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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE VII.

THE VISION OF AMOS.

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ONE perfect day in autumn I walked with a Southern gentleman, bearing a high and honorable name, over his plantation. In passing along he made bright and breezy comments on trees, plants, and flowers, for the natural sciences appealed to him as they did to Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. Soon we came to a woodland so magnificently colored that it would have shamed the gorgeous robes of Solomon and made dull the brilliant dyes of ancient Tyre and Babylon. But in the midst of the grove stood a tree iris-hued. It surpassed anything I had ever seen before. I had seen reflections from costly windows on the pavements of historic cathedrals. I had seen the glories of the Yosemite and the Yellowstone. I had seen that vivid rainbow like unto emerald, arching Niagara's awful plunge. I had seen visions above the clouds from the lofty altitudes of the Rocky Mountains. But the tree before me seemed the coronation of all shades and colors. It burned and blazed as though on fire. While looking in a state of transport, my host the naturalist, ex-governor, and world-wide traveler said: "Did you ever see so beautiful a sight?" The response was sudden: "I never did." "I have brought you here," he continued, "to study this tree, and to moralize a little. Do you notice anything peculiar about it?" "I observe that it is strikingly peculiar," I ventured to say. "Its uniqueness is as great, and its isolation as splendid, as is Dante in literature, Beethoven

in music, and Newton in science. It is the phenomenon of the woodland." "But are you aware," said he, "that all the prodigal pomp with which that tree is clothed is the herald of decay? What you see is the hectic flush of death. The tree is doomed. Its glory is an illusive and deceptive show. 'Ichabod' is written all over it. It is yielding to the ravages of consumption, and its thatch of brilliant leaves will fall, leaving it a skeleton. And that is the way nations, churches, individuals, go."

The Northern Kingdom in the time of Amos was decaying at the center, although in outward dress it resembled the dying tree. But its leaders mistook the hectic hue of decay for the blush of returning youth. With the expansion of trade and wealth came the loss of fine ideals, the lowering of ethical standards, and the obliteration of moral distinctions. And in these the poet-prophet, Amos, saw the signature of the nation's death-warrant. He saw on every hand the infallible signs of desolation. He saw that fair and goodly land fast becoming an abandoned and owl-haunted ruin. And as Isaiah, in after years, gave Babylon over to the moles and bats, Nineveh to the briers, Tyre to ashes, and Jerusalem to night, so Amos gave Samaria, the crown of pride, over to plunder, oblivion, and the tomb. For in less than fifty years Israel as a nation was wiped out, and all effort to trace the lost tribes is a chase after the will-o'-the-wisp.

In the time of Amos there was a great intellectual revival. Education was popularized, intelligence diffused, books were multiplied, and schools established. It was the literary renaissance of the Northern Kingdom. But in spite of literary culture, expanse of territory, enlargement of commerce, abounding wealth, and flourishing temples, decay had touched

the nation's life. Samaria, like Versailles before the Revolution, was brilliant. The national festivals were at the zenith of their splendor. The temple-service was superb. The treasury was full. The people were religious. The rich endowed colleges, founded libraries, and contributed largely to the cause of the state religion. But Amos saw the hollowness of such prosperity, and how that all the pomp was but the iridescence of moral rottenness. Justice became injustice, religion a mixture of hypocrisy and fanaticism. "Judges were venal; priests, simoniacal; soldiers, hirelings; rulers, tyrants; masters, monsters; and turpitude crowned every profession."

With the eclipse of the soul came civil oppression, wholesale robbery, triumphant lust, general drunkenness, and spiritual night. Externally there was much to please the eye. A superficial observer would not have been able to see in the glittering foam, gleams of decay from the abyss. But Amos, with the vision of a seer and the moral intuition of a prophet, saw beneath the enamel of wealth a deep, dark underworld, and heard ascending,

"A long, low, distant murmur of dread sound."

