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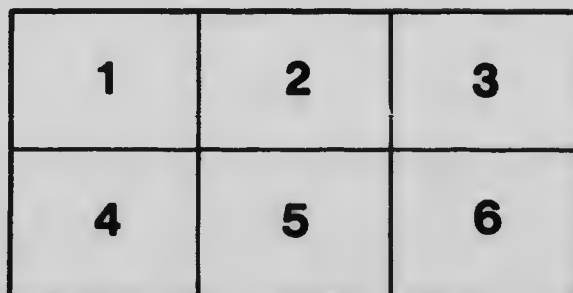
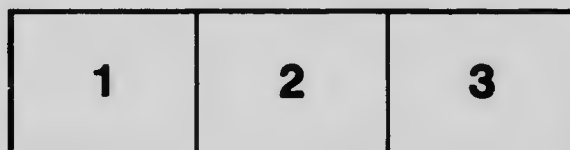
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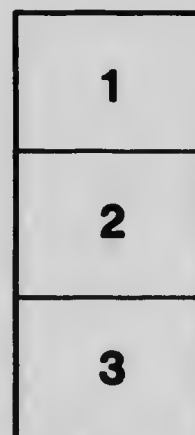
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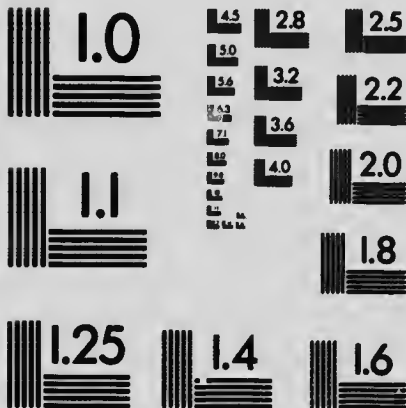
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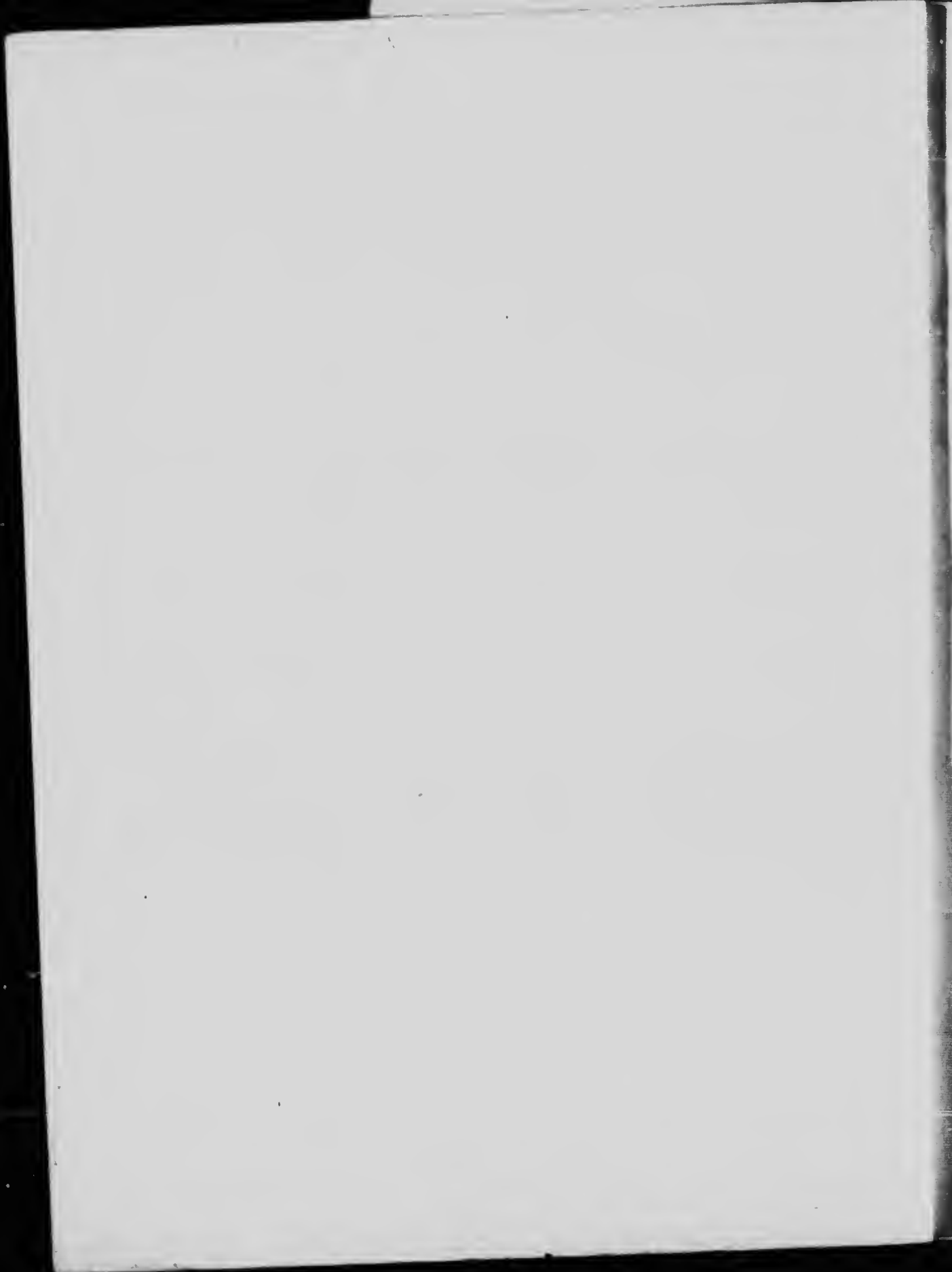
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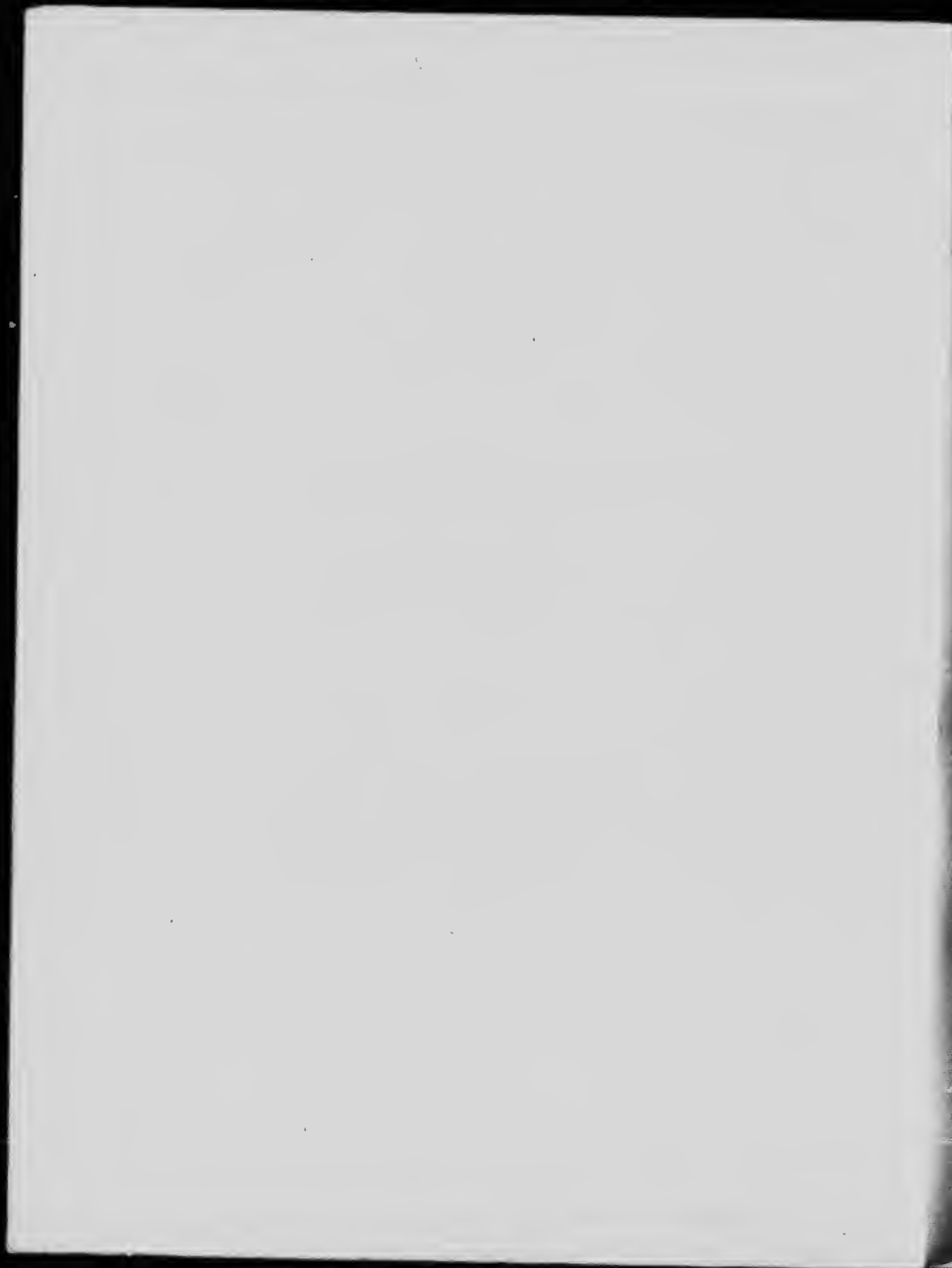
LETTICE BELL

To Clarence
from
Ethel.



NEVER-OLD STORIES

THE BOILING CALDRON





"God save King Josiah," the people cried.

THE BOILING CALDRON

BY

LETTICE BELL

AUTHOR OF

"THE TEN RED STORIES,"

"THE BOILING CALDRON," "THE BRITISH MUSEUM," ETC.

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

TORONTO

THE MACMILLAN & CO. COMPANY LIMITED
HARVARD UNIVERSITY & STOUTON



"God save King Josiah," the people cried.

THE BOILING CALDRON

BY

LETTICE BELL

AUTHOR OF

"GO-TO-BED STORIES,"

"WHY AND WHAT AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM," ETC.

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

TORONTO

THE MUSSON BOOK COMPANY LIMITED

LONDON: HODDER & STOUGHTON

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Richard's Letter

MY DEAR RICHARD,

Here is your book. I am very sorry it is so long since you ordered it. All I can say is, there is not one story about a girl in it, so perhaps you will forgive and forget.

There are plenty of texts for you to hunt for, and though there is often only one word to find, it generally means the rest of the verse has something to do with the story.

I am afraid when you see the book is about Jeremiah you will think it is going to be dull. But everything in the Bible is interesting when we set ourselves to understand it. Besides, I had to tell you Jeremiah stories after you told me the only

Richard's Letter

thing you knew about him was that he "blew the fire." Which is just the opposite of what he really did do.

God told him about the fire, and the Boiling Caldron, and he had to tell the people what God told him. He himself could neither blow it up, nor out.

Next time you come and stay here (we will invite Christopher and Chrissie too) I will tell you what we will do for our go-to-bed stories.

We will make a Jeremiah museum. For all we know Jeremiah had one himself and explained the objects to the boys and girls who came to tea—or barley bread—with him.

We shall have to get for ours—

An almond rod,

An iron caldron,

A clay pot,

A broken water jar,

A wooden yoke,

Richard's Letter

A linen girdle,

A basket of figs.

You can make ever so many yourself out of your Plasticine.

Christopher shall print the labels and Chrissie may make the girdle.

The go-to-bed stories shall be the lesson each of Jeremiah's objects is meant to teach.

Good-bye,

From your grown-up friend,

L. B.

P.S.—It is only the words printed in slanting letters that you have to find.



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Introduction

WE have always considered it to be very difficult, if not impossible, to teach children the great prophetic books in such a way as to be of any real use to them.

Yet here the work is done ; and so well done, and with ¹ so naturally, that we are amazed that no one has done it before.

The *Burden* of the prophet is not laid upon the mind of the child ; and that is right ; but the stories of the prophecy are told in such wise as to give the child a consciousness of the historic background ; sympathy with the prophet ; and a clear idea of the general purpose of his work.

Then there is the always valuable provision made for the activity of the little ones ; and such activity as will familiarize

Introduction

them in a certain elementary way with the Bible.

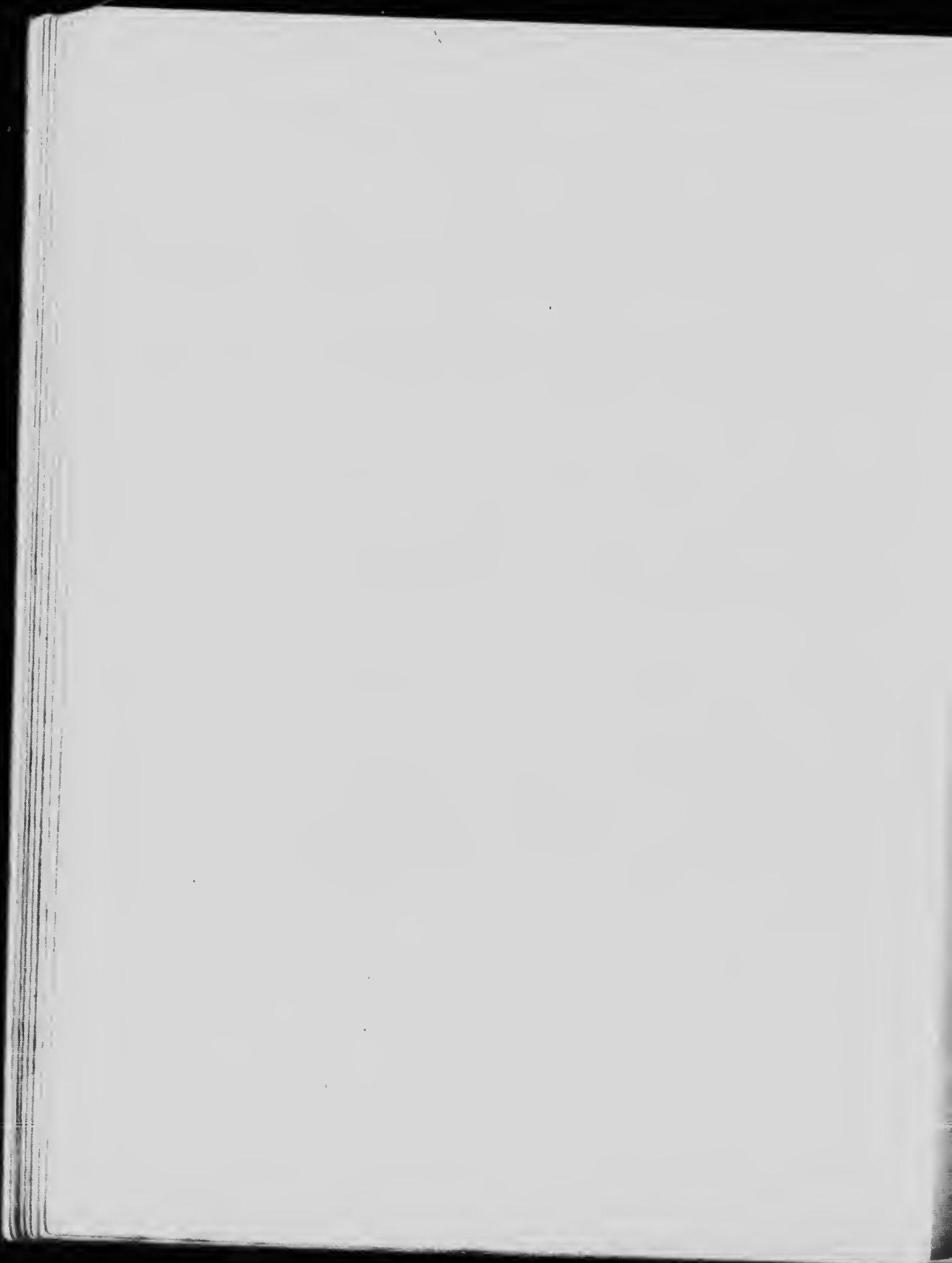
It seems to me that if any child is taken through this book in a perfectly natural way, by one who has the child heart, the result will be, that when a little later the Book of the prophet is considered in more careful detail, these stories will group themselves in the mind, and constitute an illumination and guide of the greatest value. And this surely is the true method of teaching the Bible to the little ones.

With all confidence I commend this book to mothers, and all those who desire to fulfil the highest and most gracious responsibility to the children under their care, as a most valuable aid. I hope the authoress will go on with her work until in a series she has gathered up all these Bible stories in this most systematic and therefore most valuable way.

G. CAMPBELL MORGAN.

THE BOILING CALDRON

B



The Royal Scripture Union

EVER so long ago, when there was only a very little bit of the Bible, God founded the first Scripture Union. It was at the time when His Own People were tired of being different to other Nations, and were beginning to want a *King* like the rest.

God knew that only Heavenly Laws could bring happiness and prosperity to the Land, and He told Moses to write a Book containing all His Commands and Plans and Warnings, and put it in the very safest possible place—inside the Holy of Holies at *the side of the Ark*, so it might never be lost. Copies of the Book were made for

Deut.
xvii. ().

Deut.
xxxi. ().

The Royal Scripture Union

Deut. xvii. (). daily use. Then the first Scripture Union was started. Every King was to *write him a copy* of the Book, and keep it always with him, and he was told to *read therein all the days of his life*.

And the first Scripture Union, Royal though it was, fared very much like other ones have done since. That is to say, a few members read their portion every day; others read it now and then, and some did not read it at all. Saul, for instance, must often have gone to bed with his Bible unopened, while David read his Bible every day, and thought thereon at night. As for Solomon, he was a member who began diligently, and ended carelessly, like many another.

1 Kings xii. (). Rehoboam and Jeroboam can never have joined at all. The last thing Jeroboam cared to learn about was what God had said. He liked to make laws out of *his own heart*, and rule just as he chose. He

The Royal Scripture Union

disregarded all that God had planned, and made different feast days, and different altars, and different priests, in spite of all that God had taught about His Worship in the Wonderful House.

One day, Jeroboam's presumption reached a climax. On his own altar, the pattern and placing of which *he had made* from his own ideas, he disobediently offered up *incense* with his own hands. For one sin leads on to another, and he stayed at nothing that entered his heart to devise.

^{1 Kings}
xii. ().

^{1 Kings}
xiii. ().

The Voice at the Altar

SEE him as he stands on this memorable day by the Altar he has made. The crowd around him are awed into silence. For every Israelite assembled there knows their King is breaking Heaven's law. But defiance is on his face as he takes the censer into his hand. There he stands. The Priests of his own making have slain the sacrifice, and swinging the incense, Jeroboam boldly approaches and lays his hand upon the Altar.

Suddenly he starts backward. For at this very moment, a voice of thunder is heard, thrilling every heart.

1 Kings
xiii. () " *O altar, altar,*" cried a prophet of God,
" *thus saith the Lord.*"

The Voice at the Altar

Jeroboam grows white with anger. What does he want with God?

But the prophet cares not for angry looks and frowns. *Behold, a child shall be born* ^{1 Kings} *unto the House of David, JOSIAH by name; xiii. ().* *and upon thee shall he offer (the bones of) the priests . . . that burn incense upon thee.*

It was God's message sent from Heaven about 940 B.C. to say that a little boy should reign in Jerusalem who would dig up the bones of these very Priests, and burn them upon that very altar.

The years went on, and many a little son was born to the House of David; not one was called Josiah. And the bones lay undisturbed. Two hundred and fifty years went by, and *Manasseh*, a boy in years, and ^{2 Kings} *a heathen at heart, reigned in Jerusalem, xxi. ().* and surpassed in idolatry all that were before him.

The temple of Solomon was sacred no longer. In its courts, the place of God's

The Voice at the Altar

2 Kings
xxi. (). forgiveness, he built altars to sun, moon,
and *all the host of Heaven*.

And greater than all his sins, he dared to go behind the Vail and replace the Golden Ark by a hideous idol.

