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**THE MINOR PROPHETS
UNFOLDED**

THE MINOR PROPHETS UNFOLDED

BY

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AND LATE EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE BISHOP OF DURHAM

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JOEL AND AMOS

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PREFACE

THE plan of this second volume of "The Minor Prophets Unfolded," containing the books of Joel and Amos, is like that of the first, on Hosea, to the Preface of which the reader is referred for fuller information concerning the object and method of the series.

It is sufficient to say here that this is to provide the layman who has but little time at his disposal with a very short, but trustworthy, guide to the interpretation of these little books of Holy Scripture, which are often difficult to understand, and sometimes obscure. Only it is important to bear in mind that the Commentary is not intended to be read through at one sitting, but to be taken quietly and prayerfully day by day. It is only in this way that the meaning and message of the inspired writers will be sown in the heart, and, by the blessing of God, will spring up into fruit.

JOEL

THE MINOR PROPHETS UNFOLDED

JOEL I. 1-4.

The word of the LORD . . . caterpillar eaten.

THE Book of Joel is a vivid description of the Last Times. In it the prophet uses an awful plague of locusts, through which he and his contemporaries were passing, as a basis for an earnest exhortation to repentance. Then, rising from this to the LORD's assurance that He will hear His people's prayer, and, after removing the locusts, give good harvests once again, he foretells the outpouring of the LORD's spirit upon all classes, and the salvation of every one who calls upon His name. Joel then speaks of God's judgment on the heathen who will be gathered against Him in war, but in vain—for the LORD will vindicate His people.

The description of this judgment, and of the ensuing happiness of the children of Israel, is unsurpassed for oratory in the whole Bible. The Book as a whole is a triumphant exposition of the Providence of God, who permits trials to come on His servants that He may bring them to

a right attitude towards Himself, and, when this is attained, supplies them with blessing upon blessing, bringing all their enemies to nought.

We know nothing whatever of the author, "Joel the son of Pethuel," and can only form conjectures of the date of his book. The statement that Israel has been scattered (iii. 2), the mention of the Greeks (iii. 6), as well as of the Temple (i. 13), together with the pre-supposition that Tyre is still an important city (iii. 4), suggest the early part of the fourth century B.C. In any case the prophecy was addressed principally to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the neighbourhood (*e.g.* i. 13, *sq.*, ii. 1).

NOTES.

Central thought : ii. 14.

Divisions : A. Chs. i.-ii. 17. The present calamity, which may be removed by repentance, but is the harbinger of the Day of the LORD. (a) Ch. i. The calamity—locusts and drought (*v.* 20). (b) Ch. ii. 1-11. The signs of the approaching Day of the LORD. (c) *vv.* 12-17. Therefore repent publicly. B. Chs. ii. 18—iii. 21. The LORD's response. (a) Ch. ii. 18-32. The locusts shall be removed, plenty shall be restored, and His Spirit be outpoured. (b) Ch. iii. The heathen shall be judged; the LORD shall vindicate His people, give abundant prosperity, and dwell in Zion.

Ver. 4. The four Hebrew words rendered *palmerworm*, *locust*, *cankerworm*, *caterpillar*, mean literally "shearer," "swarmer," "licker," "finisher." They probably refer to invasions of locusts in four successive years (*cf.* ii. 25), but the *names* may be those of the four stages of the insects' growth. "At first they are black; when about three weeks old they become green, after two weeks more they are yellow, striped with brown: at this stage they have wings, but too small to enable them to fly, and when in an erect position. their appearance at a little distance is that of a well-armed horseman; in 14 days more, when perfect, they are pink below and green above, with various streaks and marks, differing also in colour." (Quoted by Driver in the Excursus to his Commentary, from the account by an eyewitness in Jaffa, 1865.)

JOEL I. 5-12.

Awake, ye drunkards . . . the sons of men.

THE plague of locusts, says the Prophet, is such as no one living, no, not even the oldest inhabitant, has ever experienced or heard tell of (*v.* 2), and the memory of it will live for generations (*v.* 3). Flight after flight devours what its predecessors had left (*v.* 4). Then he describes the feelings of the three chief classes of the community. First, the dwellers in the towns (for these would doubtless be the chief drinkers of wine), are bid recognize their loss. For the locusts have come, like a nation strong and innumerable, with teeth recalling lions' teeth for strength, laying the vines of God's land waste, and His fig trees in splinters, stripping off their bark and scattering it, and leaving their twining tendrils white as snow. Secondly, the priests are bid lament, like a young married maid in sackcloth for her dead husband, because meal and wine offerings, necessary for the daily sacrifices in the Temple (Numb. xxviii. 3-8), are cut off from it. They mourn, the countryside is laid waste, the arable land mourneth; for the corn is laid waste, the new wine is as one disgraced, the oil is tired out and fails. Thirdly, the agricultural classes. The farmers feel disgraced, as they think of their wheat and their barley, for the harvest has died off. The vine dressers utter cries of lamentation; the vine is disgraced, the fig tree fails, pomegranate and palm and apple, yea, all the fruit trees are dried up, because joy feels too ashamed to stay with men.

There is a play of words throughout this passage between "shame" and "dryness" which cannot be reproduced in English, but the point of the verses is sufficiently clear—all the crops fail, and the whole community, as represented by its three classes of townsmen, priests, and countrymen, suffer bitterly. God has permitted the plague of locusts to do so much harm, and nothing can stand against them. It is well for us sometimes that we should be brought to know our weakness against the forces of nature. For, after all, God is at their back.

NOTES.

Ver. 5, *new wine* (A.V.), *sweet wine* (R.V.). This is the juice freshly "pressed out" (*asís*) from grapes (or pomegranates, Song of Songs viii. 2), which begins to ferment in the vats within three or four hours, and is therefore intoxicating (Isa. xlix. 26). It seems to be identical with "new wine" (*tírósh*) in v. 10.

Ver. 6, *whose* (*his* R.V.) *teeth* are *the teeth of a lion*. The resemblance of the mandibles of locusts to the teeth of lions lies not in the shape, for the former are edged like a saw, but in their power for destruction.

cheek teeth (A.V.), *jaw teeth* (R.V.), literally the "gnawers" or "tearers." Doubtless the four great canine teeth which are the most prominent feature of a lion's head.

Ver. 12, *joy is withered away*. The R.V. margin "ashamed" is preferable.

JOEL I. 13-20.

Gird yourselves . . . the wilderness.

THERE is but one thing which a nation in affliction can do, one thing better than all else—betake itself to God. And in this God's ministers must lead the way. Gird yourselves as mourners, cries the prophet, and wail aloud, ye priests; stay in your sackcloth day and night, mourning because our God can no longer be worshipped with the sacrifices of meal and wine prescribed. Nor mourn alone; proclaim a holy fast and call a convocation; gather the aged—named perhaps because they are more apt to pray than others—and all the inhabitants, to the Temple, and cry unto the LORD. How? With what words? Remember the verse in the Book of Isaiah (xiii. 6), and see in this plague of locusts a reminder of the last great Day of the LORD. Then set before Him the misery of the land. The vats have grown mouldy with slime on their empty walls; the garners are laid desolate; the barns broken down, for lack of corn. How the beasts groan, and the herds wander aimlessly, and the flocks of sheep are punished! Therefore to Thee, even to Thee, O LORD, will I cry, for fire hath devoured the pastures of the moorland, and the flame hath set all the trees of the country-side ablaze. Yea, the wild beasts pant each for Thee (Psa. xlii. 1), for the very brooks are dried, and the moorland pastures consumed!

How clear the scene is! What misery of man and beast is painted! But it is not quite certain

whether the Prophet intends to describe the plague of locusts under the figure of fire (*cf.* ii. 3, 5), or whether he means that scorching heat and drought have followed the devastation caused by the locusts. Perhaps, after all, the question is of no practical importance. For in any case he is endeavouring to persuade his audience to tell God their misery, that He may, of His mercy, deliver them from it. We can hardly enter too much into detail when we pray to our God. He likes us to spread our case before Him, for when He sees that we are fully conscious of our helplessness apart from Him, then He stretches out His hand to succour us.

NOTES.

Ver. 13, *ye ministers of the altar . . . ye ministers of my God.* The Rabbis interpret the second word of the singers, adding that he who sings praises to God is as one who sacrifices on the altar.

Ver. 15, *the Almighty.* *Shaddai*, an alliteration with the preceding Hebrew word for "destruction" (*shōd*); "as an overpowering from the Over-powerer" (Driver). This meaning is as likely as any, but a popular derivation, "He who is sufficient," is common in the Septuagint and may be alluded to in the New Testament (see my *St. Paul's Letters Unfolded*, 2 Cor. iii. 6).

Ver. 16, *joy and gladness from the house of our God.* For the joy of harvest was heard in the Temple thanksgivings.

Ver. 17. *The seed is rotten (The seeds rot, R.V.), under their clods.* The meaning of the three chief words is exceedingly doubtful. With one plausible emendation (*peroth*, "vats," for *perudoth*, "grains," or "seeds," R.V.) the clause may be rendered; "the vats have grown mouldy under their filth."

Ver. 19, *the wilderness.* See Hos. ix. 10, note.

JOEL II. 1-9.

Blow ye the trumpet . . . a thief.

THE prophet now begins to see in the plague of locusts the first stage of the Day of the LORD, to which he has already referred in i. 15, and he bids his audience repent. Blow the ram's horn for a solemn assembly! Shout to summon the people! Let all the inhabitants of the land quake! For the Day of the LORD cometh, yea, is now at hand! Then it is described, the locusts being taken as the harbingers of it. There is darkness, such as locusts cause (Exod. x. 15), thick and dense. There is, too, a glow on the mountains, from the sheen of their wings beyond. A people great and strong, as none aforetime or in after years! They are like a fire in front, and a flame behind! For the land in front of them is a Paradise, and behind them is a desolate wilderness; nought escapes them! Their very heads are as horses' heads, and they rush forward like cavalry. Like the rattling of chariots sounds their leaping on the mountain-tops, and as the crackle of flame devouring the stubble—nay, they are like a strong people drawn up for battle. At sight of them men's loins are in anguish and all faces lose their glow.

Then the Prophe tdevelopes the simile of the army. The locusts rush forward like soldiers, scale walls like men of war, without breaking rank. Yet none jostles his neighbour; they go on each in his path, and they hurl themselves on the lances without checking their course. They

assault the city, they rush on the walls, they ascend the houses, they enter through the windows (always unglazed) as readily as a thief.

