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influence of His Spirit that alone can uplift men. It is the weakness of men's faith that makes them demand miracles. But God takes them even with their superstition, their weakness, their defects, and works great things by them, if only they be true to the light they have. That is the lesson of Gideon's life. There was much primitive grossness in his conception of religion, of war, and of government. Nevertheless the central, sovereign, animating power in the man's soul was an absolute conviction that whatever came he would do the will of the one true, righteous God of heaven and of earth. That made his career glorious; for in so doing he was faithful to the highest light he had access to.

W. G. ELMSLIE.

THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS.

OF all the poetical books of the Old Testament this is probably the one least generally known; yet it is the one about which our information is most complete. About the circumstances in which some of these books were produced we know little or nothing; we cannot fix their dates with certainty to within hundreds of years. But we can tell precisely the circumstances in which this book arose; and we can fix its date to within, at the most, a year or two; some think to within a month or two.[1]

In the year 588 B.C. the city of Jerusalem was compassed round by the Babylonians, and, after a siege of two years, during which the inhabitants endured all the extremities of such a situation, it fell into the hands of the enemy, who burnt it to the ground and transported the inhabitants, a few excepted, to far off Babylon. Those who stayed behind

[1] Bleek argues that it was written between the surrender and the destruction of the city.

attempted to organize themselves in the empty country. But they were attacked in their weakness by the predatory tribes which lived on the borders, and so harassed, that at last, panic-stricken and demoralised, they set off for Egypt, to seek refuge there.

The book has for its theme this catastrophe of the holy nation, and especially of the holy city; and it is evident that it was written at the time by one who was an eye-witness of the scenes he depicts and felt to the very depths of his soul the horror and pain of the tragedy.[1]

There is one man well-known to us who was on the spot during all these events. The prophet Jeremiah had foretold for many years that this calamity was coming upon Jerusalem. But he spoke to deaf ears. The false prophets by whom he was surrounded made light of his warnings and maintained that he was entirely mistaken: the city of Jehovah would never be given over into the hands of the heathen. The people were only too ready to listen to these flatterers; and the heads of the community were so irritated by what they considered Jeremiah's pessimistic croaking, that they shut his mouth by casting him into prison.

It turned out, however, that he was a true prophet; and he lived to see the fulfilment of the worst which he had foretold. He was in Jerusalem all through the siege and the subsequent destruction of the city; and, after the transportation of the inhabitants had taken place, he was among the small remnant who stayed for a time in the country. He resisted the migration to Egypt, but was compelled at last to go with the rest.

It is very natural to suppose that he was the author, therefore, of the book. This, no doubt, is why it is separated in our Bible from the rest of the poetical books

[1] Ewald contends that it was written after the fugitives arrived in Egypt, and was used at a mournful anniversary celebration.

and inserted after Jeremiah's prophecy. In the Septuagint it is introduced with the superscription: "And it came to pass, after Israel was led into captivity, and Jerusalem laid waste, that Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said." These words, however, do not occur in the Hebrew, which nowhere gives the name of the author.

Jeremiah has always been supposed to be the author till the present day, when it is the fashion to suppose a new author wherever there is the faintest pretext for doing so.[1] The reasons which have been discovered for attributing Lamentations to another author are of the most microscopic order; but they have appeared sufficient to a certain school. It is allowed, however, that the writer lived at the same time as Jeremiah, and went through the same experience. Bunsen made the suggestion that he may have been Baruch, Jeremiah's loved disciple.

The question is of comparatively little interest, and it has no religious importance whatever. It would be gratifying to know that besides Jeremiah there was another gifted son of Israel in those days, who loved Zion with an affection as profound as is displayed in this book, and was able to express in such lasting literary form the meaning of these tragic events. Nature is hardly, however, so prodigal of her gifts.