Whether the precious Book in Moses' handwriting was still beside the Ark, we cannot tell. If it was, we may be quite certain that Manasseh ordered it to be destroyed with every other copy in existence.

2 Kings
xxi. (). Moreover, *Manasseh shed innocent blood very much*, until it was the thing talked of from one end of Jerusalem to the other. These Martyrs must have been the faithful few who still followed Jehovah, and refused to do as was being done around them.

2 Kings
xxi. (). God punished Manasseh, and he repented and tried hard to undo *all that he did*.

Three hundred years had passed since the day when the prophet had cried, "Thus saith the Lord, a child shall be born to the House of David, JOSIAH by name."

The Voice at the Altar

And at last the palace in Jerusalem was filled with joy. A baby grandson, Josiah by name, was sent to comfort Manasseh's last repentant years.

His own boy Amon broke his father's heart, disregarding all entreaties to turn from his idols and serve the Living God. All the old King's hopes and prayers centred in his little grandson, and we can imagine the tiny child teasing to go to his grandfather's, where he heard the stories that by the Holy Spirit went right into his six-year-old heart.

Little Josiah would surely never be tired of the story of the Altar, and don't you think he would say at the end of the story, "Tell it again," just like other children would who are not princes?

He must have felt a terribly lonely child when his grandfather died *and was buried*; ^{2 Kings} ^{xxi. ().} though it made him the Crown Prince, that did not bring him happiness. For all that

The Voice at the Altar

his father did was contrary to the God of
2 Chron. Love whom the little Prince, *while he was*
xxxiv. (). *yet young*, had begun to seek.

2 Kings Josiah's heart was *tender* and loving,
xxii. (). because God made it so. Amon's heart was
hard and cruel. His idols made him like
that.

Josiah had often seen his father's harsh-
ness and cruelty at home, and many a time he
had heard the servants, with whom he would
spend most of his day, mutter and frown,
and even shake their fists towards their
Royal Master.

Perhaps, as he had grown up, with all
this dissatisfaction, he would not notice that
threats and whispered conversations were
increasing alarmingly. Until one day, when
everything in the palace was unnaturally
quiet, as it always is before a storm, the
storm of bitter hatred burst.

Suddenly a terrible noise disturbed the
little child at his play. A thud, a bitter

The Voice at the Altar

wail, and Josiah was fatherless. The conspiracy, so long smouldering, had done its murderous work at last, and the King whose idols hardened his heart, died by the hand of his own servants *in his own house*.

2 Chron.
xxxiii. ().

Bad news travels fast, and the people of the land rushed into the palace, killing every servant in the place. Such a scene of horror and bloodshed and cries must have terrified the little Prince, till he ran and hid his face in some far-away corner.

Never would he be a child again ; toys and games were for ever left behind *in the garden* grave where they buried his father, when *Josiah was eight years old*. Among all the terrible thoughts and sounds that throng his mind, hiding as he is from the dreadful sights, does it occur to the child that the day of his father's murder is the day of his coronation ?

2 Kings
xxi. ().

2 Kings
xxii. ().

It must have come as a shock to this

The Voice at the Altar

tender-hearted boy to be dragged forth from the palace of bloodshed—out to the profaned Temple.

The bewildered little Prince, with white and tear-stained cheeks, was lifted on to the Throne. "God save the King, God save King Josiah," the people cried, and God's Word, spoken three hundred years before, of the child, Josiah by name, had come to pass. He was King of Judah.

The Boy Reformer

ALTHOUGH the people cried "God save the King," although they had crowned him themselves, they did not really like it. For the Jews looked upon a child King as a mark of God's displeasure. *See Eccles. x. 16.* Because Saul was a head and shoulders above them, they had set their hearts on him. But Josiah was sent as a blessing.

Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee King, ^{1 Kings x. ().} might have truly been said of him. And very soon after he became King, he set his heart to do right in God's sight.

We do not know who was the boy's adviser or regent, but probably the High Priest Hilkiyah. Hilkiyah cried "God save the King" with his whole heart, and rejoiced to see

The Boy Reformer

God's long-promised Josiah on the throne at last.

Did Josiah join the Royal Scripture Union? No. How could he? Though Manasseh and Hilkiyah could tell him what they knew of God's Laws, they could not put a copy of the Law Moses wrote into his hand, for the Book was lost. We do not know exactly how long it had been lost; Hezekiah was the last King we read of who had it.

When Manasseh had the Ark taken out of the Holy of Holies, you may be quite sure he ordered the Book to be destroyed then, for it was kept beside the Ark. So it had most likely been lost for about fifty years.

Josiah may have spoken to Hilkiyah about the lost Book, and perhaps have wondered if in some way or other it might have been preserved, and never burnt at all. It was possible some faithful Priest had hidden it, and though he himself died before it was safe

The Boy Reformer

to reveal its hiding-place, God knew where it lay, and could bring the lost Treasure to light.

There was some one else Hilkiash would discuss the lost Book with, besides the King, that was his own son *Jeremiah*, who was Jer. i. (). probably a few years younger than Josiah.

Hilkiash could not stay at home in *Anathoth* with his boy, but when his work in Jer. i. (). Jerusalem was over, no doubt he spent as much time as possible in teaching Jeremiah about God, and answering all the questions his little son besieged him with about the little King.

As Jeremiah grew older, he would be able to accompany Hilkiash to Jerusalem. There the two boys would come to know each other. They had many things in common, and in many ways were much alike. Both were servants of the King of Kings, and longed to obey every one of His Commands. Both were tender hearted to an extraordinary degree,

The Boy Reformer

both strong in principle and steadfast of purpose. If Josiah began a thing, he finished it, and when Jeremiah started anything, he carried it through. Yet in one point there was a tremendous difference in their characters, for Josiah was brave and fearless, and never minded standing up, or speaking up, for the right, while Jeremiah shivered and shook at the bare thought of doing the courageous things Josiah did.

Often and often these two must have said together, "If only—if only we had God's Book that Moses wrote, how gladly we would do all it says." Without the Book, they were but groping in the dark, just doing right as far as they knew, and not knowing much.

2 Chron.
xxxiv. ().

At last, *in the twelfth year* of his reign, the King determined to carry out a great scheme he had long thought of. It was nothing less than to break every idol in the land. Josiah and a band of servants started

The Boy Reformer

off on this great expedition. Jeremiah did not go. He was left in his peaceful home, glad to do quiet things, learn of God and keep behind the scenes, thankful to be only a simple boy, and not called upon to make a public stand for the Truth like Josiah. While up and down the land went the relentless young Protestant, breaking down idols, and grinding them *into powder*, till ^{2 Chron.} such a clearance as never was before ^{xxxiv. ()} prevailed in the Kingdom. News of his progress and success would come to Hilkiyah from time to time. He must have rejoiced with Jeremiah over the work of the brave young King.

Josiah was twenty when he started on this tour. He was twenty-six before he returned to his Capital.

After he had been gone one year, the most wonderful day in Jeremiah's life came to pass.

The Boy Preacher in God's School

JEREMIAH would never forget the day he went to school and God taught him.

He awoke one morning a timid child ; before he went to bed that night, he had learnt how to be a courageous preacher. When he was quite alone on this day of all days, God spoke to him. He called him by his name, and told him that long ages ago, before he was born, he had been chosen to be the bearer of a Heavenly Message to many people.

As Jeremiah heard God's Voice, his heart sank low within him. It did not make him glad to know of the great honour, so overcome was he with his own unworthiness.

The Boy Preacher in God's School

However could he, a shy, sensitive boy, dare to stand up before his friends and neighbours, old men and women, and tell them of their sins? "I can't," he said in his heart. Then aloud, "*I cannot speak, for* Jer. i. (). *I am a child.*" Jeremiah did not realize that children are often the very servants God uses best for His work. He does not need those who are clever and strong, only those who will do as they are told.

When God uses grown-ups to do His work, He first requires them to be children. But when He chooses children, He never asks them to be grown-ups.

So when Jeremiah said he couldn't, because he was only a child, God answered, "Do not say, '*I am a child,*'" and explained Jer. i. (). to him that he had only to do what he was told, and speak the words God would teach him, and would never have to make up a sermon out of his own head.

But Jeremiah still trembled. He con-

The Boy Preacher in God's School

jured up in his mind how the people would stare, and what contemptuous looks would be on their faces. It seemed so dreadful for him to have to look at them and say, "God will punish sin." For it is always easier to say unpleasant things to a person's back than to his face.

Jer. i. (). God looked down into the boy's frightened heart, and very tenderly said, "*Be not afraid of their faces.*"

When God tells us to be of good cheer, and not to fear, He does not just say "Do not mind," but always gives a good reason why we should stop minding.

Jer. i. (). He told Jeremiah not to be frightened, and gave him two strong reasons why he should not be. Both begin with "for" (that is, because). *For I am with thee*, is one. Is it not always easier to do a hard thing if some one is with you? Why, of course, it makes all the difference. The other "*for*" told frightened Jeremiah that,

The Boy Preacher in God's School

not only would the Strong and Mighty God be with him, but that a new strength and courage has been already put into his heart.

To teach him how strong this would henceforth make him, when he actually had to face Kings, Priests and People, God showed him the three strongest things in the world. Of each one He said, "Look, I have made you as strong as that."

The Lesson on Bravery

Jer. i. (). A *defenced city*, whose impregnable fortifications bristled with artillery, rose before his vision. Such a strong, inaccessible fortress, yet Jeremiah was made as strong as that.

Jer. i. (). *An iron pillar* towered above him next, firm and immovable, as though nothing could ever shake it. The timid boy learnt then that God would make him as enduring as that iron pillar.

Jer. i. (). Lastly, massive *brazen walls* enclosed him securely. High, thick, impenetrable. He looked all round in wonder; there was not one weak spot in that shining barrier. "So the Lord is round about His people," whispered a Loving Voice. "No one shall kill you,

The Lesson on Bravery

Jeremiah, though they will try their best,
for I am your Strong Protector." Jer. i. ().

On that day and for all other days the
boy who said "I can't" to begin with, found
out how to say "*I can*" over every difficulty. Phil. iv.
God did make him strong, did keep him ().
firm, was a wall of defence around him,
according to His Word.

The Lesson on Haste

BUT there were other lessons to learn on this never-to-be-forgotten day.

Jeremiah found himself looking hard at something God was showing him.

Jer. i. (). “*Jeremiah, what seest thou?*” came the question.

What he saw now was a wooden staff, like a long walking-stick, but the remarkable thing about it was that it was covered with pink flowers and nuts.

Jer. i. (). “*I see a rod of an almond tree,*” answered Jeremiah.

Will you try and think of all that the flowering Rod would mean to this young descendant of Aaron? His mind would instantly go back to the story of those twelve

The Lesson on Haste

dry rods, with a *name* on each, and the day when God said, "*The man's rod whom I shall choose shall blossom*, and bring forth buds and almonds." Jeremiah was reminded in a way he could never forget that he was chosen, like Aaron, for special service.

But the rod meant more than this, and so that he should not miss its further and important meaning, God explains it.

The earliest of all trees to flower is the almond. It does not wait for the summer, it seems to hurry to get out while it is still winter. Haste is what the pink flowers meant. God's message must be quickly given. There was no time to lose, for the punishment was coming quickly, unless the people repented. So Jeremiah learnt another lesson. He was to begin at once.

The History Lesson

STILL another picture lesson was given him, before he quite understood what he had to preach. A fire of sticks with a boiling caldron appeared next.

"What do you see now, Jeremiah?" asked his Heavenly Teacher.

Jer. i. (). "A *pot*," said Jeremiah. No pretty flowers this time, but an ugly black caldron, boiling away furiously, in clouds of thick smoke. He had often seen just such a pot before, cooking soup or heating water on a fire of sticks. But this one had a special meaning; and as he looked on in wonder, he noticed that, owing to the uneven ground, the pot was about to tip over; and before the fire has burnt much lower the boiling contents must be poured out all over the ground. He noticed, too, that the pot was tipping

The History Lesson

over towards the South side. What does it mean? Jeremiah is not left to guess. This, too, is explained by God Himself.

The scalding flood pouring out of the caldron from the North on to the South, meant that some dreadful hurting punishment was coming upon the Land of Judah. *Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.* Jer. i. ().

Jeremiah knew quite well that the North meant Assyria and Babylon, and the South Judah. He knew now that the message he had to *arise and speak* was, that because of the idolatry of Judah, who had *forsaken* the true God, an enemy should take Jerusalem and carry the Jews away captive. That enemy would come from the North—from Babylon. Jer. i. ().

He would learn too, just as the pot had not yet boiled over, there was time still for the people to repent, and so prevent the coming misery.

The History Lesson

All this was unforgettably impressed upon his mind by the Boiling Caldron.

What, then, did Jeremiah learn from these first lessons?

1. God had chosen him to preach.
2. God had made him strong and brave.
3. There was no time to lose.
4. There was still time for Israel to repent.

The Boy Preacher

THEN Jeremiah saw no more pictures. He had learnt his lesson for the time, and must begin to do what he was told. We do not know how he felt that first day when he went out into the streets of Anathoth and began to preach, we only know he did it, and God made him strong.

For after a while, God spoke to him again; he was to leave the village and go and preach in the streets of Jerusalem. How formidable this must have seemed to the country boy. Why, his own father, the High Priest, might come and listen. But Jeremiah had only to remember the Boiling Caldron to make him hurry to give the warning.

The Boy Preacher

Jer. iii.
()

All this time, Josiah was trying to rid the land of idols, and the people were helping him with their hands; but their hearts were not altered. *Judah hath not turned unto Me with her whole heart*—only in pretence.

Jeremiah might have been deceived by them, and have failed to speak faithfully had he been preaching his own sermons. As it was, God, who sees the hearts, told him every word he was to say.

In God's sight, their pretence of worshipping Him was just like a doctor covering up a sore place and saying it was cured. The idols might be covered up out of sight, but the love of them, and the secret faith in them, was a dreadful wound in the people's heart. A deep-down wound, that must kill in the end, unless it was healed.

Jer. vi.
()

"They have healed also the hurt . . . of My people slightly," said the Lord to Jeremiah. "Go and tell them of the only real remedy."

The Boy Preacher

As Jeremiah preached, the Boiling Caldron was ever at the back of his mind, but God's Love was in the front, and was foremost on his lips. It was only because God loved these people so much, He sent Jeremiah to plead with them, to let their idols go out of their hearts, and to *return* Jer. iii. ().
to their Heavenly Father.

"Only acknowledge thine iniquity," implored Jer. iii. ().
Jeremiah, "then God will not send you punishment, but mercy."

As he spoke of mercy and repentance, so sure did his own young loving heart become that God's Love must win theirs back, that he saw plainly pictured in his mind what he longed to see with his eyes. He put it into his Sermon then and there.

The Story of What Might Have Been

“**I** SEE,” he began, looking far away with tears of joy in his voice, “I see the children of Israel gathered together upon a high mountain. Some are looking up with streaming eyes, others are covering their faces in shame and contrition. Men, women and little children are *weeping* on the mountain, and the sob of their earnest *supplications* for forgiveness fills the air.

Jer. iii.
().

Jer. iii.
().

“I hear it, I catch the words they say, ‘Forgive us, we have gone our own way, yet have mercy on us now, we beseech Thee.’

“And above the noise of the bitter cry, comes, clear and plain, the Heavenly Father’s loving voice, ‘*Return, ye backsliding children,* I will heal your grievous wounds, and you

Jer. iii.
().

Story of What Might Have Been

shall call Me my Father once again. Only return to My Love and Care.'

"And I see the men and women arise, and the tears and crying are stilled, and the children look up with smiles, as with humble tones and bending heads they say together—

"*'Behold, we come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God. No one else can help us. We come to Thee.'* Jer. iii. ().

"And now the sunshine floods the mountain, and thankful happy voices come sounding down the hills in a song of Praise.

"*'Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. Thou art the Lord our God.'* Jer. iii. ().

THE Story was over. Jeremiah was back again to the Land of Reality. Unmoved, the people stood around him.

"What more do you want, Jeremiah?" they ask. "Have we not broken our idols, and backed Josiah in his reformation?"

Story of What Might Have Been

Jer. iv.
().

But Jeremiah, knowing how only skin deep the reform was, again began to plead with them to *return* in heart to God. What they were doing to please Josiah was just like sowing corn in the middle of a thorn bush, no good at all, if fruit was wanted.

Jer. iv.
().

"*Sow not among thorns*, but in prepared ground," said Jeremiah, sighing to think how unprepared their hearts were to receive God's messages of Love. He wonders if anything will stir them. Loving persuasion has left them untouched. He will try the opposite method. A look of horror and haunting fear overspreads his face.

The War Alarm

Illustration

B*LOW* ye the trumpet. Proclaim in Jer. iv.
Judah and Jerusalem the War ().
alarm," he cries excitedly.

"The Enemy is approaching. *Assemble* Jer. iv.
yourselves and let us go into the defenced cities. ().
Set up the Standard.

"A King, fierce as a lion . . . is on his Jer. iv.
way. ().

"He is coming down from the North to
make our Land desolate, and take away
every inhabitant. There is not a moment to
lose.

"The Chariots of the terrible King will be
upon us as a whirlwind.

"*His horses are swifter than Eagles.* They Jer. iv.
D 2 35 ().

The War Alarm Illustration

are upon us! Oh! woe unto us, we are taken."

THE Prophet's hands fall at his side despairingly.

Hard, obstinate faces look up at him—while, overcome by the remembrance of that terrible Caldron with its boiling flood, he breaks out again.

Jer. iv.
().

"*I cannot hold my peace. I must plead with you. My soul has heard the sound of the enemy, the alarm of War. Oh my poor foolish people. What will you do? I am pained at my very heart.*"

Jer. xiv.
().

Jer. iv.
().

Jer. vi.
().

Jer. v. ().

Again the story fell upon deaf ears and hard faces, and they said, "*We will not hearken. We do not believe what you say.*"

It will never come upon us, *neither shall we see sword nor famine.*"

Jeremiah often went home perplexed and cast down.

The War Alarm Illustration

"O Lord . . . let me talk with Thee," he Jer. xii. ()
said to his Heavenly Teacher, one day, "I
have given the warning, but they do not
fear or care. *They have made their faces* Jer. v. ()
harder than a rock, they have refused to
return."

The Burning of the Bones

WHILE Jeremiah was going up and down the streets of Jerusalem, Josiah's tour was coming to an end.

1 Kings
xiii. () The Altar at Bethel was still standing, where, three hundred years before, the Prophet had said, "*Behold, a child shall be born . . . Josiah by name.*"

The child, you remember, was to burn on that very Altar the bones of Jeroboam's idolatrous Priests, who were offering up sacrifices and incense on that memorable day.

Now the time had come for that prophecy to take place.

As the King stood on the spot, he turned

The Burning of the Bones

and looked around ; then spied out some *Sepulchres* behind him. In these Sepul- ^{2 Kings} chres lay the bones of Jeroboam's Priests. ^{xxiii. ().}

"Bring out the Bones," said the King sternly.

The servants carried them out and placed them on the Altar, and after they were *burned* the Altar itself was broken to bits ^{2 Kings} and *stamped* . . . to powder. ^{xxiii. ().}

Do you not think Josiah himself added ^{2 Kings} his stamps to those of his servants, rejoicing ^{xxiii. ().} to fulfil the Word of God spoken so many years before?

He and all that were with him learnt that day, this fact, that whatever God says will happen, must surely be fulfilled.

Meantime, preparations were going on in the palace in Jerusalem for the King's return.

Josiah's small sons must have been longing to welcome their father back after his six years' absence. Eliakim, afterwards

The Burning of the Bones

Jehoiakim, was only five when he went away, and now at eleven, he must have felt quite grown up in comparison, and very anxious to show off how much he had learnt, and how much he had grown. Any boy would feel like that when his father was coming home.

At length the last idol was smashed up, and the little boys saw their father again. He had not come home to play in the nursery though, but to finish a great work in Jerusalem.

The Book Found

THE Temple still needed repairing, and much had to be done there before the services could be rightly set in order again.

