

HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.¹

FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

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II. Israel Prior to the Origin of the National Kingdom.

HAVING SATISFIED OURSELVES that Israel's oldest traditions fit very easily into the course of the ancient history of the Orient as known to us from other sources, our task will now be to translate these oldest traditions out of the language of legend into that of history, or in other words, to ascertain their historical content. To this end we must first of all have a clear idea of the point of view that is to be our guide in the process.

With most earnest conviction I have already recognised Abraham as a strictly historical personage, and it might be thought that what is true of the father should hold for the son and grandchildren. But this conclusion would be premature. Greek tradition ascribes to Lycurgus, the lawgiver of Sparta, two sons: Eunomos and Eukosmos, i. e., Law and Order. No reasonable person will doubt that Lycurgus was a historical personage, but that he actually had two sons named "Law" and "Order" will scarcely be believed. The tradition will be understood to mean that by his whole public activity he became the father of law and order for Sparta.

I have purposely chosen the example of Lycurgus because here the names themselves speak plainly. It is the same with Hebrew tradition. The names which it gives us in connexion with Abraham are all names of races and tribes, and accordingly we are beyond question in the realm of personification; for races never

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adopt the names of individuals, but the patronymic tribal ancestor is first and ever a composite, a personification of the people. When the Hellenes derive themselves from a patriarch Hellen, who has two sons, Æolus and Dorus, and two grandsons, Achæus and Ion, no one will dream of looking for historical individuals here, but will immediately recognise in them the entire race of the Hellenes and the tribes into which it was divided. Or when in the well-known list of races in Genesis Shem has the five sons, Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram, every one will see in this directly a very evident way of representing that those five peoples were regarded as branches of the great Semitic race and language group to which Israel itself belonged.

And thus also must the primitive history of Israel be regarded. However plastic and distinct the individualities of Ishmael and Edom, Israel and Joseph may seem to us, they are all only personifications and representations of the races or tribes whose names they bear. A glimmer of this truth is seen quite clearly in Hebrew tradition itself. When Rebekah, before the birth of the twins whose mother she is to become, receives the divine annunciation :

"Two nations are in thy womb,
And two peoples shall be separated even from thy bowels :
And the one people shall be stronger than the other people ;
And the elder shall serve the younger,"

it is said with all directness that we are dealing here not with single individuals, but with races. And when Jacob and Laban together set up a boundary-stone upon Mount Gilead and make a solemn and sworn covenant that neither of them henceforth will pass this boundary with evil intent, it is perfectly plain that this is not a private agreement between father-in-law and son-in-law, but a legal regulation of tribal boundary rights between Israel and Aram, which according to the Hebrew manner of speaking reaches unto southward of Damascus and to the mountain of Gilead.

What is historically significant in this tradition is the purely genealogical element, the relations of age and kinship between the various personages. To return once more to the Greek illustration cited, just as we must conclude when Æolus and Dorus appear as sons, and Achæus and Ion as grandsons of the patriarch Hellen, that the Æolians and Dorians are older tribal organisations and entered history earlier than the Achaians and Ionians, so it is in the case of Hebrew tradition : those tribes which were consolidated earlier in a political and national way are regarded as older, and the genealogical kinship corresponds to the ethnographic relation-

ship. When Moab and Ammon appear as sons of the nephew of the patriarch, and Edom and Israel on the contrary as his twin grandsons, this means: Moab and Ammon are closely related to each other, and Israel too recognises its kinship with them, but only as cousins, not as close kin, while with Edom it feels very closely related, in a kinship as of brothers, even of twin brothers. And when of these twin brothers Edom is the elder, this signifies: Edom was earlier consolidated into a political body, a nation, became a people in the historical sense earlier than Israel. And when Israel is represented as the son of the patriarch by a concubine, this means: Israel recognises a race relationship even with the Bedouins of the Syro-Arabian desert, which borders on Palestine, but regards this relationship as a very remote one. Having thus established the correct point of view for an historical understanding of the oldest traditions of Israel, let us now proceed to loose their tongue and hear their testimony as historical witnesses.

