

# THE PROPHECY OF JEREMIAH

by H. L. ELLISON

(Continued)

## III. THE PRIESTS THAT WERE AT ANATHOTH

**T**HERE is no need to underline here the effects that the environs of Anathoth, today Anata, will have had on Jeremiah in the formative years of childhood and youth. This has been done excellently by not a few, especially by G. A. Smith.<sup>1</sup> Though the latter's words have often been quoted, his stress on the link between the village, for it was never more than that, and Jerusalem, less than four miles to the S.S.W., is all too often ignored.

Skinner<sup>2</sup> gives qualified approval to Duhm's suggestion that 5: 1-5 gives "a transcript of Jeremiah's first impressions of social conditions in Jerusalem just after he had taken up his abode there." Though the capital was hidden from Anathoth by the ridge of Scopus, the village must at all times have been very conscious of Jerusalem's pulsing life. As Smith says<sup>3</sup>, "The village is not more than an hour's walk from Jerusalem. Social conditions change little in the East; then, as now, the traffic between village and city was daily and close." If the picture given below of Jeremiah's social status and his father's position is correct, then for Jeremiah the link will have been very close indeed.

We need not question the stress laid on Jeremiah's Benjamite associations, but we must not allow ourselves to accept extremere remarks without closer scrutiny. It is very hard to justify Welch's words<sup>4</sup>, "Thus he belonged by sympathy as well as by descent to the Northern kingdom," or Pfeiffer's,<sup>5</sup> "Jeremiah . . . always remained at heart a Benjamite—a Northern Israelite rather than a Judean." We should not too lightly overlook that geographically Benjamin is part of Judea rather than of Samaria. In addition, we are not told what were the dominating factors that kept Benjamin loyal to Rehoboam, but we have no grounds for

<sup>1</sup> See especially his *Jeremiah*<sup>4</sup>, pp. 67-71.

<sup>2</sup> *Prophecy and Religion*, pp. 139-142.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> *Jeremiah: His Time and His Work*, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> *Introduction to the Old Testament*<sup>2</sup>, p. 493.

thinking that their loyalty was not genuine. It is precisely a decision of this type taken in a moment of crisis that can leave a deeper mark than ethnic bonds.

There has been a growing tendency to link the mention of Anathoth in 1: 1 with 1 Ki. 2: 26 and to draw the conclusion that Jeremiah was a descendant of Abiathar<sup>6</sup>. Köhler can even say<sup>7</sup>:

This priesthood is strictly limited to inheritance . . . It is explicitly stated of Jeremiah that he belonged to the priests who lived in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. There was no sanctuary in Anathoth, but Abiathar had been banished thither, and with him his family, the descendants of Eli, the priest at the time-honoured sanctuary of Shiloh. We are probably not wrong in finding in Jeremiah's words on Jerusalem something also of the superiority of a formerly honoured priesthood over the newcomers of the Solomonic sanctuary.

This is no mere academic question, but on our answer to it may depend our interpretation of some of the most contentious point in Jeremiah's life. Personally I consider that there can be no real doubt. I am being increasingly impressed by the skill displayed in the construction of the Former Prophets, where often deep meanings are packed away into the apparently casual remark or unusual order. Seeing that *Kings* must have received most of its shape during or immediately after the lifetime of Jeremiah, I find it hard to believe that the mention of Anathoth in 1 Ki. 2: 26 is not a deliberate linking of Abiathar with an even greater descendant across the centuries.

T. H. Robinson expressed a very widely held view, when he wrote<sup>8</sup>: "His relatives must have been the guardians and attendants of the shrine, the 'high place' of the village, and the fact needs to be borne in mind throughout if we would understand his life and his message." There can be no *a priori* reason why there should not have been a *bamah* at Anathoth, but it is incredible that the descendants of Eli should have demeaned themselves to function at a little rural sanctuary without a history, while we may be certain that the royal power would never have permitted the former high-priestly line to use its prestige to develop a sanctuary only four miles from the Temple which could in any way compete with it. This is the justification for Köhler's blunt statement already quoted: "There was no sanctuary in Anathoth."

