

ARTICLE III.

JEREMIAH, THE PROPHET OF PERSONAL
GODLINESS: A STUDY IN HEBREW
RELIGION.

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TEN years ago Professor Park urged me to study the individual theology of each prophet. The keen-eyed veteran theologian foresaw that the Old Testament must soon be used historically, and therefore wished the quarrying of the individual stones for the new building to be in hand.

The place of Jeremiah is not indeed upon the foundation line of such a building, but far up in the wall; indeed he is even a keystone in a sub-arch, or a top-stone in the early stage. Quarrying, however, does not always seem to the outside beholder to follow the true order which the stones in the wall must follow; and quarry-men know that many stones are usually in hand together. A study of Jeremiah may prepare the way for studies of earlier men.

The excellent treatise of Professor Guthe, "*De Jeremiana Fœderis Notione*," discusses thoroughly one main feature of Jeremiah's teaching, but fails to present the whole, or to discover the centrally characteristic feature, as I think will presently appear. Indeed Guthe criticises himself adversely when he quotes Hosea as really the first prophet of the covenant. Jeremiah was the pupil of Hosea in this prophesying. And yet he was far more. Among the noble searchers after what the spirit in them did signify, Jeremiah, beginning from the "covenant" prophecy, dug down far deeper than all before him, until he struck on life's very foundation stone itself; for he saw and said that only persons can experience

God's love, and only persons can express it. Since his day there has been ever a singularly wider recognition that this prophet touched, felt, proclaimed, the very rock whereon God and man stand together. Jeremiah was the prophet to whom men likened Jesus, and to whom Paul, and the writer to the Hebrews, turned for words that touch the soul to the quick. To Jew and Christian he has been among the prophets not the most brilliant, but the most human.

My task now is to explain this by showing that Jeremiah's characteristic proclamation was:—

God's love is altogether for persons; and personal love for God and his beloved is the only godliness.

As we enter the Prophet-preacher's audience-hall to listen, let us gather as preliminary a few notes that stand written on the threshold.

1. We need not throw aside the long-used popular epithet "Weeping Prophet." The title is no doubt inexact and incorrect; for, while these Hebrew seers are all "Weeping Prophets," just this man it is who often tells us, He would that he could weep, but he cannot. He knows how hard-hearted he must seem, as he speaks the often terrible, but always calm, judgment of God. He speaks out of a love too deep for tears, but deep as will, and deed, and sweat like drops of blood. Men who listen are shaken with strong feeling, and looking on the brother-like face of the man their own tears spring, and they call him not untruly "The Weeping Prophet."

2. Jeremiah preached personal godliness, yet not he alone. Every prophet knew much godliness in himself, and longed and labored that it might be in all men. Each of them was a personal friend of God, and as we read their words it is that personal friendship which we feel testifying of its own reality. The divine knowledge or authority of the prophets sprang from their personal godliness, and was its manifestation. Moreover they ever preached of sin, and that condemnation of sin implies in

the condemner at least some measure of personal godliness. To preach of sin is to demand personal godliness. Yet as we have said the prophets were a long series of searchers, each follower going deeper than his forerunner. Such has been from the first the Christian doctrine of the order of Divine love in revelation through men. And among all yonder noble miners, Jeremiah first saw and declared that the nation should rise to the godly level where stood the prophets of the past, not by a national establishment of their faiths, but by universal personal trust in the personal love of God. It is the business of the Old Testament theologians to trace Jeremiah's place and each prophet's place in the history of the gradual recognition and ever clearer declaration of the facts of personal life. Jeremiah laid the top-stone of an arch at which all the prophets builded.

3. We may not expect to find that Jeremiah revealed the full gospel of personal godliness. In our Lord Jesus came that life to the uttermost—in no other, before him, beside him, or since. I appeal with confidence to our heart's love and rest. These tell us that only the person of Jesus wins and saves us, and can win and save all men. Therefore *a priori* we may infer, as *a posteriori* it shall be ever more clearly affirmed, that the more we read the prophets, the more we shall recognize how they all say:—“Would that we could win and save! Would that we could give to all the place that God has given us! Would that the way of life were manifest!” When all had died and passed away, then at last Jesus came and said “Come unto Me.” He has done more. He has done the great saving deed, for he has won men to himself, as a center of life for all.

