

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

DR. G. A. SMITH ON JERUSALEM.

(SECOND NOTICE.)

THE second half of Dr. Smith's first volume will be of special interest to many readers, because the subject with which it deals, the internal administration of the Jewish state, is comparatively fresh, and one to which the author is known to have devoted careful study. His presentation of the evidence on this topic will be found to be both more detailed and more vivid than any which has previously been attempted.

"The Multitude," to which reference is so often made in the Gospels and by Josephus, deserved the elaborate and eloquent study which constitutes the last chapter. The power of the people, of which the notices are exhaustively collected, is traced to the institutions of the primitive Semitic tribe, called by Robertson Smith "as democratic a society as existed in the ancient world." Through all the vicissitudes undergone by the nation between nomad days and its constitution into a Roman province, "the Multitude" takes some part in the performance, more often as audience, or at best chorus, than as actor. Of whom did it consist? Perhaps the materials for solving this interesting problem do not exist. In Rome it appears to have been at one time a question of race, at another of property qualification, whether a man belonged to the few or to the many. In the Greek states the criterion was less definite, but probably Sparta, where the distinction was racial, would serve as a norm for the rest. The Fourth Gospel (vii. 49) suggests that the criterion in Judaea was one of education; the Multitude were those who had not been trained in the Law, as opposed to the Rulers and Pharisees. This agrees very well with the later Rabbinical

tradition, and its employment of the term "People of the Land." It is not indeed easy to understand how it would work, since members of the same families might belong to one group or the other; and if the Jewish sects resembled those existing in other communities, they must have had both learned and unlearned adherents. But before the study of the Law became a serious occupation, the criterion must have been different, yet it is not easy to guess what it was.

The doings of the multitude, as illustrated in Dr. Smith's pages, indicate that the application of the word "democratic" to any Semitic community is infelicitous. Belonging originally to Greek political terminology, its associations have no analogue in the history of the Eastern Semites—though that of Carthage and her colonies might have supplied something of the kind. A democracy, according to one definition, is a state in which offices are assigned by the lot. In the "primitive Semitic tribe" there were no offices to assign—there was as yet no organization of bureaux and portfolios. Or a democracy might be defined as a community in which legislation was entrusted to a public assembly, where every citizen had a vote, and decisions were carried by a majority. We, who know so many details of Greek and Roman voting, know nothing of the way in which Arabs or Israelites voted, apparently because they did not vote. We do not (to the best of the present writer's knowledge) hear of primitive Semitic tribes deciding by show of hands in what direction they should seek fresh pastures: they would be guided by a camel. We do not hear of trials by jury in which a majority of jurors made an award. Some prophet or prophetess, supposed to be divinely inspired, was asked, *moyennant* a fee, to decide.

The total absence of any belief in the wisdom, or the

rights, or the power of the majority explains the part which the multitude plays in Israelitish history from beginning to end. Force and authority they do understand; the utmost to which their efforts can rise is to substitute one form of these for another. The revolt against the tyranny of Rehoboam does not lead to a *magna charta*, but to the creation of a new despot. If we had a more detailed history of that event, we should probably find that Jeroboam's calves played a very important part therein. Where force was on one side and authority on the other, the latter went to the wall. So the fact that the people believed John to be a prophet did not prevent the Tetrarch from imprisoning him, and then beheading him to gratify a woman's caprice; it prevented the "chief priests and elders of the people" from maligning him, for they had no force behind their backs. Caligula desired his statue to be erected at Jerusalem, and the governor Petronius thought the "multitude" would die rather than see this done; whence at the risk of his own life he refused to carry out the imperial decree. Herod, who understood the multitude better than Petronius, would not have hesitated. He would have known that resistance was to be apprehended only from a few devotees, whom the multitude would admire, but would not back.

Dr. Smith's second volume consists of a history of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for which both critical labours on the surviving literature of the Jews and the most recent archaeological investigations have been utilized to the fullest extent. So far as the term conservative has in these days a meaning, when applied to Biblical history, it may be predicated of his attitude towards it. It is of great interest to watch the development of morality in any age, and the mode in which he speaks of Deuteronomy shows how fast we are advancing. Some thirty years

ago the act of those who put together a book and fathered it in the most unmistakeable way on Moses was regarded as shocking, not even defensible on artistic grounds, since glaring internal evidence of fabrication had been left. Presently, however, some apologies were found for what at best seemed a doubtful proceeding. But now in 1908 we find a theologian of whose earnest belief there can be no question eulogizing the act in a passage of great eloquence and pathos.

