

corruption is total ignorance of Jehovah, whose priests no longer teach His precepts, and whose worship has become contaminated by elements which belong to the service of the Canaanite Baalim. The whole religious constitution of Israel had thus become undermined by corrupting influences. The political condition of the realm was, in the prophet's view, no better. The anarchy which had followed the murder of Zachariah appeared to him to be the national decadence of a realm not founded on divine ordinance. The nation had rejected Jehovah its only helper. And because of this religious, this social and political corruption, the nation's doom is sealed. Punishment must come, and punishment which apparently cannot be averted. And this is the persistent note of the prophecies—insistence upon the people's sin, and its inevitable consequence. Again and again it meets us. Tender elements do appear in the prophet's utterances (and much more frequently than in those of Amos), where denunciation and threatening give place to tender pleading, for the prophet's heart is torn with grief over Israel's lack of love and fidelity towards Jehovah. No doubt what lay at the root of his thought in these outbursts of tender feeling was his conception of Jehovah as a God of love. That this is so appears from his use of the term (never used by Amos) חֶסֶד, 'leal-love,' 'kindness,' by which, although he apparently does not employ it to describe Jehovah's relation to Israel, he teaches that "love is the basis and the principal factor of religion. Because Jehovah loves Israel, Israel should be true to Him, i.e. moral." It is also evident from Hosea's own use of the figure of harlotry to describe Israel's apostasy (iv. 2, 11; v. 3; ix. 1). But these more tender elements of his thought do not form the dominant note of his sermons. Apart from the Messianic passages they are of rare occurrence, and this fact of Jehovah's willingness to forgive and to restore, despite His outraged love, is not given great prominence. Except in ch. vi.—and of course the Messianic sections—it scarcely appears; and to say that the leading thought in the prophet's message to his countrymen is that of love despite waywardness, places the emphasis at the wrong point. And to find, as Nowack does, at the centre of Hosea's conception of God, the