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THE MINOR PROPHETS.

I THINK that the Minor Prophets are less generally known than any other part of Holy Scripture. This may partly be owing to the name given them, which many take to imply that they are of less importance than the other Prophets. This, however, is a complete mistake. They are only called *minor* Prophets from their smaller size, and from the fact that, owing to the costliness of vellum in ancient days, they were not written on separate rolls, but in one complete volume. The name Minor Prophets is in fact due only to St. Jerome and St. Augustine, more than three centuries after Christ. However, be the cause what it may, ninety-nine clergymen out of a hundred would probably be unable to tell you, without referring again to their Bibles, what is the main theme of Obadiah, for instance, or of Zephaniah. My object, therefore, in this paper is a very simple one. It is merely to give the characteristics and main subject of each of the Minor Prophets in a form which may be easily remembered, and which may perhaps lead some readers to study their writings more carefully for themselves.¹

The order of the Minor Prophets in the Hebrew and in our versions is entirely unchronological. The exact epoch at which some of them wrote is still a matter of controversy. The majority of critics, however, think that they follow each

¹ In this paper I naturally go over the same ground as in my little book on the Minor Prophets in the Men of the Bible series. I may also refer to Dr. G. A. Smith's book on the Minor Prophets as full of the most valuable information.

other during three periods—the Assyrian epoch, the Chaldean epoch, and the period after the Exile. It is certain that to the first epoch belong Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum and Zephaniah. The only prophet who seems to have written in the Chaldean epoch was Habakkuk. Obadiah, Zechariah, Joel, Haggai, Malachi, and the book of Jonah belong to the post-Exilic age.

I. AMOS.

Turning now to the Prophets separately, the earliest written book of prophecy is that of Amos. The headings at the beginning of each book were probably added by post-Exilic editors, and some of them are decidedly erroneous. It is, however, certain that Amos wrote in the days of King Jeroboam II., probably about B.C. 755. The date given in the first verse, “two years before the earthquake,” does not help us, as there is no record of the year in which that earthquake took place. It has been said of Amos that “he towers like an earthborn Atlas on the confines of light and darkness”; and that his sudden appearance is one of the most wonderful in the history of the human race. He is the first prophet whose utterances were committed to writing, and his book therefore marks a memorable epoch. We know nothing about him personally except what he tells us of himself. He says that he was among the herdmen of Tekoa, and the word used for herdman occurs in only one other passage of Scripture, where Mesha, King of Moab is also called a *noked*. But the position of Amos was not that of an *owner* of flocks, but of a simple shepherd. The *nakad* was a kind of sheep with short legs and very ugly, but specially valuable for the quality of its wool. Amos also tells us that he was “a dresser of sycamore trees,” which was a very humble occupation. The word *dresser* is in the Septuagint “*knizōn*,” and in the Vulgate “*vellicans*,” which would mean perhaps a “pincher” of

sycomore fruit, which can only be ripened by puncturing it. Tekoa lies at the summit of a desolate hill, about twelve miles south of Bethel, and when this peasant of the South was summoned by the voice of God to carry His warnings and denunciations to Bethel, Samaria, and the northern kingdom in general, he had doubtless become aware of the corrupt condition of the northern tribes on his journeys to sell wool or sycomore fruit.

In the days when Amos prophesied the kingdom of Israel was at the very summit of earthly prosperity. Jeroboam II. was much the greatest, most warlike, and most prosperous of all the kings of Israel. But Amos was not deceived by the signs of outward prosperity, and he foresaw and prophesied that the ten Tribes had awakened God's anger by their sins, and that their doom was nigh at hand. There have been many other instances in which nations have seemed to reach the summit of their greatness on the very eve of their final ruin. Persia never seemed to occupy a more lordly position than in the days of Artaxerxes II.; nor Papal Rome than at the Jubilee of the year 1300, under Pope Boniface VIII.; nor Spain than in the days of Philip II.; nor France than under Louis XIV.; and yet in each instance those kingdoms were on the very verge of fatal disaster. It is curious to find that in the reign of our great Plantaganet Edward III., the poet of the people, Langland, in his *Vision of Piers Plowman*, saw through the veil of external prosperity exactly as the prophet Amos did.

Amos narrates for us the little episode in his history when Amaziah, the lordly high priest of the calf-worship at Bethel, took to the king an exaggerated report of his prophetic utterances, which had produced a profound impression on the people. The king did not deign to interfere; but the high priest contemptuously ordered the peasant seer to go back to his native Tekoa and there to prophesy as much as he liked. After this event we know

nothing of Amos except through unauthorized legends ; but the prophecies, which he probably wrote down at Tekoa, have come to us in all their magnificent force, and they inaugurate that reign of written prophecy which has been of such vast importance to the human race.

