

**ROBERT  
ALEXANDER  
WATSON**

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE:  
JUDGES AND RUTH

**Robert Alexander Watson**  
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**Judges and Ruth**

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*The Expositor's Bible: Judges and Ruth:*

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# **Robert A. Watson**

## **The Expositor's Bible: Judges and Ruth**

### **THE BOOK OF JUDGES**

#### **I.**

#### ***PROBLEMS OF SETTLEMENT AND WAR***

#### **Judges i. 1-11**

It was a new hour in the history of Israel. To a lengthened period of serfdom there had succeeded a time of sojourn in tents, when the camp of the tribes, half-military, half-pastoral, clustering about the Tabernacle of Witness, moved with it from point to point through the desert. Now the march was over; the nomads had to become settlers, a change not easy for them as they expected it to be, full of significance for the world. The Book of Judges, therefore, is a second Genesis or Chronicle of Beginnings so far as the Hebrew commonwealth

is concerned. We see the birth-throes of national life, the experiments, struggles, errors and disasters out of which the moral force of the people gradually rose, growing like a pine tree out of rocky soil.

If we begin our study of the book expecting to find clear evidence of an established Theocracy, a spiritual idea of the kingdom of God ever present to the mind, ever guiding the hope and effort of the tribes, we shall experience that bewilderment which has not seldom fallen upon students of Old Testament history. Divide the life of man into two parts, the sacred and the secular; regard the latter as of no real value compared to the other, as having no relation to that Divine purpose of which the Bible is the oracle; then the Book of Judges must appear out of place in the sacred canon, for unquestionably its main topics are secular from first to last. It preserves the traditions of an age when spiritual ideas and aims were frequently out of sight, when a nation was struggling for bare existence, or, at best, for a rude kind of unity and freedom. But human life, sacred and secular, is one. A single strain of moral urgency runs through the epochs of national development from barbarism to Christian civilization. A single strain of urgency unites the boisterous vigour of the youth and the sagacious spiritual courage of the man. It is on the strength first, and then on the discipline and purification of the will, that everything depends. There must be energy, or there can be no adequate faith, no earnest religion. We trace in the Book of Judges the springing up and growth of a collective energy

which gives power to each separate life. To our amazement we may discover that the Mosaic Law and Ordinances are neglected for a time; but there can be no doubt of Divine Providence, the activity of the redeeming Spirit. Great ends are being served,—a development is proceeding which will by-and-by make religious thought strong, obedience and worship zealous. It is not for us to say that spiritual evolution ought to proceed in this way or that. In the study of natural and supernatural fact our business is to observe with all possible care the goings forth of God and to find as far as we may their meaning and issue. Faith is a profound conviction that the facts of the world justify themselves and the wisdom and righteousness of the Eternal; it is the key that makes history articulate, no mere tale full of sound and fury signifying nothing. And the key of faith which here we are to use in the interpretation of Hebrew life has yet to be applied to all peoples and times. That this may be done we firmly believe: there is needed only the mind broad enough in wisdom and sympathy to gather the annals of the world into one great Bible or Book of God.

Opening the story of the Judges, we find ourselves in a keen atmosphere of warlike ardour softened by scarcely an air of spiritual grace. At once we are plunged into military preparations; councils of war meet and the clash of weapons is heard. Battle follows battle. Iron chariots hurtle along the valleys, the hillsides bristle with armed men. The songs are of strife and conquest; the great heroes are those who smite the uncircumcised

hip and thigh. It is the story of Jehovah's people; but where is Jehovah the merciful? Does He reign among them, or sanction their enterprise? Where amid this turmoil and bloodshed is the movement towards the far-off Messiah and the holy mountain where nothing shall hurt or destroy? Does Israel prepare for blessing all nations by crushing those that occupy the land he claims? Problems many meet us in Bible history; here surely is one of the gravest. And we cannot go with Judah in that first expedition; we must hold back in doubt till clearly we understand how these wars of conquest are necessary to the progress of the world. Then, even though the tribes are as yet unaware of their destiny and how it is to be fulfilled, we may go up with them against Adoni-bezek.

Canaan is to be colonised by the seed of Abraham, Canaan and no other land. It is not now, as it was in Abraham's time, a sparsely peopled country, with room enough for a new race. Canaanites, Hivites, Perizzites, Amorites cultivate the plain of Esdraelon and inhabit a hundred cities throughout the land. The Hittites are in considerable force, a strong people with a civilization of their own. To the north Phœnicia is astir with a mercantile and vigorous race. The Philistines have settlements southward along the coast. Had Israel sought a region comparatively unoccupied, such might, perhaps, have been found on the northern coast of Africa. But Syria is the destined home of the tribes.

The old promise to Abraham has been kept before the minds

of his descendants. The land to which they have moved through the desert is that of which he took earnest by the purchase of a grave. But the promise of God looks forward to the circumstances that are to accompany its fulfilment; and it is justified because the occupation of Canaan is the means to a great development of righteousness. For, mark the position which the Hebrew nation is to take. It is to be the central state of the world, in verity the Mountain of God's House for the world. Then observe how the situation of Canaan fits it to be the seat of this new progressive power. Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, lie in a rude circle around it. From its sea-board the way is open to the west. Across the valley of Jordan goes the caravan route to the East. The Nile, the Orontes, the Ægean Sea are not far off. Canaan does not confine its inhabitants, scarcely separates them from other peoples. It is in the midst of the old world.

Is not this one reason why Israel must inhabit Palestine? Suppose the tribes settled in the highlands of Armenia or along the Persian Gulf; suppose them to have migrated westward from Egypt instead of eastward, and to have found a place of habitation on towards Libya: would the history in that case have had the same movement and power? Would the theatre of prophecy and the scene of the Messiah's work have set the gospel of the ages in the same relief, or the growing City of God on the same mountain height? Not only is Canaan accessible to the emigrants from Egypt, but it is by position and

configuration suited to develop the genius of the race. Gennesaret and Asphaltitis; the tortuous Jordan and Kishon, that "river of battles"; the cliffs of Engedi, Gerizim and Ebal, Carmel and Tabor, Moriah and Olivet,—these are needed as the scene of the great Divine revelation. No other rivers, no other lakes nor mountains on the surface of the earth will do.

This, however, is but part of the problem which meets us in regard to the settlement in Canaan. There are the inhabitants of the land to be considered—these Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites, Hivites. How do we justify Israel in displacing them, slaying them, absorbing them? Here is a question first of evolution, then of the character of God.

Do we justify Saxons in their raid on Britain? History does. They become dominant, they rule, they slay, they assimilate; and there grows up British nationality strong and trusty, the citadel of freedom and religious life. The case is similar, yet there is a difference, strongly in favour of Israel as an invading people. For the Israelites have been tried by stern discipline: they are held together by a moral law, a religion divinely revealed, a faith vigorous though but in germ. The Saxons worshipping Thor, Frea and Woden sweep religion before them in the first rush of conquest. They begin by destroying Roman civilization and Christian culture in the land they ravage. They appear "dogs," "wolves," "whelps from the kennel of barbarism" to the Britons they overcome. But the Israelites have learned to fear Jehovah, and they bear with them the ark of His covenant.

As for the Canaanitish tribes, compare them now with what they were when Abraham and Isaac fed their flocks in the plain of Mamre or about the springs of Beersheba. Abraham found in Canaan noble courteous men. Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, Amorites, were his trusted confederates; Ephron the Hittite matched his magnanimity; Abimelech of Gerar "feared the Lord." In Salem reigned a king or royal priest, Melchizedek, unique in ancient history, a majestic unsullied figure, who enjoyed the respect and tribute of the Hebrew patriarch. Where are the successors of those men? Idolatry has corrupted Canaan. The old piety of simple races has died away before the hideous worship of Moloch and Ashtoreth. It is over degenerate peoples that Israel is to assert its dominance; they must learn the way of Jehovah or perish. This conquest is essential to the progress of the world. Here in the centre of empires a stronghold of pure ideas and commanding morality is to be established, an altar of witness for the true God.

So far we move without difficulty towards a justification of the Hebrew descent on Canaan. Still, however, when we survey the progress of conquest, the idea struggling for confirmation in our minds that God was King and Guide of this people, while at the same time we know that all nations could equally claim Him as their Origin, marking how on field after field thousands were left dying and dead, we have to find an answer to the question whether the slaughter and destruction even of idolatrous races for the sake of Israel can be explained in harmony with

Divine justice. And this passes into still wider inquiries. Is there intrinsic value in human life? Have men a proper right of existence and self-development? Does not Divine Providence imply that the history of each people, the life of each person will have its separate end and vindication? There is surely a reason in the righteousness and love of God for every human experience, and Christian thought cannot explain the severity of Old Testament ordinances by assuming that the Supreme has made a new dispensation for Himself. The problem is difficult, but we dare not evade it nor doubt a full solution to be possible.

We pass here beyond mere "natural evolution." It is not enough to say that there had to be a struggle for life among races and individuals. If natural forces are held to be the limit and equivalent of God, then "survival of the fittest" may become a religious doctrine, but assuredly it will introduce us to no God of pardon, no hope of redemption. We must discover a Divine end in the life of each person, a member it may be of some doomed race, dying on a field of battle in the holocaust of its valour and chivalry. Explanation is needed of all slaughtered and "waste" lives, untold myriads of lives that never tasted freedom or knew holiness.

The explanation we find is this: that for a human life in the present stage of existence the opportunity of struggle for moral ends—it may be ends of no great dignity, yet really moral, and, as the race advances, religious—this makes life worth living and brings to every one the means of true and lasting gain. "Where

ignorant armies clash by night" there may be in the opposing ranks the most various notions of religion and of what is morally good. The histories of the nations that meet in shock of battle determine largely what hopes and aims guide individual lives. But to the thousands who do valiantly this conflict belongs to the vital struggle in which some idea of the morally good or of religious duty directs and animates the soul. For hearth and home, for wife and children, for chief and comrades, for Jehovah or Baal, men fight, and around these names there cluster thoughts the sacredest possible to the age, dignifying life and war and death. There are better kinds of struggle than that which is acted on the bloody field; yet struggle of one kind or other there must be. It is the law of existence for the barbarian, for the Hebrew, for the Christian. Ever there is a necessity for pressing towards the mark, striving to reach and enter the gate of higher life. No land flowing with milk and honey to be peaceably inherited and enjoyed rewards the generation which has fought its way through the desert. No placid possession of cities and vineyards rounds off the life of Canaanitish tribe. The gains of endurance are reaped, only to be sown again in labour and tears for a further harvest. Here on earth this is the plan of God for men; and when another life crowns the long effort of this world of change, may it not be with fresh calls to more glorious duty and achievement?

But the golden cord of Divine Providence has more than one strand; and while the conflicts of life are appointed for the discipline of men and nations in moral vigour and in fidelity

to such religious ideas as they possess, the purer and stronger faith always giving more power to those who exercise it, there is also in the course of life, and especially in the suffering war entails, a reference to the sins of men. Warfare is a sad necessity. Itself often a crime, it issues the judgment of God against folly and crime. Now Israel, now the Canaanite becomes a hammer of Jehovah. One people has been true to its best, and by that faithfulness it gains the victory. Another has been false, cruel, treacherous, and the hands of the fighters grow weak, their swords lose edge, their chariot-wheels roll heavily, they are swept away by the avenging tide. Or the sincere, the good are overcome; the weak who are in the right sink before the wicked who are strong. Yet the moral triumph is always gained. Even in defeat and death there is victory for the faithful.

In these wars of Israel we find many a story of judgment as well as a constant proving of the worth of man's religion and virtue. Neither was Israel always in the right, nor had those races which Israel overcame always a title to the power they held and the land they occupied. Jehovah was a stern arbiter among the combatants. When His own people failed in the courage and humility of faith, they were chastised. On the other hand, there were tyrants and tyrannous races, freebooters and banditti, pagan hordes steeped in uncleanness who had to be judged and punished. Where we cannot trace the reason of what appears mere waste of life or wanton cruelty, there lie behind, in the ken of the All-seeing, the need and perfect vindication of all He

suffered to be done in the ebb and flow of battle, amid the riot of war.

Beginning now with the detailed narrative, we find first a case of retribution, in which the Israelites served the justice of God. As yet the Canaanite power was unbroken in the central region of Western Palestine, where Adoni-bezek ruled over the cities of seventy chiefs. It became a question who should lead the tribes against this petty despot, and recourse was had to the priests at Gilgal for Divine direction. The answer of the oracle was that Judah should head the campaign, the warlike vigour and numerical strength of that tribe fitting it to take the foremost place. Judah accepting the post of honour invited Simeon, closely related by common descent from Leah, to join the expedition; and thus began a confederacy of these southern tribes which had the effect of separating them from the others throughout the whole period of the judges. The locality of Bezek which the king of the Canaanites held as his chief fortress is not known. Probably it was near the Jordan valley, about half-way between the two greater lakes. From it the tyranny of Adoni-bezek extended northward and southward over the cities of the seventy, whose submission he had cruelly ensured by rendering them unfit for war. Here, in the first struggle, Judah was completely successful. The rout of the Canaanites and Perizzites was decisive, and the slaughter so great as to send a thrill of terror through the land. And now the rude judgment of men works out the decree of God. Adoni-bezek suffers the

same mutilation as he had inflicted on the captive chiefs and in Oriental manner makes acknowledgment of a just fate. There is a certain religiousness in his mind, and he sincerely bows himself under the judgment of a God against Whom he had tried issues in vain. Had these troops of Israel come in the name of Jehovah? Then Jehovah had been watching Adoni-bezek in his pride when as he daily feasted in his hall the crowd of victims grovelled at his feet like dogs.

Thus early did ideas of righteousness and of wide authority attach themselves in Canaan to the name of Israel's God. It is remarkable how on the appearance of a new race the first collision with it on the battlefield will produce an impression of its capacity and spirit and of unseen powers fighting along with it. Joshua's dash through Canaan doubtless struck far and wide a belief that the new comers had a mighty God to support them; the belief is reinforced, and there is added a thought of Divine justice. The retribution of Jehovah meant Godhead far larger and more terrible, and at the same time more august, than the religion of Baal had ever presented to the mind. From this point the Israelites, if they had been true to their heavenly King, fired with the ardour of His name, would have occupied a moral vantage ground and proved invincible. The fear of Jehovah would have done more for them than their own valour and arms. Had the people of the land seen that a power was being established amongst them in the justice and benignity of which they could trust, had they learned not only to fear but to adore Jehovah,

there would have been quick fulfilment of the promise which gladdened the large heart of Abraham. The realization, however, had to wait for many a century.

It cannot be doubted that Israel had under Moses received such an impulse in the direction of faith in the one God, and such a conception of His character and will, as declared the spiritual mission of the tribes. The people were not all aware of their high destiny, not sufficiently instructed to have a competent sense of it; but the chiefs of the tribes, the Levites and the heads of households, should have well understood the part that fell to Israel among the nations of the world. The law in its main outlines was known, and it should have been revered as the charter of the commonwealth. Under the banner of Jehovah the nation ought to have striven not for its own position alone, the enjoyment of fruitful fields and fenced cities, but to raise the standard of human morality and enforce the truth of Divine religion. The gross idolatry of the peoples around should have been continually testified against; the principles of honesty, of domestic purity, of regard for human life, of neighbourliness and parental authority, as well as the more spiritual ideas expressed in the first table of the Decalogue, ought to have been guarded and dispensed as the special treasure of the nation. In this way Israel, as it enlarged its territory, would from the first have been clearing one space of earth for the good customs and holy observances that make for spiritual development. The greatest of all trusts is committed to a race when it is made capable of this; but here Israel often

failed, and the reproaches of her prophets had to be poured out from age to age.

The ascendancy which Israel secured in Canaan, or that which Britain has won in India, is not, to begin with, justified by superior strength, nor by higher intelligence, nor even because in practice the religion of the conquerors is better than that of the vanquished. It is justified because, with all faults and crimes that may for long attend the rule of the victorious race, there lie, unrealised at first, in conceptions of God and of duty the promise and germ of a higher education of the world. Developed in the course of time, the spiritual genius of the conquerors vindicates their ambition and their success. The world is to become the heritage and domain of those who have the secret of large and ascending life.

