

THE
HEBREW PROPHEET



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BY

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PREFACE

“IT cannot be too often repeated,” says Professor Ottley in his *Bampton Lectures*, “that prophecy is the dominant and distinctive element in Israel’s religion.” That is true of Israel’s religion at its best; for the highest expression of religion in Israel is found in the writings of the prophets. In other places we find ethical and theological ideas which require to be explained as due to the natural state of things in a primitive condition of religion. But in the prophets we rarely find statements which do not stand good to-day. Indeed, the woes of the prophets were chiefly due to the fact that they were advanced too far beyond their time. The prophetic religion always soared far above the popular religion; hence the antagonism which the great seers always had to face. A people, like an individual, can never be known until seen at their best. To see the best in the religious life of the people of Israel, therefore, we must study the prophets.

But the Hebrew prophet was not a mere teacher of religion in the narrower sense. GOD created the

body as well as the soul, the world and all that grows thereon as well as spirits. GOD is the author of vegetable and animal as truly as of spiritual life. GOD is concerned that man should not only love Him with heart, mind, and soul, but also that he should love his neighbour as himself. Therefore GOD'S interest in man and in the world is broad indeed. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father.

The prophet was in a measure cognisant of that great truth, which has been too much ignored by the Christian world, absorbed in the notion that GOD'S only concern was to get men into heaven, or to damn them in hell. Hence the prophet was a statesman, a sociologist, a political economist, as well as a theologian and a moralist: hence that broad interest of the prophet in all the affairs of men.

It is not to be overlooked, however, that prophecy in the person of Isaiah is a very different institution from what it was in the person of Samuel. The Old Testament writers, or the final editors of those writings, and still more their modern interpreters, have done much to confuse the development which is so marked a characteristic of prophecy. I have tried to show something of the course of this progress, or at least to tell my story in such a way as to make evident the development. Still, I have not been

satisfied to indulge in such a radical handling of the sources as some writers have done. For I have followed the principle that the statements of the Bible are to be accepted, certainly until we see convincing reasons to the contrary.

The reader will note that there is a certain amount of repetition, which my method of treatment has rendered necessary. Some few passages, like the story of Micaiah, and Amaziah's attempt to silence Amos, illustrate a number of points in prophecy, and so I have not hesitated to use them a second or even a third time. But I have endeavoured to limit the repetition to the material, and not allow it to extend to the treatment also. The quotations from the Holy Scriptures are occasionally from the Revised Versions, English or American ; but, as a rule, I have preferred to make my own translations.

In conclusion, I should like to say that I have expended a large amount of labour on this volume, and yet I only hope that its perusal may give to the reader the same great pleasure which its writing has given to the author.

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THE HEBREW PROPHET

CHAPTER I

THE POPULAR CONCEPTION OF THE PROPHET

KNOWLEDGE in its completest form is the result of observation and interpretation, and therefore the combined product of science and philosophy. Great reputations are justly attained either by the discovery of new facts, or by the new interpretation of facts already known. The man of science is pre-eminently the man of observation, and he is ever on the search for new facts. Some scientists, indeed, scarcely ever get beyond the gathering of data. Others have little interest in a work dealing so much with petty minutiae; they prefer to give their minds to the penetration of the meaning of the facts discovered by others. But the best scientist works along both lines: he discovers a fact hidden from a gaze less keen than his own, and then places his fact in relation to other facts, so as to grasp its significance. Indeed, his perception of the meaning of

things is a large element in his ability to discover them.

The philosopher is the interpreter, and yet he is not merely a reasoner. He must also possess a wide and accurate knowledge of facts. The more comprehensive this knowledge, the more likely he is to be true in his reasoning. But he does not become a philosopher until he begins to interpret. His business is to tell the meaning of phenomena. The well-rounded man must be more or less expert in both observation and interpretation. He may at times use one faculty, at other times the other. The philosopher must occasionally be a scientist, and the moment the scientist begins to draw inferences from his observed facts he becomes in turn a philosopher.

The Hebrew prophet was a man of God, but he was also both a scientist and a philosopher; hence he was popularly regarded as pre-eminently a man of knowledge. We look upon the finished product of prophecy at its highest stage of development, that is, in the works of such prophets as Amos or Isaiah, and we call the prophet pre-eminently a teacher of righteousness. But the primitive Hebrew did not set value upon the seer on account of his knowledge of right and wrong, nor of his personally high character, but on account of his knowledge of mysteries which it greatly concerned man to understand, and which yet were hidden from the eyes of all but few.

Man could not be an intelligent being without perceiving that his life was strangely surrounded by mysteries. Questions such as these began to be

asked with great insistence. Whence came the world and the life which is upon it? What are the sun and moon and stars? Why does it rain or blow? Where is the object that was lost and cannot be found? What will be the outcome of any particular undertaking? Shall one recover from a sickness, or die? There has ever been a passion on the part of man to try to penetrate the mystery which shuts in his life, and there probably always will be. The answer to these and innumerable similar questions has always been persistently sought. The Hebrew looked to the prophet as the one raised up of God to solve the problems with which his life brought him face to face.

A sharp line of distinction has been drawn between the natural and the supernatural. It is a curious fact that this line has been persistently cherished both by scientists on the one side and by theologians on the other. The scientist has been contented to confine himself within the boundaries of the natural, and has become so distrustful of the knowledge of the supernatural claimed by theologians, that he has become sceptical in that sphere, and has been wont to label it unknown and unknowable.¹ The fatal mistake of the theologian was the admission of the line of demarcation. But such a mistake was not made by the Hebrew prophet. He was readily credited with power to perceive facts in the supernatural realm as

¹ Lately there has been a gratifying change in the attitude of scientists towards religious questions. They have learned that their so-called natural realm does not embrace the whole of life, and they have admitted it with characteristic frankness.

well as to grasp the hidden meaning of the natural. The prophet believed that all his powers were given of God, and he never troubled himself to label them as human or superhuman. His knowledge was trustworthy because given of God, and he was not concerned with the question whether it was a direct revelation or the Divine awakening of his natural powers. The sooner we get back to the prophet's position, the better for our religion.

Taking the supernatural out of the Bible is a process much feared in modern days ; but the prophet would scarcely have understood the alarm. One person holds it as his opinion that Elisha found the axe which had fallen into the water by the miracle of making the iron to swim ; another believes that he recovered it by feeling for it on the bottom with the stick which he had taken pains to cut. The latter view would be still accounted a dangerous error by some ; but to the Hebrew one method was as much the work of the man of God as the other. The sacred writer has left the story¹ so that either of the above views is a possible interpretation. The historian recorded the facts, but stated no opinion.

The prophet was the man who had eyes to see and ears to hear. For every such person there is a world of knowledge undreamed of by duller souls.² The ability to see and hear was not looked upon by either the one who possessed it, or by those who honoured

¹ 2 Kings vi. 6.

² This is what our Lord meant when He said to His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see : and your ears, for they hear" (Matt. xiii. 16).

its possession in others, as a natural gift, in the sense of being common to all men. It was a distinctive mark of an office, and a direct gift of God. The prophet saw because God opened his eyes; he heard because God opened his ears. Yet the endowment of the prophet with knowledge was similar to the endowment of the judge with judgment, or the warrior with courage and skill. All these gifts came from the same source; God revealed His secrets to the prophet, gave wisdom to the judge, and "taught the hero's hands to war, and his fingers to fight."¹

Some illustrations will best show the popular conception of the prophet, and the kind of knowledge which he possessed, or was thought to possess. Whenever one desired information about a matter beyond his own ken, he was wont to go to the prophet, because of his belief that nothing was too hard for his powers. An article might be lost; but it was still in existence, and might be recovered if one knew where to look. God always knew, and though His knowledge was not directly available by the loser, it was indirectly available, because the prophet was possessed of the mind of God.

Kish's asses had strayed,² and he followed the usual course of sending someone to hunt for them. A three days' search failed to trace the lost animals. Saul was about to give up and return home, thinking he had spent enough time in the search. But Saul's servant reminded him that they were near Ramah,³ where dwelt Samuel the seer. Finding they had a suitable fee, they went to the city to inquire of the

¹ Ps. cxliv. 1.

² 1 Sam. ix.

³ See additional note (1).

man of God. They applied to him, not because they deemed it possible that he had seen the asses, or had been told their whereabouts by one who had seen them, but because of their conviction that there was no limit to the seer's knowledge. They were not mistaken; for Samuel told them directly that the asses had been found.

Another illustration is afforded by the New Testament. Jesus was eating in the house of Simon the Pharisee.¹ A prostitute came in and anointed the feet of Jesus. She was a stranger to Him, but Simon knew her, or at all events knew her character.

The Pharisee sees in the incident a test of his guest, which he at first believes Him unable to meet. "This man, if he were a prophet," thus Simon spake within himself, "would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is which toucheth him, that she is a sinner."² Whether a woman of this kind was as easily recognisable then as now I do not know. But the Pharisee argues that if Jesus were a prophet, He would be able to discern the woman's true character with Divine insight, and would have spurned her from His presence. Her reputation might be concealed from the ordinary man, but not from a prophet.

By the exercise of his peculiar gifts the prophet was able to penetrate artificial disguises which would easily enough deceive another. Jeroboam was greatly concerned to know the issue of the sickness with which his child was laid low.³ He dare not

¹ Luke vii. 36 ff.

² Luke vii. 39.

³ I Kings xiv. 1 ff.

himself face the prophet whose counsel he had flagrantly disregarded, so he sent his wife to ask Ahijah's prognosis. The king seems to have felt apprehension of the prophet's insight, and to have blindly striven against it; though he knew that Ahijah was blind, he bade his wife disguise herself. Man is prone to deceive himself when he can deceive no one else. As the queen approached the threshold, however, her true personality was perceived by the prophet, blind though he was, and he greeted her accordingly: "Come in, wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thyself to be a stranger?"¹ As if there might be a misapprehension as to the source of this insight, the historian tells us expressly that Jahveh advised the prophet of the queen's coming in disguise. But that is only the writer's way of telling us that the prophet's knowledge was due to a divinely given perception.

The mysteries of the past were as open to the prophet as those of the present. The first Hebrews to tell of the origin of the world were not scientists, but prophets—a fact which should never be disregarded by the interpreter. The nicest illustration of the prophet's knowledge of the past is found in the New Testament. Jesus was speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar,² and incidentally laid bare the dark facts of her past life. As soon as she heard this story, which she assumed that He could know in no ordinary way, she exclaimed, "Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet,"³

¹ 1 Kings xiv. 6.

² John iv. 5 ff.

³ John iv. 19.

and adroitly shifted the subject of conversation. The ability which Jesus had shown of relating accurately the events of her career, His knowledge of which she regarded as supernatural, was proof positive that He was possessed of the prophetic gift. The insistence upon this point is shown by her comment to her townspeople: "Come, see a man, who told me all things that ever I did."¹

But the greatest mystery of life lies in the future. We may know a good deal of the past and present; but the future is a blank. We should be largely controlled in our plans for the days to come if we could know what the outcome of those plans will be. Sometimes men embark in an undertaking with the surest indications of failure, as in hopeless wars. And yet there is a supporting hope in the feeling that however preponderant the chances are against success, it is always possible that a favourable issue will follow a bold action. It is generally recognised that success in life depends to a considerable degree upon a right forecast of the future. The question with a publisher, for example, cannot be wholly the merits of the manuscript in his hands, but must be largely the probability that the reading public will buy the book. The most far-sighted man in any calling has the greatest assurance of success.

Virtually all theists believe that God knows the future. Indeed, we may go further and say that the belief is general that God not only knows, but also controls the future. In fact, the belief in God's foreknowledge comes from the belief that the future

¹ John iv. 29.

course of events is in His hands to shape as He will. The Hebrews believed that the Divine guiding of events was more or less arbitrary, and that He might easily be induced to change the course of the world in one way or another. The idea that God might stay the course of the sun and moon that His servant might have adequate time to chastise his enemies was no stumbling-block to the faithful Israelite.

Was it possible for man to learn the secret purposes of God? For knowledge of the future would depend upon penetrating the counsels of the Most High. That knowledge would be of incalculable value to the people of God, if it were attainable. Now it is perfectly clear that the prophets and people alike believed that certain men were given that highly coveted knowledge. A few instances will make this clear.

Jahveh purposed to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. But the blow should not fall without warning. So Jahveh said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him."¹ The belief that Abraham was righteous, known of God, designated as the founder of a great nation, a prophet, led to the conviction that God apprised him of His intention to destroy the cities of the plain.

The broadest statement of this idea is found in an utterance of Amos. This prophet was explaining why he had abandoned his herd and his sycamore

¹ Gen. xviii. 17 f.

trees to fill for a time the office of seer. He was prophesying because he could not help himself. Jahveh had revealed to him His intention to bring punishment upon the Northern Kingdom. To know the mind of God necessitated action in accordance with that knowledge. The specific case of Amos is explained by the general principle: "The Lord Jahveh will take no action except He disclose His purpose to His servants the prophets."¹

Attached to every court was a prophet, or company of prophets. Thus Gad is called "David's seer."² The office of such prophets, at least from the king's point of view, was not primarily to teach him right and wrong, though they usually did earnestly strive to that end; but their value to the king was conceived to be the knowledge of God's purposes which they possessed, especially their information about the future. Sometimes the prophet takes the initiative and tells the king the course of action which will lead to success and honour. Thus Deborah tells Barak that "Jahveh will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."³ But often the king consulted the prophet before embarking on an important undertaking. The illustrations of this function of the prophet are very numerous, and they show the firm conviction that the prophets did know the mind of God. Two examples will suffice.

David became discontented because, while he had built a house for himself, sumptuous for the times, the sacred ark of Jahveh was still sheltered in a

¹ Amos iii. 7. See additional note (2).

² 1 Chron. xxi. 9.

