

# THE MARRIAGE OF HOSEA<sup>1</sup>

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THE marriage of Hosea has been a perennial subject of discussion amongst scholars, and the problems surrounding it are such that it is improbable that agreement will ever be reached. Jerome commenced the preface of his commentary on the book of Hosea by saying : “ If we have need of the help of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of all the prophets . . . how much more, when we come to the interpretation of the prophet Hosea, should we pray to the Lord and say with Peter : ‘ Explain unto us this parable ’ .”<sup>2</sup> Ewald observed that “ at first

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 8th February 1956. The following abbreviations are used in the notes below : *A.J.S.L.* = *American Journal of Semitic Languages* ; *A.T.D.* = *Das Alte Testament Deutsch* ; *B.B.B.* = *Bonner Biblische Beiträge* ; *B.D.B.* = *Brown-Driver-Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon* ; *B.O.T.* = *De Boeken van het Oude Testament* ; *B.Q.* = *The Baptist Quarterly* ; *B.W.* = *The Biblical World* ; *D.B.* = *Dictionary of the Bible, or Dictionnaire de la Bible* ; *E.B.* = *Encyclopaedia Biblica* ; *E.B.* = *Études Bibliques* ; *E.T.* = *Expository Times* ; *H.A.T.* = *Handbuch zum Alten Testament* ; *H.K.* = *Hand Kommentar zum Alten Testament* ; *H.S.A.T.* = *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments* ; *H.U.C.A.* = *Hebrew Union College Annual* ; *I.C.C.* = *International Critical Commentary* ; *J.A.O.S.* = *Journal of the American Oriental Society* ; *J.B.L.* = *Journal of Biblical Literature* ; *J.E.* = *Jewish Encyclopedia* ; *J.N.E.S.* = *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* ; *K.A.T.* = *Kommentar zum Alten Testament* ; *K.H.C.* = *Kurzer Hand-Commentar* ; *P.L.* = *Patrologia Latina* ; *R.B.* = *Revue Biblique* ; *R.G.G.* = *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* ; *R.H.P.R.* = *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses* ; *R.H.R.* = *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* ; *S.A.T.* = *Die Schriften des Alten Testaments in Auswahl* ; *S.B.U.* = *Svenskt Bibliskt Uppslagsverk* ; *T.S.K.* = *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* ; *U.J.E.* = *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* ; *Z.A.W.* = *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* ; *Z.W.Th.* = *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*. For access to some of the works referred to I am indebted to my colleague, Rabbi P. R. Weis.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Migne, *P.L.* xxv (1884), 815 : “ Si in explicationibus omnium prophetarum Sancti Spiritus indigemus adventu . . . quanto magis in explicatione Osee prophetæ orandus est Dominus, et cum Petro dicendum : *Edissere nobis parabolam istam.*”

sight this book of Hosea appears dark and enigmatical",<sup>1</sup> and it has been said, with some exaggeration, that its first chapter is probably the most diversely interpreted chapter in all prophetic literature.<sup>2</sup> Not alone of this chapter, but of the whole story of Hosea's marital experiences, a bewildering variety of views has been put forward, and it is not my intention in this lecture to attempt to offer a new one to add to the bewilderment, but merely to review those which have continued to find advocates within the last thirty years or so, and to indicate which of them seems to me to be the most likely.

In the first chapter of the book of Hosea we have an account in the third person of the prophet's marital relations. We are told that the Lord's first word to Hosea was to "take a wife (or woman) of whoredom and children of whoredom",<sup>3</sup> and that in consequence of this word he married Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, who subsequently bore three children. To each of these he gave symbolical names, as Isaiah gave symbolical names to his children.<sup>4</sup> The first he called Jezreel, symbolizing a message that God would avenge the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu.<sup>5</sup> By this he appears to have meant that for the bloodshed which accompanied the revolution of Jehu vengeance would be taken on his descendants of Hosea's day. Jehu's revolution had been inspired by Elisha,<sup>6</sup> and Elijah had prophesied

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Commentary on the Prophets of the Old Testament*, English trans. by J. F. Smith, i (1875), 210. Similarly P. Humbert, *R.H.R.* lxxvii (1918), 162, says it is impossible to form a coherent picture of the prophet's marriage.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. F. McCurdy, in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, v (1909), 371.

<sup>3</sup> Hos. i. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. vii. 3 ; viii. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Hos. i. 4. Y. Kaufmann (תולדות האמונה הישראלית, iii, i (1947), 99) proposes to read "house of Jehoram" instead of "house of Jehu", on the ground that the reference is to the story of Naboth. This change is without any authority. Kaufmann rightly says that the blood of Naboth was avenged in the days of Jehoram, but that is no solid reason for dating the author of Hos. i-iii in his time (see below). The blood of Jezreel may just as naturally be understood of the blood shed by Jehu (2 Kings ix. 21-37), and the text here left unchanged, and other scholars of all schools find no necessity to make any change. N. H. Tur-Sinai, הלשן והספר, ii (1950), 319, thinks the name announced salvation, and that the blood of Jezreel, which was to be avenged, was the blood of the righteous and the prophets.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Kings ix. 1-10.

with apparent approval of the bloodshed that would accompany the downfall of the house of Omri.<sup>1</sup> Not seldom in Israel's history a revolution which was prophetically inspired was subsequently condemned, sometimes by the same prophet. Samuel anointed Saul to be king,<sup>2</sup> but later turned against him and condemned him, and promised that his house should not endure.<sup>3</sup> Similarly Ahijah urged Jeroboam I to divide the kingdom,<sup>4</sup> but soon lost confidence in the new king and prophesied the downfall of his house.<sup>5</sup> It need occasion no surprise, therefore, that so long after Jehu's revolution the prophet Hosea should prophesy evil for his house, especially in view of all the evils which the prophets saw in contemporary conditions under Jeroboam II.

The second child of Gomer was named Lo-ruhamah,<sup>6</sup> or Unpitied, signifying that God would no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, or forgive their sins.<sup>7</sup> The third child was called Lo-ammi,<sup>8</sup> or Not-my-people, signifying God's rejection of Israel from being His people.<sup>9</sup>

The third chapter of the book of Hosea returns to the story of the prophet's marital relations, but this time in the first person. The prophet himself recounts how God commanded him to love a woman beloved of her paramour<sup>10</sup> and an adulteress,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xix. 19-24.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Sam. x. 1.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Sam. xiii. 14.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings xi. 31.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Kings xiv. 7-11.

<sup>6</sup> Tur-Sinai, op. cit. ii. 319, thinks the negative is an addition to the text.

<sup>7</sup> Hos. i. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Tur-Sinai, op. cit. p. 318, finds the negative to be an addition again here. These changes of the text are arbitrary and improbable.

<sup>9</sup> Hos. i. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Hos. iii. 1. The LXX and Syr. read the same consonants differently, and find the meaning to be "loving evils". Ibn Ezra took the verb to be active, "loving another man". R.V. margin has "beloved of a husband", and this was the view of Rashi. So also R. Gordis, *H.U.C.A.* xxv (1954), 24 n. In Jer. iii. 20 the word אִשָּׁה is clearly used of a husband, and in Jer. iii. 1 equally clearly of a paramour. The miserable condition from which Hosea bought her does not suggest that the woman was highly cherished by her paramour, and while, if the view that she is Gomer and that this incident is subsequent to that of chapter i is correct, she was certainly beloved of her husband, it would be strange for Hosea to be bidden to love a woman who was beloved by him. Hence I prefer the view of Ibn Ezra, which is followed by many modern editors. J. Lindblom, *Hosea literarisch untersucht* (1928), p. 19, thinks M.T. is more in

and how he bought her <sup>1</sup> for silver and barley, but kept her for a time under control, without permitting her to play the harlot or to be any man's wife.<sup>2</sup> Here, again, a symbolical meaning is accordance with oriental ways of thought. A. D. Tushingham, *J.N.E.S.* xii (1953), 151 f., thinks the word אהבת here has the special sense of carnal passion rather than "love".

<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word used here, וַאֲכַרְהָ, is commonly taken to be from the root כרה = buy (so in the Dictionaries of Gesenius, II, i. 1839; Siegfried-Stade (1893); *B.D.B.* (1907); Gesenius-Buhl, 17th edn. (1921); König, 6th edn. (1936); Koehler-Baumgartner (1953); also in Rabbî Yônâh, *The Book of Hebrew Roots*, ed. by A. Neubauer, 1875, cols. 331 f.). This verb is found elsewhere in Deut. ii. 6; Job vi. 27; xl. 30 (E.V. xli. 6). The unusual form here in Hos. iii. 2 is explained by Gesenius-Kautzsch, *Hebrew Grammar*, English trans. by A. E. Cowley, § 20 h, as due to the insertion of *daghesh forte dirimens*. A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel*, v (1912), 171, proposed to read ואשכרה, and W. R. Harper, *Amos and Hosea* (I.C.C.) (1910), p. 216, says this was the reading implied by LXX ἐμισθωσάμην. Since the Arabic root cognate with כרה has the meaning "to hire" (used of hiring a beast), this would seem to be unnecessary (H. S. Nyberg, *Studien zum Hoseabuche* (1935), p. 23, finds no need to emend the consonantal text to explain LXX reading). C. H. Gordon, *J.B.L.* lvii (1938), p. 409, proposed to derive the word from the root נכר, which he found also in the Krt text from Ras Shamra, where he found it to be a technical term referring to the payment made upon remarriage. This view of the Krt passages he abandoned in his *Ugaritic Handbook* (1947), p. 251a, and *Ugaritic Literature* (1949), pp. 69, 71 (col. I, lines 102, 191), and instead followed H. L. Ginsberg, *The Legend of King Keret* (1946), pp. 16, 18. According to R. Gordis, loc. cit. p. 25 n., Gordon has now returned to his former view. Gordis doubts, with reason, whether Hebrew had a special term for remarriage, but agrees with Gordon that the verb here in Hos. iii. 2 is from the root נכר, which he believes to be used of purchase in marriage. The same view is taken by J. Gray, *The Krt Text in the Literature of Ras Shamra* (1955), p. 37. It is curious to note that in the *Lexicon* of Gussetius, 1743, the word in Hos. iii. 2 is derived from the root נכר (p. 983 a). Both Gordis and Gray refer to 1 Sam. xxiii. 7, where the root נכר stands in the Hebrew, while LXX understood it to mean "sold". The context here, however, is quite unrelated to marriage, and many editors emend the text. In Judges ii. 14, iv. 9, where the sense is similar to that of 1 Sam. xxiii. 7, the root מכר is used, and either that or the root סגר may have stood originally in the latter passage. A. D. Tushingham, *J.N.E.S.* xii (1953), 153 f., cites D. Daube's discussion of the legal significance of the root נכר = "recognize" (*Studies in Biblical Law* (1947), pp. 5 ff.) and suggests that the word here in Hos. iii. 2 is from this root, and means "I acquired possession of her for myself". This would be quite a considerable development from the meaning for which Daube argues. L. Waterman, *J.B.L.* xxxvii (1918), 202 ff., derives the form in Hos. iii. 2 from the root כרר and renders "I caused her to turn back to me".

