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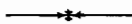
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The Baptist Quarterly

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Prophetic Ministry.

IT was with a shock that I once heard one of our leading ministers say that the Prophets belonged to the Old Testament and that there is no room in the Christian Church for a Prophetic Ministry. On the other hand, it is with some impatience that I hear men sometimes talk as if anyone who preaches what is called the "Social Gospel" is in the succession of the prophets. I think a little study of the essential genius of Hebrew prophecy might correct both ideas. For it would be well for us if we had a ministry worthy to stand in the succession of the Old Testament prophets. In this paper, therefore, I want to look at Hebrew prophecy in its origins and development, to see whether, in the broad principles that underlay it, there is any message for our ministry. I shall have to crave indulgence as I recall much that is familiar in the development of prophecy, for it is only as we look at prophecy in a historical perspective, only as we watch its growth, that we can perceive its true genius.

I.

The origins of prophecy are exceedingly obscure, but certainly very humble. Recent study has emphasised the ecstatic element in prophecy—an element not only found in its origins, but probably persisting in its development. Under the power of the divine afflatus the prophet would do the most extraordinary things. Indeed, prophecy and madness were indistinguishable, and while superstitious awe protected the prophet, he was at the same time held in general contempt. We have the interesting narrative that tells how on one occasion Saul was infected by the frenzied ardour of a group of prophets to such an extent that he stripped himself, and rolled on the ground naked all night, and that *therefore* men said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" When David moved the Ark into Jerusalem, he leaped and danced before it, exposing his person. He earned the contempt of his wife for thus acting as a prophet—as "one of the vain fellows," she puts it. When Elisha sent one of his disciples to

anoint Jehu, and to summon him to seize the throne, Jehu's companions asked him what "this mad fellow" came for.

So closely, indeed, were prophecy and madness akin, that when Saul's fits of madness came upon him, and he acted so irresponsibly that he hurled javelins about at anyone who happened to be within sight, we are told that this strange behaviour was "prophesying." "And it came to pass on the morrow, that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he *prophesied* in the midst of the house: . . . and Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul cast the spear, for he said, I will smite David even to the wall." A decidedly pointed prophecy! So, too, when David fled from Saul's presence to the king of Gath, and found his life in danger, he saved himself by feigning madness. He "scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down on his beard." The point was that madness was so indistinguishable from prophetic ecstasy that no one would dare to injure him, lest perchance he were acting under divine influence.

That an element of eccentricity continued even in the greater prophets needs little reminder. When Isaiah wished to represent to the people the folly of trusting in Egypt, he gave vigour to his warning by walking the streets of Jerusalem naked and barefoot. He thus declared that the Egyptians should be powerless to protect even themselves, but should be carried to adorn the triumphal procession of the Assyrian monarch, naked and barefoot—as we know from surviving examples of Assyrian art was customary. Similarly Jeremiah, greatest of prophets, gave point to his warning that it was useless to fight against Babylon by symbolically wearing a wooden yoke upon his neck.

Nor was such prophecy confined to Israel. In the time of Ahab we find prophets of the Tyrian Baal among the Israelites, who danced about in their frenzy and gashed themselves with knives. Though they seem to have been themselves Israelites, they suffice to show that prophecy was not an unknown feature of the religious life of the neighbouring peoples. And this we learn from independent sources. To name but one, the Egyptian story of Wen-Amon presents its testimony to the early practice of prophecy in Syria. In Asia Minor, too, the phenomenon is found, and there Hölscher would locate its origin—a suggestion developed by Theodore Robinson in his conjecture that prophecy arose amongst the Hittites, since theirs is the only influence which ever controlled Asia Minor and Syria, and practically nothing else.

II.

Eccentricity was not the only element in prophecy, however.

Nor was it ever eccentricity for its own sake, but always directed to some definite end. Primarily, of course, the prophet was an enthusiast for the god whose inspiration he received. The prophets of the Tyrian Baal in Elijah's day worked themselves into a frenzy in Baal's interest, while the prophets of Yahweh a few years later expressed their passionate zeal for Yahweh by inciting Jehu to seize the throne, and by assisting him to carry through his most bloody revolution.

