pain he came to understand his own. God had used his afflictions to open his eyes. The rod was laid upon his back, that out of his very pain should come the inspiration to a life and work in harmony with the plans of God.[1] God had called Hosea to prophesy, as He calls all men, from the day of his birth; but the prophet did not hear the call at first. He had other purposes in life. He married and begot children, and started at least in his own way. The prophetic office in the time of Hosea had even less attraction for an ambitious and capable man than the ministry has in our day. But God's voice is not always silenced with a first refusal. The child Samuel may at first mistake the voice of God for that of Eli; but every time he lies down to resume his broken sleep the voice sounds again, and will sound until it is answered, or an answer made impossible. So the call was ever pressing upon the heart of Hosea, and when personal misery brought him low, in the quiet reflection which comes with great sorrow, the voice was heard and heeded.

God's hand reaches out for all kinds of men. Elisha was taken from the plow, Amos from the herd, Jeremiah and Ezekiel from the priesthood, Matthew from the tax office, the sons of Zebedee from the fishing boats, Zephaniah probably from the royal palace.[2] But among them all, high and low,

[1] In Hosea i. 2 we read: "The beginning of Jahveh's speaking by Hosea: Jahveh said to Hosea, Go, take to thee a prostitute wife." In the light of his bitter experience the prophet sees that the whole course of his life was providentially leading to the present climax.

[2] Zephaniah was probably the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah (see Zeph. i. 1, and A. B. Davidson in Camb. Bible).

God never laid His hand upon a more accomplished man than Isaiah the son of Amoz.

Isaiah appears to have been highly educated, like St. Paul; but his training was not so narrow and partisan as Paul's. He was a man of such diversified talents that education was inevitable. Wherever there is a genuine thirst for knowledge, means to satisfy it are certain to be found. God selects choice spirits for His greatest service, even though they are often found in humble stations. God looks at the heart and requires fitness for the task in hand. At the time Uzziah died Jerusalem was a cultured city. Court and people had grown out of the crude conditions of earlier days, and had made long strides towards a high civilisation. The man who could get the ear of this people must be one whose culture and natural abilities would at once mark him as a leader among men. There was probably no one in Jerusalem who more exactly met the requirements than Isaiah the son of Amoz; and to him God's finger beckoned.

The story of his call to the prophetic office is found in the sixth chapter of his prophecies, rather than in the first, as we might expect. This order is significant. It is plain that the prophet originally had no intention of revealing that inward personal struggle, the outcome of which was his complete yielding to the Divine will. Only when the time came that the publishing of his personal relation to God might add force to the words spoken by His command was he constrained to lay bare that scene in the temple which determined finally the course of his life. We will read his story in his own words.

"In the year that king Uzziah died: at that time I saw the Lord seated upon a lofty and exalted throne, and His train filled the temple. Seraphim were standing above Him, each with six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and two he used for flight. One cried to the other and said: Holy, holy, holy, is Jahveh Sabaoth: His glory fills the whole earth. The foundations of the thresholds shook with the noise of the one crying, and the house was filled with smoke.

"And I said, Woe unto me: I am undone; for I am a man unclean of lips, and dwell among a people unclean of lips, and yet my eyes have looked upon King Jahveh Sabaoth. Then one of the seraphim flew unto me, holding in his hand a hot stone which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth and said: Lo, this has touched thy lips, so that thy iniquity is removed and thy uncleanness is absolved.

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying: Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And I spoke: Behold me, send me. And He said, Go, and say to this people, Hear with the ear, but do not comprehend, and see with the eye, but do not gain knowledge."[1]

But one might well ask us, as Philip asked the Ethiopian proselyte, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" Isaiah was an ancient Oriental, and spoke the language of his time and of his people. His thoughts were not like ours, and his way of stating things was by no means modern. From a literal

[1] Isa. vi. 1–9.

understanding of this story the conclusion has been drawn that the whole problem of Isaiah's life was raised and settled in the few moments he spent in the temple, during which he actually saw with human eye the God of Israel. But such an inference is quite unnatural, and is highly improbable.

Isaiah had seen the necessity of a voice lifted up in the cause of righteousness. Many times the thought must have forced itself upon him, that he was himself the man to whom Jahveh pointed as the fit leader in a movement to guide the State and people according to Divine principles. But there was a serious objection, the same which has been felt by every right-minded man who is called to a holy office—that is, personal unfitness. Not only did he dwell among a people whose lips were unclean, but unhappily his own were in the same condition. Whatever else it ought to be, the mouth which proclaims God's message to the world should be clean. How was he, conscious of a beam in his own eye, to have the clear vision necessary to remove the mote from his brothers' eyes?

But God's call is inexorable. Nothing more surely marks the Divine voice in a great soul than its persistence. Isaiah might have stilled the voice by absolutely disregarding and defying it. But he was a true man, of devout spirit, and was at least ready to listen. He went to the temple, as apparently was his custom when in perplexity, that he might, in that sacred place, pour out his soul to Jahveh. The hand of God pursues him in the sanctuary. As he prays he sees a vision with that inner eye which is some-

times more truthful in its sight than the outward eye. The sight of God fills him with the terror which it inspired in every Hebrew. How could sinful eyes look upon the holy God without peril? The personal disqualification which had long stood in the way of obedience is put now in the specific form of the unclean lips. God meets the objection by sending a seraph to remove the taint. The effect reaches further than the lips. The prophet's hearing also has been made acute by the purification. God needs but to touch one part and man is every whit clean.[1] Isaiah hears again the Lord calling for a volunteer: "Whom shall I send?" The obstacle which had hindered him so long has been swept away. Peace has come to the perplexed soul. Duty is clear now, and there is the impulse to follow it at any cost. "Here am I, send me." The uncertainty of weeks, and perhaps of months, is all gone. Isaiah comes from the temple with his life's work settled. However resolutely he had stood against former calls to the prophetic office, he succumbs completely now, and henceforth gives himself to the proclaiming of God's message to the world.

That this call was supernatural in the true sense of being Divine, is as unquestionable to me as it was to its object. But that its manner of operation was not essentially different from thousands of other calls is a truth too important to be lightly thrust aside. God has been calling men to His service all through the ages. Doubtless there is a personal appropriateness in the form of every call. Nevertheless God is the

[1] John xiii. 10.

same in all ages; man is man in all ages; and the Divine influence upon the soul is substantially the same. We can have no purpose to lower Isaiah's call. On the contrary, I believe the right explanation raises it. It is a greater thing that God keeps every planet in its place than that He should disarrange the system by the temporary stopping of one of them. The speaking of God to every soul that listens is vastly more supernatural, to use a too hackneyed term, than the speaking only to a soul now and then. The important thing about such a call is its reality. It is a bad condition for a man to be a blacksmith whom God calls to be a carpenter; it is much worse to be a prophet contrary to the Divine will. Isaiah's call was real. It led him to his true life, and for forty years he was the leading figure in the Jewish Church, if not in the Jewish State.

This chapter is growing apace in spite of my efforts to be brief. But room must be made for an account of the summons of one other prophet, one of the most interesting of all the men of God of the olden time, a man whose whole life was a martyrdom, who saw all his efforts apparently come to naught, who watched the State decline and then go to ruin, and who was conscious of the degradation of the popular religion—Jeremiah of Anathoth.

Jeremiah was a priest, and seemingly derived his support from the revenues of an order which he did not hesitate to expose with vigour. Whether he exercised the priestly office in his younger days we do not know. But we do know that God had more important business for him than killing animals or

laying fire upon the sacred altar. This prophet has told us of his call, and we turn first of all to his own story.

In the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (B.C. 626) "the word of Jahveh came to me thus: Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest from the womb, I sanctified thee; a prophet to the nations I have made thee.

"Then I said, Alas, Lord Jahveh: Lo, I have no ability in speaking; for I am but a youth.

"But Jahveh said unto me, Do not say, I am but a youth: for to all that I send thee, thou shalt go; and all that I command thee thou shalt speak. Have no fear because of them: for I shall be with thee to deliver thee: utterance of Jahveh.

"Then Jahveh put forth His hand and touched my mouth; and Jahveh said unto me, Lo, I have put My words in thy mouth. See, I have appointed thee this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to destroy, to tear down and to root out, to build and to plant."[1]

We find here unusually full information about the young priest's struggle before he was willing to lay aside the ephod for the hairy mantle. Jeremiah was as much a fatalist as the average Oriental. God's summons to him was no sudden impulse. Before he was born he was destined of Jahveh to this high but dangerous office. The young priest seemed to feel the hand of destiny upon him, but the present impulse to begin prophesying seemed to him premature. He was but a youth, which may mean that he

[1] Jer. i. 4–10.

was still too young, or that he as yet had risen to but a subordinate position in the priestly order; or it may very likely include both objections. When he attains riper years and has reached a more prominent position in his order, then he can begin more auspiciously the almost impossible task assigned to him.

That objection would have validity if God sent a prophet into the world, and then abandoned him to his fate, as He was once supposed to have created a world, and, when it was once set going, had withdrawn His hand for ever. But the prophet's connexion with God was constant. God's words would ever be placed in his mouth, and he had but to let them come out. Such statements as this have been misunderstood by men unconscious of the Oriental manner of speech, and who have taken the words too literally. Interpreted in that way they lay a fine foundation for a strict doctrine of verbal inspiration.

But we have no ground to take them in that way. Jeremiah himself has supplied the corrective for that slavish literalism. Years later he compares the message of God to a fire in his bones. He had reached the determination to quit his unwelcome office with its dreary messages of woe. It was easy to form that resolution, but it was not so easy to extinguish that fire in the bones, that is, the Divine impulse to speak out the truth bravely, whether the truth would kindle hope or plunge into despair.

Jeremiah's call is not limited to the kingdom of Judah. On the contrary, he is established as a prophet to the nations and kingdoms of the world. In his day the truth was well established that Jahveh

was no mere national God. The whole world was subject to His will. The prophet could have no narrower interest than his God; therefore while primarily concerned with the fate of his own people, Jeremiah's interest was world-wide.

Jeremiah had been born in the reign of Manasseh. In those days the man who prophesied took his life in his hand. The soldier's office was less hazardous than the prophet's, for the soldier's enemies were all in his front. Conditions became more peaceful under the youthful Josiah, but Jeremiah knew that Josiah could not live for ever, and the story of his call appears not to have been written till its author had experienced the bitterness of persecution, and thus his account is influenced by his later hardships. Jahveh guaranteed not only that Jeremiah should never lack a true message,[1] but also that he should not want efficient protection. However severe the antagonism to the truth should become, the Divine hand retains its power, and will not fail him at the crises.

Finally, Jeremiah is warned in advance that the character of his ministry will be destructive. The constructive process would not be entirely overlooked, and yet we find four strong words of destruction and but two of construction.[2] This indicates

[1] Cheyne interprets the statement "I have put My words in thy mouth" thus: "I promise never to leave thee in uncertainty as to thy message; I will guide and overrule the natural promptings of thy heart and intellect as that thou shalt convey the only true conception of My will which the language can express or the people of Israel comprehend" (*Jeremiah, his Life and Times*, p. 5).

[2] "To pluck up and to destroy, to tear down and to root out, to build and to plant" (i. 10).

correctly the kind of work this prophet was ever called upon to perform. He must always warn his people that the inevitable disaster of the fall of Jerusalem was drawing nearer and nearer.

There is one feature of Ezekiel's call which makes it distinct from all others, and which is therefore especially worthy of note. The command was given: "Open thy mouth, and eat what I give thee." The result follows: "And when I looked, lo, a hand was stretched forth unto me; and, lo, in it was a book-roll; and he spread it before me: and it was written within and without. . . . And he said unto me, Son of man, eat what thou findest: eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel."[1]

The peculiar feature here is that Ezekiel's inspiration was to come from a book. There was a written standard to which he was to conform. The prophet was no longer a free creator under the influence of the Spirit, but was guided by a previous revelation which is received as authoritative. Jeremiah indeed had been sent about the country to preach the newly discovered book of Deuteronomy,[2] but Ezekiel is commanded to eat a book containing the message he is to preach.

It is true that we must guard against taking too literally the bold figures of this prophet. We are not to understand that there was actually a body of written doctrine placed in his hands to which he swore conformity. That sort of shackles is a more modern invention, coming to the Church, I suppose, through the example of the State. But it does

[1] Ezek. ii. 8b–iii. 1. [2] Jer. xi. 1–8. See additional note (7).

mean that in Ezekiel's day we have reached the era of sacred books which have an authority for the people. The inaugural vision must reveal to the prophet in what manner the word of the Lord is to come to him, and in Ezekiel's case it came in the form of a written message. We have truly now reached the age of the literary prophet, for it is not unlikely that many of Ezekiel's messages were originally issued in written form. Toy says very aptly, "the eating of a book indicates a literary conception of prophecy different from that of the preceding prophets, but in accordance with the literary growth of the nation." [1]

But little needs to be added to our study to summarise the chief results. Yet these points may well be brought together here.

1. The prophet came to his office from the highest motives. He believed that he was expressly called to his ministry by the voice of God, a voice which he dare not disregard. He was no seeker after high station. Whether the prophet's mantle seemed better or worse than his own, he made the exchange not to please himself, but to please God. The manner of acquiring office betrays itself in its administration. He who uses a public office, ecclesiastical or political, as the means to gratify ambition for station, or as a source of revenue, can never be the true servant of God or man. The prophets held an office to which they were led by a will other than their own, a condition plainly written in the history of their official lives.

[1] *Ezekiel*, in Polychrome Bible, p. 97.

2. The call was due to the Spirit of God acting upon the heart of man, not to an external voice, audible only to the outward ear. This idea underlies the statements of the prophets, and is clearly the only interpretation which can be satisfactory. We could not hold God responsible for every utterance even of His holiest prophets. There is no way to avoid that responsibility if we put a literal construction upon the introductory formula "Thus saith Jahveh." The right to use that depends upon a sufficiently clear conception of God to know what He would say. The one who knows the life and heart of Jesus Christ may well solve his problems by asking what Jesus would do in like circumstances. The spiritually minded prophet, living in constant communion with God, and grasping the principles by which God came to govern the world, could rightly preface his utterances with his "Thus saith Jahveh." It is fair to assume that the call to the office came in the same way as the messages which the office involved.

3. None the less the call was real, the inspiration was real, the revelation was real. Spiritual influences are just as real as physical. The voice in the heart is just as real as the voice in the ear, though its interpretation requires a more delicate understanding. No one would assert that any Hebrew prophet knew the mind of God perfectly; but partial knowledge is still knowledge. The prophet was obliged to translate the inspiration which affected his soul into speech which might affect the souls of his fellows. That he always translated with absolute accuracy cannot be main-

tained; that he had a real message to translate is not to be doubted. There may have been prophets who mistakenly felt that they were divinely called. Hananiah may have been as certain of his call as Jeremiah. Mistakes were surely possible on the part of those for whom a later age could find no other name than false prophets. But on the part of others no mistake was made. The final test of prophecy was stated by Jesus to be the fruits of the office. We may apply that test to every canonical prophet, and then rejoice in the assured result that not one was mistaken in his belief that he was called of God.