As we have seen, about 1500 B. C. a party of emigrants from Mesopotamia set out for Palestine under the lead of Abraham, and among them must have been, along with the ancestors of Israel, those of Moab, Ammon, and Edom as well. That these races so closely related to Israel are also not natives of the lands occupied by them in historical times, but are immigrants, is declared quite expressly, and certainly not without reason, by Hebrew tradition. The new arrivals were nomads, wandering shepherds, going about the country peacefully and seeking pasture for their flocks. It is therefore only natural if they turned to the portions of the land best suited to grazing. One branch soon crossed over the Jordan and settled in the luxuriant pastures of the country east of the Jordan; and here where the Egyptian dominion did not reach they succeeded in a comparatively short time in forming a political and national organisation as Moab and Ammon. Separated from the others by the Jordan, these tribes thenceforth went their own way.

West of the Jordan the march went mainly toward the south. The more thinly populated south with the abundant growth of grass in the mountains of Judah seemed made for such nomadic shepherds, and it is therefore not accidental, but rests on sound historical tradition, when the legend locates Abraham as well as Isaac in the south. In Canaan they adopt the language of Canaan: this important process, too, must have taken place in the pre-Egyptian time, and at the same time and in the same way among all the related tribes; for the Moabites, too, speak a language differing from the Hebrew only in unimportant dialectic respects.

But we have to examine another important element of the tradition. It represents Abraham as a religious leader and hero, and I find myself compelled to regard this feature also as historical. The appearance and achievements of Moses would be entirely inexplicable unless the people already had an almost distinctive religious character: for it is "the God of the Fathers" whom Moses proposes to bring and proclaim to Israel. The details of this matter are of course beyond inquiry and recognition, but we must maintain the fact unqualifiedly.

The next occurrence of historical importance is a further division within the portion of the Abrahamitic expedition that remained in Palestine. Not too soon after the settlement in Canaan,—Edom and Israel are lateborn grandsons, not sons, of Abraham,—the chief part turned further toward the south, where on Mount Seir dwelt the evidently uncivilised tribe of the Horites, and where the very nature of the land was a guarantee that the dominion of Egypt was but nominal. They succeeded in overcoming the Horites and in forming a political and national unity as Edom. More than a thousand years they remained in undisputed possession of this territory. About the time when these events must have taken place, the Egyptian prefect in Jerusalem, Abdichiba, writes to the Pharaoh Amenhotep, in the before-mentioned correspondence of Tell-el-Amarna, of Chabiri tribes that were making him much trouble and against whom he urgently begs the Pharaoh for support. There has been an attempt to find the Hebrews in these Chabiri, and the identification is possible from a linguistic point of view; but it is too much out of harmony with the whole character of Israelitish tradition itself for us to adopt it. Yet we may learn from this letter that southern Palestine was at that time in ferment and turmoil, and thus we have even here the appropriate historical background.

Of course, the Abrahamitic expedition was much reduced by the separation of Moab, Ammon, and Edom, and perhaps it would have been unable to maintain its identity if help had not come from the original home in Mesopotamia. This is Jacob, whose name means "reinforcement," "straggler." Jacob appears as father of twelve sons: these are the tribes into which Israel was divided in historical times. Legend has these sons, with the exception of Benjamin, born in Haran and the patriarch brought thence by them to Palestine: this is significant and shows that we are dealing here with fresh additions from without. Among these twelve sons the genealogical relationship is especially important. They fall into four groups, personified by the legend in four mothers:

two wives and two concubines of the patriarch. We have four groups: a Leah group, a Rachel group, a Bilhah group, and a Zilpah group. The oldest and most important of these groups is the Leah group, and next to it the Zilpah group; but not less in power and nobility was the Rachel group, with which the Bilhah group was more closely connected.

