THE PREACHING OF JONAH

IN THE CITY OF NINEVEH

Nineveh was a great city in Assyria, built by king Ninus, and called Nineveh after his name.

Now king Ninus had a wife whose name was Semiramis; and he, fearing the woman on account of her insatiable lewdness, left the kingdom and fled into Greece. Then Semiramis reigned fifteen years, after which she was slain by her sons.

From Babylon to Nineveh one could go in seven days, from the east to the west. And the land was fertile and full of all good things, like the land of Sodom. And the people ate, and drank, and fattened their bodies, for meat for the sleepless worms. They put aside purity and lawful marriage, and walked after fornication. They displeased God and excited his wrath; but although God is provoked against the sinner, yet He has pity,
and is unwilling to punish him; He waits for his conversion and repentance, according to the saying: « I have no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but that he should be converted and live. » Wherefore He spared Nineveh, and was pleased to send first a preacher, and decreed that if it would not be converted He would punish it.

And the Lord said unto Jonah: « Go thy way unto Nineveh, the great city, and there preach repentance; for its cry is come up before Me. »

But Jonah would not go, for two reasons; first, because he would not preach to other nations, nor live among the uncircumcised. « For if I preach, » said he, « and leave my own tree to thirst while I water that of others, what profit is it to me? » — And the second reason was: « I know, » said he, « that Thou art merciful and slow to anger, and that it repenteth Thee of the evil of man. If I go and preach that this city is about to be overthrown, it will repent and make amendment, and Thou wilt not overthrow it; and therefore my prophecy shall have no fulfilment, and my name shall be that of a false prophet. »

On account of these two reasons he would not go, but he departed to Joppa, and
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went on board a merchant-ship to flee to Tarshish. And when he got into the ship, the Lord God sent out over the sea a great storm and tempest, and every man cried unto his god. But the sea went not down, but it became more tempestuous.

Now Jonah had gone down into a corner of the ship, and was sleeping and snoring. And the men awaked him, saying: "Why sleepest thou? Arise, call upon thy God, perchance He will save us that we perish not."

But the sea did not cease from being tempestuous, and they threw the food into the sea, and afterwards the cargo, to lighten the ship, but the sea was not appeased.

And they said: "Let us cast lots and see for whose sins this evil is upon us."

And they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

And they said unto him: "What kind of man art thou, of what nation or people art thou?"

And Jonah said: "I am a servant of God, and I worship the Lord of heaven who made the earth."

And they were exceedingly afraid, for they knew that he fled from the presence of God, because he had told them, and they said unto him: "Why didst thou do this?"
And they tried to bring the ship back to the land, but they were not able, and they said: « Be it far from Thee, O Lord, to lay to our charge innocent blood, for Thou hast done as it pleased Thee. »

And Jonah said: « Cast me forth into the sea, and the storm shall cease from you. »

And they took Jonah and cast him forth into the sea, and the sea became calm; and at the same time the Lord commanded the whale, the great dragon fish, to swallow up Jonah.

And the men landed on the shore, and offered sacrifices unto the Lord, and entreated Him to forgive their sins.

But the whale took Jonah, and went down into the depths, and through the sea carried him around the land of the Abyssinians, and through the river of the Indians, and brought him to the Persian Sea; and through the Persian Sea, in a twinkling, took him to the river Sarangas, which, going on foot, was fifteen days' journey off. And Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, and standing up with out-stretched arms he offered up prayer, remaining safe through the power of God. And after three days the whale brought Jonah over against the city of Ni-
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In the city of Nineveh, and vomited him forth upon the dry land, three days journey from the city, and he returned to his place. And Jonah did not know the world so as to understand that no man can flee from God, whose Omnipotent hand reaches everywhere.

And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying: « Arise, go thy way into Nineveh, the great city, and there preach repentance. »

When Jonah had gone three days journey, he reached the city and began to preach, saying: « Behold, forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown. »

And the inhabitants of the city saw that Jonah's face shone brighter than the sun, and out of his mouth came a blazing fire; and they ran and told it to the king, saying: « A strange man of fearful appearance has come, and preaches in such a way. »

And the king said: « His words are true. »

And as soon as he said so, the city began to tremble; and at first the people would have run away, but a cloud of fire came down and surrounded the city like a wall, and no one could run away.

