

## THE PROPHETS AND SACRIFICE.

MUCH as those who have been willing to learn, have learned from the later critical school of Old Testament interpreters, there is one point at which many have stumbled, and that is their teaching with regard to sacrifice. According to them, the prophets had no esteem for it as a part of the true religion. Instead of valuing it, they repudiated it, and their utterances in regard to it, formerly taken to be only strongly rhetorical condemnations of sacrifice as a substitute for morality and penitence, are to be pressed as rejections of any obligation to sacrifice at all. And the reasons why this teaching is hard to receive are plain. In all ancient religions sacrifice was indispensable. So far as is known, no other mode of worship suggested itself to many nations, and all the evidence would seem to show that the Semitic races especially could not have conceived a regular and stated approach to God without it. Further, in the later religion of Israel, the intimate connection established between sacrifice and the forgiveness of sins is not only manifest, but it is fundamental, and in passing to Christianity, that more than retains its importance, for, hitherto, the dominating thought of Christian theology has been the sacrificial and atoning nature of the death of Christ. *A priori*, therefore, it seems to many hardly likely that the religion of Jehovah should have been meant to be from the beginning independent of the one universally understood mode of worship, or that the foundation of the thought which has in the long run proved dominant in true religion should have been, during the whole history of Israel as a nation, regarded as an inheritance from heathen-

ism which was merely coldly tolerated. Of course, it is *possible* that it may have been so. It may be that sacrifice was in no way a condition of the Divine covenant with Israel; that the prophets denounced it when it was put forward as such; but that after the exile it was adopted by the prophets even, as essential, and thus came to be the central idea of Christianity. Moreover, it is quite possible to hold that view, and still to hold firmly the New Testament connection between sacrifice and forgiveness; but though these things are possible they are not easy, and the difficulty of holding such a position has suggested a re-examination of the question.

To illustrate the critical position, I shall quote from Professor Robertson Smith, not only because he is the writer to whom in this whole matter I am most indebted, but also because the lucidity and power with which he habitually states his views, and his reverently religious spirit relieve criticism of one half its difficulty. In *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, 2nd Ed. p. 293, he states his view thus: "Spiritual prophecy in the hands of Amos, Isaiah, and their successors has no such alliance with the sanctuary and its ritual" as mere official prophecy had. "It develops and enforces its own doctrine of the intercourse of Jehovah with Israel, and the conditions of His grace, without assigning the slightest value to priests and sacrifices." He then quotes Isaiah i. 11 *seq.* and Amos v. 21 *seq.*, and proceeds thus: "It is sometimes argued that such passages mean only that Jehovah will not accept the sacrifice of the wicked, and that they are quite consistent with a belief that sacrifice and ritual are a necessary accompaniment of true religion. But there are other texts which absolutely exclude such a view. Sacrifice is not necessary to acceptable religion. Amos proves God's indifference to ritual by reminding the people that they offered no sacrifice and offerings to Him in the wilderness during those forty

years of wandering which he elsewhere cites as a special proof of Jehovah's covenant grace (Amos ii. 10, and v. 25). Micah declares that Jehovah does not require sacrifice; and He asks nothing of His people, but to do justly and love mercy, and walk humbly with their God" (Micah vi. 8). And Jeremiah vii. 21 *seq.* says in express words, "Put your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat flesh. For I spake not to your fathers, and gave them no command in the day that I brought them out of Egypt concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people," etc. (Comp. Isa. xliii. 23, *seq.*). The position here laid down is perfectly clear. When the prophets positively condemn the worship of their contemporaries, they do so because it is associated with immorality, because by it Israel hopes to gain God's favour without moral obedience. This does not prove that they have any objection to sacrifice and ritual in the abstract. But they deny that these things are of positive Divine institution, "or have any part in the scheme on which Jehovah's grace is administered in Israel. Jehovah, they say, has not enjoined sacrifice." Again at p. 303: "What is quite certain is that, according to the prophets, the Torah of Moses did not embrace a law of ritual worship by sacrifice, and all that belongs to it is no part of the Divine Torah to Israel."

