

LECTURE II.

THE POET.

FROM last lecture I left over to this the discussion of a literary question, the answer to which is fundamental to our understanding both of the Book and of the Man, but especially of the Man.

The Book of Jeremiah has come to us with all its contents laid down as prose, with no metrical nor musical punctuation; not divided into *stichoi* or poetical lines nor marked off into stanzas or strophes. Yet many passages read as metrically, and are as musical in sound, and in spirit as poetic as the Psalms, the Canticles, or the Lamentations. Their language bears the marks that usually distinguish verse from prose in Hebrew as in other literatures. It beats out with a more or less regular proportion of stresses or heavy accents. It diverts into an order of words different from the order normal in prose. Sometimes it is elliptic, sometimes it contains particles unnecessary to the meaning—both signs of an attempt at metre. Though almost constantly unrhymed, it carries alliteration and assonance to a degree beyond what is usual in prose, and prefers forms of words more

sonorous than the ordinary. But these many and distinct passages of poetry issue from and run into contexts of prose unmistakable. For two reasons we are not always able to trace the exact border between the prose and the verse—*first* because of the frequent uncertainties of the text, and *second* because the prose, like most of that of the prophets, has often a rhythm approximating to metre. And thus it happens that, while on the one hand much agreement has been reached as to what Oracles in the Book are in verse, and what, however rhythmical, are in prose, some passages remain, on the original literary form of which a variety of opinion is possible. This is not all in dispute. Even the admitted poems are variously scanned—that is either read in different metres or, if in the same metre, either with or without irregularities. Such differences of literary judgment are due partly to our still imperfect knowledge of the laws of Hebrew metre and partly to the variety of possible readings of the text. Nor is even that all. The claim has been made not only to confine Jeremiah's genuine Oracles to the metrical portions of the Book, but, by drastic emendations of the text, to reduce them to one single, exact, unvarying metre.

These questions and claims—all-important as they are for the definition of the range and character of the prophet's activity—we can decide only after a preliminary consideration of the few clear

and admitted principles of Hebrew poetry, of their consequences, and of analogies to them in other literatures.

In Hebrew poetry there are some principles about which no doubt exists. *First*, its dominant feature is Parallelism, Parallelism of meaning, which, though found in all human song, is carried through this poetry with a constancy unmatched in any other save the Babylonian. The lines of a couplet or a triplet of Hebrew verse may be Synonymous, that is identical in meaning, or Supplementary and Progressive, or Antithetic. But at least their meanings respond or correspond to each other in a way, for which no better name has been found than that given it by Bishop Lowth more than a century and a half ago, 'Parallelismus Membrorum.'¹ *Second*, this rhythm of meaning is wedded to a rhythm of sound which is achieved by the observance of a varying proportion between stressed or heavily accented syllables and unstressed. That is clear even though we are unable to discriminate the proportion in every case or even to tell whether there were fixed rules for it; the vowel-system of our Hebrew text being possibly different from what prevailed in ancient Hebrew. But on the whole it is probable that as in other primitive poetries² there were no exact or rigorous

¹ 'De Sacra Poesi Hebræorum,' 1753.

² Writing of the early German lyric, Dr. John Lees says in his volume on 'The German Lyric' (London, Dent & Sons, 1914):

rules as to the proportion of beats or stresses in the single lines. For the rhythm of sense is the main thing—the ruling factor—and though the effort to express this in equal or regularly proportioned lines is always perceptible, yet in the more primitive forms of the poetry just as in some English folk-songs and ballads the effort did not constantly succeed. The art of the poet was not always equal to the strength of his passion or the length of his vision, or the urgency of his meaning. The meaning was the main thing and had to be beat out, even though to effect this was to make the lines irregular. As I have said in my Schweich Lectures: ‘If the Hebrew poet be so constantly bent on a rhythm of sense this must inevitably modify his rhythms of sound. If his first aim be to produce lines each more or less complete in meaning, but so as to run parallel to its fellow, it follows that these lines cannot be always exactly regular in length or measure of time. If the governing principle of the poetry requires each line to be a clause or sentence in itself, the lines will frequently tend, of course

‘In regard to the length of the lines, their number, and the arrangement of the rhymes, the poet has absolute freedom in all three classes;’ and again of the *Volklied* ‘there is no mechanical counting of syllables; the variation in the number of accented and unaccented syllables is the secret of the verse.’ And he quotes from Herder on the *Volklieder*: ‘songs of the people . . . songs which often do not scan and are badly rhymed.’

within limits, to have more or fewer stresses than are normal throughout the poem.'

