

THE PROPHET HOSEA

THERE are several points of interest in the person and work of Hosea. First, he was a prophet of the northern kingdom : we may say, the only prophet of the northern kingdom who has left any written prophecy. The great prophets of Israel, Elijah and Elisha, lived before written prophecy began. Unless we accept the theory of Hitzig and some other critics, that the two chapters numbered xv. and xvi. in our present book of Isaiah form a fragment of the prophecies of Jonah, who was a prophet of the North, we possess nothing of his ; for the book that goes by his name is not prophecy but narrative, and makes no pretension to be written by him ; and is, to all appearance, a very great deal later than his day. Amos, though his prophetic career, so far as we know it, was confined to the North, was a native of Judæa ; and he looked on the conditions of human life in the North with a stranger's eye, and estimated them from a stranger's point of view. Perhaps the pictures which he draws are all the sharper in their outlines on this account, and the figures bolder and more energetic, and the colours laid on with a more vigorous and determined hand. At least his sketches of the magnates of Israel and of the women of Samaria are by no friendly pencil. The artist is one of the people, and his subject is an effeminate and dissolute aristocracy ; and we may be sure no pains was taken to tone down the picture or throw any shade over its hideousness. But

Hosea was a native of that evil northern land himself. He had grown up familiar with all the forms of its life : however evil they might seem to him, they could not strike him as strange. And as even the forms of wickedness which mark a people's history spring from characteristics of the people's mind and position which are not evil, these must have been shared by the prophet ; and if he could not sympathize with the evil wrought by his countrymen, he could see whence it arose, and judge it more leniently, and condemn it less severely.

It is cause for special thankfulness that Scripture has preserved to us this book, the product of a northern mind, the testimony borne to itself by the northern kingdom. The books of Kings and Chronicles are late, and pass lightly over the affairs of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes : their view is general ; and, as was right, condemnatory. And we are apt, in our hasty and superficial manner, to conclude that, because this kingdom is condemned as upon the whole bad, therefore it was wholly bad, and to forget that moral uniformity is nowhere seen ; that there is a struggle everywhere between the good and the evil, and that only after a conflict of many generations is the one or the other victorious. The designs of Providence in the erection of this kingdom form a very profound problem. Favoured in its origin by prophets, Ahijah and Shemaiah ; fostered and purified by the greatest prophetic geniuses of the Hebrew people, Elijah and Elisha ; preached to by Amos, a direct messenger from God, and its sins condemned, but with only a condemnation by inference for itself ; at last assailed by Hosea, one of its own children, and the chiefest and first of its sins declared to be the sin of its ever having come into existence—these things form a riddle difficult to solve.

Had Providence, in permitting its rise, other designs ? and the prophets, in promoting the secession, other hopes ? And might the kingdom have had a great destiny, and played a great part in the history of salvation, if Jeroboam the son of Nebat had understood the principles of God's kingdom ? We see the possibilities of things only when these are possibilities no more. When our life is spent, or irrevocably lowered, we see the meaning of living, and exclaim, What this life of ours might have been ! By the time Hosea came upon the scene, the energies of Israel were exhausted ; his youthful powers had been wasted ; there was no destiny awaiting him now ; he was prematurely old : " Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not : yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not " (chap. vii. 9). Not in years, but in vital power, he was old ; and, like others in that state, he could not be made to feel it.

Yet we cannot help a certain sympathy for that northern kingdom. It embodied in its origin a protest, strong and strange for that time and that Eastern land, against political despotism, even if we should not go the length of regarding the movement as a protest against religious innovation and centralization, and an appeal to the conservative spirit to return to old forms—a view certainly not that of Hosea. No doubt the break occurred where there had always been a weakness. A crack in the political unity ran across the country, from the Mediterranean to the Jordan, between the boundaries of Ephraim and Benjamin. In the Song of Deborah we observe all the northern tribes acting together, both east and west of the Jordan ; but no allusion is made to any of the tribes south of Ephraim. The secession of the northern confederation was, however, none the less a bold and decisive

stroke in behalf of freedom and popular rights. Perhaps, like a political neighbour of our own, its instinct for freedom was much in excess of its capacity for self-government; and the frequent use which it made of the weapon of revolution brought no lasting liberty or tranquillity to itself. It shook off one despot only to come under the yoke of another. The great number of different tribes formed an obstacle to close coherence, although it was favourable to the love of freedom; and the kingdom was rarely united except when some stern soldier grasped the reins of power. The three greatest rulers of the North were Omri, Jeroboam II., and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, all of them military despots, but men of ability, obeyed at home and feared abroad.

