon, and lament,
And lift up thy voice in Bashan,
And lament from Abarim,⁹⁷
For thy lovers are all destroyed!"

Her "lovers," her heathen allies, whether gods or men, are impotent, and Judah is as forlorn and helpless as a lonely and unfriended woman; let her bewail her fate upon the mountains of Israel, like Jephthah's daughter in ancient days.

"I spake unto thee in thy prosperity;
Thou saidst, I will not hearken.
This hath been thy way from thy youth,
That thou hast not obeyed My voice.
The tempest shall be the shepherd to all thy shepherds."

Kings and nobles, priests and prophets, shall be carried off by the Chaldean invaders, as trees and houses are swept away by a hurricane. These shepherds who had spoiled and betrayed their flock would themselves be as silly sheep in the hands of robbers.

⁹⁶ The Hebrew verbs are in 2 s. fem.; the person addressed is not named, but from analogy she can only be the "Daughter of Zion," *i. e.* Jerusalem personified.

⁹⁷ Identified with the mountains of Moab.

"Thy lovers shall go into captivity.
Then, verily, shalt thou be ashamed and confounded
Because of all thy wickedness.
O thou that dwellest in Lebanon!
O thou that hast made thy nest in the cedar!"

The former mention of Lebanon reminded Jeremiah of Jehoiakim's halls of cedar. With grim irony he links together the royal magnificence of the palace and the wild abandonment of the people's lamentation.

"How wilt thou groan⁹⁸ when pangs come upon thee,
Anguish as of a woman in travail!"

The nation is involved in the punishment inflicted upon her rulers. In such passages the prophets largely identify the nation with the governing classes – not without justification. No government, whatever the constitution may be, can ignore a strong popular demand for righteous policy, at home and abroad. A special responsibility of course rests on those who actually wield the authority of the state, but the policy of rulers seldom succeeds in effecting much either for good or evil without some sanction of public feeling. Our revolution which replaced the Puritan Protectorate by the restored Monarchy was rendered possible by the change of popular sentiment. Yet even under the

⁹⁸ R.V. margin, with LXX., Vulg., and Syr.

purest democracy men imagine that they divest themselves of civic responsibility by neglecting their civic duties; they stand aloof, and blame officials and professional politicians for the injustice and crime wrought by the state. National guilt seems happily disposed of when laid on the shoulders of that convenient abstraction "the government"; but neither the prophets nor the Providence which they interpret recognise this convenient theory of vicarious atonement: the king sins, but the prophet's condemnation is uttered against and executed upon the nation.

Nevertheless a special responsibility rests upon the ruler, and now Jeremiah turns from the nation to its king.

"As I live – Jehovah hath spoken it —

Though Coniah ben Jehoiakim king of Judah were a
signet ring upon My right hand – "

By a forcible Hebrew idiom Jehovah, as it were, turns and confronts the king and specially addresses him: —

"Yet would I pluck thee thence."

A signet ring was valuable in itself, and, as far as an inanimate object could be, was an "*alter ego*" of the sovereign; it scarcely ever left his finger, and when it did, it carried with it the authority of its owner. A signet ring could not be lost or even cast away without some reflection upon the majesty of the king. Jehoiachin's character was by no means worthless; he had courage, energy, and patriotism. The heir of David and Solomon, the patron and champion of the Temple, dwelt, as it were, under

the very shadow of the Almighty. Men generally believed that Jehovah's honour was engaged to defend Jerusalem and the house of David. He Himself would be discredited by the fall of the elect dynasty and the captivity of the chosen people. Yet everything must be sacrificed – the career of a gallant young prince, the ancient association of the sacred Name with David and Zion, even the superstitious awe with which the heathen regarded the God of the Exodus and of the deliverance from Sennacherib. Nothing will be allowed to stand in the way of the Divine judgment. And yet we still sometimes dream that the working out of the Divine righteousness will be postponed in the interests of ecclesiastical traditions and in deference to the criticisms of ungodly men!

"And I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life,
Into the hand of them of whom thou art afraid,
Into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the
Chaldeans.

And I will hurl thee and the mother that bare thee into another
land, where ye were not born:

There shall ye die.

And unto the land whereunto their soul longeth to return,
Thither they shall not return."

Again the sudden change in the person addressed emphasises the scope of the Divine proclamation; the doom of the royal house is not only announced to them, but also to the world

at large. The mention of the Queen Mother, Nehushta, reveals what we should in any case have conjectured, that the policy of the young prince was largely determined by his mother. Her importance is also indicated by xiii. 18, usually supposed to be addressed to Jehoiachin and Nehushta: —

"Say unto the king and the queen mother,
Leave your thrones and sit in the dust,
For your glorious diadems are fallen."

