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HOSEA'S MESSAGE AND MARRIAGE¹

L. W. BATTEN

GENERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE aim of the modern biographer quite generally seems to be to strip the saints of their halo. The latest conspicuous case is that of Charles Dickens. For a century Dickens was regarded not only as one of the greatest of English novelists, but also as an upright and honorable man. But now appears Mr. Bechhofer-Roberts with his "This Side Idolatry," a biography in the form of a novel, in which he portrays Dickens as "a selfish, blustering, coarsely humorous, impressionable, but heartless vulgarian, without a suggestion of genius,"² and where challenged, as he has been from many quarters, he stands by his charges, and claims to rout all critics by irrefutable evidence. In my paper I shall be privileged to follow an opposite and more kindly course, and hope to put a bit of long overdue halo about the head of one heretofore adjudged worthy of stoning for her sins. I refer to Gomer-bath-Dibblaim, and may as well assert at the outset that *ut ego opinor* the charge of adultery standing against her for so many centuries, cannot be sustained by the available evidence, so that on the basis of the information contained in his book Hosea could not get a decree of divorce in the state of New York, however easy it might be at Reno or Paris.

¹ Presidential Address delivered before the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis at a meeting held at The Biblical Seminary, New York City, December 27, 1928.

² *Saturday Review of Literature*, Oct. 20, 1928.

Now in a proper court it is necessary not only to hear the testimony of the witnesses, but also to weigh carefully their credibility. For it is clear that if witnesses contradict each other, they cannot both be right. The difficult problem then arises to determine whether one or the other is telling the truth, or speaks from competent knowledge. I propose a rehearing of the case of Hosea *vs.* Gomer, or, rather I should put it, the interpreters of Hosea *vs.* Gomer, and see what can be learned by a critical sifting of all the testimony available.

I say *all* the testimony advisedly, for it is the common practice to base the verdict against Gomer only on the first three chapters of Hosea's book. And it may be said now that the evidence available here presents grave difficulties, for a great variety of interpretations have been educed from it, no one of which has been generally acclaimed as satisfactory. I venture to hope that some light may be shed on this perplexing problem by first calling to the stand a witness who has heretofore sat silently in the back of the court room, the witness who will limit himself to the genuine Hosean prophecies in cc. 4—14. In the case of this witness we may rely upon his words confidently, for nobody distrusts him. It is true that most scholars would presumably say that while his testimony is unquestionably trustworthy, nevertheless for the case at issue it is quite irrelevant. So far as direct testimony is concerned that is true. The witness reveals no information about the conditions of Hosea's married life. But in this self-constituted court we are not hampered, as all our American courts are, by antiquated and irrational rules about the admissibility of evidence. We want to find what the truth is, and will welcome every scrap of evidence that may aid our quest.

In the examination of cc. 4—14 it is necessary to exclude only two main passages, 11 8—11 and 14 2 -10, to which I shall return later. What we wish to learn from this witness is at first testimony showing Hosea's position in regard to the fate of Israel and the cause of that fate.

On these points the testimony is unmistakable. Our witness deposes that the doom of the nation of Israel is final and irre-

vocable. Doubtful as the text often is, there is no question as to the import of Hosea's words.

The witness need cite only a few passages. First we hear:

I am like a lion unto Ephraim,
 And like a young lion to the house of Israel³
 I verily will tear and get me away,
 I will seize, and there is none can rescue (5 14).

As Harper says of this passage it is "the strongest possible metaphor of destruction" (I. C. C.).

Again our witness testifies that Hosea clearly perceives the exile as the fate of Israel:

They shall not abide in Jahveh's land,⁴
 But Ephraim shall return to Egypt,
 And in Assyria they shall eat the unclean (9 3).

Finally the witness will cite the last message of Hosea to his doomed nation:

Samaria is surely guilty,
 For she has rebelled against her God.
 They will fall by the sword,
 Their children be dashed in pieces,
 And their pregnant women ripped up (14 1).

