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## THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR R. C. REED, D. D., LL. D.,  
COLUMBIA, S. C.

The fifty-fourth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, met in the Central Church, Kansas City, Mo., May 21, 1914, and was dissolved at 3:30 P. M., Thursday, May 28th. This is the third Assembly in succession which has limited the span of its life to six working days. These precedents will probably have the force of law for the future. Time was when the Assembly had to rush its business toward the close, in order to dissolution by the end of the ninth day from date of organization. The volume of business has increased rather than diminished. The recent Assemblies have shortened the time not by covering less ground, but by increasing the speed. The liberty of speech has been abridged. It has come to pass that by the time a speaker gets fairly launched, the cry of "question," "question," warns the speaker that further effort to get a hearing for his views will be useless. Age and distinguished services do not secure immunity from such discourtesy. The Assembly is ceasing to be a deliberative body, and coming to be an organization merely for business routine.

Obviously, our Assemblies are inoculated with the speed-madness of the age. It could hardly be otherwise. The members, who compose the Assembly, are accustomed, by the use of the telephone, rapid transit, and other time-saving devices, to dispatch business at a rate that would have made a former generation dizzy. The speed at which we live is constantly increasing,

## THE SOCIAL MESSAGE OF MICAH.

BY THE REV. ANDREW W. BLACKWOOD.

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Micah was the prophet of the common people. He arose in the latter part of the eighth century before Christ, which is known to all as the golden age of prophecy. He seems to have spoken a trifle later than Amos and Hosea, and about the same time as Isaiah. Each of these men had his own message to society, and perhaps that of Micah is the least known to the modern world. Waiving critical questions, which are neither few nor small, let us translate this man's social message into modern speech.

The age of Micah in its smaller way was much like our own. A half century of peace had brought much of prosperity, but even the casual eye could see that there were storms ahead. To avert these storms, or to guide the people through them, Jehovah raised up two prophets, Isaiah and Micah. Let us look at them side by side. The major prophet was a man of the city, born in Jerusalem, probably in a home of wealth and refinement. The minor prophet, so styled because his extant writings are brief, was born in a village, in a lowly home, and probably he died as he had lived, a poor man.

The messages of these two men differ far. Isaiah was gifted with a wider outlook and a broader sympathy, so that he could scan the field of world politics; whereas Micah, equally inspired, confined his gaze largely to Judah and Israel. Isaiah could speak to his nation as a whole; whereas Micah felt most keenly the wrongs of his own class, the common folk. Isaiah, like Paul, addressed particularly the men of the city; whereas Micah, like his coming King, spoke much to men of the field. Isaiah was the orator, with wide sympathy, rich imagination and deep fervor; whereas Micah, even when he soared, went on a lower wing, and at times he became almost as rough as Amos appeared.

What social message has this lowly seer for his own people and for us?

The first chapter may be viewed as the introduction to the book. The prophet here seems to owe more than a trifle to that "grand arraignment" in the first chapter of Isaiah, but even when Micah borrows or quotes, he looks at sin from his own peculiar angle. After pouring out stinging words against Israel and Judah for the sins which shall speedily bring on doom, he voices his own grief that so harsh a message should ever be needed. Such is the ideal for the social prophet: plain teaching of sin and judgment, but always with groanings which cannot be uttered, and sometimes with tears which cannot be kept back.

The remainder of the book falls into three parts, each of which consists of two chapters. In the second and third chapters Micah gives his bill of particulars in support of his general indictment. The sin against which he set himself was that of oppression, and the first class against whom he turned was the unworthy rich. Like the Master himself, our friend had no quarrel with the worthy rich, but he knew the peril of wealth, and he saw that many who were subjected to that peril quickly succumbed. He insisted that too often the worst citizens were not the wretched poor, who had everything to drag them down, but the idle rich, who had everything which is supposed to lift men up. Doubtless there were then, as now, bad men among the poor, but the proportion appears to have been greater among the rich.

What was the specific crime of these idle rich? Let us not call it a crime, for it seems not to have been counted an offense against the laws of man; let us rather brand it with that deeper stigma—sin. Some social ills are crimes; all are sins. The sin of these idle rich was the sin of oppression. They oppressed the common people, who alone were weak enough to submit to oppression. Prosperity, due in large measure to long years of peace under Uzziah, had brought increase of trade, and this increase had led to swollen fortunes. The newly rich, then as now, became infatuated with their sudden fortune, and became greedy for still more gain. There appears to have been no jubilee to restore the land to its rightful owners, and so the source of

national wealth, the soil, appears to have been drifting faster and faster into the hands which needed it least and would manage it worst. Such was a typical sin of the idle rich.