The northern kingdom embraced the happiest regions of the country: the most fertile, as the plains of Sharon and Jezreel; the most splendidly wooded, as Ephraim, Carmel, and Lebanon; and the best watered. The streams of Naphtali and Gilead never ran dry; and the cool breezes from Lebanon perpetually invigorated the dwellers in the great plain at its foot. Nature was kinder, and her moods more variously genial, than in the South. Hence the life of the people was perhaps more joyous, and their love for nature deeper; and, as they were far from the centre of Jehovah-worship, their religious feelings and thoughts were freer. Both what is good and bad in their history may be partly accounted for in this way. There are allusions in the Song of Solomon which seem to imply a later age than that of Solomon. If this exquisite pastoral be not by him, it owes its origin to the northern kingdom, nature's varying moods in which it perfectly reflects. Again, if the afflicted righteous of Job be not merely the righteous man, but the righteous

nation and people trodden down under the foot of professed idolaters, it was in all likelihood the sufferings of Ephraim that drove one of his children thus to express his sorrow and his perplexity over his country's fate and the inexplicable ways of God. Such freedom in criticizing God's ways, such boldness of despair in the face of the problems of Providence, seem foreign to the devouter minds of the South. They might have been found in the desert; but the book is certainly a production of the Hebrew mind, and perhaps the conditions of its production are easiest to be conceived in the northern kingdom.

If we owe to the North the Song of Songs, the book of Job, and the Prophet Hosea, to say nothing of the Song of Deborah and much else in the historical books, our obligations are of such a kind as to make us regard, with a perplexed wonder, the profound capabilities and the perverse destiny of this people. But, on the other hand, the evil in Israel may to some extent be explained in the same way. This profounder love of nature and this less deep awe of God might readily increase each other, and grow into excess; and so it seems to have been. The charms of nature altogether overpowered the people, and her sweet influences became divine. The nation fell into the worship of the many powers of physical life under the name of Baal; and this enfeebling worship crushed out all the moral energy from their heart, and led to the grossest dissoluteness of manners.

In the South the moral temper was sterner. No prophet of Judah draws such pictures of immorality as Amos does, or even Hosea: "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the understanding" (chap. iv. 11). Micah and Isaiah both chastise the

people of the South for the oppression of the poor by the rich, for their avarice, and judicial corruption, and drunkenness ; but neither of them alludes to licentiousness. But in Israel this vice, with its usual accompaniments of violence and bloodshed, had deeply penetrated all classes, even those whose purity is most closely watched : " I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your betrothed when they commit adultery : for ye yourselves go aside with whores, and ye sacrifice with harlots " (chap. iv. 14) ; " False swearing, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood " (chap. iv. 2) : i.e., one bloody deed follows immediately on the heels of another.

It would be to carry the theory of the influence of circumstance in the formation of mind and character too far, to explain the peculiarities of this prophet's disposition and writings from his northern origin. And with the life of Elijah before us, we could hardly deny that there were minds with strong enough fibre in this kingdom, Yet it is singular that the author of Isaiah xv. xvi. so completely resembles Hosea in the tenderness and sorrow of his tone. Hosea surpasses him only because it is his brethren, and not strangers, whose fate he laments and strives to avert. His voice, when addressing his countrymen, is always choked with emotion. His speech is little else than a succession of sobs. He behaves, before the wickedness and inevitable doom of his countrymen, with the extravagance of a distracted mourner in the presence of his dead. He clings to them, and calls to them, and will not believe that hope is past ; and, rising up to a height of ecstasy which is almost frenzy, he apostrophizes death with the threat, in Jehovah's name, " O death, I will be thy plagues ! " His grief over his countrymen is pure,