³ Judges iv. 9.

tent. The time seemed to have come when the symbol of the Divine presence, which had been necessarily carried about from place to place while the people had no fixed centre, should now be finally located at the newly established capital, and should be appropriately housed. But the king would not think of undertaking such a great and revolutionary project without assurance that his purpose would harmonise with the will of God, and that he would consequently be enabled to carry it to completion. To learn this he goes to His prophet. At first Nathan approved the plan, but was led afterwards to change his counsel, and say that God did not approve of the king's purpose, but that the building of the temple should be left for David's son.¹

Ahab grieved over the loss of Ramoth-gilead, which had been wrested from his kingdom. A patriotic people always mourn the loss of territory, and lament the fate of their compatriots when they are attached to a foreign rule. This is especially the case if a section is annexed by a people deemed inferior. Ahab felt that his kingdom had suffered loss, and that the Ramoth-gileadites had suffered loss by their annexation to a people of another and inferior religion. He believed the time auspicious to recover the lost city. Especially did the plan augur success by reason of the alliance with Jehoshaphat,² the king of Judah, and the agreement of the latter to join in the campaign. But it was manifestly

¹ 2 Sam. vii. On this passage, see further in chapter xiii.

² Jehoshaphat was really the vassal of Ahab. See further in chapter iv.

desirable to know in advance whether the expedition would end in success or failure. That was known to God, and was believed to be ascertainable by man; therefore Jehoshaphat, who was a God-fearing man, notwithstanding his unholy alliance with Ahab, said to the king of Israel, "Inquire first, I pray thee, for the word of Jahveh."¹ A difference of opinion developed between the royal company of prophets and Micaiah, of which I shall have more to say later, but Ahab preferred the counsel most in accord with his own wishes, and therefore set out on a campaign which proved disastrous, the king being killed and the allied armies completely routed. The forecast of Micaiah was proved fully correct.

The prophet not only knew the facts which were hidden from other men, but he also was judged to know the meaning of facts; for there are things plain enough as facts, but mysterious in meaning. He not only had powers of observation unknown to others, but he was possessed also of a philosophy more than human. Thus the prophet was required for the interpretation of any unusual event, inexplicable to the ordinary human mind. To the God-fearing Hebrew there were no accidents in the government of the world. God held every natural force in His easy control. Extraordinary events were not the result of Divine caprice, but had a meaning and a purpose. It was necessary to discern this meaning and purpose, that the people might turn the event to their good, or at least keep it from doing harm.

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 5.

In the days before the monarchy, the Israelites were mightily oppressed by the Philistines. Every attempt to break their fetters resulted in riveting them the tighter. The question was inevitably asked why the people whom God had rescued from bondage in Egypt should be enslaved again in Palestine. The fact was plain enough, but the meaning of the fact was a mystery. Then Samuel the young seer came forward with the key to the problem. The sins of the people caused their misfortunes. If they would hope to win a victory, they must be able to engage in the fight under Jahveh's almighty protection.¹ This great boon could only be had on the condition of righteousness. The people followed Samuel's advice to put away the heathen worship in which they had freely indulged, and then they defeated their dreaded foe at the battle of Ebenezer.²

The mysterious fact might be a natural phenomenon. In post-exilic days there was a great drought and a visitation of locusts. The pastures were burned up; the streams were dry; swarm after swarm of the dread locusts swept over the land, destroying everything that was green. Why did God use His people so ill? How did it happen that Jahveh made Israel a reproach to his neighbours? These are questions which only a prophet is competent to answer, and Joel attempts to penetrate the meaning of these things in the book which bears his name.

There was a current belief that the prophet not only could know the future, but could also control

¹ 1 Sam. vii. 3.

² 1 Sam. vii. 11 f.

its issues. It would be of little use to foresee coming events unless in some way the knowledge could be turned to advantage, so that evil might be averted and good assured. Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream as a prediction of the seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.¹ The seer not only comprehends the portent of the dream, but he also sees how this knowledge may be turned to good account, though the preparation for the future requires no supernatural wisdom.

The prophet usually does not share the popular belief that he can control the coming events by virtue of any knowledge or power peculiar to him. Balak, the king of Moab, sent far away for Balaam the prophet,² not because he wished to know what the future relations between Moab and Israel would be, for he can himself see that clearly enough; but he summons the prophet because of his belief that he had power so to wither Israel by a curse that the invading nation would be powerless for harm. Balaam strenuously insisted from first to last that he had no power to change the purpose of God, and that no inducement would persuade him to pretend to a power he did not possess. "If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold I could not go beyond the word of Jahveh my God."³ The prophet was no fatalist; but he knew that the future

¹ Gen. xli.

² Paton gives plausible reasons for identifying Balaam with Bela the son of Beor, a king of Edom, mentioned in Genesis xxxvi. 32. See his *Syria and Palestine*, p. 152 f. Does this mean that Balaam the king was invited to bring more effective succour to Moab than curses?

³ Num. xxii. 18.

was in God's hands, and that to change the future, one must change the purpose of God, and that could be done only by changing the conditions which constrained Him to act for the weal or woe of the nation.

There may be apparent exceptions, but they will not bear the test of a careful examination. The case of Elisha in the wilderness of Edom, for example,¹ is not an exception to the principle just stated, as a hasty glance will suffice to show. The allied armies are on the point of perishing for lack of water. The king of Israel does no more than bewail his unhappy fate and cast reproach upon God. Perhaps he had already tried the resources of his hundreds of subservient prophets and found no comfort. Jehoshaphat asked for a prophet of Jahveh, believing that by his aid the armies might be extricated from their perilous position. Elisha is summoned, and indignantly declares that Jahveh would not regard the danger of the Hebrews except for the presence of the pious king Jehoshaphat. The minstrel is called upon to play, and under this stimulus the prophet predicts that the trenches which he orders to be made shall be filled with water; and it happens in accordance with his prediction. But Elisha does not really pretend to a power by which he could fill the trenches with life-saving water, but only declares the purpose of Jahveh to save the king of Judah. The seer could learn what God's purpose was, but his foresight had no effect upon its accomplishment, except as it

¹ 2 Kings iii.

influenced man so to act as to make serviceable the favourable disposition of God.

I have gone into the common conception of a prophet fully, because of the general belief now that the primary function of the prophet was to teach the people to do the will of God. That the great prophets were teachers of righteousness is beyond question. That God sent them into the world for that purpose is told again and again in the Bible, and is not to be doubted for a moment. But I am speaking of the conception of the prophets as it was among their contemporaries. The people looked upon the prophets as men possessed of superhuman powers, and especially of superhuman knowledge, and it was this ability to know the otherwise unknowable which gave them their position in the nation.

CHAPTER II

REVELATION TO THE PROPHET

FROM the eighth to the fourth century B.C. the prophet was a conspicuous figure in Hebrew life. By the eighth century the office was fully developed and perfectly understood. But it did not attain its exalted station without a long preliminary course of growth. We must trace the growth from the primitive beginning, and see how it came to reach its peculiar influence and power.

It may be noted here that the prophet was not a figure peculiar to Israel, and unknown to other nations. In ancient times every nation had its prophets, and there were many features common to them all. And, for that matter, every nation has its prophets still. The Hebrew prophet was differentiated from other prophets in many respects, and yet was similar to those of other peoples.¹ When Balak, the king of Moab, desired the services of a seer, he sent to the Euphrates for Balaam.² Balaam certainly was not a Hebrew, yet his story is told in the Hebrew Scriptures without any intimation that

¹ See Briggs, *Messianic Prophecy*, p. 18 (ed. 1886). The lowest forms of Hebrew prophecy were most akin to that of other peoples. Other nations had few Isaiahs, but Balaams were found among them all.

² Num. xxii.

it is the record of an alien. Balaam prophesies by Jahveh, but he would have been the last one whose services Balak would have desired, had the king supposed him in any way affiliated with Israel. Among the Hebrews, however, prophecy was developed to a point which it never reached in any other nation, and our concern now is to follow the course of that development.

We have already seen that the prophet was regarded as essentially one possessed of knowledge which could only come from God. The path of the development of Hebrew prophecy is roughly marked by the manner in which God's will was revealed. We find that revelation coming to man in theophanies, dreams, visions, ecstatic states, and in direct spiritual enlightenment.

In the most primitive conception of God, He is represented as coming to earth and speaking to man face to face. God walks in the garden in the cool of the day and calls for the hiding man and woman.¹ God speaks to Noah to warn him of the coming flood.² So God spoke to Abraham, and to other patriarchs. Jacob named a place Peniel, because there he had met God face to face.³ Moses was the last to whom God spoke in this way. In his case the direct revelation is looked upon as an unusual mark of Divine favour: "Jahveh spoke unto Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend";⁴ "a prophet has not yet risen in Israel like Moses, whom Jahveh knew face to face."⁵

¹ Gen. iii. 8, 9.

² Gen. vi. 13.

³ Gen. xxxii. 30.

⁴ Exod. xxxiii. 11^a.

⁵ Deut. xxxiv. 10.

In the larger number of theophanies, Jahveh Himself does not appear, but sends an angel to carry His message to man. The angel of Jahveh found Hagar in the wilderness, and sent her back to submit to her mistress.¹ An angel meets Balaam on his way to Balak and warns him not to go beyond the word of Jahveh.² Frequently there is a confusion in the story, the messenger being called at one moment an angel, at another Jahveh Himself. God directly commands Abraham to offer his son; but at the altar it is an angel who bids him stay his hand.³ In the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah we read that three men came to Abraham; then that Jahveh Himself asks why Sarah laughed; then that two angels visit Lot to get him out of the doomed city.⁴ In the story of Gideon we are told that the angel of Jahveh came to arouse the hero to drive out the oppressing Midianites; a few verses further on we read that Jahveh turned to him and directed him to deliver His people.⁵ In the old stories it is the usual thing to identify the angel or messenger of Jahveh with Jahveh Himself.⁶ To these writers there was no essential difference between Jahveh and His messengers.

One would scarcely claim to-day that these stories are to be taken as strict records of fact. It is altogether unbelievable that God ever walked upon the earth or spoke to any person, as one man speaks to another. The higher truth was finally stated in the

¹ Gen. xvi. 7 ff.

² Num. xxii. 35.

³ Gen. xxii. 1-11.

⁴ Gen. xviii. 1-13; xix. 1.

⁵ Judges vi. 11-14.

⁶ Moore's "Judges," in *International Critical Commentary*, p. 183.

Gospel: "No man hath seen God at any time."¹ But we need not on that account discredit the narratives altogether. It is certainly historical that Gideon led his people against the Midianites; but it is clear that while the inspiration to lift up his hand against the oppressor came from God, the message from God did not come by word of mouth. There are statements in many good historical narratives, whether ancient or modern, sacred or profane, which indicate the writer's opinions rather than actual occurrences. The careful student must learn to distinguish opinions from facts, and not to reject facts because he cannot accept the opinions with which they are accompanied; nor, on the other hand, must he feel bound to believe the opinions because stated in connexion with trustworthy facts.

Rightly understood, these stories are peculiarly serviceable for the purpose we have in view. Whatever we may hold, the earliest writers of Israel certainly believed that God spoke face to face with man, and this primitive conception of Divine revelation is what I wish to show. With the advance in religious culture, we hear no more of appearances of Jahveh. But the belief in the appearance of angels as the messengers of God persisted even through New Testament times, and was held by the early Christians as steadfastly as by the early Hebrews.

Very little need be said here about revelation by dreams. Yet the dream has a distinct place in a treatment of the method of prophetic revelation. From Deuteronomy xiii. 1, it appears that the

¹ John i. 18; see also the same idea stated by Jesus in John vi. 46.

dreamer of dreams was looked upon even as the prophet, as a person to whom the will of God might be revealed. The patriarchal stories are full of dreams, which the patriarchs showed a notable ability to interpret. At the Egyptian court there were wise men, one of whose functions was the interpretation of dreams. Joseph's skill as a dream interpreter gave him his exalted place in the land of Pharaoh,¹ to which greatness his own early dreams of the sheaves² had already pointed. The dream is used but little by the later and great prophets, though persisted in by the sons of the prophets. Like the speaking with tongues in New Testament times, the revelation by dreams seems to have been discredited by abuse. Jeremiah says that the lying prophets were going about with the cant phrase, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed."³

It is a matter of interest that in the Hexateuch revelation by dreams is characteristic of the so-called Elohist, and the stories of God's speaking directly to men of the Jahvist. These two methods of revelation may therefore represent not so much stages of actual development as the different points of view among the early sacred writers. Still it is plain that the Jahvist generally gives the more primitive conceptions of religion.

The dream belongs to the primitive age of Hebrew life, while the vision, which Delitzsch⁴ rightly calls a higher step in revelation, is found chiefly in a later period. The vision begins when the dream leaves

¹ Gen. xli.

² Gen. xxxvii.

³ Jer. xxiii. 25.

⁴ *Commentary on Genesis* ii., p. 3.

off. But the two are not altogether mutually exclusive, for the dream plays a prominent part in Daniel, and even has a place in the New Testament; Joseph was warned in a dream to flee to Egypt.¹ The vision is mentioned on the other hand in connexion with Abram² and Jacob.³ There is not always a strict differentiation, for Samuel's revelation in the night was by a dream, yet it is called a vision. The frequent expression, "visions of the night," probably refers generally to dreams. But the vision is found in connexion with prophecy at its highest stage of development. In fact, the term "vision" is from the same root as "seer,"⁴ the old name for prophet. The dream belongs to any individual to whom God's revelation might come; the vision is limited for the most part to the prophetic order.

Vision is used frequently as a technical name for the prophetic revelation,⁵ or for a particular message, as the announcement to Samuel of the fall of Eli's house.⁶ Even the greatest of the prophets received his call in a vision.⁷ The vision is found in several cases in the New Testament. Zacharias saw a vision in the temple when the birth of John Baptist was announced.⁸ Visions were the means of revelation to Ananias, Cornelius, Peter.⁹ Paul himself calls the appearance of Jesus on the way to Damascus a vision.¹⁰

A characteristic of the early revelations, especially

¹ Matt. ii. 13.

² Gen. xv. 1.

³ *Ib.*, xlvi. 2.

⁴ Or more accurately, one of the Hebrew terms for "seer," *חֹזֵה*.

⁵ Isa. i. 1; Obad. 1; Nahum i. 1.

⁶ 1 Sam. iii. 15.

⁷ Isa. vi.

⁸ Luke i. 22.

⁹ Acts ix. 10; x. 3, 17.

¹⁰ Acts xxvi. 19.

by theophanies and dreams, is that they were given for the sake of the individual who received them. The Lord speaks to Noah that he may save himself in the ark. Joseph's dreams foreshadow his own brilliant career. In the more highly developed forms of revelation, God's will is disclosed through the prophet for the sake of the people, not for himself. In many cases, in fact, the giving of God's message involves great peril to the messenger; but God's concern was to save the people, even though His instruments were destroyed in the process.

