

made his own, and hallowed for him. The last words of our Lord's earthly ministry, and those of St. Paul in the last chapter of his latest Epistle are thus connected together in a remarkable manner. Where the one sought consolation, there the other found it too. And I know not where we could find a grander commentary than this on the Divine law, that "it is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his Master."

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STUDIES IN THE MINOR PROPHETS.

IV. HOSEA.

THE three great offices of the Jewish polity were those of the king, the priest, and the prophet. The province of the king was to rule, the province of the priest was to sacrifice, the province of the prophet was to teach. Of these, the last was incomparably the greatest. Indeed, it is not too much to say that, in the person of the prophet, the three offices became one. The prophet was at the same time both king and priest. He was the true representative of the Theocracy, and therefore he gave the law to kings; he was the true representative of sacrifice, and therefore he was the priest of humanity. The prophet was essentially a spokesman, a legate, an ambassador, and in that capacity he represented at once humanity and God. At one moment he stood forth as the representative of Deity and delivered his message in the room of God; at another, he appeared as the representative of humanity, and uttered his prayer in the room of man. In the one case he represented royalty, in the other he assumed the attitude of subjection; but, alike in his royalty and his service, his mission was one of priestly sacrifice. As the representative of God

to man, he bore the sorrows of the Divine heart ; as the representative of man to God, he carried the sufferings of the human spirit. The prophet was the true type of that highest revelation of royalty in which the king and the priest are united in the sceptre of love, a love which reigns by serving, and wears its crown by submitting to a cross.

It cannot surprise us, therefore, that an office so highly favoured should have been somewhat jealously guarded. We cannot wonder that to the prophet, as to the priest, there should have come to be attached a certain element of caste. The prophet was himself both a priest and a king, and it was only natural he should claim the apostolic succession of the one and the royal descent of the other. Accordingly, we find, and are not surprised to find, that the general mind of the nation was unfavourable to individualism. It was not easy for one to obtain a hearing who claimed the office of a prophet on no other ground than that of a private and personal inspiration. Men were inclined to ask where were his credentials. They wanted to know whether he had received any right to teach ; and, as a general rule, they held that no such right could be given except by the authority of another prophet. It was seldom of any avail to plead individual illumination ; the Jew was not sufficiently Protestant to recognize such a claim as that. The illumination which he did recognize was an education in the prophetic schools, and the production of evidence testifying to such tuition. Elisha might have all the inspiration of Elijah ; but if he had failed to receive Elijah's mantle, it would stand him in little stead ; the double portion of the spirit would be given in vain, unless it were accompanied by the proof that it *had* been given. The prophet, like the priest, belonged to an order of Aaron, and was prone to base his authority rather on the sanctity of his order than on the power of his own personality.

But now we must observe that, in proportion as the old régime of prophecy faded into the new, there began to appear a change in men's estimate of the prophetic dignity. In proportion as the idea of a prophet ceased to be that of a mere soothsayer, and became that of a teacher of eternal truth, the notion of an apostolic succession began to lose its value. If the gift of prophecy was not simply the gift of fortune-telling, but the power of forth-telling the everlasting principles of the moral universe, it followed, incontrovertibly, that the bestowal of that gift must ultimately depend on the mental condition of the recipient. Accordingly, with the dawn of the eighth pre-Christian century, we begin to see the dawn of what may be called a Jewish Protestantism. The apostolic succession, indeed, still remains in force, but ever and anon we are startled by the apparition of men who have broken away from that succession by flashes of individual inspiration derived, not from tradition, not from inheritance, not from education in the schools of the prophets, but from the direct and immediate illumination of the Spirit of God. We find men who have never belonged to an order of Aaron, but whose pride and boast it is to belong to an order of Melchisedek; to have been without ecclesiastical father, or mother, or descent, but to have derived at once their mission and their light from the inspiring contact of the Life eternal. These men were the Luthers of their age. They spoke with no outward authority; their credentials were all from within. They asserted their claim to be preachers of the everlasting righteousness, and, as such, they asserted their empire alike over nations and kings. But their claim was based upon something which the nations and the kings could not see; it was grounded upon personal conviction alone. They spoke to the world with the accents of imperative command simply because they had heard in their own souls a still small voice of conscience bidding them go forth to

denounce iniquity, and authorizing them to proclaim the judgments of Heaven.