Josiah knew it was no good taking bad things away from people without giving them something in their place. Only the worst of it was, he did not quite know how to rightly start the Temple worship in the way *the Lord commanded Moses*. Moses had Ex. xxxix. written it all down, as we know, but Josiah () had never seen that guide Book. It was lost.

Still, just as far as he knew, the young King determined to set things in order. So *carpenters and builders and masons* were 2 Kings xxii. () called. Consultations took place, and plans

The Book Found

were laid concerning the House which Solomon built.

In those days, just as now, the first question to be faced was the money. How was the money to be collected to pay all the *workmen?*

2 Chron.
xxxiv. ().

2 Kings
xii. ().

Once before, when King Jehoash had needed money for this same purpose, *Jehoiada the priest took a chest and bored a hole in the lid*, and placed it beside the great altar in the Temple court. Shaphan, Josiah's secretary, would know about the first money-box, and the good idea Jehoash and Jehoiada had for collecting money to repair the Temple.

2 Kings
xxii. ().

The old money chest was unearthed from the lumber rooms around the Temple. Thick with dust, it was dragged out to the light. Once more it stood in its old place in the court yard. The Levites were again stationed at *the door* of the Temple to collect the coins and to drop the money into the box.

The Book Found

It was a glad day for Josiah, Hilkiyah, Shaphan, Ahikam and all those in Jerusalem who served the Lord. For you must remember, there were always some who did not love idols, but kept true to the Lord their God.

So the money rattled into the money-box day by day, and God's servants rejoiced to think how the big chest was filling up. Till at last, *when they saw that there was* ^{2 Kings xii. ()} *much money in the chest*, King Josiah said to Shaphan, "The time has come to open the box and count the Silver. *Go up to Hilkiyah,* ^{2 Kings xxii. ()} *the High Priest*, and tell him so." It was one of the duties of the King's Scribe to empty the money-box.

So Shaphan and two other officials come up to the Temple. Hilkiyah meets them by the money-box. The Levites bring scales and bags, and tools to open the chest. When everything is ready, the box is opened, and the silver coins filling it right to the

The Book Found

2 Kings
xii. (). brim, are disclosed. Then the Levites begin to haul the money out. It is weighed before being *put up in bags*. Shaphan, no doubt, with his note-book, jots down the amounts as they go along.

2 Chron.
xxxiv. (). Presently, as their work comes nearly to an end, and they had nearly *brought out the money*, some one remarks that there seems to be something else besides money at the bottom of the chest.

Hilkiah bends down and hastily brushes the remaining coins aside with eager hands, until he is able to pull out from its hiding-place a packet of parchment sheets. His excitement, his white face and nervous haste, tell the party something of tremendous importance has happened. The calculations stop, and every eye is fixed on the High Priest. "What is it?" some one asks. But Hilkiah goes on anxiously examining his find, till at last he answered, in an awestruck voice, "*I HAVE FOUND THE BOOK OF THE LAW.*"

2 Chron.
xxxiv. ().

The Book Found

It was the very copy written by the hand of Moses.

He handed *the Book to Shaphan*, so ^{2 Chron. xxxiv. ().} that he might see for himself that the lost Bible had truly been found at last. Shaphan then and there began to read it. He did not read far, however, for the King came into his mind. What joyful news this great and surprising find would be to him. Well did Shaphan know no other treasure in the whole world would compare in Josiah's eyes with God's long-lost Book.

Directly the thought struck him, he started off with quick steps to the palace, carrying not only the Book under his arm, but the good news in his face.

Shaphan carried the Book, and went first, ^{2 Chron. xxxiv. ().} but Hilkiyah was not going to be left out of the joyful scene. He hurried after him, out of the gate.

Quickly running along, they arrived at the palace.

The Book Found

“We counted the money, and have given
2 Chron. it to the overseers, and *Hilkiah the Priest*
xxxiv. () *hath given me a Book*,” said Shaphan.

2 Chron. Then Shaphan read out of the Book to
xxxiv. () the King straight away.

The Book Feared

AS the King listens to God's commands, his face grows sadder and sadder. Tears gather in his eyes, he begins to tremble. "Stop reading," he calls out, "we have not done what this *Book that is found* says we must, and *great* ^{2 Chron. xxxiv. ().} *is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us.*"

So real was Josiah's anguish that he tore his royal clothes in his sorrow.

"Go quickly," he said through his tears, "there is no time to lose, find out what God would have us do. We have disobeyed Him, and He is wrath with us. First ask Him about *me*, and then about the People."

^{2 Chron. xxxiv. ().}

Off went the whole party on this urgent errand. Jeremiah was in Anathoth, so they

The Book Feared

2 Chron. xxxiv. (). did not spare time to walk two miles to find him, for close at hand *in Jerusalem* lived a woman called *Huldah*, to whom God spoke and revealed His Will.

"We will go to *Huldah*," they said; "she will speak to God, and tell us what He says the King must do."

So they called *Huldah*, and they told her the Bible was found, and the King was crying.

Huldah went away and asked God to give her a message to send back to the King. This was the message—

2 Chron. xxxiv. (). "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, tell ye the man that sent you to me all he has read is quite true. Punishment is coming on the people, because they have forsaken the Living God. But *as for the King* himself, before the trouble comes, he shall be taken away to My Home of Peace."

Why was *Josiah* so favoured?

Because he believed the Bible. Because

The Book Feared

his *heart was tender* and humble. Because, 2 Chron. xxxiv. (). when he heard what God said against Jerusalem and the people, and about the Fierce Foe that was coming, he did not make light of it like the rest, who *mocked* 2 Chron. xxxvi. (). *the messengers of God, and despised His Words.*

Josiah was comforted by Huldah's message. God had *heard* his many prayers. 2 Chron. xxxiv. (). He had forgiven all his sin. But the King's heart ached over his people, for he knew the reformation had never got down to their hearts, and unless they would listen to God's *voice*, and serve Him, they would Deut. xxviii. (). be made to serve a cruel master, who would besiege them and carry them away captives to a land of idols.

"Let us call all the inhabitants together," he said, "*both great and small*; they shall 2 Chron. xxxiv. (). hear the Book that is found for themselves."

The crowd collected from every quarter.

The Book Feared

The King began to read. His voice trembled
Deut. xxix. as he came to the part about the *Fierce* *Foe*.
(). But the words went in at one ear and out at
the other, as far as most of that great
congregation was concerned.

The King read on till he came to the
29th Chapter of Deuteronomy—the story of
Deut. xxix. *the Covenant* God made with His people.
(). (A covenant is only an agreement. You
make a covenant every time you say to any
one, “If you do this, then I will do that.”)

This was the Covenant. If Israel obeyed
God and loved Him, then no troubles
would come to them, but if they became
drawn away to love other gods, then
one sorrow after another should befall the
nation. “And this Covenant,” read Josiah
in the Book that was found, “was not only
for those who were then alive that day, but
Deut. xxix. was also made *with him that is not here*.”
().

Josiah saw directly that meant God had
made this Covenant too for the people who

The Book Feared

were standing around him at that moment. "Let us make it again," he cried, "with all our heart, and with all our soul—let us do all God tells us in this Book."

And all the people said "We will," and *2 Kings* stood to the Covenant. *xxiii. ()*.

They loved their generous young King, and were quite ready to say "yes" to his proposals, when it did not cost them much. Any one can easily say "yes," the point is to do it. So though they said "we will," they acted "we will not."

Dearly Beloved

LISTEN," said God to Jeremiah on the day of the Great Covenant, "listen to the words these people are saying, and go and speak to them ; tell them it is no good promising all this, unless they really *obey my Voice*."

Jer. xi.
().

Jer. xi.
().

Jer. vii.
().

"*So be it*," answered Jeremiah, going straight to the Gate in the Lord's House.

"*Amend your ways*, and not your Temple," he said plainly ; "it is no good you people pointing to the Temple, and saying over and over it is the Lord's, while you steal, murder, and break every one of the ten commandments, and then *come and stand* in God's House and say we are made so and can't help it.

Jer. vii.
().

"It is not sacrifices God looks for, but

Dearly Beloved

those who will obey. When you were promising so glibly just now to keep God's Covenant, He *hearkened and heard* that Jer. viii. () you did not speak truly. None of you repented of your wickedness, saying, *What have I done?* Why, even *the swallow* has more Jer. viii. () sense than you. Do swallows stay and die Jer. viii. () of cold when the winter is coming on? You know they foresee the evil, and go away to find food, warmth and life. But you don't go to your Father in Heaven, nor see His judgment coming."

So Jeremiah reasoned with these foolish people, who said, "*We are wise,*" as they came Jer. viii. () in at the gates to worship the Lord. And not only did he preach in the gate, but God told him to take this same message to the *Cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem,* Jer. xi. () which of course he did.

Now Jeremiah's sermon at the Covenant-making, stirred up the indignation of his family. They were furious to think he knew

Dearly Beloved

Jer. xi.
().

how insincere they really were, and they plotted and planned, and made a *conspiracy* to kill the man who made them so uncomfortable.

Jer. xii.
().
Jer. xii.
().

From this time onwards, Jeremiah's troubles began, and his life was more or less in danger. Up to now his friendship with Josiah had gained him safety at least, and he began to think of his own happiness, and to make a beautiful plan. He was going to have a home of his own like other people. Probably his father Hilkiah had died and left him a house, a little garden, and vineyard. Such a *pleasant portion* and goodly heritage it was. And *Dearly Beloved* was quite ready to come and share his home. How happy they would be together, he and Dearly Beloved, with boys and girls growing up around them.

But it was not to be, the little garden would never be trampled over by childish feet, the vineyard never robbed of its purple

Dearly Beloved

grapes by little fingers, never would Dearly Beloved comfort or cheer him at those sorrowful times when he wished he were *a fountain*, Jer. ix. (). so that he *might weep day and night*.

For all the time that Dearly Beloved was listening to his happy plans, she was treacherously helping on Jeremiah's brothers in their secret conspiracy to kill him.

Only a little while before Jeremiah had said in his sermon, "Oh, that I could live *in the wilderness* and leave my people, and go from them; they are all *treacherous*, you cannot even trust in a brother, for they are like Jacob, trying to *supplant* their brothers, and have taught their tongues to tell lies." Jer. ix. (). Jer. ix. (). Jer. ix. ().

Little did he think, as he said this, that Dearly Beloved was deceiving him too, or how soon he was to prove the truth of these words, and find his own brothers trying to supplant him, and take away his *heritage*, Jer. xii. (). for so cleverly were their plans laid to put Jeremiah off his guard, that instead of being

Dearly Beloved

angry and indignant any longer, they began to be particularly nice to him, and even pretended they wanted to hear more about God.

Jer. xi.
()
Jer. xii.
(),
margin.
Jeremiah's rejoicing at seeing his brothers in this hopeful frame of mind was but short-lived. God spoke to him, and showed him *their doings*. "*Believe them not, though they speak good things unto thee,*" said the Heavenly Revealer of Secrets. And He told Jeremiah what was really in their minds.

Jer. xi.
()
Jer. xii.
()
So Jeremiah, knowing all the conspiracy and all the treachery of their hearts, went out and accused his brothers to their faces. They did not care. "You dare to go on preaching to us, and you shall *die by our hand*," was all they said. Then, as they could not kill the object of their hatred, they revenged themselves by spoiling his pleasant garden, and trampling down his vineyard *underfoot*.

It hardly added to Jeremiah's sorrow, for

Dearly Beloved

he never wanted to see his house again. Jer. xii.
“*I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine* ().
heritage,” he said, “for Dearly Beloved will
never come into mine house. From hence-
forth I will give her up into the *hand* of Jer. xii.
her enemies.”¹ ().

Jeremiah felt like this about his home,
because God came to him and said, “Thou
shalt not have a wife, neither shalt thou Jer. xvi.
have sons or daughters in this place.” So ().
with his broken plan and his broken heart,
Jeremiah went out and buried Dearly
Beloved in the big grave of dead wishes.

He came back and preached as never
before of the sorrow that would come to all
the little children in that place, when God’s
lovingkindness and mercies should be taken Jer. xvi.
away, when glad and merry voices would ().
cease out of the land, and wedding songs
would be stilled.

¹ Dearly Beloved thought the brothers were her friends.
Jeremiah calls them by their true name.

Dearly Beloved

His grief was only just a little picture of what would be the grief of the whole nation in the day when the Caldron should be overturned.

Henceforward Jeremiah's great joy was in the Book that Hilkiah found. However discouraged he might be, that Book cheered and comforted him. What talks and Bible readings he and Josiah must have had together, for Josiah was a Scripture Union member now, if ever there was one.

Jer. xv.
()

"Thy words were found," said Jeremiah, *"and I did eat them, and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart."* Dearly Beloved's place in his heart found a better tenant in God's Word, for it was a joy that no one could take from him, and you can see how Jeremiah studied the new-found Bible, by the many quotations in his sermons from Deuteronomy.

The Long Walk

NONE are so deaf as those who will not hear. Yet even people who won't listen will generally look. Because messages had been useless, God tried to teach His people, just as He taught Jeremiah, by something they could see.

God called Jeremiah and told him exactly what to do, but He did not tell him what this doing meant.

He was to go and buy *a linen girdle*.

Jer. xiii.

().

Lots of people would know when Jeremiah went shopping, because these deaf people were not dumb, and they had time to talk and gossip, and little to interest them, and no one minded their own business in those days.

"What does he want a girdle for?"

The Long Walk

they would say ; " hasn't he one already ? " Of course he had, for was he not a priest ? And part of a priest's dress was a girdle.

So the village watched and talked and wondered, and learnt the first part of the object-lesson—

R.V.

That a girdle was BOUGHT.

Now a girdle was only a piece of linen—like a sash, but it was strong and useful to its owner, and Jeremiah's girdle was his own paid-for property. The next bit of the object-lesson was, that the girdle had to be WORN.

Jeremiah put it on, right round his waist, binding it close to his heart.

This started the tongues of Anathoth, on the most important part of all the object-lesson. Jeremiah was wearing his purchase without ever washing it with *water*.

Jer. xiii.
().

You know how many times a priest has to wash, and his clothes must always be clean.

The Long Walk

Yet here was their prophet going about in a girdle that was all unbleached, and loom-soiled to start with, and letting it grow blacker and blacker every day. What could it mean? So the people learned another bit of the object-lesson. The Girdle was not WASHED.

Now Jeremiah got a further order. God called again. *Take the Girdle*—that spotted, Jer. xiii.
grimy girdle—off. ().

Quite time, too, think the people, as they see him unwind it. Perhaps now this extraordinary man is going to wash it. That is all it wants.

But no ; they watch him fold it up, put it over his arm, and start off to walk. "What are you going to do?" they cry.

"I must take the unwashed girdle," is the answer, "right away. God has told me to bury it out of sight, *in a hole* by the Jer. xiii.
river Euphrates." ().

"Euphrates !" is the amazed exclama-

The Long Walk

tion ; " why, that is two hundred and fifty miles away at least. You are never going to do that mad thing ? Is there not earth here sufficient to bury a girdle ? "

But the prophet started upon his long walk, just as if he was deaf instead of them. As God had told him, so he did. He found a hole, put in the girdle, covered it over with earth, and walked back again.

How the people must have talked while he was away ; and when he really came back, footsore and weary, what jeers must have greeted his return.

" Did you go ? " they would ask. " What a mad journey ! How much better off are you now ? Anyway, " they would say, " that's an end of the girdle, " and perhaps they would wonder what extraordinary thing he would be up to next, little dreaming they were to hear of the much-talked-of girdle again.

Jer. xiii.
().

But it was *many days* before God called

The Long Walk

Jeremiah next, and said to him, "Now start at once and go to the River, to the very place where you were before, and find the hole where you buried the unwashed girdle, and dig it up." Jer. xiii. ()

Again Jeremiah prepared for his long walk.

Without a why or a wherefore, he trudged out of the city.

There were not many people in Anathoth that day who did not watch him go, and as he disappeared in the distance, groups of gossipers stood and discussed the latest freak of the man they would not listen to.

Well, he had always been peculiar—a most tiresome person. Now there was no doubt in any one's mind he was mad. No one but a madman would go for a two hundred and fifty miles' walk four times over, on a wild-goose chase.

For nine days Jeremiah's doings were the talk of the town. But these deaf

The Long Walk

people had short memories, and no doubt out of sight was out of mind then, as now, and Jeremiah was nearly forgotten, until news came that a figure much like their preacher had been sighted, toiling back to Anathoth.

As the news went round, the people came out to meet him. The very people who would not listen to a sermon, left their work to hear what Jeremiah had to say for himself.

Weary and travel-stained, with thrilling voice Jeremiah spoke—

Jer. xiii.
().

"*I went to Euphrates*, as God told me. I took the girdle from the place where I had hid it, and lo and behold! it was all spoilt, rotten and good *for nothing*. A useless rag."

Jer. xiii.
().

Without stopping to let them get a word in he went straight on—

"And it is just a picture of you. For you are a spoilt, useless nation. God meant you to be His own Girdle, bound close to His Heart, used by Him and an ornament to Him.

The Long Walk

That was God's plan. You know how dirty and black you were, and how you needed washing. Your Owner would have washed you as white as snow, and kept you so. Because you would not listen to this invitation, like the spoilt girdle, you must be taken away to the River Euphrates and left there. You are *good for nothing*. No use, no ornament to your Owner." Jer. xiii. ().

It is hard to believe, after hearing God's beautiful name for them, "His Girdle," these people did not all come crying to Him for forgiveness, asking Him to wash them and make them clean, and bind them securely to His Loving Heart.

If they had, God was ready to hear and make them still *A Name, A Praise*, and *A Glory* to Himself. But they would not. Jer. xiii. ().

The Singing Preacher

JOSIAH went on searching day by day in the long-lost Bible, where naturally he found many things that had been left undone. One thing in particular had been forgotten in his grandfather's sad and bad reign. That was the Passover Feast. Josiah no sooner found this *written* about, than he determined when *the fourteenth day of the first month* came round, the wonderful deliverance from Egypt a thousand years before should be remembered throughout the land.

2 Chron.
xxxiv.
().
2 Chron.
xxxv.
().

With Josiah to mean was to do. So we read there never was such a Passover as the Passover that Josiah kept. As for the people, like the Pharisees later on, they only outwardly kept the Passover, and passed over *the Love of God*.

Luke xi.
().

The Singing Preacher

There was so much to remind them of God's love too. Preaching is not the only way God has for reminding us about His Care. All around the people could have seen it, if they had not been blind as well as deaf.

Their country was beginning to flourish, trade had looked up. The unemployed found work repairing the Temple. No one was labouring without being paid fair wages, and the *poor and needy* had in Josiah a powerful friend who always took their side. Jer. xxii. ().

You would think with so much to remind them what a blessing a good King was, they would like to listen to Jeremiah's messages of a Greater King.

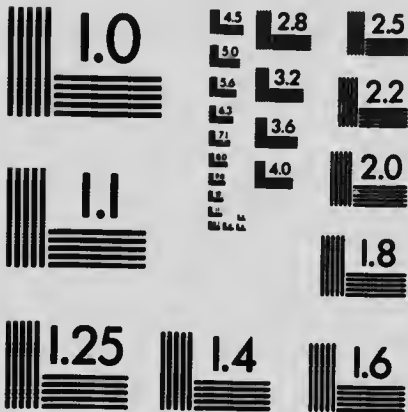
Yet they did not. For the sad thing is that however much *favour* is showed to the disobedient they will *not learn righteousness*. Isa. xxvi. ().

Another preacher, Zephaniah, was sent to them to tell of all the Passover was meant to teach. How in Heaven God had *prepared* a *Sacrifice* that should truly take away sins. Zeph. i. ().



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The Singing Preacher

John i.
(). It was the Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lamb of God*, of whom the Passover Lamb simply taught. Only those who were by faith already "feeding on Him in their hearts" were keeping the Passover in God's sight. But all might do so, for Zephaniah said, "*The Lord . . . hath bid His guests*, He has provided a wedding garment so that all who will may be made fit to come to His Feast.

Zeph. ii.
(). Why do you not accept the invitation?
Zeph. ii.
(). Why do you not *seek* the Lord with true contrition, and *be hid in the day of the Lord's anger?*"

So preached Zephaniah. And if you want to know how the people treated this message, read Matt. xxii. 1-13.

