

most influence over the king by keeping on good terms with him. Except in the above instance, we find this prophet in friendly relation with his sovereign. There was a Shunamite who had provided a lodging-place for the prophet in his wanderings. Elisha desires to reward her, and asks her, "Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?"¹ We cannot look upon this question as an empty boast, but must regard it as evidence that the prophet's recommendation had great weight with the king and his officers.

There is further evidence of this influence in the release of the captured Syrians.² Beneath the story, elaborated as it is with legend, we may trace the fact that by some stroke of good fortune, so unexpected as to seem miraculous, a band of Syrians was captured by the Israelites. The king would not imitate the lenient policy of his forebear, but proposed to rid himself of so many of his deadly foes by their butchery in cold blood. Such murder was abhorrent to the prophet, and the time had not yet come when prisoners of war could be kept honourably, therefore the only course was their release. Elisha's counsel must have been highly valued indeed that the king at his word allowed the hated Syrians to walk unharmed from Samaria.³ The impression which Elisha had produced upon the king is again revealed in his calling Gehazi before him after Elisha's death,

¹ 2 Kings iv. 13.

² 2 Kings vi. 8 ff.

³ The Chronicler tells us (2 Chron. xxviii. 9 ff.) that Pekah was induced to release 200,000 Judean prisoners captured in the Syro-Ephraimitish war.

and listening to the wonders wrought by the seer in the course of his lifetime.¹

This fact that Elisha stood close to the king is not contradicted by the other fact that at one time the king vowed to take his life. It appears that the king would have surrendered to Syria, but that by Elisha's urgent advice he decides to stand a siege, a clear evidence of the prophet's power over him. When he learnt of the ghastly condition to which the people were reduced, two mothers coolly entering into a compact to cook and eat their babes, he swore that Elisha's head should not remain upon his shoulders another day.² The king was resolved to surrender on the best terms he could make. He could scarcely carry out this resolution in the face of the prophet whom he regarded as responsible for the suffering, and whom he yet dared not openly resist; therefore in the heat of his anger he determines to take the prophet's life. Very likely he would have carried out this purpose but for the timely raising of the siege.

It is easy to see that Elisha had won his influence with the king, not only by the display of his remarkable powers, but still more by the aid he gave the State at most opportune moments. He had saved the army in the deserts of Edom, as we have already seen, in spite of his declared unwillingness to serve the unfaithful king of Israel. He healed Naaman of his leprosy, moved no little by the king's terror lest his inability to aid his enemy and virtual over-lord should be made a *casus belli*.³ He checkmated the

¹ 2 Kings viii. 4.

² 2 Kings vi. 31.

³ 2 Kings v.

cunning of the Syrians when they tried to fall upon Israel unawares, by discovering their lurking-places, and reporting them to his king.¹

Elisha promptly carried out one part of his master's programme, the revolution by which Hazael succeeded Ben-hadad. Whether or not he foresaw that the new king, the moment he heard that the hand of destiny was upon him, would foully murder his sovereign lying sick in bed, we do not know. There are very obscure parts of this story as it has survived in 2 Kings viii. 7 ff. The prophet seems to be uncertain in his vision, so that he sends word to Ben-hadad, "Thou shalt surely recover,"² at the same time adding, "howbeit Jahveh showed me that he shall surely die."

Elisha perceived that the king's sickness was not mortal, and sends him a message accordingly. He perceived also that the king's days were few, and that Hazael would succeed him. Probably he did not know that a cold-blooded murder would be the harmoniser of his seemingly contradictory visions.

But the house of Ahab, contrary to the declared

¹ 2 Kings vi. 8 ff. It is unnecessary to infer from this fact that God directly revealed the whereabouts of the Syrians to his servants, or, on the other hand, to reject the story on *a priori* grounds of impossibility. Elisha was the head of one or more bands of prophets. They were fleet of foot and hardy, and knew every nook of the wild lands, where they often had to take refuge. They would make ideal scouts, and were probably the direct source of the prophet's knowledge. Some of the Syrians had an exaggerated idea of the prophet's powers of divination; see 2 Kings vi. 12.

² The Hebrew text reads, "Thou shalt not recover." The margin gives the reading I have followed. The *kethibh*, or written text, seems to be due to an ancient harmonistic tendency.

will of God, still sat upon the throne of Israel, and the old sin of disloyalty to Jahveh still cropped out. Among the generals in the army of Israel there was one heroic in battle, fierce in disposition, and zealous for the God of Israel, Jehu the son of Nimshi. Jehoram had been wounded in the attack on Ramoth-gilead, which he was trying to wrest from Hazael, the new ruler of Syria, and had been obliged to retire to Jezreel to convalesce. The time was opportune, and Elisha was quick to see and seize the chance. Accordingly he sent one of the sons of the prophets to bid Jehu seize the throne.¹ So this prophet virtually ends his career, so far as we know it, by inspiring the bloodiest revolution in Hebrew history. I say "so far as we know it" advisedly, for if the Bible chronology is correct, our ignorance of Elisha's full career is tremendous. For there is yet a story of his efforts to save the State, which is placed in the reign of Joash, Jehu's grandson. If the date is right, Elisha must have lived at least a century.

King Joash, so we read, came to the aged prophet, now lying on his death-bed, and wept, crying the very words which had fallen from Elisha's lips many years before when his master was taken from his head, "My father, my father, Israel's chariot and its horsemen."² Just as Elisha had looked upon Elijah's loss as the taking away of the main prop of a feeble nation, so the king, looking upon the pallid face of the dying seer, perceives the loss of one who was so much the mainstay of Israel that he called him its chariot and horseman. This is a fine tribute to the

¹ 2 Kings ix.

² 2 Kings xiii. 14 ; cf. *ib.* ii. 12.

marvellous career of the man of God from the lips of the king, and there is a fine exhibition of the warm love of his country, which age and the hand of death could not tear from the prophet's bosom. Once more he tries to inspire the weak scion of the fierce Jehu with courage and perseverance to withstand to the utmost the constant encroachment of Syria; for so must we interpret the obscure incident of the bow and arrows. But the king smites three times and then his feeble hand is stayed—a clear sign, which stirs the passions of the prophet, exhausted in body and patience, that such a king can never rescue his State from the perils besetting it.

But this chapter need not close in such gloom for Israel. Joash's son, Jeroboam II., was of sturdier fibre than his father, and his lot was cast in more auspicious times. Syria discovered an enemy in its rear which so fully occupied its attention, that resistance to Assyria instead of advance upon Israel became the enforced policy. Jeroboam was aroused to put forth his energy, to make full use of the critical state of Syria's affairs, by the hopeful and inspiring prophecies of Jonah the son of Amittai,¹ a prophet who is otherwise unknown to us, unless indeed he is the original of that prophet whose brief career was used as a basis for the beautiful and edifying stories gathered much later in the little book of Jonah. The statement in the passage cited above that Jeroboam enlarged the borders of Israel according to the word of Jahveh which He spoke by Jonah the prophet, means simply that Jonah's insight first detected the

¹ 2 Kings xiv. 25.

favourable opportunity, and that the prophet directed the king in his operations.

I have told the story in detail of the activity of the early prophets in the affairs of State. It is desirable now to try to gather up the results in brief.

1. We note that after the division of the kingdom the prophets appear in Israel rather than Judah. We cannot infer that there were no prophets in the southern kingdom, but only that we have no knowledge of them. Except in so far as Judah was concerned in the affairs of Israel, and for much of this time Judah was the vassal of Israel—its history during the early period is almost a blank page. The Chronicler was evidently impressed with this defect, and tried to remedy it, but he was too far removed from original sources to accomplish much. Jehoshaphat's insistent demand for the counsel of a prophet of Jahveh implies that he was accustomed to this aid.

2. The good of the State was the chief concern of these prophets. It is true that their powers, like those of the seers who preceded them, were often at the service of individuals. But that was only an incident in the day's work. It is clear, from a study of such sources as we have, that the purpose of the prophet's life was the growth of the chosen people in religious and political power. It is true again that we have no full history of the private lives of these prophets, and that a larger knowledge might modify our conclusion. The compiler of Kings was not concerned with prophetic biography, but with national history. Nevertheless, in choosing passages to illumine his history, he fortunately embodied

whole sections instead of retelling the story in his own way. The selected passages enable us to form a fair idea of the prophet's life as a whole, and strengthen our conviction that the early seer was a patriot and statesman rather than a religious dreamer.

3. The prophets were radicals, not conservatives. They were wont to find the most congenial place upon the opposition bench. The policy of the court was not such as to win the approval of these morally heroic men. They never hesitated to administer justly deserved reproof, nor to predict boldly when they perceived that disaster would be the inevitable consequence of national folly.

4. They were so radical that they were *participes criminis* in all the revolutions of the period.¹ They did not wait to follow successful movements towards rebellion, but were instigators and leaders. This statement requires somewhat fuller illustration.

We have seen that the great rebellion of the northern kingdom was initiated by the words of Ahijah in the willing ears of Jeroboam; and that that of Jehu was instigated by Elisha. There is also good evidence that Baasha received the first suggestion of rebellion from a prophet. Jehu the son of Hanani reproaches this successful revolutionist thus in the name of Jahveh: "Since I lifted thee up from the dust, and placed thee as prince over My people Israel, and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam,

¹ Nathan was a staunch loyalist at the time of Adonijah's rebellion; but no good purpose was likely to be attained at that time by the displacing of a Solomon by an Adonijah.

and hast made My people sin, behold, I will utterly sweep away Baasha and his house."¹ Then it is said that as soon as he became king, Baasha smote all the house of Jeroboam, "according to the word of Jahveh which He spake by the mouth of Ahijah the Shilonite."² And Ahijah had said to Jeroboam's wife that "Jahveh would raise Him up a king over Israel who would cut off the house of Jeroboam."³ Whence it is plain that if Ahijah or some successor did not whisper rebellion in Baasha's ear, there were yet oracles which would persuade the would-be king that he might head a righteous revolt.

The prophecy of Jehu not only confirms the impression that Baasha was instigated by the prophets, but that his house would in turn be overthrown by the same power. Jehu declares that the dynasty of Baasha will go down as it had come up. The various attempts to fulfil this prophecy by Zimri and Tibni, and the successful achievement of Omri, the general of the army, were surely influenced by this prophecy, if they were not the direct consequence of the suggestions of the prophets.

Finally, it was declared of Jehu, the overthrower of the great house of Omri, that his dynasty should survive for four generations.⁴ This was promised because he had done well in his wholesale slaughter of the Baal worshippers, an opinion not shared by the prophet Hosea; but it is not difficult to believe that the real occasion of the prophecy was a revolution against this bloody house with which Hosea

¹ 1 Kings xvi. 2 f.

² 1 Kings xiv. 14.

³ 1 Kings xv. 29.

⁴ 2 Kings x. 30; xv. 12.

may have had something to do. Even in post-exilic days it was charged that Nehemiah was aiming at the kingdom by the aid of prophets who were inspired by him.¹

I have indicated here and there the distrust on the part of recent scholars of the accuracy of the narratives in which the various prophets appear as a conspicuous figure. Most of these sections are regarded as late insertions because of the apparently legendary character of the stories. There is neither space for a lengthy critical discussion here, nor is this a fit place for it. But while it is clear that these scholars are not without some ground for their contention, their conclusions seem to me to be too sweeping. One may be doubtful of the story that Elijah restored a youth to life; but it is a long step from this to a general distrust of Elijah's fight for the true God. Greater discrimination is needed in our judgment. The stories may be stripped of the marvellous element, due to the accretions of later ages, and there is enough left to show that in those early days the prophets were a great power in the affairs of the nation, and that they always used their power for good.

Our study has now carried us down to the period of the literary prophets, who began with Amos, and whom for convenience sake I have sometimes called the great prophets. They were more enlightened than their predecessors; they lived in more enlightened days; but I am not sure that, all things considered, they were really greater men. The early

¹ Neh. vi. 7.

seers have suffered because their own words have perished, and because the story of their works has often come to us in a form much modified by a later age, which looked upon the most marvellous works as the greatest. If we may trust the Chronicler, there still survived in his days writings such as these. The words of Samuel the seer, of the prophet Nathan, of Gad the seer, of Ahijah the Shilonite, of Iddo the seer, of the prophet Shemaiah, of the prophet Jehu, the words of the seers,¹ these were all sources to which the Chronicler refers for further information. They were histories, not of the seers written by others, but of the nation written by the seers.

If this information is correct, Amos was by no means the first literary prophet, and, moreover, the national interest of the seers was so strong that they wrote, not the words which they had spoken, but the history of the times in which they lived.

Nevertheless, we cannot fill the great blank in the lives of these prophets by conjecture. As we know them, the prophets from Amos to Ezekiel are the great prophets, and to the rich field of their writings we gladly turn; but to do so we will begin a fresh chapter.

¹ See above, p. 138 f.

CHAPTER IX

THE PROPHET'S RELATION TO THE STATE

II. AMOS TO ISAIAH

THE centre of interest is still the Northern Kingdom.¹ The bloody revolutions which prevailed so long in that land had weakened the strength of the nation very seriously; but at the period with which we have now to deal the dynasty of Jehu was coming to its end, and that at a time when a rather better ruler than usual occupied the throne, and one who had the further advantage of a longer administration than his predecessors. We cannot overestimate the importance of a long period of comparative peace for a nation which had been constantly beset by wars from without and revolutions from within. For the nearly half-century of the reign of Jeroboam II. Israel was quite free from both evils. The dynasty of Jehu had held the throne now to the fourth generation, so that for a century there was no rebellion. The persistent enemy of Israel, Syria, was fully occupied in a vain attempt to keep back the tide which the Assyrian

¹ See additional note (11).

Empire was rolling up on the east.¹ Such was the political condition of Israel when the seer of Tekoa appeared in the streets of Bethel.

Amos has little to say about the State as such. His mission was to go preach to God's people Israel. The moral condition of the nation was his chief concern. He made no attempt to shape the political policy of the State. Whether he regarded Jeroboam's statecraft as wise or foolish, we have no means of knowing. But Amos is quick to disavow any right of the State to shape his course. Though Amaziah was a priest, his injunction against the preaching of Amos was not issued in the name of the Church, but in the name of the State. His complaint to Jeroboam was that the seer conspired against the king and predicted the captivity of the people. The reason he urges against Amos is that Bethel is a king's sanctuary and a royal house.

The prophet, however, holds a commission from his God with which the State has no right to interfere. Amos consequently holds that the prophet has a free hand as against the State, and his practice was consistent with that theory. Fearlessly, therefore, he declared that the nation of Israel was rushing to its doom, and that the royal house would be involved in that destruction.² And he does a more perilous thing than that. He not only predicts

¹ "Damascus was too crippled with her wars with Assyria to hold them [Judah and Israel] in subjection, and Assyria was too weak to collect tribute from the Palestinian States. The result was that both Judah and Israel enjoyed a brief season of unparalleled prosperity" (Paton, *Syria and Palestine*, p. 225).

² Amos v. 27 ; vi. 7, 14 ; vii. 9, 17.

the downfall of the nation, but he insists that the cause of the overthrow is the gross immorality of the people. That is indeed, from first to last, the burden of his preaching. His fundamental theology is that God will punish the wicked. Israel is wicked above almost all other people ; therefore their punishment will be swift and sure. In the Assyrians, whose attack on Syria was giving to Israel a day of peace,¹ which they greatly misunderstood, Amos sees the rod which Jahveh would lay upon the back of Israel.

Little as Amos has to say about the State, it is clear that his whole interest is to save that State from the perils to which it is exposed. Assyria may be handicapped for a time, but it will speedily recover its power. Damascus will go down before its increasing blows, and then what can Israel do, exposed directly to this great empire? Amos is not a soldier, but a prophet. He has no suggestions to make about fortifications and armaments. But he does know that the nation's strength is being sapped by the licentiousness of the rich and the hard lot of the poor masses. Israel can be strong enough to face the coming storm only by winning the favour of God, and that is not obtainable by offering sacrifices, nor by merely keeping Sabbaths, but by doing justice every one to his neighbour. God's help would not be given in a miracle. No uplifting of a prophet's hands would stay the hostile hosts.² But if God's principles were applied in the

¹ It is by no means unlikely, as G. A. Smith suggests (*Twelve Prophets*, i. p. 66), that Jeroboam II. obtained his exemption from attack by the payment of tribute. Certainly that had been the custom of his predecessors.

² Exod. xvii. 11 f.

daily life of the people, then the nation would be strong. God would be on the side of the heavy battalions, because national strength meant national righteousness.

