

Our Contributors

The Book Of Jonah.

BY REV. PROF. JORDAN, D.D.

C. H. Cornhill, one of the ablest and most eloquent of German Old Testament Scholars, says of this book: "An involuntary smile passes over one's features at the mention of the name of Jonah. For the popular conception sees nothing in this book but a silly tale, exciting us to derision. Whenever shallow humour prompts people to hold the Old Testament up to ridicule, Balaam's ass and Jonah's whale infallibly take precedence."

"I have read the Book of Jonah at least a hundred times, and I will publicly avow for I am not ashamed of my weakness, that I cannot even now take up this marvellous book, nay, or even speak of it, without the tears rising to my eyes, and my heart beating higher. This apparently trivial book is one of the deepest and grandest that was ever written, and I should like to say to every one who approaches it: "Take off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." In this book Israelitic prophecy quits the science of battle as victor, and as victor in its severest struggle—that against self. In it the prophecy of Israel succeeded, as Jeremiah expresses it in a remarkable and well known passage, in freeing the precious from the vile and in finding its better self again."

The man who writes in this strain cannot be called, with justice, a negative critic. The main thing with him is not to prove that the book is not literal history but rather to show what kind of history it is, and so to bring out for us the abiding lesson.

Dr. G. A. Smith places at the beginning of his discussion of the book the quotation "And this is the tragedy of the Book of Jonah, that a book which was made the means of one of the most sublime revelations of truth in the Old Testament should be known to most only for its connection with a whale", and he says himself "How many have missed the sublime spirit of the book in amusement or offense at its curious details! Even in circles in which the acceptance of its literal interpretation has been demanded as a condition of belief in its inspiration, the story has too often served as a subject for humorous remarks." All this is quite true, as we know from our own experience; we have met with this union of dogmatism and flippancy which opposes a hard barrier to any suggestions of finer, and more spiritual interpretation. However, our present purpose is not controversy; we wish simply to point out how the believing scholar, touched by the modern spirit, and working under the his orical method manifests his reverence for this sacred literature. Reverence for a book is not really shown in praising it at a distance, and in a mechanical way, but by getting near to its heart by studying in a sympathetic spirit the way in which men of a different age experienced the great truths given to them by the Spirit of God. That is the effort that is made by the real student; he knows that inspired men spoke, in the first place, to their own time, and because it was not true and appropriate in its own time the message can be said to be "not for an age but for all time." This means the study of the literary form in which the message of a particular book is enshrined,

followed by the attempt to find the place of the book in the whole range of the literature, and the position held by its central truth in the order of a growing relation. This means careful study, in fact just such painstaking study as men bestow upon other subjects in the sphere of science or art. And surely one of the noblest tributes to the sacredness and inspiration of this great literature is the vast amount of reverent, thoughtful toil that has been spent upon it especially since the Reformation movement gave a new impulse to every form of fearless enquiry.

Enough, however, of these generalities; let us fix our minds on this one point, that the great body of Christian scholars who interpret this book, as sermonic study, allegory, or parable, do not hold a merely negative attitude. They do not take their present position because of a general disbelief in miracles but are led to it by a careful examination of the book itself, and the place of the book in the life and literature of the Hebrew people. From this point of view we are reminded that "history" is a word with several meanings. There is history of facts, and history of ideas. There was a time when English history was little more than a list of Kings and of wars more or less important. But during the last two hundred years men have been coming to larger views of history. We know now that great thinkers have been more influential than great soldiers; we know also that the life of "the common people" is an essential part of real history. The real effort of the historian now is to get back into the life of a particular period and learn how the men of that time looked out upon life, how they thought of God, the world, and their fellow men, how, in other words, they faced the everlasting problems of life.

We feel all the more secure in the possession of great truths when we learn that they are of long, slow growth, that by God's providence acting on the life of men through countless generations they have been slowly woven into the highest life of the world. The nineteenth century saw a wonderful manifestation of missionary energy in the Christian Church; the great missionary idea received a fuller, nobler embodiment. Men responded to the Master's command "Go ye into all the world." In varied forms that missionary work had been going on ever since the origins of the Christian Church, and this latest activity has its roots in all that has gone before. The revelation contained in the old Testament was also a preparation for this highest and latest development of the Christian spirit. Out of the most national and exclusive religion there comes the world religion that knows no destruction of race or clan. But because God, who in these last days has spoken to us in his Son, did also in sundry times and divers manners speak to the fathers in the prophets, this large sympathy and noble life has its beginnings in the older religion. In the centuries before Christ when the Jews had come to know that they possessed in their religion a superior and priceless treasure their life had two sides. Because of the hard battles they had to fight they were compelled to cherish a certain exclusiveness and this in later days became the unlovely Phariseism, the fierce enemy of the gentle Christ. But that was only one side of Judaism. The men who possessed the highest in-

spiration saw that the very greatness of the revelation they had received meant that they had a message for the whole world. The missionary spirit glows and burns in those marvellous pictures of the Servant of the Lord contained in the latter parts of the book of Isaiah. This theme might with profit be developed at great length but our space is exhausted and we must briefly apply it to the subject in hand.

The Book of Jonah is from this point of view a manifestation of the large free spirit which was given to God's ancient people through the prophets, and so it is very real history. It has its part in the history of the great missionary truth that our God is the God of the whole world and that in His service mere personal feelings and ambitions, local and sectional interests, are to be made subordinate to the real service of humanity and that we as men of faith, must rejoice in that mercy of God which calls men to repentance, and grants forgiveness to the penitent.

Serving.

Are you willing to work for the Master?

Are you willing a servant to be?

To be patient and true,

With this promise in view,

That a crown and a mansion await you.

Be honest in giving your service,

You ask and expect to receive;

If your purpose be true

Your heart to renew,

He will help, encourage, direct you.

There'll be troubles and trials to contend with,

Temptations without and within;

Your cross nobly bear,

Never faint or despair,

He is stronger than aught that assails you.

For the time will soon come

When your life's work is done;

When the cross for the crown

Will be gladly laid down

As the wage of your love for the Master.

M. H.

If God gave you gaiety and cheer of spirits, lift up the care worn by it. Wherever you go shine and sing. In every household there is drudgery. In every household there is sorrow. If you come as a prince, with a cheerful, buoyant nature, in the name of God, do not lay aside those royal robes of yours. Let humor be a Jew duty.—Beecher.

Century Fund.

The Executive of the Century Fund Committee met in the Rev. Dr. Warden's office on Wednesday last. It was found that a large number of promised subscriptions have not yet been received. It is hoped that in every congregation and mission station, an effort will be made to collect the subscriptions and have these forwarded to Dr. Warden during the month of February, so that whatever amount is then on hand may be divided among the several schemes of the church benefited by the Century Fund.

Presbyterian Standard: What we call today is simply the result of the yesterdays which are gone. We are what we are now because of what we have been in the past. Now is but the product—the following up so to speak—of the past. The acts which we perform day by day, the thoughts which we think, ripen into habit, and before long habit becomes a second nature.