In the origin and formation of the tribes we have one of the obscurest points in the primitive history of Israel; but weighty reasons confirm us in thinking that we must place the beginnings of tribal formation in the pre-Egyptian period. In order to avoid false conceptions, we must endeavor to get a clear idea of what a tribe is according to oriental views. We are inclined to conceive of a tribe as something great and important; but that would be a great mistake. The Turkish Bureau of Statistics publishes a list of the Bedouin tribes that wander in Dscholan, the region east of the Sea of Galilee; there are 29 enumerated and their number given by tents, the tents being estimated at an average of five persons. Of these 29 "tribes" two consist of 4 tents, two of 6, five of 8, and the most numerous of 300. This, then, would make for the largest in round numbers 1500 souls, while groups of only 20 souls are reckoned as separate tribes. On an average each of these 29 tribes has 40 tents, or in round numbers 200 souls. Such are the ideas of size with which we have to deal in treating the earliest tribal history of Israel. Even in historical times the tribe of Dan is estimated at 600 fighting men, and all Israel at 40,000.

It is not to be assumed that the Abrahamitic expedition had no connexion with the formation of the tribes, and there has been a disposition to see in the Leah group, which is generally regarded as the oldest and comprising the firstborn sons, the portions of the Abrahamitic expedition that remained in Canaan, and in the Rachel group the reinforcements from Haran, so that Jacob and Joseph would at bottom be terms of the same size historically. At any rate we must distinguish two expeditions; the second we shall call the Jacobitic. This one united with the portions of the Abrahamitic expedition that remained in Canaan—the legend has Jacob also settle in the southern part of the land—and now becomes the representative of the historical development. And the two expeditions were united not outwardly alone, but spiritually as well: the faith of Abraham was transmitted to Jacob and was perpetuated in him as the noblest inheritance from his ancestors.

The next feature reported by tradition is the internal strifes among the tribes. Presuming upon his power and upon being the

representative of the national history, Joseph, from whom Benjamin had probably not yet separated, laid claim to the hegemony, but had to give up in the face of a coalition of the other tribes, and went to Egypt, whose fertile and grassy borderlands on the side of Asia, on the isthmus of Suez, had been from early times the scene of strife among Semitic nomads.

With Joseph the Bilhah group had lost its chief support. Now the Leah group attempted to gain control of it, and the firstborn of the Leah group, Reuben, seems to have planned to achieve this by violence; but the tough and doughty tribes of Dan and Naphthali maintained their independence, and Reuben retired from the contest so reduced that he lost forever his birthright, i. e., his former power and standing. The only case in which the tribe of Reuben, or members of it, play a historical part is the insurrection of the Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram, against the Levite Moses, to whom they deny the leadership,—another contest for the hegemony. Legend has personified these occurrences in a crime on the part of Reuben with Bilhah, his father's wife, on account of which he is cursed and deprived of his birthright.

But soon conditions must have arisen which forced all the tribes to migrate. They followed the path of Joseph, and the latter now took noble revenge; forgetting the cause of offence and mindful only of the old kinship, he hospitably opened to his distressed brethren the territory occupied by himself.

Thus all the sons of Jacob had come to Egypt. At first the Egyptian government, to which such settlements of Semitic nomads in the borderlands was a very common affair, seems to have met the strangers with kindly neutrality; but soon there was a very keen change in their situation, and the reason for this is to be found in a change of the historical and political conditions. Even in the Tell-el-Amarna correspondence, Ribaddi, the Egyptian prefect of Gebal (the Greek Byblos), complains of the Chatti who are advancing threateningly against northern Palestine. This people, the Hittites of the Old Testament, did in fact at this time, during a temporary decline of the Egyptian power, set up a great kingdom between the Euphrates and Lebanon. Judging by the names of their rulers on the numerous monuments left by them, they were not Semites, and the attempt has been made to identify them with the Armenians, and even to designate their language as Ancient Armenian.

