

# HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.<sup>1</sup>

FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

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*IV. Solomon.—The Division of the Kingdom.—The Early Years of the Divided Kingdoms.*

TO BE THE SUCCESSOR of David was a great inheritance, but a much greater responsibility. Will Solomon, upon whose youthful shoulders the dying father laid the heavy burden, be equal to it? There is perhaps no other personage of Israelitish history of whose true character and its historical significance it is so difficult to get a clear conception and give a correct picture, as Solomon; for what we know of him is scant and self-contradictory. It is possible to represent him as an oriental despot of the most common stamp and support every trait of the picture thus drawn with Bible references, and to take credit into the bargain for one's objectivity and freedom from prejudice. But such a judgment would be absolutely unhistorical: Solomon cannot have been an ordinary and insignificant man,—on this point history speaks loud and clear.

He was the acknowledged favorite of his father. This may have been due solely to the fact that he was a late offspring, considerably younger than David's other sons, and born in his father's old age. Now it is deeply rooted in the nature of a man that his desire for children and his fondness for them grows with advancing age. A grandson is usually loved more fondly than a son, and Solomon might have been David's grandson as far as years were

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the manuscript of Prof. C. H. Cornill, by W. H. Carruth of the University of Kansas.

concerned. But this is not the whole explanation of their relation. Solomon was plainly made of different clay from his brothers. The elder sons of David, so far as we know them, were mere caricatures of their father, rude, wild fellows, who had inherited their father's strength and beauty indeed, but not his lofty mind and noble spirit.

Moreover, in estimating Solomon, his mother is a factor to be considered. Bathsheba, this demoniac creature, must have been a quite unusual and extraordinary woman ; for to attach to herself such a man as David not merely in the fleeting intoxication of a criminal passion but permanently, and to be indispensable to his heart for twenty years, required more than simply a beautiful face, especially when one considers how quickly physical charms decay in oriental women. From this extraordinary mother also Solomon had received a rich endowment for his career. Thus we can easily comprehend how the aged king took into his heart of hearts this highly gifted, clever and animated boy who played about him, growing under his very eyes into the image of his fondly cherished mother, and how he came to the honest conviction that this son was the fittest and worthiest to sit upon the throne after himself. And in diverting the succession to him he committed no wrong according to Israelitish ideas. In ancient times custom seems really to have conceded to the father unrestricted disposal of the right of primogeniture : the Hebrew language devised a regular formal expression for the transference of the right of primogeniture to a son who was not the first born, and this right was expressly taken from the father only with the giving of the Second Law (Deuteronomy). Solomon was eighteen years old when he ascended the throne, at least no older than this. The fact that in spite of this he maintained his dominion for forty years under the most trying conditions is of itself sufficient evidence of his great qualities, and that his father had not been deceived in him.

The new king's tasks were given in his conditions. David himself had really not been a conqueror. To extend the realm further would have been folly ; rather could the loss of provinces be endured if only domestic conditions were strengthened and consolidated. The kingdom of David was the creation of enthusiasm, an achievement of a mighty national tendency which his masterful personality had released and guided : if this creation was to be permanent it was necessary that institutions should take the place of persons.

David had in the main left domestic conditions unaltered. He

was satisfied if Israel always responded to his summons, and the tribute of conquered peoples sufficed to meet the expenses of the still comparatively simple court. True, David does seem to have contemplated some measures of taxation—the great census of which we are told can have had no other end in view—but when a severe pestilence broke out he saw in it a divine hint and gave the matter up. What united the Israelites under David was free obedience and voluntary subjection ; it was not forgotten, and he himself did not deny that his rule was the outcome of popular choice. In comparison with the neighboring peoples having long-established monarchical forms of government, conditions in Israel were still thoroughly patriarchal and primitive, and David was only a sheikh on a large scale. Now it was Solomon's accomplishment and merit to have rid the Israelites of the last trace of their Bedouin character, and to have trained them in a severe and even harsh school into national citizenship. Tradition sees in him pre-eminently the judge and the ruler who establishes everywhere solid order and strictest discipline. And in this respect his activity was unquestionably beneficent and laid the foundation for all after time. If David created an Israelitish nation, Solomon created an Israelitish state.