<sup>6</sup> E.g. *HDB II*, p. 569b; Peake (Century Bible), p. 3; Streane (Cambridge Bible), p.x.; Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, p. 390; Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 19; G. A. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 66; Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 493; Rudolph, *Jeremiah*<sup>2</sup>, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Hebrew Man*, p. 74.

<sup>8</sup> *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel*, p. 121.

Closely linked with this conception is the belief that there must have been a bitter antagonism between the Anathoth priesthood and the Zadokite priests in Jerusalem,<sup>9</sup> or at the least a lack of any connection between the priests of Anathoth and those of Jerusalem is stressed.<sup>10</sup>

This is a direct result of the many theories, some of them bizarre, concerning the Zadokite priesthood that have troubled Old Testament studies for a century, and of the emphatic denial that we can speak of a central sanctuary before the time of Josiah. Today, however, the concept of Israel in the time of the Judges as being an amphictyonic league with a central (but not exclusive) sanctuary in Shiloh has become dominant, and is not likely to be seriously modified. With it is coming in a radically changed attitude towards the Jerusalem temple.

There can be little reasonable doubt that David and Solomon intended it to be in some sense a revival and continuation of the old amphictyonic sanctuary at Shiloh. If that is so, even though it was specially linked with the concept of the dynasty,<sup>11</sup> it is only reasonable to suppose that innovation and particularism were kept to a minimum. It is a modern fad to infer on the most tenuous of evidence that, on his capture of Jerusalem, David took over much of its worship and ritual.<sup>12</sup> Not only does the reason already given make this improbable, but 2 Sam. 5: 6-8 points to a most drastic treatment of the Jebusite inhabitants, a conclusion that can hardly be avoided by an appeal to the corrupt state of the Hebrew text or to Araunah (2 Sam. 24: 6).

It has been one of the undeniables for the more liberal study of the Old Testament that 1 Chr. 24, with its twenty-four orders of priests, sixteen descended from Eleazar, including the Zadokites, and eight from Ithamar, including the descendants of Eli, gives a picture of the post-exilic scene. For all that it is an open secret that the various explanations of how non-Zadokite priests could have obtained a firm footing in the post-exilic temple, in spite of their alleged exclusion from Solomon's temple and Ezek. 44:9-16, have always been regarded as one of the weaker links in the Wellhausen complex. Today with a growing insight into the true nature of the Jerusalem sanctuary there is a greater

<sup>9</sup> So Peake, *op. cit.*, p. 3; Streane, *op. cit.*, pp. x, 75 f.; Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 21

<sup>10</sup> So Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 138 f.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. H. H. Rowley, "Zadok and Nehushtan", *JBL* 58 (1939), pp. 113-141; A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, pp. 29-46.

willingness to accept that the post-exilic situation was in some respects a mirror of the pre-exilic one, and that it is illegitimate to assume that the priesthood there must have been a Zadokite monopoly. So Rudolph can say:<sup>13</sup> "It cannot be said with certainty whether Hilkiah [the father of Jeremiah] was 'a priest of the high places' or whether he served in the Jerusalem temple, like Zacharias (Lk. 1: 39f.), although he lived outside the city." Weiser is less hesitant:<sup>14</sup> "On this basis the assumption suggests itself (. . . *legt sich die Annahme nahe*), that Jeremiah's father served in the Jerusalem temple."

The purpose of this whole chapter has been mainly negative. It has not sought to establish a vantage-point from which we can better understand Jeremiah, but rather to clear away some of the misconceptions and assumptions that have led many an expositor astray. We may sum up as follows:—

The assumption that there was a *bamah* in Anathoth, and if so, that Jeremiah's family were its traditional guardians and priests, is so hazardous, that we have no right to assume it, unless we are driven to it by Jeremiah's actual oracles.

We may not take it for granted that Jeremiah's kith and kin served in the Jerusalem temple—though we may take it that *he* never did—but equally we must not assume that there was any hostility between them and the Jerusalem priests, or that Jeremiah had been taught any hostility to the Jerusalem *cultus* in his youth.

