

WALTER ADENEY

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE:
EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND
ESTHER

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The Expositor's Bible: Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

CHAPTER I. *INTRODUCTORY: EZRA AND NEHEMIAH*

Though in close contact with the most perplexing problems of Old Testament literature, the main history recorded in the books of 'Ezra' and 'Nehemiah' is fixed securely above the reach of adverse criticism. Here the most cautious reader may take his stand with the utmost confidence, knowing that his feet rest on a solid rock. The curiously inartistic process adopted by the writer is in itself some guarantee of authenticity. Ambitious authors who set out with the design of creating literature – and perhaps building up a reputation for themselves by the way – may be very conscientious in their search for truth; but we cannot help suspecting that the method of melting down their materials and recasting them in the mould of their own style which they usually adopt must gravely endanger their accuracy. Nothing of the kind is attempted in this narrative. In considerable portions

of it the primitive records are simply copied word for word, without the least pretence at original writing on the part of the historian. Elsewhere he has evidently kept as near as possible to the form of his materials, even when the plan of his work has necessitated some condensation or readjustment. The crudity of this procedure must be annoying to literary epicures who prefer flavour to substance, but it should be an occasion of thankfulness on the part of those of us who wish to trace the revelation of God in the life of Israel, because it shows that we are brought as nearly as possible face to face with the facts in which that revelation was clothed.

In the first place, we have some of the very writings of Ezra and Nehemiah, the leading actors in the great drama of real life that is here set forth. We cannot doubt the genuineness of these writings. They are each of them composed in the first person singular, and they may be sharply distinguished from the remainder of the narrative, inasmuch as that is in the third person – not to mention other and finer marks of difference. Of course this implies that the whole of Ezra and Nehemiah should not be ascribed to the two men whose names the books bear in our English Bibles. The books themselves do not make any claim to be written throughout by these great men. On the contrary, they clearly hint the opposite, by the transition to the third person in those sections which are not extracted verbatim from one or other of the two authorities.

It is most probable that the Scripture books now known as

Ezra and Nehemiah were compiled by one and the same person, that, in fact, they originally constituted a single work. This view was held by the scribes who arranged the Hebrew Canon, for there they appear as one book. In the Talmud they are treated as one. So they are among the early Christian writers. As late as the fifth century of our era Jerome gives the name of "Esdras" to both, describing "Nehemiah" as "The Second Book of Esdras."

Further, there seem to be good reasons for believing that the compiler of our Ezra-Nehemiah was no other than the author of Chronicles. The repetition of the concluding passage of 2 Chronicles as the introduction to Ezra is an indication that the latter was intended to be a continuation of the Chronicler's version of the History of Israel. When we compare the two works together, we come across many indications of their agreement in spirit and style. In both we discover a disposition to hurry over secular affairs in order to dilate on the religious aspects of history. In both we meet with the same exalted estimation of The Law, the same unwearied interest in the details of temple ritual and especially in the musical arrangements of the Levites, and the same singular fascination for long lists of names, which are inserted wherever an opportunity for letting them in can be found.

Now, there are several things in our narrative that tend to show that the Chronicler belongs to a comparatively late period. Thus in Nehemiah xii. 22 he mentions the succession of priests down "to the reign of Darius the Persian." The position of this

phrase in connection with the previous lists of names makes it clear that the sovereign here referred to must be Darius III., surnamed Codommanus, the last king of Persia, who reigned from B.C. 336 to B.C. 332. Then the title "the Persian" suggests the conclusion that the dynasty of Persia had passed away; so does the phrase "king of Persia," which we meet with in the Chronicler's portion of the narrative. The simple expression "the king," without any descriptive addition, would be sufficient on the lips of a contemporary. Accordingly we find that it is used in the first-person sections of Ezra-Nehemiah, and in those royal edicts that are cited in full. Again, Nehemiah xii. 11 and 22 give us the name of Jaddua in the series of high-priests. But Jaddua lived as late as the time of Alexander; his date must be about B.C. 331.¹ This lands us in the Grecian period. Lastly, the references to "the days of Nehemiah"² clearly point to a writer in some subsequent age. Though it is justly urged that it was quite in accordance with custom for later scribes to work over an old book, inserting a phrase here and there to bring it up to date, the indications of the later date are too closely interwoven with the main structure of the composition to admit this hypothesis here.

Nevertheless, though we seem to be shut up to the view that the Grecian era had been reached before our book was put together, this is really only a matter of literary interest, seeing that it is agreed on all sides that the history is authentic, and that

¹ Josephus, *Ant.*, XI. viii. 7.

² Neh. xii. 26 and 47.

the constituent parts of it are contemporary with the events they record. The function of the compiler of such a book as this is not much more than that of an editor. It must be admitted that the date of the final editor is as late as the Macedonian Empire. The only question is whether this man was the sole editor and compiler of the narrative. We may let that point of purely literary criticism be settled in favour of the later date for the original compilation, and yet rest satisfied that we have all we want – a thoroughly genuine history in which to study the ways of God with man during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

This narrative is occupied with the Persian period of the History of Israel. It shows us points of contact between the Jews and a great Oriental Empire; but, unlike the history in the dismal Babylonian age, the course of events now moves forward among scenes of hopeful progress. The new dominion is of an Aryan stock – intelligent, appreciative, generous. Like the Christians in the time of the Apostles, the Jews now find the supreme government friendly to them, even ready to protect them from the assaults of their hostile neighbours. It is in this political relationship, and scarcely, if at all, by means of the intercommunication of ideas affecting religion, that the Persians take an important place in the story of Ezra and Nehemiah. We shall see much of their official action; we can but grope about vaguely in search of the few hints of their influence on the theology of Israel that may be looked for on the pages of the sacred narrative. Still a remarkable characteristic of the leading

religious movement of this time is the Oriental and foreign locality of its source. It springs up in the breasts of Jews who are most stern in their racial exclusiveness, most relentless in their scornful rejection of any Gentile alliance. But this is on a foreign soil. It comes from Babylon, not Jerusalem. Again and again fresh impulses and new resources are brought up to the sacred city, and always from the far-off colony in the land of exile. Here the money for the cost of the rebuilding of the temple was collected; here The Law was studied and edited; here means were found for restoring the fortifications of Jerusalem. Not only did the first company of pilgrims go up from Babylon to begin a new life among the tombs of their fathers; but one after another fresh bands of emigrants, borne on new waves of enthusiasm, swept up from the apparently inexhaustible centres of Judaism in the East to rally the flagging energies of the citizens of Jerusalem. For a long while this city was only maintained with the greatest difficulty as a sort of outpost from Babylon: it was little better than a pilgrim's camp; often it was in danger of destruction from the uncongenial character of its surroundings. Therefore it is Babylonian Judaism that here claims our attention. The mission of this great religious movement is to found and cultivate an offshoot of itself in the old country. Its beginning is at Babylon; its end is to shape the destinies of Jerusalem.

Three successive embassies from the living heart of Judaism in Babylon go up to Jerusalem, each with its own distinctive function in the promotion of the purposes of the mission. The

first is led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua in the year B.C. 537.³ The second is conducted by Ezra eighty years later. The third follows shortly after this with Nehemiah as its central figure. Each of the two first-named expeditions is a great popular migration of men, women, and children returning home from exile; Nehemiah's journey is more personal – the travelling of an officer of state with his escort. The principal events of the history spring out of these three expeditions. Zerubbabel and Jeshua are commissioned to restore the sacrifices and rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Ezra sets forth with the visible object of further ministering to the resources of the sacred shrine; but the real end that he is inwardly aiming at is the introduction of The Law to the people of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's main purpose is to rebuild the city walls, and so restore the civic character of Jerusalem and enable her to maintain her independence in spite of the opposition of neighbouring foes. In all three cases a strong religious motive lies at the root of the public action. To Ezra the priest and scribe religion was everything. He might almost have taken as his motto, "Perish the State, if the Church may be saved." He desired to absorb the State into the Church: he would permit the former to exist, indeed, as the visible vehicle of the religious life of the community; but to sacrifice the religious ideal in deference to political exigencies was a policy against which he

³ Allowing some months for the preparation of the expedition – and this we must do – we may safely say that it started in the year after the decree of Cyrus, which was issued in B.C. 538.

set his face like flint when it was advocated by a latitudinarian party among the priests. The conflict which was brought about by this clash of opposing principles was the great battle of his life. Nehemiah was a statesman, a practical man, a courtier who knew the world. Outwardly his aims and methods were very different from those of the unpractical scholar. Yet the two men thoroughly understood one another. Nehemiah caught the spirit of Ezra's ideas; and Ezra, whose work came to a standstill while he was left to his own resources, was afterwards able to carry through his great religious reformation on the basis of the younger man's military and political renovation of Jerusalem.

In all this the central figure is Ezra. We are able to see the most marked results in the improved condition of the city after his capable and vigorous colleague has taken up the reins of government. But though the hand is then the hand of Nehemiah, the voice is still the voice of Ezra. Later times have exalted the figure of the famous scribe into gigantic proportions. Even as he appears on the page of history he is sufficiently great to stand out as the maker of his age.

For the Jews in all ages, and for the world at large, the great event of this period is the adoption of The Law by the citizens of Jerusalem. Recent investigations and discussions have directed renewed attention to the publication of The Law by Ezra, and the acceptance of it on the part of Israel. It will be especially important, therefore, for us to study these things in the calm and ingenuous record of the ancient historian, where they are treated

without the slightest anticipation of modern controversies. We shall have to see what hints this record affords concerning the history of The Law in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

One broad fact will grow upon us with increasing clearness as we proceed. Evidently we have here come to the watershed of Hebrew History. Up to this point all the better teachers of Israel had been toiling painfully in their almost hopeless efforts to induce the Jews to accept the unique faith of Jehovah, with its lofty claims and its rigorous restraints. That faith itself however had appeared in three forms, – as a popular cult, often degraded to the level of the local religion of heathen neighbours; as a priestly tradition, exact and minute in its performances, but the secret of a caste; and as a subject of prophetic instruction, instinct with moral principles of righteousness and spiritual conceptions of God, but too large and free to be reached by a people of narrow views and low attainments. With the publication of The Law by Ezra the threefold condition ceased, and henceforth there was but one type of religion for the Jews.

The question when The Law was moulded into its present shape introduces a delicate point of criticism. But the consideration of its popular reception is more within the reach of observation. In the solemn sealing of the covenant the citizens of Jerusalem – laity as well as priests – men, women, and children – all deliberately pledged themselves to worship Jehovah according to The Law. There is no evidence to show that they had ever done so before. The narrative bears every indication of novelty. The

Law is received with curiosity; it is only understood after being carefully explained by experts; when its meaning is taken in, the effect is a shock of amazement bordering on despair. Clearly this is no collection of trite precepts known and practised by the people from antiquity.

It must be remembered, on the other hand, that an analogous effect was produced by the spread of the Scriptures at the Reformation. It does not fall within the scope of our present task to pursue the inquiry whether, like the Bible in Christendom, the entire law had been in existence in an earlier age, though then neglected and forgotten. Yet even our limited period contains evidence that The Law had its roots in the past. The venerated name of Moses is repeatedly appealed to when The Law is to be enforced. Ezra never appears as a Solon legislating for his people. Still neither is he a Justinian codifying a system of legislation already recognised and adopted. He stands between the two, as the introducer of a law hitherto unpractised and even unknown. These facts will come before us more in detail as we proceed.

The period now brought before our notice is to some extent one of national revival; but it is much more important as an age of religious construction. The Jews now constitute themselves into a Church; the chief concern of their leaders is to develop their religious life and character. The charm of these times is to be found in the great spiritual awakening that inspires and shapes their history. Here we approach very near to the Holy Presence of the Spirit of God in His glorious activity as the Lord and Giver

of Life. This epoch was to Israel what Pentecost became to the Christians. Pentecost! – We have only to face the comparison to see how far the later covenant exceeded the earlier covenant in glory. To us Christians there is a hardness, a narrowness, a painful externalism in the whole of this religious movement. We cannot say that it lacks soul; but we feel that it has not the liberty of the highest spiritual vitality. It is cramped in the fetters of legal ordinances. We shall come across evidences of the existence of a liberal party that shrank from the rigour of The Law. But this party gave no signs of religious life; the freedom it claimed was not the glorious liberty of the sons of God. There is no reason to believe that the more devout people anticipated the standpoint of St. Paul and saw any imperfection in their law. To them it presented a lofty scheme of life, worthy of the highest aspiration. And there is much in their spirit that commands our admiration and even our emulation. The most obnoxious feature of their zeal is its pitiless exclusiveness. But without this quality Judaism would have been lost in the cross currents of life among the mixed populations of Palestine.

The policy of exclusiveness saved Judaism. At heart this is just an application – though a very harsh and formal application – of the principle of separation from the world which Christ and His Apostles enjoined on the Church, and the neglect of which has sometimes nearly resulted in the disappearance of any distinctive Christian truth and life, like the disappearance of a river that breaking through its banks spreads itself out in lagoons

and morasses, and ends by being swallowed up in the sands of the desert.

The exterior aspect of the stern, strict Judaism of these days is by no means attractive. But the interior life of it is simply superb. It recognises the absolute supremacy of God. In the will of God it acknowledges the one unquestionable authority before which all who accept His covenant must bow; in the revealed truth of God it perceives an inflexible rule for the conduct of His people. To be pledged to allegiance to the will and law of God is to be truly consecrated to God. That is the condition voluntarily entered into by the citizens of Jerusalem in this epoch of religious awakening. A few centuries later their example was followed by the primitive Christians, who, according to the testimony of the two Bithynian handmaidens tortured by Pliny, solemnly pledged themselves to lives of purity and righteousness; again, it was imitated, though in strangely perverted guise, by anchorites and monks, by the great founders of monastic orders and their loyal disciples, and by mediæval reformers of Church discipline such as St. Bernard; still later it was followed more closely by the Protestant inhabitants of Swiss cities at the Reformation, by the early Independents at home and the Pilgrim Fathers in New England, by the Covenanters in Scotland, by the first Methodists. It is the model of Church order, and the ideal of the religious organisation of civic life. But it awaits the adequate fulfilment of its promise in the establishment of the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem.

CHAPTER II.

CYRUS

Ezra i. I

The remarkable words with which the Second Book of Chronicles closes, and which are repeated in the opening verses of the Book of Ezra, afford the most striking instance on record of that peculiar connection between the destinies of the little Hebrew nation and the movements of great World Empires which frequently emerges in history. We cannot altogether set it down to the vanity of their writers, or to the lack of perspective accompanying a contracted, provincial education, that the Jews are represented in the Old Testament as playing a more prominent part on the world's stage than one to which the size of their territory – little bigger than Wales – or their military prowess would entitle them. The fact is indisputable. No doubt it is to be attributed in part to the geographical position of Palestine on the highway of the march of armies to and fro between Asia and Africa; but it must spring also in some measure from the unique qualities of the strange people who have given their religion to the most civilised societies of mankind.