without one element of anger. He has none of the scorn which Amos cannot conceal for the luxury and effeminacy of the magnates of Israel. And corresponding to his own character is his conception of God. The Divine Heart is but his own with Divine deepness. Jehovah also is at His wit's end with His people : " O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee ? for thy goodness is as a morning cloud " (chap. vi. 4). He too is distracted between love and grief : " How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim ? " (chap. xi. 8). Hosea, first of all the prophets, rises to the sublime height of calling the affection with which Jehovah regards His people, *love*. No prophet had named such a word before. In Joel, God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil " (chap. ii. 13). In Amos, He is good and beneficent, the great outstanding example of His goodness being His redemption of His people from Egypt, and His planting them in Canaan : " Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite " (chap. ii. 9, 10) ; and His relation to Israel is expressed by the profound term *know* : " You only have I *known* of all the families of the earth " (chap. iii. 2). But no prophet before Hosea ventures to name the *love* of God : " When Israel was a child, then I *loved* him, and called My son out of Egypt " (chap. xi. 1) ; " I will heal their backslidings, I will *love* them freely " (chap. xiv. 4). This idea is the most remarkable thing in Hosea's prophecy, and perhaps is almost the only theological idea in it—the various forms in which it is presented, the figures in which it is set, and the various deductions from it, virtually making up the prophecy.

The main contents of Hosea's prophecy are these :

1. His lamentations over the immorality and the violence everywhere prevailing among the people. This immorality he calls whoredom and adultery: "They are all adulterers; they are as an oven heated by the baker." (Chap. vii. 4. Compare the passages already cited.) Coupled with this is the riot and excess in wine indulged in by the highest in the land on great State occasions—"On the day of our king the princes made themselves sick with a fever of wine" (chap. vii. 5)—and the treacherous revolutionary spirit that burned in the hearts of the nobles, breaking out in deeds of bloodshed, and manifesting itself, as it descended through all classes, in robbery and violence, in which even the priests engaged: "They have made ready their heart like an oven, whiles they lie in wait: . . . they are all hot as an oven, and devour their judges; all their kings are fallen (chap. vii. 6 ff.); "Gilead is a city tracked with blood, and as robbers lie in wait, so is the company of priests; they murder in the way towards Shechem." (Chap. vi. 8, ff. Comp. chap. vii. 1.) In addition to this there was the secular spirit and devotion to material well-being that had taken possession of every mind: "Canaan! in his hand are balances of deceit: he loveth to oppress. Ephraim saith, Surely I am become rich: I have found me wealth" (chap. xii. 7).

The picture which this prophet exhibits of the internal condition of the northern kingdom in his day is a terrible one. He lived during, perhaps, the most unquiet and turbulent times which the country had ever passed through. His prophecies extend over a considerable period of its history. Some of them, perhaps, belong to the time anterior to the death of Jeroboam II., but others fall in the time of the long interregnum that followed his death. After this interregnum of eleven

years, Zechariah, son of Jeroboam, succeeded in mounting the throne, on which he sat only a few months, and then was assassinated by Shallum. It is in the midst of this unquiet time that Hosea addresses his countrymen. The firm rule of Jeroboam had just ended. The forces of revolution were newly broken out, and were acting in all their strength. Under the last king's long and successful reign the country had advanced greatly in material prosperity. There were ample resources in the land to nourish the various factions, and they struggled against each other with a fury that was fresh and unexhausted. The Prophet can compare this destructive fury to nothing but the raging heat of an oven, although the figure contains the darker trait of a long-sighted, scheming policy, that suppressed and nursed the fire, till the time came to let it blaze out.

