

## Amos.

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I SHALL endeavour in this paper to get as much as I can from the Book of Amos itself, without seeking aid from the many useful books and dictionary articles which have been written to expound or illustrate it; chief among which I would place the excellent chapter upon Amos in the late Professor Robertson Smith's valuable work, *The Prophets of Israel*.

I. (1) Let us inquire, first of all then, what the Book of Amos tells us of the *man* Amos. Bearing in mind that prophets such as he was were not prophets of the pulpit, *i.e.* preachers to a set audience in a fixed place, but were men who were Divinely commissioned to deliver a message to the nation, at its very heart; to the king and the brilliant throng which encircled the throne, and that this message was couched in the pictured and dramatic form of a saga,—an oral, not a written proclamation,—full of life and gesture, of acted parables and symbolic movements; remembering all this, I say, we are prepared for a much fuller revelation of the *man* in his message than we find in any modern compositions.

Who, then, was Amos? He was (says i. 1) 'among the herdmen of Tekoa'; and Tekoa stood with its white houses on an elevated plain-top about six miles south of Bethlehem, with the Dead Sea in full view, and beyond the sea the blue mountains of Moab. In the margin you read for 'herdmen,' *sheepmasters*; and when you turn to 2 Kings iii. 4, you find that a sheepmaster might be an exceedingly wealthy man; for 'Mesha, king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs, and a hundred thousand rams, with the wool.' Was, then, Amos a grand master of the flocks, a millionaire, like those of New South Wales, who had made his fortune through selling wool? This point is settled in the negative by vii. 14, where the prophet says of himself: 'I was a herdman and a gatherer of sycomore fruit'; and we know from travellers in the East that to collect this kind of fruit was so menial as to be performed by the very lowest class of labourers. Here, then, in the uplands of Tekoa, where the wise woman dwelt in olden days who gave counsel

to a king; here, where Jehosaphat delivered to his army the mighty dictum: 'Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established: believe His prophets so shall ye prosper'; here, within an easy walk of the plain where other shepherds, eight hundred years after, heard songs in the night from the lips of those 'who hymn'd the song of peace over Bethlehem's fields,' our lowly shepherd 'whispered to the running brooks a music sweeter than their own': for 'many are the poets that are sown by nature, men endowed with highest gifts, the vision and the faculty divine'; and Amos is, as we shall see presently, no less a poet than a prophet.

(2) And what were the *times* in which Amos lived and laboured? We all know that there are other dates in our memories than those which tell of the accession and death of sovereigns. The Great Plague and Great Fire of London would be remembered for several generations as the landmarks of family history, *e.g.* men in the days of King Charles II. would say, 'I was married the year after the plague,' or, 'We opened business in a street whose houses perished in the great fire within six months after it had been subdued.' So Amos also has his big date, from which he reckons everything, and this was the 'great earthquake' (i. 1), 'two years before the earthquake.' Now we learn from Zechariah (xiv. 5) what a terror that particular earthquake created in the land. 'Ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains . . . yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah.'

And under what sort of monarchs did Amos do his God-given task? Milton complained that he had fallen upon evil times; with far greater cause the young shepherd might rail against a destiny which had fixed his span of life in the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam II., king of Israel. You will find king Uzziah's doings under his other name of Azariah in 2 Kings xv., while 2 Chron. xxvi. records his interesting life under the name of Uzziah. After a reign of fifty-two years, in which he conquered foes on every side, built towns, dug wells, patronised husbandry, and proved himself a remarkable sovereign in all

respects, he sank into what looks like senile madness. Imagining himself a priest, he rushed, against all remonstrances of the sacred orders, into the temple of the Lord, determined to burn incense upon the altar of incense. For this he was struck with leprosy, and was deposed from the throne. Not Uzziah, however, but Jeroboam II. was the king who most closely touched the personality of Amos. For although born in the southern kingdom of Judah, it is against the king, and court, and life of Israel that the herdsman has to lift up his voice. Jeroboam II. appears in 2 Kings xiv. 28 and in Hosea and Amos. The record of the Chronicler is, unhappily, lost, and so we miss the graphic detail generally added by him to the accounts given in the Books of Kings. Jeroboam was the most prosperous of the kings of Israel. He was called 'the saviour of his people.' He had repelled the Syrian invaders, captured their city of Damascus, and recovered the whole of the ancient dominion from Hamath to the Red Sea. He reconquered Ammon and Moab, and restored the trans-Jordanic tribes to their territory. But all this national 'restoration' was only outward. The sanctuary at Bethel—the spot where Abraham had built an altar and Jacob had seen the ladder of angels—was kept up in royal state for idolatrous worship. Drunkenness, licentiousness, bribery, and oppression prevailed in the country, and 'mixed worship,' *i.e.* the worship of idols, united with that of Jehovah, vexed the heart of God and good men. Against no weakling, you see, has the poor herdsman of Tekoa to lift up his parable, but against a *grand monarque*, brave, rich, profligate, the idol of a people like their king.