To this band of Jewish Luthers the subject of our present study appears to have belonged. The call of Hosea was analogous to the call of Amos; it came to each of them in an individual voice. The son of Beerî, like the herdsman of Tekoah, seems to have had no previous connexion with any existing prophetic school, but to have been selected from the multitude by a private and personal call. There is, however, one respect in which the call of Hosea has more interest for us than that of Amos; it came to him in one of those experiences of secular life which we are commonly accustomed to regard as outside the kingdom of God. Hosea has been very frank with his auditors and with his readers. He has made no mystery about his call; he has told us precisely in what circumstances it occurred. He says that he was first awakened to the conviction of having a prophetic mission by the experience of an unhappy married life.¹ He had been disappointed in the object of his affections; she had disgraced his life and ruined his happiness. It might seem at first sight as if there were here no materials for prophetic conviction, but a second glance will shew us the contrary. For the thought in the mind of Hosea is evidently this: "This experience of mine could never have occurred to me unless it had formed part of a wider experience. This want of harmony in that relation of life which ought to be the closest and most indissoluble, is surely a strong proof that there is at work a disintegrating element in society which is dissolving the bond of unity between man and man. It proves that the maiden is not trained to be the wife, that the best and highest part of female education is neglected—her power of helpfulness, her capacity for ministration. It proves, above all, that there is a spirit of levity in the air,

¹ It is thus alone we can interpret Chapters i. and iii.

that the mind of society has become enervated by the pursuit of sensuous pleasure, and that the life of self-indulgence is blinding men to the responsibility of being human souls!" That was what Hosea read in his own unhappy experience. However bitterly he felt it as a personal calamity, he felt it more bitterly still as a sign of national depravity. That it made his own life miserable was much; that it shewed something "rotten in the State of Denmark" was infinitely more. In nothing does the unselfishness of the prophet come out more conspicuously than in this. He is the victim of a personal misfortune, but he refuses to regard it in its personal aspect; he will only see it as it affects his country. He feels himself to be the bearer of a sorrow which could only have come to him from a nation and from an age corrupted at the core; and that which grieves his heart is not so much the personal sorrow as the national corruption. He forgets himself in his people; he loses his individual woe in the vision of an universal degeneracy; he transforms his own burden into a burden not his own.

Here, then, is a remarkable experience in the ecclesiastical history of the Jewish nation; a man called to the sacred office of a prophet through one of the common and secular voices of life, awakened to the sense of a Divine mission by a circumstance so unromantic and so commonplace as an unhappy domestic relationship. In passing through this experience Hosea was himself the prophecy of the universal priesthood of Christianity, a priesthood to which men were to be called not by ecstatic dreams and visions, but by the voices which spoke to them in the exercise of their daily occupations. He was the forerunner of Peter and Andrew, of James and John, of Matthew the publican, and Paul the tentmaker, and Luke the physician, of the multitude which no man can number whose religious life has been constituted and maintained amid the duties

and the avocations of the day and hour. And, in being a prophecy of the Christian spirit, Hosea is at the same time in full harmony with the ideal of Jewish worship, an ideal which had grown dim amid the shadows of the visible priesthood. For it must be remembered that the idea of Hebrew worship all along was the reverence of a Theocracy, in other words, the recognition of a Being who ruled over the heavens and the earth, without the intervention of second or finite causes. The worship of the Hebrew nation was originally built on the belief that there was no difference between things secular and things sacred. The Church was a State, and the State was a Church; the king was a priest, and the priest a king. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the very act of being the regal heads of their people, were the men who had the highest right to sacrifice in behalf of their people. The Hebrew polity bequeathed to the Jewish nation an idea which amidst all its vicissitudes it never wholly lost—the conception of a Theocracy in which God ruled alone, and in which He ruled equally over all things. The distinction between sacred and profane had no place in such a government; every event in life was alike, and in the same degree, recognized as an act of God. The experiences of individual life, however secular might be their form, and however mundane might be their natural origin, were received unhesitatingly as Divine voices to the soul, declaring the will of the King of kings. When Hosea heard such a voice in his own secular experience, he was no innovator on the national faith; he was rather the reconstructor and restorer of that faith. He was only reproducing the spirit of the past, rekindling the memory of that olden time when men had been taught to see in all things the Divine Hand, to hear in all sounds the Divine Voice, and to feel in all impressions the stirring of the Divine Breath.