4. The call was irresistible. So far as we know, or can conjecture from what knowledge we have, every great Hebrew prophet entered upon office reluctantly. The reluctance was not due to a disinclination to serve God or man, but to a deep sense of personal unfitness for such high office. For a long time some of them withstood the invitation, even as St. Paul stood against the goad which was driving him Christward; but God is patient and persistent, and in the end all objections were overcome.

It may indeed be true that God called to prophecy many a worthy Hebrew who either never came to feel the call sufficiently or whose scruples could not be removed. This is a matter of opinion, however, and we can never know the facts. We do know, though, that in the case of those prophets who made prophecy great, the call was so persistent and imperative that their resistance was broken down.

5. The call demanded of the prophet a surrender to the will of God. A Divine message would be

given him not always welcome to the people; not always welcome to the prophet; but he must be true to his inspiration, at whatever sacrifice to himself. The prophets were often told that their words would fall on unwilling ears; that opposition would even take an active form; but that they must boldly rebuke vice, however ardent the people might be in their efforts to silence the jarring remonstrance. The note of the true prophet was his faithfulness to his guidance. The unfailing mark of those who were called false prophets as early as the Christian era was their yielding to the demand of men at the sacrifice of Divine truth. There were too many prophets then as now who kept the ear groundward. There is a species of modern prophet, happily somewhat rare, who seems to think that the more he antagonises men the more certainly he is pleasing to God. Such prophets may have existed in Israel, but we do not know them. He who exaggerates the demands of God is as unfaithful as he who minimises them. Happily men are quite likely in all ages to listen to the voice of the true and wise prophet even if they do not always follow his counsel.

6. The call explains the secret of the prophet's power. When God really sends a man out into the world to proclaim His will, that man must exercise a great influence, for God has put a mighty force in his hands. However unwilling the people may be to hear or do, still the prophet is endowed with the power of God. The prophets were strong, because they were true; they were brave for the same reason. Loyalty to the deepest convictions of their souls,

loyalty to the truth which God had put in their hearts, made them the commanding figures they were, and set them high in the world's esteem, in spite of a life of suffering, and often a death of martyrdom.

7. Finally, there was no road to the office of prophet except that of the Divine call. Sanday says very truly, "We never hear of a prophet volunteering for his mission. It is laid upon them as a necessity from which they struggle to escape in vain."[1] Probably nothing struck Jeremiah more keenly than the charge which Shemaiah made that he was a prophet by his own appointment;[2] for it was a base injustice touching a vital matter. Nothing shows the high ideal of our own ministry more forcibly than the question in the ordinal, "Do you think in your heart, that you are truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . to the Order and Ministry of the Priesthood?" No one can be a prophet without the express call of God in this age any more than in the days of the Hebrew dispensation.

NOTE.—It is interesting to see that in the suggestive book of the late Dr. A. B. Davidson, *The Called of God*, there are included among those who received the call of God: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Saul, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Nicodemus, Zacchæus, the Rich Young Ruler, and Thomas. A long period of time is covered in this list, many classes of men are selected, vastly different results were attained: not all of those were called to be prophets, but every call was real.

[1] *Bampton Lectures*, p. 150.

[2] Jer. xxix. 27.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROPHET'S CREDENTIALS

TO accomplish the Divine end of prophecy there must be not only a man who will speak, but also people who will listen. We have considered in the preceding chapter the conditions which led the man to speak. In this chapter we shall take up the terms upon which the people would listen. Doubtless there would be many factors in determining that result, but only one is of primary importance for us, namely, the assurance that the man was duly qualified to speak in the name of God.

If a preacher could convince the people that he was really a prophet, that he actually had a message which God wished conveyed to man, there would be no difficulty in securing a hearing in any age of the world.[1] Is it possible for the people to be certain that a particular man speaks the mind of God? If it is, by what means is that assurance to be given? In other words, what are the prophet's credentials?

This is no idle inquiry, but is often a burning question. There were thousands of Jews in the time of

[1] This truth was understood by Zechariah: "In those days, ten men from all the foreign tongues shall seize the skirt of a man who is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you" (viii. 23).

our Lord who would have received Jesus gladly and would have followed Him even to the Cross, if they had been fully convinced that He was the Messiah promised of God. But how could they know? Their rulers pronounced Jesus a misleading impostor; what evidence was available for them in the face of this decree?

The story of Micaiah, already discussed,[1] affords a good concrete instance, and is a case where the problem was serious. The prophets of Ahab cried with absolute unanimity, "Go up and prosper." The solitary voice of Micaiah said, "Go up to your ruin." Ahab had the best of reasons for distrusting the counsel of his obsequious seers; but if he had been persuaded that Micaiah knew the truth, is it likely that he would have set out upon an expedition certain to result in disaster? And even if Ahab had been ready to take such a risk, would the godly Jehoshaphat have been willing to fly directly in the face of Providence, if he had been assured that Micaiah spoke the truth? Then there was a larger body interested in that expedition than the two kings. Thousands in the armies knew that they were going to certain triumph or to danger and death, as the one prophet or the other rightly foresaw the issue of the campaign. Could they tell positively which was right? If they had known that the son of Imlah spoke the truth, and the others a subservient lie, would there not have been such wholesale desertions as to render the campaign impossible for lack of troops?

Another example of the grave nature of the problem

[1] 1 Kings xxii.; see also above, p. 52 ff.

is afforded by the conflict between Jeremiah and Hananiah. The latter is called the prophet[1] just as Jeremiah is, but his message is absolutely contradictory to Jeremiah's. He throws down the glove in the most public manner. In the temple, before the priests and all the people, he addresses Jeremiah: "Thus saith Jahveh Sabaoth the God of Israel: I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.[2] Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the house of Jahveh which Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon has taken from this place and carried to Babylon. And Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, and all the captivity of Judah who went to Babylon, will I bring back to this place, saith Jahveh: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon."[3]

The occasion of Hananiah's positive declaration is found in chapter xxvii. Jeremiah had put a yoke on his neck, and was wearing it as a symbol of submission; he had declared that safety could be found only in yielding to a superior force; that not only would the vessels already carried off not be brought back, but that there was serious danger that the few remaining in the temple might share the fate of their fellows; that the prophets who declared that the

[1] Jer. xxviii. 1. The difficulty was solved in Greek versions and Targums by altering the text and inserting "false" before "prophet."

[2] Jer. xxviii. 2, A.V., and R.V. "I have broken"; but the verb is the so-called prophetic perfect, which should be translated by a future tense.

[3] Jer. xxviii. 2–4. The Greek versions have a much simpler text, omitting much that is redundant, and that weakens the force of Hananiah's terse statement.

exile would soon be over spoke lies in the name of the Lord. Further, Jeremiah had already declared that Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) would die in exile.[1]

In the face of this utterance Hananiah stepped forward with his positive declaration, and followed it up by breaking the yoke which Jeremiah was wearing, and using his very violence as a symbol, says: "Thus saith Jahveh: even thus within two years will I break the yoke of Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, from the necks of all the nations."[2]

Here was a direct issue, one prophet flatly contradicting another. How were the people to know which was right? Were there any means by which they might determine positively which counsel to follow? It was manifestly an important question; for one way led to the downfall of the nation, the other to its preservation.

We may at once dispose of the notion that the question could be settled by official authority; for both of these men, as the Hebrew scriptures testify, were accredited as prophets; one was as much entitled to speak in the name of Jahveh as the other, so far as official sanction was concerned. It follows, therefore, that official garb was not a sufficient guarantee that he who wore it was loyal to the truth of God, a fact unhappily evident in all ages.

We may also see that Jeremiah, a great and loyal prophet of God, who suffered more for the cause

[1] Jer. xxii. 26.

[2] Jer. xxviii. 11. The ground of Hananiah's confidence is supposed to be his knowledge that help had been promised by Egypt. It is certain that Zedekiah had joined an alliance against Babylon.

God had put in his heart than any other Hebrew prophet, had no signal to give the people as absolute proof that his words were true and his opponent's false. At first the poor prophet can only offer the plea, and we are constrained to admit that it is a feeble plea, that the prophet who predicted disaster was more likely to be right than the prophet who predicted peace. And even after he had taken time for reflection, he could only replace on his neck the broken bars of wood with bars of iron, and pronounce the doom of death upon Hananiah. I said "the poor prophet": I said it advisedly. For think of the pain and humiliation of one conscious of the truth, on seeing his truth set at naught by a lie. And think of the anguish of a soul ready to die for the welfare of his people as he sees them ready to follow a false leader who will speedily conduct them to a terrible doom.

I think no prophet could be unmindful of the force of the question we are considering. He must, of course, be assured himself that he has authority to speak in God's name, and that as a consequence what he says is true. But however important the truth is in itself, its end is to be received and followed by the people. The truth that we should not hate our enemies, but love them, is beautiful and important written on the face of the heavens, but beyond question more beautiful and more important written in the lives of men. Jesus got a hearing with the people because He spoke as one with authority. The properly accredited prophet will be listened to as no other. It is vital to the prophet's

full accomplishment of his mission, that his position as a prophet be recognised.

It might seem as if the call would settle that problem for the people as well as the prophet. When Amaziah broke in upon Amos and tried to send him from Bethel, was not the prophet's only answer the story of his call? And did he not then proceed with his mission, without let or hindrance from priest or king? Did not the prophets tell the people how they were called of God as a reason why their oracles should be heard and their counsel followed?

The call was the best possible evidence for the prophet, but was of little service to the people. For that is the very thing to be attested. The very words "thus saith the Lord" are a claim to have been called of God, but the call is not evidence of the claim. Moreover, the prophets do not use the call so much in evidence of their true inspiration as in explanation of their exercise of office. Amos could scarcely hope to satisfy Amaziah by the statement that Jahveh constrained him to do what he was doing; but it did serve as an adequate reason for his refusal to obey the mandate of the king.

I think every prophet must have felt this difficulty, even though not all have expressed it. But we find the matter clearly set forth in the oldest version of the call of Moses. Moses was perfectly satisfied that God summoned him to the great task of Israel's rescue. Whatever doubts he may have had on that score had been removed. But before he could bring Israel out of Egypt he must persuade them that the plan for their escape was no scheme of his own, but

the purpose of the God of their fathers. So we read, "And Moses answered and said: But behold, they will not believe me, nor listen to my plea; but they will say, Jahveh hath not appeared to thee."[1] Moses sees that there is no use going down to Egypt until he can answer that objection. The solution given to Moses introduces us to the commonest of all the credentials of the prophet. "And Jahveh said unto him, What is that in thy hand? And he answered, A rod. And He said, Cast it to the ground. When he cast it to the ground, it became a serpent, and Moses ran away from it. And Jahveh said unto Moses, Put forth thy hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and seized it, and it became a rod in his hand."[2]

By his ability to turn the rod into a serpent, and such a serpent as would frighten a man who had lived forty years in the wilderness, and the serpent back into a rod, Moses would establish his claim to speak in Jahveh's name. It may seem as if there is but slight connexion between turning a rod into a serpent, and knowledge of the will of God; but it was simple enough from the Hebrew point of view. The changing of the rod into the serpent was supernatural, that is, a manifestation of an extraordinary force due directly to God. The man who could exercise the Divine power in one manifestation could do it also in others. If God enabled a man to work signs, there was nothing He would withhold from him. The sign, therefore, or as it is often less accurately called, the miracle, was regarded as the

[1] Exod. iv. 1. [2] Exod. iv. 2–4.

most convincing evidence of the power of God in man, and that verdict held true for all ages of Hebrew history.

When Moses went to the Egyptian court to demand the release of the Hebrew people, he had no hope of persuading Pharaoh to comply except by proving to him that the demand would be backed up by such a display of Divine power as no king would dare withstand.[1] The story of the plagues is the story of a series of signs by which Moses sought to demonstrate to Pharaoh his own endowment with the power of God.

"All Israel, from Dan to Beersheba," so we read in 1 Samuel iii. 20, "knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of Jahveh." How did they know it? We are told that "Jahveh was with Samuel, and let none of his words fall to the ground."[2] That might mean that Jahveh fulfilled all of Samuel's sayings, but it admits of a larger interpretation, that whatever Samuel said or did was upheld by Jahveh. That statement suggests that there was undoubtedly a popular misconception of the relations between God and His prophet. The truth is, of course, that God will sustain His prophet just as long as he is true to his Divine guidance, and not a moment longer. If the salt loses its savour it is fit for no place but the dunghill. Christ promised that the gates of hell should not prevail against His Church. The pledge will hold so long as the Church is Christ's, *i.e.* true to

[1] Moses's rod was made the symbol of his wonder-working power before Pharaoh as well as before the Israelites (see *e.g.* Exod. iv. 17).

[2] 1 Sam. iii. 19.

His purpose; but if the Church shall ever cease to be Christ's, His sheltering arm will be withdrawn in a moment.

But the mass of the Hebrews did not have so refined a conception. Their idea was that when God set a man up as a prophet, the prophet might do or say what he pleased, and God was bound to sustain him. In other words, the powers placed in the hands of a prophet were unconditional. Because Jahveh was with Samuel, none of his words were allowed to fall to the ground.

Samuel did not hesitate to make use of his miraculous power to convince the people that his words were true. This appears in one of the two stories of the establishment of the kingdom,[1] in which Samuel is represented as wholly adverse to the new order. He must convince the people of their error, and he does it by a sign. At his call Jahveh sent a thunderstorm at the time of the wheat harvest. Nothing could be less miraculous in America than a thunderstorm at harvest-time, but in Palestine it was almost as unusual as a snowstorm in July,[2] and naturally produced a great effect upon the people, persuading them that the Lord did indeed uphold the words of His prophet, and that their wickedness was very great.

Elijah stakes upon the issue of a sign the right of Jahveh's claim to be the God of Israel. At Carmel

[1] For a fuller discussion of these accounts, see the author's *Old Testament from the Modern Point of View*, p. 168 ff.

[2] "As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool" (Prov. xxvi. 1).

he summoned the whole mass of Baal's prophets to offer a sacrifice to their God while he offered one to Jahveh. Both parties were to lay the dressed victim on the wood, but not to put fire underneath. Then the challenge is boldly given: "And do ye call upon the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Jahveh; and it shall be that the god who answers by fire, he is God indeed."[1] In spite of the twelve barrels of water which were poured over Elijah's pyre, his prayer was heard, and the fire descended and consumed the sacrifice and the wood, and even the stones of which the altar was made, as well as the water in the trench. We need not trouble ourselves in this connexion with the question of the historicity of this story. We are chiefly concerned with Hebrew ideas, and whether this story is based on fact or fiction, it is clear that the Hebrews believed such things to be possible. Elijah was supposed to substantiate his message that Jahveh alone was the God of Israel by a stupendous sign, the force of which no one could resist.

It is a striking fact that the moment we reach the canonical prophets, and these were the great prophets, the sign occupies an inconspicuous place. Most of them, so far as we know, never wrought signs at all. Amos had a fine chance for the display of that kind of evidence when Amaziah attempted to silence him, but he made no appeal to other than spiritual power. Jeremiah had a splendid opportunity to crush his false opponent by a display of power which could only come direct from Heaven. He does, indeed,

[1] 1 Kings xviii. 24.

declare that Hananiah would die for his sins within the year, but that event was too long delayed to be effective as a sign.

