

0160-0220 – Tertullianus – Carmen De Jona Et Ninive

A Strain of Jonah the Prophet

this file has been downloaded from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.html>

1. First century — — 500,000
2. Second century — — 2,000,000
3. Third century — — 5,000,000
4. Fourth century — — 10,000,000
5. Fifth century — — 15,000,000
6. Sixth century — — 20,000,000
7. Seventh century — — 24,000,000
8. Eighth century — — 30,000,000
9. Ninth century — — 40,000,000
10. Tenth century — — 50,000,000
11. Eleventh century — — 70,000,000
12. Twelfth century — — 80,000,000
13. Thirteenth century — — 75,000,000
14. Fourteenth century — — 80,000,000
15. Fifteenth century — — 100,000,000
16. Sixteenth century — — 125,000,000
17. Seventeenth century — — 155,000,000
18. Eighteenth century — — 200,000,000
19. Nineteenth century — — 400,000,000



X.

Appendix.¹¹⁹⁸

[Translated by the Rev. S. Thelwall.]

1. A Strain of Jonah the Prophet.

AFTER the living, aye—enduring death
Of Sodom and Gomorrah; after fires
Penal, attested by time-frosted plains

¹¹⁹⁸ [Elucidation.]

Of ashes; after fruitless apple-growths,
5 Born but to feed the eye; after the death
Of sea and brine, both in like fate involved;
While whatsoe'er is human still retains
In change corporeal its penal badge:¹¹⁹⁹
A city—Nineveh—by stepping o'er
10 The path of justice and of equity,
On her own head had well-nigh shaken down
More fires of rain supernal. For what dread¹²⁰⁰
Dwells in a mind subverted? Commonly
Tokens of penal visitations prove
15 All vain where error holds possession. Still,
Kindly and patient of our waywardness,
And slow to punish, the Almighty Lord
Will launch no shaft of wrath, unless He first
Admonish and knock oft at hardened hearts,
20 Rousing with mind august presaging seers.
For to the merits of the Ninevites
The Lord had bidden Jonah to foretell
Destruction; but he, conscious that He spare;
The subject, and remits to suppliants
25 The dues of penalty, and is to good
Ever inclinable, was loth to face
That errand; lest he sing his seerly strain
In vain, and peaceful issue of his threats
Ensnue. His counsel presently is flight:
30 (If, howsoe'er, there is at all the power
God to avoid, and shun the Lord's right hand
'Neath whom the whole orb trembles and is held
In check: but is there reason in the act
Which in¹²⁰¹ his saintly heart the prophet dares?)
35 On the beach-lip, over against the shores
Of the Cilicians, is a city poised,¹²⁰²

¹¹⁹⁹ These two lines, if this be their true sense, seem to refer to Lot's wife. But the grammar and meaning of this introduction are alike obscure.

¹²⁰⁰ "Metus;" used, as in other places, of *godly* fear.

¹²⁰¹ Lit. "from," i.e., which, *urged* by a heart which is that of a saint, even though on this occasion it failed, the prophet dared.

¹²⁰² Libratur.

Far-famed for trusty port—Joppa her name.
Thence therefore Jonah speeding in a barque
Seeks Tarsus,¹²⁰³ through the signal providence
40 Of the same God;¹²⁰⁴ nor marvel is't, I ween,
If, fleeing from the Lord upon the lands,
He found Him in the waves. For suddenly
A little cloud had stained the lower air
With fleecy wrack sulphureous, itself¹²⁰⁵
45 By the wind's seed excited: by degrees,
Bearing a brood globose, it with the sun
Cohered, and with a train caliginous
Shut in the cheated day. The main becomes
The mirror of the sky; the waves are dyed so
50 With black encirclement; the upper air
Down rushes into darkness, and the sea
Uprises; nought of middle space is left;
While the clouds touch the waves, and the waves all
Are mingled by the bluster of the winds
55 In whirling eddy. 'Gainst the renegade,
'Gainst Jonah, diverse frenzy joined to rave,
While one sole barque did all the struggle breed
'Twixt sky and surge. From this side and from that
Pounded she reels; 'neath each wave-breaking blow
60 The forest of her tackling trembles all;
As, underneath, her spinal length of keel,
Staggered by shock on shock, all palpitates;
And, from on high, her labouring mass of yard
Creaks shuddering; and the tree-like mast itself
65 Bends to the gale, misdoubting to be riven.
Meantime the rising¹²⁰⁶ clamour of the crew
Tries every chance for barque's and dear life's sake:



1203 "Tarshish," Eng. ver.; perhaps Tartessus in Spain. For this question, and the "trustiness" of Joppa (now Jaffa) as a port, see Pusey on Jonah i. 3.

1204 Ejusdem per signa Dei.

1205 i.e., the cloud.

1206 *Genitus* (Oehler); *geminus* (Migne) ="twin clamour," which is not inapt.