When under Seti I. the Egyptian power began to revive, it undertook immediately the recovery of the former dominion in

Asia ; but Seti was diverted toward the West and had to devote his chief attention to the Lybians. His son, Rameses II., however, equipped a great expedition against the kingdom of the Cheta and claims to have subdued them completely. But the end of the long contest was a treaty which proves the very opposite: the two opponents, who had apparently recognised themselves as well matched, concluded a perpetual peace, the letter of which is preserved to us as the oldest political treaty in history. When this treaty, the Egyptian version, it should be added, in which alone it is preserved, begins with the words: "Chetasar, the great king of Cheta, enters into treaty from this day on with Ramessu, the great prince of Egypt," one sees directly that this is not the style in which the vanquished deals with the victor. Evidently the kingdom of the Cheta remained unreduced and embraced all northern Palestine, while only southern Palestine returned into the former subjection to Egypt.

That this perpetual peace was not a finality was probably clear to both the contracting parties, and at least it was a heavily armed peace. Therefore we can understand why Rameses regarded distrustfully the alien elements on his eastern border facing Asia ; besides, for his great architectural undertakings,—he was unquestionably the greatest builder of ancient Egypt,—he needed laborers, and so he resorted to the measure of impressing as public slaves the Semitic settlers on the isthmus of Suez and forced them to do heavy labor under strong military guard. It is claimed that there is a direct reference to the Israelites in a papyrus of the time of Rameses II. which speaks of "Apurin" who drag stone for the constructions of King Rameses. These Apurin, who are also mentioned elsewhere, are not, indeed, the Hebrews, but the papyrus is incontestable evidence that under Rameses II. alien settlers were really treated as the Israelites were treated by him according to their traditions. In the very Land of Goshen there have been discovered numerous structures of bricks made of Nile mud and chopped straw und bearing the arms of Rameses II.

And so from free nomads the Israelites had become Egyptian serfs. It will be easily understood that of all people Bedouins, in whom the proud spirit of independence is most characteristic, could not endure such treatment ; among them especially it was inevitable that nature should rebel against the outrageous constraint which struck and wounded mortally the very heart of their being. As long as Rameses ruled, indeed, all resistance and all attempts at escape seemed vain. But under his son and successor, Meren-

ptah, an entire change in affairs took place. In the fifth year of Merenptah there poured over Egypt an invasion of several distinct foreign races, which brought the government to the verge of ruin. Merenptah claims, indeed, to have beaten and completely overcome the enemy, but it remains true that the Egyptian power received in these occurrences a blow from which it was long in recovering.

These enemies from without seem to have come simultaneously with all sorts of domestic troubles and distresses, and thus the hour of freedom for Israel had struck. Moses, a Hebrew of the tribe of Levi, had by favorable providence had access to the learning and civilisation of Egypt,—even his name, Mesu, is genuinely and specifically Egyptian. But his heart inclined him to his people; he preferred to be a brother of these despised slaves rather than to live in the enjoyment of Egyptian glory and Egyptian splendor. One single thought dominated him: how to become the rescuer and liberator of his people. With keen insight he perceived that the only possibility of rescuing them from the iron clutch of the Egyptian border fortresses and garrisons was a desperate course: through the sea to the desert. He gathers more detailed information about places and conditions, enters into connexions with the related Bedouins of the Arabian Desert, and when he thinks the proper moment come they start with wife and child, with flocks and belongings. By skilful zigzag marches he succeeds in eluding the Egyptian border-guards, and already the strait of Suez lies before them when they are overtaken by a troop of Egyptian scouts. Before them the breakers, behind them the pursuers thirsting for vengeance,—a moment of extreme distress! But where need is greatest there God is nearest. A mighty north-east wind lays dry the shallow strait and they go through on the bottom of the sea, into the desert, into freedom. The pursuing Egyptians are surprised by the returning waters; Israel is saved. Then, as Exodus says briefly, but with magnificent effect, “then the people feared the Lord and they believed in God and in his servant Moses.” This overwhelming moment created the people of Israel; they never forgot it: here they recognised the God of their fathers, who with strong hand and outstretched arm had saved his people and brought them out of the house of bondage, out of Egypt.