We may not say that Jesus simply taught the sum of all that others have taught, else the positive essence of life were not distinctively in him. But as he was something different from all others, so by his manifestation of himself he declared his own utterly new and incompar-

able Gospel. Herein, therefore, he brought an essentially distinct doctrine. It is true that the personal godliness of Jeremiah corresponds in its measure to one of the great ground-lines of Christianity; but the personal godliness of Jesus has a far fuller meaning, as well as a far mightier reproductive power. I need not describe here that failure to conceive the motive power of Christianity which marks the Christology common to real Unitarianism, to modern Judaism, and to all Ritualism. I have here to use the Old Testament in sharp antithesis to the common fault of these three religions, by asking how the prophets acknowledged their own insufficiency, and thereby pointed forward to one greater than all.

4. This implies another preliminary truth. While Jeremiah's life-work was to preach personal godliness, that work predicted Jesus. He was a prophet in the double sense. Jeremiah spoke indeed with living voice to living ears, that by present love he might move to instant life. Yet when once he had kindled a desire for an ideal life, when once he had awakened love for an ideal love, where once was born a faith in a Godlike ideal man; then true hearts, in listeners and speaker, must have looked—not about them, not backward to a golden age, but forward, for some one yet to come. The doctrine of unconscious prophecy has a truth beneath it. He knows the prophet's predictive work truly and feels it deeply, who knows thoroughly what they did for their own times. We shall therefore look and listen whether, by all his life and all his word to his fellows, Jeremiah preached a great *prophecy of personal godliness*.

I. Let me first paint a picture of the man's own person. Look with me at the turn of his hand and the look of his eye, the trend of his heart's love and the intent of his toil, the fashion of his plans and the very manner of his book.

1. Watch him standing among other men in those centuries; how sharp the contrast with them, although they be far centuries away from us. Comparatively near

him were Isaiah of the century before him, and Ezekiel of the generation after.

a. How different is he from Isaiah, the peerless statesman, the brilliant orator at a nation's bar. Isaiah defends a whole nation as if it were one individual; he pleads with the court only, or the king as the seat of the one national conscience. His soul, uplifted toward God, amid despair beholds deliverance; but the revelation is "Jehovah chooseth Zion for his one earthly home. This house and will and way of God are inviolable; therefore secondarily, by corollary, the inhabitants thereof shall not be sick, and are forgiven." God's relation to individuals' was to Isaiah almost a thought unborn. Isaiah's great talisman is "God is with us," "God with a nation," "The Lord with the Host."

But a century later when that oracle had become at once by law established and powerless; then Jeremiah's kindling faith heard the still, small voice whispering, "Lo, I am with thee." By this gentle seer came the oracle of personal salvation to replace or deepen the popular faith taught by the graceful seer of a century before. Henceforth, to Jeremiah, not Zion's temple of stone, but the soul of a man must be the abode of God. Jeremiah cares little for court and state and national life, but he loves dearly the separate lives in Judah. You read much of his care to nourish his own life—God's gift to him,—his anxiety to save the timid king Zedekiah's life, to honor a great-souled negro slave, to cheer the gentle scribe Baruch, to move God's mercy for famished children, or to plead forbearance for the poor street wanderers. When the land was desolated and the scribes were all gone, this Jeremiah chose to stay behind as companion and teacher for the feeble who had nothing and were too worthless to be exiled.

While Isaiah's prophecy is an exalted political document, the book of Jeremiah is a tale of every-day lives, and the note-book of an intensely loving pastor. Isaiah's

splendid eloquence makes his chapters favorites in the pulpit and the review; but Jeremiah's tender broodings, wearisome as they are to the hasty eye, are untold treasures for the hidden, busy curate of souls. Jeremiah's words are to be seldom read aloud, but often read in the silence where the thinking soul lives nearest to its fellows.

b. Compare Jeremiah on the other hand with his disciple Ezekiel. The younger man was the pupil of the elder, and is ever echoing his teacher's words. It was Ezekiel's nature so to treasure precious forms. For he was a born priest, and he lived a true-souled expounder of the manners that become a high-born and a godly people. Such priests are God's ministers. A high-born man himself, Ezekiel received due, if sad, honor when he was carried away captive at the first deportation, among the 10,000 nobles and men of high rank. There is fitting dignity in his sorrows, even when they rise to haughty scorn of the remnant left behind in Jerusalem. For those left behind were poor and wretched; and to Ezekiel, that was base. Yet Jeremiah was among them. He never went captive, but chose to be "left among the poor of the land who had nothing."