Above all we must not assume an ignorance of Jerusalem life in the aristocratic household in the nearby village. Jeremiah's heart may have been in the countryside, but he was no stranger to what the capital meant when the call first came to him.

#### IV. JEREMIAH'S CALL (CH. 1)

A prophet must have had a call, for whether he was genuine or self-deceived, there must have come the moment, when he was sure of his vocation. There is, however, a very real danger of our formalizing this fact, or of making too much of it. H. Wheeler Robinson does the former when he deals with the "ecstatic" element in prophecy. He says:<sup>15</sup> "It is not likely that a prophet of the classical period would have dared to prophesy without an inaugural vision such as Isaiah's in the temple, or an audition such as Jeremiah's, or such a characteristically peculiar experience

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 2 f.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Redemption and Revelation*, p. 143.

as that of Ezekiel." The theophanies of Isaiah and Ezekiel, Jeremiah's hearing of the divine voice, the matter-of-fact visions of Amos, the night call to Samuel, the relentless pressure of family tragedy with Hosea and the compulsion of Elijah's mantle with Elisha should prevent our trying to standardize the call. The varying positions in which it is recounted and its non-mention by so many should keep us from attributing to it a higher importance in itself than we would to a call to some form of Christian service.

There are, however, with Jeremiah, as there are with Ezekiel, indications that the placing of the story of the call at the beginning of the book does not come from accident or tidiness of mind, but is a sign that we are being given a vital clue to what follows.

#### 1. *The Background of the Call*

There is always the danger that if we seek the factors that have combined to make a man susceptible to God's call, we may so stress the temporal elements as to forget the reality of divine action. There is also a subtler danger. There are always those who belittle the saints' own story of their call in order to stress elements passed over with the minimum of emphasis in the autobiographical description. To be sure, we are always tempted to think we understand our neighbours better than they do themselves, and at times it may be true. But true saintliness is normally bound up with a very shrewd knowledge of self. The prophets, who showed such an uncanny knowledge of the thoughts and motives of those to whom they brought their message, would hardly have been lacking in self-knowledge. Unless we find ourselves involved in self-contradictions in the process, we shall do well to follow the hints given us by Jeremiah, the more so as we have good ground for believing that the book that bears his name was largely shaped by him.

When we allow our imaginations to lead us on, we are apt to look for an *adequate* cause behind the emergence of a prophet, but we generally mean *materially* adequate, not *spiritually* adequate. That is the reason why for some decades the exposition of the early chapters of *Jeremiah* was dominated by the shadow of the Scythians, who have repeatedly been found in 4: 5—6: 26. In spite of more cautious writers like Driver,<sup>16</sup> who, while accepting the Scythian hypothesis, yet insisted on the priority in time of 2: 1—4: 4, it became a commonplace to see Jeremiah jerked

<sup>16</sup> *LOT*<sup>9</sup>, p. 252.

into the prophetic office by the imminent peril from the north.<sup>17</sup> Even though the Scythians are beginning to lose their place in the commentaries, this view is still quite popular.

The question of the legitimacy of the Scythian theory had best be left over to our treatment of 4: 5—6: 26. All that need concern us here is, that, even if it is true, to link it with Jeremiah's call is incompatible with the present order of the book, as Skinner saw so clearly.<sup>18</sup> I believe too that in spite of many affirmations to the contrary it is not implied by the narrative of the call itself.

If we confine ourselves to the text of Jeremiah and particularly to that of the call, we find our attention drawn to the events of Josiah's thirteenth regnal year (1: 2) and to this alone. There is no warrant for regarding this merely as a note of time. Not only is the dating lacking in various prophets, where editorial ignorance can hardly be the cause, but in the remarkable case of Amos his prophesying is deliberately dated by the date of the coming earthquake and not by the regnal year of Uzziah or Jeroboam II, which must have been ascertainable by the editor of the book. It seems reasonable from the evidence before us to assume that where a prophecy or an incident has a date attached to it, this is intended to help in our understanding of it.

