

Chapter II

THE commands of the Lord to Moses were the commands of Moses to Joshua, and the latter left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses. The land was divided by lot, and "Joshua let the people depart, every man unto his heritage. . . . But unto the tribe of Levi Moses gave not any inheritance; the Lord God of Israel was their inheritance, as he said unto them."

"And all the days of Joshua the people served the Lord." There is no evidence of communism to be found in the record of the settlement under Joshua, no communal table, no communal warehouse, and no tribute. This primitive system of individualism lasted but one generation; then "there arose another generation which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works he had done for Israel." They fell under the hand of the spoiler, and "the Lord raised up judges which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them." Man's short memory is perhaps the cause of most of his sufferings. Memory unaided by instinct is a weak reed, and it may be that remembrance of God's bounty is essential in the religious scheme; certainly economic ingratitude and disobedience carry awful penalties. So long as Moses and Joshua were over them to remind them constantly of the days in Egypt, the Israelites fared well, but when God's deputies had passed away, and another generation grew up, they forgot the travail of their fathers and in their arrogance and pride imagined life was a simple trick their forbears were unable to master. Elders and judges were tried and found wanting. They were too cautious,

too slow for the progressive spoilers, so in the days of Samuel they asked for a king.

And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king.

And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots.

And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots.

And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers.

And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. . . .

And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work.

He will take a tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants.

And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day.

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us;

That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

Then civilization began, and war punished them unmercifully, sending them into bondage, and dispersing them all over the face of the earth.

From Tiglath-Pileser's record of his campaign it is learned that his Assyrian army laid waste great portions of the kingdom of Israel and carried numbers of the Jews captive to Assyria. What remained of the Israelites in Palestine were

laid under heavy tribute. Once more the children of Abraham went into bondage; this time far from Egypt, away beyond the river which flowed past Ur of the Chaldees.

Dr. Garstang, in *The Foundations of Bible History*, shows that there were four long periods of rest between the time of Joshua and the first king, Saul. Three periods each of forty years, and one of eighty years; in all two hundred years of rest out of about three hundred and fifty years.

In the Schweich lectures, Dr. Kenneth assigns to the son of Amoz, Isaiah, Chapter 1, verses 2-23, in which the prophet describes the ills under which Israel had fallen. "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, be just to the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." Economic woe overcame Israel, justice was forgotten, the conditions of the covenant spurned. God looked for justice and beheld oppression: "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place." The story of Ahab, king of Samaria, and his desire to possess Naboth's vineyard, throws a searching light upon the real significance of numbers of passages in the prophets, of the sin of laying field to field and joining house to house. Ahab wished to enlarge his domain. He said to Naboth: "Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money." And Naboth said to Ahab: "The Lord forbid

it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." Here is evidence in the seventh century that the laws of the covenant were still observed. The reply of Naboth touches the conscience of the king, who took to his bed, "turned away his face, and would eat no bread." But Jezebel, the wife of the king, sought to gain possession of the vineyard by a trick that resulted in the death of Naboth. The sentence of death passed upon Jezebel is the most horrible one recorded in the Bible; the third curse descended heavily upon her.

Dean Milman, in *The History of the Jews*, has some very interesting passages on this incident. He says:

The great principle of this law was the inalienability of estates. Houses in walled towns might be sold in perpetuity if unredeemed within the year; land only for a limited period. At the Jubilee, every estate reverted, without repurchase, to the original proprietor. Even during this period it might be redeemed, should the proprietor become rich enough, at the value which the estate would produce during the years unelapsed before the Jubilee. This remarkable Agrarian law secured the political equality of the people, and anticipated all the mischiefs so fatal to the early republics of Greece and Italy, the appropriation of the whole territory of the state by a rich and powerful landed oligarchy, with the consequent convulsions of the community from the deadly struggle between the patrician and plebeian orders. In the Hebrew state, the improvident individual might reduce himself and his family to penury or servitude, but he could not perpetuate a race of slaves or paupers. Every fifty years God, the King and Lord of the soil, as it were, resumed the whole territory, and granted it back in the same portions to the descendants of the original possessors. . . . Thus the body of the people were an independent yeomanry, residing on their hereditary farms, the boundaries of which remained for ever of the same extent; for the removal of a neighbour's landmark was among the crimes against which the law uttered its severest malediction: an invasion of family property, that of Naboth's vineyard, is selected

as the worst crime of a most tyrannical king; and in the decline of the state, the prophets denounce, with their sternest energy, this violation of the very basis of the commonwealth.

