

grace changes the critic into the penitent. "Except a man be converted, and become as a little child, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Is it not a sublime sight to behold this Son of the Most High, come to shine with saving light from heaven, yet meeting only denial from blind souls—kept at bay and set at naught by men whom, in their superior conceit, no tenderness on His part can soften, nor dignity overawe, yet able to retreat for strength in upon that innermost sacred consciousness of His essential oneness with the Father and His abiding fellowship in the Father's love? Like one who leans his back amidst all odds against some primeval rock, so does He abide in the power of His conscious divinity. From that nothing shakes Him. Believed or denied, His witness to Himself standeth fast. "I know whence I came. I know whither I am going. I know that I am not alone. Here am I, and the Father who sent Me."

J. OSWALD DYKES.

HOSEA.

IN my desire to cover the whole field of inquiry, I may explain that I cannot attend to form and polish and that sort of thing. I propose to strike various notes of thought and feeling that seem to me most interesting in our subject of study. I shall, first of all, make sure that you and I are thinking in the same way about the Hebrew prophets, when we talk about them.

A Hebrew prophet was not a sort of extraordinary magical oracle that was always telling people in a mystically wise kind of way little things that were going to happen, or predicting big things that were going to occur. The supreme end of a Hebrew prophet's action in predicting events was not so much to prove himself correct in having foreseen,

but rather to influence the people, to divert them from evil ways, to bring them back to the paths of goodness. And so there are a great many prophecies of coming evil in the Old Testament that have never been fulfilled, *e.g.* the prophecy of Jonah as to the destruction of Nineveh, because the people repented. There is a school of interpreters who think that a great deal of prophecy about the Holy Land and with reference to the Jews after the flesh still awaits fulfilment. These good people imagine that the inspiration of the Bible requires that every earthly prediction should have literal, earthly fulfilment. Their concern is, I think, quite unnecessary. A great many things that particular prophets expected to come to pass never did come to pass. Jonah cried, "In forty days Nineveh is to be destroyed," and was very much disgusted because it did not happen. Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "You have got to make your will, to set your house in order"; and yet God revokes that. There you have two concrete examples. The Divine purpose of the prophet's mission in the life and history of Israel was not to astonish people by anticipating the future: the reason of his existence was rather, as God's servant, to exert a practical, moral, religious influence on the people of his own time and his own generation.

I will add one other thing on this point. Undoubtedly those Hebrew prophets had a supernatural, Divine enlightenment given to them. With all my heart and soul I believe in the core and kernel of those great doctrines of supernatural revelation and supernatural inspiration; but, remember, God's supernatural is always natural, through and through. God did not use the prophets like speaking trumpets. He conveyed His inspirations—His Divine intuition and anticipation of what was going to happen, His own hidden mind and will, the secret energies working beneath history—He *conveyed* these, not merely through their vocal organs to their fellows, but through their minds,

through their own thinking, reasoning, struggling, in faith, hope, and endeavour, to see and to know God; *i.e.* through mind and heart and spirit, as well as through voice.

Therefore, in the whole calling of the prophets, and in the entire method through which they reached their knowledge and delivered it to the people, you must not think of them as being quite apart from us. Why, we have experience of the same kind in the work of conscience. We teach our children that conscience is the voice of God: and would to heaven we felt what we teach! It *is* teaching, if we do it. God speaks to you and to me as directly and as supernaturally as He spoke to those Old Testament prophets.

First, you have the real personal action of God in inspiring the prophets, and revealing His mind and will to them; and, secondly, you have it in their declaring and realizing that they received that Divine enlightenment, that supernatural enlightenment, in the most ordinary, simple, human, and natural ways and processes. In those facts you have a gain to evangelical truth; and there you and I may find lessons, examples, and inspirations for ourselves.