But there are other explanations of the metrical irregularities in the traditional text of Hebrew poems, which make it probable that these irregularities are often original and not always (as they sometimes are) the blunders of copyists. In all forms of Eastern art we trace the influence of what we may call Symmetriphobia, an aversion to absolute symmetry, which expresses itself in more or less arbitrary disturbances of the style or pattern of the work. The visitor to the East knows how this influence operates in weaving and architecture. But its opportunities are more frequent, and may be used more gracefully, in the art of poetry. For instance, in many an Old Testament poem in which a single form of metre prevails there is introduced at intervals, and especially at the end of a strophe, a longer and heavier line, similar to what the Germans call the 'Schwellvers' in their primitive ballads. And this metrical irregularity is generally to the profit both of the music and of the meaning.

Further, the fact that poems, such as we now deal with, were not composed in writing, but were sung or chanted is another proof of the possibility that the irregularities in their metre are original. In the songs of the peasants of Palestine at the present day the lines vary as much as from two to five accents, and within the

same metrical form from three to four ; lines with three accents as written will, when sung to music, be stressed with four, or with four as written will be stressed with five in order to suit the melody.¹

Nor are such irregularities confined to Eastern or primitive poetry. In the later blank verse of Shakespeare, broken lines and redundant syllables are numerous, but under his hand they become things of beauty, and 'the irregularity is the foundation of the larger and nobler rule.' To quote the historian of English prosody—'These are quite deliberate indulgences in excess or defect, over or under a regular norm, which is so pervading and so thoroughly marked that it carries them off on its wings.'² Heine in his unrhymed 'Nordseebilder,' has many irregular lines—irregularities suitable to the variety of the subjects of his verse.

Again, in relevance to the mixture of poetry with prose in the prophetic parts of the Book of Jeremiah, it is just to note that the early pre-Islamic rhapsodists of Arabia used prose narratives to illustrate the subjects of their chants; that many later works in Arabic literature are medleys of prose and verse; that in particular the prose of the 'Arabian Nights' frequently breaks into metre; while the singing women of Mecca

¹ Dalman, 'Palästinischer Diwan.'

² Saintsbury, 'History of English Prosody,' vol. ii. 53, 54.

'often put metre aside and employ the easier form of rhymed prose'¹ the 'Saj' as it is called.

If I may offer a somewhat rough illustration, the works of some Eastern poets are like canoe voyages in Canada, in which the canoe now glides down a stream and is again carried overland by what are called portages to other streams or other branches of the same stream. Similarly these works have their clear streams of poetry, but every now and again their portages of prose. I may say at once that we shall find this true also of the Book of Jeremiah.

All these phenomena, both of Eastern and of Western poetry, justify us in regarding with scepticism recent attempts whether to eliminate—by purely arbitrary omissions and additions, not founded on the evidence of the Manuscripts and Versions—the irregularities in the metrical portions of the Book of Jeremiah, or to confine the Prophet's genuine Oracles to these metrical portions, and to deny that he ever passed from metre into rhythmical prose. And our scepticism becomes stronger when we observe to what different results these attempts have led, especially in the particular form or forms of metre employed.

Professor Duhm, for instance, confines our prophet to one invariable form, that of the Qînah or Hebrew Elegy, each stanza of which consists

¹ Snouck Hurgronje, 'Mekka,' vol. ii. 62.

of four lines of alternately *three* and *two* accents or beats; and by drastic and often quite arbitrary emendation of the text he removes from this every irregularity whether of defect or redundance in the separate lines.¹ On the other hand Cornill concludes that 'the metrical pieces in the book are written throughout in *Oktastichs*,' or eight lines a piece, but admits (and rightly) that 'in the metrical structure of the individual lines there prevails a certain freedom, due to the fact that for the prophet verse-making (*Dichten*) was not an end in itself.' While he allows, as all must, that Jeremiah frequently used the Qinah metre, he emphasises the presence of the irregular line, almost as though it were the real basis of the prophetic metre.² Other modern scholars, by starting from other presuppositions or by employing various degrees of the textual evidence of the Versions, have reached results different from those of Duhm and Cornill.³ But at the same time it is remarkable how much agreement prevails as to

¹ 'Kurzer Hand-Commentar,' 1901; and 'Das Buch Jeremia,' a translation, 1903.

² 'Das Buch Jeremia,' 1905, p. xlvi.

³ E.g. Sievers, 'Metrische Studien,' in the 'Transactions of Saxon Society of the Sciences,' vol. xxi (which relies too much on the Massoretic or Canonical text); Erbt, 'Jeremia u. seine Zeit,' p. 298; Giesebrecht, 'Jeremia's Metrik,' iii. ff.; Karl Budde's relevant pages in his 'Geschichte der althebräischen Litteratur,' 1906, reached me after I had expressed the views I have given above. They agree in the main with these views.

the frequent presence of the Qinah measure or its near equivalent.