In Amos's day, who prophesied under Jeroboam, society was dissolute ; but in Hosea's day it was dissolved. The former prophet assails the great, the upper classes, for their immorality and drunkenness, calling the women "kine of Bashan," full-fed, luxurious, and gross, saying to their lords, "*Bring, and let us drink*" ; and for their pitiless treatment of the poor, whom they sold for a pair of shoes, whose pledged garments they retained overnight, and to whom they sold the refuse of the grain. But oppression of the poor and injustice are usual occurrences in the East, and only prove that a government is bad, not that it is unstable. In Hosea's days, however, every class seemed flung against another ; and the furious passions, whether revolutionary or immoral, of the people consumed all about them. In these circumstances, it hardly needed a prophet to see that the end of the State was at hand. And, what was worst of all, no hold could be got of the people, from their superficial fickleness and moral shal-

lowness. Sometimes they seemed resolved to abide by their idolatry, with a resolute insensibility to better things : " Ephraim is joined to idols : let him alone." Sometimes, again, the feeling of their true relations to Jehovah seemed as if it would come back, and soften their hearts : " My God, we know Thee, we Israel " (chap. viii. 2) ; " Come, and let us return unto the Lord : . . . He hath smitten, and He will bind us up " (chap. vi. 1). But their superficiality and changeableness threw even the Divine Mind into despair : " O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee ? . . . for your goodness is as a morning cloud " (chap. vi. 4).

2. The religious declension and false worship of the people, in its two forms of Baal or nature-worship, and Jehovah-worship under the figure of a calf or young bull, forms the largest element in Hosea's book. The prophet calls this also, whoredom and adultery : " Plead with your mother, plead ; for she is not My wife, neither am I her Husband : and let her put away her whoredoms from her face, and her adulteries from between her breasts." (Chap. ii. 2. Comp. ver. 5, 7, 12, 13 ; iv. 13 ff. ; v. 3, etc.) The name of whoredom, given to this false worship, might be the natural corollary of the conception, first expressed by this prophet, and but a figure for his main idea of the Love-relation of Jehovah to His people, that the Lord is the Husband of the Church. But it is probable that the name arose in another way. The Baal-worship was accompanied by shameful prostitution, in which, indeed, it partly consisted ; and it is likely that these practices first brought down upon the Baal-religion this general name, although the idea fitted perfectly into the great conception of Jehovah's relation of Husband to Israel, and in this connection received much elaboration and extension from successive prophets.

It is remarkable that Hosea joins the calf-worship with the worship of Baal in the sweep of a single condemnation. The calf-worship is also idolatry: "He hath cast off thy calf, O Samaria: . . . for from Israel is it also: the workman made it, and it is no God." (Chap. viii. 5. Comp. x. 5 ff.; xiii. 2 ff.) This looks like an advance in logical clearness and stringency over the Prophet's predecessors. To Amos the calf-worship was reprehensible, but he had not called it idolatry. And when we read the history of Elijah, we discover that, while he fought against the Baal-worship as a matter of life and death to Israel, he has no word of condemnation for the worship of the calf. The conclusion has been drawn that in these facts we may trace the advance, step by step, of the popular religion of Israel, from nature-worship first to a worship of Jehovah which was still sensuous; and then, by a further clarification of the Divine idea, to a worship of Him which was purely spiritual, and that the leaders in this advance were the prophets.

That this advance was involved in the conflict which the prophets waged, no one will deny. But what will be denied is, that the spiritual worship of Jehovah is a novelty, and the result of the conflict. The prophets fought, according to their own representation at least, not in order to gain this, but lest it should be lost. They are not innovators; they call men back to the old paths. The storm-cloud of judgment which, in the vision of Amos, sweeps round the whole horizon, discharges its fury on Judah "because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept His commandments, and their *lies* have caused them to err" (Amos ii. 4); and Hosea threatens the priests in these terms: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast

rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to Me: seeing thou hast *forgotten* the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (chap. iv. 6).