Ezekiel, after his long years of despair, saw glad days coming again; and in the bloom of his joy he penned his vision of a future worthy ritual. That ritual was the esthetic of a godly and a very lovable heart. But Jeremiah's words concerning ritual and forms inherited from the past, are chiefly an utterance of terrible indignation against that holiness which is hollowness. He denies that God ever commanded national sacrifice, while in the name of God he demands personal obedience.

Ezekiel would limit the number of Jehovah's near ministers to the small family of the Zadokites, but Jeremiah prophesied and toiled to the end that not alone the whole tribe of Levi, but also every living soul might know the LORD, by having Jehovah's name and love written on his heart.

2. Turn from these comparisons with other men, to scan the man's own features closely. How clearly traceable is the divine character in him, and this just because it is so singularly human. To use a phrase of the schools, his prophecy is remarkably subjective, and God seems the less objective. In one simple word, the closer you study him, the nearer is God to him. For:—

a. He has been truly called "The Praying Prophet." Whole passages of the book are prayers. He who longs to pray well will find Jeremiah one of the few true teachers. I should quote half the book, were I to record how often there break forth from the man's soul words like these: "O Lord, thou knowest; remember me, and visit me,—take me not away in thy long-suffering" (ch. xv.). The book is a record of talks with God. At times the prophet feels even a divine check laid on his habit of prayer: "Jehovah said unto me, 'Pray not for this people.'" He thinks of the great saints of the past, Moses and Samuel, not as great leaders, but as great intercessors (Jer. ch. xv.; cf. Deut. ch. ix.). When he sits down to write to men, it is often a prayer he sends them; when he goes out to preach to them, his word often turns into prayer in their midst. A deeper fact lies behind all these. Chapters which are largely prayers are headed, "The words of Jehovah." The naïve simplicity of the claim marks the child-like utter faith. The inner secret of Jeremiah's character beams out in this unquestioning identification of his thoughts and words with the word and thought of God. Jeremiah believed that his own most personal utterances had divine value. This was personal faith and personal God-likeness.

b. But trace this feature more closely, and it will prove still more thoroughly characteristic. The title, "The words of Jehovah," stands at the head of the whole book. Examine the contents, and in the series of three books which make up the whole you shall find:—

(i.) A group of summaries of sayings and doings during the twenty years before he was recognized as a

mighty prophet. They date, roundly, from the last seventeen years of the reign of Josiah and three years thereafter, i. e., cir. 626-606 B. C., and they include, say, chapters i. to xxv. Reserve for a moment a remark on the summaries of sayings, and observe that some of their finest passages are narratives of events. Especially so is the tenderly sad yet sublime eleventh chapter, that reads like a commentary from personal experience on the theme of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. Yet all is entitled "Words of Jehovah." But pass to—

(ii.) The second great section or book, covering, say, chapters xxv. to xlv. You shall read there in page after page simply the autobiography of a friend of God, who watched the decline and the fall of Jerusalem, while he strove to save some souls from the ruin. Read again the title, "The words of Jehovah," and feel breathing on you the fragrant godlikeness of this man, whose simple faith called his own life "God's words." Jeremiah's life was an utterance of Jehovah's thoughts, and the man's own tale of himself was God's own story of his own affairs. To this man even the story of Jerusalem, and its people, true and false together, was all a divine revelation. Here was realization of an immanent Presence, merciful, gracious, and beloved, and the realization became a revelation. Here may a theologian learn to construct a doctrine of "divine prophetic inspiration."

The nearer we draw to the man, the deeper is the depth of this godlike personality. For the expression which we translate "Words of Jehovah" meant really to the prophet and to his audience not "the words," but "the affairs of Jehovah." Then God's affairs were one with the affairs of Jeremiah. Jeremiah's personal interest in the soil and city of Judah, in the people high and low, children and fathers, his own anxious care to be delivered from a dismal dungeon, his loving care for the negro slave who saved him, his homesick cry as he goes driven out from his father's homestead, his keen interest in the free-hold

homes and farm-lands of the exiles whose return he foretells, his noble struggle for the jubilee-release of bond-servants,—all these affairs of simple men were, to Jeremiah's godlike thought, "Affairs of God." It is true that other prophets tell us something of their own personal story, and these others do also call all they write "Words of God," or "Affairs of God." Certainly to them also, and to every godly man, the affairs of earth are affairs of God. Yet there is no prophet like Jeremiah, who finds his inspired soul's chief delight and his pen's chief task in so picturing life that he may call it all "God's affairs." If it be correct to think that Jeremiah composed most of the Books of the Kings, as many scholars think on independent grounds, then there is overwhelming record of his affection for individual lives, and his simple faith in their unsurpassed value. And the divine seal has been set on these records and on that faith. The written record has become an everliving prophecy, whose voice now hastens on the fulfilment of Jeremiah's faith. For Jeremiah believed in a coming day when every man shall know Jehovah's character, and knowing it shall love it, and that day draws nearer. Note here further that—