If we may accept the Messianic passage with which the prophecy of Amos closes¹ as genuine, then we see that the divided condition of Israel was regarded by Amos as at best an evil to be endured for a time; for in the Messianic age the tabernacle of David, which had fallen in the revolt of Jeroboam I., would be raised up again, and the Hebrew race would be reunited under a royal house of God's own choosing.

Hosea's prophetic career extended over a much longer period than that of Amos, and Hosea was a native of Israel.² It may have been the voice of the Judean seer which aroused in him a consciousness of the need of an interpreter of the Divine will. Amos saw the danger to Israel while it was still far off; but Hosea lived long enough to see that the doom of Samaria was very near.³

¹ Amos ix. 11 ff. The arguments for and against the authenticity of this passage are ably stated by G. A. Smith (*Twelve Prophets*, i. chap. x.). He regards the verses as an addition made long after Amos. This position is generally accepted. It seems to me not impossible that Amos may have expressed the hope for the restoration of unity to the nation under the Davidic dynasty, and that a later hand worked over the passage and added to it the further hopes of his own day.

² G. A. Smith says he was probably a priest; but there is little evidence to support that view.

³ It may be noted that Hosea i.-iii. probably belongs to the time of Jeroboam II., and iv.-xiv. to the decade following, so that the actual prophecies of Hosea end some ten years before the fall of Samaria. See G. A. Smith, *Twelve Prophets*, i. p. 216 ff.; Kuenen, *Eintl.*, ii. 312. The title to Hosea's book extends his work to the reign of Hezekiah;

Hosea did not hesitate to hold the king responsible for his wrongs. The royal house as well as the priests would find a judgment lodged against them,¹ because they had been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor. Hosea does not scruple to expose the princes who had indulged in drunken excesses "on the day of the king,"² that is, on the day of his coronation, or on his birthday.³ The prophet was not slow to call the king to account; for the seer understood and followed the will of God, and God was the real sovereign of the nation, the king being at best but a vicegerent. All the national movements were subject to Divine control. In fact, the existence of the nation depended upon the will of God, who had called His Son out of Egypt while He was still a child.⁴

Hosea therefore held that no king had a right to sit upon the throne except by Divine appointment. Yet he found kings in Israel who had no such right to rule: "They have set up kings, but not by Me; they have made princes, and I knew it not."⁵ This statement raises some large questions: Does Hosea refer here to the whole line of Israelitish kings? That is, does he contend that only the Davidic dynasty is approved of God? And was the revolt of Jeroboam,

but the mention of the Judean kings there can scarcely be original. Dr. Peters places some of the prophecies of Hosea in the time of Hoshea, apparently to explain the reference to Egypt; and chapters x. and xiv. he places even after the fall of Samaria (*Scriptures Hebrew and Christian*, p. 425 ff.). It is difficult to think that Hosea's career extended so far.

¹ Hosea v. 1. Reading as R.V. margin; G. A. Smith renders forcibly "on you is the sentence."

² Hosea vii. 5.

³ See Matt. xiv. 6.

⁴ Hosea xi. 1.

⁵ Hosea viii. 4.

and the subsequent revolts, though supported by prophets, the sin of schism? Or does the prophet allude here to some particular kings of Israel? We shall seek for Hosea's answer to these questions.

It is certain that Hosea did not look with favour upon the reigning house of Jehu; for he names one of his children Jezreel, because in a little while God would avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease.¹ In the better days yet to come, Hosea, like Amos, looks for a reunion of the two kingdoms under one head,² and that of the line of David.³ Hosea never finds anything good to say of the rulers of Israel. In the bitter days yet to befall the State the people will be disillusioned, and will deny their king, and confess his impotence.⁴ That the prophet says, in the name of Jahveh, "I give thee a king in My anger, and take him away in My wrath,"⁵ implies no more than an explanation of the fact that kings were suffered to rule in Israel, though contrary to God's will.

In endeavouring to learn exactly what Hosea's attitude towards his own government was, there are some facts which we may state as certain. The house of Jehu, though established by a rebellion instigated by Elisha,⁶ had proved a failure in the essentials of

¹ Hosea i. 4.

² Hosea i. 11.

³ Hosea iii. 5.

⁴ Hosea x. 3; cf. xiii. 10.

⁵ Hosea xiii. 11.

⁶ Kent says that "the details of the narrative suggest that this [Elisha's action] was only the launching of a conspiracy previously arranged" (*Hist.*, ii. 66). Our information is very scanty, but while the narrative will admit such a situation, it does not seem to me to suggest it.

a divinely ordered line of kings. Jehu shed so much blood, and that the best in the land, to insure his possession of the throne, that the nation was seriously weakened as a consequence. This assassination of the innocent was a crime in Hosea's eyes for which God would hold the house of the criminal to strict account. Then, again, Jehu paid tribute¹ to Shalmanezar II., the king of Assyria, in 842 B.C. There could have been but one purpose in this payment, namely, to secure the powerful aid of Assyria for his newly won throne. That method of dependence upon foreign aid instead of upon the God of Israel was also wholly repugnant to Hosea. Though Jeroboam II.'s reign was a period of peace and prosperity, Hosea could see that it was in spite of the king rather than because of him; for it was due to the Assyrian pressure upon Syria, Israel's inveterate foe. The moral rottenness of the times impaired the power of the nation to take full advantage of the breathing spell.

Again, it is to be noted that the greater part of Hosea's prophesying belongs to the years of disastrous anarchy following the death of Jeroboam II., about 743 B.C. In the twenty years from this date to the fall of Samaria there were six different kings upon the throne of Israel, and four of them reached that station as the result of a revolution. Under such conditions it is not surprising that the prophet

¹ Thus Jehu doubly weakened the nation by slaying its citizens and by imposing heavy taxes to meet his obligations to Assyria. To a clear-minded prophet such administration was not a mark of Divine guidance.

spoke slightly of the royal house, and expected little towards the redemption of the nation from kings who sat on a throne to which they had no claim other than the sharpness of their swords or the support of a foreign power. Most scholars rightly hold that Hosea's references to the king are to be explained by virtue of these conditions, and are not due to his condemnation of the great revolt of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

On the other hand, W. Robertson Smith¹ and Cheyne,² while admitting this special reference, still hold that Hosea believed that the Divine right of kings only existed in the house of David. My own opinion coincides with theirs. Hosea did not believe in the Davidic line as a matter of theory, but as a matter of practice. Whatever good may have been possible from the great schism, very little had been realised. The kingdom of Israel, which had been the principal state in Palestine, had decayed until now it was but a petty power.

But Hosea held to two fundamental principles which greatly influenced his political position. It was to him vital that the nation should be faithful to Jahveh, and as a consequence that it should be one. Robertson Smith does not exaggerate when he says, "To Hosea the unity of Israel is a thing of profound significance. . . . The unity of Israel and the unity of God are the basis of his whole doctrine of religion as a personal bond of love and fidelity."³ These ideals could not be realised under such con-

¹ *Prophets of Israel*, p. 184.

² *Hosea* in *Camb. Bib.*, p. 82.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 186 f.

ditions as prevailed in Israel. There had never been stability in the government. From first to last, revolution had been the order of the day. In a period of a little more than two hundred years there were nine dynasties, each new house the result of a sanguinary revolution. Then, again, the worship of Baal, or of some other foreign god, was ever prevalent.

In Judah, on the other hand, the house of David persisted uninterruptedly from the founder to the fall of Jerusalem. While there was much apostasy in Judah, there was never a time when Jahveh was not worshipped there, and that worship ever had the support of the crown. It is on these grounds that this prophet could see no hope for Israel except by reunion with Judah, involving a reallegiance to the house of David. A stable government and an unswerving devotion to Jahveh were essential to the national life, so Hosea thought; and history had shown that those were not attainable under the anarchistic condition into which the North had fallen.

Hosea's confidence in the collapse of Samaria shows not only his Divine insight, but also his knowledge of human nature—if indeed these are not essentially the same thing.¹ There was no sign that the one way of salvation was discerned by the people, still less by the puppet kings, greedy of power, and dearly loving shame.² The nation would not see its way, necessarily a path of humility, and follow it until it had tasted to the last dregs the cup of schismatic folly. Instead of turning to its natural

¹ See John ii. 24 f.

² Hosea iv. 18.

ally, at one time the monarchy vainly sought to purchase stability by subserviency to Assyria;¹ at another time, when the Assyrian allegiance appeared to be approaching the inevitable result of annexation, relief was sought from Egypt.² The prophet opposed both courses; for God had no desire to save Israel by either Assyrian or Egyptian help, but only by their turning with sincere penitence to God their Father and to David their king.

If Hosea was a sincere loyalist and believed that the final peace of Israel was to be found in the unity of the whole seed of Abraham, his patriotic sentiments did not blind him to the fact that the moral condition of Judah was by no means answerable to their high calling. A number of references to Judah³ show that the sister kingdom was guilty like Israel, and should be punished accordingly. These declarations of the prophet seem strange to many scholars in view of his loyalty to the house of David. Hence Stade, Wellhausen, Cornill, and others have concluded that all the Judah passages are interpolations. The critical scholars have here done exactly what the conservatives are often justly blamed for doing, modifying the text to harmonise with preconceived ideas. There is no prophet who would have been less at pains for logical consistency than Hosea. Moreover, we cannot omit the references to Judah without a perceptible mutilation of the text. Hosea's

¹ Hosea v. 13; vii. 8, 11; viii. 9; x. 6; xi. 5; xiv. 3.

² Hosea vii. 11; ix. 6; xii. 1.

³ Hosea i. 7; iv. 15; v. 5 ff., 10 ff.; vi. 4, 11; viii. 14; x. 11; xi. 12; xii. 2.

prophecies are much disjointed at best, but the indiscriminate excision of these passages adds to the confusion. The truth is that Hosea believed in established order, and that belief made him a loyalist without blinding his eyes to facts. One may be an ardent believer in an established Church without closing his eyes to its shortcomings.

There are other passages in which Hosea speaks more favourably of Judah. "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by Jahveh their God, and will not save them by bow, neither by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen."¹ Kuenen pronounces this "the one really doubtful passage" among the Judah references.² G. A. Smith is more pronounced: "it is so obviously intrusive in a prophecy dealing only with Israel, and it so clearly reflects the deliverance of Judah from Sennacherib in 701, that we cannot hold it for anything but an insertion of a date subsequent to that deliverance, and introduced by a pious Jew to signalise Judah's fate in contrast with Israel's."³ The English versions render a doubtful passage in Hosea xi. 12, "But Judah ruleth yet with God, and is faithful with the Holy One." Cheyne renders, "Judah is yet wayward towards God, and towards the faithful Holy One."⁴ G. A. Smith says, "Something is written about Judah, but the text is too obscure for translation";⁵ but he adds that "an adverse statement is required by the parallel clauses." Nothing better

¹ Hosea i. 7.

³ *Twelve Prophets*, i. 213.

⁵ *Twelve Prophets*, i. 301.

² *Einl.*, ii. 323.

⁴ *Camb. Bib. in loc.*

can be made out of the Hebrew text than Cheyne's rendering; no satisfactory emendation has yet been proposed; the passage is therefore too uncertain to weigh much in an argument. There is one other expression favourable to Judah: "Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend."¹ G. A. Smith regards this verse and the following doubtful because "Hosea nowhere else makes any distinction between Ephraim and Judah," and on other grounds as well.² Kuenen looks upon the verb עָשָׂה "offend" as characteristic of Hosea, it being used also in Hosea v. 15; x. 2; xii. 1; xiv. 1; "the wish expressed with reference to Judah," he says, "fits exactly Hosea's favourable sentiments towards the sister kingdom."³ The passage can scarcely be regarded as above suspicion; but the hope expressed that Judah would not fall hopelessly into the particular vice of idolatry which characterised Ephraim, seems to me perfectly harmonious with Hosea's position.

I have gone into this part of Hosea's teaching with considerable fulness, because of its importance, and the difficulties involved. We have seen what the prophet's attitude towards the State was; and now we naturally desire to know what was the State's attitude towards the prophet; for his utterances could have been considered nothing less than high treason. It must be confessed that Hosea's book throws no direct light on the matter. But indirectly we may be able to get some information.

¹ Hosea iv. 15.

² *Twelve Prophets*, i. 224.

³ *Einl.*, ii. 323.

The period of Hosea's most active prophesying was the unsettled decade between Jeroboam II. and Pekah. There is nothing which can be even a remote reference to the attempt of Pekah to coerce Judah into the alliance against Assyria. The voice which had been so insistent against the moral wrongs and political blunders is silent just when these reach their climax. Silence under such conditions could scarcely be voluntary. In the period of constant revolution the upstart kings were too busy maintaining their short-lived reigns by the hunting down of political rivals to trouble themselves about the utterances of a comparatively obscure prophet. But with the accession of Pekah conditions were changed. He desired an alliance with Judah, not, however, by resigning his throne in favour of the legitimate dynasty of David, but by overthrowing that house, and imposing a foreign king¹ on the throne.

At the beginning of Pekah's reign² Israel seemed to take a new lease of life. Allied with other Palestinian powers, Pekah was able to keep his throne secure at home while waging war upon Judah. A prophet who upheld the most sweeping claims of the Davidic house was not likely to be viewed with favour at such a time as this. It is not improbable that the

¹ The son of Tabeel, probably a Syrian (Isa. vii. 6). Winckler identifies him with Rezon (*K.A.T.*³, 135). If this is correct, Syria and Judah were to be united under one sceptre.

² Pekah's reign is given as twenty years in 2 Kings xv. 27; but the inscriptions show that this is far too long. According to the best light available now, this king ruled not more than three years. Menahem paid tribute to Assyria in 738, and Pekah was overthrown and Hoshea put in his place in 734.

State, in the person of the rebel king, was responsible for the silence of the prophet's voice. If this inference is correct, Hosea must be enrolled among the martyrs; for his spirit was not one that would yield to mere threats.

The book of Micah presents serious critical difficulties to the student. The matter is not helped by the great divergence of opinion of the best scholars. Nowack holds¹ that only chapters i. 2-ii. 11, iii., and probably iv. 9 f. 14, v. 9-13 are from Micah. On the other hand, several recent writers, especially Wildeboer, Von Ryssel, Elhorst, who have written at length upon this book, defend the genuineness of the whole.² Driver and G. A. Smith accept as genuine a much larger portion than most other scholars. For my purpose, however, it is not necessary to enter into these questions; for, as a rule, the few passages which show Micah's relation to the State are undoubtedly authentic.

Micah evidently regarded the prophet as the divinely appointed guardian of the State. Consequently he was fearless to rebuke those who were wrong, no matter what their power or position might be. In iii. 1-4, he reproves "the heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel,"³ for they loved evil and hated good, and did not scruple to wax fat by oppressing the people. The rulers made use of their

¹ Art. "Micah," Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*.

² See G. A. Smith, *Twelve Prophets*, i. 358 ff., for a good summary of the critical opinions.

³ That Micah means the terms Jacob and Israel at least to include Judah is certain from iii. 9 f., where it is said that these same rulers build up Zion with blood.

official position to heap up wealth for themselves—a condition of things still widely prevalent in spite of the innumerable prophets who have raised their voice in protest. But Micah believed in a just God, and therefore he looked upon punishment as certain. In the distress which would come upon these oppressors they would cry to Jahveh for deliverance; but Jahveh's ears would be closed to such unworthy suppliants. Those who fed upon their neighbours, and only thought of God when their neighbours proposed to feed upon them, would find that they had sown the wind and would reap the whirlwind.

Micah has more to say of these same high officers of State. "They build up Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity."¹ They were all led by purely mercenary motives: "The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money."² It is vain for such to lean upon Jahveh and say, "Is not Jahveh in our midst? Therefore no evil shall befall us." Such leaders as these could not avert the punishment which God would inflict upon the unrighteous. Officers of this character would prove of no avail in the hour of peril. Even the king would not serve as a support for the tottering State. The prophet looks to the future and sees the distress coming upon the city: "Now why dost thou cry out aloud?" he asks. "Is there no king³ in thee, is thy counsellor perished,

¹ Micah iii. 10.

² Micah iii. 11.