<sup>2</sup> Hos. iii. 3, where R.V. has: "thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be any man's wife: so will I also be toward thee." Wellhausen added

given to this. It was to symbolize that Israel, who had been false to God and had sought other gods, would be for many days without king or prince, or cultic observances, until she returned in penitence to God.<sup>1</sup>

In between these two chapters we find chapter ii. continuing the account of chapter i with an oracle in which the prophet says : " Plead with your mother, plead ; for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband : and let her put away her whoredoms from her face, and her adulteries from between her breasts. . . . Upon her children will I have no mercy ; for they be children of whoredom. For their mother hath played the harlot : she that conceived them hath done shamefully : for she said, I will go after my lovers. . . . And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them. . . . Then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband ; for then was it better with me than now." <sup>2</sup> Here it would seem that the prophet's wife and children are referred to.<sup>3</sup> But in the following verses it is

the words **לֹא אִשָּׁתִּי** to the last clause, and so made the meaning to be that the prophet would refrain from intercourse with her (*Die Kleinen Propheten*, 3rd edn. (1898), p. 105). Other editors have followed him in this. This would appear to be the meaning, as Ibn Ezra and Kimḥi already perceived, though they did not think it necessary to emend the text, but thought it was implied. Cheyne, *The Book of Hosea* (Camb. B.) (1913 edn.), p. 59, thought the meaning was that Hosea would have no other woman, but this seems less appropriate. In disciplining his wife by denying her intercourse with any man, he was inevitably disciplining himself also, and the more so because of his love for her. F. Buck, *Die Liebe Gottes beim Propheten Osee* (1953), p. 13 n., favours a suggestion by Bachmann (whose work is not accessible to the present writer), that **אֲלֵךְ** should be inserted, yielding **וְגַם הִנֵּנִי אֵל אֵלֶיךָ**, which he renders "Also I (will) not (belong) to thee". He compares 2 Sam. i. 21 and Isa. lxii. 6 for the construction. Ewald, loc. cit. pp. 245, 247, understood the meaning to be "and yet I am kind to thee", and held that the words could have no other meaning, while J. A. Bewer, *A.J.S.L.* xxii (1905-6), 130, thought the meaning was "Yet I on my part am thine". D. Buzy, *R.B.*, N.S. xiv (1917), 420, denied that there was any seclusion for the woman, but thought the meaning was simply that she would be kept from her lovers. It is hard to see why, in that case, this should be only "for many days".

<sup>1</sup> Hos. iii. 4 f.

<sup>2</sup> Hos. ii. 2-7 (Heb. 4-9).

<sup>3</sup> T. H. Robinson finds here "eine merkwürdige Kombination der kollektivistischen und der individualistischen Auffassung des Volkes", in that Israel is thought of as a single person with the individual Israelites as her sons (Robinson-Horst, *Die zwölf Kleinen Propheten* (H.A.T.) (2nd edn., 1954), p. 8). Similarly A. Baumgartner says that these words are addressed to the Israelites, and that

clear that he has not Gomer and her children in mind, but the people of Israel, whose conduct is symbolized in all his own experience, and whose desertion of God is to be punished until she returns to Him, when He will betroth her to Himself for ever.

Within the prophetic books we find many passages which recount the setting of the prophetic oracles in the third person, and these appear to have been culled from prophetic biographies, probably written by the disciples of the prophets. We also find passages in the first person embodying oracles, probably drawn from separate sources which had the form of memoirs of the prophets. In addition there are many oracles with no indication of their setting, which may have come from yet a third type of collection.<sup>1</sup> It is to be observed that in the story of Hosea's marriage, with the intervening chapter which is so closely related to it, we have all three of these types represented. It is likely, therefore, that the three chapters, though related in subject, came from three separate sources. This does not mean that any of them is necessarily inauthentic, though, as will appear later, some scholars reject substantial elements. If, however, the two accounts of Hosea's marital experiences come from different sources, the relation of the one to the other calls for definition, and here is one of the major difficulties which complicate the whole discussion of the prophet's marriage.

Some writers hold that chapter iii is an account of Hosea's marriage parallel to that given in chapter i and that it gives a variant account of the way in which he came to marry his wife,

the mother is the land of Israel (*La Bible du Centenaire*, ii (1947), 708). Against this Gordis, rightly in my judgement, says: "The children who are being called upon to reprove their mother are Hosea's actual children, and they are, naturally, personalities distinct from their mother" (loc. cit. p. 22). It may be noted that Baumgartner (loc. cit.) finds it necessary to delete the last clause in ii. 3 (Heb. 5) on the ground that it is inapplicable to the land.

<sup>1</sup> S. Mowinckel first drew attention to this and found three categories of material employed in the compilation of the prophetic books. Cf. *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (1914), pp. 17 ff. Later, T. H. Robinson independently made a similar analysis (*Expositor*, 8th ser., xx (1920), 17-31; *E.T.* 1 (1938-9), 198-202; *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel*, 2nd edn. (1953), pp. 50 ff.; and Oesterley-Robinson, *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament* (1934), pp. 221 ff.).

and that historically what is described in chapter iii. precedes what is described in chapter i.<sup>1</sup> In the English version iii I reads: "Go yet, love a woman", or, in R.S.V., "Go again". Here, it is suggested, the word rendered "yet" or "again" may be either the addition of an editor who brought the materials together from the various sources to form the present book, or, alternatively, it may attach to something which had preceded in the autobiographical source.<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Gordis, to whose view we shall come later, observes that the Hebrew accents make it possible to take the word "again" either with the words that precede or with those that follow, and he prefers to take it with the words that precede, and to render: "The Lord said to me again."<sup>3</sup> It may therefore be agreed that this word cannot be pressed into the service of any theory.

It is curious that chapter iii says nothing about the birth of the children, to which so much importance is attached in the first account. Is it conceivable that the prophet himself, in his

<sup>1</sup> So, amongst others, C. Steuernagel, *Lehrbuch der Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1912), p. 605; R. Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, 7th edn., ii (1925), 348 n.; J. M. P. Smith, *The Prophets and Their Times* (1925), p. 59; L. Gautier, *Introduction à l'Ancien Testament*, 3rd edn., i (1939), 465 f.; T. H. Robinson, *T.S.K.* cvi (1934-5), 301-11; O. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1934), pp. 431 f.; A. Baumgartner, *La Bible du Centenaire*, ii (1947), 711; J. Paterson, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets* (1948), p. 43; A. Lods, *Histoire de la littérature hébraïque et juive* (1950), pp. 247 f.; N. H. Tur-Sinai, op. cit. ii. 309 f.; cf. also D. Deden, *De Kleine Profeten* (B.O.T.), i (1953), 12b, where, however, the marriage is interpreted allegorically. J. Lindblom, *Hosea literarisch untersucht* (1928), p. 41, says: "Das erste und das dritte Kapitel des Hoseabuches bieten uns also zwei Parallelberichte, von denen aber jeder eigentümliche Züge im Verhältnis zum anderen hinzufügt. Der erste interessiert sich am meisten für die späteren Begebenheiten in der Ehe Hoseas, der zweite für die, welche zu ihrem Anfang gehörten."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. T. H. Robinson, *T.S.K.* loc. cit. p. 309. Amongst the scholars who favour the deletion of the word עוֹד may be mentioned: Steuernagel, loc. cit.; H. Guthe, in Kautzsch-Bertholet, *H.S.A.T.*, 4th edn., ii (1923), 7; Gautier, op. cit. i. 465 n.; Eissfeldt, op. cit. p. 432; Lindblom, op. cit. p. 17; A. Baumgartner, loc. cit. ii. 711.

<sup>3</sup> Loc. cit. pp. 29 f. Similarly J. M. P. Smith, *B.W.* xlii (1913), 99 a; R. Kittel, op. cit. ii. 348 n.; R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1941), p. 567. H. Ewald, op. cit. i. 246, had earlier rejected this view, and so K. Budde, *T.S.K.* xcvi-xcvii (1925), 57, and A. D. Tushingham, *J.N.E.S.* xii (1953), 156 n.

own account of his marriage, should pass over without mention so much that is recorded in chapter i? To this the simple answer is that we do not know that he did. We cannot rule out the possibility that in the source from which chapter iii was taken there stood the story of the birth of Gomer's children, which the compiler omitted because he had already included the other account of this.

Much more damaging for this theory is the consideration that in chapter iii it is said that immediately after the prophet bought the woman he was told to love, he isolated her for a period from association with any man, in order to symbolize the fact that Israel would be for many days without king or prince or cultic practices until she returned to the Lord, whereas in chapter ii which could only have been composed after the third child was born, we learn that Gomer has been faithless to her husband, but will yet return to him. Chapter i says nothing about a period of isolation and discipline, but suggests that Hosea became the father of a child by Gomer without delay after his marriage. To interpose the period of delay from chapter iii into the account of chapter i means that Gomer's relations with Hosea could scarcely symbolize how Israel would return to the Lord. Unless the woman of chapter iii was Hosea's rightful wife, who after discipline would return to loyalty to him, it is hard to see how she could symbolize Israel's return in loyalty to her rightful God after a period of discipline. It is to be observed that in chapter ii. there is a prophecy of Gomer's return to her first husband, with whom it was better for her.<sup>1</sup> Who was this first husband? The view that we are examining accepts the statement of iii 1 that Gomer was an adulteress before Hosea bought her,<sup>2</sup> and some of its advocates believe that after her adultery she had become a temple prostitute<sup>3</sup>—a view to which we shall return—and that after her marriage with Hosea she was once more unfaithful to her husband.<sup>4</sup> If this is true, then her first husband was not Hosea, and it was not he and Gomer who symbolized God's

<sup>1</sup> Hos. ii. 9 (E.V. 7).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. T. H. Robinson, *loc. cit.* p. 310.

<sup>3</sup> So T. H. Robinson, *ibid.* p. 311, following H. Schmidt, *Z.A.W.* xlii (1924), 245-72.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. T. H. Robinson, *loc. cit.* p. 310.

relations with Israel, but the unnamed first husband and Gomer.<sup>1</sup> It would be curious for the unnamed first husband of this theory, who is so casually referred to in iii 1 and then forgotten or ignored, to be the symbolical representative of God in the story.

