

obligation to *them*. Wonderful is the lofty earnestness with which he deals with these vulgar topics, gilding the muddy levels with the glow and sparkle of his own ardent charity. But I think he did not hesitate to repeat their own slang; he had *not* "sponged upon" them, it was true, and, moreover, he did not *intend* to "sponge upon" them, however often he came to them. RAYNER WINTERBOTHAM.

IV. THE SCHOOLS OF THE PROPHETS AFTER THE TIME OF SAMUEL.

BEFORE quitting the subject of the Schools of the Prophets there are one or two points connected with the gradual declension of the order which seem to merit a careful consideration.

We pass by the case of Balaam, because, though he seems to have been a true prophet, yet he did not belong to the Israelite race and had no connection with the prophetic schools. Nor shall we say much of the old prophet of Bethel who acted the part of the tempter to the man of God who came from Judah. (1 Kings xiii.) We may very well believe that he had been educated in the schools founded by Samuel; for Bethel was one of their headquarters, and we find numerous scholars there in the time of Elijah. But, doubtless, he was one of those who had acquiesced in the worship of the golden calves set up by Jeroboam, arguing, perhaps, that they were but symbols of the true Deity, and to be regarded in the same light as the cherubs in the Temple of Solomon. The very reason, therefore, why he was so anxious that a prophet of higher character and more uncom-

promising views should lodge with him was that he might thereby obtain an indirect approval of his conduct. And this explains why the man of God was so strictly forbidden to touch food in Samaria. There was to be no compromise with Jeroboam's calves, but they were to be utterly condemned. Doubtless, however, the prophetic order, like the Christian ministry, had always contained unworthy as well as worthy members; and it was not in Jeroboam's time only that there were prophets who took but a low view of the responsibilities of their office. Still we must not suppose that all the prophets who remained in Israel after the disruption of the kingdom were men of this stamp. Though there was a constant migration of the more truly religious Israelites into Judah (2 Chron. xi. 16, 17), yet various causes must have conspired to keep many men of equal piety at their homes. And thus we find "the glorious army of martyrs" largely augmented by Israelite prophets (1 Kings xviii. 4) at the time when Jezebel determined to introduce the worship of Baal. Persecution, no doubt, purified them. Many who might have excused the worship of Jeroboam's symbols were ready to die rather than abandon Jehovah's service openly. And yet, even after Elijah's labours, we find the Jehovah-prophets at Samaria mere time-servers, except the one true man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, who had to pay, as true men always must, the penalty of his uprightness and manly dealing. (1 Kings xxii. 27.)

But we now come to one of the most instructive instances of the fall of men of whom high hopes had been entertained. We find in close attendance upon the person of Elisha one who discharged for him the

same offices which he himself had rendered to Elijah, and who naturally looked forward to succeed to his office. Gehazi bears even a prophetic name, as the word signifies "the valley of vision," and we find him entrusted by Elisha with a mission of a high character. When the Shunammite, who had lost by a sunstroke the child with which she had been blessed in answer to Elisha's prayers, had hurried to the Prophet and narrated her grief, he bids Gehazi take his prophetic staff, and hasten to the child, and lay it upon its face. From the manner in which the command is given, as also from the command not to salute any one by the way, it seems likely that Elisha expected more to follow than really took place. The words also of Gehazi, "The child is not awaked," look as if he too had expected that when touched by Elisha's staff the Shunammite's son would revive. Gehazi's mission was, in fact, a failure; but the fact that he was entrusted with it shews that he was thought worthy of being Elisha's official representative. He was not merely minister to Elisha, but also Elisha's minister, by whose instrumentality the Prophet's commands were executed.