³ Many suppose the "king" to refer to Jahveh. This is necessarily the explanation of those who assign this section to a later date than Micah. That interpretation gives to the whole passage a sense widely different from that above.

that pangs have taken hold of thee as of a woman in travail?"¹ The king would not even have the semblance of saving the State. Jahveh alone would do that after the king and counsellor had been cast away, and the people made to feel the bitterness of exile.²

However frankly Micah spoke his mind, the king did not attempt to restrain his speech. No prophet was ever plainer than Micah when he said, "Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."³ There is nothing in Micah's own book to show how the land bore his words; but there is testimony of the highest order in Jeremiah. Here we learn that Hezekiah and the people of Judah not only did not think of putting the prophet to death, but, on the contrary, they feared Jahveh and entreated His favour, so that Jahveh repented of the evil He had pronounced upon them.⁴ It was the heeding of Micah's preaching on the part of the king which postponed the woe that the prophet had foretold. In the reign of Hezekiah, who for other reasons is justly called a good king, we find a time of tolerance such as the prophets rarely enjoyed in other periods of Hebrew history.

Of all the prophets whom God raised up among the Hebrew people, the greatest statesman was Isaiah the son of Amoz. He was concerned, as every true man of God must be concerned, with all vital interests of his people. But he gave himself unceas-

¹ Micah iv. 9.

³ Micah iii. 12.

² Micah iv. 10.

⁴ Jer. xxvi. 17 ff.

ingly to the great problem of saving the State, which in his long life faced many critical situations. It is unnecessary—indeed, it is well-nigh impossible within my limits—to bring out every detail of his work for the State. But a few conspicuous instances will show his position.

Isaiah held fast to a few cardinal principles which served as a good guide at all critical junctures. He believed that Judah was under the protection of an all mighty and all holy God. The peace and safety of the State depended therefore on fidelity to Him and confidence in Him. Political devices, such as were commonly resorted to by all peoples in all ages, would in the long run work only harm to a feeble folk like the Judeans. Zion would be invulnerable, not by reason of her good armies, nor by membership in a foreign alliance, but by independence of every power of earth, and by sole reliance upon Jahveh of hosts.

Consequently we find him standing in direct opposition to king Ahaz at the time of the Syro-Ephraimitish war. His position in that trying time shows both his steadfast adherence to his fundamental doctrine and his political insight.

Razon¹ of Damascus and Pekah of Israel were organising a league to resist the Assyrian advance west of the Euphrates. They believed that by a consolidation of interests they could throw off the domination of that great power and successfully

¹ Rezin, the Biblical form of the name, is an easily understood error for Rezon or Razon. The Greek texts have Ραζων or Ρασσων, agreeing with Assyrian Rasunnu. See *K.A.T.*³, iii. 55.

resist a reforging of their chains. They seem to have invited Ahaz along with other kings to join their league, but Ahaz refused. Judah was too considerable a power to leave in their rear, and they made the capital mistake of attempting to force her into the alliance, proposing to dethrone Ahaz and set up a foreign king who would serve the allied interests.¹ The war dragged along for a considerable time, and at first, naturally enough, Judah suffered severely. It is true that our knowledge of the war is very limited,² but when we are told that "his heart and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind,"³ it means a good deal.

Ahaz was not indifferent to the danger, but his method of meeting it was certain to bring him face to face with a still graver peril later on. He made an

¹ Sayce supposes that Pekah was anxious to overthrow the Davidic dynasty and rule over all Israel; the forcing of Judah into the alliance was of the nature of an appeal to the patriotic sentiments of the people (*H.C.M.*, p. 401). The Syrians and Israelites were quite free at this time (735 B.C.) to make elaborate preparations for war, because the annals of Tiglath-Pileser show that he was busily engaged in a campaign in the North.

² Besides this reference in Isaiah, we have the accounts of the war in 2 Kings xv. 37, xvi. 5-9; 2 Chron. xxviii. 5-18. Hostilities apparently began in the closing part of Jotham's reign (2 Kings xv. 37). Chronicles says nothing of an alliance against Judah, but says that Jahveh sent Syria against Ahaz, and that "he was delivered into the hand of the king of Israel." We read that Pekah slew 120,000 Judeans in one day, "because they had forsaken Jahveh," and took 200,000 prisoners, who were released, however, at the solicitation of Oded the prophet. This story can scarcely be reconciled with the reference in Isaiah; but there may be a germ of historical truth, as Winckler suggests, especially in the representation of the overwhelming defeat of the Judeans, which we may place in the early stages of the war.

³ Isa. vii. 2.

alliance directly with the common enemy.¹ By paying tribute to Assyria he expected to secure so vigorous an attack on the North that both Syria and Ephraim would find occupation for their arms in self-defence. It was this alliance with Assyria that Isaiah tried so hard to prevent, though his efforts were unhappily in vain. He tried to persuade the king that he exaggerated the danger. The message with which Jahveh sent him to meet the king in the highway by the fuller's field² was one of confidence: "Be wary and keep thyself calm; fear not, neither let thy heart be faint, because of these two fag-ends of smoking fire brands."³ The allied powers, seemingly mighty as they are, have reached the end of their strength. They are burnt out like smoking brands, and can never again be fanned into effective flame. Therefore the prophet could pronounce with great positiveness his oracle of God: "Thus saith the Lord Jahveh, it shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass."⁴

Ahaz would not believe, therefore he would not be established.⁵ Declining to believe, the king failed to take the steps whereby establishment was possible, and on the contrary took the steps by which it was made impossible. In vain did the prophet plead that Ahaz should ask the message to be confirmed by a sign. The king was too confident of the success of his own

¹ 2 Kings xvi. 7-9; 2 Chron. xxviii. 16-20.

² Ahaz was expecting the siege which is mentioned in Isa. vii. 1, 2 Kings xvi. 5, and was looking after the water supply.

³ Isa. vii. 4; for the most part, Cheyne's rendering in Poly. Bib.

⁴ Isa. vii. 7.

⁵ Isa. vii. 9.

schemes to be willing to modify them to suit a plan of God. On account of this fatal policy God would give a child as a sign of two things, one the confirming of the prophet's word: "Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou darest shall be forsaken";¹ the other to point out the ominous outlook for Judah: "Jahveh will bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—even the king of Assyria."² Judah will suffer the worst fate which has befallen her since the great schism which left her an isolated and petty folk. And that disaster will be the direct consequence of Ahaz's efforts to save the State. Isaiah could see that Assyria needed no urging from Judah to coerce her rebellious subjects, and that Ahaz's offering of tribute would excite the cupidity of that empire, so that it would never rest until it had drained Judah's resources to the utmost.

Isaiah was powerless to do more than advise, and Ahaz was willing enough that the prophet should give counsel as long as he could shape the policy of the State to suit his will. The king did not interfere with the prophet's freedom of speech, even though he repudiated his advice. Ahaz lived long enough to see that the prophet was right; Assyria easily put down the coalition and reduced the northern peoples

¹ Isa. vii. 16.

² Cheyne regards this whole verse as a gloss, and the closing words "the king of Assyria" as a gloss to a gloss. Whether added by a later hand or not, the king of Assyria is rightly named as the source of danger.

to a more complete subjection than before.¹ Judah, too, became a vassal state,² and the annual tribute became not only a burden, but a constant source of danger. For the people then, as well as later, were sure to become restless under a system of tribute to Cæsar, and the cessation of payment at any time would bring about an Assyrian invasion. From this act of Ahaz dates the long series of troubles which Judah suffered at the hands of the empire of the Euphrates.

It is but natural to conjecture what would have been the fate of Judah if Isaiah's advice had been scrupulously followed. It is easy to see the disastrous consequences of disregarding the prophet's vision, and, while knowledge fails, I think it not impossible to estimate the results had better counsels prevailed. For Judah had these two leading sources of safety, always good in perilous times for the individual or the nation, isolation and obscurity. It is always true that "death loves a shining mark," and Judah was not very brilliant among the nations of the world at that time. By her course of action she removed these protections. Otherwise it seems clear that she might, at all events, have escaped Assyrian greed, and certainly have persisted much longer than she did.

It is impossible to ignore a radically different view of the history of this period, which may be found

¹ See *K.A.T.*³, p. 55 f., 264 f. According to Tiglath-pileser's annals, only the city of Samaria was left to Pekah.

² The Chronicler says, "Tiglath-pilneser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, and strengthened him not" (2 Chron. xxviii. 20).

briefly stated by Winckler.¹ Judah had long been the vassal of Israel, and so indirectly was under Assyria. When Israel resolved to throw off the yoke in conjunction with Syria, Judah was forced to choose between rebellion against Israelite sovereignty and direct alliance with Assyria. Ahaz saw that the allies would be crushed as soon as Tiglath-pileser appeared on the scene, and he elected to be on the side of the heavy battalions. He had hopes that, as a reward for his fidelity, the ancient dominions of the house of David might be restored to him. This interpretation of the history sets Ahaz's action in quite a different light. If that were the condition of things, Ahaz's choice would have been pre-eminently wise, and Isaiah's attitude quite inexplicable. For it is plain that Isaiah condemned the policy of Ahaz.² There seems to be no sufficient evidence for Winckler's statement: "The relation of Judah to Israel had finally become that of a vassal," though it is true that Israel had at times held domination over the sister kingdom.

In taking up Isaiah's political activity during the reign of Hezekiah, we are confronted with such wide difference of expert opinion that we feel some sympathy with the old demand of conservatism, that the critics should agree among themselves before they attempt to convert others to their belief. Hezekiah's accession is placed all the way from 728 to 714 B.C.,³

¹ *K.A.T.*³, p. 265 f.

² Not his refusal to ally with Israel, but his overtures to Assyria; Isaiah wanted to preserve the *status quo*.

³ The earliest date is based on 2 Kings xviii. 10, where it is said that Samaria was taken in the sixth year of Hezekiah. As Samaria

and the embassy of Merodach-baladan is by some put as early as 720 B.C., by others as late as 701 B.C. The divergent views of competent scholars in this case, however, are not due to any vagaries of opinion on their part, but to the uncertainty of the data, and we must admit that the chronology of the period is an unsolved problem. Our study will not be seriously affected, however, by ignorance as to the date of the particular events in the life of the prophet which we shall consider.

The Chronicler tells us expressly that Hezekiah's reformation began in the first month of his first year.¹ In 2 Kings also the reform is placed at the beginning of his reign.² In Jeremiah xxvi. 18 f. the reform of Hezekiah is traced to the influence of Micah. The prophecy of Micah certainly belongs to the time before the fall of Samaria, so that, according to the earliest Biblical evidence, Hezekiah reached the throne before 722, and his reformation belongs to the early days of his reign. The Chronicler describes the reforms at great length, and makes them chiefly of a ritual character. According to Kings, he "removed the high places, brake the pillars, and cut down the Asherah; and he brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made."³

Discredit has been placed upon this story by

fell in 722, Hezekiah would have come to the throne in 728 or 727.

² Kings xviii. 13 places the invasion of Sennacherib, which belongs to the year 701 B.C., in Hezekiah's fourteenth year, hence his accession would be placed 715 or 714. Kittel follows Dillmann in placing Hezekiah's succession at 719.

¹ 2 Chron. xxix. 3.

² 2 Kings xviii. 4.

³ 2 Kings xviii. 4.

various scholars, some questioning the reformation altogether, others placing it as late as the invasion of Sennacherib. But there is good reason for holding that the Biblical account is in the main correct. Hezekiah differed radically from his father Ahaz, in that he was a faithful worshipper of Jahveh. What more natural than that upon his coronation he should sweep away the corruptions which Ahaz had introduced in the temple worship? The details in Chronicles are not to be pressed, and even the brief record in Kings may be far from accurate, but there is every reason to hold that Hezekiah began his rule with just such a repentance of the evils which he found as the elders of Jehoiakim's time attributed to him. Someone has said that there is scarcely an event in the Old Testament better attested than Hezekiah's reformation. The testimony of Jeremiah xxvi. 18 f. cannot be disregarded.

But is Isaiah's influence not traceable in Hezekiah's reform?¹ Was it wholly due to Micah, as we should infer from the statement in Jeremiah? It would be very strange if the country prophet led the king to amend the royal ways and the prophet of the court produced no effect at all. For Isaiah had been active for more than ten years when Hezekiah ascended the throne.² In the early prophecies of Isaiah there is no such specific utterance with which to connect the reform as in Micah iii. 12. Moreover,

¹ Kent says that the religious reformation under Hezekiah was one of the fruits of the influence of the prophetic party under Isaiah's leadership (*History*, ii. p. 157).

² Isaiah's call was in 740 or 738; Hezekiah's accession, 728 to 714.

if the reform actually took the line indicated by the historians, it would command little interest from the great prophet, who felt that the breaking down of Asherahs was but a feeble attempt at obedience to the will of God. At the same time Hezekiah must have been familiar with the ringing utterances of the seer who had long been a conspicuous figure in Jerusalem, and his resolve to follow the counsel of the God of his people must have been largely due to Isaiah. Isaiah may have inspired the reformation, even though it did not follow a course which could command his approval.

Isaiah's influence seems to have been potent enough to save Judah from disaster at the time of Sargon's invasion in 711 B.C., a memorable event which now claims our attention. Yet it is somewhat difficult to draw the limits of Isaiah's work in connexion with this Assyrian king. A few years ago Sargon was quite unknown, save for a mention in Isaiah xx. Since the discovery of his own account of the attack upon Ashdod, there has been a tendency to connect many of Isaiah's Assyrian prophecies with this invasion. There are some things, however, which are clear. Hezekiah had fallen heir to an annual tribute to the Assyrian king. Some of the states of Canaan proposed to throw off the yoke, and Hezekiah was doubtless urged to cast in his fortunes with them. Isaiah laboured to prevent this suicidal course. His chief object seems to have been to show the vanity of the expected aid from Egypt. He stripped himself of his prophetic robes,¹ and went

¹ See p. 70.

about for three years in the garb of a captive,¹ as a sign of the humiliation which Assyria would inflict upon Egypt.² This bold step of the prophet did not apparently preserve the absolute loyalty of Hezekiah, for he seems to have stopped the payment of tribute. But it did apparently restrain him from any active part in the rebellion, so that Judah suffered no consequences other than the resumption of the tribute money.

The Egyptians had doubtless inspired this revolt. The pacification of Canaan by the Assyrians was always a menace to them, and they were ever sowing seeds of rebellion. Hezekiah was certainly involved to a certain extent, for Sargon mentions Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab along with Ashdod.³ But when the Assyrian general, the Tartan, or Turtan, appeared,⁴ the allies seem to have left Ashdod to its fate. It seems clear that Hezekiah took no part in the actual struggle, much as he may have hoped from its outcome, though he had probably stopped the payment of his annual tribute. It was doubtless Isaiah's influence which kept the king quiet. For the prophet saw the hopelessness of a contest with Sargon, and the untrustworthiness of the Egyptian promise. He seems to have regarded the case as very serious though. Enormous pressure must have been exerted to bring Hezekiah into the struggle. Isaiah adopted a bold course to counteract the

¹ From this statement and from the varying Assyrian records Winckler draws the conclusion that the revolt lasted three years (*K.A.T.*³, p. 65).

² Isa. xx.

³ *K.A.T.*³, p. 70.

⁴ Isa. xx. i.

anti-Assyrian influence. During the three years¹ of the revolt he went about the streets of Jerusalem "naked and barefoot"² *i.e.* in the garb of a captive slave, as a sign of the fate that would befall Egypt³ and Ethiopia at the hand of the power against which they had stirred up revolt.

The wisdom of the prophet's course was shown from the completeness of Sargon's suppression of the uprising, and the reward of his unpleasant personal sacrifice—for the dress of a slave must have been a disagreeable garb for one of his standing—was found in his saving Judah from an actual invasion, with all its accompanying disasters.

The embassy of Merodach-baladan⁴ will next engage our attention. In the Biblical sources we have the record in 2 Kings xx. 12–21, and the parallel passage in Isaiah xxxix. We have also some further

¹ Sargon's annals place the invasion in the eleventh year of his reign (711 B.C.); the fragments of a clay prism date it in the ninth year. Winckler explains the discrepancy by supposing the latter to be the date at which the revolt began and the former its ending (*K.A.T.*³, p. 69 f.). This agrees exactly with Isaiah's three years.

² Isa. xx. 3.

