

## The Workshop of God.

THE task of the prophet in all ages is to interpret the events of human life. He is the seer to whom is revealed the inner significance of ordinary happenings. He discerns the presence of God beneath the temporary and trivial. He gazes upon the web of history as it emerges from the loom of time, a web woven from the words and deeds of individuals and the rise and fall of institutions, and his gaze pierces through to the pattern there being formed. To his insight it is clear that things do not merely happen. They are made by God to contribute to His own divine ends.

To every man is granted at certain moments this prophetic vision. No life is so poor that it is entirely devoid of experiences which challenge unbelief and demand some faith in the supernatural. In the most hardened sceptic the spiritual eye is not so blinded that it does not at times catch a glimpse of the tassels of the robe of God. Every man is compelled at one time or another to confess that God has intervened in his life or in the world's history.

The prophet, however, never thinks of the intervention of God, for to him God is ever active, ever present. Of God alone can it be said that He "shall neither slumber nor sleep." God is the only workman for whom the evening siren never sounds. It is the prophet's supreme task to convince men that "History is the Workshop of God."

The artist does not seek simply to put upon his canvas the copy of a landscape which is there for everyone to see. It is his endeavour to express also the impression which it made upon him, to produce a permanent record of the emotion aroused in him at the moment of inspiration.

So is it with the prophet, but he is concerned with history, and in the depths of his soul there is a profound realisation of the living God. The history of the nations is his landscape and he paints upon a large canvas. Across that landscape there is a broad shaft of light streaming, lighting up every significant feature. He is convinced that it is the light of revelation, proceeding from God Himself. This conviction arouses in him feelings of adoration and high resolves. These he longs to incorporate in his picture so that others may be in like manner inspired.

Thus the prophet ponders the facts of history and then interprets their meaning to mankind. Without denying man's freedom of choice he shows how God uses men and turns evil into a means of achieving His gracious purposes. To show this is no easy task.

It is equally true that Nature also is the workshop of God. To set forth this is the peculiar province of the religious poet, and his task is easier than that of the prophet. The stars in their courses obey the will of God. Their procession across the heavens is so regular that we may well believe that the laws of their motion are ordained by God. As with the stars, so with the whole universe apart from the life of sentient beings; in those realms in which freedom of choice and action is unknown, the Creator can work unhindered by man's sinfulness. The activity of God in the realm of history is as real as it is in the realm of Nature, but is not so readily recognised. The prophet needs a very keen spiritual eye.

"No prophet, no revealer, ever comes before the fulness of time, or until the necessary conditions are at hand." So wrote Söderblom in his book, *The Nature of Revelation*. Until his death in 1931 Söderblom was Primate of Sweden. It was a conviction of his that the fact of a living God can be proved by an appeal to history. In the hour of crisis God does raise up a man to meet it in His name, and long before his appearance prepares the way for his coming.

The patient researches of scholars, ancient and modern, has abundantly vindicated the assertion of Paul, that "when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son." The Hebrew faith, the *pax Romana*, the Greek language, the long-sated lust and weariness of the ancient world, as well as the spiritual aspirations of the noblest men, all contributed to produce a world ready and waiting for the Gospel of Christ.

The great French scholar of the Reformation, D'Aubigné, has collected an impressive array of evidence to establish his thesis that there was a man sent from God whose name was Martin Luther. That God is the God of history was one of the author's fundamental principles. The sixteenth century was as weary of Romanism as was the ancient world of Paganism. It also aspired to a more satisfying religion. Thus was it prepared for the work of Luther. This does not mean that God planned the Papal corruptions in order to pave the way for the Reformation, but that He allowed the necessary conditions for reform to arise before He found the man willing and able to achieve it.

John Drinkwater is also among the prophets, for in his drama on Abraham Lincoln, he shows how the hour sent forth

the man. There was a time in America when the people were bewildered, and liberty and law were in danger. Then "from fifty fameless years in quiet Illinois was sent

A word that still the Atlantic hears,  
And Lincoln was the lord of his event."

God is a living God. Scholar, historian, dramatist, each perceives in his own way the hand of God in the diversity of human affairs. The prophet sees farther than we ordinary people do, and assures us that God is at work in the world. He declares to us that "History is the Workshop of God."

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THOMAS WESLEY FRECKLETON, in 1855, was pastor of a church in Longton, Staffs, which was extremely uncertain in its theological bearings. For five years it responded to overtures from the New Connexion, but there were strained relations with Wileman, and in 1858 it declared itself Free Baptist. Freckleton was energetic enough, for a week before Christmas he engaged the Town Hall for a lecture on Atheism and Secularism as contrasted with Theism and Christianity. It was a worthy theme, and he dealt with it for three hours, and at eleven in the evening invited discussion. Nearby, at Newcastle, was a Presbyterian church holding Unitarian views based on Scripture. He was persuaded to take charge of this, on a stipend of £78; but his ministry lasted only 1860 and 1861. His Baptist church seems not to have survived his departure, and the New Connexion ceased to take note of it.