Yet the sign does play a part in the prophetic career of the greatest of the great prophets. Isaiah wished to turn Ahaz from his fatal policy of an alliance with Assyria, which meant the degradation of Judah to a vassal state. The prophet declared that such succour was unnecessary; for the Syro-Ephraimitish coalition, which was the cause of Ahaz's terror, had no endurance, and would soon burn out what vitality it had. He offered proof that what he said was the word of God: "Ask thee a sign from Jahveh thy God, deep as sheol or high as heaven."[1] No matter how hard the sign might be to work, whether it was centred in the depths of earth or the heights of heaven, the prophet declared his readiness to stake his counsel upon its successful accomplishment. When Ahaz, with mock piety in his voice, refused the sign that was offered, that is, when it was clear that Ahaz refused to listen to God, being bent upon his own mad policy, then Isaiah gave him a sign, not, though, of the safety of Judah; for Ahaz's disobedience changed the issue of the future, and the child Immanuel was in one respect a sign of the disaster which the king's error would bring upon Judah.

When Hezekiah was seized with so severe an illness that the prophet declared that he would die,[2] the

[1] Isa. vii. 11.

[2] This incident need occasion no question of prophetic infallibility. The prophets were not infallible; and in any case there is no warrant for supposing that Isaiah meant any more than to pronounce an opinion based upon Hezekiah's symptoms. From the fact that he treated the

king prayed earnestly against death, and his prayer was heard. Isaiah was then sent to him with the message that he would yet live fifteen years. The prophet was not delivering an opinion of his own, but pronouncing the word of God. To prove this word he offers a sign that the shadow on the king's step-clock should go forward or backward ten degrees.[1] The king said that it would go forward itself; that would be no sign; let it go backward ten degrees. And backward it is said to have gone in answer to Isaiah's prayer to Jahveh.[2]

Hezekiah demanded a sign which at the same time would be a miracle; otherwise he could not see that it would prove anything. But the sign was by no means always miraculous. In the late prophets the term is generally applied to natural events. Thus when Isaiah goes naked and barefoot, his conduct is a sign to Judah.[3] Though not miraculous, his slave's

king for his ailment, Isaiah may have been a sort of practitioner in the art of healing. It would then not be the first case in which a patient has disproved the physician's prediction of death.

[1] I have followed the fuller version in 2 Kings xx. In Isa. xxxviii. the story is briefer, and the king is not offered a choice. The prophet declares that the shadow on the dial will go back ten degrees, and it does so; but there is no mention of the prophet's prayer. This version has the appearance of greater originality than that in Kings.

[2] This miracle presents a serious difficulty, which has been strangely dealt with by those bound to maintain the literal integrity of the Bible. The sign would naturally involve a backward course of the earth on its axis, and would be a degree more unnatural than Joshua's stopping of the sun. To regard the transaction as a juggler's trick, as many conservative commentators do, may be in harmony with Oriental habits, but it scarcely throws light on the ways of God. It is very likely that this story is based upon a fact which has been so obscured by successive narrators that the original statement is no longer recoverable.

[3] Isa. xx.

dress was a token or symbol of coming events. Jeremiah and Ezekiel use the natural sign frequently, and the miracle not at all. There is no record of a miracle worked by either of these great men. In fact, as we shall see shortly, the miraculous sign had already fallen into disrepute among the great men. But evidence is not lacking that the mass of the people never ceased to look for the sign as evidence of a man's authority to wear the prophet's mantle. In the pathetic description of the fallen condition of Israel in Maccabean days we find this :—

> "Our signs we see not, nor is there prophet ;
> With us is not one that knows how long."[1]

The lack of signs and the lack of a prophet are virtually one and the same.

It is so well known as to need only mention that the Jews constantly demanded a sign of Jesus as proof that He spoke with Divine authority. Even when He was hanging on the Cross, the cry was raised that His persecutors were ready to accept Him as the Messiah if He would give them a convincing sign by descending from the Cross. In spite of this feeling that Jesus had wrought no adequate sign, it is beyond question that many were persuaded by virtue of the miracles He had performed. Nicodemus states the matter from the point of view of the upper classes, for he was well educated both in head and heart : "No man can do these signs that Thou doest, except God be with him."[2] The masses looked at the matter in the same way : "He hath done all

[1] Ps. lxxiv. 9. See p. 39.

[2] John iii. 2.

things well: He maketh even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak."[1]

Yet the ability to do a sign, however marvellous it might be, did not always serve as decisive proof. Many wonders were done in Egypt, even bearing hard upon the people, before Pharaoh released the Israelites from bondage. Ahaz in effect told Isaiah that he would not accept his counsel even if he did support it by a sign high as heaven or deep as sheol. The Sanhedrim made an exhaustive investigation of Jesus' cure of a case of congenital blindness, and rendered it as their final opinion that, while they could not deny the cure, the healer was a sinner.[2] So His casting out demons was attributed to alliance with Beelzebub the chief of demons.

The sign was unsatisfactory for another reason: its performance was not restricted to the men of God. Moses ran against this difficulty at the very start. He and Aaron went before Pharaoh, and as evidence of their Divine mission turned the divining rod into a serpent. But the king calls in his magicians, and every one of them turns his rod into a serpent by the secret art.[3] It is scarcely reasonable to suppose that Moses in this particular case exercised a power different from that of the Egyptian magicians. If that conclusion is sound, then we are almost startled by the suggestion that the signs are due to a magic art, still much in vogue in the East as a part of the religious vocation,[4] and in the West as an easy means

[1] Mark vii. 37. [2] John ix. [3] Exod. vii. 8 ff.

[4] The most wonderful of the feats performed in India are the work of men belonging to religious orders.

of securing a competent livelihood.[1] The understanding of the true nature of most of the signs is not improbably the explanation of the disrepute into which they fell.

The people are, however, not left to inference, but are expressly warned against signs and wonders as proof of the authority of one who essays to speak in the name of their God: "If a prophet or a dreamer appear in thy midst, and give thee a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder came to pass, which he spake when he said, Let us go after other gods, . . . ye shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer, but Jahveh is testing you to find out whether you are loving Jahveh."[2] The writer does not deny the signality of the wonders; but he asserts that they prove something very different from what their performers suppose. The signs are to prove the strength of Israel's faith, not the authority of the prophet's utterance. The sign can do its Divine work, only if the people disregard its apparent leading.

The teaching and practice of Jesus are the decisive blows against the apologetic value of signs. The temptations which He endured were in substance merely the settlement of the problem in His own ministry whether He was to depend upon signs or not. The answer was clear, and His course consistent with the settlement reached at the beginning. In every case He refused to give a sign as proof of His authority; He lamented the popular craving for

[1] *e.g.* the healing by Christian scientists.
[2] Deut. xiii. 2–4.

miracles;[1] and gave this express warning to His disciples: "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray if possible, even the elect."[2] The true voice of God could not be hazarded on the issue of a sign. So it is testified of the forerunner of the Christ, "John indeed did no sign."[3]

In view of these facts, it is singular that the miracle has played such an important rôle in the Christian apologetics of the past, and to a certain extent of the present. Someone has said that the remarkable growth of Christian science is the measure of the credulity of the people. It may be more truly said that it is a measure of the persistence of the belief in the apologetic value of signs. The healer removes the ache, and the cure is a sign of the Divine authority of the whole system. It would be quite as reasonable to set up Mr. Kellar's wonderful exploits as evidence that the moon is made of green cheese. The logical difficulty with the sign is the lack of connexion between the proof and the thing to be proved. One may be able to relieve a toothache by mental processes; but he does not thereby establish the medley of philosophy and religion as set forth by Mrs. Eddy. One may turn his rod into a serpent, and that does prove him possessed of a mysterious power, but it does not demonstrate that God wishes Pharaoh to release his most valuable slaves. The miracles of

[1] As a good example we may cite John iv. 48; Jesus says to the nobleman who sought succour for his son, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe."

[2] Matt. xxiv. 24; cf. Mark xiii. 22.

[3] John x. 41.

Jesus differ from most of the signs, in that they were inextricably bound up with His method of work, and were never meaningless wonders performed to impress the people. Their evidential value is to be found, not in the similarity to other signs, but in their difference from them.[1]

The sign, which was the most decisive proof of the Divine authority of the prophet in the early days, came to be regarded as wholly unreliable evidence by thoughtful men. What took its place in apologetics? If the sign was no proof, what was valid evidence for or against the claim of a seer?

A kind of evidence which developed late in Israel, and which has persisted down to the present time, is the fulfilment of predictive prophecy. Prediction is but a minor element in the highest order of prophecy. In time past the place of prediction was so unduly magnified[2] that it is not surprising that recent writers have almost ignored its existence. But the truth is in neither extreme. The power to forecast the future was one of the leading qualifications of the early fortune-telling seers;[3] and though prediction occupied a less prominent place in the later prophecy, we may

[1] The miracles of Elisha are most like those of the great Master. They were wrought for a beneficent end, not to astonish the people. For example, we may take the rescue of the axe, if indeed that is a miracle. The prophet who lost it had no money ; the axe was borrowed, and was very valuable. The poor prophet was in a serious difficulty, from which the chief extricates him.

[2] Justin Martyr's definition of a prophet makes him essentially a forecaster : "There were among the Jews certain men who were prophets of God, through whom the prophetic spirit published beforehand things that were to come to pass ere ever they happened" (*First Apologia*, c. xxxi.).

[3] See chap. i. p. 8 ff.

yet see its supreme importance by recalling the fact that all Messianic prophecy is of necessity predictive.

Messianic prophecy is looked at very differently to-day from what it was even a few years ago. The specific predictions of Christ, which our fathers believed they had found in vast quantity in the Old Testament, have not been able to bear the test of the microscopic examination of modern scientific methods. But the most radical scholar affirms with great positiveness the supreme importance of Messianic prophecy. But our concern now is not Messianic prophecy, but the fulfilment of predictive prophecy as a source of evidence. We find that this occupies a considerable place in the Old Testament, and a still larger place in the New Testament.

In its earliest form the appeal to fulfilment and the sign border on each other very closely. Thus in Samuel's calling of the thunderstorm, already referred to,[1] there may be almost as much proof in the fulfilment of the prophet's prediction that a thunderstorm would come as in the thunderstorm itself.

Micaiah stakes his mission as a true prophet of Jahveh upon the fulfilment of his prediction of disaster; the prophet's reply to the king's order to put him in prison until he returned in peace was, "If thou ever return at all in safety, Jahveh has sent no message by me."[2]

Jeremiah alluded to this test of prophecy when he was confronted by Hananiah: "the prophet who predicts peace: when the word of the prophet is fulfilled, then will he know the prophet whom Jahveh

[1] See above, p. 113.

[2] 1 Kings xxii. 28.

has truly sent."[1] The proof of the Divine mission is to be found in fulfilment of the prophet's words. The prophets of old foretold war, evil, and pestilence. The presence of these evils proves the inspiration of those who predicted them. If the peace which Hananiah so confidently predicts shall actually come, it will be adequate proof that Jahveh truly speaks by him. There is no reason to doubt that Zedekiah's growing feeling in favour of Jeremiah's counsel, as the final catastrophe grew near, was due to his observation that the course of events was following with painful closeness the forecasts of the persecuted prophet.

Jeremiah had long before preached to the people the contents of a law book which gave a rule to determine the true prophet from the false. The problem is put in the question: "If thou say in thy heart, How shall we know the word which Jahveh has not spoken?" Then the answer is given: "Whatever the prophet speaks in the name of Jahveh, and it occurs not, nor comes true, that is the word which Jahveh has not spoken."[2] The final test of prophecy is its fulfilment. Briggs places a wider interpretation on this passage than it will bear.[3] What he says about the test of prophecy is true, but it does not follow from this passage. The one test here given is fulfilment.

Ezekiel found quite early in his career as a prophet a widespread scepticism based upon the non-fulfilment of prophecy. It had come to be a proverb in the land of Israel that "the days grow long, and every vision fails."[4] The prophets had long declared

[1] Jer. xxviii. 9.
[2] Deut. xviii. 21 f.
[3] *Mess. Proph.*, p. 23 f.
[4] Ezek. xii. 22.

that disaster was near at hand. As the days went by and nothing happened, the people lost confidence in the prophetic forecast. Ezekiel himself does not dispute the conclusion, but he does reject the premises. He declares that the present generation will see the downfall of Jerusalem, and so have the proof of prophetic authority and power. Ezekiel in Babylonia, like Jeremiah in Jerusalem, gained repute as a prophet as the approaching disaster became only too plain to his fellow-exiles.[1]

In Deutero-Isaiah we find the most use of this kind of evidence. The appeal to fulfilment is there much more frequent than anywhere else in the Old Testament. The long sojourn in a foreign land, and the inevitable weakening of old religious ties, made a new apologetic necessary. The prophet of the exile seeks it in the right place. The character of Jahveh as Creator of the world, as the providential director of the affairs of men, was the ground upon which he based his hope. Jahveh is made to challenge the idols of Babylon :—

"Bring forward your suit, saith Jahveh ;
Produce your idols, says Jacob's king.
Let them draw near and announce to us what shall happen.
The former events how they were foretold, do ye announce, that we may reflect upon them :
Or else the future events do ye declare to us, that we may work their issue ;
Announce the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods."[2]

[1] See especially Ezek. xxxiii. 33.
[2] Isa. xli. 21 f. Cheyne's translation. See also xlii. 9 ; xliii. 8 ff. ; xliv. 7 f.

Jahveh's power to forecast the future—a power the prophet denies to the Babylonian gods—is a strong argument for Israel's return to the worship of the God of their fathers.

In a subsequent passage the fulfilment of prophecy is looked at from another side. Among the acts of Israel's God the prophet specifies: "Fulfilling the word of His servants[1] and the counsel of His messengers He confirms."[2]

This statement is peculiarly interesting, because it opens up a field of inquiry somewhat akin to that suggested by the statement that Jahveh let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground.[3]

Literally this passage implies that Jahveh fulfils what the prophets said because they said it. We are reminded of the famous declaration of Elijah: "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."[4] Is it true that Jahveh delegated to a prophet a power to speak or act according to his own discretion, and that Jahveh is bound to support the act or deed? Was that idea prevalent among the prophets? Did they believe themselves clothed with so great a power?

These questions raise a large subject. We cannot follow it out in all directions, but will look at the matter in a simple way. First, we may say confidently that God never delegated to any man a Divine power to use as he willed. Naturally I do not wish to

[1] I follow Dillmann and Cheyne in reading the plural. The sense and parallelism with "messengers" require this. The servants were the whole body of the prophets, not a particular one.

[2] Isa. xliv. 26. [3] See above, p. 112. [4] 1 Kings xvii. 1.

be taken too literally. I suppose we are all possessed with Divine power after a sort, and we may certainly use it as we will. But we are dealing here with the extraordinary power of the prophet. The prophet was a man of God, not because God was bound to do the prophet's will, but because the prophet was bound to do God's will. That Jesus was greater than any prophet, we might know from the stress He lays upon the complete surrender of His will to God's.[1]

It is not so sure, however, that the prophets themselves always understood the limitation of their powers. Amos, indeed, comprehended it, and stated the truth finely: "The Lord Jahveh will take no action except He disclose His purpose to His servants the prophets."[2] Such a passage as that in Isaiah, quoted above,[3] may be interpreted as a free expression of the same truth. The idea in the prophet's mind may be that Jahveh confirms the words of His servants, for the very reason that the word of the servants was the word of the Master. It is quite probable that the distinction is one that would not occur to a prophet. His word and Jahveh's word were so completely one that, in his mind, a distinction of cause and effect could hardly exist.