The ecstatic state is another way in which the Divine knowledge was supposed to be conveyed to man. The case of Balaam is the classical example. The history, it is true, contains no express allusion to such an ecstasy. But there are some decisive hints. Balaam's first attempt to curse Israel resulted in forecasting the nation's great numerical strength. Balak thought that the prophet was unduly influenced by the sight of the whole Israelite camp; he therefore took him to a place whence he could see but a small part of the people. This influence is most simply explained on the supposition that Balaam uttered his oracles while in a state of frenzy. Moreover, the prophet seems not to have known in advance what his utterances would be; they were, in fact, quite contrary to what he desired. In one of the oracles we have allusions to "the visions of the Almighty" seen by the seer.¹ Then the prophet is described as "falling down, and having his eyes open." Altogether it is plain that he was in that

¹ Num. xxiv. 4.

state of ecstasy which was regarded as a favourable condition for prophesying among all nations of the world.

When Elisha was called upon to rescue the armies from their perilous position in Edom, and he desired to seek counsel of Jahveh, he calls for a minstrel, at whose playing it would be possible for him to reach that exalted state in which a revelation was most likely to come. That is clearly the meaning of the statement, "And it was as the minstrel played, that the hand of Jahveh came upon him."¹ This is the condition of the prophets of Baal, leaping and gashing themselves with knives as they cried, "O Baal, hear us!"² and also of king Saul when in his frenzy he lay down naked all day and all night.³

The Hebrews were themselves well aware of a higher form of revelation than that by dreams or ecstatic visions. They always looked back to Moses as one possessed of God's revelation in its highest form, and he is set in sharp contrast to the ordinary prophets of the time: "If there be a prophet among you, I will make Myself known unto him in a vision. I will speak with him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so . . . with him I will speak mouth to mouth."⁴

The knowledge given to Moses is distinguished by its clearness and definiteness as contrasted with the obscurer dreams and visions. To some prophets

¹ 2 Kings iii. 15.

² 1 Kings xviii. 28.

³ 1 Sam. xix. 24.

⁴ Num. xii. 6 ff. The text is corrupt in this passage, but the corruption does not affect the general sense as rendered above. For emendations, see Dillmann *in loc.*; and Gray, *Numbers*, p. 124 ff.

God revealed His will directly ; not when they were asleep, or worked up to a state of ecstasy, but when they were most self-possessed. This highest phase has been called direct spiritual enlightenment.

Spiritual enlightenment is the common method of revelation to the great prophets of the golden age of Israel's religious development. To Amos, Isaiah, and the others of their kind, God did not appear as a bodily presence, nor did He send them vague dreams to perplex the mind. Occasionally they saw strange visions, which they interpreted as conveying a Divine message to the people. But generally God put His Spirit into their hearts, and thus they were endowed with a knowledge of the Divine will which gave them a strength of conviction otherwise impossible.

It has sometimes been supposed that the various phases of prophecy show a gradual decline in the manner of revelation. Modern criticism has enabled us to estimate the primitive traditions at their true value, and to see that there was a steady progress upward rather than downward. It was possible for Isaiah to know the mind of God more fully than Deborah or Samuel, because he lived in a more enlightened age, and knew better than to consult the dead on behalf of the living.¹ The men of the prophetic period had learned that the clearest Divine knowledge comes directly to the soul, and not through the medium of dreams or portents.

It should, however, be borne in mind that we are not to question the genuineness of a revelation by dream or theophany because of its medium. Men

¹ Isa. viii. 19.

believed that God spoke to them face to face or in other primitive ways. God has always been wont to reveal Himself to man in whatever ways man was able to understand. But in the lower form the possibility of error is so great that every instance must be judged on its merits. Primitive man generally believed that the dream was an objective reality. To dream of hearing God speak was actually to hear Him. To see God in a vision was to see Him really.¹

Abraham was firmly convinced that God commanded him at first to sacrifice Isaac and then to substitute the ram. We see in the whole story the Divine teaching of the great lesson so clearly taught by a late prophet that the fruit of one's body was no expiation for the sin of one's soul.²

The message which a man read in his dream or vision was not always just what God intended ; still it was often a groping after the truth which pointed the way to a higher conception.

The progressive character of the revelatory methods is perceptible from the seer's ability to command them. One can have but little control over his dreams. Visions may be largely self-induced. The aid of a minstrel or dancing or singing will generally bring on the ecstatic state, at least to the person practised in the art. The direct spiritual enlightenment is always available for one who has eyes to see and ears to hear. Balaam must sleep over the problem involved in Balak's request ; Isaiah could answer his problems immediately.

¹ See article "Dream," in Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*.

² Micah vi. 7. See Newman Smyth, *Christian Ethics*, p. 161.

CHAPTER III

THE PROPHETIC INSTITUTION

WE turn now to the development of Hebrew prophecy as an institution. The institution is not, however, uniform and simple, but varied and complex. We shall best be able to cover the ground by dividing the prophets into two classes. In one class we include Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and, in fact, the whole line of great men who lived and prophesied as independent individuals. The other class is composed of the so-called "sons of the prophets," whose operations were conducted in companies, and who belonged to a fixed order. This latter class will be reserved for consideration in the next chapter.

When we speak of the prophets we usually mean the men of the first class, and they are indeed men worthy of the distinction accorded by the name. They were men pre-eminent in their day, and held a high place among the great men of Israel. They maintained their greatness because they were free and independent, preserving their individuality to the utmost. We rarely find them working together. Even when they belonged to the same time and place, they co-operate so little that it is not easy to determine their relation. Isaiah and Micah, for ex-

ample, prophesied to the people of Judah at the same period. It is frequently assumed that Micah was a disciple of his greater contemporary. But there is no sure warrant for this assumption. These men worked always as individuals, never as members of an institution. Nevertheless, the great prophets had so much in common that we may for convenience speak of them as an order. The history of this order may readily be traced from its lowly origin to a position of great influence and power, and then again through a stage of decline to its final disappearance.

If we read the Old Testament in the traditional way, prophecy seems to go backward rather than forward. That conception is not to be pronounced *a priori* impossible, but is nevertheless untenable, because it is contrary to historic facts. To those facts we now turn. Moses stands as a great figure at the very beginning of Hebrew history; and in later ages he was deemed the first and the greatest prophet. Many centuries after his time it was declared that "no prophet like Moses had since risen in Israel."¹ Nothing higher could be said even of the Messianic prophet than that he would be like Moses: "A prophet from thy midst, of thy brethren, like unto me, shall Jahveh thy God raise up for thee."² St. Peter quoted this prophecy as fulfilled in Jesus Christ.³ But was the greatest prophet at the beginning?

Modern criticism has enabled us to read the early history of Israel in a truer light than was formerly

¹ Deut. xxxiv. 10.

² Deut. xviii. 15.

³ Acts iii. 22.

possible. Some scholars have, indeed, gone to extremes in recasting the early history; nevertheless, some reconstruction is inevitable. The work of Moses is now known to be very different from what our fathers supposed. A vast amount of tradition has gathered about his great name. But sound critical opinion rather confirms the greatness of the famous refugee who, under the guidance of Jahveh, led his people out of the land of Egypt, and who did so much to place the institutions of Israel on a solid foundation. Moses may loosely be called a prophet,¹ but his chief functions were not prophetic. He was careful to provide a successor, but he chose a man qualified for military leadership, as the times demanded, rather than for prophetic guidance. Moses is called a prophet only in the later writers. Even in the priestly writing, Aaron is appointed to be Moses's prophet;² but the word as there used means no more than spokesman or mouthpiece. Therefore prophecy can scarcely be said to have begun with the great law-giver.

The Hebrews came to believe in the course of time that prophecy was as old as the world. Zacharias sang in his Benedictus—

“As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets
Which have been since the world began.”³

St. Peter uses the same words in his speech in Solomon's porch.⁴ Long before the time of the apostle, Hebrew writers had applied the term

¹ Art. “Prophetic Literature,” *Encyc. Bibl.*

² Exod. vii. 1.

³ Luke i. 70.

⁴ Acts iii. 21.

prophet to their heroes, even to Abraham;¹ but they were certainly speaking from the point of view of their own day, not from the condition of the time of Abraham. St. Peter showed that he was possessed of an idea of the prophetic institution which was more in accord with the records of his people. In the address already cited he says, "All the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days."² Samuel, not Moses, is deemed the founder of the prophetic order. This suggestion is worthy of most careful consideration. Samuel was not only a conspicuous figure in early Israel, but he was also the first prophet of whom we have any adequate knowledge.

The books of Samuel are composite, some of the documents being very old, others belonging to a period long after the time of Samuel. In one of the earliest documents we find an old gloss, which nevertheless proves to be an important and trustworthy archæological note: "Formerly in Israel, the man who went to inquire of God, said thus: Come and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called the prophet was formerly called the seer."³ It is quite impossible to determine when this gloss was written. Whenever it was, prophet was the current name for the man of God, and seer had gone out of common use. But the writer positively identifies the familiar office of the prophet with the obsolete office of the seer. There may have been certain changes

¹ Gen. xx. 7.

² Acts iii. 24.

³ 1 Sam. ix. 9. See additional note (3).

in the office as it developed, but to this writer the prophets were the successors of the seers. Let us see if his statement may be verified.

The term prophet is applied to Abraham,¹ Moses,² Aaron,³ Eldad and Medad,⁴ Miriam,⁵ and to Samuel.⁶ There is no evidence, though, that the name was in use in the days of those to whom it is given. All of the writings in which this term is used are later than Samuel.

There are two Hebrew words for seer—*hozeh* and *ro'eh*. The former is never applied to Samuel; the latter is rarely applied to anyone else.⁷

The first occurrence of *seer* is in 1 Samuel ix. 9, and the term is applied to many later persons. In 1 Chronicles xxix. 29, we find all three terms for prophet applied to different men: "Samuel the seer (*ro'eh*), Nathan the prophet, and Gad the seer" (*hozeh*). In Isaiah xxx. 10, the two words for seer are applied to different classes: "that say to the seers (*ro'im*) see not, and to the prophets⁸ (*hozim*), prophesy not unto us right things." Amos is called a seer by the priest Amaziah. The same term is generally applied to the earlier men of God, and broadly speaking, the gloss states the matter correctly. It is certain that "prophet" persisted, while "seer" dropped out of common use.

¹ Gen. xx. 7.

² Deut. xxxiv. 10.

³ Exod. vii. 1.

⁴ Num. xi. 26 ff.

⁵ Exod. xv. 20.

⁶ 1 Sam. iii. 20.

⁷ The only exception is Hanani (2 Chron. xvi. 7). In 2 Samuel xv. 27, the word is applied to Zadok, according to the English translation; but that rendering is clearly wrong, and the text is certainly corrupt. See proposed emendation in Budde, *Bücher Samuel*, in loc.

⁸ This is the only place in the English versions where *hozeh* is rendered prophet. That is because we have no other word for seer.

This stage in the history of Hebrew prophecy gives us a starting-point from which we may trace our way forward with certainty. For Samuel's age and all later times we have good historical sources, even if sometimes the information is meagre. For the period before Samuel we have but scanty information, and the sources need to be carefully sifted in order to make sure that the writer does not ascribe to the early days conditions existing in his own, but unknown to the age of which he writes. We still speak of the stationary East, and assume that what is seen there to-day has always been so. Many historical writers, like the Chronicler, fell into the same fallacy. Institutions with which they were familiar were so permanent that they seemed always to have been, and the historians jumped to the conclusion that they had always existed. It was a natural mistake for one living in the prophetic age, himself endowed with the prophetic spirit, to infer that prophets had existed from the beginning.

The age of Samuel marks a great transition in the development of Hebrew life in the broadest sense. A more settled order was brought in by his administration. Before his day was over the monarchy was securely established, so that it survived to the exile. The people took up permanent abodes and occupations. The days of wandering were giving place to a period of settled life and fixed occupation. The popular desire for a king shows the growing sense among the people that a more centralised rule was necessary. The new condition of the prophetic life

was a part of a general movement touching the whole life of the people. The rising against the Philistines, which was largely due to prophetic instigation, made a new era possible.

Before the time of Samuel, prophecy was at most occasional and crude. The description in 1 Samuel iii. 1, "The word of Jahveh was precious in those days; there was no widespread vision,"¹ was equally applicable, so far as we know, to any previous period.

Priest and prophet were not sharply differentiated. Samuel himself exercised the functions of both offices, and probably many of his predecessors had held the same double office. The judges exercised prophetic as well as political powers. The fact that "all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of Jahveh,"² shows that a new order of things existed, and yet that the prophet was not an unknown figure. Whatever information the early Hebrews may have had, however, we are forced to the conclusion that they have passed on very little knowledge of those early times to us.

There are some hints of those who may be called

¹ This verse has perplexed the commentators. Smith says: "The qualifying word ('widespread') may mean public or widespread, but there is reason to suppose that the original reading is lost" (*Int. Crit. Com.*, *in loc.*). The passage, however, yields a good sense: "The word of Jahveh was weighty [*i.e.* influential] in those days, because there was no general vision." In the writer's time, seers were numerous and visions were multiplied; but their counsel was not followed. In the days of Samuel, seers were unusual, and their words had great influence. Men had particular visions of import to themselves; but prophecies conducive to the general welfare were almost unknown. The new phase of prophecy is the appearance of a man of God whose messages are given for the good of the people.

² 1 Sam. iii. 20.

prophets. Deborah is called a prophetess,¹ or, in the older version of the story,² "a mother in Israel." We only know of her arousing the people to war against the invading Canaanites. But as the younger version of the story says that she "judged Israel at that time,"³ it is very likely that her office was permanent. Barton⁴ calls attention to the fact that Deborah sat under the sacred palm, and that the proximity to the tree helped her inspiration. But Moore⁵ holds that iv. 5 is added by a later editor, and that we should emend the text of verse 4, and render, "delivered Israel at that time," referring to this particular event. The name "mother in Israel," as commonly interpreted, implies a permanent place of influence; but as this term occurs elsewhere only in 2 Samuel xx. 19, where it means a city, it has been held that a town is meant here.⁶ Whether her functions were only for the time or not, Deborah's act was regarded as inspired of God, and she was therefore looked upon as a prophetess.