A further outstanding feature of the prophets was their intense patriotism. They were passionate lovers of their country, and hated every foreign oppressor with all their soul. They came forward to use all the power of religion to kindle the spirit of their fellows to rise and smite the oppressor. Thus Deborah, a prophetess, stirred Barak to take the lead and rouse Israel to freedom, and herself accompanied him to kindle in the hearts of his followers the fierce flame of passion. With burning words of hatred she hailed the overthrow of the oppressor, and gloated over the bitter pain the proud mother of Sisera experienced when her son returned not home.

In the time of Saul it was the Philistines who were the oppressors, and the prophets were therefore bitterly anti-Philistine. When Samuel parted from Saul, after their first meeting, he told him he should meet a company of prophets "after thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison—or, we should perhaps render, the monument—of the Philistines." It is not without significance that it was in that spot that Saul met the prophets, and caught their frenzy.

In the time of Ahab and his immediate successors, it was the Aramaeans of Damascus who were the oppressors. Again and again they attacked the Israelites, and annexed large districts of northern Israel and the territory across the Jordan, treating the people with a cruelty that was still a vivid memory in the time of Amos, in the middle of the following century. Hence the prophets were ever ready to rouse the spirits of Israel against these northern foes. An unnamed prophet of Yahweh encouraged Ahab to resist Benhadad, and when the Aramaean came again to attack Israel in the vain confidence that a battle in the plains would be more successful than an attack on the hill fortress of Samaria, another prophet came forth to assure the king of victory. When Ahab and Jehoshaphat went up to the fatal field of Ramoth-gilead, no less than four hundred prophets of Yahweh were found to offer them false assurance of victory. In the days of Jehoram, when the Aramaeans besieged Samaria, and the king was reduced to the point of surrender, it was Elisha who still maintained the morale of the suffering populace. Although, therefore, in this age, Elijah and Elisha were in violent conflict

with the cult of the Tyrian Baal, which was then flourishing in Israel, when it came to a question of war with foreign foes, the Yahweh prophets, including Elisha, were ready to throw their weight into the national scale.

III.

But if Hebrew prophecy had been nothing more than this, it would not have deserved our thought to-day. Happily, it was more. For no movement should be judged by its Whence? but by its Whither? And if Hebrew prophecy had beginnings of little promise, it achieved heights of the rarest value to the spiritual progress of mankind. Nor is even the Whence? of prophecy exhausted in this source of frenzied piety and patriotism. The waters of more than one stream flowed into the river of Hebrew prophecy.

There is an important note in 1 Sam. ix. 9, that "he that is now called a prophet (*nabi*) was beforetime called a seer (*ro'eh*)." This points to the merging of two originally distinct classes, and it is of no little significance that this note appears in the record about Samuel. For while Samuel was, in the earliest narrative, a Seer, we find in him some of the outstanding marks of the *Nabi*, and it was doubtless under the powerful influence of his personality and example that the two classes became identified.

In that early narrative we find Samuel at Ramah, a man of some importance in the town, but with a purely local reputation. When Saul is unable to find his father's asses, it occurs to his servant that Samuel might be able to give some information. The only difficulty is the fee, which he would naturally expect, but which Saul is unable at the moment to provide. Fortunately the servant has sixpence, which is sufficient for the purpose. Speculation has been indulged in as to the method whereby the Seer gained such knowledge, and he has been likened, improbably I think, to Babylonian and other magicians. That certain magical ideas are to be found amongst the prophets may, indeed, be fairly inferred from such a narrative as the account of Elisha's death, where the prophet places his hands on the king's hands and shoots from his bow, and then makes the king strike the ground with his arrows—where potency is held to lie in the act itself. But that has no relevance to the character of the Seer, or the method of his enlightenment. Neither the story of Samuel nor that of Ahijah of Shiloh, when the wife of Jeroboam came to inquire if her son should recover, gives us any light on that method. But, however, he gained his knowledge, the Seer was a man whose vision could penetrate beyond the confines of ordinary human perception, and he brought into the stream of prophecy a contribution that was of the profoundest importance.

IV.

Yet another element entered into it, of even more significance. From the beginning there was in Hebrew prophecy a moral element, which gave it its unique character. It is not equally conspicuous in all the prophets of the Old Testament, indeed, but it was those prophets who most manifested this element who were most truly and most essentially Hebrew prophets.