In proceeding to test the question whether Jeremiah, and the author of Micah vi., and Amos, teach that God never commanded sacrifice, that it formed no part of the Mosaic Torah, or not, I would start from the book of Deuteronomy, written, as is now generally believed, in the period between the beginning of Manasseh's reign and Josiah. The author of Micah vi. was probably an older contemporary of its author, and Jeremiah took an active part in the reforms which it occasioned. Let us see then whether they are likely to have held the views attributed

to them. As every one will admit, Deuteronomy commands sacrifice in the name of Moses and in the name of God. Now, in chap. x. v. 12, we have its version of the Divine requirements. "And now, Israel, what doth Jehovah thy God require of thee, but to fear Jehovah thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of Jehovah and His statutes which I command thee this day for thy good." The commandments and statutes here referred to are those contained in Deuteronomy, chaps. 12-26, and include the commands regarding sacrifice. But if so, from the time of Isaiah, when Deuteronomy was accepted by the nation as the completest expression of the will of God, the view that ritual and sacrifice as well as penitence were essential things in true religion, and had been Divinely commanded, must have been known, and not only known, but accepted as the orthodox opinion. Now, whatever the prophets before that time may have felt, those who lived after it must have accepted this view, unless they denied to Deuteronomy the authority which it claimed, and which the nation conceded to it. But Jeremiah was among that number, and he least of all can be supposed to have repudiated the authority of the newly found book. He had helped to introduce it. His style and thought are so closely moulded on it that some have even thought he may have been its author. How then is it possible that in the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, when he wrote the above-quoted passage, viz. vii. 21 *seq.*, he should have meant to repudiate with energy the very teaching which he had welcomed as from God in Josiah's day. Professor Robertson Smith<sup>1</sup> escapes the difficulty by saying, indeed, that while Jeremiah accepted the moral precepts of the Deuteronomic code as part of the covenant of the Exodus, he does not regard it in the light of a *posi-*

<sup>1</sup> *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 371.

*tive* law of sacrifice. "The ritual details of Deuteronomy are directed against heathen worship; they are negative, not positive." But, putting aside the difficulty that, even so, sacrifice would be implicitly if not explicitly a part of the covenant of the Exodus and therefore implicitly commanded, we have to ask in what way the command to sacrifice is negative in Deuteronomy? It is quite true that the 12th chapter states first the heathen manner of worship, which is to be put an end to, and proceeds thus: "Ye shall not do so unto Jehovah your God, but unto the place which Jehovah your God shall choose . . . thou shalt come, and thither shall ye bring your burnt-offerings and your sacrifices, and your tithes," etc. So far sacrifice is only taken for granted, but how is *v.* 11 to be interpreted: "Thither shall ye bring all that I command you, your burnt-offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and the heave-offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto Jehovah"? Clearly it means that burnt-offerings, sacrifices, tithes and heave-offerings, are regular dues commanded by Jehovah in distinction from vows which are not commanded. Moreover, the word used for commanding is *צִוִּיתִי*, consequently it is a *Mitzwah* that these sacrifices, etc., should be brought, and the *Mitzwoth* in Deuteronomy are distinctly and always part of the covenant between Israel and Jehovah. That this interpretation is not strained, is made clear by other passages. The people are absolutely commanded to bring sacrificial tithes (*chap. xiv. v. 22 seq.*), and to sacrifice the firstlings of their flocks (*chap. xv. 19 ff.*). The truth is, that while sacrifice is mentioned in Deuteronomy mainly because the author wished to direct that it should be carried on at one central sanctuary, it is so mentioned as to imply that it is an acknowledged part of Israelite religion, and in the passages quoted is distinctly asserted to have been commanded by God. Consequently, to repudiate sacrifice as commanded