It is said that Jahveh sent a prophet (whose name is not given) to the Israelities to reproach them for disobedience.⁷ Likewise "a man of God" was sent to Eli⁸ to declare the downfall of his house and to give the reason therefor.⁹

From such instances it is possible that there were

¹ Judges iv. 4.

² Judges v. 7.

³ Judges iv. 4.

⁴ *A Sketch of Semitic Origins*, p. 89.

⁵ "Judges," *Int. Crit. Com.*, p. 113; Nowack, *in loc.*

⁶ See Moore on v. 7.

⁷ Judges vi. 8.

⁸ 1 Sam. ii. 27.

⁹ Stade says: "These anonymous men of God are everywhere the creations of later redactors" (*Geschichte*, i. 182 n). Such an opinion may not be altogether disregarded.

prophets in early Israel of whom no mention is made. But so far as we know, there was no man in those days whose whole life was given to the prophetic office. Judges, priests, and others now and again received messages from God, and were accordingly called prophets. Amos bears striking testimony to the fact that prophecy had a real place in the ages preceding his own: "I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazirites";¹ but his words may apply to persons already known to us.

I am well aware of the difference between the view of Samuel's prophetic work, set forth above, and that of Budde,² and other writers.

Budde divides the books of Samuel into the older and later narratives. Such a division is essential to the right reading of the history. But Budde accepts the statements of the older sources and generally discredits the rest. We are much indebted to this accomplished scholar for his valuable contributions to the early history; but it seems to me more reasonable to credit the later sources except in so far as they contradict the statements of the earlier, or describe conditions inconsistent with them. The earliest history is most likely to be accurate, but is not necessarily so. 1 Samuel vii., for example, describing the efforts of the Israelites to throw off the oppressive Philistine bondage under Samuel's leadership, belongs to the late sources; therefore Budde rejects it. But there seems to be no good reason why Samuel may not have persuaded the people to try

¹ Amos ii. 11.

See his *Religion of Israel to the Exile*, p. 93 ff.

to drive out their foe, even if his success was limited. The partial failure of this attempt would explain Samuel's next move, which was to make a more stable combination of the tribal forces under the head of a Benjamite king.

According to the older source, which Budde seems to accept, "Samuel is only a priest and seer of the old type in an Ephraimite country town." He finds confirmation of Samuel's obscurity in the fact that a person like Saul had not heard of him. But Saul's servant knew his reputation as a seer, as well as his place of residence. Budde looks upon Saul as the prophet of his age rather than Samuel. Of this more will be said in the next chapter. But there seems to me to be ample justification for the view widely held by Hebrew writers that Samuel was a prophet, and that of no mean order.

After Samuel's time there is scarcely a period during which there was not one or more choice spirits called of God who gave up their lives to the interpretation of the Divine will for the sake of their fellow-men.¹

There was an idea more or less prevalent that the office was to be continuous. Elijah was commanded to set up kings in both Syria and Israel, "and to anoint to be prophet in his place Elisha, the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah."² Not every prophet after this time, however, exercised his office per-

¹ Here again I am constrained to depart from Budde's opinion. He distrusts the Elijah stories, and has no confidence in what is said of occasional prophets in the early part of the Davidic dynasty (*op. cit.*, p. 102).

² 1 Kings xix. 16.

manently. Even Amos, the first of the literary prophets, was called to prophesy to Israel for a brief time, and then probably returned to his herd. There may have been other instances of the same kind. But most of the prophets were called to a life office, and were not permitted to lay down their work, even when they grew weary of their task. Jeremiah had been called upon to say so much of woe that he resolved to speak no more in the name of Jahveh. But Jahveh would not have it so. The message was in the prophet's soul, and would be spoken even if it must burn its way out.¹ Jonah was unwilling to say a word in Nineveh that might lead the hated enemies of Israel to repentance and pardon. But his story is told to show that God's will cannot be balked by His prophets.

There were many prophets in Israel between Samuel and Amos whose writings have not come down to us, if, indeed, their prophecies were ever put into writing at all, but about whose work we have considerable information in the historic books. Among these may be mentioned such conspicuous examples as Nathan, Gad, Ahijah,² Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Ahaziah.

Their functions were in part much like those of

¹ Jer. xx. 9.

² It is an interesting fact that there is no mention of a prophet during Solomon's reign. Nathan anoints him king, and Ahijah inspires Jeroboam to wrest a large part of the kingdom from Rehoboam, Solomon's son. But there is no record of a prophetic utterance or act between these two. Solomon saw visions himself, and was not the kind of man to invite or even tolerate interference from any quarter.

the later prophets, except that they seem to have striven more to lead the court in the right way than to teach the people. That inference is certainly deducible from the records, but inasmuch as the historians are concerned chiefly with the history of the kings, they would naturally tell only so much of the prophet's story as served their purpose. The history of Isaiah in 2 Kings xviii.-xx. tells us nothing of the prophet's character as a great teacher of the people, but only of his office as a prophet of the court.

The golden age of Hebrew prophecy begins with Amos about the middle of the eighth century and extends down to the exile. Ezekiel, whose life and work were in the land of captivity, already shows the beginning of a decline. He employs symbols very largely, and depends upon the pen as well as the voice. Moreover, his life was far removed from the stirring scenes which gave the prophet his great opportunity. In the great unknown prophet or prophets, to whom we owe Isaiah xl.-lxvi., we find again, and for the last time, a prophetic voice which is not shorn of its power. Joel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and others whose anonymous work has been embedded in the writings of older prophets, contain some passages of great power, but, as a rule, these are decidedly inferior to their great predecessors of the Assyrian age.

After Malachi the voice of prophecy is silent until revived in John Baptist. For much of this period, it is true, we must argue from silence; but for the Maccabean age we have ample assurance that there

was no prophet. The defiled altar was torn down, but what to do with the profaned stones was a grave problem. The people finally shelved it by laying the stones in the mountain "until there should come a prophet to give an answer concerning them."¹ The knowledge required could only come from God. There were priests at hand, but knowledge of the Divine will was not given to them. The question was one for a prophet, but the prophet was lacking. As it is pathetically put in one of the Psalms of the period :—

"Our signs we see not, nor is there prophet ;
With us is not one that knows how long."²

In this dark age, however, there was the hope that prophetic voices would again be heard in the land. In the gloomy days of the early exile, a poet bewails the fact that though prophets exist, there is no vision from the Lord ;³ yet visions came in due season. So now, though there was not even a prophet in Judah, there was the assuring hope that God would send again these chosen counsellors. The Jews and priests were ready to acknowledge Simon, the brother of Judas Maccabæus, as leader and high priest, with the stipulation that he was to hold the chief place only until God sent them a faithful prophet.⁴ Little did those people realise how long their hope for the reappearance of prophecy would be deferred. This incident marks the final transfer of power from the hands of the prophets to those of the priests, a subject of which I shall have more to say hereafter.

¹ I Macc. iv. 46.

² Ps. lxxiv. 9.

³ Lam. ii. 9.

⁴ I Macc. xiv. 41.

There is another class of men who may barely be called prophets, whom we may mention for the sake of completeness. These are the authors of the pseudepigraphic prophecies, such as the Assumption of Moses, the Book of Enoch, the Wisdom of Solomon. The study of the written Word had taken the place of the fresh utterance from the prophet's mouth. The great names of the past were highly venerated. If a real prophet had risen, he would scarcely have been able to get a fair hearing. His words would have been measured, not by the standard of truth, but by their agreement with the written Law. That basis of judgment made the thorny path of John Baptist, of our Lord Himself, of Paul and other apostles, as well as many a Christian minister of later ages.

This esteem of the written Law, which is displayed somewhat wearisomely in Psalm cxix., as against the living Word, must be given full weight, or we shall do injustice to the unknown authors of apocryphal books. Schürer expresses but a part of the truth when he says that these men "had no longer the courage to confront their contemporaries with the proud claim to have their words listened to as the words of God Himself, but who rather seemed to think it necessary to conceal themselves under the guise of someone or other of the acknowledged authorities of the olden time."¹ It is true that a prophet should boldly declare his message, whether the people will bear or forbear; but we cannot blame these men very severely that they elected to

¹ *Jewish People*, div. ii. vol. iii. p. 45.

put forth their message in a form which would most surely get it a prompt hearing, especially as there were then no literary ethics to bar their way. We should rather rejoice that in such way as they could, men were still striving to keep religion a vital factor in Jewish life. For that was the essential task of the prophetic institution.

CHAPTER IV

THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS

IN the time of Samuel a new institution arose in connexion with prophecy which deserves a further study than has been given to it by any writer. Various scholars have touched the subject incidentally, but an exhaustive treatment is still a desideratum. Budde seems to me to have missed the point by regarding these guilds as the real prophets of the early time, and then to lose sight of them entirely. I cannot treat the subject here as fully as is desirable, but shall attempt to gather the essential facts and present them in a convenient form.

Samuel directed the newly anointed Saul to return to his home, and said that on his way he would see certain signs, among which would be "a band of prophets, coming down from the high place with a psaltery and a timbrel, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they will be prophesying."¹ It is evident that this band was a company exercising a corporate rather than an individual office. Whence did they arise? And what were their functions?

This is the first mention of such a body in the

¹ 1 Sam. x. 5. It should be noted that this passage belongs to the oldest part of the narrative in the books of Samuel.

Old Testament, and there is nowhere a statement to explain their origin. As Samuel was the leader of such a company,¹ it has been frequently assumed that he was the founder of the order.²

In the absence of further information, this origin can only be assumed as probable. It is perfectly possible that such bands were in existence even long before,³ though we know nothing about them. In that case Samuel would have associated with this order, just as Elisha did at a later time.

But while we have no certain information as to the origin of these prophets, which is comparable to

¹ 1 Sam. xix. 20. Literally, "And Samuel standing appointed over them." The two participles are, as Driver says (*Heb. Text of Samuel*), "peculiar and suspicious." H. P. Smith rejects "standing"; the verse would then read, "And he saw the band of prophets, and Samuel appointed over them." Paton says, "It is safe to infer that he organised the ecstasies into communities, and thus made their influence more effective" (*Syria and Pal.*, p. 173). It is clear that Samuel was the official head of this company. Kraetzschmar holds that Samuel is confused with the guild by a very late writer who no longer understood the distinction between the "seer" and the prophetic bands (*Prophet und Seher im alten Israel*, p. 23).

² See, for example, Schultz, *O.T. Theology*, i. 240 f. So Ottley says, "It is significant that Samuel's distinctive work was the regulation and organisation of prophetism" (*Bamp. Lect.*, p. 270).

³ Budde argues that the order was new, since the prophets were looked upon in 1 Samuel x. 10 ff as something noteworthy, and were regarded with a certain distrust (*Bücher Samuel*, p. 68). The elders appointed by Moses are said to have prophesied as a body when they were clothed with the Spirit (Num. xi. 25). Such ravings as the sons of the prophets indulged in may be intended. Kraetzschmar, on the other hand, holds that those prophets are of Canaanitish origin, and explains the hostility to them on that ground. As there were prophets of some sort among all the Semitic peoples, the Hebrews may have been influenced by their neighbours. But it is doubtful if the institution was taken over ready-made. At all events, there is not sufficient evidence for that view.

the order of the Nazirites,¹ we have ground for plausible conjectures. It is not certain that Amos refers to the order when he says, "I raised up of your sons for prophets," but it is highly probable. That would show that the order had been established long before his day, and, in spite of its degradation, was regarded as a Divine institution.² To Amos it would seem perfectly possible that the institution may have been divinely founded, even though its present representatives were so unworthy.

It was the custom of every great prophet to gather disciples about him. Thus Elijah had Elisha as a personal attendant; the latter had Gehazi, as well as others of the prophetic order. Isaiah had disciples,³ Jeremiah had Baruch;⁴ John the Baptist gathered disciples about him, and so did our Lord. Moreover, the familiarity of the Jews with this custom is unmistakably shown by the wrath of the Pharisees because "Jesus was making and baptising more disciples than John."⁵ Samuel himself had begun his career as a disciple of Eli.

The most natural name for such a disciple, following good Hebrew usage, would be a son of the prophet. Elisha calls his master "father."⁶ Samuel probably gathered many such disciples and trained them for special duties. It would be inconvenient to

¹ See Amos ii. 11.

² A fact which counts against the Canaanitish origin.

³ Isa. viii. 16.

⁴ Though perhaps he was rather secretary than disciple. Still he read prophecies of his master to the people, and probably wrote most of the biography of Jeremiah.

⁵ John iv. 1.

⁶ 2 Kings ii. 12.

take such a large company with him as he went about to sacrifice at the various shrines which were scattered through the country; therefore he would have a body at each place, and thus it would happen that "sons of the prophet" would be found in many different parts of the land.

Budde makes Saul rather than Samuel the head of the prophets;¹ but I think without sufficient reason. Saul only catches the frenzy when under the influence of the prophetic band. What befell him had happened to the messengers sent by him.² It is true that "the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words [telling the plight of Jabesh-gilead], and his anger was kindled fiercely."³ But this is said also of Samson,⁴ of David,⁵ and represents the common Hebrew idea that any person doing a great act was moved by the spirit of God. That moving does not constitute a prophet. If Saul had been conceived as a prophet his visit to the witch of En-dor would be unaccountable.

Paton supposes these prophets to have come into being at the time of the Philistine invasion; Samuel's work was to organise these ecstasies into communities, so as to make their influence more effective.⁶ While Samuel was the head of such orders, I believe it necessary to distinguish sharply between the rank and file on the one hand, and such leaders as Samuel and Elisha on the other. There is no evidence that Samuel led them in their violent religious exer-

¹ *Religion of Israel*, p. 95.

² 1 Sam. xix. 18 ff.

³ 1 Sam. xi. 6.

⁴ Judges xiv. 6.

⁵ 1 Sam. xvi. 13.

⁶ *Early History of Syria and Palestine*, p. 173.

cises,¹ and I believe that he was not in the habit of doing so. Macdonald concludes that inasmuch as the learned theologian al-Ghazzali took part in the wild dervish exercises, there would be no difficulty in supposing that Samuel should take part in the prophetic ecstasy.² But al-Ghazzali joined the Sufis in order to stimulate his own religious life. Samuel organised the prophets to quicken the religion and patriotism of the people.