Judah moving southward from Bezek took Jerusalem, not the stronghold on the hill-top, but the city, and smote it with the edge of the sword. Not yet did that citadel which has been the scene of so many conflicts become a rallying-point for the tribes. The army, leaving Adoni-bezek dead in Jerusalem, with many who owned him as chief, swept southward still to Hebron and Debir. At Hebron the task was not unlike that which had been just accomplished. There reigned three chiefs, Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai, who are mentioned again and again in the annals as if their names had been deeply branded on the memory of the age. They were sons of Anak, bandit captains, whose rule was a terror to the country side. Their power had to be assailed and

overthrown, not only for the sake of Judah which was to inhabit their stronghold, but for the sake of humanity. The law of God was to replace the fierce unregulated sway of inhuman violence and cruelty. So the practical duty of the hour carried the tribes beyond the citadel where the best national centre would have been found to attack another where an evil power sat entrenched.

One moral lies on the surface here. We are naturally anxious to gain a good position in life for ourselves, and every consideration is apt to be set aside in favour of that. Now, in a sense, it is necessary, one of the first duties, that we gain each a citadel for himself. Our influence depends to a great extent on the standing we secure, on the courage and talent we show in making good our place. Our personality must enlarge itself, make itself visible by the conquest we effect and the extent of affairs we have a right to control. Effort on this line needs not be selfish or egoistic in a bad sense. The higher self or spirit of a good man finds in chosen ranges of activity and possession its true development and calling. One may not be a worldling by any means while he follows the bent of his genius and uses opportunity to become a successful merchant, a public administrator, a great artist or man of letters. All that he adds to his native inheritance of hand, brain and soul should be and often is the means of enriching the world. Against the false doctrine of self-suppression, still urged on a perplexed generation, stands this true doctrine, by which the generous helper of men guides his life so as to become a king and priest unto God. And when we turn from persons of highest

character and talent to those of smaller capacity, we may not alter the principle of judgment. They, too, serve the world, in so far as they have good qualities, by conquering citadels and reigning where they are fit to reign. If a man is to live to any purpose, play must be given to his original vigour, however much or little there is of it.

Here, then, we find a necessity belonging to the spiritual no less than to the earthly life. But there lies close beside it the shadow of temptation and sin. Thousands of people put forth all their strength to gain a fortress for themselves, leaving others to fight the sons of Anak—the intemperance, the unchastity, the atheism of the time. Instead of triumphing over the earthly, they are ensnared and enslaved. The truth is, that a safe position for ourselves we cannot have while those sons of Anak ravage the country around. The Divine call therefore often requires of us that we leave a Jerusalem unconquered for ourselves, while we pass on with the hosts of God to do battle with the public enemy. Time after time Israel, though successful at Hebron, missed the secret and learnt in bitter sadness and loss how near is the shadow to the glory.

And for any one to-day, what profits it to be a wealthy man, living in state with all the appliances of amusement and luxury, well knowing, but not choosing to share the great conflicts between religion and ungodliness, between purity and vice? If the ignorance and woe of our fellow-creatures do not draw our hearts, if we seek our own things as loving our own, if the

spiritual does not command us, we shall certainly lose all that makes life—enthusiasm, strength, eternal joy.

Give us men who fling themselves into the great struggle, doing what they can with Christ-born ardour, foot soldiers if nothing else in the army of the Lord of Righteousness.

## II.

# *THE WAY OF THE SWORD*

### **Judges i. 12-26**

The name Kiriath-sepher, that is Book-Town, has been supposed to point to the existence of a semi-popular literature among the pre-Judæan inhabitants of Canaan. We cannot build with any certainty upon a name; but there are other facts of some significance. Already the Phœnicians, the merchants of the age, some of whom no doubt visited Kiriath-sepher on their way to Arabia or settled in it, had in their dealings with Egypt begun to use that alphabet to which most languages, from Hebrew and Aramaic on through Greek and Latin to our own, are indebted for the idea and shapes of letters. And it is not improbable that an old-world Phœnician library of skins, palm-leaves or inscribed tablets had given distinction to this town lying away towards the desert from Hebron. Written words were held in half-superstitious veneration, and a very few records would greatly impress a district peopled chiefly by wandering tribes.

Nothing is insignificant in the pages of the Bible, nothing is to be disregarded that throws the least light upon human affairs and Divine Providence; and here we have a suggestion of no slight

importance. Doubt has been cast on the existence of a written language among the Hebrews till centuries after the Exodus. It has been denied that the Law could have been written out by Moses. The difficulty is now seen to be imaginary, like many others that have been raised. It is certain that the Phœnicians trading to Egypt in the time of the Hyksos kings had settlements quite contiguous to Goshen. What more likely than that the Hebrews, who spoke a language akin to the Phœnician, should have shared the discovery of letters almost from the first, and practised the art of writing in the days of their favour with the monarchs of the Nile valley? The oppression of the following period might prevent the spread of letters among the people; but a man like Moses must have seen their value and made himself familiar with their use. The importance of this indication in the study of Hebrew law and faith is very plain. Nor should we fail to notice the interesting connection between the Divine lawgiving of Moses and the practical invention of a worldly race. There is no exclusiveness in the providence of God. The art of a people, acute and eager indeed, but without spirituality, is not rejected as profane by the inspired leader of Israel. Egyptians and Phœnicians have their share in originating that culture which mingles its stream with sacred revelation and religion. As, long afterwards, there came the printing-press, a product of human skill and science, and by its help the Reformation spread and grew and filled Europe with new thought, so for the early record of God's work and will human genius furnished the fit instrument.

Letters and religion, culture and faith must needs go hand in hand. The more the minds of men are trained, the more deftly they can use literature and science, the more able they should be to receive and convey the spiritual message which the Bible contains. Culture which does not have this effect betrays its own pettiness and parochialism; and when we are provoked to ask whether human learning is not a foe to religion, the reason must be that the favourite studies of the time are shallow, aimless and ignoble.

Kiriath-sepher has to be taken. Its inhabitants, strongly entrenched, threaten the people who are settling about Hebron and must be subdued; and Caleb, who has come to his possession, adopts a common expedient for rousing the ambitious young men of the tribe. He has a daughter, and marriage with her shall reward the man who takes the fortress. It is not likely that Achsah objected. A courageous and capable husband was, we may say, a necessity, and her father's proposal offered a practical way of settling her in safety and comfort. Customs which appear to us barbarous and almost insulting have no doubt justified themselves to the common-sense, if not fully to the desires of women, because they were suited to the exigencies of life in rude and stormy times. There is this also, that the conquest of Kiriath-sepher was part of the great task in which Israel was engaged, and Achsah, as a patriotic daughter of Abraham, would feel the pride of being able to reward a hero of the sacred war. To the degree in which she was a woman of character this would balance other

considerations. Still the custom is not an ideal one; there is too much uncertainty. While the rivalry for her hand is going on the maiden has to wait at home, wondering what her fate shall be, instead of helping to decide it by her own thought and action. The young man, again, does not commend himself by honour, but only by courage and skill. Yet the test is real, so far as it goes, and fits the time.

Achsah, no doubt, had her preference and her hope, though she dared not speak of them. As for modern feeling, it is professedly on the side of the heart in such a case, and modern literature, with a thousand deft illustrations, proclaims the right of the heart to its choice. We call it a barbarous custom, the disposition of a woman by her father, apart from her preference, to one who does him or the community a service; and although Achsah consented, we feel that she was a slave. No doubt the Hebrew wife in her home had a place of influence and power, and a woman might even come to exercise authority among the tribes; but, to begin with, she was under authority and had to subdue her own wishes in a manner we consider quite incompatible with the rights of a human being. Very slowly do the customs of marriage even in Israel rise from the rudeness of savage life. Abraham and Sarah, long before this, lived on something like equality, he a prince, she a princess. But what can be said of Hagar, a concubine outside the home-circle, who might be sent any day into the wilderness? David and Solomon afterwards can marry for state reasons, can take, in pure Oriental fashion, the one his

tens, the other his hundreds of wives and concubines. Polygamy survives for many a century. When that is seen to be evil, there remains to men a freedom of divorce which of necessity keeps women in a low and unhonoured state.

Yet, thus treated, woman has always duties of the first importance, on which the moral health and vigour of the race depend; and right nobly must many a Hebrew wife and mother have fulfilled the trust. It is a pathetic story; but now, perhaps, we are in sight of an age when the injustice done to women may be replaced by an injustice they do to themselves. Liberty is their right, but the old duties remain as great as ever. If neither patriotism, nor religion, nor the home is to be regarded, but mere taste; if freedom becomes license to know and enjoy, there will be another slavery worse than the former. Without a very keen sense of Christian honour and obligation among women, their enfranchisement will be the loss of what has held society together and made nations strong. And looking at the way in which marriage is frequently arranged by the free consent and determination of women, is there much advance on the old barbarism? How often do they sell themselves to the fortunate, rather than reserve themselves for the fit; how often do they marry not because a helpmeet of the soul has been found, but because audacity has won them or jewels have dazzled; because a fireside is offered, not because the ideal of life may be realized. True, in the worldliness there is a strain of moral effort often pathetic enough. Women are skilful at making the best of

circumstances, and even when the gilding fades from the life they have chosen they will struggle on with wonderful resolution to maintain something like order and beauty. The Othniel who has gained Achsah by some feat of mercantile success or showy talk may turn out a poor pretender to bravery or wit; but she will do her best for him, cover up his faults, beg springs of water or even dig them with her own hands. Let men thank God that it is so, and let them help her to find her right place, her proper kingdom and liberty.

There is another aspect of the picture, however, as it unfolds itself. The success of Othniel in his attack on Kiriath-sepher gave him at once a good place as a leader, and a wife who was ready to make his interests her own and help him to social position and wealth. Her first care was to acquire a piece of land suitable for the flocks and herds she saw in prospect, well watered if possible,—in short, an excellent sheep-farm. Returning from the bridal journey, she had her stratagem ready, and when she came near her father's tent followed up her husband's request for the land by lighting eagerly from her ass, taking for granted the one gift, and pressing a further petition—"Give me a blessing, father. A south land thou hast bestowed, give me also wells of water." So, without more ado, the new Kenazite homestead was secured.

How Jewish, we may be disposed to say. May we not also say, How thoroughly British? The virtue of Achsah, is it not the virtue of a true British wife? To urge her husband on and up in the social scale, to aid him in every point of the contest for wealth

and place, to raise him and rise with him, what can be more admirable? Are there opportunities of gaining the favour of the powerful who have offices to give, the liking of the wealthy who have fortunes to bequeath? The managing wife will use these opportunities with address and courage. She will light off her ass and bow humbly before a flattered great man to whom she prefers a request. She can fit her words to the occasion and her smiles to the end in view. It is a poor spirit that is content with anything short of all that may be had: thus in brief she might express her principle of duty. And so in ten thousand homes there is no question whether marriage is a failure. It has succeeded. There is a combination of man's strength and woman's wit for the great end of "getting on." And in ten thousand others there is no thought more constantly present to the minds of husband and wife than that marriage is a failure. For restless ingenuity and many schemes have yielded nothing. The husband has been too slow or too honest, and the wife has been foiled; or, on the other hand, the woman has not seconded the man, has not risen with him. She has kept him down by her failings; or she is the same simple-minded, homely person he wedded long ago, no fit mate, of course, for one who is the companion of magnates and rulers. Well may those who long for a reformation begin by seeking a return to simplicity of life and the relish for other kinds of distinction than lavish outlay and social notoriety can give. Until married ambition is fed and hallowed at the Christian altar there will be the same failures we see now, and the same successes

which are worse than "failures."

For a moment the history gives us a glimpse of another domestic settlement. "The children of the Kenite went up from the City of Palm Trees with the children of Judah," and found a place of abode on the southern fringe of Simeon's territory, and there they seem to have gradually mingled with the tent-dwellers of the desert. By-and-by we shall find one Heber the Kenite in a different part of the land, near the Sea of Galilee, still in touch with the Israelites to some extent, while his people are scattered. Heber may have felt the power of Israel's mission and career and judged it wise to separate from those who had no interest in the tribes of Jehovah. The Kenites of the south appear in the history like men upon a raft, once borne near shore, who fail to seize the hour of deliverance and are carried away again to the wastes of sea. They are part of the drifting population that surrounds the Hebrew church, type of the drifting multitude who in the nomadism of modern society are for a time seen in our Christian assemblies, then pass away to mingle with the careless. An innate restlessness and a want of serious purpose mark the class. To settle these wanderers in orderly religious life seems almost impossible; we can perhaps only expect to sow among them seeds of good, and to make them feel a Divine presence restraining from evil. The assertion of personal independence in our day has no doubt much to do with impatience of church bonds and habits of worship; and it must not be forgotten that this is a phase of growing life needing forbearance no less than

firm example.

Zephath was the next fortress against which Judah and Simeon directed their arms. When the tribes were in the desert on their long and difficult march they attempted first to enter Canaan from the south, and actually reached the neighbourhood of this town. But, as we read in the Book of Numbers, Arad the king of Zephath fought against them and took some of them prisoners. The defeat appears to have been serious, for, arrested and disheartened by it, Israel turned southward again, and after a long *détour* reached Canaan another way. In the passage in Numbers the overthrow of Zephath is described by anticipation; in Judges we have the account in its proper historical place. The people whom Arad ruled were, we may suppose, an Edomite clan living partly by merchandise, mainly by foray, practised marauders, with difficulty guarded against, who having taken their prey disappeared swiftly amongst the hills.

In the world of thought and feeling there are many Zephaths, whence quick outset is often made upon the faith and hope of men. We are pressing towards some end, mastering difficulties, contending with open and known enemies. Only a little way remains before us. But invisible among the intricacies of experience is this lurking foe who suddenly falls upon us. It is a settlement in the faith of God we seek. The onset is of doubts we had not imagined, doubts of inspiration, of immortality, of the incarnation, truths the most vital. We are repulsed, broken, disheartened. There remains a new wilderness journey till we

reach by the way of Moab the fords of our Jordan and the land of our inheritance. Yet there is a way, sure and appointed. The baffled, wounded soul is never to despair. And when at length the settlement of faith is won, the Zephath of doubt may be assailed from the other side, assailed successfully and taken. The experience of some poor victims of what is oddly called philosophic doubt need dismay no one. For the resolute seeker after God there is always a victory, which in the end may prove so easy, so complete, as to amaze him. The captured Zephath is not destroyed nor abandoned, but is held as a fortress of faith. It becomes Hormah—the Consecrated.

Victories were gained by Judah in the land of the Philistines, partial victories, the results of which were not kept. Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron were occupied for a time; but Philistine force and doggedness recovered, apparently in a few years, the captured towns. Wherever they had their origin, these Philistines were a strong and stubborn race, and so different from the Israelites in habit and language that they never freely mingled nor even lived peaceably with the tribes. At this time they were probably forming their settlements on the Mediterranean seaboard, and were scarcely able to resist the men of Judah. But ship after ship from over sea, perhaps from Crete, brought new colonists; and during the whole period till the Captivity they were a thorn in the side of the Hebrews. Beside these, there were other dwellers in the lowlands, who were equipped in a way that made it difficult to meet them. The most vehement sally of men on

foot could not break the line of iron chariots, thundering over the plain. It was in the hill districts that the tribes gained their surest footing,—a singular fact, for mountain people are usually hardest to defeat and dispossess; and we take it as a sign of remarkable vigour that the invaders so soon occupied the heights.

Here the spiritual parallel is instructive. Conversion, it may be said, carries the soul with a rush to the high ground of faith. The Great Leader has gone before preparing the way. We climb rapidly to fortresses from which the enemy has fled, and it would seem that victory is complete. But the Christian life is a constant alternation between the joy of the conquered height and the stern battles of the foe-infested plain. Worldly custom and sensuous desire, greed and envy and base appetite have their cities and chariots in the low ground of being. So long as one of them remains the victory of faith is unfinished, insecure. Piety that believes itself delivered once for all from conflict is ever on the verge of disaster. The peace and joy men cherish, while as yet the earthly nature is unsubdued, the very citadels of it unreconnoitred, are visionary and relaxing. For the soul and for society the only salvation lies in mortal combat—life-long, age-long combat with the earthly and the false. Nooks enough may be found among the hills, pleasant and calm, from which the low ground cannot be seen, where the roll of the iron chariots is scarcely heard. It may seem to imperil all if we descend from these retreats. But when we have gained strength in the mountain air it is for the battle down below, it is that we may advance the

lines of redeemed life and gain new bases for sacred enterprise.