In the case before us the greatest man of his age, one of

the half-dozen Founders of Empires, who constitute a lofty aristocracy even among sovereigns, is manifestly concerning himself very specially with the restoration of one of the smallest of the many subject races that fell into his hands when he seized the garnered spoils of previous conquerors. Whatever we may think of the precise words of his decree as this is now reported to us by a Hebrew scribe, it is unquestionable that he issued some such orders as are contained in it. Cyrus, as it now appears, was originally king of Elam, the modern Khuzistan, not of Persia, although the royal family from which he sprang was of Persian extraction. After making himself master of Persia and building up an empire in Asia Minor and the north, he swept down on to the plains of Chaldæa and captured Babylon in the year B.C. 538. To the Jews this would be the first year of his reign, because it was the first year of his rule over them, just as the year A.D. 1603 is reckoned by Englishmen as the first year of James I., because the king of Scotland then inherited the English throne. In this year the new sovereign, of his own initiative, released the Hebrew exiles, and even assisted them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their ruined temple. Such an astounding act of generosity was contrary to the precedent of other conquerors, who accepted as a matter of course the arrangement of subject races left by their predecessors; and we are naturally curious to discover the motives that prompted it.

Like our mythical King Arthur, the Cyrus of legend is credited with a singularly attractive disposition. Herodotus says

the Persians regarded him as their "father" and their "shepherd." In Xenophon's romance he appears as a very kindly character. Cicero calls him the most just, wise, and amiable of rulers. Although it cannot be dignified with the name of history, this universally accepted tradition seems to point to some foundation in fact. It is entirely in accord with the Jewish picture of the Great King. There is some reason for believing that the privilege Cyrus offered to the Jews was one in which other nations shared. On a small, broken, clay cylinder, some four inches in diameter, discovered quite recently and now deposited in the British Museum, Cyrus is represented as saying, "I assembled all those nations, and I caused them to go back to their countries." Thus the return of the Jews may be regarded as a part of a general centrifugal movement in the new Empire.

Nevertheless, the peculiar favour indicated by the decree issued to the Jews suggests something special in their case, and this must be accounted for before the action of Cyrus can be well understood.

Little or no weight can be attached to the statement of Josephus, who inserts in the very language of the decree a reference to the foretelling of the name of Cyrus by "the prophets," as a prime motive for issuing it, and adds that this was known to Cyrus by his reading the book of Isaiah.⁴ Always more or less untrustworthy whenever he touches the relations between his people and foreigners, the Jewish historian is even

⁴ *Ant.*, XI. i. 1, 2.

exceptionally unsatisfactory in his treatment of the Persian Period. It may be, as Ewald asserts, that Josephus is here following some Hellenistic writer; but we know nothing of his authority. There is no reference to this in our one authority, the Book of Ezra; and if it had been true there would have been every reason to publish it. Some Jews at court may have shown Cyrus the prophecies in question indeed it is most probable that men who wished to please him would have done so. Plato in the "Laws" represents Cyrus as honouring those who knew how to give good advice. But it is scarcely reasonable to suppose, without a particle of evidence, that a great monarch flushed with victory would set himself to carry out a prediction purporting to emanate from the Deity of one of the conquered peoples, when that prediction was distinctly in their interest, unless he was first actuated by some other considerations.

Until a few years ago it was commonly supposed that Cyrus was a Zoroastrian, who was disgusted at the cruel and lustful idolatry of the Babylonians, and that when he discovered a monotheistic people oppressed by vicious heathen polytheists, he claimed religious brotherhood with them, and so came to show them singular favour. Unfortunately for his fame, this fascinating theory has been recently shattered by the discovery of the little cylinder already referred to. Here Cyrus is represented as saying that "the gods" have deserted Nabonidas – the last king of Babylon – because he has neglected their service; and that Merodach, the national divinity of Babylon, has transferred his

favour to Cyrus; who now honours him with many praises. An attempt has been made to refute the evidence of this ancient record by attributing the cylinder to some priest of Bel, who, it is said, may have drawn up the inscription without the knowledge of the king, and even in direct opposition to his religious views. A most improbable hypothesis! especially as we have absolutely no grounds for the opinion that Cyrus was a Zoroastrian. The Avesta, the sacred collection of hymns which forms the basis of the Parsee scriptures, came from the far East, close to India, and it was written in a language almost identical with Sanscrit and quite different from the Old Persian of Western Persia. We have no ground for supposing that as yet it had been adopted in the remote south-western region of Elam, where Cyrus was brought up. That monarch, it would seem, was a liberal-minded syncretist, as ready to make himself at home with the gods of the peoples he conquered as with their territories. Such a man would be astute enough to represent the indigenous divinities as diverting their favour from the fallen and therefore discredited kings he had overthrown, and transferring it to the new victor. We must therefore descend from the highlands of theology in our search for an explanation of the conduct of Cyrus. Can we find this in some department of state policy?

We learn from the latter portion of our Book of Isaiah that the Jewish captives suffered persecution under Nabonidas. It is not difficult to guess the cause of the embitterment of this king against them after they had been allowed to live in peace

and prosperity under his predecessors. Evidently the policy of Nebuchadnezzar, which may have succeeded with some other races, had broken down in its application to a people with such tough national vitality as that of the Jews. It was found to be impossible to eradicate their patriotism – or rather the patriotism of the faithful nucleus of the nation, impossible to make Jerusalem forgotten by the waters of Babylon. This ancient "Semitic question" was the very reverse of that which now vexes Eastern Europe, because in the case of the Jews at Babylon the troublesome aliens were only desirous of liberty to depart; but it sprang from the same essential cause – the separateness of the Hebrew race.

Now things often present themselves in a true light to a new-comer who approaches them with a certain mental detachment, although they may have been grievously misapprehended by those people among whom they have slowly shaped themselves. Cyrus was a man of real genius; and immediately he came upon the scene he must have perceived the mistake of retaining a restless, disaffected population, like a foreign body rankling in the very heart of his empire. Moreover, to allow the Jews to return home would serve a double purpose. While it would free the Euphrates Valley from a constant source of distress, it would plant a grateful, and therefore loyal, people on the western confines of the empire – perhaps, as some have thought, to be used as outworks and a basis of operations in a projected campaign against Egypt. Thus a far-sighted statesman might

regard the liberation of the Jews as a stroke of wise policy. But we must not make too much of this. The restored Jews were a mere handful of religious devotees, scarcely able to hold their own against the attacks of neighbouring villages; and while they were permitted to build their temple, nothing was said in the royal rescript about fortifying their city. So feeble a colony could not have been accounted of much strategic importance by such a master of armies as Cyrus. Again, we know from the "Second Isaiah" that, when the Persian war-cloud was hovering on the horizon, the Jewish exiles hailed it as the sign of deliverance from persecution. The invader who brought destruction to Babylon promised relief to her victims; and the lofty strains of the prophet bespeak an inspired perception of the situation which encouraged higher hopes. A second discovery in the buried library of bricks is that of a small flat tablet, also recently unearthed like the cylinder of Cyrus, which records this very section of the history of Babylon. Here it is stated that Cyrus intrigued with a disaffected party within the city. Who would be so likely as the persecuted Jews to play this part? Further, the newly found Babylonian record makes it clear that Herodotus was mistaken in his famous account of the siege of Babylon where he connected it with the coming of Cyrus. He must have misapprehended a report of one of the two sieges under Darius, when the city had revolted and was recaptured by force, for we now know that after a battle fought in the open country Cyrus was received into the city without striking another

blow. He would be likely to be in a gracious mood then, and if he knew there were exiles, languishing in captivity, who hailed his advent as that of a deliverer, even apart from the question whether they had previously opened up negotiations with him, he could not but look favourably upon them; so that generosity and perhaps gratitude combined with good policy to govern his conduct. Lastly, although he was not a theological reformer, he seems to have been of a religious character, according to his light, and therefore it is not unnatural to suppose that he may have heartily thrown himself into a movement of which his wisdom approved, and with which all his generous instincts sympathised. Thus, after all, there may be something in the old view, if only we combine it with our newer information. Under the peculiar political circumstances of his day, Cyrus may have been prepared to welcome the prophetic assurance that he was a heaven-sent shepherd, if some of the Jews had shown it him. Even without any such assurance, other conquerors have been only too ready to flatter themselves that they were executing a sacred mission.

These considerations do not in the least degree limit the Divine element of the narrative as that is brought forward by the Hebrew historian. On the contrary, they give additional importance to it. The chronicler sees in the decree of Cyrus and its issues an accomplishment of the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah. Literally he says that what happens is in order that the word of the Lord may *be brought to an end*. It is in the "*fulness of the time*," as the advent of Christ was

later in another relation.⁵ The writer seems to have in mind the passage – "And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it desolate for ever";⁶ as well as another prophecy – "For thus saith the Lord, After seventy years be accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place."⁷ Now if we do not accept the notion of Josephus that Cyrus was consciously and purposely fulfilling these predictions, we do not in any way diminish the fact that the deliverance came from God. If we are driven to the conclusion that Cyrus was not solely or chiefly actuated by religious motives, or even if we take his action to be *purely* one of state policy, the ascription of this inferior position to Cyrus only heightens the wonderful glory of God's overruling providence. Nebuchadnezzar was described as God's "servant"⁸ because, although he was a bad man, only pursuing his own wicked way, yet, all unknown to him, that way was made to serve God's purposes. Similarly Cyrus, who is not a bad man, is God's "Shepherd," when he delivers the suffering

⁵ Gal. iv. 4.

⁶ Jer. xxv. 11, 12.

⁷ Jer. xxix. 10.

⁸ Jer. xxvii. 6.

flock from the wolf and sends it back to the fold, whether he aims at obeying the will of God or not. It is part of the great revelation of God in history, that He is seen working out His supreme purposes in spite of the ignorance and sometimes even by means of the malice of men. Was not this the case in the supreme event of history, the crucifixion of our Lord? If the cruelty of Nebuchadnezzar and the feebleness of Pilate could serve God, so could the generosity of Cyrus.

The question of the chronological exactness of this fulfilment of prophecy troubles some minds that are anxious about Biblical arithmetic. The difficulty is to arrive at the period of seventy years. It would seem that this could only be done by some stretching at both ends of the exile. We must begin with Nebuchadnezzar's first capture of Jerusalem and the first carrying away of a small body of royal hostages to Babylon in the year B.C. 606. Even then we have only sixty-eight years to the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, which happened in B.C. 538. Therefore to get the full seventy years it is proposed to extend the exile till the year B.C. 536, which is the date of the commencement of Cyrus's sole rule. But there are serious difficulties in these suggestions. In his prediction of the seventy years Jeremiah plainly refers to the complete overthrow of the nation with the strong words, "This whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment." As a matter of fact, the exile only began in earnest with the final siege of Jerusalem, which took place in B.C. 588. Then Cyrus actually began his reign over

the Jews in B.C. 538, when he took Babylon, and he issued his edict in his first year. Thus the real exile as a national trouble seems to have occupied fifty years, or, reckoning a year for the issuing and execution of the edict, fifty-one years. Instead of straining at dates, is it not more simple and natural to suppose that Jeremiah gave a round figure to signify a period which would cover the lifetime of his contemporaries, at all events? However this may be, nobody can make a grievance out of the fact that the captivity may not have been quite so lengthy as the previous warnings of it foreshadowed. Tillotson wisely remarked that there is this difference between the Divine promises and the Divine threatenings, that while God pledges His faithfulness to the full extent of the former, He is not equally bound to the perfect accomplishment of the latter. If the question of dates shows a little discrepancy, what does this mean but that God is so merciful as not always to exact the last farthing? Moreover it should be remarked that the point of Jeremiah's prophecy is not the exact length of the captivity, but the certain termination of it after a long while. The time is fulfilled when the end has come.

But the action of Cyrus is not only regarded as the accomplishment of prophecy; it is also attributed to the direct influence of God exercised on the Great King, for we read "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia," etc. It would indicate the radical scepticism which is too often hidden under the guise of a rigorous regard for correct belief, to maintain that because we now know Cyrus to have been a polytheist his

spirit could not have been stirred up by the true God. It is not the teaching of the Bible that God confines His influence on the hearts of men to Jews and Christians. Surely we cannot suppose that the Father of all mankind rigidly refuses to hold any intercourse with the great majority of His children – never whispers them a guiding word in their anxiety and perplexity, never breathes into them a helpful impulse, even in their best moments, when they are earnestly striving to do right. In writing to the Romans St. Paul distinctly argues on the ground that God has revealed Himself to the heathen world,⁹ and in the presence of Cornelius St. Peter as distinctly asserts that God accepts the devout and upright of all nations.¹⁰ Here even in the Old Testament it is recognised that God moves the king of Persia. This affords a singular encouragement for prayer, because it suggests that God has access to those who are far out of our reach; that He quite sets aside the obstruction of intermediaries – secretaries, chamberlains, grand-viziers, and all the *entourage* of a court; that He goes straight into the audience chamber, making direct for the inmost thoughts and feelings of the man whom He would influence. The wonder of it is that God condescends to do this even with men who know little of Him; but it should be remembered that though He is strange to many men, none of them are strange to Him. The Father knows the children who do not know Him. It may be remarked, finally, on this point, that the

⁹ Rom. i. 19.

¹⁰ Acts x. 34, 35.

special Divine influence now referred to is dynamic rather than illuminating. To stir up the spirit is to move to activity. God not only teaches; He quickens. In the case of Cyrus, the king used his own judgment and acted on his own opinions; yet the impulse which drove him was from God. That was everything. We live in a God-haunted world: why then are we slow to take the first article of our creed in its full meaning? Is it so difficult to believe in God when all history is alive with His presence?

CHAPTER III.

THE ROYAL EDICT

Ezra i. 2-4, 7-11

It has been asserted that the Scripture version of the edict of Cyrus cannot be an exact rendering of the original, because it ascribes to the Great King some knowledge of the God of the Jews, and even some faith in Him. For this reason it has been suggested that either the chronicler or some previous writer who translated the decree out of the Persian language, in which of course it must have been first issued, inserted the word Jehovah in place of the name of Ormazd or some other god worshipped by Cyrus, and shaped the phrases generally so as to commend them to Jewish sympathies. Are we driven to this position? We have seen that when Cyrus got possession of Babylon he had no scruple in claiming the indigenous divinity Merodach as his god. Is it not then entirely in accordance with his eclectic habit of mind – not to mention his diplomatic art in humouring the prejudices of his subjects – that he should draw up a decree in which he designed to show favour to an exceptionally religious people in language that would be congenial to them? Like most men of higher intelligence even among polytheistic races, Cyrus

may have believed in one supreme Deity, who, he may have supposed, was worshipped under different names by different nations. The final clause of Ezra i. 3 is misleading, as it stands in the Authorised Version; and the Revisers, with their habitual caution, have only so far improved upon it as to permit the preferable rendering to appear in the margin, where we have generally to look for the opinions of the more scholarly as well as the more courageous critics. Yet even the Authorised Version renders the same words correctly in the very next verse. There is no occasion to print the clause, "He is the God," as a parenthesis, so as to make Cyrus inform the world that Jehovah is the one real divinity. The more probable rendering in idea is also the more simple one in construction. Removing the superfluous brackets, we read right on: "He is the God which is in Jerusalem" —*i. e.*, we have an indication who "Jehovah" is for the information of strangers to the Jews who may read the edict. With this understanding let us examine the leading items of the decree. It was proclaimed by the mouth of king's messengers, and it was also preserved in writing, so that possibly the original inscription may be recovered from among the burnt clay records that lie buried in the ruins of Persian cities. The edict is addressed to the whole empire. Cyrus announces to all his subjects his intention to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Then he specialises the aim of the decree by granting a licence to the Jews to go up to Jerusalem and undertake this work. It is a perfectly free offer to all Jews in exile without exception. "Who is there among you" —*i. e.*,

among all the subjects of the empire – "of all His" (Jehovah's) "people, his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem," etc. In particular we may observe the following points: —

First, Cyrus begins by acknowledging that "the God of Heaven" – whom he identifies with the Hebrew "Jehovah," in our version of the edict – has given him his dominions. It is possible to treat this introductory sentence as a superficial formula; but there is no reason for so ungenerous an estimate of it. If we accept the words in their honest intention, we must see in them a recognition of the hand of God in the setting up of kingdoms. Two opposite kinds of experience awaken in men a conviction of God's presence in their lives – great calamities and great successes. The influence of the latter experience is not so often acknowledged as that of the former, but probably it is equally effective, at least in extreme instances. There is something awful in the success of a world-conqueror. When the man is a destroyer, spreading havoc and misery, like Attila, he regards himself as a "Scourge of God"; and when he is a vulgar impersonation of selfish greed like Napoleon, he thinks he is swept on by a mighty tide of destiny. In both instances the results are too stupendous to be attributed to purely human energy. But in the case of Cyrus, an enlightened and noble-minded hero is bringing liberty and favour to the victims of a degraded tyranny, so that he is hailed by some of them as the Anointed King raised up by their God, and therefore it is not unnatural that he should ascribe his brilliant destiny to a Divine influence.