We in European lands can but faintly imagine the horror that all this implies—the irremediableness of the attack, its all-pervading effect, the gloom, the devastation. The locusts are a fitting, though, after all, but a faint symbol of the terrors of the last days, which the LORD will suffer to come upon His people. Perhaps they have already begun (1917); in any case the Prophet still cries, Repent.

NOTES.

Ver. 1, *sound an alarm*. By shouting, in accordance with the prevailing usage of the Hebrew word. Canon Parfit, who has had many years' experience of the Holy Land, tells me, in a private letter, that to-day the human voice is most generally used for calling together any solemn assembly," though a trumpet or bugle is used occasionally. Perhaps, however, the word refers to sounding an alarm on the clarion (Hos. v. 8, note). In Talmudic times on Fast-days bent rams' horns were used in the synagogue service by preference, because they saw in them a symbol of a soul bowed down in penitence; two trumpets (clarions) were blown and a bent ram's horn on each side, the former still continuing when the latter had ceased (see Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, iii. p. 96).

Ver. 2, *as the morning (dawn R.V.) spread upon the mountains*. This should perhaps be the beginning of the following clause.

Ver. 4, *the appearance of horses*. The shape of a locust's head bears some resemblance to that of a horse (*cf.* i. 4, note).

Ver. 6, *shall gather blackness (A.V.), are waxed pale (R.V.)*. This difficult phrase (Nah. ii. 10) should be translated "contract their glow."

Ver. 8, *path*. A suggestive correction is "in his covering" (*cf.* Ezek. xxviii. 13) or "cuirass."

JOEL II. 10-14.

And the LORD . . . unto the LORD your God.

HERE the prophecy passes from the locusts to a more real and awful Presence. It is the LORD that is coming, and before Him earth quakes, heavens shake, sun and moon go black, and stars restrain their beams. His voice is heard in front of His army, for very great is the host that waits on Him, for He that accomplishes His word is strong, for the Day of the LORD is great and very terrible, and who shall endure it ?

The Prophet, it will be observed, frames clause upon clause, to enforce upon his hearers the sense of their nothingness compared with God, and of the immediate and pressing danger in which they stand. They find the locusts terrible, but how much more Him whose army these are, and whose other army these but faintly represent !

Yet, even now, continues the Prophet, even now in this misery and this fear, turn and come to God in full sincerity, and with public evidence of your sorrow, seen in fasting, weeping, and lamentation. For whatever may be the case in Europe, Eastern peoples can hardly conceive of repentance in the absence of outward signs. But the Prophet warns them that these are not enough. The rending of the garment is as nothing compared with the true rending of the heart ; return, therefore, he says, with this unto the LORD, who is still your own God. For His character is such that you may dare to do so in hope. He is full of grace and of tender

compassion, very slow to wrath and great in mercy, ready to change His purpose of inflicting the punishment that He has had in mind! Return and venture! For, perhaps, He too will turn and change His purpose, and, as He draws back from punishing, will leave behind Him a blessing on the land, even the means of offering up once more to the LORD your God in His temple meal-offerings and libations of wine (i. 9), as thankful signs of an abundant harvest!

Observe how the Prophet works round to the thought that blessings received by true believers are sure to make themselves known by public recognition of God's mercy. The Prophet cannot imagine open repentance and only secret gratitude.

NOTES.

Ver. 10, *before them*, lit. "him." Understood by the A.V. and R.V. to mean the locusts (*cf. v. 3*), but here probably the LORD.

Ver. 14, *who knoweth*. See Jonah iii. 9. The ambiguity of the A.V. may be due to a feeling that the Hebrew is capable of being understood (as by the Targum and some Rabbinic commentators) to refer to the man's own repentance. Even the R.V. is not clear.

a blessing. The Prophet is thinking of material blessings, as the following words show. But spiritually, we may speak of God (see Pusey) "as one estranged, who had been long absent and who returns, giving tokens of His forgiveness and renewed good-pleasure. God often visits the penitent soul, and, by some sweetness with which the soul is bathed, leaves a token of His renewed Presence."

JOEL II. 15-20.

Blow the trumpet . . . he hath done great things.

THE summons of v. 1 is repeated ("Blow ye the sacred trumpet in Zion"), with the more precise additions of, Proclaim a holy fast, Call a solemn assembly. This is to extend to all ages and conditions. Gather the people together; proclaim a holy congregation; collect the aged, gather the children, even the very youngest; let even the bridegroom and bride alike leave the preparations for their marriage. We must picture all the people standing in the Temple area, with the priests drawn up within their own precincts between the great altar in the inner area and the porch of the sacred building itself. There let them lead the service as the LORD'S ministers, and say amid their tears: "Have pity, O LORD, upon Thy people, and give not up Thine own inheritance to reproach, that heathen nations make no proverbs over them—for why should men say among the peoples: Where is their God?" Observe that the locusts are not mentioned, although they are implied throughout.

Then the LORD is depicted as becoming jealous for His own land, having compassion on His people, and answering their prayer, by saying they shall now behold Him sending them a full harvest, so that they shall be satisfied, and shall not be any more a reproach among the heathen nations. For, if these have taunted them for their misery from the locusts, they shall find no more occasion to do so. For God will remove

the locusts which He has brought from the north, and will drive them into a dry and desolate, and therefore foodless, land (such as the Negeb, south of Palestine), with the van of its host into the Dead Sea, and the rear into the Mediterranean, and they shall perish in a corrupting mass, in punishment for all the great evil that they have wrought. So effective is a nation's prayer, when uttered from a sincere and repentant heart!

NOTES.

Ver. 16, *bridegroom . . . bride*. "There was no room for the plea, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come'" (S. L. Warren in Ellicott's Commentary). For the scene cf. Judith iv. 9-15.

Ver. 17, *between the porch and the altar*. The entrance to the Temple courts being from the East, one came first to the Great Altar of Burnt Offering, and after that to the Porch at the east end of the Temple building. Cf. Ezek. viii. 16, and Matt. xxiii. 35.

should rule over them. The margin is preferable: "use a byword against them" (cf. Job. xvii. 6), for in the LORD's answer (v. 19) there is nothing about servitude to the Gentiles, but only about their "reproach."

Ver. 20, *the northern army*. Locusts so seldom come to Palestine from the north or the north-east that the term must be used here at least to suggest human foes, from Assyria or Babylon. But the rest of the verse shows that the locusts are still the main subject.

because he hath done great things. "He" is the LORD. But some understand it of the foe (cf. Lam. i. 9) or the locusts. It is possible that this clause has been wrongly inserted here from v. 21.

"Oh! ye humble followers of the Lord Jesus," says Robert Hawker on this chapter . . . "see to it, that ye manifest a spirit of grace and supplication, which hath been given you, that is, continually in your daily walk, by besieging the throne with earnest cries and prayers, that will take no denial for Zion in her present alarming state of languishing."

JOEL II. 21-27.

Fear not, O land . . . shall never be ashamed.

No wonder that with the removal of the locusts the people are bid rejoice, and that promise after promise of abundance of blessing is given to them. The ground is bid not fear—as it has feared with the terrible experience of the locusts, but be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has already done great things. For God's promises are so sure that the believer may count them as already fulfilled. The animals too are bid not fear, for the pastures have already begun to spring, the trees to bear their fruit, fig tree and vine to yield their produce. Men, too, who belong to the LORD's own city, children of Zion, are bid be glad and rejoice in the LORD their God, for He has given them the early rain of November, in accordance with the promptings of His gracious righteousness, and has brought down a soaking rain, even the latter rain in the first month of the sacred year, April or May. So shall the barns be filled with grain, and the vats overflow with new wine and olive oil. And more than this, for it is characteristic of God to give to the utmost, He promises to send future harvests so good that they will make up for the ravages in former years by the locusts of various kinds, His great army which He had sent among them.

What effect shall all this have on the people? Their bodily needs shall be fully satisfied; their hearts shall be so moved that they will praise the name of the LORD (implying, as this does,

His revelation of His character) who hath dealt so marvellously with them; and they, as the LORD'S own people, will never have cause to feel ashamed of their worship of Him. On the contrary, they shall know with a vivid knowledge gained by fresh and personal experience, that He Himself is in the midst of Israel; that He is the LORD their own God, and that there is none other; and, taking this ever to heart, they, as the LORD'S people, shall never be ashamed. So when the repentant sinner takes to heart the multitude of blessings—even physical blessings—bestowed upon him, he takes also to heart, as never before, the wondrous grace of God, and the privilege of being His servant.

NOTES.

Ver. 23. *the former rain* (1st). The Hebrew word in itself can mean "the teacher," but this is not suggested in any way by the context.

moderately (A.V.), *in just measure* (R.V.), or "in normal measure" (G. A. Smith). But perhaps better, "as His righteousness prompts," or "in accordance with His vindication of you."

the former rain (2nd). Perhaps the Hebrew word is a participle meaning "soaking" (*cf.* Hos. vi. 3), or it may be only an interpolation from the beginning of the verse.

Ver. 24, *the fats*, *i.e.* the vats. The vat is the lower receptacle into which the juice flows from the press in which the grapes are trodden.

Ver. 25, *the years*. Some would alter this (*hashanim*) to "the fatness" or "the fertile places" (*hashemannim*); *cf.* Gen. xxvii. 28, 39.

the locust. See i. 4, note.

my great army. "The Arabs regard the tiny cross-lines on locusts' wings as letters which read, 'we are the army of the living God'; and one of their names for God is, 'Lord of the locusts'" (Woods and Powell).

JOEL II. 28-32.

And it shall come to pass . . . call.

REPENTANCE brings more than temporal blessings, the fresh conviction of the LORD'S presence, and the assurance of the triumph of His cause (v. 27). The Spirit of the LORD is poured out also. Whether we can press the "afterward" to refer strictly to time is another matter. Presumably it suggests another consequence of the penitential prayer previously reported. Neither can we understand the outpouring of the Spirit "upon all flesh" (v. 28) to refer to Gentiles as such as well as to Jews. For the following words: "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy," as the effect of the outpouring of the Spirit, seem to limit the blessing to those of Jewish birth, and to include every one of these, not only specially favoured individuals. The passage means that all classes of believers among the Jews shall receive the Spirit, and experience the effect in prophetic utterance, and in dreams and visions. But this language was natural in days before the heathen were brought to the knowledge of the true God. Yet the express intention of the blessing to your "menservants and maid-servants" (v. 29), suggests that though these were not necessarily of Jewish birth they should be included, on the ground that they were believers in the true God. The two verses that follow (vv. 30, 31) speak of portents in sky and earth, for to Joel, as to all the prophets, the latter part of the Messianic time seemed almost

contemporaneous with the former. The intervening centuries, such as we know them, were merged (for him) in one short common period.