Under Merenptah, as we know from documentary evidence, southern Palestine and the sea-coast was still in uncontested Egyptian possession, and the neighboring kingdom of the Cheta was

obliged according to the treaty referred to, to deliver Egyptian deserters and fugitives; therefore Moses led the liberated people into the gorges of Sinai, whither a troop of wandering nomads could indeed make its way, but never an army of any size. Israel remained for some time in Sinai, and here in this mighty highland scenery tradition locates the capital achievement of Moses, his religious reorganisation of the people. It is one of the most remarkable moments in the history of mankind, the birth-hour of the religion of the spirit. In the thunder-storms of Sinai the God of revelation himself comes down upon the earth: here we have the dawn of the day which was to break upon the whole human race, and among the greatest mortals who ever walked this earth Moses will always remain one of the greatest.

But Sinai was only a station, not the goal of the expedition. Soon the people, strengthened by the rest and compacted by discipline, wandered on as far as Kadesh Barnea in the desert south of Canaan, very probably the modern Ain Kadès on the southwest slope of the plateau of Azazimeh. This place, sufficient as a settlement for simple shepherds, was out of reach of the Egyptian arms, and yet at the gate of the land of the fathers. Here for a time they could quietly await the development of affairs, and from all we can judge the stay in Kadesh must have been a tolerably long one. Probably here too occurred the death of Moses. That he personally did not enter the Promised Land, nor any one else of those who left Egypt, is an important feature of the tradition, the more essential when one remembers that the distance involved is one that can be covered easily under normal conditions in two weeks.

After the death of Merenptah Egypt fell into a condition of wild anarchy which made any interference in the affairs of Palestine impossible. His grandson, Setnecht, finally succeeded in restoring order; but then there came a new danger. In the eighth year of his successor, Rameses III., a general race migration swept in upon northern Syria and Palestine. We are told of a whole series of races who came bringing with them their wives and children to seek new dwellings. Rameses was obliged to take measures against the impending danger. With a great army and a strong fleet he set out for Palestine, and the experienced military art of Egypt was successful in defeating the undisciplined hordes. The danger to Egypt was removed and the glory of the Egyptian name in Palestine was revived—but it was a final flickering before extinction. After this we hear no more of the deeds of the Egyp-

tians in Canaan ; indeed when the first great Assyrian conqueror, Tiglathpileser, advanced to the Mediterranean, the Pharaoh hastened to send him presents.

This race-migration in the time of Rameses III. had two great results. It evidently destroyed the kingdom of the Cheta, of whom no more is heard, and it brought the Philistines to Palestine. In the army of these hordes Rameses repeatedly gives prominent mention to the "Pursta." As the Egyptian script regularly represents the "l" in foreign words by "r" and makes no distinction in the sounds, we may also read the name "Pulsta," and have probably to recognise in them the Philistines, who were of course also immigrants, and whose alien race character was especially felt. In nature and customs they were entirely different from all the other races of Palestine, and are therefore justly to be regarded as the remnant of that migration which remained in Palestine.