To pass from hand to hand¹²⁰⁷ the tardy coils
To tighten the girth's noose: straitly to bind
70 The tiller's struggles; or, with breast opposed,
T' impel reluctant curves. Part, turn by turn,
With foremost haste outbale the reeking well
Of inward sea. The wares and cargo all
They then cast headlong, and with losses seek
75 Their perils to subdue. At every crash
Of the wild deep rise piteous cries; and out
They stretch their hands to majesties of gods,
Which gods are none; whom might of sea and sky
Fears not, nor yet the less from off their poops
80 With angry eddy sweeping sinks them down.
Unconscious of all this, the guilty one
'Neath the poop's hollow arch was making sleep
Re-echo stertorous with nostril wide
Inflated: whom, so soon as he who guides
85 The functions of the wave-dividing prow
Saw him sleep-bound in placid peace, and proud
In his repose, he, standing o'er him, shook,
And said, "Why sing'st, with vocal nostril, dreams,
In such a crisis? In so wild a whirl,
90 Why keep'st thou only harbour? Lo! the wave
Whelms us, and our one hope is in the gods.
Thou also, whosoever is thy god,
Make vows, and, pouring prayers on bended knee,
Win o'er thy country's Sovran!"

Then they vote

95 To learn by lot who is the culprit, who
The cause of storm; nor does the lot belie
Jonah: whom then they ask, and ask again,
"Who? whence? who in the world? from what abode,
What people, hail'st thou?" He avows himself
100 A servant, and an over-timid one,

¹²⁰⁷ Mandare (Oehler). If this be the true reading, the rendering in the text seems to represent the meaning; for "mandare" with an *accusative*, in the sense of "to *bid* the tardy coils tighten the girth's noose," seems almost too gross a solecism for even so lax a Latinist as our present writer. Migne, however, reads *mundare*—to "*clear*" the tardy coils, i.e., probably from the wash and weed with which the gale was cloying them.

Of God, who raised aloft the sky, who based
The earth, who corporally fused the whole:
A renegade from Him he owns himself,
And tells the reason. Rigid turned they all
105 With dread. “What grudge, then, ow’st thou *us*? What now
Will follow? By what deed shall we appease
The main?” For more and far more swelling grew
The savage surges. Then the seer begins
Words prompted by the Spirit of the Lord:¹²⁰⁸
110 “Lo! I your tempest am; I am the sum
Of the world’s¹²⁰⁹ madness: ’tis in me,” he says,
“That the sea rises, and the upper air
Down rushes; land in me is far, death near,
And hope in God is none! Come, headlong hurl
115 Your cause of bane: lighten your ship, and cast
This single mighty burden to the main,
A willing prey!” But they—all vainly!—strive
Homeward to turn their course; for helm refused
To suffer turning, and the yard’s stiff poise
120 Willed not to change. At last unto the Lord
They cry: “For one soul’s sake give us not o’er
Unto death’s maw, nor let us be besprent
With righteous blood, if thus Thine own right hand
Leadeth.” And from the eddy’s depth a whale
125 Outrising on the spot, scaly with shells,¹²¹⁰
Unravelling his body’s train, ’gan urge
More near the waves, shocking the gleaming brine,
Seizing—at God’s command—the prey; which, rolled
From the poop’s summit prone, with slimy jaws
130 He sucked; and into his long belly sped

¹²⁰⁸ Tunc Domini vates ingesta Spiritus inquit. Of course it is a gross offence against quantity to make a genitive in “us” short, as the rendering in the text does. But a writer who makes the first syllable in “clamor” and the last syllable of gerunds in *do* short, would scarcely be likely to hesitate about taking similar liberties with a genitive of the so-called fourth declension. It is possible, it is true, to take “vates” and “Spiritus” as in apposition, and render, “Then the seer-Spirit of the Lord begins to utter words inspired,” or “Then the seer-Spirit begins to utter the promptings of the Lord.” But these renderings seem to accord less well with the ensuing words.

¹²⁰⁹ Mundi.

¹²¹⁰ i.e., apparently with shells which had gathered about him as he lay in the deep.



The living feast; and swallowed, with the man,
The rage of sky and main. The billowy waste
Grows level, and the ether's gloom dissolves;
The waves on this side, and the blasts on that,
135 Are to their friendly mood restored; and, where
The placid keel marks out a path secure,
White traces in the emerald furrow bloom.
The sailor then does to the reverend Lord
Of death make grateful offering of his fear;¹²¹¹
140 Then enters friendly ports.

Jonah the seer

The while is voyaging, in other craft
Embarked, and cleaving 'neath the lowest waves
A wave: his sails the intestines of the fish,
Inspired with breath ferine; himself, shut in;
145 By waters, yet untouched; in the sea's heart
And yet beyond its reach; 'mid wrecks of fleets
Half-eaten, and men's carcasses dissolved
In putrid disintegrity: in life
Learning the process of his death; but still—
150 To be a sign hereafter of the Lord¹²¹²—
A witness was he (in his very self),¹²¹³
Not of destruction, but of death's repulse.

¹²¹¹ This seems to be the sense of Oehler's "Nauta at tum Domino leti venerando timorem Sacrificat grates"—"grates" being in apposition with "timorem." But Migne reads: "Nautæ tum Domino læti venerando timorem Sacrificant grates:"—

"The sailors then do to the reverend Lord
Gladly make grateful sacrifice of fear:"

and I do not see that Oehler's reading is much better.

¹²¹² Comp. Matt. xii. 38–41; Luke xi. 29, 30.

¹²¹³ These words are not in the original, but are inserted (I confess) to fill up the line, and avoid ending with an incomplete verse. If, however, any one is curious enough to compare the translation, with all its defects, with the Latin, he may be somewhat surprised to find how very little alteration or adaptation is necessary in turning verse into verse.