

CAMBRIDGE NOTES.

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In the Book of Amos we hear the first words of written prophecy. Jonah seems to have lived at an earlier period in Jeroboam's long reign, but as we have seen, there is the gravest doubt whether the Book of Jonah is not the production of a much later age. Earlier prophets wrote history, and their writings are the material from which the historical books were compiled. But prophecy, or preaching, was essentially oral, and when the advancing culture of the people made it possible for the prophet to perpetuate his message by sending it forth in written form, it was still a spoken word, the orator's fire not giving way to the writer's logic. Written prophecy is worthily inaugurated by a book full of genius unsurpassed except in the "roll of Isaiah" itself. Amos was a child of nature. He was not of the "sons of the prophets" (7. 14), the degenerate clerical order who rivaled the priests in the violence and immorality of their lives. To this order Amos belonged in the same sense as Savonarola belonged to the priesthood of Florence, or Wesley to the Anglican clergy. To him, as to those prophets of later ages, came a voice which he must obey, bidding him speak God's message against the wickedness in high places that made the splendor of Jeroboam's victorious reign the preface of speedy ruin. In the quiet pastures of Judah, where he tended the flocks of some rich sheep-master and dressed the coarse sycamore figs, the Lord Jehovah spoke to him. Straightway he took the short journey to the royal city of Beth-el, and there confronted priests and people with his outspoken denunciation. He had every reason to expect violence, but seems only to have met with contempt. Amaziah the high-priest sent a perverted account of his words to Jeroboam, but the powerful monarch was indifferent. Then in tones of haughty scorn Amaziah bade him get back to Judah and earn his bread. He must not bring such messages to a royal city so full of the odor of sanctity. Amos took him at his word, and after one tremendous woe against the worldly priests and the sinful land he seems to have retired home. He dwelt at Tekoa, a village in the hills, twelve miles from Jerusalem and six from Bethlehem, still bearing the same name. Comp. 2 Sam. 14. 2; 23. 26. There he wrote out his prophecy, added (it would seem) the message of hope at the end, and sent it to work upon consciences that were not yet dead. The style and contents we shall best appreciate by studying the selected passages before us.

Verse 4. From addressing the women, whose cruelty and luxury proved more than any thing else the corruption of the upper classes, Amos turns to the whole people in words of seathing irony. We are not to understand this verse as a denunciation of the calf-worship. After its first introduction the

prophet, until Hosea, appear to have left this alone, bending their energies almost exclusively to the work of moral reform. The one unvarying message of the prophets, from Samuel down to John the Baptist, was to expound the "pure worship and undefiled" as set forth by the New Testament writer who shows their spirit must perfectly (Jas. 1. 26, sq.). We may well doubt whether the people of Amos's time realized that the cherubim at Beth-el were forbidden symbols of Jehovah, nor did the prophets insist that Jerusalem was the one authorized place of worship, preferring to use and regulate the imperfect worship existing. **Transgress.** Acts of worship offered by unrepentant sinners were an aggravation of their guilt. Comp. Isa. 1. 13, sq. **Morning.** Instead of on special occasions. **Days.** Instead of every three years (Deut. 26. 12). This exaggeration of external piety shows us that the Pharisee (Luke 18. 12) was no new type. The prophetic communities, which in Elijah's days had kept alive Jehovah's worship at Beth-el and Gilgal, now only existed to encourage self-righteous formalism.

5. Offer by burning (margin). A comparison of Lev. 7. 12, 13, shows that the part of the thank-offering which was burnt was always unleavened, while the accompanying cakes, destined for the priests, were leavened, as being more palatable. Leaven, except in a solitary parable, is always a symbol of corruption, and is therefore rigidly excluded from all that is directly offered to Jehovah. It is most in character with the ritualistic zeal here displayed to suppose that they deliberately substituted leaven in order to offer God the same palatable food they gave the priests. The Canaanite conception of Deity actually consuming the food offered naturally gained ground among men who had accepted a materialistic symbol of Jehovah. Thus they endeavored to show exceptional devotion by breaking Jehovah's law, and only succeeded in showing that their ideal of God was an almighty epicure! **Proclaim.** Here again the Pharisees are anticipated (Matt. 6. 2). **Liketh.** Matt. 23. 37, echoes yet more sadly the All-Father's recognition of man's free will in rebellion. **Saith the Lord Jehovah.** The word "saith" inadequately renders this characteristic phrase; literally, "oracle of."

6. I. Very emphatic judgment upon judgment had been sent to warn them, but they were so secure in their righteousness that they only credited the order of nature with the disaster. **Cleanness.** This vigorous pictorial phrase is explained by the parallel following; often the literal phrase comes first in the parallelism. **Returned.** Comp. Hos. 14. 2. In chap. 5. 4, Amos insists on "seeking Jehovah" as his one positive message. But this was