To sum up: in view of the argument adduced from the obvious principles of Hebrew verse and of the primitive poetic practice of other nations—not to speak of Shakespeare and some modern poets—I am persuaded after close study of the text that, though Jeremiah takes most readily to the specific Qinah metre, it is a gross and pedantic error to suppose that he confined himself to this, or that when it appears in our Book it is always to be read in the same exact form without irregularities. The conclusion is reasonable that this rural prophet, brought up in a country village and addressing a people of peasants, used the same license with his metres that we have observed in other poetries of his own race. Nor is it credible that whatever the purpose of his message was—reminiscence, or dirge, or threat of doom or call to repent, or a didactic purpose—Jeremiah, throughout the very various conditions of his long ministry of forty years, employed but one metre and that only in its strictest form allowing of no irregularities. This, I say, is not credible.¹

¹ Certainly the evidence of both the Hebrew text and the Versions are against it, and the sense supports the text. More than once when sharp questions or challenges are thrown out, we have very appropriately two parallel lines of *two* accents each instead of the usual Qinah couplet of *three* and *two*: e.g.

The other question, whether in addition Jeremiah ever used prose in addressing his people, may be still more confidently answered. Duhm maintains that with the exception of the letter to the Jewish exiles in Babylonia,¹ the Prophet never spoke or wrote to his people in prose, and that the Book contains no Oracles from him, beyond some sixty short poems in a uniform measure. These Duhm alleges—and this is all that he finds in them—reveal Jeremiah as a man of modest, tender, shrinking temper, ‘no ruler of spirits, a delicate observer, a sincere exhorter and counsellor, a hero only in suffering and not in attack.’² Every passage of the Book, which presents him in any character beyond this—as an advocate for the Law or as a didactic prophet—is the dream of a later age, definitely separable from his own Oracles not more by its inconsistency with the temper displayed in these than by its prose form; for in prose, according to Duhm, Jeremiah never prophesied. On the evidence we have reviewed this also is not credible. That Jeremiah never passed from verse to prose when addressing his people is a theory at variance with the practice of other poets of his

ii. 14 and iii. 5. See below, pp. 46 ff. Compare the variety of metres, which Schiller employs to such good effect in his ‘Song of the Bell’—a variety in beautiful harmony with that of the different aspects of life on which he touches; and see above, p. 36, on the irregularity of metre in Heine’s *Nordseebilder*.

¹ Ch. xxix.

² *Op. cit.*, p. xii.

race ; and the more unlikely in his case, who was not only a poet but a prophet, charged with truths heavier than could always be carried to the heart of his nation upon a single form of folk-song. Not one of the older prophets, upon whom at first he leant, but used both prose and verse ; and besides there had burst upon his young ear a new style of prophetic prose, rhythmical and catching beyond any hitherto publicly heard in Israel. At least some portions of our Book of Deuteronomy were discovered in the Temple a few years after his call, and by order of King Josiah were being recited throughout Judah. Is it probable that he, whose teaching proves him to have been in sympathy with the temper and the practical purpose of that Book, should never have yielded to the use of its distinctive and haunting style ?

It is true that, while the lyrics which are undoubtedly the prophet's own are terse, concrete, poignant and graceful, the style of many—not of all—of the prose discourses attributed to him is copious, diffuse, and sometimes cold. But then it is verse which is most accurately gripped by the memory and firmly preserved in tradition ; it is verse, too, which best guards the original fire. Prose discourses, whether in their first reporting or in their subsequent tradition more readily tend to dilate and to relax their style. Nor is any style of prose so open as the Deuteronomic to additions,

parentheses, qualifications, needless recurrence of formulas and favourite phrases, and the like.

Therefore in the selection of materials available for estimating the range and character of Jeremiah's activities as a prophet, we must not reject any prose Oracles offered by the Book as his, simply because they are in prose. This reasonable caution will be of use when we come to consider the question of the authenticity of such important passages as those which recount his call, or represent him as assisting in the promulgation of Deuteronomy, and uttering the Oracle on the New Covenant.¹

But, while it has been necessary to reject as groundless the theory that Jeremiah was exclusively a poet of a limited temper and a single form of verse and was not the author of any of the prose attributed to him, we must keep in mind that he did pour himself forth in verse; that it was natural for a rural priest such as he, aiming at the heart of what was mainly a nation of peasants, to use the form or forms of folk-song most familiar to them²—in fact

¹ Chs. i, xi and xxxi.