The spiritual worship of Jehovah, without material form, had prevailed from the time of Moses, for it is not supposed that any image existed in the Tabernacle. But that this worship was sometimes in danger of being overwhelmed by the tide of idolatry is certain, and is a thing quite natural. For the Israelites were surrounded on all sides by these idolatrous tendencies, and their kings sought alliances with the nations where they prevailed. And the religious condition even within Palestine must have been a very mixed one. For a "mixed multitude" came up with Israel out of Egypt. Tribes here and there attached themselves to the host in the wilderness. The native populations of Canaan, among whom the grossest forms of nature-worship prevailed, were not exterminated, but absorbed into the nation, becoming with it practically, with the rarest exceptions, one people. Such a mass could not be penetrated in a day with pure conceptions of deity. On the contrary, the pure light of Jehovah could only illuminate the fringes of this illimitable darkness, which threatened ever to swallow it up. Too much weight is given to the presumed silence of Elijah regarding the calf worship. The history of Elijah which we possess is later than his day; and it was no doubt the design of the author of it, to confine his work to tracing the glorious campaign of his hero against the infamous priests of Baal—a campaign the full fruits of which were reaped only in the sweeping revolution of Jehu, that shortly after involved the house of Omri in the ruin of the superstition which it had upheld.

And then, as to the difference between Hosea and Amos, we must, in judging their statements, observe their type of mind, and the natural light in which they view things. Amos is the prophet of morality, of natural right, of the ethical order in human life—upheld, no doubt, by Jehovah, and referrible to Him at last.¹ Hosea is a prophet of religion. Jehovah is the starting point from which he begins, the centre of his whole view. The light that covers all things is a light that falls on them from Jehovah. In that light he sees sharply the bearings of all practices in the nation's life; and the incongruity of the calf worship with the true idea of Jehovah at once strikes his eye. The prophets of the second half of the ninth and of the eighth century are of immense value in enabling us to conceive the condition of men's minds in their day. But they do more than this: they enable us to overshoot their day, and behold what is indefinitely anterior to it. The most significant contribution which they make is the attitude which they take up. They are not leaders of the people in a path that shall conduct them to new truths—truths never known before. On the contrary, their movement is retrograde. They desire to preserve for the people what they are losing. They call them back to old attainments in knowledge and sanctity; they tell them that they have "forgotten" and "corrupted themselves." (Comp. chap. viii. 1; xiii. 4, where, for "shalt know," read "knowest.")

But the picture of religious confusion which the Prophet draws is even more extraordinary than his pictures of social and political anarchy. He justly complains that there is "no truth, nor mercy, nor *knowledge of God*

¹ Duhm, *Theology of the Prophets*.

in the land" (chap. iv. 1), and that the "people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (chap. iv. 6). All true conceptions of deity had gone from their minds. A vague sense of some power "not themselves" in nature seemed the utmost they could reach. There was no want of sacrifice and incense and feasts; and these were offered too, to the name of Jehovah, but with no perception of His character: "I desire . . . the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings" (chap. vi. 6). The Baal-worship and Jehovah-worship had run into one. The existing syncretism was the confluence of two streams: a worship of Jehovah, although, among the mass of the people, with somewhat clouded conceptions of His spirituality and ethical nature—conceptions which the calf-worship tended to darken still further—and a nature-worship, under the name of Baal, which, running always as a feeble stream among the people, as their history in the wilderness shews (chap. ix. 10; xi. 1 ff.), had been reinforced and increased to a flood by the inbreak of Phœnician idolatry. Even when the revolution of Jehu put an end to this worship as a public institution, its spirit remained, and served itself of the various forms of Jehovah-worship, and lived on.

The confusion was deepened by the fact that in Israel the name Baal, which means "lord," had naturally been in use as a designation of Jehovah—a fact which can hardly be doubted, when we remember the many proper names compounded with Baal, such as Ishbaal. Afterwards, when the name fell into disrepute, and, from its dangerous character, was proscribed, these names were transformed; and the popular abhorrence substituted *bosheth* ("shame") for the primary element of the compound. Hosea (chap. ii. 16 ff.) looks forward to the happy time when this

name shall no more be used : " In that day thou shalt call Me *Ishi* (my Husband) ; thou shalt no more call Me *Baali* (my Baal, lord)." But a change of name could do little to clarify the people's conceptions of God. Sterner measures were demanded. As sin has so infected our natural bodies that they must die and be dissolved, and atom be separated from atom, till sin has nought to which to attach itself, and thus really we shall " die unto sin " ; so every institution which the Baal-spirit had infected in Israel, from the rites of religion down to the husbandry of the ground, shall perish and cease, and the remnant of Baal shall be cut off, and Jehovah alone shall be exalted. " The corn, and the wine, and the oil, of which the people said, These are my hire that the Baalim have given me, the Lord will take back in the time thereof " (chap. ii. *passim*)—and the institutions of religion, which Baal had invaded and filled with his unclean spirit, shall be abolished, till a purer worship arise ; and the kingdom shall be broken up, and the people go into captivity : " The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim." (Chap. iii. 4. Comp. ii. 13 ff. ; viii. 11 ff. ; ix. 1 ff., etc.)