If Samuel gathered a band of disciples at each of the shrines he was wont to visit, then we have at hand the explanation of two facts in connexion with these prophets. In the first place, we find them in the earliest days always attached to a sanctuary. Saul met the band of prophets coming down from the high place, a technical term for a local shrine. Samuel was at the head of a company of prophets at Ramah, which was his home, and at which place he had built an altar.³ We know that such bands were stationed at Bethel⁴ and at Jericho.⁵

Then, again, it is perfectly certain that the sons of the prophets were to be intimately associated with the priests.⁶ Samuel went about the country exercising the functions of judge, prophet, and priest. But he established the monarchy to take the place

¹ Unless we regard 1 Sam. xix. 20 as such evidence. Budde says correctly that Samuel sharply distinguishes himself from the prophetic hordes (*Bücher Samuel*, p. 139). Kraetzschmar says that *ro'eh* (seer) was applied to Samuel to distinguish him from the *nebi'im* (prophets).

² *J.A.O.S.*, xx. 93.

³ 1 Sam. vii. 17.

⁴ 2 Kings ii. 3.

⁵ 2 Kings ii. 5.

⁶ "Shall the priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?" (Lam. ii. 20).

of the judge, and the order of prophets with functions distinct from the priests. After this time the connexion between the priest and the higher prophets became less and less close. Most of the great prophets either were not priests¹ at all or rarely exercised the priestly office. The members of the prophetic guilds, on the other hand, while never serving as priests, maintained a close connexion with the priesthood.²

Elijah, too, offered sacrifices. The prophets were apparently important figures at religious festivals. There is a story of Elisha, which has a distinctly archaic flavour, and which shows that the people were accustomed to go to him at the sacred seasons. When the Shunamite, whose son had died, proposed to go at once to the man of God, her husband asked her: "Why art thou going to him to-day? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath."³

Isaiah, and others of his order, class priests and prophets together in their denunciations.⁴ These two classes joined in the persecution of Jeremiah.⁵ But the clearest connexion is shown in Jeremiah v. 31: "the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule at their hands";⁶ that is, the power of the priesthood was maintained by the false oracles of lying

¹ Jeremiah and Ezekiel are the only ones who belonged to the priestly order.

² See W. Robertson Smith, *Prophets*, p. 85. This author holds that at Jerusalem the prophets were subject to the priesthood (*ib.*, p. 389). Jer. v. 31 does not support his opinion. On this passage see further in text.

³ 2 Kings iv. 23.

⁴ Isa. xxviii. 7; Zeph. iii. 4; Jer. *passim*.

⁵ Jer. xxvi.; cf. xviii. 18.

⁶ Additional note (4).

prophets.¹ In post-exilic days the people sent to the priests and prophets to learn whether they shall keep up a certain fast day, as if uncertain which class should answer this question.²

The office of the sons of the prophets is more easily determined than their origin. A company was coming down from the high place, where they had taken part in some ceremony. Musical instruments were played by those who went before them, while they were prophesying.³ This prophesying does not mean the uttering of oracles, or the proclaiming of religious truth, but was probably something like the incoherent cries one may hear at a primitive revival. The frenzy of the Baal prophets, described in 1 Kings xviii. 28, was simply an exaggerated form of that which was wont to seize the sons of the prophets at a time of great religious excitement. Like all such forms of religious excitement, this prophesying was contagious. When the messengers of Saul came to Ramah to take David, Samuel protected him by having the company prophesy in the presence of the messengers, so that they caught the spirit and began to prophesy likewise. Three sets of messengers were in turn incapacitated for their errand by the wild frenzy induced by prophetic contagion. Then Saul came himself, but he caught the spirit, and exceeded all others in the wildness of his frenzy. So great was his

¹ Cf. Jer. vi. 13 ; viii. 10.

² Zech. vii.

³ So the prophets of David were said to prophesy, stimulated by the music of harps, psalteries, and cymbals (1 Chron. xxv. 1). The music was designed to induce the ecstatic state.

excitement that he tore off his clothes ; and so great was the resulting exhaustion that he lay down there naked all that day and all that night.¹ H. P. Smith therefore scarcely exaggerates when he says that "we have here a company of dervishes² engaged in their religious exercises," and explains the proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" as a mark of surprise that the son of a well-to-do man should be found in a company not highly esteemed.³

Some scholars hold that the sons of the prophets arose from political conditions, and their chief purpose therefore was patriotic. Day calls them "ardent patriots."⁴ Paton speaks of them as "bands of religious devotees traversing the land, awakening the patriotism of the people."⁵ Budde says, "The prophets appear as second saviours and new founders of Israel's nationality and religion."⁶ Winckler regards the prophets as political agitators.⁷ Kractzschmar, to whose pamphlet on *Prophet und Seher im alten Israel* I gladly confess my indebtedness, regards

¹ I Sam. xix. 18 ff. This passage is comparatively late, and is regarded as another attempt to explain the proverb, "Is Saul among the prophets?" Such a proverb would be applied to many occasions. However late the narrative is, it is perfectly possible that just such an event took place. Budde distrusts the story altogether. At all events it represents a correct idea of the habits of the prophetic guilds. The older story (I Sam. x. 10) represents Saul as catching the contagion in the same way. See also *Encyc. Bibl.*, col. 3857.

² In fact the study of the life of Mohammedan dervishes gives the fullest light for an adequate knowledge of the methods of the sons of the prophets.

³ *Inter. Crit. Com.*, pp. 68, 71.

⁴ *Social Life of the Hebrews*, p. 60.

⁵ *Syria and Palestine*, p. 173.

⁶ *Religion of Israel*, p. 88.

⁷ K.A.T.³, 171.

these prophets as enthusiasts for the old conditions of political and religious life. He thinks that Saul's meeting the prophets was no accident, but a carefully devised plan by which these enthusiasts might arouse his patriotic and religious spirit. I am persuaded that Schultz states the matter more correctly: he holds that the aim of these prophets was religious, not political.¹ They were at the beginning organised as firm adherents of the national God. Their patriotism was merely such as was involved in their religion. But the fact of the matter is that we know but little of the motive of the sons of the prophets.

As early as the days of Saul the bands of prophets were consulted for advice. Saul was driven to go to the witch of En-dor because "Jahveh did not answer him by dreams, by Urim, or by the prophets."² It is plain that the prophets here are the guilds, who in their ecstatic state were supposed to reveal the will of God.

W. Robertson Smith³ says that Elijah had little to do with the "sons of the prophets." That is apparently true of the later period of his life, but not of the earlier. Elijah fled from the north when Jezebel's persecution became so severe that prophets were no longer safe in bodies. The reason he gives for abandoning his field is that he only was left of the faithful, and his life was in imminent danger.⁴ The prophets whose slaughter he laments were companies with which he had been associated. It is not likely that there were other conspicuous individual

¹ *O. T. Theol.*, i. 242.

³ *Prophets*, p. 85.

² 1 Sam. xxviii. 6.

⁴ 1 Kings xix. 10.

prophets who became victims of Jezebel's wrath. In the great sacrifice on Mount Carmel, Elijah says with a tone of bitter regret that while there are four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, he was obliged to stand alone as the representative of Jahveh,¹ for his fellows had all been slain. Obadiah regards his act in saving a hundred of the "sons of the prophets" from the royal persecution as a deed sure to win favour from Elijah.² If the great prophet had had nothing to do with the guilds, Obadiah would scarcely have made such a plea. The rescue of a hundred of these prophets incidentally shows how numerous these guilds had become.

Elisha certainly stood in close relation to the prophetic guilds. He was connected with them as a sort of father superior. Whether this was an inheritance from his great predecessor or not we cannot tell positively. But we have found reason to believe that all the conspicuous prophets of the early days were the heads of the guilds. Elisha, according to the story told in 2 Kings ii., had especial reason to look with favour upon them, because he had seen evidence of their power in the prediction made by company after company that his master would be taken from his head. On the other hand, these prophets recognised that the leadership of Elijah had fallen to him.³ This incident confirms our belief in Elijah's connexion with the guilds. Elisha himself had probably belonged to the order of prophets, and was closer to Elijah than the rest because of

¹ 1 Kings xviii. 22.

² 1 Kings xviii. 13.

³ 2 Kings ii. 15 ; cf. v. 14.

personal superiority. That Elisha was the head of the guilds is abundantly testified. He felt called upon to feed these prophets in a time of dearth,¹ and to put himself at their head when they proposed to build larger quarters.² When Elisha resolved to anoint Jehu king of Israel, it was a member of this order who not only carried the message to the captain, but who was delegated actually to anoint the new king.³ The distressed wife of one of these prophets turns naturally to Elisha for succour.⁴ Delegations from these guilds were wont to come to Elisha for counsel.⁵

But such a relation between a true prophet and this order did not persist. In Elisha's own time we find a condition of affairs very different from what we should suspect from his history alone. Micaiah the son of Imlah may have begun his career as one of the *nebi'im* (sons of the prophets); but, if so, he soon severed his connexion completely. The attitude of this prophet requires fuller exposition.

In the Syrian wars Ramoth-gilead had been wrested from the Israelites, and Ben-hadad had not kept his promise to restore it.⁶ Ahab resolved to take it by force. Jehoshaphat the king of Judah and vassal of Ahab⁷ agreed to Ahab's proposal for a joint expedition. But Jehoshaphat was unwilling to enter

¹ 2 Kings iv. 38 f.

² 2 Kings vi. 1.

³ 2 Kings ix.

⁴ 2 Kings iv. 1.

⁵ 2 Kings v. 22.

⁶ 1 Kings xx. 34. Or it may be, as Paton holds (*Syria and Palestine*, p. 208), that Ahab had lost Ramoth-gilead in a war two years before, *i.e.* in 855 B.C.

⁷ That Jehoshaphat was actually in vassalage to the king of Israel is shown conclusively by Paton, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

upon a campaign without assurance of the favourable disposition of Jahveh. Ahab therefore summoned his four hundred prophets. This band knew what answer the king expected. He was one who was willing to consult Jahveh, provided Jahveh would answer in conformity with his own purposes. He had trained his prophets to their business, which was to comprehend the royal rather than the Divine will. They drew their inspiration, not from heaven, but from the throne. They answered with a unanimity readily comprehensible to us: "Go up, that the Lord may deliver it into the hand of the king."¹

But Jehoshaphat was not satisfied. He knew that these were accredited prophets. That they prophesied by Jahveh, and not by Baal, is expressly stated by Micaiah himself.² Nevertheless, the king of Judah saw plainly that they were merely echoing the wishes of his ally. Insincerity is ever difficult to disguise. Doubtless these subservient seers bowed too low in their ardour to interpret the royal will as the command of God. Therefore Jehoshaphat asks if there is not another prophet of Jahveh by whom the Divine will may be ascertained. The king of Judah assumed that all the prophets who would unscrupulously bow to the will of Ahab were already marshalled in imposing array. Any prophet not in that company testified by his absence that he was of another spirit.

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 6. The parallel passage, 2 Chron. xviii. 5, has "God" here instead of "the Lord," not instead of "Jahveh," as erroneously stated in Hastings' *Bible Dictionary* (art. "Micaiah"). Kittel, it is true, supposes "Jahveh" to be the original text (*Könige*, 172).

² 1 Kings xxii. 23.

And so it proved. The only other prophet, at least of Jahveh, was Micaiah the son of Imlah, who was probably in prison at the time.¹ But he was unpopular with the king, because he prophesied evil and not good.² What a witness Ahab was against himself! The only prophet in the land who dared to tell the truth could never predict good for the king, but only evil. Micaiah was urged to confirm the forecast of the others, but replied, like the true man that he was, "what Jahveh saith to me, that will I speak." At first he repeated the words of the other prophets, but with such scornful irony that even Ahab was not deceived.

Schultz seems to misunderstand this passage entirely. He says that Micaiah "had at first, in accordance with the Divine will, to say what was untrue, because he was aware that God intended to beguile the king."³ When pressed for a frank answer, Micaiah shows his hand, not only predicting disaster to Israel, but adding that God Himself had laid a snare for the wicked Ahab by inspiring His prophets to deceive him.⁴

¹ Josephus says that Ahab had already put Micaiah in prison, because he had predicted that he would be defeated and slain by the king of Syria (*Antiquities*, viii. xv. 4). The first part of this statement appears to be correct. Ahab directs that Micaiah be sent back to Amon, the city officer, implying that he had previously been in his custody. But the reason given can scarcely be right. It looks as if Josephus had taken Micaiah's present prediction as a reason for a previous imprisonment.

² 1 Kings xxii. 8.

³ *O.T. Theol.*, i. p. 257.

⁴ Budde infers from this statement a higher opinion of these prophets than mine; for he says they were deceived by Jahveh. Such an idea was by no means repugnant to the Hebrews, as we may see

I have dwelt here at some length upon this striking story, although it has been already referred to, because it is the first case of a solitary prophet taking issue with the company of prophets. Later this condition becomes the rule. No great and true prophet after this time ever had much sympathy with the sons of the prophets. The attitude of Micaiah is the attitude of all the rest, and for the same essential reason: that these prophets did not seek to follow the counsels of God, but of men, and no one can ever be a true prophet and do that. A part of the evidence of the hostility of the great prophets towards these guilds must be reserved for a later chapter, but enough is introduced here to show the true condition of things. There is so much material that but a small proportion can be used.

First, however, we may note that the beginning of the decline of the sons of the prophets can be unmistakably traced to the persecution of Jezebel. That wretched woman was bent upon introducing her own religion into the nation of Israel. She brought a great company of the prophets of Baal to Samaria. Every prophet of Jahveh was obliged to change his god, seek uncertain shelter in hiding, or die.¹ All the best and bravest gave up their lives,

from Deut. xiii. 3 and Ezek. xiv. 9. But, however possible for Micaiah to conceive of Jahveh sending one of the host of heaven to be a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, such a conception is impossible from the Christian point of view. Jesus said the devil was "a liar, and the father thereof" (John viii. 44). It is significant that a snare assigned to Jahveh in an early writer (2 Sam. xxiv. 1) is by the late Chronicler ascribed to Satan (1 Chron. xxi. 1).