³ Winckler holds that Isaiah's reference is not to the empires of the Nile, but to a Musri and Kush in Western Arabia. Many similar references are explained in the same way. Rogers says that his "suggestions concerning Musri are exceedingly fruitful, and many are undoubtedly correct, but he has carried the matter too far in attempting to eliminate Egypt almost entirely and to supplant it with Musri" (*Hist. of Babylonia and Assyria*, ii. p. 144 n.). Winckler's views may be found in *K.A.T.*³, p. 70 f. Hommel seems to have made the same suggestion independently; see Hilprecht's *Explorations in Bible Lands*, p. 743; cf. Hommel's art. "Assyria," *Hastings' Bib. Dict.*

⁴ In 2 Kings xx. 12 the name is given as Berodach-baladan. Isa. xxxix. 1 has the correct form, as shown by the inscriptions, in which the name is Marduk-abal-iddina.

light from Assyrian sources. From these we learn that this prince took possession of Southern Babylonia, and in 721 B.C. was proclaimed king of Babylon. Babylonia had been an Assyrian province, and Sargon was not likely to lose it without a bitter struggle. But his first battle was unsuccessful, for Merodach-baladan was supported by a number of allies, especially the Elamites and Aramaeans. In 710, however, after the suppression of the uprisings in the West and North, some of which the usurper may have helped to instigate, Sargon turned southward and completely routed his enemy and regained complete control of Babylon.

In 702, when Sargon had been succeeded by Sennacherib, Babylonia was once more loosened from its Assyrian control, and the clever Chaldean came forth again from the southern marshes and set himself up as king. In order to maintain his position, it was essential that he keep the Assyrian king busily employed elsewhere. To do this it was only necessary to stir up rebellion among the many peoples over whom the Assyrian ruled, and who were ever zealous for a blow to regain their lost freedom. On this occasion Merodach-baladan's rule was short, for Sennacherib ignored for the time the uprising in the West, and turned his army towards Babylon. His success was quick and complete. After a rule of but nine months,¹ the Chaldean was finally overthrown.²

The embassy to Hezekiah would fit in very well

¹ Or six months according to Winckler.

² See Rogers, *Hist. of Babyl. and Assyr.*, ii. pp. 152 ff, 187 ff.

with any of these periods. Winckler places it in 720 B.C.,¹ Sayce fixes it at 711 B.C.,² while Rogers and others date it in 702. The book of Kings places this embassy after the invasion of Sennacherib, 701 B.C. But it also says that Hezekiah lived fifteen years after his sickness, in connexion with which Merodach-baladan sent the embassy; this would carry his reign down to 686 B.C. To say nothing of the uncertainty of the numbers in the text, we are in doubt about the limits of Hezekiah's reign. On the whole, the last-named date, 702 B.C., seems the most probable.³

The only ostensible purpose of the embassy was to congratulate Hezekiah upon his recovery from sickness. But apparently the king was apprised of the real purpose of the visit. For the mere congratulations would offer no excuse for his exhibit of his military resources. We are told that "Hezekiah hearkened unto them,"⁴ and showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious oil, and the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not."⁵ From this display

¹ *K.A.T.*³, 72, 270 f.

² *H.C.M.*, 424 ff; *Hastings' Bible Dict.*, iii. 347.

³ The most serious objection to this date is the shortness of Merodach-baladan's reign at that time, but nine months at most. If 702 is the correct date, the embassy must have gone back to a defeated and deposed monarch.

⁴ So *Isa.* xxxix. 2; this is undoubtedly the correct text, and has the support of the Greek versions. The difference in Hebrew is only that of a single letter.

⁵ *2 Kings* xx. 13.

it is plain that the real object of the king was to show the envoys that he would be no mean ally in case of war.

How Isaiah's suspicions were aroused we cannot tell. It would be impossible to keep the presence of these strangers a secret, but Hezekiah seems to have tried to conceal their real purpose. There is a foreboding sternness in the prophet's questions: "What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? What have they seen in thy house?" Hezekiah answers all the questions but the first; that matter he regards as his secret. But it was not really essential to the keen prophet; he knows the state of affairs in Babylon, and he knows that Merodach-baladan would not trouble himself about a Judean king's sickness or recovery. He perceives that the king has virtually allied himself with this distant power, and would revolt against his suzerain, and he hastens to point out the disastrous consequences of Hezekiah's folly: "The days come, that all that is in thy house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried to Babylon."¹

Isaiah's prediction has received many interpretations. By some it is regarded as a clear vision of what actually took place more than a century later, when the last treasures were taken to Babylon. But that would make the prophecy meaningless to Hezekiah. Moreover, Isaiah also says, "Of thy sons that shall issue from thee, whom thou shalt beget, shall they take away: and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the

¹ 2 Kings xx. 17.

king of Babylon." ¹ This is too specific to refer to Hezekiah's remote descendants. Then, further, the prophecy is aimed at the king's folly in meditating rebellion, whereas the older view would make the display of his treasures to a greedy potentate a sin.

Again, the prediction is explained as a *vaticinium ex eventu*.² But it seems to me unlikely that the prediction was wholly manufactured to agree with the historic facts, though it might easily be that the form was modified in conformity with the event. Isaiah may have named Assyria, and the historian who wrote this part of his life changed the name to Babylon.³

In all ages and among all peoples the death of an absolute monarch has been a matter of great moment to his subjects, whether native or foreign. If the deceased king had been a successful conqueror, there was always the hope that his successor might prove more feeble, and so the vassal states be able to regain their freedom. Sargon had shown himself an able general, and had made good the claims of his predecessors to a great empire. Much of it was held together, however, simply by the might of his brawny arms. Consequently, when the great conqueror died, in 705, exultant hopes were raised among the subjugated peoples that they would be strong enough to

¹ Isa. xxxix. 7.

² See *e.g.* art. "Hezekiah," Hastings' *Bible Dict.*, ii. 378.

³ There is another possible explanation. Babylon was subject to Assyria. Transported captives were sent frequently to the colonies, and Isaiah may have expected Sennacherib to send the prisoners to Babylonia. But it is only by misunderstanding prophecy that one can press literally a prophetic prediction.

throw off the yoke. It is perfectly possible that Isaiah xiv. 28-32 shows the great expectations of the Philistines at this crisis, and the prophet's assurance that their hopes would soon be dashed to the ground.¹

However that may be, it is certain that Sennacherib ascended the throne to find himself confronted with rebellion in many of the remoter parts of his empire. Probably as being the least important, he neglected the West for a few years and addressed himself to the graver problems in other parts of his wide realm.

The nations of the West took advantage of the absence of the Assyrian armies, and combined in a seemingly formidable revolt. Padi, the king of Ekron, appears to have been the only one to remain loyal, and he was dethroned and sent to Hezekiah as a prisoner. That fact, coupled with the embassy of Merodach-baladan, would indicate that Hezekiah was the recognised head of the revolting allies. Egypt also contributed to the spirit of rebellion by lavish promises of aid. Against this reliance upon the empire of the Nile, the great prophet set his face like a flint. He was utterly opposed to the rebellion; for he knew that the Assyrians had not lost their power, that an attempt to throw off the yoke would only fasten it tighter, and that no real aid could be expected from the Nile. In chapters xxx., xxxi. of his book we have a record of his zealous efforts

¹ The serpent's tooth would be Sargon, and the fiery flying serpent would be Sennacherib, his successor. Driver inclines to this view (*L.O.T.*⁶, p. 213). Cheyne accepts the date of the title ("the year that King Ahaz died"), and refers both expressions to Sargon (*Polychrome Bible*, p. 149).

to preserve the fidelity of Judah to the power which held her in subjection.

"Woe to the rebellious children," he cries in Jahveh's name, "that take counsel, but not of Me: and that make a league, but not of My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; that set out to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at My mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to take refuge in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the refuge in the shadow of Egypt your confusion."¹

The anti-Assyrian party was very strong at this period. The Hebrews were ever galled by a foreign domination, which seemed to fly in the face of the Divine promises to their forefathers, and the appeal to a religious and patriotic sentiment never gained adherents more easily than in the days of Hezekiah. The revolt was so sure of their position that they attempted to silence opposition. This was the only time when Isaiah was constrained to cry out against the attempt to put down the truth by violent means. The lying children said to the seers, "See not," and to the prophets, "prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things," *i.e.* those which will arouse no opposition,² the invariable resource of those who are persistently in the wrong.

Isaiah held that the revolt against Assyria was rebellion against the Lord, because it was contrary to His will; not that Jahveh was indifferent to the national distress, for He would save His people

¹ Isa. xxx. 1-3.

² Isa. xxx. 10.

in His own way and in His own time. The saving of the nation could not be accomplished by "the Egyptians, who are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit," and who shall stumble in their helping even as those helped shall fall, when Jahveh shall stretch out His mighty hand.¹ For that hand will be stretched out and the Assyrian will struggle in vain against it: "as birds hovering, so will Jahveh of hosts protect Jerusalem: He will protect and deliver it, He will pass over and preserve it. . . . The Assyrian shall fall by the sword, not of a man; and the sword, not of men, shall devour him. . . . His rock shall pass away by reason of terror, and his princes shall be dismayed at the ensign, saith Jahveh, whose fire is in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem."²

The movement against Assyria was popular among the people, was more than countenanced by the king, and naturally enrolled among its supporters some of the chief officers of the State. There was one, however, whose support was for some reason so obnoxious to Isaiah that he for once, and once only, indulges in personal denunciation. He made a vigorous attack upon Shebna, though the latter occupied a commanding position in the king's household. This position was that of steward or treasurer over the house.³ He was a foreigner apparently, but

¹ Isa. xxxi. 3.

² Isa. xxxi. 5-9.

³ This office had become an important one; it may have been originally a minor domestic place, but in royal households such offices increase their powers. Shebna was an important figure, and evidently possessed much wealth. See further art. "Shebna," Hastings' *Bible Dict.*

was taking up permanent citizenship in Judah, and even building for himself, as was the custom of the great, a tomb in which his body should lie.¹

Shebna's policy and influence were so odious in Isaiah's eyes, that his language against him is very strong: "Jahveh, like a strong man, will hurl thee away violently: yea He will wrap thee up closely. He will surely wind thee round and round, and toss thee like a ball into a large country; there shalt thou die, and there shall be the chariots of thy glory, thou shame² of thy lord's house."³

Isaiah did not rest with denunciation or predictions of disaster, but set to work to secure Shebna's removal from office. The fact that he was able to accomplish his object and to name Shebna's successor indicates that our prophet was speaking with intimate knowledge of the purposes of the court, though doubtless his own influence had contributed largely to the minister's downfall. Surely there is more than an ordinary prophetic declaration in the threat: "I will thrust thee from thine office; and from thy station shalt thou be pulled down. . . . I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy authority into his hand."⁴ A short time afterwards Eliakim the son of Hilkiah held the office of steward of the king's house-

¹ Isa. xxii. 16. For similar cases see 2 Sam. xviii. 18; 2 Chron. xvi. 14; Matt. xxvii. 60.

² From this term it may be that Shebna was open to attack on the side of moral character as well as political policy.

³ Isa. xxii. 17 f.

⁴ Isa. xxii. 19-21.

hold.¹ Isaiah not only opposed the policy of rebellion against Assyria and alliance with Egypt, but he used his power for the overthrow of a chief minister and apparently chose his successor. His influence therefore was very powerful in spite of his belonging to the opposition.

The question has been raised as to whether the prophet's victory was real or only apparent. It is clear that Eliakim succeeded Shebna as governor of the palace. What became of Shebna? Was Isaiah's prediction fulfilled that he would be cast out into another foreign land and die there? Along with Eliakim, when he was sent to treat with the Assyrian envoys, was Shebna the secretary?² It is generally assumed that this is the same Shebna whom Isaiah had driven from office, and the degradation is explained by asserting that the new post was a less important one.³ But we know so little concerning these offices that we can scarcely be very positive about their relative consequence. Moreover, the assignment to a less important office is not the same punishment as exile and death, and so would not be any real fulfilment of Isaiah's prediction. But it seems to me perfectly possible that there was more than one Shebna at Jerusalem. In any case, we cannot pronounce the prophecy unfulfilled even if the same Shebna holds high office in 701. Hezekiah

¹ 2 Kings xviii. 18.

² 2 Kings xviii. 18.

³ So Cheyne, *Poly. Bib.*, p. 159; Driver, *L.O.T.*⁶, p. 218; Dillmann, *Jesaia*,⁶ *in loc.* Kittel says very truly that we have no ground for asserting that the office of scribe was lower than that of house steward (*Königsbücher*, p. 282).

must have looked with favour upon this servile creature. Yet he dare not wholly disregard the prophet's attacks. But after Shebna's removal from office, and the consequent quieting of the clamour, the king could easily appoint him to another post. Isaiah's desires may have thus been thwarted for the time, but Shebna was not dead yet. Even though he may have held the post of secretary in 701, it does not follow that he ever occupied the tomb which had been so much concern to him. Stevenson's suggestion¹ that Isaiah's language was only intended as a special case of warning, "He putteth down the mighty from their seat," offers, I think, one of the less satisfactory solutions. We know that Shebna was degraded from office at the prophet's instigation; we do not know what became of him afterwards; but Isaiah certainly accomplished his main purpose, even if all of his predictions were not literally fulfilled.

Perhaps we should remember that a Hebrew prophet's "shall" is often equivalent to the modern "ought." Isaiah would thus mean that the shameless minister *ought* to be exiled and die in disgrace. That might be said of many men to-day who disgrace the high offices they hold. It is easy to cry out that they ought to be removed, and even we hear that they *shall* be relegated to other spheres; but many such hopes and predictions are ever unfulfilled.

Isaiah had stood strenuously against the attempt to overthrow the Assyrian supremacy. He had opposed all Babylonian, Egyptian, and Palestinian

¹ Hastings' *Bible Dict.*, art. "Shebna."

alliances. He believed that Judah should be faithful to the oath of allegiance which she had taken,¹ and he knew that Assyria was strong enough to exact obedience. In the early part of Sennacherib's invasion, the prophet was probably quiet. He saw and the people could see the abundant fulfilling of his warnings. Hezekiah was too shrewd to need a seer to cry in exultation, "I told you so."

For the Assyrian king was everywhere victorious when at last he invaded the West in 701 B.C. A single great leader always has an advantage over a coalition. The Assyrian knew how to press that advantage, and succeeded in breaking up the alliance so as to deal with the rebellious peoples in detail. With his first success several states, fearing the vengeance of the king and wishing to avoid the destruction of property incident to an invasion, and being quite hopeless of successful resistance, were prompt to sue for peace and make such terms as they could get. Hezekiah was one of the kings who apparently felt that he had gone too far to retreat, or who felt that he could resist long enough at least to secure better terms by treaty than by surrender. The Egyptian forces had been driven back; Ekron had paid a severe penalty for its deposition of Padi, an Assyrian appointee. The armies then invaded Judah. Both the Bible² and the inscriptions³

¹ This was not a mere principle of statecraft: an oath taken in the name of Jahveh could not be lightly broken, even though the bond was galling.

² 2 Kings xviii. f. = Isa. xxxvi. f.

³ An English translation of these interesting inscriptions by Rogers may be found in *Records of the Past*, New Series, vol. vi.

tell the disastrous story. Forty-six¹ fortified cities were taken and annexed to other provinces. Jerusalem might hold out a long time, but resistance was not likely to restore the lost territory. Judah could not afford to be shorn of its towns; hence the king was constrained to send an embassy to Sennacherib at Lachish to make a treaty of peace. His message was humble enough in tone: "I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear."² The Assyrian imposed a fine of three hundred talents of silver³ and thirty of gold, which Hezekiah raised only by emptying both the royal and the sacred treasuries, and by stripping off the golden ornaments of the temple.

Still Sennacherib was not satisfied. He seems to have thought that Jerusalem was now so weakened and discouraged that it would offer no further resistance, and that he could wreak his vengeance upon its people as he had upon Ekron. The king sent his lieutenants with a great army to demand the surrender of the city. Hezekiah was in a sore strait. The great army before the city, the bold challenge of the Assyrians, the appeal to the people against the king, all tended to make his situation desperate. In his distress he turns to the very one whose counsel he had so long disregarded, Isaiah the prophet. Covered with sackcloth, Eliakim, Shebna, and the

¹ This number is given by Sennacherib. The Bible says the king of Assyria took "all the fortified cities of Judah" (2 Kings xviii. 13).

² 2 Kings xviii. 14.

³ The Assyrian inscription says eight hundred talents of silver. It is generally supposed that three hundred talents Hebrew are equivalent to eight hundred Assyrian. See *K.A.T.*³, p. 342.

elders of the priests are sent to the prophet to ask his intercession for the poor remnant of Israel.