Secondly, Cyrus actually asserts that God has charged him to build Him a temple at Jerusalem. Again, this may be the language of princely courtesy; but the noble spirit which breathes through the decree encourages us to take a higher view of it, and to refrain from reading minimising comments between the lines. It is probable that those eager, patriotic Jews who had got the ear of Cyrus – or he would never have issued such a decree as this – may have urged their suit by showing him predictions like that of Isaiah xlv. 28, in which God describes Himself as One "that saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying of Jerusalem, Let her be built; and, Let the foundations of the temple be laid." Possibly Cyrus is here alluding to that very utterance, although, as we have seen, Josephus is incorrect in inserting a reference to Hebrew prophecy in the very words of the decree, and in suggesting that the fulfilment of prophecy was the chief end Cyrus had in view.

It is a historical fact that Cyrus did help to build the temple; he supplied funds from the public treasury for that object. We can understand his motives for doing so. If he desired the favour of the God of the Jews, he would naturally aid in restoring His shrine. Nabonidas had fallen, it was thought, through neglecting the worship of the gods. Cyrus seems to have been anxious to avoid this mistake, and to have given attention to the cultivation of their favour. If, as seems likely, some of the Jews had impressed his mind with the greatness of Jehovah, he might have desired to promote the building of the temple at Jerusalem with

exceptional assiduity.

In the next place, Cyrus gives the captive Jews leave to go up to Jerusalem. The edict is purely permissive. There is to be no expulsion of Jews from Babylon. Those exiles who did not choose to avail themselves of the boon so eagerly coveted by the patriotic few were allowed to remain unmolested in peace and prosperity. The restoration was voluntary. This free character of the movement would give it a vigour quite out of proportion to the numbers of those who took part in it, and would, at the same time, ensure a certain elevation of tone and spirit. It is an image of the Divine restoration of souls, which is confined to those who accept it of their own free will.

Further, the object of the return, as it is distinctly specified, is simply to rebuild the temple, not – at all events in the first instance – to build up and fortify a city on the ruins of Jerusalem; much less does it imply a complete restoration of Palestine to the Jews, with a wholesale expulsion of its present inhabitants from their farms and vineyards. Cyrus does not seem to have contemplated any such revolution. The end in view was neither social nor political, but purely religious. That more would come out of it, that the returning exiles must have houses to live in and must protect those houses from the brigandage of the Bedouin, and that they must have fields producing food to support them and their families, are inevitable consequences. Here is the germ and nucleus of a national restoration. Still it remains true that the immediate object – the only object named in the decree – is the

rebuilding of the temple. Thus we see from the first that the idea which characterises the restoration is religious. The exiles return as a Church. The goal of their pilgrimage is a holy site. The one work they are to aim at achieving is to further the worship of their God.

Lastly, the inhabitants of the towns in which the Jews have been settled are directed to make contributions towards the work. It is not quite clear whether these "Benevolences" are to be entirely voluntary. A royal exhortation generally assumes something of the character of a command. Probably rich men were requisitioned to assist in providing the gold and silver and other stores, together with the beasts of burden which would be needed for the great expedition. This was to supplement what Cyrus calls "the free-will offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem" —*i. e.*, either the gifts of the Jews who remained in Babylon, or possibly his own contribution from the funds of the state. We are reminded of the Hebrews spoiling the Egyptians at the Exodus. The prophet Haggai saw in this a promise of further supplies, when the wealth of foreign nations would be poured into the temple treasury in donations of larger dimensions from the heathen. "For thus saith the Lord of hosts," he writes, "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; ... and the desirable things of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the

Lord of hosts."¹¹

The assumed willingness of their neighbours to contribute at a hint from the king suggests that the exiles were not altogether unpopular. On the other hand, it is quite possible that, under the oppression of Nabonidas, they had suffered much wrong from these neighbours. A public persecution always entails a large amount of private cruelty, because the victims are not protected by the law from the greed and petty spite of those who are mean enough to take advantage of their helpless condition. Thus it may be that Cyrus was aiming at a just return in his recommendation to his subjects to aid the Jews.

Such was the decree. Now let us look at the execution of it.

In the first place, there was a ready response on the part of some of the Jews, seen especially in the conduct of their leaders, who "rose up," bestirring themselves to prepare for the expedition, like expectant watchers released from their weary waiting and set free for action. The social leaders are mentioned first, which is a clear indication that the theocracy, so characteristic of the coming age, was not yet the recognised order. A little later the clergy will be placed before the laity, but at present the laity are still named before the clergy. The order is domestic. The leaders are the heads of great families – "the chief of the fathers." For such people to be named first is also an indication that the movement did not originate in the humbler classes. Evidently a certain aristocratic spirit permeated it. The

¹¹ Hag. ii. 6-8.

wealthy merchants may have been loath to leave their centres of commerce, but the nobility of blood and family were at the head of the crusade. We have not yet reached the age of the democracy. It is clear, further, that there was some organisation among the exiles. They were not a mere crowd of refugees. The leaders were of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. We shall have to consider the relation of the Ten Tribes to the restoration later on; here it may be enough to observe in passing that representatives of the Southern Kingdom take the lead in a return to Jerusalem, the capital of that kingdom. Next come the ecclesiastical leaders, the priests and Levites. Already we find these two orders named separately – an important fact in relation to the development of Judaism that will meet us again, with some hints here and there to throw light upon the meaning of it.

There is another side to this response. It was by no means the case that the whole of the exiles rose up in answer to the edict of Cyrus; only those leaders and only those people responded "whose spirit God had raised." The privilege was offered to all the Jews, but it was not accepted by all. We cannot but be impressed by the religious faith and the inspired insight of our historian in this matter. He saw that Cyrus issued his edict because the Lord had stirred up his spirit; now he attributes the prompting to make use of the proffered liberty to a similar Divine influence. Thus the return was a movement of heaven-sent impulses throughout. Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones showed the deplorable condition of the Northern Kingdom in

his day – stripped bare, shattered to fragments, scattered abroad. The condition of Judah was only second to this ghastly national ruin. But now to Judah there had come the breath of the Divine Spirit which Ezekiel saw promised for Israel, and a living army was rising up in new energy. Here we may discover the deeper, the more vital source of the return. Without this the edict of Cyrus would have perished as a dead letter. Even as it was, only those people who felt the breath of the Divine afflatus rose up for the arduous undertaking. So to-day there is no return to the heavenly Jerusalem and no rebuilding the fallen temple of human nature except in the power of the Spirit of God. Regeneration always goes hand in hand with redemption – the work of the Spirit with the work of the Christ. In the particular case before us, the special effect of the Divine influence is "to raise the spirit" —*i. e.*, to infuse life, to rouse to activity and hope and high endeavour. A people thus equipped is fit for any expedition of toil or peril. Like Gideon's little, sifted army, the small band of inspired men who rose up to accept the decree of Cyrus carried within their breasts a superhuman power, and therefore a promise of ultimate success. The aim with which they set out confirmed the religious character of the whole enterprise. They accepted the limitations and they gladly adopted the one definite purpose suggested in the edict of Cyrus. They proceeded "to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." This was their only confessed aim. It would have been impossible for patriots such as these Jews were not to feel some national hopes and dreams

stirring within them; still we have no reason to believe that the returning exiles were not loyal to the spirit of the decree of the Great King. The religious aim was the real occasion of the expedition. So much the more need was there to go in the Spirit and strength of God. Only they whose spirit God has raised are fit to build God's temple, because work for God must be done in the Spirit of God.

Secondly, the resident neighbours fell in with the recommendation of the king ungrudgingly, and gave rich contributions for the expedition. They could not go themselves, but they could have a share in the work by means of their gifts – as the home Church can share in the foreign mission she supports. The acceptance of these bounties by the Jews does not well accord with their subsequent conduct when they refused the aid of their Samaritan neighbours in the actual work of building the temple. It has an ugly look, as though they were willing to take help from all sources excepting where any concessions in return would be expected on the part of those who were befriending them. However, it is just to remember that the aid was invited and offered by Cyrus, not solicited by the Jews.

Thirdly, the execution of the decree appears to have been honestly and effectively promoted by its author. In accordance with his generous encouragement of the Jews to rebuild their temple, Cyrus restored the sacred vessels that had been carried off by Nebuchadnezzar on the occasion of the first Chaldæan raid on Jerusalem, and deposited in a temple at Babylon nearly

seventy years before the time of the return. No doubt these things were regarded as of more importance than other spoils of war. It would be supposed that the patron god of the conquered people was humiliated when the instruments of his worship were offered to Bel or Nebo. Perhaps it was thought that some charm attaching to them would bring luck to the city in which they were guarded. When Nabonidas was seized with frantic terror at the approach of the Persian hosts, he brought the idols of the surrounding nations to Babylon for his protection. The reference to the temple vessels, and the careful and detailed enumeration of them, without the mention of any image, is a clear proof that, although before the captivity the majority of the Jews may have consisted of idolaters, there was no idol in the temple at Jerusalem. Had there been one there Nebuchadnezzar would most certainly have carried it off as the greatest trophy of victory. In default of images, he had to make the most of the gold and silver plate used in the sacrificial ceremonies.

Viewed in this connection, the restitution of the stolen vessels by Cyrus appears to be more than an act of generosity or justice. A certain religious import belongs to it. It put an end to an ancient insult offered by Babylon to the God of Israel; and it might be taken as an act of homage offered to Jehovah by Cyrus. Yet it was only a restitution, a return of what was God's before, and so a type of every gift man makes to God.

It has been noticed that the total number of the vessels restored does not agree with the sum of the numbers of the

several kinds of vessels. The total is 5400; but an addition of the list of the vessels only amounts to 2499. Perhaps the less valuable articles are omitted from the detailed account; or possibly there is some error of transcription, and if so the question is, in which direction shall we find it? It may be that the total was too large. On the other hand, in 1 Esdras nearly the same high total is given – viz., 5469 – and there the details are made to agree with it by an evidently artificial manipulation of the numbers.¹² This gives some probability to the view that the total is correct, and that the error must be in the numbers of the several items. The practical importance of these considerations is that they lead us to a high estimate of the immense wealth of the Old Temple treasures. Thus they suggest the reflection that much devotion and generosity had been shown in collecting such stores of gold and silver in previous ages. They help us to picture the sumptuous ritual of the first temple, with the "barbaric splendour" of a rich display of the precious metals. Therefore they show that the generosity of Cyrus in restoring so great a hoard was genuine and considerable. It might have been urged that after the treasures had been lying for two generations in a heathen temple the original owners had lost all claim upon them. It might have been said that they had been contaminated by this long residence among the abominations of Babylonian idolatry. The restoration of them swept away all such ideas. What was once God's belongs to Him by right for ever. His property is inalienable; His claims

¹² 1 Esdras ii. 14.

never lapse with time, never fail through change.

It is not without significance that the treasurer who handed over their temple-property to the Jews was named "Mithredath" – a word that means "given by Mithra," or "devoted to Mithra." This suggests that the Persian sun-god was honoured among the servants of Cyrus, and yet that one who by name at least was especially associated with this divinity was constrained to honour the God of Israel. Next to Judaism and Christianity, the worship of Mithra showed the greatest vitality of all religions in Western Asia, and later even in Europe. So vigorous was it as recently as the commencement of the Christian era, that M. Renan has remarked, that if the Roman world had not become Christian it would have become Mithrastic. In those regions where the dazzling radiance and burning heat of the sun are felt as they are not even imagined in our chill, gloomy climate, it was naturally supposed that if any visible God existed He must be found in the great fiery centre of the world's light and life. Our own day has seen the scientific development of the idea that the sun's force is the source of all the energy of nature. In the homage paid by one of the ancient followers of Mithra, the sun-god, to the God of Israel, may we not see an image of the recognition of the claims of the Supreme by our priests of the sun – Kepler, Newton, Faraday? Men must be more blind than the slaves of Mithra if they cannot recognise an awful, invisible energy behind and above the forces of the solar system – nay more, a living Spirit – God!

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECOND EXODUS

Ezra ii. 1-67

The journey of the returning exiles from Babylon has some points of resemblance to the exodus of their fathers from Egypt. On both occasions the Israelites had been suffering oppression in a foreign land. Deliverance had come to the ancient Hebrews in so wonderful a way that it could only be described as a miracle of God: no material miracle was recorded of the later movement; and yet it was so marvellously providential that the Jews were constrained to acknowledge that the hand of God was not less concerned in it.

But there were great differences between the two events. In the original *Hegira* of the Hebrews a horde of slaves was fleeing from the land of their brutal masters; in the solemn pilgrimage of the second exodus the Jews were able to set out with every encouragement from the conqueror of their national enemy. On the other hand, while the flight from Egypt led to liberty, the expedition from Babylon did not include an escape from the foreign yoke. The returning exiles were described as "children

of the province"¹³—*i. e.*, of the Persian province of Judæa – and their leader bore the title of a Persian governor.¹⁴ Zerubbabel was no new Moses. The first exodus witnessed the birth of a nation; the second saw only a migration within the boundaries of an empire, sanctioned by the ruler because it did not include the deliverance of the subject people from servitude.

In other respects the condition of the Israelites who took part in the later expedition contrasts favourably with that of their ancestors under Moses. In the arts of civilisation, of course, they were far superior to the crushed Egyptian bondmen. But the chief distinction lay in the matter of religion. At length, in these days of Cyrus, the people were ripe to accept the faith of the great teachers who hitherto had been as voices crying in the wilderness. This fact signalises the immense difference between the Jews in every age previous to the exile, and the Jews of the return. In earlier periods they appear as a kingdom, but not as a Church; in the later age they are no longer a kingdom, but they have become a Church. The kingdom had been mainly heathenish and idolatrous in its religion, and most abominably corrupt in its morals, with only a thin streak of purer faith and conduct running through the course of its history. But the new Church, formed out of captives purified in the fires of persecution, consisted of a body of men and women who heartily embraced the religion to which but few of their forefathers had attained, and who

¹³ Ezra ii. 1.