Again, if the period of discipline following Gomer's marriage to Hosea represented the discipline which should be terminated by Israel's return to God,<sup>2</sup> it is not clear why chapter ii. should speak of another period of discipline, subsequent to Gomer's disloyalty to Hosea, as representing God's discipline of Israel, which should be terminated in her return to Him in loyalty.<sup>3</sup> If chapter iii is concerned with Hosea's marriage with Gomer, it would seem necessary to integrate it into the account which can be pieced together from chapters i and ii at a much later time than the prophet's first relations with her. Hence I find it difficult to accept this view of the problem.

By many writers Gomer is defended from all charge of adultery.<sup>4</sup> This view would seem to have some formidable difficulties to negotiate. For at the beginning of chapter i we read that the prophet was bidden to marry a "wife of whoredom", and at the beginning of chapter iii that he was bidden to love a woman who was an adulteress. Assuming for the moment that both refer to the same woman, though not necessarily to the same point in her life, it would seem to be clearly indicated that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, *Two Hebrew Prophets* (1948), p. 15: "It (i.e. this theory) throws the emphasis of the prophet on the reclamation of a woman who has not been faithless to *him*, instead of on that of a faithless wife who has borne at least one child of which he is the father."

<sup>2</sup> Hos. iii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Hos. ii. 19-23 (Heb. 21-25).

<sup>4</sup> Amongst those who defend Gomer's good name may be mentioned: W. Staerk, *Das assyrische Weltreich im Urteil der Propheten* (1908), pp. 193 f.; G. Hölscher, *Die Profeten* (1914), pp. 424 f.; W. R. Arnold, *Ephod and Ark* (1917), p. 126 n.; D. Buzy, *R.B.*, N.S. xiv (1917), 376-423; J. Fück, *Z.A.W.* xxxix (1921), 283-90; A. Heermann, *Z.A.W.* xl (1922), 287-312; P. Humbert, *R.H.P.R.* i (1921), 97-118; L. W. Batten, *J.B.L.* xlviii (1929), 257-73; R. H. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.* pp. 567 ff.; J. Coppens, *Alttestamentliche Studien* (Nötscher Festschrift, B.B.B. No. 1) (1950), pp. 38-45. E. Sellin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, English trans. by W. Montgomery from 3rd German edn. (1923), p. 159 (cf. *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch* (K.A.T.) (1929), p. 31), says: "Of the adultery and dismissal of Gomer we do not in fact hear a word." This view he later abandoned; cf. *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 7th edn. (1935), pp. 103 f.

she was of loose character. To many writers it is unthinkable that the prophet should be commanded to marry such a woman,<sup>1</sup> and they therefore seek to explain the language away. It has been suggested that she is described as a wife of whoredom because she was a northern Israelite, and not because she was personally unchaste.<sup>2</sup> If that were so, the prophet should have found similarly opprobrious language with which to refer to himself, since he too appears to have been a northern Israelite.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, a distinction is drawn between the expression "a wife of whoredom" (אִשְׁתּוֹ זְנוּנִים) and the normal term for a harlot (זֹנֶה), and it is argued that as Isaiah could speak of himself as "a man of unclean lips" because he dwelt among "a people of unclean lips",<sup>4</sup> and not because he was himself impure, so Gomer could be described as "a wife of whoredom" because

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. B. Davidson, in Hastings's *D.B.* ii (1899), 421 b: "It has been supposed that Hosea allied himself with a woman already known as a sinner, with the view of reclaiming her. It is very difficult to believe either that the prophet should do such a thing, or that he should represent himself as commanded by God to do it." If Gomer subsequently became an adulteress and unchaste, it is hard to suppose that God did not know that she was a woman of such a character, and no easier to see how He could command marriage with a woman who would prove unfaithful than with one who was already immoral. E. Day, *A.J.S.L.* xxvi (1909-10), 105-32, held that the whole book of Hosea is an exilic pseudepigraph. He thinks it improbable that Hosea would have attributed to God such a command to marry an unchaste woman, but supposes it easier to think of a late author imaginatively picturing his prophet as having been so commanded (p. 111). It is not clear why this is more understandable in the exilic period than in the eighth century.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1941), p. 569. This view, found in several older writers, is rejected by W. R. Harper, *Amos and Hosea* (I.C.C.) (1910), 207.

<sup>3</sup> I. Engnell, *S.B.U.* i (1948), 874 f., holds that he was a man of Judah, and so N. H. Tur-Sinai, *op. cit.* ii (1950), 306 ff. This view was advanced already by F. J. V. D. Maurer, *Commentarius grammaticus criticus in Vetus Testamentum*, ii (1838), 293. G. Hölscher, *Die Profeten* (1914), pp. 205 f., and *Geschichte der israelitischen und jüdischen Religion* (1922), p. 105, thought he was a Benjamite, and according to V. Ryssel, *J.E.* vi (1907), 473 b, this view was put forward in the fifteenth century by the Spanish Jew Abraham ben Samuel Zacuto. There are no adequate grounds for this, or for various early Christian and Jewish traditions, which Ryssel records. H. Ewald, *op. cit.* i. 211 ff., while holding that Hosea was a northerner, believed that he retired to Judah, where he composed his book. There is no evidence at all that Hosea compiled the book that bears his name. P. Haupt, *J.B.L.* xxxiv (1915), 182 f., maintained that Hosea was from Ibleam.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. vi. 5.

she dwelt among a people who “went a-whoring” from God, and not because she was personally unchaste.<sup>1</sup> Here the alleged parallel offers no support. For it is clear that in the presence of God Isaiah felt himself to be impure, and it was by the touch of the live coal from the altar that his sin was taken away and he was cleansed. He still lived among “a people of unclean lips”, and if that was a sufficient reason for describing him as “a man of unclean lips”, the position was unchanged.

If it is desired to save Gomer from the charge of in chastity, another way would seem to be more promising. This is found in regarding the description of her as proleptic—a way which has been followed by many writers of various schools.<sup>2</sup> On this view Hosea married a woman who was pure, or whom, at any rate, he believed to be pure, though subsequently she turned to evil. This, however, only spares her character in the premarital stage. On this view, when subsequent experience revealed the true character of Gomer and from his bitter pain—the more bitter because of his unquenchable love for her—Hosea gained a new insight into the heart of God, he looked back and believed that all had been overruled by God, and so he could in retrospect represent it as though he had been bidden to marry a woman with an evil character. Though unknown to him at the time, she had had a tendency to evil rather than a sinful

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gordis, loc. cit. pp. 14 f.

<sup>2</sup> So, amongst others, W. Nowack, *Die kleinen Propheten* (H.K.) (1897), p. 9; A. B. Davidson, in Hastings's *D.B.* ii (1899), 421; K. Marti, in *E.B.* ii (1901), 2123, and *Das Dodekapropheton* (K.H.C.) (1904), p. 16; V. Ryssel, loc. cit.; H. Guthe, op. cit. p. 3; W. R. Harper, op. cit. p. 207; W. Robertson Smith, *The Prophets of Israel* (1912 edn.), pp. 181 f.; C. F. Kent, *The Growth and Contents of the Old Testament* (1926), p. 111; G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, revised edn. (1928), p. 248; H. Wheeler Robinson, in *The Abingdon Bible Commentary* (1929), p. 761, and *Two Hebrew Prophets* (1948), p. 13; S. Landman, in *U.J.E.* v (1941), 463; J. P. Hyatt, *Prophetic Religion* (1947), p. 42; J. Paterson, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets* (1948), p. 44; J. A. Bewer, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, i (1949), 41; G. A. Hadjiantoniou and L. E. H. Stephens-Hodge, in *The New Bible Commentary* (1953), p. 683 and *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, iv (1955), 888 b, thinks Hosea may have received a permissive command to marry someone he already loved, while J. M. Powis Smith, *B.W.*, N.S. xlii (1913), 100 b, thinks it unnecessary to suppose that he loved her. Some writers get rid of the difficulty of Hos. i. 2 by the familiar expedient of surgery, and delete the inconvenient words.

past.<sup>1</sup> But what of chapter iii? Here the prophet is bidden to take an adulteress, and the fact that he disciplines her before he takes her to himself clearly indicates that he knew that she was an adulteress. If this was prior to his first association with her, as in the view already examined, then the description of her as a "wife of whoredom" is not proleptic. If, on the other hand, it was at a later stage in their relations, we do not really avoid the difficulty. For in Hebrew thought it was no less loathsome to take back an adulterous wife than to marry a woman whose lapses were premarital. But to this we shall have to return.

By some Gomer is thought to have been a temple prostitute prior to her marriage with Hosea.<sup>2</sup> We have many references

<sup>1</sup> Against this view cf. J. M. Powis Smith, *B.W.*, N.S. xlii (1913), 95 b.

<sup>2</sup> So, in addition to H. Schmidt and T. H. Robinson, above cited, O. R. Sellers, *A.J.S.L.* xli (1924-5), 245; H. G. May, *J.B.L.* lv (1936), 287; E. A. Leslie, *Old Testament Religion* (1936), p. 173; Smith-Irwin, *The Prophets and their Times*, 2nd edn. (1941), pp. 74 f.; R. B. Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets* (1944), p. 75; F. James, *Personalities of the Old Testament* (1947), p. 233; G. Fohrer, *Die symbolischen Handlungen der Propheten* (1953), p. 21; A. Gelin, in Robert-Tricot, *Initiation Biblique*, 3rd edn. (1954), p. 169. H. Wheeler Robinson, *Two Hebrew Prophets*, p. 14, thinks Gomer had become a temple prostitute when she was reclaimed by Hosea, as recorded in chapter iii and so E. Osty, *Amos et Osée* (Jerusalem Bible) (1952), p. 64. A. D. Tushingham, *J.N.E.S.* xii (1953), 150 ff., holds that the woman of chapter iii, whom he differentiates from Gomer, was a cultic prostitute. Following a suggestion of A. van Selms, *J.N.E.S.* ix (1950), 71 f., that the Hebrew מרע means a bridegroom's "best man", he takes רע in Hos. iii. 1 to be a comparable term, but here to stand for the cultic deputy for the god in the sexual rites. He also holds that Gomer was a similar cultic woman, but one over whom Hosea did not have proper legal control (*ibid.* p. 157). On the other hand, J. P. Hyatt, *op. cit.* p. 41, rejects the view that Gomer was ever a sacred prostitute, and J. A. Bewer, *op. cit.* p. 37, thinks it questionable. H. G. May, *A.J.S.L.* xlviii (1931-2), 89 ff., finds very extensive traces of ritual prostitution in the Old Testament. He thinks the term מאהב, which is found in Hos. ii. 7 (Heb. 9), denotes a male sacred prostitute, and holds that the bands of the prophets were professional sacred prostitutes, while the priests are credited with a similar function. Even Hannah is held by him to have functioned as a sacred prostitute. All this seems to me to be going beyond the evidence. L. Waterman, *J.B.L.* xxxvii (1918), 199 ff., thinks Gomer was as religious as Hosea, but in a different way, and that she may have been regarded as a local saint. He thinks she took part in the sexual promiscuity at the religious festivals, but Hosea could bring no charge of adultery for this, and she may have assumed a martyr's attitude in response to his threats and reproaches. This view distinguishes her from a professional sacred prostitute, but brings her "whoredom" into association with the shrines.