A mark of the humanness and, shall we not also say, the divineness of this history is to be found in the frequent notices of other tribes than those of Israel. To the inspired writer it is not all the same whether Canaanites die or live, what becomes of Phœnicians or Philistines. Of this we have two examples, one the case of the Jebusites, the other of the people of Luz.

The Jebusites, after the capture of the lower city already recorded, appear to have been left in peaceful possession of their citadel and accepted as neighbours by the Benjamites. When the Book of Judges was written Jebusite families still remained, and in David's time Araunah the Jebusite was a conspicuous figure. A series of terrible events connected with the history of Benjamin is narrated towards the end of the Book. It is impossible to say whether the crime which led to these events was in any way due to bad influence exercised by the Jebusites. We may charitably doubt whether it was. There is no indication that they were a depraved people. If they had been licentious they could scarcely have retained till David's time a stronghold so central and of so much consequence in the land. They were a mountain clan, and Araunah shows himself in contact with David a reverend and kingly person.

As for Bethel or Luz, around which gathered notable associations of Jacob's life, Ephraim, in whose territory it lay, adopted a stratagem in order to master it, and smote the city. One family alone, the head of which had betrayed the place,

was allowed to depart in peace, and a new Luz was founded "in the land of the Hittites." We are inclined to regard the traitor as deserving of death, and Ephraim appears to us disgraced, not honoured, by its exploit. There is a fair, straightforward way of fighting; but this tribe, one of the strongest, chooses a mean and treacherous method of gaining its end. Are we mistaken in thinking that the care with which the founding of the new city is described shows the writer's sympathy with the Luzzites? At any rate, he does not by one word justify Ephraim; and we do not feel called on to restrain our indignation.

The high ideal of life, how often it fades from our view! There are times when we realize our Divine calling, when the strain of it is felt and the soul is on fire with sacred zeal. We press on, fight on, true to the highest we know at every step. We are chivalrous, for we see the chivalry of Christ; we are tender and faithful, for we see His tenderness and faithfulness. Then we make progress; the goal can almost be touched. We love, and love bears us on. We aspire, and the world glows with light. But there comes a change. The thought of self-preservation, of selfish gain, has intruded. On pretext of serving God we are hard to man, we keep back the truth, we use compromises, we descend even to treachery and do things which in another are abominable to us. So the fervour departs, the light fades from the world, the goal recedes, becomes invisible. Most strange of all is it that side by side with cultured religion there can be proud sophistry and ignorant scorn, the very treachery of the intellect towards

man. Far away in the dimness of Israel's early days we see the beginnings of a pious inhumanity, that may well make us stay to fear lest the like should be growing among ourselves. It is not what men claim, much less what they seize and hold, that does them honour. Here and there a march may be stolen on rivals by those who firmly believe they are serving God. But the rights of a man, a tribe, a church lie side by side with duties; and neglect of duty destroys the claim to what otherwise would be a right. Let there be no mistake: power and gain are not allowed in the providence of God to anyone that he may grasp them in despite of justice or charity.

One thought may link the various episodes we have considered. It is that of the end for which individuality exists. The home has its development of personality—for service. The peace and joy of religion nourish the soul—for service. Life may be conquered in various regions, and a man grow fit for ever greater victories, ever nobler service. But with the end the means and spirit of each effort are so interwoven that alike in home, and church, and society the human soul must move in uttermost faithfulness and simplicity or fail from the Divine victory that wins the prize.

### III.

## *AT BOCHIM; THE FIRST PROPHET VOICE*

### **Judges ii. 1-5**

From the time of Abraham on to the settlement in Canaan the Israelites had kept the faith of the one God. They had their origin as a people in a decisive revolt against polytheism. Of the great Semite forefather of the Jewish people, it has been finely said, "He bore upon his forehead the seal of the Absolute God, upon which was written, This race will rid the earth of superstition." The character and structure of the Hebrew tongue resisted idolatry. It was not an imaginative language; it had no mythological colour. We who have inherited an ancient culture of quite another kind do not think it strange to read or sing:

"Hail, smiling morn, that tip'st the hills with gold,  
Whose rosy fingers ope the gates of day,  
Who the gay face of nature dost unfold,  
At whose bright presence darkness flies away."

These lines, however, are full of latent mythology. The

"smiling morn" is Aurora, the darkness that flies away before the dawn is the Erebus of the Greeks. Nothing of this sort was possible in Hebrew literature. In it all change, all life, every natural incident are ascribed to the will and power of one Supreme Being. "Jehovah thundered in the heavens and the Highest gave His voice, hailstones and coals of fire." "By the breath of God ice is given, and the breadth of the waters is straitened." "Behold, He spreadeth His light around Him; ... He covereth His hands with the lightning." "Thou makest darkness and it is night." Always in forms like these Hebrew poetry sets forth the control of nature by its invisible King. The pious word of Fénelon, "What do I see in nature? God; God everywhere; God alone," had its germ, its very substance, in the faith and language of patriarchal times.

There are some who allege that this simple faith in one God, sole Origin and Ruler of nature and life, impoverished the thought and speech of the Hebrews. It was in reality the spring and safeguard of their spiritual destiny. Their very language was a sacred inheritance and preparation. From age to age it served a Divine purpose in maintaining the idea of the unity of God; and the power of that idea never failed their prophets nor passed from the soul of the race. The whole of Israel's literature sets forth the universal sway and eternal righteousness of Him who dwells in the high and lofty place, Whose name is Holy. In canto and strophe of the great Divine Poem, the glory of the One Supreme burns with increasing clearness, till in Christ its finest radiance

flashes upon the world.

While the Hebrews were in Egypt, the faith inherited from patriarchal times must have been sorely tried, and, all circumstances considered, it came forth wonderfully pure. "The Israelites saw Egypt as the Mussulman Arab sees pagan countries, entirely from the outside, perceiving only the surface and external things." They indeed carried with them into the desert the recollection of the sacred bulls or calves of which they had seen images at Hathor and Memphis. But the idol they made at Horeb was intended to represent their Deliverer, the true God, and the swift and stern repression by Moses of that symbolism and its pagan incidents appears to have been effectual. The tribes reached Canaan substantially free from idolatry, though teraphim or fetishes may have been used in secret with magical ceremonies. The religion of the people generally was far from spiritual, yet there was a real faith in Jehovah as the protector of the national life, the guardian of justice and truth. From this there was no falling away when the Reubenites and Gadites on the east of Jordan erected an altar for themselves. "The Lord God of gods," they said, "He knoweth, and Israel he shall know if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the Lord." The altar was called *Ed*, a witness between east and west that the faith of the one Living God was still to unite the tribes.

But the danger to Israel's fidelity came when there began to be intercourse with the people of Canaan, now sunk from the purer thought of early times. Everywhere in the land of

the Hittites and Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites, there were altars and sacred trees, pillars and images used in idolatrous worship. The ark and the altar of Divine religion, established first at Gilgal near Jericho, afterwards at Bethel and then at Shiloh, could not be frequently visited, especially by those who settled towards the southern desert and in the far north. Yet the necessity for religious worship of some kind was constantly felt; and as afterwards the synagogues gave opportunity for devotional gatherings when the Temple could not be reached, so in the earlier time there came to be sacred observances on elevated places, a windy threshing-floor, or a hill-top already used for heathen sacrifice. Hence, on the one hand, there was the danger that worship might be entirely neglected, on the other hand the grave risk that the use of heathen occasions and meeting-places should lead to heathen ritual, and those who came together on the hill of Baal should forget Jehovah. It was the latter evil that grew; and while as yet only a few Hebrews easily led astray had approached with kid or lamb a pagan altar, the alarm was raised. At Bochim a Divine warning was uttered which found echo in the hearts of the people.

There appears to have been a great gathering of the tribes at some spot near Bethel. We see the elders and heads of families holding council of war and administration, the thoughts of all bent on conquest and family settlement. Religion, the purity of Jehovah's worship, are forgotten in the business of the hour. How shall the tribes best help each other in the struggle that is already

proving more arduous than they expected? Dan is sorely pressed by the Amorites. The chiefs of the tribe are here telling their story of hardship among the mountains. The Asherites have failed in their attack upon the sea-board towns Accho and Achzib; in vain have they pressed towards Zidon. They are dwelling among the Canaanites and may soon be reduced to slavery. The reports from other tribes are more hopeful; but everywhere the people of the land are hard to overcome. Should Israel not remain content for a time, make the best of circumstances, cultivate friendly intercourse with the population it cannot dispossess? Such a policy often commends itself to those who would be thought prudent; it is apt to prove a fatal policy.

Suddenly a spiritual voice is heard, clear and intense, and all others are silent. From the sanctuary of God at Gilgal one comes whom the people have not expected; he comes with a message they cannot choose but hear. It is a prophet with the burden of reproof and warning. Jehovah's goodness, Jehovah's claim are declared with Divine ardour; with Divine severity the neglect of the covenant is condemned. Have the tribes of God begun to consort with the people of the land? Are they already dwelling content under the shadow of idolatrous groves, in sight of the symbols of Ashtoreth? Are they learning to swear by Baal and Melcarth and looking on while sacrifices are offered to these vile masters? Then they can no longer hope that Jehovah will give them the country to enjoy; the heathen shall remain as thorns in the side of Israel and their gods shall be a snare. It is a message

of startling power. From the hopes of dominion and the plans of worldly gain the people pass to spiritual concern. They have offended their Lord; His countenance is turned from them. A feeling of guilt falls on the assembly. "It came to pass that the people lifted up their voice and wept."

This lamentation at Bochim is the second note of religious feeling and faith in the Book of Judges. The first is the consultation of the priests and the oracle referred to in the opening sentence of the book. Jehovah Who had led them through the wilderness was their King, and unless He went forth as the unseen Captain of the host no success could be looked for. "They asked of Jehovah, saying, Who shall go up for us first against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" In this appeal there was a measure of faith which is neither to be scorned nor suspected. The question indeed was not whether they should fight at all, but how they should fight so as to succeed, and their trust was in a God thought of as pledged to them, solely concerned for them. So far accordingly there is nothing exemplary in the circumstances. Yet we find a lesson for Christian nations. There are many in our modern parliaments who are quite ready to vote national prayer in war-time and thanksgiving for victories, who yet would never think, before undertaking a war, of consulting those best qualified to interpret the Divine will. The relation between religion and the state has this fatal hitch, that however Christian our governments profess to be, the Christian thinkers of the country are not consulted on moral questions, not even on

a question so momentous as that of war. It is passion, pride, or diplomacy, never the wisdom of Christ, that leads nations in the critical moments of their history. Who then scorn, who suspect the early Hebrew belief? Those only who have no right; those who as they laugh at God and faith shut themselves from the knowledge by which alone his can be understood; and, again, those who in their own ignorance and pride unsheathe the sword without reference to Him in Whom they profess to believe. We admit none of these to criticise Israel and its faith.

At Bochim, where the second note of religious feeling is struck, a deeper and clearer note, we find the prophet listened to. He revives the sense of duty, he kindles a Divine sorrow in the hearts of the people. The national assembly is conscience-stricken. Let us allow this quick contrition to be the result, in part, of superstitious fear. Very rarely is spiritual concern quite pure. In general it is the consequences of transgression rather than the evil of it that press on the minds of men. Forebodings of trouble and calamity are more commonly causes of sorrow than the loss of fellowship with God; and if we know this to be the case with many who are convicted of sin under the preaching of the gospel, we cannot wonder to find the penitence of old Hebrew times mingled with superstition. Nevertheless, the people are aware of the broken covenant, burdened with a sense that they have lost the favour of their unseen Guide. There can be no doubt that the realization of sin and of justice turned against them is one cause of their tears.

Here, again, if there is a difference between Israel and Christian nations, it is not in favour of the latter. Are modern senates ever overcome by conviction of sin? Those who are in power seem to have no fear that they may do wrong. Glorifying their blunders and forgetting their errors, they find no occasion for self-reproach, no need to sit in sackcloth and ashes. Now and then, indeed, a day of fasting and humiliation is ordered and observed in state; the sincere Christian for his part feeling how miserably formal it is, how far from the spontaneous expression of abasement and remorse. God is called upon to help a people who have not considered their ways, who design no amendment, who have not even suspected that the Divine blessing may come in still further humbling. And turning to private life, is there not as much of self-justification, as little of real humility and faith? The shallow nature of popular Christianity is seen here, that so few can read in disappointment and privation anything but disaster, or submit without disgust and rebellion to take a lower place at the table of Providence. Our weeping is so often for what we longed to gain or wished to keep in the earthly and temporal region, so seldom for what we have lost or should fear to lose in the spiritual. We grieve when we should rather rejoice that God has made us feel our need of Him, and called us again to our true blessedness.

The scene at Bochim connects itself very notably with one nine hundred and fifty years later. The poor fragments of the exiled tribes have been gathered again in the land of their fathers.

They are rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple. Ezra has led back a company from Babylon and has brought with him, by the favour of Artaxerxes, no small treasure of silver and gold for the house of God. To his astonishment and grief he hears the old tale of alliance with the inhabitants of the land, intermarriage even of Levites, priests and princes of Israel with women of the Canaanite races. In the new settlement of Palestine the error of the first is repeated. Ezra calls a solemn assembly in the Temple court—"every one that trembles at the words of the God of Israel." Till the evening sacrifice he sits prostrate with grief, his garment rent, his hair torn and dishevelled. Then on his knees before the Lord he spreads forth his hands in prayer. The trespasses of a thousand years afflict him, afflict the faithful. "After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, shall we again break Thy commandments, and join in affinity with the peoples that do these abominations? wouldest not Thou be angry with us till Thou hadst consumed us so that there should be no remnant nor any to escape?... Behold we are before Thee in our guiltiness; for none can stand before Thee because of this." The impressive lament of Ezra and those who join in his confessions draws together a great congregation, and the people weep very sore.

Nine centuries and a half appear a long time in the history of a nation. What has been gained during the period? Is the weeping at Jerusalem in Ezra's time, like the weeping at Bochim, a mark of no deeper feeling, no keener penitence? Has there been religious advance commensurate with the discipline of suffering,

defeat, slaughter and exile, dishonoured kings, a wasted land? Have the prophets not achieved anything? Has not the Temple in its glory, in its desolation, spoken of a Heavenly power, a Divine rule, the sense of which entering the souls of the people has established piety, or at least a habit of separateness from heathen manners and life? It may be hard to distinguish and set forth the gain of those centuries. But it is certain that while the weeping at Bochim was the sign of a fear that soon passed away, the weeping in the Temple court marked a new beginning in Hebrew history. By the strong action of Ezra and Nehemiah the mixed marriages were dissolved, and from that time the Jewish people became, as they never were before, exclusive and separate. Where nature would have led the nation ceased to go. More and more strictly the law was enforced; the age of puritanism began. So, let us say, the sore discipline had its fruit.

And yet it is with a reservation only we can enjoy the success of those reformers who drew the sharp line between Israel and his heathen neighbours, between Jew and Gentile. The vehemence of reaction urged the nation towards another error—Pharisaism. Nothing could be purer, nothing nobler than the desire to make Israel a holy people. But to inspire men with religious zeal and yet preserve them from spiritual pride is always difficult, and in truth those Hebrew reformers did not see the danger. There came to be, in the new development of faith, zeal enough, jealousy enough, for the purity of religion and life, but along with these a contempt for the heathen, a fierce enmity towards

the uncircumcised, which made the interval till Christ appeared a time of strife and bloodshed worse than any that had been before. From the beginning the Hebrews were called with a holy calling, and their future was bound up with their faithfulness to it. Their ideal was to be earnest and pure, without bitterness or vainglory; and that is still the ideal of faith. But the Jewish people like ourselves, weak through the flesh, came short of the mark on one side or passed beyond it on the other. During the long period from Joshua to Nehemiah there was too little heat, and then a fire was kindled which burned a sharp narrow path, along which the life of Israel has gone with ever-lessening spiritual force. The unfulfilled ideal still waits, the unique destiny of this people of God still bears them on.