It would be easy to elicit much more evidence of the same tenor, but enough has been presented to show that in the oracles which may confidently be credited to Hosea there is an unqualified forecast of disaster; and were we to search ever so diligently we could find no hint of a less ominous fate. How could there be any other note, unless we assume that a sane man, to say nothing of a prophet of God, could with the same breath blow both hot and cold? Moreover, it is highly probable that Hosea's

³ I follow those like Harper and Marti in substituting Israel for Judah. If the text is sound Hosea takes quite a different attitude towards the fate of Judah than the later prophet who added such passages as 1 7. But it is not probable that Hosea was concerned with the fate of the Southern Kingdom. The conditions of Israel were enough to engross his attention.

⁴ Marti pronounces this line a gloss, but that is immaterial for my purpose, for the exile is clear without it.

prophecies extend over practically the whole of that dark era which marked the close of Israel's life as a nation, reaching perhaps nearly or quite to the siege and fall of Samaria in 722 B. C. And the ominous messages do not mark any single period of the prophetic career, but run through the whole as a leading motive. Further it seems pretty evident that the emphasis on Israel's dire fate increases as the prophet approaches the end of his ministry.

Now we are ready to hear the witness' testimony as to the cause of Israel's plight. To a Hebrew prophet of this age the cause could only be sin, but to Hosea the sins of Israel fall into three categories, ethical, political and religious. In sharp contrast to what we find in Amos, comparatively little is found about Israel's immorality, though there is enough to show that Hosea was not blind to the people's vice, nor unaware of its consequences. There was a prevalence of gross evils, stealing, killing, lying, adultery and drunkenness, and the prophet was not indifferent to such wrongs; but he castigates the nation still more sharply for their political blunders. He points out their stupidity in their handling of both national and international problems. For they had dared to set up dynasties and to throw them down without the counsel of God, and they had made futile alliances with one power after another, each equally disastrous in its consequences, and each equally repugnant to their God.

But the supreme sin of Israel as Hosea sees it is in the religious field, and consists of their infidelity to their God. Like Elijah Hosea stands squarely for the religion of Jahveh without addition or admixture, but the people are idolaters. Whatever Jeroboam I had intended when he established the calf worship as the distinctive feature of the religion of his kingdom, and whatever that cult meant to the ordinary man of the prophet's day, to Hosea it was rank idolatry. To the mind of this prophet, while there was much religion in Israel, it was at best a gross corruption of the pure religion of Jahveh, and so was worthless.

Our witness could cite more testimony on this point than we should have the patience to hear just now, so we will restrict him

to a few passages which will serve as samples. This one is pretty plain:

Ephraim is a worshipper of idols,
 He has set up for him a fat ox.
 They have grossly apostatized,
 They love shame more than glory⁵ (4 17f).

This one shows the prophet's attitude towards the bovine cult:

I spurn thy calf, O Samaria,
 My anger blazes against it.
 A workman made it,
 And it is not a god;
 And so Samaria's calf
 Shall become fragments (8 5, 6).

As a part of the persistent denunciation of Israel as an idolatrous nation we find passages more nearly relevant to the subject of Hosea's marriage, for the prophet frequently uses the figure of illicit sex relations to express Israel's infidelity to Jahveh. Thus:

My people inquire of their wood,
 And their staff gives them answer.
 For a spirit of whoredom leads them astray,
 And they practice adultery against their God (4 12).

Thou hast played the harlot, Ephraim;
 Israel has made himself unclean (5 3).

To Jahveh they have been unfaithful,
 For they have borne bastard sons (5 7).

Do not rejoice, O Israel,
 Exult not like the peoples;
 For thou turnedst from God to harlotry,
 Thou hast loved the prostitute's wage (9 1).

It is pertinent to ask whence Hosea derived that figure. According to the usual view of the prophet's life, it came inevitably from his own unhappy experience. But surely that is not a necessary inference. That is, if we did not assume a marital tragedy, we should not have to invent one to account for the me-

⁵ For the most part, I follow here the rendering of Powis-Smith. A part of the text is corrupt, but the general trend is unmistakable.

faphor. The following passage shows that Hosea was quite aware to the existence of sexual vice outside of his own household:

Your daughters play the harlot,
 And your daughters-in-law commit adultery;
 For yourselves company with harlots,
 And sacrifice with prostitutes (4 13 f.).

