

CHAPTER XV
The Monarchy
Samuel - Kings

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The original inhabitants of Jerusalem felt so secure, the city being a natural fort, that they contemptuously sent word to David, "Thou shalt not come in thither, but the blind and the lame shall turn thee away." Material walls in themselves are no security; and the mortal who puts his trust in them, awakens to find the stronghold his no longer. Constant vigilance is the price we pay to hold forts, be they material or spiritual; and as Jerusalem belongs to him who can take it, David entered and established his kingdom there. The wandering tribes now had a capital and during the reigns of David and Solomon the nation reached the zenith of its national power.

One great sin darkens the pages of David's history; and the historian makes no attempt to condone it either because David is founder of the monarchy or the popular hero of the race. Then we see the "national conscience," the restraining hand of the prophet. Nathan presented himself before the king, and told him the story of a great wrong. "There were two men in one city; the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb; which he had bought and nourished up; and it grew up together with him and his children; and it did eat of his own morsel, and drink of his own cup, and lay in his bosom and was to him as a daughter. And there came a traveler unto the rich man and he spared to take of his own flock but took the poor man's lamb and dressed it for the man who was come to him." The anger of the generous David was greatly kindled, and he exclaimed: "As the Lord liveth the man who hath done this thing is worthy to die." Nathan answered: "THOU ART THE MAN."

In his own household he had sinned, and to his own household retribution came. There arose a feud between the sons of David and Absalom laid deliberate plans to depose his father. Still David was always the father, never the enemy of Absalom; and though driven from Jerusalem again into hiding, commanded his generals, "Deal gently with the young man for my sake." He did not ask of the returned courier the success of his own army but, "Is it well with the young man?" And it was not the victor, but the father, who retired to the chamber over the gate weeping, "O my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son." The kingdom belonged to David, he had gained it; Saul could not keep it from him; because he was friend and father first and king last. The spiritual fulfilment of our duties always holds the external symbol true and fast.

When Solomon succeeded his father, the Lord appeared to him in a dream by night, and said to him: "Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon said: "Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil." The speech pleased the Lord, who said to him: "Because thou hast asked this thing, and not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself; nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart; I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked both riches and honor, and I will lengthen thy days."

This, however, is a "dream by night", it is not a day vision of God. A "dream by night" may be but a travesty of the Real. When we read closely and searchingly into the life of Solomon, we know this "Lord" was such an one. He is not our God; neither the wisdom he gives, nor the gifts he bestows strike a responsive chord in the soul. The "understanding" of Solomon is a cold judicial mind. "The heart hath its arguments which the understanding knows not of." Who cares for riches, honor or long life, if love be lacking? Who that has found infinite substance and has learned to build therein cares for riches? Who that has received the gift of "eternal life," knows aught of length of days? He dwells out of time in eternity.

There is always something elementary in David, he touches the soul of things and strikes a chord to which we always respond; but try as we will Solomon can never gain entrance into our hearts. Competency we grant him; executive power he certainly has; he is magnificent and kingly in all of his ways; but all about him, all that he has relates to "this world," and though his kingdom seems to be flourishing, we always feel the rumble of disintegration. Unity is lacking; the many strange women, his political marriages with foreign powers, all bringing with them their gods; and Love, the combining power, is most conspicuously absent. It is all a spectacular play of scenic effects, the curtain will drop and the scenes will all be torn down. We come with the Queen of Sheba, to admire his temple, his buildings, his reservoir, his commerce; but we leave him and say with the Preacher, "For what hath man with all his labor, and of the striving of his heart wherein he laboreth under the sun? For all his days are but sorrow, and his travail is grief; yea, even in the night time his heart taketh no rest. This also is vanity."

The children of Israel pay the price for the king as foretold by Samuel. Solomon's magnificence is built out of the flesh and blood of his subjects, the nation has been reduced to slavery. He built the great temple with a levy of impressed labor, "of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so there was neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house." He built a palace for himself that was thirteen years in building; and another one for the Egyptian princess whom he had married. He had a great navy which allied with that of the Phoenicians went as far away as India. But it is a monarchy of oriental splendor and despotism, dissatisfaction is rife and its downfall is imminent.

No master but Love ever receives loyalty, and an overseer whom Solomon had placed over the northern portion of his kingdom, Israel, was found guilty of intrigue, plotting for the secession of the ten northern tribes. Jeroboam was unscrupulous, but ambitious and valorous. Solomon discovered his plot and he was forced to flee into Egypt to escape the wrath of his royal master.

When Solomon died even his worldly wisdom and diplomacy did not descend upon his son and heir, Rehoboam. Israel demanded of the new king by the envoy sent out to meet him, "Thy father made our yokes grievous; now therefore make thou the service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee." Solomon's son would not listen to the elders of the people who advised leniency; but to his own foolish young companions, and said to the envoy, "My father made your yokes heavy, and I will add to your yoke; my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

No government can last save that which rests on the consent of the governed; there is a rebellion against Rehoboam; and the ten northern tribes seceded leaving to the southern kingdom at Jerusalem [only] Judah and Benjamin. So the monarchy fell, and the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel were formed on its ashes. Jeroboam returned from Egypt, and was crowned king of Israel. Thus were the ten tribes lost to the nation and to Jehovah, for Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, did sin and caused Israel to sin. He made two golden calves, Egyptian symbols of fertility, one he placed at Dan and the other at Bethel. So in the maze of idolatry and debauchery, the ten tribes were swallowed up among other heathen nations.