to ritual prostitution in the Old Testament, though we are told little about the women who were devoted to a life of shame in the fertility cult of Baal.<sup>1</sup> That it was regarded as a life of shame by the common people is by no means certain. We have knowledge of similar classes of women in Babylonia, who were not without respect,<sup>2</sup> and it may well be that they were accorded respect in Israel.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it is certain that in the authentic faith of Israel ritual prostitution had no legitimate place, and it is hard to suppose that Hosea had anything but condemnation for the whole institution. In modern times Hosea has been psycho-analysed,<sup>4</sup> and some explanation has been offered to show why he should feel led to do the thing he most loathed, and marry a woman who lived what he, at any rate, regarded as a life of shame, devoted to a cult and a practice which only called forth his unsparing condemnation.<sup>5</sup> I do not find this satisfying, and I am persuaded that we must look deeper than psycho-analysis for the motives for Hosea's action. This does not of necessity rule out the possibility that Gomer was a temple

<sup>1</sup> A. D. Tushingham, loc. cit. p. 153 b, thinks three separate classes of sacred women are referred to in Hos. iii.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. B. Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien*, ii (1925), 70 f.; G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws*, i (1952), 358 ff. (also *Iraq*, vi (1939), 66 ff.).

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. B. P. Church, *The Private Lives of the Prophets* (1953), p. 78, makes the astonishing statement that in Israel every woman was required to prostitute herself once with a priest before marriage. This is without foundation. Herodotus, *History*, i. 199, says that every Babylonian woman was required so to act, but Driver and Miles, op. cit. pp. 360 f., think this rests on a misunderstanding, since there is no trace of it in extant Babylonian and Assyrian literature. As for Israel, H. Schmidt, *Z.A.W.* xlii (1924), 254 n., observes: "Dass aber im israelitischen Altertum dieser Brauch des Opfers der Jungfrauschaft vor der Ehe nicht bestanden hat, zeigt z. B. Dtn 22<sub>13-15</sub> mit aller Deutlichkeit. Das israelitische Volk empfand auf diesem Gebiet viel strenger als die übrigen alten Semiten."

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. Allwohn, *Die Ehe des Propheten Hosea in psychoanalytischer Beleuchtung* (Beiheft zur *Z.A.W.*, No. 44) (1926), pp. 54 ff. Cf. also O. R. Sellers, *A.J.S.L.* xli (1924-5), 243-7.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Allwohn, op. cit. pp. 57 ff.; T. H. Robinson, *T.S.K.* loc. cit. pp. 304 f., and Oesterley-Robinson, *Introduction*, p. 350; A. Lods, *The Prophets and the Rise of Judaism*, English trans. by S. H. Hooke (1937), pp. 91 f. O. R. Sellers, loc. cit. p. 244, thought the prophet merely rationalized his physical attraction to Gomer. On the other hand, J. M. P. Smith, *B.W.*, N.S. xlii (1913), 100, thinks it unnecessary to suppose that Hosea loved Gomer when he married her.

prostitute, though it seeks some other motive than an attraction to do the thing he most loathed when Hosea married her.

It has further been suggested, though there is no real evidence for this, that it may have been regarded as a specially meritorious thing to marry a woman of this class.<sup>1</sup> It is conceivable that amongst a people who practised ritual prostitution such women could be held in sufficient honour to make marriage with one of them a thing of which a man would not be ashamed, or even a meritorious thing. But it is hard to suppose that this appealed to Hosea, who hated ritual prostitution. If he was moved by any instinct that had no deeper source than his own heart, it would be more likely that he would feel it to be a meritorious thing to rescue a woman from such a life than that her past life in itself made her a desirable wife.<sup>2</sup> We are told, however, that it was by the direction of God that he married Gomer, and though this is found in the narrative recorded in the third person, it doubtless goes back to Hosea himself through his disciples.<sup>3</sup> How far it is credible that God should really move a prophet to do this is a problem for theology, and not for us here. How far it is credible that a prophet should believe that God was moving him to such an act is a question to which we must return. But,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. T. H. Robinson, *T.S.K.* loc cit. p. 311, and Oesterley-Robinson, op. cit. p. 350. There is evidence that in Babylonia such marriages did take place; cf. B. Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien*, i (1920), 400; Beatrice A. Brooks, *A.J.S.L.* xxxix (1922-3), 189-94. A. Bentzen, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd edn., ii (1952), 131, points out that Lev. xxi. 7 forbids such a marriage to an Israelite priest, and therefore implies that it was permissible to others. This passage more probably refers to an ordinary harlot than a ritual prostitute; it is relevant if Gomer were a harlot, but not a sacred prostitute.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. T. H. Robinson, *Prophecy and the Prophets*, p. 76. C. F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, English trans. by J. Martin, i (1868), 29 f., thought the children of whoredom were children whom Gomer had borne as a harlot before she married Hosea, and that God's command to him to rescue her was not at variance with His holiness. Against such a view E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, English trans. by T. Meyer, i (1858), 194, had already observed that it is self-evident that it was untenable. Recently A. D. Tushingham, *J.N.E.S.* xii (1953), 157 a, has revived the view that the "children of whoredom" were children born to Gomer before Hosea married her, and that she thereafter bore three more.

<sup>3</sup> T. H. Robinson, op. cit. says that Hosea received this command when he was in an ecstatic state. Of this there is no evidence, save the theory that all oracles were received in that state.

as I have already indicated, this does not touch the questions with which we are concerned here. For whatever Gomer was at the time described in i 2, the woman referred to in iii 1, whether Gomer or another, was known to the prophet to be an adulteress before he took her into his home. And adultery was not regarded with less horror than sacred prostitution. A ritual prostitute could not be described as an adulteress in virtue of her profession,<sup>1</sup> of course, since in Israelite law there could be no adultery except where a married woman was concerned. The woman of chapter iii—again, I observe, whether she was Gomer or another—could not be called an adulteress merely because she was the paramour of more than one man, but only because she had been faithless to her marriage bond.

A more thorough-going attempt to save the character of Gomer is made by those who hold that the entire story is allegorical,<sup>2</sup> and not historical. Many years ago C. H. Toy argued that chapters i-iii consist of “a mass of separate prophetic productions, originating in different periods, and put together, as was the manner of scribes, by a late editor who made no vigorous attempt at coherency”, and that these chapters have nothing to do with the rest of the book.<sup>3</sup> The separate parts of these chapters he held to be symbolical and to rest on no real marriage of Hosea. More recently, in a different way, Y. Kaufmann has advocated the view that chapters i-iii have nothing to do with the rest of the book, but come from the hand of a prophet who lived in the time of Jehoram, the son of Ahab,

<sup>1</sup> Married women may, indeed, have acted as sacred prostitutes on occasion. Cf. H. G. May, *J.B.L.* lv (1936), p. 287, where there is a reference to Prov. vii. 20 ff. In that passage a married woman is represented as invoking the name of religion to cover her adultery.

<sup>2</sup> This was formerly the normal interpretation of the story. Amongst modern authors who continue to adopt it may be mentioned: A. van Hoonacker, *Les douze petits prophètes* (E.B.) (1908), pp. 38 f.; A. Calès, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, xi (1911), 337; H. Gressmann, in *S.A.T.* II, i (1910), 362 f.; A. Regnier, *R.B.* xxxii (1923), 390 ff.; H. Gunkel, in *R.G.G.*, 2nd edn., ii (1928), 2022; H. Hirschfeld, *J.A.O.S.* xlviii (1948), 276 f.; E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (1949), p. 246; D. Deden, *op. cit.* pp. 12 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *J.B.L.* xxxii (1913), 77. P. Humbert, *R.H.R.* lxxvii (1918), 163 f., similarly held that there was no unity in these chapters. Against this view cf. A. Regnier, *R.B.* xxxii (1923), 390-7.

853-842 B.C., quite different from the Hosea of the rest of the book.<sup>1</sup> He finds in chapters i-iii a "prophetic-dramatic allegory", which is unconcerned with the ethical state of Israel so prominent in the rest of the book,<sup>2</sup> and supposes the "wife of whoredom" i of 2 to mean merely that Gomer wore the clothes appropriate to a harlot,<sup>3</sup> while the woman of chapter iii he differentiates from Gomer.<sup>4</sup> Others go along different lines, but nevertheless resolve the marriage of Hosea into an allegory, or even a dream,<sup>5</sup> without real counterpart in the actual experience of the prophet. The reputation of Gomer is saved by dissolving her into thin air and dismissing her from the story.

It is improbable that the splitting of the book into two separate works will find much following,<sup>6</sup> but the view that the marriage of Hosea is pure allegory and not history does not fall with that hypothesis. It cannot be ruled out off-hand that the prophet presented an imaginary story of his marriage as a parable on which to base his message. Isaiah told the parable of the vineyard,<sup>7</sup> but it is not necessary to suppose that it was an actual account of a historical incident. Similarly, it is conceivable that Hosea could have told an imaginary story of his marriage, with the sole purpose of leading up to his message. On this view all that was real was Israel's defection from God, which is so often described in the Old Testament by the terms fornication and adultery.

There are many difficulties in the way of this view, however. In the first place, it has often been pointed out that Gomer's name does not appear to be symbolical,<sup>8</sup> and it is more likely

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit. III, i. 93 ff. Kaufmann bases his view on the fact that the literary form is different in i-iii and iv-xiv, while Gomer and her children do not figure in the latter. This is not convincing. For Isaiah's sons do not figure after their mention, and Isa. v. 1 ff. is without parallel in the book of Isaiah without forfeiting its claim to be regarded as Isaianic.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 102 f.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 102.

<sup>5</sup> This view is found in many older writers, but is rarely found today. Cf. however, J. Pedersen, *Israel III-IV* (1940), p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> It is rejected by Gordis, loc. cit. pp. 9 f. n.