3. Another considerable element in Hosea's prophecy is the opposition to the foolish politics of his country, the alternate coquetting with Assyria and Egypt. He gives the same name of whoredom and " hiring loves " to this policy : " They are gone up to Assyria, like a wild ass alone by himself : Ephraim hireth loves " (chap. viii. 9) ; " Then Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, and Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to king Jareb : but he is not able to heal you " (chap. v. 13). The name

of whoredom may have been given to the foreign policy of the nation, either because the foreign nations whose aid was sought were idolatrous, and their overwhelming influence tended to a reciprocity of religion, and to the flooding of the land of Israel with their thought and the forms of their civilization, as Isaiah says of his countrymen, "*They are filled from the East,*" and contrasts the happy time coming, when the people shall return to what is native, and when the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful, . . . and the fruit of the land a pride and a glory (Isa. ii. 6 ; iv. 2) ; or the name may have sprung immediately from the Prophet's conception of Jehovah as the Husband of Israel. This leaning on foreign nations and trust in them indicated alienation from Jehovah and mistrust of Him ; the Husband felt He did not possess the whole-hearted affection which He claimed.

This changeable policy, not unnatural to a small State situated between two great empires, in the collision of which it was ever liable to be crushed, was dangerous even on principles of ordinary Statecraft. It was like the unstable fluttering, from place to place, of a foolish bird : " Ephraim is like a silly dove, without understanding : they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria " (chap. vii. 11). In the nature of things such a policy must prove disastrous. Both empires resented, and felt free to revenge, what they could call disloyalty. But, in the Prophet's view, the disloyalty was of a deeper kind ; it was against Jehovah : and the chastisement of it came direct from Him : " When they go, I will spread My net upon them " (chap. vii. 12). Here and everywhere in the Prophets, the Nemesis of the evil deed is wrapped up within it ; men fall by their own counsels (chap. xi. 6) ; the reed on which they lean goes up into their hand : " Ephraim

shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria" (chap. ix. 3).¹

4. The last thing which Hosea blames in Israel is its rebellion and defection from the house of David, which, truly considered, was defection from Jehovah also. This is its primary offence, and the root of all other offences (chap. viii. 4; xiii. 11, 16). Hence in their regeneration they shall undo their past rebellion, "and seek Jehovah their God, and David their king" (chap. iii. 5).

5. The great truth which Hosea has to teach is the love of Jehovah to Israel. It was in love that He redeemed them from Egypt (chap. xi. 1); His relations to them, all through their history, have been those of love (chap. xi. 4); even His chastisements have been inflicted in love (chap. ii. 14 and chap. iii. *passim*);

¹ The expression "unclean" used here indicates that, in the view of the Prophet and those of his time, the land of Israel was sacred, and all other lands profane; that only in that land could Jehovah be worshipped by sacrifice and aright; and that food, not sanctified by the preliminary rite of sacrifice to Jehovah, was unclean (chap. ix. 4 ff.). This is one of a class of references in the early Prophets of extreme value in the present condition of Old Testament criticism, when investigators into the antiquity and order of succession of the Hebrew records have turned away from the literary characteristics of the books, as offering no basis for anything except the most general conclusions, to pursue inquiries into the archaeological contents of the books, the ideas prevailing in them, the relations of law to law, and codes of law to one another, and the like, and thus trace the progress of thought and institution, and construct a history of Israel from within. Hosea is particularly rich in allusions to matters now in controversy. Compare, on the appliances of worship, chapter iii. 4; on the written law, viii. 12; the multiplicity of altars, xii. 11; viii. 11; x. 1; iv. 13; the novelty of the Baal-worship, xiii. 1, 4; xi. 2; ix. 8; vii. 13; historical allusions, i. 4; iii. 5; vi. 7, if we read "like Adam"; x. 9, 14; xi. 8; xii. 3 ff., 12 ff.