But, in any case, the evangelical promise of v. 32 holds good for all time: "whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered" (Rom. x. 13), a promise then expressly connected by Joel (as it seems) with the LORD's assurance in Obadiah (v. 17), that safety is found in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, for those that escape thither. Immediately after this the promise takes a wider sweep, as the next verse (iii. 1) shows, and says that there shall be also some to escape among those that have been fugitives in other lands, whom the LORD is now calling to return to Jerusalem. For though the Jews are dispersed, they are not forgotten of God. His voice reaches them even among the Gentiles.

Thus the first clause of v. 32 suggests to us English Churchmen our privileges at home, the second our duty to strengthen the faith of those who have left us to live in less favoured countries. Compare St. Peter's use of the verse in Acts ii. 39.

NOTES.

Vers. 28, 29. The promise was partially fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts ii. 17-21), but most of it remains for the future.

Ver. 30. *blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.* The Prophet refers first to "earth" and draws a picture of the wars of the last days, in their destruction of life and property. In the next verse he speaks of "heaven." But the Rabbinic commentators explain "blood" as on earth, and lightnings from heaven causing conflagrations.

Ver. 32, *deliverance* (A.V.), *those that escape* (R.V.). The latter is preferable.

the remnant (*sridim*). Not the usual word for "the remnant" (*she'erith*, Jer. xxxi. 7; Micah iv. 7, and often). It means "the fugitives."

JOEL III. 1-8.

For, behold . . . for the LORD hath spoken it.

As to Christian people the hope of future blessedness is bound up with the expectation of the destruction of evil and evil powers, so to the Jews was the hope of material and spiritual prosperity connected with the expectation of the destruction of their political foes. Thus the full restoration of the captivity of Judah (*v. 1*) is followed by God's judgment on the heathen. They shall be gathered, prompted no doubt by their own ambition, but finally by the will of the LORD ("I will gather"), to a valley called by the suggestive name of Jehoshaphat, "the LORD judgeth," probably the valley of the Kidron on the north-east side of Jerusalem. Here He will enter on a law-suit with them, as He pleads for His own people whom they have scattered abroad, and whose land (nay, it is the LORD's land) they have divided up as their own. Further, they have cast lots for God's people, selling boys and girls to satisfy their lusts, and their craving for immediate drink.

Two nations in particular are named, the Phœnicians and the Philistines, who are asked in scorn what they want of the LORD? Do they think of paying God back for measures He has taken against them? Nay, if they do attempt this, He will quickly make their action return on their own heads. They deserve all the punishment they shall receive. For they took for their own temples the gold, and silver, and fair precious

things, all of which had been given to the LORD, and they sold the inhabitants of Judah and of Jerusalem to the Greeks, so as to send them far away from their own territory. But lo, He is arousing them from thence, and will cause the action of their foes to return upon their own heads. For He will sell their sons and daughters into the power of the children of Judah, who shall sell them to the travelling merchants of the Sabæans, a people living in the far south-west of Arabia—and this is certain, for the LORD hath spoken it.

To us Christian readers, indeed, the whole picture is rather gruesome, with its vivid description of the horrors of barbarous warfare, committed both by heathen and by Jews. But it at least drives home the lesson which we are apt to forget—that sin shall and must be punished, and that evil-doers shall not triumph for ever, for God, the LORD of hosts, reigns on high, and in due season will execute judgment.

NOTES

Ver. 2, *and will plead*. More literally "and I will enter into judgment," the Hebrew word being the same verb as the last two syllables of "Jehoshaphat," *cf. v. 12*.

Ver. 3, *cast lots*. Another reference to Obadiah (*v. 11*); *cf. ii. 32*.

Ver. 4, *and if* (A.V., R.V.). The R.V. margin "or will" is improbable.

Ver. 8, *for the LORD hath spoken it*. "The great law of Divine Justice, 'as I have done, so God hath requited me' (Judges i. 7) was again fulfilled. It is a sacred proverb of God's overruling Providence, written in the history of the world and in men's consciences" (Pusey).

JOEL III. 9-17.

Proclaim ye this . . . any more.

THE prophet reverts to the gathering of the nations against Jerusalem (*v.* 2). He orders them (*i.e.* their leaders) to proclaim it among the nations, to inaugurate war, to arouse the warriors, to bid all the men of war draw near and come up! It is time for the implements of peaceful husbandry to be made into weapons; and for the weak to call himself a warrior! Lend your aid, and come, all ye nations around, and be gathered together!

Thither, O LORD, adds the Prophet, do Thou bring down Thine own warriors also! Let the nations be aroused, and come up into the valley of Jehoshaphat ("the LORD is judge" *v.* 2), for there, saith the LORD, will I sit to judge all the nations gathered from every quarter. Put ye in the sickle, He bids His heavenly ministers, for the harvest of men's evil deeds has grown ripe; come, stamp down upon the grapes, for the wine-press of their sins is full; yea, the vats overflow with the weight of the grapes themselves, their wickedness is great!

Then the picture changes. Not the sins, but the men themselves are brought before our vision. There they stand, one hears the din of their multitudes, in the valley which is to be the scene of God's decision. For the day of the LORD's judgment is at hand, in that valley of decision! Even Nature waits in silence, for sun and moon are dark, and the stars restrain their beams (*ii.* 10). Then the LORD takes action.

To use Amos' words (i. 2), out of Zion He roars, like a lion from his lair, and out of Jerusalem He utters His voice, and heavens and earth shake.

No more is said. The prophet with consummate art, leaves the effect upon God's foes to be imagined by his readers. He only adds that the LORD proves Himself, then and always, a refuge for His own people, a stronghold for the children of Israel. Then, in words that recall ii. 27, he reports the LORD as saying: So shall ye know, that is, by blessed experience of My power in judgment and in deliverance, that I, the LORD your God, do make My dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain—and Jerusalem shall be all consecrated to Me, without strangers, who acknowledge Me not, ever passing through it. The thought is that God will completely vindicate His people, and will make their home His home, purified from the ungodly.

NOTES.

Ver. 9. *Prepare*. Hebrew, "sanctify," for sacrifices were always made before entering on war (cf. I Sam. xiii. 12).

Ver. 11. *Assemble yourselves* (A.V.), *Haste ye* (R.V.). The word is probably from an Arabic root, meaning to "bring aid."

Ver. 13, *get you down* (A.V.), *tread ye* (R.V.). The latter rendering is best obtained by a slight alteration of the Hebrew words (*rdu* to *dirku*); cf. Isa. lxiii. 3.

fats, ii. 24, note.

Ver. 17, *that I am the LORD your God, dwelling*, i.e. that I am in reality all that you have verbally long acknowledged me to be (cf. Ezek. vi. 7, and often in Ezekiel). But it is simpler to translate: "that I, the LORD your God, am dwelling," etc.

JOEL III. 18-21.

*And it shall come to pass . . . for the LORD dwelleth
in Zion.*

A FINAL and highly figurative description of the blessedness of the LORD's people. In *v.* 17 the thought is of Zion and Jerusalem; but in *v.* 18 of all Judah. "In that day" of the LORD's vindication of His people, the mountains shall drop new wine (without toil to the vine-dressers), and the hills flow down with milk (or to the farmers), and all the brooks of Judah shall flow with water—even this being no common occurrence in so hot a country. And a fountain shall issue from the house of the LORD (apparently the fountain of Siloam, Isa. viii. 6, which gushes from the Temple hill), copious enough to water the whole Kidron valley, so dry in its lower part (which is very narrow and rocky) that the Prophet calls it the ravine of the acacias.

We should have expected that now he would close with a summary statement of the LORD's presence. But first he speaks once more of God's vengeance on Judah's foes. For Egypt and Edom had committed violence on the Jews, in shedding innocent blood in their land, and both shall be laid desolate. But Judah shall be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem for generation after generation. Last of all, the LORD says that He will avenge their blood which He had not hitherto avenged, for the LORD has His dwelling in Zion. The verse is a summary of the promises in this chapter—God's vindication

of His justice by punishing the ungodly for their crimes upon His people, and, on the other hand, His eternal presence with His own.

Perhaps we Christians need this lesson at least as much as did the Jews. The ungodly may triumph for a time, but God is supreme, and will at last vindicate His servants, and will give unmistakable evidence that He has taken up His abode within His Church.

NOTES.

Ver. 18, *a fountain*, cf. Ezek. xlvii. 1-12; Zech. xiv. 8. *the valley of Shittim*. Some, however, suppose this to be the modern *Wady es Sant* (*Sant*=acacia), west of Bethlehem, but it has no connection with Jerusalem. Acacias grow in dry ground.

Ver. 19. Van Hoonacker thinks of the wanton destruction of the Jewish colony at Elephantine in Upper Egypt about 400 B.C. (*Schweich Lectures*, 1915, p. 52).

Ver. 21, *cleanse . . . cleansed*. Better, "hold as innocent" (R.V. margin). Until God avenged the murder of His people it might be thought that He did not hold them innocent. But it is simpler to alter the Hebrew word (from *wniqqêthi* to *wniqqamti*), and translate "avenge" . . . "avenged."

the LORD dwelleth in Zion. So Ezekiel closes his description of the city, at the end of his book, with *Jehovah-shammah*, "the LORD is there."

AMOS

AMOS I. 1-2.

The words of Amos . . . wither.

THOUGH the Book of Amos is placed so late in the order of the Books of the Bible, it is, in reality, the earliest of all the writings of the prophets that have come down to us. Amos prophesied between 765 and 750 B.C., that is, in the long and prosperous reigns of Uzziah, King of Judah (about 789 to 737 B.C.), and Jeroboam the Second, who was King of Israel from about 782 to 741 B.C. Amos was an older contemporary of the prophet Hosea.

By occupation he was a shepherd (see below) of Tekoa, a town some six miles south of Bethlehem, and a dresser of sycomore fruit, and had had no special training as a prophet (vii. 14). But God called him, and he gave God's message faithfully. So in our own land John Bunyan was only a tinker, yet God's voice has spoken to millions through him, and Thomas Carey only a shoemaker, yet he took a leading part in arousing England to a sense of its duty towards the heathen. Whatever a man's position in life may be, let him give himself to God, and God will use him beyond all his thoughts and hopes.