To get to know an Old Testament prophet, we want to find out what he was in his own day; what he said to his own people, what they understood him to say, what effect that had upon them; what aims and purposes he set before himself, as he spoke in public and forced his way into the councils of kings, and addressed great mob-meetings of his fellow subjects in the streets of Samaria or Jerusalem. What was the man actually, practically, driving at? what was he seeking to accomplish in his own age and among his own people?

Our subject is the prophet Hosea. I must show you the background against which stands out his figure, full of pathos and beauty, religious value and worth. Therefore I must sketch to you the region of the kingdom of Samaria:

the Northern kingdom, usually called the kingdom of Israel, in distinction from the kingdom of Judah. Palestine is a lofty tableland of broken hill-ridges, lying along the eastern end of the Mediterranean; away to the north are deserts, with fertile districts lying between, once occupied by various races, such as the Syrians and the Hittites. Away beyond, in the fertile valley of the Euphrates, lay the Assyrian empire; and away to the west and south the mighty Egyptian empire, in the rich plain made by another great river, the Nile. In the time of Hosea these were the two world-powers, the mighty empires, that controlled the Eastern and Western hemispheres.

Palestine lay like a bridge on the highway between those two great empires. Let me point out the political position occupied by it. It was, practically, precisely in the same unhappy position that Afghanistan holds in regard to India and the Russian advance through Central Asia. Those two empires, Assyria and Egypt, hate each other, and are competing with each other for the control of the world—for the mastery of the great highways of commerce, for the wealth of human industry. They must approach each other along that highway, in the midst of which lies Palestine.

You see therefore, that that little country, lying between these two empires, was exposed to the threatening danger of advance from opposite sides. Moreover, it became the very focus of plots on the part of those two contending powers; and just as in Afghanistan, so, constantly, it happened in Northern Israel, that you had two pretenders to the throne, one actually in power and the other his rival. The one in power holds his throne backed up by Assyria, while his rival is put up and supported by the great empire of Egypt. The consequence was ceaseless faction-fights and constant revolutions in the government in that Northern kingdom, very much the spectacle we lately witnessed in Afghanistan.

Going back to the period of the Judges, you remember how the confederated tribes—the Jewish tribes—took possession of Canaan, driving out, partially, the old inhabitants. One particular weakness that arose out of their tolerating the continued existence of the Canaanitish towns and colonies in their own land was this: The wedge of the Canaanitish towns ran right across the middle of the country possessed by the twelve tribes; between the ten Northern tribes and the two Southern ones, Benjamin and Judah. Moreover there was a natural break in the country, caused by specially wide valleys and passes. During the period of the Judges, power, authority, and dignity mostly lay to the north; Ephraim was the commanding tribe. One of the kings that came after the troubled reign of Saul, king of all the twelve tribes, was a man of the people—king David, whose dynasty was permanently established on the original Hebrew throne. During David's strong rule, the whole of the kingdom was held together, but not without difficulty. There were symptoms of revolt. During Solomon's reign, the unity of the kingdom was also maintained. But when his son Rehoboam was made king, insubordination broke out. There were two main causes, one civil and the other religious. First of all, Solomon had made great modifications in the local, communal method of government. He attempted to abolish the whole of the tribal districts, to form his kingdom into provinces, and to establish a government ruled by governors appointed by himself. It was a proper stroke of imperial policy. But it excited enmities; it had a tendency to centralization, and also to further reduce the power, influence, and dignity of the Northern tribes. Solomon likewise erected at Jerusalem a magnificent temple. Those were the two causes—religious and civil jealousies.

You remember the deputation that waited on king

Rehoboam, and the foolish answer he gave. Instead of going a long way to meet discontent and dissatisfaction, he took the high-handed course of coercion, and said: "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." The result was that the ten Northern tribes revolted; and Jeroboam was established as king.