Once while he was speaking, God filled his mind with a wonderful picture, of a day that is coming when Jerusalem will no longer be a rebellious city, disobedient, ignorant, trustless, prayerless. A day when all the proud, *haughty* ones shall be taken away. Only

See Zeph.
iii. 2.
Zeph. iii.
().

The Singing Preacher

those who trust and obey shall inhabit the
Land with God Himself for their *King*. Zeph. iii.
()

Zephaniah was so overjoyed at the
thought of this glorious future time, that
he left off preaching, and began to sing.

"Sing," he cried, "*Shout, O Israel, be glad* Zeph. iii.
and rejoice with all the heart, for the Lord thy ().
God . . . is mighty, He will save, He will Zeph. iii.
rejoice over thee with joy, . . . He will joy over ().
thee with singing, . . . He will make you a Zeph. iii.
name and a praise among all people of the ().
Earth. Sing and rejoice and be glad."

But the people did not want that Day.
They did not long for righteousness and
truth; idols and deceit were more to their
liking. They never sang with Zephaniah,
and his song had no more effect than
Jeremiah's tears.

And He Died

PALESTINE, as you know, was a small but very important country, that lay between two great Empires: Egypt on the south, and Assyria on the north.

The story of these nations and how Israel was for ever chopping and changing their friendship from one to the other would fill a book to itself.

The whole thing was rather like a sandwich. Egypt and Assyria were the bread on either side, and Israel the jam in the middle, which stuck sometimes to one piece, sometimes to the other, while both wanted it.

When God put His people in such close quarters with the heathen, it was so that they might see His power and might on Israel's account.

And He Died

If Israel had trusted alone in God as their defence, they would have conquered all along the line. Instead they turned to Egypt or Assyria for help whenever either, or any other King came up to fight them.

At this point in our story, Pharaoh-Necho was on his way to fight with Assyria. Josiah, for some reason that does not matter to us, saw fit to interfere and try to prevent Necho reaching Nineveh.

While Necho's army marched along the coast northwards, Josiah's did the same inland, until they met at Megiddo, and the rest of the story is told us in a sentence.

The Egyptian *archers shot at King Josiah,* ^{2 Chron.} *and the King said to his servants, "Have me* ^{xxxv.} *away, for I am sore wounded."* So he died: the noblest, truest King that ever reigned in Jerusalem, the kindest heart that ever beat, the most faithful student that ever searched the Scriptures. No wonder there was mourning through all the land. Mourning

And He Died

and sorrow and tears such as had never been before. Such mourning that a hundred years after it was still spoken of as the greatest *mourning* that ever was.

Zech. 12.
().

2 Chron.
xxxv.
(),
margin.

All their losses in the loss of Josiah, all his *kindnesses*, all his generosity, all his tender-heartedness, all his justice, and all his goodness were wept and wailed over, with a bitter wailing. And amongst all the men, and all the women, and all the little children who cried in every city that day and for many days beside, not one wept as did Jeremiah, the King's friend.

Sec 2 Sam.
i.

2 Chron.
xxxv.
().

2 Chron.
xxxv.
().

Perhaps he used the burial hymn of David and cried, "I am distressed for thee, my brother, very pleasant hast thou been unto me, thy love to me was wonderful. The beauty of Israel is slain. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle." We cannot tell. But Josiah *died*, and *Jeremiah lamented*, and God was true to His promise, that Josiah's tender heart should

And He Died

never see the punishment and sorrow that was on its way. The Egyptian arrow, the deadly wound, the last sigh in that Royal Chariot, were but a pathway of Light for him to the *Heavenly Jerusalem*. 2 Chron. xxxv.
()

It would have broken Josiah's heart to know all the wicked ingratitude that Jeremiah was made strong to live and bear. In love God took Josiah *away from the evil to* Isa. lvii.
() *come*. In love he left Jeremiah to plead on with His own beloved people. Heb. xii.
()

Jehoiakim,¹ the New King

FOR some reason Josiah's second son, Jehoahaz, was made King after him.

2 Kings
xxiii.

().

2 Chron.
xxxvi.

().

In the three-and-twenty years of his life he had not learnt to do right *in the sight of the Lord*, and he very soon displeased Necho too, so that in *three months'* time he found himself carried off a prisoner to Egypt, and saw his elder brother, Jehoiakim, King in his stead.

Even in the nursery days little Jehoiakim got his own way. Though he was not the eldest, he put himself first. His temper was so ungovernable if he could not get what he wanted in the beginning, he kicked and

¹ Called also Eliakim.

Jehoiakim, the New King

fought and threw things into the fire, till his brothers gladly gave him all he demanded. And he demanded all, for *covetous-* Jer. xxii.
ness was the ruling principle of Jehoiakim's ().
unruly heart.

Supposing Jehoiakim's name had been Jack, and he had worn an Eton jacket and lived in the present time, he would have collected butterflies for the fun of seeing them wriggle on a pin. For he was cruel from his *youth* up just as he was passionate Jer. xxii.
and disobedient. ().

If at night the Royal servants over their supper discussed the young Prince's temper, although they shook their heads and said "he would be master," "and it would be a bad day if he ever was King," they rather admired his spirit and overbearing manner, and no doubt helped on his downfall.

But Josiah grieved over all he *found* in 2 Chron.
him. Sometimes he took his small son to xxxvi.
the Temple to watch the repairs going on. ().

Jehoiakim, the New King

As Jehoiakim stood by the stonemasons, and the overlayers of gold, and the carpenters and painters he admired it all. "But," he said in his heart, "I wish it was for us. What a house I shall build myself when I am a man."

Then his father would call him to listen to a chapter from the long-lost Bible, and if they said "Bother!" in those days, Jehoiakim, Prince of Judah, said it then.

It was not really much bother, because he did not listen, and just went on building his castle in the air, for another thing he said in his heart was, "*I will not hear.*" If he had dared he would have torn the book from Hilkiah's hand and trampled on it. The Bible bored him. He wanted to get back to his bricks and paints and build a palace for himself in the nursery.

It may have been that seeing all this in his son's character, Josiah, with his tender heart, determined that a boy so tyrannical

Jer. xxii.
().

Jehoiakim, the New King

and covetous and cruel, should not be King after him, with power to inflict untold misery. He made Jehoahaz, two years younger, his heir.

Perhaps Jehoiakim was not very sorry when Josiah died, for all his father loved he hated, and what his father hated he loved. Though it must have been pain and grief to him to see his younger brother on the coveted throne, he found a way to make up to Necho, and in three months' time, as we said, the King of Egypt made Jehoiakim King over Judah.

"Now *I will build*," said Jehoiakim. Jer. xxii. ().
"This palace is too poky for anything. It will not hold me. The house I shall build will be *wide*, and the rooms large and airy. And as Jer. xxii. ().
to my *windows*, they shall be the talk of the town. My doors and my cedar wood work shall be *painted with vermilion*. The glory of my Red House shall strike every eye."

So it was; and everything comfortable,

Jehoiakim, the New King

and everything beautiful was put into that Red House. Everything except the thought of right or wrong. That was never in the young King's heart. How could it get down to the foundations of his palace?

Jer. xxii.
(). The workmen toiled and laboured. Hour after hour and day after day Jehoiakim used *his neighbour's service without wages*. Never a penny did he pay for all the work in his magnificent house.

Jer. xxii.
(). The labourers went on strike. It only cost them their lives, and fresh workers were imported, who did not dare to refuse, such was the *oppression and violence* into which Jehoiakim's covetous heart led him.

"Splendid--wonderful," said he, as he gazed on the Vermilion House, complete at last.

Hab. ii.
(). "Woe," said God, looking down at the murdered workmen and their empty pockets.

Hab. ii.
(). "Woe to him that coveteth. The very stones of his unrighteous house shall cry shame,

Jehoiakim, the New King

and the beams of the vermilion-painted timber shall *answer it*. For the sin of Hab. ii. Jehoiakim is against his own *soul*." ().

Palaces do not establish a kingdom, and Hab. ii. (). after all this, no one ever even knew where the owner of the Red House was buried ; of no more account was he than *an ass* in the Jer. xxii. day of his death. And the character of (). Jehoiakim was another, though unrecorded, bit of Solomon's work. For that craze for building, which Solomon allowed to run riot in his heart, came to be handed down, like the kingly crown, from father to son, till at last it came down to a heart that had a use for it, and that heart was Jehoiakim's. But that was not its end by any means, and perhaps when you look next time on an over-great and over-ornamental pile, with more windows than you can count, and towers and turrets, and extravagant designs ; possibly you will be actually looking on the fruits of Solomon's doings handed down, down, down,

Jehoiakim, the New King

even till now. If the house is painted red, you may feel pretty sure of it. All of which is written for our learning and meant to teach us—well, you know what it is meant to teach us, and if you don't, the sooner you find out the better.

Anyway, take this to heart, that a character built on the True Foundation is the only one that can be safely left behind as an heirloom to the third and fourth generation. And a good name to leave is rather to be desired than a great fortune.

In Danger

JEREMIAH'S life became harder than ever after Josiah's death.

Directly Jehoiakim began to reign, Jeremiah was sent to preach another sermon *in the Court of the Lord's House*.

Jer. xxvi.
().

This sermon nearly cost him his life.

His audience rose up in indignation. "Kill him," they shouted, "how dare he say our city shall be destroyed!" Angry hands seized him. "*Thou shalt surely die*," cried one and all, for every single soul that heard Jeremiah speaking, was *against* him, because of the home truths that fell from his lips.

Jer. xxvi.
().

Jer. xxvi.
().

In the midst of the hubbub of furious words and shouts, a grand procession of *Princes* came slowly down from the King's house to the Temple Court.

Jer. xxvi.
().

In Danger

The angry Priests hurried up to meet them. The crowd stopped threatening and shouting, to hear what *the Priests* would make of it all.

Jer. xxvi.
().

Pointing to Jeremiah they said furiously, "*This man is worthy to die* for the things he is saying about our city."

Jer. xxvi.
().

While Josiah was alive, no one dared to say openly that Jeremiah should be killed. Such words were whispered, and secret plans were laid. Now Josiah was dead, Hilkiash was dead, Shaphan was dead; was there no one to befriend the lonely preacher?

Jer. xxvi.
().

Yes, Shaphan's son *Ahikam* stood up for Jeremiah, and Jeremiah himself pleaded his cause so convincingly that at last the Princes and the people agreed with one voice, "*This man is not worthy to die.*"

Jer. xxvi.
().

So from one more danger was Jeremiah delivered, which was all the more remarkable as Jehoiakim, in his unreasonable tyranny, ordered another preacher, called

In Danger

Urijah, to be put to death. As *Urijah* said Jer. xxvi. () exactly the same as *Jeremiah*, it was quite unreasonable to kill one and not the other. *Urijah* fled and took refuge in Egypt, the land of refugees. This made no difference to *Jehoiakim*. He ordered his father-in-law, *Elnathan*, to go off post-haste to Egypt and Jer. xxvi. () fetch him back. *Urijah* was found, brought to *Jehoiakim*, and the King, whose cruelty was a by-word, killed him with his own sword. Jer. xxvi. ()

"A good riddance too," said his wife, Queen *Nehushta*, proudly. "The sooner this sort of people are got rid of the better." Then she sent for her small son *Jehoiachin*, and taught him to admire his father's tyranny. Poor little boy, with such a father and a heathen mother, he had every encouragement to grow up like them.

God looked down into *Nehushta's* heart, and this is what He said: "*What wilt thou* Jer. xiii. () say, O Queen, when I shall *punish thee*, when

In Danger

Jer. xxii.
().

I shall give thee and thy son into *the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar?*"

"Nehushta" meant "brazen." But Nehushta did not feel very brazen in the day when the thing she feared most came upon her.

The Temperance Family

IN the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign the Caldron began to overturn, which means that the great Conqueror was on his way.

Nineveh, after a long siege, had surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar's father.

At the battle of *Carchemish*, Pharaoh- Jer. xlv.
Necho lost Palestine, so that he went off and ().
never came back *again any more*. Whether ² Kings
Jehoiakim liked it or no, he had to change xxiv.
Masters and become Nebuchadnezzar's ser- ().
vant.

Nebuchadnezzar, to impress his victory, marched down from the North to Jerusalem.

One day while the enemy was coming down like a *flood* through the land, a very Nahum i.
85 ().

The Temperance Family

remarkable party of gypsy-like people came hurrying into Jerusalem for safety.

2 Kings x.
(). During nearly three hundred years this wandering tribe had never been inside a town, and nothing but sheer terror of the Fierce Foe had driven them in now. The reason why the Rechabites lived in tents away from cities and the ordinary doings of men, takes us back to the time of *Jehu*, when there lived a good man named Jonadab. Now when Jonadab saw all the wickedness in the cities, the drunkenness and the idolatry, and the little children learning bad ways, he thought how much better it would be for his family to live always away from towns and adopt the fashion of "the simple life."

Jer. xxxv.
(). He told them to build no *house*, to sow no *seed*, to grow no grapes, to *drink no wine*, to do with as little as possible, and to bring up their children in the same Spartan manner.

Jer. xxxv.
().

The Temperance Family

So did the family of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, and their sons followed in his footsteps unto the third and fourth generation and after, right up to the day when the Fierce Foe drove them for shelter inside the walls of Jerusalem.

Quite a stir and excitement must have been occasioned on the arrival of the Rechabites. No doubt the children of Jerusalem crowded around the gypsies, and poked their little noses in wherever a nose could poke, carrying many a tale of queer doings back to their homes. Perhaps the queerest would be that not one Rechabite had been seen to touch a drop of wine. Then their parents would very likely smile and say meaningly, "When we go to Jerusalem, we do as Jerusalem does."

But the Rechabites did not do as Jerusalem did, strange as they felt in their new surroundings. The ways of Jerusalem did not attract them in the least.

The Temperance Family

After the excitement of their coming had quieted down Jeremiah himself went to their encampment; he went because God had told him to *go*, and invite them all to a feast.

Jer. xxxv.
().

The feast was to be held in one of the rooms over the gate inside the Temple Court. And all the Rechabites accepted the invitation gladly.

Quite a long procession of them started off with Jeremiah, and crowds collected all along the way.

The mad prophet, with a tribe of gypsies at his heels, was not a sight to miss, even though Nebuchadnezzar was causing great anxiety in high quarters.

Right down the Courtyard the crowd followed eagerly, full of interest and speculation, as the gypsies passed inside the gate and up the stairs into the *chamber*, where the feast was prepared.

Jer. xxxv.
().

And what a feast it was. Just such a feast

The Temperance Family

as the soul of Jerusalem would have loved.

A cup was placed by every seat, and the table was laden with brimming *pots full of wine*.

Jer. xxxv.

"*Drink*," said their host anxiously, when all were assembled.

().

Jer. xxxv.

().

You could have heard a pin drop in the silence that followed. Jeremiah's suspense was almost unbearable. Supposing, after all, these men "did do as Jerusalem did"! They were but human, and the temptation was great.

The Rechabites looked at the table, they looked at each other, they looked at Jeremiah, and then they said firmly with one accord—

"No, *we will drink no wine*. Our father told us not to, and we always have, and always will, obey him."

Jer. xxxv.

().

The crowd outside had not long to wait for their curiosity to be rewarded. Jeremiah appeared with a quiet, triumphant face, and preached them a sermon on obedience.

"These Rechabites," he said, "have been

The Temperance Family

Jer. xxxv. (). sorely tempted to disobey their earthly father's commandment. The table in here is loaded with wine, and I, a servant of God, have offered it to them, and yet they have resisted and kept true to their principles.

Jer. xxxv. (). "Oh, how different are these people to you. You to whom your Heavenly Father has sent message after message to tell you of His love, and the blessings that He will send if you obey Him ; but you never listen to His voice. *Will ye not learn wisdom even now ?*"

Jer. vi. (). The crowd had not come to be preached to, and began to melt away, when they found the tables turned upon themselves. Muttering their usual answer, "*We will not hearken,*" they slunk back to their own homes.

The Rechabites had not turned out amusing after all.

Daniel

THE next thing that happened was, that the dreaded Conqueror marched into Jerusalem.

Jehoiakim did not even attempt to resist, and Nebuchadnezzar contented himself with looking round the city to see what he would like to take back with him to Babylon.

His first choice fell upon the beautiful golden furniture in the Temple.

It had been such a joy to Jeremiah to help Josiah arrange the Temple worship, and replace and repair and re-use those bowls and tables and oil *vessels* that God ^{Dan. i.} Himself had shown Solomon how to make. (). We can imagine with what grief Jeremiah would see part of them borne away to adorn an idol temple in Babylon.

Daniel

Nebuchadnezzar's other choice was even more heart-breaking, for, after all, golden vessels cannot feel. Children can, and amongst the captives Nebuchadnezzar saw fit to make was a group of young Princes. See Dan. i. 4. Splendid boys they were, picked out just because they were so tall and straight and clever.

Standing out noticeably amongst them in his boyish beauty and rare intellect, was little Prince *Daniel*. Jehoiakim may not have grieved overmuch to see the Temple vessels *carried* away, except for their value in pounds, shillings and pence. But letting these royal princes go away for ever was a different thing altogether. Dan. i. (). Dan. i. ().

How could he bear to see Prince Daniel, with chained hands, led away!

When the punishment came, did Jehoiakim cry like Cain, "My punishment is greater than I can bear"? For Daniel, in all probability, was his own little son. A

Daniel

child, moreover, that any father would be proud of, and Jehoiakim was not behind any father in pride.

We may be sure there was sorrow and anguish in the Red House when Prince Daniel was led through its gorgeous gateway a prisoner in chains.

We can picture the parting and the tears, and then the farewell with Jeremiah.

Away from the palace, outside on the road to Babylon, perhaps the Prophet joined the captive band, and walked sorrowfully along by the boy's side.

"Only seventy years, Daniel, then God will bring you back here to this place. You will live till then, though I shall not see that glorious return. You are going to a heathen city now, but God will go with you. And Daniel, continue in the things you have learned. Never do as the people will be doing around you. Pray, pray, pray. God will take care of you, and make you a

Daniel

blessing where you are going, and keep you faithful even unto death."

In words like these, we may be sure Jeremiah took a last farewell of the lovable little Prince and his three boy-friends.

And Daniel went on to begin his new life in the Palace of the dreaded King.

Dan. i.
().

He was only a little boy, but he had a great purpose *in his heart*. He, too, like the Rechabites, would not do as Babylon did, but would at all times be true to his God, and seek His help in every time of need. And so it was, and *three times* every day in Babylon, Daniel opened his window wide, so that he might kneel and pray with his face towards Jerusalem.

Dan. vi.
().

Jeremiah prayed for Daniel with his face towards Babylon. He would remember to commend his boy-friends to God's care many times a day.

How much grace and strength and help came down from Heaven from those prayers,

Daniel

and how Daniel counted up the *years* that Dan. ix. he must stay in Babylon till at last the time (). really came to go back to Jerusalem, can only be known by reading the story of what befell them there.

There is no better time to read Daniel i., ii., iii., vi. and ix. than now.

So Nebuchadnezzar settled affairs in Jerusalem, went back to his own land, and dreamed dreams, and began to learn that Daniel's God is a Lord of kings.

Daniel was only a boy and a captive, but God used him as He had used Josiah and Jeremiah to witness for His Truth.

No boy who has lived since these three should ever feel ashamed to "stand alone" for his Master, when we see the honour God put on this one who honoured Him.

As for Jehoiakim, we do not expect to hear of a man with his temper quietly submitting to be ordered about, and having to

Daniel

pay large sums of money to be a far-off monarch. He was not going to do it.

2 Kings
xxiv.
().

Just as Jehoiakim ever rebelled against the King of kings, we now read, At the end of three years *he turned and rebelled* against Nebuchadnezzar.

Perhaps he thought Nebuchadnezzar would not trouble to come back so far to punish his unfaithfulness. If so he found to his cost this was just what Nebuchadnezzar did trouble to do.

