

to each other only by the fact that they spoke in God's name and delivered somewhat unwelcome messages to men. But, in reality, these inspired prophets were only selected individuals out of a large number of men who held the same office and went by the same name. Frequent allusions are made to them as forming a numerous body. Some idea of their number may be gained from the statements that when Jezebel persecuted them in Israel, Obadiah hid a hundred of them from her in caves, and that a few years later Ahab had no difficulty in collecting four hundred of them together at one time. In more auspicious days their numbers would be proportionately much larger. But not only were they numerous, they seem also to have been pretty thoroughly organized and to have formed a sort of guild or fraternity, with certain well known places as their headquarters where they had houses in common and ate together. We find such for example at Ramah, Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho; and it is quite likely there were others. We 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 foundations 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 character; 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 functions 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 thee, 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 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 Nazarite 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.