The genius of Jeremiah was a rare and peculiar one; but it could not be better expressed than in the profound impression made on the heart of the writer of this book by his country's calamities and the profoundly religious view which he takes of the situation. It is also a noteworthy circumstance that we know from other Scripture that Jeremiah was a lament-writer. Of course a man might be a prophet without having the peculiar gift of the poet. But Jeremiah not only wrote poetry, but this kind of poetry;

[1] Whenever the writer pauses to take breath, says Matthew Arnold.

he wrote a lament on the death of Josiah.[1] There are some peculiarities in the language of the Lamentations which do not occur in Jeremiah's prophecy; but this is no more than might be expected, when a writer was passing from one species of literature to another;[2] and, on the other hand, there are many striking resemblances, and among them one or two phrases which are so characteristic of Jeremiah's style, that they may almost be called his cipher. By far the most conclusive proof, however, of the authorship is the account of Jeremiah's personal experience given in the third chapter. Here the facts of the prophet's history are described with autobiographic fulness. And who but Jeremiah could have used the opening words of that great chapter, "I am the man that hath seen affliction"? Only some prominent public character could have ventured to apply such a description to himself; and whom does the grandiose phrase fit so well as the typical sufferer of his age?[3]

[1] Dr. Driver takes no notice of this fact, when giving the reasons *pro* and *con*, in his *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*. I join in the gratitude with which this book has been received. It is an ornament to English theology. But a close examination of it in this case, and in some others where I happen to have some knowledge of my own, does not dispose me to place absolute confidence in it in other cases where I am not able to check it in this way. The air of moderation which it wears is more apparent than real.

[2] What can be the use of quoting as arguments against Jeremiah's authorship, as Dr. Driver does, single words occurring in Lamentations but not in Jeremiah, when, according to Dr. Driver's own theory, these words were current at the time and as accessible to Jeremiah as to any of his disciples? In a case like this, while striking resemblances of word or phrase are important evidence, minute verbal differences have no weight whatever.

Another argument to which Dr. Driver gives prominence, as proving that at least a portion of the book is not by Jeremiah, is that, while in the three poems after the first two of the initial Hebrew letters change places, they occupy in the first poem their usual positions. But he does not mention the simple suggestion of Ewald, that in the first poem an editorial hand may have altered the arrangement. The verses read better, Ewald thinks, when their initial letters stand as in chapters ii., iii., iv.

[3] The interpretation of those who do not accept Jeremiah's authorship of the book is that the nation personified speaks here. But in chapter i. the nation personified is a woman.

The form of this book is of course poetical. But there are certain peculiarities in its poetry which deserve to be noted.

The book is not a continuous poem, but a collection of five separate pieces, all of the same character, and all on the same theme. And the book is so divided in our version that each poem just fills a chapter.

The poems belong to the elegiac species of poetry; and we should call the separate pieces elegies, or dirges, or laments. This kind of poetry seems to have been much cultivated in Israel. We find in the Bible not a few other laments besides those of Jeremiah. They appear to have been frequently composed on the death of persons prominent in the public eye or beloved by a large circle of acquaintance; and very likely they were sung in connexion with the funeral rites. But they might also be composed in commemoration of public calamities; and there are some very remarkable prophetic laments, predicting the destruction of cities with the accompanying scenes of woe.[1]

But there is a remarkable peculiarity still to be mentioned in these laments of Jeremiah. The first four of them are acrostics on the Hebrew alphabet. That is to say, the successive verses begin with the successive letters of the alphabet; the first with the letter corresponding to A, the second with B, and so on. And in the great third chapter each successive letter begins three successive verses. The fifth chapter has the same number of verses as it would have if it were an acrostic also; but for some unknown reason the acrostic form is dropped.