¹ 1 Kings xviii. 13.

or were scattered in flight.¹ Those who remained bowed the knee not so much to Baal as to the royal authority. They were a selected list of weaklings who were ready to prophesy by any god, and to give any answer required by the king. The order seems never to have recovered from this blow. The blood of the martyrs may have been the seed of the Christian Church, as Tertullian said, but it was the ruin of this particular institution of the Jewish Church. They doubtless served a good purpose in the early days, though their office was a humble one; but the prophet who values peace above truth has always in the end met the same doom. That course may lead to a great popularity for a season, but it cannot endure the searching test of time.

Budde seems to think that the sons of the prophets were never held high in the popular esteem. He interprets that puzzling question, "And who is their father?"² to mean that "no one knows to whom they belong: they are stray vagabonds without name or pedigree."³ H. P. Smith is unable to get a satisfactory reading, and takes refuge in the usual method of supposing the text corrupt.⁴ Schultz notices that the Greek reads, "who is his father?" *i.e.* Saul's. He understands the question to be an inquiry concerning the one who had taught Saul to prophesy, as the sons of the prophets had been taught by their father or chief. Driver calls this rendering easier, but weak. At all events, it is more intelligible than

¹ See additional note (5).

² 1 Sam. x. 12.

³ *Religion of Israel*, p. 94. So Kraetzschmar, *Prophet und Seher*, p. 10.

⁴ *Int. Crit. Com.*, *in loc.*

the Hebrew. Whether Budde's interpretation is right or not, it is very probable that the people never had a good opinion of these prophets.¹ But let us see how they were regarded by the prophets whose works have been approved by time, and whose life record shows that they were endued of the Spirit of God.

When Amos was commanded by Amaziah to leave Bethel, he set the example which has been followed by true prophets in all ages; that is, he explained why he was prophesying at Bethel, and declared why he could not obey the high priest's order. In his *apologia* he says, "I am not a prophet, nor am I a son of a prophet . . . Jahveh took me from the flock, and Jahveh said unto me, Go prophesy unto My people Israel."² By prophet and son of a prophet, Amos means the same thing, the professional order. He does not belong to that order; he is speaking by Divine command, not by royal sanction. Therefore he cannot heed the interdiction. The implication is plain that the members of that order were subservient to the king's pleasure. There is a note of indignation in Amos' words, as if he said, "Am I one of these cringing prophets, that you expect me to disregard the expressed will of God, because my speech is not agreeable to the king?"

Except in this case, the great prophets do not call these men "sons of the prophets," but simply

¹ Jehu's fellows ask, "Why did this crazy fellow come to thee?" And Jehu replies, "You know the man, and his talk" (2 Kings ix. 11). There is no attempt to disguise the contempt for the prophet; yet he led them to revolution.

² Amos vii. 14 f.

prophets. They do not discriminate in terms. They call the prophets, whom God has raised up in all ages to guide His people, and those who were leading them in wrong paths, by the same name. The Greek version applies the term "false prophet" to Hananiah, but the term is not found in the Hebrew Old Testament anywhere. And yet it is easy to tell when the great prophets are speaking of the order. In the cases cited below, it is clear that the sons of the prophets are meant. The scholars who have written on this subject generally do not regard these prophets as members of the guilds. They regard the sons of the prophets as existing only in the earlier period. Nothing seems to me more certain than the fact that the *nebi'im* denounced by all the writing prophets were members of the guilds established by Samuel, and that this order existed all through Old Testament history. It was not a mere temporary institution, but persisted to the end of the Old Testament era.

The professional prophet was not to be depended upon. He did not rise above his fellows, he did not see clearly when others failed; but when the people stumbled in the day, the prophet would stumble with them in the night.¹ The holy city was disobedient and all classes shared in the wrong; "princes, judges and priests have been no support, and her prophets are boasters and traitors."² These prophets are untrustworthy; they do not speak the word of God, but teach vanity, and speak a vision of their own heart.³

¹ Hosea iv. 5.

² Zeph. iii. 4.

³ Jer. xiv. 14, xxiii. 16; Ezek. xiii. 3.

They even steal a message, "each one from his fellow."¹ They have given way to the most deadly formality; they are careful to preface their prophecies with the accepted introduction: "oracle of Jahveh"; but that form is no guarantee of the genuineness of the message to which it is prefixed, and in fact has been so abused that the prophets are forbidden any more to use the familiar term.²

These prophets have misled the people and have become a potent cause of the decay and downfall of the nation. They have supposed that they could lightly heal the wounds of Judah by the false cry of peace when there was no peace.³ The poet, looking back and reviewing the causes which led to the ruin over which he laments, sees how the prophets have added to the trouble: "Thy prophets have seen for thee false and foolish visions; and they have not uncovered thine iniquity, to bring back thy captivity, but have seen for thee false oracles and causes of banishment."⁴

Not only were they not sent by Jahveh, but on the contrary, He utterly repudiates them: "They say 'oracle of Jahveh'; but Jahveh hath not sent them: yet they look for the fulfilling of their word."⁵ "I did not send these prophets, yet they ran: I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied."⁶

¹ Jer. xxiii. 30. Clerical plagiarism appears to be an old sin. Strange that any Christian minister should justify a grossly immoral practice condemned by a Hebrew prophet. We may take courage from the belief that the practice of stealing sermons and sermon material is growing less.

² Jer. xxiii. 34 ff.

⁴ Lam. ii. 14; cf. iv. 13.

³ Jer. viii. 11, xiv. 13; Ezek. xiii. 10.

⁵ Ezek. xiii. 6.

⁶ Jer. xxiii. 21.

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¹ Hosea iv. 5.

³ Jer. xiv. 14, xxiii. 16; Ezek. xiii. 3.

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³ Jer. ii. 14; cf. ii. 15.

⁴ Jer. xiii. 11, xiv. 13; Ezek. xiii. 10.

⁵ Jer. xiii. 6.

⁶ Jer. xiii. 21.

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changed his spots, which probably we have a fine example of the new that day will be causes of Israel's away, but that Jahveh's work and the unclean

No one else is t from the late e, he says, when n his father and nan would boast e labourer rather nows the odium n order which, in g very high, and its. G. A. Smith hets had become r oracle-mongers eir own ashamed o prophets are ing exiles, there e of Nehemiah.⁶

ii. 401.

himself to be apart from icts with an unclean Toy seems to make no icts he denounces. ng as he himself was h. xiii. 3 ff. h. vi. 14.

ever ready to be fed on false hopes of security and peace. They asked of the prophet only that he would give them a cheerful message. There was no constraint laid upon the weak prophets by the great power of public opinion. Anything would be forgiven except speaking the truth to people who would not hear. The sins we have mentioned, many and serious as they are, do not exhaust the catalogue. "In the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: and they strengthen the hands of evil-doers so that none returns from his wickedness."¹ This faithful yet persecuted prophet does not always shelter himself behind general statements. He makes this specific charge against Zedekiah and Ahab, two captive prophets in Babylon, who were doing great harm by their lies: "They have wrought folly in Israel, and they have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken words in My name falsely."² His opinion of these prophets, and his advice about them, are gathered up in a sentence: "For every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet, thou shouldst put them in the stocks and in shackles."³

In the period of the exile and of the restoration we hear comparatively little of the sons of the prophets. Schultz says the prophetic guilds had ceased already in the Assyrian age;⁴ but in this I am sure the learned author is greatly mistaken. There is enough to show that they were in existence

¹ Jer. xxiii. 14.

³ Jer. xxix. 26.

² Jer. xxix. 23.

⁴ *O. T. Theol.*, i. 221.

still, and that the leopard had not changed his spots. In a part of the book of Zechariah, which probably belongs to a date about 300 B.C.,¹ we have a fine Messianic passage giving a picture of the new golden age. The chief marks of that day will be the total extinction of the many causes of Israel's degradation. Idols will be swept away, but that will not remove the greatest evils. Jahveh's work will be unsparing: "The prophets and the unclean spirit I will drive out of the land."² No one else is so severe as this unknown prophet from the late days of Israel. The time will come, he says, when if any man venture to prophesy,³ even his father and mother will put him to death. A man would boast then, as Amos did, of being a humble labourer rather than a prophet.⁴ This passage shows the odium which had come to be attached to an order which, in its best day, never reached anything very high, and at its lowest sank into the deepest pits. G. A. Smith says strongly but truly, "The prophets had become mere professional and mercenary oracle-mongers abjured to the point of death by their own ashamed and weary relatives."⁵ Though no prophets are named in the catalogue of returning exiles, there were prophets at Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah.⁶

¹ G. A. Smith, *Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. 401.

² Zech. xiii. 2. Toy says, "The writer feels himself to be apart from the prophetic herd, whose inspiration he connects with an unclean spirit" (*Judaism and Christianity*, p. 54). Yet Toy seems to make no real distinction between the writer and the prophets he denounces.

³ Manifestly he did not mean such prophesying as he himself was doing.

⁴ Zech. xiii. 3 ff.

⁵ *Twelve Prophets*, ii. 484.

⁶ Neh. vi. 14.

What the governor says about them shows that they were the same kind as those denounced in Zechariah.

Of the functions of these prophets very little needs to be added. Originally they seem to have been attendants of their chief, probably going through their exciting exercises to induce the ecstatic state. Elisha calls for a minstrel,¹ apparently because such a body was not with the invading armies. They were sent out on special missions by their chief.² In very few cases did they act on their own initiative. One of them disguised himself to rebuke Ahab for letting his chance slip to end the Syrian wars when Ben-hadad was in his power.³ It is true that Josephus identifies this prophet with Micaiah the son of Imlah;⁴ and Patrick, in Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*, pronounces this identification not unlikely. It has not a shred of evidence to stand upon.

As time went on it was natural that they should exercise more and more the general functions of a true prophet, especially when they were cut off from the leadership of great men, and made subservient to the royal will. A similar thing happened in the early Apostolic Church. Deacons were appointed to serve tables, that the greater Apostles might be set free to preach the Gospel. But as the order was broken and scattered by persecution we find, as we might expect, these deacons exercising the functions of baptising and preaching.

The numerous membership of the prophetic guilds raises the question of livelihood. Were the prophets

¹ 2 Kings iii. 15.

³ 1 Kings xx. 35 ff.

² 2 Kings iv. 29 ; ix. 1 ff.

⁴ *Antiquities*, viii. xiv. 5.

obliged to provide for themselves, or were there emoluments of office to maintain them? The information available enables us to answer these questions very definitely.

Elisha first appears plowing in his father's field.¹ As there were twelve yoke of oxen at work, his family must have had considerable means. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear of him living in his own house at Samaria;² and he probably provided largely for his own support. Not entirely so, however, for we read of his eating frequently at the table of the rich Shunamite, who built a special room for his accommodation.³ So Elijah in a time of dearth was fed by a widow of Zarephath.⁴ A man of Baal-shalisha brought Elisha the first-fruits for himself and the sons of the prophets who were with him.⁵ This story has been preserved because of a miracle connected with it: one hundred prophets were fed on the twenty barley loaves and a few ears of corn. There were probably many other instances of gifts of food to the prophets of which we hear nothing. A large part of the living came from alms.

The prophets' fees were a considerable source of revenue. The fee paid to Samuel for telling where the lost asses were,⁶ shows the general custom of paying the seers for their services. Balak's messengers carried a fee to Balaam.⁷ Naaman expected to make a handsome payment for the cure of his

¹ 1 Kings xix. 19.

² 2 Kings vi. 32.

³ 2 Kings iv. 8, 10.

⁴ 1 Kings xvii. 8 ff.

⁵ 2 Kings iv. 42 ff.

⁶ 1 Sam. ix. 8; one-fourth of a silver shekel, about sixteen cents.

⁷ Num. xxii. 7.

leprosy.¹ Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, evidently thought his master reckless in throwing away such an opportunity, and he tried to replenish the treasury secretly. The Syrian understood the plea that unexpected visitors who were prophets made an imperative demand. A gift for a prophet was plainly a common thing. When Ben-hadad sent Hazael to consult Elisha, he naturally directed him to take a fee in his hand.² There is no intimation that the prophet declined the very large payment.

The rapacity of the prophets increased in the course of time. Micah refers to their habit of waging war on those who did not provide them with food.³ Ezekiel finds both men and women guilty of a similar fault.⁴ The second Isaiah finds the same condition in his time.⁵ These prophets had apparently reached the conclusion that the world owed them a living. Schultz sees in these cases evidence that "some took to prophesying just for the sake of a livelihood."⁶ The mercenary spirit did not die out until the order became extinct. Nehemiah discovered that God had not sent Shemaiah with a prophetic warning, but that the prophet had been hired by Tobiah and Sanballat to utter in the name of God a message which his employers furnished.⁷ This custom of taking fees was doubtless rejected by the great prophets, as Cheyne suggests,⁸ because it had become an abuse. But in the earlier days it was

¹ 2 Kings v. 15.

³ Micah iii. 5, 11.

⁵ Isa. lvi. 10 f.

⁷ Neh. vi. 12.

² 2 Kings viii. 8.

⁴ Ezek. xiii. 19 ; xxii. 25.

⁶ *O. T. Theol.*, i. 261.

⁸ *Commentary on Isaiah*, ii. 68.

expected that a prophet should obtain his living by his office ; so Amaziah tells Amos "to flee to Judah and there eat bread and there prophesy."¹

We are told of a large company of prophets who were fed at Jezebel's table.² These were Syrian prophets imported by the queen, who would have fared ill if left to the support of the people. It can scarcely be doubtful, however, that the company of prophets who were ever ready to utter oracles in harmony with Ahab's will were supported by the royal bounty. They respected the hand that fed them. Obadiah, Ahab's house-steward, fed one hundred prophets while they were hiding in a cave at a time of persecution.

The prophets were not always amply furnished with the necessities of life. The widow of one of them comes to Elisha in great distress.³ When the guild needed larger quarters they were obliged to build it with their own hands, even being constrained to borrow the necessary tools.⁴ At a period of famine the sons of the prophets went out to gather herbs that they might have food.⁵ Schultz quotes this passage as proof that the prophets engaged in agriculture ;⁶ it is rather proof of their ignorance of rural arts, as one of them unwittingly gathered poisoned herbs, and put them in the boiling pot, and so nearly killed the whole band.

To sum up in a word. The maintenance of the

¹ Amos vii. 12 ; that is, Amos was to eat the bread earned by his exercise of the prophetic office. Amos tells with satisfaction that he had maintained himself by tending the herd and dressing trees.

² 1 Kings xviii. 19.

³ 2 Kings iv. 1.

⁴ 2 Kings vi. 1 ff.