There are passages in which Moses is referred to as a prophet. In one sense, of course, it is not true, but in another it is most profoundly true. Moses was not an ecstatic zealot, but a great leader, who took a company of serfs and made of them a nation. But it was Moses who gave Israel that rich moral element which was the distinctive thing about their religion, and who thus contributed to the stream of prophecy its most distinctive feature. I am not thinking merely of the Decalogue. I know it is much disputed whether the Decalogue, even in its original brief form, came from Moses. But I am thinking of something more primary.

In Ex. vi. 2, we read, "And God spake unto Moses and said, I am Yahweh, and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as El Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh I was not known unto them." Moses came to the people in Egypt, then, with a new divine name. It is commonly supposed that Yahweh was originally the God of the Kenite clan, with which Moses had taken refuge. But whether so or not, one day there burned in Moses' heart the certainty that Yahweh would, through him, deliver his people from their Egyptian bondage. And he went down to Egypt and told them that this God, whose very name was new and strange to them, had chosen them to be His people, and would deliver them from their bondage. In His name Moses led the people out of Egypt to Horeb, the sacred mount where Yahweh's chief seat was. And here the people entered into a solemn covenant with Yahweh. In all this there was something new and unique in the history of religion. Yahweh had first adopted and delivered Israel, and now in her gratitude Israel adopted Yahweh as the national God. The worship of Yahweh in Israel began, then, as an act of moral choice, and had its roots in the essentially ethical emotion of gratitude. It is true that Israel passed through a long period when every man did that which was right in his own eyes. But Moses had planted in the covenant relation an ethical seed, which was destined to bear rich fruit, and which bore its noblest fruit in the work of the great prophets.

I have said that the ethical note was not struck by every prophet. Nevertheless, it was very frequently struck, even in

early days. Think of the enormous significance of Nathan's rebuke of David for his adultery, and for his infamous treatment of a most faithful servant. The courage of the man who dared to challenge his monarch with "Thou art the man," was a good augury for the future of prophecy. Even more courageous was Elijah's rebuke of Ahab for the way he secured possession of Naboth's vineyard. The covenant that was ethically grounded in gratitude was already bearing ethical fruit, and bringing into Hebrew prophecy its unique note.

V.

So far I have not mentioned prediction as a feature of prophecy. An older generation, obsessed with the Greek derivation of the word, found in prediction the principal element of prophecy. Our own generation, finding no suggestion of prediction in the derivation of the Hebrew *nabi'*, is insistent that a prophet was not a fore-teller, but a forth-teller.

There are two instructive verses in Exodus, where the word *nabi'* occurs. When Moses was seeking to evade the call of God, fearing the greatness of the responsibility laid upon him, God said unto him: "Is there not Aaron, thy brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. He shall be thy *nabi'* unto the people, and it shall come to pass, that he shall be to thee a mouth, and thou shalt be to him as God." He shall be thy *nabi'*, or prophet. Our version renders by *spokesman*. In Ex. vii. 1 the same word is translated *prophet*, where the meaning is clearly the same. "See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy *prophet*." From these passages it would appear that the prophet was regarded as the mouthpiece of God. And whenever Hebrew prophecy was true to its own genius, it was the mouthpiece of God. The prophet spoke God's message to the men of his own day and generation. Its significant content was not the distant future, but the principles that God would have them live by. Sometimes the prophet penetrated deeply to the heart of God and brought out some new truth concerning God Himself. Sometimes he addressed himself to the evils of his day and generation, and summoned men in the name of God to sweep away all unrighteousness and injustice from their midst.

But with all this there *is* a predictive element, which is not to be ignored. Look where you will in the prophets and you will find prediction. For prediction was a very real function of the prophets. It may not appear in the derivation of *nabi'*, but we have said that the Seer was merged in the *Nabi'*. Fundamentally, the prophet was the man of clear vision, who looked on the events and social conditions of his own day with more penetrating eye than his fellows. When Elisha was at Dothan, the