And he knew, as every man of deep moral insight must know, that no nation can stand with the State a Robber, and the Church an Inquisition. The glamour of wealth and factitious brilliancy may charm the lovers of ease and self-indulgence, but the Seer can discern the artificial from the real, the accidental from the immutable, and the transient from the permanent. The law of retribution is ever at work. It neither slumbers nor sleeps. And Amos knew that Israel, living so remote from the eternal laws of God, must go down under the avalanche of its own iniquity.

After the prophet had uttered his sevenfold denunciation against Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and

Judah, he pronounced a crushing doom on Israel because of her fourfold sins. Civil oppression, land-grabbing, licentious and idolatrous revelries, extortion, and wanton cruelty to poor debtors were the principal crimes singled out from among the many. As a people they were terribly corrupt. The rulers were cruelly unjust. The poor were robbed, flailed, and bruised. They were like wheat between the upper and lower millstones. The innocent and helpless were sold for a pair of shoes. By fraudulent schemes, swindling speculations, drunkenness, venality, false balances, and deceitful weights, justice had disappeared. And the rulers in state and church, by their brazen wickedness, invoked the red horse of war, the pale horse of famine, and the black horse of pestilence. Bubble companies there were, as well as now, having "extortion for the assessor, fraud for the cashier, confusion for the accountant, concealment for the reporter, and oblivion for the remembrancer." The women shared in the general debauchery, and were contemptuously called by Amos "fat cows of Bashan, upon the mountain of Samaria."

During one of the bacchanalian wassails at Bethel his voice broke into articulate thunder, and crashed upon the self-congratulating confidence of the revelers. Though startled for a moment, they recovered, but heeded not the laconic utterances of a herdsman. And so they continued to loll on ivory beds, lounge on damask-covered couches, and empty their wine-bowls, indifferent to the impending catastrophe. But he kept on pouring out his ire until the court and priesthood were stung into madness, and arose to avenge the onslaught and to silence if possible the intruder.

Amaziah the high priest asked the king to interfere and to use his power in crushing the bold conspirator, the fierce and fiery revolutionist; for, said he, "The land is not able to bear

all his words." How true! This is what Lorenzo said of Savonarola, and Mary of John Knox, and the Spanish clergy of Castelar. This is what tradition says of the imperial march of scientific thought. This is the attitude of owls and bats toward the newest and brightest stars. It is the cry of corporate greed and predatory wealth. It is the cry of the boss in politics, of the fossil in theology, and the formalist in religion. But Jeroboam II. did not interfere, but permitted the high priest to order Amos back to Judah, where he might prophesy to his heart's content. Amaziah did so, and commanded him to flee, with the curt request not to prophesy any more in Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary and the king's abode. But not until he accomplished his work as a prophet did he obey. Before he departed he announced a heart-chilling doom on the priest of the golden calf. "Thy wife shall be a harlot in the city, thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a land that is unclean, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land." Revolution impended on the horizon like a cloud; while internal fires were raging, and giving forth sounds predictive of national overthrow. The glory of the dynasty had already faded into darkness to the Seer's vision. And while its outward form was still standing, it needed but little pressure to tumble it into a ruinous heap. But there were hypocritical ones, feigning great sorrow, simulating great love, and asking for the day of the Lord. But Amos tore away the mask and exposed their insincerity and duplicity. "What is the day of Jehovah to you? It shall be darkness and not light."

And, in view of the swift and irresistible coming of doomsday, he played upon his lyre Israel's requiem. It was the knell of a mighty ruin. With what splendor and intensity of

expression he paints the hurricane blast and earthquake shock of Israel's complete and final abandonment! The antithesis is startling. "I will slay the last of them with the sword; he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered. Though they dig into Sheol [the underworld], thence shall my hand take them; and though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down; and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them: and though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them; and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good."