The reason, doubtless, why Gehazi's mission was unsuccessful was his personal unworthiness, revealed subsequently by his covetous dealing with Naaman the Syrian. Like Judas among the Apostles, and Demas among the disciples of St. Paul, he loved the things of this world too well, and so was unable to resist the sight of the rich treasures which the stranger had offered to his master. But we shall lose the whole point of the narrative if we suppose that Gehazi held the position of an ordinary servant. He was to Elisha

what Elisha had been to Elijah. At Elisha's death he expected to be endowed with similar powers. Elisha had not certainly known that his master's dignity would descend to him, but he had prayed that such might be the case (2 Kings ii. 9); and Gehazi had, without doubt, supposed that he would succeed in like manner to Elisha's office. Probably he had already taken part with him in the management of the prophetic schools, and we may be sure that he had been originally chosen because he had shewn himself to be a man of much promise, endowed with all the natural faculties necessary for the able discharge of his high duties. But as Saul, a man of the greatest natural gifts, when called to the kingdom ruined all his earlier promise by his wilfulness and want of self-control, so did Gehazi ruin his hopes, in a meaner way, by letting the love of money gain possession of his soul.

The case of Baruch has several points of comparison with that of Gehazi. He was a nobleman by birth, being the grandson of the Maaseiah, who was governor of Jerusalem at the beginning of the reign of Josiah, and brother of Seraiah, the king's chamberlain. (Jer. lxi. 59.) He, nevertheless, filled the office of scribe to the prophet Jeremiah, and we thus have an indirect corroboration of the Patristic view that Jeremiah himself was of high birth, and the son of the chief priest Hilkiah. We also see the gradual advance of social refinement. The Prophet's minister no longer pours water upon his master's hands (2 Kings iii. 11), but serves him in a higher capacity. All menial service, however natural in simpler days, would gradually be looked upon as unseemly

for one who was marked out as the future holder of a high and sacred office. Now it seems certain that Baruch had looked forward to being Jeremiah's successor. In Jeremiah xlv. we are expressly told that he had sought "great things for himself," and Jeremiah comforts him under his disappointment, and yet not in a very consolatory way. There is none of that praise which we might have expected from the master whom he had served so well, and, above all, he is warned that the great things he had hoped for, even the gift of prophecy, would never be granted him. Why this was so we cannot tell. Baruch seems to us, as we read the pages of Jeremiah, to have been a true and faithful servant and an earnest worshipper of Jehovah. His ambition alone excepted, all else in his character is noble and praiseworthy; and even after the assurance that he would not succeed to his master's office we find him sharing Jeremiah's misfortunes and accompanying him into Egypt. (Jer. xliii. 3-6.) Yet the higher gift of being himself Jehovah's mouthpiece is steadily denied him. It is plain from the narrative that Baruch had looked upon this gift as well within the compass of his reasonable hopes, and had been grieved when it was withheld. Oriental traditions even go so far as to represent him as so indignant at its refusal that he apostatized from Jehovah's service and adopted the tenets of Zoroaster. Though all credence is to be denied to these traditions, they nevertheless serve to shew the Oriental estimate of the place which Baruch held in Jeremiah's service, and the nature of the relation which existed between the Prophet (who was recognized as the head of the order) and the minister

who was constantly in attendance upon him. I may add that, unless there had been something real in the prophetic gift, it is hard to see how Baruch could have sustained this disappointment. If, on the contrary, it was a special grace from God, it would be given or withheld as He saw fit. Certainly we find that Elijah could not bestow it, though it was granted to his minister Elisha. (2 Kings ii. 10.)

But though this was so, yet false claimants to the office did rise up, and one of the greatest trials in the declining days of the Monarchy, to those who wished to be led right, must have been the immense number of men who, on grounds more or less specious, claimed to speak in Jehovah's name. From the very first this difficulty had been foretold, and the command given that the prophet who incited them to abandon Jehovah's service should be put to death. (Deut. xiii. 1-5.) To lessen the danger, all divination and fortune-telling had been sternly forbidden; for there is no surer mark of falsehood than the indulging in unholy attempts to pry into the future, and the people were undoubtedly to understand that all claim to prophecy connected with divination, was absolutely, and, in all cases, untrue. (See Jer. xxix. 8; Micah iii. 6, 7, and compare Isa. xlv. 25; Ezek. xiii. 23; Zech. x. 2.) But though such a test would be of great practical value, still, so great is the general desire to know the future, and so ready are men to be deceived, that possibly only the more thoughtful were saved by this prohibition from becoming the prey of designing men.