by God is to repudiate Deuteronomy, and I must confess that almost any interpretation of this passage would, for me, be preferable to one which wrought such havoc with the prophet's consistency and cast such contempt upon the words of men of God who had preceded him. Disappointment at the death of Josiah, unless it reached the point of absolute unfaithfulness to Jehovah, cannot explain it. The very utmost that could be said on that score is what Professor Cheyne has said in his *Jeremiah*, p. 107. There he expresses the view that after the great catastrophe, while one party returned to idolatry, is that which had previously given prosperity, another took up the old rationalistic view, that the cause of the disaster was that sacrifice had not been sufficiently insisted upon in Deuteronomy. In opposition to this last view, Jeremiah ceased to emphasize the priestly side of the book, and "confined himself to reproducing its moral spiritual and more prophetic portions." But that is a very different thing from denying that sacrifice had ever had any positive Divine command behind it. For Jeremiah, I venture to think, such a position was impossible, and, as we shall see immediately, there is no need to put any such interpretation on his words.

With regard to the passage in Micah, the case is not so clear, but while there is nothing compelling us to interpret utterance as a repudiation of sacrifice, there is much that bars such an interpretation. The author of the 6th chapter of Micah is supposed to have lived some time in Manasseh's reign. If so, he would probably be a contemporary of the author or editor of Deuteronomy. In any case, we may presume that he would be affected by the general ideas which were then current among the faithful servants of Jehovah. Now, we know that precisely at that time prophets and priests were drawing nearer to each other than perhaps ever before, and the views embodied in

Deuteronomy were the programme of this alliance. If then this prophet means by this passage to exclude the view that sacrifice was part of the Divine Torah for Israel, he must have stood alone in those days, and not only alone, but in pronounced opposition to his own party. In Manasseh's time that is scarcely possible. When Jerusalem was filled "from lip to lip" with the blood of martyrs, and all faithful men had to go into hiding, the probability is that they were welded into perfect unity. If not, then hostility must have assumed that fierce and embittered tone which has always distinguished the internecine strifes of a small and persecuted party, and would have expressed itself with a force and directness which is quite absent here. All the circumstances, therefore, are hostile to Prof. Robertson Smith's view of the passage, and unless there are strongest reasons in the passage itself binding us to that view, I do not think it should be entertained.

But if we cannot show by Deuteronomy that the author of Micah vi. *must* have held the view that sacrifice had been commanded by Jehovah, we can show that both he and Amos must have done so by reference to the previous law. Almost all the legislation contained in Deuteronomy is a mere repetition, with adaptations to new times, of the law contained in the Book of the Covenant. Now, in that, altars of sacrifice are provided for, and the provision stands at the head of the special laws which immediately follow the Decalogue. Further, the offering of first-fruits, the ritual requirement of three great yearly feasts, and the direction, "Thou shalt not offer the blood of MY sacrifice with leavened bread, neither shall the fat of MY feast remain all night unto the morning," are contained in this first legislation. Consequently, no prophet, writing after these laws were put in force and regarded as Mosaic, could possibly say that sacrifice had not been positively enjoined. But the Book of the Covenant is put down by advanced

critics like Cornill as "den Niederschlag des Gewohnheitsrechtes der älteren Königszeit," the deposit of the customary law of the earlier regal period, and is assigned to the beginning of the 9th century at latest. Hillel, on the other hand, would put it before the regal period, and E, in which it is embedded, before Amos. In either case, it was long before any of the writing prophets, so that Amos even, much more the author of Micah vi., can hardly have meant to declare that sacrifice had never been enjoined by Jehovah. The Elohist inserts it in his book as ancient Mosaic law, and there can be no reasonable doubt that Amos and all the prophets regarded it as such. In any case, it was binding law, divinely given, and as it contains commands for sacrifice, as well as directions for ritual, they cannot have meant to deny that. The fully developed ritual law of Leviticus, therefore, may have been unknown to the prophets, probably was so, but some Divine enactments in regard to sacrifice must have been known to them all. Nor does it weaken this fact at all, that the directions of sacrifice and ritual contained in the first Deuteronomic legislations may well have been taken over from pre-Mosaic times. A great proportion of the custom and law which ruled the life of Israelites as the people of Jehovah was taken over in that very way; but it was none the less Mosaic and divinely given on that account. All that Moses sanctioned of ancient practice and custom was lifted up into the sphere of the true religion, and the distinction so many now make between that which was of purely Mosaic origin and that which was only adoptively so, is one which is not known, I venture to think, to the Old Testament writers. All their law was equally from Jehovah whatever its immediate source or its date may have been, since those in Jehovah's confidence had promulgated it on lines which Moses had laid down.