Such is the picture of Israel's annihilation and abandonment. And yet in the midst of the great wreck shines the star of hope. The vision does not end in chaos. It contains a promise. Lifted into the unseen world of the real, Amos saw the incoming of a new order, a new day. He saw an age of unexampled prosperity and unutterable peace.

If we think of some vivid rainbow like unto emerald after a violent storm, or soft delicious strains of music after the noise of bells jangled out of tune; if we think of some ideal morning after a night of thunder and tempest, or a valley teeming with tropical luxuriance after drought, mildew, and yellow blight, then we can faintly understand with what sweetness the music of the final vision fell on the ears of the elect of ancient Israel.

"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt."

How eagle-eyed and eagle-winged the imagination of Amos to see beyond disaster and eclipse the sumptuous flora of a renovated land; and how keen his ear to hear the incommunicable hymn of the new age of economic emancipation! Even men royally endowed, possessing something of the primal insight, and unclouded by tradition, when staggering under the weight of some national calamity have been swept into the gulf of despair. "Roll up the map of Europe," said William Pitt when the film of pessimism passed over his eye in contemplating the successive victories of Napoleon. But no pessimistic strains mingled in the chorus-prophecy of Amos. While terrible in denunciation and in picturing future conditions, he visions objectively in striking imagery a new flora, tropical in fullness, equatorial in glory. The final vision of the prophecy is not unlike the lighted spot in one of Rembrandt's famous paintings. While the shadows are deep and dark, the center of the painting is radiant. And so he proclaims in the language of form and color, the evanescence of darkness and the eternity of light. In a similar way Amos gave to his countrymen, though depicting the night of fire and judgment, the lighted spot, assuring them that the light would widen until the gloom, shot through with golden arrows, would disappear.

But, was the vision ever realized? Not literally. Many of the pictures of the prophets, enchanting to the imagination and bracing to the heart, could no more be literalized than the piers of mighty bridges can be made of inverted rainbows. Yet, they were poetically true and illuminated faith and strengthened hope.

If we think of Judah's fairly prosperous condition under Uzziah and her escape from the Assyrian invasion; if we think of the return of the exiles from Babylon with shouts

and jubilations, the reconstruction of Jerusalem, and the cultivation of long-neglected fields and vineyards; if we think of the Maccabees defeating the Græco-Syrians and achieving their freedom and independence against infinite odds, we must confess that, in a literal sense, we have only a partial realization of the vision. And if we extend the time to Jesus, from Incarnation to Excarnation we cannot say that there were any such material, social, industrial, and religious conditions, so as to correspond with the prophet's beguiling picture of peace and plenty. And if we think of what occurred after the Resurrection, — the dotting of the Roman Empire with little communions called churches, and their enlargement and ascent to the throne of the Cæsars, — we cannot say the vision was literally fulfilled, for the Jewish nation had ceased to exist. Yet, James of First Church, Jerusalem, saw in the spread of Christianity and in the flowing together of different peoples, making possible and real socio-industrial, intellectual, and moral communes, its realization, — not of the letter, but of the spirit.

But many believe its full and final realization is yet to be seen on the soil of Palestine, and that the harvest, phenomenal as is the description, must surely be. Before such a state of things exists, however, the Turk must go, or change himself so as to harmonize with the best in modern civilization. And he is changing and passing from Dark-age ideas, antique shams, customs of immemorial age, and from the times of ignorance God winked at, into the open, where the air is spiced with freedom, and reverberant with the organ-roll of world-democracy.

The land of Palestine and the adjacent countries stretching to the Euphrates and the Tigris, though luxuriantly fertile, are now in comparative desolation. But, with modern ideas

and methods, millions of agriculturists can be amply sustained. The climate is salubrious, the rivers are navigable, the canals of the ancients are available for irrigation, the water is pure and abundant, the harbors are capacious, the winter is mild and brief, and the summer long enough for two harvests. We may yet see "the plowman overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed" on Palestinian soil. It is possible that there will be a harvest so abundant that before the crops are gathered, it will be time to plow again; the vintage of the vine so heavy that before the juice is extracted, it will be planting time. The seasons will be running into each other like colors and shades in the rainbow. What a harvest! All crops an hundred-fold. What a lovely picture! Is it not sufficient to inflame the imagination of the poet, fire the heart of the patriot, celestialize the speech of the orator, and send the Christian on his journey with irresistible momentum?