In these cases the fulfilment refers to the predictions of prophets who had foretold both the exile and the restoration. This seer discerns the end of the

[1] It is true that Jesus acknowledges a power to do that which is forbidden by a moral constraint. He had power to call angels to His succour, yet it would not be right for Him to do so (Matt. xxvi. 53 f.). [2] Amos iii. 7. [3] See p. 124.

enforced sojourn in Babylon, and so declares the end as foreseen and foretold. But he had begun his declarations of the fall of Babylon and the release of the Jews long before it happened.[1]

The prophet therefore, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel before him, was soon able to appeal to the fulfilment of his own words, not as proof of his own foresight and sagacity, but of Jahveh's unbounded knowledge and power. Isaiah xlviii. is a review of the situation of the exiles just after Cyrus had taken Babylon. The prophet naturally sounds the note of triumph because Jahveh's word is fulfilled, and with this proof he would inspire the sceptical exiles with a clearer faith. I quote a single passage:—

"I have declared the former things from of old: yea, they went forth out of My mouth, and I showed them: suddenly I did them, and they came to pass."[2] In fact, the very object of Jahveh in foretelling what should come was the kindling of a stronger faith: "Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; therefore have I declared it to thee from of old; before it came to pass I showed it thee; lest thou shouldst say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them."[3] It was not enough that Jahveh should restore exiled Israel; the mere act, however glorious, might be attributed to the images; but when the act was at the same time the fulfilment of prediction uttered long before, then

[1] Several years ago I dealt with this subject in a paper on the Historical Movement Traceable in Isaiah xl.–lxvi. *Andover Review*, August, 1888. [2] Isa. xlviii. 3. [3] Isa. xlviii. 4 f.

the forecaster had strong proof that he who foresaw was also he who fulfilled.

The problem of the restoration is just now a vexed one among Biblical scholars. There is a rapidly growing belief that there was, properly speaking, no restoration at all, so far as the exiles were concerned: that to the extent that Jerusalem was rebuilt, it was the work of those Jews who had never left Palestine. It falls to me to take up this difficult problem in another place;[1] it only concerns me here to say that if any of the exiles returned to Judah, and it is difficult to believe otherwise, their faith in their God was largely rekindled by the argument from the fulfilment of prophecy. Whatever final value the argument may have in apologetics, there can be no doubt that it has served its purpose in its day.

But, after all, the evidence from fulfilment was in greatest vogue in the Apostolic age. Jesus did, indeed, appeal to this argument,[2] but only rarely. To the Apostles, whose field of labour was the race of Israel, it was the chief and most effective argument. The Jews believed that there was a great body of predictive prophecy in their Scriptures; they believed that it would be fulfilled to the very letter;[3] the test of the Messiah would be His correspondence to prophecy.

It is clear then that to convince a Jew that Jesus was the Christ, it was necessary to show that the life of Jesus was in accord with Messianic prophecy.

[1] "Ezra and Nehemiah," *International Critical Commentary*. (In preparation.)

[2] "The scriptures must be fulfilled" (Mark xiv. 49).

[3] *e.g.* The determination of the birthplace of the Messiah (Matt. ii. 4 ff.).

Thus we understand the oft-recurring phrase in St. Matthew's Gospel, which was surely written for Jewish readers, "that it might be fulfilled," as if Jesus ordered His life according to the predictions of the prophecy of old.

Certain Jews beyond the Jordan found testimony both to John and to Jesus in the fulfilment of the former's predictions. Though John did no sign and therefore lacked one of the commonest credentials of a prophet, yet "all things whatsoever John spake of this man (Jesus) have come true."[1]

Much stress was laid upon this argument in Christian apologetics until quite recent times.[2] In the present day apologists make little appeal to this argument, for the larger and more accurate knowledge of the Bible has greatly impaired its value. We are now constrained to admit that much of the predictive prophecy never has been fulfilled, and probably never will be fulfilled. And that is not all. It has frequently happened that the actual event was radically different from the prediction. Naturally we cannot base the inspiration of the prophet upon his power to foresee the future, if at any time his foresight proves incorrect. God's foreknowledge is accurate: and if a man partook of God's foresight his must needs be accurate too.

It may seem that the failure of correspondence between prediction and fulfilment has more than a negative force. It certainly fails to prove the inspiration of the prophets; but does it not also prove that they were not inspired? The negro who recently

[1] John x. 41.

[2] See Bruce's *Apologetics*.

predicted a tidal wave which would destroy an important resort on the American sea-coast had quite a following until the day came for fulfilment. As the sea obstinately refused to roll in at the appointed time, it was agreed, even among those who had been deluded, that the prophet was a fraud. Is a similar judgment to be pronounced upon Jeremiah because some of his predictions still await fulfilment? Or do the Apostles lose credit because they declared that Jesus would return to earth in their day?

We must lay aside any consideration of time; that is, mere delay in fulfilment is not to be reckoned against the foretellers. The nearer one comprehends the mind of God, the less arbitrary are distinctions of time and place. One day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.[1] If a prophecy is reasonably fulfilled in other respects, the time question need never disturb us. This consideration helps a little in removing the difficulty; but it must be frankly admitted that it does not go far. We are forced to admit that a true prophet may be an indifferent forecaster, or else deny that there ever was a true prophet.

The prophets were sent to Israel to save the nation, not to play the rôle of soothsayers and to withdraw the veil of the future to satisfy a morbid curiosity. It is but occasionally that they venture predictions at all, and then chiefly as expressions of their sublime faith in God. It is clear that the faulty interpretation of the prophets has been

[1] See Phillips Brooks' sermon on "The Shortness of Time"; and Briggs' *Messianic Prophecy*, p. 52 ff.

responsible for no little of the mischief. They have been made to predict where they did not predict at all,[1] and they have been made to foretell details which were quite foreign to their minds.[2] The prophet was led to see that the conditions in Israel would produce certain results whether of weal or woe. They declare what those results will be, hoping thereby to restrain Israel from the vice which will result in evil, or to arouse them to the virtue which will issue in good. They were not trying so much to disclose in detail what the future would be, as to kindle enthusiasm for a sober, righteous, and godly life. They dressed up their picture of the future so as to make it impressive for the present. They are therefore scarcely to be held responsible for a failure in accuracy. They were not realists, but idealists of the boldest sort. A novelist is condemned by a realistic critic because a character he has portrayed is not true to life. But what does that matter if the character is interesting and instructive?

Moreover, as already suggested, much of the prediction was conditional[3] upon Israel's conduct. The brightness or darkness of the future, which the

[1] *e.g.* when St. Matthew quotes "Out of Egypt have I called My son" from Hosea xi. 1, where it is a mere historical statement without allusion to the future at all.

[2] In the Bethlehem prophecy already alluded to, it was no part of the prophet's purpose to foretell where Jesus Christ should be born (see Micah v. 2).

[3] Conditional prophecy is a big subject in itself. Jonah was unwilling to announce the destruction of Nineveh because he felt sure that the Ninevites would repent, and then God would not fulfil his prediction. He knew that the issue of his forecast depended upon the conduct of the people whose destruction he announced.

prophet graphically depicts, is dependent upon the life of the people. Many a glorious prediction remains unfulfilled because the nation was too unworthy, and some fearful disasters announced by the prophets failed to appear, because Israel repented.

Finally, it must be noted that inspiration and infallibility are by no means the same. A prophet might have his whole soul charged with the Spirit of God without becoming thereby possessed of a knowledge of the future, which God has wisely kept exclusively within His own ken.

Prophecy urgently demands a more immediate test than fulfilment affords. To take the problem of Zedekiah and his court, already quoted,[1] it is plain that the test of fulfilment could not be determined for two years. If Hananiah was right, however, it was essential that the whole power of the nation should be marshalled for a defensive war; if, on the other hand, Jeremiah was right, then the people must beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Jeremiah's prediction could not be fulfilled if Hananiah's advice was taken, nor could the latter's hopeful outlook be realised if Jeremiah's tame policy was followed. It was a matter of life or death for the nation as they adopted one course or the other; it was evidently then a question of great moment, whose credentials were valid.

In the passage of Deuteronomy quoted above[2] there is a suggestion of a test which is less definite than signs or fulfilment, but nevertheless reaches a much higher truth. The writer's argument may be

[1] See p. 107 f. [2] Deut. xiii.; see p. 119.

plainly stated. Under no circumstances are you to worship other gods than Jahveh. No matter how cunningly you may be counselled, no matter by what miracles your seducers may support their plea, it is a fundamental obligation that you be loyal to Jahveh. A prophet may arise able to work the most wonderful signs, but if he urges you to depart from Jahveh, he is a false and mischievous prophet, and is to meet the penalty of death.

There is therefore a moral standard to which the prophet must conform, and the value of his prophecy was to be measured by that standard. A prophet who advises the people to do wrong is a false prophet, even if he is able to work miracles. Whatever value the sign might have as evidence, it must always give way to the higher test, conformity to the truth. Hananiah made a great hit before the people by breaking the symbol of submission upon his adversary's neck; Jeremiah put an iron yoke in place of the wooden one to show that truth could not be disposed of so summarily. In that very controversy Jeremiah seems to have groped, even though somewhat blindly, after that highest standard of prophecy. His point was that the people had reason to believe his message, all the more because it foreboded an evil time. If the people had paused to analyse, instead of madly seizing at straws in conformity with their desires, they might have seen many reasons to urge the accuracy of Jeremiah's forecast. He had prophesied already for several years, and had shown that he could not be swerved by persecution. The political outlook was all in favour of Jeremiah. The

impotence of an alliance of small jealous nations against the great power of Babylon, and the futility of dependence upon Egyptian aid, had been shown again and again in history. However difficult the problem appeared to Zedekiah's court, it is plain now, and was plain then, on which side was the lover of truth and its upholder at whatever personal peril.

Jesus develops this idea, and has given us in a few sayings the final credentials which we may ask of any prophet, and by which we may determine the validity of any prophetic utterance. "Beware of the false prophets," He said, showing that He had this very problem in mind, "which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them. . . . Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. . . . Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them."[1]

One might be unable to distinguish the grape-vine from the thorn-bush, but every man knows the difference between grapes and thorns, and the fruit determines the vine which bears it. If grapes are borne, then the plant is a grape-vine, and no miracle could prove it a thorn-bush. If the produce was thorns, then no sign, high as heaven or deep as sheol, could prove that the plant which bore it was a grape-vine. That was the principle of His answer to His troubled forerunner. He staked the Baptist's faith upon the fruit of the tree. "Go your way and tell John the things which ye do hear and see: the

[1] Matt. vii. 15 ff.

blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in Me."[1]

Yet this test is not devoid of difficulty. It cannot always be of immediate application; man is impatient to pull up the tares at once, and finds it hard to wait until the harvest days clearly reveal the difference between the wheat and the weeds. Occasionally it is important to have the knowledge at once, though more often than we realise it is the path of wisdom to allow full liberty to the suspected prophet. The fuller chance he has to bear fruit, the sooner his real character will be revealed. The world rids itself of false prophets quickly, when once their falseness is convincingly shown. The Church would have freed herself from heretical prophets more completely if, instead of putting them in jail, she had hired a hall for them.

Jesus offers another test, however, which is of immediate application. It was given for the benefit of those who were perplexed about their relations to Him. Was He a good man, as some declared, or did He deceive the people, as others alleged? Should one follow His word loyally, or join those who were already beginning to hound Him to death?[2]

To those who were thus troubled, Jesus offers

[1] Matt. xi. 4 ff.

[2] A wiser course than the latter was indeed open, as suggested later by Gamaliel about the Apostles (Acts v. 34 ff.). But to the average Jew there were but two sides, for God or against Him, and the choice could not wait.

this help: "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from Myself."[1]

Here is a test of prophecy which lies wholly in the hearer. There is a quality in him, provided his heart is in the right place, which makes him a capable judge of the Divine in another. There is a truth in his own heart which answers to the truth in another's heart. To be a judge of the truth, it is a prerequisite that one be a lover of the truth.

These two tests of Jesus are the final ones. The latter we are in need of applying all the time. This would have saved Ahab from the terrible death to which he was led by heeding the false voice of his subservient seers; it would have saved Ahaz from his costly alliance with Assyria; it would have saved Zedekiah from the fatal policy which he adopted as the result of the specious counsels of Hananiah. Every one of these kings desired to do his own will, and would have had his God confirm that, even as many a Christian's version of the Lord's Prayer would properly be "my will be done on earth as God's is done in heaven."

The first test, that of the fruits, has been relentlessly applied, and has separated the Hananiahs from the Jeremiahs. As early as the making of the Greek version the fruits were known, and Hananiah and others of his ilk were called by a name which their contemporaries could scarcely give them—false prophets. Every prophet of the present must know that he must face both tests. If he is a true prophet

[1] John vii. 17.

he will know it himself, and need have no fear of the derisive cries which may beset him; for in the end even the world will judge him by his fruits. Many a prophet has been denounced in his day as a bramble-bush who, when the test of the harvest could be applied, was shown to be the choicest vine, because he had brought forth the choicest fruit.[1]

[1] See Isa. liii.

CHAPTER VII

THE WRITINGS OF THE PROPHETS

FOR the knowledge of the prophets who preceded Amos, we are limited to such information as we find incorporated in the history of Israel and Judah. The historians chose such portions of prophetic biography as were most serviceable in throwing light upon the religious history of the people. The excerpts, usually mere fragments, fail to satisfy one who would gladly know more of such men as Nathan, Gad, Iddo, Ahijah, Shemaiah, and Micaiah. The selected portions are apparently taken bodily from lives of the prophets. These lives, however, are not autobiographies; the prophets did not write their own histories. Yet there is evidence that these early seers used the pen as well as the voice.

The Chronicler names as sources of his information a long list of prophetic histories. We find the following so mentioned: the Words of Samuel the Seer, the Words of Nathan the Prophet, the Words of Gad the Seer;[1] the Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, the Vision of Iddo the Seer;[2] the Words of Shemaiah the Prophet and Iddo the Seer;[3] A Midrash of the Prophet Iddo;[4] the Words of Jehu the son of Hanani;[5] the Acts of Uzziah written by Isaiah the

[1] 1 Chron. xxix. 29. [2] 2 Chron. ix. 29. [3] 2 Chron. xii. 15.
[4] 2 Chron. xiii. 22. [5] 2 Chron. xx. 34.

son of Amoz the prophet;[1] the Words of the Seers.[2] According to these statements, nearly all of the prophets known to us were historians. By "the Words of Samuel," the Chronicler means writing of Samuel. It is expressly said that Isaiah wrote the chronicles of Uzziah.

It is true that the Chronicler's authority is not very highly esteemed. The opinion prevails widely among scholars that all the above-quoted sources are, as a matter of fact, one and the same, and that a Midrash or annotated edition of the history of Israel and Judah.[3] The sections in which a certain prophet figured were called by his name, and finally assigned to his authorship. It would therefore follow that the above-named prophets were, as a matter of fact, merely figures in the history, and not authors of history.

