

*SOME FRESH BIBLE PARALLELS FROM THE
HISTORY OF MOROCCO.*

IN Judges 12. 6, we read how the Ephraimites were distinguished from the men of Gilead by their inability to articulate the letter ψ , which they sounded ϑ . One derivation offered by the historians of Morocco for the name of the city of Fez is the following: When Idrees̄ began to build the city, his secretary asked him how he proposed to have it called. He replied: "Call it after the name of the first person who passes by you." A man passed by, and they asked him his name. Now his name was Féris, but he could not pronounce the letter r , but called himself Féis; whence the city received the name of Fez. It is also said that the Jews in the town of Mequinez are unable to pronounce ψ , and use ϑ instead.

When Idrees̄ had finished the building of the city of Fez, and the circuit of the walls had been completed, and the gates had been made to ride upon their hinges, the question arose whence people should be found to fill the town. Idrees̄, therefore, caused the surrounding tribes to take up their residence in it, each tribe in the quarter of the town adjacent to its pasturing ground. A like drastic solution for the same problem was adopted by Nehemiah, when he rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, and set up its doors about the year 444 B.C. (11. 1).

The picture drawn in Ps. 84. of the sparrow and swallow building their nests and rearing their young in fearless security in the Temple has been paralleled by the similar immunity of birds in the temples of Greece and the mosques of Islám. One of the commonest sights in North Africa is the minaret crowned with a stork's nest. In these countries any one who should injure one of these birds would be reckoned no better than the ancient mariner, who slew the harmless albatross. This love of birds, especially of storks

and pigeons, is found in all Muslim countries.¹ When the minaret of the Karaweeyeen mosque, the principal mosque of Fez, was built, holes were left in the sides for birds to build in, and it was not long before they were filled with starlings' and pigeons' nests.

The realistic account of the misappropriation by the priests of the contributions of the people towards the upkeep of the Temple in the reign of Joash (2 Kings 12.) finds a curious parallel in the history of the Karaweeyeen mosque also; for in the days of Alee, the son of Yoosuf the "Almoravid," the mosque could no longer hold the Friday congregations, which overflowed into the surrounding streets, so that funds had to be raised for its enlargement. The Sultan was willing to defray the expense out of the public treasury; but the kadee was of opinion that the endowments of the mosque would prove sufficient for the purpose. Upon inquiry, however, it turned out that the trustees had looked upon the income of the mosque as their private property, and had spent it, so that there was no accumulated surplus, on which to draw. The kadee, however, did not cancel the arrears, like Jehoiada, but compelled the trustees to refund the sums they had "eaten."

The commentaries do not appear to offer anything in illustration of the practice of threshing in secluded places in troubled times, as Gideon threshed wheat in a wine-press, to save it from the Midianites (Jud. 6. 11). The citizens of Fez were reduced, under the rule of petty Berber dynasties in the eleventh century, to a condition very similar to that of Israel under foreign masters, so often depicted in the Old Testament. In the days of these oppressors, famine raged in Morocco, and the people of the City of Fez, both small and great, made for themselves underground cellars within their houses, for storing, grinding and cooking, so that the noise of the grinding should not be heard. In their

¹ Jer. 8. 7, etc.

houses they made also upper rooms which had no stairs leading to them, but when night fell, a man would go up into them by a ladder, he and his wife and his children, and they would draw up the ladder after them, so that none might enter upon them unawares.

All Semitic history is written from the moral and religious, or, as it is now somewhat inaptly named, the "Deuteronomic" point of view. The rise and fall of dynasties are traced to moral and religious causes. The historian of the Berber dynasties in Morocco sums up that period precisely as the author of the Books of Kings sets forth the religious "pragmatism" of the story of the kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17.). "They oppressed their subjects, seizing their property, spilling their blood, and violating their hareems. Terror reigned in the land, and prices rose. Ease was turned to straitness, security to fear, and justice to oppression. The last of their days were days of violence and tyranny, until insurrections grew rife. Famine and dearth reigned in the city of Fez, until an ounce of flour was sold for a dirhem, and provisions failed. The chiefs of the Berbers would force their way into the houses of the citizens, and carry off any food they found there. None had the power to hinder, nor the courage to protest. The baser sort of Berbers would climb to the top of a neighbouring hill, and cast their eyes over the city lying at their feet, and if they saw smoke rising from a house, they would make for that house, and, entering, seize whatever food they found there. But when they did such things, God took the kingdom away from them, and changed His favours towards them; and, verily, God doth not change His favour for a people, until they change what is in their hearts.¹ So He gave them into the power of the Almoravids, who brought their kingdom to an end, dispersing their gathering, and slew them, and cast them out of the country of Morocco."

¹ Koran 13. 12.

The Almoravids, led by Abdallah ibn Yaseen, played the same part in Morocco as did the Israelites under Joshua in the land of Canaan. The account of the death of that hero in the year 1059 A.D., forms a striking parallel to the last two chapters of the Book of Joshua. When he was borne into the camp out of his last fight, heavy with wounds, he summoned around him the shaikhs of the Almoravids, and delivered to them his last charge. "O company of Almoravids, ye are in the enemy's country, and I am dying on this my day, beyond a doubt. Beware, therefore, lest ye turn back and become faint-hearted, and your breeze fall. But be ye friends and helpers for the truth, and brethren in God ; and beware of disputings and of envy, arising from the love of ruling ; for God giveth His kingdom to whom He will, and maketh His vicar upon earth whom He loveth of His servants. And now that I am gone from you, look out for yourselves one whom ye may put at your head, to manage your affairs and to lead your armies, and to divide your plunder, and to receive your poor-rates and your tithes."