Bochim is a symbol. There the people wept for a transgression but half understood and a peril they could not rightly dread. There was genuine sorrow, there was genuine alarm. But it was the prophetic word, not personal experience, that moved the assembly. And as at Florence, when Savonarola's word, shaking with alarm a people who had no vision of holiness, left them morally weaker as it fell into silence, so the weeping at Bochim passed like a tempest that has bowed and broken the forest trees. The chiefs of Israel returned to their settlements with a new sense of duty and peril; but Canaanite civilization had attractions, Canaanite women a refinement which captivated the heart. And the civilization, the refinement, were associated with idolatry. The myths of Canaan, the poetry of Tammuz and Astarte, were

fascinating and seductive. We wonder not that the pure faith of God was corrupted, but that it survived. In Egypt the heathen worship was in a foreign tongue, but in Canaan the stories of the gods were whispered to Israelites in a language they knew, by their own kith and kin. In many a home among the mountains of Ephraim or the skirts of Lebanon the pagan wife, with her superstitious fears, her dread of the anger of this god or that goddess, wrought so on the mind of the Jewish husband that he began to feel her dread and then to permit and share her sacrifices. Thus idolatry invaded Israel, and the long and weary struggle between truth and falsehood began.

We have spoken of Bochim as a symbol, and to us it may be the symbol of this, that the very thing which men put from them in horror and with tears, seeing the evil, the danger of it, does often insinuate itself into their lives. The messenger is heard, and while he speaks how near God is, how awful is the sense of His being! A thrill of keen feeling passes from soul to soul. There are some in the gathering who have more spiritual insight than the rest, and their presence raises the heat of emotion. But the moment of revelation and of fervour passes, the company breaks up, and very soon those who have won no vision of holiness, who have only feared as they entered into the cloud, are in the common world again. The finer strings of the soul were made to thrill, the conscience was touched; but if the will has not been braced, if the man's reason and resoluteness are not engaged by a new conception of life, the earthly will resume control and

God will be less known than before. So there are many cast down to-day, crying to God in trouble of soul for evil done or evil which they are tempted to do, who to-morrow among the Canaanites will see things in another light. A man cannot be a recluse. He must mingle in business and in society with those who deride the thoughts that have moved him and laugh at his seriousness. The impulse to something better soon exhausts itself in this cold atmosphere. He turns upon his own emotion with contempt. The words that came with Divine urgency, the man whose face was like that of an angel of God, are already subjects of uneasy jesting, will soon be thrust from memory. Over the interlude of superficial anxiety the mind goes back to its old haunts, its old plans and cravings. The religious teacher, while he is often in no way responsible for this sad recoil, should yet be ever on his guard against the risk of weakening the moral fibre, of leaving men as Christ never left them, flaccid and infirm.

Again, there are cases that belong not to the history of a day, but to the history of a life. One may say, when he hears the strangely tempting voices that whisper in the twilight streets, "Am I a dog that from the holy traditions of my people and country I should fall away to these?" At first he flies the distasteful entreaty of the new nature-cult, its fleshly art and song, its nefarious science. But the voices are persistent. It is the perfecting of man and woman to which they invite. It is not vice but freedom, brightness, life and the courage to enjoy it they cunningly propose. There is not much of sweetness; the voices

rise, they become stringent and overbearing. If the man would not be a fool, would not lose the good of the age into which he is born, he will be done with unnatural restraints, the bondage of purity. Thus entreaty passes into mastery. Here is truth; there also seems to be fact. Little by little the subtle argument is so advanced that the degradation once feared is no longer to be seen. It is progress now; it is full development, the assertion of power and privilege, that the soul anticipates. How fatal is the lure, how treacherous the vision, the man discovers when he has parted with that which even through deepest penitence he may never regain. People are denying, and it has to be reasserted that there is a covenant which the soul of man has to keep with God. The thought is "archaic," and they would banish it. But it stands the great reality for man; and to keep that covenant in the grace of the Divine Spirit, in the love of the holiest, in the sacred manliness learned of Christ, is the only way to the broad daylight and the free summits of life. How can nature be a saviour? The suggestion is childish. Nature, as we all know, allows the hypocrite, the swindler, the traitor, as well as the brave, honest man, the pure, sweet woman. Is it said that man has a covenant with nature? On the temporal and prudential side of his activities that is true. He has relations with nature which must be apprehended, must be wisely realised. But the spiritual kingdom to which he belongs requires a wider outlook, loftier aims and hopes. The efforts demanded by nature have to be brought into harmony with those diviner aspirations. Man is bound to be

prudent, brave, wise for eternity. He is warned of his own sin and urged to fly from it. This is the covenant with God which is wrought into the very constitution of his moral being.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the scene at Bochim and the words which moved the assembly to tears had no lasting effect whatever. The history deals with outstanding facts of the national development. We hear chiefly of heroes and their deeds, but we shall not doubt that there were minds which kept the glow of truth and the consecration of penitential tears. The best lives of the people moved quietly on, apart from the commotions and strifes of the time. Rarely are the great political names even of a religious community those of holy and devout men, and, undoubtedly, this was true of Israel in the time of the judges. If we were to reckon only by those who appear conspicuously in these pages, we should have to wonder how the spiritual strain of thought and feeling survived. But it did survive; it gained in clearness and force. There were those in every tribe who kept alive the sacred traditions of Sinai and the desert, and Levites throughout the land did much to maintain among the people the worship of God. The great names of Abraham and Moses, the story of their faith and deeds, were the text of many an impressive lesson. So the light of piety did not go out; Jehovah was ever the Friend of Israel, even in its darkest day, for in the heart of the nation there never ceased to be a faithful remnant maintaining the fear and obedience of the Holy Name.

## IV.

# *AMONG THE ROCKS OF PAGANISM*

### **Judges ii. 7-23**

"And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash." So, long after the age of Joshua, the historian tells again how Israel lamented its great chief, and he seems to feel even more than did the people of the time the pathos and significance of the event. How much a man of God has been to his generation those rarely know who stand beside his grave. Through faith in him faith in the Eternal has been sustained, many who have a certain piety of their own depending, more than they have been aware, upon their contact with him. A glow went from him which insensibly raised to something like religious warmth souls that apart from such an influence would have been of the world worldly. Joshua succeeded Moses as the mediator of the covenant. He was the living witness of all that had been done in the Exodus and at Sinai. So long as he continued with Israel, even in the feebleness of old age, appearing, and no more, a venerable figure in the

council of the tribes, there was a representative of Divine order, one who testified to the promises of God and the duty of His people. The elders who outlived him were not men like himself, for they added nothing to faith; yet they preserved the idea at least of the theocracy, and when they passed away the period of Israel's robust youth was at an end. It is this the historian perceives, and his review of the following age in the passage we are now to consider is darkened throughout by the cloudy and troubled atmosphere that overcame the fresh morning of faith.

We know the great design that should have made Israel a singular and triumphant example to the nations of the world. The body politic was to have its unity in no elected government, in no hereditary ruler, but in the law and worship of its Divine King, sustained by the ministry of priest and prophet. Every tribe, every family, every soul was to be equally and directly subject to the Holy Will as expressed in the law and by the oracles of the sanctuary. The idea was that order should be maintained and the life of the tribes should go on under the pressure of the unseen Hand, never resisted, never shaken off, and full of bounty always to a trustful and obedient people. There might be times when the head men of tribes and families should have to come together in council, but it would be only to discover speedily and carry out with one accord the purpose of Jehovah. Rightly do we regard this as an inspired vision; it is at once simple and majestic. When a nation can so live and order its affairs it will have solved the great problem of government still exercising every civilized

community. The Hebrews never realized the theocracy, and at the time of the settlement in Canaan they came far short of understanding it. "Israel had as yet scarcely found time to imbue its spirit deeply with the great truths which had been awakened into life in it, and thus to appropriate them as an invaluable possession: the vital principle of that religion and nationality by which it had so wondrously triumphed was still scarcely understood when it was led into manifold severe trials." [1] Thus, while Hebrew history presents for the most part the aspect of an impetuous river broken and jarred by rocks and boulders, rarely settling into a calm expanse of mirror-like water, during the period of the judges the stream is seen almost arrested in the difficult country through which it has to force its way. It is divided by many a crag and often hidden for considerable stretches by overhanging cliffs. It plunges in cataracts and foams hotly in cauldrons of hollowed rock. Not till Samuel appears is there anything like success for this nation, which is of no account if not earnestly religious, and never is religious without a stern and capable chief, at once prophet and judge, a leader in worship and a restorer of order and unity among the tribes.

The general survey or preface which we have before us gives but one account of the disasters that befell the Hebrew people—they "followed other gods, and provoked the Lord to anger." And the reason of this has to be considered. Taking a natural view of the circumstances we might pronounce it almost impossible for the tribes to maintain their unity when they were fighting,

each in its own district, against powerful enemies. It seems by no means wonderful that nature had its way, and that, weary of war, the people tended to seek rest in friendly intercourse and alliance with their neighbours. Were Judah and Simeon always to fight, though their own territory was secure? Was Ephraim to be the constant champion of the weaker tribes and never settle down to till the land? It was almost more than could be expected of men who had the common amount of selfishness. Occasionally, when all were threatened, there was a combination of the scattered clans, but for the most part each had to fight its own battle, and so the unity of life and faith was broken. Nor can we marvel at the neglect of worship and the falling away from Jehovah when we find so many who have been always surrounded by Christian influences drifting into a strange unconcern as to religious obligation and privilege. The writer of the Book of Judges, however, regards things from the standpoint of a high Divine ideal—the calling and duty of a God-made nation. Men are apt to frame excuses for themselves and each other; this historian makes no excuses. Where we might speak compassionately he speaks in sternness. He is bound to tell the story from God's side, and from God's side he tells it with puritan directness. In a sense it might go sorely against the grain to speak of his ancestors as sinning grievously and meriting condign punishment. But later generations needed to hear the truth, and he would utter it without evasion. It is surely Nathan, or some other prophet of Samuel's line, who lays bare

with such faithfulness the infidelity of Israel. He is writing for the men of his own time and also for men who are to come; he is writing for us, and his main theme is the stern justice of Jehovah's government. God bestows privileges which men must value and use, or they shall suffer. When He declares Himself and gives His law, let the people see to it; let them encourage and constrain each other to obey. Disobedience brings unfailing penalty. This is the spirit of the passage we are considering. Israel is God's possession, and is bound to be faithful. There is no Lord but Jehovah, and it is unpardonable for any Israelite to turn aside and worship a false God. The pressure of circumstances, often made much of, is not considered for a moment. The weakness of human nature, the temptations to which men and women are exposed, are not taken into account. Was there little faith, little spirituality? Every soul had its own responsibility for the decay, since to every Israelite Jehovah had revealed His love and addressed His call. Inexorable therefore was the demand for obedience. Religion is stern because reasonable, not an impossible service as easy human nature would fain prove it. If men disbelieve they incur doom, and it must fall upon them.

Joshua and his generation having been gathered unto their fathers, "there arose another generation which knew not the Lord, nor yet the work which He had wrought for Israel. And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baalim." How common is the fall traced in these brief, stern words, the wasting of a sacred testimony that seemed

to be deeply graven upon the heart of a race! The fathers felt and knew; the sons have only traditional knowledge and it never takes hold of them. The link of faith between one generation and another is not strongly forged; the most convincing proofs of God are not recounted. Here is a man who has learned his own weakness, who has drained a bitter cup of discipline—how can he better serve his sons than by telling them the story of his own mistakes and sins, his own suffering and repentance? Here is one who in dark and trying times has found solace and strength and has been lifted out of horror and despair by the merciful hand of God—how can he do a father's part without telling his children of his defeats and deliverance, the extremity to which he was reduced and the restoring grace of Christ? But men hide their weaknesses, and are ashamed to confess that they ever passed through the Valley of Humiliation. They leave their own children unwarned to fall into the sloughs in which themselves were well-nigh swallowed up. Even when they have erected some Ebenezer, some monument of Divine succour, they often fail to bring their children to the spot, and speak to them there with fervent recollection of the goodness of the Lord. Was Solomon when a boy led by David to the town of Gath, and told by him the story of his cowardly fear, and how he fled from the face of Saul to seek refuge among Philistines? Was Absalom in his youth ever taken to the plains of Bethlehem and shown where his father fed the flocks, a poor shepherd lad, when the prophet sent for him to be anointed the coming King of Israel? Had these young princes

learned in frank conversation with their father all he had to tell of temptation and transgression, of danger and redemption, perhaps the one would never have gone astray in his pride nor the other died a rebel in that wood of Ephraim. The Israelitish fathers were like many fathers still, they left the minds of their boys and girls uninstructed in life, uninstructed in the providence of God, and this in open neglect of the law which marked out their duty for them with clear injunction, recalling the themes and incidents on which they were to dwell.

One passage in the history of the past must have been vividly before the minds of those who crossed the Jordan under Joshua, and should have stood a protest and warning against the idolatry into which families so easily lapsed throughout the land. Over at Shittim, when Israel lay encamped on the skirts of the mountains of Moab, a terrible sentence of Moses had fallen like a thunderbolt. On some high place near the camp a festival of Midianitish idolatry, licentious in the extreme, attracted great numbers of Hebrews; they went astray after the worst fashion of paganism, and the nation was polluted in the idolatrous orgies. Then Moses gave judgment—"Take the heads of the people and hang them up before the Lord, against the sun." And while that hideous row of stakes, each bearing the transfixed body of a guilty chief, witnessed in the face of the sun for the Divine ordinance of purity, there fell a plague that carried off twenty-four thousand of the transgressors. Was that forgotten? Did the terrible punishment of those who sinned in the matter of Baal-

peor not haunt the memories of men when they entered the land of Baal-worship? No: like others, they were able to forget. Human nature is facile, and from a great horror of judgment can turn in quick recovery of the usual ease and confidence. Men have been in the valley of the shadow of death, where the mouth of hell is; they have barely escaped; but when they return upon it from another side they do not recognize the landmarks nor feel the need of being on their guard. They teach their children many things, but neglect to make them aware of that right-seeming way the end whereof are the ways of death.

The worship of the Baalim and Ashtaroth and the place which this came to have in Hebrew life require our attention here. Canaan had for long been more or less subject to the influence of Chaldea and Egypt, and "had received the imprint of their religious ideas. The fish-god of Babylon reappears at Ascalon in the form of Dagon, the name of the goddess Astarte and her character seem to be adapted from the Babylonian Ishtar. Perhaps these divinities were introduced at a time when part of the Canaanite tribes lived on the borders of the Persian Gulf, in daily contact with the inhabitants of Chaldea."<sup>1</sup> The Egyptian Isis and Osiris, again, are closely connected with the Tammuz and Astarte worshipped in Phœnicia. In a general way it may be said that all the races inhabiting Syria had the same religion, but "each tribe, each people, each town had its Lord, its Master, its Baal, designated by a particular title for distinction from

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<sup>1</sup> Maspero.

the masters or Baals of neighbouring cities. The gods adored at Tyre and Sidon were called Baal-Sur, the Master of Tyre; Baal-Sidon, the Master of Sidon. The highest among them, those that impersonated in its purity the conception of heavenly fire, were called kings of the gods. El or Kronos reigned at Byblos, Chemosh among the Moabites; Amman among the children of Ammon; Soutkhu among the Hittites." Melcarth, the Baal of the world of death, was the Master of Tyre. Each Baal was associated with a female divinity, who was the mistress of the town, the queen of the heavens. The common name of these goddesses was Astarte. There was an Ashtoreth of Chemosh among the Moabites. The Ashtoreth of the Hittites was called Tanit. There was an Ashtoreth Karnaim or Horned, so called with reference to the crescent moon; and another was Ashtoreth Naamah, the good Astarte. In short, a special Astarte could be created by any town and named by any fancy, and Baals were multiplied in the same way. It is, therefore, impossible to assign any distinct character to these inventions. The Baalim mostly represented forces of nature—the sun, the stars. The Astartes presided over love, birth, the different seasons of the year, and—war. "The multitude of secondary Baalim and Ashtaroth tended to resolve themselves into a single supreme pair, in comparison with whom the others had little more than a shadowy existence." As the sun and moon outshine all the other heavenly bodies, so two principal deities representing them were supreme.

