

What a struggle that was, and what importance it had for the future of the world? On the one side was the only true religion, the highest morality, the most sublime notion of God, the regenerating idea, which developed by the Gospel, was to produce at a future day all human civilization; on the other side was the paganism of Syrian modes of worship, with its voluptuous or bloody practices, its debauchery in honor of Astarte, its human sacrifices in honor of Moloch. Let the prophets be vanquished, and there was an end to belief in one God, an end to the ideal morality which thereafter the rest of the world would never have been capable of discovering by its own efforts. Never was cause more worthy of divine aid; never was there more justification for the intervention of that providence which, in the darkest ages, does not cease to guide humanity surely to its supreme end; and certainly this higher intervention in the history of the prophets is incontestable.

For what, in fact, are the prophets, if you refuse to acknowledge that they were divine messengers? Men without a mission, the most of them in no way connected with the priesthood, and who yet take it on themselves to lecture their people, the kings, and even the priests; unfortunate censors, who thrust themselves forward constantly to address reproaches to people with whom they have not the slightest right to interfere; diviners of evil augury, who never announce aught but chastisement, or if they speak sometimes of an era of happiness, always postpone that era to a far-distant future. Would you liken them to the mahdis who often sprung up in Islam, proclaiming that they are, and sometimes believing themselves to be, envoys of Allah? These mahdis, however, are fanatics and warrior chiefs who put themselves at the head of popular

movements, while the prophets of Israel, indifferent to honors, to money, to power, while engrossed above all with spiritual good and in fulfilling their mission in all sorts of dangers, took refuge in a rough solitude, or in the distant dwellings where their poor brothers dwelt in rude encampments, in those primitive and comfortless monasteries which are called their schools. This is the sort of persons who triumphed over the seductions of idolatry, who resisted victoriously powerful empires; who, without, perhaps, comprehending fully the important part they played, preserved, developed, transmitted the precious germ of the divine promises; or, if you prefer such phraseology, the trembling and fragile light, which, hidden in an obscure corner of the world, was little by little to grow stronger and brighter until later on it illuminated all the human race.

The prophets were bitterly opposed by the people, the kings and the priests. Jeremiah was put in prison as a traitor to his country, and escaped death by an accident only. The lives of these Hebrew prophets were one long warfare, while endeavoring to reform the spirit of the government in general, and establish principles of right, of justice and social morality. To effect all this was the greatest, most difficult, and most important part of their task. Their gift of prophecy and the fulfillment of their predictions by the events of subsequent history were secondary matters.

If happiness has not her seat
And centre in the breast,
We may be wise, or rich, or great,
But never can be blest.—*Burns.*

Time is infinitely long, and every day is a vessel into which much may be poured, if we fill it up to the brim.—*Goethe.*