I think we would all agree that were a prophet today to compare backsliders to the faithless in marriage, we should not dream of inferring that his figure was due to domestic troubles of his own. On the contrary such personal pain would, by a true prophet, never be revealed to his audience.

It is expedient to note here a marked characteristic of Hosea's utterances. Invariably he is singularly impersonal. His favorite course is to represent Jahveh as the speaker. However microscopically we scan the oracles we find no word which throws a single beam of light on the prophet's person or history. It is not likely therefore that he would break his habitual reserve and lift the veil only to disclose what would be the deepest pain of his life. As a matter of fact the inference from the prophecies is that Hosea's married life was a happy one. The comparison of wicked Israel to an adulterous wife shows that Hosea had a high conception of the duty of marital fidelity, and his idea of faithfulness would naturally come from what he had seen in his own helpmeet.

To return once more and for the last time to the witness patiently waiting on the stand, we will seek what information he has about Jahveh's attitude towards Israel. The importance of this evidence is apparent. It is reiterated over and over again that Hosea is the exponent of a God of love. It is often urged, as by my esteemed friend Professor Bewer, at whose feet I always rejoice to sit, that Hosea's conception of God's love was derived from his own bitter experience. God directed him to love a bad woman and by obedience to this command he discovered that God loved a bad people, and his mission was henceforward to proclaim that love. There may remain doubt, even after my ex-

position is complete, about what orders Hosea received from on high, but there is no doubt as to what Hosea actually said in the part now under consideration, and we will let the witness speak.

First of all he declares in unmistakable language that love was the motive which led God to take Israel under his protecting wings at the beginning. I quote in part the beautiful passage with which we are all familiar:

When Israel was a child, then I loved him,
And from Egypt I called him to be my son.⁶
I myself taught Ephraim to walk.
I took him up in my arms,
With easy lines I led him,
With cords of love.
I was one taking the bit from his jaws
And I bent down and fed him (11 1-4).

Hosea shows clearly enough and often enough, and this passage if read in full would show that the idea is brought out here, that Israel did not respond to this love, and it is not an unreasonable inference that he would imply that even God could not maintain a one-sided love through all the centuries of Israel's history. It is not a necessary inference that because the seer holds that God loved the innocent infant, he must still love the deeply guilty adult. That point, however, is not to be pressed now, for it may be admitted that the position is tenable, so far as this one utterance goes, that Hosea conceives God as still loving his wayward people. It is certain though that the prophet never says so explicitly or implicitly, but that he does say much of quite another tenor. Listen to our witness:

⁶ Harper rejects the word "son" on the ground that Hosea always employs the figure of the wife for Israel, though in another place the figure of the son is accepted (cf. pp. cli and 362, I. C. C.). Marti reads "his children," and that would correspond to the place of Israel in C. 2. At the Egyptian period Israel is conceived as too young to be the mother of many sons, and the rest of the passage shows that Israel is pictured as a helpless infant. If Harper's argument were valid, the inference would be that the passage is not Hosean. The conception of Israel as Jahveh's son would be natural in view of Ex. 4 22 (J.).

With flocks and herds they shall go
 To seek Jahveh, but shall not find him;
 He has withdrawn from them (5 6).

And again:

Therefore will I hew them by the prophets,
 Slay them by the words of my mouth (6 5).

Their wickedness is in Gilgal,
 So there I came to hate them.
 On account of their evil deeds,
 I will drive them from my house.
 I will never again love them,
 Since all their princes are rebels (9 15).

Once more:

Ephraim gave bitter provocation,
 For blood guilt remains upon him,
 And his shame will his Lord requite (12 14).

And finally:

I will be to them like a lion,
 Like a leopard by the road will I lurk.
 I will meet them like a bereaved bear,
 I will tear the ribs from their chests.
 I will devour them there like a lion,
 And tear them like a wild beast (13 7 f.).

It is true that the beast of prey does love his victim's flesh, but his affection goes no further. If the prophet had in mind a God of love, he was most unhappy in his metaphors.