But,—and now we come to the reverse of the medallion—Solomon was thoroughly imbued with the sentiment : *L'état e'est moi*. His government has a decidedly personal character, and all that he did was done not for the benefit of his people, but for his own glorification. Love of splendor and desire for display are the most prominent traits of his picture. He looked for the essence of dominion in outward show : extensive buildings, an extravagant court with innumerable servants and concubines,—that was his taste. But for this he needed most of all money, and so his whole reign has a marked financial character. This necessity grew more imperative in so much as the tributes from foreign peoples soon ceased.

Right at the beginning of his reign Edom secured its independence. Hadad, a descendant of the Edomite royal family, had escaped the catastrophe that came upon Edom at the hands of Joab and David by fleeing to Egypt and had there formed an alliance of marriage with the Pharaoh. When he heard that David and Joab were dead Hadad returned to his country. He despised Israel and became king in Edom, as the Book of Kings briefly and dryly reports. The commercial highway by way of the Arabah valley to the Red Sea must, indeed, have remained in Solomon's

possession, otherwise he would not have been able to make his famous trips to Ophir; but Hadad evidently ruled without molestation in the Edomite mountain-land proper.

Moab, too, seems to have shaken off the Israelitish yoke. At any rate, it was necessary soon after to subdue it anew. But a matter of much more moment was that Solomon did not, or could not, prevent the secession from Israel of the Aramæans whom David had conquered. They established a new kingdom with Damascus as centre, which was destined to become the mortal enemy of Israel.

Thus the conquests of David were quickly lost, and Solomon was left dependent on the resources of his own land and people alone. He divided the land into twelve districts for fiscal purposes, each of which had to meet the expenses of the court for one month. In conjunction with the Phœnicians he undertook from his seaport of Eziongeber expeditions to South Arabia and East Africa, which brought him abundant profit. From the caravans which crossed his territory he collected high tolls, and monopolised the Egyptian horse trade with Asia. And when these resources failed he borrowed of his friend and neighbor, Hiram of Tyre. The Tyrian loan had finally reached the amount of 12,000 pounds of gold: that is, according to current value of the metal, about \$2,880,000, but taking into consideration the purchasing power of money at that time it would in fact correspond to \$48,000,000; and as Solomon could not pay back this immense sum he had to cede to Hiram a border district with twenty towns.

But Solomon's chief need was workers. To supply it he robbed the Canaanites who still dwelt among the Israelites of all their rights and liberties, making them state slaves, just as Pharaoh Rameses II. had done to the Israelites in Goshen in his day. This was not exactly commendable, but it was an enormous advance in the centralisation of the state. Saul had planned something of the sort, but had not been able to carry it out. But this was still insufficient, and accordingly Solomon had levies made of 30,000 Israelite citizens, who were compelled to work in sections of 10,000 every fourth month.

Among the buildings of Solomon none became of such importance to succeeding generations as the Temple. Yet the Temple was originally planned merely as a chapel—only a part, and by no means the largest and most important, of Solomon's palace. The royal residence of David had long ceased to satisfy the increased

requirements. Solomon worked for thirteen years on his palace at Jerusalem.

Solomon's activity in building and his development in splendor were doubtless increased by the fact that he had won for a wife the daughter of his powerful neighbor, Pharaoh Pasheban II., and had to supply her in some measure with what she was used to at home, as indeed he did build her a palace for herself with quite exceptional splendor. The Pharaoh had furnished Egyptian troops to conquer the ancient Canaanite city of Gezer which was evidently indisposed to submit to forced annexation by Solomon, and surrendered it to Solomon as dowry for his daughter.