Let us now pass from the call of Hosea, to the burden of his message. There is one thing which must strike us very powerfully at the outset, and it is this: we have here a life which seems at one and the same moment to exhibit two contrary phases of mind. In one aspect Hosea may be regarded as the saddest, in another he may be viewed as the most sanguine, of the Jewish prophets. When we look at his picture of the national life, we behold in him the most gloomy of all pessimists. The vision he gives us of his country is a tableau of horrors. The Jewish nation to his mind presents the aspect of a night without a star. He sees on every side degeneracy, corruption, vice, forgetfulness of God; he sees on no side any natural possibility of remedy. It is a picture of unrelieved immorality. Everything has reached an extreme of blackness, and the prophet is unable even to discern the prospect of that reaction which proverbially follows such extremes. So far, then, Hosea is a pessimist. He can point to nothing in the character or circumstances of the nation which can warrant him to hope; and he will not pretend to see what is not within the range of his vision. Accordingly, his prognostics are gloomy so far as they relate to the natural condition of his country; and were he unable to look beyond the natural condition, he would be without exception the saddest of prophets and the most melancholy of bards. But it is just here that there emerges that second and seemingly contradictory side of Hosea's mind which makes it possible for a critic to place him in the opposite category. For this man, who can see no human ground of hope for the world, has been gifted with a very rare power of hoping without human grounds. All his natural reasonings, all his personal observations, point to despair; but he is sanguine in defiance of these, and in the very act of admitting

the truth of these. Such sanguineness, it must be conceded, is of a very peculiar order.

There have been men who, when tossed upon a sea of trouble, have been able to buoy themselves up by the hope in a single natural contingency; we call these sanguine men. But here is a man who, in looking across his sea of trouble, can discern no place for the intervention of such a contingency. He beholds storm and cloud everywhere, and he can imagine no natural law by which the storm and the cloud can possibly be dispelled. Yet this man, with every reason for despair and with full consciousness that he has reason for despair, has no doubt whatever that the sea of troubles will be ultimately calm; he is an optimist against reason. He is the most absolutely sanguine of all the Jewish prophets, because he is sanguine in deliberate defiance of his own judgment. He has weighed his country in the balance and found her wanting; he believes his country to be incapable at any time of reversing that balance; and yet he is convinced of her final triumph. How are we to account for this seeming inconsistency of human nature? How are we to explain the contradiction between the man's premisses and his conclusion? How are we to reconcile the conflict between the sadness of his natural perceptions and the exuberant hope with which he looks beyond them?

The reconciliation lies in one fact—the prophet's belief in the supernatural. Of all the singers of Israel Hosea is the man who soars furthest beyond the sphere of human conditions. He is, in a quite peculiar sense, the prophet of grace and salvation. Others have predicted for Judæa a return of the Divine favour; but they have seen the promise of that return in the hope of a national repentance. Hosea sees no hope of a national repentance except in the promise of a Divine return; his only hope

is in God. He feels that the Jewish nation is so impotent as to preclude all natural expectation of succour, and therefore his expectation rests on the supernatural. God must Himself come as the Refuge and the Strength of humanity. Before any order can be restored, before the downward course of the nation can be arrested, there must be felt the intervention of a Power distinctly different from all the resources of man. The Divine Life must itself descend into the heart of the human; and the human life must be purified by its contact with the Divine. Hosea is essentially the prophet of a Divine salvation, for he looks for the emancipation of humanity to the advent of a strength which humanity can never yield.

