

The Reformation under Josiah.

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II.

IN a former article (in the November number), the two accounts of this Reformation given in Kings and Chronicles were compared, and it was shown that the chronological order of events as expressly stated in Chronicles is also necessarily implied in Kings, if the history is to be believed at all; and that the destruction of high places and the restoration of the central sanctuary took place *before* the finding of the roll.

This at once disposes of the theory that there had been no central sanctuary before this time, and that it was a spurious book of Deuteronomy that suggested the reform.

In this article it is proposed to consider the subject from another point of view, comparing the histories with the prophecies of Jeremiah, especially in regard to the witness they bear to the character of the reformation and its issue.

The order of events is found to be as follows :

1. The rising up of the young King in the twelfth year of his reign and the twentieth of his age, to make war upon the idolatry that prevailed throughout his kingdom. We are not told of any helpers or allies in the work : the king commanded, and by personal and untiring activity he accomplished the task. Six years were spent upon it, and when altars, idols, high places, and heathen priests had been destroyed everywhere the King "returned to Jerusalem."

The fact that so great a work was accomplished in spite of all the resistance of long custom and vested interests indicates that there was among the people some well-established tradition of a national worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem : else the authority of the King would hardly have prevailed, and the publication of a spurious book would not be likely to have much weight.

2. The next event is the repair or restoration of the fabric of the Temple, and after the removal of the idols and altars and

houses of shame that cumbered the sanctuary and its courts and gates, some work of repair would be indispensable.

The interesting thing is that the cost of the work was defrayed by contributions collected from the people from "Manasseh and Ephraim, and all the remnant of Israel and all Judah and Benjamin."

This collection itself is a proof that by this time a widespread movement for the worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem had taken place, as it is in the highest degree improbable that a people who were practising idolatry would of themselves, without any external influence, agree everywhere to contribute to the repair of the House of Jehovah. But if the King had been about and among them for six years, using to the utmost his authority and influence for the destruction of idols, and if they had yielded to him in this matter, we can understand that they might be ready to go farther and help him in the crowning act of the reformation.

3. To expedite this work of repair the King sent Shaphan and other officers of state to the high priest, and this royal commission implies that the King had no great reliance on the zeal of Hilkiyah in this matter, and little, indeed, could be expected of one who had lived and officiated in the Temple under its recent conditions. However, the commissioners found that the work was being done satisfactorily; there were some zealous faithful workers, Levites, who now gladly undertook the work that pertained to their office.

It was to these royal commissioners that Hilkiyah gave the roll of the Law which he had recently found in the House. It was "when they emptied out the money that was brought into the House" that the book was found, and maybe the roll was found in one of the money-chests, where it may have been secreted in the evil days of Manasseh, who like other persecutors would be a destroyer of sacred books. This book may have been the very book laid up near the Ark, and when the Ark was removed from the Sanctuary (as appears to have been the case, 2 Chron. xxxv. 3); this other treasure would be hidden

in any convenient receptacle, and a trumpet-mouthed money-chest might very well have been utilized. Another interesting suggestion has been recently made on this subject by a French writer.

4. Then followed the mission to Huldah and the distressing reply.

Then the King called upon his people to renew the covenant with Jehovah in His house, and then to hold the Passover solemnities. It may again be pointed out how utterly improbable it is that the King should at this juncture, *without any previous work of reformation*, be able to induce all his people to come up to Jerusalem to the covenant service, and then to submit to the destruction everywhere of all their idols and high places, and then to keep the Passover, and that all these things should be accomplished in one year, the eighteenth of his reign.

It may be that the covenant service and the Passover were suggested by the book, but if so it would not be Deuteronomy that would furnish Josiah with instructions. It is in Exodus that the Covenant-making is described, and it is in Exod. xii., Lev. xxiii., and Num. xxviii., that rules concerning the Passover are found, and without these the King would not know how to proceed. As there is no mention of a Passover in the days of Manasseh, it is likely that sixty or seventy years had elapsed since its last observance, and the King would therefore probably have no one about him with any personal knowledge of the matter.

The new critics attribute to Josiah the keeping of the Passover, but allow him no instructions except the few general expressions he might find in Deuteronomy. Surely, if ever the priestly code was needed it was in the eighteenth year of Josiah, not to speak of Hezekiah and Solomon.

Thus the historical records lend not the least countenance to the theory that the reformation was brought about by a recently written and spurious Deuteronomy. Such a theory is negatived by every circumstance in the story.

The King's alarm at the threatenings contained in the roll,

and the awful answer returned to him through Huldah, would move him to do everything that could be done to bring the people back to their God; and he did not cease to make war upon everything evil. "Moreover, them that had familiar spirits and the wizards and the teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were spread in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did the King put away, that he might confirm the words of the law that were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the House of the Lord."

Such is the account given us of the King's energy and zeal. He was successful in so far that he had his way. His authority was not openly resisted, and the face of things was changed. But what of the spiritual condition of the people? The idols were destroyed, the Temple was restored, the Covenant had been made, the Passover had been revived, and the wizards and necromancers put down by the strong hand of the King. "Like him there was no King that turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses. . . . Nevertheless the Lord turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath, wherewith His anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked Him withal," and this must mean that, with all that the King did, nevertheless the people remained for the most part what they were in the days of Manasseh, alienated from the Lord. Josiah was warned of this, and the promise he received was only this: "I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil which I will bring upon this place."

He was a brave man, indeed, who thus, from a strong sense of duty, persisted as long as he lived in a thankless and hopeless task.

We turn to Jeremiah, who was a contemporary of the King, and who was called to be a Prophet while still, as he says, a child, in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign and the twenty-first year of the King's life, when he had already commenced his work of reform.