This is a symptom of great military weakness or at least of indolence, and it is in keeping with the fact that Solomon's buildings were chiefly of the nature of fortifications. He endeavored to protect by fortresses all the strategic or otherwise important points of his country, and especially to make his capital of Jerusalem impregnable. We see that Solomon places himself wholly on the defensive and desires only to put his country into condition to maintain and defend itself within his own borders. Here the difference from David becomes most conspicuous, but here also the question may be asked whether Solomon's policy was not the more correct and suited to the situation. If he succeeded in securing his own country against attack and strengthening it within, that was enough.

That these new conditions seemed very strange to the Israelites, who were accustomed to the most unrestricted freedom, and were very distasteful to them, we can easily imagine. So much the more significant is the fact that there was only one revolt against Solomon's authority, and that easily suppressed. A young Ephraimite named Jeroboam had attracted Solomon's attention and Solomon had made him overseer of the laborers of the house of Joseph, who were working on the fortifications of Jerusalem. Jeroboam induced those who were under him to rebel, though they probably followed unwillingly, but was obliged to flee to Egypt. There the throne was no longer occupied by Solomon's father-in-law, but a new dynasty had arisen, the founder of which, Sheshenk I. (Shishack), of course received with open arms the enemy of his neighbor who was allied to the previous dynasty.

Otherwise Solomon's reign seems to have passed off altogether peacefully and without disturbance within the country itself. And in one respect it bore the most important results for

Israel. Solomon was what one might almost call a cosmopolitan nature: he extended immensely the intellectual horizon of Israel, and opened his country in all directions to intercourse with the world. He placed Israel in the ranks of the great nations. Not only gold and ivory, sandalwood and peacocks came to Jerusalem; but also the art of the Phœnicians and Egyptians, the wisdom and the fairy-lore of the East found their way into Israel, giving everywhere the most powerful impulses, and rousing to new life.

Solomon was just as striking and winning a person as his father David, only in a different way: what is told of his wisdom and his wit, his artistic and scientific tastes and interests is certainly to be regarded as historical. The epigram has come down to us which he uttered on the occasion of the dedication of the Temple, and it is among the most profound and original in all Israelite literature. It runs:

" God hath set the sun in the tent of heaven,  
But He Himself hath chosen to dwell in the thick darkness.  
And yet I have dared to build Thee an house  
As habitation and a dwelling-place for ever."

It is quite conceivable that about the person of just such a ruler a whole circle of legends and anecdotes was woven, and his portrait was especially ornamented by poetry. Judah never had occasion to regret that it remained faithful to its son and preserved the solid structure of the state founded by Solomon.

After a reign of forty years Solomon died and thereupon a serious crisis came upon his realm. The imposing personality of Solomon had restrained opposing forces; now they were determined to bear the heavy burdens no longer. In Jerusalem, it is true, Rehoboam, the oldest son of the deceased king, was promptly recognised; but in northern Israel they had not forgotten that David was not a member of their tribes, but that the house of Joseph had submitted to him as an electoral king and on the terms of a solemn electoral compact.

And so all Israel gathered at Shechem to set terms for the new king: "Make thou the heavy yoke which thy father put upon us lighter, and we will serve thee," so ran their demand. Rehoboam was clearly disposed to consent, but his advisers succeeded in changing his purpose. Legally considered, the men assembled at Shechem were rebels; he was urged to make no concessions to the revolution, but to suppress it by an appearance of energetic firmness. When on the third day the people came to get the royal re-

sponse Rehoboam answered: "My father did lade you with a heavy yoke, but I will add to your yoke; my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

After these fateful words the rebellion was openly declared. The terrified king sent Solomon's overseer, Adoniram, to negotiate, but he could not have chosen a less acceptable negotiator; the people stoned the odious officer to death before the eyes of the king, and the latter hastily sought his chariot and barely escaped to Jerusalem. But those who were at Shechem proclaimed Jeroboam, who meanwhile had returned from Egypt, king over Israel.

And thus the work of David was destroyed; what he had united through the pains and labors of a beneficent life was divided forever by the imprudence of his grandson. Of course the might of the nation was broken by this division, and it is a real wonder and an astonishing evidence of its toughness and vitality that it maintained itself, divided as it was, for centuries.