In Isaiah v, the work of a man who makes a vineyard is described. After fencing it, clearing it of stones, it brought forth wild grapes. What does this mean? Surely this: the land had not brought forth good fruit. And for that reason the hedge, the fence, the landmark was taken away. The careless husbandman was a danger to the system, for soon his shiftlessness could bring him down to penury, and his land would "be eaten up" by those who lay field to field; "the earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they had transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant." The book of Jeremiah contains much evidence of the breakdown of the Mosaic system, and the awful consequences of the sins of Israel. "Where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt; that led us through the wilderness through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through and where no men dwelt?" Jerusalem made no reply; the priests were silent. "And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination!" All was forgotten. "Is Israel a servant? Is he a homeborn slave? Why is he spoiled?" As a revelation of a people doing wrong things, Jeremiah II is hard to beat. Kings, princes, priests, pastors, prophets, people, all guilty; no offender escaped the censure of Jeremiah. Israel is called upon to put away her abominations and to swear: "The Lord liveth in truth, in justice and in right doing." No; "they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge." They are called upon to mend their ways, to execute strict

justice between a man and his neighbour, not to oppress the strangers, the fatherless, the widow, not to shed innocent blood. They were deaf to these entreaties. They trusted in lying words; they were given to theft, murder, adultery; they worshipped false gods and burnt incense unto Baal. The House of the Lord had become a den of robbers. Then the Lord God of Israel told Jeremiah to say to them: "Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice and do them, according to all which I command you, so shall ye be my people and I will be your God: that I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is this day."

The great cry of God's prophets for justice rises like the roar of a mighty storm and fills the skies with forbidding thunder. Execute justice! Do this and all will be well. If you do not this, desolation will fall upon you. "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by injustice and his chambers by wrong, that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work. . . ." So deep and abiding was this sense of economic justice that even in captivity God commanded: "Build ye houses and dwell in them; and plant gardens and eat the fruit of them." To the labourer the fruit of his toil.

The story of the purchase of Hanameel's field for Jeremiah, for the right of inheritance was his, and the redemption was his, reveals the strictness to be followed in all dealings with land. The story of the command to observe the old law of freeing servants after seven years is evidence of the economic nature of the covenant. The sons of Jonadab, the son of

Rechab, fulfilled the Lord's commands and all their days dwelt in tents, drinking no wine, building no houses, neither ploughing, sowing, nor reaping, and they were blessed. Yet those of Israel and Judah, brought from bondage into a land where there was no scarceness, could not remain faithful to the trust.

Higher criticism, which seems to be concerned chiefly with the composition, arrangement, and authenticity of the books, passes lightly over the economic sins of the Jews. The student may search the *Encyclopædia Biblica* in vain for any discussion of the primary laws of the Mosaic covenant which will lead him to the underlying causes of the catastrophes which overwhelmed the Jews. Their economic woes since the days of Saul receive scant notice. Their backslidings into idolatry cannot be avoided, for they are so many that there are few chapters of the books of the prophets which do not mention them. Perhaps economic frailties are subjects for lower criticism. In any case, it is not too much to expect from higher criticism correct renderings of key words (from the Greek or Hebrew or both) such as judgment and righteousness. The free use of these words in innumerable cases does not make sense. For example: "Execute ye judgment and righteousness." Judgment, according to John Locke, "is in separating carefully one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference." Man's judgment is no substitute or synonym for God's justice. Righteousness, as it is used in the Bible, has the ring of piety about it, and piety has always covered a multitude of sins. Righteousness and piety are Janus-faced words and permit of quite opposite definitions. Their connotations now are many and not always pleasant. Isaiah says: "All our righteousness are as filthy rags." Even in his day the pious fraud was known. Rightwise or rightwiseness was the old form

of the word, and meant "wise as to what is right," which is more like the Saxon root word, right. Right can have no two meanings and requires no pietistic connotations to make it sacred. So the command, "Execute ye judgment and righteousness," should be rendered, "Observe justice and execute rightness," if the command is to be clearly understood. Sometimes the translators have no choice and hit upon the right word. "Ye have sinned against the Lord, the habitation of justice." Here, neither judgment nor righteousness would serve. For justice is before and above judgment and piety; it is a system fundamental to the relationship between man and his Maker. It is antecedent to all positive law. It is the basis of title to own produce.