2 Kings
xxiv.
().

He did not apparently come for some years, but first sent some of the neighbouring nations who were under his power. These came up and fought *against Judah* till Nebuchadnezzar found it convenient or necessary to start himself.

He came determined not to let Jehoiakim off so easily this time.

Jeremiah in God's School again

WHILE the punishment was coming nearer and nearer every day, and while the people were still saying, "We can't help doing wrong, we are made so," God told Jeremiah He was going to give him an object-lesson on making pots.

"Go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear My words." Jer. xviii. ().

Jeremiah went as he was told. He always did go directly. The potter was at work, and Jeremiah silently stood and watched. As the wheel went round, the potter moulded lump after lump of clay, pressing here and widening there until, as if by magic, jars and pitchers grew in his skilful hand.

Jer. xviii.

Jeremiah in God's School again

Presently the fascinated watcher noticed that the potter, who was in the middle of fashioning a beautiful vessel, suddenly took it all unfinished off the wheel. It was only half done, so quite useless, yet the potter held it tenderly in his hand.

Something hard in the clay had spoilt the potter's work. It would not make the vessel he wanted.

Every moment Jeremiah expected to see the spoilt pot thrown away. But the potter held it still. He picked out the hard unyielding bit, then squeezed it firmly into a lump, just like it was at first. Then he started to make the vessel all over again. This time the wheel turned on, until Jeremiah saw before him the spoilt pot, *made over again*, into one good to look at, and good to use. There was nothing wrong with it this time, for the potter was skilful, and the clay was soft.

Jer. xviii.
().

Then said Jeremiah's Teacher, "Is not



Jeremiah watched as the potter moulded.

Jeremiah in God's School again

Israel like that spoilt vessel? Mine was a beautiful plan for them. But it never came to pass, because of their hard, unyielding hearts. Yet, cannot I do with them *as this* Jer. xviii. () *potter* did with the clay?" And Jeremiah knew the lesson the spoilt pot was meant to teach. He went back to Jerusalem to tell of God's almighty Power to re-make spoilt, *good for nothing*, people. Jer. xiii. ()

Just as the girdle could not wash itself, he would tell them, so the pot could not re-make itself. All of which means for our learning that it is about as impossible for us to make ourselves good as it would have been for us to create our own bodies.

The Heavenly Potter says to us to-day—for He means us all to go to school with Jeremiah—"Cannot I do with you as an earthly potter does with clay?"

We must each answer the question for ourselves. David, long before this time, summed up the prayer that should follow

Jeremiah in God's School again

Psa. li.
().

Psa. li.
().

the lesson of the dirty girdle and the lesson of the spoilt pot, in two sentences—" *Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God.*"

This is our heart's answer God waits day by day to hear, for we always read of God's Love waiting to bestow blessings on us. It is not the will of your Father that one of

Matt. xviii. His *little ones* perish.
().

The Broken Pot

THE people did not care a bit about the sermon on the potter. They were quite satisfied with themselves, and did not wish to be made any different. "Don't listen," they said to one another, "*let us speak as loudly as we can* Jer. xviii. (). against him, and drown his voice." It was no use for Jeremiah to go on trying to shout against the rising uproar. He did not want to shout, he longed to plead gently and touch their hearts with God's wonderful love and patience.

He walked home, wondering which was the greatest marvel, God's love or the people's indifference. As he so thought along the road, God spoke to him. Jeremiah stopped short to listen, then made straight

The Broken Pot

Jer. xix.
().

for the potter's shop. This time he was not told to watch, but to buy an *earthen bottle*.

Did his choice fall on the re-made jar? No. Surely Jeremiah had already taken that home and put it in the chief place in his house, where it would say to him every day, "God keeps those He re-makes." It would be the most-prized ornament in his house, because of what it reminded him.

No, it was not that pot, but just an ordinary water jar.

Now, in Palestine, men never carry water pots. Only women do that. Men carry water in skins if they need to carry it at all. It would be just as strange to these people to see Jeremiah with a jar of water, as it would be to us to see a man with a parasol, or Louis XIV heels. He bought his water bottle, and carried it through the streets, nevertheless. The children followed his steps with laughter and jeers. But Jeremiah sent the children away. This was not going to

The Broken Pot

be a children's lesson, but one for old people only.

All the old people and all the old priests were called to come together. They came willingly enough when they heard that their mad prophet carried a water pot. Something out of the way might happen, and life is monotonous in Palestine.

"Come with me for a walk," said Jeremiah. "I am going down to *the Valley . . . of Jer. xix.*
Hinnom. Send all the children back." Then ().
he led the way through the streets to the valley in silence, while behind, gossiping hard, followed the *ancients.*

It was not a pleasant place, neither had it pleasant associations, this Valley of Hinnom. But Jeremiah looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, until he halted by a great rock. Upon the rock Jeremiah took his stand. He looked down on the curious, eager group of uplifted faces. Tousled and grey, cunning and deceitful was every

The Broken Pot

countenance that day in the Valley of Hinnom. Sin-spoilt, useless men and women. One shudders to think of the sight Jeremiah looked down upon from the rock. But he was not there to look, but to act. He seized his water jar, and holding it high above his head, he suddenly poured out its contents. A stream ran down to his feet, and trickled away in a hundred tiny rivulets. "*Hear ye the word of the Lord,*" he cried. "So will He empty out Judah and Jerusalem in the days of the coming invasion." Then, raising the now empty jar into the air, he thundered out, "*Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, even so will I break this people . . . as one breaketh a potter's vessel that cannot be made whole again.*"

Jer. xix.
().

Jer. xix.
().

With those terrible words, he hurled the earthen bottle to the ground. It broke on the rock, and the echo crashed and crashed again up the narrow valley in the awful silence that followed. But the noisy echo in the valley was soft to the echo in Jere-

The Broken Pot

miah's brain. That echo would live with him for evermore. Never would he stand and preach without the smash of broken pottery sounding in his ears, and the "ancients" would ever hear its ring in his imploring tones. "Thus saith the Lord, turn ye, O turn, for why will ye die?"

Silently and shamefacedly the old people stole away. Jeremiah alone in the valley with the chips of pottery around him, could only cry, "*Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow . . . I will fear no evil,* Psa. xxiii. (). *FOR THOU ART WITH ME.*" What other comfort had he, or did he need?

As to the water bottle, it lay a little heap of dust and chips. Jeremiah sought in vain amongst the larger pieces for any worth preserving. Not one was large enough to carry to the nearest well to serve as a cup for travellers' use, not one was worth his taking it home as a little shovel to carry fire in from house to house, if a neighbour came

The Broken Pot

Jer. xix.
().

out borrowing. He left the pieces and went back to Jerusalem, and preached a sermon on the broken pot *in the Court of the Lord's House*, so that old and young might hear.

The Hard Blow

NOW *Pashur* the priest, who was also Jer. xx. chief officer in the House of the () Lord, was among the listeners to the broken pot sermon. It must have been an unusual thing for so great a personage to condescend to hear Jeremiah. But somehow with the morning's scene fresh in his mind, and the rumours of what had taken place in the Valley of Hinnom, he found himself edging closer and closer to the preacher.

The nearer he got to Jeremiah, the harder did the prophet's word hit his conscience. He grew more and more angry every moment.

When he heard Jeremiah actually dare to say Nebuchadnezzar was going to take every

The Hard Blow

one away from Jerusalem, and every one away from the cities of Judah, he could contain his passion no longer.

Pushing fiercely up to the front, he dealt Jeremiah a sudden staggering blow. Hard as the blow was, it was nothing to the blows God's Word had dealt him, for that is sharper than a two-edged sword, and Pashur had no weapon but a fist of flesh. Smarting under his wounded pride, he ordered Jeremiah to be put *in the stocks*.

Jer. xx.
().

Now the stocks were in a public gateway. In the very gateway by which Jeremiah came in day by day from Anathoth. Every one going back that afternoon would see the preacher in his shame, and there would be joy in Anathoth at supper-time.

All night long Jeremiah endured those stocks, till every bone and joint in his body ached and ached again. But the aching of his bones was a small matter to the aching of his heart.

The Hard Blow

It was a night to be remembered, that night in the stocks, with Self and Satan, contending as Self and Satan have ever contended against the Spirit since they first started in the garden of Eden. "Every one mocks you, Jeremiah," said Satan boldly.

Jeremiah tried to move his aching limbs. "I know," he cried, "*daily every one mocketh me.*" Jer. xx. ().

"All your family are against you," went on the enemy. It is always his method to trample on a man when he is down.

"True," moaned Jeremiah, "*all my familiars watched for my halting, saying peradventure he will be enticed.*" Jer. xx. ().

"Why do you go on preaching, Jeremiah?" suggested Satan almost under his breath. He was very close to the stocks as he whispered this, and Jeremiah cried out in agony, "*Then . . . I will not . . . speak any more ; the reproach of it all has broken my heart.*" Jer. xx. ().

The Hard Blow

Even as he uttered the faithless words, Satan moved back. Another, stronger far than Satan—stronger even than Self—came and stood beside the stocks in the darkness.

At the touch of His Loving Hand, at the sound of His Still Small Voice, Jeremiah's heart burned within him. "I never meant it," he cried remorsefully. And all the words of the "Book that was found" having sunk long ago into his heart, cried to be let out, as though they were *fire shut up*.

Jer. xx.
().

Jer. xx.
().

Jer. xx.
().

"I must preach till I die," he said, "for I cannot help it. *The Lord is with me as a Mighty terrible One*. He will make me strong again like an iron pillar and a defenced city. One day *my persecutors . . . shall be greatly ashamed*, they shall never prevail against me."

So comforted and uplifted was Jeremiah, he forgot the stocks, and he forgot his aches, and he burst out into a song of praise, like Paul and Silas in their prison later on.

The Hard Blow

*"Sing unto the Lord," he sang in the dark, Jer. xx.
"for He hath delivered the soul of the poor from ().
the hand of evildoers."*

Yet, even in that triumphant moment, Satan stepped up again. The song ceased abruptly.

"Has He, indeed?" the Arch-Deceiver asked.

"Has He?" questioned Jeremiah's old deceitful Self.

A shadow fell, even in the darkness. It was Satan edging nearer. Again the One stronger than Satan was blotted out of Jeremiah's vision.

"Your birthday was a bad *day* for you, Jer. xx. Jeremiah," Satan began afresh. "Your (). father was *very glad*, but it was a bad day Jer. xx. notwithstanding." ().

"I know, I know," writhed poor Jeremiah, aching from head to foot. "Nobody knows better than I. I wish I had never been born."

The Hard Blow

A thousand times that night this tempted, tortured saint was down in the depths with Satan, and up in the heights with God. Which shows us that Jeremiah was a man of like passions to us, and that Satan has never changed his tactics.

Worn out in mind and body, the sun arose, and Satan, who cannot bear the sunshine, went away discomfited.

Then God spoke to Jeremiah about Pashur.

The next morning Pashur came down to the Gate of Benjamin to order his release.

Numbed and stiff, Jeremiah struggled to his feet, but the fire in his heart burnt fiercely as he faced Pashur. Fixing his persecutor with his fearless gaze, pointing his finger towards his shrinking form, Jeremiah spoke.

Jer. xx.
().

“God does not call your *name Pashur*,” he said, “whatever you call yourself. He calls you Fear. And do you know why? Because

The Hard Blow

He is going to make you *a terror* to yourself Jer. xx.
and your friends." ().

Now all night Pashur had been mentally patting his own back. He was not a brave man. His new name fitted him well, and he did not like it. At the very mention of the King of Babylon his legs began to quake. If they had not quaked so, he might not have stayed to hear what more Jeremiah had heard about him. As it was, he remained. This is what he heard.

"*Thou Pashur and all that dwell in thine* Jer. xx.
house, shall go into captivity, and thou shalt ().
come to Babylon, and there thou shalt die, and
shalt be buried there, thou and all thy friends."

Pashur found his legs, and walked away. But his heart trembled from that day onwards.

A life-like portrait of Pashur was written by Moses a thousand years before. For the Holy Spirit knew Pashur just as well before as after he lived. "*Thy life shall hang in* Deut. xxix.
I 113 ().

The Hard Blow

doubt before thee : and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life.

Deut. xxix. (). *The Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind."*

And of all the mean, despicable cowards frightened at their own shadow that have ever walked the earth, Pashur the priest is as much to be pitied as any. Remember a guilty conscience makes cowards of us all, and we all need a *conscience void of offence toward God*, if we are to lie down in peace and sleep.

Acts xxiv. ().
Psa. iv. ().

Pashur never slept again in peace. Every night he had a nightmare, and every day he thought a bogy was after him.

The Writing Lesson

PASHUR did not intend to be annoyed by Jeremiah's Voice again. He forbade him to come into the Temple Court, or to preach any more at all.

It meant that Jeremiah was to stay at home for a while. This was easier far, than to go outside and preach.

God had work for His servant indoors. He was going to teach him to write a book.

"*Write* My words in a book, Jeremiah," Jer. xxxvi. God said, "maybe My people will attend to (). My written Word."

Baruch, his friend, came to do the actual writing. Baruch was a prince, but it was an honour for him to share Jeremiah's disgrace. This is the way the book was made.

The Writing Lesson

Jer. xxxvi. God told Jeremiah what was to be written,
(). and then Jeremiah dictated, while *Baruch*
Jer. xxxvi. wrote it down *with ink*.

().

When the book was finished, it did not look like a book does now. It was the same shape as a Chinese picture, rolled on to a stick.

Jer. xxxvi. "Now, Baruch," said Jeremiah, "*I cannot*
(). *go into the House of the Lord, therefore go thou and read in the roll which thou hast written.*"

At last Jerusalem was beginning to get alarmed. Nebuchadnezzar's approach was too close to be comfortable. In their fear the people remembered the God they had so long neglected, and gladly fell in with the idea of setting aside a whole day for fasting and prayer for deliverance.

Jer. xxxvi. It was on that very day, the day of the
(). great *fast*, when all Judah and Jerusalem came crowding to the Courtyard, that Baruch went down to read the book. To such a crowd as that Baruch felt he would never make himself heard.

The Writing Lesson

Over the new entrance gate were two or three rooms, one belonged to the King and one to his scribe. The King's present scribe was Shaphan's son *Gemariah*. He let Baruch Jer. xxxvi. () come up to this room to read Jeremiah's book "*in the ears of all the people*." It was a splendid place, over everybody's head.

Somewhere within ear-shot was Gemariah's young son Micaiah. Probably he had Jer. xxxvi. () often heard Jeremiah saying just what Baruch was reading, but on this day the words struck him as they never had before. It ~~all~~ seemed real and terrible, and urgent, with Nebuchadnezzar so near. Why did not some one tell the King? Surely some one ought to warn him? Perhaps he did not know that God had really said that Nebuchadnezzar was going to conquer them, destroy their land, and take them all captive to Babylon for *Seventy years*. Well, one Jer. xxv. () thing was certain, the King must be told. His father was the one to do that.

The Writing Lesson

In deadly earnest Shaphan's grandson made his way through the crowd to the scribes' chamber in the Palace. And lo, all the statesmen were gathered together.

Regardless of everything but the message still ringing in his ears, Micaiah poured out all he had just heard. Much impressed and greatly interested were the Princes. "We will hear the book for ourselves," they said. And a messenger went off to Gemariah's room over the gate, and stopped Baruch in his reading. "Bring the book with you," said the messenger, "*and come.*"

Jer. xxxvi.
().

Jer. xxxvi.
().

Wonderingly, Baruch *took the roll in his hand*, and followed his guide.

Jer. xxxvi.
().

"*Sit down now*," cried all the Princes at once, as Baruch arrived, "*and read it in our ears.*"

So Baruch read, and as he read they looked at one another, these Princes of old, and fear was on every face. As the reading

The Writing Lesson

ended, with one accord they spoke again :
“*We will surely tell the King.*”

Jer. xxxvi.
().

Then question followed question, as Baruch told how, though shut up, Jeremiah was but shut in with his Heavenly Teacher, who told him what to write, just as He used to tell him what to preach. And this thing is true in all ages. God’s work often prospers amazingly when His workers are shut up. Think about that, for there is more in it than appears.

“Whatever do you think, Jeremiah?” said Baruch, as he went back to Jeremiah’s house. “King Jehoiakim is going to be told about your book. It is going to be read to him, but you and I have to *hide* for our lives.”

Jer. xxxvi.
().

We do not know their hiding-place. Only God knew that, for He *hid them*.

Jer. xxxvi.
().

The Torn Bible

KING JEHOIAKIM sat by the fire in the Red House. It was the same Jehoiakim whose temper and selfishness distressed Josiah when he was a boy.

Time had neither improved his expression nor his temper. People learnt to keep out of his way when a frown was on his royal brow. Saul's were not the only servants who grew clever in dodging missiles thrown across the room.

The Princes fully realized the fury of his temper when they advised Jeremiah to hide, before the book was produced, and when they hid the book itself until they saw how their monarch bore the news of its existence.

See Jer.
xxxvi.
20.

The Torn Bible

To-day Jehoiakim was quite amiable. He allowed the Princes to tell him of Jeremiah's book and what it said. Then he made the same remark the Princes had previously made, "I will hear it for myself." Jehudi was sent *to fetch the roll*, and Jehudi read it Jer. xxxvi. to the King. ().

The good humour left Jehoiakim's face before the first page was turned. A scowl appeared by the second, and at the third his hand stole out and tightened round a scribe's penknife. At the fourth his anger blazed. Snatching the parchment from Jehudi's hand, he thrust the *penknife* viciously Jer. xxxvi. through and through the parchment. ().

Three of the audience around that hearth, seeing the destination of the book, implored the King not to *burn the roll*. Their entreaties fell on deaf ears, for Jehoiakim's whole heart was set on cutting up and burning, and he never stopped until all the roll was consumed in the fire. Jer. xxxvi. ().

The Torn Bible

When the last page was burned to ashes, in a storming rage he ordered Baruch and Jeremiah to be killed, for daring to say the King of Babylon was going to conquer his kingdom.

But all Jehoiakim's power and all his fury could not really destroy the book or its writers.

Jer. xxxvi.
(). God hid Jeremiah, and told him in his hiding-place how to write the book over again. And Baruch, who was hidden too, wrote afresh *all the words of the Book which Jehoiakim, King of Judah, had burned in the fire*. This book was longer than the last, and God took care of it after it was written.

Jehoiakim never got his knife into the new book, though undoubtedly he set the fashion for cutting up the Bible, and men have tried to follow his example ever since.

Tried, but that is all, for God Himself has preserved His Own Word, and not one stop, or syllable, can ever pass away.

The Torn Bible

No terrible punishment fell from Heaven upon Jehoiakim for his deed. He sat on by the fireside as though nothing had happened, neither was he *afraid*, nor any of his servants. Jer. xxxvi. ().

We cannot suppose he cared very much either when Jeremiah told him that God would *punish him* unless he repented. Jer. xxxvi. ().

The flood from the overturned Caldron was almost within sight, yet Jehoiakim *hearkened not*. Jer. xxxvi. ().

The Servant who said Why?

Hab. i.
().

AMONGST God's little band of faithful servants at this time was *Habakkuk* the Prophet.

Hab. i.
().

Hab. i.
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Hab. i.
().

Jeremiah hardly ever asked questions. He did just what he was told. This man was quite different; he could not help saying *Why?* He saw Jehoiakim's workmen going home at night unpaid. He saw the *law* of the land disregarded. He saw the miserable people unjustly taxed, and his soul cried out, "Why is it? O Lord, *how long* shall these things be?"

God, who always answers heart questions for those who will listen, answered His perplexed servant.

The answer puzzled Habakkuk more than

The Servant who said Why?

ever. Something worse than Jehoiakim's tyranny was going to be sent to Jerusalem. A *terrible and dreadful* foe, with fierce faces Hab. i. and swift horses, should sweep the land, and (). *gather* up captives like sand by the sea. Hab. i. Why, it was just what Jeremiah had so often () preached.

Habakkuk trembled when he heard of the invader and *his troops*, and he said Hab. iii. "Wherefore?" He quite understood that Hab. i. Jerusalem must be punished, but why did () God use a heathen nation to do it?