On the other hand, it is beyond question that the authors of all Hebrew history were prophets. The books from Joshua to Kings were called by the Hebrews the Former Prophets; this naming may be a critical blunder, as Kittel supposes, but there is a good deal of sober truth in it, nevertheless, for the history everywhere bears the prophetic imprint. The motive is nowhere historical, but everywhere religious. The books were composed with a distinct moral

[1] 2 Chron. xxvi. 22.

[2] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 19. I follow LXX. reading החזים instead of a proper name Hozai; so Benzinger, Kuenen, and most others.

[3] But if we follow LXX., as Benzinger does, in 1 Chron. xxxii. 32, reading "and in the books of the kings," etc., then some of the prophecies were surely distinct writings. See further, Kittel, *Hist.*, ii. 223 ff.; Driver, *L.O.T.*[6], 529 f.; Kuenen, *Einleitung*, i. ii. 155 ff.; Benzinger, *Bücher der Chronik*, x. ff.

purpose. The authors cared little about the detailed facts of history, but much about the religious lessons of the same. The life of the people of the past was significant for the life of the people of the present. It was perfectly natural, therefore, that the defence of St. Stephen the martyr should be a review of Jewish history.

Now it is by no means improbable that the prophets in their addresses were wont to tell historic stories to reinforce their teaching. In fact, we know that such appeals to the past were not uncommon. The prophets were the educated men ; they knew the history of their people. They may themselves have never gone beyond the oral description of particular events. Their historical stories may have been put in written form by others. But some prophets certainly wrote the history of their nation, and it may well be that those known to us did an important part of this work. The Chronicler, therefore, may have preserved a true tradition, though inexact in his explicit statements. His professed extracts from prophetic writings show the post-exilic language; he therefore does not quote from original sources. My point is that from the Chronicler's witness, we may reasonably hold that these were prophetic historical writings, even though he does not take literal extracts from them.

Further, the Chronicler informs us that Elijah sent a letter to Jehoram the king of Judah. The letter was a prophecy, reproaching the king for his evil courses, and predicting disaster to king and people.[1]

[1] 2 Chron. xxi. 12 ff.

However it may be with the earliest seers, certain it is that for Amos and those who followed him, we are on sure ground. For them we are not limited to second-hand information, but have the original sources; not, indeed, a history of their times, but something far better, a record of the very words of these messengers of God. In this connexion certain questions inevitably force themselves upon us.

Whence came these records? Does the descriptive term "writing prophets" correctly represent the facts? Did these men with their own hands record their utterances? or did some other hand gather up such fragments as were available? Again, did the prophets write out in advance what they would say? or did they depend upon the memory, writing out each utterance after its delivery? And if this last be the case, did they write exactly what they had said? or were they influenced by that inevitable human tendency to improve or modify an address in the course of reproduction? Finally, what was the object of writing? Did their knowledge of the future constrain them to rescue their oral sayings for the sake of posterity, and for the making of holy writ? Had they literary ambitions? Or did they write, as they spoke, with an immediate object? and was that the moral and spiritual upbuilding of the men of their day and generation?

Some of these questions are not peculiar to the Old Testament. When as a lad I was reading the orations of Cicero against Catiline, I supposed at first that I was reading speeches which the great Roman orator had written in advance, and then read to his

auditors. But I came across passages which were due to the attitude of Catiline during the delivery of the speech. Cicero could not have anticipated that quailing of his victim. Then I began to ask most of the questions catalogued above, and especially this: if Cicero or a secretary wrote the speeches from memory, how do we know that we have his *ipsissima verba?* For stenographers existed neither in ancient Rome nor in ancient Israel.[1] Similar questions confront us in the New Testament. We have there what purport to be the words of Jesus. Now our Lord did not write Himself. The record of His sayings is due to His disciples, in the broad sense of that term. The words of Jesus differ very much as reported by St. John and by the other Evangelists. Are we quite sure that we have His exact words? Manifestly not, though we are loath to admit such an unwelcome truth; for the same parable or saying frequently exists in variant forms in different gospels. Some modern scholars have been making an effort to recover the exact words of Jesus by a retranslation into Aramaic,[2] the native tongue of our Lord. Their efforts have not been very kindly received, perhaps because Christians dread to see this question fairly opened. Such an apprehension is groundless. We may have our confidence shaken in the possession of our Lord's exact words; but the conviction will be persistent that we are in no doubt about His teaching.

Our concern now, however, is not the greatest of all teachers, but those men of the nation of Jesus

[1] See additional note (8).
[2] See, *e.g.* Briggs, *Gen. Introd.*, and works on New Test.

who preceded Him, and gave to the world such lesser light as God had been able to bestow upon them. To answer the inevitable questions, we have some direct and valuable evidence and some suggestive hints. From a careful study of these we ought to be able to draw some fairly accurate conclusions, though we may not find a detailed answer to every question raised above.

A word of warning may well be interposed here. We always need to be careful not to confuse facts and conclusions from the facts. There has been too much of that mixture in Biblical studies both by the harmonisers of the past and the radicals of the present. One is bound to interpret, he is of little use as a teacher otherwise; but he is an unsafe guide unless it is easy to see when he is arraying indisputable facts, and when he is stating his inferences. Facts are better on the whole, though interpretation is more interesting. In the work before us we will first of all present some facts which no one can gainsay.

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, 605 B.C., and therefore twenty-one years after Jeremiah had begun to preach, the prophet by Divine command dictated to Baruch, who served as his secretary, the prophecies he had delivered in the course of his ministry. The object of gathering a written collection of his utterances is stated in these words: "It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin."[1]

[1] Jer. xxxvi. 3; cf. also ver. 7.

The laborious task occupied Jeremiah and his scribe a year or more;[1] we may be sure that it was a big year's work.

Then Baruch read the whole collection of prophecies—the first book of the kind known to us in Hebrew history—first to the people assembled to keep a special fast, and later to the king's officers who had been told of the bold step of the persecuted prophet. These men felt that they must tell the king, first giving the authors of the dangerous oracles time to hide. The king seemed to think, like the Church of Rome with its *Index expurgatorius*, that unwelcome words may be wiped out by fire. The roll was burnt; but the prophet was left, and he immediately set to work to replace the lost book; and added to the new edition many prophecies of similar import.

Such are the salient facts told in Jeremiah xxxvi., a notable chapter and valuable for many reasons. It appears that Jeremiah had been preaching for some twenty years without any thought of recording his addresses. What led him to adopt a new course? To say that God commanded it solves the problem only to raise it in another form: Why did God so command?

Jeremiah himself gives a reason for Baruch's reading the prophecies to the people rather than himself: "I am restrained; I am unable to enter the house of Jahveh."[2] What was the restraint? The

[1] The command was given in the fourth year, the finished book was read in the ninth month of the fifth year (Jer. xxxvi. 1, 9). Therefore the time intervening was from ten to twenty months.

[2] Jer. xxxvi. 5.

word I have rendered "restrained" may mean imprisoned; but that sense is inapplicable here; the princes advised Baruch that he and his master had better seek a secure hiding-place as promptly as possible. If Jeremiah were already in jail, he could seek no shelter from the king's wrath. The restraint might be due to a vow or to "a ceremonial impurity," as W. Robertson Smith holds;[1] but that sense is weak in this place. Jeremiah was scarcely the man, priest though he was, to be kept from his real duty by petty questions of ritual. The restraint might be, and I believe was, the danger to which the prophet would be exposed the moment he appeared in public. The king's ire had been so aroused that Jeremiah could only speak in public at the peril of his life. If he had come forward again with one of his to the king treasonable utterances, it would certainly have been his last message. He was ready to lay down his life for his God; but at that time it would be a useless and untimely sacrifice.[2] Still the enforced silence galled him now as much as the enforced speaking at another time. In his dilemma the thought came to him that the pen was mightier than the sword. The works of Micah, and of other prophets doubtless, existed already in written form.[3] Here was an idea destined to be so important in his work that Jeremiah easily,

[1] *Religion of the Semites*, p. 436 f.; so Duhm, "Jeremia," *in loc.*

[2] But a short time before this the priests and prophets had tried to secure his execution; the temple would not be a very safe place for the delivery of such prophecies as he had written. The issue of events showed his wisdom. See also chap. x.

[3] Jer. xxvi. 18.

and I believe rightly, traces its origin to the inbreathing spirit of God. Jehoiakim might silence the voice, but the pen would make a record which would tell its tale even if the author paid the penalty with his life. So it appears that the true interpretation of these words gives us not only the reason why Baruch was reader as well as penman, but also why God commanded the prophet to write.

Jeremiah's object in writing, however, is not a matter of doubtful disputation. He had no thought of literary fame, no knowledge of the sacred writings in which in the providence of God his words would find no inconspicuous place; he was concerned with the immediate and pressing problems of his own day. If he could turn the present inhabitants of Judah from their sinful ways, God could be trusted to raise up other men for dealing with the problems which lay beyond his horizon.

Writing was a rare accomplishment in Jeremiah's time.[1] Whether he could handle the pen himself or not, we do not know, and need not care. We are told that he did not write himself, and beyond that we must be content to remain in ignorance.

We know that these prophecies were not written until after their delivery, and many of them very long after their delivery. Any man could gather up a summary of his teaching during past years from memory, if he were a true prophet, zealous for truth; but no man could recall the very words he had used

[1] In enlightened countries now, nearly every person can read and write. In Israel, writing was a profession, known and practised by comparatively few.

in his addresses. To suppose that Jeremiah wrote *verbatim* in the year 605 what he had said in the year 626 and the years intervening, puts a burden upon inspiration which is an unnecessary stumbling-block. The Holy Spirit stirs men to their work, but does not do it for them. We are therefore constrained to infer that Jeremiah reproduced such of his utterances as abided in his memory and were adapted to his present object, in their original substance, but in such form and language as would make them most powerful in their present task. His interest was not archæological, but spiritual.

What we know of Jeremiah's writing gives us the key to the writing of the other prophets. There is evidence in abundance that they, too, did not write in advance. To say nothing of the *a priori* improbability of an ancient prophet standing before the people with a manuscript or a tablet in his hand, or repeating, like a parrot, words already written and learned by heart, there is much direct and conclusive evidence. There are many cases in which they, like Cicero, adapted what they had to say to the conditions under which they were speaking. A few cases will make this point clear.

Amaziah broke in upon Amos while he was relating a series of visions. The prophet turned upon him with an *apologia pro vita sua*, and a prediction concerning the priest which he could scarcely have thought of before, and certainly could not record until after its delivery. Isaiah bids Ahaz ask a great sign which he holds himself ready to give upon the spot, and when the king declines his offer the prophet

pours forth *ex tempore* the wonderful Immanuel prophecy,[1] which has been such a stumbling-block to commentators. Isaiah quotes a wonderfully bright prophecy of Zion's glory, apparently intending it as the text of a hopeful address. But seeing the actual conditions of the people before him, he is turned from his purpose, and pours forth a severe indictment of the faithless and wicked nation.[2]

Jeremiah preached his sermon on the temple, a sermon which brought so much trouble to him, because he heard the people crying "the temple of Jahveh," putting a misplaced trust in God's interest in a sacred place.[3] Watching the potter one day at work with his wheel, he was led to declare that God's work in the world was like the potter's in the clay.[4] When he spent a night in the stocks, Passhur did not furnish him with writing materials, nevertheless Jeremiah was ready in the morning with a prophecy of ominous portent to his persecutor.[5] He was ever prepared to answer on the spot questions which were brought to him from the king.[6] His discourse upon the Rechabites hung upon their refusal to take the wine which he offered them in the presence of the people.[7]

When the elders of Israel came to consult the prophet Ezekiel, in exile in Babylonia, he was always able to give them a message at once.[8] His fine Messianic prophecy of the resurrection of the nation was occasioned by the despondent cry of the exiles:

[1] Isa. vii. [2] Isa. ii. [3] Jer. vii.
[4] Jer. xviii. [5] Jer. xx. [6] *e.g.* Jer. xxi.
[7] Jer. xxxv. [8] *e.g.* Ezek. xiv., xx.

"Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off."[1] The beautiful passage in which a prophet states the requirements of God in a manner never excelled, was due to the anxious inquiries of people who desired to know the will of God.[2]

Haggai's prophecies are largely conversational. He urges the people to set about the rebuilding of the temple. He presses the timeliness of the project because they excuse delay by saying, "The time has not come for Jahveh's house to be built."[3] The disparaging remarks about the new temple lead him to declare that the glory of this house will yet exceed anything which had been known before.[4] The questions he asked the priests in the presence of the people and their answers provided him with suggestions for a prophecy.[5] Malachi, hearing the people ask, "Wherein has God shown His love?" and "Wherein have we polluted Thee?"[6] finds in the answer the message of God to the people. Joel's great Messianic utterance, one of the finest in Holy Writ, was prompted by the magnificent spectacle of the great mass of the people, under the lead of the priests, pouring out their supplications for the exhibition of God's mercy.[7]

The prophet was a man of his times: he was a man promptly to meet emergencies as they arose. He could not be bound down by a cut-and-dried form, but must be quick to seize a chance, and to drive home every advantage he could gain. The

[1] Ezek. xxxvii. 11.
[2] Micah vi. 1–8.
[3] Hag. i. 2.
[4] Hag. ii. 3 ff.
[5] Hag. ii. 12 ff.
[6] Mal. i. 2, 7.
[7] Joel ii. 18 ff.

prophets were orators rather than essayists. It must not be inferred, however, that the prophets had the fixed habit of speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance. No modern preacher who loves to trust to *ex tempore* inspiration can find warrant for his indolent habit in the example of the prophets. If they knew how to turn the chance feelings or expressions of their hearers to good account, there is also sufficient testimony to the care with which they usually prepared their messages.

Perhaps the best evidence of all, paradoxical as it may seem, is the very readiness to speak God's word as the moment required. Our Lord counselled His disciples to make no preparation beforehand for their defence when they were brought to trial for His sake. The Spirit would not fail at a critical time the man who had been living in the Spirit always. The nation which is ready for sudden war is the one which has not been idle in time of peace. The man who is best prepared to speak unexpectedly is the one who loses no opportunity to keep the mind full. The prophets were men whose hearts were turned toward God. Their minds were ever bent to comprehend something of the mystery of life. They were earnest in their efforts to solve the problems of God's dealings with His people. They were therefore ready with a message from God when it was needed.

The prophets say nothing about specific preparation for particular prophecies. Who would think of incorporating into a sermon or speech the method of its preparation? In a book it is permissible for an

author to make revelations from the workshop; no such preface is tolerable in a speech. If the discourse does not tell its own story, the hearers will not accept any other evidence. Now the prophecies have the internal witness to careful work. The literary form, the coherence of thought, the fine choice of words, all proclaim the painstaking labour of a conscientious student. No one could easily believe that Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard,[1] or Amos's Arraignment of the Seven Nations,[2] were impromptu efforts.