But we have almost lost sight of Israel, and shall now return to it. It was in all probability the consequences of the just-mentioned disturbances which brought Israel to the end of its wanderings. Driven in turn, perhaps, by the Philistines who were settling in their country, the Canaanites, led by their king, Sihon, made an advance into the country east of the Jordan, expelling the Moabites and the Ammonites from the most fertile parts of their territory and founding a new kingdom with Heshbon for its capital. At this point the conquered bethought themselves of their kinsmen in the desert of Kadesh. Perhaps called to aid by Moab and Ammon themselves, in any case they were welcome allies, and the fresh and unexhausted vigor of Israel accomplished the work. King Sihon was defeated at Jahaz and his kingdom destroyed, but Israel took up its dwelling in the bountiful land and kept for itself the reward of the contest and the victory. Soon, however, the fertile valleys and fields ceased to suffice for the constantly increasing men and flocks: it was necessary to seek homes west of the Jordan. Judah led the advance. He crossed the Jordan and turned southward toward the mountains and fertile lowlands which afterwards bore his name. Here Judah succeeded, indeed, in establishing himself, but only after heavy losses. Many mixtures with alien races took place, but after long and persistent struggles the intruder finally overcame the native; at the time of David, when Judah enters the clear light of history, the Israelitish part of the population is in unquestioned control of the land and it is recognised as distinctly Israelitish.

A second and entirely unsuccessful attempt was made by Si-

meon and Levi. Through treachery they got possession of the Canaanite city of Shechem which is the key to the mountain region of Ephraim ; but Israel recoiled in horror from the disgraceful deed, and the transgressing tribes fell victims to the vengeance of the Canaanites. Levi was obliterated as a tribe, to reappear by a most remarkable metamorphosis as a sacerdotal tribe ; the remnants of Simeon took refuge with their nearest kinsmen, the tribe of Judah, and were absorbed by it.

The third and most successful invasion was conducted by the house of Joseph. Only Reuben and Gad remained behind in the country east of the Jordan ; the other seven tribes united under the lead of the Ephraimite Joshua for a combined expedition against middle Palestine. They took advantage of unusually low water in the Jordan to make a sudden assault upon Jericho, which they captured and destroyed ; they also succeeded in taking Ai and Bethel.

Only now did the Canaanites, who were evidently enervated by luxury, and no match in respect of bravery for the impetuous sons of the desert, rouse themselves to united resistance ; but Joshua defeated them at Gibeon, and so Israel was firmly established in middle Palestine. But this does not mean that Israel was in full possession of the land : by far the best and most fertile portions of it, and especially the majority of the cities, whose strong fortifications made them impregnable to the primitive military skill of the Israelites, remained in possession of the Canaanites ; it was chiefly the woody mountain-chains of northern and middle Palestine that had come into the power of Israel, and the Canaanites had partly to be subdued by force and partly to be peacefully absorbed—a long and difficult task.

That Israel had the ability to carry on this centuries-long struggle deliberately and with final success, is due entirely to Moses and his work. Moses had given the people a nationality and in this an inalienable palladium which, purified and strengthened by the power of religion, could not be destroyed, but of itself led on to victory. Thus it came about that Israel in Canaan did not become Canaanitish, but on the contrary the Canaanites became Israelitish.

But this outcome of the contest of the nationalities was by no means certain to human foresight. In Canaan Israel adopted from the Canaanites agriculture and all the arts of domiciliated life. How easily this might have led to a change in national character, a loss of national individuality, so that Israel would have been conquered and subdued spiritually by the Canaanites !

Besides, quite apart from the superior numbers and civilisation of the Canaanites, Israel had within itself the worst of enemies and a germ of destruction. This was the proud sense of independence and the strongly-developed family feeling of the nomad, which did not immediately vanish from the national character with the surrender of the nomadic fashion of life. After the united effort under Joshua had but barely laid the foundation, the people again broke up into tribes and clans, which now aimlessly and each on its own account and unmindful of its neighbor sought new places of settlement.