It was all so mysterious, that at last, worn out with his perplexities, he stopped asking questions, and waited to hear what God would *say* to him, which is always the Hab. ii. better plan. ().

So God spoke to him again; this time he showed Habakkuk in a picture or *vision* Hab. ii. what was going to happen. ().

We are not told exactly what he saw.

Whatever it was, it was for a settled

The Servant who said Why?

J. ii.
(). time, a time that would *surely come*, and that before very long.

Hab. iii.
(). After the vision, Habakkuk in his *prayer*, prayed very earnestly that in the coming years God's work might be preserved *alive*, and in the time of punishment that He would

Hab. iii.
(). *remember mercy.*

Putting these two verses together, does it not look as if the picture Habakkuk saw was of the seventy years' captivity?

Hab. ii.
(). It may be. In any case, the vision was of such importance, that Habakkuk was told to go and get a large clay tablet, and write on it in *plain* letters what he had seen.

Perhaps the people who refused to listen to Jeremiah would have their eye caught by Habakkuk's poster.

Hab. i.
(). Amongst other things that God made clear to Habakkuk that day was one thing that he could not understand before. How could God look on at men who dealt *treacherously* without interfering?

The Servant who said Why?

And in order to teach His servant that the wicked do not go on unnoticed and unpunished, God spoke of one particular man.

Habakkuk knew the person's name. Perhaps you can give him one too, though the Bible does not.

Listen to the description of him.

He was some one in a position of power, who apparently knew what was right, but deliberately "took himself off" to do what was wrong. A man who was *proud*, fond of *wine*, with a *home* too small for his large desire, who could not be *satisfied* with anything less than a world-wide dominion, a worshipper of *idols*, full of *covetousness*, and *cutting off many people* for his own gain. One who tried to establish a city by iniquity, and who ruled by *violence*, that did not hesitate to take people's *labour* for nothing, and tempted his friends to drink.

Now, who was this man God knew so well, and described so exactly?

Was it King Jehoiakim?

The Servant who said Why?

Hab. ii.
().

Habakkuk knew the man, if we do not, and he learnt this, though sinners against their own soul may prosper for a time, *woe* awaits all such.

Hab. ii.
().

He also found that a better plan than asking questions was to *keep silence* before God, and let Him speak. The end of Habakkuk's listening was that he sat down and wrote a beautiful song of faith. The song was sung in the Temple, and it has been sung ever since in the hearts of men and women and little children who have learnt, like Habakkuk, to stop saying "why," "wherefore," and "how long," and to trust their Heavenly Father with the affairs of the world and their own lives.

THE SONG OF FAITH

Hab. iii.
().

"For though the fig-tree shall not blossom,
Neither shall fruit be in the vines;
The labour of the olive shall fail,
And the fields shall yield no meat;

The Servant who said Why?

'The flock shall be cut off from the fold,
And there shall be no herd in the stalls:
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my Salvation.
The Lord God is my strength,
And He will make my feet like hinds' feet,
And He will make me to walk upon mine
high places.'

Habakkuk wrote the song in a book and the vision on the tablet. But we do not read that the King or the people took any more notice of Habakkuk's written warning than they did of Jeremiah's spoken message.

And Nebuchadnezzar came up to Jerusalem and Jehoiakim found himself bound *in fetters* ready to be carried off to Babylon. ^{2 Chron. xxxvi.}
He was all ready to go, but he never went. ().
Nobody knows what happened to him. Remembering his violent temper, and the fact that his body was to be thrown outside the gates of the city, as a dead *ass* would be, it ^{Jer. xxii.}
looks as if he had taken his own life rather ().
than be taken to Babylon. ^{2 Kings xxiv.}

And *Jehoiachin his son* reigned in his stead. ().

K

Jehoiachin¹

One Hundred Days King
Thirty-seven Years Prisoner

THE Coronation was a poor affair. With little heart can the people have cried "Long live King Jehoiachin." It was almost a mockery making him King at all.

Affairs were hopeless. His father had taken his own life rather than go to Babylon. *Nebuchadnezzar* — owing possibly to some rebellious act of the young King's — was besieging them with renewed energy. There was really nothing for it but to give in. Yet for *three months and ten days* Jehoiachin held on to his throne before he was forced to surrender.

2 Chron.
xxxvi. ().

2 Chron.
xxxvi. ().

¹ Also called Jeconiah and Coniah.

Jehoiachin

It was a humiliating procession that passed through Jerusalem when Jehoiachin, King of Judah, went out to give himself up to the King of Babylon. *He, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers.* But it was the best day's work Jehoiachin did in his short and *evil* reign. ^{2 Kings xxiv. ().}

Jeremiah learnt this the next time he went to God's school.

A Mournful Procession

IT was well indeed for Josiah that he was away before this day of sorrow came.

Jer. xxii.
(). No wonder Jeremiah was told not to weep for Josiah ; not to bemoan him, but rather to weep sore for Jehoahaz, *for he shall return no more, nor see his native country again.*

Isa. xxxiii.
(). Josiah is going back. He will return to his native country. One day he will see Jerusalem, with the *Glorious Lord* for its Judge, Lawgiver and King. Songs, and joy and gladness will be everywhere, while sickness, sorrow and sighing shall be unknown.

Isa. xxxv.
().
Isa. x.
(). Meantime, another stroke of God's *Rod*

A Mournful Procession

had fallen. Jeremiah had proved false prophet. Long had he foreseen all this, long had he spoken of it. Yet, as he stood on this sorrowful day beside the Temple, to watch the long procession of prisoners pass out of Jerusalem on the way to Babylon, he could hardly see for tears.

Here they come. Let us stand and watch them too.

The King, surly and cast down, strictly guarded by fierce soldiers; the remaining Princes of the Royal House beside him. Following the Princes comes Queen Nehushta. Where is her pride now? What are her thoughts? Only God knows. She wrings her chain-bound hands, and cries with a bitter lamentation.

Presently a thoughtful young face, bearing the unmistakable family likeness of the Household of Faith, smiled up at Jeremiah. It is *Ezekiel the Priest*, whose interest in the House of God, and in Jeremiah's preaching, ().

A Mournful Procession

must have endeared him to the lonely Prophet.

It was hard to see Ezekiel, with his marvellous genius and simple faith, driven out of the city he would have died for.

Daniel had been eight years or more in Babylon now. What messages Jeremiah must have sent to him by Ezekiel! Knowing what a great man he had become, and how Nebuchadnezzar was under his influence, no doubt Ezekiel was cheered to think that Daniel could do much to lessen the hardships of their captivity. He and Jeremiah would speak of this, and commend each other to God's loving care and protection.

2 Chron. xxxvi. (). Next, a mighty chariot rumbled out of the Temple Court, piled high with sacred treasures. Nearly all *the goodly vessels of the House of the Lord* that Nebuchadnezzar left the last time were being taken to adorn his idol temple.

Now and then a group of old men shook



Mothers urged their little ones to throw mud and stones in Jeremiah's direction, uttering cries of reproach.

A Mournful Procession

their fists fiercely at Jeremiah, and poured curses on his head, accusing him of all their woes. Even mothers urged their little ones to throw mud and stones in his direction, uttering cries of reproach, for wrong-doers always want to blame some one else.

Here and there a kindly face was turned to Jeremiah, as one of God's faithful servants went by—bound, it is true, and within reach of the overseer's cruel lash, but with calm face and unfaltering step. Little brown hands stretched out or waved, as one child after another spied out the man who loved them.

Oh, there were many among that long, long procession of captives who were dear to Jeremiah's heart—Mordecai, Gemariah, Michaiah and Ahikam. Every one who had ever befriended him was there, besides those who had insulted and persecuted him.

Amongst the rest, Pashur shambled past, white to the lips, his chains clinking as he

A Mournful Procession

shivered in terror. Even his frightened family in that moment wished he could show a little more spirit. His face is turned away to avoid Jeremiah's eye. How unnecessary! Jeremiah looked at him, as on all, with infinite compassion.

So the procession passes out of sight, even every one in the city who was of any use. All *the Carpenters, Soldiers, Craftsmen and Smiths, ten thousand captives* without counting the women and children. *None remained, save the poorest sort of the people.*

Jer. xxiv.
().
2 Kings
xxiv. ().

Through a mist of tears, Jeremiah watched Israel's departing glory.

Five hundred years later, that One whom some of the Jews believed to be Jeremiah come back from the grave, stood and gazed at this same city, and cried, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together . . . and ye would not!*"

Luke xiii.
().

And Jeremiah, as he looked on the deso-

A Mournful Procession

lated city, cried, *Is it nothing to you, all ye that* Lam. i.
pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow ().
like unto my sorrow. My people have gone Lam. i.
into captivity. God longed to gather them ().
around Him. They chose to be scattered.
O Jerusalem, if thou hadst only known
the things which belong unto thy peace, the Luke xix.
Caldron would never have overturned ; this ().
sorrowful day would never have dawned.

The Baskets of Figs

Jer. xxiv.
().

A*FTER* the last captive had passed out of sight, God took Jeremiah into the desolated Temple to give him an object-lesson on Comfort.

Jer. xxiv.
().

Jeremiah looked up, and he seemed to see before him *two baskets of figs*.

Jer. xxiv.
().

One basket had very good figs, each one purple and tempting in its ripeness.

Jer. xxiv.
().

"Figs," said Jeremiah, "good figs, very good figs."

When he said that, he had learnt the first bit of his lesson on comfort. Not a very hard one, was it? Just as simple as the lessons he had when a boy.

"Now what seest thou, Jeremiah?" asked his Teacher.

The Baskets of Figs

"A basket of bad figs," answered God's pupil, "*very naughty figs*, which cannot be eaten for badness, so bad and rotten are they." Jer. xxiv. ()

That was a little bit more of the easy lesson, and then Jeremiah sat and looked at the two baskets, and tried to find out the meaning.

Presently God spoke *again*—for He always makes His lessons clear and plain to those who listen. Jer. xxiv. ()

"*These good figs* are like the long procession of captives you are grieving for whom I have sent out of this place . . . for *their good*," said He. Jer. xxiv. ()

Why, that was exactly what Jeremiah already knew about Josiah being taken to Heaven, away from the evil. What a good and pleasant fig Josiah had been all his short, faithful life. And God took him for his good.

So with these captives. God had taken

The Baskets of Figs

them away for their good. He was going to teach them His ways in a new place, and give them a fresh opportunity to learn His love, and to understand His lessons. Then, after seventy years at school in Babylon, He would *bring them again to this land*.

Jer. xxiv.
().

Jeremiah's heart was comforted. However sorely he would miss his friends, it was for their good and happiness. He was more than content, now he knew what the basket of good figs meant. God was with the captives in their chains. And God in Heaven was at *work*, bringing to pass His own plan, of which Zephaniah used to sing.

Hab. i.
().

This was the comforting part of the lesson. The sad part was to come, about the bad figs.

The basket of useless, rotten figs, that was only fit to be thrown away, was like *Zedekiah . . . and his princes*, and the people that still remained in the land. They were to be sent troubles, and enemies and

Jer. xxiv.
().

The Baskets of Figs

pestilence, till none were left. Rotten and naughty, they must be thrown away.

The prophet went home. Glad and sad after his lesson.

He sat down and read in the Book he had written. It was about the good figs. He read, "*Thus saith the Lord, refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears, for thy work (all his unappreciated preaching) shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.*"

He read that the captives were to set up waymarks or signposts to mark the road back again, so certain was it that their children should come again to their own land, and build again the City of God's joy.

That night Jeremiah's sleep was sweet unto him. God had satisfied his weary soul, and turned his sorrow into joy.

Zedekiah the Waverer

NEBUCHADNEZZAR took Jehoia-
chin away and made Zedekiah
king in his place. Zedekiah, or
Mattaniah as his father called him, was the
baby of Josiah's nursery. He was ten years
old at the time of Megiddo, and unlike
Jehoiakim, he was terribly sad on that
terribly sad day. Zedekiah was born with
a tender heart, but then he was born without
any determination or pluck to carry through
his kind intentions.

He would never have knocked down a
single heathen temple, or stamped an idol to
powder like his father. No, he would have
stood and looked at it, hammer in hand, and
said, "Shall I, or shall I not?" and after he

Zedekiah the Waverer

had said "Shall I?" a dozen times, he would have dropped the hammer, murmuring, "Better not to-day." Yet that would not have decided the matter, for as he tossed on his bed at night, he would have wondered whether he had been wise to leave it, and in the morning he would talk it over again till his brain was in a whirl.

For Zedekiah was like a leaf *driven with* Jas. i.
the wind, and tossed first one way and then ().
the other. He hated to decide anything
himself, yet never asked the Lord to be
his *Wonderful Counsellor*. Isa. ix.

Poor Zedekiah! we find his like still, in
every habitation of men. ().

The Six Yokes

SUBMISSION to Babylon became more than ever now the drift of all Jeremiah's preaching. Nebuchadnezzar is God's servant. By him you are to be punished. Nothing can alter it. God has given him this land, and other lands, just as *seemed meet* to the Creator and Owner of the earth. All nations shall *serve* Nebuchadnezzar, and his son after him, and his grandson after him. Those who refuse to serve Babylon will sorely regret it. Submission to him is the only thing that can help you. And in order that there should be no means lost to make the people understand this, Jeremiah had been down to the carpenter's shop for some pieces of wood.

Jer. xxvii.

().

Jer. xxvii.

().

The Six Yokes

"What do you want, Jeremiah? Wood to make *yokes* with?"

Jer. xxvii.

().

Was the mad prophet going to start farming that he wanted yokes?

The people wondered, and Jeremiah sat on the ground and worked. He made six yokes. Then he got up, and tying one firmly together, put it around his neck and walked off with the other five under his arm. He walked as far as the Red House. Then he waited outside. Inside the Palace King Zedekiah was deep in council. For Ambassadors had come to him from five surrounding Kings, who, uniting together, invited Zedekiah to join himself to them. Before Nebuchadnezzar became so formidable a foe, these nations had always been fighting against Jehoiakim. Now they wanted to make friends with Israel. Together they might crush the dreaded Babylonian monarch. Separately each must be overcome.

See 2 Kings
xxiv. 2.

The Six Yokes

Presently the embassy would be coming out. Jeremiah with his yokes awaited them.

Jer. xxvii.
(). With endless ceremony and bowing and scrapings, the foreign *Messengers* at last were ushered out of the Red gates. The Prophet stepped forward, a striking figure in his plain dark garment among all the gay dresses and royal pomp.

Jer. xxvii.
(). "Here is a gift for your masters," he said, handing round his yokes, "one for the King of *Edom*, one for the King of *Moab*, one for the King of the *Ammonites*, one for the King of *Tyrus*, and one for the King of *Zidon*. Take them with you and say to your Kings, 'Put the yoke around your neck and learn this: if you will submit to Nebuchadnezzar, all will be well; for *the Nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the King of Babylon and serve him, THOSE WILL I LET REMAIN still in their own land, saith the Lord.*' If you will not put your neck under

The Six Yokes

the yoke of the King of Babylon, then woe betide you."

Jeremiah wore that wooden yoke wherever he went, and never ceased to urge on all his hearers to submit to Nebuchadnezzar.

The Man who broke the Yoke

JUST after this Jeremiah noticed one day a great crowd gathered in the Temple Court. In the distance he could hear the sound of preaching, and quickly hastened up to find out what new prophet had arisen.

Jer. xxviii.
().

Hananiah, a man well known to Jeremiah, was the speaker. His was a character that loved popularity; but he did not hesitate to say what was untrue to gain it. Yet he said it so pleasantly that no one thought ill of Hananiah.

Jer. xxviii.
().

Jeremiah took his place in the crowd. He heard the words, "*Thus speaketh the Lord.*"

The Man who broke the Yoke

Had God spoken to this man, who told untruths so glibly?

Any one could say God had sent them; but God does not send every one who says so, even in these days.

It was not long before the self-appointed preacher noticed Jeremiah. Pointing his finger scornfully at the yoke around his neck, he called out, "Take that thing off. Listen to my message. Within *two years* Jer. xxviii. (). from now all the Temple vessels that were taken to Babylon, and *all the captives* that Jer. xxviii. (). went there with Jehoiachin, will be back again in Jerusalem."

Smiles were on every face; this was better hearing than Jeremiah's seventy years.

Sorrowfully the true prophet looked from the satisfied countenance of the untrue preacher to the delighted crowd.

"Would to God Hananiah was right," he said; "*nevertheless*, time will show which of us two is speaking the truth." Jer. xxviii. ().

The Man who broke the Yoke

As Jeremiah finished speaking, Hananiah, with angry frowns, strode towards him, and seizing the yoke, tore it from the prophet's

Jer. xxviii. *neck and brake it.*
().

In the silence that followed he then cried excitedly, "So within two years God says He will break the yoke which Nebuchadnezzar has put on you."

Jer. xxviii. Puzzled and disheartened, *Jeremiah went*
(). *his way.* As he walked and wondered, feeling how useless his years of preaching had been, God came down and spoke to his dejected heart.

Jer. xxviii. "Go back and *tell Hananiah,*" He said,
(). "though wooden yokes are easily destroyed, My word can never be broken. Israel shall

Jer. xxviii. *serve Nebuchadnezzar under a yoke of iron.*
(). Jeremiah hurried back. The people were still around their new prophet.

Jer. xxviii. "*Hear now, Hananiah,*" said Jeremiah,
(). and there was a ring of certainty in his voice, "*the Lord hath not sent thee; but thou*
150

The Man who broke the Yoke

makest this people to trust in a lie. Because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord, this year thou shalt die."

Jer. xxviii.

().

Two months later *Hananiah* the untrue prophet *died*.

Jer. xxviii.

().

So the people had not a shadow of excuse for believing anything he had pretended to foretell that day when he broke the yoke, and said "two" instead of "seventy."

The Letter to the Good Figs

JEREMIAH knew that men like Haniah would be in Babylon too, and that they would make it their business to try and deceive the captives there by telling them God would soon bring them back to Jerusalem.

His heart was often in Babylon, and he longed to warn the good figs not to listen to any one who said they would be there less than seventy years.

Jer. xxix. ().
Jer. xxix. ().

One day an opportunity came to send a letter. Zedekiah was sending *Elasah* and *Gemariah* with a request to Nebuchadnezzar. Now *Elasah* was a son of *Shaphan*, and *Gemariah* was probably Jeremiah's brother.

The Letter to the Good Figs

Zedekiah was clever enough to know if these two men went on his errand (both of them recommending Jeremiah's policy of submission), that Nebuchadnezzar would be the more readily influenced by them. For of course Nebuchadnezzar knew all about Jeremiah's advice and warnings.

So Jeremiah sat down and wrote a letter to the captives.

With his heart full of Hananiah and his lies, he wrote, "Do not listen to the prophets who tell you not to settle down in your exile, but see to it that you build yourselves houses, and make gardens and plant fruit trees, and do all you can for the good of the land where God has put you. *Pray . . . for it, and in its peace shall ye have peace.* Babylon is to be your home for seventy years; but at the end of that time God will surely cause you *to return to this place.* Not one day sooner will you come, whatever any one tells you."

Jer. xxix.
().

Jer. xxix.
().

The Letter to the Good Figs

Jeremiah finished the letter, dated it from Jerusalem, and addressed it to the good figs. Off it went to Babylon.

We may be sure the very first person who read that letter was Prince Daniel. About twelve years had passed since he had left Jerusalem. What a welcome he would give his two old friends, and what questions and messages he would send back to Jeremiah! Daniel's joy in the letter was not shared by all the captives.

Jer. xxix.
().

Shemaiah, a person with a strong likeness to Hananiah, received it in great indignation. Here was he telling the people not to content themselves in their exile, as they were going back directly, now Jeremiah dares to write a letter and tell them exactly the opposite. Well, he could write letters as well as Jeremiah, so down he sat and addressed an epistle to the High Priest for *all the people that are at Jerusalem*.

Jer. xxix.
().

His letter said, "What is the good of you

The Letter to the Good Figs

being High Priest, Zephaniah, if you leave every *mad* prophet at large? It is your business to put such people *in prison and in the stocks*. Jer. xxix. ().