Isaiah's words were full of encouragement to the perplexed king: "Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him, and he shall hear tidings, and shall return to his own land."¹ Rabshakeh returned to his master, whom he found at Libnah, Lachish having fallen in the meantime, and reported Hezekiah's refusal to surrender. As Tirhakah was advancing with an Ethiopian army, Sennacherib was not in a position to invest Jerusalem. He therefore made another effort to secure a peaceful surrender by sending a threatening letter to Hezekiah. The king took this epistle to the temple and spread it out as if he would have Jahveh read the taunts of the blasphemous enemy. The answer of Jahveh came from the mouth of the prophet. It was God's own defiance of the perjured blasphemer: "The virgin daughter of Zion hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn: the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. . . . Because of thy raging against Me, and because thine arrogancy is come up into Mine ears, therefore will I put My hook into thy nose, and My bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest. . . . Thus saith Jahveh concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast up a mound against

¹ 2 Kings xix. 6 f.

it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and he shall not come into this city, saith Jahveh. For I will defend this city to save it, for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake."¹

There can be no doubt that Isaiah's expectations about the collapse of Sennacherib's forces were fully realised. The Biblical accounts state that the angel of Jahveh went forth in the night and slew one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp; that Sennacherib returned to Nineveh, and was there assassinated by his sons while he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god.²

It ought to be plain that this story is not to be interpreted literally, as it is in Byron's well-known poem, "The Destruction of Sennacherib," and by some of the Biblical scholars, such as Rawlinson. The Hebrews ignored secondary causes, ascribing every event directly to God. The historian speaks indifferently of the punishment of David as a pestilence and as the direct work of the angel of Jahveh.³

Herodotus preserves a tradition⁴ that at Pelusium field-mice ate the bowstrings of the Assyrians. But field-mice are a symbol of pestilence. If a disastrous plague broke out in the Assyrian camp, such as has demoralised many an army, that would satisfy both the Biblical story and Herodotus' tradition. Jerome accepted this interpretation.

¹ 2 Kings xix. 21, 28, 32-34.

² Isa. xxxvii. 36 ff. ; 2 Kings xix. 35 ff.

³ 2 Sam. xxiv. 15 ff.

⁴ ii. 141.

Winckler ignores this disaster altogether, asserting that Sennacherib was constrained to raise the siege of Jerusalem and hasten back to the East because of an invasion of Chaldeans and Elamites.¹ The Egyptians and the Hebrews alike claimed that they were saved from the Assyrians by Divine intervention. The fact is that Sennacherib retreated, leaving both Jerusalem and Egypt unsubdued. Isaiah was justified in his confidence, and must have appeared to the people the real deliverer of the people of God. They could not doubt that Jahveh had opened his eyes to see the future doom of the enemy of Judah and the blasphemer of God.

Just at this moment of his popularity we must leave this great prophet, who had laboured for forty years for the State, whose wise policy would have made a vastly different reading of history had it been faithfully followed. Even as it happened he was triumphant in the end, and Judah had still a possibility of recovery, a possibility which, as we shall see, she recklessly threw away. Whether Isaiah continued his prophetic activity or retired in the zenith of popularity we do not know. There is no prophecy of his which we can surely date after this time. The tradition preserved in the Mishna, that he was slain by Manasseh; or that in the Ascension of Isaiah, that he was sawn asunder, may be based on facts, but we have no good historic testimony as to his fate.

¹ *K.A.T.*³, 80.

CHAPTER X

THE PROPHET'S RELATION TO THE STATE

III. JEREMIAH TO ZECHARIAH

THREE-QUARTERS of a century elapsed between the close of Isaiah's career and the beginning of Jeremiah's. Our knowledge of that period is very slight, and the little we know does not make an attractive picture. So far as our information goes, prophecy was silent. But we may easily infer the actual conditions. The prophets who saw visions according to the pleasure of the ruling kings were doubtless numerous, but their worthless effusions have found no record. Those who saw according to the visions of God were put to silence, even though the tomb alone could stop their mouths. We read that "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other."¹

Doubtless the faithful prophets furnished their full quota of martyrs.² We can easily comprehend from this condition the fact that the prophets as a class in

¹ 2 Kings xxi. 16.

² See Jer. ii. 30. It is by no means impossible that Isaiah was a victim of Manasseh's bloody sword (see chap. ix.). Even Herod dared not put John to death openly, because the people esteemed him a prophet (Matt. xiv. 5; cf. xxi. 26, 46). Manasseh did not heed the natural protection which belonged to the office of prophet.

Jeremiah's time were leagued with the priests in subserviency to the civil power, and the further fact that Jeremiah assumed the prophetic office with great reluctance, and stood to his task only from an overwhelming conviction that it was God's will. The seer who proposed to see straight and tell what he saw was engaging in an extra hazardous task.

Yet Jeremiah began to prophesy in the peaceful days of Josiah, when the power of the State was on the side of righteousness and truth. He might well rejoice in that day, for it did not last long, and the rest of the prophet's life was strenuous and stormy.

What part our prophet played in Josiah's reformation it is not easy to say. If we could be sure of the accuracy of such passages as Jeremiah xi. 1-8 and xvii. 19 ff., we should know that Jeremiah was an enthusiastic supporter of the king's efforts. Both of these passages are rejected by Duhm and others, and not without some reason. There is the most convincing evidence that Jeremiah took little interest in Josiah's reforms. For when the book of the law was found, and the puzzled king in doubt as to his course of action, he sought counsel of the otherwise unknown prophetess Huldah,¹ rather than of the already well-established seer of Anathoth. The choice of Huldah is not explained by her being the wife of a temple officer ("the keeper of the wardrobe"), nor by Kittel's suggestion that Jeremiah was "still relatively young, and only later attained greater authority."²

¹ 2 Kings xxii. 14. The office was freely open to women; as Huldah had a husband, marriage was no impediment.

² *Die Bücher der Könige*, 1900, p. 299.

Jeremiah may have uttered his earliest oracles in Anathoth, as Duhm supposes; but the world is quick to hear a fresh voice, and after five years of prophesying this seer could scarcely be unknown.

Josiah's reform was largely external and destructive. Such methods as he adopted were necessary doubtless; but a young prophet, inspired with great ethical ideals, longing passionately for purity in the State, would naturally not be greatly interested in the smashing of images.¹

In his earliest utterances Jeremiah reveals a clear idea of a state policy which was necessary, not merely for the welfare, but for the existence, of the nation. Israel was destined of God to be high among the peoples of the earth, not a servant, nor a home-born slave. Why, then, had he become a prey over whom the young lions roared? The answer was that he had forsaken Jahveh his God, and was at one moment consorting with Egypt, at another with Assyria.² Judah might have profited by the example of its sister kingdom, whose sins had brought it to destruction.³ Notwithstanding the ruin of Israel and the low estate of Judah, the prophet in the eager years of his youth looked for a new national unity—Israel and Judah walking together in the land which God had given to their fathers.⁴

¹ Yet Jeremiah had a high opinion of the general beneficence of Josiah's reign; see Jer. xxii. 15 f.

² Jer. ii. 14 ff.

³ Jer. iii. 6 ff.

⁴ Jer. iii. 18. The last two passages are rejected by Duhm. They are, however, explicable on the generally received theory that these passages, belonging originally to the Scythian invasion, were adapted to conditions of a later time.

Jeremiah's chief concern was the State as such. In his call he was set over nations and over kingdoms, not over individuals.¹ The grave peril of Judah was the subject of one of his inaugural visions, and his mission was to seek to avert the impending calamity.² The ground of his contention with the priests and prophets was not directly their deadly formal religion, but their blindness to the true interests of the State.³ The ideas of our prophet about the State may be easily gathered from his arraignment of the various kings in whose reigns his lot was cast. The oracle concerning Jehoahaz affords us little light, but the contrast pointed out between the shameless Jehoiakim and his righteous father shows clearly what a king should be. Jehoiakim had ruled by harsh measures: he had followed the bad example of Solomon in his employment of forced labour; he had devoted his time to the building of palaces; he was addicted to covetousness, oppression, violence, and even murder. In God's kingdom no man could rule by such means. The result of his administration was that on the day of his death he would not be lamented as a king, but would "be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."⁴ These words are very bold, if we follow Duhm in placing them at the beginning of the king's reign, even though we agree with him that the last part was added after the burning of the roll. But the judgment was just, and the true prophet of God has only one measure for his words, not expediency, but truth.

¹ Jer. i. 10.

³ Jer. viii. 8-12.

² Jer. i. 13 ff.

⁴ Jer. xxii. 13 ff.

The judgment of Coniah,¹ or Jehoiachin, who reigned but three months before he was deposed by the Babylonian king² and Zedekiah put in his place, is equally severe. His fate is portrayed in the darkest colours, and it is quite inconceivable that Jeremiah could have expected anything good from his rule. He represents this king as utterly repugnant to Jahveh, and such repugnance could only be due to the king's failure to inaugurate his reign in righteousness.

It was inevitable that Jeremiah should come into conflict with the State. Men are not generally tolerant of plain speaking about their vices. During the main part of his prophetic life, Jeremiah was persecuted by State and Church alike. We shall follow him through some of those perilous days, when, with his life in his hand, he was leading a forlorn hope.

Jeremiah early found, like a much greater Seer of a later age, that "a prophet was not without honour save in his own country." The first attempt upon his life was made by his fellow-townsmen of Anathoth. They were incensed at his bold rebukes, and had no notion of stopping with such half-way measures as a mere command to cease from prophesying. Their plan was to "destroy the tree with the fruit thereof."³ In some way, so notable as to be regarded by him as a special providence, the prophet had been apprised of the murderous plot,

¹ Jer. xxii. 24-30.

² Babylonia is now the great empire of the East, Assyria having fallen.

³ Jer. xi. 18 ff.

and was able to avoid the danger, probably by a hasty flight to Jerusalem.¹ We can easily understand, even if we cannot approve, the hope he expresses: "I shall see Thy vengeance upon them."²

Early in the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.), Jeremiah felt the hand of the religious leaders of the nation, and, strange to say, the civil power now saved him from their hands. This story, which we find in chapter xxvi., will come before us again in another chapter, but needs to be referred to here for the sake of completeness. The case against the prophet was his declaration that the temple would be destroyed,³ which was to the Jews blasphemy,⁴ a capital offence, and one of the charges brought against our Lord. The prosecutors were the priests and prophets and some of the people whom they had stirred up; the judges were the princes of Judah; Jeremiah was his own counsel. His defence was simply that the words he spoke were not his, but God's, and that they might do with him as they saw fit; but that if they took his life, they would bring innocent blood upon their own heads.⁵

Help came to Jeremiah from two unexpected quarters. First, the elders cited the case of Micah, who in the days of Hezekiah had prophesied similarly, and whose dire threats stirred up the king and people, not to shed the innocent blood of a servant of God,

¹ Jeremiah probably prophesied first in Anathoth; this plot may belong therefore to the very beginning of his career. The date is, however, quite uncertain. Cheyne places it after the death of Josiah (*Jeremiah, his Life and Times*, p. 107 f.).

² Jer. xi. 20.

³ See Jer. xxvi. 6 f.; and cf. vii. 4 ff.

⁴ Cf. 1 Macc. vii. 34-38.

⁵ Jer. xxvi. 12 ff.

but to amend their ways and so avert the threatened calamity.¹ Secondly, we are told almost parenthetically that "the hand of Ahikam,² the son of Shaphan, was with Jeremiah, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death."³ How much Jeremiah owed to the powerful intervention of Ahikam is shown by the fate of Uriah, a fellow-prophet. He was emboldened by Jeremiah's acquittal to speak in a similar strain. The king and princes even sent to Egypt, where he had fled for asylum, brought him back and put him to death.⁴ The prophet who had no friends at court lost his life, but his blood was not shed in vain, for it is ever true that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah was saved from the royal displeasure, not by a powerful friend at court, though that help seems not to have been lacking, but by hiding. Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation a résumé of the prophecies previously delivered. A year later, when the people were drawn to Jerusalem in great numbers to keep a fast, Baruch read the words of Jeremiah to the

¹ Jer. xxvi. 17 ff.

² Ahikam was a member of the deputation sent out by Josiah to inquire of Huldah about the newly discovered law (2 Kings xxii. 12); he was the father of Gedaliah, the royal governor of Judah after the capture of Jerusalem, to whose care Jeremiah was committed by the king of Babylon (Jer. xxxix. 14; xl. 5 ff.).

³ Jer. xxvi. 24.

⁴ Jer. xxvi. 20-23. Uriah could not have been brought back without the consent of the Egyptian Government; this extradition shows that Jehoiakim was disposed to lean on Egypt as a protection against Babylon (see *K.A.T.*³, p. 278).

assembled people. Among the auditors of Baruch was Micaiah the son of Gemariah, and nephew of Ahikam, mentioned above.

Gemariah was evidently well disposed towards Jeremiah, even as his brother Ahikam had been. Not improbably he despatched his son Micaiah to the princes; for he saw that there was trouble for the author of the words that he had heard. Baruch was brought before the princes that they too might hear the book which was so full of omen. When they had heard the words of the book, they were frightened, and resolved to report the matter to the king.

Just what this book contained we do not know,¹ for it was burned by the king. That the second edition contained the same words is very likely; but we do not know positively that the alarming message has survived. But we shall not go astray in our inference that this book contained words of ominous import to the State: for that only would explain the alarm of the princes and their resolve to report the matter to the king.² They did not tell Jehoiakim because they wanted to get Jeremiah into trouble,³

¹ The character of the book is disclosed by the incidental quotation in Jer. xxxvi. 29: "Thus saith Jahveh, Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast?" Duhm makes merry with this passage, which he attributes to a stupid editor. But why?

² See also Duhm *in loc.*

³ The English rendering, they "said unto Baruch, We shall surely tell the king of all these words," gives a wrong impression: with the Greek text we must drop out "unto Baruch." The last clause may be rendered, "We shall have to tell the king of all these words." The Greek text gives a better reading for the whole verse: "And it

but because they wanted this king, like Hezekiah and Josiah, to take such steps as would avert the threatening danger, and so let the book accomplish its purpose.

That the nobles were free from animosity towards the author and at the same time doubtful about the repentant spirit of the slayer of Uriah, is clear from their counsel that Baruch and Jeremiah should seek shelter from the king's anticipated wrath by hiding.

The nobles apparently tried to break the news to the king gently. They did not carry the roll with them, but left it in the care of the scribe, not, I think, because they feared Jehoiakim would tear it in pieces, as Duhm suggests, but for the reason indicated: they probably hoped he would accept their statement of its contents. But they misjudged their man. He promptly sent Jehudi to fetch the roll and read it in his presence. Three or four pages showed the king what was coming; and his mind was made up quickly. As the book was unrolled, piece after piece was cut off and thrown into the brazier to burn. The king did this in spite of the efforts of some of his ministers to stay his impious hand.¹

The king answered the threat of the prophet by burning his prophecies and by a vain effort to arrest

was when they had heard all these words, they took counsel one with another, and said, We must make all these words known to the king."

¹ These men may have been moved by friendship for Jeremiah; but it is more likely that they were influenced by the possible danger of treating so despitely the sacred words of a man of God. Such oracles were generally received with veneration and respect.

both prophet and scribe.¹ He had decided on a policy of his own, and he would brook no interference from prophet or prince. The prophet had an answer ready for the king: "He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the cold."² Then Jeremiah set to work at once to replace the prophecies which had been destroyed, and to the restored book he added many words of similar import.³ The issue was fairly drawn. Never again while Judah stood would a true prophet be free to utter the message of Jahveh without taking his life in his hand. For this time the prophet escaped; but his conflict with the governing power was soon to grow more intense.

Jehoiakim's reign came to an inglorious end in 598. He had rebelled against Babylon, but death spared him the bitter consequences of his folly, and reserved them for his son and successor, Coniah or Jehoiachin, who ruled but three months. There is one prophecy which belongs apparently to this period, and which shows how hopeless were the affairs of Judah.⁴ Nehushta, the king's mother, seems to have had a large share in the government; and the prophecy is addressed to her as well as to her hapless son. The prophet warns them that there is no glory now in

¹ Jer. xxxvi. 23-26.

² Jer. xxxvi. 30.

³ Jer. xxxvi. 32b.

⁴ Jer. xiii. 18 f. Duhm assigns this prophecy to the reign of Jehoiakim, on the ground that the unhappy short rule of Jehoiachin gave no occasion to Jeremiah to give a warning against pride. The reason does not seem to be very convincing, even though the conclusion may be right.

the crown of Judah, because the power of the State is broken, the land being overrun by hostile armies. The false friends in whom the people have trusted will now appear in their true light as enemies. There is nothing for this reign better than failure and disgrace.