Then the king said: « Fear not; if that God which has sent the prophet, willed our ruin. He would have overthrown the city
instantly, and would not have sent to us a preacher and a prophet. But He has sent him for the purpose of warning us through the preaching of the prophet, to repent of our sinning and to make amendment. If we put from us our sins God will turn from us His wrath.

And it was proclaimed throughout Nineveh by the king and his nobles, that no one, man or woman, old man or child, should taste any food during three days, nor give the beasts pasture, nor the mothers give the breast to the children. And all put on sack-cloth, the king, and the nobles, and all the city.

But the cloud became dark and full of thunders, and caused lightening to flash out. And the men began to cheer up one another, saying: « God is merciful and kind to man; He does not abandon his creatures. »

The children asked their mothers, «When is that last day coming when our city shall be overthrown? » — The mothers answered and gave to the children such a hope as this: « God is compassionate and merciful, He does not abandon His servants. »

And the parents said to their sons: « Pray ye unto God, it may be that through mercy for your sake, we also may be saved. »
And all turned unto God with all their hearts, and they repented of their evil doings and said: "Peradventure God may repent and turn away from us his anger."

And they beat their breasts and wept and mourned in the midst of the darkness.

And Jonah went out of the city through the cloud of fire and suffered no harm; and he sat down over against the city to see the end of it, and he was pleased to think that the city should be overthrown and that his prophecy should be fulfilled.

But they that dwelt in the city, during three days and three nights saw not one another; but men and beasts, through fasting, repentance, tears and penance, caused to turn away from themselves the severe punishment of the Divine wrath. And after three days the cloud was taken up, and the trembling ceased, and the sun shone forth, and the fear of death, and sadness was removed, and men began to praise God and offer up thanks.

And Jonah was grieved, and the sun beat upon his head, so that he fainted.

And God said to Jonah: "Art thou very grieved?"

And Jonah said: "Was not this my saying, when I still was in my own country?"
For I knew that Thou art merciful and compassionate, and that it repenteth Thee of the evil against men. »

But the Lord was pleased to condemn in the person of Jonah, cruelty of heart, and therefore on the following morn a gourd sprouted out, grew up and made a shadow above Jonah's head. And he sat under its shade and was relieved awhile of his grief. And when that day was over, on the next day, through the command of God, the earth-worm smote the gourd, so that it withered, and the heat beat again upon his head so that he fainted.

And Jonah said: « It is better for me to die than to live like this. »

And the Lord said to Jonah: « Art thou very grieved on account of the gourd? »

And Jonah said: « I am very grieved, for it was my comfort. »

And the Lord said: « Thou hast had pity upon the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured even an hour, which came up in a night and in the next night perished; if the loss of a gourd, » said the beneficent God, « caused thee so much trouble and grief, how then shall I not spare the great city of Nineveh, wherein are more than six-score thousand people that cannot discern..."
between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle? Should I punish the sinners," said the Lord, "why should I not spare the innocent children? Thou art angry on account of the loss of a gourd, how much more grieved must I be for the loss of my creatures?" And then Jonah grew tender.

Then they that dwelt in Nineveh, who through penance escaped punishment, waited upon the prophet and worshipped and honoured him as a god, and the prophet dwelt among them six months. When he was pleased to depart, they that dwelt in the city said unto him: "Thou art our illuminator, our burning lamp and sun, do not leave us, do not go away from us, lest the darkness of sin and irreligion should again surround us. If thou art not pleased to live with us, take us with thee."

But he was not pleased to remain with them, nor to take them away with him, alleging as a pretext the hurtfulness of the country. "The bread of our land is hurtful," said he, "any man that eats it, is seized with colic, and cannot be holpen."

1-2. The Armenian text has annual (առևտրի) which gives no sense to the phrase; wherefore I thought it better to translate it by hurtful and hurtfulness.
Then they wept and went after the prophet, and affectionately sent him on his way, deeming the nation and the people of Israel happy.

And the prophet would not take them away with him, lest the Syrians should know their disgrace, that is the irreligion and the dissensions of the people of Israel.

And Jonah did not go to his own country, but he took his mother and went and sojourned in the land of Ishmael; « For, » he said, « in this way I shall remove my reproach, for having lied in prophesying against the city of Nineveh. »

And his mother died on the way, and he buried her near the oak-tree at Rougel.