All I can do is just to sketch to you the main character of the career of the Northern kingdom. It was exposed to rivalries, attacks from a number of small nations—Philistia, Phœnicia, Ammon, Moab, and especially Syria. It held its own with varying fortunes, sometimes successful, sometimes beaten, suffering a good deal in the constant wear and tear of those endless border forage wars. Its history was one of ceaseless vicissitude and disunion. The Southern kingdom always held together, more or less. It retained the family of David on the throne from its commencement to the end, over a period of four hundred years. But the wretched Northern kingdom changed its royal family seven times in the course of a period a little over two hundred years.

Then came a succession of assassinations and revolts. Indeed we know that the internal condition of the kingdom in those last years of its existence, in which it was crushed by Assyria, was something like a baker's oven when the fire has broken into it and is burning with fierce heat and flame all that the oven contains. The kingdom was rent by military adventurers sticking at nothing, the country was a scene of bloodshed and anarchy; all ties of relationship and mutual loyalty and trust were broken up, and the fire was stirred from both sides, by Assyria to the north, and Egypt to the south-west.

That is a rough sketch of the history of the Northern kingdom. The period in which Hosea worked began near the termination of the long reign of the most statesmanlike

and warlike of Israel's kings, Jeroboam the Second. He was a man of great ability, of indomitable will. He knew how to organize all his resources; he conducted successful wars against the neighbouring rival nations. Moreover, he was favoured by the advance of Assyria from the north. Assyria began to attack the kingdom of Damascus, which had always been the most dangerous rival and opponent of Israel. Israel took advantage of that to recover its old ascendancy, to regain portions of territory of which it had been robbed. During the reign of Jeroboam, the Northern kingdom acquired great wealth and great fame, and a warlike spirit was developed. Religion, commerce, practically everything, flourished, except the actual well-being of the people; for a power built up by war is not naturally wholesome, is not founded on a stable basis. It may bring the appearance of great prosperity, wealth, and commerce, but it is purchased by the destruction of the foundation of national welfare; for all the wealth goes into the hands of the king and of the ruling classes. Instead of a great quantity of small freeholders, we find that the misery and the poverty of the slaves and serfs, the daily labourers in the towns and the peasantry in the country, was something horrible and pitiable.

It is a law of revelation that the great prophets always appeared at critical points in the national history. For instance, Elijah and Elisha appeared like two storm-birds presaging the troubled, bloody end of the great dynasty of Omri. In like fashion Hosea and Amos heralded the downfall of the great, imposing dynasty of Jehu. The actual ruin of Jehu's house did not take place for some time after. Ostensibly, to the end of king Jeroboam the Second's reign, Israel was prosperous. It took the Divine insight of the prophets of God, Hosea and Amos, to expose the ostentatious religion with its elaborate ritual, luxury, impurity, and idolatry—to understand that what looked like

a shining summer would end with nothing but the snows and frosts of utter desolation.

We gather that Hosea was a native of the Northern kingdom, and not a native of Judæa, as was his colleague Amos. It is just possible that he belonged to the aristocracy. Probably he was of priestly rank; at all events, he had a wonderful knowledge of Israel's past history. We see that Hosea was himself a citizen of the Northern kingdom when we compare his book with the book of Amos. Amos also writes, with an exact, vivid power of delineation, about wrongs and oppressions, about the political and religious position in the kingdom of Samaria. But here is the distinction. The words of Amos sound like a voice from outside, pealing with the thunder of God's anger and righteous indignation against wrongs and injuries that Amos does not feel himself bound up with. The characteristic of Hosea's book is that the burden of Israel's guilt lies weighty on his soul; he wails, and mourns, and laments, and repents with that sinful people. He cannot, without tears in his eyes, contemplate the glorious opportunities that have been flung away. He almost expresses a sense of his vicarious involvement in their guilt and carrying of their sorrows. That is the note which gives its exquisite music of pathos and beauty to Hosea's prophecy of the coming downfall of his own land and of his own people.