I have already argued in the first chapter that Josiah had in fact, however cautiously, started his reformation in his twelfth regnal year (627 B.C.). The great weakness of Skinner's excellent description of "The Two Religions of Israel"<sup>19</sup> is that he assumes that Jerusalem still lay below the horizon of the young prophet's consciousness in ch. 2, and that he sees in the popular religion under Manasseh merely a clearer expression of what had existed all along.

For a short period under Ahaz and for three generations under Manasseh, Amon and the boy king Josiah, Jehovah's temple in Jerusalem had not merely given hospitality to other deities, who might be regarded as allies and subordinates, but had publicly proclaimed the subordination of Judah's God to the astral deities of Assyria. It was as a mark of subordination, religiously as well as politically, that Azah had introduced a copy of Tiglath-

<sup>17</sup> So, among many others, Peake (Century Bible), p. 4; Streane (Cambridge Bible), pp. xii, 5; Caiger, *Lives of the Prophets*<sup>2</sup>, p. 175; G. A. Smith, *Jeremiah*<sup>4</sup>, pp. 73 f. (with reserve); Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion*, pp. 31 f., 38-42; T. H. Robinson, *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel*<sup>2</sup>, p. 121.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 52-57.

<sup>19</sup> *Op. cit.*, ch. IV.

pileser's travelling altar (2 Ki. 16: 10-16).<sup>20</sup> This was carried much further by Manasseh (2 Ki. 21: 3c, 5). "This developed astral worship . . . came in with the Assyrian domination as part of the obligation of subject states to the empire; e.g., there were the ritual dues for 'Ashur and Belit, and the gods of Assyria', required by Ashurbanipal."<sup>21</sup>

The circles round the throne may have acquiesced in this because of the atmosphere it created, which favoured "divine kingship" and hence royal autocracy. But for every loyal Jehovah worshipper it must have meant continual pain of heart and sorrow, and this in itself is sufficient to explain why Zephaniah and Jeremiah, in contrast to their eighth-century predecessors, put religious and not moral reform in the first place.

But even in the purely West-Semitic elements in Manasseh's syncretistic worship there is something which is absent in the licentious nature-worship attacked by Hosea. Albright<sup>22</sup> accepts the view that by this period human sacrifice was dying out in Phoenicia, while it did not exist in Assyria to act as a corrupting influence from there. He may be correct in his linking of it under Ahaz and Manasseh with North Syrian influence, but it is hard to believe that the influence of this region could have been naturally strong in Judah; in addition Jer. 7: 31 seems to be conclusive that under Manasseh it was not merely a by-product of syncretistic worship, but that it was offered to Jehovah himself. Skinner's suggestion<sup>23</sup> that it was due to a loss of nerve in the popular religion is hardly borne out by its vanishing in Phoenicia under almost identical conditions. Further, what little evidence we have seems to link it with Tophet in the Hinnom Valley alone. It seems to have been peculiarly a royal-sponsored cult. We shall probably be not far wrong in seeing under Manasseh not merely the old Canaanized worship of Jehovah that had all along threatened true religion in Israel, but a deliberate syncretism intended to destroy all that was distinctive in the religion of Jehovah.

It is almost impossible to picture to ourselves what it must have meant to the loyalists, when in 627 B.C., after almost seventy years, the first signs of reform appeared. Their joys must have been tempered by doubts and fears as to whether there

<sup>20</sup> So Montgomery and Gehman: *Kings* (I.C.C.), pp. 495 f., with citation of authorities. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*<sup>3</sup>, p. 161, gives a different interpretation.

<sup>21</sup> Montgomery and Gehman, *op. cit.*, pp. 519 f.

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 168 ff. <sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

would be repercussions from Assyria and whether the old court circles might not cut it prematurely short. Surely here is an adequate background against which young Jeremiah could hear the Lord's call, and we need look no further.