From now on the real history of the Hebrews lies with "the remnant," those who either in the northern or southern kingdom remained true to the Mosaic law. The prophets now become the very soul of the nation, and we read the history of the people from this time on mainly through their written pages. The soul of the race deepens and broadens during the succeeding centuries, losing much of its intense nationalism, gaining thereby the universal idea which finally culminates in the Christ, whose country is the world. He who loves the world must love his country, not less but more than any other.

Consciousness in the race is like the tide in the ocean--it ebbs and flows. The apex of world power being reached, down again to the ebb, and again in Hebrew history we follow as it waxes to power, not again to the climax of a national monarchy, but to the spiritual kingdom of universal Christianity. The failure of earth ambitions is the beginning of spiritual aspirations. It is a law for the individual, the nation, and the human race; for the individual is the unit in the nation, the nation is but the unit in the race--all subject to the law given by Him whom men call God's own son, "Whosoever will lose his life, will save it." None can enter spiritual life until he has lost the material conception of life, be it man, nation or race.

Associated with the monarchy will always be the names of David and Solomon. The genius was David's; Solomon but enlarged and consummated his father's plans. The characteristics of both David and Solomon have been incorporated in two distinct classes of literature; the Psalms are imputed to David, because he wrote at least twelve of them, according to competent scholars, and is the originator of this class of poetry. The twelve Psalms of David are: III, IV, VIII, XI, XV, XVIII, XIX, XXIV, XXIX, XXXIII, CI, of the one hundred and fifty.

The remaining Psalms are the poems of the eight following centuries, and celebrate the festivals and victories, or mourn the defeats and sorrows of the nation. This book contains all the extant lyric poetry of the ancient Hebrews. The spirit of poetry includes at least two elements--truth and beauty. There are two worlds, an outer and an inner; a world of sense and a world super-sensuous. One is Real and must be perceived by revelation; the other is unreal, the human concept of the Real. To see this inner world, the invisible, real and eternal world, and to translate it into outward form, thus enabling others to see what he sees, is the function of the artist, the musician and the poet.

In the Psalms the soul reaches out to the Soul; as the river seeks to be united to the ocean. They are the cry of the soul to be delivered from trouble and to find rest in the Spirit. They have been called the perfection of the lyric, and their musical rhythm, from the diminuendo of humility to the crescendo of triumph and attainment is aptly so denominated. They cover the whole gamut of soul experience; and there is no mood inherent in the soul of man, from repentance of sin, despair, sorrow, helplessness, to trust, hope, faith, love, triumph, but are expressed in the Psalms. They are the natural outpouring of the heart of man, who finds it impossible to find rest save in unison with God.

The Proverb is associated with Solomon because he was possibly the first of his race who took the ethical view of life instead of the spiritual. The Wisdom books of the Hebrews represent a distinct departure of thought from the national theme, religion. The Proverbs are not poems, they do not penetrate deeply into spiritual causes; but the maker of a proverb must have a keenly analytical mind and be able to sum up concisely his observation of a characteristic trait. The Psalms are spiritual; Proverbs, on the contrary, are a dissertation on the folly of wickedness, not because it is a sin against God, and a violation of man's spiritual nature, but because the man who is wicked gets nowhere. It is profitable to be good; it is unprofitable to be wicked, is the verdict of the Proverbs. The Psalm therefore comes from the heart of man, the proverb from the head. While the Psalms express our emotions, and all that is finest in life comes from the emotional or spiritual nature, the proverb is a sanity we are greatly in need of. Emotions without balance are wasteful and non-productive; and the proverb is always balanced. It holds the mirror before the face, and we see that every day is judgment day. The sinner never conceals his folly, but carries it where all may behold it, in his face, actions and conditions. There is no one great day in which the Lord

calls us to reward or retribution; but each day has left the mark in his character where all may read; not God's verdict of him but man's verdict of himself.

One who is not familiar with Prof. Moulton's admirable arrangement of the Psalms can scarcely appreciate the variety of literature and beauty of expression contained in the book of Psalms. Come to the Psalms for comfort in any sorrow and you may find it. Spiritual guidance is found in the twenty-third, and the law of supply in the thirty-seventh. If attacked by discouragement read the one hundred and twenty-sixth; if vanity seizes you, read the nineteenth Psalm and see it fade away in the grandeur of the Whole. To walk above the material in the clear light of the spiritual world, flee to the ninety-first Psalm, and dwell under the "shadow of the Almighty."

The Greeks made alive their mountains, rivers, ocean, woods, glens, and glades, by giving to each its presiding deity. The Hebrew makes the universe alive with the one Presence. It is an all-pervading, unmistakable Presence; man cannot hide from it. Gleaming behind the shadows of sense, it will retain its unbroken continuity until all men are alive with the One Life forever.