The book of Amos falls into well marked divisions. He begins (chaps. i. and ii.) with eight prophecies of doom against Syria, the Philistines, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, and finally Israel. In each instance he says that the doom shall fall for three transgressions and for four. But in each instance, except the last, he only mentions the fourth offence. I have no space to dwell on the chief sins for which the other nations are denounced, but the four crimes of Israel are trade in men, greedy oppression of the poor, idolatrous and licentious feasts, and ruthless luxury. The second division (iii., iv., v., vi.) is the great condemnation, rendered more overwhelming by the neglect of repeated warnings, which brought on the final doom.

After this there follow (vii. to viii. 3) five Visions—in the midst of which the little personal episode (vii. 10–11) is interposed. The first vision is of destroying locusts ; the second of consuming fire ; in the third, the prophet sees Jehovah standing on the city wall with the plumb line of destruction in His hand ; in the fourth vision a basket of summer fruit indicates that the end is at hand, and this vision is partly dependent on a play of words between “ *kaits* ” (summer) and “ *kits* ” (the end) ; the fifth vision (ix. 1–6) is one of irremediable destruction due to the neglect of many warnings. The prophecy ends (ix. 7–15), as is the case with many others, with a final word of hope and promise ; but many critics regard this as a later addition to the genuine “ oracle ” of Amos.

The sins denounced by Amos are those of greed, rapacity, cruelty, idolatry, drunkenness, and licentiousness, which are also denounced by all his successors. But all the earlier

Prophets alike insist on the necessity for *spiritual religion*, and on the emptiness of all ritual and external formalism.

Amos puts into the mouth of Jehovah the words (v. 21-24), "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream." The Rabbis also said that Amos had reduced the 613 commands of the Mosaic law to one, namely, "*Seek ye Me, and ye shall live.*"

There is but one direct quotation from this remarkable and impassioned peasant prophet in the New Testament. That is found in Acts xv. 15-17, where St. James quotes the prophecy that the fallen tabernacle of David should be restored and that the Jews should "possess the remnant of Edom." The Apostle, however, seems to have read "Adam" (man) for "Edom," since he says "that the residue of *men* might seek after the Lord."

II. HOSEA.

Of Hosea, as of most of the Minor Prophets, nothing is known except what he tells us of himself. He was the earliest prophet of the North who committed his prophecies to writing, and he certainly wrote in the later days of Jeroboam II. and in the reigns of his immediate successors. That he was a northerner is certain. He is influenced by the language of the beautiful northern poem "The Song of Songs," and all the places which he mentions—Gilead, Tabor, Bethel, Gilgal, Shechem, Samaria, Jezreel—belong to the land of Ephraim. His book falls into two divisions. The first three chapters turn mainly on his own domestic misery. All the remainder of the book deals with the sins

and punishment of Israel. These chapters may be arranged under five divisions, although they are not very distinctly marked. The first division (iv.-vi. 3) was probably written in the miserable reign of Zechariah; the second (vi. 4-vii. 16) in the reign of Menahem, after the assassination of Zechariah and Shallum; the third (vii. 1-ix. 9) was written after Menahem had become the vassal of Tiglath-Pilezer II.; the fourth (ix. 10-xi. 11) was written after Hoshea, the last king of Israel, had been carried captive to Babylon; the fifth (xii. 1-xiv. 9) was written before the final crash of ruin, but while hope was still possible,—for Gilead and Galilee are still alluded to as parts of the kingdom of Israel.

Hosea differs widely from his predecessor Amos. Amos, it has been said, “identified God with *law*, and is the prophet of Conscience,” but Hosea saw that *love* transcends law, and he is the prophet of Repentance. Both prophets denounce the sins of swearing, lying, killing, stealing, drunkenness, robbery, and licentiousness, but in Hosea there is none of the terrible sternness of Amos. It seems as if his voice was constantly broken by sobs while he bewails the vileness and hypocrisy and cruel marauding violence of the wicked priests and the corruption of religion at its very source.

The whole history of Hosea was decided by the tragic events which he narrates in the first three chapters. His wife Gomer turned out to be a woman of most immoral character. Since her second and third children were not *his* children, he called them Lo-Ruhamah (not pitied) and Lo-Ammi (not my people). After their birth Gomer deserted him to live with her paramour, who, after a short time, sold her in the open market-place as a slave. Hosea, however, still loved her and bought her back, at a slave's price, to live in his house, though no longer as his wife. In his relations to Gomer he saw an analogy of God's relation to guilty Israel, and he learnt the lesson that if the love of man can be so deep, the love of God is unfathomable and eternal.