## 2. *The Call* (1: 4-10)

- (4) The word of the LORD came to me ;
- (5) "Before I fashioned you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I set you apart for My service; a prophet to the nations I appointed you."
- (6) I said, "Alas, Lord Jehovah! behold, I know not how to speak, for I am too young."
- (7) The LORD said to me: "You must not say, 'I am too young'; for you shall go to whomever I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you."
- (8) Be not afraid, however grimly they may look, for I am with you to deliver you—oracle of Jehovah!"
- (9) The LORD stretched out His hand and caused it to touch my mouth, and the LORD said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth."
- (10) See! today I give you authority over the nations and kingdoms to root out, to pull down (to destroy, to break down), to build and to plant."

It was January or early February 625 B.C. Young Jeremiah, some eighteen or nineteen years old, was out of doors, maybe at work in the family fields, maybe just thinking of the future—the justification for this setting is given later. Suddenly, without any conscious preparation, he knew that the Lord was speaking to him. The simplicity of the narrative defies the translator's skill. The "now" (v. 4, R.V.) is merely "and", linking doubtless with the date in v. 2, for v. 3 is a parenthesis, while "came to" gives too much precision to the "became to" of the Hebrew. So often this has been the experience of the saints, and such is ever the miracle of God's voice. Suddenly it is there, and, as Myers wrote in his *Saint Paul* :

Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest  
Cannot confound nor doubt Him nor deny:  
Yea with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,  
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

The message was simple. In the darkest hour of Manasseh's reign, even as in the darkness of Egyptian bondage, God had been planning for the future and had brought Jeremiah into the world, as He had once brought Moses. He was to be His spokesman

(for this is the meaning of *nabi'*, prophet) to the nations with all God's authority to aid him (v. 10).

In the light of this and 36: 2 it seems unreasonable to question the essential authenticity of the oracles against the nations, as is done by many (cf. ch. II). If there had been in fact the amount of editorial work on Jeremiah as is often suggested, it would have been easier to omit this unique title, which is so hard to explain than to have provided a collection of spurious oracles in semi-justification of it.

At first sight, when we study Jer. 25: 15-19; 27; 28; 46-51, it is hard to see wherein we are to give Jeremiah the preference over Isaiah or Ezekiel as a prophet to the nations. Closer study will suggest that there are marked differences among them. Isaiah's oracles to the nations, where he is not simply a proclaimer of God's moral rule, are largely a commentary on and an amplification of the theme "Ho! Assyrian the rod of mine anger." Ezekiel is concerned above all else to guarantee the world rule of Jehovah to the despondent exiles. Jer. 25: 15-29 and 46: 1-49: 33 are linked with Nebuchadrezzar's decisive victory at Carchemish in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. This, one of the turning points of ancient history, left the Fertile Crescent in perplexity as to what the womb of the future might hold. It was then that Jeremiah in the name of his God gave the rule of the world, Judah not excepted, to Nebuchadrezzar.

There is, however, perhaps another sense in which Jeremiah may be said to be a prophet to the nations, even though it is secondary. The words of God's spokesmen were so bound up with Israel that though they were not bounded by Israel's horizons, their words were scarcely comprehensible to any who did not know Israel's history. With Jeremiah, however, his life spoke more clearly and loudly than his words, and its message was one which all men could understand.

Jeremiah's answer is a striking one. It reveals not only that there lay a history of close communion with God behind the call, but also that the call was expected. His answer was not "No!", but "Not yet!" It is hardly fair to compare him with Moses and to say with Kirkpatrick (typical of countless others),<sup>24</sup> "We mark at the outset the prophet's natural timidity of character and reluctance to face the terrible task before him." He did not yet know that the task was terrible, and he had every reason for saying, "Not yet!" But once God showed that He was in earnest

<sup>24</sup> *The Doctrine of the Prophets*,<sup>3</sup> pp. 301 f.

Jeremiah had no more to say. The Reader of hearts knew that he had accepted the commission laid on him.