The conception of Hosea as an evangelical prophet, depicting a loving God concerned to save the sinners rather than the righteous, is very pleasant to contemplate, but willing as I am, I fail to find any such idea in the testimony of our witness, and I have endeavoured to induce him to disclose all that he knows bearing on that topic. Whether we can find the idea elsewhere is another matter, but if my interpretation thus far is sound I fear we can no longer search very hopefully, for a prophet must be deemed reasonably consistent.

I referred to two passages, 11 8—11 and 14 2—10, which have been left out of the testimony. I need say no more than that as

generally recognized, these along with other small bits here and there are clearly later additions. For their tenor is quite different from the other oracles and they definitely predict a return from the exile. Hosea probably lived to see his direful forecasts fulfilled to the letter, but he did not live long enough to witness any conditions on which the most optimistic observer could base an expectation of a return of the exiles to their native land. That was left for the devout dreamers of a much later day.

The way is now clear to undertake the confessedly difficult task of examining the more direct testimony found in Cc. 1—3. We may classify this material in either one of two ways. On a literary basis Cc. 1 and 3 belong together in sharp contrast to C. 2. But on a basis much more suitable to our purpose, we must classify according to the tenor of the passages, and we have then also two groups, but quite different groups; for with C. 1 1—9 we must connect 2 4—15, and with C. 3 the rest of C. 2, i. e., vv. 1—3, 16—25.

We begin with a study of the second group, and ask our witness to cite in full the original form of C. 1 1—9.

The beginning of Jahveh's speaking with Hosea. And Jahveh said to Hosea, take thyself a wife, so he took Gomer-bath-Dibblaim. And she conceived and bore him a son. And Jahveh said to him, name him Jezreel, for shortly I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel and bring to an end the dominion of Israel.

And again she conceived and bore a daughter. And he said to him, name her Lo-ruhamah, for I no longer have compassion on the house of Israel that I can grant them forgiveness.

When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived again and bore a son. And he said, name him Lo-ammi, for they are not my people, nor am I their God.

It will be noticed that I accept the nearly unanimous verdict of both the traditional and liberal schools that the phrase qualifying *wife*, "of whoredoms and children of whoredoms" is a clumsy gloss. In any case it is difficult to make it mean that Hosea was to marry an adulterous woman, and remain her husband while she bears a brood of illegitimate children.⁷

Even a cursory examination of the passage shows plainly that

⁷ v. 5 is also deemed an amplification.

while biographical in form, the motive of the story is wholly prophetic. Hosea names each child so that the name carries a prophetic message to Israel, thus giving us a perfect parallel to the cases in Isaiah. Neither prophet was concerned with the story of his domestic life, but both use that as a means of driving home the word of God to the nation.

Again, we note that the prophetic message in Hosea's names is one of punishment, of the rejection of Israel by their God so complete that pardon is no longer possible. God is utterly hostile to Israel. He will no longer recognize them as his people. Therefore the essential idea of the passage is in exact agreement with the evidence on this point already found in Cc. 4—14, and thus there is no ground to question its authenticity.

It is necessary to emphasize another point in this passage. Study it minutely as we will, we can in the text itself find no hint of anything abnormal in the family life of the prophet; as a source for scandal it is as barren as the old time register of births in the family Bible. It is true that the motive is the prophetic significance of the names of the children, and not their parentage, but there is not the slightest suggestion that Gomer ever had been or ever would be any other than a virtuous woman. So to get such a character for her as was deemed necessary, the ancient step was to add the clumsy gloss, while the modern is to read into the story what it clearly lacks. Thus Harper did not hesitate to declare that all three children were illegitimate. He apparently realized a difficulty in the record of Jezreel, plainly stating that Gomer bore her first son "to him," i. e. Hosea. He did try in a note to cast a bit of doubt on that obstinate snag "to him," but found the textual evidence too slender to serve as a prop for his theory.