“Moses did not complete the elevating and purifying process. By Israel’s faith in a living God this continued through the subsequent centuries. We have seen it at work under the kings and priests of Judah; it was no less active through the early prophets of the north. Then came the further revelation of God by the prophets of the eighth century, and the light which this reflected alike on the religious practices of the nation and the new temptations which came to them from abroad. Simultaneously the possibilities of conserving and developing these religious gains from so long a divine guidance were being manifestly limited by the events of history to Jerusalem and the Temple. For so great a crisis, for so divine a call, a gifted school of writers in Judah were found sufficient. Equally alive to the real origins of their religion under Moses and to the workings of God’s Spirit in their own day, they recast the ancient laws of Israel in the temper of the prophets and with regard to the changed historical conditions of the nation. In particular they were concerned with some religious practices which their fathers had pursued without questioning, but which recent experience had shown to be dangerous to a spiritual faith. . . . Hence the sincerity, the vitality, the power of the work they produced. Deuteronomy is a living and a divine book, because, like every other religious reformation in which

God's Spirit may be felt, it is at once loyal to the essential truth revealed in the past, while daring to cast off all tradition, however ancient and sacred, that in practice has become dangerous and corruptive, vigilant to the new perils and exigencies of faith and receptive of the fresh directions of the living God for their removal or conquest."

Why did they say that Moses had spoken these words (as "recast" by themselves) "in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month"? There does not appear to be an eloquent paragraph in praise of this "terminological inexactitude," except that it is admitted that the primitive Deuteronomy (to which it may be supposed that the eulogies apply) probably began at chap. iv., and so had not those words. To another obvious question, viz., Why did the authors, when their object was the centralization of worship at Jerusalem, refuse to mention the city's name?—an answer is attempted: "the authors of the policy were more concerned to state the religious principle involved in it, than to advocate the claims of a particular locality. Nor did the latter need to be asserted. Jerusalem was the only possible candidate for the unique position designated by Deuteronomy." The audience might not know which were the Cities of refuge, whence they have to be named; they might be unaware of the place assigned to mountains Ebal and Gerizim in the cult, and are instructed; but that the place to be chosen out of all their tribes was Jerusalem was too obvious to deserve mention, when the authors' purpose was to condemn all other places of worship. It is not for the present writer to say whether this answer is satisfactory or not. Is it really possible to distinguish the principle involved from the application to this extent? The compilers of the Code, then, were more anxious that worship should be centralized at "the place chosen by the Lord"

than that it should be at Jerusalem. But if each sanctuary had round it a halo of association and patriarchal romance, it would have been unsafe to leave it to the hearer's intuition to say which sanctuary was meant. The time at which Jerusalem was the "only possible candidate" could not have been the time at which the dogma "one God, one Temple" was contentious matter. For it would appear that every sanctuary had some well-grounded claim to be considered the chosen spot.

Some very powerful and impressive passages could be quoted from the account of Isaiah's life and work. As might be expected, the more radical views, which leave the Prophet very little of the matter traditionally ascribed to him, are not accepted; and the picture of Jerusalem drawn from the casual utterances and phrases of the Prophet (ii. 134-137) is extraordinarily vivid and convincing. The merits of the historical Isaiah are generously appreciated: "he was the first to set Jerusalem on high among the nations"; "the attempt to sublimate (?) a great intellect like Isaiah's till it is confined to one consistent line of thought and activity can be achieved only by grave injustice at once to the genius of the Prophet, to the text of his undoubted oracles, and to such evidence as we have of the religious exigencies of his time"; "Jerusalem may be said to be Isaiah's Jerusalem even more than she was David's or Solomon's."

"Undoubted oracles" of the Prophet scarcely exist; in a work published a few weeks ago, ostensibly embodying the latest results of "criticism," many of the passages on which Dr. Smith draws for his picture of Jerusalem are assigned to a far later hand; and the French critic who regards the whole book as a forgery by one hand of the third century B.C. is probably not without adherents; for the simplicity of his hypothesis commends it. While

the assertion that Isaiah (in a sense) made Jerusalem is to be cordially applauded, it is worth observing how little honour this prophet appears to have had in his own country. The Chronicler knows of him as a historian, and as one who prayed with Hezekiah when the invasion of the Assyrians took place; the glorious part which he (according to other authorities) played in connexion with that and other events is overlooked in this late compendium of Jewish history. "Ezra" knows that Jeremiah prophesied the Return, but fails to quote the Prophet who named his son "Shear-jashub." Of Isaiah II. and Isaiah III., orators as gifted as Isaiah I., neither history nor tradition has preserved a trace. The reason for this will only be discovered when some authentic literary history of Israel is found.