Yet, as a whole, the prophetic order maintained a high character until the later days of the Monarchy.

No doubt there were many unworthy men in it, or men who aspired to belong to it for unworthy motives—men of the Gehazi type—even in its best days; but they were too few in number to depress their fellows to their level, and the mass were men “of whom the world was not worthy” (Heb. xi. 38): for I may remind the reader that the “sheep-skins and goat-skins” spoken of in this passage of Holy Scripture are the terms used in the Septuagint for the dress worn by the prophets. Thus Elijah’s mantle is, in the Septuagint, called his sheep-skin; and the wanderings here described refer to the constant journeys taken by him and other prophets in visiting the prophetic schools, or in preaching, like Amos, throughout the whole country. Now up to the time of Isaiah the record of the prophets is a noble one; but in his days we find the people eager to corrupt them and make them minister to their prejudices: “This is a rebellious people, . . . which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits” (Isa. xxx. 9, 10). And we gather from the Prophet’s words that the temptation had not altogether failed of its effect.

His contemporary Micah draws a harsher picture. He sets before us the prophets as one of the three leading orders in the State, but as abusing their power to further their worldly interests. At Jerusalem, he says, “the heads judge for reward, and the priests teach for hire, and the prophets divine for money” (Micah iii. 11). They doubly, therefore, degraded their office. They divined,—a thing absolutely wrong and positively forbidden; and they divined for gain.

Yet this would not make them of any political importance. They were content to get money in a mean way ; but still it was one that would give them influence only with besotted and superstitious people. In another place he represents them as exercising a sort of terrorism over their countrymen. "The prophets," he says, "make God's people err : they bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace ; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him " (Micah iii. 5). Now, before this was possible, they must have possessed considerable influence, but probably only the lower classes of the people would be thus afraid of them. By working upon their superstitious fears they forced them to bring them presents of food and money ; but the prophets who thus acted must have been of the class of diviners, and their influence was due to the high character not of themselves, but of the order as a whole.

Probably in Micah's days but few prophets had so entirely lost all respect for themselves and their office ; but the fact that there were any prophets thus fallen must have greatly struck one coming from a remote village, to whom everything at Jerusalem was new and surprising. But later on, in the days of Jeremiah, false prophecy had become a great social and political evil, and he speaks of it with righteous indignation : "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land ; the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule at their hands " (Jer. v. 30, 31). It had been the especial duty of the prophet to magnify the spiritual lessons of the law ; to warn men that obedience is better than sacrifice ; and that what God

requires is that man should do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with his Maker. But now it seems that they induced the people to put their trust in the magnificent restoration of the Temple by Josiah; and instead of aiding Jeremiah in teaching that private reformation and penitence must accompany the king's public acts (Jer. iv. 3, 4), they taught that Josiah's efforts alone would suffice to preserve the realm from danger (Chap. vii. 4), and that the Chaldean attack, threatened by Jeremiah, would be as certainly frustrated as that of Sennacherib in the days of the pious Hezekiah. They thus lulled the people into a fancied security, and frustrated the more heart-searching and humbling lessons of the true prophet.

As the kingdom became more and more degenerate, the false prophets increased in boldness. Thus, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, we find Hananiah loudly foretelling that in about two years the power of Nebuchadnezzar would cease, and the vessels which he had taken away from Jerusalem, when he carried Jeconiah prisoner to Babylon, be restored, together with that unfortunate young prince. Apparently such favourable predictions were believed only too readily, and Hananiah, coming from Gibeon, a city of priests, and probably himself a priest as well as a reputed prophet, would exercise no little influence on the councils of the king. At all events, we find that Jeremiah is content to give him a meek and patient answer. It is only subsequently that he foretells his death, and declares that Jehovah had not sent him; and though the confederacy of the smaller kingdoms against Babylon, which Hananiah had apparently come

to Jerusalem to further, was not formed at that time, yet we can have little doubt that the hopeless rebellion of Zedekiah was the result of the vain expectations raised by men speaking falsely in Jehovah's name. Even if the king and his wiser counsellors did not believe their words, yet their words kept the minds of the people in a perpetual ferment; and the war party no doubt eagerly supported these false prophets, and took care that their prediction should be made known to all the dwellers in Jerusalem.