Jeremiah had good grounds for his protest. The standard English translation "child" entirely distorts the meaning. There is probably no case where *na'ar* means child, except where this is made clear by the context. Where it is used of free men, it implies someone too young to be a full citizen, unmarried and still living in his parents' home—when it is used of slaves, there is probably no suggestion of youth involved. The rendering above, "too young", follows the LXX and gives the general meaning of what Jeremiah said, though it fails to indicate clearly his lack of standing in society. The inference that he was eighteen or nineteen is based on the fact that he was not married (cf. 16: 2); it is hardly likely that he would have remained unmarried much longer, had the call not come.

In an age, when we are faced even with the abomination of child evangelists, i.e. genuine children preaching regularly to adult congregations, it has become hard for us to appreciate the weight laid on age in Old Testament times. This would have been felt particularly in a priestly family, where seniority will have been more valued than in most walks of life, and where the normal entry into full priestly functions will probably have been at thirty.<sup>25</sup> So Jeremiah's protest, "Too soon!" was an entirely reasonable one.

God's only answer was to make His instructions clearer. It is questionable whether "Be not afraid of them" (v. 8, so essentially R.S.V.) is a really adequate rendering of the Hebrew, though that offered is a paraphrase. We hardly need assume that the Lord made Himself visible at this point (v. 9); at the most the consciousness of an arm and the touch of fingers is implied. This was sufficient; God needed no answer, for He knew the reply of Jeremiah's heart.

There is no MS. authority for the omission of the words bracketed in v. 10, but the parallelism strongly suggests that they have been supplied from similar passages like 18: 7; 24: 6.

### 3. *The Prophet's Message* (1: 11-16)

(11) The word of the LORD came to me: "What are you looking at, Jeremiah?" I said, "I am looking at a branch of waker" (i.e. almond). (12) "You have rightly seen," said the LORD, "for I am awake over My word to fulfil it."

(13) The word of the LORD came to me a second time: "What

are you looking at?" I said, "I am looking at a boiling pot, and its contents are tilting over from the north." (14) The LORD said to me, "From the north evil shall break forth on all the inhabitants of the land, (15) for see, I am even now calling all (the families of) the kingdoms of the north—oracle of Jehovah!—to come and place every man his throne hard by the gates of Jerusalem and against her walls round about, and against all the cities of Judah. (16) And I shall speak My judgments against them because of all their wickedness in forsaking Me and making sacrifices to smoke to other gods and prostrating themselves before the works of their hands."

It must be clearly realized that the question of whether ch. 1 covers a day in Jeremiah's life or a longer period can receive only a subjective answer. Personally I incline strongly to the former, though most prefer the latter view.<sup>26</sup> Their motivation is that they see the visions as an outcome of Jeremiah's brooding over the meaning of his call.

Only in the stories of the call of Isaiah and Ezekiel do we have enough detail to justify firm conclusions. In neither case have we any suggestion of a break between the call itself and the giving of what was to be the prophet's basic message; nor is there any suggestion that this message had been anticipated by him. The tremendous power of the true prophet came not from his giving his own message at the divine command, but from his certainty that his message came from God alone. It may well be that after the shock of the initial message the prophet found past impressions suddenly being brought into focus, showing him the logical force of the message he had received from God, but that is something else.

Jeremiah is the extremist among the prophets. His call may explain his certainty of being the Lord's spokesman, but not the grip of his message on him, a grip he would so gladly have avoided. His faithfulness and his extremism are best explained by the impact of a revelation he knew was not his discovery. I consider, therefore, that we have every justification for linking call and message in the closest way. To him who would suggest that somewhat more time is suggested by the narrative it is enough to say, that when a man hears the voice of God, as Jeremiah did, whether in ecstasy, or trance, or vision, or however it be, time seems to slow up, and the experience of days can be packed into an hour.

Some writers make rather heavy work explaining the nature of

<sup>25</sup> See my discussion in *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message*, pp. 16 f.

<sup>26</sup> So Skinner, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 ff., G. A. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 84 f.