Observe the Prophet's description of the power of the LORD. He is compared to a lion whose lair is in Zion, which is Jerusalem, and at whose roar, of which the scorching wind is the physical expression, the pasture fails in the south, where

shepherds mourn for their dying flocks, while in the north the growth on Mount Carmel, which is generally fed with heavy sea-dews, and is, perhaps, the most fertile spot in Palestine, withers away. The words are a fitting introduction to this book of threatening and woe.

NOTES.

Central thought, iv. 12.

Divisions. Introduction, ch. i. 1, 2. Name and date. The Power of the LORD.

Part I., ch. i. 3—ii. 5. The sins of the neighbours of North Israel. ii. 6—16. North Israel, its sin and punishment.

Part II., chs. iii.—vi. The sin and punishment of North Israel more fully stated.

Part III., chs. vii.—ix. 10. Visions showing that the time for mercy has gone (with the episode of the Priest of Bethel, vii. 10—17).

Epilogue, ch. ix. 11—15. The dynasty of David is to be restored to the limits of its former conquests, with lasting prosperity in Palestine.

Ver. 1, *the herdmen*. The Hebrew word (elsewhere only 2 Kings iii. 4, of Mesha King of Moab) is thought to mean shepherds of a peculiar breed of small sheep famous for its wool.

two years before the earthquake. This earthquake in the time of King Uzziah is mentioned in Zech. xiv. 5, and, according to Josephus (*Antt.* ix. x. 4, § 225), took place when Uzziah attempted to sacrifice in the temple (2 Chron. xxvi. 16). Perhaps the threat of iii. 15 may have been fulfilled by it in part.

Ver. 2, *Zion*. Not Samaria the political, nor Bethel the religious, capital of the Northern Kingdom.

habitations (A.V.), *pastures* (R.V.) The R.V. is right (Joel i. 19).

AMOS I. 3-8.

Thus saith the LORD . . . saith the Lord GOD.

AMOS here begins to describe the punishment that God will lay on several nations for their sins. The Prophet's thoughts were chiefly for Israel, that is to say the Northern Kingdom, but he does not speak of it until ii. 6. Meantime he sets forth the punishment of nations that live near, namely Syria (whose capital was Damascus), the Philistines (of which Gaza was an important city), Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites, Moab, then Judah, and lastly, Israel itself. Observe that the sins mentioned are offences which shock ordinary morality. It is possible that many in Israel and Judah thought that God was very particular about rules and ceremonies, and did not much care whether men were honest, and pure, and considerate. Amos here teaches them otherwise. "By Him actions are weighed," Hannah had already said (1 Sam. ii. 3).

In these verses the Syrians are blamed for their barbarous cruelty to the conquered inhabitants of Gilead, for they had killed them by dragging threshing-sledges over them. Hence the palaces of the dynasty now reigning over Syria are to be burnt; Damascus, the capital, to be captured; the outlying dependency of Coelesyria to be destroyed, with the ruler of the little Syrian settlement far east on the Euphrates, and these shall go captive with the Syrians themselves to Kir, south-east of Babylon, whence, indeed, they had come (see ix. 7). Again, the

Philistines had taken whole villages of Jews or North-Israelites as captive slaves, and had sold them to Edom. Hence the Philistines shall perish, and no remnant of them shall be left.

To-day it is difficult to find even traces of these Philistine cities, so surely has God's warning been fulfilled.

NOTES.

Ver. 3. *For three transgressions of Damascus and (yea, R.V.) for four.* So vv. 6, 9, 11, 13; ii. 1, 4, 6. Each place had sufficient crimes, and more than sufficient, to deserve punishment.

Gilead. 2 Kings x. 33. The part of Israel nearest to Damascus.

threshing instruments. In the East corn is threshed by a heavy sledge being drawn over it. In the bottom of this are set sharp stones or pieces of iron. These tear the corn to pieces.

Ver. 4. *Hazael's* predecessor whom he murdered (2 Kings viii. 7-15) was *Benhadad* (II.), and his own son was also named *Benhadad* (III).

Ver. 5, *the bar.* The great bar that fastened the city gate.

Aven. Probably Baalbek, where there are still famous remains of temples to Jupiter and to Bacchus.

the house of Eden. The R.V. margin is "Beth Eden." The "ruler" suggests the place Bît-Adîni on the Euphrates, Ezek. xxvii. 23, though it seems to have been long subject to Assyria. Other identifications are two places twenty miles north-west, or thirty miles north-east, of Baalbek.

Ver. 6. Of the five Philistine cities (1 Sam. vi. 17) Gath is not named, perhaps because it had been destroyed by Uzziah, 2 Chron. xxvi. 6.

Ver. 8, *turn my hand,* lit. draw it back so as to smite heavily, or again and again.

AMOS I. 9-11. 5.

Thus saith . . . Jerusalem.

IN these verses the characteristic sins of five nations are stated, and their punishments. The men of Tyre are blamed for their wholesale slave-dealing, and their lack of trustworthiness in keeping treaties. Probably this refers to treachery towards other Phœnician towns, hardly to a covenant with Israel, such as Hiram King of Tyre had made with David and Solomon (2 Sam. v. 11; 1 Kings v. 1-12). The Edomites, descendants of Esau, are blamed for stifling their feelings of compassion, and persecuting the descendants of Jacob, Esau's brother, on every possible occasion. The Ammonites had been shockingly cruel, in order that there should be no heirs to dispute their claim (Jer. xlix. 1), and their city is to be destroyed, and their king and princes carried captive. The Moabites had committed a crime unpardonable in the East, rifling the tombs of a conquered enemy, and even burning the bones of his king. Judah, in spite of the privilege of possessing the Law of the LORD, had rejected it, and had not kept His statutes, choosing to serve false gods (here simply called "lies"; cf. Ps. xl. 4).

Observe that Judah is not blamed, like the preceding nations, for acts of fiendish cruelty, or for open irreligion regardless of others' feelings. Its fault seems so slight in comparison with theirs! For it only neglected its privileges, and was ungrateful for its benefits! But much had

been committed to Judah, and much was required (Luke xii. 48). "The sin most to be dreaded is sin in the LORD'S people. . . . I do not say as much, but I verily believe it, and perhaps it may be so, all the sorrows and calamities of public life begin at this place" (R. Hawker on v. 3).

NOTES.

Ver. 11, *his anger did tear*. It is better to omit the last letter of the Hebrew verb, and read "he retained his anger."

Ver. 12. *Teman . . . Bozrah*. Places in the Edomite country, the second the modern *Busaireh*, twenty miles south-east of the Dead Sea.

Ver. 15, *their king*. Possibly we should follow the Latin Vulgate and read *Milcom*, by an alteration of the vowel-points only. See 1 Kings xi. 5.

II. 1. *He burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime*. It is a common mistake to suppose that this refers to the incident recorded in 2 Kings iii. 27, but nothing is known of the fact mentioned by the Prophet here. Possibly the sin was not desecration of a tomb, but the burning of the body in order to prevent honourable burial.

Ver. 2. *Kiriath*. Mentioned on the Moabite stone (line 13) as a seat of the worship of Chemosh, the god of Moab. Probably the same place as Ar (Num. xxi. 15).

Ver. 3, *the judge*. The king was so called from one of his chief functions (Micah v. 1).

AMOS II. 6-16.

Thus saith . . . in that day, saith the LORD.

At last the Prophet turns to Northern Israel itself, whose sins are not, indeed, so barbarous as those of the heathen, but very unworthy of professed servants of the true God. "They have sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes." They have, that is to say, accepted bribes in administering justice, and so have delivered an innocent man into slavery, and have reckoned the value of even a pair of shoes sufficient to sell a man for debt. They are, too, so greedy for land, says the Prophet by a strong figure of speech, that they will pant after the very dust that is on a man's head, put there perhaps as a sign of mourning. They are grossly immoral with their household servants. They do not give back at nightfall clothes taken in pledge from the poor, though that was the Law (Ex. xxii. 25-27), but recline on them themselves, and that near sacred places public to all, and they will fine a man wrongfully, to buy wine with the money so obtained, that they may drink in the idols' temples.

God then (*v.* 9) reminds them that it was He who had exterminated the Canaanites, tall and strong though they were, out of their sight; He who had brought them up from Egypt, and led them so long in the wilderness, that they might inherit the Canaanites' land; who had raised up some to be prophets (through whom His will should be made known), and others to be Nazirites, specially consecrated to Him. But His

kindness had been wasted ; they had dragged back the Nazirites from their holiness by making them drink wine, and had bidden the prophets be silent.

This cannot continue. Behold I, I who did so much for you, I make you totter as you stand (see note), as the waggon totters that is filled with sheaves. Speed, strength, valour, shall not then avail ! Nor weapons ward off, nor flight on foot or on horseback deliver, but the very bravest of the brave shall fling away every garment, as he flees on that day—saith the Lord. The whole passage (vv. 13-16) describes God's judgment by an earthquake, from which the strongest and quickest cannot escape.

NOTES.

Ver. 6, *sold*. This may, however, refer to unscrupulous creditors selling an honest man, who had not given way to the temptations of property, although he had become in debt to them ; cf. viii. 6.

a pair of shoes. An old, but improbable, suggestion is that as the shoe was a symbol of poverty this meant handing over the title deeds.

Ver. 8, *the wine of the condemned* (A.V.), better "*the wine of such as have been fined*" (R.V.). This and the preceding clause may refer to participation in sacred feasts.

Ver. 11. *Nazarites* (A.V.), *Nazirites* (R.V.). The spelling of the R.V. is right, the A.V. wrongly suggesting that the word is connected with Nazareth. "Their life taught. Nay, it taught in one way the more, because they had no special gifts of wisdom or knowledge, nothing to distinguish them from ordinary men, except extraordinary grace. They were an evidence, what all might do and be, if they used the grace of God" (Pusey).

Ver. 13, *I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves* (A.V. and R.V. margin). This would describe the pressure felt by God at the behaviour of His people. But probably the R.V. is right in translating the present Hebrew : "*I will press you in your place, as a cart presseth that is full of sheaves*" ; see also A.V. margin. This describes the weight of punishment that is to come on Israel. It is better still to alter one letter (*mēphiq* for *mē'iq*) and translate "make you totter" ; cf. Isa. xxviii. 7.

AMOS III. 1-8.

Hear this word . . . who can but prophesy?