But on general grounds also we must come to the same conclusion. When the full Levitical law was introduced, sacrifice was doubtless made more prominent than it had been before, and its significance was deepened, but it can hardly have been then first enjoined as a necessary part of the cultus. For no religion in ancient times could exist without sacrifice. So far as is known, that was the universal way in which religious feeling expressed itself. From the day that Israel became Jehovah's people, and He was acknowledged as their God, sacrifices must have been offered to Him; indeed a sacrifice to Him was the occasion of their asking permission to go into the wilderness; and had there been no mention of them, we should have had to fill them in as one of the necessities of the position. Moreover, the priestly lot itself presupposes sacrifice. The direction the priests gave was supposed to come from Jehovah at their particular shrine. It was because of the peculiar nearness of God to this place that they could give it, and this nearness of God, this communion with Him, was kept up by sacrifice. The whole direction of moral life, consequently, was inseparably bound up with sacrifice. Robertson Smith himself asserts this in his *Semitic Religion*. "Within a sacred land or tract," he says, "it is natural to mark off an inner circle of intenser holiness, where all ritual restrictions are stringently enforced." "Such a spot of intenser holiness becomes the sanctuary or place of sacrifice, where the worshipper approaches the god with prayers and gifts, and seeks guidance for life from the divine oracle." And this combination of sacrifice and oracle was peculiarly congruous with Hebrew ideas. Whenever a Theophany is mentioned in Scripture, those who behold it offer sacrifice, and wherever Jehovah had once revealed Himself, He might be again expected, and sacrifice might be offered there (Exod. xx. 24). Even Wellhausen seems to admit this when he says (*History of Israel*, p. 397), "If Moses did

anything at all, he certainly founded the sanctuary at Kadesh and the Torah there." If oracle, then, was an essential part of the religion of Jehovah, sacrifice must have been so also ; and on this line of proof, too, the belief that Jehovah had never commanded sacrifice would seem to be refuted. It is true, of course, that there is no distinct assertion in either the Book of the Covenant or in Deuteronomy of the immediate and intimate connection between forgiveness of sin and sacrifice established by the Levitical law. Sacrifice is rather dealt with as a part of the divinely appointed way of approaching Jehovah acceptably than as a special provision for atonement, reconciliation between God and man. If, therefore, the view we had been combating had been limited to this, that sacrifice had existed before Mosaism, that it was commanded by Jehovah only in the sense that it was taken over and stamped with approval as part of the Mosaic system, but that the deep atoning significance which it has in the Levitical legislation was not at first attached to it, much might be said for it. Further, it is obvious that this is all that is necessary for the establishment of the critical position in regard to the date of the Levitical law as we now have it. But when the prophets are said to deny to sacrifice and ritual any divinely given place in the religion of Israel, the denial is pushed too far, and overreaches itself.

But if the interpretation put upon the crucial passages we have been discussing by the latest critical school is to be rejected, in what sense ought they to be taken ? The passage in Micah is perhaps the strongest for the opposite view, for though it does not state that sacrifice had never been divinely commanded, it does seem to declare that Jehovah does not now require it, and we shall take that first. The prophet represents Jehovah as calling His people to judgment before the world of nature. In *vv.* 2-4 He shows that He has been true to His part of the covenant. In *vv.* 6 and 7 the