The characteristic idea, indeed the key-thought that underlies the whole of Hosea's prophetic message, is a very remarkable one. He pictures the relation between God and Israel as a marriage tie. It is of little use to try to divide the Book of Hosea into minute paragraphs and divisions, and to trace a line of thought through it, because, if there is any book in the Bible which is one long musical burst of emotional life and harmonious unity from beginning to end, it is the Book of Hosea. The man was not so

much an intellect ; he was a great, overflowing heart. He cannot think out things and reason out things. He sways like a pendulum from one extreme to another : now blazing indignation against the people's wickedness and blindness and madness, and the next moment lamenting over them like a mother over her only son.

Emotion is the characteristic of Hosea's writing. Thought, again, is the characteristic of the writing of Amos. And so far as thought goes, the key-doctrine of Amos is this : God is righteous sovereignty. The key-doctrine of Hosea is this : God is holy love.

The key-conception of Hosea's doctrine, Hosea's gospel, Hosea's prophecy is that the actual, real relation between God and Israel is best represented for his purpose by the tie between husband and wife. It is true that he varies that image near the end of his prophecy : there he pictures God as his father and Israel as his child, his son ; but still the great, moulding, explaining thought, throughout the whole book, is the marriage tie as a picture of the covenant between Jehovah and His people.

How did Hosea come to choose that as the image or metaphor of the relation of Jehovah to His people ? Very probably because it was an idea that lay in all the heathen religions round about : an idea that had corrupted the religion of Israel, for the gods Baal and Ashteroth predominantly represented the powers of nature, and especially the power of reproduction. That conception of a people being the offspring of their god and his spouse furnished to Hosea a basis on which to picture the tie between Jehovah and Israel. But, you say, when that idea had been so corrupted and defiled, how came it that Hosea did not discard it and choose a purer image ? The answer to that will come best when we see what use Hosea makes of the discarded and dishonoured image or conception.

Let us run over the essential points and thoughts in

Hosea's message. The first thing we have to pick out and fix in our minds in the message he delivered to his own age is the terrible picture he makes of Israel's utter moral ruin ; and, more than that, of Israel's physical, social, moral, political, and religious dissolution. Powerfully and passionately he scathes the oppression, the cruelty, and the selfish ambition that had impoverished and destroyed the conditions of happy and wholesome life for the mass of the people. Then he pillories the corruption of all justice, the taint of bribery that had ruined all the moral influence of every representative of law and government, priest-judge, and civil-judge. But what chiefly occupies Hosea is a loathing horror of the moral blight and stain that have appeared through the whole of the relationships of the people. The very sanctuary of Jehovah had attached to it a band of loathsome prostitutes, who served the temple in what were accounted acts of worship to Baal, the god of reproduction, and earned money to feed the greedy priests, and to aggrandise the external show and pomp of the sanctuary. When religion consecrated lust, that meant that all purity of family ties, all stainless virtue in the womanhood of the country, got its death.

The next thing Hosea strikes at is this—the utter loosening and dissolution of all law and order, and righteousness between man and man. The noble oppresses the peasant, the money-lender grinds with his cruel usury the poor victim he has got under his clutches, the corn-dealers band together to raise the price of bread in the starving towns, so that the poor are driven to desperation. Noble fights against noble, faction-fights fill the whole land, conspiracies destroy the foundations of the throne, the king is assassinated by his most trusted friends and followers and servants ; everywhere there is violence and rebellion, and all the ties and bonds that bind a nation together have been torn asunder.

Third, political ruin had fallen upon Israel. Placed there in that position of unsettlement, of exposure to the intrigues of two powerful empires, the people were driven on to ruin by the selfish schemes and disunion of their leaders and rulers, who did not comprehend that a nation's real welfare consists in virtue, in brotherhood, in justice, in mercy, in industry, in well-doing, in loving union of class with class, in the obedience of all to God above, in faith and heroic aspiration to work out a career on earth worthy of God that called them to be a nation. But Israel's leaders, Israel's rulers, were playing a mad, foolish game.

Those are the three great elements of Israel's corruption and of the ruin that had already established itself in the realm.