<sup>7</sup> Isa. v. 1 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Marti observes that on the name of Gomer "all the allegorists, from the Targum, Jerome and Ephrem Syrus downwards, have spent their arts in vain, whereas the true symbolical names in the book are perfectly easy of interpretation" (*E.B.*, loc. cit. col. 2123).

that she was a real woman. Van Hoonacker held that some name was given to her to give verisimilitude to the allegory,<sup>1</sup> and suggested that it might have had a significance which the prophet's hearers would divine.<sup>2</sup> If the name had any symbolical significance we should have expected it to be indicated, as is done with the other symbolisms in the narrative. Further, if the name Gomer was not the actual name of Hosea's wife, then no verisimilitude would be given to the story; while if her name was Gomer, and yet the story was baseless in fact, a gratuitous reflection was cast on her.<sup>3</sup> Again, we have curious details on which no symbolical meaning is built, such as the fact that the second child of Gomer was a daughter, and that it was after she was weaned that the third child was conceived. Here again Van Hoonacker argued that they were just to give verisimilitude,<sup>4</sup> though this is rather to explain them away than to explain them.

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit. p. 15. So also Regnier, loc. cit. pp. 391 f.

<sup>2</sup> Loc. cit. Van Hoonacker records some of the many suggestions that have been made. Several writers have connected the name Gomer with the Hebrew root indicating *perfection*. H. Hirschfeld, *J.A.O.S.* xlviii (1928), 276 f., thought it meant *burning passion*. B. D. Eerdmans, *The Religion of Israel* (1947), p. 152, thought bath-Diblain meant that she gave herself for two clumps of figs (cf. E. Nestle, *Z.A.W.* xxiii (1903), 346, xxix (1909), 233 f., and W. Baumgartner, *ibid.* xxxiii (1913), 78), and Powis Smith, *B.W.*, N.S. xlii (1913), 97 f. (cf. *The Prophets and their Times* (1925), p. 58) similarly thought it meant that she was in low esteem. So also P. Haupt, *J.B.L.* xxxiv (1915), 44, supposed that it signified that she was worth two figs, while Tur-Sinai, op. cit. ii. 316, thought the name meant "coal", and was a symbol of prostitution (cf. Prov. vi. 27-29). A. Lods, *Histoire de la littérature hébraïque et juive* (1950), p. 244, observed of the efforts to find a symbolic meaning for her name: "Il faut avouer que c'est bien tiré par les cheveux." H. S. Nyberg, *Hoseaboken* (1941), p. 33, thought bath-Diblain indicated that she was from Diblathaim in Moab, and that she was therefore a Moabitess, and in this he is followed by I. Engnell, *S.B.U.* i (1948), 878. For other suggestions cf. E. Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch* (K.A.T.) (1929), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> G. L. Robinson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 1952 edn., p. 20, says that if these chapters "are to be taken as figurative or allegorical only, such an interpretation would reflect upon the prophet's actual wife, if he were married; or, upon the prophet himself, if unmarried". P. Humbert, *R.H.R.* lxxvii (1918), 158, observes: "Il se serait rendu ridicule en se faisant le héros fictif d'une histoire d'adultère tandis qu'il vivait heureux en ménage."

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit. pp. 17 f. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, English trans. by T. Meyer, 2nd edn., i (1858), 203 f., thought the reason why the second child was represented as a daughter was to emphasize the contrast with the name, since a daughter might be expected to excite more pity.

Far more damaging, in my view, is the fact that it is said that it was by the word of the Lord that Hosea married Gomer. The prophets did not lightly bandy the word of the Lord about, and if all that was meant was that the Lord commanded Hosea to speak a parable, it is improbable that more than this would have been said. It is true that there were prophets who lightly used the name of the Lord to authenticate their oracles, but they stand condemned in the Bible, and it is improbable that Hosea was such a prophet. When he said that the Lord moved him to marry Gomer, it is more likely that he did feel so moved and did so marry her than that he meant that it was all in imagination.<sup>1</sup>

Again, if Gomer throughout merely stands for Israel and not also for a real woman, it is hard to see why she should be called a harlot prior to her marriage, or why she should be spoken of as forsaking the Lord before she had become His people.<sup>2</sup> The assumption already referred to, that it was in retrospect that the prophet perceived Gomer's infidelity, might have some relevance if the marriage were a real one—though, as will be seen later, I do not share this view—but it could have no relevance on the allegorical view. For Israel could not be said to have forsaken the Lord before His marriage with her. Moreover, the name of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. L. Gautier, *op. cit.* i. 464: "Une autre objection . . . contre le système allégorique, c'est que le prophète n'aurait rencontré aucune créance en racontant à ses auditeurs des aventures purement imaginaires; il aurait affaibli ou même anéanti la portée de la leçon qu'il voulait leur donner. Si l'on admet, au contraire, qu'Osée relate ses douloureuses expériences personnelles, qu'il prêche pour ainsi dire d'exemple en pardonnant finalement à l'épouse coupable, sa prédication prend quelque chose de vécu et de tragique, et l'impression qui s'en dégage est saisissante." L. Fillion, in Vigouroux's *D.B.* iv (1908), 1910: "Pour que la narration orale des faits par Osée fût capable d'impressionner la foule, il fallait qu'ils correspondissent à la réalité historique, et on ne conçoit pas que le prophète se soit mis en scène comme un homme soumis à la plus rude épreuve domestique, si la conduite de sa femme avait toujours été honorable." Similarly C. von Orelli, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, English trans. by J. S. Banks (1893), p. 22: "It is quite inconceivable that the prophet should have related such things if his married life was happy, if his partner was a thoroughly honourable housewife." (According to A. Æschmann, *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible* (ed. by A. Westphal), ii. 257 a, Gautier later tempered his objections to the allegorical view. He says: "Après avoir critiqué vigoureusement (dans son *Introduction*) l'interprétation allégorique, le professeur Lucien Gautier ne craignait pas d'avouer, sur la fin de sa vie, que de graves hésitations lui étaient venues à ce sujet.")

<sup>2</sup> Hos. i. 2.

the first child, Jezreel, and all that was symbolized by that name, was concerned with the house of Jehu, which had ruled for less than a century, rather than with Israel's relations with God from the wilderness days, when Israel became His bride.

A different way of saving Gomer's reputation is followed by those who hold that chapter i is historical, while chapter iii is allegorical.<sup>1</sup> Even without chapter iii. it seems to me difficult to avoid the recognition of her infidelity, but to that we shall return. Here I would content myself with saying that there seems no more reason to deny the historical character of chapter iii than that of chapter i. The curious fact that in chapter iii we are told the exact price the prophet paid for the woman he is there said to have taken into his home, where no symbolical use is made of the price in the sequel, argues as strongly against the merely allegorical interpretation of this chapter as the name of Gomer argues against the allegorical interpretation of chapter i. For here it does not seem remotely apt to suggest that the price was named in order to give verisimilitude. The price was fifteen shekels of silver, and a homer and a half of barley.<sup>2</sup> A homer and a half of barley contained forty-five seahs. From 2 Kings vii. 1, 16 we learn that when Samaria was relieved from the rigours of famine by the withdrawal of the besieging Aramaeans and the despoiling of the Aramaean camp, the price of barley was two seahs for a shekel. If it be assumed that this was higher than the normal price, and that ordinarily barley may have been sold at three seahs for a shekel, the value of the barley may have been another fifteen shekels of silver, and the total price paid by Hosea may have been equivalent to thirty shekels,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> So P. Volz, *Z.W.Th.* xli (1898), 321-35; K. Marti, *op. cit.* pp. 33 f.; P. Humbert, *R.H.R.* lxxvii (1918), p. 170, and *R.H.P.R.* i (1921), 100; H. Guthe, *op. cit.* ii. 6 f. P. Haupt, *J.B.L.* xxxiv (1915), 42, dismisses chapter iii. as secondary, and similarly L. W. Batten, *J.B.L.* xlviii (1929), 271 ff. holds that this chapter is of later origin, and that there is nothing to connect either Hosea or Gomer with it, its whole message being other than his.

<sup>2</sup> Hos. iii. 2. The LXX says "a homer of barley and a skin of wine", instead of "a homer and a half of barley". Though some editors have preferred this, Harper, *op. cit.* p. 219, rejects it, and H. S. Nyberg, *Studien zum Hoseabuche* (1935), p. 23, observes that the reading of M.T. is not inferior to LXX.

<sup>3</sup> So many writers; most recently Gordis, *loc. cit.* p. 26 n.

which was the price at which a slave was valued.<sup>1</sup> But surely this is a most unnatural way of indicating a price, besides the highly conjectural nature of the calculation,<sup>2</sup> and an allegorist who intended to make no use of its curious details might have been expected to say simply that Hosea bought the woman for thirty shekels of silver.<sup>3</sup> Both chapter i and chapter iii would seem to stand or fall together as historical or allegorical, and in my judgement the historical view is the better grounded.

Some have accepted both chapters as historical, but have held that the woman of chapter iii was not Gomer at all, but another woman.<sup>4</sup> What had happened to Gomer we must not ask. Here, it is believed, we have the account of a second marriage. In favour of this view is the fact that Gomer is not named in chapter iii and the prophet is told to love "a woman" who was an adulteress. It must be agreed that this is a strange way to refer to her if she was already the prophet's wife. The view

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xxi. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. van Hoonacker, *op. cit.* p. 34, and D. Buzy, *R.B.* xiv (1917), 416.

<sup>3</sup> J. A. Bewer, *A.J.S.L.* xxii (1905-6), 124 n., regards the payment as a *mohar*, and notes that the equation of the sum paid with the price of a slave has a parallel in the Code of Hammurabi, where the price of a slave, as defined in § 252, is the same as the value of a marriage settlement for a woman of the poorer classes, as defined in § 140. Buzy also, *loc. cit.* p. 442, thinks the price was a *mohar*. It is by no means certain, however, that this was so, and H. Schmidt, *loc. cit.* p. 264, denies that it was a bride price. Similarly W. R. Harper, *op. cit.* p. 219, thinks the passage is easier to understand if it referred to the purchase price of a slave than if it referred to a *mohar*.