The prophet was not short-sighted enough to suppose that these unworthy rich were alone in their sin. He saw that they could do little or nothing if they were not aided or at least countenanced by the rulers, whom God had ordained to safeguard the rights of the common people. Where the social prophet saw evil in high places, he exposed it to the fire. Like his more famous contemporary, he made no charge against King Hezekiah, who seems to have been almost helpless in the hands of unscrupulous subordinates. These nobles, weakened by daily indulgence in many vices, amenable to bribes and even soliciting them, had neither the power nor the desire to curb the growing rapacity of the idle rich.

Micah compared such exploitation of the poor to a cannibal feast. Is not that a terrific figure? But what mild word could express the horrible truth? Who, in the sight of God, were the greater sinners, the ignorant barbarians who killed their foes in battle and lived on their flesh, or the so-called cultured classes who slowly starved their supposed friends, and thus feasted on the blood of God's suffering poor? Awful as was the fate of those devoured by cannibals, it was better by far than the fate of these victims of the idle rich, who flourished under the protection of godless politicians.

Such oppression is always to be traced to the door of the church. Here in Micah is the age-long trinity of evil: the idle rich, the unworthy ruler, the false prophet; and the worst of these is the false prophet. Living on the bounty of the idle rich, basking in the favor of the corrupt nobility, the false prophet found it easy to justify the wicked for a reward, to wink at their vices, and to share in their cannibal feasts. He was an expert in the gentle art of soothing the troubled conscience, including his own, without causing anguish for sin; and, like Baalam of old, he could bolster up an unspeakable cause by appearing to give it the sanction of Almighty God. Is it any wonder that our prophet, himself the victim of social and

industrial wrong, cried out against prostitution of his holy calling?

Behold an age-long trinity of evil conspiring to oppress the poor. Lloyd George is fighting that accursed band across the sea, and if we are to be patriots, not to say prophets, we must fight them here. The message to that ghastly triumvirate today is the same at heart, however the form may change, as in the days of Micah, "Woe unto you except ye repent." And woe unto us if we sit with voices dumb while all about us the poor are crying out beneath burdens too heavy for the children of men. The age demands the social prophet.

Passing from these strong rebukes, we find in the fourth and fifth chapters glowing promises, largely for the common folk. Micah was no mere prophet of judgment, no destructive critic of national life. One could not with truth address to him such lines as these from Homer—"Prophet of evil, never yet hadst thou a cheerful word for me; to mark the signs of coming evil is thy chief delight; good dost thou ne'er foretell, nor bring to pass." The social prophet is ever a seer, and perhaps the most of us who are striving to correct the ills of the world are failing because we are working without hope and without a song. We are prophets of gloom.

Micah was no pessimist. After leading his people for a time through the shadows, he brought them out suddenly into a large, bright place, where the atmosphere was new and strange. He predicted a coming day when conditions should be reversed, when there should be a flood of blessings for the common folk. These blessings were not to be for them alone, but since they had been suffering under the oppression of the trinity of evil, they were most to appreciate and to enjoy the new freedom. What, then, were to be the blessings of the golden age?

The first blessing was to be peace,—world-wide, perpetual peace. This promise is almost the same as that in Isaiah, but even if we grant that Micah quoted from his elder brother, we must note here a peculiar emphasis: the blessings of peace were to be largely for the common folk. This promise might be represented for child-like folk by the figure of a star: religion, which is another name for peace, was to become world-wide;

the nations of the earth, instead of submitting their disputes to the unjust decision of the sword, were to choose Jehovah as their Arbitrator; they were to cease preparing to fight; they were to cease actual fighting; and they were even to cease training their children to fight. Such peace was to be a wonderful gift of God's love.

Has this humble prophet no message for the nations of today? Has the Christian religion yet risen to the height where one can say that civilization is a synonym for peace? Have England and Germany, have England and France, have America and Mexico, have America and Japan begun to abate their preparations for war? Have they ceased doing evil that good may come? Are they beating their swords into plow-shares and their spears into pruning-hooks? Ah, no! And when a modern prophet, such as Jefferson, or Lynch, or Bryan, or Root, dares to proclaim the gospel of peace, the words scoffs at the dreamer.