people, touched by this exhibition of His goodness, ask anxiously and penitently what they can do to please Him. If multiplicity of offerings, and rivers of oil, or even the lives of their first-born children would be acceptable, they would gladly give them. This shows so miserable a misapprehension of Jehovah's character as a moral being, such a slavish view of their relation to Him, that He does not answer them. Then the prophet exhorts them, saying that being as he had described them to be, utterly ungodly and immoral in their conduct, while thinking that their standing with Jehovah is secured by their sacrifices, not more ritual zeal, but "to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God," are the things Jehovah demands of them at this crisis in their history. There is no repudiation of sacrifice *per se*. The question of its origin and value does not seem to me to be raised at all. The thing God requires of this people at this time is obviously not sacrifice—they were only too zealous about that side of their duty already—it is justice and mercy and faith they are deficient in, and Jehovah's demand upon them is for these things. That is in itself a perfectly fair interpretation; and seeing that the existence of the Book of the Covenant before this forbids us to believe that the Prophet means that sacrifice was no part of true religion, I think we must accept it. Moreover, so taken, this passage is entirely in harmony with the parallel one in Deuteronomy x. 12 and 13. Both express the same protest against trust in mere sacrifice without true fear of Jehovah and regard for His laws. The only difference is that in Micah, as is natural in a passage so highly rhetorical, the alternative is stated less guardedly, and with less reserve than in the introduction to the revised law. As for Jeremiah vii. 21-23, there are two ways of interpreting it legitimately. The prophet may mean, as has ordinarily been supposed, that Jehovah, when He brought the people out of Egypt,

gave no command concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices comparable in emphasis with that by which he enjoined them to obey His voice. The figure of speech employed would in that case be entirely scriptural—parallel to that exemplified in our Lord's words, "If any man cometh unto Me and hateth not his own father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." And this would be in accord with Deuteronomy, for there the moral commands of the Decalogue are given with great emphasis first, as having the chief place in the covenant. The second interpretation is that Jeremiah is reasoning here upon the letter of Deuteronomy, just as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews reasons from the narrative of Scripture when he says that Melchizedek was "without father, without mother, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." In saying so, he is not giving us new facts about this kingly priest, from authorities other than Genesis. He is only using the story as it stands in Genesis xiv. and deducing lessons from its form. He is describing the "picture of him presented in Scripture," and drawing inferences from the fact that the inspired record elects to present Him so. Similarly Jeremiah is not giving us new information founded upon other than Biblical authorities; he is simply pointing out what Deuteronomy states. In the narrative of what took place at Sinai Jehovah did not speak and command the fathers concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. He spoke only the Decalogue, and the other ordinances were spoken by Moses. What Jehovah spoke Himself must, Jeremiah thinks, have been the principal thing, and as the Decalogue is exclusively moral, then morality must be of more importance than sacrifice, which was only commanded later, and through a mediator. Either of these interpretations would meet the demands of sound exegesis, and it seems certain that he

meant it in some such sense. With regard to Amos's statement about the wilderness journey, the same explanation would hold. He is not giving a different tradition as to the wilderness journey from that which the oldest records contain, he is only using as an argument what he finds in them. In J E there is no record of systematic sacrifice in the wilderness. Sacrifice is simply taken for granted, and some instructions are given regarding it. Even the Levitical law gives us no such record; it only gives orders for the building, and the regulations for the use of the tabernacle. Nowhere is it said that sacrifices were offered continuously, and anything like the regular stated sacrifices of later times must have been impossible. Amos's argument, therefore, is mainly this. During the wilderness journey there is no record of sacrifices being offered, yet that was above all others the time in which Jehovah specially revealed Himself to His people in love. Consequently sacrifice cannot be the first and main element in the covenant with Jehovah as you are making it. He does not mean that sacrifice might be neglected with impunity, for he knew it had been commanded in Jehovah's name, but he does mean that morality and faith in God can alone give efficacy to sacrifice, and can still less be neglected.

These three passages, therefore, cannot be cited as denying that sacrifice in Israel was divinely appointed. They have another meaning which fits them better, and brings them into no collision with the facts of history as related in Deuteronomy. Under these circumstances it would seem to be unnecessary to hold to an exegesis of them which was always somewhat surprising, and which made an irreconcilable feud between Priests and Prophets. Scripture generally represents them as being equally necessary and equally authorised as instruments for building up the higher life of these people, and, rightly understood, there is no passage which contradicts that natural and probable view.

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