⁵ 2 Kings iv. 38 ff.

⁶ *O. T. Theol.*, i. 241 f.

prophets came from their private means and personal efforts; from the royal bounty; from fees for counsel; and from the alms of the people. On the whole, the last two sources were those upon which they chiefly relied. The dependence of these prophets was undoubtedly one of the causes of their degradation. They looked for support to the people for whom they prophesied. People will pay for good news, not for bad. Naaman was carrying his fee back to Syria when he left Elisha in indignation. After he was cured of his leprosy he went back to the prophet eager to bestow a rich reward. The great prophets did not receive fees, and so far as we know were not supported by the people in any way. Their independence enabled them to stick to the truth without undue temptation. Jeremiah, we know, was a man of such ample means that he was able to buy land and pay cash for it.¹

It remains to say a few words about the dress of the prophets. The kindred order of the Nazirites wore their hair long, perhaps as a special mark of their order. The priests wore a distinctive dress. Did the sons of the prophets have any outward mark by which they could be distinguished? Our information is slight, and yet considerable light may be drawn from it. It seems to have been the custom of the higher prophets to wear a peculiar mantle as a sign of their office. When the witch of En-dor described Samuel she said, "An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a robe."² This was enough to enable Saul to recognise Samuel, without mention

¹ Jer. xxxii. 9.

² 1 Sam. xxviii. 14.

of the rent made in the robe by his own hands.¹ This was probably an unusually large garment in which a man could completely wrap himself.² When Ahijah went out to meet Jeroboam he was clad in a new garment. The rending of the prophetic mantle was symbolic of the rending of the kingdom from Rehoboam, as the rending of Samuel's had been before.³ Elijah wore a similar mantle. When Ahab learns that the person met by his messengers was "a man with a garment of hair, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins," he said at once, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."⁴ Elijah was commanded to anoint Elisha as his successor in the prophetic office. To execute this order he cast his mantle upon Elisha as the latter was plowing in the field; for to be clothed with the prophetic robe was to be called to the prophetic office; and Elisha readily recognised the significance of this act.⁵ The prophetic vestment was a symbol of the prophet's miraculous powers.

Elijah used his mantle to clear a way through the waters of the Jordan,⁶ and his successor, to whom the mantle had fallen, used it in the same way.⁷ Before Elisha put on the garment of his predecessor we are told that "he seized his garments and tore them into two pieces."⁸ From this statement we are told in Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*, i. 693, that Elisha wore the clothing common to other men. The fact seems

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 27.

² In spite of this statement, Kraetzschmar, who holds that Samuel was a *seer*, and not a *nabi*, contends that the seers did not wear the prophetic mantle.

³ 1 Kings xi. 29 f; cf. 1 Sam. xv. 27 f.

⁴ 2 Kings i. 8.

⁵ 1 Kings xix. 16 ff.

⁶ 2 Kings ii. 8.

⁷ 2 Kings ii. 14.

⁸ 2 Kings ii. 12.

to be that he tore off his own garment¹ and discarded it,² that he might put on the robe of Elijah, and so appear in the garb of the great leader.

The peculiar garment had become a mark of the prophet's position. When Isaiah was commanded to loose the sackcloth from his loins, and assume the scanty garb of a captive,³ the sackcloth is the hairy garment of the prophet. In the work of destruction all ranks would be reduced to slavery. The girdle which Jeremiah wore, whose rotting by the Euphrates is a symbolic prophecy, implies that he too wore the large prophetic mantle which was fastened at the waist by a girdle.⁴ John Baptist was clothed as a prophet, wearing the raiment of camel's hair fastened at the loins by a leather girdle.⁵

Jastrow, in his interesting article on "The Tearing of Garments as a Symbol of Mourning,"⁶ holds a very different notion of the prophet's dress. He says, "The example of Saul shows that stripping off the garments was an act preliminary to prophesying, and hence even at a later age the prophet's garb is characterised as more primitive than the ordinary fashions of the day. It is clearly because prophesying is a religious act that nakedness is associated with it."⁷ And again, "From the passage Isaiah xx. 2-4, it appears that the prophet's ordinary clothes consisted merely of a loin-cloth and sandals, and from

¹ This is not excluded by the fact that the rending of the garment was a mark of sorrow.

² Jastrow argues that the language here used means a tearing of the garments off the body (*J.A.O.S.*, xxi. 24).

³ Isa. xx. 2.

⁴ Jer. xiv.

⁵ Matt. iii. 4; Mark i. 6.

⁶ *J.A.O.S.*, xxi. 23 ff.

⁷ *Ib.*, p. 35.

other testimony we know that the dress of the seers was of a much simpler character than that worn by other persons."¹

I cannot follow Jastrow's reasoning. As the prophet became heated in his frenzy, he would naturally cast aside his large outer garment, just as the countryman may throw off his coat to dance. I agree with Cheyne that "sackcloth" in Isaiah xx. 2 refers to the haircloth which the prophets adopted as their habitual dress. The expression to gird sackcloth implies that it was worn as an outer garment. It is good Hebrew usage to call one "naked" who had laid aside the outer garment. Jastrow is carried away by his thesis that in religious practices there is a tendency to revert to the primitive customs.

Kraetzschmar holds that the *nebi'im* wore the hairy mantle, but that the seers (*ro'im*) had no distinctive dress. He draws too sharp a line between the seers and the prophets. The statement in 2 Samuel xxiv. 11, "the prophet Gad, David's seer," would imply that the former term denoted the general office, and the latter the particular function, as we might say "the priest A. B., rector of St. James' Church."

Did the sons of the prophets also wear a distinctive dress? From our meagre information and from the probabilities of the case, we infer that they did.² A New Testament writer expresses the accepted Jewish idea when he says that the prophets "went about in sheepskins, in goatskins."³ When one of these went

¹ *Ib.*, p. 31.

² The dervishes still wear a cloak of camel's hair (Stanley, *Sinai and Pal.*, p. 381).

³ Heb. xi. 37.

out to meet Ahab he "disguised himself with a covering over his eyes."¹ As soon as the covering was removed the king "recognised him that he was one of the prophets."² This cannot mean that the king recognised his face because of personal acquaintance; the statement is explicit that Ahab perceived that he was one of the prophets. Some mark of a prophet had been covered to effect a disguise.³ The disguise may have been partly effected by laying aside the prophetic cloak. Whatever may have been the case when the members of this order occupied a humble and subordinate place, it is more than probable that they clothed themselves in the peculiar prophetic dress when they assumed the complete prophetic functions. In Zechariah we are told that in the new era "the prophets shall be ashamed of their vision; neither shall they wear a hairy mantle to deceive."⁴ It is probable that in Zechariah xi. 3, we should read "their [the shepherds'] prophetic garment is destroyed" for "their glory is spoiled," the howling shepherds being no other than these useless prophets. It seems to be highly probable that this dress was common to all prophets, and was universally regarded as a mark of their office, just as now the cassock vest is a garment peculiar to the clergy.

¹ 1 Kings xx. 38.

² 1 Kings xx. 41.

³ Kittel argues from this passage that the prophets were recognisable by some mark on the face, in the region of the eyes. Kraetzschmar holds that the prophets wore a hairy mantle and also made scars in their foreheads, after the manner of the Beduin tribes. To disguise himself this prophet simply covered his face with a cloth in order to conceal the scars. This view affords a good explanation of this passage, but lacks other support in O.T. See additional note (6).

⁴ Zech. xiii. 4.

CHAPTER V

THE PROPHET'S CALL

NOTHING is more striking in the phenomena of prophecy than the absolute confidence with which the message is spoken. The reason of this is not far to seek, for the Holy Ghost spoke by the prophets. If the prophet were expressing merely his own opinions, the positiveness of his tone would not be altogether inexplicable. Any man who has deep convictions is apt to speak them with a confidence bordering on assurance. But the peculiarly strong confidence of the prophet had a different and deeper basis. He was, indeed, a man of strong convictions, but above that he was fully persuaded that he spoke the mind of his God. Consequently there is no doubt, no hesitation, no uncertainty. He is authorised to preface his message with the formula "Thus saith the Lord," and therefore feels that his words cannot be gainsaid.

It was not given to every Hebrew to know or to declare the will of God. The ability and right to do that was the direct gift of God Himself. He selected out of the mass of men those to whom His purposes were so revealed that they spoke with conviction and authority. In other words, the prophet believed himself to be divinely called to his office. He held

that without that call no one had a right to exercise the prophetic function. Those who did so otherwise were mere pretenders or visionaries who spoke the vanity of their own hearts. Sometimes, indeed, the true prophets were unwilling to believe that any man could say insincerely "thus saith the Lord." Yet they knew the message so introduced to be false and misleading. The only explanation was that God Himself had deceived the prophet.¹ Sometimes the error of the seers is attributed to the inspiration of false gods.²

The most certainly genuine call, however, could have evidential value chiefly for the one who experienced it. In the usual tests of prophecy, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter,³ the call has no place. For it is a personal experience, and its nature varies with the personality. It is therefore impossible to set up a standard by which its genuineness can be predetermined. This rule applies to modern as well as ancient prophets; hence no minister should ever be asked for evidence of his call other than may be read in his ministry; and no Christian should ever be asked to expose his deepest spiritual experiences to a curious audience.

Yet the Hebrew prophets have generally themselves told the story of their call. There is, however, a vast difference between a voluntary revelation of a deep personal experience for the sake of one's fellows, and an enforced exposure which could have no proper meaning to one's auditors, for they sit as

¹ See, for example, 1 Kings xxii. 22; Ezek. xiv. 9.

² Jer. ii. 8.

³ See chap. vi.

judges rather than as disciples. The prophet would have scorned to betray the secret of his soul before a body sitting to pass judgment on the genuineness of his vision. God had spoken to him, and should any mortal pretend to control one who had heard the Divine voice? But when in the course of his ministry, the story of his call could lend weight to his words, and so persuade those who were doubtful of God's revelation, then the prophet would not hold back even the dearest secret of his heart.

Such autobiographical revelations should be read with reverence and sympathy. We may study them for our profit, but not to satisfy an idle curiosity. May God give us the humble spirit of a learner as we venture to seek the explanation of those scenes in which the Divine voice called to their office the holy men of old!

How shall we pursue this investigation, the difficulty of which is patent? The surest way is to take a few instances and study them inductively. We shall attain the clearest conception of the call by a study of concrete cases. From this study we shall be able to gather the broad principles in a brief summary.

There will be no danger of mistake if we begin with the first of the great prophets, the herdman of Tekoa. Of the early life of the prophets before Amos we know little, and cannot always tell how they were led to their sacred office.¹ They either

¹ Samuel, like Moses, is said to have been called directly; Elisha was summoned by the prophet he was to succeed, though it is said that Elijah was divinely commanded to appoint Elisha his successor.

found no occasion to relate personal history; or as they did not themselves write, the story was not preserved by those who have given us such meagre biographical information as we have. Of the sons of the prophets nothing is to be said, because their call consisted in admission to an order. They were not looked to for high service, nor regarded by posterity as channels of revelation. They were probably received into the order by the father, or chief, and had no such direct Divine summons to office as had those great men who really contributed to the knowledge of God.

Amos reveals something of his call upon two different occasions. One of his allusions throws light upon the other, and though less significant as a source of information, must nevertheless be carefully considered. The call of Amos is particularly interesting, because he was not summoned to a lifelong service, but only to the delivery of a special message. All that we know of his prophetic career occupies but a few days. It is, of course, not impossible that Amos may have been known as a seer to his fellows at Tekoa even while he was a herdman; but it is highly improbable.¹

By a variety of figures Amos prepares the way for the account of his personal revelation. There is nothing accidental in his leaving his flock in the wilderness of Judah to prophesy in Bethel. If two persons walk together, it is obvious that they meet

¹ Kraetzschmar says, however, "It was not for the first time that Amos had in this way appeared openly, but heretofore he had been let alone" (*Prophet und Seher im alten Israel*, p. 1).

by appointment. If the lion roars, it is plain that he has taken his prey. If a bird is snared, it is evident that someone has set a trap. If a trumpet is blown as an alarm of war, it is not necessary to hunt further for the cause of the people's terror. If a man prophesies in the name of Jahveh, the inference is plain that Jahveh has spoken to him.¹ No man can truly preach unless the word has been given him from his God. On the other hand, if God has spoken to a human soul, and revealed things which vitally concern the weal or woe of the nation, it is impossible for that man to hold his peace. As Emerson put it, "the seer must be a sayer." Amos only began to speak when silence was no longer possible.

Amos speaks more distinctly, however, when Amaziah interrupts his preaching, and bids him go back to Judah, if he must needs prophesy, for Bethel was a royal sanctuary, and the king would not permit such heavy words to be declaimed there. Then Amos tells the priest that he is not prophesying because prophecy is his trade and he must needs exercise it; on the contrary, he was a herdman and dresser of sycamore trees; but Jahveh took him from the flock and bade him prophesy. Nor was it a roving commission which was entrusted to him. Jahveh said, "Go, prophesy unto My people Israel."² That command could not be obeyed by exercising the office of a seer among the villagers of Tekoa, nor by adopting the priest's suggestion to prophesy in Judah. The Divine commission made Israel his

¹ Amos iii. 3-8.

² Amos vii. 15.

objective, and it was to Israel that Amos spoke, and would continue to speak, in spite of the power of both priest and king.

The prophet's declaration, superficially considered, is simple enough. God directed him to prophesy to Israel, and he did as he was bid. But must we be content with the statement which lies on the surface? May we not seek to penetrate further into the mystery, so that we may more fully comprehend the prophet's call to his great mission?

We believe still in the Divine call. More than ever before are we convinced that every true life is a vocation. The physician is divinely called to lengthen and ease the physical life; the lawyer, the merchant, the manufacturer, the writer, the carpenter, and the shoemaker, if they be true men, are appointed of God to their several callings. Especially is woman called of God, whether, as is so common in these days, she stands as the competitor of man in nearly every occupation of life, or whether she fills her old and highest place as the light of a home, and the bearer and best counsellor of children. We believe also that men are called to be prophets to-day as well as in the time of Jeroboam II.; and sometimes we think the voice of the true prophet was never more urgently needed. Was the call of Amos different in kind from all these other calls, or at most only in a degree? Did God once give men a specific summons infinitely clearer than any man knows to-day? Were the prophets of old absolutely safeguarded against mistaking their vocation, while men of to-day are honestly doubtful whether the

"P. C.," which a man said he saw in a vision, stands for "preach Christ" or "plow corn"? Or can those ancient calls be only rightly explained in terms of modern thought?

