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THE  
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MAGAZINE OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE.

VOL. 2.

AUGUST, 1890.

No. 5.

FOR THE MAGAZINE OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE.

THE BOOK OF JONAH: IS IT FACT OR FICTION?

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THE old method of explaining the story of Jonah by a comparison with heathen fables is now out of date. The myth that Perseus rescued Andromeda by slaying the sea monster to whom she was exposed, and the similar tale that Hercules delivered Hesione, who was confronted with the same danger, by leaping into the jaws of the monster and tearing out its entrails, are admitted now to have no connection with a Hebrew narrative composed long before the earliest date assigned to these classical stories. Indeed, they are so different in tone and texture and ethical purport that only a wild imagination can dream that all three belong to the same category.

But at the present time the question has taken a new shape. It is no longer between believers and unbelievers, or supernaturalists and rationalists, or the learned and the ignorant. But devout scholars of high repute for attainments and character, who equally recognize the divine authority of the written Word, differ very widely as to the way in which the Book of Jonah is to be regarded. Some accept the common opinion of the Church at large that it is strictly historical, and is a faithful narrative of actual occurrences. Others affirm that it is an imaginative composition, not intended to be understood literally, but written with a didactic purpose, like the parables of our Lord, or the vision related to King Ahab by Micaiah, the son of Imlah (1 Kings xxii. 19-23). Professor Briggs ("Biblical Study," pp. 238-39) does not positively pronounce Jonah to be a fiction, but strenuously insists that if it were there would be no loss. Speaking of this book and Esther he says, "The model of patriotic devotion, the lesson of the universality of divine providence and grace, would be still as forcible, and the gain would be at least equal to the loss,

if they were to be regarded as inspired ideals rather than inspired statements of the real. The sign of the Prophet Jonah as a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is as forcible, if the symbol has an ideal basis, as if it had an historical basis." To the same effect Professor Bruce says ("The Chief End of Revelation," p. 221), "On similar grounds we can regard with equanimity critical discussions respecting the literary character of such a book as that of the Prophet Jonah. Whether it be history, or whether it be parable, that book bears witness to the catholicity of divine grace, and in performing that important canonical function, it fully vindicates its title to a place in the literature of revelation." Still more plain is the language of Professor G. P. Fisher, of Yale University, in his admirable article in the *Century* for January last, on the nature and method of Revelation. After mentioning the hatred of pious Israelites toward the abominations of paganism, which awakened a desire for the divine vengeance to fall upon heathen worshippers, he proceeds (pp. 463-64), "An impressive rebuke of this unmerciful sentiment, and what is really a distinct advance in the inculcation of an opposite feeling is found in the Book of Jonah. There are reasons which have availed to satisfy critics as learned and impartial as Bleek, who are influenced by no prejudice against miracles as such, that this remarkable book was originally meant to be an apologue—an imaginary story, linked to the name of an historical person, a prophet of an earlier date, and was composed in order to inculcate the lesson with which the narrative concludes. This was the opinion also of the late Dr. T. D. Woolsey. One thing brought out by the experience of Jonah is that, so great is God's mercy that even an explicit threat of



dire calamities may be left unfulfilled in case there intervene repentance on the part of those against whom it was directed. The prophet who was exasperated at the sparing of the Ninevites was taught how narrow and cruel his ideas were, by the symbol of the gourd 'which came up in a night and perished in a night.' He was incensed on account of the withering of the gourd which had shielded his head from the sun. The Lord referred to Jonah's having had pity on the gourd, and said: 'And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?' This humane utterance, in which compassion is expressed even for the dumb brutes, is memorable for being one of the most important landmarks in Scripture, since it marks a widened view of God's love to the heathen. To illustrate this truth the narrative was written, and toward it as onward to a goal it steadily moves.\*

The same ground is taken by Dr. Charles H. H. Wright, author of several valuable exegetical works, in a volume of "Biblical Essays," issued in 1886. His view is that the book is an allegory, which he supports by a reference to the fourth chapter of Galatians in which the Apostle Paul cites the account given in Genesis of Abraham's two sons, one by the handmaid and one by the free-woman, and then adds "which things contain an allegory." But the allegory here instead of excluding presupposes the historical sense. Dr. Wright holds that the book is an allegorical description of Israel's past and a prophecy of Israel's future. He explains the meaning of the great fish by such phrases as Isaiah's (xxvii. 1) "He shall slay the sea-monster which is in the sea," *i. e.*, the world-power opposed to God and His people, and Jeremiah's (li. 34) "The King of Babylon hath devoured me . . . he hath swallowed me up like the sea-monster, he hath filled his maw with my delicates," and still further the words of Jehovah (li. 44) "I will do judgment upon Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he

hath swallowed up." To these passages is to be added the saying of Hosea (vi. 2), "After two days will He revive us: on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him." On the basis of these hints Dr. Wright thinks that the story was constructed in order to meet the case of Israel when restored to their own land. They expected that the judgments upon the heathen world foretold in the prophets would be at once executed, and since they were not, they were greatly disappointed. It was not enough that the covenant people were brought back, their enemies and God's needed to be signally overthrown, and since, on the contrary, they were great and flourishing, while Israel was weak and in subjection, they became gloomy and depressed. Now the writer of the Book of Jonah made his narrative to suit the case. First the huge fish swallows the prophet who represented his people; his entombment continues three days. Then he is suddenly extricated, alive and whole. He proceeds on an errand of mercy to the great heathen capital of which the fish was a symbol, and that errand is successful. Here, then, is exhibited anew and in a very striking form the extent of the divine compassion and the truth that God's denunciations of wrath against any nation are conditioned on the continuance in evil of the nation especially threatened. The ruin of kingdoms announced by any prophet might be averted by their repentance. Jeremiah expressly states this (xviii. 7, 8) "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, to pluck up and to destroy it; if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." This great principle is emphasized in Jonah because his unwillingness to execute the commission with which he was entrusted was due to the conviction he cherished in his innermost soul that God was "gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Jonah iv. 2). He considered it quite possible that God might repent of the evil He designed to do, and that his message delivered in Nineveh might be the very means of awakening the repentance which would avert the threatened doom. It is not strange, therefore, that this result when it did occur greatly surprised him. His prophecy was apparently a failure, and the heathen enjoyed a wonderful exhibition of the divine favor. This was admirably adapted to correct the views of the exiles who returned from Babylon. For though restored they were still under the Gentile yoke. Their bodies,