Hence he is the first of the Prophets who "rises to the sublime height of calling the affection with which Jehovah regards His people by the name of *Love*." It has been said that if "Amos is the prophet of *morality*, Hosea is a prophet of *religion*." We find in his book a mingled despair and hopefulness: despair when he thinks of the idolatry and wickedness involved in the moral and political decay brought on by the wickedness of the kings, princes, and priests, and the tremendous punishment which it involved, which, he saw, would ultimately lead to their disastrous overthrow by "King Jareb" (i.e. King *Combat*), the ruthless king of Assyria. Nevertheless he sees a final hope of deliverance, and again and again, in language of marvellous beauty, he expresses his conviction that God will ultimately pardon. He makes Jehovah say, in words of deepest significance:

I will not execute the fierceness of my anger,
I will not again destroy Israel,
For I am God and not man.

Owing to the depth and impassioned conviction with which Hosea wrote he is more quoted in the New Testament than almost any of the Prophets. Our Lord Himself twice quoted the memorable words, "*I desired mercy and not sacrifice*," of which he bade the Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, to go and learn the meaning. St. Paul (Rom. ix. 25, 26) and St. Peter (1 Peter ii. 10) both allude to the names *Lo-Ruhamah* and *Lo-Ammi*. Our Lord (Luke xxiii. 30) and St. John (Rev. vi. 16, and ix. 6) quote Hosea's powerful metaphor, "They shall say to the mountains, 'Cover us,' and to the hills, 'Fall on us.'" St. Matthew applies to Christ the words (Hosea xi. 1) "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." St. Paul also (1 Cor. xv. 55) quotes the grand passage:

O Death, I will be thy plagues;
O Grave, I will be thy destruction.

Hosea, like other prophets, after many passages of mingled despair and hopefulness, ends with the words of a triumphant hope, which found its fulfilment only in the Messianic age.

III. MICAH.

The name Micah means "who is like Jehovah" and was not an uncommon name; but the only fact which we know about the prophet is the instructive story told us by Jeremiah (xxvi. 8-24). When the life of Jeremiah was endangered by the sternness of his prophecies, he was able to point to the precedent of Micah, whose still sterner prophecies, so far from bringing him into peril, had only brought about the reformation in the reign of Hezekiah, and had thus postponed the threatened doom. We learn from this that all prophecy was regarded as *conditional* and that the events predicted might be averted by timely repentance.

Micah calls himself a Morasthite, that is an inhabitant of Moresheth Gath in the Shephelah. He was a humble provincial, and became a sort of tribune of the people, who denounced in burning words the sin of greedy aristocrats—princes, priests, and false prophets. His message was to Jerusalem and Judah, and he points to the Assyrian, and the land of Nimrod, as the source of impending vengeance. His book may be arranged in four divisions :

- I. The threat of judgment (i.);
- II. The necessity of the judgment (ii. iii.);
- III. The promise of blessing (iv., v.); and
- IV. (vi., vii.) a dramatic colloquy of marvellous force.

Micah has several very remarkable passages. No prophet taught the nature of spiritual religion more powerfully than in the question addressed by the conscience-stricken people to Jehovah :

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord,
Bow myself before the High God ?
Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings,
With calves of a year old ?

Taketh Jehovah pleasure in thousands of rams,
In ten thousands of rivers of oil ?
Shall I give my firstborn for my guilt ?
The fruit of my body for the expiation of my soul ?

To which appeal, showing an utter misconception of God's nature, Jehovah answers :

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good,
And what doth the Lord require of thee,
But to do justly, and to love mercy,
And to walk humbly with thy God ?

Micah, in i. 10-16, has a remarkable series of plays upon words, which here there is no room to explain, but which is due to the fact that the old Prophets regarded language as frequently indicating the omens of destiny. It should, however, be pointed out that Micah's *Messianic* prophecies are remarkable for their distinctness. St. Paul, in Romans vii. 26, alludes to his prophecy of Messiah's kingdom (ii. 12, 13), and three of the Evangelists (Matt. ii. 5, 6, John vii. 42, and Luke xxiv. 47) refer to his remarkable prophecies that Migdal-Edar, "the tower of the flock," and Bethlehem-Ephratah were to be the scene of the advent of the promised Davidic King.

IV. ZEPHANIAH.

Zephaniah, unlike most of the other Minor Prophets—who were of origin so humble that they sometimes do not even mention the name of their father—was of royal descent. He was a great-great-grandson of Hezekiah and prophesied in the days of Josiah, king of Judah. The name of his father Kushi seems to point to the days in which Judah was seeking an alliance with Egypt against Assyria. The picture which he draws of the state of Judah is one so apparently hopeless that it was probably written before Josiah's reformation, which began in the twelfth year of his reign. His menaces are vague and general, and he is the prophet of

inevitable laws. It has been said that there is no hotter book than his in the Old Testament. He probably began to prophesy as a young man, for King Josiah was only the great-grandson of Hezekiah, and Zephaniah belongs to a generation later. This, however, is accounted for by the long reign of King Manasseh, who had no son till he was forty-five years of age. In Zephaniah, as in his predecessors, threatening, exhortation and promise are interwoven, and he shows little originality except that the result of advancing civilization makes him rather more cosmopolitan in his views. His book falls into three divisions :

- I. The menace (i. 1-18) ;
- II. The admonition (ii. 1-iii. 7) ;
- III. The promise (iii. 8-20).