In Deuteronomy and Jeremiah there is foreshadowed a change of great importance regarding the law of responsibility: the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon their children. In Ezekiel the change is complete. "If a man be just and do that which is lawful and right . . . and hath not oppressed any but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; he that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true justice between man and man, hath walked in my statutes and hath kept my justice, and dealt rightly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God." No matter what the misdeeds of the fathers, the just son shall live. "Therefore, I will judge you, O House of Israel, every one according to his ways." The old law of visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation had not served as a threat. The threat was perhaps effective for a people who had suffered the yoke of bondage for long genera-

tions, but not for Israel, when she advanced in civilization and the people submitted to the rule of kings and priests. Fixing responsibility on the individual sinner was a great advance in discipline. Wicked king, idolatrous priest, corrupt judge, false prophet, each was directly accountable for his misdeeds. The same law for all violators, labourer or ruler, each responsible for his acts. Priests had violated the law, princes, out for dishonest gain, had acted like wolves ravening the prey, and the people of the land had oppressed and robbed and vexed the poor and needy, and they had treated the stranger wrongfully. "And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none." One man, one who would restore the landmark, make restitution—but not one was left of all Israel to save her from the peril of the third curse. Yet all the prophets of God in the direst days of suffering and bondage kept constantly before them the hope of restoration, hope of the joys of the old system based on justice. Renew the covenant, observe the commandments, and the yoke will be lifted, the chains broken, captivity ended. They were never left without hope. "For behold, I am for you, and I will turn unto you, and ye shall be tilled and sown, and I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded; and I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring fruit, and I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings; and ye shall know that I am the Lord." On the redivision of the land for inheritance, portions were to be reserved for the sanctuary, for the priests, and another portion for the prince. All that was necessary was for the princes of Israel to remove violence and

spoil, execute justice, and take away their exactions from the people. Weights and measures were to be exact, and the dues of all oblations according to the standards set down. Princes were not to take of the people's inheritance by oppression, they must make their sons' inheritance out of their own. The people must not be scattered, every man from his possession. The land was to be divided according to the tribes of Israel, and for the people division was to be by lot. Even the stranger was to be provided with his inheritance. After all the vicissitudes since the days of Moses and Joshua, knowledge of the justice of the system of settlement in Canaan lived, and no prophet of God thought of changing it or even tried to improve it. Egypt was the word burned into their hearts. The memory of the bondage lived through the centuries; nothing could blot it out of the prophetic mind. Daniel refers to the curse that is poured upon Israel according to the oath that is written in the law of Moses. Hosea says: "The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound (landmark), therefore I will pour my wrath upon them like water." Micah says: "They covet fields and take them by violence; and houses and take them away; so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage." The doleful lamentation was: "We be utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people; how hath he removed it from me! Turning away he hath divided our fields." Wicked balances and deceitful weights, violent rich men and lying people, forests cut down, fields uprooted, hunger, and desolation are the iniquities Micah denounces. Haggai cries: "Ye have sown much and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." Malachi indicts the nation: "Ye are cursed

with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.”

The custom of the people seeking redress of grievance before granting supply is ancient. Ezra gives a letter sent to Artaxerxes, the king, making complaint: “Be it known unto the king that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations. Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings.” The threat was effective. Such courage born of knowledge and faith in the old system was sure to carry them on to great reforms. At the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, Palestine was reduced to conditions bordering on slavery. Nehemiah describes the economic position in detail: “Some also there were that said, we have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn because of the dearth. There were also that said, we have borrowed money for the king’s tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards . . . and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought into bondage already; neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards.” On learning the plight of the people, Nehemiah rebuked the nobles: “Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money and of the corn, the wine and the oil, that ye exact of them.” And restoration followed. Such a sudden change of heart seems miraculous, but there may be a good reason—quite apart from pity or contrition—for relinquishing the ill-gotten gains, and that may be the finding of the book of the law of Moses, read by Ezra, with sense and understanding.

The old covenant read distinctly to all the people would certainly help the nobles to lay all doubts as to the enormity of their iniquities. The third curse, read with sense and understanding, would powerfully affect those who had despoiled the people by removing the landmarks. A vivid description of the consequences of violating the Mosaic law of the landmark is to be found in Job xxiv. So deeply ingrained in the soul of the people was the admonition, that no tribulation could wipe it out entirely. It was there, there always and no matter how guilty they were in violating that law, they knew that whenever a true prophet appeared their sin would be brought home to them, and all the prophets of God taught them that this sin was the cause of their economic woe. Proverbs says: "Remove not the ancient landmark which thy fathers have set." Ritual might change, but the economic basis of the settlement in Canaan never. Again in Proverbs: "Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless." To keep not this law meant bondage. A landless people are an abomination in the sight of the Lord, for they are ripe for slavery.