Judah had been entirely lost sight of by the other tribes. Zebulun and Naphtali went into the extreme north where under the leadership of a certain Barak of Kedesh-naphtali they succeeded in defeating King Jabin of Hazor and thus secured their tribal territory in the North. A part of the tribe of Manasseh, the families of Jair and Machir, crossed the Jordan and conquered the land east of the Sea of Galilee: an event of much importance, since thus was established the permanent connexion between the country east of the Jordan and that west of it. The tribe of Dan tried first to establish permanent homes in the fertile plain sloping toward the Mediterranean; but in spite of all its bravery it did not succeed in conquering territory from the powerful and warlike Philistines: the poetic, one might almost say romantic, expression of this fruitless struggle between the tribe and the Philistines is preserved in the story of Samson. They finally left this region and in the utmost north conquered the city of Laish on the slope of Mount Hermon, giving it their own name of Dan. The division of Benjamin from Joseph and its continuance as a separate tribe must also be dated from this time. Shamir in the mountains of Ephraim was occupied by the family of Tolah of the tribe of Issachar, Pirathon in the same region by the family of Abdon, Aijalon by the family of Elon from the tribe of Zebulun. Only an extreme danger could bring about union among these, and not even this a complete or permanent union.

After the time of Joshua the Canaanites seem to have made only one more effort, by gathering and exerting all their forces, to overcome the intruders. Under the leadership of a certain Sisera of Harosett-haggiojim a powerful coalition of Canaanitish kings was formed, which undertook the war of extermination against Israel. And it seemed about to succeed: the Israelites were already withdrawing into the hiding-places of their woods and mountains when aid came from heaven. Deborah, a divinely inspired woman,

rekindled the spirits of the discouraged troops. Under the lead of Barak of the tribe of Issachar the fighting-men of seven tribes assembled upon the venerable and sacred Mount Tabor, and the Canaanites gave way before the impetuous attack of these troops fighting for God and their existence. At Taanach by the river Kishon they were beaten and scattered; Sisera himself was slain on his flight by a woman. After this battle we hear no more of any resistance on the part of the Canaanites: it settled the destiny of Palestine for good in favor of Israel.

While Israel had thus obtained relief from the Canaanites, it was now threatened by another enemy. The races related to Israel looked enviously upon its success, and now wanted a share of the Canaanite booty. Moab advanced across the Jordan, and its king, Eglon, received at Jericho homage and tribute from the tribe of Benjamin, but the Benjaminite Ehud stabbed him and freed his people from the foreign yoke. Ammon, too, advanced to the Jordan, and the hard-pressed tribe of Gad was saved only by the bravery of Jephthah, whose victory is made especially memorable by the tragic circumstances connected with it,—the hero was forced by a too hasty vow to sacrifice upon the altar his only child, a beloved daughter. Jephthah had also to wage domestic war. The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh regarded with jealous and anxious eyes the rising power of the tribe of Gad which lay between them, and tried to extend their own territory by an act of aggression against Gad; but they were repulsed by the Gaddites under Jephthah and suffered a fearful defeat.

If Israel was so lacking in inner harmony, it is no wonder that its enemies had free play. Even the marauding Bedouins of the desert made plundering incursions into the land which was exposed to them as a defenceless prey. Such a band of Midianites advanced even to Mount Tabor in the extreme north of the country not far from the Sea of Galilee. But this very expedition was to bear far-reaching consequences. In pure wantonness the Midianites had slaughtered on Tabor some captured members of the noble family of Abiezer of the tribe of Manasseh. Thereupon Gideon, or Jerubbaal, the head of the family, took up the sword to avenge the blood of his murdered brethren. He summoned the members and dependants of his family, three hundred men all told, and with these pursued the retreating Midianites. Far beyond the Jordan, on the very border of the desert, he overtook them; he succeeded in dispersing the enemy and in taking captive their two kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, whom he himself struck down in ex-

piation for his murdered brethren, after his eldest son, Jether, had refused to do it. On his return he chastised the inhabitants of Succoth and Penuel, who had scornfully refused to aid him in his pursuit of vengeance. After this victory Gideon must have established a regular tribal kingdom: in his ancestral city of Ophrah he erected a great ephod, or idol, from the gold of the Midianitish booty, and maintained there a regular court and numerous wives.