<sup>4</sup> The view that chapter iii has nothing to do with Gomer has been common, both with writers of the allegorical school and with some of those who understand the passages literally. So amongst others, S. Davidson, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, iii (1863), 237; C. F. Keil, *op. cit.* i, 31 f.; C. von Orelli, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, English trans. by J. S. Banks (1893), p. 19; C. H. Toy, *J.B.L.* xxxii (1913), 77; G. Hölscher, *Die Profeten* (1914), p. 427; W. R. Arnold, *Ephod and Ark* (1917), p. 126 n.; D. Buzy, *R.B.* *loc. cit.* p. 442; P. Humbert, *R.H.R.* lxxvii (1918), 170; H. Hirschfeld, *J.A.O.S.* xlviii (1928), 276 f.; Smith-Irwin, *The Prophets and their Times*, 2nd edn. (1941), 74; R. H. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.* pp. 568 f.; H. S. Nyberg, *Hoseaboken* (1941), p. 38; B. D. Eerdmans, *The Religion of Israel* (1947), pp. 152 f.; Y. Kaufmann, *op. cit.* iii. i. 100 f.; A. D. Tushingham, *J.N.E.S.* xii (1953), 156 a. M. Haller, *R.G.G.* iii (1913), 143, was uncertain whether two marriages or one were intended, while N. H. Snaith, *Mercy and Sacrifice* (1953), pp. 31 f., is undecided whether chapter iii refers to a second marriage of Hosea's, or whether it is a later composition unrelated to Hosea.

that chapter i and chapter iii are parallel accounts of the marriage of Hosea taken from different sources is not embarrassed here, since on that view Gomer was not already the prophet's wife and this is the introduction to the story in this account. As has been said, however, it is other difficulties which stand in the way of that view. The main difficulty which stands in the way of the view that chapter iii concerns a different woman is that in that case both of these women, Gomer and the other, symbolize the wayward people of God. The interpretation of the two marriages speaks strongly for the identification of the wife of the one with the wife of the other. It cannot be supposed that the prophet wished to say that God betrothed Israel to Himself, but when she turned from Him He turned to find another bride.<sup>1</sup> Surely it is clear, and the interpretation makes it quite explicit, that Israel is symbolized by the bride in both cases.<sup>2</sup> In both it is indubitable that the bride is represented as an unfaithful and adulterous woman, and in both we find a message of Israel's ultimate return to the Lord, which could only be symbolized by the final return of the bride to faithfulness.<sup>3</sup> There is surely

<sup>1</sup> Nyberg, loc. cit. p. 38, says the two marriages illustrate the breach with El Elyon and Yahweh. This does not seem to be possible. Nyberg holds that the women of chapter i and chapter iii were different (see preceding note), but here he would seem to find that the husbands represented different deities. Both chapters are specifically related to Yahweh in the present text, and there is no reason to emend it in this respect.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hos. i. 2 (where "the land" is clearly the land of Israel; cf. 4, 6), iii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Hos. i. 11 (Heb. ii. 2). Gordis, loc. cit. p. 20 n., would follow a number of scholars who transfer the verses at the end of chapter i (beginning of chapter ii in Hebrew) to the end of chapter ii. Wellhausen, *Die Kleinen Propheten*, 3rd edn. (1898), p. 99, had earlier rejected this view on the ground that they would be superfluous there, and instead excised the verses as spurious. So, also, G. Hölscher, *Geschichte der israelitischen-jüdischen Religion* (1922), p. 106, and H. G. May, *J.B.L.* lv (1936), 285, both of whom also delete the last ten verses of chapter ii (against this cf. P. Humbert, in *Vom Alten Testament* (Marti Festschrift), ed. by K. Budde (Beiheft zur Z.A.W. No. 41) (1925), pp. 158 ff., where the unity of Hos. ii. 2-20 (Heb. 4-22) is maintained). Marti, op. cit. pp. 9 f., rejected all hopeful passages in Hosea as due to interpolation, but F. James rightly declares this to be arbitrary (*Personalities in the Old Testament* (1947), p. 229). Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch* (K.A.T.) (1929), pp. 45, 49, transfers i. 10-ii. 1 (Heb. ii. 1-3) to follow chapter iii. and so D. Deden, op. cit. pp. 36 f. These verses may have been taken, like chapter ii, from a separate

no need to find two marriages here, and the hypothesis seems to me to be entirely without foundation.<sup>1</sup>

Even if chapter iii is excluded from the consideration of Hosea's marriage to Gomer, we should not be left without difficulties. Gomer is then held to have been a pure woman, whom the prophet married, and who bore him children in faithful wedlock. The description of her as a "wife of whoredom" is held to reflect not on her personal character, but to be due solely to the fact that she represents unfaithful Israel. The actor who is given the part of Iago need not himself be a bad man. Then, on this view, when Gomer successfully bore the prophet children, he gave them symbolical names, which became the texts of his messages to Israel and which in no way reflected his domestic circumstances. If chapter i is studied by itself, there is little difficulty about this view. It is agreed by all that Jezreel was the child of Hosea, since it is explicitly said that Gomer bore this child to him. It may be without significance that "to him" is omitted in the case of the other children, and Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi could just as easily be the texts of messages to Israel without reflecting disloyal relations between Gomer and Hosea as Jezreel could be, and no connection with the personal history of the prophet be found here. All this may be granted. It is chapter ii, however, which stands most obstinately in the

source, and may have been uttered on a separate occasion. Nevertheless chapter i is their background, and I see no reason to deny them to Hosea. It is surely significant that each of the three chapters ends on the same note. In chapter iii it cannot be eliminated, save by the desperate expedient of eliminating the whole chapter. It would seem to be wiser to find in the presence of this note at the end of all three chapters evidence that this belonged to the authentic message of Hosea. If we first excise what we do not like, it is not convincing to be told that after the excision no trace of it is left. J. Coppens, *Alttestamentliche Studien* (Nötscher Festschrift, B.B.B. No. 1), 1950, p. 42, deletes i. 10-ii. 1 (Heb. ii. 1-3), ii. 14-23 (Heb. 16-25) and iii. 5, in the interests of his theory that chapter iii. records how Hosea staged an action for divorce against his wife, but then made a volte-face in the middle of the proceedings. This does not seem a natural interpretation of the chapter, and the necessity to deal violently with the text is a serious weakness.

<sup>1</sup> Nowack, *op. cit.* p. 25, notes that if chapter iii concerned another woman it would really be irrelevant, and L. Fillion, *loc. cit.* col. 1912, observed that to be perfect the symbolism required that it should be the same woman. Cf. also B. W. Anderson, *Interpretation*, viii (1954), 297, where it is concluded that chapter iii is "theologically inseparable from the story of Gomer-Israel".

way of this view, and it would be necessary not merely to isolate chapter i from chapter iii, but also from chapter ii, which is most intimately connected with what goes before. Here we find plays on the names of the children recurring, in a way that could not be understood without chapter i. Moreover, here Gomer's children are declared to be the children of harlotry,<sup>1</sup> and she is said to have gone after her lovers.<sup>2</sup> It is undoubted that in chapter ii. the interpretation of the symbolism in terms of Israel's experience in relation to God is intermingled with the prophet's words about Gomer, because Israel appears to be in his mind throughout alongside Gomer ;<sup>3</sup> but it is hard to exclude Gomer altogether from this chapter, and most natural to find the references to her dissolving into the references to Israel. Unless Hosea's relations with Gomer had significant points of contact with, and similarity to, God's relations with Israel, there was no symbolism in the marriage. For the above mentioned case of an actor playing the part of a villain is no real parallel. However fine the actor's own character may be, he pretends to be the villain ; and if Gomer were but playing the part of unfaithful Israel, she would at least have to pretend to be unfaithful. Those who seek to save her character do not suggest that she pretended to be unfaithful—of this there is no suggestion whatever—but rob the marriage of any symbolic relevance to that which it is declared to symbolize.<sup>4</sup>

If both chapter i and chapter iii are historical, and both are concerned with Gomer, it is even more difficult to save her character. For here it is said that she was an adulteress, bought for the price of a slave,<sup>5</sup> and isolated for a period of probation and purification before being given the status of a wife. It would be carrying prophetic symbolism far to treat a pure woman as an adulteress in order to make her the text of a message which had no relation to her.

Rabbi Gordis, to whom reference has already been made, has

<sup>1</sup> Hos. ii. 4 (Heb. 6).

<sup>2</sup> Hos. ii. 7 (Heb. 9).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. A. Bewer, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, i (1949), 38 : "The story in ch. 2 is a fusion of Hosea's and the Lord's experiences."

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Oesterley-Robinson, *op. cit.* p. 351 : "It is difficult to understand Hosea's message and teaching except on the theory that she (i.e. Gomer) was false to him."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *supra*.

recently put forward the view that chapter i and chapter iii both tell the story of Hosea's marriage with Gomer, but that the facts were differently interpreted because the two chapters come from different periods in the ministry of Hosea.<sup>1</sup> On this view, at one point in his career he interpreted its symbolism in terms of judgement, but later he looked back over the marriage of long ago and saw in it a symbol of the discipline that should lead to restoration. We are here back at the difficulty already noted above, that if chapter iii tells the story of Hosea's first association with Gomer, then she is described as already an adulteress before she became his wife. She had therefore been the wife of another husband, and the looked-for return to her first husband could not have been to Hosea. Further, we are entitled to ask whether on this view Hosea had really kept his wife under discipline for a time after he first married her, and, if so, whether he is supposed to have given this no symbolic significance until years after. In view of the fact that in both accounts the important thing is the symbolic significance, it is scarcely likely that Hosea attached no symbolic significance to the discipline until years after. Moreover, at the end of chapter i <sup>2</sup> we have a promise of restoration, when Jezreel shall symbolize the gathering together of Israel, and instead of being declared not the people of God they shall be called the sons of the living God.<sup>3</sup> This is precisely the same note that we find at the end of chapter iii, with which it is clearly to be connected. Is this also to be referred to the later period in Hosea's life, when he looked back over the events of long ago? There would be no difficulty about this, were it not for chapter ii.<sup>4</sup> For here we find a reference to Gomer's infidelity to Hosea, followed by a threat of

<sup>1</sup> Loc. cit. pp. 30 f. He holds that the first interpretation dates from before 743 B.C., while the other comes from twenty years later.

<sup>2</sup> It has been noted above that several writers hold these verses to be out of place, and transfer them to the end of chapter ii. So L. Gautier, *Introduction à l'Ancien Testament*, 3rd edn. i (1939), 463 n., where reference is made to Rom. ix. 25 f. In that passage the end of chapter ii is cited before the end of chapter i. This can hardly be held to be evidence that the verses stood in this order in Paul's text.

<sup>3</sup> Hos. i. 10 (Heb. ii. 1).

<sup>4</sup> It will be seen below that I recognize the message of restoration to be one which Hosea reached later in his life, but rather through his developing experience than merely through reflection on past events which he reinterpreted.

punishment and suffering for her, until she wishes to return to her husband. It is clear that Gomer here represents Israel, and the chapter ends with the promise of Israel's betrothal to God in faithfulness. Again, then, we have the same note as at the end of chapter iii. Is it supposed that as Hosea looked back over his life, he represented the immediately post-nuptial discipline as representing the discipline of Israel that should lead to restoration, and also the bitter experience of Gomer at a later stage in her career, after she had been unfaithful to Hosea, as representing precisely the same thing, despite the fact that *ex hypothesi* he had learned by experience that the immediately post-nuptial discipline had had no effect?