² 'It is an understatement of the case to say that the folk-song has been a source of inspiration. In the very greatest lyricists we simply find the folksong in a new shape: it has become more polished and artistic, and it has been made the instrument of personal lyrical utterance.'—John Lees, M.A., D.Litt., 'The German Lyric' (London, etc., Dent & Sons, 1914).

the only literary forms with which they were familiar; and that in all probability more of the man himself comes out in the poetry than in the prose which he has left to us. By his native gifts and his earliest associations he was a poet to begin with; and therefore the form and character of his poetry, especially as revealing himself, demand our attention.

From what has been said it is clear that we must not seek too high for Jeremiah's rank as a poet. The temptation to this—which has overcome some recent writers—is due partly to a recoil from older, unjust depreciations of his prophetic style and partly to the sublimity of the truths which that mixed style frequently conveys. But those truths apart, his verse was just that of the folksongs of the peasants among whom he was reared—sometimes of an exquisite exactness of tone and delicacy of feeling, but sometimes full both of what are metrical irregularities according to modern standards, and of coarse images and similes. To reduce the metrical irregularities, by such arbitrary methods as Duhm's, may occasionally enhance the music and sharpen the edge of an Oracle yet oftener dulls the melody and weakens the emphasis.¹ The figures again

¹And in particular sins against the fundamental principle of parallelism, e.g. in iv. 3, where even with the help of part of an obvious title to the Oracle he gets only three lines and supposes

are always simple and homely, but sometimes even ugly, as is not infrequent in the rural poetries of all peoples. Even the dung on the pastures and the tempers of breeding animals are as readily used as are the cleaner details of domestic life and of farming—the house-candle, the house-mill, the wine skins, the ornaments of women, the yoke, the plough, and so forth. And there are abrupt changes of metaphor as in our early ballads, due to the rush of a quick imagination and the crowd of concrete figures it catches.

Some of Jeremiah's verse indeed shows no irregularity. The following, for instance, which recalls as Hosea loved to do the innocence and loyalty of Israel's desert days, is in the normal Qinah rhythm of lines with alternately *three* and *two* accents each. The two first lines are rhymed, the rest not.

II. 2f. :—

The troth of thy youth I remember,
 Thy love as a bride,
 Thy follow of Me through the desert,
 The land unsown.

the fourth to be lost; and though the sense-parallelism is generally within a couplet he divides it between the last line of his first couplet and the first of his second. Again, if we keep in mind what is said above (p. 35) of the recurrence in Hebrew poems of longer, heavier lines at intervals—especially at the end of a strophe or a poem, we must feel a number of Duhm's emendations to be not only unnecessary but harmful to the effectiveness of the verse.

Holy to the Lord was Israel,
 Of His income the firstling,
 All that would eat it stood guilty,
 Evil came on them.

Or II. 32 :—

Can a maiden forget her adorning,
 Or her girdle the bride ?
 Yet Me have My people forgotten,
 Days without number.
 How fine hast thou fashioned thy ways,
 To seek after love !
 Thus 't was thyself¹ to [those] evils
 Didst train² thy ways.
 Yea on thy skirts is found blood
 Of innocent³ souls.
 Not only on felons (?) I find it,⁴
 But over all these.

Here again is a passage which, with slight emendations and these not arbitrary, yields a fair constancy of metre (IV. 29-31) :—

From the noise of the horse and the bowmen
 All the land is in flight,
 They are into the caves, huddle in thickets,
 And are up on the crags.⁵
 Every town of its folk is forsaken,
 With none to inhabit.

¹ Pointing $\text{תָּא} for \text{תָּא}$. ² Pointing לְמַדְתִּי .

³ Hebrew adds *poor*.

⁴ So Duhm after the Greek ; see p. 97, n. 3. ⁵ After the Greek.

All is up! Thou destined to ruin, (?)¹
 What doest thou now
 That thou deck'st thee in deckings of gold
 And clothest in scarlet,²
 And with stibium widenest thine eyes?
 In vain dost thou prink!
 Though satyrs, they utterly loathe thee,
 Thy life are they after.
 For voice as of travail I hear,
 Anguish as hers that beareth,
 The voice of the Daughter of Sion agasp,
 She spreadeth her hands:
 'Woe unto me, but it fainth,
 My life to the butchers!'

On the other hand here is a metre,³ for the irregularities of which no remedy is offered by alternative readings in the Versions, but Duhm and others reduce these only by padding the text with particles and other terms. Yet these very irregularities have reason; they suit the meaning to be expressed. Thus while some of the couplets are in the Qinah metre, it is instructive that the first three lines are *all* short, because they are mere ejaculations—that is they belong to the

¹ By differently arranging the Hebrew consonants, see p. 117. Other arrangements are possible. Greek omits *destined to ruin*.

² Hebrew and Greek have this couplet in the reverse order.