\* One's confidence in Professor Fisher's critical acumen is shaken by his remark (p. 462) on the supposed fact that the less instructed Hebrews imagined that there was some sort of a territorial limit to the jurisdiction of the God whom they worshipped. "An indistinct idea of this kind is at least a natural explanation of the attempted flight of the Prophet Jonah to Tarshish which lay on the western border of the Mediterranean." We believe that all modern critics are agreed that the phrase (i. 3) "to flee from the presence of the Lord" does not mean at all that the prophet hoped to escape Jehovah's omniscient eye, but that he fled from being in the presence of the Lord as His servant and minister. It was a formal renunciation of his office. Weak as Jonah was, he could not possibly have regarded "the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land" (i. 9) as a local deity.

their cattle, and their goods were in the power of their enemies, and they were consequently in great distress (Neh. ix. 36-37). It was quite natural for them to scan eagerly the horizon in order to discover any one who would bring them news of the great overthrow which they had been taught to expect and which they eagerly wished. The allegory also represents one of their expectations and its disappointment. This was the hope excited by Haggai's promise to Zerubbabel that followed immediately upon the prediction of a great shaking of the heavens and the earth. "In that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith Jehovah, and will make thee as a signet; for I have chosen thee" (ii. 23). The Jews expected that their governor would soon be manifested not as a mere Persian viceroy, but as the Anointed of Jehovah; that the government would be upon His shoulder; and that they would indeed sit down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit be sweet to their taste (Cant. ii. 3). But this expectation was not realized. Zerubbabel, although he was a lineal descendant of David and a man of many excellences, soon passed away. Whether he died in exile or in the city of his fathers, we know not, but his viceroyalty was short. The gourd or palmchrist, on which the Jews had fixed their hopes, and which for a time shadowed and sheltered them, was destroyed. It perished, as it were, in a night. The worm did the work of destruction. And after that the house of David sank for centuries into utter insignificance.

Dr. Wright thinks that the reference of our Lord to Jonah can be fully justified even if the ground be taken that the book was an allegory or symbolical prophecy. For Messiah and the people of Israel are so closely connected together that the prophecies which relate to the one refer more or less directly to the other. Messiah and Israel are both termed "the servant of Jehovah," the one in the higher, the other in a lower, sense of the phrase (cf. Isa. xlii. 1 and 19). The events which happened to the people of Israel in the infancy of the nation find a counterpart in the history of Israel's king. The world-power sought to destroy both in infancy (Ex. i. 15-22; Matt. ii. 16); they were both driven into Egypt for temporary deliverance from danger (Gen. xlv. 7-11; Matt. ii. 13-15); and after a season were called forth out of that land (cf. Hos. xi. 1 with Matt. ii. 15). It is hence inferred that a prophetic allegory, depicting the temporary death of

the nation and its resurrection anew to a national existence, might therefore very properly be referred to as containing a prophecy of the death and resurrection of Israel's Lord and king.

We have thus endeavored to give a faithful outline of Dr. Wright's view, using largely his own words, and it is fair to presume that the work of so learned and devout a scholar presents that side of the question as fully and strongly as any of its advocates could desire.\* But before considering his theory it may be well to look at the objections he makes to the acceptance of the book as actual history. One is that if the framers of the Canon of the Old Testament had so regarded it, they would scarcely have inserted it in its present position among the prophetic, instead of with the historical books. It is hard to see the force of this reason. The book does not have the usual character of histories which are anonymous (Judges, Ruth, Samuel, etc.), but after the regular manner of prophecies begins with the customary identification of the author, "the Word of the Lord came unto Jonah." And to this is prefixed the word "And" [in A. V., *Now*], thus joining it on to the other prophetic writings, in the midst of which it is found. It records the experience of a prophet in the discharge of his official duty, and as such was surely entitled to the place it occupies, whether interpreted literally or symbolically. So far as we can judge from the usual methods of those who compiled the Canon they had no option but to put it where we find it.

Again, it is said that "if the incidents mentioned in the book were historical, it is more than strange that no allusion is made to any one of them in the Books of the Kings and the Chronicles." The argument *e silentio* is always a precarious one, because we know not all the circumstances of the case. Dr. Wright says that no prophet was ever despatched on a grander or more important mission than Jonah, and the outcome, if the narrative be regarded as history, was a wonderful success. When compared with the result of Jonah's preaching, Elijah's controversy with Israel on Mount Carmel sinks into utter insignificance.

\* I have not quoted Dr. Wright's reference to the parable of the Prodigal Son, because that parable does not treat of Jews compared with Gentiles but (as Luke xv. 1, 2 shows) of Pharisees compared with publicans and sinners, and because the whole narrative of the eldest son is mere costume, designed to set off and enhance the ground of the father's compassion, but having no independent signification of its own, and having no counterpart in actual life either when the exquisite parable was delivered or at any period since, any more than there are now or ever have been "ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance."