There is information which, when rightly understood, has a direct bearing on this subject. How often in the prophets we read that God told His messengers to do a certain act, to speak certain words, and then that the messenger did as he was bid. There is more in such cases than a useless and wearying tautology. For example, God directs Elijah to go meet Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth fitly to pronounce his doom on the land obtained by blood and theft.[3] He sends Isaiah and his son to meet Ahab on the spot where the king is studying the problem of water supply, telling him in advance what he is to say.[4] He tells Jeremiah to carry his girdle to the Euphrates, and to let it decay there.[5] He warns Ezekiel that his wife is to die, but bids him abstain from every external mark of grief.[6]

What is the meaning of such directions? We can no longer hold that the prophet was a mere machine, just doing literally as he was bid, without any active

[1] Isa. v. [2] Amos i., ii. [3] 1 Kings xxi. 17 ff.
[4] Isa. vii. [5] Jer. xiii. [6] Ezek. xxiv. 15 ff.

intelligence of his own. Samuel could not have been carrying out Divine orders literally when he told the people that he had come to Bethlehem to offer a sacrifice, when as a matter of fact he had come to inaugurate a revolution against the house of the reigning king. It is easy to believe that Samuel thought that God so counselled him: it is impossible to believe that God actually did so. Moreover, if the prophets were but the mechanical mouthpieces of God, higher critics would have been constrained to give over their attempts at analysis on the basis of literary style.

Yet these directions are not without meaning. The prophet believed that God controlled all of his life, not a small part merely. There was to him no distinction between sacred and profane. There was no division of his life into a part which was God's business, and a part which was his own. His whole life belonged to God, and was guided by God. When therefore he had adopted a certain course of action after due consideration, or went forth to speak a certain message after careful preparation, there was only one way to state the fact to be true to his own conception, and to be understood of the people, and that is just the way he does state the fact, that God told him to do so. Would that every prophet of the Lord Jesus Christ were so to prepare for his work by hard study, earnest meditation, and fervent prayer, that he could feel deeply as he went forth to give the results to the world, that his Master was but sending him on an errand! Then indeed he might realise the high privilege of the service of God. Then he might

comprehend in all its fulness what Jesus meant by placing servantship above mastership.

But the previous preparation of the prophets was not accomplished by the pen, and we are now concerned with their writing. Whatever writing they did certainly followed the delivery of their prophecies. The chief exception, if indeed there be any, is Ezekiel. Some scholars hold that Ezekiel was distinctively the literary prophet, in that his prophecies appeared first in written form. The upholders of this view make little attempt to support it by tangible evidence. It is, in fact, the sort of thing about which one easily forms an opinion from broad general considerations, which it is not easy to prove or disprove by detailed evidence. It does not seem worth while to turn aside and take up this question fully. But if I were to do so, I am persuaded that we should conclude that much of Ezekiel was certainly not written in advance of delivery, and that, with the possible exception of chapters xl.–xlviii., there is no evidence that any of his prophecies were originally issued in written form.

The belief that prophecies were written long after delivery is the only reasonable explanation of a fact which we notice again and again, namely, the presence of historical allusions of different periods. Historical allusion is the easiest and most exact means of determining the date of any writing. But it often happens that we find along with clear historical evidence of a certain date, certain references to a much later time. Such a condition may be explained in three ways. 1. By assigning the prophecies to the later date.

2. By supposing that an editor had interpolated the later references to which he found the text applicable.
3. By holding that the prophets themselves coloured their earlier addresses by allusions to the conditions which were present at the time of writing.

Possibly all three of these methods must be used in the interpretation of prophecy. But that the last is one to which the student must often turn is, I believe, plain to the discerning eye. It seems quite unlikely that the story of Isaiah's call,[1] or Jeremiah's,[2] could have been written as it stands at the time the call was given. There is so much in each story which a prophet could only learn by experience, that we are forced to believe that the record of the call was made as the explanation of that experience. There is a long passage in Jeremiah[3] which seems to belong to the Scythian invasion. Many allusions there have no other such natural fitness as to the wild hordes which swept over the country and seriously threatened Judah. Yet there seem to be equally clear references to a condition belonging to a time some years subsequent.[4] The difficulty is easily removed in this case: for we know that Jeremiah did not write until 605 B.C.; he was not concerned with an exact reproduction of what he had said years before; he wanted a lesson for the present. God had turned back the terrible tide of barbarians, and He could turn back the hosts of Babylon. Jeremiah would naturally adapt his early utterance so as to make it forceful for the present.

[1] Isa. vi. [2] Jer. i. [3] Jer. ii.–vi.
[4] See further, Driver's *Introd.*[6], p. 252 f., and the references there.

That we have most prophecies in an edition later than the delivery, or in substance merely, is undeniably a loss; but the loss is more apparent to the literary than to the religious interest. The moment an author issues a new edition of a book, the value of the old editions becomes little. The student of the Hebrew language finds it difficult and expensive to keep up with the new editions of grammars, lexicons, commentaries, etc. The latest is almost invariably the most valuable; for the final judgment of an author is preferred to superseded opinions. The same principle applies to the prophets. The written issue of their prophecies bears the stamp of their ripest judgment. If we had Jeremiah's prophecies about the Scythians in their original form, doubtless they would be of greater historical value than the existing collection; but we should not have the final judgment of the prophet. If the prophets in reducing their utterances to writing improved the form, that is wholly a gain. Jeremiah was the author of his prophecies in written form. Baruch is careful to tell most explicitly that he wrote them from the mouth of the prophet: the scribe was a mere amanuensis.[1]

It is highly probable that this was the case with the other prophets as well. We have a good test of this in the case of Isaiah. Some of the prophets we know only from history; others we know only from

[1] Duhm is doubtless in the main right in ascribing the historical parts of Jeremiah to Baruch, though he goes pretty far at times. Jeremiah probably dictated the prophecies, and Baruch himself wrote the historical settings.

their own works. Isaiah we know from both. Chapters xxxvi.–xxxix. are incorporated bodily in his book from history, because the history deals so much with the prophet, and the bringing together of all sacred books into a single volume was not dreamed of in the days of Isaiah. In these historical sections we find many of Isaiah's utterances reported. They have usually a genuine ring. They are worthy of the great prophet, and are fit expressions of his power. But in style they differ considerably from the prophecies in his book. Though coming from the same lips, they are the record of a different pen. The historian—not the compiler of Kings, but the original author whose work he embodies—wrote Isaiah's words from memory. He knew in substance the great sayings of Isaiah at these critical moments. But the words of Isaiah are coloured by passing through his mind, so that while the thoughts are clearly Isaianic, the literary form is not. This difference is most naturally explained by the supposition that the prophecies of Isaiah, as found in his book, are the product of his own hand.

The prophecies bear the earmarks of oral discourse. They are never transformed to the form of religious essays. They have this witness to the fidelity of their reproduction. They are invariably in the form of direct address. This fact of itself means little, for many histories contain manufactured speeches given in the form of direct address. In Samuel and Kings the prophets are usually quoted in direct address. But there is a great difference between the invented and the genuine. In reading a prophecy we feel the

audience present. Either the authors were literary artists of the highest order, or the words are a faithful reproduction of a message from the prophet's lips. They bear the mark of the former so plainly that we can easily believe, on this ground alone, that they were not written out in advance of delivery. They often bear the imprint of the circumstances of their delivery. By their own hand, or by the office of a scribe, shortly after delivery in some cases, long after in others, the messages of the prophets were put in written form.

The purpose so clearly stated by Jeremiah, as quoted above, is the purpose of God, and it does not vary in different cases. The written word was to serve the same purpose as the oral word. When writing was once in vogue, the prophet could enlarge his ministry by the use of the pen. A prophet of the Christian dispensation began to write with the same object, though his writing was not intended as a reproduction of his speeches. St. Paul was a restless traveller; as soon as a fair foundation was laid in one place, he was eager to carry the Gospel to a new field. But there were quick departures from his standard. He could not always be going back to correct and confirm. But he could write, and the wonderful collection of his Epistles bears witness to St. Paul's desire to extend the area of his apostleship as widely as possible.

Occasionally the purpose of writing pointed to the future, though generally the prophet was concerned with the pressing needs of the hour. The wonderful timeliness of his utterances is one of the most marked

traits of the Hebrew prophet. But his outlook was, nevertheless, broad; in fact, his farsightedness was a great source of power for his work of the moment. He can best prescribe the duty for to-day who knows what to-morrow will be. No statesman can be truly great who does not see the inevitable issue of present conditions and handle them with reference to the future. There were times when the prophets seemed ready to drop consideration of the hopeless present, buried in gloom, and to turn their eyes to the glorious future in which they steadfastly believed, and in which every child of God must believe. Sometimes their writing had reference to that remote future.

Jeremiah wrote his glowing picture of the future[1] in the tenth year of Zedekiah, 587 B.C. He was at the time a prisoner in the court of the guard:[2] it was the darkest period of Hebrew history; for the fall of the holy city was so certain and so near that the prophet ceases to regard it, and looks beyond to a new day. Jeremiah was commanded to write in a book all the words that God had spoken to him.[3] The words to be written were these fine Messianic chapters which had come from this time of national anguish. The purpose of reducing to writing is clearly stated: "For lo, the days are coming, saith Jahveh, when I will bring back the captivity of My people Israel and Judah; and I will restore them to the land which I gave to their fathers."[4] The written words were to be preserved and read as an evidence of God's gracious purpose to restore the nation,

[1] Jer. xxx.–xxxiii.
[2] Jer. xxxii. 2.
[3] Jer. xxx. 2.
[4] Jer. xxx. 3.

which was now speeding to destruction. Through the dark days of exile and humiliation the bright words of the prophet would serve to cheer the spirits of the depressed, and bid them look hopefully for better times.

Habakkuk also was commanded to take up the pen: "Write the vision and engrave it upon tablets, that he may run who reads it; for the vision is for a set time, and it hastens to the end; and it shall not lie."[1] The reason seems to be similar to Jeremiah's. The condition described by the prophet, the overthrow of the wicked power of Babylon, was near, but not present. Yet it would surely come, and the prediction of its coming was to console the people suffering in the interim.

Isaiah was commanded to write a brief prophecy on a tablet; it was this: *maher shalal hash baz*, "swift the spoil, speedy the prey."[2] The words were a prediction of the overthrow of the combined powers of Damascus and Samaria, before which Judah was quailing, and the fear of which drove Ahaz to the disastrous alliance with Assyria. Isaiah seems to have set up the tablet in the presence of witnesses, as a testimony for the future day, when the development of time should establish the truth of his words. So Isaiah wrote for the future to prove the uselessness of the reliance upon Egypt. The command to him was, "Now go, write it upon a tablet before them, and upon a book inscribe it, that it may be for a future day, for a witness for ever."[3]

Our conclusions, then, about the writing prophets

[1] Hab. ii. 2 f. [2] Isa. viii. 3. [3] Isa. xxx. 8.

agree with what we should on general principles deem most probable. These prophets wrote or dictated their own prophecies sometimes shortly after delivery, sometimes long after.[1] They are not *verbatim* reports of speeches as delivered, but are sometimes modified to suit the purpose of their issue in written form. These conclusions will fit the case of many of the prophecies preserved in the Hebrew Scriptures. They may not apply to all cases. Sometimes there seems to be a condition best explained by supposing that a prophecy has been either recorded from the uncertain memory of one who heard it, or revised by a less skilful and faithful hand than the author. A critical discrimination is always essential in our study. But we are safe in assuming that the genuine productions of the writing prophets are peculiarly trustworthy as sources of information for our use. In turning to them we are dealing with authorities of the highest order.

[1] See additional note (9).

CHAPTER VIII

THE PROPHET'S RELATION TO THE STATE

I. BEFORE AMOS

THE civil ruler among the ancient Semites was in many respects a despot of the most arbitrary kind. His rule was based on the doctrine of the Divine right of kings, and he at least was convinced that the king could do no wrong. Nevertheless his practice was considerably influenced by the fact that he was intensely religious, even though his religion may seem to us, in the case of some of the kings, of the grossest type. Believing in the gods, he felt that success in his career depended upon their good pleasure. Hence he strove always to keep in favour with them, so that every enterprise might be undertaken under their favourable auspices. To that end it was necessary to know the mind of the gods, for that information was equivalent to the knowledge of the ways of success and failure.

There were many means employed to determine the will of the gods: dreams, divination, magic, soothsaying, sorcery, witchcraft, all had their place. Among many of the ancient Semitic peoples the method of ascertaining the Divine will never rose

above divination. In the sixth century before Christ, Nebuchadrezzar still decides by arrows and the convulsions of the slain animal's liver, whether the gods would have him take the road to Rabbah or Jerusalem.[1]

Among the Hebrews all the primitive methods were in use at various periods. Jonathan decided to attack the Philistine garrison because, according to his prearranged sign, they said, "Come up to us," instead of "Tarry until we come to you."[2] Shortly afterwards Saul, desiring to know whether it was a favourable time to attack, summoned the priest to divine with the ephod.[3] In the same way David learned, first, that he should attack the Philistines who were besieging Keilah, and later, that he must abandon Keilah to escape treachery.[4] In his great distress, when he was hard pressed by the Philistines, Saul failed to get a satisfactory answer

[1] Ezek. xxi. 18 ff. See also art. "Soothsayer," by Whitehouse, in Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*.

[2] 1 Sam. xiv. 9 f.

[3] 1 Sam. xiv. 18 ff. The Hebrew text reads, "bring hither the ark of God." The best Greek versions read, "bring hither the ephod." There seems to be no question but that the latter is right. The ark was not used for divination, the ephod was. Ahijah was present in the camp of Saul "wearing an ephod" (1 Sam. xiv. 3). Later on David used the same words to Abiathar, "bring hither the ephod" (*ib.* xxiii. 9; cf. also xxx. 7, and Driver's Notes on the Hebrew text of Samuel, p. 83 f.). The change in the Hebrew text was accidental; the words for ark and ephod are much alike; after this error came in, "of God" was added as a necessary explanation.

[4] 1 Sam. xxiii. This instance is particularly instructive because we find a detailed conversation between David and Jahveh, but conducted through the ephod. David asked his questions, and the oracular yes or no was given in reply. The true explanation of the earlier part of the story (vers. 1–5), where the ephod is not mentioned, is thus supplied.

from any other source, and so resorted to necromancy.[1]

But the Hebrews did not always depend upon the dark arts for determining the moment which was auspicious by the favour of God. Comparatively early in their career they learned a better and higher way. The counsel of God came to them, not through the uncertainties of dreams and divination, but through the voice of the living prophets. Thus the Hebrew prophet in his relation to the State was accorded a position of tremendous power, and was given a chance for the religious enlightenment of the people. The attitude of Nebuchadrezzar, following the falling of the arrows and the movements of a liver, is not unlike that of David moving to the attack at the rustling of the mulberry trees; but it is very different from Hezekiah, stoutly resisting the assaults of Sennacherib under the influence of the confident cry of a great prophet: "The virgin daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee."[2]

At first the man was nothing apart from his apparatus. Abiathar the priest would have been little esteemed by David without the sacred ephod. Moses could do nothing without his divining rod. The early seers may have used some similar primitive methods of learning the will of God. Samuel the seer may have determined that the asses were found

[1] 1 Sam. xxviii. An unusual procedure, but not unknown at a much later age, as we learn from Isa. viii. 19.