IN the third to the sixth chapter of his book Amos enlarges on the solemn message to Northern Israel which he has given in ii. 6-16. They thought that as God's people they would be treated gently. Not so, says God, in the first and second verses of this chapter, but because I have loved you, and shown special affection to you, therefore will I chastise you. This, indeed, is one of the great principles running through this book: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Praised and blessed be God that in His affection He never acts weakly, but thinks of the lasting good of those He loves. And the best kind of human love acts in the same way.

After this, in the third to the eighth verses, the Prophet defends himself for prophesying. Men blamed him for speaking, and for speaking as he did, and he gives a series of illustrations to show that he had no choice. Will two men take a walk together, unless they have agreed on their starting-place? You hear the lion's roar as he hurls himself into the air? Does he do so unless he has found his prey? If a bird swoops down on a gin, you may be certain the trigger is baited for it. If a gin springs up, it has taken something. If the watchman suddenly blows his alarm, the people are sure to be frightened. If calamity comes on a city, has not the LORD

brought it? Even so there is a cause, an awful cause, for my speaking. God tells His secret to His servants the prophets. "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"

NOTES.

Some older and many modern scholars force quite a different meaning upon these verses and interpret them thus: *Vv.* 1-3. There is no longer any agreement between the LORD and Israel; *vv.* 4, 5. Assyria like a lion is at hand; *vv.* 6, 7. God's servants have sounded the alarm, yet the people do not tremble; *v.* 8.

Ver. 2. The Rabbinic commentators illustrate this verse by *Lev.* x. 3: "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me," not those at a distance. *Cf.* *Ezek.* ix. 6.

Ver. 3, *agreed*. The R.V. margin has: "made an appointment," which is preferable. The verse does not refer to the need for harmony and agreement between companions in a walk (Israel and God), but to the fact that they do not meet except by appointment of place and time. The walk is not by mere chance—nor the prophet's words.

Ver. 5, *a snare*. Apparently a kind of trap in which the two sides flew up when the centre was touched. Probably they were of network. *gin*, rather "bait."

Ver. 8, *who can but prophesy?* Even Jonah was constrained to fulfil his task at last.

AMOS III. 9-15.

Publish . . . have an end, saith the LORD.

AFTER the Prophet has shown in *vv.* 3-8 that necessity is laid upon him to prophesy, he here returns to his subject proper, the approaching destruction of the kingdom of Northern Israel. He bids all who hear summon the very heathen, the Philistines of Ashdod, and the Egyptians, to gather on the hills that surround the city of Samaria, the capital of the Kingdom, and see the uproar in its streets, the oppression, the lack of straightforward dealing, the violence and robbery.

Then Amos tells of its near destruction, when the foe surrounds the land, brings down its strength, and plunders its palaces.

A lion, he says, seizes a sheep, carrying it all away save, perhaps, two legs or a piece of an ear, which are rescued with difficulty. So small will be the fragment of the nation which shall be rescued from the enemy, though now, indeed, the Israelites are at ease, sitting in the corner, the place of honour, on their divans (a kind of cushioned recess in the parlour of an eastern house), or on their silken couches. Then, in the name of the Supreme, the LORD, God of the heavenly hosts, he once more bids his hearers hear, and testify against Israel. For when He punishes the false worship of the calves at Bethel, cutting off from the altar its very horns—those sacred symbols of beasts offered in propitiation for men's sins—so that they fall unheeded to the ground, He will also smite the houses of the wealthy, those for the cold weather crashing

down on those for the hot, while those that are sumptuously inlaid with ivory shall perish, and the poor men's cease.

Yet Amos' warnings were unheeded. Within twenty-five years the Assyrian monarch had ravaged the north of the Kingdom, and within another fifteen Samaria had been taken, and the Israelites carried off into captivity.

R. Eliezer used to say, "Repent one day before thy death." His disciples asked him: "Does a man know on what day he will die!" He said to them, "So much the more let him repent to-day; perhaps he will die to-morrow" (Babylonian Talmud, *Sabbath* 153 a).

NOTES.

Ver. 9, *in the palaces*. The R.V. margin has "upon," and perhaps rightly, the thought being that in the East the house-tops are the great means of communication.

behold. "The city, being built on the summit and terraced sides of the hill, unfenced and unconcealed by walls which, except at its base, were unneeded, lay open, unsheltered in every part from the gaze of the besiegers. The surrounding hills were one large amphitheatre, whence to behold the tragedy of Israel, and enemies were invited to be the spectators" (Pusey).

the oppressed (A.V.), better as R.V., *oppressions*.

Ver. 12, *and in Damascus in a couch* (A.V.), cf. R.V. margin. It is hard to see what the distant city of Damascus has to do with it, unless perhaps the young nobles of Samaria were accustomed to visit it and enjoy its luxury. Hence some scholars accept the translation of the Revised Version: "and on the silken cushions of a bed," or perhaps "and on the damask of a bed." Perhaps, after all, Aben Ezra is right in explaining it as "in a bed's holding," a place (like the preceding *corner*) where the sleeper is safe.

Ver. 15, *winter house, summer house*. Buildings or rooms made to suit the weather, the summer in Palestine being extremely hot; cf. Jer. xxxvi. 22.

houses of ivory, such as Ahab had built for himself in Kings xxii. 39).

great. Better, as R.V. margin, "many."

AMOS IV. 1-3.

Hear this word . . . saith the LORD.

WHAT an awful picture of the siege ! The prophet addresses the rich ladies of Samaria, much as Isaiah addressed those of Jerusalem some forty years later. By Isaiah, however, their manifold luxury is attacked, by Amos their brutality and greed. For, too often, alas ! men are urged on to evil by those who should be the very first to hold them back. Here Amos addresses these wealthy women as fat kine from the rich pastures of Bashan (and Eastern peoples often pride themselves on their obesity), which are now on the hill of Samaria, crushing the poor and asking their lords (that is, their husbands) for more drink. They are both cruel and intemperate.

But a terrible punishment is threatened. On the sculptures brought from Nineveh and now in the British Museum, may be seen captives being dragged along with hooks fastened in their lips. So shall these rich ladies be treated. The enemy shall take them away with hooks, and their children, or their residue (R.V.) with fish-hooks. Another picture is given—a stampede of frightened animals rushing through a breach in the walls and tumbling in their haste into a great pit. For this, or some other term for destruction, seems to be the meaning intended by the word translated “into Harmon” by the revisers, and “into the palace” in the Authorised Version. So piteous shall be the condition of those who care nothing for the rights and the

needs of others, but are voluptuous and self-indulgent.

NOTES.

Ver. 3, *every cow* (A.V.), *i.e.* every woman.

and ye shall cast them (A.V.), *and ye shall cast yourselves* (R.V.). If the former is right "them" will mean their possessions or even their children. But the latter is preferable.

into the palace (A.V.), *into Harmon* (R.V.). The passage has not come down to us as Amos wrote it, and cannot be corrected satisfactorily. The Greek version: "and ye shall be cast forth on the mountain of Romman" (Rimmon), suggests the awful fate of becoming slave-girls in a heathen temple, and may come nearer to Amos' meaning. Rimmon seems to have been worshipped near Megiddo, some 25 miles north of Samaria (Zech. xii. 11).

AMOS IV. 4-13.

Come to Beth-el . . . his name.

A VERY solemn appeal to the men of Israel. It was spoken, perhaps, at a great assembly gathered to keep a feast at Bethel, where the LORD was worshipped under the form of a calf. At first (*vv.* 4, 5) the Prophet describes the worshippers as very particular about their sacrifices when they come in the morning, and about tithes every third year (*Deut.* xiv. 28), and thanksgiving offerings (but with leaven!), and freewill offerings, which they proclaim aloud; but he implies that the sin of self-will spoils all such religious services.

He then (*vv.* 6-11) enumerates the methods of correction which God, for His part (having received no satisfaction from their sacrifices, etc.), had been using to bring them back to Himself, dearth (*v.* 6), drought (*vv.* 7, 8), their crops destroyed (*v.* 9), pestilence and war (*v.* 10), and, finally earthquake (*v.* 11). All, however, was in vain. They had not returned to Him. Therefore, He cries at last (*vv.* 12, 13): "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel"; for He who frames mountains, and creates the wind, and reveals to man his inmost thoughts, supreme over the course of nature, and marching in victory over the heights of the earth, is the LORD whom you profess to worship, and God of the hosts of heaven.

The awe, the claims, and the sublimity of the passage are almost unequalled in the whole

Bible. For us Christians perhaps the best comment in George Herbert's humble prayer ("Judgement") :—

"Almightie Judge, how shall poore wretches brook
 Thy dreadfull look,
 Able a heart of iron to appall,
 When Thou shalt call
 For every man's peculiar book ?
 * * * * *
 What others mean to do, I know not well ;
 * * * * *
 But I resolve, when Thou shalt call for mine,
 That to decline,
 And thrust a Testament into Thy hand :
 Let that be scann'd.
 There Thou shalt finde my faults are Thine."

(That is, Thou hast taken them on Thyself through the death of Christ.)

NOTES.

Ver. 4, *Gilgal*, v. 5 ; Hos. iv. 15 note.

Ver. 5, *offer*, as though it were incense in God's nostrils ; cf. Gen. viii. 21 ; Lev. i. 9.

with leaven (A.V.), *of that which is leavened* (R.V.). Though strictly this was forbidden by the Law (Ex. xxiii. 18).

proclaim and publish the free offerings (A.V.), *proclaim freewill offerings and publish them* (R.V.). Be sure to let others know your good deeds ! cf. Matt. vi. 2.

Ver. 8, *wandered*, tottering through weakness.

Ver. 9, *blasting*, by the scirocco (Gen. xli. 23, 27).

when . . . increased (A.V.), *the multitude of* (A.V. marg., R.V.). A slight alteration of the Hebrew gives : "I laid waste."

Ver. 12, *thus*. The reference is not to the preceding but to the following words.

Ver. 13, *declareth unto man what is his thought*, i.e. what God's purpose is.

that maketh the morning darkness, i.e. who can cause what is usually bright to be gloomy and dark. The object of the phrase is to call attention to the fact that God rules over nature as well as over man.

AMOS v. 1-9.

Hear ye . . . the fortress.