c. Such a man would have been strangely incomplete had he cared only to think of the outward facts of individual life. But Jeremiah has left us a treasury of psychological notes, richer far than we find in any other Old Testament writings, save in some Psalms. And some of these Psalms may be his own or his pupils' songs. When to-day a preacher would probe the depths of character and trace the soul's subtle pathos, how often does he find a text in Jeremiah. This prophet first tracked to its hiding the deceitful heart: he wrote the oldest meditation on the continuity of the will. His parable of the potter suggested to Paul the vision of God's mysterious sovereign creation of a soul. Jeremiah caught up old Hosea's great test of inspiration, and handed it on to the apostle James as the eternally gracious declaration of man's

greatest dignity: "Who is the wise man, let him discern the truth of God's oracles. Yet let him not boast of his wisdom, but of his knowledge of Jehovah's righteous grace."—Jer. ix.; Hos. xiv.; Jas. iii.

Jeremiah's argumentation is full of faith in that dignity of man, and he wins by the impress of his own reasonableness. In the summaries of arguments in the first great section of the book, we have proof that to the writer his inspired reason was more precious than some of his inspired words. Thought cannot, indeed, be without form, and the dream of some past theologians that "the spirit of the teachings was inspired, but not the form," has been fain to vanish before a more logical, i. e., a more scientific theology. The prophet orator's glowing thought and firm word, fit to convict, or soothe, or woo, were all the outburst of God's own conceptions; yet, in Jeremiah's estimate, more worthy of undying record were the bare links of the reasoned chain. The former were the inspired effort to reach one peculiar set of hearers, the latter were the inspired evidence of God's estimation of every soul's reason. The concrete individuality of each original hearer was precious to the speaker, but therefore all the more precious was the reasoning thoughtfulness which is the vital breath of every concrete individuality. So Jeremiah wrote summaries of his arguments. They should not glorify to after-time his own rhetorical skill, but they should stir the reader to criticism and to reason, which is individual manliness. The summaries seem awkward, but they grow full of light and pathos, as they throw a Rembrandt light upon the eager writer, forging argument after argument, hasting on, unwearied, if by any means he may persuade the souls he loves. He seems to wrestle with his own heart, testing each argument's edge upon himself; for so keenly does he cut to the heartstrings as one only dare or can who has groped after these strings in his own breast. His strange knowledge of others is reached by a genuine, simple knowledge

of himself. His own deep, personal friendship with God brings forth the great message of his life and his book. Such was Jeremiah: this was the Prophet of Personal Godliness.

ARTICLE IV.

THE REVISION OF GENESIS.

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[Continued from page 527.]

- xxvi. 7. Omit '*she is.*'
- xxvi. 11. 'the' for '*his.*'
- xxvi. 14. 'and' for 'For;' 'possessions' for 'possession' (twice); 'a great household' for 'great store of servants.'
- xxvi. 15. 'Now' for 'For.'
- xxvi. 21. Add 'they' (strove).
- xxvi. 26. Omit 'chief.'
- xxvi. 27. 'are ye come unto' for 'come ye to.'
- xxvi. 28. Change of order.
- xxvi. 34. 'When' has been carried back to first clause.
- xxvi. 3. It is plainer here than in the similar passages that a telic force is to be given to γ . The Rev. have not been particular to restore this force where it was missed by A. V. Cf. Lev. ix: 6; Amos v. 14. They have likewise (cf. xxvii. 10) not been particular to restore the force of strong γ with the perfect where the A. V. wrongly attributes an idea of purpose.
- xxvi. 10. 'might easily have lain' or 'had almost lain' or 'would soon have lain' would be an improvement.
- xxvi. 22. 'can' for 'shall' would avoid the appearance of grammatical inaccuracy.
- xxvii. 1. 'too dim to see' is briefer and more accurate than Rev.
- xxvii. 5. 'was listening' for 'heard.'
- xxvii. 8. 'about to command' for 'command.'
- xxvii. 9. 'that I may make' is better.