Syrians sent to capture him. The prophet's servant was alarmed to find the city surrounded, but Elisha was calm and confident, and quietly said: "They that be for us are more than they that be with them." He then prayed: "Lord, open thou his eyes, that he may see." And he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. That is but a typical picture. The prophet was the man of the open eye. He looked on any given situation and he saw it all. He saw through it to the end. He read the inevitable issue of things, and proclaimed it with no uncertain voice. When he saw his fellows plunging headlong in a course of sin and selfishness, he saw the inevitable disasters to which that course must lead. When others lived in the comforts of the present, he declared the sorrows that were being laid up. He *did* predict, but whether the events he predicted were in the near or distant future, they were related to the conditions of his own day and generation. It was never prediction for its own sake, or prediction to impress succeeding generations with his inspired cleverness, but ever with an immediate and practical objective—to persuade men to turn from their follies to God, in the hope that they might avert the evils he saw coming. That is the genius of Hebrew prophecy. The prophet looked through the present to the end towards which it was tending. He was essentially a Seer, a man who penetrated human affairs, and human situations, and who laid bare their inevitable issue.

VI.

But all the prophets were not equally penetrating in their vision, and there was real progress from age to age. For there is a human element as well as a divine element in prophecy. Its richness depends not alone on God's willingness to give, but on the prophet's capacity to receive. Thus, when Jehu had carried through his orgy of bloodshed, we read that God praised him for it. He had acted under prophetic incitement in his murderous zeal, and the zealot Rechabites had assisted him in his massacre. And then we read: "The Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." But a century later, when Hosea's first child was born, we read that "the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu." Clearly, according to Hosea, Jehu's assassinations and massacres, so far from being according to all that was in God's heart, were strongly displeasing to Him, since they were now to be punished. This does not mean that God had advanced somewhat, and

no longer took delight in acts that He had been rewarding for a century. But it does mean that His prophets had advanced, and now saw more clearly into His heart.

So was it with patriotism. We have said that patriotism was one of the distinctive marks of the early *nabi'*. It continued so throughout. But there was considerable advance in the understanding of the true nature of patriotism, and it was in this connexion that the distinction between true and false prophets first appeared. The earlier prophets were ever ready to kindle the warlike zeal of their contemporaries against their enemies. In later times there were still prophets who did the same, but they are known as the false prophets, while the true prophets opposed these things. The false prophets doubtless thought they were the true successors of Samuel and Elijah and Elisha, for just as they had stirred up men to fight against the Philistines and the Aramaeans, so were the false prophets ready to support every war against foreign oppressors, whether Aramaean, Assyrian or Babylonian. But just as Samuel and Elijah and Elisha had penetrated to the needs of their own day, so the true prophets were their real successors in penetrating to the differing needs of their own, and in perceiving that a crude conservatism was insufficient to meet the changing demands of a new age. They realized that patriotism does not consist merely in hating the foreigner, and desiring to see one's own country powerful and wealthy. They recognized that what mattered was not the wealth and power of the State, but its spiritual and moral worth. They believed that the power of God was great enough to rescue Israel from the hand of all their oppressors, if only Israel would cultivate in her life those qualities which were dearest to the heart of God Himself. This was an altogether deeper patriotism—the desire to see their country not so much great as good, and the conviction that unless it were good, it could not become truly great.

False prophets and true prophets alike prophesied in the name of God and felt themselves to be His servants. But whereas the false prophets were ever concerned to prophesy smooth things, the things that men wanted to hear, the others were often constrained to say things that were highly unpopular. The false prophets reserved all their condemnation for the foreign foes of Israel, while the true prophets, though displaying no gentleness to the cruelties and wickednesses of foreign peoples, were more especially interested in attacking the things that marred the life of their own people. The false prophets were ever ready to go with the stream, while the true prophets again and again stood against it. It was not that they loved opposition. Far from it! The loneliness of their position oftentimes rent

their heart. But they felt an inner constraint they could not resist. They were prophets because they had to be, because the hand of the Lord was laid upon them. "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" "When I say I will speak no more in His name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am worn out with the strain and unable to control it."

The distinction between true and false prophets first appears with Micaiah. When Ahab and Jehoshaphat were thinking of going up to recapture Ramoth-gilead, no less than four hundred prophets of Yahweh encouraged them to their adventure. It was in the name, not of Baal, but of Yahweh that they spoke, promising the two kings victory. Then Micaiah was brought in, in answer to Jehoshaphat's request. He already had the reputation of being somewhat of a pessimist, who always prophesied evil, and who was always found on the unpopular side. And he lived up to his reputation. Micaiah, true forerunner of a great host, found a prison as the reward of his faithfulness. That his word was justified by the event mattered little. That was, doubtless, only an aggravation of his offence. Whoso would be honoured of men, let him not be a prophet of God—unless it be a false one.