“Why, then, should the latter incident have been recorded in the Second Book of Kings (chap. xviii.), while the most extraordinary fact connected with a prophet is passed over in silence?” This question is by no means unanswerable. Elijah’s dealing at Mount Carmel was a constituent part of the miraculous procedures intended through the agency of him and his successor Elisha to arrest the dreadful apostasy introduced by Ahab. That apostasy was not simply, like previous backslidings, the worship of God by idols, but an absolute dethronement of Jehovah and the putting of Baal in his place. To overcome this great evil and recover the nation back to its ancient faith there was an unusual display of supernatural power, and it was successful. The people swung back to their former moorings, and Baal worship was suppressed. These proceedings were part and parcel of the national history, and they needed to be recorded if that history was to be complete. The experience of Jonah, on the contrary, was an episode, bearing no relation to the ordinary stream of events, an object-lesson on some principles of the divine nature and government, and therefore not requiring to be noticed by the historian or annalist. The author of the Book of Kings (2 Kings xiv. 25) recorded Jonah’s prediction of the recovery of the lost provinces of Israel because it indicated the divine hand in the prosperous reign of the great Jeroboam II., and he omitted to mention the prophet’s expedition to Nineveh because it had no bearing upon the course of things inside the commonwealth of Israel.

Precisely the same objection may be made to the Book of Ruth. Her name and history are not mentioned or even alluded to in the Old Testament. Shall we then say that this touching story which Goethe pronounced to be “the loveliest thing in the shape of an epic or an idyl which has come down to us” is not a narrative of facts, but simply a pastoral story composed for moral and didactic purposes?

Another objection is drawn from the prayer of Jonah recorded in the second chapter of his prophecy. This is said to be a cento of passages taken chiefly from the Psalms, many of which were composed during the exile (iii. 8; xviii. 4, 5, 6; xvi. 10; xxx. 3; xxxi. 6, 22; xlii. 7; lxxxviii. 6, 7; lxix. 1, 2, 5; cxvi. 17; cxix. 55; cxx. 1; cxlii. 3).

It must be admitted that the resemblance between Jonah’s language and that of the Scriptures referred to is real and not imaginary, yet he is not a mere copyist. If he

were, it would make against the allegorical theory, for why could not the genius who conceived and executed such a marvellous composition, showing such a creative imagination and such a power of condensation, have expressed the sentiments proper to the occasion in words of his own? Whereas on the literal interpretation it is reasonable to suppose that Jonah’s mind being stored with the lyrics used in public worship, he naturally used these consecrated words and phrases in uttering his feelings. When it is said that the Psalms used were written in view of or at the time of the captivity, one doubtful hypothesis is sustained by another equally doubtful. The only compositions of certainly late date that are said to be borrowed from are cxvi. 17 and cxx. 1. The former has,

I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
And will call upon the name of the LORD.  
I will pay my vows unto the LORD,  
Yea, in the presence of all His people.

The words of Jonah are (verse 9)

But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of  
thanksgiving;  
I will pay that which I have vowed.

But is it necessary to suppose that the terms of such a commonplace statement were borrowed by the prophet? The same question may be asked with still more point in regard to the opening words of the prayer,

I called by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD,  
And He answered me,

which are said to have been taken from the second of the Psalms cited above, viz. :

In my distress I cried unto the LORD,  
And He answered me.

Could not such an utterance be made independently by two writers, without either leaning upon the other?

It is further said of the prayer that not a single note of repentance is struck from first to last. It contains no lamentation for sin. It is not such a hymn as could have been naturally composed under the circumstances, if those circumstances be regarded as literal facts. Nor is it such a hymn as one would think that a man rescued from the stomach of an actual sea-monster would compose as a memorial of his deliverance. In reply it may be said that the objection fails to consider the exact circumstances of the case, and the purport of the composition. Certainly the terms and phrases employed are well adapted to set forth after the Hebrew fashion the conceptions of a man drowned in the open sea.

It is his rescue from this hopeless condition that he celebrates, and not from the imprisonment in the fish's belly, for the latter was a token of favor and the means of his preservation. What he dwells on is that he had sunk down to the roots of the mountains, his head wrapped in the seaweed and the solid bars of the earth around him forever, and yet Jehovah, his God, had delivered him from the desperate entanglement. This absorbs his mind. There is no confession of sin, but there is no assertion of righteousness (as in Ps. xviii. 20-24 and elsewhere); there are no words of repentance, but is not this implied in his calling upon Jehovah, and his turning again, though cut off and cast out, toward God's holy temple? And is it anything marvellous if the consciousness of forgiveness assured by his rescue so filled his mind with the sense of gratitude that this alone was the burden of his utterance unto the Lord? Besides, the argument may be turned against its proposers, and we may ask, if this narrative were an apologue composed by some sacred scholar in his retirement, would he not have been careful to insert a proper expression of the prophet's sin? The omission of such an utterance, therefore, makes for the historical character of the book. At the same time it is noteworthy that while Jonah's sin is clearly set forth no remarks are made upon the subject. Even at the close of the proceeding, when the prophet displayed his miserable petulance so strikingly, all the reproof uttered is simply a question, "Doest thou well to be angry?" The design was to use him and his narrow-minded bigotry as a foil in order to set forth the wondrous compassion of the Most High more effectively. Hence the absence of penitential confessions in Jonah's prayer is no argument against the real occurrence of the strange rescue that called forth his gratitude and praise.