The king of Babylon had incited Judah's neighbours to wage guerilla war.¹ Soon after the accession of Jehoiachin a Babylonian army laid siege to Jerusalem. Either because of the hopelessness of his situation, or because he thought he might save the city, the king surrendered, and was taken to Babylon as prisoner, with his mother, court officers, nobles, warriors, craftsmen ; in fact, "none remained save the poorest sort of the people of the land."²

This deportation had important consequences for Jeremiah. The people who had befriended him were carried away, and he was left to fight his battles alone. We have seen that twice during the reign of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah was saved by the kindly offices of the nobility. This class had not abandoned all hope of Divine intervention, and they had not been ready to disregard wholly the admonitions of a prophet whose messages bore unmistakable marks of Divine inspiration. With the disappearance of these people, Jeremiah lost his friends and supporters. In the reign of Zedekiah, who was appointed Babylonian vassal by Nebuchadrezzar, there was no class in the State to whom the prophet could look for sympathy and support.

But Jeremiah did not give up the struggle to save

¹ 2 Kings xxiv. 2.

² 2 Kings xxiv. 14 ; cf. Jer. xxix. 2.

his country because he was left to stand alone. Early in the reign of Zedekiah embassies appeared at Jerusalem from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon, to make a league, whose purpose was to throw off the yoke of Babylon. Jeremiah saw plainly how hopeless such a project was. At the critical moment these states would not stand together, but would abandon the league to serve their own interests. And even if they had acted in concert, these combined powers were no match for Babylon. Moreover, Jeremiah knew that the punishment for further rebellion would be severe. Any attempt to get rid of the Babylonian yoke would only fasten it the tighter, and leave those who wore it less strength to bear. Hence he sends yokes to all the ambassadors, and declares to them that peace and safety are only possible as long as the vassalage is patiently endured. The prophet wore a yoke upon his own neck as a symbol of the submission which became every true friend of the poor remnant of Judah.¹ His efforts seem to have been successful, for there was no revolt in the early part of Zedekiah's reign, though it is likely that some sort of a league was made, which bore its disastrous fruit at a later day.

Those who had been carried to Babylon were restless, and were making those still in Judah restless by the feeding of the false hopes of an early return. Hananiah declared that within two years the exile would be over,² basing his prophecy not upon a revelation from heaven, but upon secret knowledge of promised aid from Egypt. To counteract this

¹ Jer. xxvii.

² Jer. xxviii. 3 f.

mischievous Jeremiah wrote letters to the exiles in Babylon,¹ telling them to build houses and plant vineyards, and to marry wives, and even to pray for the welfare of the city under whose rule they were constrained to live, for their sojourn there would not be short, as the false prophets declared, but would last for the rounded-out limits of a human life. One Shemaiah was so incensed at this letter of Jeremiah's, that he wrote back urging his followers in Jerusalem to lay hands on the prophet who was proclaiming so depressing a message.

Acting under the instigation of Egypt, Zedekiah was at last led into rebellion. Instead of the Egyptian army, for which he hoped, the king beheld the reappearance of the hosts of Babylon in Judah. The obstacles which formerly had made the progress towards Jerusalem slow had been for the most part removed. There were few outlying cities to dispute the course of the army. Such as there were had long ago learned the advantage of discretion over valour. The poor weak king who had disregarded counsel when it would have done some good, eagerly seeks it now that it is too late. The hope that Jahveh might deal with Judah according to all His wondrous works² was vain now. The world has often before and since fed on that fatal delusion that man may sin to the very brink of the pit, and then demand of God salvation by a miracle. The result is too often the scepticism which abandons all hope with the cry "miracles do not happen."

The answer of the prophet is very crushing to the

¹ Jer. xxix.

² Jer. xxi. 2.

king's hopes. Jahveh will even blunt the edge of the poor arms wielded against the foe, for Jahveh is on the side of the king's opponents. The people of the city shall die of a great pestilence, and Zedekiah the king, and those who survive the disasters of the siege, will be carried away as prisoners.

The people of Judah were greatly elated by the news of the approach of an Egyptian army. The Babylonians knew that this rescuing force must be crushed, and to do it easily and effectively, the siege was raised temporarily, and the whole army marched off to meet the new enemy. Zedekiah apparently had great hopes that this was a permanent deliverance, that the Babylonians would return to the siege no more. His inquiries of the prophet did not encourage his hopes. Jeremiah declared that Pharaoh's army would be driven back to Egypt, and the Chaldeans would return to the investment of Jerusalem, and capture it and destroy it. There were no conditions now to invite another such experience as the overthrow of Sennacherib.

During the early stages of the siege an incident happened which tells very forcibly the true situation in the city. Jeremiah's words were being fulfilled, and he had for a short period a commanding influence. He had insisted that the Babylonians could not be turned back by the sword, nor the city saved by Egyptian troops, but only by righteousness and the fear of the Lord. He had induced the princes and rich men to enter into a solemn covenant in the temple of the Lord to release their Hebrew slaves, which they had held, in defiance of the law, beyond

the limit of seven years.¹ As soon as the siege was raised, the people began to regret their rashness in sacrificing property to appease an offended God. By an act of the most high-handed tyranny the recently freed slaves were again forced under the yoke. Never does this prophet appear to finer advantage than in his denunciation of the covenant breakers, while he again assures the people of the return of the besiegers and the utter destruction of the city.

Jeremiah's home was in Anathoth, a priestly city, a short distance from Jerusalem, from which, as a priest, he drew his living. During the siege he had been cut off from his support, and now that the way was open he starts out of the city to visit his home. Those who were smarting from his rebukes, and wished to silence his gloomy tongue, saw now their opportunity. In vain had he been accused of blasphemy; for the court had not sustained the charge. Now, however, he is arrested in the gate of Benjamin on the ground of desertion. Irijah, the captain who made the arrest, took his prisoner before the angry princes, where he was ordered to be chastised and put in the dungeon house, in which place he remained for many days; in fact, Jeremiah remained in prison nearly all the time that was left for the house of David. The princes, who had been Jeremiah's friends, were in Babylon; their successors would not stand his frank utterances, and were constantly engaged in an effort to effect his destruction. The king, too, though at times moved by fear to heed the prophet's appeal for liberty, was strongly

¹ Jer. xxxiv. 8 ff.

influenced by his treasonable utterances, and so kept him under restraint.¹

Much as we admire the courage of Jeremiah, we must admit that it is easy to censure his persecutors unduly. For the prophet's counsel must at times have been fairly maddening to the deluded patriots who thought they might achieve the freedom of the State. From the beginning of the invasion Jeremiah counselled submission, and he constantly declared that the city would be taken and destroyed. The case of Judah was constantly pronounced hopeless: that judgment weakened the hands of the defenders seriously. But more than that, he actually advised individuals to desert to the enemy. "Unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith Jahveh: Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and passeth over to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey. For I have set My face upon this city for evil, and not for good, saith Jahveh: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire."²

We need not be surprised that the princes demanded that the king put the prophet to death, on the ground that he depressed the spirits of the men of war and of all the people.³ Indeed, it is quite certain that the princes were acting on something more than mere apprehension. Unquestionably many soldiers had

¹ See Jer. xxxii. 2 f.

² Jer. xxi. 8-10.

³ Jer. xxxviii. 4.

already deserted the hopeless cause and made good their escape to the hostile lines. Jeremiah must have seemed to them no better than a Babylonian partisan. In fact, Nebuchadrezzar took that view. For when the city fell, he gave particular orders that the prophet Jeremiah should be free to go to Babylon or remain in Judah,¹ evidently feeling that the seer had aided materially in the conquest of the city. Jeremiah produced so great an effect upon Zedekiah that he shielded the prophet as best he could from the princes who persistently clamoured for his blood, and at one time declared that he was only kept from taking the prophet's advice to surrender by his apprehension that he would be abused by the Jews who had already deserted to the enemy's standard.²

The issue showed that the prophet was right and the princes wrong. The temper of a conqueror is such that the more obstinate the resistance, the more severe the punishment for rebellion. The pricks are always sharpest to him who kicks against them. If Zedekiah had surrendered, the city and temple would not have been ruthlessly destroyed. And when the king and his counsellors were hopelessly bent on bringing about the destruction of the city, Jeremiah still tried to save something from the wreck. He was pained to see so many innocent people suffering by the sword, famine, and pestilence. If the city was doomed, some of the inhabitants might be saved; for God cares vastly more for people than for cities and temples. To save them Jeremiah adopted the course, so certain to bring odium upon him, of advising

¹ Jer. xxxix. 11 ff.; xl. 2 ff.

² Jer. xxxviii. 19.

individuals to consult their personal interest and surrender at discretion.

Space will not permit our tracing in detail the career of the prophet in the dark days following the fall of Jerusalem. He was at heart a true patriot, and elected to share the trying life of the poor remnant left in Judah, a life which proved to be far harder than that of the exiles. But the prophet could accomplish very little; a mad fatuity seemed to be in the blood of the Jewish people. Strife did not cease, nor wisdom rule. Jeremiah was dragged to Egypt finally by the small handful of zealots who fled from the dread hand of Babylon. If he had been left as free by his own people as he was by the Babylonians, he would still have stood by the rapidly decreasing number of poor Jews who clung to their native soil; and he might finally have gathered about him a small community who would have set God's will above personal fear and national prejudice. For some Jews still stuck to Jewish soil, and seem never to have been seriously molested. It may be said, by the way, that recent criticism has credited the Jews who never left Judah with the rebuilding of Jerusalem, rather than the returning exiles, as has generally been held.

One more word and then we must leave this, the most persecuted of all the prophets. His message was generally a gloomy one. In fact, the skies were so dark to his vision that he lays down the general principle in his controversy with Hananiah that the prophet who predicts evil is much more likely to be justified by time than the prophet who predicts

good.¹ Again, he himself became so weary of the constant reiteration of evil tidings so unwelcome to the people and so conducive to his unpopularity, that at one time he resolved to quit the gloomy task, and would, but for the fire in his bones, which, being kindled of God, man could not extinguish.² The condition of the State and people was such that no true-sighted seer could have descried any other outlook than the dark one pictured by Jeremiah. Nevertheless, there were moments when his supreme faith in God made him hope for better things. The great Messianic passage in chapters xxx.-xxxiii. is full of assurance that the coming golden age of Judah is not a dream. In the straitest days of the siege he was constrained, though very much against his will, to buy a piece of land then in the possession of the enemy. Afterwards his eyes were opened to see the meaning of his own transaction, that land would again have value in Judah, and buying and selling be resumed.³

Ezekiel, while still a young man, was carried away among the captives of 598 and taken to the river Chebar,⁴ a large canal in Southern Babylonia, not far from Nippur, the site of the excavations carried on by the University of Pennsylvania. So

¹ Jer. xxviii. 7 ff.

² Jer. xx. 7 ff. This is the sort of statement which makes the reader feel sure that the prophet was inspired of God.

³ Jer. xxxii.

⁴ The location of the Chebar has been definitely settled by Prof. Hilprecht. See *Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania*, ix. pp. 27 f., 76; and his *Explorations in Bible Lands*, p. 411 f.; also Toy's *Ezekiel* (Poly. Bib.), p. 93.

far as we know, Ezekiel's whole prophetic career was spent in Babylonia. In the fifth year of his captivity the visions of God first came to him, and his greatest activity as a prophet lasted only during the six years of Jerusalem's final throes.

Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, was both priest and prophet. The priestly element was not so lost in the prophetic as in the case of Jeremiah. Yet being in a strange land, in which the Lord's songs could not be sung, still less the sacred rites observed, there was no occasion for him to exercise the office of priest. Nor could he derive his support from the official revenues as Jeremiah did; for these were cut off in the exile. During the first four years of his exile, before he began to prophesy, he was very likely engaged in earning his living. Later on he had a house, and supported a wife, so that he was probably successful in his efforts.

Though living in Babylonia among the exiles, the interest of Ezekiel was centred chiefly in Jerusalem among the remnant left there. His book throws very little light upon the condition of the Jewish captives, because his mind was always wandering away to the holy city. He was kept well informed of the progress of events in Judah, and took pains to spread his knowledge among his fellow-exiles.

From the fact that he was so far away, and was unknown as a prophet to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, he could exercise little influence upon the course of events there. But communication between the Chebar and Jerusalem seems to have been free and prompt, surprisingly so, considering the time

and distance. We cannot explain Ezekiel's acquaintance with Judean affairs by any supernatural agency. The stream of intelligence must have flowed both ways, so that some of the Judeans must have known of the utterances of this prophet of the exile. But if Zedekiah, and still more the princes, disregarded the persistent and powerful voice of Jeremiah poured into their very ears, they were not likely to be much troubled by the distant echoes of a voice hundreds of miles away. Nevertheless, Ezekiel learned the hard lesson that the business of the watchman is to watch and to warn, without regard to the effect of his warning upon those for whose sake he stands guard. If Judah met her doom in spite of the prophet's voice, he was freed of responsibility; but if the seer did not declare the disaster which he foresaw, then the blood of the people would be required at his hand. So the faithful shepherd, far removed as he was from his flock, steadily strove to keep them in the way of safety.

Ezekiel seems to have tried to impress upon his fellow-exiles, as well as upon the inhabitants of Judah, the fact that there was no hope of a speedy return. This delusion needed to be shattered; for it would result in a hand-to-mouth existence among the people, and in the suffering which is an inevitable consequence of such a state. He does this by asserting most positively that not only will the exiles not return, but, as a consequence of the downfall of Jerusalem, they will be joined by those who now vainly seek the independence of Judah. We find Ezekiel's position fully stated in chapter vii., which

Toy has entitled "The Doom of the Nation." But Ezekiel was too true a prophet to content himself with the cry of Jonah, "Within forty days this city shall be destroyed." The cause of the impending doom is fully stated, so that the people might turn and repent and so avert the catastrophe. There is no blind chance working against God's people. They are preparing to reap the whirlwind because they have sowed the wind. In the end the disaster comes from the hand of their own Jahveh, not from Bel or Nebo.

Such a discouraging message as this would certainly make Ezekiel unpopular among the exiles, as it had made Jeremiah unpopular in Jerusalem. But the exiles were abler men than the remnant in Judah. They early saw tendencies which pointed to the complete fulfilment of the dire predictions, and the prophet was constantly sought for advice as to the course of events. The moment the elders came to him the prophet is lifted up in spirit,¹ and his mind is turned to the evil which he sees in Jerusalem. There the prophet beholds an image of a false god by the north door of the inner court of the temple;² a chamber in the temple where Egyptian worship was carried on in secret, the elders, and the son of Shaphan among them, joining in the desecration;³ the women weeping for Tammuz

¹ "He put forth the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem" (Ezek. viii. 3); which, being interpreted, is that the prophet enters the ecstatic state and sees a vision, showing him, however, the true state of things in Jerusalem.

² Ezek. viii. 3-5.

³ Ezek. viii. 10 11.

at the door of the north gateway;¹ and at the very door of the temple twenty-five men with their backs to the house of Jahveh and worshipping the sun as it rose in the east.² There could be but one result of such conditions, the final destruction of a sanctuary so defiled that the holy God of Israel could no longer abide there.

We know clearly from Ezekiel that there was a war party in Jerusalem whom he accused of devising iniquity and giving wicked counsel.³ In his vision he sees twenty-five princes,⁴ who say that it is not the time to build houses, but to buckle on the sword, assuring the people that the naturally strong fortifications would protect them, even as the caldron does the meat.⁵

Against this party the prophet lifts up his voice with strength. He paints in sombre colours the picture which will result from this policy: "Ye have multiplied your slain in this city, and ye have filled the streets thereof with the killed. I will bring you forth out of the midst thereof, and deliver you into the hand of strangers, and will execute judgments on you."⁶ The prophecy was made more portentous by the fact that as Ezekiel was delivering his message against this party, his words were fulfilled by the

¹ Ezek. viii. 14.

² Ezek. viii. 16.

³ Ezek. xi. 2.

⁴ Toy says it is uncertain whether these are the sun worshippers of viii. 16; Davidson says they are not the same (Cambridge Bible *in loc.*); but the latter is probably wrong. To persuade the people to follow their mad advice the leaders must alienate them from the influence of the prophets of Jahveh. They could do this in no way more effectively than by leading them on to the worship of other deities.

⁵ Ezek. xi. 3.

⁶ Ezek. xi. 6 ff.

slaughter of one of its leaders, Pelataiah the son of Benaiah.¹ Because Ezekiel sees these things in a vision, we are not to infer that there is no reality. The prophet is describing actual occurrences in Jerusalem, and the vision is merely the form he chooses for his message. Very likely he had already heard of the death of Pelataiah, and takes this opportunity to announce the fact. There are admitted difficulties in any explanation, but the simplest is not unlikely to be correct. It is unnecessary to call in the aid of telepathy, miracle, or illusion. The death of one of the war lords was an impressive warning for those who leaned towards useless resistance, and Ezekiel makes a dramatic and effective use of the fact.