We may therefore turn from these varying views to that which has long commanded more support than any of them, and whose chief fault, as Wheeler Robinson observes, is that it has lost the charm of novelty.<sup>1</sup> This is the view that both chapters are historical, and that both concern the same woman, but that the one is not a variant repetition of the other. We have then to ask what is their relation to one another. Not a few scholars have held that chapter iii is the sequel to chapter i and this seems to me to be the most satisfactory view.<sup>2</sup> Sellin and Budde believed that both were once contained in a single account, written in the first person, and that the compiler threw part of it into the third person.<sup>3</sup> That is a conjecture which, in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Two Hebrew Prophets*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> This view is most familiar to English readers in the work of George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, revised edn. i (1928), 241 ff. It was found in H. Ewald, op. cit. i. 223 ff.; J. Wellhausen, op. cit. p. 104; W. R. Smith, *The Prophets of Israel* (1912 edn.), pp. 178 ff. In recent years it has appeared in P. Cruveilhier, *R.B.*, N.S. xiii (1916), 342-62; K. Budde, *T.S.K.* xcvi-xcvii (1925), 1-89; E. Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch* (K.A.T.) (1929), p. 46; E. A. Leslie, op. cit. pp. 174 f.; S. L. Caiger, *Lives of the Prophets* (1936), pp. 40 ff.; J. P. Hyatt, op. cit. p. 42; F. James, op. cit. pp. 229 f.; H. Wheeler Robinson, *B.Q.*, N.S. v (1930-1), 304-13, and *Two Hebrew Prophets*, pp. 16 f.; F. Nötscher, *Zwölfprophetenbuch* (Echter Bib.) (1948), p. 12; A. Weiser, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 2nd edn. (1949), p. 175 and *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten* (A. T. Deutsch), i (1949), 24; E. Osty, *Amos et Osée* (Jerusalem Bible) (1952), pp. 64 f.; F. Buck, *Die Liebe Gottes beim Propheten Osée* (1953), p. 12 n.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Sellin, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 7th edn. (1935), p. 103 (English trans. by W. Montgomery from 3rd German edn. (1923), p. 160); K. Budde, *T.S.K.*, loc. cit. pp. 7 f.

nature of the case, is unsupported by evidence, though it must be agreed that it would be very strange if one part of the story stood in a biography of the prophet and the other part stood by itself in an autobiography. We need not stay to examine Sellin's attempt to rearrange the verses in a new sequence that is entirely subjective.<sup>1</sup> We may be content to recognize that if the two accounts are taken from separate sources, it is possible that the biographical account was fuller than the other for part of the story, even though the autobiographical, in its now lost state, may not have been without reference to it. Indeed, if chapter iii. contains the sequel to chapter i in the prophet's experience, it is hard to see how Hosea could have related the sequel without mention of what went before it. It may be that only the autobiographical account contained the sequel, though, as has been said, the other account was not without some promise of it.

If, now, we treat the one as the sequel to the other, let us see how far a consistent story results, and how far the message of the prophet is related to the essential conception of God as reflected in his teaching. On this view the prophet was commanded to marry a woman whom he knew to have an evil past, and who bore children to whom he gave symbolic names. These names became in turn the texts on which he based his utterances of denunciation of the house of Jehu, and of the coming judgment of God upon Israel, who were no longer loyal to Him or rightly to be called His people. It is only chapter ii. that shows that Gomer was an adulteress, and that two of her children were not really Hosea's. The same chapter makes it apparent that Gomer left Hosea and went after her lovers,<sup>2</sup> who, however, failed her so that she longed for her husband once more, as the Prodigal Son longed for home when he found how delusive were the hopes inspired by the far country. In chapter iii we find that she has fallen into slavery, so that when Hosea finds her he has to buy her back to himself.<sup>3</sup> He buys her back because he

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, English trans., p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> It is not clear whether she was driven out or whether she deserted Hosea.

<sup>3</sup> Much discussion has been devoted to the question why Hosea should have had to buy Gomer back, if she were the woman referred to in chapter iii. It is sometimes said that if she were his wife, he would be entitled to recover her

still loves her, despite her unfaithfulness, and instead of putting her to death for her adultery, as the law empowered him to do, he reclaimed her for himself.<sup>1</sup>

without payment. On the other hand, it is sometimes thought that the sum was paid to her paramour. It seems unlikely that the paramour would need to be compensated, but rather that he would be fortunate to escape without punishment for his adultery. If Gomer were living in freedom, it might be expected that Hosea could claim her back without any payment. If, however, she had sunk to a condition of slavery, then her master might have to be compensated. If, for instance, she had sold herself, or had been sold, into slavery to pay her debts, her creditor, or the purchaser who had satisfied her creditor, would need to be compensated. Hosea's payment was therefore more probably to buy her freedom than to buy back his marital rights. A. D. Tushingham, *J.N.E.S.* xii (1953), 154 n., thinks the payment was a fee paid to the sanctuary in exchange for its loss of revenue, but theoretically to acquire her from the cult god. He thinks Gomer was a similar cult woman, over whom Hosea did not have power, despite the fact that he married her (p. 157), but that this time he made proper legal arrangements to get another woman completely into his power (p. 159), although this time there is no reason to suppose that he necessarily married her (p. 154 n.). It is very improbable that a man would have less power over his wife than over a similar hierodule to whom he was not married.

<sup>1</sup> R. E. Wolfe, *Meet Amos and Hosea* (1945), p. 86, thinks that "Gomer finally met the doom which Palestinian Society meted out to faithless wives, namely death". No evidence is offered in support of this, for the sufficient reason that none is available. Wolfe declares that the view which is adopted in the present paper rests on two misconceptions (pp. 81 ff.). The first is the idea that Gomer was unchaste before her marriage, and the second is the idea that Hosea sought to reclaim her after her adultery. He declares, again without a vestige of evidence, that in Hos. i. 2 the phrase rendered "a wife of whoredom" is "a technical term" which means "a woman who was to develop tendencies toward harlotry" (p. 82), and while he admits that as the book now stands it plainly shares the "misconception" that Hosea sought to reclaim Gomer (p. 84), he disposes of this by eliminating, in the manner of Marti, all that conflicts with his interpretation (*ibid.*). It may be gently pointed out that the suppression of evidence is not evidence, and that while it is true that if we first rewrite a book in accordance with a theory it may then appear to support the theory, something more than the theory is required as the basis of the rewriting, or we are guilty of arguing in a circle. We are offered no serious reason why Hosea could not have sought to reclaim Gomer, or why he could not through the chastening of his own poignant experience have passed from a message of judgement to a message of unquenchable love. It can scarcely be regarded as axiomatic that Hosea could not possibly grow in his understanding of the nature of God or in his expression of God's message to Israel. Even lesser men than Hosea have perceived that God will not quite fit into the wooden moulds we make for Him in our first excursions into theology. O. Procksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1950), p. 154, observes: "Der Prophet hat in seinem Schicksal, das ihm an die tiefsten Lebenswurzeln gegriffen hat, die

Later Talmudic law forbade a man to live with an adulterous wife,<sup>1</sup> and L. M. Epstein, speaking of Biblical law, says that "the husband cannot forgive his wife, and his forgiveness has no bearing on the crime of the adulterer".<sup>2</sup> This goes beyond the evidence, since the law says nothing whatever about this. Other oriental codes make specific provision for a husband's forgiveness of an erring partner,<sup>3</sup> and it is likely that in Israel forgiveness was possible, though not encouraged by the law. Certainly not all adulterers and adulteresses were put to death, as the references in the prophets to the adultery that was rampant in some periods abundantly shows. But that forgiveness was possible is clearly indicated by Hosea's forgiveness of Gomer. Had Hosea divorced her, it would have been contrary to the law for him to take her back after she had associated with another.<sup>4</sup> But he had not divorced her,<sup>5</sup> and he was therefore free to take her back,

Erkenntnis gefunden, dass Gottes Wesen Liebe ist. In ihrer Grundsätzlichkeit ist diese Erkenntnis neu, wie innerhalb Israel, so überhaupt in der Geschichte der Menschheit." It seems to me more reasonable to suppose that this new perception came through the tragic experience of Hosea, as the present text admittedly indicates, than to suppose with Wolfe that it arose as a casual result of a clumsy interpolator's desire to draw the teeth of Hosea's message of judgement.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. T. B. Sotah, 28 a (L. Goldschmidt, *Der Babylonische Talmud mit Einschluss der vollständigen Mišnah*, v (1912), 266), and Sifre Numbers, § 7 (M. Friedmann, *Sifré debé Rab* (1864), p. 4 a). By implication the same thing stands in Sifre Numbers, § 19 (loc. cit. p. 6 b).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism* (1948), p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Code of Hammurabi, § 129, and Assyrian Code, Tablet A, § 15 (Driver-Miles, *The Babylonian Laws*, ii (1955), 50 f., and *The Assyrian Laws* (1935), pp. 388 f.).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Deut. xxiv. 1-4. The Code of Deuteronomy is commonly assigned, in its present form, to the seventh century B.C., and therefore later than the time of Hosea. This does not mean, however, that all of its provisions were new at the time of their codification. According to S. A. Cook, *The Laws of Moses and the Laws of Hammurabi* (1903), p. 124, the Babylonian husband was forbidden intercourse with his divorced wife, and this would suggest the probability that the Hebrew law was of ancient origin.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Gordis, loc. cit. pp. 20 f. n. Gordis records the view of C. H. Gordon that "she is not my wife and I am not her husband" (Hos. ii. 2 (Heb. 4)) is a formula of divorce and the stripping of the wife naked (ii. 3 (Heb. 5)) constituted the legal act of divorce. This view is rejected by Gordis, who holds that the threat of stripping was a threat of punishment, and not of divorce. So also J. Coppens, *Alttestamentliche Studien* (Nötscher Festschrift, B.B.B. No. 1) (1950), p. 44, rejects the view that in ii. 2 (Heb. 4) we have a formula of divorce.

just as Deutero-Isaiah tells us that God was free to take Israel back to Himself, since He had not given her a bill of divorce.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Hosea for a time disciplined his wife before restoring her to her lost status.

All this offers a close parallel to Israel's relations with God, as the prophet conceived them. It is not necessary to suppose that Hosea thought of Israel as a harlot, in a metaphorical sense, before God's union with her in the wilderness days. There are passages in the prophets which think of Israel as the faithful bride of God in those days.<sup>2</sup> There are others, it is true, which think of her as rebellious and unfaithful even from that time.<sup>3</sup> Hosea elsewhere speaks of Israel as the child of God, rather than His bride,<sup>4</sup> but he also makes it clear that even in her childhood she did not requite His love and care with the love she should have shown.<sup>5</sup> But leaving this aside, Hosea was bidden to marry a "wife of whoredom" to symbolize Israel's disloyalty to God in his own day.<sup>6</sup> He is not here looking back to the wilderness period, but concerned with the Israel he saw around him, living in a state of religious promiscuity which he could only characterize by the metaphor of fornication. He could best symbolize God's present relation to Israel by marrying a woman whom he knew to be of an evil past, and of whose immediate loyalty he had little hope.