We have very scanty information regarding the next two centuries. The Hebrew sources themselves run low, and we receive nothing worth speaking of from without. Even the kings of this period are known to us by little more than their names. Only a few, here and there, are for us concrete figures with individual features.

In the beginning the two hostile brothers made war upon each other for life and death. At first the advantage seems to have been upon the side of Judah, where Rehoboam had at his disposal the well-filled arsenals and garnered treasures of his father, and lived amid established conditions, while Jeroboam had to create everything from the beginning. Thus Jeroboam considered it advisable to transfer his residence from Shechem, where he had at first dwelt, to Penuel on the east bank of the Jordan.

But at this point a severe storm broke over Rehoboam. The Egyptian Pharaoh, Shishak (Sheshenk), marched against his country and plundered Jerusalem, carrying off all the treasures accumulated by Solomon. As Shishak is the former host and protector of Jeroboam one might be led by the account of the Old Testament to suspect that Jeroboam had called him in to relieve him of his neighbor and enemy; but from the report of his victory made by Shishak himself in the great temple of Ammon at Karnak we learn that he conquered and plundered north Israelitish cities also, and accordingly that his expedition was directed against both kingdoms alike. So we see that it was just an ordinary marauding ex-

pedition on which Shishak expected to secure easy booty and cheap laurels, and succeeded.

This is all that is told us of the seventeen years reign of Rehoboam,—this and the fact that there was constant war between him and Jeroboam. It is the same with Rehoboam's son and successor Abijah, though it appears that he entered into alliance with the kingdom of Damascus, in order, of course, to make with it common cause against Israel. Abijah reigned but three years; he was followed by his son Asa, of whom we learn that he was obliged to take measures against his own mother, because she had devoted herself to the worship of an unclean idol.

Meanwhile Jeroboam had died after a reign of twenty-two years, having transferred his residence back to the west side of the Jordan at Tirzah. He was followed by his son Nadab. But the latter was murdered in the second year of his reign. While engaged in the siege of the Philistine border fortress of Gibbethon—for we learn thus that war had again broken out between the people of northern Israel and the Philistines—he was slain by a certain Baasha and the whole house of Jeroboam destroyed.

This performance is typical of the whole history of the northern kingdom. Israel had rebelled against the heavy yoke of Solomon, and now it was never rid of revolutions and anarchy; the throne was regarded as derelict, and every bold robber took possession of it only to be dispossessed by the next more lucky comer. Baasha who was perhaps Nadab's general (the usurpers are generally officers and the revolutions military revolutions), and who must have been an efficient soldier, turned his whole force against Asa of Judah. At Ramah, about six miles north of Jerusalem, on the border of his country, he established a close blockade, and as the Book of Kings says, "suffered no one to go out or come in to Asa, king of Judah." Asa was thus brought into such straits that he gave all his remaining gold and silver to purchase the aid of the king of Damascus. The latter immediately invaded and devastated the whole north of Israel, whereupon Baasha was obliged to hasten to the aid of his hard-pressed north-border. Now Asa summoned all Judah to arms, had the fortifications at Ramah taken down and the material transported across the border where with Baasha's stone and timber he strongly fortified Geba and Mizpah on his own territory. The Book of Kings also attributes to him the fortification of other cities.

Baasha ruled for twenty-four years. But fate overtook his son Elah. Once more the Israelites were in the field against the Philis-

tines and besieging Gibbethon ; but the king, as it is said, lay drunken at Tirzah in the house of his minister, Arza. Here a cavalry officer named Zimri murdered him and exterminated the whole house of Baasha and all his relatives and friends. But the glory of Zimri was to last but seven days. Scarcely had the army which lay encamped before Gibbethon, learned of the palace-revolution when it proclaimed its tried leader Omri as king. In forced marches Omri moved against Tirzah ; Zimri realised that all resistance was in vain, but was resolved at least to die like a king : he set fire to the palace and perished in the flames. Omri, however, was not destined to receive general recognition ; a certain Tibni was set up as opposition king. But after several years of civil war Omri succeeded in overcoming his rival ; Tibni fell, and now Omri was the undisputed monarch.

