

*A PROPHET'S VIEW OF INTERNATIONAL
ETHICS.*

AMOS departed from Bethel feeling that his message had been rejected, and his further stay there would be useless. The higher classes of Israelite society were too comfortable and too much engrossed in the pleasures of sense to be moved by the appeals of a wandering shepherd. The official head of the religion of the kingdom had begun by despising him, but had rapidly passed through the stages of suspicion and dislike to that of hatred. The king's contemptuous tolerance was more unpromising than active hostility would have been. No good end would be served by remaining longer. Even a prophet could not make—

“Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk
From burning spurge, honey from hornet-combs,
And men from beasts.”

There is not a trace of alarm in his withdrawal. He repels Amaziah's attack (chap. vii. 10-17) with absolute fearlessness: then he finishes the account of his visions (viii. 1, 2) just as though he had not been interrupted: to these he adds severe rebukes and threatenings. This done, he returns to his sheep in the pastures near Tekoa, where he had left them, probably in charge of some lad like that David whom God in earlier days had taken from following the ewes great with young in this same neighbourhood.

But the Spirit that brought him from Tekoa to Bethel did not leave him now that he had taken up again his daily work. Preaching had proved a failure. But the matter of the preaching had been true. Why not record it? To us that seems natural. At that time the idea was quite novel. The prophets of whom Amos knew (ii. 11) had been messengers sent on special occasions to speak their word in season and then pass away. To none of them had

it occurred to leave behind them the abiding *litera scripta*. The distinction of having been the first to entertain this thought and carry it out belongs to Amos. Perhaps he sent the roll containing the substance of his sermons to the proud monarch who had been utterly careless whether they were preached or not.

In the written *résumé* there are touches that do not belong to the spoken harangue. For example, the frequently employed phrase, "Oracle of Yahweh!" [Eng. Verss., "saith the Lord,"] which clenches so many of the sections into which the book naturally falls. We may be quite sure that the speaker did not stop every few minutes and exclaim "Oracle of Yahweh!" When, however, he came to write, he judged it well to call attention to the gravity of his messages by this impressive rubric. But we are chiefly concerned in the present paper with a quite different kind of addition. Amos had been sent to Israel. To and of Israel, accordingly, he had spoken. What had he to do with them that were without? Yet he was not unacquainted with or indifferent to the conduct of the surrounding nations. He was not so prejudiced against his brethren in the north as to think them the only sinners. If such an impression had been produced, the prelude to his written work (i. 3-ii. 3), would correct the mistake. Give him a congregation of Israelites, and he will cry aloud and spare not and show them their sins. But when he writes in calmness and solitude, he will prefix this rapid survey of the doings of Syrians, Philistines, Phœnicians, Edom, Ammon and Moab, this series of just sentences for the wrongs they have done to Israel or to one another.

1. As was to be expected, he begins with the relations between Damascus and Israel. The entire history of the northern kingdom was affected by the proximity of the Aramæan race that had Damascus for its capital. After

Shalmanezzer the Second's unsuccessful attempts on that city in 842 and 839 B.C., the Aramæans invaded and wasted Israel. We have a brief but pregnant record of this at 2 Kings x. 32, 33, and in another reference to it, 2 Kings xiii. 7, the same expressive word (*dûsh*, threshing) as is employed by Amos describes the treatment undergone by the vanquished. No milder figure will bring out the manner in which the victors behaved to that unhappily situated district of Gilead, to the east of the Jordan, which must needs bear the brunt of their attack. It was as bad as driving over the naked bodies of the people with threshing-sledges, thick boards with pointed pieces of iron on their under surface. The imagery is too painful. But the plain prose of ancient inscriptions exonerates the writer from any charge of exaggeration. "Phraortes was taken prisoner and brought before me," says Darius, on the rock of Behistun. "I cut off his nose, his ears, his tongue . . . He was kept chained to my door, and all the people saw him. Then I crucified him at Ecbatana and his accomplices with him." Tiglath-Pileser is as proud to use the figure employed by Amos as Darius is to employ literal language: "I trampled down the land of Beth-Amukkan as it were by threshing." *Væ victis!* The East has ever been cruel. Religion there, to say nothing of war, has treated man as though his were, indeed, a "vile body." Witness the abominable ceremony of the *Dôseh*,¹ practised in Egypt till Tewfik Pasha's reign!