It is no wonder that the approaching ruin of Northern Israel (in spite of its present prosperity under Jeroboam II.) called forth a lamentation from the Prophet. The nation, heretofore unconquered, falls, and lies stricken on its own land, no more to arise; and of its warriors but one in ten remains! Yet still there is time for this calamity to be averted. For it is characteristic of our God that He postpones, and postpones, judgment, offering pardon if men will but turn to Him. "Seek ye Me," He says, "and ye shall live." Give up your false worship at Bethel, at Gilgal, and at Beersheba beyond your frontier. Give it up while there is time, lest He rush on you like fire that devoureth and cannot be stayed. God thus bids men leave false systems of worship; yet not these only. Then, as now, men made their verdicts nauseous to the innocent, and laid justice low, and therefore the prophet bids them seek Him who is the Lord of creation, and the final power of all wars. He forms the stars above, changes darkness to morn, and day to night; summons the sea that it floods the earth—He the self-existent, self-revealing, all ordering Cause of all—who flasheth out destruction on the strong, yea, upon a fortress!

Observe that "in dealing with the superstitious externalism of Bethel and Gilgal, Amos does not say that there is no element of good in that which he condemns. What he does say is that,

when you bring religion to the test of whether it gives power for life and character, it is the religion of Jehovah, the religion of Christ alone, that stands the test. 'Seek ye *Me*, and ye shall live.' " (Guy Warman, *Missions and the Minor Prophets*, 1909, p. 77).

NOTES.

Ver. 1, *a lamentation*. A technical word for a dirge, *v. 2* being in the "metre" proper to it.

Ver. 2, *virgin*. The conquest by Hazael (2 Kings x. 32), may not have included the capital, and in any case was but temporary.

Ver. 5, *Beer-sheba*. Though in the South of Judah it seems to have attracted pilgrims from Northern Israel, as an old "holy place" (viii. 14, note). They would have to "pass" over into Judah.

Gilgal shall surely go into captivity. In the Hebrew there is a play on the words which can hardly be reproduced in English. Compare "London is undone."

Beth-el (i.e. "the House of God") *shall come to nought*. The R.V. margin is "or become vanity (Heb. *Aven*)."
Hos. iv. 15, exposition.

Vers. 7, 8, *turn . . . turneth*. The Rabbis point out the contrast: The ungodly turn judgment to the bitterness of wormwood (*cf. vi. 12*); the LORD turns the darkness in which many now dwell to morning light; and brings night on those who live in worldly brilliance.

Ver. 8, *the seven stars* (A.V.), *the Pleiades* (R.V.). To us the constellations suggest God's power, to Eastern peoples rather the seasons, and the consequent productions of the earth.

Ver. 9, *that strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong* (A.V.), *that bringeth sudden destruction upon the strong* (R.V.). The R.V. margin is better: that "causeth destruction to flash forth" upon the strong.

AMOS v. 10-17.

They hate him . . . saith the LORD.

IN the first part of this section the Prophet once more denounces the corruption of justice. He pictures judges administering it in public (namely the open space by the city-gate), and refusing to listen to one who reproves them for their unfairness, or who speaks sound truth. And so, because they trample on the weak, exacting grain from him unjustly, they may build their own houses of hewn stone—but they shall not live in them; they may plant delightful vineyards—but they shall not drink the wine of them. For God has full knowledge that their transgressions are many, and their sins stout, as they are hard on a just man, take a ransom for a murderer (Num. xxxv. 31), and turn away the poor when these appeal to them on the judgment seat. A prudent man, therefore, must say nothing in such a time, for it is an evil time.

But (v. 14), as so often, the Prophet's heart grows warm as he thinks of the needs of men and the mercy of God, and he entreats his people afresh. Seek good, he says, not evil, that ye may live! Thus shall ye indeed enjoy that presence of the LORD with you of which ye talk. Hate evil, love good, set your justice up again—it may be that the LORD will be gracious to the remnant of Northern Israel!

Yet, alas, the Prophet feels this is unlikely (vv. 16, 17), and therefore, in the name of the LORD,

he describes the grief which follows the approaching calamity. In all the wide places of the city there shall be wailing! In all the streets shall they say, Alas! And this not in the towns alone! For they shall summon the labourer to mourning, and wailing shall they have who are skilled in lamentation (Jer. ix. 17), yea, in all vineyards (the scene of festal joy, Judges ix. 27; Isa. xvi. 10) shall be wailing; for I will pass through thy midst, saith the LORD, as I passed through Egypt (Exod. xii. 12, A.V. rightly).

So His presence, unless there is repentance carried out into action, means punishment and sorrow.

NOTES.

Ver. 15, *the remnant of Joseph*. The most powerful of the Ten Tribes of the Northern Kingdom was that of Ephraim, the descendant of Joseph.

the remnant. The Prophet regards the destruction as so certain that he speaks of it as already come; or perhaps the clause was added after the conquest by Tiglath-pileser in 734 B.C.

Ver. 16, *the Lord*. "It costs men nothing to own God, as a Creator, the Cause of causes, the Orderer of all things by certain fixed laws. It satisfies certain intellects, so to own Him. What man, a sinner, shrinks from, is that God is Lord, the absolute disposer and Master of his sinful self" (Pusey).

skilful of lamentation. The reference is to the professional mourners who at a death utter loud cries (Jer. ix. 17-19; Matt. ix. 23).

AMOS v. 18-27.

Woe unto you . . . whose name is the God of hosts.

AMOS had prophesied the destruction of Israel by its enemies, but the people were still professing their faith in God, and expecting Him to work deliverance from their foes. They only wished, said they, that the Day of the LORD would come ! The Prophet tells them that their confidence is misplaced. The day of the LORD would not bring deliverance but destruction. As a man fleeing from a lion may meet a bear, which is even worse than a lion, or a man escaping into a house may be bitten there by a serpent, so will it be when they think to escape from punishment. The day of the LORD will bring not happiness, but sorrow, not light, but darkness. Even in our own day, alas ! many who profess Christ with their lips, but deny Him in their lives, say that they wish to die, though they are not fit, either in themselves or in Christ, to stand before God.

In the last verses of this passage God declares that He hates mere religious profession unaccompanied by a change in the life. The Israelites imagined that frequent sacrifices, with beautiful music, were pleasing to Him. No, He says, have just and righteous dealing in unfailling abundance ; that is what I want. Remember that when you were in the wilderness, as you came out from Egypt, you offered hardly any sacrifices—yet I accepted you. But now you shall go off, together with your false gods, into captivity far beyond Damascus, where the Syrians have taken you

before, saith the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts, the supreme ruler of all powers in earth and in heaven.

NOTES.

Ver. 21. *I will not smell in your solemn assemblies* (A.V.). That is, as the R.V., *I will take no delight in them*. God is pictured as enjoying, or, in this case, not enjoying, the smell of the burning sacrifices.

Ver. 22, *burnt offerings . . . meat (meal R.V.) offerings . . . peace offerings*. The order is the same in Lev. i.-iii.

Ver. 23, *viols*. An early form of guitar, such as most primitive peoples possess, with ten or twelve strings. The Hebrew word is translated "psaltery" in Ps. xxxiii. 2.

Ver. 25. *Have ye offered* (A.V.), *Did ye bring* (R.V.). The prophet alludes to the shortage of animals in the wilderness-wandering, so that very few sacrifices were offered then. Some commentators suppose that the whole sacrificial legislation was of much later date, but in view of the primæval character of sacrifice this is extremely improbable. Another unlikely interpretation is: Yes, you offered sacrifices in the wilderness, but this did not prevent your staying there forty years.

Ver. 26. *But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images*. Better as the R.V. *Yea, ye have borne Siccuth your king and Chiun your images*. The R.V. margin ye "*shall take up, etc.*" is better still, describing the captivity that is at hand. The names are those of false gods, Siccuth being perhaps the god of war, and Chiun probably the planet Saturn. In a cuneiform incantation we find "*may Sakkut and Kaiwan . . . break the spell.*" *vv.* 25-27 are quoted by St. Stephen in Acts vii. 42, 43.

Ver. 27, *whose name is The God of hosts*. And the powers you worship are His messengers (Kimchi).

AMOS VI. 1-6.

Woe to them that are at ease . . . the affliction of Joseph.

A VIVID description of the luxury and godlessness of the rich. Amos says to them: You care not about the poor; you take no heed to the danger that is at hand from the enemy; you think of nothing but your own ease and pleasure. Some of you live in Zion, and others in Samaria, men of mark (*cf.* R.V.) among the first people of the earth (*cf.* Jer. iii. 19, R.V. margin), and to you the rest of the nation appeals for justice and protection. Go visit, writes Amos, the great cities round; Calneh in the North East, Hamath in the North, Gath in the south-west. Are they more prosperous than you? Have they larger boundaries? Why seek to imitate them? You neglect God, regardless of approaching disaster. You put the evil day far from you—it has not come, and will not, you think, never heeding the Divine warnings—and you draw up your judgment seat to act unjustly (or perhaps you like to see violence enthroned, regardless of justice). You care for luxuries, such as beds made of ivory, and you sprawl about on sofas, killing lambs and calves for your dainty food, and idly troll to the notes of your guitar, inventing, like David, new instruments of music; and drink wine by buckets, and are anointed with expensive perfumes, as at a festival—but are not grieved for the wound of Joseph, the troubles of your own nation (v. 6, 15).

The rich are peculiarly exposed to temptations of this kind, by the very fact of their wealth, and they have always been the objects of invective by reformers inspired or not. And rightly so. For by position, by money, by (for the most part) education, they can, if they choose, set an example of godliness, self-sacrifice, and energy in the cause of God, which will go very far towards raising the religious tone of the whole nation. Let the work of men like our own William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury be witness.

NOTES.

Ver. 1, which are *named chief of the nations* (A.V.). Better, as the R.V., *the notable men of the chief of the nations*. A plausible correction of the Hebrew gives: "mark the chief of the nations, and come to them, O house of Israel," but this is unnecessary.

Ver. 2, *Pass ye unto Calneh*, etc. Presumably the ancient city mentioned in Gen. x. 10. It is possible that the verse means: these great and prosperous cities have all been destroyed, and shall you escape? The interpretation depends on the date of the destruction of these cities, which is unknown.

Hamath. About 100 miles north of Damascus, on the Orontes. The capital of the Hittite Kingdom, and said now to contain 60,000 inhabitants (Driver. 1897).

Ver. 4, *beds of ivory*. The Assyrian Inscriptions confirm this, when they tell us that Sennacherib received "ivory couches" and "great ivory seats," from King Hezekiah, less than 50 years after Amos wrote. The details of the luxury belong to the East rather than to Europe, where the rich take their pleasures, for the most part, in much more active forms.

lambs . . . calves. An Eastern shepherd (such as was Amos) thinks it the grossest extravagance to kill these for food.