Omri's very first deed after attaining the sole rule bears testimony to his statesmanship. Zimri had burned the palace at Tirzah, and there was need of building another. Omri may himself have learned with dismay what an easy game the capture of the capital had been ; therefore he moved the royal residence to another place and founded Samaria. The very name, which we may translate with watch tower (*Wartburg*), is significant enough. Proud and free the hill of Samaria rises from the surrounding valley, sloping gently only to the east, but falling off steeply on the other sides. A gigantic circle of higher mountains surrounds it with a protecting sweep. Moreover this particular region is extraordinarily fertile and comparatively well watered. From a strategic point of view especially the choice of the site is a strikingly fortunate one ; that the kingdom of Israel survived for a century and a half the lamentable times that soon came upon it is due first of all to its almost impregnable capital, which resisted even the Assyrians for three years. Through the foundation of Samaria Omri became the real founder of the kingdom of Israel, and it has its good reason that the Assyrians always designated the kingdom of Israel as Omri-land.

Further than this we know only a few facts regarding Omri's reign, and these only indirectly. He made successful war against Moab, colonised the northern parts of Moab with Israelites, and made the king Kemosgad pay tribute. On the other hand, he was not successful against Damascus: he had to cede several border districts and acknowledge a sort of feudal overlordship. Therefore he sought the support of his powerful neighbor on the west, and married his son Ahab to Jezebel, the daughter of the Tyrian king

Etlibaal. With Judah, where king Asa still reigned, he seems to have maintained peace and to have taken steps toward closer relations with the brother kingdom. On the other hand, the first conflict with Assyria occurs in his reign.

Under Assurnasirapal, who ascended the Assyrian throne in 884 B. C., the power of Assur experienced a mighty revival after a long period of decrepitude; Assurnasirapal is the first of the great conquerors who lived wholly in war and by war and carried the terror of the Assyrian arms everywhere. In the year 876 he marched as far as the Mediterranean and Mount Libanon, and Omri among others hastened to lay his offering at the feet of the mighty monarch; but Assurnasirapal never came again.

Omri was succeeded by his son Ahab. We know relatively the most of him, because the great prophet Elijah was his contemporary, and his career throws also important light on the king. True, this light is not favorable for Ahab, and his conflict with Elijah was fateful for him. He is one of the most ill reputed personages in Israelitish history. But if we examine carefully and with the searching eye of criticism the reports preserved regarding him, the result is a materially different picture. His religious conflict with Elijah, as reported in the Book of Kings, is pure legend; the historical residue turns out to be quite innocent, leaving no occasion for any just reproach to Ahab, and the only actual crime that is laid to his door, the judicial murder of the Israelite Naboth, was the work of Jezebel, which he simply did not interfere with; when Elijah openly and frankly reproached him with the wretched deed, he bitterly repented it and did heavy public penance for it.

What remains of the reports concerning Ahab shows him to have been a worthy son of Omri and one of the best kings and most powerful rulers that Israel ever had. The situation of his kingdom was very critical, and to this were added exterior misfortunes, crop-failure, and shortage, famine and drouth, so as to shake the state to its foundations. But Ahab was equal to the situation, and managed to win the respect and admiration of friend and foe. First of all, he took steps for a peaceful and friendly relation with Judah. Under him we find again for the first time Israel and Judah fighting shoulder to shoulder; the old feud is forgotten, and to seal their friendship the two reigning houses ally themselves by marriage: Jehoshaphat of Judah, who meanwhile had succeeded his father Asa, married his heir, Jehoram, to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab.

It is notable, although Jehoshaphat reigned twenty-five years,

and is praised by the Book of Kings as one of the best kings of Judah, that we really know nothing about him save his relations to the ruling family of Israel. When we find express mention that under him there was no king in Edom, but that a governor from Judah ruled the land, we may indeed infer that Jehoshaphat again subdued the land and deposed the dynasty of Hadad, but the conclusion is not inevitable. He attempted to resume the Ophir expeditions of Solomon from Ezion-geber, but characteristically refused to let his Israelitish friend and neighbor take part in them. However, he did not in the end carry out his purpose, for the ships, though constructed with much pains, were wrecked, probably because they were not managed by the skilled seafarers of Phœnicia, who in Solomon's undertakings had been the leaders.