Damascus had not been privileged with the full revelation of the divine will. Her responsibility was lighter than that of Israel. But cruelty to the conquered is a sin against the law written in the heart. The aptness to deny "the rights of man," when the man is a beaten foreign foe, is the first misdeed against which the shepherd of Tekoa testifies.

¹ See Lane's *Mod. Egyptians*, ii. 221, for a full account of the ceremony.

Many are the sins of the Damascenes.¹ This is the one that renders the threat of punishment irrevocable. For it shall royal palaces be destroyed,² the city gate that has defied Assyria be forced open by a more successful besieger, the land swept bare of every inhabitant from prince to peasant, the whole people be carried back to the region whence it had emigrated centuries before.³ The course of modern history would make one doubt whether such a proclamation of the law of retribution can have been made so long ago as the middle of the eighth century before Christ. A dispassionate outsider cannot pretend to decide how much truth there is in the novelist's description of what happened at Bazeilles. But, unhappily, there can be no doubt about what is implied in the fact that Poland is only a "geographical expression."

2. We turn now to a meaner vice. The Syrian campaigns in the north-east occupy all the attention and claim all the forces of Israel. These enemies are pitiless, but they are men; they bring armies to fight armies:

"Blood hath bought blood, and blows have answered blows;
Strength match'd with strength, and power confronted power."

Meanwhile, on the undefended south-western frontier, the Philistines make raids for slaves. Once a formidable enemy, able to compete with Israel on equal or more than

¹ For a definite number used in place of an indefinite large one, see Micah v. 4; Job v. 19; Eccles. xi. 2; Sirach xxv. 7.

² According to Josephus, *Antiqq.*, ix. 4, 6, the names of Ben-hadad II. and Hazael, his murderer, were long remembered in connection with their buildings. Μέχρι νῦν αὐτός τε ὁ Ἀδαδος καὶ Ἀζάηλος ὁ μετ' αὐτὸν ἄρξας, ὡς θεοὶ τιμῶνται διὰ τὰς εὐεργεσίας καὶ τὰς τῶν ναῶν οἰκοδομίας, οἷς ἐκόσμησαν τὴν τῶν Δαμασκηῶν πόλιν. With the language of Amos compare Shalmaneser the Second's: "In his palaces I cast fire."

³ The precise localities of Aven, Beth-Eden, and Kir are uncertain. The first is commonly identified with Baalbek. Shalmaneser II. claims to have captured a city called Adennu, belonging to Hamath, and some think that Beth-Eden is meant. Kir has been generally supposed to be the modern Georgia: for it see Amos ix. 7; Isa. xxii. 6; 2 Kings, xvi. 9.

equal terms, they are now petty communities, their former chief city, Gath, having fallen into such decay that it is not mentioned. But if their power is limited, their spite is great, and such means as they possess they will use against the ancestral foe.¹ Simple as are the words in which the foray is described, they call up immediately the pictures which travellers in Central Africa paint, of villages where every house has been burned to the ground and only the skeletons remain of former inhabitants. These are the scenes of slave hunts. And the Philistines "carried away a whole captivity,"² swept a village, a town, or a district clean, left not a single person remaining. An Arab slave hunter is the nearest modern analogue to one of these Philistine chiefs. Or we might compare him to one of those Italian bravos of the Middle Ages, who had the twofold gratification of receiving pay for assassinating men with whom they were at feud. The craftiness, the pitilessness, the sordid selfishness of a people, small in every sense of the word, is branded here. The slaves whom they take are meant for the market, and the Philistine captors, caring for nothing but the price, hurry the stolen wretches³ along the caravan route from Gaza⁴ to Petra, and hand them over to the traders, who will sell them further south. Under no light can the slave hunter appear a noble creature. And the smallness of a nation, its

¹ τυτθὸν

θηρίον ἐντὶ μέλισσα, καὶ ἀλικά τραύματα ποιεῖ.