¹⁴ Tirshatha. Ezra ii. 63.

were even ready to welcome a more rigorous development of its cult. Thus they became a highly developed Church. They were consolidated into a Puritan Church in discipline, and a High Church in ritual.

It must be borne in mind that only a fraction of the Jews in the East went back to Palestine. Nor were they who tarried, in all cases, the more worldly, enamoured of the fleshpots. In the Talmud it is said that only the chaff returned, while the wheat remained behind. Both Ezra and Nehemiah sprang from families still residing in the East long after the return under Zerubbabel.

It is in accordance with these conditions that we come across one of the most curious characteristics of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah – a characteristic which they share with Chronicles, viz., the frequent insertion of long lists of names.

Thus the second chapter of Ezra contains a list of the families who went up to Jerusalem in response to the edict of Cyrus. One or two general considerations arise here.

Since it was not a whole nation that migrated from the plains of Babylon across the great Syrian desert, but only some fragments of a nation, we shall not have to consider the fortunes and destinies of a composite unity, such as is represented by a kingdom. The people of God must now be regarded disjunctively. It is not the blessing of Israel, or the blessing of Judah, that faith now anticipates; but the blessing of those men, women, and children who fear God and walk in His ways, though, of course, for the present they are all confined to the limits of

the Jewish race.

On the other hand, it is to be observed that this individualism was not absolute. The people were arranged according to their families, and the names that distinguished the families were not those of the present heads of houses, but the names of ancestors, possibly of captives taken down to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. As some of these names occur in later expeditions, it is plain that the whole of the families they represented were not found in the first body of pilgrims. Still the people were grouped in family order. The Jews anticipated the modern verdict of sociology, that the social unit is the family, not the individual. Judaism was, through and through, a domestic religion.

Further, it is to be noted that a sort of caste feeling was engendered in the midst of the domestic arrangement of the people. It emerges already in the second chapter of Ezra in the cases of families that could not trace their genealogy, and it bears bitter fruit in some pitiable scenes in the later history of the returned people. Not only national rights, but also religious privileges, come more and more to depend on purity of birth and descent. Religion is viewed as a question of blood relationship. Thus even with the very appearance of that new-born individualism which might be expected to counteract it, even when the recovered people is composed entirely of volunteers, a strong racial current sets in, which grows in volume until in the days of our Lord the fact of a man's being a Jew is thought a sufficient guarantee of his enjoying the favour of

Heaven, until in our own day such a book as "Daniel Deronda" portrays the race-enthusiasm of the Israelite as the very heart and essence of his religion.

We have three copies of the list of the returning exiles – one in Ezra ii., the second in Nehemiah vii., and the third in 1 Esdras v. They are evidently all of them transcripts of the same original register; but though they agree in the main, they differ in details, giving some variation in the names and considerable diversity in the numbers – Esdras coming nearer to Ezra than to Nehemiah, as we might expect. The total, however, is the same in every case, viz., 42,360 (besides 7337 servants) – a large number, which shows how important the expedition was considered to be.

The name of Zerubbabel appears first. He was the lineal descendant of the royal house, the heir to the throne of David. This is a most significant fact. It shows that the exiles had retained some latent national organisation, and it gives a faint political character to the return, although, as we have already observed, the main object of it was religious. To fervent readers of old prophecies strange hopes would dawn, hopes of the Messiah whose advent Isaiah, in particular, had predicted. Was this new shoot from the stock of David indeed the Lord's Anointed? Those who secretly answered the question to themselves in the affirmative were doomed to much perplexity and not a little disappointment. Nevertheless Zerubbabel was a lower, a provisional, a temporary Messiah. God was educating His people through their illusions. As one by one the national

heroes failed to satisfy the large hopes of the prophets, they were left behind, but the hopes still maintained their unearthly vitality. Hezekiah, Josiah, Zerubbabel, the Maccabees all passed, and in passing they all helped to prepare for One who alone could realise the dreams of seers and singers in all the best ages of Hebrew thought and life.

Still the bulk of the people do not seem to have been dominated by the Messianic conception. It is one characteristic of the return that the idea of the personal, God-sent, but human Messiah recedes; and another, older, and more persistent Jewish hope comes to the front – viz., the hope in God Himself as the Saviour of His people and their Vindicator. Cyrus could not have suspected any political designs, or he would not have made Zerubbabel the head of the expedition. Evidently "Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah," to whom Cyrus handed over the sacred vessels of the temple, is the same man as Zerubbabel, because in v. 16 we read that Sheshbazzar laid the foundation of the temple, while in iii. 8 this work is ascribed to Zerubbabel, with whom the origin of the work is again connected in v. 2.

The second name is Jeshua.¹⁵ The man who bears it was afterwards the high-priest at Jerusalem. It is impossible to say whether he had exercised any sacerdotal functions during the exile; but his prominent place shows that honour was now offered to his priesthood. Still he comes after the royal prince.

¹⁵ This name is a later form of "Joshua"; the older form of the name is used for the same person in Hag. i. 1, 14, and Zech. iii. 1.

Then follow nine names without any description.¹⁶ Nehemiah's list includes another name, which seems to have dropped out of the list in Ezra. These, together with the two already mentioned, make an exact dozen. It cannot be an accident that twelve names stand at the head of the list; they must be meant to represent the twelve tribes – like the twelve apostles in the Gospels, and the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse. Thus it is indicated that the return is for all Israel, not exclusively for the Judæan Hebrews. Undoubtedly the bulk of the pilgrims were descendants of captives from the Southern Kingdom.¹⁷ The dispersion of the Northern Kingdom had begun two centuries earlier than Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judæa; it had been carried on by successive removals of the people in successive wars. Probably most of these early exiles had been driven farther north than those districts which were assigned to the Judæan captives; probably, too; they had been scattered far and wide; lastly, we know that they had been sunken in an idolatrous imitation of the manners and customs of their heathen neighbours, so that there was little to differentiate them from the people among whom they were domiciled. Under all these circumstances, is it remarkable that the ten tribes have disappeared from the observation of the world? They have

¹⁶ Of course the Nehemiah and Mordecai in this list are different persons from those who bear the same names in the Books of Nehemiah and Esther and belong to later dates.

¹⁷ See Ezra i. 5.

vanished, but only as the Goths have vanished in Italy, as the Huguenot refugees have vanished in England – by mingling with the resident population. We have not to search for them in Tartary, or South America, or any other remote region of the four continents, because we have no reason to believe that they are now a separate people.

Still a very small "Remnant" was faithful. This "Remnant" was welcome to find its way back to Palestine with the returning Judæans. As the immediate object of the expedition was to rebuild the temple at the rival capital of Jerusalem, it was not to be expected that patriots of the Northern Kingdom would be very eager to join it. Yet some descendants of the ten tribes made their way back. Even in New Testament times the genealogy of the prophetess Anna was reckoned from the tribe of Asher.¹⁸ It is most improbable that the twelve leaders were actually descendants of the twelve tribes. But just as in the case of the apostles, whom we cannot regard as thus descended, they represented all Israel. Their position at the head of the expedition proclaimed that the "middle wall of partition" was broken down. Thus we see that redemption tends to liberalise the redeemed, that those who are restored to God are also brought back to the love of their brethren.

The list that follows the twelve is divisible into two sections. First, we have a number of families; then there is a change in the tabulation, and the rest of the people are arranged according to

¹⁸ Luke ii. 36.

their cities. The most simple explanation of this double method is that the families constitute the Jerusalem citizens.

The towns named in the second division are all situated in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. The only part of Palestine as yet restored to the Jews was Jerusalem, with the towns in its vicinity. The southern half of Judæa remained in the hands of the Edomites, who begrudged to the Jews even the resumption of the northern portion – and very naturally, seeing that the Edomites had held it for half a century, a time which gives some assurance of permanent possession. This must be borne in mind when we come across the troubles between the returned exiles and their neighbours in Palestine. We can never understand a quarrel until we have heard both sides. There is no Edomite history of the wars of Israel. No doubt such a history would put another face on the events – just as a Chinese history of the English wars in the East would do, to the shame of the Christian nation.

After the leaders and the people generally come the successive orders of the temple ministry. We begin with the priests, and among these a front rank is given to the house of Jeshua. The high-priest himself had been named earlier, next to Zerubbabel, among the leaders of the nation, so distinct was his position from that of the ordinary priesthood. Next to the priests we have the Levites, who are now sharply separated from the first order of the ministry. The very small number of Levites in comparison with the large number of priests is startling – over four thousand priests and only seventy-four Levites! The explanation of this

anomaly may be found in what had been occurring in Chaldaea. Ezekiel declared that the Levites were to be degraded because of their sinful conduct.¹⁹ We see from the arrangement in Ezra that the prophet's message was obeyed. The Levites were now separated from the priests, and set down to a lower function. This could not have been acceptable to them. Therefore it is not at all surprising that the majority of them held aloof from the expedition for rebuilding the temple in sullen resentment, or at best in cool indifference, refusing to take part in a work the issue of which would exhibit their humiliation to menial service. But the seventy-four had grace to accept their lowly lot.

The Levites are not set in the lowest place. They are distinguished from several succeeding orders. The singers, the children of Asaph, were really Levites; but they form a separate and important class, for the temple service was to be choral – rich and gladsome. The door-keepers are a distinct order, lowly but honourable, for they are devoted to the service of God, for whom all work is glorious.

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

Next come the Nethinims, or temple-helots. These seem to have been aborigines of Canaan who had been pressed into the service of the old Jerusalem temple, like the Gibeonites, the hewers of wood and drawers of water. After the Nethinims come "the children of Solomon's servants," another order of slaves,

¹⁹ Ezek. xliv. 9-16.

apparently the descendants of the war captives whom Solomon had assigned to the work of building the temple. It shows what thorough organisation was preserved among the captives that these bondsmen were retained in their original position and brought back to Jerusalem. To us this is not altogether admirable. We may be grieved to see slavery thus enlisted in the worship of God. But we must recollect that even with the Christian gospel in her hand, for centuries, the Church had her slaves, the monasteries their serfs. No idea is of slower growth than the idea of the brotherhood of man.

So far all was in order; but there were exceptional cases. Some of the people could not prove their Israelite descent, and accordingly they were set aside from their brethren. Some of the priests even could not trace their genealogy. Their condition was regarded as more serious, for the right of office was purely hereditary. The dilemma brought to light a sad sense of loss. If only there were a priest with the Urim and Thummim, this antique augury of flashing gems might settle the difficulty! But such a man was not to be found. The Urim and Thummim, together with the Ark and the Shekinah, are named by the rabbis among the precious things that were never recovered. The Jews looked back with regret to the wonderful time when the privilege of consulting an oracle had been within the reach of their ancestors. Thus they shared the universal instinct of mankind that turns fondly to the past for memories of a golden age, the glories of which have faded and left us only the dingy scenes of

every-day life. In this instinct we may detect a transference to the race of the vaguely perceived personal loss of each man as he reflects on those far-off, dream-like child-days, when even he was a "mighty prophet," a "seer blest," one who had come into the world "trailing clouds of glory." Alas! he perceives that the mystic splendours have faded into the light of common day, if they have not even given place to the gloom of doubt, or the black night of sin. Then, taking himself as a microcosm, he ascribes a similar fate to the race.

Nothing is more inspiriting in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ than its complete reversal of this dismal process of reflection, and its promise of the Golden Age in the future. The most exalted Hebrew prophecy anticipated something of the kind; here and there it lit up its sombre pages with the hope of a brilliant future. The attitude of the Jews in the present instance, when they simply set a question on one side, waiting till a priest with Urim and Thummim should appear, suggests too faint a belief in the future to be prophetic. But like Socrates' hint at the possibility of one arising who should solve the problems which were inscrutable to the Athenians of his day, it points to a sense of need. When at length Christ came as "the Light of the World," it was to supply a widely felt want. It is true He brought no Urim and Thummim. The supreme motive for thankfulness in this connection is that His revelation is so much more ample than the wizard guidance men had formerly clung to, as to be like the broad sunshine in comparison with the shifting lights of magic

gems. Though He gave no formal answers to petty questions such as those for which the Jews would resort to a priest, as their heathen neighbours resorted to a soothsayer, He shed a wholesome radiance on the path of life, so that His followers have come to regard the providing of a priest with Urim and Thummim as at best an expedient adapted to the requirements of an age of superstition.

If the caravan lacked the privilege of an oracle, care was taken to equip it as well as the available means would allow. These were not abundant. There were servants, it is true. There were beasts of burden too – camels, horses, asses; but these were few in comparison to the numbers of the host – only at the rate of one animal to a family of four persons. Yet the expedition set out in a semi-royal character, for it was protected by a guard of a thousand horsemen sent by Cyrus. Better than this, it possessed a spirit of enthusiasm which triumphed over poverty and hardship, and spread a great gladness through the people. Now at length it was possible to take down the harps from the willows. Besides the temple choristers, two hundred singing men and women accompanied the pilgrims to help to give expression to the exuberant joyousness of the host. The spirit of the whole company was expressed in a noble lyric that has become familiar to us: —

"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion,
We were like unto them that dream.

Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing:
Then said they among the nations,
The Lord hath done great things for them.
The Lord hath done great things for us;
Whereof we are glad."²⁰

²⁰ Psalm cxxvi. 1-3.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW TEMPLE

Ezra ii. 68-iii

Unlike the historian of the exodus from Egypt, our chronicler gives no account of adventures of the pilgrims on the road to Palestine, although much of their way led them through a wild and difficult country. So huge a caravan as that which accompanied Zerubbabel must have taken several months to cover the eight hundred miles between Babylon and Jerusalem;²¹ for even Ezra with his smaller company spent four months on their journey.²² A dreary desert stretched over the vast space between the land of exile and the old home of the Jews among the mountains of the West; and here the commissariat would tax the resources of the ablest organisers. It is possible that the difficulties of the desert were circumvented in the most prosaic manner – by simply avoiding this barren, waterless region, and taking a long sweep round by the north of Syria. Passing over the pilgrimage, which afforded him no topics of interest, without a

²¹ *I.e.*, if the route was the usual one, by Tadmor (Palmyra). The easier but roundabout way by Aleppo would have occupied a still longer time.

²² Ezra vii. 8, 9.

word of comment, the chronicler plants us at once in the midst of the busy scenes at Jerusalem, where we see the returned exiles, at length arrived at the end of their tedious journey, preparing to accomplish the one purpose of their expedition.

The first step was to provide the means for building the temple, and contributions were made for this object by all classes of the community – as we gather from the more complete account in Nehemiah²³– from the prince and the aristocracy to the general public, for it was to be a united work. And yet it is implied by the narrative that many had no share in it. These people may have been poor originally or impoverished by their journey, and not at all deficient in generosity or lacking in faith. Still we often meet with those who have enough enthusiasm to applaud a good work and yet not enough to make any sacrifice in promoting it. It is expressly stated that the gifts were offered freely. No tax was imposed by the authorities; but there was no backwardness on the part of the actual donors, who were impelled by a glowing devotion to open their purses without stint. Lastly, those who contributed did so "after their ability." This is the true "proportionate giving." For all to give an equal sum is impossible unless the poll-tax is to be fixed at a miserable minimum. Even for all to give the same proportion is unjust. There are poor men who ought not to sacrifice a tenth of what they receive; there are rich men who will be guilty of unfaithfulness to their stewardship if they do not devote far more

²³ Neh. vii. 70-72.

than this fraction of their vast revenues to the service of God and their fellow-men. It would be reasonable for some of the latter only to reserve the tithe for their own use and to give away nine-tenths of their income, for even then they would not be giving "after their ability."