The exiled prophet takes every opportunity to impress upon his hearers the certainty of the ruin of Judah. He collected the goods in his house, as if going into exile, and at night, with a bandage on his eyes, he carries the stuff away on his back,² to the astonishment of the confused exiles.³ The next day the prophet explains the significance of his strange actions. "The burden refers to the prince in Jerusalem,⁴ and all the house of Israel. They shall

¹ Ezek. xi. 13.

² Toy says, "It is doubtful whether such acts as these were really performed" (Ezek. *in loc.*). It does not seem to me doubtful. The Orientals indulge freely in symbolic prophecy, and Ezekiel is especially addicted to it. There would be no force in the prophecy without the symbolic acts.

³ Ezek. xii. 3-7.

⁴ It is noteworthy that, except in vii. 27, which Toy explains rightly as a scribal addition, Ezekiel calls Zedekiah *prince*, not *king*. The exiles looked upon Jehoiachin, living with them in captivity, as their real sovereign.

go into exile. And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the dark, and shall go forth. He shall cover his face, because he shall not see the land with his eyes.¹ I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans ; yet shall he not see it though he shall die there."²

Ezekiel announces the fearful doom of Zedekiah not as a mere fact, still less with any marks of pity ; for he regards him as the victim of his own folly. This is clearly shown in the fine allegory of the Eagles and the Cedar of Lebanon.³ The prophet shows here his acute ethical sense. One of the gravest charges against Zedekiah is that he is a covenant breaker, and God loves no false oath. Zedekiah was set on the throne by the king of Babylon, to whom he had sworn a solemn oath of fidelity in the name of Jahveh. Yet he covenanted with Egypt and violated his oath : " Shall he prosper ? Shall he escape that doeth such things ? Shall he break the covenant and yet escape ? As I live, saith the Lord Jahveh, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he broke, even with him in the midst of Babylon shall he die."⁴ The oath to Nebuchadrezzar, sworn in the name of Jahveh, was Jahveh's oath, and He will punish the king as one breaking faith not merely with a foreign tyrant, but with God Himself.⁵

¹ Zedekiah was brought before Nebuchadrezzar at Riblah, and his eyes put out, after witnessing the slaughter of his sons (2 Kings xxv. 6 f.).

² Ezek. xii. 8-13 in part.

³ Ezek. xvii.

⁴ Ezek. xvii. 15 f.

⁵ Ezek. xvii. 19.

Enough passages have been cited to show how carefully Ezekiel watched the downward course of the city of Jerusalem, and how gladly he would have stopped it. But nations, like individuals, are held strictly responsible for their acts. Zedekiah and his deluded followers were not paying the penalty for the sins of their forefathers, but of themselves. The lower the estate of the nation politically, the lower it became morally, and thus Divine intervention was made impossible. The people must sink lower before they could begin to rise. The devastation of Judah must be complete before the process of restoration could become possible.

Ezekiel looked for the complete ruin of the State, but he never regarded the catastrophe as final. God tore down and God would build up. The moment Jerusalem is laid waste, Ezekiel loses all interest in the ruins, and lets his mind soar freely in the distant future when the rebuilding will have become an accomplished fact. Up to the moment of the fall of Jerusalem the prophet had been engaged in killing false hopes. From that very day he began to kindle real ones. The people who had been so blind to their peril could see that much now. Before they had exaggerated their power; now they exaggerated their helplessness. So it is always. The man who can see things as they are has always the weary burden of correcting the vision of those who can only see things as they are not.

From the day when an escaped fugitive brought tidings of Zion's waste,¹ Ezekiel set his gaze to the

¹ Ezek. xxiv. 26.

future. In fact, he had been warned by a terrible blow that he was not to weep nor lament over the ruin, but to set about its repair. The prophet's wife died suddenly, and he was forbidden to indulge in any of those extravagant marks of grief which characterise the Oriental.¹ So the desolation of Judah was not to be occasion for idle grief, but for zealous work.

And there was need of brave souls at the crisis. They who could not believe in Zion's fall were completely crushed by the unexpected fact. The despondency was so great that the hopeless exiles cried, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost: we are clean cut off."² Their cry of despair gave the prophet his text for a sermon of hope. On their words he builds his vision of the resurrection of the dry bones. The dry bones with which the valley of his vision is strewn come together, each one finding its place in the frame to which it belongs; sinews grow upon them, and they are covered with flesh and skin; then the wind blows and brings the living breath into the restored bodies. So will be the history of the nation. The scattered fragments will be collected from the remotest corners of the earth and brought to the land of their fathers.³ And in this resurrected people there will be neither division nor discord, but union and strength. Judah and Joseph will be welded into one people, just as the prophet twines two sticks together so as to make one stout staff. This people would be morally restored, and would acknowledge the one sovereign of the

¹ Ezek. xxiv. 15 ff.

² Ezek. xxxvii. 11.

³ Ezek. xxxvii. 12 ff.

house of David. Jahveh would make a covenant of peace with them, which would be an everlasting covenant.¹

We must move forward about half a century from this glowing prophecy to its fulfilment in the days of Haggai and Zechariah. The actual condition of Jerusalem was very mean compared to the Messianic pictures which had been painted long in advance. So it often happens that the fulfilment of God's promises seems very poor compared to the expectations raised; but that is generally due to man's inability to interpret his own time and his own experiences.

A number of modern scholars have thrown grave doubt upon the return of the exiles as told in the book of Ezra, holding that the Jews of the restoration were those who had always remained on Judean soil. I shall hope to show in another place that there is much truth in the history in Ezra, but that does not concern us now. Our problem is to see the part played by the prophets in the rebuilding of Judah and Jerusalem. If we read the little books of Haggai and of Zechariah, we can see that these prophets, while far inferior to their great predecessors, yet had the advantage of a more submissive people to deal with, so that the influence of the prophets was paramount. In the main the post-exilic seers undertook an easier task than fell to the lot of their predecessors, for it is vastly easier always to rouse people to build a temple than to lay aside their sins. Haggai was concerned almost wholly with the rebuilding of the temple, feeling very rightly that the house of the

¹ Ezek. xxxvii. 16 ff.

Lord was essential as a central rallying point for the people. The reconstructed temple, which was, so far as our records go, the fruit of Haggai's prophetic activity, made possible the larger work of Nehemiah. In the actual work priest and governor worked shoulder to shoulder, but it was the voice of the prophet which roused them to action.¹ As a reward for Zerubbabel's obedience, the prophet declares that the governor is a signet and the chosen of Jahveh.²

Zechariah's visions are for the most part symbolic of the new era about to dawn on Judah. First we have the horsemen among the myrtle trees who have come from a tour of the earth, and report that "all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest."³ The time is propitious. There are no disturbing wars to prevent the peaceful development. The Jews need no longer fear the harassing invasions of foreign armies. Then there is greater hope because Jahveh is now on the side of His people: "Cry thou, saying, I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies; My house shall be built in it, saith Jahveh of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem. My cities shall yet overflow with prosperity; and Jahveh shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem."⁴

¹ Hag. i. 12 ff. Ezra v. 2 says that the prophets of God helped the temple builders. Siegfried, who supposes the prophets to be Haggai and Zechariah, renders "supported" them. But the reference may be to the sons of the prophets aiding in the actual labour.

² Hag. ii. 23; cf. Ecclus. xlix. 11.

³ Zech. i. 11.

⁴ Zech. i. 14 ff.

The vision of the man with a measuring line conveys much the same message. The city would be measured and found to be too small for the great population which would gather in her borders. The people would overflow the walls and yet be safe; for Jahveh Himself would be a wall of fire round about, and so afford ample protection to the inhabitants.¹ This large population would be due not only to the natural increase, though that was a characteristic of the new Jerusalem;² but large additions would also be made by the return of the exiles, who were now free to depart, and whom the prophet exhorts to seek the home of their fathers.³ Even strangers would take up their abode in Jerusalem, an element of national life and strength which the prophet cordially welcomes.⁴

The vision of the golden candlestick with seven burners was meant as a personal encouragement to Zerubbabel. Mountains of difficulty stood in the way of the governor. The desolate ruins, the sparse population, the poverty of the people, the lack of general interest and enthusiasm, all combined to make the outlook dark. Out of such materials it must have seemed almost impossible to construct an empire in any way worthy of the ancient glory of the house of David. The prophet does not in the least attempt to minimise the obstacles; but rather to show how they are to be overcome. The meaning of the vision is that Zerubbabel is to look for success not to might nor to power, but to the Spirit of the Lord.⁵ Just

¹ Zech. ii. 1-5.

³ Zech. ii. 6 ff.

² Psalms cxxvii., cxxviii.

⁴ Zech. ii. 11.

⁵ Zech. iv. 6 ff.

as the lamps are kept perpetually burning by the flow of golden oil from the olive trees, so is the governor to be always sustained in his mission by the pervading presence of Jahveh's Spirit. And that being the case, the prophet can confidently assert that as Zerubbabel has begun the rebuilding of the temple, so he shall accomplish its completion.

Finally, there is the splendid prophecy of the golden age with which Zechariah's message ends.¹ The conditions of life will be so propitious that men will live to a ripe old age.² The city will be so secure that it will be full of boys and girls playing freely in the streets.³ The fruitfulness of the land shall not again be withheld, nor the heaven keep back the dew and rain; the present dearth shall be followed by an era of plenty, so that Judah will be a blessing to the whole earth.⁴ But the fame of Jerusalem will not rest in its walls, nor in its dense population, nor in its wealth, but in the power and beneficence of its God. So great will Jahveh's reputation become, and so eager are men to find God—a fact for all ages and all peoples to grasp and use—that every returning exile will find himself beset by men of all nationalities, determined that he shall guide them to Zion, because of the news that God is there.

With this beautiful picture, which, alas! has never yet been fully realised, but which is ever ready for a complete realisation wherever and whenever man

¹ Zech. viii. ; ix. -xiv. belong to other authors.

² Zech. viii. 4 ; cf. Psalm lv. 23.

³ Zech. viii. 5.

⁴ Zech. viii. 12 f.

shall learn that God is the greatest power in a State, and that the State may show the presence of God in its institutions and in its people, I must bring to a close the long study of the prophet's relation to the State.

It is interesting to note that the two eras when the prophet's political influence was perhaps greatest were the reign of Hezekiah, and the beginning of the restoration; that is, when Jerusalem was at the height of its glory, and when its fortunes were at the lowest ebb. But there was never a time when the prophets were not solicitous in the national interests, nor when they did not speak their mind freely about political affairs.

CHAPTER XI

THE PROPHET'S RELATION TO THE CHURCH

I. THE EARLY PERIOD

WHEN our Lord had a rebuke to administer, He did it directly, plainly, and unmistakably. Those who came in for the greatest share of His censure were not, however, the poor, the ignorant, and the sinful ; but the rich, the learned, the self-righteous—the Scribes and Pharisees. For example, we recall these words : “ Ye witness to yourselves, that ye are the sons of them that slew the prophets ” ; “ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her.”¹ These are surely hard words, and their severity is not lost because we feel the tender pathos in the lament over Jerusalem. How St. Luke loves to dwell upon the persistence with which Jesus set His face steadily towards Jerusalem on the last long journey from Galilee ! and how clear the motive becomes to us, as we recall the words spoken by the Master as He at length drew near the city : “ Howbeit I must go on My way to-day and to-morrow and the day following : for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of

¹ Matt. xxiii. 31, 37.

Jerusalem.”¹ The prophets who perished at Jerusalem had had a hard time of it in this world, and in a large degree the hardship of their lot was due to the Church from which they might have expected support and co-operation. For it was the fate of the prophet to die in Jerusalem, and that means that the Church would be the executioner.

The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us of the triumphant faith of the prophets; but it also tells the story of their triumphant sufferings: “Others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, evil entreated (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth.”² Those who found this world an easy and pleasant road, Jesus differentiated from the true man of God by a significant adjective: “Woe unto you,” He said to His disciples, “when all men shall speak well of you! for in the same manner did their fathers to the *false* prophets.”³

The martyrs did not endure their sufferings in foreign lands, and at heathen hands; indeed, they were safest on strange soil; for their blood was shed in Jerusalem, and by their co-religionists. The point of danger to them was not places like the modern China or Turkey, where our missionaries have in our day shown the old power of faith, but at home and among their own people.

¹ Luke xiii. 33; Addn. note (12). ² Heb. xi. 36 ff. ³ Luke vi. 26.

No suffering is so keen as that which comes from those from whom we have a right to expect sympathy and help. How true a note is struck in the Psalmist's cry :—

“ For it is no enemy that reproaches me ;
 Or I could have borne it :
 Neither is it my hater that insults me ;
 Or I would have hid from him :
 But it is thou, a man mine equal,
 My companion, and my familiar friend.”¹

If anything could justify the fierce imprecation which follows (ver. 15), it is just that situation. The hardest cross which Jesus had to bear was not the one laid on His shoulders on the way to Calvary, but the one eloquently described in those few words, “ Neither did His brethren believe on Him ”; and the other implied in His pathetic question, “ Will ye also go away ? ”

We have been so long accustomed to look upon the great prophets of Israel as leaders of religion that we are apt to forget the bitter opposition they encountered in their day. They seem to us so truly to have been men to whom their contemporaries might well look up, that we quietly assume that the hungry people gaped with open mouth, quick to catch the crumbs of Divine counsel which fell from their lips. The passages I have cited warn us to look for a different story, and as a matter of fact the Old Testament tells us a different story. And it is to that story I now wish to call attention.

¹ Psalm lv. 12 f.

The prophets were opposed at times by the State, at times by the Church, and at times by both. My task now is to bring out the opposition between the prophet and the Church; for the relation was generally one of opposition. I use the word "Church" indeed in the loose sense, necessary in such a study as this, of the organised or established religion of the time. For the course of study sweeps over a long period, in some parts of which the Church was very different from what it was in other parts.

In our study of the sons of the prophets we have seen reason to believe that the prophetic guilds¹ were originally associated with sanctuaries, and therefore in close contact with the priests. These prophetic bodies seem to have remained faithful to the priesthood and to ceremonial religion all through Hebrew history. They were not only a part of the established religious institution, but were in sympathy with it. When we come to the great prophets who stand out for living truth against dead tradition, we shall see that these guilds were invariably on the side of the priesthood and rigid institutionalism.

The earliest of the conspicuous and worthy prophetic figures, such as Samuel, Nathan, and Elijah, were in name and in fact priests as well as prophets. Samuel began his career as an apprentice in the sanctuary, and it was there he received his first messages from God. Samuel was the head of the Jewish Church in his day. But Samuel remained loyal to the high ethical standard which belongs to prophecy. He would admit no lowering

¹ See chap. iv.

of the ideal such as that "the end justifies the means." The sharpest admonition is administered to king Saul, because he thought that Jahveh would willingly be propitiated for disobedience by the offering of a splendid sacrifice:—

"Does Jahveh find pleasure in offerings and sacrifices
As in hearkening to the voice of Jahveh?
Behold, to hearken is better than sacrifice,
And to give heed than the fat of rams."¹

Elijah was engaged for the greater part of his life in a struggle to save the true Jewish Church from pollution by the introduction of foreign idolatrous elements. The prophetic guilds for the most part² and the priesthood were subservient to the royal power. They adopted the easiest and most profitable course, ready to offer sacrifice to any god,³ or utter oracles from any deity, so long as the king approved and the devotees paid. Elijah's warfare against the king was also a warfare against the corrupt Church which he had set up in the Northern Kingdom. As we have gone over that ground pretty fully, however, it is unnecessary for us to traverse it again.

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 22. The theology of this passage is regarded as too advanced for the rude age of Samuel. H. P. Smith says, "The passage is a summary of later Jewish theology" (Sam. *in loc.*). If we admit the historic incident, then some such rebuke of Saul is appropriate.

² But we must not forget that there were brave souls among them, who died, and endured every kind of hardship, because they would not repudiate Jahveh (1 Kings xviii. 4). Yet Elijah alone was left with courage and power to resist the introduction of the Baal-worship (1 Kings xviii. 22; xix. 10).

³ Even in Judah at a much later day Urijah the priest did not scruple to build a new altar according to the pattern sent by Ahaz from Damascus (2 Kings xvi. 11).