³ ii. 14-17.

same class of happy irregularities as we recalled in Shakespeare's blank verse.

Israel a slave!
 Or house-born serf!
 Why he for a prey?
 Against him the young lions roar,
 Give forth their voice,
 And his land they lay waste
 Burning and tenantless.
 Is not this being done thee
 For thy leaving of Me?

Or take the broken line added to the regular verse on Rachel's mourning, the sob upon which the wail dies out:—

A voice in Ramah is heard, lamentation
 And bitterest weeping,
 Rachel beweeeping her children
 And will not be comforted—
 For they are not!¹

Sometimes, too, a stanza of regular metre is preceded or followed by a passionate line of appeal, either from Jeremiah himself or from another—I love to think from himself, added when his Oracles were about to be repeated to the people in 604-3. Thus in Ch. II. 31 we find the cry,

O generation look at the Word of the Lord!

¹ xxxi. 15.

breaking in before the following regular verse,

Have I been a desert to Israel,
Or land of thick darkness?
Why say my folk, 'We are off,
No more to meet Thee.'

There is another poem in which the Qinah measure prevails but with occasional lines longer than is normal—Ch. V. 1-6a (alternatively to end of 5¹).

Run through Jerusalem's streets,
Look now and know,
And search her broad places
If a man ye can find,
If there be that doth justice
Aiming at honesty.

[That I may forgive her.]

Though they say, 'As God liveth,'
Falsely they swear.

Lord, are thine eyes upon lies²
And not on the truth?

Thou hast smitten, they ail not,
Consumed them, they take not correction;
Their faces set harder than rock,
They refuse to return.

¹ While Duhm and Giesebrecht reduce the text to the exact Qinah form, Erbt correctly reads it as varied by lines of four accents.

² After Duhm who reads לֹא־רָאָה = לֹא־רָאָה (cp. viii. 6) and transfers it to the following line.

Or take Ch. II. 5-8. A stanza of four lines in irregular Qīnah measure (verse 5) is followed by a couplet of four-two stresses and several lines of three each (verses 6 and 7), and then (verse 8) by a couplet of three-two, another of four-three, and another of three-three.¹ In Chs. IX and X also we shall find irregular metres.

Let us now take a passage, IX. 22, 23, which, except for its last couplet, is of another measure than the Qīnah. The lines have three accents each, like those of the Book of Job :—

Boast not the wise in his wisdom,
 Boast not the strong in his strength,
 Boast not the rich in his riches,
 But in this let him boast who would boast—
 Instinct and knowledge of Me,
 Me, the Lord, Who work troth
 And² justice and right upon earth,
 For in these I delight.

Or this couplet, X. 23, in lines of four stresses each :—

Lord, I know—not to man is his way,
 Not a man's to walk or settle his steps!

Not being in the Qīnah measure, both these passages are denied to Jeremiah by Duhm. Is not this arbitrary?

The sections of the Book which pass from verse to prose and from prose to verse are frequent.

¹ See below, p. 92.

² So Greek.

One of the most striking is the narrative of the Prophet's call, Ch. I. 4-19, which I leave to be rendered in the next lecture. In Chap. VII. 28 ff. we have, to begin with, two verses:—

This is the folk that obeyed not
 The voice of the Lord,¹
 That would not accept correction ;
 Lost² is truth from their mouth.
 Shear and scatter thy locks,
 Raise a dirge on the heights,
 The Lord hath refused and forsaken
 The sons of His wrath.

Then these verses are followed by a prose tale of the people's sins. Is this necessarily from a later hand, as Duhm maintains, and not naturally from Jeremiah himself?

Again Chs. VIII and IX are a medley of lyrics and prose passages. While some of the prose is certainly not Jeremiah's, being irrelevant to the lyrics and showing the colour of a later age, the rest may well be from himself.

Ch. XIV is also a medley of verse and prose. After the Dirge on the Drought (which we take later), comes a passage in rhythmical prose (verses 11-16), broken only by the metrical utterance of the false prophets in verse 13:—

¹ So Greek ; Hebrew adds *their God*.

² Hebrew adds *and is cut off*.

Sword or famine ye shall not see,
 They shall not be yours;
 But peace and staith shall I give you
 Within this Place.¹

And verse comes in again in verses 17-18, an Oracle of Jeremiah's own :—

Let mine eyes with tears run down,
 By night and by day,
 Let them not cease from weeping²
 For great is the breach—
 Broken the Virgin, Daughter of my people,
 Most sore the wound!
 Fare I forth to the field,
 Lo, the slain of the sword;
 If I enter the city,
 Lo, anguish of famine.
 Priest and prophet alike are gone begging
 In a land they know not.
 Hast Thou utterly cast away Judah,
 Loathes Sion Thy soul?
 Why then hast Thou smitten us,
 Past our healing?
 Hoped we for peace—no good,
 For time to heal—and lo panic!
 Lord we acknowledge our evil,
 The guilt of our fathers—
 To Thee have we sinned.

