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## STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

### I. THE LIVING SACRIFICE AND THE ACCEPTABLE OFFERING.

*Text.*—"I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this thing I commanded them 'Hearken unto My Voice.'" (Jer. vii. 22, 23).

[Book of the Month: THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH,<sup>1</sup> by Rev. L. Elliott Binns = B. Other refs., Peake in *Century Bible* = P. Davidson in *Hastings' Dictionary of Bible* = HDB. Payne Smith in *Speaker's Commentary* = PS. Thorn's *Prophets of Israel* = T. A. R. Gordon's *Prophets of the Old Testament* = G.]

#### I. THE CHARACTER OF THE PROPHET.

(a) *His timidity.* "The outward sternness of his life only concealed an inward conflict. His physical cowardice and shrinking make Jeremiah a figure much more human and like unto the ordinary Christian of to-day; and those who share in his weakness have the consolation of knowing that they can also learn the secret of his strength" (B. xxxviii).

(b) *His power of endurance.* "The more one studies his life, the greater becomes one's wonder that he was able to endure at all. For the most considerable part of his ministry he had to stand practically alone" (B. xxxix). "Almost alone he had to expose the immoralities, the self-deception founded on superficial reforms, and the fanatical confidence in the protection of Jehovah who dwelt in His temple by which all classes were carried away" (HDB. ii. 569).

(c) *His sensitiveness.* "He was not one who heard the deep sighing of the poor and left it unheeded; rather was he one of that noble but suffering band

'to whom the miseries of the world  
Are misery, and will not let them rest'" (B. xl).

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<sup>1</sup>"Jeremiah," in the Westminster Commentaries, pub. by Methuen. A careful, moderate, spiritual and able commentary by a young and promising Cambridge scholar, now engaged in pastoral work.

“ His style reflects all the articulation of his thought and all the emotions of his mind ” (HDB. ii. 576).

(d) *His desire for sympathy.* “ One point which must strike every student is his great loneliness. It is as though throughout his whole life he was lavishing his affection upon objects from which he vainly expected some return ” (B. xlii). “ His naturally affectionate disposition, cut off from the love of wife or child, poured itself out in overflowing measure upon his country ” (B. xl). “ Jeremiah, whose heart was so exquisitely fitted for love, and to whom a home would have been a welcome refuge from the scorn and cruelty of his fellows, was doomed to a life of loneliness uncheered by wife or children ” (P. 15). “ Yet the prophet longed for the love of his fellows, and the fact that they misinterpreted his motives and suspected his teaching was a great grief to him ” (B. xlii). “ He was not of naturally morose temper, nor had his isolation soured him ; he looked at the felicity of others with no jaundiced eye, but only with the sad conviction that it would soon utterly cease ” (P. 15).

## 2. THE STATEMENT OF THE PROPHET.

“ At first sight Jeremiah’s statement as we have it in EVV. that God gave no commands as to sacrifices and burnt offerings during the wilderness period is exceedingly startling and unexpected ” (B. 75). “ A similar statement in Am. v. 25 ” (B. 75). “ ‘ Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness ? ’ obviously expecting an answer in the negative ” (B. 75). “ The suggestion is merely a statement that it was not sacrifices *only* that were offered, but also ‘ true worship of the heart and righteousness, public and private ’ ” (B. 75). “ No less a critic than W. R. Harper says ‘ This rendering places the emphasis in its proper place and does not compel Amos to say that there were no sacrifices or offerings in the wilderness ’ ” (B. 75).

So in Jeremiah “ an alternative translation is grammatically possible ; this translation avoids the difficulties involved in any explanation which may be suggested on behalf of the more usual rendering ” (B. 76).

“ The Hebrew word rendered ‘ concerning ’ may equally well be rendered ‘ for the sake of,’ ‘ because of,’ : see Genesis xii. 17, Deuteronomy iv. 21 ; while in 2 Samuel xviii. 5 and Jeremiah xiv. 1 the rendering ‘ for the sake of ’ would meet the sense equally well ”

(B. 76). "Jeremiah's statement would then be rendered, 'I spake not unto your fathers . . . *for the sake of burnt offerings.*' In other words, the prophet is emphasising the fact that God did not reveal Himself to the people in order to obtain their sacrifices, a rendering which obtains support from v. 21; the two vv. might be paraphrased 'eat your own meat yourselves, God doesn't want it.' The same lesson exactly is taught in Psalm I. 12 f. 'If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine and all the fulness thereof.' God wanted the hearts of His people, not their offerings" (B. 76).

"The current exposition of the older commentators is best given by Kimchi, who points out that the decalogue, which was the basis of the whole law, and laid up in the ark as the bond of the covenant, contained no ritual ordinances except that of the Sabbath" (PS. 376).

### 3. THE TEACHING OF THE PROPHET.

"He was not denying the cherished belief of the people that the sacrificial system was of Divine origin, but he was trying to restore to them a worthy notion of the meaning of that system" (B. 77). "In the writings of Jeremiah, on the eve of the long exile, when the sacrificial ritual became impossible, it was natural in the order of divine Providence that the realities symbolised by sacrifices should be brought into prominence" (Westcott on Heb. viii. 12, cited B. 77). This is the teaching of Samuel in a famous passage, 1 Samuel xv. 16, and of Isaiah i. 11-13. And compare Jeremiah's derisive description of the sacrifice as so much "meat" with Isaiah's bitter description of "going to church" as "trampling on God's floor," and the services as "wickedness and worship." And Micah's words in vi. 6-8. "No membership of any nation or church, no trust in Bible or sacraments, no submission to the authority of priest or creed can suffice. In the secret depths of the individual's soul there must be a direct meeting with God" (T. 113). "This lifeless ritualism and laxity of faith and morals" (G. 181). "The sacrifice of bullocks and rams with bloodstained hands was blasphemy" (G. 181). And it is striking that from this chapter Christ justified His unique violence in the temple (vii. 11; Mark xi. 17). "Where the thing symbolised is lacking the symbol is but a mockery and intrinsically valueless" (77).