This strikes us as a very peculiar thing. It might be expected that a form so artificial must cramp the thought and crush out all naturalness. But it is not uncommon in Hebrew poetry. It appears in several of the Psalms,

[1] Dr. Driver has a valuable note on the form of the biblical lament.

culminating in cxix., where, as is well known, each successive letter of the alphabet begins eight successive verses. It is essentially of the same nature as parallelism, alliteration, metre and rhyme. It appears to be the nature of poetical thought to submit itself to such restraints, and yet be able to move with more grace and freedom than in the slovenly garb of common speech. Odd as this acrostic form seems to us, it probably appeared far more natural to an ancient poet than rhyme would have done, which now is thought so natural. It was apparently resorted to when the material of the poem consisted of a great many somewhat similar remarks, and an artificial thread was needed on which to string the separate thoughts.[1]

The picture painted in the Lamentations is one of colossal sorrow. The siege and the sack of cities have always been horrible incidents of warfare; but the enemies by whom Jerusalem was destroyed were noted for their cruelty and ruthlessness. In their own annals and in their artistic delineations of their practices in war, which have been dug in recent times from beneath the sands of the desert, this is made painfully evident. The Babylonians, in the height of their power, not only practised the most outrageous cruelty, but gloried in it. And they had many reasons for not sparing Israel.

A most pitiful description is given by the author of the sufferings endured in the siege, especially from famine. The children swooned with hunger and cried for bread to their mothers, who had none to give. The aged gave up the ghost "while they sought their meat to relieve their souls." The famished crept through the streets like gray and feeble ghosts. Those who all their lives before had fed

[1] Dr. Driver alleges this acrostic form as an argument against attributing the book to Jeremiah, "who in his literary style followed the promptings of nature"!

delicately and been clothed in scarlet were reduced to such extremities that they were willing to part with anything for a morsel of bread. Of the nobles[1] it is said that once "they were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire": but now, as the effect of famine, "their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets" (so disfigured are they); "their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick." The dark rumour was even in circulation that mothers, mad with hunger, had sodden their own children.

After the siege came the indescribable horrors of the sack of the city, when the gates were burst open and the brutal soldiery, irritated by long delay, rushed in to wreak their will on the doomed inhabitants. Every home had to endure its own share of cruelty and shame. But above all private grief towered the public calamity. Everything noble and venerable, to which patriotic affection and religious feeling clung, was ruthlessly dishonoured. To crown all, in the temple was heard the ribald noise and shouting of the enemy, loud as had been in happier days the mirth of the solemn festivals. "The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things; for she hath seen that the heathen entered her sanctuary, whom Thou didst command that they should not enter into Thy congregation."

Then followed the deportation of the inhabitants to Babylon, in which king and princes, priests and prophets, high and low, were all mingled in a common degradation; and, as the long procession moved away, they could see, or seemed in their melancholy hearts to see, the ancient and implacable enemies of Israel, such as the Edomites, drawn up along the path as scornful and exultant spectators of their calamity.

A remnant were left behind, among whom was the

[1] In Authorized Version, "Nazarites."

author of Lamentations. But their lot was perhaps the most pitiable of all. Not only were they constantly harassed by the incursions of the skirmishers from the desert and made to live in perpetual fear, but they had before their eyes the ruins of their country and their capital. The gates were sunk in the ground and the bars broken; the city was a heap of ruins, and silence reigned in the streets. "A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things"; and, as amidst the silence of the deserted city they remembered the days of music and mirth, calling to mind especially the happy pilgrim bands which used to make vocal the roads of the country, now deserted, and to crowd the courts of the temple, now in ruins, no wonder they cried, "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!"

To all this history of sorrow the author of Lamentations gives the most complete and sympathetic expression. The book is full of tears. "Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water," he says, "for the destruction of the daughter of my people." In the first chapter he personifies Israel as a woman weeping and appealing to the whole world: "Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow."

But he had a deeper purpose than merely to give vent to the national grief. All through these poems the minds of the people for whose use they were composed are directed, in a truly prophetic spirit, to the cause of their sufferings. The Babylonians were not the cause: they were merely the instruments of a higher will. It was God who was chastising them; and they were chastised because they had sinned: "The Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions." "The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandment." Such is the undertone from first to last below the record of calamity; and the poet seeks to impress on his fellow sufferers that

hope lies only in acknowledging their iniquity and seeking forgiveness from Him against whom they have sinned.