Throughout large parts of the Old Testament we find the comfortable doctrine that happiness and prosperity are the inevitable reward of faithfulness to God. That God is kind to them that love and serve Him is indeed true, but that His kindness shows itself in material comforts and worldly honours is belied by the whole course of prophetic history. Which of the prophets received aught but the scorn and contempt of men? Which of them found aught but persecution and suffering, and the agony of a loneliness that was far more bitter than the pain of the blows laid upon them, or the sufferings of a prison? Yet pity not the prophets in their sufferings. Envy them rather the faithfulness on which God could so count.

VII.

But we must turn to another side of prophetic progress. The earlier prophets not merely took a deep interest in public and national affairs, but took a decisive hand in them as well. It was due to Samuel that Saul was set on the throne, and when Samuel had broken with Saul, the prophet looked out David to succeed him on the throne. When David was about to die, his eldest surviving son, Adonijah, somewhat naturally thought he would have the succession to the throne. It was the prophet Nathan who frustrated his ambition and set Solomon on the

throne. When Solomon's oppressive rule and heavy exactions had alienated men's hearts from him, the prophet Ahijah stirred up Jeroboam to head a rebellion and seize the throne. For the moment it failed, and Jeroboam was forced to flee to Egypt. But when the strong hand of Solomon was removed, the revolution was accomplished, and Israel was divided into two separate states. When Rehoboam purposed to march northwards to the conquest of the northern tribes, it was another prophet, Shemaiah, who paralyzed his action by forbidding him in the name of Yahweh. Elisha sent one of his disciples to summon Jehu to rebel against his master and seize the throne.

The earlier prophets were thus constantly engaging in plots, and interfering with the course of government. The later prophets, however, were men of a different stamp. They still took a deep and vital interest in public affairs, and were ever discussing national policies and advocating public action. But they relied on the power of their word alone. They did not supplement it with plots and incitements to revolution and murder. They strove to influence the court, either directly or through the medium of public opinion. But they did not plot against the throne. For they did not feel it to be necessary to do so. So strongly convinced were they that national sin must entail its own penalties that they felt it was superfluous to do more. A false national policy could only lead to an ill end, and involve the nation in deeper misfortunes than any the prophet could desire.

VIII.

But while every prophet was primarily the mouthpiece of God to his own generation, and related his message to the affairs of his own day, there was always a timeless element in the message of the great prophets. They were not mere political and social reformers, but men who penetrated some of the secrets of God's heart, and laid them bare for all succeeding generations. They did not see the whole of God's heart, indeed, and none of them had a perfect view of Him. But each of them enshrined some fresh understanding of God in a new emphasis in divine truth. And what is equally vital is that the distinctive message of each prophet is always based on his own experience, and is always intimately related to his view of God.

The greatest example, of course, is Hosea. The prophet learned from his own tragic experience the depth of God's love. Though his own wife was unfaithful to him, and utterly unworthy of the love he gave her, yet did he love her still. And from the agony of his personal experience he learned to know what the love of God was like. If human love could thus survive

the bitter wounds that faithlessness inflicted, how much more must the love of God, who chose Israel in her weakness and bondage and made her His bride, survive the cruel faithlessness of Israel? Though Israel was perverse and worthless, yet would He continue to love her until He won her. For His love was unconquerable. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? Mine heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together. I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God and not man."

But the love of God is not mere weak sentimentality, as Jeremiah later saw, and as Amos had earlier perceived. It was the sterner side of God that Amos saw. His soul was aflame at the injustice he saw rampant on every side in the northern kingdom, the luxury of the upper classes and the relentless oppression of the poor, and he cried aloud against it. If God was God, he must be a God of righteousness. And Amos propounds the great and eternal principle that a great heritage brings a great responsibility. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: *therefore* will I visit upon you all your iniquities." Of what profound significance is that word to us, who rejoice in the greatness of the heritage that is ours. Begone the spirit of an empty pride! Rather let our hearts tremble even as they rejoice, and realize the weight of our responsibility.