"Do you know that Jeremiah of Anathoth has *sent unto us* a crazy letter, saying as we are to stay in Babylon seventy years, we are to build houses and plant gardens here? Now, *why* do you allow him to say these things? It will have a bad effect on the people. They will lose all interest in Jerusalem, and we shall never stir them up to try and get back at all." Jer. xxix. ().

Shemaiah sealed the letter with joy, thinking he was sealing Jeremiah's lips for ever, and Gemariah carried it back to Jerusalem.

The High Priest received the letter in due course, but the people for whom it was written never even heard its contents, for he took it straight off to Jeremiah, and instead of putting him in prison, *read this letter* in his ears. Jer. xxix. ().

The Letter to the Good Figs

It did not take long for Jeremiah to write his answer to Shemaiah, neither was there any uncertainty as to its meaning. It ran like this—"Thus saith the Lord, *I will punish Shemaiah*; he and all his family shall die before the seventy years are over, and not a child or grandchild of his shall ever come back to Jerusalem again."

Jer. xxix.
().

Jer. xxix.
().

Shemaiah had become one of the *vile figs*, worthless and only fit to be thrown away.

Ezekiel. A very good Fig

ALTHOUGH there were men who tried to teach what was wrong in Babylon, God did not leave *the Captives* without a preacher of Righteousness.

Ezek. i.
().

Ezekiel was a man after God's own heart, and in order that he should learn and have time to study the Bible, God inclined King Nebuchadnezzar to treat him well, and give him a house of his own on the banks of *the river*.

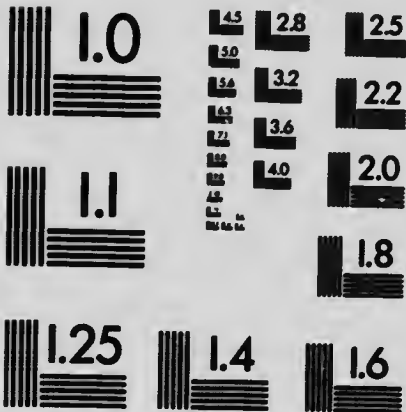
Ezek. i.
().

Daniel may have asked this favour; perhaps it was one of the things he prayed for three times a day.

After Ezekiel had been five years in his



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Ezekiel. A very good Fig

riverside house, God spoke to him, just like He did to Jeremiah, and told him he was to go and preach to the Captives.

Ezek. iii.
().

Ezekiel must often have listened to Jeremiah, and have seen object-lessons in Jerusalem ; he was to teach the Captives in the same way.

Ezek. iv.
().

Ezek. iv.
().

One of the first things God wanted them to hear about was the coming siege of Jerusalem. Surely if the horrors of that time were shown them, their hearts would feel a spark of gratitude at being taken away before it came. It was no use telling them of it. Jeremiah had done that, and they did not listen. So Ezekiel was made to get a large flat *tile* or clay tablet, and draw a picture on it.

The picture was to be of *Jerusalem*—Jerusalem besieged. This was easy to Ezekiel, for plans, measurements and buildings were his delight. So he made a splendid picture of the city, with the Temple in the

Ezekiel. A very good Fig

middle and the wall around. You could see the forts of the enemy outside, and the earth mounds, and Nebuchadnezzar's *battering rams* quite clearly, and then their *camp* beyond.

Ezek. iv.
().

After he had made the clay picture, he was to act the object-lesson of the siege, and make believe he was a prisoner inside Jerusalem.

Accordingly, during four hundred and thirty nights Ezekiel lay on the ground beside his picture, and through four hundred and thirty days he eat bread and drank water in small measured portions, just like the people really had to six years later in the actual siege.

Not a child could have failed to understand the Picture sermon on Gratitude for Deliverance.

And this was only one of many such lessons.

Another day Ezekiel was told to shave off all his hair with a *barber's razor* and

Ezek. v.
().

Ezekiel. A very good Fig

weigh it and divide it. Part he was to burn, part cut up with a knife, part throw away, and a very little part was to be carefully tied up in a corner of his dress.

All of which was to show what would happen to the people left in Jerusalem. Some would die, some be killed, some be scattered, and a few taken special care of.

Still another object-lesson was given to the Captives concerning their fellow-countrymen, but they were very slow to learn, only took in *here a little and there a little*, and had to be taught *line upon line* over and over, like little children.

So Ezekiel was sent to act house-moving. In broad daylight, in *sight* of every one, he was told to make preparations for going a journey, and to bring out all his belongings ready for *removing*. When this was done, as darkness began to fall, he was to *dig* a hole in the wall of his house. Secretly and hurriedly he must do this, as a man hiding

Ezekiel. A very good Fig

for his life. Then *in the twilight*, with Ezek. xii.
covered face and laden shoulders, he was to ().
creep through the hole he had made, and
escape away.

All this Ezekiel *did*, and the Captives Ezek. xii.
watched in wonder, and said " *What doest thou ?* " Ezek. xii.
().

Ezekiel could not tell them at once, for
he did not know himself what it all meant,
until the next *morning*, when God ex- Ezek. xii.
plained it all. ().

The object-lesson concerned Zedekiah.
Just as Ezekiel had done, so should Zede-
kiah do. A night was coming when he
should dig a hole in a wall, and secretly
steal away by it; moreover, to disguise his
Royalty, his face should be covered, and a
burden be upon his *shoulder* like any ordin- Ezek. xii.
ary person. ().

Yet in spite of the secrecy, in spite of
the darkness, in spite of the disguise, Zede-
kiah would be caught and brought to

Ezekiel. A very good Fig

Babylon ; and then God told Ezekiel something very puzzling : "Zedekiah shall not see Babylon, though he shall die there."

Ezekiel did not say "How?" like Habakkuk would have done. He went straight out to the Captives and told them all God had told him. No doubt they said "How?" and added, "*We are wise*, and do not believe what we cannot understand."

Jer. viii.
().

Was Jeremiah Wrong after all ?

SIX years later the real siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar began in earnest.

Zedekiah, being a man of impulses, led one day by a sudden idea, *sent* to Jeremiah, Jer. xxi. (). asking him to pray that God would by some *wondrous* miracle dispatch the Fierce Foe Jer. xxi. () out of the country.

Jeremiah knew what answer Zedekiah would get. Nevertheless he prayed.

The King did not like getting the same message over and over again. This time he was told in the plainest words imaginable that Nebuchadnezzar would enter the city,

Was Jeremiah Wrong after all?

Jer. xxi.
().

and he should find no mercy or pity at his enemy's hands. There was only one way of escape for king and people. *The way of life* was to surrender at once. *The way of death* was to remain in the city.

Sometimes Zedekiah wished to choose the way of life, but most times he preferred his own way.

Jer. xxxvii.
().

Still, Jeremiah never ceased to implore Zedekiah to submit to Nebuchadnezzar's yoke, *but neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land* took any notice of what he said.

Ezek. xvii.
().

Instead they sent secret *ambassadors* down to Egypt to ask Pharaoh-Hophra to help them, which Zedekiah had faithfully promised he would not do when Nebuchadnezzar had made him King. Zedekiah's promises did not count for more than his principles.

Great hopes were raised in the threatened city when news came that Egypt had risen

Was Jeremiah Wrong after all?

to the occasion. *Pharaoh's Army* was on its way to their help. Jer. xxxvii. ().

"Well, Jeremiah," asked the King, "what do you say to this? Things look better, surely you believe that God is going to help us now?" Jeremiah must have felt perplexed.

But God looked back to the day when Zedekiah had sworn to Nebuchadnezzar, and had *given his hand* in token of his promise Ezek. xvii. never to seek help or horses from Egypt. ().

Shall he prosper? Shall he escape that doeth such things? "No," said the Lord, Ezek. xvii. ().

"Pharaoh's army which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt, into their own land, and the Fierce Foe shall take Jerusalem." Jer. xxxvii. ().

Jeremiah repeated all this to the King.

For a moment Zedekiah's face fell; but he looked out of the window at his soldiers, and he thought of the great army on its way, and he made up his mind he would not be frightened into surrender by the mad prophet.

Was Jeremiah Wrong after all?

And then one of Jeremiah's greatest trials came to pass.

After all he had said to the contrary, the very thing Zedekiah was looking for did happen. Hophra did come. Nebuchadnezzar
Jer. xxxvii. retreated from Jerusalem *for fear of Pharaoh's*
(). *Army.*

What could Jeremiah say now? Still
Jer. xxxvii. only the same old warning, "*Deceive not your-*
(). *selves; Nebuchadnezzar shall return and*
Jer. xxxvii. *burn this city with fire.*"
().

Jeers met Jeremiah's declaration, and the city settled down again as if no judgment overshadowed it.

In Prison

SORE at heart, wearied by Satan's suggestions, discouraged beyond words, longing for the country, Jeremiah walked down the narrow streets towards *the Gate of Benjamin*. Jer. xxxvii. ().

Perhaps he meant to wander in the fields and speak to God, away from the taunts and jeers. He wanted to be alone, *to separate himself*, besides taking the opportunity to get in provisions. Jer. xxxvii. ().

In the gateway, on duty, was Captain *Irijah*, the grandson of Hananiah. The prophet, suspecting nothing, walked slowly towards the gate. Jer. xxxvii. ().

A rough hand on his shoulder roused him, as he stepped beneath the archway.

In Prison

"You are caught now, Jeremiah," said the young Captain, "caught slipping away to the enemy, you traitor!"

Jer. xxxvii.
(). "It is false," called out Jeremiah hotly.
"No such thing."

All his protestations, all his explanations
Jer. xxxvii.
(). were useless. The Captain *hearkened not* to any. He only hurried his prisoner back to judgment, and Jeremiah, without a friend to stand by him, was cruelly beaten and
Jer. xxxvii.
(). cast into *prison*.

Evil firs Jeremiah had called the people who were left. He was now bitterly proving it for himself.

The King could have interfered, but Zedekiah hated to take any responsibility. Besides, Jeremiah was down just then. Zedekiah liked to side with those who were
Jer. xxxviii.
(). on top. So when the Princes said "*We beseech thee let this man be put to death,*" he
Jer. xxxviii.
(). weakly answered, "*He is in your hand. You do what you like.*"

In Prison

The Princes did not wait for their changeable King to change his mind, but hastened their victim off to a dreadful *dungeon*. The Jer. xxxviii. *dungeon* was an old well in *the court of the* (). *prison*, deep, dark and damp. Hurriedly, ropes were fetched and put round the helpless prophet, and Jeremiah found himself being lowered into the well *with cords*. There was *no water* at the bottom, but what was almost worse, thick black mud.

Jeremiah sank in the *mire*, and his heart sank within him. He grew hungry. A *stone* rattled down at his request for food. Lam. iii. He was ready to die with thirst. A flood (). of water was poured over his *head*. He met Lam. iii. it with a bitter *cry*. And the cry reached (). Lam. iii. up from the depths of *the low dungeon*, to (). Lam. iii. the very heights of Heaven. God heard his (). voice, and drew near at his call, saying, "*Fear not*"; and Jeremiah forgot his misery Lam. iii. and the mud and the darkness, and began to (). count his blessings.

In Prison

Jer. xxxviii.
().

Now in *the King's house* there was at this time a black servant called Ebed-Melech. Often and often he had listened to Jeremiah's warnings. As he heard, he shivered and shook at the very thought of the Boiling Caldron and its scalding flood. Ebed-Melech did not stop his ears and say, "I do not believe"; he was sure God's words would come true. Moreover, he learnt although the Ethiopian can no more change his nature than *his skin*, God would give him *a new heart and a new spirit*, and put him among His children, and black Ebed put his whole trust in God's Word. Ebed-Melech, with his black face and white heart, thanked God every day for sending Jeremiah with the good tidings, and he could hardly believe his ears when he *heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon*.

Jer. xiii.
().
Ezek.
xxxvi. ().

Jer. xxxviii.
().

The King was out when Ebed-Melech learnt his friend's fate. Hot with indignation, he hastened to find Zedekiah, and the

In Prison

words poured out of his thick lips, one on top of the other. Jeremiah was dying and every moment was important. He must impress the weak King while he had him alone.

So just as Zedekiah had previously been influenced by the men who wished to imprison the prophet, again he was swayed like a wind-tossed leaf by the man who longed to release him.

"Take *thirty men*, Ebed-Melech, and get Jer. xxxviii. Jeremiah out of the dungeon," whispered (). the King hoarsely, looking round with shifty eyes.

Before he could recall his words, the black servant was off collecting his rescuing party. The thirty men were speedily commandeered, and the King's lumber-rooms were invaded forthwith in search of old clothes and *old rotten rags*.

Jeremiah, in the mire, was surprised in Jer. xxxviii. the middle of his complex thoughts by two ().

In Prison

bundles of disreputable garments swinging down the well sides. Looking up, he saw a pair of black hands holding the cords which bound them. Then a black face appeared over the edge. "Jeremiah," called such an anxious voice, "are you still alive? Then *Jer. xxxviii. (). put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords so that we may pull you up.*"

Jeremiah did so. The signal was given, the thirty men braced themselves, pulled hard, and the next moment the dungeon and its horrors were left behind, and the prophet was out of the *horrible pit, out of the miry clay.* *Ps. xl. ().*

Jeremiah was glad to be out in the sunshine, glad to feel the warm grasp of his black friend's hand, but he was glad too that he ever was put in the pit, for there he learnt some lessons he could never have learnt anywhere else. If Jeremiah came across a child—and a black man too, perhaps—afraid of

In Prison

being alone in the dark, he could comfort that one with the comfort wherewith he himself was *comforted of God*.

2 Cor. i.
().

After this Jeremiah was kept a prisoner, but he was allowed to walk about and have visitors *in the court of the prison*.

Jer. xxxviii.
().

The next time Ebed-Melech came into the court, he found that God had been talking to Jeremiah about him.

Probably nobody in the world had any idea that Ebed-Melech lived in terror of being taken prisoner by the King of Babylon, or that his dreams at night were of swords and spears and horrible tortures. God knew. This is why He sent him a special message from Heaven, and the message was this.

"Tell Ebed-Melech, *Thus saith the Lord . . .* Jer. xxxix.
thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men Jer. xxxix.
of whom thou art afraid, for I will surely ().
deliver thee . . . because thou hast put thy trust
in Me."

In Prison

That promise ought to have stopped all the black man's nightmares, all his shiverings and shakings, all his doubts and fears. But grown-ups are very apt to worry their minds about what may happen, even after God has faithfully promised to take care of them and never leave them.

Ebed-Melech was a grown-up.

The Secret Interview

IT was not long before Nebuchadnezzar, who, you remember, had withdrawn his army to meet that of Pharaoh-Hophra's, was back again besieging the city. Very glad had the people been for the short respite and the chance to get outside for fresh provisions. No doubt this enabled them to hold out for as long as eighteen months.

Zedekiah's day of triumph had been a short one. He was again worried beyond words. He lay down, but no sleep came to his distracted brain. "Shall I surrender?" he asked himself, tossing to the right;

The Secret Interview

"Shall I hold out?" he queried, turning to the left. And he tossed and he turned, he wondered and he supposed, until he could stand it no longer, and he arose and dispatched a messenger to fetch Jeremiah

Jer. xxxvii. *secretly*.
().

Jeremiah on his prison-floor, with his aching bones and injured head, slept the sleep of a clear conscience.

The King's servant hastily and silently stole into the prison court. All was quiet in the moonlight. Jeremiah was in the land of happy dreams.

"Awake!" said the servant under his breath. "You must come at once to the Red House. The King is uneasy, he cannot rest; he wishes to talk matters over with you."

The prophet groped about for his sandals, and followed his guide noiselessly into the Temple Court and through the door at the end that led into the palace.

The Secret Interview

"Quietly," whispered the servant, and silently they came into the room where the King awaited them. His limbs trembled, and his voice shook likewise as he asked hoarsely, "*Is there any fresh message from the Lord, Jeremiah?*" Jer. xxxvii. ()

"*There is,*" answered Jeremiah.

Zedekiah started at the sound of his voice, and glanced furtively around the room, as though an armed Nebuchadnezzar of fierce countenance might lurk in every shadow.

"Not quite so loud, Jeremiah. I do not want any one to know of this interview. Now tell me all, *hide nothing from me.*" Jer. xxxviii. ()

"Yes," said Jeremiah, "and when I tell you the truth, you will *surely put me to death.*" Jer. xxxviii. ()

"I promise," answered Zedekiah, "that *I will not.*" Jer. xxxviii. ()

"Then," said Jeremiah plainly, "God says again, just as He has time after time, if

The Secret Interview

Jer. xxxviii. (). only you will surrender to Nebuchadnezzar your *soul shall live*, and Jerusalem shall not be burnt, and none of your family shall be killed."

Zedekiah looked at the ground.

Jer. xxxviii. (). "But," went on Jeremiah, "if you will not surrender, then Jerusalem will fall into the hands of the enemy, and you will *not escape*."

Jer. xxxviii. (). The King lifted his shifty eyes. "I cannot make up my mind to do it, Jeremiah," he said abjectly. "*I am afraid* to. If I did, Jeremiah," he whined, "those Jews who have taken your advice, and have gone over to the enemy already, would simply *mock me*, and might even kill me. Oh no, I cannot do it."

Jer. xxxviii. (). Then very earnestly and patiently Jeremiah implored the wavering King to *obey* God's Voice, and all over again he set before him the right path with its blessing, and the wrong with its misery, and the King chose

The Secret Interview

and re-chose, and decided and undecided, until a fancied footfall frightened him into ending the interview. "And look," he said, with his eternal caution, "if it should come out *that I have talked* with you, and you are questioned by the Princes, you need only tell them that you asked me not to put you back in the dungeon. Do not say any more." Jer. xxxviii. ().

Jeremiah had asked this, so the next day he could say truthfully what the King wished. Royalty can do little in secret, and of course the King's midnight interview was known all over the palace. And all came out that was said that night, when Zedekiah lost his last chance of saving his life.

What Jeremiah bought in Prison

GOD had often told Jeremiah the Captives in Babylon should come back to their own land at the end of seventy years. But telling had not impressed him sufficiently. He had to learn it by an object-lesson.

Now as each day went by, affairs in Jerusalem looked blacker. Supplies diminished, while disease increased. The dreaded enemy had completely enclosed them with a wall of earth as high as the stone wall of the city. On top of these earthen *mounts* all the latest Babylonian artillery was hoisted, ready to pour down stones and arrows upon the helpless, starving Jews.

Jer. xxxii.
().
See margin
ver. 24.

What Jeremiah bought in Prison

Nothing but a miracle could prevent Nebuchadnezzar coming into the city *to take* Jer. xxxii. ().
it. Well did Jeremiah know that no miracle would come. He did not even pray that it might, for God had said, "*Pray not thou for* Jer. vii. () *this people any more.*" It was too late.

Jeremiah was still *shut up* in the court Jer. xxxii. () of the prison, because he persisted in what he had said all along, that Zedekiah would join the Captives in Babylon, and Jerusalem would be burnt. Zedekiah preferred to listen to the men who told him pleasant lies, than to the man who told him unpleasant truth, so he kept Jeremiah a prisoner, on one *piece of bread* a day. Jer. xxxvii. ().

This, then, was the state of affairs when God came and spoke to him in prison, and told him to expect a visitor. Jeremiah's cousin Hanameel was coming to ask him to buy a field in Anathoth.

It was a curious errand for Hanameel to set out on at such a time, and Jeremiah

What Jeremiah bought in Prison

was terribly puzzled when God said to him,
Jer. xxxii. "*Buy . . . the field.*"
().

And as he thought upon it all, and pictured the conquering enemy at that very moment encamped upon the field in Anathoth he was told to purchase, steps came nearer and nearer to the prison door, and lo and behold! *Hanameel*¹ himself arrived.

Jer. xxxii. "It is about my field, Jeremiah," he
(). began; "buy it, I pray thee; *buy it for thyself.*"

Then Jeremiah *knew* without a doubt what he was meant to do, and he did not say "Why?" for that was seldom his way, but *bought the field* forthwith for *seventeen shekels of silver*.
Jer. xxxii.
().