AMOS vi. 7-14.

*Therefore now . . . the river of the wilderness (A.V.),
the brook of the Arabah (R.V.).*

IN the first six verses of this chapter the prophet had addressed the godless nobles of Israel who boasted of being men of mark in the first of the nations. Here, he says, that they shall be the first to go into captivity, with the company of the revellers. For God now abhors Jacob, that is, Israel, and his palaces, and will deliver up the whole city to the enemy. Then follows as it seems, in *vv.* 9, 10, a description of the horrors after the enemy has sacked the city.

Should, out of one large household, ten persons be left, yet they shall die. Should a near relation, an uncle, for example, come to bury his people who dwelt in another house, yet when he calls out to ask if any remain, the answer shall be: "There is only I, and pray do not wail aloud, using God's name, lest He bring some fresh woe upon us!" How awful the desolation, how unutterable the despair!

The Prophet closes this portion of his book with a solemn reminder of the LORD'S judgments, on great and small, and of the folly of employing wrong means for true prosperity (*vv.* 11-14). As well use horses on slippery rocks, or plough the sea with oxen (for this seems to be the true meaning of the Hebrew words)! The ungodly have made so-called justice as bitter as gall, and as poisonous as hemlock. They pride themselves also on their strength, as though it were horns

of defence wherewith to gore the foe, yet it will be a thing of nought—when God raises against them the nation of the Assyrians, who shall afflict the whole land from Hamath in the north to the brook near the lower end of the Dead Sea in the south. Ruin and desolation for those who neglect God, however strong be their confidence in themselves!

NOTES.

Ver. 7, *the banquet . . . shall be removed* (A.V.), *the revelry . . . shall pass away* (R.V.). Better "the company . . . shall depart." The word translated "banquet" perhaps means a club for feasting together.

Ver. 8, *the excellency of Jacob*. Rather the "pride" (R.V. marg.) i.e. the self-satisfaction with which the Israelites regarded themselves and their defences (*cf. v. 1.*).

Ver. 10, *he that burneth him*. Better "his burner," he that came to burn spices over the dead (see 2 Chron. xvi. 14). The Hebrews did not burn the bodies.

Hold thy tongue (*peace* R.V.). Jerome, however, explains this as the words of the man who was standing outside, preventing the one within from taking his oath that there was no one left.

Ver. 13. This verse should perhaps be rendered: "Ye which rejoice in (having captured) Lo-debar (2 Sam. ix. 4 sq.), which say, Have we not taken to us Karnaim (1 Macc. v. 26; *cf. Gen. xiv. 5*) by our own strength?" They boasted of comparatively unimportant successes.

Ver. 14, *the wilderness* (A.V.), *the Arabah* (R.V.). This is the low depression which includes the Jordan valley, the Dead Sea, and even south of it. The brook mentioned appears to be that one which, "flowing down from the south-east, enters the 'Arabah about three miles south of the Dead Sea, and then, turning northwards, runs straight into the lower end of the Dead Sea" (Driver). It formed the ancient boundary between Moab and Edom. Its modern name is Wadi-el-Hasa. Observe that the phrase "from the entering in of Hamath unto . . . the Arabah" recalls the past victories of the king (Jeroboam II.) in whose reign Amos was prophesying (2 Kings xiv. 25).

AMOS VII. 1-9.

Thus hath . . . with the sword.

WITH this seventh chapter we enter upon a fresh part of Amos' solemn prophecy, which lasts to ix. 10, very nearly to the end of his book. He describes a series of visions, intended to show the Israelites that though the LORD has been very long-suffering (*vv.* 1-6), the time for mercy has now gone by, and they must expect punishment. Three of these visions are found in these nine verses. First, he sees a vision of grasshoppers (A.V.) or rather locusts (R.V.) being formed by the LORD, and settling on the spring crops at the most critical time, after the early mowing for fodder for the king's establishment. They are eating almost everything; yet at the prophet's intercession to God their further ravages cease. Secondly, he sees the LORD challenging Israel by fire (*Isa.* lxvi. 16), apparently the blazing heat of the Syrian sun—which devours the sea, and is nearly devouring the solid land, the Holy Land, the "portion" (R.V. margin) given by God to His people (*Mic.* ii. 4). Yet again, at the Prophet's prayer, the danger is removed. But in the third vision all such hope is gone. He sees the Lord of all standing by a perfectly upright wall, with a plumbline in His hand. Everything with God, it means, must be built true. All that is not upright must fall and perish, and in Israel's case, the verdict is clear. There can be no passing by in forgiveness now! The idolatrous high places of Isaac, and

the sanctuaries of northern Israel shall be laid waste, and the ruling house of Jeroboam the Second, one of the descendants of Jehu, shall be slain. No hope; only the dread certainty of punishment! A message awful to deliver, and terrible to receive!

NOTES.

Ver. 1, *the latter growth after the king's mowings*. This appears to mean that the king took at least part of his tribute in kind, not money, and that this consisted of the first mowing of the grass, or perhaps even of the crops. "The Roman governors of Syria levied similarly a tax on pasture-land, in the month Nisan [April-May], as food for their horses" (Driver). Some think that this demand was made only occasionally, and that the verse speaks of the year following such a tax.

Ver. 2, *And it came to pass, that when they had made (they made, R.V.) an end of eating*. It is impossible to translate the Hebrew text like the A.V., but the addition of one letter, and a new division of the words, give: "And it came to pass that when they were making an end of eating."

by whom (A.V.), how (R.V.). Probably, in what character or capacity.

Ver. 9, *Isaac*. Only here and v. 16 in the sense of Israel.

AMOS VII. 10-17.

Then Amaziah . . . his land.

THE series of visions describing the certainty of Israel's punishment is interrupted, to tell of the opposition stirred up by Amos' words. God's faithful messengers have at all times been attacked, and when their message has been against the State as well as against individuals their lives have often been in peril. Here apparently Amos, unlike Jeremiah, is in no personal danger. But Amaziah, the chief priest of the great temple at Bethel, tries to incite the king against him by informing Jeroboam of the Prophet's threat (which loses nothing in the telling, for Amos did not threaten Jeroboam personally), and assuring him that Amos' public speech was resented by the people. Then, without waiting (as it seems) for an answer from Jeroboam, who plainly was absent from Bethel, he sends a sharp message to Amos himself, bidding him go back to his own country of Judah, and earn his living by prophesying there (where they would gladly hear evil of the Northern Kingdom), and not in Israel, especially not at Bethel, which was the king's own sanctuary and (for perhaps the words mean this) the site of the national temple. The Prophet's reply is straight and stern. You think I earn my bread by prophesying? You are wrong. I am not an official prophet at all; I am a farmer, who have cattle and sycomore trees (a kind of figtree). By them I get my living. But I have no choice about preaching. God Himself has bid me

preach. Woe, woe to you and to all your family (Zech. xiv. 2), for refusing to listen, and for trying to stop me. God's message of awful punishment must be fulfilled.

* Yes, it is to no easy, luxurious path that God calls His preachers. If we hear His voice bidding us, constraining us, to utter His message, it will always provoke some of those who hear us. Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel, cried St. Paul, and yet in the preaching of it he had to bear innumerable trials. To preach faithfully demands courage, and, more than courage, endurance.

NOTES.

Ver. 10, *Amos hath conspired*. So the prophet's words had not been without effect; he had gained disciples.

Ver. 14. *I was*. Better, *I am*, with the R.V. margin.

no prophet, neither . . . a prophet's son. Not by actual training, nor by hereditary position, do I belong to the rank of prophets. For these, much like the clergy of to-day, had a recognized position in Israel and Judah. Amos was legally and socially known as a farmer. The phrase "a prophet's son" may, however, not refer to his father, but to the prophetic guild implied in the term "sons of the prophets" (1 Kings xx. 35).

a gatherer of sycamore fruit (A.V.), *a dresser of sycamore trees* (R.V.). The word translated "gatherer," "dresser," may be technical. When the fruit is nearly ripe it must be *nipped*, in order that a certain insect which infests it may escape. If this is not done the fruit is not eatable.

Ver. 17, *thou shalt die in a polluted land* (A.V.), *in a land that is unclean* (R.V.), that is, a foreign land, which was regarded as being without the true God and all the holiness His presence implied. Again, it was also polluted by the heathen temples and unclean rites that almost always form part of heathen worship. Most of the food, too, was legally unclean to a Jew (see Hosea ix. 3; Dan. i. 8).

AMOS VIII. 1-3.

*Thus hath the Lord GOD showed unto me . . .
silence.*

AMAZIAH, the priest of Bethel, had bid the prophet cease from prophesying. But in vain. God's messenger must give God's message faithfully. Hence Amos continues to relate his visions of the approaching destruction of Israel. This time he sees a basket of late summer fruit, fruit, that is to say, fully ripe, but of rather poor quality. Further, the word "summer" in Hebrew is *qäyitz*, which is almost the same in sound as the word "end," *qêtz*. Therefore the LORD says: The *end* is come upon My people Israel; I will not again pass by their sins. Now they are singing, but their songs shall soon be changed to howls of misery, with war and pestilence, and many hasty burials in silence, perhaps only from sorrow, but probably also from fear lest survivors should be unduly frightened.

Observe how God uses the seasons of the year to teach His people. If those who observe His works in nature are also to profit by them they must learn from them warnings as well as encouragements. Let them indeed praise God, as they perceive fresh signs of His forethought, and wisdom, and love, in His creation of plant, insect and animal, but let them also take to heart the lessons of the falling leaf and the ripening fruit. There is an awful passage in Jer. viii. 20: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." A time will come when we ourselves

shall be, in one sense, like the fruits of late summer, fully ripe. God grant us grace to have been drawing the sap of our life from union with Christ, and to have been ripened by the warm rays of the Sun of Righteousness.

NOTES.

Ver. 1, *summer fruit*. This would be the second crop of figs, which ripens in August and September, and, as it seems, is not so much esteemed as the first (Mic. vii. 1).

Ver. 3, *the songs of the temple*, or perhaps the revelry in the palace (see R.V. margin). Instead of "the songs" the Greek translation reads: "the panels" or "the planks" . . . "shall howl"; cf. 1 Kings vi. 9. Another suggestion is "the singing women . . . shall howl."

with silence. The same word is translated: "Hold thy tongue" in vi. 10. It comes in so curiously here that it can hardly be part of the Prophet's original utterance.

AMOS VIII. 4-14.

Hear this . . . never rise up again.