Our humble friend of the long ago placed his finger upon a dark truth too much neglected in this age when the powers are rushing blindly toward bankruptcy. He insisted that in war those suffered most who were least able to suffer, and that in peace those would profit most who had least to lose in war—the poor. In war the rich may thrive, and at the worst, they can retain a shadow of existence; but what of the poor? We must draw the curtain over their sufferings, but not before we learn from Micah and from his Lord that the only way to insure the blessings of peace is to desist from war and from preparations for war.

Micah promised that prosperity would follow from peace, prosperity not alone for the rich and the strong, but for the poor and the weak. In this coming prosperity, made possible by the blessing of God upon an age so loving that it should cease from war, the blessings were to be equitably distributed. It is not for us, more than for our friend of old, to become judges or dividers over these matters of pure economics, but it is for us as for him, a sacred duty to insist that there is a fair system for distributing the results of man's toil, and to insist that men shall not rest until they have found that fair system, and have followed it to the end.

Christian men everywhere are seeking to solve this problem,

and strange to tell, the wisest thinkers of our time have led us to the point where Micah leaves us, namely, that every toiler should have a home of his own, not a mansion and not a hovel, but a home, with modest comforts and absolute privacy; and that he should have leisure in the cool of the day, after every reasonable task has been well done, to sit at ease under his own vine and fig-tree. In modern phrase, to every man who does his best, whether he earns his way or not, society owes a decent living and an outlook upon the higher life. Such a man is not poor. He is no industrial slave. There is no one to make him afraid: no idle rich to browbeat him, no corrupt ruler to entice from him his liberty, no false prophet to justify his oppressor for a reward.

Peace and prosperity! What could do more for the common people? Nothing here below, we all agree, but with a sigh we exclaim that even if this golden dream came true, the common folk would not be worthy. Without pausing to remind ourselves that our humble prophet, like our Lord, cherished for the average man a far higher respect than we can muster, let us rather turn with Micah to the third blessing, the greatest of all, the one which is to make the others possible. After showing that peace and prosperity depended upon the progress of Zion, he led to a higher truth: these promises rested upon a person. King Hezekiah might be powerless to relieve the oppressed, but One mightier by far than he was to arise, the One whom we know as the Christ.

The Messiah was to be of rustic and popular origin. This truth is so familiar to us that we have ceased to wonder, but it would impress us more if we remembered that the most definite prediction of this lowly origin came through the prophet of the common people. The wise men whom Herod consulted about the birthplace of the Christ quoted from memory Micah 5:2. The other side of the truth, that the King was to be the Wonderful Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, might well come through Isaiah; but when the Spirit wished to point men's eyes towards Bethlehem, He spoke through Micah. The prophet who hailed from another village assured his weary fellow toilers that the coming Messiah, even in his birth, would be one of themselves. The social prophet of today finds in this same truth his surest comfort for the woes

of the oppressed. "The poor have the gospel preached to them."

What connection has this promise about the Messiah with those practical promises about peace and prosperity? Much every way! This coming child of a little town was not to be merely a second Micah, grieved at the wrongs of the world, but powerless to right them. Ah, No! The coming One was to be a King, a King! "His goings forth are from of old, from everlasting . . . And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah his God; and they shall abide, for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be our peace." My brothers, here is our social gospel, our only solution for the wrongs of the world—"This man shall be our peace."

Peace, prosperity, the Messiah; and the last shall be first. Too long have men been striving to persuade the powers of the earth to lay down their arms; too long have scholars and statesmen been striving to manufacture prosperity; now let us turn, as we should have turned long since, to the Bible, and we shall find that this man, this Jesus Christ, shall be our peace. He shall solve every problem of society. Prosperity follows from peace, and peace comes through Him. Such is the teaching of our prophet, and of a greater than he, even our King Himself.