[2] Isa. xxxvii. 22.

by the art of soothsaying.[1] But in the development of prophecy the man came into direct communion with God, and all apparatus was laid aside.[2] With the appearance of great men, the belief grew among the people that Jahveh spoke directly to His prophets.[3] The Hebrew kings and counsellors might, if they would, have a more certain assurance that they were walking in the way of God than the dark arts permitted. When the kings looked to the seers for guidance from on high, these became inevitably great figures in the State. To fill his place the prophet must be not only a man of God, but a statesman as well. For he was no blind medium, but an intelligent transmitter of the Divine counsel. He was a man of his times, looking about him with clear sight, knowing not only the political movements of his day, but their significance for the time and for the future. So it happened that the prophet cannot be understood apart from his connexion with the State.[4] We

[1] The use of apparatus would be maintained after it had ceased to be a guide to the seer, because of its impressive effect upon the people. Sir Henry Rawlinson had learned as well where to look for a commemoration tablet in a Babylonian building as we should for a cornerstone. Excavating at Birs, he reached the point where he expected the cylinder. Before removing the last bricks he adjusted a prismatic compass on the wall, then removed the brick and picked out the cylinder. The Arabs thought the compass a wonderful instrument, and attributed the find to magic. (See Hilprecht, *Explorations in Bible Lands*, p. 183 f.)

[2] The use of symbols, such as Jeremiah's yoke, was a survival of the old customs.

[3] Amos iii. 7.

[4] "From the days of Samuel onwards we find the prophets standing in the closest relations to the political circumstances of their times. . . . They made it their business to watch the course of national affairs in general, and specially to control and judge the conduct of the reigning monarch and his counsellors" (Ottley, *Bamp. Lect.*, p. 279).

shall trace that relation in its historical development. To this end we must go back to the early days and review the history of prophecy from the political point of view. We shall thus see how the early seer worked for the State's welfare; confessedly, though, our information is at times pretty scanty.

Ehud, the left-handed Benjamite, was not a prophet, but a shrewd warrior, such as the times called for when his tribe was oppressed by Eglon, the king of Moab. Ehud was delegated to carry the tribute to the suzerain, and resolved to make use of the opportunity to rid his people of the tyrant. It was easy to get a private audience with the king by pretending that he had a secret message, for mankind ever loves a secret. But as he desired the fat king to stand, that he might aim the blow more effectively, he accomplished his purpose by saying that his message was from God.[1] Though Ehud was a foreigner from the Moabite's point of view, his pretension to have a message from God to deliver sufficed to gain the attention of the king, and to bring him to his feet. This incident shows the esteem in which any man was held who claimed to have a message from heaven. Ehud the Hebrew was able positively to count upon the Moabite king's welcome to one assuming to bear a Divine commission.

The tolerance of kings towards prophets has often been noted. A raving dervish may gain admission to a despotic Oriental court when an important ambassador would be debarred. Among the Israelites

[1] Judges iii. 20.

it is generally assumed that the prophet had a free hand, and not only dared, but was permitted, a freedom of speech which would have been quickly punished in another. Often his hand was free. That was ever the ideal. Zedekiah is charged with great wrong because he did not humble himself before Jeremiah.[1] But it is easy to exaggerate this tolerance; for conditions varied greatly at different times. There are many cases showing the clearest intolerance towards the prophets. The king of Israel lent his aid to the priest in an effort to dismiss from the kingdom the first of the literary prophets. There is a long story of repression and persecution, which shows that the prophet who opposed the royal policy did so at the risk of liberty and life. The details of this story will be brought out in the course of our study.

Among the very earliest writings preserved by the Hebrews is the Song of Deborah.[2] This ancient poem affords a striking picture of the prophetic influence in early Israel. The northern tribes had been sorely beset by Sisera, and there was no one to gather an effective force in opposition until Deborah arose a mother in Israel, and inspired Barak to rally the people and lead them in a fierce assault against the foe. The prophetess did not wait for someone to seek her counsel, but, acting under a Divine impulse of patriotism, herself took the initial steps which led to the expulsion of the enemy.

That position of leadership was ever maintained by the prophets. They were never passive instru-

[1] 2 Chron. xxxvi. 12. [2] Judges v.

ments of divination to say yes or no, when the springs were touched by an inquiring hand, but were active in arousing the people to their God-given opportunities. Thus the great seer of Ephraim is introduced to us in the oldest story of the establishment of the kingdom.[1] Samuel sees the disadvantage of Israel in their tribal jealousy and disorganisation.[2] The time has gone by when heroic leaders may be expected as occasion requires. The people had seen enough of the evil of a state of anarchy to enable Samuel to count upon their acceptance of the new institution if it is presented to them at a fitting moment. The young giant who comes to the seer to inquire about the strayed asses has all the marks of the kind of leader the people of that age would be likely to follow; and therefore upon the head of the son of Kish the anointing oil is poured.

If Samuel had occupied the commanding position ascribed to him in the later narratives of the Book of Samuel, nothing more than this anointing would have been necessary to have finally established the kingdom. But as Samuel appears to have been at all events at the start a seer of Ephraim, with little more than local repute,[3] the pouring of oil upon a man's head would command little heed from the people at large. Therefore Saul must demonstrate

[1] 1 Sam. ix.

[2] This is a vastly more probable explanation of the origin of the kingdom than the other version of the story (1 Sam. viii., xii.), according to which Samuel grudgingly yielded to a popular demand.

[3] Whatever may be the fact in regard to Samuel's position, the above is assuredly the view of the writer of the early story of the founding of the kingdom.

his leadership by watching his opportunity, by following the seer's counsel to "do as occasion shall serve." [1] The prophet's part was to make choice of a fit person to serve in the high office of king; the king's part was to demonstrate the fitness of that choice when the occasion arose. The seer wisely contents himself with a general direction; Saul finds the opportunity himself when he hears of the dire stress of Jabesh-gilead. It is often erroneously assumed, on the basis of the later stories, that Samuel was the real authority in the kingdom, and Saul but a figure-head carrying out his instructions. This conception is far from the truth; for later we read that Jonathan, of his own initiative, determined by signs, and Saul by the ephod, when to attack the enemy. Samuel as a matter of fact occupied an inconspicuous position in the monarchy which he had inspired.

According to the Book of Samuel, the prophet not only set up a king, but he also put him down, when his services were not deemed sufficiently pleasing to Jahveh. The critical problems in these sources are pretty difficult. But they must be faced. Between those who reject everything except the oldest narrative and those who accept the whole as equally authoritative in all parts, smoothing out the inconsistencies with greater skill than success, there may not be much choice. The practice of considering every statement impossible, because found in a late source, is reprehensible; that of accepting every statement because it is found in Holy Scripture is impossible. Every statement ought to be judged on

[1] 1 Sam. x. 7.

its own merits. It seems scarcely likely, however, that Saul was deposed from the throne for offering a sacrifice before the priest-prophet appeared ;[1] and this story is inconsistent with another ground for Saul's rejection, namely, his failure to exterminate the Amalekites.[2] The latter story is much more in accord with the ideas of the times, and probably gives the real cause of Samuel's disaffection.[3]

What part Samuel had in the revolution by which David reached the throne, it is not easy to say. The information is not always consistent, and the most specific is the latest and least trustworthy.[4] But it is highly probable that there is this much of historic truth back of these stories, that David was prompted by the seer of Ephraim to overthrow the house of Saul, and to set up his own dynasty in its place.

It is interesting to note that in all the later sources of the Book of Samuel, the place of the prophet is much more conspicuous than in the early sources. Looked at from the point of view of the later times, it was inconceivable that Samuel had been other than the power behind the throne directing the king in all his ways. We find the same tendency in the history of David's reign. In the latest source the power of the prophet appears to be greatest. The story of the king's consultation with Nathan about the building of the temple is one of the latest additions to the narrative.[5] The most despotic king, according to

[1] 1 Sam. xiii. 8 ff. [2] 1 Sam. xv. [3] See additional note (10).

[4] *i.e.* 1 Sam. xvi. 1–13. Budde has so poor an opinion of this section that he regards it as a midrash, taken from the same source quoted by the Chronicler (*Bücher Samuel*, p. 114).

[5] 2 Sam. vii

that story, dare not carry out a project long cherished in his heart without the sanction of the prophet. If we question this story we must do so, however, not merely on the ground of lateness of source, but chiefly upon the improbability that a man like David would brook such interference.

David seems to have had little to do with the prophets. According to the oldest sources, his inquiries of God were apparently made through the priest and ephod, which had served him so well in the days of his conflict with Saul.[1] In the list of his officers[2] we find two priests, but no prophet. When the king was obliged to flee on account of Absalom's rebellion, Zadok the priest was with him, but there is no mention of a prophet. Hushai the councillor was relied upon for advice, and was deliberately counselled to aid the fugitive king by deceiving the usurper. According to Chronicles, when the elders of Israel came to Hebron to make David king, they acted "according to the word of Jahveh by the hand of Samuel";[3] but that assertion sounds like a harmonistic effort of the Chronicler. It is in agreement with the later conceptions.

Still we find even in these oldest sources that the prophets do sometimes appear on the scene and speak with the utmost freedom, even though their mission was to rebuke a king. Nathan's severe censure of David for the high-handed crimes by which Bath-sheba became his wife, reveals an early picture of the true prophet's high courage, and his solid

[1] 2 Sam. ii. 1; v. 19; xxi. 1.
[2] 2 Sam. viii. 16–18.
[3] 1 Chron. xi. 3.

moral principles. That the State may be strong, it must be pure. A dissolute, unscrupulous monarch is intolerable to Jahveh, and the prophet, full of the spirit of Jahveh, cannot hesitate to lay bare the king's sins, and to declare the punishment which will inevitably follow.[1]

Another prophet, who is called a royal seer, was the divinely appointed means of conveying to the king the choice of punishments offered him in expiation of his sin in taking a census.[2] This story is not free from difficulty for the interpreter. But we may easily separate it into certain historic facts on the one side, and the theological interpretation of those facts on the other. The facts seem to be that for military purposes David ordered a census of the whole people; and that this census was followed by a dreadful pestilence. In accordance with the ideas of the times, the pestilence could only be explained as a punishment for sin, as indeed all pestilences are, though unhappily the right sin is not always discovered. But the writer of this old story makes the prophet Gad the messenger to the offending king, and the agent by whose advice the stay of the plague is accomplished.

[1] H. P. Smith is doubtful about this narrative. "There is nothing unreasonable in supposing that the early narrative was content with pointing out that the anger of Jahveh was evidenced by the death of the child. A later writer was not satisfied with this, but felt that there must be a specific rebuke by a direct revelation" (*Sam.*, p. 322). The question is whether there is anything unreasonable in the narrative as it stands. That there may be some later embellishments in the story is possible; that a whole section has been added from an untrustworthy source is not very likely.

[2] 2 Sam. xxiv.

It would be unreasonable to suppose that these two notices tell us the whole history of prophecy in relation to the reign of David. They are rather to be regarded as evidence that, apart from the sons of the prophets as bodies, there were conspicuous individual prophets, who watched the course of "the king after God's own heart," and though not called in counsel in affairs of state, were yet quick to appear of their own motion, when they perceived the king to be falling from the ways of their God.

If we look over such history as we have of the oppressive reign of Solomon the great, we are struck at once with the absence of any mention of prophets. In the list of his officers[1] we find priests, but neither seer nor prophet. There is no record of Solomon's ever consulting a seer, or being sharply called to account by a prophet. In fact, Solomon was not a man to take censure from anybody. All the knowledge we have of him points to a man of self-sufficiency. Wisdom came to him directly from God, so it was believed, and he felt no dependence upon a mediating officer.

At the same time Solomon could not have forgotten that he owed his office to the shrewdness of a prophet. Nathan seems to have been the first to penetrate the treacherous purposes of Adonijah, and the first to suggest a means to counteract the effects of David's inactivity and rapidly waning popularity. The prophet was concerned to secure the succession of the heir-apparent as determined by royal authority. Yet the actual anointing was done by Zadok the

1 Kings iv. ff.

priest, not by Nathan the prophet.[1] It is highly probable that Nathan lived through a part of Solomon's reign, but he could have had no conspicuous place in the royal councils.

There is good indirect evidence that Solomon did not look kindly upon prophetic meddling with his great affairs; this we find in the history of Ahijah the Shilonite. Ahijah saw the evil consequences of an attempt, such as Solomon had made, to maintain a splendid Oriental court in a nation as small and poor as Israel. In the heir-apparent the seer could perceive no signs of improvement. The only course, therefore, was a revolt and a secession of the northern tribes from the united kingdom, and the establishment of a royal line of their own. This dangerous business was executed in the wild mountain land,[2] where the seer would not be under the observation of royal spies.

It was a prophet, therefore, who inspired the greatest rebellion in Hebrew history. The part of the prophet in such movements was to pick out the man for the occasion, and to set him at the arduous and perilous work of revolution. While Solomon lived, the prophet dare not interfere with the evils which he deprecated, nor did he venture to stir up revolt. Under the feebler rule of Solomon's son, revolution became possible.

[1] So we are expressly told in 1 Kings i. 39. David commands Zadok and Nathan to anoint Solomon king (ver. 34), and Jonathan reported to the conspirators that Zadok and Nathan had anointed him (ver. 45). Nathan may have had some part in the function, but Zadok was evidently the chief.

[2] 1 Kings xi. 29. The rendering of the English versions, "field," conveys quite a wrong impression.

Another prophet played an important rôle in this revolution. Rehoboam was as conceited as arrogant, and vainly supposed that he could bring back his revolted subjects by force of arms. A protracted attempt to do so would have resulted in great loss of property and life, and probably in the entire destruction of the Davidic kingdom. Rehoboam gathered a great army, but was halted in his purpose by Shemaiah, the man of God, who persuaded the king that the division of the kingdom was of God.[1] It would have been useless to try to stay the king's hand by predicting failure; but the plea that the rebellion he purposed to suppress was of Divine ordering proved effective.

How exactly reversed are conditions now! A government will be very much influenced by probabilities of success or failure, but very little effort will be made to learn the will of God. It may indeed be urged that we have no longer a prophet to announce authoritatively, "thus saith the Lord." But we have a surer means than an Ahijah or a Shemaiah had for determining the will of God. For the party which is in the right is that which God looks upon with favour, and not the party with the heaviest battalions; though

[1] 1 Kings xii. 21 ff. Kittel says this narrative is a later addition, and sounds like a friendly excuse for Rehoboam's inaction and indifference (*Hist.*, ii. 211, 246). He regards it as a post-exilic midrash after the manner of the Chronicler (*Königsbücher*, 106). It is true that Rehoboam kept up a sort of border war for a long time; it is so expressly stated in 1 Kings xiv. 30; but it may be that this passage, however late, contains a bit of true history, namely, that the king refrained from a great war by prophetic advice. The border war he could not control, even if he had cared to stop it.

it is unhappily not always the case in war that right makes might.

Whatever Shemaiah's position at court was, he evidently wielded a great influence in the affairs of state. It was no light task to turn back a king when his forces were already mustered for war. The prophet appears once again in the character of a state counsellor, though in a matter more distinctly religious. In the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign Judah was invaded by Shishak, the king of Egypt. To the king and princes wondering at the havoc wrought in Jahveh's land, the prophet gives the easy explanation: "Thus saith Jahveh: you have abandoned Me, and therefore have I abandoned you in the hand of Shishak."[1]

Again Rehoboam accepted the counsel of the man of God, and as a consequence of his humility, a comforting message was given to him: "They have humbled themselves: I will not destroy them, but I will shortly make them an escaped remnant, and My anger shall not be poured upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Yet they shall become servants to him, that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the lands."[2]

The plain meaning of this advice in modern terms seems to be this. The feeble Judean army had no chance against the vastly superior Egyptian force.

