

MODERN APPLICATION OF AMOS'S SERMON.

By DELAVAN L. PIERSON,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

A WESTERN newspaper bears under its title the legend, "This paper is printed for the people now on earth." Too many men and women in our churches, and out of them, seem to think that the Bible, and particularly the Old Testament, has a message for those who are not only "not of this world," but not in it. Even the Old Testament prophecies are read too much merely as history or as revealing the life of the times in which they were delivered. This is essential to a correct understanding of their contents, but we should bear in mind that, while the events to which they refer may be "out of date," the principles laid down are not. These Old Testament reformers were commissioned to denounce the sins of the times and to pronounce divine truth for all time.

The paraphrasing of Scripture is helpful, both because a passage must be carefully studied in order to express the thoughts in our own words, and because the attempt to paraphrase leads us to realize how much more is contained in the Scripture phraseology than in any words that we can choose. If we try this with the first chapter of the Gospel according to John, we shall not deceive ourselves into thinking that any paraphrase is equal to the original.

Another exceedingly interesting and helpful method of bringing out the very pointed and practical character of the Old Testament prophecies, and also the eternal truths which they proclaim, is by bringing their prophecies "up to date." Imagine Amos, for instance, living in our day, preaching in America, seeing evils similar to those which he denounced, and wishing to impress the same truths. How would he have talked? What particular evils would he have decried? What figures of speech would he have used? What nations would he have mentioned?

Amos lived in Judah and prophesied in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. At that time the Northern Kingdom was at the height of its temporal prosperity, with extended boundaries, a mighty army, and great material wealth. The book containing Amos's utterances reveals the characteristics of his times; his facts and figures relate to the country in which he lived, and the experiences of his daily life. Imagine him transported to the present day with a message to deliver to God's much-favored people, the Americans.

There are many similarities between this day and that—national prosperity, extension of boundaries, wealth, and selfish luxury. Many of the evils which were prevalent then are present now. If they gain the mastery over us, the result will be the same as that which Amos predicted. Let us look at the prophecy and translate it into modern phraseology with reference to present-day conditions and events.

The written prophecy begins with a title-page, containing information as to the author, his home, his date, and his subject. Then follows an introduction, calculated to catch the attention of the people (chaps. 1, 2). This introduction shows the result of national sins—beginning with three foreign nations, following with three related nations, and reaching a climax by predicting judgment on Judah and on Israel itself.

By way of illustrating this method of study, picture Amos as an Englishman coming to New York and preaching to a crowd of Americans in a public square. We might render the title-page as follows:

A *Sermon* on "The Present Condition of the United States," by John Smith, a farmer, from Warwick, England (delivered in New York), in the reign of Edward VII., king of England, and during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, president of the United States, in the year of the eruption of Mt. Pelée.

Subject: The Divine Displeasure and a Warning of Threatened Disaster on account of Sin.

Introduction: Almighty God will no longer save the "unspeakable Turk" from suffering the consequences of his many sins, especially because of his inhuman cruelty to the Armenians. The Yildiz Kiosk at Constantinople will be destroyed by fire and the forts of the Bosphorus will be blown up; whole

districts will be laid waste, the Sultan will be killed, Turkey will be divided among European powers, and many of the Turks will be exiled.

God will no longer save the people of Russia² from suffering the consequence of their many sins; because they have oppressed the Jews, have robbed Poland of its freedom, have denied liberty of conscience to Douk-hobours and Stundists, and have sent many of them to exile in Siberia. Therefore St. Petersburg will be destroyed by fire and its fine palaces will be burned; many of the people will be killed, and the Czar will be dethroned. Moscow will be captured, and the nation will be blotted out.

Then follows a similar prophecy concerning another foreign power, three related nations, and a sister-country, before the prophet finally reaches the climax of his introduction by denouncing Israel itself. A parallel to this might be a sentence pronounced against China for the Boxer outrages; against Germany, France, and Spain, for various national offenses; against England (whence the preacher came), for the disregard of God's laws; and finally, against the United States, for sins of oppression and sacrilege.

Then follows the sermon proper (chaps. 3-6), containing three main heads: (1) the summons to hear the denunciation of the favored nation; (2) the indictment of the women, and of religious ceremonies; and (3) the lamentation over the national sins and disaster. Look at this third point as dealt with explicitly in the fifth chapter of Amos and brought down to the present day.

Listen to these words that I speak with anguish of heart on your account, O men and women of America! The Puritan uprightness of your forefathers is no longer to be found. Your honor and your purity are dragged in the dust, and you have neither enough strength to reform nor is there anyone else able to help you. Your present course is death to you; it will decimate your population. But God calls on you to repent and to turn to him so that you may be saved from destruction. Do not put your confidence in formal worship and pilgrimages to Rome and Jerusalem, or in false standards, or in the "god of this world"—money; all these things will pass away. Turn to Jesus Christ with your whole heart, and he will save you; for the day of his power is coming and no one else can help you. You men, who corrupt justice and utterly disregard God's laws of right and wrong, return to your allegiance to God, the Creator of the universe, the Ruler of the world, and the Giver of

²This is, of course, only a suggested application. Russia is not in a decadent state, as was Gaza or Tyre, but we believe that she is guilty of national sins which will bring trouble upon her.

every good gift; he is the merciful covenant-keeping God; none can withstand his power.

Nowadays a man who is outspoken against the prevalent evils is heartily disliked, and one who denounces dishonesty in business is looked down upon as "ignorant of business principles." On account of the way in which you oppress the poor with your monopolies and sweatshop system, and grind them down to the earth with high rentals and low wages, though you have grown rich and have built fine houses you shall not live in them, and though you have bought fine estates, you shall never enjoy them.

God is not blind to your continued wrong-doing and your great wickedness—you, I mean, who make honest men and women suffer because of their honesty, and refuse to give justice to any who cannot pay for it. As a result those who think discretion the better part of valor keep their mouths shut, thinking it of no use to speak out when evil is so prevalent.

Trouble is coming on you who pretend to be looking forward to the millennium. Why should you want the millennium? For sinners it will be a day of judgment and not of blessing. Your efforts to escape will be like a man who dodges a trolley to step in front of an automobile, or who seeks refuge in his house only to be bitten by a mad dog. Could you expect anything else than that the establishment of God's kingdom on earth would mean anguish to you and not joy?

Your selfish celebrations of Christmas and Thanksgiving are an abomination in the sight of God. He cares not for your heartless, though elaborate, church services. Even though you do give money "to charity," and put your names down for large amounts on church subscription lists, God will not accept them as given to him. The singing of your expressive but godless church choirs is discord in his ears; do away with them—he will not listen to your elaborate but insincere songs of praise. If you would please him, let justice abound in the land, and let honesty prevail in all your dealings. Do not plead your past good deeds or those of your fathers, for now you have made gold to be your god and self-indulgence your ambition. On this account the nation will become weak and will be swept away.

The preacher continues by predicting sorrow to the self-indulgent, and closes his address with a conclusion in which he foretells, in a series of visions, the impending destruction of the nation and the rescue of a "remnant."

This method of study is only suggestive; men would differ widely in their present-day application of the prophet's message. But that the truth enunciated has an important practical bearing on the life of today, all will admit. This method of bringing the Old Testament prophecies "up to date" has proved especially helpful in Bible-class work.