

find that in Elisha's time they had outgrown their accommodation, and new premises were erected. It is not likely, however, that the prophets were permanently domiciled in these semi-monastic institutions; for many of them had families of their own, and their duties must have taken them elsewhere. It is more probable that these were the centres where they were trained or fitted for their work, and where they afterwards met at occasional intervals for conference or fellowship. Some such arrangement must have been necessary to give unity and cohesion to their work in the nation.

Their organization into schools is commonly attributed to Samuel. In his day we find a school of the prophets at Naioth or the meadows near Ramah with Samuel himself at their head. After the elevation of Saul to the Kingship he seems to have devoted his attention almost entirely to the work of training and guiding them; and there can be no doubt that he did much to put them on a firmer basis than before. But he cannot really have done more than consolidate, extend and modify an institution of far older standing. In the book of Numbers we find their original foundation attributed to Moses. When he complained to the Lord that the burden of governing and directing the people was too heavy for him, he was told to select seventy of the elders as his especial assistants, and organize them into a body of Councillors, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord descended so that they prophesied. Individual prophets such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses himself there had of course been before that time, but this must have been their first appearance as a recognized body.

And just here we get at what seems to have been the original idea as to the functions of the order. We are not told what the prophesying of these seventy consisted in, though it must have been some form of public address. But whatever it was, it was associated with a share in the government of the people. They were a sort of higher magistracy whose work would be partly executive and partly judicial. In an unsettled community such as Israel then was, these functions would demand unusual gifts, the greatest practical wisdom and the keenest insight into characters; and they would require to be clothed with all the dignity and authority that a sacred office and a divine consecration could confer. This idea of the governmental function of the prophets is further borne out by the assurance which Moses gave the people before his death, of a prophet or line of prophets to succeed him. "The Lord, thy God, will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of these of thy brethren like unto me." This was the lofty ideal which Moses had formed for the government of the theocracy, that its acknowledged leaders should be prophets speaking in God's name and not in their own, using their power and influence as he himself had done for the realization of divine ideas, not for self-aggrandizement. And, as a matter of fact, this continued to be the only government in Israel for 400 years, until the establishment of the monarchy. Joshua, the immediate successor of Moses, was a man of like mind, who placed himself consciously under divine direction and enjoyed divine guidance. He held his authority neither by inheritance, nor by right of the strongest, nor by popular election, but by the fact that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. And so with all the judges until Samuel. They were commissioned and sent forth by Jehovah himself, having to revive the national religion and the national spirit, to deliver the people from their enemies, and to administer affairs for the general well-being. Of Othniel it is said that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel and went out to war." Deborah is distinctly called a prophetess. Gideon went forth to battle with the Midianites, only after several distinct revelations from God. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah when he led Israel to victory over the Ammonites. Samson was a Nazirite consecrated to God from his birth, and though, perhaps, the least wise and the least spiritual of all the judges, he performed his marvellous feats of strength and prowess when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. Samuel, who consolidated the nation and prepared the way for the kingdom, was at once the far seeing statesman and the head of the prophetic order. And when the prophetic line reached its grand culmination in Jesus of Nazareth, it was again linked with the highest power. He being king as well as prophet.

It can hardly be said that the government of the nation by a line of prophets was a success. The ideal was too high a one to be realized. The mass of the people was too selfish, sectional feeling was too strong to be readily controlled by purely moral power. And there were wanting men of sufficiently high character to supply a continuous succession of effective leaders. In some cases too, the power must have been abused, and there was no effective check on it. Consequently the period of the Judges was a period of ever recurring anarchy and disaster. It was necessary that this form of government should, sooner or later, be replaced by something more stable, and in the nature of things it was almost inevitable that it should be replaced by a military despotism, which, at first intended to be supreme only in time of war, soon usurped all power in time of peace as well. Samuel foresaw the change coming and strove against it, by purifying the order of prophets and giving it a better organization. He also sought to secure a higher degree of efficiency by training them for their work. It was to this end doubtless that he established the schools of the prophets. And so far as his own administration was concerned, it seems to have been highly successful. But even with him the system broke down, just where it always had broken down, viz.: in the dif-