Seeing that position a little too raw others have modified it, and claim to discover evidence that while the first two children may have had an honest mother, Hosea himself knew that it was unhappily otherwise in the case of the third child, and so he gave him the name Lo-ammi, and that means *not my kin*. That interpretation quite ignores the fact that the purpose of the names

was not personal, but prophetic. The prophecy did not come from the names, but the names were chosen to express the prophetic message. God directs the seer to name his daughter Loruhamah, unloved, not to show that the father does not love his wife or child, but to show that God does not love Israel. Similarly the name Lo-ammi is not given to indicate a rift between father and son, but to proclaim the spanless breach between God and Israel. The meaning assigned to the word in this interpretation is quite impossible in view of the antithesis: "they are not my people, nor am I their God." To get a bad character for Gomer this must be changed to read: "they are not my sons, nor am I their father."⁸

We turn now to the other passage of this group, closely related in tenor, 2 4-15, aptly titled in the Powis-Smith translation, "Denunciation of Israel as a faithless wife." It is worth while to ask the witness to give it in full:

Plead with your mother, plead,
 For she is not my wife,
 That she put whoredoms from her face,
 And her symbols from her breasts.
 Lest I strip her naked,
 And show her as the day she was born,
 And make her like a desert,
 And set her like a parched land,
 And let her die of thirst.
 Upon her sons I have no pity,
 Because they are sons of adultery.
 For their mother played the harlot,
 She that bore them is shameless.
 She said, I follow my lovers,
 That gave me bread and water,
 Wool and flax, oil and drink.
 Therefore I strew her path with thorns,
 And fence her in with a wall,
 That she no longer find her way.
 When she pursues her lovers,

⁸ The one who added 2 1-3 clearly understood that *ammi* meant *my people*. So for that matter did other prophets, e. g., Zech. 8 8.

And does not overtake them,
 When she seeks, but does not find,
 Then she will say, I return to my first love,
 For better was it then than now.
 She did not even know
 That I was the one who gave her
 The corn and the wine and the oil.
 But of the abundance of my silver,
 And of the gold, they made a god.
 So I withhold my corn in its time,
 And my new wine in its season;
 I recover my wool and my flax,
 With which she would clothe her flesh.
 Now will I expose her lewdness to her lovers,
 And none shall save her from my hand.
 I will put a stop to her gladness,
 Her feast and new moon and sabbath,
 I will destroy her vine and fig tree,
 Of which she said, they're my fee,
 Which my lovers gave me.
 I will make them a thicket,
 Where wild beasts will feed.
 Will visit on her the days of the Baals,
 To whom she burned incense,
 And adorned her with rings and jewels.
 For thus she went after her lovers,
 And forgot me her God.⁹

The passage makes as perfect a unit as we can expect to find, and quite after Hosea's practice in the form of an address to Israel by Jahveh himself. Using a figure common enough in later prophecy, and quite intelligible from Hosea's other oracles, the adulterous wife is pictured as the figurative mother of Israel, while her children are the people themselves. It is obvious that the adultery here as in Cc. 4—14 is a figure for idolatry and no-

⁹ The last line is difficult. Marti makes it the introduction of the prophecy following. It seems better to take the last words נאם־יהוה as the heading of that oracle. That leaves the last line very short, perhaps intentionally, but there may have been a confusing of the end of one and the beginning of another section, and I have ventured a guess, in restoration.

thing else, and that alone is the ground for the severe arraignment. It is clear here too that in spite of hints at other lost chances, the doom of Israel is final. None shall rescue the guilty one from the avenging hand; for Jahveh here is not a God of love, but of vengeance. Israel is unpitied, and has no longer any claim for God's protection. The passage has nothing to do with Gomer, for Gomer was not the mother of Israel as Rachel was.

In all respects the conception is exactly what we have found in Hosea's prophecies in Cc. 4—14, and the authenticity of the passage is beyond question.