The worship connected with this horde of fanciful beings is

well known to have merited the strongest language of detestation applied to it by the Hebrew prophets. The ceremonies were a strange and degrading blend of the licentious and the cruel, notorious even in a time of gross and hideous rites. The Baalim were supposed to have a fierce and envious disposition, imperiously demanding the torture and death not only of animals but of men. The horrible notion had taken root that in times of public danger king and nobles must sacrifice their children in fire for the pleasure of the god. And while nothing of this sort was done for the Ashtaroth their demands were in one aspect even more vile. Self-mutilation, self-defilement were acts of worship, and in the great festivals men and women gave themselves up to debauchery which cannot be described. No doubt some of the observances of this paganism were mild and simple. Feasts there were at the seasons of reaping and vintage which were of a bright and comparatively harmless character; and it was by taking part in these that Hebrew families began their acquaintance with the heathenism of the country. But the tendency of polytheism is ever downward. It springs from a curious and ignorant dwelling on the mysterious processes of nature, untamed fancy personifying the causes of all that is strange and horrible, constantly wandering therefore into more grotesque and lawless dreams of unseen powers and their claims on man. The imagination of the worshipper, which passes beyond his power of action, attributes to the gods energy more vehement, desires more sweeping, anger more dreadful than he finds in

himself. He thinks of beings who are strong in appetite and will and yet under no restraint or responsibility. In the beginning polytheism is not necessarily vile and cruel; but it must become so as it develops. The minds by whose fancies the gods are created and furnished with adventures are able to conceive characters vehemently cruel, wildly capricious and impure. But how can they imagine a character great in wisdom, holiness and justice? The additions of fable and belief made from age to age may hold in solution some elements that are good, some of man's yearning for the noble and true beyond him. The better strain, however, is overborne in popular talk and custom by the tendency to fear rather than to hope in presence of unknown powers, the necessity which is felt to avert possible anger of the gods or make sure of their patronage. Sacrifices are multiplied, the offerer exerting himself more and more to gain his main point at whatever expense; while he thinks of the world of gods as a region in which there is jealousy of man's respect and a multitude of rival claims all of which must be met. Thus the whole moral atmosphere is thrown into confusion.

Into a polytheism of this kind came Israel, to whom had been committed a revelation of the one true God, and in the first moment of homage at heathen altars the people lost the secret of its strength. Certainly Jehovah was not abandoned; He was thought of still as the Lord of Israel. But He was now one among many who had their rights and could repay the fervent worshipper. At one high-place it was Jehovah men sought, at

another the Baal of the hill and his Ashtoreth. Yet Jehovah was still the special patron of the Hebrew tribes and of no others, and in trouble they turned to Him for relief. So in the midst of mythology Divine faith had to struggle for existence. The stone pillars which the Israelites erected were mostly to the name of God, but Hebrews danced with Hittite and Jebusite around the poles of Astarte, and in revels of nature-worship they forgot their holy traditions, lost their vigour of body and soul. The doom of apostasy fulfilled itself. They were unable to stand before their enemies. "The hand of the Lord was against them for evil, and they were greatly distressed."

And why could not Israel rest in the debasement of idolatry? Why did not the Hebrews abandon their distinct mission as a nation and mingle with the races they came to convert or drive away? They could not rest; they could not mingle and forget. Is there ever peace in the soul of a man who falls from early impressions of good to join the licentious and the profane? He has still his own personality, shot through with recollections of youth and traits inherited from godly ancestors. It is impossible for him to be at one with his new companions in their revelry and vice. He finds that from which his souls revolts, he feels disgust which he has to overcome by a strong effort of perverted will. He despises his associates and knows in his inmost heart that he is of a different race. Worse he may become than they, but he is never the same. So was it in the degradation of the Israelites, both individually and as a nation. From complete absorption

among the peoples of Canaan they were preserved by hereditary influences which were part of their very life, by holy thoughts and hopes embodied in their national history, by the rags of that conscience which remained from the law-giving of Moses and the discipline of the wilderness. Moreover, akin as they were to the idolatrous races, they had a feeling of closer kinship with each other, tribe with tribe, family with family; and the worship of God at the little-frequented shrine still maintained the shadow at least of the national consecration. They were a people apart, these Beni-Israel, a people of higher rank than Amorites or Perizzites, Hittites or Phœnicians. Even when least alive to their destiny they were still held by it, led on secretly by that heavenly hand which never let them go. From time to time souls were born among them aglow with devout eagerness, confident in the faith of God. The tribes were roused out of lethargy by voices that woke many recollections of half-forgotten purpose and hope. Now from Judah in the south, now from Ephraim in the centre, now from Dan or Gilead a cry was raised. For a time at least manhood was quickened, national feeling became keen, the old faith was partly revived, and God had again a witness in His people.

We have found the writer of the Book of Judges consistent and unflinching in his condemnation of Israel; he is equally consistent and eager in his vindication of God. It is to him no doubtful thing, but an assured fact, that the Holy One came with Israel from Paran and marched with the people from Seir. He has no

hesitation in ascribing to Divine providence and grace the deeds of those men who go by the name of judges. It startles and even confounds some to note the plain direct terms in which God is made, so to speak, responsible for those rude warriors whose exploits we are to review,—for Ehud, for Jephthah, for Samson. The men are children of their age, vehement, often reckless, not answering to the Christian ideal of heroism. They do rough work in a rough way. If we found their history elsewhere than in the Bible we should be disposed to class them with the Roman Horatius, the Saxon Hereward, the Jutes Hengest and Horsa and hardly dare to call them men of God's hand. But here they are presented bearing the stamp of a Divine vocation; and in the New Testament it is emphatically reaffirmed. "What shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; ... who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, ... waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens."

There is a crude religious sentimentalism to which the Bible gives no countenance. Where we, mistaking the meaning of providence because we do not rightly believe in immortality, are apt to think with horror of the miseries of men, the vigorous veracity of sacred writers directs our thought to the moral issues of life and the vast movements of God's purifying design. Where we, ignorant of much that goes to the making of a world, lament the seeming confusion and the errors, the Bible seer discerns that the cup of red wine poured out is in the hand of Almighty

Justice and Wisdom. It is of a piece with the superficial feeling of modern society to doubt whether God could have any share in the deeds of Jephthah and the career of Samson, whether these could have any place in the Divine order. Look at Christ and His infinite compassion, it is said; read that God is love, and then reconcile if you can this view of His character with the idea which makes Barak and Gideon His ministers. Out of all such perplexities there is a straight way. You make light of moral evil and individual responsibility when you say that this war or that pestilence has no Divine mission. You deny eternal righteousness when you question whether a man, vindicating it in the time-sphere, can have a Divine vocation. The man is but a human instrument. True. He is not perfect, he is not even spiritual. True. Yet if there is in him a gleam of right and earnest purpose, if he stands above his time in virtue of an inward light which shows him but a single truth, and in the spirit of that strikes his blow—is it to be denied that within his limits he is a weapon of the holiest Providence, a helper of eternal grace?

The storm, the pestilence have a providential errand. They urge men to prudence and effort; they prevent communities from settling on their lees. But the hero has a higher range of usefulness. It is not mere prudence he represents, but the passion for justice. For right against might, for liberty against oppression he contends, and in striking his blow he compels his generation to take into account morality and the will of God. He may not see far, but at least he stirs inquiry as to the right way, and though

thousands die in the conflict he awakens there is a real gain which the coming age inherits. Such a one, however faulty however, as we may say, earthly, is yet far above mere earthly levels. His moral concepts may be poor and low compared with ours; but the heat that moves him is not of sense, not of clay. Obstructed it is by the ignorance and sin of our human estate, nevertheless it is a supernatural power, and so far as it works in any degree for righteousness, freedom, the realization of God, the man is a hero of faith.

We do not affirm here that God approves or inspires all that is done by the leaders of a suffering people in the way of vindicating what they deem their rights. Moreover, there are claims and rights so-called for which it is impious to shed a drop of blood. But if the state of humanity is such that the Son of God must die for it, is there any room to wonder that men have to die for it? Given a cause like that of Israel, a need of the whole world which Israel only could meet, and the men who unselfishly, at the risk of death, did their part in the front of the struggle which that cause and that need demanded, though they slew their thousands, were not men of whom the Christian teacher needs be afraid to speak. And there have been many such in all nations, for the principle by which we judge is of the broadest application,—men who have led the forlorn hopes of nations, driven back the march of tyrants, given law and order to an unsettled land.

Judge after judge was "raised up"—the word is true—and rallied the tribes of Israel, and while each lived there were

renewed energy and prosperity. But the moral revival was never in the deeps of life and no deliverance was permanent. It is only a faithful nation that can use freedom. Neither trouble nor release from trouble will certainly make either a man or a people steadily true to the best. Unless there is along with trouble a conviction of spiritual need and failure, men will forget the prayers and vows they made in their extremity. Thus in the history of Israel, as in the history of many a soul, periods of suffering and of prosperity succeed each other and there is no distinct growth of the religious life. All these experiences are meant to throw men back upon the seriousness of duty, and the great purpose God has in their existence. We must repent not because we are in pain or grief, but because we are estranged from the Holy One and have denied the God of Salvation. Until the soul comes to this it only struggles out of one pit to fall into another.

## V.

# *THE ARM OF ARAM AND OF OTHNIEL*

### **Judges iii. 1-11**

We come now to a statement of no small importance, which may be the cause of some perplexity. It is emphatically affirmed that God fulfilled His design for Israel by leaving around it in Canaan a circle of vigorous tribes very unlike each other, but alike in this, that each presented to the Hebrews a civilisation from which something might be learned but much had to be dreaded, a seductive form of paganism which ought to have been entirely resisted, an aggressive energy fitted to rouse their national feeling. We learn that Israel was led along a course of development resembling that by which other nations have advanced to unity and strength. As the Divine plan is unfolded, it is seen that not by undivided possession of the Promised Land, not by swift and fierce clearing away of opponents, was Israel to reach its glory and become Jehovah's witness, but in the way of patient fidelity amidst temptations, by long struggle and arduous discipline. And why should this cause perplexity? If moral education did not move on the same line for all peoples in every age, then indeed mankind would be put to intellectual

confusion. There was never any other way for Israel than for the rest of the world.

"These are the nations which the Lord left to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord." The first-named are the Philistines, whose settlements on the coast-plain toward Egypt were growing in power. They were a maritime race, apparently much like the Danish invaders of Saxon England, sea-rovers or pirates, ready for any fray that promised spoil. In the great coalition of peoples that fell on Egypt during the reign of Ramses III., about the year 1260 B.C., Philistines were conspicuous, and after the crushing defeat of the expedition they appear in larger numbers on the coast of Canaan. Their cities were military republics skilfully organized, each with a *seren* or war-chief, the chiefs of the hundred cities forming a council of federation. Their origin is not known; but we may suppose them to have been a branch of the Amorite family, who after a time of adventure were returning to their early haunts. It may be reckoned certain that in wealth and civilization they presented a marked contrast to the Israelites, and their equipments of all kinds gave them great advantage in the arts of war and peace. Even in the period of the Judges there were imposing temples in the Philistine cities and the worship must have been carefully ordered. How they compared with the Hebrews in domestic life we have no means of judging, but there was certainly some barrier of race, language, or custom between the peoples which

made intermarriage very rare. We can suppose that they looked upon the Hebrews from their higher worldly level as rude and slavish. Military adventurers not unwilling to sell their services for gold would be apt to despise a race half-nomad, half-rural. It was in war, not in peace, that Philistine and Hebrew met, contempt on either side gradually changing into keenest hatred as century after century the issue of battle was tried with varying success. And it must be said that it was well for the tribes of Jehovah rather to be in occasional subjection to the Philistines, and so learn to dread them, than to mix freely with those by whom the great ideas of Hebrew life were despised.

On the northward sea-board a quite different race, the Zidonians, or Phœnicians, were in one sense better neighbours to the Israelites, in another sense no better friends. While the Philistines were haughty, aristocratic, military, the Phœnicians were the great *bourgeoisie* of the period, clever, enterprising, eminently successful in trade. Like the other Canaanites and the ancestors of the Jews, they were probably immigrants from the lower Euphrates valley; unlike the others, they brought with them habits of commerce and skill in manufacture, for which they became famous along the Mediterranean shores and beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Between Philistine and Phœnician the Hebrew was mercifully protected from the absorbing interests of commercial life and the disgrace of prosperous piracy. The conscious superiority of the coast peoples in wealth and influence and the material elements of civilisation was itself a guard to the

Jews, who had their own sense of dignity, their own claim to assert. The configuration of the country helped the separateness of Israel, especially so far as Phœnicia was concerned, which lay mainly beyond the rampart of Lebanon and the gorge of the Litâny; while with the fortress of Tyre on the hither side of the natural frontier there appears to have been for a long time no intercourse, probably on account of its peculiar position. But the spirit of Phœnicia was the great barrier. Along the crowded wharves of Tyre and Zidon, in warehouses and markets, factories and workshops, a hundred industries were in full play, and in their luxurious dwellings the busy prosperous traders, with their silk-clad wives, enjoyed the pleasures of the age. From all this the Hebrew, rough and unkempt, felt himself shut out, perhaps with a touch of regret, perhaps with scorn equal to that on the other side. He had to live his life apart from that busy race, apart from its vivacity and enterprise, apart from its lubricity and worldliness. The contempt of the world is ill to bear, and the Jew no doubt found it so. But it was good for him. The tribes had time to consolidate, the religion of Jehovah became established before Phœnicia thought it worth while to court her neighbour. Early indeed the idolatry of the one people infected the other and there were the beginnings of trade, yet on the whole for many centuries they kept apart. Not till a king throned in Jerusalem could enter into alliance with a king of Tyre, crown with crown, did there come to be that intimacy which had so much risk for the Hebrew. The humbleness and poverty of Israel during the early centuries

of its history in Canaan was a providential safeguard. God would not lose His people, nor suffer it to forget its mission.

Among the inland races with whom the Israelites are said to have dwelt, the Amorites, though mentioned along with Perizzites and Hivites, had very distinct characteristics. They were a mountain people like the Scottish Highlanders, even in physiognomy much resembling them, a tall, white-skinned, blue-eyed race. Warlike we know they were, and the Egyptian representation of the siege of Dapur by Ramses II. shows what is supposed to be the standard of the Amorites on the highest tower, a shield pierced by three arrows surmounted by another arrow fastened across the top of the staff. On the east of Jordan they were defeated by the Israelites and their land between Arnon and Jabbok was allotted to Reuben and Gad. In the west they seem to have held their ground in isolated fortresses or small clans, so energetic and troublesome that it is specially noted in Samuel's time that a great defeat of the Philistines brought peace between Israel and the Amorites. A significant reference in the description of Ahab's idolatry—"he did very abominably in following idols according to all things as did the Amorites"—shows the religion of these people to have been Baal-worship of the grossest kind; and we may well suppose that by intermixture with them especially the faith of Israel was debased. Even now, it may be said, the Amorite is still in the land; a blue-eyed, fair-complexioned type survives, representing that ancient stock.

Passing some tribes whose names imply rather geographical

than ethnical distinctions, we come to the Hittites, the powerful people of whom in recent years we have learned something. At one time these Hittites were practically masters of the wide region from Ephesus in the west of Asia Minor to Carchemish on the Euphrates, and from the shores of the Black Sea to the south of Palestine. They appear to us in the archives of Thebes and the poem of the Laureate, Pentaur, as the great adversaries of Egypt in the days of Ramses I. and his successors; and one of the most interesting records is of the battle fought about 1383 B.C. at Kadesh on the Orontes, between the immense armies of the two nations, the Egyptians being led by Ramses II. Amazing feats were attributed to Ramses, but he was compelled to treat on equal terms with the "great king of Kheta," and the war was followed by a marriage between the Pharaoh and the daughter of the Hittite prince. Syria too was given up to the latter as his legitimate possession. The treaty of peace drawn up on the occasion, in the name of the chief gods of Egypt and of the Hittites, included a compact of offensive and defensive alliance and careful provisions for extradition of fugitives and criminals. Throughout it there is evident a great dependence upon the company of gods of either land, who are largely invoked to punish those who break and reward those who keep its terms. "He who shall observe these commandments which the silver tablet contains, whether he be of the people of Kheta or of the people of Egypt, because he has not neglected them, the company of the gods of the land of Kheta and the company of

the gods of the land of Egypt shall secure his reward and preserve life for him and his servants."<sup>2</sup> From this time the Amorites of southern Palestine and the minor Canaanite peoples submitted to the Hittite dominion, and it was while this subjection lasted that the Israelites under Joshua appeared on the scene. There can be no doubt that the tremendous conflict with Egypt had exhausted the population of Canaan and wasted the country, and so prepared the way for the success of Israel. The Hittites indeed were strong enough had they seen fit to oppose with great armies the new comers into Syria. But the centre of their power lay far to the north, perhaps in Cappadocia; and on the frontier towards Nineveh they were engaged with more formidable opponents. We may also surmise that the Hittites, whose alliance with Egypt was by Joshua's time somewhat decayed, would look upon the Hebrews, to begin with, as fugitives from the misrule of the Pharaoh who might be counted upon to take arms against their former oppressors. This would account, in part at least, for the indifference with which the Israelite settlement in Canaan was regarded; it explains why no vigorous attempt was made to drive back the tribes.

