THE REV. JOHN PAGE HOPPS

ON

OLD TESTAMENT SPIRITUALISM.

“Spiritualism in the Old Testament; illustrated by the Book of Ezekiel,” a small pamphlet which I could have wished longer, is a most noteworthy publication. The writer, the Rev. Page Hopps, tackles his question in a most refreshing directness. The key, he says, to the enigmatical utterances of the old Hebrew prophet has been lost. “The truth is that the only persons who are at all likely or able to understand this puzzling book are the mediums.” With this the reader is left. Much that is coming from the Psychic Spiritualism is a thing of the past; but in the writings of Ezekiel; “commands which, if they came to a medium now, would be laughed at or recollected from.”

The development of the God-Ideas from early days down to the epoch of the Church, to say nothing of its subsequent growth, is a subject, from which Mr. Page Hopps is inclined to gather from a study of the Old Testament that the most probable source is “whatever that name implies. An instance will at once occur. (I. Kings ch. xxii.) Micaiah, “the prophet of the Lord,” narrates a vision which has been shown to his opened eye. He has seen “the Lord” on His throne with the host of Heaven before him. “Who,” he asks, will persuade Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And one said on this manner and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said I will persuade him, and prevailed also: go forth and do so. Now, therefore, behold the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets.” Nothing could be more explicit. It was Jehovah who put this spirit of deception in the mouth of Ahab’s prophets. There was a lying spirit in the holy of holies.

“The Bible is full of records of spirit intercourse, even to the calling up of the so-called dead, as in the case of Samuel and the Witch of Endor. When the boy Samuel heard the Voice, it was a Voice of something very wonderful, but it was taken at once as the voice of the Lord. Perhaps if the Voice had spoken elsewhere, it would have been denounced as demoniacal. For the Spiritualism that is found within the sacred pale of the Catholic Church is a hallowed intercourse with angels; all else is demoniacal, or lies at least under suspicion. "Ezekiel was a seer. He held regular stances, and a writing-medium. He was probably among the first, if not the first, to understand the things influenced by spirits who took a passionate interest in the affairs of the Jews, both at home and in the captivity. He was open to all kinds of influences, good and bad, wise and unwise, sublime and ridiculous. The amazing blunder was the putting everything down to Jehovah; a piece of folly that few focused spiritualists would be guilty of, when communications come from Socrates, or Shakespeare, or Milton, always have their doubts.” Mr. Page Hopps proceeds in his most interesting analysis:— "Ezekiel was a spirit-medium. He held regular stances. In fact, the whole book consists of a collection of spirit séances and spirit messages, and of visions and clairvoyant and other occult experiences.” (See Ch. II., 1, 2.) Nor does the case of Ezekiel stand alone. The whole Old Testament is a bare assumption that 'The Lord' Is speaking. In Ezekiel’s case; so it is still.

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This (says Mr. Page Hopps) "suggests one of the gravest considerations. What we really find all along is a baseless strong influence of the Lord He says, 'The Lord saith, This is wholly true; this is undeniably false?" It would be either a very rash or a very inexperienced mind that would venture on any such hard and fast statement. The problems that Spiritualism offers for our solution may well give pause even to the boldest. The true and the false are so mingled that wisdom will say of
them, as of the tares and wheat in the parable, "Let both grow together till the harvest." Let them alone, reserving judgment till we are more fitted to pronounce it. All Scripture, all deep experience, shows that there is always an opposing spiritual force arrayed against the dissemination of truth—the adversaries of whom we are warned. And the most successful device that these "adversaries" could conceivably adopt would be so to mix up fair seeming truth with easily detected fraud, that suspicion would be thrown on everything by reason of the doubts so engendered. In this way many a circle, in which once truth was taught, has been broken up by the introduction of misleading spirits who have caused doubts in minds that could not break a lie, and so have retired in dismay from dealing with what seemed to them of doubtful benefit. In this way such hesitation of mind, such lurking misgivings, such mistrust may be bred that true and good spirits cannot live in such an atmosphere, and the unfortunate is deserted by those who can no longer help him. "Esau is joined to idols: let him alone." There is no device more clever, more truly diabolic. And the converse picture is not less true to nature. I have more than once said that psychic powers may be a valuable adjunct to the conjuror's slight of hand. They may, it is obvious, be so employed as to make it impossible for any observer to separate their action from the mere trick of the conjuror. They may be so used that no man can say where the trick ends, and the explicable and imitable result of the psychic power manifests itself. And so it may well be that the conjuror's imitation of genuine psychical phenomena may not be distinguishable from the real thing. It may be the old story of Ichabod, the prophet of truth, and the prophet possessed by the lying spirit, but a prophet still:—Medium pure and simple versus Conjurer and Medium combined.

Mr. Paget Hopkins's final summary of his most instructive study of old world Spiritualism I give in his own words:—"Apart from this subject of spirit intercourse, not only the book of Ezekiel, but the whole of the Old Testament, is a sealed book; but with the light that this subject can throw upon it, it is exceedingly instructive, and everywhere clear. Turn where we will, we find indications of this intercourse between the visible and invisible spheres; and only the enormous assumption that the whole of these multitudinous records are fraudulent, or fanciful, or merely symbolical, will dispose of the inference that in the days of the ancient Hebrews spirit intercourse was regarded as an almost every day event. 'The name of the Lord is never long absent from the record. He appears, so that he can be seen or felt; he speaks; he comes in vision; he acts as leader, guardian, inspirer; he works what we should call miracles; he actually wrestles with one of the patriarchs, who fancies he has seen 'God face to face.' Sometimes only a vivid light is seen; or a bush glows with a glory that does not consume or a hand appears—part of which is seen writing a word of doom. But why multiply instances? The Bible is full of it, and this Book of Ezekiel is only a striking instance. The spirit appearances, the spirit lights, the sounds, the trance speaking, the symbolisms, the intense feeling, and the peremptory style of the messages, the dignity, the pathos, the authority, the vulgarity, the imbecility, are all perfectly familiar to the Spiritualist, or to those who are acquainted with modern Spiritualism. What has to be chiefly taken note of is, that whereas modern Spiritualists know that spirits are not necessarily either wise or good, Ezekiel seems to have committed the grave mistake of taking everything for granted, and everything as from God, and nineteenth century Christians back him up! What is our duty, then? Our duty is to follow the wise advice of the Apostle John, when he says, 'believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God.' If we do that, we shall find the true use of this very remarkable Book of Ezekiel as a record of intensely interesting instances of spirit intercourse in ancient times; but if we do that we shall also be saved from the post-posterior superstition of imagining that the Book contains a series of veritable revelations from the all wise God. Above all we shall find the key to the Bible itself, and discover the true significance of the puzzling but familiar phrase, 'Thus saith the Lord.'"—Light, 15th January, 1887.