In the work of such men the ethical seed that Moses had planted produced its noble and rich fruit. For while they unfolded, with ever growing clearness, the character of God, they were not concerned with an abstract theology. Back of all their distinctive emphases were two great principles, common to them all, principles which are still valid for us. They are (1) that whatever God is, we must be like Him. If He is righteous, we must be righteous. If He is holy, we must be holy. If He is gracious, then must we be gracious. If we truly reverence a God of this character, then must we build up in our lives those rich ethical qualities which belong to the essence of His heart. And (2) unless we do thus strive to be like Him, we do not truly worship Him. All our outward forms of worship are an offence to Him, unless behind them is the truer and deeper worship of obedience. And that deeper worship can dispense with the ritual of the cultus. Again and again the prophets denounce the cultus of their day. "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and your meal offerings, I will not accept them." "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my

transgression, and the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

It is sometimes maintained that the prophets held the ritual to have value, but only when it was the organ of the worship of the life, and not when it was the substitute for that worship. It seems more probable that they opposed the ritual in itself. No *opus operatum* could achieve anything, and in itself it was a peril. Certainly the exclusive demand of the prophets is for obedience to the will of God, and the culminating word of prophecy is Jeremiah's promise of God's rich and immediate fellowship, whereby that will shall be known in all its fulness. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord. For they shall all know me."

IX.

We have far from exhausted the greatness of our subject, but we have at least reminded ourselves of something of the amazing development of Hebrew prophecy from a crude patriotism and a frenzied religious passion to the spiritual penetration and the ethical loftiness of the later prophets. And if there is little in the early beginnings of prophecy that would be an enrichment to our ministry, it is clear that there is much in its later growth that may be added to us with profit.

It is also clear that there is nothing peculiarly prophetic in denouncing current social conditions, and making that the burden of our message, especially to congregations that are happy to join us in thinking of the sins of others. It was in the royal sanctuary that Amos prophesied. Still less can we claim the prophet's mantle if our "Social Gospel" is a second-hand thing—got up from books.

Many elements must enter into a ministry that is truly prophetic. The wild frenzy of the early *nabi'* is to be avoided, but at least there must be an absorbing passion in the service of God. Nor let us despise a true and enlightened patriotism, through which we may best serve the wider international causes that claim our help. Beyond a living interest in the affairs of our day, we need penetrating vision ere we can exercise a prophetic ministry—the power to look through the present to the end to which it is tending. We need to speak as the mouth-piece of God, and to proclaim with fearless courage His message to those we have to address. We need a great experience of God, and our message must be born of that experience. No mere

repetition of the message of others is truly prophetic. It is when we have known Him with the immediacy of rich experience, when we have heard His voice and looked upon His face, that there is given to us that penetrating vision of His heart that must lie behind our penetration of human situations, and that alone can inspire our message and give us ethical power. No truly prophetic message can exhaust itself in denunciation, or concern itself merely with social righteousness. It is primarily a message about God, and a passionate call to men to be like Him.

But what of Christ? Is He not the fulfilment of prophecy, and in Him is not prophecy superseded? It is true that many words of the prophets find their deepest fulfilment in Him. Nor is this surprising. For we have said that their utterances were based on their penetrating glimpses into the heart of God. And Christ is the very effulgence of the divine glory, Himself the perfect manifestation of God's heart. Little wonder, then, that the prophetic utterances should find their perfect setting in Him, and that He alone should reveal the depth and fulness of meaning that was in them, transcending far the thought of the prophets who uttered them.

Where, then, is the need for our penetration of God's heart? If such penetration must lie behind all prophetic ministry, what room is there now for such ministry? Can we hope to progress beyond the revelation that is in Christ? Nay, indeed. But who has exhausted all the fulness of that revelation? There are treasures in it that none has yet explored. And when through the intimacy of our experience of God we learn new things of Him, they are only things that our blindness has prevented our seeing long since in Christ. We cannot progress beyond Him, nor can we apprehend all that is in Him. At most we can perceive one or two aspects of the Heart that was perfectly unveiled in Him, but that is so largely veiled from us by our own limitations, and make them the basis of a living message which is essentially God's message through us, and which is vitally related to the needs of our own day.

In all prophecy there is a divine element, and there is a human element. The prophets were not creators; they were the clay in the hand of the Potter. Nevertheless, the Potter Himself was limited by the material He had to work with. This, too, is of abiding significance to us. All our limitations are limitations upon God, and an impoverishment, not alone of ourselves, but of the world that God would serve through us.

H. H. ROWLEY.