Again, it is said that, considering the size and importance of Nineveh and the minute and well-developed system of idolatry that prevailed there, it is incredible that such a change should so suddenly have been produced by the outcry of a single man, and no record of it made in the monuments that remain. The answer is that extensive and thorough as is our acquaintance with the history and literature of ancient Egypt, there has yet to be found any trace of the ten plagues inflicted through Moses or of the catastrophe at the Red Sea. The lacuna in the Nile Valley explains the lacuna on the Tigris. Besides, it is not said that the Ninevites were spiritually converted, or that they dethroned their idols,

or that they worshipped the Jehovah of the Hebrews. All these things may have taken place, but they are not necessarily involved in the view that the narrative is historical. All that the book says is that the people one and all repented, turned from their evil ways, especially "the violence that was in their hands," and instituted a universal fast accompanied with a fervent cry unto God, *i.e.*, the God whose announcement had struck them with terror. It was more an ethical than a religious movement. Now there is on record the case of an individual which for ought we know may present exactly what occurred at Nineveh. Elijah was sent to Ahab with a prediction of dreadful evil upon him because he sold himself to work evil in the sight of the Lord, whereupon the king rent his clothes and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and went softly (1 Kings xxi. 27). There is not much reason to consider this exercise of Ahab a deep-seated and spiritual one such as is described in Ps. xxxii. and li., especially when one remembers his conduct and his death, as described in the next chapter, yet Jehovah was pleased to accept it, and accordingly he said to Elijah, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house." What is to hinder us from thinking that the humiliation and fasting and reformation of the Ninevites procured for them just what Ahab's humiliation procured for him, *i.e.*, not a reversal of the sentence, but a suspension of it, so that it was not inflicted upon him, but upon another generation? This agrees with all the facts in the case. Nineveh was overthrown, and the predictions of Israel's prophets were literally accomplished, but it was more than a century after Jonah's time. The mission of the disobedient prophet was effectual. It accomplished its purpose. It spared more than sixscore thousand people for several generations, and exhibited in the most striking manner the mercy and forbearance of the Most High.

As to the language of the book, it has been claimed that there are words used which distinctly show that it was composed at a late period when the language received a Chaldaizing element. But Dr. Pusey in his commentary has shown that all or nearly all the words specified are Hebrew or from a Hebrew root, and that they are not used elsewhere because there was no occasion to use them, just as Luke, for the same reason, in recounting Paul's voyage to Rome,



employs a number of words not to be found in any other part of the New Testament. One peculiar word (*taam*) rendered "decree," which is not Hebrew but Aramaic, was doubtless the very term used in Nineveh to designate the ordinance of the king and nobles.

The notion that the book is a fiction seems to us not consonant with the ideas we are accustomed to cherish concerning divine revelation. As the late Dr. J. A. Alexander stated it, "The necessity of fiction to illustrate moral truth arises not from the deficiency of real facts adapted to the purpose, but from the writer's limited acquaintance with them, and his consequent incapacity to frame the necessary combinations without calling in the aid of his imagination. But no such necessity can exist in the case of an inspired, much less of an omniscient teacher. To resort to fiction, therefore, when real life affords in such abundance the required analogies, would be a gratuitous preference, if not of the false to the true, at least of the imaginary to the real which seems unworthy of our Lord, or which, to say the least, we have no room to assume without necessity" (Com. on Mark, p. 86). He thinks therefore that all our Saviour's parables are founded on fact, if not entirely composed of real incidents. But whether this be so or not, they are set forth as simply illustrations of moral or religious truth derived from the analogy of human experience. They do not pretend to be anything more than figurative statements or prolonged metaphors, and can in no case deceive.\* All hearers or readers at once penetrate beneath the surface, and see what is really meant. Take, for example, the parable of Dives and Lazarus. The rich man is represented as asking for water to cool his tongue, yet at that very time his body, as the parable says, was lying in the grave, and hence every one sees that these words are only a representation of mental anguish. The same is true of all the so-called apologues in the Old Testament. They bear their metaphorical meaning on their face. And this seems to have been the rule, and one in marked contrast with the customs of the Orientals, whose teachings abounded in fables, apologues, and allegories. Thus the extremely fine story of the way in which Abraham came to escape the idolatries of

the primeval world, which is referred to by Josephus and Philo, and given at length in the Talmud and the Koran, was doubtless extant when our Canon was formed if not long before, yet it was not inserted in the sacred text, simply because it was not true. Abraham might have said this, but there is no evidence that he did say it. Yet if it had been reproduced, it would have impressed the reader as the narrative of a fact.\*

And just here is the great objection to the view which regards Jonah as an ideal composition. Not a hint of anything of the kind is anywhere given in the prophecy. From first to last the book runs on like the narrative of a series of actual occurrences. Indeed, so plain and palpable is this that one is tempted to think that if it had not been for the abnormal entombment of the prophet in the belly of the fish, no one would ever have dreamed of taking it as an allegory. This seems to have staggered the faith of men, yet without reason. For to one who believes in God nothing in the shape of a miracle is incredible. One sign differs from another in its form and accompaniments, but substantially all stand upon the same footing, and are alike manifestations of Him to whom all things are possible. "There can be no scale of the miraculous. To Infinite Power it is no easier to pick up a pin than to stop all the planets in their courses for a time and then send them on again" (Reade). Nor is it for us to determine when, where, and how the miraculous shall be put forth. And, further, if the fish's swallowing Jonah is objectionable as a fact, why is it not equally so as an ideal narrative? If it shocks common sense in one case, why not in the other?

Again, the Book of Jonah, while of course it has, and must have, a moral aim, bears throughout the appearance of an historical narrative and has been so regarded for ages. It is thus referred to in Tobit xiv. 4, 8, 15, and by Josephus, Ant. 9, 10: 2. In the Koran a chapter (the tenth) bears the prophet's name as a title, and in the thirty-seventh chapter there is a distinct recital of his experiences—that he fled, that he was cast overboard and swallowed by a fish, that he was vomited out, and that a gourd was made to grow up over him. There is

\* The story is thus given in the Koran: When night overshadowed him he saw a star and said, "This is my Lord." But when it set he said, "I like not those that set." And when he saw the moon rising he said, "This my Lord." But when the moon set he answered, "Verily if my Lord direct me not in the right way I shall be as one of those that err." And when he saw the sun rising he said, "This is my Lord. This is greater than the star or the moon." But when the sun went down he said, "O my people, I am clear of these things. I turn my face to Him who hath made the heaven and the earth."