ficulty of obtaining a worthy successor. His sons, from whom he expected the choice would be made, gave no promise of the qualities that would have fitted them for the office. A popular movement began in favor of a military leader, which proved too strong for Samuel to resist, and, somewhat reluctantly, he consented to the change. Even then, however, an effort was made to preserve the ancient form of government by the prophets; for before Saul was crowned as king, he was initiated into the prophetic order, somewhat to the surprise of those who were not in the secret. And the strong hold which this idea had upon the popular mind is shown by the ready recognition of prophetic gifts in the persons of King David and King Solomon, even though they no longer formally held the prophetic office. It is in all probability owing to the persistence of that feeling that we owe the ready acceptance of their works as inspired.

One would naturally have expected that as soon as the prophets were superseded in the government of the nation, they would quietly have disappeared from view, and that nothing more would be heard of them. But it was not to be so by any means. The change had not been of their seeking and they were not prepared to step aside and have no further voice in the conduct of public affairs. They felt that they were still the representatives of the divine idea in the nation. In a peaceful revolution old forms and old offices are apt to survive even though the functions may be changed. They might be deprived of power but they could not be deprived of their moral influence. And it was not long before the course of events opened up a sphere of activity to them. In the case of Saul, it soon became apparent that the spirit of his government was a purely selfish and worldly one, utterly at variance with the traditions of the prophetic order. And at a very early period of his reign he came into collision with Samuel, who was still too influential to be readily overridden. At first a peace was patched up and an open rupture avoided; but the spirit of the one was irreconcilable with the spirit of the other, and the result was a struggle that lasted as long as Saul lived. But it is important to observe the practical effect which it had upon them and their order. First of all it gave them increased vitality and secured the permanence of the office. It at once furnished them with an object to work for and stimulated their activity, while their success showed the real extent of the power that remained to them and made them necessary for the support of the monarchy. Again it must have changed very largely the composition of the order. Previous to this time the idea was that the prophets should be as it were the picked men of the elders. Thus they were almost necessarily drawn from the ruling classes. But the moment they came into conflict with the king, the ruling classes would naturally take his side and they would be glad to welcome those coming from any social grade who were in sympathy with their ideas and had the necessary qualifications.

It undoubtedly the chief effect which it produced was a change in their work and sphere of activity. Up to this time, as we have seen, they were occupied with the responsibilities of government. They had been the judges of Israel. Now they became teachers and preachers of religion. The change seems to be a radical one, and it was; but the transition from the one to the other was made easily enough. Even as judges and magistrates they must have done much towards the education of the people in matters of morality and religion. In a primitive community justice is not administered in the strictly legal and technical spirit that is so apt to be found at a higher stage of civilization. The magistrate is rather an arbitrator and adviser than a judge, in the modern sense, and he would as frequently be found seeking to prevent wrong-doing as punishing it. He is the sort of social head of the community, the leader and guide of public opinion, to whom the people naturally look to take the initiative when any good work was needing to be done, or any growing evil checked. When, therefore, they were deprived of their official duties, and found themselves in a position of antagonism to the government, it was the most natural thing in the world for them to take the role of educators of public opinion and to seek to spread abroad their ideas among the people.

They did not, however, become mere political propagandists. It arose indeed from the very nature of the case, that the great subject on which they would first be led to influence public opinion was a political one, the general policy which Saul was pursuing at home and abroad. But their own feelings, and the traditions of their order, led them to take a wide and far-sighted view of the case. In their view the one essential feature of a sound policy was fidelity to Jehovah and obedience to his law. In seeking, therefore, to bring the nation to adopt what they considered a sound policy, they were naturally led to remind the people of their allegiance to God, and to instruct them in the requirements of his law. In this sense the work of the prophets never ceased to have a political bearing, and they always interested themselves in the great political questions of the day. In fact, they seem to have done more to make and unmake dynasties than any other class in the nation. As we have already seen, they removed the family of Saul from the throne in favor of that of David. It is not very clear how far the revolt of the ten tribes was due to them, but they certainly seem to have favored the cause of Jeroboam, and helped him to success. The various revolutions in the northern kingdom, by which the families of Jeroboam, Baasha and Ahab were successively dethroned, were either encouraged or headed by prophets. They never shrank from the logical consequences of their opinions, even though they in-