After the preliminary step of collecting the contributions, the pilgrims proceed to the actual work they have in hand. In this they are heartily united; they gather themselves together "as one man" in a great assembly, which, if we may trust the account in Esdras, is held in an open space by the first gate towards the east,²⁴ and therefore close to the site of the old temple, almost among its very ruins. The unity of spirit and the harmony of action which characterise the commencement of the work are good auguries of its success. This is to be a popular undertaking. Sanctioned by Cyrus, promoted by the aristocracy, it is to be carried out with the full co-operation of the multitude. The first temple had been the work of a king; the second is to be the work of a people. The nation had been dazzled by the splendour of Solomon's court, and had basked in its rays so that the after-glow of them lingered in the memories of ages even down to the time of our Lord.²⁵ But there was a healthier spirit in the humbler work of the returned exiles, when, forced to dispense with the king they would gladly have accepted, they undertook the task of building the new temple themselves.

²⁴ 1 Esdras v. 47.

²⁵ Matt. vi. 29.

In the centre of the mosque known as the "Dome of the Rock" there is a crag with the well-worn remains of steps leading up to the top of it, and with channels cut in its surface. This has been identified by recent explorers as the site of the great Altar of Burnt-offerings. It is on the very crest of Mount Moriah. Formerly it was thought that it was the site of the inmost shrine of the temple, known as "The Holy of Holies," but the new view, which seems to be fairly established, gives an unexpected prominence to the altar. This rude square structure of unhewn stone was the most elevated and conspicuous object in temple. The altar was to Judaism what the cross is to Christianity. Both for us and for the Jews what is most vital and precious in religion is the dark mystery of a sacrifice. The first work of the temple builders was to set up the altar again on its old foundation. Before a stone of the temple was laid, the smoke of sacrificial fires might be seen ascending to heaven from the highest crag of Moriah. For fifty years all sacrifices had ceased. Now with haste, in fear of hindrance from jealous neighbours, means were provided to re-establish them before any attempt was made to rebuild the temple. It is not quite easy to see what the writer means when, after saying "And they set the altar upon his bases," he adds, "for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries." The suggestion that the phrase may be varied so as to mean that the awe which this religious work inspired in the heathen neighbours prevented them from molesting it is far-fetched and improbable. Nor is it likely that the writer intends to

convey the idea that the Jews hastened the building of the altar as a sort of Palladium, trusting that its sacrifices would protect them in case of invasion, for this is to attribute too low and materialistic a character to their religion. More reasonable is the explanation that they hastened the work because they feared that their neighbours might either hinder it or wish to have a share in it – an equally objectionable thing, as subsequent events showed.

The chronicler distinctly states that the sacrifices which were now offered, as well as the festivals which were established later, were all designed to meet the requirements of the law of Moses – that everything might be done "as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God." This statement does not throw much light on the history of the Pentateuch. We know that that work was not yet in the hands of the Jews at Jerusalem, because this was nearly eighty years before Ezra introduced it. The sentence suggests that according to the chronicler *some* law bearing the name of Moses was known to the first body of returned exiles. We need not regard that suggestion as a reflection from later years. Deuteronomy may have been the law referred to; or it may have been some rubric of traditional usages in the possession of the priests.

Meanwhile two facts of importance come out here —*first*, that the method of worship adopted by the returned exiles was a revival of ancient customs, a return to the old ways, not an innovation of their own, and *second*, that this restoration was in careful obedience to the known will of God. Here we have the

root idea of the Torah. It announces that God has revealed His will, and it implies that the service of God can only be acceptable when it is in harmony with the will of God. The prophets taught that obedience was better than sacrifice. The priests held that sacrifice itself was a part of obedience. With both the primary requisite was obedience – as it is the primary requisite in all religion.

The particular kind of sacrifice offered on the great altar was the burnt-offering. Now we do occasionally meet with expiatory ideas in connection with this sacrifice; but unquestionably the principal conception attached to the burnt-offering, in distinction from the sin-offering, was the idea of self-dedication on the part of the worshipper. Thus the Jews re-consecrated themselves to God by the solemn ceremony of sacrifice, and they kept up the thought of renewed consecration by the regular repetition of the burnt-offering. It is difficult for us to enter into the feelings of the people who practised so antique a cult, even to them archaic in its ceremonies, and dimly suggestive of primitive rites that had their origin in far-off barbaric times. But one thing is clear, shining as with letters of awful fire against the black clouds of smoke that hang over the altar. This sacrifice was always a "whole offering." As it was being completely consumed in the flames before their very eyes, the worshippers would see a vivid representation of the tremendous truth that the most perfect sacrifice is death – nay, that it is even more than death, that it is absolute self-effacement in total and unreserved surrender to God.

Various rites follow the great central sacrifice of the burnt-offering, ushered in by the most joyous festival of the year, the Feast of Tabernacles, when the people scatter themselves over the hills round Jerusalem under the shade of extemporised bowers made out of the leafy boughs of trees, and celebrate the goodness of God in the final and richest harvest, the vintage. Then come New Moon and the other festivals that stud the calendar with sacred dates and make the Jewish year a round of glad festivities.

Thus, we see, the full establishment of religious services precedes the building of the temple. A weighty truth is enshrined in this apparently incongruous fact. The worship itself is felt to be more important than the house in which it is to be celebrated. That truth should be even more apparent to us who have read the great words of Jesus uttered by Jacob's well, "The hour cometh when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father, . . . when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth."²⁶ How vain then is it to treat the erection of churches as though it were the promotion of a revival of religion! As surely as the empty sea-shell tossed up on the beach can never secrete a living organism to inhabit it, a mere building – whether it be the most gorgeous cathedral or the plainest village meeting-house – will never induce a living spirit of worship to dwell in its cold desolation. Every true religious revival begins in the spiritual sphere and finds its place of worship where it may – in the rustic

²⁶ John iv. 21, 23.

barn or on the hill-side – if no more seemly home can be provided for it, because its real temple is the humble and contrite heart.

Still the design of building the temple at Jerusalem was kept constantly in view by the pilgrims. Accordingly it was necessary to purchase materials, and in particular the fragrant cedar wood from the distant forests of Lebanon. These famous forests were still in the possession of the Phœnicians, for Cyrus had allowed a local autonomy to the busy trading people on the northern sea-board. So in spite of the king's favour it was requisite for the Jews to pay the full price for the costly timber. Now, in disbursing the original funds brought up from Babylon, it would seem that the whole of this money was expended in labour, in paying the wages of masons and carpenters. Therefore the Jews had to export agricultural products – such as corn, wine, and olive oil – in exchange for the imports of timber they received from the Phœnicians. The question at once arises, how did they come to be possessed of these fruits of the soil? The answer is supplied by a chronological remark in our narrative. It was in the second year of their residence in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood that the Jews commenced the actual building of their temple. They had first patiently cleared, ploughed, and sown the neglected fields, trimmed and trained the vines, and tended the olive gardens, so that they were able to reap a harvest, and to give the surplus products for the purchase of the timber required in building the temple. As the foundation was laid in the spring, the order for the cedar wood must have been sent before the harvest was reaped

– pledging it in advance with faith in the God who gives the increase. The Phœnician woodmen fell their trees in the distant forests of Lebanon; and the massive trunks are dragged down to the coast, and floated along the Mediterranean to Joppa, and then carried on the backs of camels or slowly drawn up the heights of Judah in ox-waggons, while the crops that are to pay for them are still green in the fields.

Here then is a further proof of devotion on the part of the Jews from Babylon – though it is scarcely hinted at in the narrative, though we can only discover it by a careful comparison of facts and dates. Labour is expended on the fields; long weary months of waiting are endured; when the fruits of toil are obtained, these hard-earned stores are not hoarded by their owners: they too, like the gold and silver of the wealthier Jews, are gladly surrendered for the one object which kindles the enthusiasm of every class of the community.

At length all is ready. Jeshua the priest now precedes Zerubbabel, as well as the rest of the twelve leaders, in inaugurating the great work. On the Levites is laid the immediate responsibility of carrying it through. When the foundation is laid, the priests in their new white vestments sound their silver trumpets, and the choir of Levites, the sons of Asaph, clang their brazen cymbals. To the accompaniment of this inspiring music they sing glad psalms in praise of God, giving thanks to Him, celebrating His goodness and His mercy that endureth for ever toward Israel. This is not at all like the soft music

and calm chanting of subdued cathedral services that we think of in connection with great national festivals. The instruments blare and clash, the choristers cry aloud, and the people join them with a mighty shout. When shrill discordant notes of bitter wailing, piped by a group of melancholy old men, threaten to break the harmony of the scene, they are drowned in the deluge of jubilation that rises up in protest and beats down all their opposition with its triumph of gladness. To a sober Western the scene would seem to be a sort of religious orgy, like a wild Bacchanalian festival, like the howling of hosts of dervishes. But although it is the Englishman's habit to take his religion sombrely, if not sadly, it may be well for him to pause before pronouncing a condemnation of those men and women who are more exuberant in the expression of spiritual emotion. If he finds, even among his fellow-countrymen, some who permit themselves a more lively music and a more free method of public worship than he is accustomed to, is it not a mark of insular narrowness for him to visit these unconventional people with disapprobation? In abandoning the severe manners of their race, they are only approaching nearer to the time-old methods of ancient Israel.

In this clangour and clamour at Jerusalem the predominant note was a burst of irrepressible gladness. When God turned the captivity of Israel, mourning was transformed into laughter. To understand the wild excitement of the Jews, their pæan of joy, their very ecstasy, we must recollect what they had passed through, as well as what they were now anticipating. We must

remember the cruel disaster of the overthrow of Jerusalem, the desolation of the exile, the sickness of weary waiting for deliverance, the harshness of the persecution that embittered the later years of the captivity under Nabonidas; we must think of the toilsome pilgrimage through the desert, with its dismal wastes, its dangers and its terrors, followed by the patient work on the land and gathering in of means for building the temple. And now all this was over. The bow had been terribly bent; the rebound was immense. People who cannot feel strong religious gladness have never known the heartache of deep religious grief. These Israelites had cried out of the depths; they were prepared to shout for joy from the heights. Perhaps we may go further, and detect a finer note in this great blast of jubilation, a note of higher and more solemn gladness. The chastisement of the exile was past, and the long-suffering mercy of God – enduring for ever – was again smiling out on the chastened people. And yet the positive realisation of their hopes was for the future. The joy, therefore, was inspired by faith. With little accomplished as yet, the sanguine people already saw the temple in their mind's eye, with its massive walls, its cedar chambers, and its adornment of gold and richly dyed hangings. In the very laying of the foundation their eager imaginations leaped forward to the crowning of the highest pinnacles. Perhaps they saw more; perhaps they perceived, though but dimly, something of the meaning of the spiritual blessedness that had been foretold by their prophets.

All this gladness centred in the building of a temple, and therefore ultimately in the worship of God. We take but a one-sided view of Judaism if we judge it by the sour ideas of later Pharisaism. As it presented itself to St. Paul in opposition to the gospel, it was stern and loveless. But in its earlier days this religion was free and gladsome, though, as we shall soon see, even then a rigour of fanaticism soon crept in and turned its joy into grief. Here, however, at the founding of the temple, it wears its sunniest aspect. There is no reason why religion should wear any other aspect to the devout soul. It should be happy; for is it not the worship of a happy God?

Nevertheless, in the midst of the almost universal acclaim of joy and praise, there was the note of sadness wailed by the old men, who could recollect the venerable fane in which their fathers had worshipped before the ruthless soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar had reduced it to a heap of ashes. Possibly some of them had stood on this very spot half a century before, in an agony of despair, while they saw the cruel flames licking the ancient stones and blazing up among the cedar beams, and all the fine gold dimmed with black clouds of smoke. Was it likely that the feeble flock just returned from Babylon could ever produce such a wonder of the world as Solomon's temple had been? The enthusiastic younger people might be glad in their ignorance; but their sober elders, who knew more, could only weep. We cannot but think that, after the too common habit of the aged, these mournful old men viewed the past in a glamour of

memory, magnifying its splendours as they looked back on them through the mists of time. If so, they were old indeed; for this habit, and not years, makes real old age. He is aged who lives in bygone days, with his face ever set to the irreparable past, vainly regretting its retreating memories, uninterested in the present, despondent of the future. The true elixir of life, the secret of perpetual youth of soul, is interest in the present and the future, with the forward glance of faith and hope. Old men who cultivate this spirit have young hearts though the snow is on their heads. And such are wise. No doubt, from the standpoint of a narrow common sense, with its shrunken views confined to the material and the mundane, the old men who wept had more reason for their conduct than the inexperienced younger men who rejoiced. But there is a prudence that comes of blindness, and there is an imprudence that is sublime in its daring, because it springs from faith. The despair of old age makes one great mistake, because it ignores one great truth. In noting that many good things have passed away, it forgets to remember that God remains. God is not dead! Therefore the future is safe. In the end the young enthusiasts of Jerusalem were justified. A prophet arose who declared that a glory which the former temple had never known should adorn the new temple, in spite of its humble beginning; and history verified his word when the Lord took possession of His house in the person of His Son.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LIMITS OF COMPREHENSION

Ezra iv. 1-5, 24

The fourth chapter of the Book of Ezra introduces the vexed question of the limits of comprehension in religion by affording a concrete illustration of it in a very acute form. Communities, like individual organisms, can only live by means of a certain adjustment to their environment, in the settlement of which there necessarily arises a serious struggle to determine what shall be absorbed and what rejected, how far it is desirable to admit alien bodies and to what extent it is necessary to exclude them. The difficulty thus occasioned appeared in the company of returned exiles soon after they had begun to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. It was the seed of many troubles. The anxieties and disappointments which overshadowed the subsequent history nearly all of them sprang from this one source. Here we are brought to a very distinguishing characteristic of the Persian period. The idea of Jewish exclusiveness which has been so singular a feature in the whole course of Judaism right down to our own day was now in its birth-throes. Like a young Hercules, it had to fight for its life in its very cradle. It first appeared

in the anxious compilation of genealogical registers and the careful sifting of the qualifications of the pilgrims before they left Babylon. In the events which followed the settlement at Jerusalem it came forward with determined insistence on its rights, in opposition to a very tempting offer which would have been fatal to its very existence.

The chronicler introduces the neighbouring people under the title "The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin"; but in doing so he is describing them according to their later actions; when they first appear on his pages their attitude is friendly, and there is no reason to suspect any hypocrisy in it. We cannot take them to be the remainder of the Israelite inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom who had been permitted to stay in their land when their brethren had been violently expelled by the Assyrians, and who were now either showing their old enmity to Judah and Benjamin by trying to pick a new quarrel, or, on the other hand, manifesting a better spirit and seeking reconciliation. No doubt such people existed, especially in the north, where they became, in part at least, the ancestors of the Galileans of New Testament times. But the men now referred to distinctly assert that they were brought up to Palestine by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon. Neither can they be the descendants of the Israelite priests who were sent at the request of the colonists to teach them the religion of the land when they were alarmed at an incursion of lions;²⁷ for only one priest is directly mentioned in the history,

²⁷ 2 Kings xvii. 25-28.

and though he may have had companions and assistants, the small college of missionaries could not be called "the people of the land" (ver. 4). These people must be the foreign colonists. There were Chaldæans from Babylon and the neighbouring cities of Cutha and Sepharvaim (the modern *Mosaib*), Elamites from Susa, Phœnicians from Sidon – if we may trust Josephus here²⁸ – and Arabs from Petra. These had been introduced on four successive occasions – first, as the Assyrian inscriptions show, by Sargon, who sent two sets of colonists; then by Esarhaddon; and, lastly, by Ashur-banipal.²⁹ The various nationalities had had time to become well amalgamated together, for the first colonisation had happened a hundred and eighty years, and the latest colonisation a hundred and thirty years, before the Jews returned from Babylon. As the successive exportations of Israelites went on side by side with the successive importations of foreigners, the two classes must have lived together for some time; and even after the last captivity of the Israelites had been effected, those who were still left in the land would have come into contact with the colonists. Thus, apart from the special mission of the priest whose business it was to introduce the rites of sacrificial worship, the popular religion of the Israelites would have become known to the mixed heathen people who were settled among them.