\* Are any words strong enough to express the difference between a transparent fiction like that of the parable of the Sower which every hearer detects at once as having a concealed meaning, and a narrative which has so much the appearance of actual history that for ages and generations it never enters the mind of a reader that it is anything else?



also in the twenty-first chapter distinct mention of him as the dweller in the fish and of his prayer in the darkness and of God's answer. Now the oracles of Mohammed are not quoted as authority, but they may justly be appealed to as witnesses to the prevailing manners and modes of thought among the Orientals, and as evidence that an occurrence which to Western tastes would be most unsuitable would exactly meet their needs and be in their view every way appropriate. The religious lesson of the narrative is wholly neglected by the Koran, but the miracle as an evidence of God's power and justice is duly emphasized. And what is there in the story that is justly objectionable to the people of any age or land? As far back as the Song of Moses (Deut. xxxii. 21) we read

They have moved me to jealousy with that which  
is not God ;  
They have provoked me to anger with their vanities :  
And I will move them to jealousy with those who  
are not a people ;  
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.

These words are quoted by the Apostle Paul (Rom. x. 19) to prove that Israel would be rejected for their sins and the Gentiles received to favor instead of them ; and they had the same meaning at an older date. When Jonah was commissioned to go to Nineveh, he doubtless remembered these words of the Most High, and inferred that the substitution spoken of was about to take place, in consequence of which repentant Nineveh would become the people of God while the children of Abraham would be cast out. And this was insupportable. In any event the covenant people were no longer to be the exclusive recipients of divine revelation. Rather than be a party to any such proceeding Jonah would renounce his office and give up his home in Israel. God allows him to carry out his purpose so far as to embark for a heathen port, and then interposes with a fearful storm so persistent and increasing as to suggest supernatural agency. In the end he is cast overboard, but is miraculously preserved in a most wonderful way, whereupon his commission is renewed and he executes it with the result which he anticipated from the beginning. Nineveh repents and is spared. The prophet repines and mourns, and is rebuked by symbol and word, in the gourd which sheltered him and in the words of Jehovah, "Should not I have pity on that great city Nineveh?" Now we may well ask, If Jewish narrowness and bigotry were to be rebuked and God's boundless grace to

be set forth, how could these things be more effectually accomplished than by such a series of events as are here recorded? The objections made to the narrative as halting and incomplete are of no account, for all that is necessary for the instruction of the reader is given. What the special sins of Nineveh were, the name of the king then on the throne, the details of the prophet's journey, the subsequent fate of Jonah, are points not at all required to the author's aim. That aim is not simply to add a chapter to Israel's history or record what otherwise might be lost, but to set forth a divine disclosure made in a series of historical acts and words, and bearing upon a feature of God's character most likely at that period to be misconceived or denied.

But the decisive evidence in regard to Jonah is given by our Lord in words recorded by two of the evangelists (Matt. xii. 38-41; xvi. 4; Luke xi. 29-32). The people, or rather certain of the scribes and the Pharisees, came to him, seeking a sign from heaven. They wanted some miraculous token of his divine mission, such as when Moses gave manna from the skies, or when Joshua made the sun and moon stand still, or when Elijah brought down fire upon the sacrifice at Carmel. To this request blended of idle curiosity and unbelief Christ refused compliance, and said that the only sign of this sort that would be given to the evil generation was that of the Prophet Jonah. "For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation" (Luke). The words recorded by Matthew show how Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, viz., his marvellous experience when swallowed by the fish, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (*Three days and three nights* are to be computed in the Jewish manner, which applies that formula to one whole day with any part however small of two others.) The sign to be given is that of his own burial and resurrection, which Christ's connects in an enigmatical manner with a well-known incident of Old Testament history. The historical verity of that incident is thus guaranteed by the Saviour's words—words which are not to be explained away by saying as Dr. Hort does (App. p. 282), "It is difficult to believe that all the words as they stand have apostolic authority," or as does Professor Toy ("Quotations," p. 28) that they are due to "the oral tradition;" for the textual authority for them is complete. Our Lord

then says that Jonah's miraculous deliverance from the belly of the fish was a sign to the men of Nineveh, *i. e.*, a mighty deed which confirmed to them the authority of the prophet and influenced their reception of his message, and similar was the intention and in many cases the result of his own deliverance from the tomb. But if the Old Testament story is a myth or an allegory, what are we to think of the New Testament narrative thus put on a par with the former? Surely the same rule must be applied to both. But our Lord went further. He drew a parallel not only between Jonah and Himself, but also between Jonah's hearers and His own, saying, "The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold a greater than Jonah is here." The force of this solemn assertion lies in its literal verity. If there was no preaching of Jonah and no repenting of the Ninevites, then it is impossible to see any weight in our Lord's comparison.

It has been said that "the marks of a story are as patent in the Book of Jonah as in any one of the Thousand and One Nights." It is very true that the literary skill shown in the narrative is surprising. Charles Reade, himself certainly no mean judge, has said ("Bible Characters," p. 76), that "It is the most beautiful story ever written in so small a compass. In writing it is condensation that declares the master, verbosity and garrulity have their day, but only hot-pressed narratives live forever. The book is in forty-eight verses or one thousand three hundred and twenty-eight English words. That number does not carry the reader far even in such close models as 'Robinson Crusoe,' the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' 'Candide,' 'Rasselas,' yet in Jonah it gives a wealth of incident, and all the dialogue needed to carry on the grand and varied action. You have also character, not stationary, but growing just as Jonah's grew, and a plot that would bear volumes yet worked out without haste or crudity and with the perfect proportion of dialogue and narrative." If this be so, it can be explained in no other way than that in which we account for the simple and unstudied yet lucid and complete and masterly narrative contained in the synoptical Gospels. The writers told nothing but the truth, but a divine hand directed them what to say and how to say it. And so with Jonah, or whoever made the record that bears his name. The so-called resemblance to an Arabian tale is only on the sur-