The most important matter in the reign of Ahab is his wars with the kingdom of Damascus. Omri had been obliged to recognise its overlordship in a certain fashion, and evidently Ahab did the same for some time; but he could not suffer this state of things to continue. After he had increased the power of resistance of his country by fortifying the most important cities, he made an attempt to secure his independence. At first fortune did not favor him, and Ahab found himself shut up in Samaria. King Ben-hadad sends word to him: "Thy gold and thy silver are mine." And with truly royal mind Ahab does not hesitate to take upon himself the misfortune of his people, and consents.

Now Ben-hadad, who had evidently not expected such prompt yielding, demands further that his people shall also plunder Samaria. But Ahab cannot consent to this; he says: "All that thou didst send for of thy servant at the first I will do; but this thing I may not do." Then Ben-hadad answers: "The dust of Samaria will not suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me;" and to this brutal boast Ahab replies with dignity and decision: "Let not him that girdeth on his armor boast himself as he that putteth it off." While Ben-hadad and his officers lie in their drunken mid-day sleep Ahab makes a desperate sortie with the seven thousand two hundred and twenty-three men whom he had in Samaria; the Syrians are taken wholly by surprise and defeated, and hasten back to Damascus in confusion with additional heavy losses on the way.

The following day they again measure strength in open battle at Aphek, and again, despite greatly inferior numbers, Ahab wins a complete victory; the army of Damascus is destroyed, and Ben-hadad himself, with the remnants of his forces, shut up in Aphek.

But Ahab nobly and magnanimously spares his defenceless opponent, and makes peace and friendship with him on condition of the surrender of all the territories that had been taken from Israel.

This performance on the part of Ahab is only explained by a very surprising piece of information which we receive from the Assyrians. Salmanasar II., son and successor of Assurnasirapal, takes up his father's plans, and in 854 leads all the forces of his empire against Cölesyria. At Karkar on the river Crontes there is a battle. Here Salmanasar meets a coalition of many kings and tribes, at the head of which Ben-hadad of Syria and Ahab of Israel are fighting shoulder to shoulder. True, the Assyrian king claims a complete victory, but this victory results in his beginning a very hasty retreat, and it is five years before he attempts to come again.

If Ahab had been a king of common mould he would certainly have used the opportunity to fall upon the rear of this his mortal foe of many years' standing and the natural enemy of his people; but he looked further and recognised the greater danger; and as he had put an end to the fraternal dissension with Judah, it was plainly his intention here by conciliation and magnanimity to put an end to the quarrel with Damascus and conquer his opponent by moral force; and he steadily and faithfully carried out this noble and magnificent policy.

But Ahab had made the mistake of judging others by himself, and in his nobility and large-heartedness overlooked a factor with which the practical statesman unfortunately must deal, and that is human meanness. When the danger was past Ben-hadad never dreamed of keeping his plighted word, and Ahab is compelled to demand the rightful possessions of his people at the point of the sword.

One year after the battle at Karkar the allies of that occasion are facing each other in open battle. Ahab was supported by Jehoshaphat of Judah; for the first time since the days of David we see all Israel united against a foreign foe. The campaign is to secure the important border fortress of Ramoth in Gilead. How high Ben-hadad rated his opponent may be learned from the order he gave his captains: "Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel."

Ahab may have known or suspected this; he does not wear his usual armor in the battle, but his fate was sealed. By chance a man shot an arrow into a joint of his breastplate which was to put a premature end to his precious life. But Ahab proposed to

die as he had lived, a king and a hero. Although he immediately recognised the wound as mortal he held himself by gigantic efforts upright in his chariot until evening, in order not to discourage his troops; then his strength gives way and he falls down dead. At this dreadful tidings a wild panic seizes the Israelite ranks; they think only of saving the king's body; battle and campaign are lost. This is the historical Ahab of Israel.