For the characteristics of the Hittites, whose appearance and dress constantly suggest a Mongolian origin, we can now consult their monuments. A vigorous people they must have been, capable of government, of extensive organization, concerned to perfect their arts as well as to increase their power. Original

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<sup>2</sup> "The Hittites," by A. H. Sayce, LL.D., p. 36.

contributors to civilization they probably were not, but they had skill to use what they found and spread it widely. Their worship of Sutekh or Soutkhu, and especially of Astarte under the name of Ma, who reappears in the Great Diana of Ephesus, must have been very elaborate. A single Cappadocian city is reported to have had at one time six thousand armed priestesses and eunuchs of that goddess. In Palestine there were not many of this distinct and energetic people when the Hebrews crossed the Jordan. A settlement seems to have remained about Hebron, but the armies had withdrawn; Kadesh on the Orontes was the nearest garrison. One peculiar institution of Hittite religion was the holy city, which afforded sanctuary to fugitives; and it is notable that some of these cities in Canaan, such as Kadesh-Naphtali and Hebron, are found among the Hebrew cities of refuge.

It was as a people at once enticed and threatened, invited to peace and constantly provoked to war, that Israel settled in the circle of Syrian nations. After the first conflicts, ending in the defeat of Adoni-bezek and the capture of Hebron and Kiriath-sepher, the Hebrews had an acknowledged place, partly won by their prowess, partly by the terror of Jehovah which accompanied their arms. To Philistines, Phœnicians and Hittites, as we have seen, their coming mattered little, and the other races had to make the best of affairs, sometimes able to hold their ground, sometimes forced to give way. The Hebrew tribes, for their part, were, on the whole, too ready to live at peace and to yield not a little for the sake of peace. Intermarriages made their position

safer, and they intermarried with Amorites, Hivites, Perizzites. Interchange of goods was profitable, and they engaged in barter. The observance of frontiers and covenants helped to make things smooth, and they agreed on boundary lines of territory and terms of fraternal intercourse. The acknowledgment of their neighbours' religion was the next thing, and from that they did not shrink. The new neighbours were practically superior to themselves in many ways, well-informed as to the soil, the climate, the methods of tillage necessary in the land, well able to teach useful arts and simple manufactures. Little by little the debasing notions and bad customs that infest pagan society entered Hebrew homes. Comfort and prosperity came; but comfort was dearly bought with loss of pureness, and prosperity with loss of faith. The watchwords of unity were forgotten by many. But for the sore oppressions of which the Mesopotamian was the first the tribes would have gradually lost all coherence and vigour and become like those poor tatters of races that dragged out an inglorious existence between Jordan and the Mediterranean plain.

Yet it is with nations as with men; those that have a reason of existence and the desire to realize it, even at intervals, may fall away into pitiful languor if corrupted by prosperity, but when the need comes their spirit will be renewed. While Hivites, Perizzites and even Amorites had practically nothing to live for, but only cared to live, the Hebrews felt oppression and restraint in their inmost marrow. What the faithful servants of God among them

urged in vain the iron heel of Cushan-rishathaim made them remember and realize that they had a God from Whom they were basely departing, a birthright they were selling for pottage. In Doubling Castle, under the chains of Despair, they bethought them of the Almighty and His ancient promises, they cried unto the Lord. And it was not the cry of an afflicted church; Israel was far from deserving that name. Rather was it the cry of a prodigal people scarcely daring to hope that the Father would forgive and save.

Nothing yet found in the records of Babylon or Assyria throws any light on the invasion of Cushan-rishathaim, whose name, which seems to mean Cushan of the Two Evil Deeds, may be taken to represent his character as the Hebrews viewed it. He was a king one of whose predecessors a few centuries before had given a daughter in marriage to the third Amenophis of Egypt, and with her the Aramæan religion to the Nile valley. At that time Mesopotamia, or Aram-Naharaim, was one of the greatest monarchies of western Asia. Stretching along the Euphrates from the Khabour river towards Carchemish and away to the highlands of Armenia, it embraced the district in which Terah and Abram first settled when the family migrated from Ur of the Chaldees. In the days of the judges of Israel, however, the glory of Aram had faded. The Assyrians threatened its eastern frontier, and about 1325 B.C., the date at which we have now arrived, they laid waste the valley of the Khabour. We can suppose that the pressure of this rising empire was one cause of the expedition of Cushan

towards the western sea.

It remains a question, however, why the Mesopotamian king should have been allowed to traverse the land of the Hittites, either by way of Damascus or the desert route that led past Tadmor, in order to fall on the Israelites; and there is this other question, What led him to think of attacking Israel especially among the dwellers in Canaan? In pursuing these inquiries we have at least presumption to guide us. Carchemish on the Euphrates was a great Hittite fortress commanding the fords of that deep and treacherous river. Not far from it, within the Mesopotamian country, was Pethor, which was at once a Hittite and an Aramæan town—Pethor the city of Balaam with whom the Hebrews had had to reckon shortly before they entered Canaan. Now Cushan-rishathaim, reigning in this region, occupied the middle ground between the Hittites and Assyria on the east, also between them and Babylon on the south-east; and it is probable that he was in close alliance with the Hittites. Suppose then that the Hittite king, who at first regarded the Hebrews with indifference, was now beginning to view them with distrust or to fear them as a people bent on their own ends, not to be reckoned on for help against Egypt, and we can easily see that he might be more than ready to assist the Mesopotamians in their attack on the tribes. To this we may add a hint which is derived from Balaam's connection with Pethor, and the kind of advice he was in the way of giving to those who consulted him. Does it not seem probable enough that some counsel of

his survived his death and now guided the action of the king of Aram? Balaam, by profession a soothsayer, was evidently a great political personage of his time, foreseeing, crafty and vindictive. Methods of his for suppressing Israel, the force of whose genius he fully recognised, were perhaps sold to more than one kingly employer. "The land of the children of his people" would almost certainly keep his counsel in mind and seek to avenge his death. Thus against Israel particularly among the dwellers in Canaan the arms of Cushan-rishathaim would be directed, and the Hittites, who scarcely found it needful to attack Israel for their own safety, would facilitate his march.

Here then we may trace the revival of a feud which seemed to have died away fifty years before. Neither nations nor men can easily escape from the enmity they have incurred and the entanglements of their history. When years have elapsed and strifes appear to have been buried in oblivion, suddenly, as if out of the grave, the past is apt to arise and confront us, sternly demanding the payment of its reckoning. We once did another grievous wrong, and now our fondly cherished belief that the man we injured had forgotten our injustice is completely dispelled. The old anxiety, the old terror breaks in afresh upon our lives. Or it was in doing our duty that we braved the enmity of evil-minded men and punished their crimes. But though they have passed away their bitter hatred bequeathed to others still survives. Now the battle of justice and fidelity has to be fought over again, and well is it for us if we are found ready in the strength of God.

And, in another aspect, how futile is the dream some indulge of getting rid of their history, passing beyond the memory or resurrection of what has been. Shall Divine forgiveness obliterate those deeds of which we have repented? Then the deeds being forgotten the forgiveness too would pass into oblivion and all the gain of faith and gratitude it brought would be lost. Do we expect never to retrace in memory the way we have travelled? As well might we hope, retaining our personality, to become other men than we are. The past, good and evil, remains and will remain, that we may be kept humble and moved to ever-increasing thankfulness and fervour of soul. We rise "on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things," and every forgotten incident by which moral education has been provided for must return to light. The heaven we hope for is not to be one of forgetfulness, but a state bright and free through remembrance of the grace that saved us at every stage and the circumstances of our salvation. As yet we do not half know what God has done for us, what His providence has been. There must be a resurrection of old conflicts, strifes, defeats and victories in order that we may understand the grace which is to keep us safe for ever.

Attacked by Cushan of the Two Crimes the Israelites were in evil case. They had not the consciousness of Divine support which sustained them once. They had forsaken Him whose presence in the camp made their arms victorious. Now they must face the consequences of their fathers' deeds without their fathers' heavenly courage. Had they still been a united nation full

of faith and hope, the armies of Aram would have assailed them in vain. But they were without the spirit which the crisis required. For eight years the northern tribes had to bear a sore oppression, soldiers quartered in their cities, tribute exacted at the point of the sword, their harvests enjoyed by others. The stern lesson was taught them that Canaan was to be no peaceful habitation for a people that renounced the purpose of its existence. The struggle became more hopeless year by year, the state of affairs more wretched. So at last the tribes were driven by stress of persecution and calamity to call again on the name of God, and some faint hope of succour broke like a misty morning over the land.

It was from the far south that help came in response to the piteous cry of the oppressed in the north; the deliverer was Othniel, who has already appeared in the history. After his marriage with Achsah, daughter of Caleb, we must suppose him living as quietly as possible in his south-lying farm, there increasing in importance year by year till now he is a respected chief of the tribe of Judah. In frequent skirmishes with Arab marauders from the wilderness he has distinguished himself, maintaining the fame of his early exploit. Better still, he is one of those who have kept the great traditions of the nation, a man mindful of the law of God, deriving strength of character from fellowship with the Almighty. "The Spirit of Jehovah came upon him and he judged Israel; and he went out to war, and Jehovah delivered Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into

his hand."

"He judged Israel and went out to war." Significant is the order of these statements. The judging of Israel by this man, on whom the Spirit of Jehovah was, meant no doubt inquisition into the religious and moral state, condemnation of the idolatry of the tribes and a restoration to some extent of the worship of God. In no other way could the strength of Israel be revived. The people had to be healed before they could fight, and the needed cure was spiritual. Hopeless invariably have been the efforts of oppressed peoples to deliver themselves unless some trust in a divine power has given them heart for the struggle. When we see an army bow in prayer as one man before joining battle, as the Swiss did at Morat and the Scots at Bannockburn, we have faith in their spirit and courage, for they are feeling their dependence in the Supernatural. Othniel's first care was to suppress idolatry, to teach Israelites anew the forgotten name and law of God and their destiny as a nation. Well did he know that this alone would prepare the way for success. Then, having gathered an army fit for his purpose, he was not long in sweeping the garrisons of Cushan out of the land.

Judgment and then deliverance; judgment of the mistakes and sins men have committed, thereby bringing themselves into trouble; conviction of sin and righteousness; thereafter guidance and help that their feet may be set on a rock and their goings established—this is the right sequence. That God should help the proud, the self-sufficient out of their troubles in order that

they may go on in pride and vainglory, or that He should save the vicious from the consequences of their vice and leave them to persist in their iniquity, would be no Divine work. The new mind and the right spirit must be put in men, they must hear their condemnation, lay it to heart and repent, there must be a revival of holy purpose and aspiration first. Then the oppressors will be driven from the land, the weight of trouble lifted from the soul.

Othniel the first of the judges seems one of the best. He is not a man of mere rude strength and dashing enterprise. Nor is he one who runs the risk of sudden elevation to power, which few can stand. A person of acknowledged honour and sagacity, he sees the problem of the time and does his best to solve it. He is almost unique in this, that he appears without offence, without shame. And his judgeship is honourable to Israel. It points to a higher level of thought and greater seriousness among the tribes than in the century when Jephthah and Samson were the acknowledged heroes. The nation had not lost its reverence for the great names and hopes of the exodus when it obeyed Othniel and followed him to battle.

In modern times there would seem to be scarcely any understanding of the fact that no man can do real service as a political leader unless he is a fearer of God, one who loves righteousness more than country, and serves the Eternal before any constituency. Sometimes a nation low enough in morality has been so far awake to its need and danger as to give the helm, at least for a time, to a servant of truth and righteousness and

to follow where he leads. But more commonly is it the case that political leaders are chosen anywhere rather than from the ranks of the spiritually earnest. It is oratorical dash now, and now the cleverness of the intriguer, or the power of rank and wealth, that catches popular favour and exalts a man in the state. Members of parliament, cabinet ministers, high officials need have no devoutness, no spiritual seriousness or insight. A nation generally seeks no such character in its legislators and is often content with less than decent morality. Is it then any wonder that politics are arid and government a series of errors? We need men who have the true idea of liberty and will set nations nominally Christian on the way of fulfilling their mission to the world. When the people want a spiritual leader he will appear; when they are ready to follow one of high and pure temper he will arise and show the way. But the plain truth is that our chiefs in the state, in society and business must be the men who represent the general opinion, the general aim. While we are in the main a worldly people, the best guides, those of spiritual mind, will never be allowed to carry their plans. And so we come back to the main lesson of the whole history, that only as each citizen is thoughtful of God and of duty, redeemed from selfishness and the world, can there be a true commonwealth, honourable government, beneficent civilization.

# VI.

## *THE DAGGER AND THE OX-GOAD*

### **Judges iii. 12-31**

The world is served by men of very diverse kinds, and we pass now to one who is in strong contrast to Israel's first deliverer. Othniel the judge without reproach is followed by Ehud the regicide. The long peace which the country enjoyed after the Mesopotamian army was driven out allowed a return of prosperity and with it a relaxing of spiritual tone. Again there was disorganization; again the Hebrew strength decayed and watchful enemies found an opportunity. The Moabites led the attack, and their king was at the head of a federation including the Ammonites and the Amalekites. It was this coalition the power of which Ehud had to break.

We can only surmise the causes of the assault made on the Hebrews west of Jordan by those peoples on the east. When the Israelites first appeared on the plains of the Jordan under the shadow of the mountains of Moab, before crossing into Palestine proper, Balak king of Moab viewed with alarm this new nation which was advancing to seek a settlement so near his territory. It was then he sent to Pethor for Balaam, in the

hope that by a powerful incantation or curse the great diviner would blight the Hebrew armies and make them an easy prey. Notwithstanding this scheme, which even to the Israelites did not appear contemptible, Moses so far respected the relationship between Moab and Israel that he did not attack Balak's kingdom, although at the time it had been weakened by an unsuccessful contest with the Amorites from Gilead. Moab to the south and Ammon to the north were both left unharmed.

But to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh was allotted the land from which the Amorites had been completely driven, a region extending from the frontier of Moab on the south away towards Hermon and the Argob; and these tribes entering vigorously on their possession could not long remain at peace with the bordering races. We can easily see how their encroachments, their growing strength would vex Moab and Ammon and drive them to plans of retaliation. Balaam had not cursed Israel; he had blessed it, and the blessing was being fulfilled. It seemed to be decreed that all other peoples east of Jordan were to be overborne by the descendants of Abraham; yet one fear wrought against another, and the hour of Israel's security was seized as a fit occasion for a vigorous sally across the river. A desperate effort was made to strike at the heart of the Hebrew power and assert the claims of Chemosh to be a greater god than He Who was revered at the sanctuary of the ark.

Or Amalek may have instigated the attack. Away in the Sinaitic wilderness there stood an altar which Moses had

named Jehovah-Nissi, Jehovah is my banner, and that altar commemorated a great victory gained by Israel over the Amalekites. The greater part of a century had gone by since the battle, but the memory of defeat lingers long with the Arab—and these Amalekites were pure Arabs, savage, vindictive, cherishing their cause of war, waiting their revenge. We know the command in Deuteronomy, "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt. How he met thee by the way and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee. Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. Thou shalt not forget it." We may be sure that Reuben and Gad did not forget the dastardly attack; we may be sure that Amalek did not forget the day of Rephidim. If Moab was not of itself disposed to cross the Jordan and fall on Benjamin and Ephraim, there was the urgency of Amalek, the proffered help of that fiery people to ripen decision. The ferment of war rose. Moab, having walled cities to form a basis of operations, took the lead. The confederates marched northward along the Dead Sea, seized the ford near Gilgal and mastering the plain of Jericho pushed their conquest beyond the hills. Nor was it a temporary advance. They established themselves. Eighteen years afterwards we find Eglon, in his palace or castle near the City of Palm Trees, claiming authority over all Israel.