and, finally, their restoration and everlasting peace shall come about through Jehovah's love (chap. v. 4 ff.). This relation of love Hosea expresses by calling Jehovah the Father and, especially, the Husband of Israel. The idea of the latter relation runs through the whole prophecy, and is the more fertile idea of the two; or, at least, is truer to the primary conception of the Old Testament religion, which is that of a covenant (chap. vi. 7), and not that of generation by Jehovah; although the latter idea, really the more profound, is touched upon by Hosea, and more fully developed by later prophets. Throughout the Prophets, who are statesmen in the kingdom of God, the person or subject, with whom Jehovah enters into relations, is always the community of Israel. Individual Israelites only share the blessings of this fellowship, in a secondary way, as members of the community.

No doubt, side by side with this view, there runs another. The claims of the individual spirit ever thrust themselves forward, and become more pressing; and the fruit of this strife of the individual to attain and express his true relations to Jehovah, we observe in the Psalms and in such books as Job. To this strife we owe the full development of such doctrines as that of immortality. But the Prophets deal with the kingdom of God and its destinies; all their activities are directed toward the well-being and perfection of the community. And the idea of the marriage relation between Jehovah and the community, when once struck, opened up the way both to the extension and the deepening of former conceptions of the covenant relation. The somewhat hard and merely civil notions of fidelity to a paction, and offence at the breach of it, have the glow of human relations thrown over them. Affection, and faithful-

ness, and the keen emotions of wounded love, and hasty anger (Isa. liv. 8), and putting away, and an overwhelming regret that longs for reunion, and much else (chap. ii. 19 ff.), are all sides of one great truth, proofs of profound efforts to approach what can never be reached, the idea of the love of God "that passeth knowledge." How strong a hold this idea had taken of the prophet Hosea, we may see from the extraordinary use which he makes of the circumstances of his own married life, in the first three chapters of his book.

In this connection an interesting question arises, viz., What is the relation to one another of the ideas which have been referred to above in particulars 1 to 5? Which of them is primary, and in what order did they rise? In seeking an answer to such a question, we must distinguish between the way in which these ideas arose historically in the Prophet's mind, as the forms of the national life and the tendencies of his country presented themselves to him, and the way in which we perceive them to lie in his mind, when, towards the end of his career perhaps, he sat down to write his book. By this time his scheme of ideas had crystallized; and the order of thought in his own mind, although he does not follow this order strictly in his book, is the order which reading his book at once suggests to our minds. The idea of the Divine Love and the marriage relation is first; and all the other ideas are but deductions from it. That this idea had already become primary when he wrote, is evident from his placing, at the head of his work, the history or allegory of his own married life. What follows, not only in chapter ii., but on to the end, is but exposition of the one thought. But the thought is grasped with extraordinary clearness, and followed out with great consistency.

First, the love of Jehovah elevates the object of it into a personality, and gives it a unity of feeling, giving it also the sense of benefit, and of responsibility. But from this unity follows the sin of the schism of the nation under Jeroboam. This divided the object on which God's love was fixed; it both made that love, which cannot be divided, impossible; and, particularly, it made impossible the reciprocal duties. Whether we might not find here an argument even for a more perfect superficial unity than exists among Christian Churches may be left a suggestion.

Again, it seems carrying out the idea of the married relation with even a greater stringency and inwardness, when the Prophet condemns the national policy. It was not merely that seeking the help of Assyria and Egypt shewed distrust of Jehovah: this might be momentary, and due to the perilous exigencies of the situation. The Prophet, with a certain subtlety, seizes the condition of mind of the community, and the direction of the nation's heart, which indicated profound alienation of feeling, and dissatisfaction with the whole range of affections and duties that her relation to Jehovah imposed. What he detected in her policy was the desire to rank as one of the nations (chap. vii. 8), to become a military power and ride upon horses (chap. xiv. 3), and affect the pomp of a secular State by building "palaces" and "fenced cities" (chap. viii. 14). It was this secular feeling and entire misconception of her true meaning that prompted the community to demand a king at first, and led men like Samuel, who saw clearly the meaning of it, to resist the demand. Even in this early age Hosea and other prophets understood clearly what Christ stated in words: "My kingdom is not of this world."