[1] 2 Chron. xii. 5. There is no mention of Shemaiah's appearance in the brief story in 1 Kings xiv. 25 ff. While we must admit that the Chronicler's unsupported testimony must be cautiously scrutinised, it nevertheless seems uncritical to reject it *en masse*. He had no especial predilection in favour of the prophets.

[2] 2 Chron. xii. 7 f.

To resist such a power meant destruction. The only wise course for the weaker side was submission for a time, not vain resistance, which would only aggravate the trouble. Shemaiah, the man of God, was the one who saw the course of safety, and who was able to pilot the frail State of Judah through the troubled waters.

We know little more of prophetic activity in the State for a long time. The Chronicler tells us that Azariah the son of Obed tried to keep Asa in the straight path by reminding him that Jahveh's favour was conditional upon good behaviour.[1] About the same time Jehu the son of Hanani sharply rebuked Baasha, the third king of Israel, and declared that his rule would fall to the ground because of the sins he had committed.[2] It is highly probable[3] that this same seer played an active part in the overthrow of the discredited dynasty of Jeroboam, and the passing of the reins to the powerful hand of Omri.

The disastrous war between Amaziah of Judah and Joash of Israel was brought about, according to the Chronicler, by partly following and partly ignoring the advice of a prophet. The king of Judah hired Israelitish mercenaries to aid him in a campaign against Edom. A man of God advised against this accession so strongly that Amaziah sent the Israelites back as a consequence. While the Judeans were plundering Edom, the returning Israelites seized the opportunity to find redress in looting the Judeans.

[1] 2 Chron. xv. 1 ff. [2] 1 Kings xvi. 1 ff.

[3] Some such activity seems to be implied in the language of 1 Kings xvi. 2–7; cf. also xv. 29, xiv. 14.

Amaziah was reproved by the prophets, according to the story, because he worshipped the captured deities of Edom ; but probably the real ground of the rebuke was the king's proposal to exact vengeance from Israel. Then we come to a case of conflict between prophet and king. The king asked the seer, "Have we made thee of the king's counsel?" and follows his question with a grave threat, "forbear : why shouldst thou be smitten?" Though we are told that the prophet heeded the threat, he did so with the real spirit of the prophets, which was to bid defiance to any other authority than God's : "I know that God has determined to destroy thee because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel." [1]

We must go back a little now to a time when the prophet was a prominent figure in the State, to the time of Elijah and Elisha. Conditions at this period were very bad from the point of view of a prophet of Jahveh. The dynasty of Omri was anything but faithful to Jahveh's ways. The kings were no longer amenable to prophetic counsel, and the seers were constrained to sit constantly on the opposition bench. This was a time, too, when the king was intolerant of what seemed to him as prophetic interference with affairs of state. Like others in civil authority whose life is not above reproach, he would insist that the pulpit keep close to a narrow range of religion and let business and politics alone. In spite of intolerance and persecution, however, the great prophets had their say, and, like true watchmen, did not let

[1] 2 Chron. xxv. 1–16.

Israel rush on to its doom without lifting up their voice in warning.

It is only possible to state briefly some of the prophet's acts, selecting those which are most important for our subject. While it is true that considerable legendary matter has become imbedded in the stories of Elijah, and more still in those of Elisha, there is yet an abundance of good historical material. This is particularly the case in such parts of the stories as are serviceable for our present purpose. Though not trustworthy in all details, this narrative doubtless gives the position of the prophet correctly.

Elijah comes on the scene very abruptly in 1 Kings xvii., declaring to Ahab that there shall be neither dew nor rain except at his word. Apparently the compiler chose from the history of Elijah such events as threw most light on the history of Israel. Certain it seems, doubtless as a result of this method of selection, that Elijah's chief concern is the State. The welfare of the State in the mind of the prophet depended upon its faithfulness to Jahveh. Consequently the prophet, fired with a religious zeal rarely excelled in history, gave his life so far as we know to an effort to stay the evil tendency towards the introduction of a religion foreign to that upon which the Hebrew nation was founded, and vastly inferior as a moral power.

The prophet's declaration that there would be neither dew nor rain except at his word did not arise from a mere arbitrary desire to display power or to inflict suffering, but was the initial step in his programme to awaken the people to a sense of their

infidelity. When the king and people, feeling the heavy hand of God, humbled themselves penitently, then the dew and rain would fall again as a token of Jahveh's gracious forgiveness.

The result was quite contrary to the prophet's purpose and hope. Jezebel had perhaps already been striving to make Baal the national God. She was as shrewd as she was unscrupulous, and saw her opportunity in the drought which followed Elijah's prediction. She could easily persuade the man who had quite yielded to her dominating influence, that the way to break the drought was to break the man who was responsible for it, and along with him the whole body of his followers. Consequently we find Elijah in hiding and the king doing everything in his power to find him; while the king's officer Obadiah had concealed some of the persecuted prophets, and was secretly maintaining them in a cave. There were probably many hundred other prophets, however, who found neither protector nor hiding-place, but were ruthlessly slain. The prophets at this period, working for the welfare of the State, were violently opposed and persecuted by the king.

The great sacrifice on Mount Carmel, so finely described in 1 Kings xviii., was largely an appeal to the people on the part of the prophet. The king had shown no disposition to interpret correctly the hand of God in the history of his own times. The court of last resort is the people, and this appeal may succeed even under the most despotic government. The true conception of this great effort only appears when we realise that Elijah's purpose was neither the

working of a miracle nor the exhibition of prophetic power, but the saving of the people of God. He seemed to accomplish his object. The immediate result of the complete failure of the Baal prophets to meet the hard conditions imposed, and his own triumphant success, was that the people cried those words sweeter than any music to Elijah's ears, "Jahveh, He is God; Jahveh, He is God."

Elijah was quick to see and take his chances. Mild treatment was not fitted for such rough times. A decisive blow must be struck while the iron was hot. Baal must taste some of Jezebel's own medicine. The prophet who had just emerged from hiding, and was still in danger of his life, the king probably being present, assumes high governmental powers in the name of his God, and orders the immediate execution of the whole body of the prophets of Baal.

The result of the slaughter of these prophets was the awful oath of Jezebel to take Elijah's life. Once more he fled, no longer to a refuge near by, but out of the kingdom, far away to the wilderness of Judah, where he yields to despair and prays for the very thing which would surely have come without petition to heaven had he remained within Jezebel's reach. Notwithstanding the great manifestation of Jahveh's power and the mark of His favour, at the overthrow of the prophets of Baal, in the fall of copious rains, the evil influence of the queen was dominant, and the people quickly followed the lead of their sovereign. The great work was all undone in a moment. What was the use struggling against such fearful odds? The usefulness of the prophet had gone. "Let it now

suffice, O Jahveh," he cries in the bitterness of his soul, "take away my life; for I succeed no better than my fathers."[1]

But Elijah reckoned without a comprehension of God's perseverance in a forlorn hope. Not easily does God abandon His purpose to save His people. When one means fails it is displaced by another, but the gracious purpose of God has never wavered from the time of Eve's disobedience to this day. Ahab was a hopeless failure, but a king is too frail to stand long as an obstacle in the way of God's good purposes towards His people. Kings rise and fall, but the redemptive work of God goes on for ever. From his very despair comes the light, not in the tempest nor the earthquake, but in the clear plan formulated in his own mind, which he rightly sees to be the inspiration of heaven: "Do thou anoint Hazael to be king of Aram; and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king of Israel; and Elisha, the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint as prophet to succeed thee."[2]

To strip this incident of its Oriental and prophetic colouring and to state the event in modern terms is not impossible, nor does it lead us away from the truth. Elijah had tried, as it seemed to him, every means to bring the people back to God, but he was always thwarted by the court. In the course of his disconsolate meditations in the desert a new suggestion comes to him to strike higher than the deluded prophets who felt constrained to do as they were bid, and to reach the throne itself. Revolutions in two

[1] 1 Kings xix. 4.

[2] 1 Kings xix. 15 f.

States were required, and the appointment and training of one worthy to follow his own footsteps, that the great task might not flag for lack of inspired suggestions and unwearying oversight. This new programme seemed to the disheartened refugee like a fresh voice from heaven; and who dare say that he was mistaken? The task now entered upon was difficult and dangerous, and many years elapsed before it was brought to completion. However favoured of heaven, the leaven must do its work in its own tedious way, for God is not wont to send twelve legions of angels to the succour of His travailing servants.

The relations of Syria and Israel were so close and, at the same time, so hostile, that the fortunes and peace of Israel depended no little upon the conditions in Damascus. When the revolution referred to above was finally effected at the instigation of Elisha, the change then boded no good to Israel. Whether the long delay defeated the purpose, or Elijah was mistaken in his man, we cannot say. But Elisha, though loyally carrying out the instructions of his master, saw at the time of his anointing that Hazael would be a serious danger to Israel.[1]

It seemed, too, that the bloody times could only be changed by a man who would be as unscrupulous in

[1] 2 Kings viii. 12. This narrative is not from the same hand as the instructions to Elijah in 1 Kings xix. 15 f., and some writers hold that there is no connexion between the two. It seems to me reasonable to believe that Elijah was unable to effect the revolution and transmitted the unfinished task to his successor; just as David turned over to Solomon the avenging of his own wrongs, because he had been unable to redress them himself.

shedding blood for Jahveh as Ahab and Jezebel had been in shedding it for Baal. Jehu had already a reputation which indicated that he was the man to meet the situation. It is significant of the man's character that he was recognised at a distance by his furious driving of his chariot.[1]

It was essential that there should be a champion of Jahveh in the times of stress which were sure to come. Elijah was growing old. He could not endure the strain much longer, even if he did not fall a prey to the persistent seeking for his life. As we shall presently see, the milder-tempered Elisha was well adapted to the work.

Meanwhile, Ahab played right into the hands of the one whom, for better reasons than he yet knew, he called his enemy. So far Elijah had fallen foul of Ahab on account of his departure from true worship. Now he lights upon him for a flagrant offence in morals. The prophet is guided to Ahab, and finds him red-handed with the murder of Naboth. The seer's clear moral sense is not confused because Ahab could plead, as an extenuation of the crime, that Jezebel had been the author of the ingenious plan, and that a regularly constituted court had pronounced the death sentence upon one convicted of blasphemy. The king coveted the land of Naboth, and sat stupidly by while his more clever queen executed the black plot. But Ahab was the real culprit, and the prophet seizes the chance fearlessly to pronounce his doom: "Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? In the place where dogs

[1] 2 Kings ix. 20.

licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood."[1]

It is refreshing to find in this time, when the great prophet's ardent desire to serve the State brought him into constant conflict with the powers that be, that other prophets found themselves able to give comfort and aid to Ahab in the campaigns against the Syrians. The king of Israel was roused to resistance by the insulting and humiliating terms which Ben-hadad proposed. A prophet, whose name is unknown, but whom the compiler may have assumed to be Elijah, declared that Ahab would conquer, and advised him how to set the battle in array.[2] In another campaign, a man of God, stung by the reproach that Jahveh was a god of the hills but not of the valleys, foretells to Ahab another great victory.[3] But not for long could a man with a grain of wisdom approve the course of this king. Ahab was proud of his triumph, and gladly spared Ben-hadad, trusting foolishly to a treaty, which the Syrian would be ready enough to break when the opportunity should come.[4] The prophet declared that Ahab's life and the life of his people would pay the penalty of his ill-advised clemency. It is not strange that the petulant king returned to his house heavy and displeased.[5]

[1] 1 Kings xxi. 19. [2] 1 Kings xx. 13 ff. [3] 1 Kings xx. 28.

[4] Paton suggests that Ahab's aim was to preserve Damascus as a buffer-state between himself and the Assyrians (*Syria and Palestine*, p. 208).

[5] 1 Kings xx. 42 f. This chapter does not belong to the Elijah narrative, and was incorporated by the compiler of Kings from some other source. In its main features it appears to be a good historical narrative, though worked over by later revisers. The source is quite different from the Elijah story, for unknown prophets—or in chapter xxii.,

So much has been already said of the interesting story of Micaiah,[1] that it is only necessary to refer to it here as a good instance of the bitter hostility of the State towards the honest prophet. The king demands subserviency of the prophets as well as of his courtiers. The latter, however, are kindly disposed towards Micaiah, and urge him to feign agreement with Ahab's favourites. But the son of Imlah knows that the prophet of Jahveh can fulfil his duty to the State only by the strictest adherence to the truth. Not even the threats of the king, nor the blows of his fellow-seers, could move him to say other than what God revealed.

Once again, and that after Ahab's death, does Elijah appear to pronounce judgment upon the king. Ahaziah, being severely wounded by a fall, and having the ardent desire which possesses every mortal under like conditions to know the outcome, is said to have sent messengers to inquire his fate of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron. That act was quite sufficient to arouse the zealous prophet of Jahveh; so we learn that Elijah sees in the event the working out of God's doom upon the house of Omri.[2]

In spite of the unfortunate prominence of legendary matter[3] in the fragments of the history of Elisha, it

Micaiah—take the place of Elijah. Kuenen supposes the prophet to be introduced in the later tradition that Israel's rescue should appear to be the work of God (*Bücher des A. T.*, p. 79).

[1] 1 Kings xxii.

[2] 2 Kings i. This narrative shows the marks of later hands, but is probably a true account of the fate of Ahab's son and successor.

[3] 2 Kings viii. 4 f. gives a good hint how these stories grew. Gehazi is engaged in telling the king the wonderful deeds of his master. Still, the very circulation of these stories is convincing proof that Elisha had been a man possessed of remarkable powers.

is not difficult to gather some significant facts which show this prophet's attitude towards the State.

Elisha had followed the allied kings in their invasion of Moab, strange to say, without the knowledge of either of them. It is easy to divine his purpose. However hostile he showed himself to the king of Israel,[1] he was not hostile to the nation which God had planted in Canaan. Moreover, he looked upon Jehoshaphat as a real follower of Jahveh, and so worthy of his consideration. The king had an equally good opinion of Elisha. When in answer to his inquiring whether a prophet of Jahveh was with the host, he was told by a servant of his royal brother that Elisha was there, he exclaimed, "The word of Jahveh is with him."[2] He was found in the camp when the invaders were likely to perish for lack of water, and was able to save the armies.[3]

Elisha followed the principle that he could wield

[1] Jehoran or Joram, the younger brother and successor of Ahaziah. His name is not given in the narrative.

[2] 2 Kings iii. 12.

[3] 2 Kings iii. 13 ff. It is interesting to note that in spite of Elisha's prediction that Jahveh would deliver the Moabites into the hands of the Hebrews, the invaders fled precipitately (2 Kings iii. 18, 27). Elisha's forecast might easily have been verified; for at first the Hebrews carried everything before them, and brought the Moabites to their last stand in Kir-hareseth. Here the king of Moab tried in vain to cut his way out; then, in desperation at his failure, he offered his eldest son as a human sacrifice, burning him on the wall in plain sight of the besiegers. According to the ideas of the times, no god could resist so frantic an appeal. Panic seized the Hebrews. No prophet could stay their flight; for they felt that they were in sore danger of a fierce visitation of Chemosh, whose land they had violated. Whatever effect the offering may have had upon Chemosh, there is no question of its effect upon the Hebrews. The famous Moabite Stone commemorates this victory.