Now we come to the causes of Israel's downfall and degradation. The first cause Hosea points out for us in the shape of tremendous denunciation of Israel's prophets and Israel's priests. Strange that! It makes a man, by profession a preacher—a religious preacher—first tremble and then experience a great exaltation and inspiration. Hosea thinks that the most powerful force in a people resides, not in its wealth, not in its military might, not in its law or legislation, not even in its throne and government, but that the sovereign, dominating influence that makes or mars a nation resides in its moral and religious teachers. Whether they wield that influence by voice or by the pen—a nation's thinkers, morally and religiously, in the pulpit, in the press, on the platform, are a nation's heart. If that be diseased, woe betide the people! If the heart be kept sound, pumping and pulsating pure blood away through diseased parts and members of the body politic, there is hope, there is recovery, there is life, there is a future.

The second cause of Israel's utter corruption and ruin lay in the debasement and falsification of true religion.

The God Hosea knew was a great, spiritual God: a God whose whole being cared supremely for moral things, not for physical things; a God who meant this world to be only as a means to an end, to be the platform on which a human drama was to be played, a scaffolding within which a temple of eternal human character of goodness was to be built up, a kingdom of heaven on earth. Hosea's God longed for righteousness, justice, truth, mercy between man and man; for aspirations of unselfishness, of heavenliness in human hearts. Israel's God bore the same name as Hosea's God. Israel's God, worshipped at its shrine, was Jehovah—Jehovah, the old orthodox God of the nation. And Israel had not cancelled one of the old articles of its creed. Israel had not touched one of the laws that came down out of antiquity—laws stamped with the name and backed by the will of Jehovah. But Israel had utterly transformed the character of the God it worshipped. The God of Israel had sunk down to be a God of physical force, of sensual pleasures; a God of wine, revelry, lust; a God contaminated by everything materialistic, superstitious.

Hosea says the question is not what is the name of a nation's God, not what is the state-established religion, but what is the real religion, what is the real God, what is the real faith, the real aspiration, of a people?

What is the god of Great Britain now? Wealth. Wealth to be won by a merciless application of the laws of competition, and selfishness, and rivalry, and a so called political economy, at the sacrifice of thousands of human lives driven by the hard wheels of commerce and competition down into the mire and crushed out of human shape and form. The question is not, What is the God whose creed we recite in our churches? but, What is the God that dominates in our politics? What is the God that rules in our cities, and in our commerce? What is the God that is worshipped in our actual homes, in all our efforts to change

customs, to reach noble ends? Is it the God of justice, truth, mercy, human love, the God that is building a kingdom on earth? Or is it mammon? or is it human pride? or is it selfish advantage? Is it a God that will tolerate anarchy, and lawlessness, and hatred, and strife between class and class?

Hosea says the future of a nation hangs, not on the name of its God, nor on the creed of its worshippers, but on the actual God that is honoured, that is obeyed, that is worshipped.

Then, thirdly, Hosea declares that Israel's ruin is the ripe outcome of a total falseness in its very existence, its *raison d'être*, the fundamental principle of its being, its position as a state—defiant of God's will, thwarting the Divine designs.

Here is a strange thing. The Northern rebellion was divinely authorized. Prophets like Elijah and Elisha spoke not one word against the separate existence of the Northern kingdom; and now Hosea comes and says the existence of this Northern kingdom is a sin, out of which all other sin grows, and must end in ruin. There you have a splendid insight into the true nature of prophecy. Prophecy never made a declaration of absolute, infallible dicta of the perfect, complete will of God. Prophecy was opportunist. It spoke just the present truth, and it did not say, "An age hence this will not be true"; "that has been God's will all along." Prophecy always pointed to present duty.