So the Hebrew tribes, partly by reason of an old strife not forgotten, partly because they have gone on vigorously adding to their territory, again suffer assault and are brought

under oppression, and the coalition against them reminds us of confederacies that are in full force to-day. Ammon and Moab are united against the church of Christ, and Amalek joins in the attack. The parable is one, we shall say, of the opposition the church is constantly provoking, constantly experiencing, not entirely to its own credit. Allowing that, in the main, Christianity is truly and honestly aggressive, that on its march to the heights it does straight battle with the enemies of mankind and thus awakens the hatred of bandit Amaleks, yet this is not a complete account of the assaults which are renewed century after century. Must it not be owned that those who pass for Christians often go beyond the lines and methods of their proper warfare and are found on fields where the weapons are carnal and the fight is not "the good fight of faith"? There is a strain of modern talk which defends the worldly ambition of Christian men, sounding very hollow and insincere to all excepting those whose interest and illusion it is to think it heavenly. We hear from a thousand tongues the gospel of Christianized commerce, of sanctified success, of making business a religion. In the press and hurry of competition there is a less and a greater conscientiousness. Let men have it in the greater degree, let them be less anxious for speedy success than some they know, not quite so eager to add factory to factory and field to field, more careful to interpret bargains fairly and do good work; let them figure often as benefactors and be free with their money to the church, and the residue of worldly ambition is glorified, being

sufficient, perhaps, to develop a merchant prince, a railway king, a "millionaire" of the kind the age adores. Thus it comes to pass that the domain which appeared safe enough from the followers of Him who sought no power in the earthly range is invaded by men who reckon all their business efforts privileged under the laws of heaven, and every advantage they win a Divine plan for wresting money from the hands of the devil.

Now it is upon Christianity as approving all this that the Moabites and Ammonites of our day are falling. They are frankly worshippers of Chemosh and Milcom, not of Jehovah; they believe in wealth, their all is staked on the earthly prosperity and enjoyment for which they strive. It is too bad, they feel, to have their sphere and hopes curtailed by men who profess no respect for the world, no desire for its glory but a constant preference for things unseen; they writhe when they consider the triumphs wrested from them by rivals who count success an answer to prayer and believe themselves favourites of God. Or the frank heathen finds that in business a man professing Christianity in the customary way is as little cumbered as himself by any disdain of tarnished profits and "smart" devices. What else can be expected but that, driven back and back by the energy of Christians so called, the others shall begin to think Christianity itself largely a pretence? Do we wonder to see the revolution in France hurling its forces not only against wealth and rank, but also against the religion identified with wealth and rank? Do we wonder to see in our day socialism, which girds at great fortunes as an insult

to humanity, joining hands with agnosticism and secularism to make assault on the church? It is precisely what might be looked for; nay, more, the opposition will go on till Christian profession is purged of hypocrisy and Christian practice is harmonized with the law of Christ. Not the push, not the equivocal success of one person here and there is it that creates doubt of Christianity and provokes antagonism, but the whole systems of society and business in so-called Christian lands, and even the conduct of affairs within the church, the strain of feeling there. For in the church as without it wealth and rank are important in themselves, and make some important who have little or no other claim to respect. In the church as without it methods are adopted that involve large outlay and a constant need for the support of the wealthy; in the church as without it life depends too much on the abundance of the things that are possessed. And, in the not unfair judgment of those who stand outside, all this proceeds from a secret doubt of Christ's law and authority, which more than excuses their own denial. The strifes of the day, even those that turn on the Godhead of Christ and the inspiration of the Bible, as well as on the divine claim of the church, are not due solely to hatred of truth and the depravity of the human heart. They have more reason than the church has yet confessed. Christianity in its practical and speculative aspects is one; it cannot be a creed unless it is a life. It is essentially a life not conformed to this world, but transformed, redeemed. Our faith will stand secure from all attacks, vindicated as a supernatural

revelation and inspiration, when the whole of church life and Christian endeavour shall rise above the earthly and be manifest everywhere as a fervent striving for the spiritual and eternal.

We have been assuming the unfaithfulness of Israel to its duty and vocation. The people of God, instead of commending His faith by their neighbourliness and generosity, were, we fear, too often proud and selfish, seeking their own things not the well-being of others, sending no attractive light into the heathenism around. Moab was akin to the Hebrews and in many respects similar in character. When we come to the Book of Ruth we find a certain intercourse between the two. Ammon, more unsettled and barbarous, was of the same stock. Israel, giving nothing to these peoples, but taking all she could from them, provoked antagonism all the more bitter that they were of kin to her, and they felt no scruple when their opportunity came. Not only had the Israelites to suffer for their failure, but Moab and Ammon also. The wrong beginning of the relations between them was never undone. Moab and Ammon went on worshipping their own gods, enemies of Israel to the last.

Ehud appears a deliverer. He was a Benjamite, a man left-handed; he chose his own method of action, and it was to strike directly at the Moabite king. Eager words regarding the shamefulness of Israel's subjection had perhaps already marked him as a leader, and it may have been with the expectation that he would do a bold deed that he was chosen to bear the periodical tribute on this occasion to Eglon's palace. Girding a

long dagger under his garment on his right thigh, where if found it might appear to be worn without evil intent, he set out with some attendants to the Moabite head-quarters. The narrative is so vivid that we seem able to follow Ehud step by step. He has gone from the neighbourhood of Jebus to Jericho, perhaps by the road in which the scene of our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan was long afterwards laid. Having delivered the tribute into the hands of Eglon he goes southward a few miles to the sculptured stones at Gilgal, where possibly some outpost of the Moabites kept guard. There he leaves his attendants, and swiftly retracing his steps to the palace craves a private interview with the king and announces a message from God, at Whose name Eglon respectfully rises from his seat. One flash of the dagger and the bloody deed is done. Leaving the king's dead body there in the chamber, Ehud bolts the door and boldly passes the attendants, then quickening his pace is soon beyond Gilgal and away by another route through the steep hills to the mountains of Ephraim. Meanwhile the murder is discovered and there is confusion at the palace. No one being at hand to give orders, the garrison is unprepared to act, and as Ehud loses no time in gathering a band and returning to finish his work, the fords of Jordan are taken before the Moabites can cross to the eastern side. They are caught, and the defeat is so decisive that Israel is free again for fourscore years.

Now this deed of Ehud's was clearly a case of assassination, and as such we have to consider it. The crime is one which

stinks in our nostrils because it is associated with treachery and cowardice, the basest revenge or the most undisciplined passion. But if we go back to times of ruder morality and regard the circumstances of such a people as Israel, scattered and oppressed, waiting for a sign of bold energy that may give it new heart, we can easily see that one who chose to act as Ehud did would by no means incur the reprobation we now attach to the assassin. To go no farther back than the French Revolution and the deed of Charlotte Corday, we cannot reckon her among the basest—that woman of "the beautiful still countenance" who believed her task to be the duty of a patriot. Nevertheless, it is not possible to make a complete defence of Ehud. His act was treacherous. The man he slew was a legitimate king, and is not said to have done his ruling ill. Even allowing for the period, there was something peculiarly detestable in striking one to death who stood up reverently expecting a message from God. Yet Ehud may have thoroughly believed himself to be a Divine instrument.

This too we see, that the great just providence of the Almighty is not impeached by such an act. No word in the narrative justifies assassination; but, being done, place is found for it as a thing overruled for good in the development of Israel's history. Man has no defence for his treachery and violence, yet in the process of events the barbarous deed, the fierce crime, are shown to be under the control of the Wisdom that guides all men and things. And here the issue which justifies Divine providence, though it does not purge the criminal, is clear. For through Ehud a genuine

deliverance was wrought for Israel. The nation, curbed by aliens, overborne by an idolatrous power, was free once more to move toward the great spiritual end for which it had been created. We might be disposed to say that on the whole Israel made nothing of freedom, that the faith of God revived and the heart of the people became devout in times of oppression rather than of liberty. In a sense it was so, and the story of this people is the story of all, for men go to sleep over their best, they misuse freedom, they forget why they are free. Yet every eulogy of freedom is true. Man must even have the power of misusing it if he is to arrive at the best. It is in liberty that manhood is nursed, and therefore in liberty that religion matures. Autocratic laws mean tyranny, and tyranny denies the soul its responsibility to justice, truth, and God. Mind and conscience held from their high office, responsibility to the greatest overborne by some tyrant hand that may seem beneficent, the soul has no space, faith no room to breathe; man is kept from the spontaneity and gladness of his proper life. So we have to win liberty in hard struggle and know ourselves free in order that we may belong completely to God.

See how life advances! God deals with the human race according to a vast plan of discipline leading to heights which at first appear inaccessible. Freedom is one of the first of these, and only by way of it are the higher summits reached. During the long ages of dark and weary struggle, which seem to many but a fruitless martyrdom, the Divine idea was interfused with all the strife. Not one blind stroke, not one agony of the craving soul

was wasted. In all the wisdom of God wrought for man, through man's pathetic feebleness or most daring achievement. So out of the chaos of the gloomy valleys a highway of order was raised by which the race should mount to Freedom and thence to Faith.

We see it in the history of nations, those that have led the way and those that are following. The possessors of clear faith have won it in liberty. In Switzerland, in Scotland, in England, the order has been, first civil freedom, then Christian thought and vigour. Wallace and Bruce prepare the way for Knox; Boadicea, Hereward, the Barons of Magna Charta for Wycliffe and the Reformation; the men of the Swiss Cantons who won Morgarten and routed Charles the Bold were the forerunners of Zwingli and Farel. Israel, too, had its heroes of freedom; and even those who, like Ehud and Samson, did little or nothing for faith and struck wildly, wrongly for their country, did yet choose consciously to serve their people and were helpers of a righteousness and a holy purpose they did not know. When all has been said against them it remains true that the freedom they brought to Israel was a Divine gift.

It is to be remarked that Ehud did not judge Israel. He was a deliverer, but nowise fitted to exercise high office in the name of God. In some way not made clear in the narrative he had become the centre of the resolute spirits of Benjamin and was looked to by them to find an opportunity of striking at the oppressors. His calling, we may say, was human, not Divine; it was limited, not national; and he was not a man who could rise to any high thought

of leadership. The heads of tribes, ingloriously paying tribute to the Moabites, may have scoffed at him as of no account. Yet he did what they supposed impossible. The little rising grew with the rapidity of a thunder-cloud, and, when it passed, Moab, smitten as by a lightning flash, no longer overshadowed Israel. As for the deliverer, his work having been done apparently in the course of a few days, he is seen no more in the history. While he lived, however, his name was a terror to the enemies of Israel, for what he had effected once he might be depended upon to do again if necessity arose. And the land had rest.

Here is an example of what is possible to the obscure whose qualifications are not great, but who have spirit and firmness, who are not afraid of dangers and privations on the way to an end worth gaining, be it the deliverance of their country, the freedom or purity of their church, or the rousing of society against a flagrant wrong. Do the rich and powerful angrily refuse their patronage? Do they find much to say about the impossibility of doing anything, the evil of disturbing people's minds, the duty of submission to Providence and to the advice of wise and learned persons? Those who see the time and place for acting, who hear the clarion-call of duty, will not be deterred. Armed for their task with fit weapons—the two-edged dagger of truth for the corpulent lie, the penetrating stone of a just scorn for the forehead of arrogance, they have the right to go forth, the right to succeed, though probably when the stroke has told many will be heard lamenting its untimeliness and proving the dangerous

indiscretion of Ehud and all who followed him.

In the same line another type is represented by Shamgar, son of Anath, the man of the ox-goad, who considered not whether he was equipped for attacking Philistines, but turned on them from the plough, his blood leaping in him with swift indignation. The instrument of his assault was not made for the use to which it was put: the power lay in the arm that wielded the goad and the fearless will of the man who struck for his own birthright, freedom,—for Israel's birthright, to be the servant of no other race. Undoubtedly it is well that, in any efforts made for the church or for society, men should consider how they are to act and should furnish themselves in the best manner for the work that is to be done. No outfit of knowledge, skill, experience is to be despised. A man does not serve the world better in ignorance than in learning, in bluntness than in refinement. But the serious danger for such an age as our own is that strength may be frittered away and zeal expended in the mere preparation of weapons, in the mere exercise before the war begins. The important points at issue are apt to be lost sight of, and the vital distinctions on which the whole battle turns to fade away in an atmosphere of compromise. There are those who, to begin, are Israelites indeed, with a keen sense of their nationality, of the urgency of certain great thoughts and the example of heroes. Their nationality becomes less and less to them as they touch the world; the great thoughts begin to seem parochial and antiquated; the heroes are found to have been mistaken, their names cease

to thrill. The man now sees nothing to fight for, he cares only to go on perfecting his equipment. Let us do him justice. It is not the toil of the conflict he shrinks from, but the rudeness of it, the dust and heat of warfare. He is no voluntary now, for he values the dignity of a State Church and feels the charm of ancient traditions. He is not a good churchman, for he will not be pledged to any creed or opposed to any school. He is rarely seen on any political platform, for he hates the watchwords of party. And this is the least of it. He is a man without a cause, a believer without a faith, a Christian without a stroke of brave work to do in the world. We love his mildness; we admire his mental possessions, his broad sympathies. But when we are throbbing with indignation he is too calm; when we catch at the ox-goad and fly at the enemy we know that he disdains our weapon and is affronted by our fire. Better, if it must be so, the rustic from the plough, the herdsman from the hill-side; better far he of the camel's hair garment and the keen cry, Repent, repent!

Israel, then, appears in these stories of her iron age as the cradle of the manhood of the modern world; in Israel the true standard was lifted up for the people. It is liberty put to a noble use that is the mark of manhood, and in Israel's history the idea of responsibility to the one living and true God takes form and clearness as that alone which fulfils and justifies liberty. Israel has a God Whose will man must do, and for the doing of it he is free. If at the outset the vigour which this thought of God infused into the Hebrew struggle for independence was

tempestuous; if Jehovah was seen not in the majesty of eternal justice and sublime magnanimity, not as the Friend of all, but as the unseen King of a favoured people,—still, as freedom came, there came with it always, in some prophetic word, some Divine psalm, a more living conception of God as gracious, merciful, holy, unchangeable; and notwithstanding all lapses the Hebrew was a man of higher quality than those about him. You stand by the cradle and see no promise, nothing to attract. But give the faith which is here in infancy time to assert itself, give time for the vision of God to enlarge, and the finest type of human life will arise and establish itself, a type possible in no other way. Egypt with its long and wonderful history gives nothing to the moral life of the new world, for it produces no men. Its kings are despots, tomb-builders, its people contented or discontented slaves. Babylon and Nineveh are names that dwarf Israel's into insignificance, but their power passes and leaves only some monuments for the antiquarian, some corroborations of a Hebrew record. Egypt and Chaldea, Assyria and Persia never reached through freedom the idea of man's proper life, never rose to the sense of that sublime calling or bowed in that profound adoration of the Holy One which made the Israelite, rude fanatic as he often was, a man and a father of men. From Egypt, from Babylon,—yea, from Greece and Rome came no redeemer of mankind, for they grew bewildered in the search after the chief end of existence and fell before they found it. In the prepared people it was, the people cramped in the narrow land between

the Syrian desert and the sea, that the form of the future Man was seen, and there, where the human spirit felt at least, if it did not realise its dignity and place, the Messiah was born.

## VII.

# *THE SIBYL OF MOUNT EPHRAIM*

### **Judges iv**

There arises now in Israel a prophetess, one of those rare women whose souls burn with enthusiasm and holy purpose when the hearts of men are abject and despondent; and to Deborah it is given to make a nation hear her call. Of prophetesses the world has seen but few; generally the woman has her work of teaching and administering justice in the name of God within a domestic circle and finds all her energy needed there. But queens have reigned with firm nerve and clear sagacity in many a land, and now and again a woman's voice has struck the deep note which has roused a nation to its duty. Such in the old Hebrew days was Deborah, wife of Lappidoth.