These neighbours assert that they worship the God whom

²⁸ *Ant.*, XII. v. 5.

²⁹ The "Osnappar" of Ezra iv. 10.

the Jews at Jerusalem worship, and that they have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esar-haddon, the Assyrian king to whom, in particular, they attribute their being brought up to Palestine, possibly because the ancestors of the deputation to Jerusalem were among the colonists planted by that king. For a century and a half they have acknowledged the God of the Jews. They therefore request to be permitted to assist in rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem. At the first blush of it their petition looks reasonable and even generous. The Jews were poor; a great work lay before them; and the inadequacy of their means in view of what they aimed at had plunged the less enthusiastic among them into grief and despair. Here was an offer of assistance that might prove most efficacious. The idea of centralisation in worship of which Josiah had made so much would be furthered by this means, because instead of following the example of the Israelites before the exile who had their altar at Bethel, the colonists proposed to take part in the erection of the one Jewish temple at Jerusalem. If their previous habit of offering sacrifices in their own territory was offensive to rigorous Jews, although they might speak of it quite naively, because they were unconscious that there was anything objectionable in it and even regard it as meritorious, the very way to abolish this ancient custom was to give the colonists an interest in the central shrine. If their religion was defective, how could it be improved better than by bringing them into contact with the law-abiding Jews? While the offer of the colonists promised aid to the Jews in building the

temple, it also afforded them a grand missionary opportunity for carrying out the broad programme of the Second Isaiah, who had promised the spread of the light of God's grace among the Gentiles.

In view of these considerations we cannot but read the account of the absolute rejection of the offer by Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the twelve leaders with a sense of painful disappointment. The less pleasing side of religious intensity here presents itself. Zeal seems to be passing into fanaticism. A selfish element mars the picture of whole-hearted devotion which was so delightfully portrayed in the history of the returned exiles up to this time. The leaders are cautious enough to couch their answer in terms that seem to hint at their inability to comply with the friendly request of their neighbours, however much they may wish to do so, because of the limitation imposed upon them in the edict of Cyrus which confined the command to build the temple at Jerusalem to the Jews. But it is evident that the secret of the refusal is in the mind and will of the Jews themselves. They absolutely decline any co-operation with the colonists. There is a sting in the carefully chosen language with which they define their work: they call it building a house "unto *our* God." Thus they not only accept the polite phrase "Your God" employed by the colonists in addressing them; but by markedly accentuating its limitation they disallow any right of the colonists to claim the same divinity.

Such a curt refusal of friendly overtures was naturally most

offensive to the people who received it. But their subsequent conduct was so bitterly ill-natured that we are driven to think they must have had some selfish aims from the first. They at once set some paid agents to work at court to poison the mind of the government with calumnies about the Jews. It is scarcely likely that they were able to win Cyrus over to their side against his favourite *protégés*. The king may have been too absorbed with the great affairs of his vast dominions for any murmur of this business to reach him while it was being disposed of by some official. But perhaps the matter did not come up till after Cyrus had handed over the government to his son Cambyses, which he did in the year B.C. 532 – three years before his death. At all events the calumnies were successful. The work of the temple building was arrested at its very commencement – for as yet little more had been done beyond collecting materials. The Jews were paying dearly for their exclusiveness.

All this looks very miserable. But let us examine the situation.

We should show a total lack of the historical spirit if we were to judge the conduct of Zerubbabel and his companions by the broad principles of Christian liberalism. We must take into account their religious training and the measure of light to which they had attained. We must also consider the singularly difficult position in which they were placed. They were not a nation; they were a Church. Their very existence, therefore, depended upon a certain ecclesiastical organisation. They must have shaped themselves according to some definite lines, or they would have

melted away into the mass of mixed nationalities and debased eclectic religions with which they were surrounded. Whether the course of personal exclusiveness which they chose was wisest and best may be fairly questioned. It has been the course followed by their children all through the centuries, and it has acquired this much of justification – it has succeeded. Judaism has been preserved by Jewish exclusiveness. We may think that the essential truths of Judaism might have been maintained by other means which would have allowed of a more gracious treatment of outsiders. Meanwhile, however, we must see that Zerubbabel and his companions were not simply indulging in churlish unsociability when they rejected the request of their neighbours. Rightly or wrongly, they took this disagreeable course with a great purpose in mind.

Then we must understand what the request of the colonists really involved. It is true they only asked to be allowed to assist in *building* the temple. But it would have been impossible to stay here. If they had taken an active share in the labour and sacrifice of the construction of the temple, they could not have been excluded afterwards from taking part in the temple worship. This is the more clear since the very grounds of their request were that they worshipped and sacrificed to the God of the Jews. Now a great prophet had predicted that God's house was to be a home of prayer for all nations.³⁰ But the Jews at Jerusalem belonged to a very different school of thought. With them, as we have learnt

³⁰ Isa. lvi. 7.

from the genealogies, the racial idea was predominant. Judaism was for the Jews.

But let us understand what that religion was which the colonists asserted to be identical with the religion of the returned exiles. They said they worshipped the God of the Jews, but it was after the manner of the people of the Northern Kingdom. In the days of the Israelites that worship had been associated with the steer at Bethel, and the people of Jerusalem had condemned the degenerate religion of their northern brethren as sinful in the sight of God. But the colonists had not confined themselves to this. They had combined their old idolatrous religion with that of the newly adopted indigenous divinity of Palestine. "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods."³¹ Between them, they adored a host of Pagan divinities, whose barbarous names are grimly noted by the Hebrew historian – Succoth-benoth, Nergal, Ashima, etc.³² There is no evidence to show that this heathenism had become extinct by the time of the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple. At all events, the bastard product of such a worship as that of the Bethel steer and the Babylonian and Phœnician divinities, even when purged of its most gross corruption, was not likely to be after the mind of the puritan pilgrims. The colonists did not offer to adopt the traditional Torah, which the returned exiles were sedulously observing.

Still it may be said, if the people were imperfect in knowledge

³¹ 2 Kings xvii. 33.

³² 2 Kings xvii. 30, 31.

and corrupt in practice, might not the Jews have enlightened and helped them? We are reminded of the reproach that Bede brings so sternly against the ancient British Christians when he blames them for not having taught the gospel to the Saxon heathen who had invaded their land. How far it would have been possible for a feeble people to evangelise their more powerful neighbours, in either case, it is impossible to say.

It cannot be denied, however, that in their refusal the Jews gave prominence to racial and not to religious distinctions. Yet even in this matter it would be unreasonable for us to expect them to have surpassed the early Christian Church at Jerusalem and to have anticipated the daring liberalism of St. Paul. The followers of St. James were reluctant to receive any converts into their communion except on condition of circumcision. This meant that Gentiles must become Jews before they could be recognised as Christians. Now there was no sign that the mixed race of colonists ever contemplated becoming Jews by humbling themselves to a rite of initiation. Even if most of them were already circumcised, as far as we know none of them gave an indication of willingness to subject themselves wholly to Jewish ordinances. To receive them, therefore, would be contrary to the root principle of Judaism. It is not fair to mete out a harsh condemnation to Jews who declined to do what was only allowed among Christians after a desperate struggle, which separated the leader of the liberal party from many of his brethren and left him for a long while under a cloud of suspicion.

Great confusion has been imported into the controversy on Church comprehension by not keeping it separate from the question of tolerance in religion. The two are distinct in many respects. Comprehension is an ecclesiastical matter; tolerance is primarily concerned with the policy of the state. Whilst it is admitted that nobody should be coerced in his religion by the state, it is not therefore to be assumed that everybody is to be received into the Church.

Nevertheless we feel that there is a real and vital connection between the ideas of toleration and Church comprehensiveness. A Church may become culpably intolerant, although she may not use the power of the state for the execution of her mandates; she may contrive many painful forms of persecution, without resorting to the rack and the thumb-screw. The question therefore arises, What are the limits to tolerance within a Church? The attempt to fix these limits by creeds and canons has not been wholly successful, either in excluding the unworthy or in including the most desirable members. The drift of thought in the present day being towards wider comprehensiveness, it becomes increasingly desirable to determine on what principles this may be attained. Good men are weary of the little garden walled around, and they doubt whether it is altogether the Lord's peculiar ground; they have discovered that many of the flowers of the field are fair and fragrant, and they have a keen suspicion that not a few weeds may be lurking even in the trim parterre; so they look over the wall and long for breadth and brotherhood, in

a larger recognition of all that is good in the world. Now the dull religious lethargy of the eighteenth century is a warning against the chief danger that threatens those who yield themselves to this fascinating impulse. Latitudinarianism sought to widen the fold that had been narrowed on one side by sacerdotal pretensions and on the other side by puritan rigour. The result was that the fold almost disappeared. Then religion was nearly swallowed up in the swamps of indifference. This deplorable issue of a well-meant attempt to serve the cause of charity suggests that there is little good in breaking down the barriers of exclusiveness unless we have first established a potent centre of unity. If we have put an end to division simply by destroying the interests which once divided men, we have only attained the communion of death. In the graveyard friend and foe lie peaceably side by side, but only because both are dead. Wherever there is life two opposite influences are invariably at work. There is a force of attraction drawing in all that is congenial, and there is a force of a contrary character repelling everything that is uncongenial. Any attempt to tamper with either of these forces must result in disaster. A social or an ecclesiastical division that arbitrarily crosses the lines of natural affinity creates a schism in the body, and leads to a painful mutilation of fellowship. On the other hand, a forced comprehension of alien elements produces internal friction, which often leads to an explosion, shattering the whole fabric. But the common mistake has been in attending to the circumference and neglecting the centre, in beating the bounds

of the parish instead of fortifying the citadel. The liberalism of St. Paul was not latitudinarian, because it was inspired by a vital principle which served as the centre of all his teaching. He preached liberty and comprehensiveness, because he had first preached Christ. In Christ he found at once a bond of union and an escape from narrowness. The middle wall of partition was broken down, not by a Vandal armed with nothing better than the besom of destruction, but by the Founder of a new kingdom, who could dispense with artificial restrictions because He could draw all men unto Himself.

Unfortunately the returned captives at Jerusalem did not feel conscious of any such spiritual centre of unity. They might have found it in their grandly simple creed, in their faith in God. But their absorption in sacrificial ritual and its adjuncts shows that they were too much under the influence of religious externalism. This being the case, they could only preserve the purity of their communion by carefully guarding its gates. It is pitiable to see that they could find no better means of doing this than the harsh test of racial integrity. Their action in this matter fostered a pride of birth which was as injurious to their own better lives as it was to the extension of their religion in the world. But so long as they were incapable of a larger method, if they had accepted counsels of liberalism they would have lost themselves and their mission. Looking at the positive side of their mission, we see how the Jews were called to bear witness to the great principle of separateness. This principle is as essential to Christianity as it was to Judaism.

The only difference is that with the more spiritual faith it takes a more spiritual form. The people of God must ever be consecrated to God, and therefore separate from sin, separate from the world – separate unto God.

Note. – For the section iv. 6-23 see Chapter XIV. This section is marked by a change of language; the writer adopts Aramaic at iv. 8, and he continues in that language down to vi. 18. The decree of Artaxerxes in vii. 12-26 is also in Aramaic.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISSION OF PROPHECY

Ezra v. 1, 2

The work of building the temple at Jerusalem, which had been but nominally commenced in the reign of Cyrus, when it was suddenly arrested before the death of that king, and which had not been touched throughout the reigns of the two succeeding kings, Cambyses and Pseudo-Bardes, was taken up in earnest in the second year of Darius, the son of Hystaspes (B.C. 521). The disorders of the empire were then favourable to local liberty. Cambyses committed suicide during a revolt of his army on the march to meet the Pretender who had assumed the name of his murdered brother, Bardes. Seven months later the usurper was assassinated in his palace by some of the Persian nobles. Darius, who was one of the conspirators, ascended the throne in the midst of confusion and while the empire seemed to be falling to pieces. Elam, the old home of the house of Cyrus, revolted; Syria revolted; Babylon revolted twice, and was twice taken by siege. For a time the king's writ could not run in Palestine. But it was not on account of these political changes that the Jews returned to their work. The relaxing of the supreme authority

had left them more than ever at the mercy of their unfriendly neighbours. The generous disposition of Darius might have led them to regard him as a second Cyrus, and his religion might have encouraged them to hope that he would be favourable to them, for Darius was a monotheist, a worshipper of Ormazd. But they recommenced their work without making any appeal to the Great King and without receiving any permission from him, and they did this when he was far too busy fighting for his throne to attend to the troubles of a small, distant city.

We must look in another direction for the impetus which started the Jews again upon their work. Here we come upon one of the most striking facts in the history of Israel, nay, one of the greatest phenomena in the spiritual experience of mankind. The voice of prophecy was heard among the ruins of Jerusalem. The Cassandra-like notes of Jeremiah had died away more than half a century before. Then Ezekiel had seen his fantastic visions, "a captive by the river of Chebar," and the Second Isaiah had sounded his trumpet-blast in the East summoning the exiles to a great hope; but as yet no prophet had appeared among the pilgrims on their return to Jerusalem. We cannot account for the sudden outburst of prophecy. It is a work of the Spirit that breathes like the wind, coming we know not how. We can hear its sound; we can perceive the fact. But we cannot trace its origin, or determine its issues. It is born in mystery and it passes into mystery. If it is true that "*poeta nascitur, non fit*," much more must we affirm that the prophet is no creature of human

culture. He may be cultivated, after God has made him; he cannot be manufactured by any human machinery. No "School of the Prophets" ever made a true prophet. Many of the prophets never came near any such institution; some of them distinctly repudiated the professional "order." The lower prophets with which the Northern Kingdom once swarmed were just dervishes who sang and danced and worked themselves into a frenzy before the altars on the high places; these men were quite different from the truly inspired messengers of God. Their craft could be taught, and their sacred colleges recruited to any extent from the ranks of fanaticism. But the rare, austere souls that spoke with the authority of the Most High came in a totally different manner. When there was no prophet and when visions were rare men could only wait for God to send the hoped-for guide; they could not call him into existence. The appearance of an inspired soul is always one of the marvels of history. Great men of the second rank may be the creatures of their age. But it is given to the few of the very first order to be independent of their age, to confront it and oppose it if need be, perhaps to turn its current and shape its course.

