

IV.

It need scarcely be pointed out, that if this be the true explanation of the origin and nature of these introductory chapters, and of their relation to the remainder of the book, as well as the correct explanation of the Messianic allusions throughout the book, the point of emphasis of the prophet's message to his time appears to be somewhat different from that indicated by the usual interpretation of these chapters. According to this interpretation, as outlined at the beginning, the prophet has, in chs. i-iii., "abstracted from his prophetic speeches and career the essential conception of his teaching," which was the unchangeableness of Jehovah's love despite Israel's waywardness, and has set it as "a kind of programme at the head of his book." In these chapters the prophet shows how this central principle of his teaching was symbolized in his personal experience. As this view thus puts the emphasis upon the divine love, Hosea has been defined as a "mystic" (in contrast with Amos "the stern moralist"), and compared with John. When these introductory chapters are interpreted in this way, it is quite natural to thus find the central conception in this prophet's teaching to be that of the enduring love of Jehovah. One of the leading exponents of this view presents it thus: "Yahweh is God. His nature as revealed in Israel's history is love. It was in love that He redeemed them from Egypt: 'when Israel was a child I loved him' (xi. 1); and He has an emotional delight in the object of His love (ix. 10). His love has followed Israel all through their history (xi. 3, 4; vii. 15); even his chastisements are not without love - 'I will speak to her heart' (ii. 16; iii.); and their restoration and everlasting peace will be due to His love (xiv. 4; ii. 18ff; cf. xi. 8ff.). It is Israel His spouse whom Yahweh drives out of His house, and it is she whom He again betrothes to Himself forever (ii. 19; xiv.). His prophecy ends with the prediction of the restoration, the holy beauty and eternal endurance of God's people: 'they shall bloom like the lily and cast forth their roots like Lebanon' (xiv. 5). Amos' mind is filled with great general ethical principles, valid eternally, and