Nor were the Jews free from this pest at Babylon. It was Jeremiah's wise advice to them to prepare themselves for a lengthened sojourn there; but men of high position among the captives, especially Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, attempted to prevent this by promising them early deliverance in Jehovah's name. And probably their words found ready credence. Men smarting under the wrong of being torn from a beloved home would regard it as a patriotic act to believe that the Divine vengeance would overtake their conqueror. Possibly the cruel fate of those men whom Nebuchadnezzar roasted alive (Jer. xxix. 22) may have warned the people against too implicitly trusting their words. And, what was better, the exiles were men of far deeper piety than the people left behind at Jerusalem (Jer. xxiv. 5, 8), and had among them leaders who knew how to distinguish between the false and the true. Hence, though Jeremiah's words were of painful import, and bade the exiles expect no deliverance within the lifetime of those who had been carried away, yet they were believed. And thus the captivity at Babylon became the turning-

point in the nation's history, and the plague of false prophets, which had been its bane in the years which preceded the fall of Jerusalem, and had rendered all the labours of Isaiah and Jeremiah for a national repentance vain, ceased for ever. Prophecy revived in its full purity after the return from exile, but only for a time; and then, having done its work, there was silence for four hundred years. Then appeared the Baptist, wearing the prophet's garb, preaching in the power of Elias, as the forerunner of Him of whom Moses had said, "A Prophet shall the Lord thy God raise up unto thee, from among thy brethren, like unto me: unto him ye shall hearken" (Deut. xviii. 15).

Yet how active they were at the commencement of the exile we learn not only from Ezekiel (xiii. 2; xxii. 25), but from a remarkable narrative contained in the Book of Jeremiah (xxix. 24-32). A false prophet at Babylon, named Shemaiah, had the audacity to write to Zephaniah, the deputy High Priest at Jerusalem, and reprove him for not restraining Jeremiah by force. It was his duty, he said, to silence such madmen, and confine them in the stocks, and put a collar round their necks, and subject them to such other indignities as might deprive them of the respect of the populace. Zephaniah did not attend to the letter, but, on the contrary, read it to Jeremiah, and put him on his guard against Shemaiah's machinations; but the narrative shews that this false prophet must have had no mean opinion of himself when he could thus write to those in high authority at Jerusalem in the expectation that his letter would induce them to inflict disgraceful indignities upon a man of such high standing and worth as the prophet Jeremiah.

In conclusion, we find Samuel's schools productive of the most remarkable results. They were the means, first of all, of raising the Israelites to a high state of intellectual culture. From the time of David to that of Hezekiah, when the Assyrians began to degrade and barbarize the land, we have the record in the Scriptures of a degree of culture, especially in Judah, far in advance of that which then obtained even in Egypt. But, secondly, from these schools sprang the order of prophets. Now, even if we grant that there were always among them men who fell short of the high standard of the body as a whole, and that, finally, the fall of the kingdom was hastened by the existence of numerous false claimants to the prophetic dignity, yet the mass of the members were distinguished for fervent piety, for pure and holy lives, and for a self-denying love of their country. And if such were the mass, what shall we say of those upon whom rested no ordinary but the special gifts of the Holy Ghost? Where besides shall we find such a series of writers whose words still speak to us with authority and power? Surely it is no common thing that we should be able to give this reverence to books written more than two thousand years ago; and that all the ingenuity which has been exercised to lower them in our esteem should have produced such trifling results! Looked at in any way, the Bible is the most remarkable phenomenon in the world; and in producing this extraordinary work the chief human means employed by God were Samuel's schools.

R. PAYNE SMITH.