face. All those tales are of the earth, and earthly, devoid of any ethical aim and simply intended to amuse. But this narrative has a lofty moral purpose throughout. Even if one accepts the conclusion of Volck in the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopædia (*sub voce*) that the central purport of the book is given in the three positions that the prophet of God must do whatever the Lord commands; that not even death can frustrate his calling; and that he must leave the fulfilment of his message to God, there is still that which widely separates this narrative from every other of those to which it has been compared. The interval is as wide as that between the one living and supreme God and the imaginary *genii* whose aid is secured by magical formulæ. But the contrast becomes far greater when one considers the real controlling purpose of the book and what it contains, *viz.*, the rebuke of national bigotry and hard-heartedness, and the vindication of Jehovah's tender compassion toward His creatures even outside the bounds of the Abrahamian covenant.

This fact dispels at once and forever the notion that the book is a poetic myth based upon tradition, or a mere expansion of some ancient incident which may or may not have been historical. There was nothing in the character or the habits or the tastes of the Hebrews at any time during the eight centuries before Christ to suggest or to invite any such composition. Everything pointed the other way. The habitual thought of the people was that they were the favored and accepted people of God, having the true worship and the certain hope of continuance, while all other nations were idolatrous, depraved, and sure in the end to be the victims of the divine wrath. The intensity and inveteracy of this feeling may be gathered from the evidences of its survival to the time of Christ and its passing over for a time at least into the Christian Church. Dr. Wright has brought this forth with his accustomed lucidity: "The efforts made by our Lord in His lifetime to raise the degraded classes of the Jews were not looked upon with favor by the Pharisees and scribes (Luke xv. 1, 2). The very disciples of Jesus, who were directed by the Master to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, showed a deep-seated and decided reluctance to believe that God was no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him (Acts x. 34). The early Christians were amazed when the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon the Gentiles." Dr. Wright justly remarks



that "There is little reason to be surprised at the picture of Jonah sitting over against Nineveh, angry and sullen because God had granted repentance and life from the dead to that city after it had been doomed to destruction, when the disciples of Jesus, in the full enjoyment of a Pentecostal effusion of grace, found it so hard to believe in the loving-kindness of God." And, in fact, it took a long course of years and many efforts of the great Apostle to emancipate the Jewish believers from their prejudices. Their great desire was to bring Gentile Christians under the yoke of the old law. They insisted that these disciples should become Jews, and like the servants of Abraham should receive on their persons the sign of circumcision. This led to the first great controversy of the new dispensation, and to settle it the council was called which met at Jerusalem, and after a long discussion came to a conclusion in favor of liberty (Acts xv.). But even this did not settle the question in practice as it did in theory, for the struggle was renewed again and again. Once even Peter and Barnabas were constrained by the adverse feeling to dissemble the broad and liberal views they had before held and expressed on this question (Gal. ii. 11-14). Nor indeed was it finally settled and laid to rest until the period when the temple was destroyed, the city overthrown, and the Gentile element in the Church shown to be a decided majority. And it is fairly argued by Dr. Wright that the attitude of the Church on this question under apostolic leading was one great reason why the Jews so largely refused to recognize the claims of Christianity. They could not bear to admit that the Gentiles ought to be admitted to an equal position with themselves. The two stumbling-blocks in their way were the doctrine of Christ crucified and the equality of the Gentiles, and the latter was as great as the former. When Paul at Jerusalem related in Hebrew the story of his conversion and the vision he had seen of the glory of the Lord Jesus, he was listened to patiently, far more so than was the proto-martyr Stephen when he addressed the council, but when the Apostle proceeded to state that Christ had sent him to the Gentiles, the Jews could abide his speech no longer, but lifting up their voices with one accord, they cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live" (Acts xxii. 22). Thus did the Jews, the prophets of humanity, intended by Divine Providence to be the teachers of religion to the world, act when the very mission they had been se-

lected and appointed to discharge met with its grandest success. Such now being the prevailing habit of mind toward the heathen world, how could there have arisen among them of their own accord any conceptions of a message to the metropolis of the nations, designed to lead this great capital to repentance and thus avert the deserved judgment that impended? What welcome could such a story receive? What inducement was there for any one to devise or circulate it?

This is still further confirmed by a reference to the prevailing tenor of prophecy in regard to Assyria and its capital Nineveh. In this point of view the material miracle in Jonah's preservation in the belly of the fish is far outstripped by the moral miracle shown in the mere fact of the prophet's mission to Nineveh. That stands alone in the whole history of the covenant people. Nothing like it occurred from the days of Samuel to those of Malachi. The great empire whose seat was on the Tigris is often mentioned in Scripture, but always in its relation to the covenant people, either as an oppressing foe which is one day to be destroyed, as in the vivid pictures of Nahum setting forth the assault, the siege, the capture, the overthrow, the final and remediless ruin, or in Zephaniah's mention of the day of Jehovah's anger, the *dies iræ*, when He will make Nineveh a barren waste where wild animals roam and the pelican and the porcupine lodge amid the fallen columns, or as an alien who is one day to be converted into a friend, as in Isaiah's memorable utterance (xix. 24, 25), "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth for that the LORD of hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance." In marked contrast to these and all similar utterances is the Book of Jonah, which makes no reference whatever to any antagonism between Israel and Assyria, and does not point at all to the distant future, but deals only with the present. The prophet is summoned to bear a divine message to Nineveh, not because of past injuries to Israel or because such are apprehended in the future, but simply because of its wickedness which is such as to attract the attention of the Most High; and Jonah is bidden to announce its overthrow within a limited period. The only reason for such a warning beforehand was that an opportunity of repentance might be afforded. This Jonah understood at once and hence his refusal to act.