(3) And now let me ask how Amos received his call to the prophetic office? Is he one of the collegiate band of official prophets, called in Elisha's time, 'sons of the prophets,' who lived and studied in guilds and wore a special garment of their calling? Not so; for did he not tell the priest of Bethel, the court chaplain, Amaziah: 'I was no prophet, neither was I prophet's son . . . and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel?' Like St. Paul, therefore, he is as one born out of due time; he comes like a meteor across the sky, not like a planet at an expected time; but he cometh not in vain. 'The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord

God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?' He has never any misgivings as to his calling; at every new development of his message, he boldly begins with 'The Lord saith.'

II. It is time that I began to handle the message which the Spirit of God entrusted to the delivery of this remarkable man. I think we shall find that in every point of view it was a *great* message. The poet Burns has told us in a remarkable letter of the exaltation and rapture which he feels when walking 'in the sheltered side of a wood, or high plantation, in a cloudy winter day, and hearing the stormy wind howling among the trees and raving over the plain.' Even so Amos seems lifted up into sublime enthusiasm in the presence of the gathering storm of the Assyrian invasion. 'The Lord shall roar from Zion and utter His voice from Jerusalem, and the pastures of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.' This is the note, so full of awful grandeur and deep pathos, struck at the very beginning of the whole book. And then comes the roll of prophecy in two great divisions; the first for heathen nations, the second for the chosen people of Judah and Israel. How much that is new and full of instruction is there in the first roll! Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab is each summoned to hear tidings of Divine vengeance upon them for 'the three transgressions, and for four' of which they have been guilty. The meaning of this phrase is, for *multiplied* transgression. Now look here at two things of great importance. (1) The traditional Israelite believed that the eyes of Jehovah were fixed only upon the area of his own land. That Jehovah should interest Himself in any capital but Jerusalem; in any nationality but the Hebrew; in any joys or sorrows, uprisings or downfallings, but of the few millions He had brought forth out of Egypt and placed in this favoured land, was unsuspected by the Israelites, from the highest to the lowest. But here comes Amos with the declaration that Jehovah's eye and heart go forth north-east to Damascus; south-west to Gaza; north-west to Tyre; east and south-east to Edom, Ammon, and Moab. Nay more, in ix. 7 he declares that if God had brought Israel out of Egypt, He had equally brought the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir. Let us, then, learn this for ourselves at the mouth of the herdsman-prophet, that there is no historical

event in the annals of time, great or small, from the change of an imperial dynasty down to the migration of a barbarous tribe from one hillside to another in which the All-present is not interested. They are all His children though they know Him not, neither call upon His name. There is no narrow patriotism with God; His heart is as wide as His works! And (2) mark this also, that these transgressions of the heathen nations are all sins against the light of nature, the law which St. Paul tells us every man has in himself. Damascus, in a war with Gilead, 'had threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron'; Gaza had 'carried away captive an entire captivity to deliver them up to Edom'; Tyre had done the same, and 'had not remembered the brotherly covenant'; Edom 'did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever'; Ammon 'ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border'; and Moab 'burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime.'

I know nothing more profoundly interesting from the moralist's standpoint than this 'burden' of the heathen nations. No charge against them of idolatry; but a charge which makes one ponder over many a curious phase of human history, both past and present, clearly showing that God's right arm will be always bared against men who are brutal, inhuman, savage, oppressive, in short, who 'forget the brotherly covenant.' Not against the chosen people had any of these cruelties been perpetrated; they were all crimes against *man as man*.

How marked is the contrast when we pass to the second roll with its very unequal halves addressed to Judah and Israel. Scarcely half a dozen lines are addressed to Judah (see ii. 4), but upon Israel there falls a whole cannonade of indignation and wrath. The law courts are corrupt, in which 'the righteous are sold for silver'; domestic life is polluted (ii. 7); the poor debtor is robbed, even of his clothes, in defiance of Ex. xxii. 26; the Nazarites have been tempted to break their pledge of abstinence from wine; the prophets have been silenced; 'violence and robbery are stored up in the palaces' of the great (iii. 10); the needy are crushed (iv. 1); judgment is turned to wormwood, and righteousness cast down to the earth (v. 7); exactions like those, which led to the French Revolution, are levied upon the poor (v. 11); a