And, once more, if the breaking up of the kingdom,

and mixing among the nations (chap. vii. 8), were held by the Prophet to be a disruption of the one consciousness of the object beloved, and a confusion fatal to the continuance of Jehovah's affection, and to the right performance of duties to Him, the setting up of Baal-worship or even calf-worship was much more an offence against His love. This not only shewed alienation of feeling ; it was downright infidelity. And the Prophet exposes, with a grave severity unmixed with any feeling of its absurdity, the feminine vanity and love of attire that characterized the community even when pursuing her grosser pleasures—when "she decked herself with her ear-rings and her jewels, and went after her lovers" (chap. ii. 13).

The order of the Prophet's book shews that, when he wrote it, the primary idea in his mind was the love-relation of Jehovah to Israel, and that his other thoughts follow from it as corollaries. It is possible, however, that he did not start on his prophetic career with any such scheme in his mind, but was led to it in attacking, one by one, and independently, the practical mischiefs he encountered among the people. There are some indications, however, which would lead us to infer that the idea of the marriage-relation of Jehovah to Israel was one with which the Prophet began his career of public preaching ; and, if this be so, we are perhaps put upon the track of the way in which this great primary idea came to take possession of him. The prophecy commences : "In the beginning, when the Lord spake by Hosea, the Lord said unto Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms" (chap. i. 2). There seems this much at least of history here, that the idea of Israel's infidelity, and consequently the idea of her married relation to Jehovah, was a primary one in the Prophet's mind from the moment of his public

action, however much his long activity may have given it clearness. Consequently we are thrown into a period anterior to this, to find the circumstances that gave the idea such force to him. These circumstances are no doubt those which he narrates in his own personal history. To suppose that Jehovah would have commanded his prophet to ally himself to a woman already known as of impure life is absurd and monstrous. On the other hand, the supposition that the story told in chapters i. to iii. of the Prophet's married life is pure allegory, with no element of history in it, is superficial, and does no justice to the severe realism of the Prophet's character and words. Some such miserable history as he narrates had no doubt been his own. His wife had gone astray from him, sharing the deep corruption of the time. What had happened to him had happened to others. Nay, it was not a corruption of individuals only ; it was universal. Israel was corrupt ; and the thought flashed on him that his history was but a type of the history of Jehovah and His people. And, when he looked into it still more deeply, the additional conviction forced itself on his mind that it was not an accident, or a misfortune, that had brought him through such painful experiences. It was God's providential way of making a prophet of him, and giving him His prophetic word. Henceforth he comes forward as a prophet, and speaks with the energy and pathos of one who has experienced in life what he speaks, whose experiences have been his school for his work, and who feels that the Lord designed them to be so, and had through them lifted him up into a fellowship with Himself. Of course, when he came to write his prophecies, long after, he extended the bare outline of facts, and added to it much ideal ornamentation, in order the better to body out the great divine truth

which both his life and revelation had so profoundly impressed upon him.

Nothing more than a brief allusion need be made to the brilliant anticipations of the Prophet in regard to the future of his people, founded on the unchangeable love of Jehovah. These anticipations prove that Hosea felt certain of Israel's restoration to God's favour (chap. i. 10; xiv. 3 ff.); of the reunion of the disrupted kingdom, in the Messiah's days, under "one head" (chap. i. 11); of the reconstruction of the dismembered tribes, set forth as a resurrection (chap. vi. 2), an idea elaborated into such splendid proportions by Ezekiel (chap. xxxvii.), and applied, apparently, in a literal way to deceased individuals of the house of Israel in Isaiah xxvi.; of the destruction of Death and Hell (chap. xiii. 14); and the final settlement of the people of God in holy beauty and unchanging power, when they "shall grow as the lily, and cast forth their roots like Lebanon" (chap. xiv. 5).