The few fragments which "criticism" leaves the Prophet would scarcely justify Dr. Smith's estimate of his importance, but the whole work, by whatever authors, and at whatever time compiled, bears it out. And in history what is thought about a factor in its working is of consequence, not what is the truth about it. "Jerusalem the golden," the city blazing with gems, which was to belong to a new dispensation, and could part company with its earthly prototype to be located in heaven, seems to be a creation of one of the later Isaiahs rather than of the first—if there were many. Nor, perhaps, does the state of our knowledge justify the assertion that any doctrine of the first Isaiah was preached by him for the first time. But that the name Isaiah played an extraordinary part in making Jerusalem the praise of the earth is rightly emphasized.

In the post-exilian history the conservative tendencies of the author are perhaps more decidedly apparent than in that of the earlier periods, and his treatment of the

problems connected with the rebuilding of the city and the work of Ezra and Nehemiah will be found luminous. Was Ezra an invention of a later age, or a historical personage? The reply to the powerful essay of Torrey, who asserted the former, is given on page 330. "To the theory as a whole two answers at once suggest themselves. So lavish and detailed a story can hardly be conceived as developing except from the actual labours of a real and impressive personality. And against the hypothesis that a later generation of priests, jealous for the history of their order, invented a man learned in the Law as colleague to the layman Nehemiah, may be urged the necessity of the actual appearance of such a man in the conditions in which Nehemiah found himself at Jerusalem." If Wellhausen's assertion be true, that the Rabbis were the boldest of historical romancers, the first of these arguments will be of doubtful force; the power required to invent Ezra seems small compared with that which gave the world the Tabernacle, Aaron, Joshua, and many other persons and institutions. On the other hand, the argument that "a layman like Nehemiah could hardly have ventured to enforce the religious reforms to which he was obliged after his work upon the walls was completed without some more authoritative exposition of the Divine Law than he himself could give" seems to be introducing the modern notions of laity and clergy. It would rather seem that in Israel from the time of Jeroboam (if not earlier) to that of Herod the ruler ordinarily arranged religious matters as he thought fit, without waiting for the advice of the priest. It would also seem that it was an accident whether the person learned in the Law were a priest or not; if the Law had at any time been a monopoly of the priests, the profession of Scribe could not have been instituted without some violent revolution, of which there is no record. Hence

it can scarcely be hoped that this reasoning will weigh heavily with the followers of Torrey. Nor does Dr. Smith undertake to reconcile the narratives of Ezra and Nehemiah without resorting to the hypothesis that those narratives have undergone serious mutilation, transposition and corruption. His reconstruction of the history on this basis appears, however, to be exceedingly satisfactory, and likely to obtain confirmation from those sources whence some final solutions of Old Testament problems may now be hoped.

One other discussion to which some notice may be given is that on the Jew and the Greek, occupying much of chap. xv. It may be thought by some readers that matter is introduced into this which properly belongs elsewhere—e.g., the exquisite account of Ecclesiastes, who is brought to Jerusalem, although an inhabitant of that city, with Jordan and the Dead Sea almost before his eyes, could not (unless hopelessly unobservant) have uttered the proposition that “all the rivers run into the sea.” However the effect of the meeting between the two civilizations appears to be analysed with no less skill than eloquence, with the causes that brought about alternations of friendliness and hostility. Many of the phenomena can be illustrated from what goes on in the present day, when the stagnant Oriental mind is confronted with the intellectually active West. There is an excellent friend of the reviewer in Cairo, whose time is devoted to the composition of books in which the anticipation by the Koran of Evolution and other discoveries of modern science is demonstrated; another asserts boldly that European political philosophy is taken from Ibn Khaldun, an author as familiar to the English as was Moses to the Greeks. Like Aristobulus, such writers “succeed only in showing how much their own minds are governed by” what are the modern

equivalents for "the Greek language and the Greek methods." Between Herod the Great, the magnificent patron at once of the national religion and of foreign progress and civilization, and Mohammed Ali there is a curious family likeness. Nor would it be difficult to name persons and classes in whose minds acquaintance with Europe and its ways produces nothing but abhorrence, and the desire to avoid all contamination with it. Nor could we find it hard to point out those who would, if they could, earn with Moslems a reputation similar to that which Antiochus Epiphanes gained from the Jews. An earnest and esteemed writer has recommended that some European power should destroy Meccah, believing that fanaticism which constitutes a danger to mankind should be scotched. This appears to have been the idea entertained by Epiphanes; and if his knowledge of human nature and of other matters proved to be at fault, the number of his fellow-culprits takes away from the heinousness of his offence. Since his aim was in part to abolish a variety of barbarous practices which were abolished by far higher authority a couple of centuries later, it is not clear that sympathy in the struggle between him and the Jews should wholly be on the side of the latter.

The reviewer has held it to be more respectful to Dr. Smith to submit some of his opinions to consideration than to string together eulogies, which, however well deserved, might prove wearisome. That the two volumes on Jerusalem will for many years count as the standard authority on the subjects with which they deal he is not disposed to doubt.

D. S. MARGOLIOUTH.