—*Theoc.*, xix. 5, 6.

² Cf. Jer. xiii. 19: "Judah is carried away captive, all of it; it is wholly carried away captive."

³ How pathetically the Vendidād expresses the sadness of this experience! "O Maker of the material world, Thou Holy One! Which is the fifth place where the earth feels sorest grief? Ahura Mazda answered: It is the place whereon the wife and children of one of the faithful, O Spitama Zarathustra! are driven along the way of captivity, the dry, the dusty way, and lift up a voice of wailing."—*Farg.*, iii.

⁴ Then, as now, one of the principal towns in Philistia. At present it contains about 16,000 inhabitants.

inferiority in numbers and power, does not excuse meanness. Philistia's petty cunning is as blameworthy a departure from the ideal as Assyria's crushing tyranny. Gaza, therefore, the strongest of its cities,¹ shall be smitten where it is strongest, and when the rest have been mentioned, lest any loophole of escape should seem left, the threat is rounded off completely: "The remainder of the Philistines shall perish."

3. After the slave hunters the slave-dealers. The Philistines make whole districts desolate, sweeping away all that dwelt there. The Phœnicians are ready to buy and sell again all these captives. There had been a time when the latter people had done a little man-stealing on its own account. Herodotus begins his history with the mythical narrative of the treacherous carrying off of Io. Eumæus, in the *Odyssey* (xv. 415), describing his own capture and sale, has no difficulty in identifying his captors:

"And so it fell,
Phœnicians with a thousand things to sell,
Came, very wolves for lucre, false of heart."

When these practices were discovered to be hindrances to more legitimate trade the purchase and re-sale of men was not discontinued. Ezekiel knew Tyre to be a mart which welcomed alike "the persons of men and vessels of brass" (xxvii. 13). Phœnicians are represented on the Egyptian monuments bringing slaves in tribute. And no doubt the "merchants of the country" who accompanied the army of Gorgias to buy the expected prisoners (1 Macc. iii. 41; 2 Macc. viii. 25) were members of the same race, travelling southward with the Syrian troops.

The distinguishing feature in this charge against Tyre is that its traffic in men was a breach of "the covenant of

¹ Μεγάλη δὲ πόλις ἡ Γάζα ἦν καὶ ἐπὶ χόματος ὑψηλοῦ ᾤκέστο καὶ τεῖχος περιβέβλητο αὐτῇ ὄχυρόν.—*Arrian*, ii. 27.

brothers." Who, then, were the brothers towards whom they behaved so unnaturally? More than one answer has been returned to the question. Whichever of them we acquiesce in, we shall learn something concerning the writer's theory of the relations that should prevail between nations and communities. In a book recently noticed in *THE EXPOSITOR*¹ the view has been propounded that this crime was committed by Tyre against other Phœnician or Canaanite peoples. If this is the meaning, the word "brothers" is used almost literally, and we shall have to think of the miserable scenes that may have formed the sequel of one of the many conflicts between "the merchant of the peoples" and weaker states of the same blood. The Phœnician sailors, who constituted the most important part of the Persian fleet, refused to obey Cambyses when he would have had them sail against Carthage, a city founded and peopled by their own countrymen. But Tyre, on the hypothesis before us, paid no heed to considerations of this kind. Amos brands such disregard as fratricidal. The modern poet makes his ideal king lament:

"Ill doom is mine
 To war against my people and my knights.
 The King who fights his people fights himself.
 And they, my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
 That strikes them dead is as my death to me."

The ancient prophet would have each people cherish a like feeling. If Tyre must needs sell men into slavery, she need not sell those of her own race. Let the ties of blood be recognised.