Present duty is often the outcome of contending principles. An existent wrong may demand as its rightful remedy a thing wrong in itself. That was exactly the Divine justification of the first rebellion. It was an assertion of liberty against oppression. It was probably, to some extent, the assertion of the spiritual religion against the state-degraded religion that Rehoboam wanted to establish at Jerusalem. In any case, it had its justification in that it

was a protest against tyranny and despotism. The course that is justified by pre-existent evil nevertheless dare not become permanent, or else it will create worse evils. If, in the government of a country, you are forced to adopt such a course as coercion, your whole longing must be to get rid of it as soon as you can. Napoleon, you remember, said: "You can do anything with bayonets, except sit down on them." Governments must not sit down permanently on force.

Mark the difficulty of altering a course once entered upon. Note the awful power of an act or a decision to assert a separate existence for ourselves, when once taken, to escape from all control and to establish a force and an influence with our character that we never dreamt of. Take the case of a relation entered into with some one of a certain definite character. You fancied you would control and mould it. Ah! there it lives its own life; and moulds you.

Once that Northern kingdom was established with its throne, with its civil service, with its army, with its own shrines and places of worship—all of which had to be aggrandised, and emphasised, and backed up, to hold their own against the attraction of the centre at Jerusalem—with a priesthood, with hatreds and rivalries between the North and the South, how hard it was, in the teeth of all that, to always say, "We have rebelled; we have established a kingdom, but not permanently; the moment that we can re-unite with Judæa we must do it"! On the contrary, you had all these vested interests struggling to make the revolt permanent and unchangeable.

Hosea found in the original sin of the wilful, needless perpetuation of the rupture the root of all the original injuries. First of all, do you see how, once that rupture had taken place, once that Northern throne had been established by revolt and violence, there is a terrible ten-

dency in anarchy, in lawlessness, in violence, to breed and repeat themselves? As at Jezreel, bloodshed will avenge itself with bloodshed. I do not say that revolution is not sometimes necessary; but then, if a nation is wise, it will set its face determinately against a repetition of revolutions. Perhaps England has been wiser in that respect than other countries. It has had its revolutions, but it has not had a lot of them, like France. Once the rupture was made in religion, the terrible temptation that pressed upon the priests in the North to make their sanctuaries more attractive by rich and lavish luxuries had a tendency towards self-indulgence for its own pleasure and lust. Moreover, the Northern kingdom was more exposed to the contamination of such worship, because it felt bound to bid for favour and to please the people.

Last of all, there lay, like a demoralizing blight and chill at the heart of the Northern empire, the lack of some great, grand reason for its existence. It was a wrong of the South that had created it. That is a poor basis for a man to stand upon and protest. The South held to its grand belief that it had the true God, and God's chosen king. It held God's mandate to do God's will. But the Northern kingdom that protested against the wrong of the South, not able to believe it had the Divine charter, had slipped down into self-seeking selfishness and earthly aggrandisement. Here was no great, noble enthusiasm, no sense of a magnificent, single purpose and destiny in the world's history, to lift up its life, government, and religion. The kingdom inevitably sank down into a poor, an unprincipled, a selfish, a violent, a lawless condition.

Was there any hope of recovery? There was; and yet that hope lay like sunlight in the very heart of a night of darkest desolation and seeming despair. Hosea looked to renovation—moral, religious, national renovation. He looked to natural causes. He looked to poverty increasing

till it became intolerable. He looked to bloodshed and anarchy growing until they were insupportable. He looked to the utter dissolution of the nation's state. He looked to foreign conquest. He looked to exile in alien lands. He looked to natural processes of suffering and misery to produce a moral and a religious reform.

Do you know that is God's universal way? If you will read the world's history, you will find that famines, the growth of intolerable poverty in towns, the insupportableness of life among the peasantry, have been God's educative influences for waking the nations up to their proper career, moral, philanthropic, religious.