It is well known that the prophets performed many strange symbolic acts, acts which may well have seemed as revolting to them as they do to us. To the Hebrew nudity was always revolting, and it must have been revolting to Isaiah to walk the streets of Jerusalem naked and barefoot.<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel must have found the meal he symbolically ate revolting and loathsome.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Hosea could well have found this marriage loathsome,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Isa. l. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hos. ii. 15 (Heb. 17); Amos v. 25; Jer. ii. 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ezek. xx. 5 ff.; xxiii. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Hos. xi. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Hos. xi. 2 f.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Buzy, *R.B.* loc. cit. p. 392.

<sup>7</sup> Isa. xx. 2 ff. It is, however, true, as L. Waterman, *J.B.L.* xxxvii (1918), 197, points out, that Isaiah's action spoke of captivity rather than of obscenity. O. R. Sellers, *A.J.S.L.* xli (1924-5), 245, says this was "a clear case of exhibitionism, a tendency which may be observed at any bathing-beach or track meet". It is improbable that this is correct.

<sup>8</sup> Ezek. iv. 12 ff.

even though he felt a constraint, which he believed to be of God, to enter into it. Many writers have been concerned with the theological problem as to how God could have bidden Hosea to do something so dreadful as to marry a woman of ill repute with his eyes open to the certainty that she would be unfaithful to him. This is no more relevant to the discussion of what took place than is the theological problem of a lying spirit being sent forth by God to deceive Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah<sup>1</sup> to the factual study of 1 Kings xxii. However unique Hosea's symbolism is in prophetic symbolism, and however far it goes beyond other examples in unsavouriness in the eyes of the law,<sup>2</sup> there is no reason to regard it as impossible that a prophet who wished to bring home to his contemporaries the far more unsavoury character of their religious life should so realistically represent it in symbolic action. Moreover, as many writers have observed, an act which is ethically to be condemned in actual conduct does not become defensible as a Divine command in a vision or an allegory.<sup>3</sup>

The first child Gomer bore is stated to have been his,<sup>4</sup> but the subsequent children do not seem to have been,<sup>5</sup> and the prophet was prepared for this, since it paralleled the experience of Israel, whose religious disloyalty was in his eyes whoredom or adultery. Gomer's desertion of him in pursuit of a more exciting life than conjugal loyalty provided was symbolical of that complete rejection of God which the prophet saw in the life of the nation. But for whatever reasons Hosea had married Gomer, he had come to love her, despite all her disloyalty, so that though she had deserted him and brought sorrow and trouble upon herself, he was yet ready to buy her back. In the interpretation which the prophet gives in his oracle in chapter ii. he describes the sorrows which Israel, like Gomer, would bring upon herself.<sup>6</sup> But he does not stop there. He speaks also of the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xxii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gordis, loc. cit. pp. 13 f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. P. Cruveilhier, *R.B.*, N.S. xiii (1916), 348; E. Sellin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, English trans., p. 159; A. Weiser, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 2nd edn., p. 175; Gordis, loc. cit. p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Hos. i. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Harper, op. cit. p. 207, thought all the children were illegitimate, while Bewer, *A.J.S.L.* loc. cit. p. 123, held that all the children were legitimate, but that Gomer later became unfaithful.

<sup>6</sup> Hos. ii. 9 ff. (Heb. 11 ff.).

way in which God would draw her back to Himself and speak tenderly to her.<sup>1</sup> This is in harmony with the way in which Hosea restores Gomer to himself in chapter iii. Chapter ii speaks of the discipline God will bring on Israel in the laying waste of her vineyards, and in the cessation of her feasts,<sup>2</sup> just as chapter iii. speaks of the cessation of her independent government and of her cultic usages.<sup>3</sup> But both chapters end on the note of restored relations, with utter loyalty now marking Israel. Just as on this view Gomer had married Hosea and had then been false to him, until she was restored to "her first husband", so Israel, the bride of God, was faithless to Him and abandoned Him, until she was restored to Him by His own initiative when she showed a chastened spirit. It is clear that Hosea still hoped to win the loyalty of Gomer, comparable to the devotion of Israel to God to which he looked forward, and though we are not told whether after her probation and purification she did give him her loyalty, it is tempting to think it may have been so, and that his love triumphed over her shame.

This view of the prophet's marriage, which is in no sense new, seems to me to be straightforward and relevant. It means that the prophet, who from the beginning knew the waywardness of Gomer as God must have known the waywardness of Israel, yet loved her with a love that could not give her up, and realized that if he so loved a woman who ill requited his love, and loved her until he won her back to himself, not alone by buying her from slavery but by winning her affection and loyalty, God must love Israel with a love transcending his own for Gomer. When he puts into the mouth of God the words: "How can I give thee up, Ephraim? How can I hand thee over, Israel? . . . I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger; I will not return to destroy Ephraim",<sup>4</sup> he perceives that judgement is no more

<sup>1</sup> Hos. ii. 14 (Heb. 16).

<sup>2</sup> Hos. ii. 12 (Heb. 14).

<sup>3</sup> Hos. iii. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Hos. xi. 8 f. For the rejection of these verses cf. J. Wellhausen, *Die Kleinen Propheten*, 3rd edn. (1898), p. 128; K. Marti, *Das Dodekapropheton* (K.H.C.) (1904), p. 90; L. W. Batten, *J.B.L.* xlviii (1929), 258, 264 f. I find no sound reason to reject these verses, which chime so well with elements in chapters i-iii that seem to me to belong essentially to those chapters. Cf. E. Sellin, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 7th edn. (1935), p. 105.

the last word of God than it had been his own last word to Gomer.

One last question remains to be considered, and this brings out the one significant difference between the view I hold and the one so familiar to English readers in the work of George Adam Smith. Was the experience of Hosea the basis or the result of his prophetic vocation? Both views have found advocates. If we suppose, with Ewald, Wellhausen and George Adam Smith, that Hosea married a woman who was pure—or whom at any rate he believed to be pure—and only afterwards found that she played him false, and then by reflection on his experience came to realize that God had been leading him through it all to a deeper knowledge of Himself, we are led to the conclusion that his call came through his experience.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, if we take at its face value the statement that it was by the word of the Lord that he was led to marry Gomer, his prophetic call preceded his experience.<sup>2</sup> It does not seem to me to be quite so simple as either of these views would suggest. The second seems to me to be without question substantially sound. Whether Hosea felt a divine urge to marry Gomer or not, it would appear that he acted as a prophet when Gomer's first child was born, before he was aware of her infidelity, and therefore before his bitter experience could have brought him the call that the other school of writers recognize.<sup>3</sup> Hence I

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *supra* for references to a number of writers who take this view. Further writers who hold that the call of Hosea arose out of his unhappy experience include C. Cornill, *Introduction to the Canonical Books of the Old Testament*, English trans. by G. H. Box (1907), p. 321; H. P. Smith, *The Religion of Israel* (1914), p. 140; C. F. Kent, *The Growth and Contents of the Old Testament* (1926), p. 112; L. Gautier, *op. cit.* i. 465. Cf. also J. P. Hyatt, *Prophetic Religion* (1947), p. 43: "This interpretation of Hosea's domestic life considers the command of 3:1 as the crucial moment in his career. While not actually the initial summons to a prophet's mission, it was the moment which gave him a distinctive belief. . . . It was a moment which also gave him an insight into his past life that enabled him to interpret his marriage to Gomer as obedience to a divine decree." Against the view of Wellhausen, cf. E. König, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1893), pp. 310 f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. P. Volz, *Z.W.Th.* xli (1898), 322; J. M. P. Smith, *B.W.*, N.S. xlii (1913), 95.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. P. Humbert, *R.H.R.* lxxvii (1918), 160; also the full discussion by P. Volz, *loc. cit.* pp. 321 ff.

would range myself with those who hold that the call preceded his poignant experience, and I see no reason to doubt that it accompanied his urge to marry Gomer. At the same time it is certain that his experience deepened and enriched his message. At the time of the birth of the three children his word was of judgement, and it was only later that the note of reclamation was found.<sup>1</sup> When Gomer left him he breathed out threatenings against her, only to find that love transmuted them into forgiveness and sent him to seek her and reclaim her.<sup>2</sup> In the case of some other prophets we find that in the moment of their call they perceived in germ the essence of the message with which they were charged. This appears to have been so in the case of Isaiah<sup>3</sup> and Jeremiah.<sup>4</sup> But there is no reason to suppose that more than one element of the message of Hosea was given to him before his marriage with Gomer, and that the least rich element. His experience was at once the consequence and the basis of his consciousness that God was claiming him for His service. Hence I am persuaded that the call of Hosea was a sustained one, beginning in a moment before his marriage with Gomer indeed, but growing clearer and deeper through the experiences that followed until at last he perceived the full

<sup>1</sup> Here I range myself fully with Hyatt, loc. cit.: "It (i.e. the moment referred to in the passage cited above) turned Hosea from a prophet of doom to a prophet of hope and redemption." R. Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, 7th edn., ii (1925), 345 ff., somewhat differently maintained that before discovering his wife's infidelity Hosea was a political prophet, and only afterwards became a prophet of love.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. A. Bewer, *A.J.S.L.* xxii (1905-6), 126 f., 130, and *The Literature of the Old Testament in its Historical Development* (1922), p. 95. Cf. also A. Æschmann, *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible*, ii. 257 b: "S'il n'avait pas souffert par sa femme, Osée aurait-il compris si profondément les sentiments de Yahvé souffrant par son peuple? S'il n'avait pas éprouvé une telle indignation contre l'épouse infidèle, aurait-il su mettre des accents si pathétiques dans la bouche de Yahvé trompé par la nation infidèle? S'il n'avait pas aimé Gomer d'un amour espérant contre toute espérance, aurait-il pu parler d'une manière si émouvante des perspectives d'un retour d'Israël à son Dieu?"

<sup>3</sup> Isa. vi. In verse 13 there is to be found the germ of Isaiah's teaching on the Remnant. This verse is often denied to Isaiah and removed as secondary. Against this cf. I. Engnell, *The Call of Isaiah* (1949), pp. 14 f., 47 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Jer. i. 10. It is to be observed that here Jeremiah is called to a mission which was not exhausted in judgement; it was a mission of building and planting, as well as one of destruction and uprooting.

message entrusted to him. Like Another, he learned obedience by the things that he suffered,<sup>1</sup> and because he was not broken by an experience that has broken so many others, but triumphed over it and in triumphing perhaps won back his wife, he received through the vehicle of his very pain an enduring message for Israel and for the world.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. v. 8.