

comes the nearest to the New Testament spirit of any part of the Old Testament. Part of the neglect with which this book has been treated is perhaps owing to the fact that its grotesque details amuse or displease us, according to our temperament or the mood of the moment. This is inevitable if we regard the events narrated as authentic history; but we must remember that our modern sense of humor is a plant of recent growth. Moreover, once accepted as fiction, the grotesque features of the story are seen to be the ordinary accompaniments of the allegoric style of the author's time, while the vigor of the narrative, and its success in bringing out its moral purpose, are something quite unique.

All that we know of Jonah as a real personage is gathered from II. Kings xiv. 25. By this we see that Jonah flourished about 780 B. C., and was therefore one of the earliest of the prophets. It is clear, however, that this narrative is not written by Jonah himself, nor even by a contemporary. This is shown by the statement in Chapter iii. 2, "Now Nineveh *was* an exceeding great city." Nineveh fell 606 B. C., and the Canon of the Minor Prophets was closed about 200 B. C. Had the Book of Jonah been written later than that, it would have come under the head of the Haggada or Writings. On the other hand, considerations of language and style, together with the number of echos of, and allusions to other parts of the Old Testament, make it probable that the book is at all events post-exilic, and was written much nearer to the later than the earlier date.

This book nowhere claims to be real history, but offers all the marks of parable or allegory. The absence of precise historical data is one of its distinguishing notes. Then, again, we observe a number of trifling discrepancies due to the license allowed himself by a writer who is telling a tale, not writing a history; and most striking

of all from this point of view is the abrupt close of the narrative at the exact point when the moral becomes obvious.

The purpose of the parable is to illustrate the mission of prophecy to the Gentiles, and to enforce the truth that the Gentiles were capable of repentance. This lesson required to be urgently pressed home to the reluctant and prejudiced people of Israel, who are typified in the parable by the personality of Jonah. It was when Jonah fled from this duty to which he was sent that he was buried in the fish, thus symbolizing the exile of his people—but we shall recur to this point later on. To take the narrative in order, we note firstly that it was not distance nor danger which deterred Jonah from obeying the voice of God, so much as an instinct or a fear that God meant something else than Nineveh's destruction. In Israel, the belief in God's essential grace, and the feeling that sooner or later that grace might reach the heathen, was never far away from the Jewish mind. The secret of this fear was their faith in the love of God, but to the narrow-minded Jewish patriot this foreboding of God's mercy to the heathen was repellent in the extreme. It was to avoid this that Jonah "fled to Tarshish," which is simply a mode of expressing the fact that he tried to get as far as possible from his land and from his God. The contact with the heathen brought about by this voyage is represented as the beginning of his conversion. We note the extreme vividness of the account of the storm, how that the ship "thought that she must break up," we see the worn-out prophet sleeping like a stowaway while the sailors discuss the situation, and we observe that it is the reverence the heathen feels for his God that at last rouses the better self in the heart of Jonah, and he nobly counsels his own sacrifice. This is unwillingly accepted, and we have a striking description of the generous conflict between heathen and Hebrew.