It was a time of miserable thralldom in Israel when she became aware of her destiny and began the sacred enterprise of her life. From Hazor in the north near the waters of Merom Israel was ruled by Jabin, king of the Canaanites—not the first of the name, for Joshua had before defeated one Jabin king of Hazor, and slain him. During the peace that followed Ehud's triumph over Moab the Hebrews, busy with worldly affairs, failed

to estimate a danger which year by year became more definite and pressing—the rise of the ancient strongholds of Canaan and their chiefs to new activity and power. Little by little the cities Joshua destroyed were rebuilt, re-fortified and made centres of warlike preparation. The old inhabitants of the land recovered spirit, while Israel lapsed into foolish confidence. At Harosheth of the Gentiles, under the shadow of Carmel, near the mouth of the Kishon, armourers were busy forging weapons and building chariots of iron. The Hebrews did not know what was going on, or missed the purpose that should have thrust itself on their notice. Then came the sudden rush of the chariots and the onset of the Canaanite troops, fierce, irresistible. Israel was subdued and bowed to a yoke all the more galling that it was a people they had conquered and perhaps despised that now rode over them. In the north at least the Hebrews were kept in servitude for twenty years, suffered to remain in the land but compelled to pay heavy tribute, many of them, it is likely, enslaved or allowed but a nominal independence. Deborah's song vividly describes the condition of things in her country. Shamgar had made a clearance on the Philistine border and kept his footing as a leader, but elsewhere the land was so swept by Canaanite spoilers that the highways were unused and Hebrew travellers kept to the tortuous and difficult by-paths down in the glens or among the mountains. There was war in all the gates, but in Israelite dwellings neither shield nor spear. Defenceless and crushed the people lay crying to gods that could not save, turning ever to new gods in strange

despair, the national state far worse than when Cushan's army held the land or when Eglon ruled from the City of Palm Trees.

Born before this time of oppression Deborah spent her childhood and youth in some village of Issachar, her home a rude hut covered with brushwood and clay, like those which are still seen by travellers. Her parents, we must believe, had more religious feeling than was common among Hebrews of the time. They would speak to her of the name and law of Jehovah, and she, we doubt not, loved to hear. But with the exception of brief oral traditions fitfully repeated and an example of reverence for sacred times and duties, a mere girl would have no advantages. Even if her father was chief of a village her lot would be hard and monotonous, as she aided in the work of the household and went morning and evening to fetch water from the spring or tended a few sheep on the hill-side. While she was yet young the Canaanite oppression began, and she with others felt the tyranny and the shame. The soldiers of Jabin came and lived at free quarters among the villagers, wasting their property. The crops were perhaps assessed, as they are at the present day in Syria, before they were reaped, and sometimes half or even more would be swept away by the remorseless collector of tribute. The people turned thriftless and sullen. They had nothing to gain by exerting themselves when the soldiers and the tax-gatherer were ready to exact so much the more, leaving them still in poverty. Now and again there might be a riot. Maddened by insults and extortion the men of the village would make a stand. But without weapons,

without a leader, what could they effect? The Canaanite troops were upon them; some were killed, others carried away, and things became worse than before.

There was not much prospect at such a time for a Hebrew maiden whose lot it seemed to be, while yet scarcely out of her childhood, to be married like the rest and sink into a household drudge, toiling for a husband who in his turn laboured for the oppressor. But there was a way then, as there is always a way for the high-spirited to save life from bareness and desolation; and Deborah found her path. Her soul went forth to her people, and their sad state moved her to something more than a woman's grief and rebellion. As years went by the traditions of the past revealed their meaning to her, deeper and larger thoughts came, a beginning of hope for the tribes so downcast and weary. Once they had swept victoriously through the land and smitten that very fortress which again overshadowed all the north. It was in the name of Jehovah and by His help that Israel then triumphed. Clearly the need was for a new covenant with Him; the people must repent and return to the Lord. Did Deborah put this before her parents, her husband? Doubtless they agreed with her, but could see no way of action, no opportunity for such as they. As she spoke more and more eagerly, as she ventured to urge the men of her village to bestir themselves, perhaps a few were moved, but the rest heard carelessly or derided her. We can imagine Deborah in that time of trial growing up into tall and striking womanhood, watching with indignation many a scene

in which her people showed a craven fear or joined slavishly in heathen revels. As she spoke and saw her words burn the hearts of some to whom they were spoken, the sense of power and duty came. In vain she looked for a prophet, a leader, a man of Jehovah to rekindle a flame in the nation's heart. A flame! It was in her own soul, she might wake it in other souls; Jehovah helping her she would.

But when in her native tribe the brave woman began to urge with prophetic eloquence the return to God and to preach a holy war her time of peril came. Issachar lay completely under the survey of Jabin's officers, overawed by his chariots. And one who would deliver a servile people had need to fear treachery. Issachar was "a strong ass couching down between the sheepfolds"; he had "bowed his shoulder to bear" and become "a servant under task-work." As her purpose matured she had to seek a place of safety and influence, and passing southward she found it in some retired spot among the hills between Bethel and Ramah, some nook of that valley which, beginning near Ai, curves eastward and narrows at Geba to a rocky gorge with precipices eight hundred feet high,—the Valley of Achor, of which Hosea long afterwards said that it should be a door of hope. Here, under a palm tree, the landmark of her tent, she began to prophesy and judge and grow to spiritual power among the tribes. It was a new thing in Israel for a woman to speak in the name of God. Her utterances had no doubt something of a sibyllic strain, and the deep or wild notes of her voice pleading for Jehovah or

raised in passionate warning against idolatry touched the finest chords of the Hebrew soul. In her rapture she saw the Holy One coming in majesty from the southern desert where Horeb reared its sacred peak; or again, looking into the future, foretold His exaltation in proud triumph over the gods of Canaan, His people free once more, their land purged of every heathen taint. So gradually her place of abode became a rendezvous of the tribes, a seat of justice, a shrine of reviving hope. Those who longed for righteous administration came to her; those who were fearers of Jehovah gathered about her. Gaining wisdom she was able to represent to a rude age the majesty as well as the purity of Divine law, to establish order as well as to communicate enthusiasm. The people felt that sagacity like hers and a spirit so sanguine and fearless must be the gift of Jehovah; it was the inspiration of the Almighty that gave her understanding.

Deborah's prophetic utterances are not to be tried by the standard of the Isaian age. So tested some of her judgments might fail, some of her visions lose their charm. She had no clear outlook to those great principles which the later prophets more or less fully proclaimed. Her education and circumstances and her intellectual power determined the degree in which she could receive Divine illumination. One woman before her is honoured with the name of prophetess, Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, who led the refrain of the song of triumph at the Red Sea. Miriam's gift appears limited to the gratitude and ecstasy of one day of deliverance; and when afterwards on the strength of her

share in the enthusiasm of the Exodus she ventured along with Aaron to claim equality with Moses, a terrible rebuke checked her presumption. Comparing Miriam and Deborah, we find as great an advance from the one to the other as from Deborah to Amos or Hosea. But this only shows that the inspiration of one mind, intense and ample for that mind, may come far short of the inspiration of another. God does not give every prophet the same insight as Moses, for the rare and splendid genius of Moses was capable of an illumination which very few in any following age have been able to receive. Even as among the Apostles of Christ St. Peter shows occasionally a lapse from the highest Christian judgment for which St. Paul has to take him to task, and yet does not cease to be inspired, so Deborah is not to be denied the Divine gift though her song is coloured by an all too human exultation over a fallen enemy.

It is simply impossible to account for this new beginning in Israel's history without a heavenly impulse; and through Deborah unquestionably that impulse came. Others were turning to God, but she broke the dark spell which held the tribes and taught them afresh how to believe and pray. Under her palm tree there were solemn searchings of heart, and when the head men of the clans gathered there, travelling across the mountains of Ephraim or up the wadies from the fords of Jordan, it was first to humble themselves for the sin of idolatry, and then to undertake with sacred oaths and vows the serious work which fell to them in Israel's time of need. Not all came to that solemn rendezvous.

When is such a gathering completely representative? Of Judah and Simeon we hear nothing. Perhaps they had their own troubles with the wandering tribes of the desert; perhaps they did not suffer as the others from Canaanite tyranny and therefore kept aloof. Reuben on the other side Jordan wavered, Manasseh made no sign of sympathy; Asher, held in check by the fortress of Hazor and the garrison of Harosheth, chose the safe part of inaction. Dan was busy trying to establish a maritime trade. But Ephraim and Benjamin, Zebulun and Naphtali were forward in the revival, and proudly the record is made on behalf of her native tribe, "the princes of Issachar were with Deborah." Months passed; the movement grew steadily, there was a stirring among the dry bones, a resurrection of hope and purpose.

And with all the care used this could not be hid from the Canaanites. For doubtless in not a few Israelite homes heathen wives and half-heathen children would be apt to spy and betray. It goes hardly with men if they have bound themselves by any tie to those who will not only fail in sympathy when religion makes demands, but will do their utmost to thwart serious ambitions and resolves. A man is terribly compromised who has pledged himself to a woman of earthly mind, ruled by idolatries of time and sense. He has undertaken duties to her which a quickened sense of Divine law will make him feel the more; she has her claim upon his life, and there is nothing to wonder at if she insists upon her view, to his spiritual disadvantage and peril. In the time of national quickening and renewed thoughtfulness many

a Hebrew discovered the folly of which he had been guilty in joining hands with women who were on the side of the Baalim and resented any sacrifice made for Jehovah. Here we find the explanation of much lukewarmness, indifference to the great enterprises of the church and withholding of service by those who make some profession of being on the Lord's side. The entanglements of domestic relationship have far more to do with failure in religious duty than is commonly supposed.

Amid difficulty and discouragement enough, with slender resources, the hope of Israel resting upon her, Deborah's heart did not fail nor her head for affairs. When the critical point was reached of requiring a general for the war she had already fixed upon the man. At Kadesh-Naphtali, almost in sight of Jabin's fortress, on a hill overlooking the waters of Merom, ninety miles to the north, dwelt Barak the son of Abinoam. The neighbourhood of the Canaanite capital and daily evidence of its growing power made Barak ready for any enterprise which had in it good promise of success, and he had better qualifications than mere resentment against injustice and eager hatred of the Canaanite oppression. Already known in Zebulun and Naphtali as a man of bold temper and sagacity, he was in a position to gather an army corps out of those tribes—the main strength of the force on which Deborah relied for the approaching struggle. Better still, he was a fearer of God. To Kadesh-Naphtali the prophetess sent for the chosen leader of the troops of Israel, addressing to him the call of Jehovah: "Hath not

the Lord commanded thee saying, Go and draw towards Mount Tabor"—that is, Bring by detachments quietly from the different cities towards Mount Tabor—"ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun?" The rendezvous of Sisera's host was Harosheth of the Gentiles, in the defile at the western extremity of the valley of Megiddo, where Kishon breaks through to the plain of Acre. Tabor overlooked from the north-east the same wide strath which was to be the field where the chariots and the multitude should be delivered into Barak's hand.

Not doubting the word of God, Barak sees a difficulty. For himself he has no prophetic gift; he is ready to fight, but this is to be a sacred war. From the very first he would have the men gather with the clear understanding that it is for religion as much as for freedom they are taking arms; and how may this be secured? Only if Deborah will go with him through the country proclaiming the Divine summons and promise of victory. He is very decided on the point. "If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, I will not go." Deborah agrees, though she would fain have left this matter entirely to men. She warns him that the expedition will not be to his honour, since Jehovah will give Sisera into the hand of a woman. Against her will she takes part in the military preparations. There is no need to find in Deborah's words a prophecy of the deed of Jael. It is a grossly untrue taunt that the murder of Sisera is the central point of the whole narrative. When Deborah says, "The Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman," the reference plainly is, as

Josephus makes it, to the position into which Deborah herself was forced as the chief person in the campaign. With great wisdom and the truest courage she would have limited her own sphere. With equal wisdom and equal courage Barak understood how the zeal of the people was to be maintained. There was a friendly contest, and in the end the right way was found, for unquestionably Deborah was the genius of the movement. Together they went to Kedesh,—not Kadesh-Naphtali in the far north, but Kedesh on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, some twelve miles from Tabor.<sup>3</sup> From that as a centre, journeying by secluded ways through the northern districts, often perhaps by night, Deborah and Barak went together rousing the enthusiasm of the people, until the shores of the lake and the valleys running down to it were quietly occupied by thousands of armed men.

The clans are at length gathered; the whole force marches from Kedesh to the foot of Tabor to give battle. And now Sisera, fully equipped, moves out of Harosheth along the course of the Kishon, marching well beneath the ridge of Carmel, his chariots thundering in the van. Near Taanach he orders his front to be formed to the north, crosses the Kishon and advances on the Hebrews who by this time are visible beyond the slope of Moreh. The tremendous moment has come. "Up," cries Deborah, "for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand. Is not the Lord gone out before thee?" She has waited till the troops of Sisera are entangled among the streams which

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<sup>3</sup> See Conder's *Tent Work in Palestine*.

here, from various directions, converge to the river Kishon, now swollen with rain and difficult to cross. Barak, the Lightning Chief, leads his men impetuously down into the plain, keeping near the shoulder of Moreh where the ground is not broken by the streams; and with the fall of evening he begins the attack. The chariots have crossed the Kishon but are still struggling in the swamps and marshes. They are assailed with vehemence and forced back, and in the waning light all is confusion. The Kishon sweeps away many of the Canaanite host, the rest make a stand by Taanach and further on by the waters of Megiddo. The Hebrews find a higher ford and following the south bank of the river are upon the foe again. It is a November night and meteors are flashing through the sky. They are an omen of evil to the disheartened half-defeated army. Do not the stars in their courses fight against Sisera? The rout becomes complete; Barak pursues the scattered force towards Harosheth, and at the ford near the city there is terrible loss. Only the fragments of a ruined army find shelter within the gates.

Meanwhile Sisera, a coward at heart, more familiar with the parade ground than fit for the stern necessities of war, leaves his chariot and abandons his men to their fate, his own safety all his care. Seeking that, it is not to Harosheth he turns. He takes his way across Gilboa toward the very region which Barak has left. On a little plateau overlooking the Sea of Galilee, near Kedesh, there is a settlement of Kenites whom Sisera thinks he can trust. Like a hunted animal he presses on over ridge and

through defile till he reaches the black tents and receives from Jael the treacherous welcome, "Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not." The pitiful tragedy follows. The coward meets at the hand of a woman the death from which he has fled. Jael gives him fermented milk to drink which, exhausted as he is, sends him into a deep sleep. Then, as he lies helpless, she smites the tent-pin through his temples.

In her song Deborah describes and glories over the execution of her country's enemy. "Blessed among women shall Jael, the wife of Heber be; with the hammer she smote Sisera; at her feet he curled up, he fell." Exulting in every circumstance of the tragedy, she adds a description of Sisera's mother and her ladies expecting his return as a victor laden with spoil, and listening eagerly for the wheels of that chariot which never again should roll through the streets of Harosheth. As to the whole of this passage, our estimate of Deborah's knowledge and spiritual insight does not require us to regard her praise and her judgment as absolute. She rejoices in a deed which has crowned the great victory over the master of nine hundred chariots, the terror of Israel; she glories in the courage of another woman, who single-handed finished that tyrant's career; she does not make God responsible for the deed. Let the outburst of her enthusiastic relief stand as the expression of intense feeling, the rebound from fear and anxiety of the patriotic heart. We need not weight ourselves with the suspicion that the prophetess reckoned Jael's deed the outcome of a Divine thought. No: but we may believe

this of Jael, that she is on the side of Israel, her sympathy so far repressed by the league of her people with Jabin, yet prompting her to use every opportunity of serving the Hebrew cause. It is clear that if the Kenite treaty had meant very much and Jael had felt herself bound by it, her tent would have been an asylum for the fugitive. But she is against the enemies of Israel; her heart is with the people of Jehovah in the battle and she is watching eagerly for signs of the victory she desires them to win. Unexpected, startling, the sign appears in the fleeing captain of Jabin's host, alone, looking wildly for shelter. "Turn in, my lord; turn in." Will he enter? Will he hide himself in a woman's tent? Then to her will be committed vengeance. It will be an omen that the hour of Sisera's fate has come. Hospitality itself must yield; she will break even that sacred law to do stern justice on a coward, a tyrant, and an enemy of God.

A line of thought like this is entirely in harmony with the Arab character. The moral ideas of the desert are rigorous, and contempt rapidly becomes cruel. A tent woman has few elements of judgment, and, the balance turning, her conclusion will be quick, remorseless. Jael is no blameless heroine; neither is she a demon. Deborah, who understands her, reads clearly the rapid thoughts, the swift decision, the unscrupulous act and sees, behind all, the purpose of serving Israel. Her praise of Jael is therefore with knowledge; but she herself would not have done the thing she praises. All possible explanations made, it remains a murder, a wild savage thing for a woman to do, and we may

ask whether among the tents of Zaananim Jael was not looked on from that day as a woman stained and shadowed,—one who had been treacherous to a guest.

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