

Dominion Churchman.

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THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The 36th chapter of the second book of "The Chronicles" brings us to the end of the Kingdom of Judah, and very near the close of Old Testament History. All the chief of the priests and the people had transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the Lord. "They mocked [the messengers of God] and despised his words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord had arose against His people, till there was no healing." The Kingdom of Judah had continued for five hundred and eight years, from B. C. 1096 to 508. Notwithstanding the present tendency of the whole nation to join with the heathen around them in cultivating idolatrous worship, yet some splendid examples had been given of devotion to the God of their fathers, which no allurements or menaces could diminish. To this age and race we owe the sublime effusions of a literature that shall never die; and in the imperishable characters of Heaven, they have given to the world the loftiest examples of prophecy, and the richest and noblest flights of song. Age after age, preparation was being made for the coming of Messiah; and each of the prophets of the Lord, as he unfolded his message, gave greater distinctness to the visions of the future, and brought out to the wondering people of the land, in greater detail and relief, the principal events connected with the coming of Shiloh, and the glory that should follow. But in process of time the nation had become thoroughly corrupt; and that the land might enjoy her Sabbaths for three score and ten years, the great mass of the inhabitants, especially the nobles and chief men of the land, were carried captive by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon. The "captivity of the Jews" was the combined result of two expeditions against Judea, both of which are recorded in this chapter. The first was that in the third year of Jehoiakim when Nebuchadnezzar was only the deputy of his father; on which occasion, though Daniel and Jehoiakim were carried to Babylon, we do not know that Jerusalem was actually taken. The second that in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, which was at first led by Nebuzaradan, one of his generals, but subsequently by the King in person. (Jerem. lii. 28).

Since the captivity of the ten tribes, Assyria had become enfeebled, and Babylon, which was subject to Assyria, became stronger. Nabopolassar con-

solidated his power at Babylon. About B.C. 610, he entered into an alliance with Necho, King of Egypt, and with Cyaxeres, the Mede, whose daughter, Amytis, he obtained for his eldest son, Nebuchadnezzar. These three together attacked the Assyrian empire; and it was on his way to Nineveh that Necho mortally wounded Josiah at Megiddo. The country west of the Euphrates fell into the hands of Necho, who fixed his court at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, where as Suzerain, he deposed Jehoahaz. The siege of Nineveh was carried on chiefly by the Medes and Babylonians for more than two years. The walls were a hundred feet high and fifty feet thick. In the spring there happened to be a great rise of the Tigris, when the flood carried away a great portion of the wall; and on the subsiding of the river, the besieging host entered the city. The conquerors quarreled over the spoil, and B.C. 605, Nabopolassar sent his son Nebuchadnezzar against Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish, and expelled the Egyptian army from Syria. After this Assyria is scarcely mentioned except by travellers; its cities decayed, its people dwindled away, its history and language became forgotten, until revived a few years ago by the explorations of Botta, Layard, Rawlinson, and George Smith. It is necessary to bear these facts in mind in order to understand how it was that the Assyrian power was merged into the Babylonian.

During the seventy years of the captivity, Babylon itself suffered reverses. The Medes and Persians took the city B.C. 538, and Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, was slain. Darius is supposed to have been the same person as Cyaxeres, and to have had a nominal supremacy at Babylon, Cyrus the Great being the real monarch. Cyrus having been brought up in the Persian faith, which was equally free from idolatry, and immorality, may have had a sincere admiration of the Jewish faith, which actuated his noble soul when he exclaimed (Ezra i. 8) "Go ye up, and build in Jerusalem, the house of Yahveh, God of Israel; He is God"—and forced the Babylonian temples to disgorge their spoil.

The Artaxerxes mentioned in Neh. ii. 1, was Artaxerxes Longimanus, third son and successor of the celebrated Xerxes who invaded Greece with an immense host of three millions of people, and was beaten at Salamis. This Xerxes was the "King that sat on the rocky brow." He counted his hosts "at break of day, but when the sun set" he had turned his back on the victorious Greeks. He is also believed to have been the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther.

The period embraced for the first lessons of this Sunday was in some respects, an eventful period of the world's history. During its progress Sappho, Solon, Eschylus, Pythagoras, Miltiades, Sophocles, Euripides, Pericles flourished;

Pharaoh Necho also constructed a canal across the Isthmus of Suez. In China Confucius was born B.C. 594. His great superior Mencius, who was one of the greatest men Asiatic nations ever produced, was not born till a century and a half later.

In Nehem viii. 8, we have the first notice of any thing approaching the modern practice of preaching a sermon from a text of holy writ. "They read in the book, in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." Some have imagined that the Jews had lost the knowledge of their language during the captivity, and required to have the Hebrew translated into a mongrel tongue, called in modern times Syro-Chaldaic. This is simply impossible, for a whole nation could not have lost their language in so short a time. In fact, the Hebrew has never been a dead language: to this day, where large bodies of Jews live together, as in Poland, and some other countries, it is still used as a living language, for all the ordinary purposes of every day life.

THE COLLECT like that for last Sunday is a prayer for the Church; but as that was a prayer for mercy to be manifested to the Church, this is a prayer for the Divine pity to be exercised for a definite object, that of cleansing and defending the Church. Pity is commiseration, compassion for distress or suffering, and is the feeling which prompts to acts of mercy. The Church ever needs both cleansing and defending, while it is a suffering and a militant Church. Its need of cleansing arises from false doctrines which are ever creeping in or rising up, and from the unholy lives of its members. And these evils affect the entire body in its organized and corporate capacity; so that if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, and if one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. And hence is the apostolic injunction: "That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another." The assaults made on the Church from the beginning, and which will be made on it till the Lord shall come again are unceasing in the present day; but few of the attacks on Christianity come in the way of violence; and yet many of the assaults it has to endure come in one form or other from the civil power. Just now infidelity is the great enemy with which the Church has to contend. Just now we have peculiar need to offer most fervently the prayer contained in this Collect that, of his continual pity, the Lord would vouchsafe to cleanse and defend the Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without His succour, he would preserve it evermore by His help and goodness.

THE EPISTLE contains one of the richest gems in the whole of St. Paul's