¹The Hebrew *makôm* must here as elsewhere be given as equivalent to the Arabic *makâm* (literally like the Hebrew *standing-place* but) generally *sacred site*.

²After Duhm.

And now the measure changes to one of longer irregular lines, hardly distinguishable from rhythmical prose, which Duhm therefore takes, precariously, as from a later hand:—

For Thy Name's sake do not despise,
 Demean not the Throne of Thy Glory,
 Remember and break not Thy Covenant with us!
 Can any of the gentile Bubbles bring rain,
 Or the Heavens give the showers?
 Art not Thou He¹ on whom we must wait?

For all these Thou hast made.

Again in Ch. XV. 1-2, prose is followed by a couplet, this by more prose (verses 3, 4) and this by verse again (verses 5-9). But these parts are relevant to each other, and some of Duhm's objections to the prose seem inadequate and even trifling. For while the heavy judgment is suitably detailed by the prose, the following dirge is as naturally in verse:—

Jerusalem, who shall pity,
 Who shall bemoan thee?
 Who shall but turn him to ask
 After thy welfare?

And once more, in the Oracle Ch. III. 1-6 the first verse, a quotation from the law on a divorced wife, is in prose, and no one doubts that Jeremiah himself is the quoter, while the rest, recounting

¹ Hebrew adds *the Lord our God*; not in the Greek.

Israel's unfaithfulness to her Husband is in verse. See below, pages 98, 99.

So much for the varied and often irregular streams of the Prophet's verse and their interruptions and connections by "portages" of prose. Let us turn now from the measures to the substance and tempers of the poetry.

As in all folk-song the language is simple, but its general inevitableness—just the fit and ringing word—stamps the verse as a true poet's. Hence the difficulty of translating. So much depends on the music of the Hebrew word chosen, so much on the angle at which it is aimed at the ear, the exact note which it sings through the air. It is seldom possible to echo these in another language; and therefore all versions, metrical or in prose, must seem tame and dull beside the ring of the original. Before taking some of the Prophet's renderings of the more concrete aspects of life I give, as even more difficult to render, one of his moral reflections in verse—Ch. XVII. 5 f. Mark the scarceness of abstract terms, the concreteness of the figures:—

Curséd the wight that trusteth in man
Making flesh his stay!
[And his heart from the Lord is turned]
Like some desert-scrub shall he be,
Nor see any coming of good,
But dwell in the aridest desert,
A salt, uninhabited land.

Blesséd the wight that trusts in the Lord,
And the Lord is his trust!
He like a tree shall be planted by waters,
That stretches its roots to the stream,
Unafraid¹ at the coming of heat,
His leaf shall be green.
Sans care in a year of drought,
He fails not in yielding his fruit.

As here, so generally, the simplicity of the poet's diction is matched by that of his metaphors, similes, and parables. A girl and her ornaments, a man and his waist-cloth—thus he figures what ought to be the clinging relations between Israel and their God. The stunted desert-shrub in contrast to the river-side oaks, the incomparable olive, the dropped sheaf and even the dung upon the fields; the vulture, stork, crane and swift; the lion, wolf and spotted leopard coming up from the desert or the jungles of Jordan; the hinnying stallions and the heifer in her heat; the black Ethiopian, already familiar in the streets of Jerusalem, the potter and his wheel, the shepherd, plowman and vinedresser, the driver with his ox's yoke upon his shoulders; the harlot by the wayside; the light in the home and sound of the hand-mill—all everyday objects of his people's sight and hearing as they herded, ploughed, sowed, reaped or went to market in the city—he brings them in simply and with natural

¹ So Greek and Vulg.; Hebrew has *he shall not see*.

ease as figures of the truths he is enforcing. They are never bald or uncouth, though in translation they may sometimes sound so.

In the very bareness of his use of them there lurks an occasional irony as in the following—a passage of prose broken by a single line of verse.¹ The Deity is addressing the prophet:—

And thou shalt say unto this people,
‘Every jar shall be filled with wine,’

and it shall be if they say unto thee, ‘Don’t we know of course² that

‘Every jar shall be filled with wine,’

then thou shalt say unto them: Thus saith the Lord, Lo, I am about to fill the inhabitants of this land, the kings and princes, the priests and prophets, even Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, with drunkenness [the drunkenness, that is, of horror at impending judgments] and I will dash them one against another, fathers and sons together. I will not pity, saith the Lord, nor spare nor have compassion that I should not destroy them.