When we turn to the witness who will offer us the other group, we shall hear quite another story. Two of the passages need not detain us long. For their late origin is generally recognized, and they offer no contribution either to Hosea's message or life. The first section 2 1—3 (Eng. 1 10—2 1) is a beautiful messianic prophecy painting in rosy colors an impressive picture of the restored unity and prosperity of the whole nation as in the days of David, and is usually assigned to a late post-exilic age. The second section 2 16—25 (Eng. 2 14—23) is from the hand of a gifted poet, who was familiar with the material in the other group (1 2—9; 2 4—15) and contributes a supplement. He gives expression to a beautiful faith that one day Jahveh would renew the broken bond with Israel in a union that would last forever. Both sections therefore show affiliation with the redemptive passages already noted as additions in Cc. 4—14, and reveal ideas not only beyond any existing conditions in Hosea's time, but also beyond the visions even of a reasonable faith. It was in later days when Israel's faith rose to the point that it seemed as if Jahveh must rescue his then loyal people, for their distress was so acute that it appeared that he could not fail to hear their cry.

Now we are ready to call our last witness, and his evidence, contained in C. 3, has been more misunderstood, so it seems to me, than almost any other chapter in the Bible. Yet, I shall have utterly failed to be thus far convincing, or the mere recital of the words will give a pretty conclusive hint as to the proper interpretation. Our witness speaks:

And Jahveh spoke to me again: go love a woman dear to an intimate¹⁰ and an adulteress, as Jahveh loves the Israelites in spite of their turning to other gods and cherishing raisin cakes. And I bought her for me for fifteen pieces of silver, and a homer and a lethek of barley. And I said to her, many days thou shalt tarry for me, not practising fornication, nor allying thyself with a man. And I am so towards thee.¹¹ For many days shall the Israelites tarry without king or prince or sacrifice or pillar or ephod and teraphim. Afterwards will the Israelites again seek Jahveh their God and David their king; and they shall hasten to Jahveh and to his goodness in the latter days.

It will be noted in the first place that the passage is in form autobiographical, and therefore seemingly of the highest authority. But I may remind you that Professor Torrey has explained the use of the first person in what are deemed the memoirs of Ezra as a literary device of the ingenious Chronicler to make his story plausible. It would not be consistent to accept as an explanation in one case a theory which I was unable to admit in another, so I will say frankly that I have no idea why the author of this piece employed the first person. Perhaps it does not require any particular explanation, for the prophets do often use the first person and the author of this piece was a prophet; and a prophet with a beautiful message.

The vital question is something quite different. The real point is that usually in this case the literary form has determined the interpretation. It is an autobiographical sketch, and is in the book of Hosea, and therefore Hosea is here telling his own story. Whatever problems of text or exegesis arise must be solved on the basis of that fundamental hypothesis. Now form-criticism has attained

¹⁰ This phrase is obscure in meaning. Hölscher is confident that the verb is active, so that the meaning would be "loving a neighbor," or as LXX "a lover of wickedness." But, as Nowack says, that fits ill with the term "adulteress." For my purpose it does not matter what the phrase means. It is clear from the whole passage that here a bad woman is described.

¹¹ Nowack emends to read, "and I will not come into thee." The phrase looks like a gloss, for it comes in awkwardly, and mars the exposition, for naturally there need be no pledge of Jahveh's fidelity to Israel, and the prophet certainly does not mean that Jahveh will have nothing to do with Israel.

quite a prominent place as a new element in dealing with the New Testament, and the principle may be of value in the Old Testament as well. But we must be on our guard about oversimplification of the problems in the one testament or the other.

In the passage under consideration a vital question is this: what is the writer's aim in telling the tale? Is it to depict personal history or to give a comforting message to suffering Israel? The answer is so positive, that a clear understanding of the passage lies right at hand.

The passage is a parable, but a parable of a peculiar kind. In normal parabolic teaching an invented story is told, the aim of which is to make the real purpose so clear that he who runs may read. But the parabler does not always get his meaning over. So Nathan must explain to David the application of his story, and the disciples must needs ask for an explanation of one of the simplest of Jesus' parables. Now our author was not speaking his story with a chance subsequently to explain, but writing, and the key must be a part of his prophecy if he is to get it across. In this case the exposition is really necessary, for if the very simple story stood alone it would be quite unintelligible. What could one get out of a story that a man is directed to love an adulteress, that he buys one, and bids her live many days an isolated life of chastity? For both procedures were quite alien to Hebrew experience or usage.