Jeremiah's visions. There is no intrinsic objection to the suggestion that the Beduin method of drawing an omen from the object on which the eye first rests was known to the prophets of Israel. Guillaume, however, carries little conviction, when he says,<sup>27</sup> "The Book of Jeremiah . . . in its opening chapter affords two perfect examples of the Beduin method of augury." Had he been able to show that Jeremiah was in the habit of receiving his oracles in this way, it would have been different, but only the doubtful example of ch. 24 is given. It is too easily overlooked that we are not dealing with normal oracles, but with a necessary part of the prophet's call. A closer parallel is probably to be found in John

Masefield's *The Everlasting Mercy*:

O glory of the lighted mind.  
How dead I'd been, how dumb, how blind.  
The station brook, to my new eyes,  
Was babbling out of Paradise ;  
The waters rushing from the rain  
Were singing Christ has risen again . . .  
All earthly things that blessed morning  
Were everlasting joy and warning.

Jeremiah's eye fell on a spray of almond blossom in the winter sunshine proclaiming that the tree was awake, and so nature as a whole would soon show the fulfilment of spring. The divine voice assured him that Jehovah too was awake over His word to fulfil it. In the long winter of Manasseh's reign it had seemed that God was trebly asleep. He had seemed indifferent to the cruelty, injustice and blasphemy of the royal religious policy. It would seem that even the prophetic witness had ceased. Then too the words of doom spoken by Isaiah and Micah seemed to have been no more than their adversaries had maintained, the ravings of fanatics. For the loyal remnant too it had seemed as though God were asleep and did not hear their prayers. Now, just as the blossoms of the waker proclaimed the irresistible coming of spring, so God too was awake. The prophetic voice had been renewed with Zephaniah, Josiah was turning to reforms, Jeremiah had heard his call—the purposes of God were beginning to work, and once they were in spate, nothing would be able now to hold them up.

Rudolph<sup>28</sup> is, of course, correct in pointing out that nothing is said of winter and almond blossom, etc., but these are conclusions

<sup>27</sup> Peake, *op. cit.*, pp. 8 f., Rudolph: *Jeremia*,<sup>2</sup> p. 9, Weiser: *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia*, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> *Prophecy and Divination*, p. 153.

from the story which seem so obvious that they are not likely to be false. It is hard to see why the standard English versions (A.V., R.V., R.S.V.) have preferred to speak of God as *watching* over His word. The Hebrew verb includes both meanings equally, and their rendering destroys the parallelism with the waking tree.

But what would the fulfilment of God's purposes mean? As Jeremiah's eyes fell on the cloud masses to the north, it seemed as though they took the shape of a great boiling pot, tilting over from the north, its contents ready to boil over on Anathoth and Jerusalem behind him. Then came the divine voice assuring him that not only would evil break forth from the north, but that at the very moment God was preparing His instruments of judgment.

Obviously the pot Jeremiah saw may have been an ordinary cooking-pot over a fire, but this hardly accounts for the feeling of awe expressed in the terse Hebrew, nor for Jeremiah's ready consciousness in which direction it was tilting. I have followed Rudolph and Weiser in keeping the Massoretic text of the passage, for though the Hebrew is difficult, it hardly needs emendation. The LXX justifies the omission of "the families of" in v. 15.

It should be specially noted that this prophecy of doom is completely indeterminate. Unless Egypt were to revive, the only enemies of note would have to come from the north—from the east and west there were no foes to be feared. The mention of "all the kingdoms" clearly rules out any pre-occupation in Jeremiah's mind with the Scythians. It implies some power that would lead, as had Assyria in the past, vassal rulers in its ranks. It is worth noting that Nabopolassar will have made Babylon independent of Assyria within a matter of months after this oracle.

Here then we see the source of all that is most typical of Jeremiah's message, the conviction that he lived in the last days of Jerusalem, and that the forces were already abroad that would destroy her. The strength of these convictions provides the simplest explanation of many an oracle in which he goes beyond his eighth-century predecessors.

*London.*

*(To be continued)*

<sup>29</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 9.