The Almoravids ran the wonted course for a hundred years, when they in their turn were swept away by the rising tide of the "Almohads" under Muhammad ibn Toomart. This Muhammad ibn Toomart began life very poor, but such was his love of learning that he travelled the world in search of it. In the East he met with Al Ghazálee, the greatest of the great men of many generations, who pointed him out to his disciples, assuring them that "this Berber would one day attain to empire." On his return to Morocco Ibn Toomart first found Abd el Mu'min, to whom he made known his designs ; after which he proclaimed himself as the long-expected "Mahdi," who should arise in the last times, to fill the earth with justice. He entered into the market-places preaching righteousness and denouncing wrong, breaking the instruments of music

and pleasure, and pouring out the wine in every place to which he came, until he reached Fez, where he remained teaching for three years. Then he set out for the city of Morocco, for it could not be that his mission should be accomplished out of the Almoravid capital. Haled before the Sultan, the latter mocked at his sorry and poverty-stricken estate, but Ibn Toomart rebuked the Sultan to his face, for his neglect of the religion which it was his business to maintain. Confronted with the "Ulemas" he put to them questions, which they could not answer, and consequently denounced him as an impostor and a heretic and a raiser of sedition. He was therefore driven out of the city, but built himself a hut in the low hills to the north of the town, where many of the students visited him, and read and studied under him. The number of his disciples increased, and the hearts of men were filled with the love of him. But when he made known to his most intimate followers his hope of establishing a new dynasty in Morocco, when that came to the ears of the Sultan, he went about to kill him. He fled, therefore, with ten of his disciples who had been the first to join him to the hills, where he soon began to spread his cause by force, at the same time sending out disciples into the country, to call men to his allegiance and to sow the love of him in their hearts, telling them of his virtues and wonderful works, and his forsaking of the world, and his devotion to the truth. He appointed fifty other disciples also, on whose counsel he might rely in difficulty and doubt. And so he stole the hearts of men by his tact, and by the sweetness of his voice and of his words.

The above excerpts have been taken from the history of Morocco by the fourteenth-century writer, Ibn abee Zera, of Fazzán. The arrangement of the work is similar to that of the Books of Kings or Chronicles or, indeed, to that of almost any other oriental history: that is to say,

the accession-years of the various rulers form the links of the chain on which the narrative is hung; and the accuracy of the dates is vouched for by a comparison with the contemporary coinage. Of a new sultan it is said that he walked in the way of his father or grandfather, in piety, and that there was great prosperity, and people flocked to Fez from all countries until the city could not contain them; or that he lived an evil life, and came to a violent end.

A characteristic of the oriental narrator is that he puts the climax of the tale at the beginning, and then proceeds to show how this came about; but sometimes the end does not justify the opening statement. A curious example of this occurs in the 9th chapter of the Book of Judges, where the commentators have missed a rare opportunity of making another breech in the text. In *v.* 50 we are told: "Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it"; but the detailed narrative which follows gives one a different impression as to the course of events. Similar, but more accurate, instances of thus anticipating the conclusion of a story are common enough. In the description of the famous battle of the River Makházín, as a result of which the kingdom of Portugal was for eighty years blotted out from the map of Europe, the issue of the battle and the fate which befell one of the kings who perished there, are stated at once, instead of being held back to the last.

It goes without saying that in any genuinely eastern history impending events are foreshadowed by means of dreams and omens. When Muhammad al Kaim, the founder of the last dynasty in Morocco, was in Madeenah, one of the people of the City of the Prophet dreamed that he saw two lions come forth from Muhammad's breast; which was interpreted to signify that his two sons should turn out something great. And when he had returned to

Morocco, as his two children sat one day in school, learning to repeat the Korán, it is said, a cock flew in at the open door, and perched, first on the head of the one, and then on the head of the other, crowing loudly; which was regarded as a sure indication of the good fortune which awaited them.

One of the first principles of present-day criticism appears to be that any work of antiquity, however long, must have been composed at one sitting. Only on this supposition can all liberty to change his style, or alter one of his expressions or phrases, be denied to an author. Yet when there is a change in the turning of a phrase, it is confidently put down to a change of authorship or a change of source; although some glaring examples are passed over unnoticed. But one does not require to go to oriental writers to find an author modifying his language and altering his style in the course of a work which must have been written at many sittings and in many moods. In the works cited above there are several examples of this.

The right to curse an enemy whom one is powerless to injure in a more effective way belongs to every Arab or Hebrew. The Arabic expression for "to curse" is "to pray against," the opposite of "to pray for," which is to bless; and in the case of a saint "whose prayers are answered," blessing and cursing are most effective weapons of weal or woe. Sometimes the imprecation is sought as a means of resisting invasion, as in the case of Balak and Balaam: sometimes it concerns individuals, and then results in the death of the offender, as did Jotham's¹

¹ There is an interesting parallel to Jotham's address to the citizens of Shechem and his immediate flight (Jud. 9.) in Chenery's translation of the Assemblies of Al Hariri, p. 476, where an Arab, standing at a safe distance, recites jeering verses to a hostile tribe, and then runs away.

imprecation upon Abimelech, and the extinction of his posterity: at other times it takes the form of banishment from Muslim territory, as Isaiah's curse upon Shebna was to result in his expulsion from the land of Israel (22. 18).

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