In the last two chapters of our little book Micah turns to a still different phase of his work as an ethical teacher. He demands that the people, including his own class, shall be worthy of God's blessing. Unlike many a professed reformer, he does not curry favor with his own class by ignoring their weaknesses and sins while he paints for them a charming picture of future blessings, and consoles them for present hardships by depicting the doom of their oppressors. Micah denounces sin in high places, and he pities suffering in low places, but he is just: he insists that the entire people, common as well as select, must undergo a change of heart. Jehovah cannot bless them until by His grace they become worthy. Here is a note which is absent from the call of many a social prophet, who wonders why he fails. He has no eye for the sins of the common folk, and no vision to allure them towards the heights. Is not he, too, a false prophet?



The sixth chapter of Micah is one of the most powerful in all prophetic literature; it contains the heart of the social teaching of the Old Testament. The prophet throws his message into the form of a controversy, in which the mountains are called upon to act as witnesses, thus anticipating the teaching of Paul that nature shares in the evil wrought by sin. This device is not new in prophetic writing, but the emphasis here is unique: Isaiah and Amos have presented Jehovah in controversy with His people concerning their sins, but Micah presents Him in controversy with them concerning their so-called worship, which in the sight of God is sin. The social gospel ever insists that formal worship is good, but that it is far from all of man's duty to God, and that alone it is worse than worthless.

If we wish to follow this controversy, we must watch the frequent changes of speakers. All of us are familiar with this phenomenon of Hebrew literature, but oftentimes we fail to apply our knowledge. Here is one division of this passage, a division presented not as a model, but as an illustration of the sort of work which each student of the Bible should do for himself. First of all, the prophet appeals to the mountains and hills as witnesses. Then Jehovah, speaking through the prophet, expostulates with His people for their abuse of His mercies. The people respond with the pathetic query: What doth Jehovah require of us more than we are doing; does He ask greater sacrifices, and still greater, even the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul? The prophet replies, in one of the noblest passages of the Old Testament: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Then Jehovah speaks, in strong rebuke; and the prophet replies, speaking now for the people, with humble confession of their sins, and speaking again for himself, with strong confidence, which soars at last into a triumphant song of trust.

Rising out of the confusion caused by our rapid transit through this mountain region, three great demands emerge. These three demands are for justice, for manhood and for trust; but in using such keywords we must remember that the virtues demanded in this living, breathing book are loftier by far than

any of our words about them. These demands came to a people who had been taught by a false prophetic school that religion consisted in making sacrifices, and that when Jehovah was displeased, it was a demand for larger and more costly sacrifices. The people confused ritual, a ritual divinely ordained, with piety; they needed to learn that even a holy ritual, when divorced from a holy life, is a stench in the nostrils of God. Is there no call today for an echo of this teaching?

"What doth Jehovah require of us?" On every hand one hears the eager cry. Men have tested the world's solutions of their problems, and now they long to try God's way, but they know not how. They learn that religion brings rebuke for every sin, and that it is filled to overflowing with promises which culminate in Jesus Christ, but they ask how they can secure these blessings for a sin-cursed world. "What doth Jehovah require of us?" "Shall we give up a little more time, a little more money?" Yes, perhaps, but peace lies not thither. "Shall we give up still more?" Yes, perhaps. "Shall we give our children for the work across the sea?" Yes, perhaps, but religion demands more than any of these, or all; religion is love for God and love for man, love made possible by the death of Christ; religion finds expression in social service, and social service is no more of a sacrifice than the fruit upon the tree. "What doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Such a path leads at once to the foot of the cross, "and this man shall be our peace."

On November 20, 1908, there fell asleep in the city of Cairo, Egypt, a man who for two score years and three had been serving in that godless land as a foreign missionary, and who, during all those years had shown by life and speech the only remedy for social ills, even the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the relatives of this social prophet, the late Dr. William Harvey, father-in-law of Professor George L. Robinson, erected a suitable monument over his remains, with rare discernment they chose as an inscription the keynote of our little book—"What doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Let us look more closely at the three demands of Micah.

First of all, as the bedrock of true character in man and in society, is justice. In the homes of the rich are treasures of wickedness; in their places of business are unjust balances; in their mouths are lies to increase their profits; in their hearts is the love of gold. The greatest offenders are the rich and strong, but Micah calls upon the people as a whole to learn the old, hard lesson—that Jehovah delights in justice. And lest men forget, he paints in unmistakable hues a picture of the doom certain to fall upon those who pervert God's bounty, a doom which is to include loss of power to enjoy the fruits of iniquity.