THE summer fruit, the Prophet had said (*vv.* 1-3), was ripe, but ripe only for destruction; it was so very bad. Now he describes again the sins of the well-to-do classes. They were so greedy of gain that they longed for the solemn feast of the New Moon, and the Sabbath, to be over, that they might get them once more to their business, dishonest though it was, with their corn-measures too small, and the weights by which they weighed the money paid them too heavy. Thus by their cheating they hoped to get men into their debt, and then to purchase them as their own slaves, for a mere trifling price of a pair of shoes, more than the poor debtor could pay. Also when they sold wheat the buyer would find that it was bad, and largely mixed with refuse.

God, says the prophet, cannot pass over such things. Punishment, dark and terrible, is approaching. Festivals will become funerals, with mourning as bitter as when an only son has died. Worse still; there shall be no message heard from God. Men have been accustomed to seek Him in their difficulties; now He will not be found; for there shall be a famine of hearing the words of the LORD, though they go far and wide to seek them. The prophet ends this chapter by foretelling the fate of those who have worshipped at centres of the false worship, like Samaria and Beersheba—"they shall fall, and never rise up again." Such is the end of those

who neglect God, and the plain teaching of His word !

NOTES.

Ver. 5, *ephah*. A dry measure, a little over 64 pints or 8 gallons.

shekel. The ancient Hebrew shekel was probably about 185 grains. Silver was not coined in the time of Amos, but weighed (see also Gen. xxiii. 16).

Ver. 7, *by the excellency of Jacob*. Probably the LORD Himself, as the excellency, that is, the Pride of His people. But perhaps it means: "by the vain-glorious boasting" of Israel. See vi. 8 for each interpretation.

Ver. 8, *as a flood (A.V.), like the River (R.V.)*. That is, the river Nile in Egypt, which comes down in a great flood every year.

Ver. 9, *I will cause the sun to go down at noon*. A total eclipse of the sun, visible as a partial eclipse in Palestine, had taken place on June 15, 763 B.C.

Ver. 14, *the sin of Samaria*. Either the idolatrous sacred tree (*Asherah*) at Samaria itself (2 Kings xiii. 6), or the calf at Bethel, in which case Samaria is mentioned because it was the capital of the Northern Kingdom in which Bethel lay.

The manner of Beer-sheba (A.V.), the way of Beer-sheba (R.V.). The A.V. follows the Targum, "the legal customs." But the R.V. is better, referring to the pilgrim-road thither (see v. 5). Arabs still swear "by the life of" a thing which really has no life. For false worship at Beersheba, see 2 Kings xxiii. 8.

AMOS IX. 1-6.

I saw the LORD . . . the LORD is his name.

THE last and most terrible of the Prophet's visions. The nation of Israel is gathered for worship in the temple at Bethel, and beside the altar stands the Lord of all the earth! He bids His angel, His agent of destruction: Smite the chapiters (R.V., see also the margin of the A.V.), that is, the head of the pillars supporting the roof of the temple, in order that the "posts" (A.V.) or rather the very "thresholds" (R.V.), may shake, and pillars and roof fall with a crash on the assembled multitude. Nor shall they who leave the temple alive escape. Should they flee below ground, even to the under world where the dead are, God's hand shall reach them. Should they climb up to heaven thence shall God bring them down. Should they conceal themselves on Mount Carmel (whether in its caves, said to number 2000, or in its thick woods) God will search them out. Should they hide from God's eyes on the very floor of the sea, there shall the great serpent (which the Hebrew thought inhabited it) be bid bite them with his poisonous fangs. Even in captivity, driven along in front of their enemies, in a land where they might think the Lord was not present, they shall not be safe, but the sword shall slay them. For the Lord of all will do this, who is supreme on earth, and in the heavens, and in the sea, even He whom Israel professes to serve, the LORD, Jehovah.

The spiritual lesson for ourselves is surely once more this, that the wrath of our God can be turned aside by no worship—however great and costly—based on disobedience to His Divine order, and accompanied by gross sins. Let sinners return to the LORD Himself, accepting His way of salvation, forsaking their vices, and then, but only then, is there deliverance for them. Otherwise, as described in these verses, there is a certain fearful looking for of judgment.

NOTES.

Ver. 1, *upon* (A.V.), *beside* (R.V.). The latter is preferable. See also vii. 7.

the lintel of the door (A.V.), *the chapiters* (R.V.). Compare the A.V. margin, "chapter" or "knop." The word means not the lintel, that is, the headpiece of the door, but the tops, or capitals, of the pillars, which are generally larger than the pillars themselves. The Hebrew word means literally a knob, or bulb.

posts (A.V.), *thresholds* (R.V.). The R.V. is doubtless right. The shaking is to be felt to the very ground. But a simple correction of the text (*sippân* for *sippîm*, 1 Kings vi. 15), gives "ceiling."

Ver. 5, *flood* (A.V.), *River* (R.V.). See the note on viii. 8.

Ver. 6, *stories* (A.V.), better, *chambers* (R.V.), or "terraces," that is, the heights of heaven. Compare Ps. civ. 3, 13.

troop (A.V.) Better, *vault* (R.V.). Doubtless this means the firmament of heaven, which seems to rest on earth like an arching roof.

AMOS ix. 7-10.

Are ye not . . . prevent us.

It was the old story ; Israel was for ever harping on the fact that it was God's chosen people, and therefore could not come to serious harm. But God wishes them to learn the true state of the case. You think so much of yourselves, He seems to say, but have you any more claim on Me than the Ethiopians, who are negroes and slaves? You yourselves were but slaves when I brought you up from Egypt—just as I brought up the Philistines from Caphtor (perhaps Crete, or Carpathos near Rhodes), and the Syrians from Kir, beyond Babylon (i. 5). But I always notice any kingdom that is sinful and I will destroy it. The only difference is that in the case of Israel the destruction shall not be complete. Then an illustration is used of a man sifting corn in a sieve, and taking (as is done in the East) some pebbles wherewith to clean it. So, says God, will I sift Israel, till all the chaff and rubbish is separated, but with such care that not even one almost worthless pebble of Israel, so to speak, shall be wasted. For the words translated "the least grain" mean probably "the least pebble." But all the godless shall perish in spite of their asserting that evil shall not meet them from any side.

If, after all, there is in the Lord's judgments upon His own people the remembrance of mercy, let the believer take courage. God may try him and his to the uttermost, but nothing that is of

any use at all shall be destroyed or lost in the process. Rather let us say, May the LORD do what He will with us His servants, purifying us and all that belongs to us, in whatever way He thinks best. We, both ourselves and they who are dear to us, are safe in His Hands.

NOTES.

Ver. 7, *the Ethiopians*. The Hebrew word is "the Cushites" (*cf.* Jer. xiii. 23). They lived in what we call the Soudan, which word itself means Black.

"That is, What pretensions have you to My favour more than they? Reader! if we know not the LORD in a way of grace, we are no better than others in the claims of nature!" (R. Hawker).

Ver. 8, *the sinful kingdom*. Not Israel as such. Our English idiom would be, "a sinful kingdom."

Ver. 9, *the least grain*. The margin of the A.V. has "stone" (2 Sam. xvii. 13). Some, however, think that it is used here of a hard full grain, and this interpretation, though less probable, is certainly easier; not a single good grain of Israel shall be wasted. It should be stated that the exact form of the sifting to which Amos here refers is uncertain. In the larger kind of sieve used to-day the good grain falls through, and what remains in the sieve is threshed again; in the smaller kind all the dust, etc., falls through, and the grain remains in the sieve. It would seem as though the latter process answers best to the description given by the Prophet. It is, however, possible that the sentence should be translated: "like as corn is sifted in a sieve, that it fall not in a mass (a "bundle," 1 Sam. xxv. 29) upon the earth."

Ver. 10. *The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us*. The literal translation is: "shall not come near us, nor come in front of us."

AMOS ix. 11-15.

In that day . . . saith the LORD thy God.

WHAT a contrast these closing verses form to the rest of the book of Amos! There was, indeed, a glimpse of comfort to be seen in *v.* 8, that God would not utterly destroy His people. But here is a full promise of restored prosperity and peace. We cannot be surprised that many scholars think that these last verses were not written by the same hand that penned the rest of the book, but by a prophet who lived later, and had been accustomed to the promises of future blessing, given through Isaiah, Micah, and others. Yet it is improbable that Amos would leave off with *v.* 10, the last word of which in Hebrew is "the evil."

In any case, whoever wrote these verses saw far into the future, and knew much of the mind of God. First, he foretells the restoration of the kingdom of David, over, presumably, North Israel, and the repair of the ruined walls and cities. The effect is that Israel regains possession over Edom and the other nations which once had belonged to David, and had therefore known the name of the LORD. Secondly, he foretells the abundant prosperity and peace of the Holy Land itself. Its crops shall be so rich, and ripen so rapidly, that the ploughman shall tread on the heels of the reaper, who cannot clear the land fast enough, and the vintage shall last till the sowing-time (*Lev.* xxvi. 5). And, last and best of all, God will bring back the captivity of His

people, and they shall live in their old home safely, and be removed no more. So saith He who once had summoned the Nation to meet Him for judgment (iv. 12).

Would that we might see all this with our own eyes! For in its completion the fulfilment is still future. The Jews are right in claiming this passage as one of many which point them forward to that blessed day when they shall once more live in Palestine in comfort and blessing. We Christians, however, know that this is closely bound up with their acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as their King. Then, and only then, will they find all hindrances to their happiness as a nation removed, and will, in a new and full sense, gain possession of the whole world, by winning it over to true faith in Jesus the blessed Son of David. The LORD hasten this in His time!

Godly Archbishop Leighton (died 1684) writes: "they forget a main point of the Church's glory, who pray not daily for the conversion of the Jews" (Sermon on Isa. lx. 1, Works, 1820, iii. 127).

NOTES.

Ver. 11, *the tabernacle of David*. The word translated "tabernacle" is better rendered "booth," properly a shelter of branches. The thought here seems to be that the protecting and sheltering power of David and his royal line, though now both weak and even fallen, will be raised up again.

Ver. 12, *which are called by my name*. Better, "over whom my name was called," when they were conquered, in sign of their new ownership by the LORD, and His people. The old Greek translators, whose version is followed essentially in Acts xv. 16, 17, develop the spiritual meaning of vv. 11, 12, by slight alterations of the Hebrew.

Ver. 13, *the treader of grapes*. Generally the vintage is over by the middle of October, and sowing begins about the middle of November.

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