hollow parade of religious oblations is all the time going on alongside the grossest wickedness and worship of the star-god (v. 26); luxury abounds on every hand; the nobles 'lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; they sing idle songs to the sound of the viol; they devise for themselves instruments of music like David; they drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph' (vi. 4-6); and lastly, after the vision of the basket of summer-fruit, there is added an indictment of a peculiarly pungent nature revealing the hypocrisy of a money-worshipping but pretentiously religious people, 'Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy' (viii. 4-6). Such is the prophet's terrible charge against Israel. And, now, what was the corresponding array of penalties he was commissioned to denounce? For the oppressors, to begin with, 'I,' saith the Lord, 'will press you in your place, as a cart presseth that is full of sheaves' (see ii. 14-end). Philistia and Egypt are summoned to witness the overthrow of the luxurious inhabitants of Samaria (see iii. 9-end). The hooks and fish-hooks of the invading Assyrians shall torture the torturers (see iv. 1-3). 'Cleanness of teeth, *i.e.* hunger (iv. 6), drought, blasting, mildew, a plague of locusts, pestilence, the slaughter of the young men, the alienation of houses and vineyards (v. 11), wailing in place of festive mirth (v. 16), captivity (vi. 7), destruction of sanctuaries (vii. 9), and the songs of the temple turned into howlings (viii. 3). But even this is not all, a deeper doom is sounded as a death-knell to the life of the nation. The death shall be followed by no resurrection (see viii. 9-end). And is this, then, to be the *real* end of the great drama begun in the days of old, when Abraham received the promise that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed? Is even God subject to the law of failure in His magnificent proposals for the good of mankind? Is His mercy irreversibly come to an end for evermore? Glory be to His name, the door is not shut for all eternity. A spiritual Israel, whose Chief shall be an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile—'a Prince with God,' who shall indeed prevail—rises up in the closing words of Amos, just when all seemed without a ray of hope (ix. 11-end).

III. I have, I hope, said enough of the *matter* of the Book of Amos. Let me now say a few words about its manner or style. I will here avail myself of an instructive quotation from Professor Robertson Smith: 'In Hebrew, as in Arabic, the best writing is an unaffected transcript of the best speaking; the literary merit of the Book of Genesis, or the history of Elijah . . . is that they read as if they were told by word of mouth; and, in like manner, the prophecies of Amos, though evidently rearranged for publication, and probably shortened from their original spoken form, are excellent writing, because the prophet writes as he spoke, preserving all the effects of pointed and dramatic delivery, with that breath of lyrical fervour which lends a special charm to the highest Hebrew oratory. . . . Ezekiel is much more of a bookman than Amos, but his style is as much below that of the shepherd of Tekoa as the rhetorical prose of the later Arabs is below the simplicity of the ancient legends of the desert' (*Prophets*, p. 126).

In my judgment, Amos is the most interesting of the minor prophets. I venture to say that he is even a humorist, though, of course, in a properly subdued key. In proof, let me recall the scene in chap. vii., where we find Amaziah, the court chaplain at Bethel, first inflaming the mind of his sovereign, Jeroboam, against Amos (vii. 10-11). No doubt this was done secretly, but then, 'Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there [*i.e.* earn thy bread as a prophet]: but prophesy not again any more at Bethel; for *it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court.*' Cannot you imagine the scene for yourselves? The sleek, wheedling, and sycophantic chaplain taking aside the wild-looking honest herdman, and trying to persuade him that the court of a great monarch was no place for downright speaking of truth, but for silken whispers and soporific draughts and pleasant lullabies. 'Go where thou wilt else, and thunder thy loudest, but allow us here to pass away our time like the lotus eaters, with our temples crowned with rosebuds and the wine cup unshattered in our hand.'

I said at the beginning of this paper that Amos was a poet, and anyone who will examine his similes and graphic cameos will at once accept my statement. What more plaintive than 'the pastures of the shepherds mourning,' when you

remember that he also was a shepherd, and 'the top of Carmel'—ever green to the sailor as he nears the western shore, or the traveller riding along the plains of Esdraelon from the east—that its greenery 'shall wither'? What more vivid than 'the fire devouring the palaces of Rabbah, with shouting in the day of battle, and with a tempest in the day of whirlwind'—the roar, *i.e.* of a fighting crowd of besiegers, and the fanning fire-spreading power of a heavy gale blowing on the conflagration? or what more picturesque than the harvest-wain groaning homewards under its burden of sheaves, or the hero fleeing from the stormy battlefield stripped of armour and even clothes? or again, the lion roaring in the forest over prey just taken, or the steel spring leaping up as it closes over a captive limb? or the two compartments of a nobleman's desolate house, the winter and the summer house, now alike without a guest; or the upward gaze of the herdman by night to behold 'the seven stars and Orion,' followed by the exquisite image of the shadow of death 'greiking' into morning dawn, which reminds us of Tennyson's sweet lines in the *Gardener's Daughter*—

Sweeter than the dream  
Dreamed by a happy man, when the dark East,  
Unseen, is brightening to his bridal morn.