Rising out of this fundamental teaching about justice, is a still higher call—for unadulterated manhood. Listen to the prophet's lament—"The godly man is perished out of the earth;" the best of men is no better than a briar; the typical neighbor is not to be trusted, or the typical friend, or even the wife of one's bosom; the sons and the daughters in the home rise up against the parents; "a man's enemies are the men of his own house." Surely manhood is rotten, and no less surely the land must suffer until this putrefying mass of so-called manhood is either cleansed and healed, or else buried and forgotten. But how restore fallen manhood? By restoring the true religion of Jehovah. It is noteworthy here that our friend calls for the same lofty type of manhood which he has pointed out in the coming Messiah. "And this man shall be our peace."

The third demand, and the highest, is for trust in God. This demand is not phrased in hard, cold words, but couched in the most winning form. In that verse which strikes the keynote of the book, the character which is pleasing to God reaches its highest expression in its humble trust. This is the spirit which makes possible the life and work of Micah. In his closing words he assures us that whatever others may do, he will trust in Jehovah. And he pours out his heart in a song so tender and yet so mighty that one thinks of the sweet singer of Israel. He trusts not for himself alone, but for his people, the common people most of all, that they shall be guarded from every ill; he beseeches the Shepherd of Israel to feed His flock as of old and to lead them tenderly in the way everlasting. He lays bare the secret of such trust: he relies upon the mercy of his God, Who pardons

iniquity and passes over transgressions, Who casts the sins of His people into the depths of the sea. Thus closes the prophecy of Micah.

Justice, manhood, trust; and the greatest of these is trust! What have these to do with social service? Everything! With such stalwart character on every side, social problems would lose their bane; without such character, no social program can raise the dead. Herein lies the fallacy of Socialism and of many another proffered panacea: external conditions can never make man's heart good; but if man's heart is good, he will right the wrongs about him. First make the tree good, and then the fruit will be good. Such is the teaching of Micah.

Let us glance back over the long way which we have traveled together. We have seen our friend as the uncompromising foe of sin wherever he saw it, and in his time he could see it most in the highest places. But he was no narrow agitator fomenting class hatred and strife; he had nothing of that modern spirit which delights in the poor because they are poor, and despises the rich because they are rich. He had the spirit of the Master, who was no respecter of persons, who taught that a man is "a man for a' that and a' that." The fact remains, however, that Micah thought most tenderly of those who most needed sympathy and strength, the suffering poor; and that he promised to them blessings rich and vast, culminating in the personal Redeemer. Unlike many a social agitator, he demanded that the people become worthy of God's favor.

Such is a bird's-eye view of the message; let us turn back still farther and bid farewell to the man. In the olden time a child came to brighten a humble cottage; he was born in a low condition, and as his parents were neither wealthy nor famous, the growing lad must have begun early to toil with his hands; he may have grown to manhood with little of the learning of the schools. Although his teachings have provided eternal principles, which in the hands of later men have revolutionized the world, he himself took small apparent interest in world politics. In an age when religion was supposed to be almost wholly theoretical, he concerned himself largely with practical piety, and yet in some mysterious fashion, he presented a type of practical

religion which illustrated a broad and lasting theory never to be found by men who sought theory alone. This man succeeded, even though many who were noble and mighty counted him a failure, because he was one of the common people. He felt their wrongs; he shared their dreams; and he wept for their sins. For them he lived; to them he preached; for them he would gladly have died.

Whose portrait have I been drawing? I scarcely know. From one angle it appears to be the form of Micah, but on a closer view I behold such beauty, such majesty, such divinity, that I am constrained to cry out, "My Lord and my God!" Let us not speak of our prophet as a type of the Saviour; let us not strive to trace minutely the limits of the resemblance; let us rather awake to the broad fact, and in it rejoice.

My brother minister, it should hearten us to know that such a man, a child of humble birth, a teacher of lowly rank, a prophet of no such gifts and graces as were showered upon Isaiah, has left to the world a body of satisfying ethical teaching. The Spirit who blessed Micah is waiting to bless us. We have come from the ranks of the common folk; we have taken up the mantle of this lowly seer. If in the spirit of Micah we go to our people with a message from the Lord, we shall ever be pointing their weary eyes to those old truths which we know as the gospel of Jesus Christ; we shall be treading in those blessed footsteps which lead ere long to Calvary. "And this man shall be our peace."

August 1, 1914.