The Queen Mother is a characteristic figure of polygamous Eastern dynasties, but we may be helped to understand what Nehushta was to Jehoiachin if we remember the influence of Eleanor of Poitou over Richard I. and John, and the determined struggle which Margaret of Anjou made on behalf of her ill-starred son.

The next verse of our prophecy seems to be a protest against the severe sentence pronounced in the preceding clauses: —

"Is then this man Coniah a despised vessel, only fit to
be broken?

Is he a tool, that no one wants?"

Thus Jeremiah imagines the citizens and warriors of Jerusalem crying out against him, for his sentence of doom against their darling prince and captain. The prophetic utterance seemed to them monstrous and incredible, only worthy to be met with impatient scorn. We may find a mediæval analogy to

the situation at Jerusalem in the relations of Clement IV. to Conradin, the last heir of the house of Hohenstaufen. When this youth of sixteen was in the full career of victory, the Pope predicted that his army would be scattered like smoke, and pointed out the prince and his allies as victims for the sacrifice. When Conradin was executed after his defeat at Tagliacozzo, Christendom was filled with abhorrence at the suspicion that Clement had countenanced the doing to death of the hereditary enemy of the Papal See. Jehoiachin's friends felt towards Jeremiah somewhat as these thirteenth-century Ghibellines towards Clement.

Moreover the charge against Clement was probably unfounded; Milman⁹⁹ says of him, "He was doubtless moved with inner remorse at the cruelties of 'his champion' Charles of Anjou." Jeremiah too would lament the doom he was constrained to utter. Nevertheless he could not permit Judah to be deluded to its ruin by empty dreams of glory: —

"O land, land, land,
Hear the word of Jehovah."

Isaiah had called all Nature, heaven and earth to bear witness against Israel, but now Jeremiah is appealing with urgent importunity to Judah. "O Chosen Land of Jehovah, so richly blessed by His favour, so sternly chastised by His discipline, Land

⁹⁹ Milman's *Latin Christianity*, vi. 392.

of prophetic Revelation, now at last, after so many warnings, believe the word of thy God and submit to His judgment. Hasten not thy unhappy fate by shallow confidence in the genius and daring of Jehoiachin: he is no true Messiah."

"For saith Jehovah,
Write this man childless,
A man whose life shall not know prosperity:
For none of his seed shall prosper;
None shall sit upon the throne of David,
Nor rule any more over Judah."

Thus, by Divine decree, the descendants of Jehoiakim were disinherited; Jehoiachin was to be recorded in the genealogies of Israel as having no heir. He might have offspring,¹⁰⁰ but the Messiah, the Son of David, would not come of his line.

Two points suggest themselves in connection with this utterance of Jeremiah; first as to the circumstances under which it was uttered, then as to its application to Jehoiachin.

A moment's reflection will show that this prophecy implied great courage and presence of mind on the part of Jeremiah – his enemies might even have spoken of his barefaced audacity. He had predicted that Jehoiakim's corpse should be cast forth without any rites of honourable sepulture; and that no son of his should sit upon the throne. Jehoiakim had been buried

¹⁰⁰ 1 Chron. iii. 17 mentions the "sons" of Jeconiah, and in Matt. i. 12 Shealtiel is called his "son," but in Luke iii. 27 Shealtiel is called the son of Neri.

like other kings, he slept with his fathers, and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead. The prophet should have felt himself utterly discredited; and yet here was Jeremiah coming forward unabashed with new prophecies against the king, whose very existence was a glaring disproof of his prophetic inspiration. Thus the friends of Jehoiachin. They would affect towards Jeremiah's message the same indifference which the present generation feels for the expositors of Daniel and the Apocalypse, who confidently announce the end of the world for 1866, and in 1867 fix a new date with cheerful and undiminished assurance. But these students of sacred records can always save the authority of Scripture by acknowledging the fallibility of their calculations. When their predictions fail, they confess that they have done their sum wrong and start it afresh. But Jeremiah's utterances were not published as human deductions from inspired data; he himself claimed to be inspired. He did not ask his hearers to verify and acknowledge the accuracy of his arithmetic or his logic, but to submit to the Divine message from his lips. And yet it is clear that he did not stake the authority of Jehovah or even his own prophetic status upon the accurate and detailed fulfilment of his predictions. Nor does he suggest that, in announcing a doom which was not literally accomplished, he had misunderstood or misinterpreted his message. The details which both Jeremiah and those who edited and transmitted his words knew to be unfulfilled were allowed to remain in the record of Divine Revelation – not, surely, to illustrate the fallibility of prophets,

but to show that an accurate forecast of details is not of the essence of prophecy; such details belong to its form and not to its substance. Ancient Hebrew prophecy clothed its ideas in concrete images; its messages of doom were made definite and intelligible in a glowing series of definite pictures. The prophets were realists and not impressionists. But they were also spiritual men, concerned with the great issues of history and religion. Their message had to do with *these*

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