Hosea and Amos teach men to see in Assyria the mere tool in the hand of a just and an avenging God. Why, even the very ruin of the nation drives men not to despair, but to reverence of God. The mere awful fear of recognition of God as the God of retribution is not enough. There needs to come this second experience; when a long-continued, wilful, obdurate sinner has had the resistance of his pride broken down, there come to him regrets, strange pathetic visions of what he might have been, sudden perceptions of a Divine hand that reached out to him all along that pathway of folly, which, if he had only taken hold of it, must have lifted him up to honourable and noble achievements. He suddenly says: "This hand that strikes me with retributive ruin is the hand of One who loves me." All the past is filled with God, and then the present. Thus God in punishing is loving still—punishing therefore, not as vengeance, punishing as chastisement, punishing as educative discipline, punishing for restoration. Oh, the grandeur of that conception! A God that punishes His own loved child for sin must be such a holy God; who, when He strikes, hurts His own heart more than He hurts His own child; who does it to bring that child back to Himself and goodness. Oh the

love of the punishing, recovering God! Hosea's God is a God of holy love.

Now come back to Hosea's key-thought and image. God's relation to Israel is that of a husband to wife; not of master to purchased slave and harlot, but of husband to wife, bent on being wedded to His spouse in righteousness, in purity, in lovingkindness, in mercy, in virtue, in holiness. That conception of marriage so tender, so grieved, so forgiving, so clinging, how came Hosea to have that wondrous thought about God? It was something new. You find nothing like it in the Bible, before Hosea. That was the new revelation, the supernatural revelation to Hosea. How did God give it to him? Speak it to him mechanically? Ah, no! Divine revelations must be writ, not in type like printer's; it must be writ into the very sinew and web of the human heart and spirit, into a man's life. It is by experience God teaches man, by making man in His own image. Then a man sees and knows the image of God.

Go back to that story of Hosea's. As it is often told in a superficial, blundering way, it is something so paralysing that the majority of commentators have said it is mere allegory, and that Hosea only did it in symbolical action. The thing would be revolting in fact; it would be equally revolting in symbol or allegory. Moreover, how could it ever have an edifying effect upon a people ruined by sensuality and lust? It is a story of how God taught Hosea to understand God's heart, and so it was no allegory, no symbolical representation. It was a real experience. But comprehend what it was. For one thing, the very power of it depends on this, that Hosea's relation to the one unfaithful to him had at its very core and heart an exquisitely noble, genuine, true, human love. Hosea, a man of lofty character, grieved, broken-hearted for the sin of his own time, prayed to God, struggling to know God's will, and in the providence of God is led to fall into a pure, sworn,

noble love. He dreams of a bright, happy home with a woman to whom his heart goes out, whom he counts true, pure, and good, and lovely in return. He loves her, has children by her, learns to know what sweet human love is. Then a terrible disaster comes upon him: she proves unfaithful, and Hosea comprehends that this guilt that has struck his heart in his own house is but a bit of the great pervading pollution of his time. It is that degraded religion, that unfaithfulness to God, that declension of all purity in the land that has broken into his own family circle and has cut his heart till it bleeds. Oh, how the prophet's soul flamed with an unfelt-before indignation against the evils of his time, when, in God's providence, he felt them in the tenderest fibres of his being!

That was the beginning of God's revelation to Hosea, but not the end of it. Hosea was told how Israel had been unfaithful to God, and that made him comprehend God's loathing of Israel's sin. The fierce anger blazed out against her who had injured him; then in the desolation of his home after she had fled from him, the relentings, the agony, the old memories, the dreams that would come up, for the past could be recalled—in all that passing through Hosea's heart, he felt the echoes of the great heart of God; and then a thing almost beyond human nature happened to him. His heart grew so tender and so pitiful, that when he heard that his unfaithful spouse had been cast off by her paramour, had sunk into wretched poverty, had become a slave despised and ground down, the old love waked up within him; and he conceived a heroic deed of loyalty, forgiveness, and reclamation, almost supernatural, to go and love again, to buy her back out of her degradation and misery, which had made her repentant; not at once to restore the old ties—that might not be—but with infinite, wise lovingness to give her a chance to prove that she had returned to purity, to penitence, to affection.

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