If there is such an ideal condition for Palestine, there must be such an ideal condition for the church. If, as some believe, the Apostolic age marked a golden era, and ever since has been cheapening down into silver, iron, and lead, then they had better study history and ascertain the facts. Even around the immaculate Christ there was a denier like Peter, an unbeliever like Thomas, and a traitor like Judas. Paul openly accused the church at Corinth of licentiousness and drunkenness. Its members turned the Lord's Supper into a bacchanalian wassail. Deadness and immorality prevailed in some of the Asiatic churches. In the very morning of Christianity, when the original halo was hanging around it, ere it had been divided into sects, or chilled by formalism, it seemed to have been necessary for Paul to say: "Be not weary in well-doing," and James to admonish: "Be patient unto the coming

of the Lord." The golden age of the church is before us. Its light is of the dawn and not of sunset. The era of unprecedented harvests is yet to come.

There is nothing comparable in magnetic power to a deep, genuine revival of spirituality, and such a revival is promised in the vision of the prophet. The fruit-bearing power of the church will be increased a hundred-fold. There will be a perpetual influx of souls, because of a perpetual influx of spiritual power.

And here is the secret of all missionary fire. Spiritual power when rising into the white heat of benevolent passion becomes executive and aggressive. The secret of Paul's missionary passion was in his vision of the glorified Christ. For in that vision he saw the hope of the world. The purpose that inspired him, and the faith that moved him, to such conquests, were the effects of which the heavenly vision was the cause. From that hour Paul carried no phantom Christ, but the radiant and ever-living Christ, inorbing in himself the glory of his divinity, and globing in himself all the excellences of ideal humanity.

When he saw the vision surpassing in brightness the sun at midday, he saw what the world would be with Christ enthroned. And so he went forth telling it, until the story overarched Greece with her arts, Rome with her laws, Alexandria with her science, and Jerusalem with her ceremonial. And wherever the vision orbs itself like a mighty cosmos in the brain of the church, there will be found missionary enthusiasm and the outgoings and ongoings of love pure and passionate. With such a vision of Christ, such a hope for humanity, and with such a love for the world, the church would blaze with inextinguishable glory, and move out into richer and broader fields.

Between reaping time and planting time there is an interval. The interval varies in length in different lands. It is longer in Palestine than it is in the temperate zone. Growth is so rapid in the tropics that the period is brief between sowing and reaping. And because of this there is a long interval between the song of the reapers and the merry notes of the plowman. But in the vision of the prophet there is no such interval. Harvest time lengthens into spring. Such spiritual luxuriance in the church would mean the supremacy of the kingdom of heaven. And an ideal condition for the world is nothing more than the kingdom of God objectivized in every sphere of life. And what are the signs of the times? A new expansion of intelligence; a new conscience, rectified and illumined; a finer sense of right; an insistent demand for justice; a finer thought of God; a finer conception of the universe, of inspiration, of redemption, of salvation; a new conception of retribution, quick, universal, irreversible, and unescapable; a new revelation of love and hope for all mankind however belated; and a new discovery of the unity of force, the unity of law, of an eternal and changeless order, the unity of life, the unity of religion, and the unity of God.

"And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."

These are some of the hopeful signs of the times. So we can join with Browning in his song of hope, that, like a sun, it will pierce—

"The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
That after Last returns the First,
Though a wide compass round be fetched;
That what began best can't end worst.
Nor what God blessed once prove accurst."