The two prophets who now proclaimed their message in Jerusalem appeared at a time of deep depression. They were not borne on the crest of a wave of a religious revival, as its spokesmen to give it utterance. Pagan orators and artists flourished in an Augustan age. The Hebrew prophets came when the circumstances of society were least favourable. Like painters

arising to adorn a dingy city, like poets singing of summer in the winter of discontent, like flowers in the wilderness, like wells in the desert, they brought life and strength and gladness to the helpless and despondent, because they came from God. The literary form of their work reflected the civilisation of their day, but there was on it a light that never shone on sea or shore, and this they knew to be the light of God. We never find a true religious revival springing from the spirit of the age. Such a revival always begins in one or two choice souls – in a Moses, a Samuel, a John the Baptist, a St. Bernard, a Jonathan-Edwards, a Wesley, a Newman. Therefore it is vain for weary watchers to scan the horizon for signs of the times in the hope that some general improvement of society or some widespread awakening of the Church will usher in a better future. This is no reason for discouragement, however. It rather warns us not to despise the day of small things. When once the spring of living water breaks out, though it flows at first in a little brook, there is hope that it may swell into a great river.

The situation is the more remarkable since the first of the two prophets was an old man, who even seems to have known the first temple before its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar.³³ Haggai is called simply "the prophet," perhaps because his father's name was not known, but more likely because he himself had attained so much eminence that the title was given to him *par excellence*. Still this may only apply to the descriptions of him in the age of

³³ Hag. i. 1, ii. 9.

the chronicler. There is no indication that he prophesied in his earlier days. He was probably one of the captives who had been carried away to Babylon in his childhood, and who had returned with Zerubbabel to Jerusalem. Yet all this time and during the first years of his return, as far as we know, he was silent. At length, in extreme old age, he burst out into inspired utterance – one of Joel's old men who were to dream dreams,³⁴ like John the Evangelist, whose greatest work dates from his last years, and Milton, who wrote his great epic when affliction seemed to have ended his life-work. He must have been brooding over the bitter disappointment in which the enthusiasm of the returned captives had been quenched. It could not be God's will that they should be thus mocked and deceived in their best hopes. True faith is not a will-o'-the-wisp that lands its followers in a dreary swamp. The hope of Israel is no mirage. For God is faithful. Therefore the despair of the Jews must be wrong.

We have a few fragments of the utterances of Haggai preserved for us in the Old Testament Canon. They are so brief and bald and abrupt as to suggest the opinion that they are but notes of his discourses, mere outlines of what he really said. As they are preserved for us they certainly convey no idea of wealth of poetic imagination or richness of oratorical colouring. But Haggai may have possessed none of these qualities, and yet his words may have had a peculiar force of their own. He is a reflective man. The long meditation of years has taught him the

³⁴ Joel ii. 28.

value of thoughtfulness. The burden of his message is "Consider your ways."³⁵ In short, incisive utterances he arrests attention and urges consideration. But the outcome of all he has to say is to cheer the drooping spirits of his fellow-citizens, and urge on the rebuilding of the temple with confident promises of its great future. For the most part his inspiration is simple, but it is searching, and we perceive the triumphant hopefulness of the true prophet in the promise that the latter glory of the house of God shall be greater than the former.³⁶

Haggai began to prophesy on the first day of the sixth month of the second year of Darius.³⁷ So effective were his words that Zerubbabel and his companions were at once roused from the lethargy of despair, and within three weeks the masons and carpenters were again at work on the temple.³⁸ Two months after Haggai had broken the long silence of prophecy in Jerusalem Zechariah appeared. He was of a very different stamp; he was one of the young men who see visions. Familiar with the imagery of Babylonian art, he wove its symbols into the pictures of his own exuberant fancy. Moreover, Zechariah was a priest. Thus, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, he united the two rival tendencies which had confronted one another in marked antagonism during the earlier periods of the history of Israel. Henceforth the brief

³⁵ Hag. i. 5, 7.

³⁶ Hag. ii. 9.

³⁷ Hag. i. 1.

³⁸ Hag. ii. 1 *seq.*

return of prophetism, its soft after-glow among the restored people, is in peaceable alliance with priestism. The last prophet, Malachi, even exhorts the Jews to pay the priests their dues of tithe. Zechariah, like Haggai, urges on the work of building the temple.

Thus the chronicler's brief note on the appearance of two prophets at Jerusalem, and the electrical effect of their message, is a striking illustration of the mission of prophecy. That mission has been strangely misapprehended by succeeding ages. Prophets have been treated as miraculous conjurers, whose principal business consisted in putting together elaborate puzzles, perfectly unintelligible to their contemporaries, which the curious of later times were to decipher by the light of events. The prophets themselves formed no such idle estimate of their work, nor did their contemporaries assign to them this quaint and useless rôle. Though these men were not the creatures of their times, they lived for their times. Haggai and Zechariah, as the chronicler emphatically puts it, "prophesied to the Jews that were in Jerusalem, ... *even unto them.*" The object of their message was immediate and quite practical – to stir up the despondent people and urge them to build the temple – and it was successful in accomplishing that end. As prophets of God they necessarily touched on eternal truths. They were not mere opportunists; their strength lay in the grasp of fundamental principles. This is why their teaching still lives, and is of lasting use for the Church in all ages. But in order to understand that teaching we must first of

all read it in its original historical setting, and discover its direct bearing on contemporary needs.

Now the question arises, In what way did these prophets of God help the temple-builders? The fragments of their utterances which we possess enable us to answer this question. Zerubbabel was a disappointing leader. Such a man was far below the expected Messiah, although high hopes may have been set upon him when he started at the head of the caravan of pilgrims from Babylon. Cyrus may have known him better, and with the instinct of a king in reading men may have entrusted the lead to the heir of the Jewish throne, because he saw there would be no possibility of a dangerous rebellion resulting from the act of confidence. Haggai's encouragement to Zerubbabel to "be strong" is in a tone that suggests some weakness on the part of the Jewish leader. Both the prophets thought that he and his people were too easily discouraged. It was a part of the prophetic insight to look below the surface and discover the real secret of failure. The Jews set down their failure to adverse circumstances; the prophets attributed it to the character and conduct of the people and their leaders. Weak men commonly excuse their inactivity by reciting their difficulties, when stronger men would only regard those difficulties as furnishing an occasion for extra exertion. That is a most superficial view of history which regards it as wholly determined by circumstances. No great nation ever arose on such a principle. The Greeks who perished at Thermopylæ within a few years of the times we are now considering are

honoured by all the ages as heroes of patriotism just because they refused to bow to circumstances. Now the courage which patriots practised in pagan lands is urged upon the Jews by their prophets from higher considerations. They are to see that they are weak and cowardly when they sit in dumb despair, crushed by the weight of external opposition. They have made a mistake in putting their trust in princes.³⁹ They have relied too much on Zerubbabel and too little on God. The failure of the arm of flesh should send them back to the never-failing out-stretched arm of the Almighty.

Have we not met with the same mistaken discouragement and the same deceptive excuses for it in the work of the Church, in missionary enterprises, in personal lives? Every door is shut against the servant of God but one, the door of prayer. Forgetting this, and losing sight of the key of faith that would unlock it, he sits, like Elijah by Kerith, the picture of abject wretchedness. His great enterprises are abandoned because he thinks the opposition to them is insuperable. He forgets that, though his own forces are small, he is the envoy of the King of kings, who will not suffer him to be worsted if only he appeals to Heaven for fresh supplies. A dead materialism lies like a leaden weight on the heart of the Church, and she has not faith enough to shake it off and claim her great inheritance in all the spiritual wealth of the Unseen. Many a man cries, like Jacob, "All these things are against me," not perceiving that, even if they are, no number of "things" should

³⁹ Psalm cxviii. 8, 9.

be permitted to check the course of one who looks above and beyond what is seen and therefore only temporal to the eternal resources of God.

This was the message of Zechariah to Zerubbabel: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the head stone with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it!"⁴⁰

Here, then, is the secret of the sudden revival of activity on the part of the Jews after they had been slicing for years in dumb apathy, gazing hopelessly on the few stones that had been laid among the ruins of the old temple. It was not the returning favour of the court under Darius, it was not the fame of the house of David, it was not the priestly dignity of the family of Zadok that awakened the slumbering zeal of the Jews; the movement began in an unofficial source, and it passed to the people through unofficial channels. It commenced in the meditations of a calm thinker; it was furthered by the visions of a rapt seer. This is a clear indication of the fact that the world is ruled by mind and spirit, not merely by force and authority. Thought and imagination lie at the springs of action. In the heart of it history is moulded by ideas. "Big battalions," "the sinews of war," "blood and iron," are phrases that suggest only the most external and therefore the most superficial causes. Beneath them are the *ideas* that govern all they represent.

⁴⁰ Zech. iv. 6, 7.

Further, the influence of the prophets shows that the ideas which have most vitality and vigour are moral and spiritual in character. All thoughts are influential in proportion as they take possession of the minds and hearts of men and women. There is power in conceptions of science, philosophy, politics, sociology. But the ideas that touch people to the quick, the ideas that stir the hidden depths of consciousness and rouse the slumbering energies of life, are those that make straight for the conscience. Thus the two prophets exposed the shame of indolence; they rallied their gloomy fellow-citizens by high appeals to the sense of right.

Again, this influence was immensely strengthened by its relation to God. The prophets were more than moralists. The meditations of Marcus Aurelius could not touch any people as the considerations of the calm Haggai touched the Jews, for the older prophet, as well as the more rousing Zechariah, found the spell of his message in its revelation of God. He made the Jews perceive that they were not deserted by Jehovah; and directly they felt that God was with them in their work the weak and timid citizens were able to quit them like men. The irresistible might of Cromwell's Ironsides at Marston Moor came from their unwavering faith in their battle-cry, "The Lord of Hosts is with us!" General Gordon's immeasurable courage is explained when we read his letters and diaries, and see how he regarded himself as simply an instrument through whom God wrought. Here, too, is the strong side of Calvinism.

Then this impression of the power and presence of God in their destinies was deepened in the Jews by the manifest Divine authority with which the prophets spake. They prophesied "in the name of the God of Israel" – the one God of the people of both kingdoms now united in their representatives. Their "Thus saith the Lord" was the powder that drove the shot of their message through the toughest hide of apathy. Except to a Platonist, ideas are impossible apart from the mind that thinks them. Now the Jews, as well as their prophets, felt that the great ideas of prophecy could not be the products of pure human thinking. The sublime character, the moral force, the superb hopefulness of these ideas proclaimed their Divine origin. As it is the mission of the prophet to speak for God, so it is the voice of God in His inspired messenger that awakes the dead and gives strength to the weak.

This ultimate source of prophecy accounts for its unique character of hopefulness, and that in turn makes it a powerful encouragement for the weak and depressed people to whom it is sent. Wordsworth tells us that we live by "admiration, love, and hope." If one of these three sources of vitality is lost, life itself shrinks and fades. The man whose hope has fled has no lustre in his eye, no accent in his voice, no elasticity in his tread; by his dull and listless attitude he declares that the life has gone out of him. But the ultimate end of prophecy is to lead up to a gospel, and the meaning of the word "gospel" is just that there is a message from God bringing hope to the despairing. By inspiring a new

hope this message kindles a new life.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW DIFFICULTIES

MET IN A NEW SPIRIT

Ezra v. 3-vi. 5

It is in keeping with the character of his story of the returned Jews throughout, that no sooner has the chronicler let a ray of sunshine fall on his page – in his brief notice of the inspiring mission of the two prophets – than he is compelled to plunge his narrative again into gloom. But he shows that there was now a new spirit in the Jews, so that they were prepared to meet opposition in a more manly fashion. If their jealous neighbours had been able to paralyse their efforts for years, it was only to be expected that a revival of energy in Jerusalem should provoke an increase of antagonism abroad, and doubtless the Jews were prepared for this. Still it was not a little alarming to learn that the infection of the anti-Jewish temper had spread over a wide area. The original opposition had come from the Samaritans. But in this later time the Jews were questioned by the Satrap of the whole district east of the Euphrates – "the governor beyond the

river,"⁴¹ as the chronicler styles him, describing his territory as it would be regarded officially from the standpoint of Babylon. His Aramaic name, Tattenai, shows that he was not a Persian, but a native Syrian, appointed to his own province, according to the Persian custom. This man and one Shethar-bozenai, whom we may assume to be his secretary, must have been approached by the colonists in such a way that their suspicions were roused. Their action was at first only just and reasonable. They asked the Jews to state on what authority they were rebuilding the temple with its massive walls. In the Hebrew Bible the answer of the Jews is so peculiar as to suggest a corruption of the text. It is in the first person plural – "Then said *we* unto them," etc.⁴² In the Septuagint the third person is substituted – "Then said *they*," etc., and this rendering is followed in the Syriac and Arabic versions. It would require a very slight alteration in the Hebrew text. The Old Testament Revisers have retained the first person – setting the alternative reading in the margin. If we keep to the Hebrew text as it stands, we must conclude that we have here a fragment from some contemporary writer which the chronicler has transcribed literally. But then it seems confusing. Some have shaped the sentence into a direct statement, so that in reply to the inquiry for their authority the Jews give the names of the builders. How is this an answer? Possibly the name of Zerubbabel, who had been appointed governor of Jerusalem by Cyrus, could be

⁴¹ Ezra v. 3.

⁴² Ezra v. 4.

quoted as an authority. And yet the weakness of his position was so evident that very little would be gained in this way, for it would be the right of the Satrap to inquire into the conduct of the local governor. If, however, we read the sentence in the third person, it will contain a further question from the Satrap and his secretary, inquiring for the names of the leaders in the work at Jerusalem. Such an inquiry threatened danger to the feeble Zerubbabel.

The seriousness of the situation is recognised by the grateful comment of the chronicler, who here remarks that "the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews."⁴³ It is the peculiarity of even the driest records of Scripture that the writers are always ready to detect the presence of God in history. This justifies us in describing the Biblical narratives as "sacred history," in contrast to the so-called "secular history" of such authors as Herodotus and Livy. The narrow conception of the difference is to think that God was with the Jews, while He left the Greeks and Romans and the whole Gentile world to their fate without any recognition or interference on His part. Such a view is most dishonouring to God, who is thus regarded as no better than a tribal divinity, and not as the Lord of heaven and earth. It is directly contradicted by the Old Testament historians, for they repeatedly refer to the influence of God on great world monarchies. No doubt a claim to the Divine graciousness as the peculiar privilege of Israel is to be seen in the Old Testament. As far as this was perverted into a selfish desire to confine the blessings of God

⁴³ Ezra v. 5.

to the Jews, it was vigorously rebuked in the Book of Jonah. Still it is indisputable that those who truly sought God's grace, acknowledged His authority, and obeyed His will, must have enjoyed privileges which such of the heathen as St. Paul describes in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans could not share. Thus the chronicler writes as though the leaders of the Jews in their difficulties were the special objects of the Divine notice. The eye of God was on *them*, distinctively. God is spoken of as *their* God. They were men who knew, trusted, and honoured God, and at the present moment they were loyally carrying out the direction of God's prophets. All this is special. Nevertheless, it remains true that the chief characteristic of Biblical history is its recognition of the presence of God in the affairs of mankind generally, and this applies to all nations, although it is most marked among those nations in which God is known and obeyed.