There is, however, at least one strong reason for rejecting this interpretation. The language used in verses six and nine respectively points to altogether different activities in the two cases. The Philistines make captives. The Syrians merely receive and dispose of them. Are we then

¹ Wellhausen's *Kleine Propheten*, p. 69.

to understand that whereas the Israelite prisoners might have been sold to other purchasers without involving Tyre in the guilt of unnatural conduct, it was the disposal of them to the Edomites that constituted the breach of "the covenant of brothers?"¹ Now it must be admitted that this relationship of brotherhood between Israel and Edom is repeatedly insisted on. Malachi's question, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" would have been unhesitatingly answered in the affirmative by every Old Testament writer. But the idea of there being a "covenant of brothers" between them is nowhere expressed. No trace exists of the sentiment which this would imply. Even Amos would have found it difficult to urge so refined a consideration. "When you sell slaves be careful to ascertain that there are no affinities of race between the purchaser and the purchased." "What is that to us?" would be the immediate reply. "Let the parties concerned see to it." Trade cannot pause to entertain such considerations. The bargain's the thing! Whether, indeed, this is quite so axiomatic as the commercial spirit holds, may reasonably be doubted. The wounds received in the house of our friends are remembered by communities no less than by individuals. The sentiment of brotherhood binding together the various portions of a race which space and circumstances have severed is of far too great value to be sacrificed for a commercial advantage that one may gain over the other.

We come back to the explanation recommended by the context. The brotherly covenant is that friendly relation which had long subsisted between Tyre and the Hebrews (see 2 Sam. v. 11; 1 Kings v. 1; ix. 11-14, especially v. 13). This had been cemented and brought into peculiarly close

¹ "Wäre die Drohung gegen Tyrus ein späterer Einsatz, so könnte der Bruderbund auf der Verhältnis von Israel und Edom bezogen werden können." Well., *Kl. Proph.*, p. 69. And he treats it as a later interpolation.

connection with the northern kingdom by the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel, on which occasion it is possible that a formal covenant between the two nations may have been made. Amos, at all events, admits the validity and insists on the sacredness of the bond. He is intensely interested in the fortunes of his own people, but he is no fanatic bent on barring off every tribe that is not descended from Abraham. A covenant is a covenant. Israel has never broken the covenant by waging war on Tyre or Sidon. Why should Tyre indirectly violate it? Phœnicians and Israelites may be as brothers. Alas, at a later day Judaism will repudiate the assertion. Alas, too, that amongst Christian nations unions of a similar kind, old comradeship in arms, association in discovery, co-operation in industrial enterprise, connection in blood as near as or nearer than that of Phœnicians and Israelites, fail to ensure chivalric unselfishness. These considerations *ought* to weigh.

4. Edom has been mentioned twice already as the receiver, the intermediary, in the slave trade. Now it is put forward as an independent actor, violating a closer brotherhood than that of Tyre and Samaria. "He pursued his brother with the sword." There is no record to tell us when this was done. Later writings, such as Obadiah and some of the Psalms, indicate that when they were composed the habit had become ingrained, and Edom might ever be counted on as ready to take advantage of his brother's misfortunes. If the same holds good of the time before Amos, we must ascribe our ignorance to the scantiness of the documents relating to the history of Judah.¹ When Judah was forced to flee, Edom was only too glad to follow up his

¹ Wellhausen argues with considerable force that the section referring to Edom is a later interpolation, partly because of our never hearing of Edom being in a position to act thus till the Chaldean period; partly from the fact that no early prophet denounces them as Amos does here; and also from the mention of Teman and Bozrah, not elsewhere named before the exile, and the omission of Sela, the capital town.