Humanity is rising, the horizon is broadening, the light is

increasing, the seers are banishing the potentates, the prophets are silencing the priests, and the moral ideal is far unto the sky, never to set. "Lift up your eyes," shouts Victor Hugo, "the supreme drama is enacting! The legions of light are in full possession of the sword of flame. The masters are going, and the liberators are coming in."

Industrially the world is rising Godward. Statistics prove that the percentage of profit to capital is smaller than ever before, while labor is getting a larger percentage of the total product. The home of the average toiler is better furnished than the castles of barons in the feudal age. Duplicates of great and costly paintings adorn the walls. Never were men so well clothed, so bountifully fed, so comfortably and artistically housed, and so liberally provided with books and musical instruments as now. The luxuries of a few years ago are the necessities of to-day.

Intellectually we have had immense gains. Never was intelligence so widely and uniformly diffused as it is to-day. One of the hopeful signs of the times is the high development of human sensitiveness to suffering. Nothing like it was ever known in the history of the race, and this sensitiveness extends to the bird, beast, man, and to Magdalene in the social cellar.

Religiously we are on the Mount of the Beatitudes. The professional fineries, the routined ceremonies, the shibboleths and mummeries of traditionalism, are no longer a part of the intelligent thinking of the world. They are crowded out by the incoming of spiritual religion. Never did men see the evil of sectarianism and the need for the reunion of Christendom as now.

In the work of temperance, social purity, industrial amelioration, prison reform, we have gained immensely, and so we are

traveling to that point in history when this world will be a garden abounding in the fairest flowers and finest fruits. For in—

"This Eden every flower shall bloom,
And every weed shall be a flower."

But note the latter part of the prophecy, — "The mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt." What bold and dramatic imagery the prophets used? We have seen cataracts and cascades, swift and impetuous rivers, rolling down the mountains, and sweeping before them trees and boulders as though they were but straws; but we have never seen wine rolling in streams, or welling up in pools. It was no uncommon thing in Palestine to see the woods flooded with honey. The flora was so sumptuous, that the bees in absorbing the sweetness were able to produce honey in great abundance. But here we have the daring figure of wine gushing from the rocks, the significance of which is something phenomenal, something extraordinary. This figure seems to mean marvelous triumphs of grace in unexpected localities and out-of-the-way places.

The melting of the hills seems to imply the elevation of the lowest and the purification of the vilest. It means there is hope for the harlot in her boudoir, for the gambler in his den, for the drunkard in his sty, and for the prisoner in his cell. It means that evil, however ancient and colossal, however incarnated in legislation and enthroned in statecraft, will fall with a crash.

Oh! when we see the church aflame with seraphic fire, her face lambent and auroral, her tongue electric, her movement majestic and irresistible, her altars thronged, her songs lyrical exclamations and irrepressible hallelujahs, then the mountains will drop their wine and the hills will melt.

Looking into the future in the light of this glorious vision, I can see picture encircling picture, each lovely in itself, but lovelier still combined. I can see the grand procession of humanity climbing the spiral road, like Dante's pilgrims, with rhythmic step reaching the flowery summit, and pouring forth unending song. I can see a race of men as pure as snow, as white as milk, as ruddy as rubies, and covered with the sheen of sapphires. I can see all the armies of the world disbanding, all the forts dismantling, all the ships of war converted into messengers of commerce, the sword a plowshare, the spear a pruning-knife, and the blood only that of purple wine. I can see the ships on every sea without a gun or drop of liquid death to cleave the heart with pangs, going on happy errands, the sailors singing hymns to universal peace. I can see a world at rest like a babe upon the breast, capital and labor harmonized, a song on every lip, a psalm in every heart. I can hear the poet-laureate of the "New-to-Be," singing of Africa's illumination, Asia's regeneration, and of a world delivered from all sorrow, purified from all evils, and bathed in love and light from the tropics to the poles. Then, in a larger sense than the Great Unknown ever dreamed of Israel's emancipation, we can apply the words: "Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for Jehovah will be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."