The prophet's first message (chapter ii.) is a remonstrance against idolatry, and implies that idolatry prevailed at the time (thus agreeing with the histories), but the force of the remonstrance consists in the knowledge the people possessed of their past history, and this past we find is the past recorded in the historical books now extant. There is no development of religious consciousness from fetishism to monotheism, but their history begins with a Divine deliverance and covenant, and is marked throughout its course by a tendency to degradation, that is kept in check only by Divine chastenings.

There are indications that some work of outward reformation had now begun, but the conscience of the nation was not awakened, and there was no acknowledgment of sin. "For though thou wash thee with lye, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me. . . . How canst thou say I am not defiled, I have not gone after Baalim? . . . Thou saidst, I am innocent, surely His anger is turned from me. Behold, I will enter into judgment with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned."

In chapter iii. there is a contrast drawn between the open rebellion of Israel and the pretended loyalty of Judah. The *backsliding*, the restive resistance, of the one is followed by repentance, the *treacherous* pretences of the other by ruin. True piety is not a matter of material and visible things. According to the histories Josiah's work of reformation began at the Temple, and much attention would be drawn to the Ark which seems to have been removed, probably during the days of Manasseh. The prophetic word at this time was that this very ark, the most precious piece of sacred symbolism, would be no longer inquired for or thought of in the better time to come, when Jerusalem would attain to its high destiny as the gathering place of the worshipping nations.

The opening words of chapter iv. imply that there was a movement of return to the purer worship: "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, unto Me shalt thou return."

There must be a real putting away of sin. The oath, "the

Lord liveth," must be used in truth and judgment and righteousness. The fallow ground must be broken up by the ploughshare of repentance; there must be no sowing of good seed among thorns; circumcision must be of the heart.

The exhortations are interrupted by warnings of coming destruction, and the prophet cries: "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" The words of false prophets promising peace are sternly reprov'd in several places in this part of the prophecy, and priests and prophets are frequently linked together for rebuke in subsequent chapters.

Chapter v. begins with a condemnation of prevailing impiety. There was not a man to be found who did justly and sought the truth, while the great ones of the land had with one accord broken the yoke and burst the bonds. Smooth words were spoken and fair professions made, but there was no health in the nation. Priests and prophets "healed the hurt of the people, lightly saying, Peace, peace, when there was no peace."

The beautiful and costly services in the Temple were vain. "To what purpose cometh unto Me frankincense? . . . Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing unto Me." The people were "refuse silver." The Lord had rejected them.

Chapter vii. may belong to the next reign, as there is mention here again of idolatry, which is not mentioned in the four preceding chapters.

But we find the Temple worship still in use, and the Temple a subject of boasting. The Prophet takes his stand in the Temple, and calls on the people to amend their ways, to cease from lying words that cannot profit, and sternly condemns the impiety of living in sin while they come and stand before the Lord in His house, making it a den of robbers. He bids them do what they would at the altar in violation of all rules of sacrifice, for it is not sacrifice the Lord required, but obedience.

Such is the general tenor of the succeeding chapters. Special attention is drawn in chapter xi. to the *covenant*, and

to the curse that must fall upon those who break their covenant with the Lord. There is mention of "a conspiracy to turn back to the iniquities of their fathers," implying that there had been a reformation, but that its force was now spent.

Thus the prophecy corresponds with the histories. There was an outward turning unto the Lord, a covenant made, the Temple services revived, words of piety on the lip, but no more, and, when the restraining hand of Josiah was withdrawn, there was a return to open idolatry.

That Jeremiah is not mentioned in the history of Josiah's reign, nor Josiah mentioned in the prophecy, is noticeable. The King must needs do the best he could with the men about him, but Jeremiah could not identify himself with the men who gathered about the King to enter into covenant with the Lord, while their hearts were far from Him, and their lives spent in self-seeking deceit and violence. And they would not desire his presence, and certainly would not yield to him a leading position. So Jeremiah would not appear in the history; and so, also, Jeremiah, as a prophet, does not commend a movement which, notwithstanding the piety and sincerity of the King, was without moral earnestness or spirituality. And Jeremiah had no message for Josiah, who had received a Divine word through Huldah, which would suffice to keep him to the end.

That Jeremiah knew and loved the King is evidenced by his bitter grief at his death; but the word of prophecy concerning this event is: "Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan him."

So Josiah does not appear in the prophecy.

It may seem difficult to believe that Josiah should of his own mind and will undertake so great a task, and persevere in it unto the end. But such men of resolution have appeared on the earth, and have succeeded. It is, however, possible, and indeed probable, that he was trained for the work from childhood. His grandfather spent the last years of his life in such a work, and Josiah, who was six years old when Manasseh

died, would have some personal recollections of him. His mother, Jedidiah, whose name is suggestive of pious parentage, may have set this work before him as the work that he, as King, sitting on the throne of the Lord, ought to undertake. The history of the kingdom would be known to him ; the names of Hezekiah and Isaiah would be an inspiration. He would know that his people had been called to be the people of Jehovah, and ought not to worship any other God ; and he would know, *pace* the critics, that the Temple at Jerusalem had been and was the one sanctuary where the people should worship.¹

We see that our literary sources—Kings, Chronicles, and Jeremiah—supplement and confirm one another in ways that are obviously undesigned, and that they lend no support to the theory of a spurious Deuteronomy placed in the King's hand to induce him to set up a central sanctuary. Every word in them condemns it, and it seems quite time that those to whom now are committed the oracles of God should refuse to regard such a theory as an assured result of criticism.

¹ Even the critics would grant him J and E and the prophecies of Hosea, Amos, Micah, Isaiah, etc.