Thus the first attempt at political concentration, the establishment of a tribal kingdom, had originated with the house of Joseph, and from this tribal kingdom might have grown a national kingdom, but the time for it had not yet come. During his life Gideon was in undisputed possession of the sway over Joseph; but after his death harem-politics, the curse of all oriental royal houses, overthrew his family. Abimelech, the son of a noble from the still purely Canaanitish city of Shechem, with the aid of kinsmen in this city, appropriated the inheritance of his father. He attacked Ophrah and slew there upon one stone all his brothers, seventy in number according to the legend; only the youngest escaped. Of course, this was not the way to establish the kingdom in the hearts of the Israelitish people. Abimelech enjoyed the usurped throne only three years. At the end of this period he fell into a quarrel with the Shechemites. Toward them, too, he acted the Israelitish king, and the proud Canaanitish nobles would not endure this of their creature. An open insurrection against him took place in consequence of which he sacked and utterly destroyed Shechem. But before the Canaanitish city of Thebez, which he was threatening with the same fate, destiny overtook him. As he was on the point of setting fire to the tower in which the inhabitants of Thebez had taken refuge, a woman threw a millstone down upon him from the battlements of the tower and killed him.

Thus the first attempt at an Israelitish kingdom ended in blood and murder. But it failed not on its own account, but because of the manner of its execution. Conditions called for a repetition of the attempt: only it must be no tribal kingdom, but a national one. It was an absolute necessity. Only through the union in one strong hand of all the divided and therefore impotent forces could the way be paved for order, and race and nationality be maintained. True, it required first a great danger to overcome all the centrifugal forces in Israel, and a gigantic danger really came; but in the fire of this extreme distress Israel was welded together into a united and strong nation.

The truculent people of the Philistines, well trained in war,

took advantage of the weakness of Israel and advanced toward the mountain region of Ephraim into the fertile plain of Jezreel. The first clash at Eben-ezer resulted unfortunately for Israel. Thereupon they fetched from the temple at Shiloh the old military shrine of the house of Joseph, the ark of the covenant, in order to make sure of the help of God. But as though God had wished to give his people an impressive lesson on the folly of such reliance upon outward things, this second battle ended with a more terrible and complete defeat: thirty thousand Israelites covered the field of battle; the sacred ark itself was captured by the heathen victor. With this the power of Joseph was broken. The Philistines burned and destroyed the temple at Shiloh, carried the captured sacred ark to the temple of their chief god, Dagon, and subjected the land even to the Jordan: the people were disarmed and held in check by Philistine prefects and strongholds. And from all evidence this Philistine domination must have lasted a considerable time. Israel seemed paralysed, and submitted, though with gnashing of teeth. After all it was no disgrace to have succumbed to the lion. But when in addition the ass came to give a kick to the powerless people, the measure was full. The Ammonites renewed the attempt which Jephthah had checked, and spread out as conquerors on the east bank of the Jordan. They laid siege to the city of Jabesh-gilead; the inhabitants, recognising the impossibility of resistance, offered to capitulate. But the Ammonite king, Nahash, answered them: "On this condition will I accept a capitulation from you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel." The inhabitants of Jabesh beg for seven days time, during which they propose to call on all Israel for help. Scornfully the Ammonite grants them the respite and calmly permits the messengers to leave the beleagured city. But he was destined to have erred in his reckoning. The God of Sinai had not forgotten his people; he who had freed it from the bondage of the Egyptians delivered it now from the Philistine subjection. Already his spirit had touched the heart of the hero whom he had chosen as the liberator of his people; this liberator is still following the plow in the field inherited from his fathers, but humbly yet confidently he bides his time. Then when the call for help from Jabesh reaches his ear, there is no delay; the districts of Israel are stirred as by a spring tempest: the liberator, the king has come.