

F. 10539

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 with 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 those who know something of what is called Spiritualism." "Ezekiel was what is now called a medium. He was clairvoyant and clairaudient. He was a seer, a trance-speaker, and a writing-medium. . . . He was probably (if there is truth in such 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, sane and deleterious, sublime and ridiculous. The amazing blunder was the putting everything down to Jehovah; a piece of folly that few practised Spiritualists would be guilty of, who, 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 sances. . . . in fact, the whole book consists of a collection of spirit sances 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 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 not regarded as anything 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." Yes; 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. Yet those who know both can see no hard and fast line of demarcation between them. To whomsoever these communications come there is no absolute guarantee of purity. Evil and good, true and false, weighty utterances and frivolous, are usually commingled. So it was in Ezekiel's case; so it is still.

"This" (says Mr. Page Hopps) "suggests one of the gravest considerations. What we really find all along is a bare assumption that 'The Lord' is speaking. In reality there is always a conflict between Voice and Voice." This the writer illustrates by citations from the Book of Ezekiel, and remarks that Ezekiel was not the only prophet to whom "the word of the Lord" came. He laments that we have no record of these other utterances, and draws the conclusion that there were then, as there are now, various claimants to true mediumship; spirit against spirit: to be judged by their words and not by their pretensions, which latter are always magnificent. No instructed observer of the communications which are given through various forms of mediumship now can fail to see the exact parallel between what Mr. Page Hopps discerns in the case of Ezekiel and what is given through modern mediums. The messages do not usually emanate from a single source; they are given by "a band of spirits" under a leader, no doubt, but still a company." So Mr. Page Hopps is inclined to gather from a study of the Old Testament that the "Jehovah of the Jews was no other than a finite spirit

or band of spirits of very limited and variable power." This suggestion should not be deemed irrevocable by any, nor will it cause any surprise to an intelligent Spiritualist, who has read his Bible in the light of his present knowledge. Rather will it relieve his mind that he feels no longer compelled to attribute to Deity commands and instructions, such as some contained in the writings of Ezekiel; "commands which, if they came to a medium now, would be laughed at or recoiled from."

The development of the God-idea from early days down to the epoch of the Christ, to say nothing of its subsequent growth, is sufficient to show us that its early presentation must of necessity seem crude and undignified compared with the views we now hold. Nothing but an extreme unwillingness to see things as they are can blind the eye to the patent fact that Scripture, read in the light of this conception, gains a new interest and instructiveness. Surely it is clear that our present day experiences throw a blaze of light on the dark places of ancient Hebrew literature. People have had a blind reverence for the letter, while they have missed the spirit, of these old writings. They have resented any attempt to treat the Bible in the same way of comment and explanation as they would demand to have any other old and obscure book dealt with. And so they have missed their way, foundering in a morass from which they cannot extricate themselves.

I must allow Mr. Page Hopps to speak for himself in his final summing up. But before doing so there is another aspect of the question which, I suspect, finds many a modern parallel. It is not an uncommon thing to find in the earlier books of the Old Testament that the "false prophet" has been made so by Jehovah Himself. An instance will at once occur. (I Kings ch. xxii.) Micalah, "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 the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And He ("the Lord") said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail 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, Jehovah, whatever that name implies, sent forth a lying spirit to lure Ahab to destruction. Spirit against Spirit. Micalah against the Lying Spirit. Truth against Fraud mixed with Fact: no fraud pure and simple—that would soon be discovered—but fraud cunningly mingled with truth. For the prophets—seers, mediums—were genuine, only they were possessed by a "lying spirit."

"Apropos. How often is this case in our very midst? Who will be so bold as to say in a given case, where spirit action is in question, "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. This 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 misguided spirits who have caused doubts in minds that could not brook 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 inimitable 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 by the nicest and keenest observation from the real thing. It may be the old story of Micalah, the prophet of truth, and the prophet possessed by the lying spirit, but a prophet still.—Medium pure and simple versus Conjuror and Medium combined.

Mr. Page Hopps'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 angel 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 symbolism, 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 preposterous 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.

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