Now making a purchase in the East is a lengthy affair. Papers or "deeds" had to be drawn up, witnesses found, and the price fixed. Baruch the Scribe was fetched to write the agreement, and you may be sure

¹ Hanameel was probably Huldah's son.

What Jeremiah bought in Prison

long before that deed was made out, the news of Jeremiah's extraordinary purchase was the talk of the town. What would he do next? To think, after all his gloomy talk about defeat and captivity, that he should buy a field in the condemned city, just as if nothing was going to happen. If he had wished to buy some property in Babylon, no one would have been surprised.

Meantime Baruch wrote out two copies of the *purchase* deeds. Jeremiah signed Jer. xxxii. them, and the witnesses signed them. Then (). one was *sealed* up securely. No one but the Jer. xxxii. owner might break that seal. The other (). paper was left *open*, so that at any time Jer. xxxii. Jeremiah could prove, by showing it, that (). the field was his own.

Then both the documents were safely stored away in an *earthen vessel*, and put in Jer. xxxii. the place where legal documents were kept. ().

So Jeremiah bought his cousin's field *according to the law and custom*. The Jer. xxxii.

What Jeremiah bought in Prison

witnesses and the little crowd that had collected strolled away, and Jeremiah was left alone. And he was just as perplexed as ever he could be.

Jer. xxxii. (). "O Lord God," he *prayed*, "all that Thou hast spoken has come to pass, we are in the hand of the enemy now ; *and, behold, Thou seest it, and Thou hast said unto me, O Lord God, Buy thee the field for money and take witnesses ; for the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans.*"

Jer. xxxii. (). Then God spoke to his much-tried servant, and made everything clear. "I am the God of all," He said ; "*is there any thing too hard for Me ?*"

Jer. xxxii. (). Jeremiah could answer that question, for had he not just said the same, "*There is nothing too hard for Thee ?*"

Jer. xxxii. (). And then God told him He had made him buy the field to teach His People how sure it was they were to come back from Babylon. "*I will bring them again unto this*"

What Jeremiah bought in Prison

*place, and I will cause them to dwell safely . . .
and fields shall be bought in this land . . . Jer. xxxii.
for I will cause their Captivity to return, saith ().
the Lord." Jer. xxxii.
().*

Jeremiah knew that day was years and years off, but by faith he saw it and was glad.

In the Dark

THE siege wore on, with misery indescribable. Little children, too young to understand, implored their parents to give them bread. They cried to their mothers, "*Where is corn and wine?*" But their mothers could not help them, and the children died *in the streets*.

Every place was full of dead and dying, *the young and the old* lying together on the ground, while those who died of *hunger* envied the shorter sufferings of those who died by the sword, for *the famine was sore in the city*.

For eighteen months Zedekiah held out. Then on the tenth day of *the tenth month*, at dead of *night*, the dreaded Foe entered Jerusalem.



The siege wore on, with misery indescribable. Children implored their parents to give them bread. Every place was full of dead and dying.

In the Dark

Away in the land of captivity, on this very *same day*, God told Ezekiel that Jerusalem had fallen, and he was to write down *the name of the day*, and the date, then and there. So did Ezekiel by faith, although no actual news of the calamity could possibly come for weeks. Ezek. xxiv. ().

How Ezekiel and Daniel must have wept together on that day as they pictured Nebuchadnezzar triumphantly marching with torches and shouting, taking possession of the holy city.

So the Boiling Caldron overturned at last. Zedekiah saw its destroying flood pouring through the condemned city, yet he still refused to give up hope.

Before the conquering army could reach the palace, he and his soldiers crept out in the darkness, through the palace *garden*, into a secret passage (doubtless he had prepared it for such an emergency) which led down to the city wall. Jer. xxxix. ().

In the Dark

So far their escape was easy. The danger began at the end of the passage. Trusting to the darkness, or to the carelessness of the sentries, the fugitives made a dash for the

Jer. xxxix. *Gate.*
().

Zedekiah, like most feeble minds, could screw his courage up to foolhardy exploits; besides, he knew this was his only chance, which accounts for his unwonted decision. But alas for his hopes! The Foe was on the alert. The runaways were seen, the signal was given. In a short time an army was

Jer. xxxix. pursuing the hapless King. Out *in the*
(). *plains of Jericho*, forsaken by his soldiers, Zedekiah was overtaken, and marched like an ordinary prisoner, with his sons, to

Jer. xxxix. Nebuchadnezzar's camp *in Riblah*. On that
(). dreadful journey, Zedekiah wished he had listened to Jeremiah's advice. All the stories he had heard of Babylonian cruelty surged through his mind, as each step brought him nearer to his fate.

In the Dark

Nebuchadnezzar, the King of *Fierce* Deut. xxviii. ().
countenance, sat in *judgment* on the prisoners Jer. xxxix. ().
of war. His face was fierce indeed that day,
for Zedekiah's rebellion and persistence had
cost him greatly.

The unfortunate King shrank before that
cruel eye. He never had been one to look a
man straight in the face.

"Look up!" cried Nebuchadnezzar.

Zedekiah looked up, and saw the most
terrible sight he had ever seen. His ears
heard the saddest cry they had ever heard.
It was the dying cry of his own sons, put to
death *before his eyes*.

Jer. lii. ().

And all the remainder of his life that cry
rang in his ears, and that cruel sight haunted
his brain. It was the last thing he ever saw
on earth, for as he covered his face with his
hands he, too, was seized and thrown to the
ground, and by Nebuchadnezzar's orders his
eyes were *put out*.

Jer. lii. ().

The rest of his story is this. His hands

In the Dark

Jer. lli. (). were bound in *chains*, he was marched to Babylon, and there he was left in prison, with his blindness and regrets, until *the day of his death*.

So he came to Babylon as God had said, though he never did see it with his eyes.

Jeremiah's Choice

JEREMIAH was out of all the dreadful sights of those terrible days, shut up still in his *prison*.

Before long a deputation of Babylonian *Princes* found him out, and went to call on him there. Jer. xxxix. ().

A special message came through the Chief Captain, from Nebuchadnezzar himself, about Jeremiah. In all this strenuous time the Fierce King had remembered the prophet. No doubt Daniel's last word to his monarch as he set out for Jerusalem was to implore him to befriend Jeremiah.

Anyway, Nebuchadnezzar ordered that the man who had always urged the people to submit should be *well* cared for, and allowed to go wherever he liked. And Jer. xxxix. ().

Jeremiah's Choice

though we read that by some mistake, after all, Jeremiah was placed among the captives, with manacles on his hands, the Chief Captain, Nebuzar-adan, soon found it out, took the chains off, and had a kind talk with him about his future, asked him to come to Babylon, gave him food and money, Jer.xl.() and *let him go*.

If Jeremiah had been obliged to choose what he liked best, no doubt he would have been tempted to choose to end his days with the good figs in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar Jer.xl.() had promised to *look well* after him if he did. Many dear friends would welcome him. And there was Daniel.

If he stayed behind, there would be no one but the poorest of the peasants left, and they were so ignorant and superstitious. It would not be easy to go on preaching to them still after forty years of reproach and indifference. But Jeremiah did not choose what was easiest. He knew that God

Jeremiah's Choice

wanted him to stay at his post, and he stayed.

Meantime, a Governor was chosen to rule over the few *poor* people still left in the land. *Gedaliah*, Shaphan's grandson, was the man picked out by Nebuchadnezzar for this, and a splendid choice it was. Jer. xl. ().

Gedaliah was glad, indeed, to welcome Jeremiah to his *home*, and in the terrible days that came soon after, these two men after God's own heart, must have found comfort in being together. Morning by morning perhaps they walked to the House of God in each other's company, until the never-to-be-forgotten day when Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers surged through the length and breadth of the holy city, and set fire to every building. Jer. xxxix. ().

As Jeremiah watched the beautiful Temple he loved so dearly, perish in the flames, his grief overwhelmed him.

"What shall I do? What can I say?"

Jeremiah's Choice

he cried. "Can these charred and blackened ruins really be the city that the world has called '*The perfection of beauty*'? No one would have *believed* that the enemy would enter the gates of Jerusalem. Oh, why did my people never seek help from God, why were their eyes ever turned away from Him to *a nation that could not save*? For these things I weep. My sorrow is greater than I can bear, while *the Comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me.*"

So wept the broken-hearted preacher, forgetting everything but the flames and the dreadful punishment.

But The Comforter was near all the time, and soon He brought back to Jeremiah's mind the remembrance of God's *faithfulness*. "*Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion . . . for He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men,*" said Jeremiah, drying his tears. "Jerusalem has departed, but *Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever.*"

Lam. ii.
().

Lam. iv.
().

Lam. ii.
().

Lam. i.
().

Lam. iii.
().

Lam. iii.
().

Lam. iii.
().

Lam. v.
().

Thinketh no Evil

GEDALIAH was a man greatly beloved. No one dared backbite or abuse his neighbour in Gedaliah's hearing, for Gedaliah never listened to slander, and tried hard to extract the "chip" out of his *own eye*, and left the other men's "beams" alone. Matt. vii. ()

Those people who esteem others *better than themselves* are always the most beloved. And Phil. ii. ()
Jews who had taken refuge in other *countries* Jer. xl. ()
hearing of Gedaliah's promotion, gradually
came back again *to the land of Judah*. Jer. xl. ()

It was summer-time, and the sun shone, and the fruit ripened, and there was plenty to do in the fields and vineyards.

"*Gather the fruit*," said the kindly Jer. xl. ()

Thinketh no Evil

Jer. xli.
(). Governor, "and serve and obey the King of Babylon, *and it shall be well with you.*"

With Gedaliah to rule, and Jeremiah to teach, prospects began to look peaceful for those who could make the best of things. Then, just when all looked quiet, a thunderbolt fell. A fresh sorrow came upon the people who would not listen—all through the jealousy of one man.

Jer. xli.
(). Now, amongst the refugees in the land of the Ammonites was a *Royal* Prince, Ishmael by name. Ishmael had been glad enough to run away from Jerusalem when captivity or death threatened him, and no doubt had made himself very useful to *the King of the Ammonites*, who thought no end of the clever young man. All Ishmael's life he had been thought clever, and, alas, he had such a good opinion of himself, that he could not bear any one to be considered better or greater than he. Jealousy cruel as death lived in Ishmael's heart, and ruled

Thinketh no Evil

him with a rod of iron. It was no joy to him to hear of Ahikam's lovable son being made ruler of the land. No, his one thought was, "I ought to be the Governor, not he. I am a Prince, and he is a nobody."

The King of the Ammonites saw the cloud on Ishmael's brow, and before long he had fathomed its cause. He saw, too, that the jealousy of Ishmael might be used for his own ends, so he patted the sulky Prince on the back, and encouraged him in his evil thoughts, until Ishmael listened to the King of the Ammonites, and made up his mind to murder the man who was greater than he.

One morning when the plans were all laid, he and ten men set out for Mizpah to find an opportunity to do the shameful deed. Hardly ever has a conspiracy been carried through without some one letting the secret out. Whether Ishmael talked too loud in Mizpah, or whether one of the ten had pity on the victim, we are not told, only we know

Thinketh no Evil

Jer. xl.
().

that in some way or other, *Johanan*, a plucky young soldier, heard of the horrible treachery, and went with haste to warn Gedaliah. His friends accompanied him.

Jer. xl.
().

"Do you *know*, Gedaliah, that Prince Ishmael has come?" asked *Johanan*.

Yes, Gedaliah had already seen him, had welcomed him back to his old country, advised him to serve the King of Babylon, and ended up the interview by inviting him to dinner.

Johanan looked in horror from one face to another. "How dreadful," he said, "for Ishmael has come here on purpose to kill you."

Poor *Johanan* could hardly speak for horror at the thought of what he was saying, and he looked up at the Governor, expecting to see him white with terror.

But Gedaliah smiled peacefully. "Have you not learnt that we cannot believe half we hear, *Johanan*? We must not think so badly of Ishmael as all that."

Thinketh no Evil

And whatever Johanan and his friends could say, went in at one ear and out of the other; *Gedaliah . . . believed them not.* Johana^{Jer. xl.} and his friends went away at last in despair, (). and they spoke together of the horrible deed that was threatened, and of the beautiful character of their beloved Gedaliah. "What will happen to us if he is killed," they moaned, "just, too, as *all the Jews* are^{Jer. xl.} coming back, and everything looks brighter () for us?"

Johanan could not bear it. "It shall not be done," he said, clenching his hands. And he slipped away unnoticed from the consultation. Alone he stole into the Governor's presence. "Look, Gedaliah," he pleaded with his whole soul in his voice. "It really is true, you shall believe it. Ishmael is determined to kill you, and you must *let me go* and kill him. No one need^{Jer. xl.} ever know I did it. Say the word and let () me go."

Thinketh no Evil

Gedaliah's eyes shone with indignation as he looked on Johanan.

Jer. xl.
().

"*Thou shalt not do this thing,*" he said, "*for thou speakest falsely of Ishmael.*"

You might as well have tried to turn a worm into a canary, as make Gedaliah think evil of his worst enemy.

So Ishmael the jealous Prince went to dinner after all with the Saint, who believed him to be all that he seemed.

Johanan did not go.

At the appointed hour the guests arrived. The unsuspecting Governor welcomed them without a pang. Talking pleasantly, they sat and ate *together*.

Jer. xli.
().

Suddenly, at a planned signal, Ishmael rose to his feet, his *ten men* arose also, and not a man came away from that feast except Ishmael and the ten murderers.

Jer. xli.
().

"Dead men tell no tales," said Ishmael; "do not let one escape to tell on us."

When it was quite dark, the dead body

Thinketh no Evil

of Gedaliah and those who died with him were dragged outside the house to a deep *pit*. No one saw, *no man knew*. The whole of the next day went by. Nothing happened. Ishmael settled himself in the Governor's quarters, and waited. On the *second day*, Ishmael looked out of the window. A long, sorrowful procession met his view. Eighty men with torn garments and bowed heads were bringing *offerings and incense* to the House of God in Mizpah, bemoaning with bitter wails the fate of their glorious Temple. Jer. xli. ()

In a moment Ishmael decided what to do. Pulling as long a face as he knew how, he, too, covered his head, and swaying as if in grief, he went out to meet the mournful procession, pretending to weep *all along as he went*. Jer. xli. ()

"Come," he said, with a hypocritical sniff, "*Come to Gedaliah.*" And turning, he led the procession on to the middle of the

Thinketh no Evil

Jer. xli.
().
Jer. xli.
().

city to the field at the back of Gedaliah's house. Then suddenly throwing off his mourning, he and his ten men fell on the unsuspecting eighty and *slew them* one by one—all, at least, save *ten*—and he cast their dead bodies into the pit where Gedaliah's had already lain for two days.

And that is how they came to Gedaliah. And in their death they were not divided.

Ishmael did not stop at this, he made prisoners of all the people that remained in Mizpah, and started to take them over to his friend the King of the Ammonites. What price had been put on Gedaliah's head, or what Ishmael expected to receive for all his deeds, we are not told. We may be sure that all the pieces of silver in the world would never give him a moment's satisfaction. So Ishmael, with his sin and his captives, *departed* for the land of the Ammonites.

Jer. xli.
().

But his plans for the return journey were somewhat altered.

Thinketh no Evil

Johanan knew nothing of the fresh calamity at the time; all had been accomplished so secretly and hastily. Neither did the news reach him till Ishmael had got several miles on his way. Then, without losing a moment, he gathered all his remaining forces together, and set forth in hot pursuit.

By the waters of *Gibeon*, the rescue party Jer. xli. overtook the captives. When the people who () were with Ishmael saw Johanan, *they were* Jer. xli. *glad*. They knew he had come to save them, () and with one accord, rushed to his protection.

Ishmael, without a moment's hesitation, took to his heels, and fled, and his *eight men* Jer. xli. who were with him ran back to the land of () the Ammonites, and none of them were ever heard of again.

No one pursued, yet Ishmael felt all the rest of the days of his life as if an enemy was behind him, *for the wicked flee when no man* Prov. xxviii. *pursueth*. ()

Was there Room in the Inn?

ALL the rescued men and women and children went back with Johanan to an inn near *Bethlehem*, on the Egyptian road. There was a wayside inn at Bethlehem, five hundred years later, where some Other Travellers came and found *no room*. For the dear sake of One of those Other Travellers, our hearts dwell on this *habitation of Chimham* with interest. Was there room in there for the King of Glory? For Him who waited outside the door, ready to save, just as He waits outside closed hearts to-day?

Jer. xli.
().

Luke ii.
().

Jer. xli.
().

Jer. xlii.
().

Jeremiah, still hopeful, still looking out for signs of repentance, came down to the inn. "*Pray for us, Jeremiah,*" said the people,

Was there Room in the Inn?

coming out to meet him. "Ask God to show us *the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do.*" Jer. xlii. ().

Gladly Jeremiah promised to ask God to direct their next move, and show them where to go.

"We will do whatever He tells us this time, whether we want to or not," they said glibly, with their faces and feet towards Egypt, and their minds made up to go there in any case.

For *ten days* God kept the "dissemblers" waiting for an answer. Then He told them to stay in their own land, and not go into Egypt. Jer. xlii. ().

And the men who just before had said, "*We will obey the voice of the Lord,*" at all costs, cried, "*No . . . we will go into the land of Egypt . . . and there will we dwell.*" Jer. xlii. ().

There was no room for the King of the Jews in the inn by Bethlehem on the road to Egypt either.

The Place where Two Ways Met

S^O Israel, consistent to their character, stood in the place where two ways met, and deliberately chose the forbidden road, and *came into the land of Egypt*, for they obeyed not the Voice of the Lord.

Jer. xliii.
().

Jeremiah, consistent to the last in his faithful obedience to his Heavenly Father, went with them.

And the God of Love, who never changes, spoke to them in Egypt with words tender and touching enough to melt any but hearts of stone.

Jer. ii.
().

"My people," He said, "*have forsaken Me*, and they are just like a foolish family

The Place where Two Ways Met

leaving a beautiful home by the side of a fountain, where cool, refreshing springing waters run day and night; leaving it just for the sake of *change* to go to a land Jer. ii. () where they must hew out cisterns in rock that cracks at every blow. Rain cisterns that leak, and *can hold no water*. A land Jer. ii. () where *the little ones* suffer and die of thirst, Jer. xiv. () through their fathers' disobedience.

"O My people, My special treasure, *what* Jer. ii. () *hast thou to do in the way of Egypt?* Why shouldst thou be drinking the muddy water of the Nile?

"Why are you outcasts from My land which flows with milk and honey? But *hast thou not procured this unto thyself* in Jer. ii. () *forsaking Me, the Fountain of Living Waters?* Jer. ii. () And thou sayest still, each one of you, 'It () is not my fault, *I am innocent.*' Jer. ii. ()

"Listen to My voice, My people. It is because thou dost not know, because thou dost not consider, because thou sayest per-

The Place where Two Ways Met

Jer. ii.
().

sistently '*I have not sinned,*' that I yet plead with thee to return again to Me.

Jer. iii.
().

Jer. iii.
().

"Though thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldst . . . wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, '*My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth*'?"

Written for Our Learning

EVEN to the very last, after all the deafness and deliberate disobedience, God still followed these foolish people with messages of love. Still Jeremiah pleaded with them to "return." Even "from this time" God was ready to forget and forgive, and supply all their need.

Our story began with love. It ends with love, and the best part of it all is that God's love is just the same to-day. He never changes. All these "Never-Old Stories" of long ago were written on purpose *for our learning*.

Each sermon and object-lesson Jeremiah

Rom. xv.
().

Written for Our Learning

gave is just as much for us as for those who actually heard them.

Everything God did for Jeremiah, He will do for all His servants still.

The patience and longsuffering of God, with the people who did not hear or care, only shows us how He is waiting to-day for us to begin to call Him our Father, and look to Him to guide our lives.

Let us ask for the Holy Spirit now to make us hear His voice, see His face, and teach us from this time to call Him

Rom. viii.
().

FATHER.

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