A man to-day, however conscientious and devout, may be in the gravest doubt of the nature of his call. A young man thinks of the ministry and various other occupations. He desires to live an upright and a useful life. He is ready to become a minister, a merchant, or a blacksmith, if he can be assured that his mission is surely one or another. He is persuaded that no office is low if it comes by Divine appointment; but how can he be sure what is God's purpose for him? He may have a decided preference for a certain calling; but can he be sure that his preference is also God's? Or a young minister may be equipped for his career, and in most heartbreaking uncertainty where to prophesy. He is offered many places by men: the rector of a city parish offers him an assistantship; a vestry elects him to a rectorate; he is urged to go to the mission field. He knows that in any of these places opportunity will not be lacking for any talent he may possess; he is ready not to choose, but to be chosen. Among the discrepant calls of men, where is he to find the Divine voice, which never gives a roving commission, and which never perplexes by sending two calls at once? In such cases we cannot depend upon hearing the objective voice of God, telling us to go prophesy to Israel. It seems, therefore, as if the Hebrew prophets had a great advantage over their poor modern successors. But was it really so? Did they hear

a voice which is no longer audible even to the most devoutly inclined ear? Or were they constrained to undergo the same confusing experience as ourselves, and leave us the record not of the grave problem, but only of its clear and final solution?

Amos was absolutely convinced that he was called of God to prophesy to Israel. Nothing could have shaken his faith in his vocation. We do certainly believe that he was not mistaken. However strange the course of our interpretation of this call may seem, we wish to keep this as our guiding principle: Amos was really called of God.

Yet we shall fail to reach the psychological explanation of that call if we do not bear in mind the fact that we are dealing with a foreign people and a distant time. The religious language of the eighth century before Christ is not the same as the religious language of the twentieth century after Christ; and the Hebrews did not speak the English tongue, nor did they think English thoughts. To understand the facts of the earlier life of the Orientals we must translate their speech into the language of the later life of the Occidentals. The failure to do that has led to confusion and error in the past, and will do so again in the present unless we are on our guard.

As I have before intimated, Amos gives us a hint, in Oriental language, indeed, which may lead us to understand the truth. He said he must prophesy because God had spoken; in plain terms, he means that he perceived a condition of things to which his Israelite neighbours were blind. This herdman was a man quite beyond the ordinary. He had eyes to

see, and he saw. His contemporaries were rejoicing in a peaceful period, and were quite blind to the political movements which indicated that the present happy situation could not last long. Amos beheld a nation revelling riotously in a prosperous day, and laying up no stores against the troubled night which was pressing near. The insight was the call of God; God showed him the true condition: that disclosure was a command to warn those who were in peril.

The herdman was, moreover, deeply religious and conspicuously moral. He had watched the course of the world's history and had reflected upon God's government. He was persuaded that all the world-movements were in the hands of Jahveh. He rose above his times in that conception. Jahveh had, indeed, brought Israel out of Egypt, but His part in the great movements did not stop with that. Logically it could not stop with that, and Amos was as relentless in following conclusions to their end as Calvin. If Jahveh could bring a nation from Egypt, He was more than a mere national God; for that fact presupposes a control of Egypt as well as of Israel. Therefore it was His hand also that brought the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir. And it was His hand that would bring the Assyrians upon Israel.

There was another great idea which God breathed into the soul of this Tekoan seer: the basis of the Divine judgments was ethical, not racial. This simple herdman rose entirely above the notion, so common even in much later ages, that God looked toward His

people as a parent looks who is blinded by blood-relationship, and so will defend an abandoned son in his wantonness. The people might still believe that Jahveh would protect His own, and fight their battles against any foreign people, whether Israel was faithful or not. Amos had no such idea. Damascus would be punished because of its barbarous cruelty, Gaza because of its indulgence in an inhuman slave trade, and other nations for similar offences against sound morality. Israel also was steeped in wrong. This people had sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes; they had made the Nazirites drunk in violation of their vows; they had silenced the voice of those who were ordained of God to speak. Punishment was just as certain for Israel as for Damascus, aye, more certain; for their superior relation to Jahveh, and greater knowledge of His holy ways, aggravated their offence. Damascus might plead ignorance, but Israel had sinned against the light.

This, then, in a word, is the picture seen by the keen eye of the prophet of Tekoa: a nation steeped in all manner of vice, utterly disregarding of the sword hanging over their head, and not a voice raised to show them their peril, and so to turn them from their sin. Amos saw all this plainly. Many a day must he have reflected upon the unhappy condition of Israel. Could not a voice sound the alarm so that the nation would turn from their sin? There was no such voice in all the nation. What the people were doing to avert the Divine punishment was useless. They were attempting to pacify a God inflamed by

righteous wrath with sacrifices and sacred song. They offered bullocks in place of obedience, the fat of rams in place of hearkening. This seer could hear the cry from Heaven, "Take thou away from Me the noise of thy songs . . . and let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."¹

What a moment it must have been to Amos when the question first forced its way to recognition: "Why do *you* not warn Israel?" It was easy for him to object: "I am no prophet, or prophet's son; I have no commission to speak in God's name." But the rejoinder was inevitable: "Your assumed impediment is really an important qualification. The members of the prophetic order are at a disadvantage. They do not see as you do, because they look too much with professional eyes. They are bound up with the State, so that frankness would lead to a persecution which they are not strong enough to face. You are free and brave, and you understand."

Over and over again, by day and by night, such thoughts must have troubled the soul of the seer, until the truth flashed upon him which ended inward discussion and led to obedient action. He came to see that just as Jahveh leads a nation from Egypt, or sends the Assyrians to chastise Damascus, so was the Divine voice calling him to preach. The difficulties and dangers were as plain as before; but they no longer constituted an obstacle. The prophet perceived that when God gives a man insight, the gift is not for selfish enjoyment, but for use. In his clear perception of the perilous situation and sore need of

¹ Amos v. 23 f.

Israel, he saw the call of God: "Jahveh God hath spoken; who can but prophesy?"¹

Such an interpretation of Amos's call as I have given may still be unwelcome to some, because, as it seems to them, it is one of the countless ways in which modern critics are taking the supernatural out of the Bible. I must say frankly that in this study I am searching primarily for truth, and not for welcome truth, or harmless truth, or truth qualified in any way whatsoever. Truth ought always to be welcome; it certainly is not only harmless, but is the most helpful of all things. Yet I should be quite devoid of a sympathetic spirit if I did not desire so to present what I believe to be true that my presentation shall edify faith rather than destroy it.

That God should pronounce in objective audible words in the Hebrew tongue, "Go prophesy to Israel," is regarded as supernatural. There is an element of the miraculous in it, and it is an apologetic support for faith. That God should have inspired Amos in some such way as I have indicated is natural, and therefore apologetically worthless. The prophet becomes only an enlightened man, and

¹ Amos iii. 8. Wellhausen gives an entirely different turn to this passage. He emends the text and interprets thus: "The Lord Jahveh speaks (through the prophets); who shall not tremble?" (*Die kleinen Propheten*, p. 75.) I can only say here that there is no warrant for the emendation except that it completes a parallelism; and that I agree with G. A. Smith that thus to alter the text is "to blunt the point of the argument." Amos at this point is referring to the voice of Jahveh which he heard, not what the people heard. Wellhausen is influenced by his desire to establish the fact that the word of Jahveh and the message of the prophets are not distinguishable. His text is followed by Nowack, but rejected by Marti.

down he tumbles from the high pedestal upon which a portion of the Protestant world has placed him. But facts are stubborn things. In the one case there is consistency with all that we know of God's dealings with man, which is not by precept, but by inspiration. This method is likewise consistent with our highest conception of God, a Spirit guiding the world upward by spiritual influences upon souls kindred to Himself. And God is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."¹

But why did not the prophet tell us plainly what happened, instead of misleading us by doubtful words? The difficulty is with our understanding rather than with Amos's statement. I suppose that every Israelite to whom he spoke in Bethel understood exactly what the prophet meant. Those people were accustomed to the direct ascription to God of what we call natural forces. The thunder was the voice of God just as truly as the still whisper in the soul. Then again this preacher had no time and no occasion to tell the whole story of the process by which his conclusion was reached, but only to state the final truth. In conclusion, let me say, and say as strongly as possible, that the man who does not see the agency of God in the call of Amos, supposing my interpretation right, must have a faith sorely in need of props; for how otherwise can he possibly believe in the agency of God in the affairs of men to-day?

How different was the call of Hosea, a native Israelite, who put on the prophetic mantle shortly

¹ Heb. xiii. 8.

after Amos was permitted to lay it aside. God leads many men by many paths. O that men could see when God is leading, that they might follow as Amos and Hosea did! Amos was led to prophesy by reason of divinely given insight; Hosea was directed to the same task by domestic affliction of the sorest kind which can come to an upright soul.

The sad facts of Hosea's life, so far as he has disclosed them to us, are briefly these. He married a woman whom he tenderly loved. Gomer the daughter of Diblaim bore the prophet two sons and a daughter,¹ whose symbolic names² show that already God's hand was at work upon this choice spirit.

While these children were still young, came the heart-breaking discovery to the loving husband that his wife was unfaithful. So abandoned did she become that she left Hosea's home and indulged in riotous living with her paramours, until the inevitable end was reached by her sale into slavery.

Nothing would have been easier for Hosea than to have written a divorce, and closed his house and heart against his faithless spouse for ever. But real love cannot always be eradicated by a bill of divorce. In spite of her wantonness, Hosea loved the wife of his youth. He bought her back from the bondage into which she had fallen, and put her under restraint; if that

¹ G. A. Smith holds that Jezreel alone was Hosea's child, and that therefore Gomer's infidelity began soon after marriage. In the case of Jezreel it is said that Gomer "conceived and bore him a son" (Hosea i. 3). This "him" is lacking in the account of the birth of the other children. But the omission may be accidental, or at least not so full of meaning as Smith supposes.

² Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah (uncompassionated), and Lo'ammi (not my people); see Hosea i. 3-9.

did not turn her heart back to her husband, at least it made indulgence in her favourite vice impossible.

Space will not permit a discussion of the strife over the interpretation of this story, nor is it necessary for my purpose. The reader will find ample treatment in the recent commentaries and other books on the prophets. For myself, I can only say that I agree on the one hand with those who deem it impossible for God to demand of a keenly affectionate soul that he should take a prostitute to his bosom, and on the other hand with those who cannot be satisfied with the idea that this story is an allegory, but insist that it is the real record of the prophet's life.¹

As I have indicated above, Gomer's unfaithfulness developed after her marriage.

The command "Go, take thee a prostitute wife"² is an instance common enough in prophecy, of interpreting an early experience in the light of later knowledge. It does not necessarily imply that Gomer was bad when Hosea married her, though many have held that strange view.

The explanation of the prophet's persistent efforts

¹ There are in the main three interpretations of this story. (1) That it is wholly allegorical. Hosea invents it to describe the infidelity of Israel. But as G. A. Smith says, it "would be strange for Hosea to tell such a record of his wife if false, or, if he was unmarried, about himself." (2) That it is wholly literal. God, indeed, lays heavy burdens upon His servants, but we should require greater evidence than we have to believe that He demanded that a pure man should take a foul woman to his breast. (3) That the experience is real, but to be interpreted with discretion. The main point is that Gomer was pure, or thought to be pure by Hosea, and fell into wrong after marriage. This view has rapidly gained acceptance since its convincing presentation by W. Robertson Smith in his *Prophets of Israel*.

² Hosea i. 2.

to reclaim his fallen wife, and the proof that she had been a pure bride, are to be found in his inextinguishable love for her. Hosea might have taken a prostitute to wife at the Divine command, but no power in earth or heaven could have kindled such a love as he felt for Gomer, if the object of it had been already a fallen woman. Love in many cases proves unable to endure any very great strain. A father loves a son until the boy goes badly astray, and then the once fond parent turns him out of doors without compunction. A man and woman really seem to be a loving pair during courtship and honeymoon. Soon afterwards they may face each other in a divorce court with the most implacable hatred. But there are some natures in which love takes a deeper root, and can never be eradicated. A mother often tenderly loves a son who breaks her heart. A wife may continue to love a man, in spite of everything on his part to destroy her affection. Such a love as Hosea's is beyond question uncommon, but is by no means so impossible a feat as to be explicable only as fiction.

What has this essay on love to do with Hosea's call? Much every way. Hosea must have struggled many a time with those troublesome questions which arise in afflicted souls: Why does my God whom I devotedly serve suffer my lot to be so rough? Why is my heart, so full of a pure passion, denied a worthy object? Why am I unable to tear out this passion from my soul, and allow the profligate to meet the doom she so richly deserves?

Then some day the explanation came to Hosea with the fearful force with which great truths break

into human souls. This hard life of mine is history in miniature of God's relation to this nation. Jahveh loved Israel in her youth, and brought her from Egypt to be His own people. How sadly Israel has requited this love. She has played the harlot with Baals, and has fallen into every manner of sin. Will Jahveh cast her off as utterly abandoned and worthless, and let her meet her just doom? No; Jahveh will punish His unfaithful spouse, but He loves her in spite of her infidelity, and will reclaim her, and take her back purified into His bosom.¹

Having grasped that truth, it is easy to see that he must preach it to the people. "Jahveh hath spoken; who can but prophesy?" The burden of Hosea's message is drawn from his own unhappy life. The very bitterness of his own estate opened his eyes to the great facts about God and Israel. If only Gomer could see the matter as Hosea saw it! If only Israel could see the matter as God saw it! Hosea sees it as God sees it, and God's mission for him is to make Israel's eyes like his own.

In the opening of his eyes he discovers the providence in his own affairs. The prophet looks back upon his life, which had first explained a portion of God's life, and now in the light of that truth about God he understands what before had been so mysterious in his own sufferings. In realising God's

¹ Long afterward a prophet greater than Hosea draws a brief picture of Jahveh's patient endurance of His unfaithful bride. "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, wherewith I have put her away?" (Isa. l. 1). This implies, of course, that Jahveh had not put her away. The unknown prophet of the exile evidently was familiar with Hosea.