The author runs no risk of misunderstanding. He intersperses his parable with the interpretation so that the real meaning stands out clear as a bell. Indeed he seems to be almost impatient of the story, so that it is sometimes obscured while he rushes on to make the real message stand out.

These considerations alone would persuade me that Hosea had no hand in the composition of the passage; that it has nothing whatever to do with his life or message, that it was one of those innumerable scraps produced in the late days of Israel which the compilers of the prophetic books incorporated according to their convictions of suitability, not always critically sound; and that

the compiler inserted the passage in Hosea, quite in the wrong place, because its contents were sexual in character.

It is necessary to scrutinize the passage somewhat more closely, and not content ourselves with sweeping generalizations. In the first place the discipline of the erring woman is an invention to explain the exile. As God's discipline of Israel the matter is intelligible, but no man actually disciplined his wife in that way. As often noticed the "many days" have a widely different sense in the two cases. The real point is that after an indefinite period God will take back his erring people.

Again, there is nothing whatever in this passage or elsewhere to make it clear that the adulterous wife is to be identified with Gomer-bath-Dibblaim, and unless that identification is established beyond reasonable doubt the case against Hosea's maligned wife falls to the ground. There is nothing to go on but inference, and no one would dare go into a court to-day with a grave charge against a woman with an identification based wholly on inference. In this case inference points quite the other way. If the writer meant Gomer, he should have made it plainer than calling her an adulterous woman, for as we have seen there is not elsewhere a scrap of valid evidence which reflects any evil in Hosea's wife. If this woman were Gomer, she would not have to be bought. David bought Michal from Saul for one hundred Philistine foreskins, but he did not buy her back again from Paltiel who had taken her to wife after David's flight. Further, there is no hint in the passage itself, though it is usually read in, that the woman is other than a new *dramatis persona*. There is no suggestion that she was an already well known woman.

For that matter what reason is there to hold that the man of this tale is Hosea? It may seem sufficient that the passage is in Hosea's book. That evidence would be sufficient, if it were clear that the passage came from Hosea's times, but it loses all weight if the passage belongs to a much later era. Hosea's story in the first chapter, the authenticity of which is beyond reasonable doubt, is told in the third person, and were this Hosean it would presumably be in the same form. There is no intimation in this

passage that the man of the story had ever been married before, except the debated word "again." Authorities are divided as to whether the proper rendering is "again" or "still," and whether it qualifies "spoke" or "love." The evidence is too uncertain to help much in forming an opinion. The theory that Hosea had divorced Gomer and was buying her back has to meet the stubborn fact that in Israel the punishment for adultery in a wife was neither divorce nor isolation, but death, in the early days by burning and in the later days by stoning. As a matter of fact I can find no evidence that Hosea ever thought of divorcing his wife. All that we know of his married life is the record of the birth of his children in C. 1. Hosea himself brought no charge against his wife; that was the work of other hands.

If now we view the passage for a moment as a whole, we are forced to conclude that even if the hands are Esau's, and there is much doubt about this, the voice is Jacob's. The message of this passage is not that of Hosea. Here God loves Israel in spite of past sins, and after a period of probation, Israel would return joyfully to their own God and to their lawful king, the latter phrase betraying the Judean origin of the passage. Furthermore there is an interesting theological conception which is certainly not Hosean. There is a conception which reminds us of the doctrine of purgatory. Israel is to exist for an indefinite period without the usual conveniences of earth or the joyful blessings of heaven.

Harper indeed saw that the contents of the passage made the interpretation as an experience of the prophet's life difficult, and so he resorted to the easy expedient of eliminating v. 5 as a gloss. But v. 5 is the snapper to the whip; it is the climax of the story, and is perfectly consistent with all that has gone before.

The witnesses in the case have all been heard. An attempt has been made to weigh scrupulously their credibility. This being a presidential address, there is no jury to render a strange verdict, and the auditors may not now even offer a criticism. The court is all powerful, and finds a verdict easy: the charge against Gomer is dismissed. Next case.