How one catches the irritation of the crowd on being told what seems to them such a commonplace—till it is interpreted!

¹ xiii. 12-14. The above rendering follows the Greek version.

² A Hebrew idiom, literally *don't, knowing, we know?*

Like his fellow-prophets, whose moral atmosphere was as burning as their physical summer, who living on the edge of the desert under a downright sun *drew breath* (as Isaiah puts it) *in the fear of the Lord* and saw the world in the blaze of His justice, Jeremiah brings home to the hearts of his people the truths and judgments, with which he was charged, in the hard, hot realism of their austere world. Through his verse we see the barer landscapes of Benjamin and Judah without shadow or other relief, every ugly detail exposed by the ruthless noon, and beyond them the desert hills shimmering through the heat. Drought, famine, pestilence and especially war sweep over the land and the ghastly prostrate things, human as well as animal, which their skirts leave behind are rendered with vividness, poignancy and horror of detail.

Take, to begin with, the following, XIV. 1 ff. :—

*The Word of the Lord to Jeremiah Concerning
the Drought.*

Jerusalem's cry is gone up,
Judah is mourning,
The gates thereof faint in
Black grief to the ground.

Her nobles sent their menials for water,
They came to the pits ;
Water found none and returned,

Empty their vessels.
 [Abashed and confounded
 They cover their heads.]¹

The tillers² of the ground are dismayed,
 For no rain hath been³ ;
 And abashed are the ploughmen,
 They cover their heads.

The hind on the moor calves and abandons,
 For the grass has not come.
 On the bare heights stand the wild asses,
 Gasping for air
 With glazen eyes—
 Herb there is none!

Though our sins do witness against us,
 Lord act for the sake of Thy Name!
 [For many have been our backslidings,
 'Fore Thee have we sinned.]

Hope of Israel, His Saviour
 In time of trouble,
 Why be like a traveller⁴ thorough the land,
 Or wayfaring guest of a night?
 Why art Thou as one that is stunned,—
 Strong yet unable to save?

¹ This couplet is wanting in the Greek.

² So rightly Duhm after the Greek.

³ Hebrew uselessly adds *in the land*.

⁴ So Duhm, reading *gār* for *gēr*.

Yet Lord, Thou art in our midst,
 [O'er us Thy Name hath been called]
 Do not forsake us!

Thus saith the Lord of this people :—

So fond to wander are they,
 Their feet they restrain not,
 The Lord hath no pleasure in them,
 He remembers their guilt.¹

The following dirge is on either a war or a pestilence, or on both, for they often came together. The text of the first lines is uncertain, the Hebrew and Greek differing considerably :—

Call ye the keening women to come,
 And send for the wise ones,
 That they hasten and sing us a dirge,
 Till with tears our eyes run down,
 Our eyelids with water.

For death has come up by our windows,
 And into our palaces,
 Cutting off from the streets the children,
 The youths from the places.
 And fallen are the corpses of men
 Like dung on the field,
 Or sheaves left after the reaper,
 And nobody gathers.²

¹ Hebrew adds, *and will make visitation on their sins*, which the Greek omits.

² ix. 17 f., 21 f. ; see also pp. 205, 206.

The minatory discourses are sombre and lurid. Sometimes the terror foretold is nameless and mystic, yet even then the Prophet's simplicity does not fail but rather contributes to the vague, undefined horror. In the following it is premature night which creeps over the hills—night without shelter for the weary or refuge for the hunted.

Hear and give ear, be not proud,
For the Lord hath spoken!
Give glory to the Lord your God
Before it grows dark,
And before your feet stumble—
On the mountains of dusk.

While ye look for light, He turns it to gloom
And sets it thick darkness.¹

There this poem leaves the Doom, but in others Jeremiah leaps in a moment from the vague and far-looming to the near and exact. He follows a line which songs of vengeance or deliverance often take among unsophisticated peoples in touch with nature. They will paint you a coming judgment first in the figure of a lowering cloud or bursting storm and then in the twinkling of an eye they turn the clouds or the lightnings into the ranks and flashing arms of invaders arrived. I remember an instance of this within one verse of a negro song from the time of the American Civil War:—

¹xiii. 15-16.

Don't you see de lightning flashing in de cane-
brakes ?

Don't you think we'se gwine to have a storm ?
No you is mistaken—dem's de darkies' bayonets,
And de buttons on de uniform !

Examples of this sudden turn from the vague to the real are found throughout Jeremiah's Oracles of Doom. Here are some of them :—

Wind off the glow of the bare desert heights,
Right on the Daughter of My people,
It is neither to winnow nor to cleanse,
In full blast it meets me . . . :
Lo, like the clouds he is mounting,
Like the whirlwind his chariots !
Swifter than vultures his horses ;
Woe ! We are undone !