The most remarkable of all the five chapters is the middle one. The other two on each side may be said to lean up against it, while it towers above them. In it Jeremiah comes forward to speak in his own person, beginning with the words already quoted, "I am the man that hath seen affliction." He goes on to give a poetical description of his own history, for the purpose of showing the right way of dealing with trouble.

His fellow-sufferers had just come into trouble, but he had been a man of sorrows all his life. Years before their chastisement arrived, the hand of God had been laid heavily on him: "He bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He caused the arrows of His quiver to enter into my reins. I was a derision to all my people, and their song all the day." His personal grief might have been described in the very words which would now describe their public calamity. But he had discovered for himself the way out of trouble, and he could now teach it to them.

At first he had agitated himself and cried out against the hand which was chastising him; his whole being was in tumult and refused to be comforted. But, when he became still and humbled himself, then the day broke and the day-star arose in his heart. The most delightful and comforting truths came pouring into his mind; in the strength of which he surmounted sorrow; and, though outward trouble did not cease, he was able to rise above it.

It is here that there come in a dozen or score of verses totally different from the rest of this book. The rest of the book is steeped in tears; this portion is flushed with sunshine: "It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him.

The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, unto the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. . . . For the Lord will not cast off for ever; but, though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men."

These verses are like a bed of water-lilies lying on the surface of a brackish and desolate mere. The rest of the book may be compared to a sky full of black and dripping clouds, but these verses are like a rainbow arched athwart them. They speak of hope in the depths of desolation, and show the way to reach it. They sound the true evangelic note, which echoes all through the Scripture. They lead up to the proposal with which, at the close of them, Jeremiah appeals to his fellow countrymen, "Let us search and try our way, and turn again to the Lord."

Thus the book has not merely a historical and poetical interest; but it handles with inspired power the problems of sin and suffering, and points out clearly the way to God.

As we close it, the image which remains in our minds is that figure of the Septuagint—Jeremiah seated on the ruins of Jerusalem, with the calamity of his country in all its compass and significance mirrored in his tear-filled heart. And that figure makes our eye travel forward to another. Another son of Israel and lover of Jerusalem, when He was come near, as He descended the Mount of Olives, beheld the city, and wept over it. Strange city! What sons that nation bore! How amazingly they loved her! And how unmotherly was her treatment of them!

Some said, in the days of our Lord's flesh, that He was Jeremiah; and between the prophet and the Saviour there were many resemblances. Both loved the people and the

capital of their country with passionate affection. Both were repaid with deadly cruelty and persecution, and yet they could not cease to love. Each of them was the man of sorrows of his own age. But from the book of Lamentations we may draw a profounder resemblance. Jeremiah in this book attempted to solve the twin mysteries of suffering and sin; and may we not say that to do this was the purpose of the whole life of Christ? Jeremiah solved the mystery well; but it was left for Jesus to give the perfect solution, when He made sin the background on which to display to the universe the glory of love Divine, and when, by His suffering even unto death, He brought to the world joy unspeakable and life eternal.

JAMES STALKER.

ABRAHAM KUENEN.

THE death of Professor Abraham Kuenen, of Leyden, is an event which cannot fail to sadden every honest student of the Old Testament, to whatever school he may belong. "To our great sorrow, our dearly beloved father and brother departed this life to-day (Dec. 10), after a long illness, suddenly but peacefully, at the age of sixty." So runs the mournful notice which gives most of us our only information as to the circumstances of Kuenen's decease. Who has not heard of the great scholar who has left us?—heard of him, perhaps, with pain and regret as an enemy of God's word. Such he was not; his faith was firm and reverent. Note the words in which he expresses the lamentable omission of the quality of "reverence" in Steinthal's definition of religion ("idealism on a naturalistic basis," *Theologisch Tijdschrift*, May, 1886). Could we know the course of Kuenen's development, as we doubtless shall before long, we should have the key to anything that repels English Christians in Kuenen. Perhaps we do not love ideal truth as he did; perhaps we feel that Bible-students must, for the sake of the general progress, put a bridle on their mouth, and check too excessive an individualism. But the more we know Kuenen, the more we shall see that, allowing for his