advantage. The description of Edom's dealings with his own feelings is even more interesting than that of his conduct towards "his brother." He "destroyed his compassions, and kept his anger perpetually, and retained his wrath for ever."¹ Natural feelings of pity could not be prevented from stirring. Edom fiercely crushed them down, doing violence to his own better nature at the bidding of bitter animosity, as a Brutus quenched his fatherly compassions from patriotic motives, or a Sir Thomas More banished pity when religion seemed to demand this. The disasters with which Israel was overwhelmed had almost succeeded in "Turning dispiteous torture out of doors." But no! By a vigorous effort these gentler feelings may be expelled. The general who at last succeeded in destroying Carthage remembered his Homer and his history: "Rome's day might come next." But there was a fiercer type of Roman who would have quelled every thought of compassion by his incessant *Delenda est Carthago*. Edom kept his wrath and retained his anger. It required an effort. Time has a tendency to soften national animosities as well as personal ones. Darius needs his attendant to remind him thrice a day: "Sire, remember the Athenians." The Edomites carefully treasured up and guarded their hate lest it should die or sleep. It is kept up by what you might almost call an artificial process. But there is nothing artificial in the grim will which insists on this. We see, then, what was the sin of the people most nearly allied to Israel. The repression of those gentler feelings which the sufferings even of a foe evoke. The fostering and perpetuating an anger

¹ With the first of these expressions cf. Ezek. xxviii, 17: "Thou hast destroyed [R.V. corrupted] thy wisdom." There is a fairly general consensus of opinion in favour of Olshausen's conjecture ויטרף for ויטרף: perhaps the similarity of ל and פ in some periods of Hebrew writing may justify the conjecture that the Massoretic reading is due to a mistaken reduplication of the ל in לעד. The Peshitta has ;Δ both for ויטר and ישמר in this verse. For ישמר לנאח read שמרה נצח.

that should be allowed to die. Modern politicians have too often been guilty of one or both these.

5. Amos had no sympathy with the very natural desire for an increase of territory. He would have agreed with Scipio Africanus, who, in laying down the censorship, substituted for the customary petition that the gods would *increase* and *magnify* the power of Rome the prayer that they would *preserve* it. "It is great enough already," he said. The sin of Ammon springs from a desire to "enlarge their border." The prophet would have each keep his own, and leave others in undisturbed possession of theirs. He uses different language from Jephthah's (Judg. xi.); but he would have concurred in the spirit of Jephthah's appeal: "Will not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess?" It is at least an open question whether the same kind of appeal might not have been addressed to more than one European nation by the uncivilized tribes that have been "eaten up" one after another. Humanitarian considerations may render some encroachments necessary. It is difficult to see how an enlargement of the border can be other than theft, unless it be carried out for some unselfish reason. Ammon was so hungry for land, hungry as perhaps only a little kingdom, no bigger than an English county, could be, that the bloodiest atrocities did not seem to big a price to pay. "They ripped up the women with child of Gilead; that they might enlarge their border." Anything more repugnant to that widespread Semitic feeling which regards the processes of generation and birth as possessing a certain sacredness we cannot well imagine. But herein consists the fascination of it, in inflicting the very evil that you would most dread. "Do unto your enemies the thing you would least like doing to yourself." And this is to be perpetrated in order that terror may seize the opponents, and the invaders be left free to occupy the land. The object aimed at is not great enough

to justify the means taken. Pheretima of Cyrene crucified the men who had assassinated her son, cut off the breasts of their wives, and placed these on the walls opposite the men as they hung on their crosses. We can understand even that brutality; revenge will go any lengths. But the outrage on all modesty, the contempt for human nature, the exaggeration of cruelty on the part of these Ammonites, when nothing more was to be gained than a new province—this fills the prophet with indignation. He is more deeply stirred; he waxes more eloquent, than at any of the misdeeds previously proclaimed. We hear the very war cry of the avenger. We see the rush of battle sweeping all before it like a whirlwind. The king¹ of Ammon and his princes together are carried off by foes as unscrupulous as themselves.