It was unprecedented that the heathen should be dealt with in this way, and he was not disposed to be an agent in the work. This has usually been regarded as a personal defect, due to some unusual narrowness of disposition. But this may well be doubted. Probably any other prophet would have done the same. To admit individual Ninevites or even the whole city to the privileges of Judaism upon condition of their adopting circumcision and the ceremonial law would have been nothing strange, but to show mercy to the heathen as heathen, and simply upon the condition of repentance was a new departure. The case of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings xvii. 10) is not analogous, for Elijah went to her because his life was not safe anywhere in Israel, and since the Sidonian widow received him and sheltered him he gained for her a great blessing. Still less is there any similarity in the case of Naaman. Not only did he apply himself in person for what he needed, but came with money enough for a king's ransom to pay for his cure if pay were wanted. The circumstances at Nineveh are wholly different. No application is made, nothing in the condition of Jonah or the people to whom he belonged invited any such mission as he effected. The whole movement is original, spontaneous, and free from any ulterior thought.

A weighty argument against the allegorical interpretation of the book has been adduced by Dr. O. M. Mead in his recent volume on "Supernatural Revelation," which contains in an Appendix a short essay on the subject. The substance of his forcible reasoning is here reproduced. One point is that if the book be an allegory the author must have intended it to be so understood, but as it was not so regarded by those for whose benefit it was written, he must be considered as having made a bad failure. This point becomes still more serious when it is claimed to be an inspired ideal, for then the failure goes back of the human author to the Divine Spirit under whose influence he wrote.

Another point is that the very considerations which are urged to prove the book to be unhistorical equally bear against the assumption of its didactic character. We are assured that its chief events, the strange conduct of Jonah in his flight from the presence of God, the story of his miraculous preservation through the fish, the improbability of so long and toilsome a journey as he is represented as making, the lack of details in the account of Nineveh and its king, the thorough and universal repent-

ance, are intrinsically improbable, and that therefore the story is not historical and was not intended to be understood as such. Thus Kuenen says, "The whole of this writing—which interpreted historically so justly gives offence—breathes a spirit of benevolence and universal humanity which is very attractive" ("Religion of Israel," II., 244). What else can this mean than that if God had really brought about by His providence such occurrences as are narrated in this book, it would have been justly offensive; but if the occurrences are only *imagined* to have taken place, they convey a most attractive lesson? Can anything be more absurd? The theory of Dr. Wright, the best sustained of all that have been devised to escape the natural and rational interpretation of the narrative, maintains, as we have seen, that it was composed in order to justify God for not having fulfilled the prophecies against the heathen which are so conspicuous in the writings of the Old Testament seers. Now admitting this to be the case, although no evidence can be adduced for it, the question arises how this end was to be gained? The answer is that the narrow conceptions concerning God's dealings with the heathen and His purposes toward them, which were cherished by the writer's contemporaries, would be corrected by the story of the Prophet Jonah's preaching to the Ninevites. This is quite satisfactory, if the narrative was true and related actual occurrences, but not at all if it was fictitious. For in that case the narrow-minded contemporaries might justly reply, How can fiction give evidence in favor of truth? And especially how can a story which contains extravagant and incredible statements furnish a proper basis for rightly conceiving the character of God? If the story is true and what is related did really occur, we do have a most winning and convincing statement of the gracious nature of our covenant God; but since it is merely a work of the imagination, it leaves the case just where it was before. The terrible predictions as to the utter ruin of the great world-powers still stand, and we await their accomplishment with some disappointment that it is so long delayed; and to meet the case you put us off with an allegory, you relate a narrative of inherently improbable, nay impossible events. We decline to accept your ingenious fiction as an offset to certain and acknowledged facts. Thus it is seen that the theory of a didactic purpose in the book and the theory that it is a pure and acknowledged fiction, are mutually destructive. Fiction cannot do the work of



truth. Fictitious narratives may and do often powerfully excite the feelings, but they cannot turn doubt into conviction or unbelief into belief. That is quite beyond their province. The illustrious men whose names have come down to us as models of heroism, self-sacrifice, charity, or devotion make a deep impression so long as the record made of them is deemed trustworthy, but let it be resolved into a myth or an allegory, and the charm is at an end.

It is time to sum up.

1. The book has every appearance of being a record of facts, not a hint to the contrary being anywhere dropped.

2. It was evidently so regarded by the compilers of the Old Testament Canon.

3. The same view prevailed, so far as we have any evidence on the subject, among the Jews in the time of Christ.

4. The modern opponents of this view differ widely as to the date of the book's composition, some putting it in the eighth century B. C., others in the second, the times of the Maccabees, and the rest at various intermediate periods.\*

5. They differ also as to its character. Some make it an allegory, others a legend or tale, others a myth, intermingled with Grecian or with Babylonian elements, others a moral fable or parable, and others a prophetic didactic fiction.

6. The objections they make to its reality, whether founded upon its place in the Minor Prophets, its style and language, its lack of details, the improbability of the events it records, or the failure of the historical books to mention them, are all without foundation.

7. If the book was intended as an allegory, it failed of its purpose, as it was not so regarded by the Jews.

8. If it was a didactic fiction it could not answer the end proposed, because as a fiction it could show only what God might do, not what He would do or was actually doing at the time.

9. If it was not amiss to feign that God acted as the book represents Him, where is the harm in considering that He really did so act?

10. If the narrative viewed as fiction is honoring to God and helpful to man, surely it is immeasurably more so if it be considered strictly historical.

11. The testimony of our Saviour is conclusive. He referred to Jonah and Nineveh just as He did to Tyre and Sidon, to Sodom and Gomorrah, or to Noah and the deluge,

or even more emphatically; and by consequence all are alike historical.