Other prophets of this early period raised their protesting voice against the idolatrous tendencies. There is one particularly interesting case, though the prophet's name is unknown to us, and was even unknown to his biographer.¹ Jeroboam knew the danger to political independence of religious subjection to a foreign power,² but he took a bad way to accomplish a good result. He set up bullock images at Dan and Bethel, and commanded the people to worship them.³ At first the cult was apparently not very popular; for the king could not find priests willing to serve at his strange altars, and was reduced to the necessity of consecrating to that office any that were willing to do his will.⁴ It is possible that the unpopularity may have been greatly increased by the public denunciation, which we shall now describe.

The king himself was standing by his new altar at Bethel, in the act of burning incense to the bull image of Jahveh, when a "man of God from Judah" appeared on the scene, and addressed the altar thus: "O altar, altar, thus saith Jahveh, Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah⁵ by

¹ The story is found in 1 Kings xiii.

² This was the real cause of the English Reformation.

³ 1 Kings xii. 26 ff.

⁴ 1 Kings xiii. 33 f.

⁵ The mention of this name and the prediction in which it is imbedded (cf. 2 Kings xxiii. 15 ff.) show that in its present form this narrative was written very long after the events. But there is an older folk-story woven into the passage, and back of the written form are actual occurrences such as I have suggested in the text. When the story was first written down, the names of both prophets had already been forgotten.

name; and upon thee he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense upon thee."¹ Jeroboam stretched forth his hand to seize the bold seer, but his arm was paralysed, and the ashes poured from the altar, according to the sign given by the man of God. At the king's plea and by the prophet's intercession his hand was restored, but the seer could not be induced to accept the royal hospitality proffered; for he had been straitly charged not to pause to eat or drink, nor to return the same way he came.

Good would it have been for that seer if he had obeyed his instructions. It was no evil spirit which led him astray, but a fellow-seer who was more interested in the kingdom of Samaria than in the Kingdom of God. This aged prophet followed the man of God, and persuaded him, by a story of an angel message, that God charged him now to return to eat bread. When the seer yielded to his aged brother, he was greeted with a reproach for his disobedience and a prediction of his disastrous end. The prediction was soon fulfilled, for after the feast the seer started for Judah, and was devoured on his way by a lion.²

It is easy to point the moral of this interesting old story, and to divine the actual facts on which it is based. The true prophet can never trust any vision but his own. Yet it was very pleasant for the seer to believe God had changed His orders, because another and older prophet had said so, especially as food and rest are always agreeable to the weary;

¹ 1 Kings xiii. 2.

² 1 Kings xiii. 24.

but unfortunately for him, God cares more for right than for ease.

The strait command that the prophet should neither tarry in Israel nor return as he went was designed to insure his safety. His errand was perilous; Jeroboam could be contrite enough till his hand was restored, but would soon forget his punishment in his determination to brook no interference with his religious programme. Though himself unable to allure the seer to peril, one of his prophets was more successful, for there can be no doubt that the old prophet deliberately set the fatal trap. The lion which met the seer in the way was undoubtedly an assassin who had been appointed to lie in wait. It is to be said to the credit of the old prophet that his subsequent actions show a sincere contrition for the infamous part he had played.¹

Even from the priesthood we find an occasional voice lifted up against the prevailing religious corruption. The Chronicler tells the story of the martyrdom of Zechariah the son of Jehoida,² the priest who saved the house of David. The priest's recorded words are few, but he said enough to show his understanding of the times that there was much misfortune because there was much sin. Short shrift was given

¹ The bones of both these prophets were left undisturbed by Josiah when he was fulfilling the prophecies of this man of God (2 Kings xxiii. 17 f.). Whether his motive was veneration or superstition it is not easy to say.

² 2 Chron. xxiv. 2 ff. It is a prevalent fashion to reject all unsupported stories of the Chronicler. It must be admitted that he has a habit of putting events in the wrong place, and is prone to exaggerate; but some of his stories may be true for all that.

the priest ; he was stoned to death by the mob, the king, whom the martyr's father had placed on the throne, aiding or abetting the atrocity.

Naturally we shall find the most copious and interesting material for our study in the canonical prophets. To them we now turn. When Amos went to Bethel he could make no pretence that there were no prophets in Samaria that he must needs go from the furthest bounds of Judah, nor that there was no religion in the Northern Kingdom. Prophets and religion were there, and this is Amos's opinion of the whole system : "Come to Bethel, and transgress ; to Gilgal and transgress again ; and bring in your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes every three days ; and make a thank-offering of leavened bread, and publish generous offerings,¹ yea, make them heard : for thus you love to do, O sons of Israel : oracle of the Lord Jahveh."² The worthlessness of this sort of religious rites, performed with punctilious fidelity, is shown by the prophet's oft-repeated cry which follows immediately : "Ye have not returned unto Me, oracle of Jahveh." Sacrifice was one thing, approach to God another. The people had to learn the great lesson which even the Christian world is slow to grasp, that God's earthly sanctuary and God Himself are not necessarily the same. "Thus saith Jahveh to the house of Israel, Seek Me and live : but do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba" — though those were famous

¹ Perhaps "liberalities," as G. A. Smith renders. The idea is the advertising of their generous contributions to religion.

² Amos iv. 4 f.

sanctuaries, where the people had been long wont to suppose that God was sure to meet them, and which they deemed safe under His protection; so the prophet goes on to say, "for Gilgal shall surely become an exile, and Bethel shall come to nought."¹

The people observed the letter of the law, but were blind to its spirit. There were people who cried, "How long ere the new moon will be gone, that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?"² Is it surprising that the prophet should cry out hotly against such religious practice as this? Can we doubt that Amos knew the mind of God when he represented Jahveh as exclaiming: "I hate, I scorn your feasts, and I delight not in your sacred assemblies. If you offer Me your offerings of flesh and meal I will not favour them; neither will I regard your fat peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of thy songs, and let Me not hear the melody of thy viols" ?³

The question is ever raised about such passages, whether the antagonism of the prophets is against the ceremonial system as such, or only against the abuse of it, which certainly was common enough. It is neither possible nor necessary to discuss that question at length here.⁴ It is certain that there was pretty strenuous antagonism between the prophetic and priestly systems. It is now generally conceded that the great bulk of the so-called priestly legislation was post-exilic; but it is certain that priestly

¹ Amos v. 4 f.

² Amos viii. 5.

³ Amos v. 21 ff.

⁴ See the writer's *Old Testament from the Modern Point of View*, p. 155 ff. W. R. Smith, *O.T.J.C.*², lect. x.

institutions existed from very early times in Israel. Samuel was both prophet and priest at the beginning, and Ezekiel was both at the end of the great historic period of Israel. In the intervening time the prophets set their face against the system, either because they did not recognise it as of Divine origin, or because it had lost its primitive ethical motive. Amos seems to show clearly enough what he thought about the origin of the system, for he asks, "Did you bring Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?"¹ The period under Moses was looked upon as the golden age of God's favour to His chosen people.² The Divine grace was not bought by a prescribed measure of sacrifice offered according to a minute ritual, for Amos asserts that no sacrifices were offered in the desert. Surely he could not believe that Moses wrote the priestly laws of the Pentateuch³ at that period. What God wants is shown clearly when the prophet demands that "justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as an everflowing stream."⁴

It is certain that the priests of Israel did not look with favour upon the free speech of this untutored prophet. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, was troubled with these utterances, and called in the royal authority to silence the speaker. He interrupts the humble preacher with persuasive sarcasm: "O seer,

¹ Amos v. 25.

² Amos ii. 10.

³ See also the passage of Jeremiah quoted below.

⁴ Amos v. 24. Ottley says very truly: "Some of them [the prophets] appear to represent it [sacrifice] as a concession to spiritual immaturity; all of them speak of it as wholly subordinate to moral obedience" (*Bamp. Lect.*, p. 230).

come, flee thee away to the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and there prophesy; but at Bethel do not prophesy again, for it is a royal sanctuary, and it is a royal house."¹ The example for all prophets to follow was set once for all by this first prophet² whose words have been preserved. He begins with an *apologia*: "I am not a prophet, nor am I one of the sons of the prophets: but I am a herdman, and a dresser of sycamore trees." He thus reminds Amaziah that he did not belong to the order of established prophets, possibly under a vow of obedience to king or priest, but received his commission in such a way that obedience to the priestly mandate, even though supported by royal authority, was impossible: "Jahveh took me from the flock, and Jahveh said unto me, Go, prophesy unto My people Israel."³ In other words, Amos was not pleading his disadvantages in not having a prophet's education and position, but rather explaining his superior position to the members of an institution who were bound hand and foot. No prophet can ever wear fetters. Amos was prophesying, not by virtue of a commission sealed by human authority, but by the direct call of God. He proclaims the unwelcome truth, not because he likes contention and unpopu-

¹ Amos vii. 12 f.

² Yet we must not forget the words of Micaiah the son of Imlah, when his friendly advisers asked him to confirm what the other prophets had foretold: "What Jahveh saith unto me that will I speak" (1 Kings xxii. 14); nor the words of Balaam, anxious as he was to win the rich prize offered by the king of Moab: "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of Jahveh my God, to do less or more" (Num. xxii. 18).

³ Amos vii. 15. See further p. 57.

larity, but because he must obey God rather than men. God had started him, God alone could stop him.

Now and then, all through the ages, Jewish and Christian, there has arisen a great soul, who was not mistaken in his belief, that however he was connected with man-controlled institutions, the real source of his authority to speak was God Himself. Such men have generally met fierce opposition in their day, but they have never wavered in their work. They are the men who have lifted religion from the low plane to which it sometimes falls, and to whom the Church owes a debt which it usually pays in building their sepulchres. We may also confidently believe that there are thousands of humbler men, whose names are never known to but few, who are rightly conscious of the same high calling, and are equally faithful to their exalted trust.

Before we leave Amos, let us pause for a moment to ask the result of the attempt to silence him. He went right on with his preaching, forecasting a direful future for the misguided priest who was unable, because unwilling, to discern the voice of the Lord; he went right on with his denunciation of Israel's sins; he declared that so far from the temple's being a talisman of safety, God would stand by the sacred altar, and begin His work of destruction there; and at length finishing his message with some bright pictures of a new Israel in a new age. Then, his work done, we may surmise that he gladly returned to the little village of Tekoa, on the confines of the wilderness of Judah, and resumed the humble tasks of following the flock and dressing sycamore trees.

Hosea stands in marked contrast to Amos, as already pointed out, in that he was called, not to exercise a ministry temporarily, and then to lay it down for all time, but to give his life to it.

Hosea seems never to have come into conflict with the powers that be, political or ecclesiastical, in such a way that they attempted to restrict his liberty of prophesying, but that was not because he did not give them abundant excuse. No man was ever more strenuous in denouncing evil even when the culprits were high in ecclesiastical power. Priests and prophets alike come in for a full share of stinging rebukes. Let me venture to remind the reader that the prophets of whom he speaks were not upstarts, deluded by their aspirations for position, but were supposed to have a juster claim to popular recognition than he had.

He says to the priest, "Thou shalt stumble by day, and the prophet also shall stumble with thee by night."¹ Again he exclaims, "The prophet is a fool, and the man of the spirit is mad, because of the multitude of their iniquity and the greatness of the enmity. As for the prophet, a fowler's snare is in all his ways, and enmity in the house of his God."² These deceivers and time-servers stand in their true bad light; especially when contrasted with those who had really believed God's word. God had "hewed them [His people] by the prophets, and slain them by the words of His mouth."³ Again God says, "I have spoken unto the prophets, and I have multiplied

¹ Hosea iv. 5.

² Hosea ix. 7 f.

³ Hosea vi. 5.

visions; and by the hand of the prophets have I used similitudes."¹

The priests were even worse than the prophets. "And it shall be, like people, like priest."² No wonder that the people were bad under such a priesthood; and the doom hanging over the people would involve the priests as well. Those who were called a "snare at Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor," were not only the masses, but the royal house and the priests.³ For the priests do not stop short even of the most open crime: "As bandits lying in wait, so the company of priests murder on the road to Shechem; yea, they commit outrages."⁴

The religious rites performed by such priests and such people will avail nothing: "They shall not pour out wine unto Jahveh, neither shall they arrange sacrifices for Him; their bread shall be like the bread of mourners."⁵ "Israel is a spreading vine: according to the abundance of his fruit, he has increased his altars." But what good is prosperity? for "their heart is divided; surely they will be found guilty."⁶ But the sum of the whole matter is put in one of those fine utterances which God now and then breathes into the soul of man: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."⁷

Amos and Hosea both prophesied in the Northern

¹ Hosea xii. 10.

² Hosea iv. 9.

³ Hosea v. 1.

⁴ Hosea vi. 9.

⁵ Hosea ix. 4; making two slight but necessary emendations, after G. A. Smith, Wellh., Kuenen, Marti.

⁶ Hosea x. 1 f.

⁷ Hosea vi. 6.

Kingdom, where the religion of Jahveh was at a low ebb. We turn now to Judah and to the prophets whose life and work lay in that kingdom. We will first glance for a moment at Micah, the rural contemporary of Isaiah. He was familiar with those who would suppress unpleasant truths, but he was unmoved by their opposition: "Prate not, thus they prate: let none prate of these things; revilings are unceasing."¹ The evil prophets took the lead in trying to silence the honest and fearless voice. Sinful people soon weary of having their sins laid bare. We occasionally yet hear a preference expressed for preaching about the goodness of God, rather than of the sins of men.

Micah had something to say about a class of prophets who exist in every age, who make their message conform to the standards of men, rather than to the standards of God: "Thus saith Jahveh about the prophets who lead My people astray; who snap their teeth and cry, Peace; and whoso does not give for their mouths, against him do they proclaim war: therefore they shall have a visionless night, and darkness too intense for divination; and the sun shall set upon the prophets, and the day shall be black over them. And the seer shall be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer of God."² Preachers who care more for what goes into their mouths than for what comes out are an abomination unto the Lord at all times.

There is another passage in this little book which

¹ Micah ii. 6, after G. A. Smith.

² Micah iii. 5-7.

I will quote here, though there is doubt whether it belongs to Micah or not.¹

But to whatever period and to whatever man it is to be assigned, the ever-convincing internal evidence assures us that it was breathed into a human soul by the Spirit of the Lord. It points out unmistakably the sharp contrast between the popular religion with an appointed sacrifice to atone for every sin and the high ethical religion most pleasing to God. The passage represents a soul in a great struggle. A serious problem has to be faced. A man has sinned. His sin does not sit lightly upon him, but is seen in its true light. The soul's peace is disturbed; relations with God are broken—what is to be done? "Where-with shall I come before Jahveh? Shall I bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, and with calves of a year old? Will Jahveh be propitiated with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for a guilt offering: the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" The questions are asked with all the fervour of a soul in deep distress, and yet in such a way as to show the various popular methods of relief. He knows the things that will not help; but the prophet does not let him rest in negations. The positive statement is clear, brief, and ethically beautiful: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jahveh require of

¹ Micah vi. 1-8. W. R. Smith long ago accepted Ewald's view that Micah vi., vii. 1-6, belongs to the age of Manasseh; he accepted Wellhausen's conclusion that vii. 7-20 must be dated in the Babylonian exile (*Prophets*, p. 439). G. A. Smith comes back to the conservative position and ascribes the passages to Micah.

thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"¹

Not all prophecies are to be found in the prophets' books. Some of the finest have come down in poetic form. There are several anti-sacrificial Psalms, whose authors were really seers. They show that the spirit of the prophets manifested itself in many ways.²

"I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices;
And thy burnt offerings are continually before Me.
I will take no bullock out of thy house,
Nor he-goat out of thy folds.
Will I eat the flesh of bulls,
Or drink the blood of goats?"³

"For Thou delightest not in sacrifice; else would I give it;
Thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."⁴

Before leaving Micah, I must point out the best evidence that Micah produced a great effect on his age, greater than we can estimate from his book alone. The testimony of Jeremiah xxvi. 17-19 is of the first importance, and it shows us that the reforms of Hezekiah were traced to the influence of Micah rather than to Isaiah.⁵ Micah's declaration that Zion would be

¹ Micah vi. 6-8.

² Peters thinks that some passages in the prophets, *e.g.* Jer. xx., show the influence of the Psalms (*The Old Testament and the New Scholarship*, p. 176 f.). Is it not rather the case that the Psalms show the influence of the Prophets?

³ Psalm l. 8 f., 13.

⁴ Psalm li. 16 f.

⁵ For Isaiah's part in the reform see chap. x.