The peculiar form of Providence which is brought before us in the present instance is the Divine observation. It is difficult to believe that, just as the earth is visible to the stars throughout the day while the stars are invisible to the earth, we are always seen by God although we never see Him. When circumstances are adverse – and these circumstances are only too visible – it is hard not to doubt that God is still watching all that happens to us, because although we cry out in our agony no answer breaks the awful silence and no hand comes out of the clouds to hold us up. It seems as though our words were lost in the void. But that is only the impression of the moment. If we read history with

the large vision of the Hebrew chronicler, can we fail to perceive that this is not a God-deserted world? In the details His presence may not be discerned, but when we stand back from the canvas and survey the whole picture, it flashes upon us like a sunbeam spread over the whole landscape. Many a man can recognise the same happy truth in the course of his own life as he looks back over a wide stretch of it, although while he was passing through his perplexing experience the thicket of difficulties intercepted his vision of the heavenly light.

Now it is a most painful result of unbelief and cowardice working on the consciousness of guilt lurking in the breast of every sinful man, that the "eye of God" has become an object of terror to the imagination of so many people. Poor Hagar's exclamation of joy and gratitude has been sadly misapprehended. Discovering to her amazement that she is not alone in the wilderness, the friendless, heart-broken slave-girl looks up through her tears with a smile of sudden joy on her face, and exclaims, "Thou God seest me!"⁴⁴ And yet her happy words have been held over terrified children as a menace! That is a false thought of God which makes any of His children shrink from His presence, except they are foul and leprous with sin, and even then their only refuge is, as St. Augustine found, to come to the very God against whom they have sinned. We need not fear lest some day God may make a miserable discovery about us. He knows the worst, already. Then it is a ground of hope that while He sees

⁴⁴ Gen. xvi. 13.

all the evil in us God still loves His children – that He does not love us, as it were, under a misapprehension. Our Lord's teaching on the subject of the Divine observation is wholly reassuring. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father's notice, the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and the exhortation based on these facts is not "Beware of the all-seeing Eye!" but "Fear not."⁴⁵

The limitation of the chronicler's remark is significant. He speaks of the *eye* of God, not of God's mighty hand, nor of His outstretched arm. It was not yet the time for action; but God was watching the course of events. Or if God was acting, His procedure was so secret that no one could perceive it. Meanwhile it was enough to know that God was observing everything that was transpiring. He could not be thought of as an Epicurean divinity, surveying the agony and tragedy of human life with a stony gaze of supercilious indifference, as the proud patrician looks down on the misery of the dim multitude. For God to see is for God to care; and for God to care is for God to help. But this simple statement of the Divine observation maintains a reserve as to the method of the action of God, and it is perhaps the best way of describing Providence so that it shall not appear to come into collision with the free will of man.

The chronicler distinctly associates the Divine observation with the continuance of the Jews in their work. Because the eye of God was on them their enemies could not cause them to cease until the matter had been referred to Darius and his answer

⁴⁵ Luke xii. 7.

received. This may be explained by some unrecorded juncture of circumstances which arrested the action of the enemies of Israel; by the overruling Providence according to which the Satrap was led to perceive that it would not be wise or just for him to act until he had orders from the king; or by the new zeal with which the two prophets had inspired the Jews, so that they took up a bold position in the calm confidence that God was with them. Account for it as we may, we see that in the present case the Jews were not hindered in their work. It is enough for faith to perceive the result of the Divine care without discovering the process.

The letter of the Satrap and his secretary embodies the reply of the Jews to the official inquiries, and that reply clearly and boldly sets forth their position. One or two points in it call for passing notice.

In the first place, the Jews describe themselves as "servants of the God of heaven and earth." Thus they start by mentioning their religious status, and not any facts about their race or nation. This was wise, and calculated to disarm suspicion as to their motives; and it was strictly true, for the Jews were engaged in a distinctly religious work. Then the way in which they describe their God is significant. They do not use the national name "Jehovah." That would serve no good purpose with men who did not know or acknowledge their special faith. They say nothing to localise and limit their idea of God. To build the temple of a tribal god would be to further the ends of the tribe, and this the jealous neighbours of the Jews supposed they were doing. By the larger title the Jews

lift their work out of all connection with petty personal ends. In doing so they confess their true faith. These Jews of the return were pure monotheists. They believed that there was one God who ruled over heaven and earth.

In the second place, with just a touch of national pride, pathetic under the circumstances, they remind the Persians that their nation has seen better days, and that they are rebuilding the temple which a great king had set up. Thus, while they would appeal to the generosity of the authorities, they would claim their respect, with the dignity of men who know they have a great history. In view of this the next statement is most striking. Reciting the piteous story of the overthrow of their nation, the destruction of their temple, and the captivity of their fathers, the Jews ascribe it all to their national sins. The prophets had long ago discerned the connection of cause and effect in these matters. But while it was only the subject of prediction, the proud people indignantly rejected the prophetic view. Since then their eyes had been opened by the painful purging of dire national calamities. One great proof that the nation had profited by the fiery ordeal of the captivity is that it now humbly acknowledged the sins which had brought it into the furnace. Trouble is illuminating. While it humbles men, it opens their eyes. It is better to see clearly in a lowly place than to walk blindfold on perilous heights.

After this explanatory preamble, the Jews appeal to the edict of Cyrus, and describe their subsequent conduct as a direct act of obedience to that edict. Thus they plead their cause as loyal

subjects of the Persian empire. In consequence of this appeal, the Satrap and his secretary request the king to order a search to be made for the edict, and to reply according to his pleasure.

The chronicler then proceeds to relate how the search was prosecuted, first among the royal archives at Babylon – in "the house of books."⁴⁶ One of Mr. Layard's most valuable discoveries was that of a set of chambers in a palace at Koyunjik, the whole of the floor of which was covered more than a foot deep with terra-cotta tablets inscribed with public records.⁴⁷ A similar collection has been recently found in the neighbourhood of Babylon.⁴⁸ In some such record-house the search for the edict of Cyrus was made. But the cylinder or tablet on which it was written could not be found. The searchers then turned their attention to the roll-chamber at the winter palace of Ecbatana, and there a parchment or papyrus copy of the edict was discovered.

One of the items of this edict as it is now given is somewhat surprising, for it was not named in the earlier account in the first chapter of the Book of Ezra. This is a description of the dimensions of the temple which was to be built at Jerusalem. It must have been not a little humiliating to the Jews to have to take these measurements from a foreign sovereign, a heathen, a polytheist. Possibly, however, they had been first supplied to

⁴⁶ Ezra vi. 1.

⁴⁷ "Nineveh and Babylon," p. 345.

⁴⁸ Bertheau-Ryssel, "Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch," p. 74.

the king by the Jews, so that the builders might have the more explicit permission for what they were about to undertake. On the other hand, it may be that we have here the outside dimensions, beyond which the Jews were not permitted to go, and that the figures represent a limit for their ambitions. In either case the appearance of the details in the decree at all gives us a vivid conception of the thoroughness of the Persian autocracy, and of the perfect subjection of the Jews to Cyrus.

Some difficulty has been felt in interpreting the figures because they seem to point to a larger building than Solomon's temple. The height is given at sixty cubits, and the breadth at the same measurement. But Solomon's temple was only thirty cubits high, and its total breadth, with its side-chambers, was not more than forty cubits.⁴⁹ When we consider the comparative poverty of the returned Jews, the difficulties under which they laboured, the disappointment of the old men who had seen the former building, and the short time within which the work was finished – only four years⁵⁰ – it is difficult to believe that it was more than double the size of the glorious fabric for which David collected materials, on which Solomon lavished the best resources of his kingdom, and which even then took many more years in building. Perhaps the height includes the terrace on which the temple was built, and the breadth the temple adjuncts. Perhaps the temple never attained the dimensions authorised by the edict. But even if the full size

⁴⁹ 1 Kings vi. 2.

⁵⁰ Ezra iv. 24, vi. 15.

were reached, the building would not have approached the size of the stupendous temples of the great ancient empires. Apart from its courts Solomon's temple was certainly a small building. It was not the size, but the splendour of that famous fabric that led to its being regarded with so much admiration and pride.

The most remarkable architectural feature of all these ancient temples was the enormous magnitude of the stones with which they were built. At the present day the visitor to Jerusalem gazes with wonder at huge blocks, all carefully chiselled and accurately fitted together, where parts of the old foundations may still be discerned. The narrative in Ezra makes several references to the great stones – "stones of rolling"⁵¹ it calls them, because they could only be moved on rollers. Even the edict mentions "three rows of great stones," together with "a row of new timber,"⁵² – an obscure phrase, which perhaps means that the walls were to be of the thickness of three stones, while the timber formed an inner panneling; or that there were to be three storeys of stone and one of wood; or yet another possibility, that on three tiers of stone a tier of wood was to be laid. In the construction of the inner court of Solomon's temple this third method seems to have been followed, for we read, "And he built the inner court with three rows of hewn stone and a row of cedar beams."⁵³ However we regard it – and the plan is confusing and a matter

⁵¹ Ezra v. 8.

⁵² Ezra vi. 4.

⁵³ 1 Kings vi. 36.

of much discussion – the impression is one of massive strength. The jealous observers noted especially the building of "the wall" of the temple.⁵⁴ So solid a piece of work might be turned into a fortification. But no such end seems to have been contemplated by the Jews. They built solidly because they wished their work to stand. It was to be no temporary tabernacle; but a permanent temple designed to endure to posterity. We are struck with the massive character of the Roman remains in Britain, which show that when the great world conquerors took possession of our island they settled down in it and regarded it as a permanent property. The same grand consciousness of permanence must have been in the minds of the brave builders who planted this solid structure at Jerusalem in the midst of troubles and threatenings of disaster. To-day, when we look at the stupendous Phœnician and Jewish architecture of Syria, we are struck with admiration at the patience, the perseverance, the industry, the thoroughness, the largeness of idea that characterised the work of these old-world builders. Surely it must have been the outcome of a similar tone and temper of mind. The modern mind may be more nimble, as the modern work is more expeditious. But for steadfastness of purpose the races that wrought so patiently at great enduring works seem to have excelled anything we can attain. And yet here and there a similar characteristic is observable – as, for example, in the self-restraint and continuous toil of Charles Darwin, when he collected facts for twenty years

⁵⁴ Ezra v. 9.

before he published the book which embodied the conclusion he had drawn from his wide induction.

The solid character of the temple-building is further suggestive, because the work was all done for the service of God. Such work should never be hasty, because God has the leisure of eternity in which to inspect it. It is labour lost to make it superficial and showy without any real strength, because God sees behind all pretences. Moreover, the fire will try every man's work of what sort it is. We grow impatient of toil; we weary for quick results; we forget that in building the spiritual temple strength to endure the shocks of temptation and to outlast the decay of time is more valued by God than the gourd-like display which is the sensation of the hour, only to perish as quickly as it has sprung up.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

Ezra vi. 6-22

The chronicler's version of the edict in which Darius replies to the application of the Satrap Tattenai is so very friendly to the Jews that questions have been raised as to its genuineness. We cannot but perceive that the language has been modified in its transition from the Persian terra-cotta cylinder to the roll of the Hebrew chronicler, because the Great King could not have spoken of the religion of Israel in the absolute phrases recorded in the Book of Ezra. But when all allowance has been made for verbal alterations in translation and transcription, the substance of the edict is still sufficiently remarkable. Darius fully endorses the decree of Cyrus, and even exceeds that gracious ordinance in generosity. He curtly bids Tattenai "let the work of the house of God alone." He even orders the Satrap to provide for this work out of the revenues of his district. The public revenues are also to be used in maintaining the Jewish priests and in providing them with sacrifices – "that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savour unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and of

his sons."⁵⁵

On the other hand, it cannot be doubted that Darius sent a reply that was favourable to the Jews, for all opposition to their work was stopped, and means were found for completing the temple and maintaining the costly ritual. The Jews gratefully acknowledged the influence of God on the heart of Darius. Surely they were right in doing so. They were gifted with the true insight of faith. It is no contradiction to add that – in the earthly sphere and among the human motives through which God works, by guiding them – what we know of Darius will account to some extent for his friendliness towards the Jews. He was a powerful ruler, and when he had quelled the serious rebellions that had broken out in several quarters of his kingdom, he organised his government in a masterly style with a new and thorough system of satrapies.⁵⁶ Then he pushed his conquests farther afield, and subsequently came into contact with Europe, although ultimately to suffer a humiliating defeat in the famous battle of Marathon. In fact, we may regard him as the real founder of the Persian Empire. Cyrus, though his family was of Persian origin, was originally a king of Elam, and he had to conquer Persia before he could rule over it; but Darius was a prince of the Persian royal house. Unlike Cyrus, he was at least a monotheist, if not a thoroughgoing Zoroastrian. The inscription on his tomb at *Naksh-i-Rustem* attributes all that he has achieved to the favour

⁵⁵ Ezra vi. 10.

⁵⁶ Herodotus, iii. 89.

of Ormazd. "When Ormazd saw this earth filled with revolt and civil war, then did he entrust it to me. He made me king, and I am king. By the grace of Ormazd I have restored the earth." "All that I have done I have done through the grace of Ormazd. Ormazd brought help to me until I had completed my work. May Ormazd protect from evil me and my house and this land. Therefore I pray unto Ormazd, May Ormazd grant this to me." "O Man! May the command of Ormazd not be despised by thee: leave not the path of right, sin not!"⁵⁷ Such language implies a high religious conception of life. Although it is a mistake to suppose that the Jews had borrowed anything of importance from Zoroastrianism during the captivity or in the time of Cyrus – inasmuch as that religion was then scarcely known in Babylon – when it began to make itself felt there, its similarity to Judaism could not fail to strike the attention of observant men. It taught the existence of one supreme God – though it co-ordinated the principles of good and evil in His being, as two subsidiary existences, in a manner not allowed by Judaism – and it encouraged prayer. It also insisted on the dreadful evil of sin and urged men to strive after purity, with an earnestness that witnessed to the blending of morality with religion to an extent unknown elsewhere except among the Jews. Thus, if Darius were a Zoroastrian, he would have two powerful links of sympathy with the Jews in opposition to the corrupt idolatry of the heathen – the spiritual monotheism and the earnest morality that were common to the two religions.

⁵⁷ Sayce, Introduction, pp. 57, 58.

And in any case it is not altogether surprising to learn that when he read the letter of the people who described themselves as "the servants of the God of heaven and earth," the worshipper of Ormazd should have sympathised with them rather than with their semi-pagan opponents. Moreover, Darius must have known something of Judaism from the Jews of Babylon. Then, he was restoring the temples of Ormazd which his predecessor had destroyed. But the Jews were engaged in a very similar work; therefore the king, in his antipathy to the idolaters, would give no sanction to a heathenish opposition to the building of the temple at Jerusalem by a people who believed in One Spiritual God.

Darius was credited with a generous disposition, which would incline him to a kindly treatment of his subjects. Of course we must interpret this according to the manners of the times. For example, in his edict about the temple-building he gives orders that any one of his subjects who hinders the work is to be impaled on a beam from his own house, the site of which is to be used for a refuse heap.⁵⁸ Darius also invokes the God of the Jews to destroy any foreign king or people who should attempt to alter or destroy the temple at Jerusalem. The savagery of his menace is in harmony with his conduct when, according to Herodotus, he impaled *three thousand* men at Babylon after he had recaptured the city.⁵⁹ Those were cruel times – Herodotus tells us that the besieged Babylonians had previously strangled their own wives

⁵⁸ Ezra. vi. 11.

⁵⁹ Herodotus, iii. 159.

when they were running short of provisions.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

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