12. If the book is a fiction (whether inspired or uninspired makes no difference), the solemn warning of the Lord Jesus to His contemporaries is utterly pointless.

I conclude with two sentences from Dr. Donald Fraser's "Synoptical Lectures on the Books of Scripture" (I., 340). "The stones of Nineveh have risen already within our own lifetime to cry out against the men of this generation who were incredulous of Bible history. But there is to be a greater resurrection on those famous Eastern plains, The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here."

FOR THE MAGAZINE OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE.

## THE DIFFICULTIES IN SCRIPTURE.

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THE Bible is a composite of apparently sixty-six books (which may be reduced to fifty-seven) written by at least forty different authors during a period of fifteen hundred years. That a work thus constituted should have a substantial unity is a wonder unparalleled in the history of literature. This fact, if carefully considered, would alone prove that a divine influence has marked its production. From the tree of life in the beginning of Genesis to the tree of life in the end of Revelation the view of God and man is the same, and the holy philosophy taught is one. Man is throughout a sinner. God is the holy and righteous Judge and the merciful Saviour. Bloody sacrifice is the medium through which man comes to God, by which He maintains His justice and yet justifies the sinner. The Infinite Judge is thus the pitying Father to every one who will have it so. There is no conflict of doctrine anywhere in the Bible.

1. The oppositions that men have alleged between the Old Testament and the New have been the results of superficial thought. Changes have been rung on the antagonism of Law and Gospel, as if the Old Testament prescribed good works as the efficient means of salvation, while the New Testament prescribed faith, when the truth is that the Old Testament is full of faith and the Gospel, and exhibits God's holy law as a rule of

\* For details on this point and the next, see Lange's "Commentary, Minor Prophets, Jonah," pp. 3, 11.

life for those who accept salvation by faith in the sacrifice appointed of God. From Abel to Noah and from Noah to Abraham the bloody sacrifice is the symbol of a substitute bearing man's sin, and faith, not work, is the efficient factor in the worship. "By *faith* Abel offered up." "Abraham *believed* God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." It is God's mercy, and not man's obedience to law, that saves man, and this is the doctrine of the Old Testament as much as of the New. The typical ceremonies of the Old Church were no means of salvation, but types of the coming One: in whom faith centred. The fact that the Jews perverted these types and made them saving ordinances no more alters the truth of their character than the same perversion of ordinances in the present Church of Christ. The godly soul finds the self-same teaching in Exodus as in Matthew, in the Psalms as in John.

2. Next to this difficulty about the two Testaments we may place the doctrinal difficulties that men find in the teaching concerning the fall of man, the incarnation of the Word, the substituted sacrifice, the salvation by faith, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These doctrines are said to be contrary to the reasonable propositions that God would not let man sin; that God, who is Spirit, could not be man; that one suffering for another is unjust and does not meet the end of punishment; that works have far more merit than faith, and that to confound the Divine Spirit with man's spirit is absurd. These difficulties regarding the cardinal doctrines of Scripture are to be answered by the truths that man is sinful, however it came about, and that as a sinner it is for him to look not to himself, but to God for salvation and restoration to holiness, and that the Scripture professes to be God's way of saving sinful man. It will be seen that a free will in man implied the power to sin; that, if man was made in the image of God, there is nothing incredible in the Son of God becoming man; that in Him thus becoming man and suffering, man's sin was punished in man, and that the saved are those who, by the indwelling of the Divine Spirit, are made one with the Son of God who became man. The salvation is thus reasonable and in full accordance with the holiness and justice of God. But these difficulties of doctrine, though so readily explained, will never be received by the evil heart of man until he bow humbly before God as speaking in His Holy Word.

3. After these difficulties come those of a lower nature. First, there is the difficulty

about miracles. Old and New Testaments both narrate many miracles, and if these are falsehoods the revelation is a cheat. Those who would eliminate the miracles destroy the whole authority of the Bible, for they are interwoven with the whole texture of Scripture. You cannot take out these threads without ruining the whole cloth. But miracles, instead of being a difficulty, ought to be a witness to the truth of Scripture. A revelation of God without a miracle could have no weight in the human mind, for the mere learning about God from the works of nature is no revelation in the sense we use the word. A revelation demands a miracle. We can conceive of none without. A revelation is extraordinary, something outside of the ordinary course of nature. It must have a specific and direct action on the mind, that it may not be mistaken for anything else. And hence it must have the credentials of extraordinary events impossible to man, and yet wrought by man as evidence that God chooses him as His mouthpiece. So Moses, the prophets, Christ and the apostles, all who furnish us with the Book of God, wrought miracles in confirmation of their divine calling and message. Hence the words of Peter, "Jesus Christ approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs." This is the function of miracles, and we would not be justified in accepting anything as God's Word unless it were proved by miracle. Miracle confirmed the Old Testament dispensation, and only miracle could set it aside and confirm the New in its place. Otherwise we should yet have the old ritual as our form of worship.

That miracles are impossible is the assertion only of the atheistic mind. If God cannot do works impossible to man, then there is no God. The proof of miracles is that of ordinary human testimony.

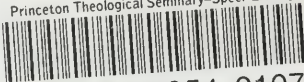
4. After the difficulty regarding miracles and the supernatural, which we assert to have no basis in reason, we may put the matter of discrepancies in the Scriptures. Of course it would be impossible in a brief paper to catalogue the alleged discrepancies and meet them all. There are useful books in which this has been done more or less completely, as, for example, Haley's "Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible," published at Andover in 1881. Many of our best commentaries explain satisfactorily the points at issue. All we can do in this article is to call attention to a few general facts regarding these alleged discrepancies. In the first place, thousands of intelligent and learned Christians have





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