.

For hark a signal from Dan,
Mount Ephraim echoes disaster,
Warn the folk ! ' They are come ! ' ¹
Make heard o'er Jerusalem.
Lo, the beleaguerers (?) come
From a land far-off,
They let forth their voice on the townships of
Judah,
[Close] as the guards on her suburbs

¹ So the Greek.

They are on and around her,
 For Me she defied.¹

There is a similar leap from the vagueness of IV. 23-26, which here follows, to the vivid detail of verses 29-31 already rendered on page 45.

I looked to the earth, and lo, chaos,
 To the heavens, their light was gone,
 I looked to the mountains, they quivered,
 The hills were all shuddering.
 I looked and behold not a man,
 All the birds of the heavens had fled.
 I looked for the gardens, lo desert,
 All the townships were burning.

Or take a similar effect from the Oracle on the Philistines, Ch. XLVII. 2, 3.

Lo, the waters are up in the North,
 The torrents are plunging,
 O'erwhelming the land and her fulness,
 The city and her dwellers.
 Mankind is crying and howling,
 Every man in the land,
 At the noise of the stamp of the hoofs of his steeds
 At the rush of his cars,
 The rumble of his wheels.

¹iv. 11-13, 15-17. The text and so the metre of 16, 17 are uncertain. For *besiegers* Duhm proposes by the change of one letter to read *panthers*, to which in v. 6 Jeremiah likens the same foes. Skinner, *leopards*. See below, p. 114.

Fathers look not back for their children,
So helpless their hands!¹

Or take the Prophet's second vision on his call, Ch. I. 13 ff., the boiling cauldron with its face from the North, which is to boil out over the land; then the concrete explanation, *I am calling to all the kingdoms of the North, and they shall come and every one set his throne in the gates of Jerusalem.* There you have it—that vague trouble brewing in the far North and then in a moment the northern invaders settled in the gates of the City.

But the poetry of Jeremiah had other strains. I conclude this lecture with selections which deal with the same impending judgment, yet are wistful and tender, the poet taking as his own the sin and sufferings of the people with whose doom he was charged.

The first of these passages is as devoid of hope as any we have already seen, but like Christ's mourning over the City breathes the regret of a great love—a profound and tender Alas!

Jerusalem, who shall pity,
Who shall bemoan thee?
Or who will but turn him to ask
After thy welfare?

Then follow lines of doom without reprieve and the close comes:—

¹ Lit. *Because of the feebleness of their hands.*

She that bore seven hath fainted,
 She breathes out her life.
 Set is her sun in the daytime,
 Baffled and shaméd ;
 And their remnant I give to the sword
 In face of their foes.¹

In the following also the poet's heart is with his people even while he despairs of them. The lines, VIII. 14-IX. 1, of which 17 and 19^b are possibly later insertions, are addressed to the country-folk of Judah and Benjamin :—

For what sit we still ?
 Sweep together,
 And into the fortified cities,
 That there we may perish !
 For our God² hath doomed us to perish,
 And given us poison to drink,
 For to Him³ have we sinned.
 Hope for peace there was once—
 But no good—
 For a season of healing—
 Lo, panic.³
 From Dan the sound has been heard,⁴
 The hinnying of his horses ;

¹ xv. 5-9.

² Greek ; in both cases Hebrew adds *the Lord*.

³ This verse is uncertain ; for Hebrew בעתה read with the Greek בהלה. For another arrangement see above, p 51.

⁴ So Greek ; Hebrew omits *sound*.

With the noise of the neighing of his stallions
 All the land is aquake.
 For that this grief hath no comfort,¹
 Sickens my heart upon me.
 Hark to the cry of my people
 Wide o'er the land—
 'Is the Lord not in Sion,
 Is there no King there?'²

Harvest is over, summer is ended
 And we are not saved!
 For the breach of the Daughter of my people
 I break, I darken,
 Horror hath seized upon me,
 Pangs as of her that beareth.³
 Is there no balm in Gilead,
 Is there no healer?
 Why will the wounds never stanch
 Of the daughter of my people?
 O that my head were waters,
 Mine eyes a fountain of tears,
 That day and night I might weep
 For the slain of my people!

Such in the simple melodies of his music and in the variety of his moods—now sombre, stern and relentless, now tender and pleading, now in despair of his people yet identifying himself with

¹ This line is uncertain.

² Greek.

³ So Greek; Hebrew omits this line.

them—was this rural poet, who was called to carry the burdens of prophecy through forty of the most critical and disastrous years of Israel's history. In next lecture we shall follow the earlier stages which his great heart pursued beneath those burdens.