6. Jerome says: "Tradunt Hebræi, ossa regis Idumææ jam sepulti, qui cum Joram rege Juda ascenderat adversum Moab, in ultionem doloris a Moabitis postea convulsa atque succensa." It would be unsafe to insist on this identification of the crime denounced by Amos with the sequel of the campaign described in 2 Kings iii. The petty wars of

¹ Professor Guthe, in Kautzsch's *Bibelwerk*, renders "And Milcom must go into captivity, his priests and princes together." The textual note on this is: "Follow the LXX. of Jer. xlix. 3 in reading מְלִכָם instead of מְלִכָם (their king). Also read with the Hebrew text of Jer. xlviii. 7, xlix. 3, בְּהַיִּי instead of the M.T. הוּא ("both himself and his great lords.") He might have made his case stronger. The Pesh., Vulg., Aq., Symm., and many cursives of the LXX. have the proper name Milcom at Amos i. 15. And in the same passage the LXX. and Pesh. presuppose בְּהַיִּי. Yet both these should be rejected. Jeremiah is thinking of the gods of these nations (xlviii. 7, 46): Amos is not. Nothing could be more natural than that the princes should accompany their king into exile, whereas if בְּהַיִּי were mentioned here, we should have to understand the word as meaning "great men," a possible sense, but not the sense in the *Jeremiah passages referred to*. If Jeremiah had before him the words of Amos, there was no reason why he should not give them the turn he desired and complete the description with the addition, "his priests." The latter words found their way into the LXX. and Pesh. of Amos under the influence of the passage in Jeremiah. And it would not be at all difficult to suppose that הוּא had been corrupted into בְּהַיִּי, or, if it still stood, was believed to be a misreading for בְּהַיִּי.

these neighbouring tribes have been rich in exemplifications of the ingenuity of revenge. Yet the Biblical history presents us with no more suitable occasion: the losses undergone by Moab, especially that mentioned at 2 Kings iii. 27, account for any savagery of reprisal. Whenever it occurred it was the very height of indignity. Ziska, the Taborite chief, ordered that his own dead body should be flayed and his skin used for the covering of a drum, at the sound of which the enemy would flee. If it were allowable for a man to dishonour his own body thus, it does not follow that others may. And to burn the bones to powder was worse treatment still. It involved an interference with the profoundly cherished privilege of being gathered to the fathers (1 Kings xiii. 22). An even more cruel purpose may have been in view, the making the dead suffer through the ill-treatment of his body (see Job xiv. 22; Isa. lxvi. 24). In any case the cremation of Achan and his relatives (Josh. vii. 25) and the burning the bones of the priests of the high places (2 Kings xxiii. 16; cf. *v.* 18) are examples of utter ignominy. Amos protests against this insult to the dead king. His conscience reclaims against the degradation of one's enemy, the treatment of his body as though it were a thing¹ and not part of a person. It was not an Israelite prince that had been dishonoured; it was not that Edom especially attracted the sympathy of the prophet; the deed in itself was a national disgrace and crime. The story of all lands and times evinces that the root of malignity out of which it grew lies deep in human nature.²

To sum up. The God of Amos was not concerned exclusively with the conduct of the Hebrews and of other

¹ The Targum has caught the idea: "He burnt the bones of the king of Edom, and spread them on the house like lime."

² The Scythian custom of wearing the skins of their slain enemies; the treatment of the corpse of Amasis by Cambyses; the exhumation and hanging of the bodies of the English regicides are specimens of what hardly needs any exemplification.

nations only in so far as it affected them. Wrong-doing is wrong-doing whoever be the doer or the sufferer. The obligations by which nations are bound to each other cannot be transgressed with impunity. And those obligations are delicate and far-reaching. Cruelty to the conquered : the low craft of the slave hunter : the greed that obliterates all memory of old comradeship and fraternity : the bitter animosity that feeds the fires of hatred : the lust of conquest, counting no price too high that is paid in the sufferings of others : the petty revenge that tramples on the dead : all these are crimes. The code, perhaps, is not large enough to embrace all the international rights and duties that might now be insisted on. It is chiefly occupied with war, its incidents and consequences. Amos himself may not have been able to see with sufficient clearness that his own people had frequently violated some of the rights that he enforces. But whatever defects be recognised, whether in the prophet or in his prophecy, it is indisputable that this section of the Book of Amos exhibits a loftier standard of international ethics than the nations of Christendom have observed. It was not until the seventeenth century that a Grotius arose to initiate the modern movement for the reform of International Law. It is only in our own day that arbitration has obtained a narrow foothold. *E pur si muove!*

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