I. *The Menace* begins with the singularly sweeping threat, "I will utterly consume all things from the earth, saith the Lord" (i. 2), but the threat is mainly aimed at Jerusalem and Judah. Jerusalem was evidently the home of Zephaniah, for he shows an intimate acquaintance with its topography. He speaks of the Fishgate, the New Quarter or Mishneh (see 2 Kings xxii. 14), and the Maktesh (i.e. the mortar), possibly the valley of the Tyro-Pæon. In Jerusalem he denounces (1) the *Idolaters*, the remnant of Baal worshippers, with their *Chemarim* or black-robed priests, together with the false priests of Jehovah (*Kohanim*) who worshipped the stars on their house tops; (2) the *Waverers*, who swore both by Jehovah and by Moloch; and the open *Apostates*. To all these is threatened a day of distress and darkness in which they shall stagger like blind men and be destroyed.

II. *The Admonition*. In this section he denounces the crimes of Gaza, Ashdod, Askelon, Ekron, the Cherethites, Kanaan, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, and the Ethiopians; but his main denunciation is against Nineveh, of which he says that "pelicans and hedgehogs shall pass the night upon her

capitals; the owl will sing in the windows, and the crow upon the threshold, Crushed, desolated." Jerusalem also, because she is a rebellious polluted city, shall suffer God's judgements with her fierce princes, her ravening judges, her treacherous prophets, and her hypocritic priests.

III. *The Promise* (iii. 8-20). The book closes with a promise to the remnant of the faithful, who shall be brought back, even from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, and shall offer to God a pure offering. Thus the bitter and sweeping menaces end with a word of hope in which even heathen nations are partly included. On the whole the main part of Zephaniah's book might be summed up in the words "*Dies irae, dies illa*"—"that day of wrath, that dreadful day."

V. NAHUM.

Of Nahum—whose name means "compassion"—we know nothing except that he was a native of Elkosh, which is by some placed in Galilee near Capernaum (which means "the village of Nahum"); by some in Assyria; and by some, with less probability, in Judah. He probably began to write in the days of King Manasseh before the final destruction of Nineveh. His whole prophecy might be summed up in the words, "*Woe to the city of blood.*" He has nothing to say of the sins of Israel or Judah, but is filled with intense abhorrence of the brutal and ruthless cruelties of the Assyrians. This is not astonishing, since no conquering power which the world has ever seen was more useless, more savage, or more terrible than Assyria and her kings, who filled the world with carnage, and depict, in long lines of sculpture, the frightful nonchalance with which they committed their diabolical atrocities.

The prophecy falls into three main divisions, which deal with God and His enemies; the fall of Nineveh; and the guilt which drew down the vengeance.

The prophecy of Nahum is full of lyric beauty and pictorial

vividness, and it found its fulfilment in the fearful catastrophe which overwhelmed the guilty city, when, on the last night of the siege, which was spent in drunken orgies, a breach was made in the walls by an overflow of the Tigris, and the effeminate king burnt himself alive in his palace. Nineveh disappeared so utterly that the army of Alexander the Great marched over its débris without knowing that a world-empire lay buried beneath his feet. In point of fact the remains of Nineveh first began to be revealed to the world by Layard and Botta after the year 1842.

If the prophecy of Nahum seems to be less directly spiritual than those of such prophets as Hosea, Micah or Habakkuk, we must remember that it forcibly brings before us God's moral government of the world, and the duty of trust in Him as the avenger of wrongdoers, and the sole source of security and peace to those who love Him.

F. W. FARRAR.

THE JEWS IN THE GRAECO-ASIATIC CITIES.

II.

IT will help to illustrate the position of the Jews in Tarsus, if we bring together the scanty facts known about the Jews in some other cities of Asia Minor.

V. THE JEWS IN EPHESUS.

Incorrect views on this subject are widely accepted.¹ The Ephesian constitution was settled by the Seleucid Antiochus II., 261-246 B.C.; and this settlement was appealed to by the Ephesian Greeks as authoritative in 15 B.C. There had, therefore, been no serious modification introduced after the time of Antiochus. Now a body of Jews were dwellers in Ephesus in 15 B.C. and the Greeks of

¹ Shared by the present writer, *EXPOSITOR*, December 1901, p. 403; corrected January 1902, p. 19.