And what is Hosea's ground for this hope? To the natural mind of man, in any age, it must seem an irrational expectation; to the natural mind of the Jew it must have appeared specially so. If there was one thing which the Jew emphasized more than another it was the distance, the self-containedness, the incommunicableness of God. The Divine Life was to him eternally separate from the human; there was a great gulf fixed between them, so that the one could not directly pass over to the other. They could only commune with each other through the intervention of emissaries—by a Jacob's ladder, or a Divine fire kindled on Sinai, or a descending hierarchy of angels. That God and man should meet face to face, that the creature should see God and live, that the human soul should be permitted to hold immediate converse with the Divine Author of its being, was a thought originally foreign to the Hebrew mind. Yet it is precisely this foreign element which breaks forth in the writings of Hosea. In him the spirit of Judaism seems to desert its own standpoint. The supernatural is seen bridging that gulf which itself had created; and the God, who had hitherto been inaccessible

to the human soul except through the medium of angels, is beheld Himself spanning the distance and touching the creature with his own hand.

We ask again, wherefore is this? What is that thought in the mind of Hosea which makes it possible for him, without irreverence, to say what, to his forefathers, would have seemed blasphemy. The answer is not far to seek. Hosea is distinctively the prophet of the supernatural, because Hosea for the first time has fully awakened to the anticipation of that great Christian idea—the Fatherhood of God. Here, more distinctively than either in Jonah or Joel or Amos, we are confronted by a manifestation of the Divine Life in which the lineaments of the Ruler and of the Lawgiver are softened into the features of the Heavenly Father. The opening of the eleventh chapter of this prophecy is a matchless picture of the infinite tenderness which sleeps in the heart of God; it is in a higher sense a prophecy of Christianity than if it had foretold one by one all the events of the Gospel history. In no previous writer do we see God brought so near to man; in no previous prophet is the idea of the Divine mercy so abundantly realized. In Jonah we meet with a God whose sympathy is aroused by the sufferings of a vast population; but, even in this beautiful picture, the vastness of the population detracts from the full vision of the Infinite Tenderness. Tenderness, to be infinite, must be concentrated on the individual. In the picture of the Divine Master bending his gaze upon a little child we have a more vivid image of condescension than in that universal benevolence which makes its sun to rise on the evil and on the good. And the former is the more vivid because it is the more individual. The Divine Master, setting the child in the centre of the disciples, exhibits the revelation of an infinite light concentrating itself upon a single point of space. It is not simply the rise of an

indiscriminately diffuse sunshine; it is the rise of the full sunshine upon one corner of a valley. The intense concreteness of the image, the extreme individualism of the picture, conveys a more vivid sense of the Fatherhood of God than the exhibition of Divine Benevolence in the sphere of universal law. Now, it is this thought which Hosea has grasped in the eleventh chapter of his prophecy. In the Book of Jonah the Divine Sympathy is awakened by the collective sorrows of a vast multitude; here the Divine Tenderness is aroused by a human sorrow which comes to the Father's ear in the cry of a child. The heavenly Father is represented as beholding humanity as if it existed in the form of a single individual life. The Israelitish nation is said to be imaged in the heart of God, not as a vast population, but as one human soul. The history of that nation is said to be the history of a child's education by his father. The child's first natural lesson is in the art of locomotion. In the mind's eye of the prophet there is the image of a father teaching his son to walk. The father places himself at an apparent distance from the child in order to constitute a point of approach; he seems to stand apart from him, and tells him to try whether he can come to him. Yet all the time the distance is only apparent. The father has never for a moment relinquished his grasp; his arm is stretched through the intervening space to support the steps of the child, to further his effort or to cover his failure. Even such is the picture which Hosea sees in the early history of the Hebrew nation. Ephraim was then a child, and God dealt with him as a child. He taught him to walk (Hosea xi. 3); He directed every step of his way; He dictated the course of his journey. But He did more than that; He was Himself the supernatural force that gave him strength to attempt the journey. The heavenly Father, like the earthly, had seemed to stand at a distance