Or, again, the phrase, 'Maketh the day dark with night,' reminding us once more of the same poet's lines on *St. Agnes' Eve*—

The shadows of the convent towers  
Slant down the snowy sward,  
Still creeping with the creeping hours  
That lead me to my Lord.

And what, I may ask, could we have better as a picture of men flying from one misfortune only to meet another than that in v. 19? or what note of woe can sound so deep as the day of sorrow, which is predicted as 'the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day'? What more gruesome than the picture of the uncle (in vi. 10) searching a house for corpses, which he wishes to burn, and crying to his friend in the inner chamber to ask if there are any more bodies forthcoming, and in reply to his loud and hollow 'No,' begging him to hold his peace,—for such is the hostile watchfulness,—'we may not make mention even of the name of the Lord' (which was always spoken with bated breath); and, finally, what more radiant picture of Messiah's reign than in ix. 13?

It is always a mark of the power of a book when it has wrought some of its phrases into the popular speech of this world. What phrases are more common than 'A brand plucked from the burning' (iv. 11), and 'Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel' (iv. 12)? But I wonder how many people reflect that the sea-serpent—the welcome friend of every newspaper in the dull season—has its origin in Amos? (ix. 3).

The abiding value of the book for all time is

reserved for my last word. It places man's claim to favour with God in moral conduct, and not in external offerings, however magnificent. 'For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me, and ye shall live' (v. 4). 'Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you.' 'Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate' (v. 14-15). 'Let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream' (v. 24).

## Recent Foreign Theology.

### Among the Periodicals.

#### The Hittite Inscriptions.

IN the *Z.D.M.G.* (p. 441 ff.) PROFESSOR JENSEN publishes a transcription, translation, and explanation of Inscription I of Jerabis. The present article represents, as he himself remarks, the highest level he has yet reached in his interpretation of the Hittite Inscriptions. In some points of detail it shows deviations from Jensen's former results, but he claims that it marks a distinct advance which, owing to the scantiness of the material to work with, he would have considered impossible so recently as a year ago. The article is intended to serve not only as a justification of the favourable judgment already passed on Jensen's decipherments by Brockelmann and Zimmern, but as a reply to the diametrically opposite contentions of Sayce, Halévy, Messerschmidt, and Hommel. The reader is specially requested to judge of the probability of the results not merely from the translation of the Inscription, but also from the appended commentary. Jensen makes no claim to infallibility. Here and there he may have given a false reading or rendering of a word and yet be on the right track. At all events he claims to have distinctly inaugurated the work of decipherment, and protests against having the fruit of long years of hard toil treated with ridicule, especially by critics whom he accuses of lacking even a superficial acquaintance with the subject. The article is sure to receive abundant attention from the few scholars who are entitled to the name of experts on the Hittite

question, and it treats the whole subject so lucidly and in such detail that, like Hommel's article in the *P.S.B.A.*, which we noticed some time ago, it puts even a lay reader in a position to form something of an independent judgment on the matters in dispute.

#### The Unity of Obadiah.

IN the *Revue Biblique* of April last DR. CONDAMIN of Toulouse writes in defence of the unity of the short book of Obadiah. As is well known, the great majority of recent critics divide the book into two parts, the first nine or ten verses being reproduced from an early prophecy, which is quoted also (more freely) in Jer 49<sup>7-22</sup>, while the closing verses are held to be from the pen of an exilic or, more probably, post-exilic author. Condamin's paper is specially characterized by this, that it builds its conclusion as to the unity of the book upon the *rhythm* and the *strophic arrangement* which he thinks he can discover. He is led, further, to the decision that, in the passage common to both, Obadiah is quoted by Jeremiah.

#### The Sirach Controversy.

The latest issue of the *Jewish Quarterly Review* may well be called a 'Sirach number,' containing as it does no fewer than five articles connected with the Hebrew fragments of the book, besides a short note by Professor Cheyne on Sir 50<sup>9</sup>. Professor Schechter publishes, line by line, and page by page, with critical footnotes, a further fragment of Ben Sira, which belongs to a third MS., called for convenience' sake C. In the multiplicity of MSS