

JEREMIAH IN MODERN SPEECH

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Jeremiah in modern speech by John Edgar McFadyen

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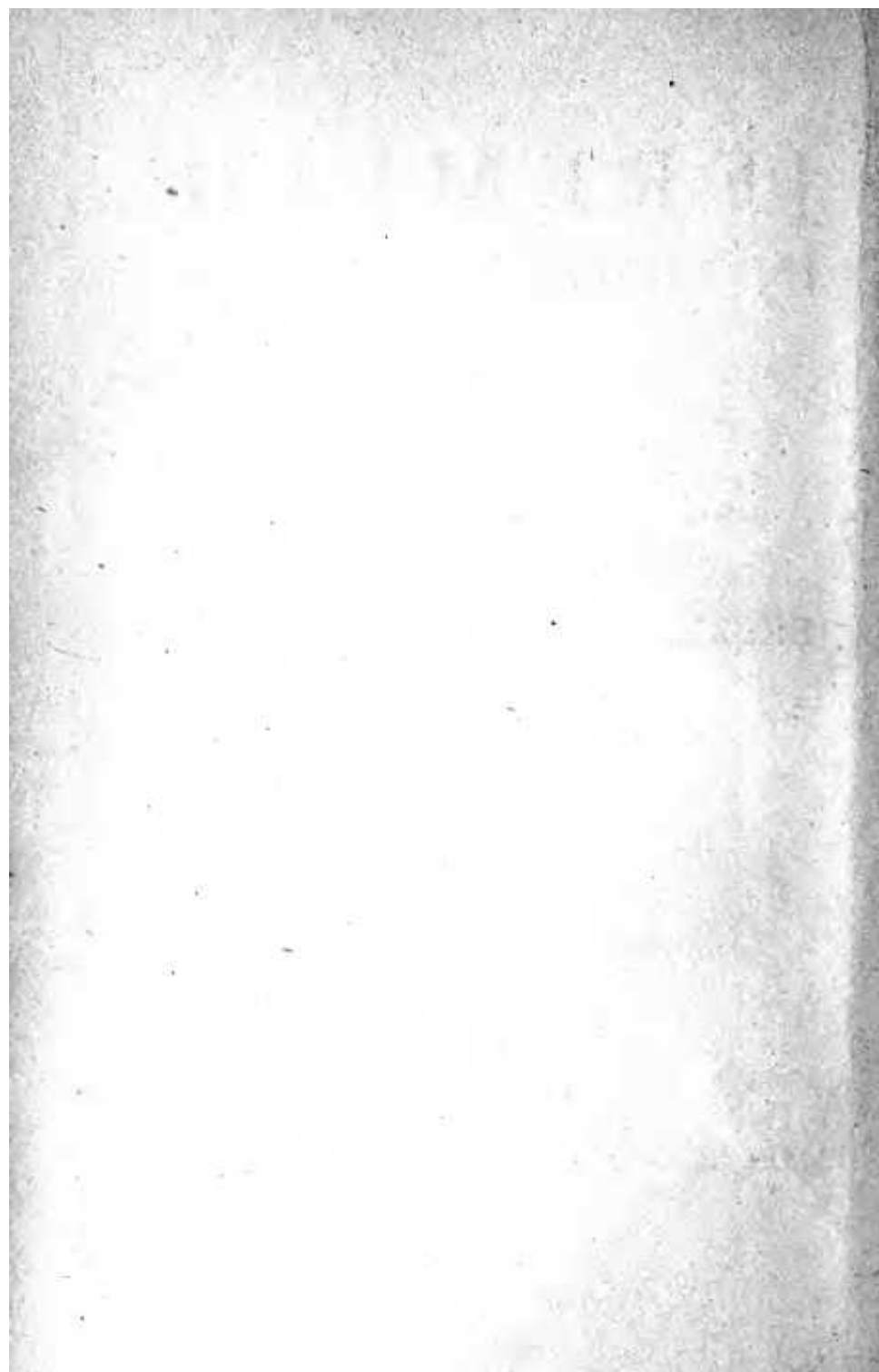
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JOHN EDGAR MCFADYEN

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JEREMIAH IN MODERN SPEECH

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PREFACE

Of all the fascinating personalities that crowd the pages of the Old Testament, none surpasses Jeremiah in sheer intensity of human interest. He has been called "the prophet of the inner struggle." In him more vividly than in any other do we see the conflict of the human will with the divine—the natural longing of an acutely sensitive spirit to escape from a task so stern and terrible, and the irresistible impulse to undertake it for his God and his country's sake. The word which he would fain have hidden in his heart he felt to be a burning fire shut up in his bones and it had to leap forth into speech of flame (xx. 9).