from the child; but it had been only the semblance of distance. The supernatural had been really the moving power which had developed the child's nature; the heavenly Father had been holding him by the arms all the way, so that it had been impossible for him to fall, or impossible that a fall should hurt him. There is something very touching in the words, "They knew not that *I* healed them;" they strike at the prevalent Jewish error regarding the distance of the supernatural. It is as if the prophet had said: "Ephraim has mistaken the cause of his own progress. He imagines that he has been led by the mediation of celestial intelligences, by angel and archangel, by powers that have bridged the distance between the human and the Divine. All the time he has been oblivious to the fact that there is no distance to bridge, that the Divine has never for a moment been absent from the human, that the guidance of celestial spirits was but the disguised hand of God. Ephraim has been seeking to span an imaginary gulf between him and his Creator; but it is the Creator Himself who has formed within him the imagination of that gulf of distance. The Father has seemed to stand apart from the child, that the child in his efforts to reach Him may gain the power of motion; but, in reality, He has never for a moment relaxed his grasp of tenderness, nor ceased to hold the arms of that life which is struggling into self-support!"

Here, then, in this very early document, we have something like the germ of a philosophy of Jewish history; something from which it is not impossible that such modern minds as those of a Lessing and a Herder may have derived hints and suggestions. The idea of Lessing, indeed, seems to be specially anticipated. This world is recognized as a scene not so much of probation as of education. Man is brought into the Universe for the purpose of being taught,

and his teaching is conducted on the principle of development. In the days of his childhood God deals with him as a child; the supernatural is in constant contact with his natural weakness. The individual life is described as a process of healing; and its earliest stage is said to be a process of unconscious healing. The child who comes into the world, bearing within him the desires and appetences of a nature lower than his own, is led by the hand of Infinite Love into such paths and circumstances as may tend to eradicate those desires; but all the time he is unconscious of the Hand that leads him, and ignorant of that goal towards which his steps are being directed.

What, then, *is* this goal of the human life? The prophet Hosea, as representative of developed manhood, professes to see that of which the child is ignorant—the object of human existence itself. He professes to have reached the solution of the great problem, What is the chief end of man? Every parent has a reason for the education of his child; most parents educate their children for a definite calling. Hosea sees clearly that, if God be the Educator of the world, there must be some plan according to which He trains the world, and some end which He designs that training to subserve. What, then, according to the prophet, is God's goal for humanity? what is that ideal which He desires humanity to attain? We shall find the answer if we turn to the sixth chapter of this prophecy, which is the true and logical sequel of the eleventh. Here the child ceases to be unconscious of the Divine plan, and awakes to the knowledge that he has been all along the subject of a process of healing. In Hosea vi. 6, God reveals his purpose for humanity in these remarkable words: "I desired goodness, and not sacrifice." If we might paraphrase the utterance of this Divine Voice, its meaning would be this: "Why is it that you lay such stress upon the remission of your penalties? Why is it that your whole idea of religion is

summed up in the sacrifice that may avert physical pain? Will you not learn that the deepest of all penalties is that life of sin in which you are content to live and move and have your being; that the only sacrifice which can permanently ease your soul is the offering of a broken and a contrite spirit? You are seeking redemption from every outward evil, from battle and lightning and tempest and sudden death; but you have never yet realized that the only evil which a human soul cannot bear is moral depravity. You are dying of your sins every day; inward corruption is eating into your heart, and you are dignifying it by the name of life. You need another kind of sacrifice than that of the visible altar—the sacrifice of your own selfish will, the surrender of your own pride, the giving-up of your own lust: *that* is the sacrifice which will bring, not merely freedom from penalty but, freedom from the great disease from which all penalty has sprung!”

And can we fail to mark in this message of Hosea a striking forecast of the higher Christian spirit? God's desire of goodness is the desire for a new species for sacrifice; the yearning, not for an involuntary victim but, for a self-surrendered soul. Judaism, in that aspiration, is seen already pressing forward to the age of golden glory whose motto and watchword was to be, “Thy will be done.” It is hurrying onward to the time when the child's unconsciousness of the Divine Power that healed it was to be transformed into the man's recognition that this Power was his Life and Light. The new spirit of prophecy, almost in the hour of its birth, was already enfolding the germ of that Gospel dispensation where Duty was to melt in Love, and the sense of obligation to law was to fade away in the aspiration: “I delight to do Thy will.”

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