But his inexorable fidelity to his mission exposed him to the unscrupulous intrigue of those who had been his friends, and brought upon him the implacable hatred and fanatical persecution of the accredited leaders of Church and State, so that he stands forth as a figure of pathetic loneliness, truly a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief—in this, as in so much else, the precursor of Jesus. With a heart as tender as a woman's, yet brave as a lion, he battled against the externalism, the conventionality, the political and religious folly of his time, looking with tear-stained face upon the calamity which was swiftly rushing upon the daughter of his people, whom there was no balm in Gilead to heal.

At times he fascinates and amazes us by the candour and the passion of his challenges of the ways of God with men and especially with himself ; but with hope undimmed

Preface

he looks beyond all the confusions and perplexities to the day of forgiveness and redemption, the day when discipline would have done its work and the law of God would be written upon every heart. Never has religion been more spiritually conceived than by Jeremiah. He lived in a world all his own, to which the dearest and most venerable material symbols of popular religion—the ark, the temple, the sacrifices—were no longer necessary, and if withdrawn, so far from being lamented, would not even be missed (iii. 16, vii. 4, 22, xxxi. 33ff.).

The attitude of Jeremiah to the Babylonian assault upon his native land raises some curious questions as to the nature and essence of patriotism—questions to which recent history lends an interest of the most piquant kind.

A peculiar injustice is done to the exquisite poetic vein of Jeremiah when, as in the ordinary translations, the prose of the book—some of it the work of later and conventional minds—and his own touching elegiacs are presented in an indistinguishable medley; and an attempt is made in this volume to do what little justice is possible to the literary form as well as the haunting pathos of his poetry.

As in the previous volumes of translation, the figures in the text indicate the points remarked upon in the notes at the end; and, as before, the notes themselves are reduced to the minimum necessary for the understanding of the text or the justification of the translation.

JOHN E. MCFADYEN.

GLASGOW,

February, 1919.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
JEREMIAH'S CALL AND EARLY VISIONS (i.)	13
THE EARLIER MESSAGES OF JEREMIAH (ii.-vi.)	15
MESSAGES FROM THE MIDDLE PERIOD (vii.-ix., x. 17-25)	39
THE FOLLY OF FEARING THE GODS OF THE HEATHEN (x. 1-16)	52
JEREMIAH EXHORTS THE PEOPLE TO BE TRUE TO THE DEMANDS OF THE DEUTERONOMIC LAW (xi. 1-17)	54
A PLOT AGAINST JEREMIAH'S LIFE (xi. 18-xii. 6)	56
LAMENT OVER THE HAVOC WROUGHT UPON JUDAH BY HER NEIGHBOURS (xii. 7-17)	58
THE PARABLES OF THE WAISTCLOTH AND THE WINE-JARS (xiii. 1-14)	59
WARNING AND LAMENT (xiii. 15-27)	61
A GRIEVOUS DROUGHT AND THE THOUGHTS IT AWAKENED IN THE PROPHET (xiv. and xv.)	63
PREDICTIONS OF COMING DISASTER (xvi. 1-xvii. 18)	69
THE SANCTITY OF THE SABBATH (xvii. 19-27)	75
THE LESSON OF THE POTTER AND THE CLAY (xviii.)	76
THE LESSON OF THE BROKEN FLASK, AND ITS CON- SEQUENCES FOR JEREMIAH (xix. 1-xx. 6)	79
JEREMIAH'S IRRESISTIBLE IMPULSE TO PREACH (xx. 7-18)	82
JEREMIAH WARNS ZEDEKIAH THAT THE BABYLONIANS WILL CAPTURE JERUSALEM (xxi.)	84