The consequences of the death of Ahab are seen forthwith. Now that his strong hand was cold, the Moabites again became aggressive. Their king, Mesha, reconquered the parts of his country that had been taken by Omri, and massacred the Israelites that had settled there without respect to age or sex, "as a delight for the eyes in Kemosh and Moab," as he himself says. There was no opposition, for Ahab's eldest son and successor, Ahaziah, seems to have been an incapable and insignificant man. Fortunately for Israel, one is inclined to say, he died in the second year of his reign in consequence of a fall from the window of his palace, and as he had no children he was succeeded by his much abler brother Jehoram. The latter immediately undertook a campaign of revenge against Moab. In conjunction with Jehoshaphat of Judah they advanced from the south by way of Edom into that country and wasted it terribly; but Mesha succeeded in holding his own in the fortress of Kir-hareseth, and the allied kings were obliged to depart finally with their purpose unaccomplished.

Soon after this Jehoshaphat died and was succeeded by his son Jehoram, husband of Athaliah. The Book of Kings reports from his eight years' reign nothing but these two misfortunes: the Edomites freed themselves from their subjection to Judah, while an attempt on the part of Jehoram to subject them again failed utterly, and the king himself barely escaped; furthermore the city of Libhah revolted from Judah and allied itself with the Philistines. Jehoram was followed by his son Ahaziah who reigned but one year, for then a terrible catastrophe broke upon the royal houses of both kingdoms.

In the years 849, 848, and 845 Salmanassar was again in Cölesyria, and thus we can understand how Jehoram of Israel succeeded in recovering from the power of Damascus the city of Ramoth, before the walls of which his father Ahab had fallen. Besides there had been a violent change of dynasty in Damascus, Ben-hadad having been murdered by one of his courtiers, Hazael, who himself mounted the throne. Jehoram was wounded and withdrew to

Jezreel to be healed of his wound. And then the calamity which had long been creeping in the darkness suddenly burst forth.

The great prophet Elijah had died ; his pure and sacred work was carried on in a very impure and unholy spirit. The impression grew up that the whole house of Ahab must be exterminated root and branch for the honor of God. And now the favorable moment seemed to have come. Elisha sent into the camp at Ramoth a disciple of the prophets to anoint as king the man whom he had selected to execute the judgment against the house of Ahab. This was Jehu, a dashing cavalry officer, as we would describe him : no match for him in madness rode horse in Israel.

Jehu had been an eye-witness of the memorable scene when Elijah, after that judicial murder executed against Naboth, had denounced upon Ahab the divine judgment which would demand of him and his children the blood of Naboth and his children. Ambitious and full of restless energy, he seemed to be the most suitable instrument. The anointing takes place, and his comrades do homage to him. Jehu immediately forbids any one to leave the camp, and himself with a troop of cavalry takes the road for Jezreel where lay the wounded king, and where meanwhile Ahaziah of Judah had arrived to visit his sick uncle. The guard sees a troop of cavalry approaching ; after two messengers sent out to meet them fail to return, the two kings themselves mount their chariots and ride out to meet this mysterious troop. Jehoram recognises Jehu and calls out to him : "Is it peace, Jehu?" and Jehu answered : "What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel are so many?" Then Jehoram turned his chariot and cried : "There is treachery, Ahaziah!" But with fatal accuracy Jehu shoots an arrow into his back, piercing his heart ; the body of the king he orders thrown into Naboth's vineyard. Ahaziah had fled, but is pursued by Jehu's command and likewise fatally wounded ; he dies in Megiddo, not far away, and his servants bring the corpse to Jerusalem.

Meanwhile the red-handed murderer has reached the royal palace in Jezreel. The aged Jezebel is minded at least to die like a queen : in full royal attire she looks from the window and receives the ruthless Jehu with the haughty greeting : "Goes all well, Zimri, thou murderer of thy master?" Jehu has her thrown out of the window, her blood spattering his horse. Then he coolly rides over the quivering corpse, leaving it lying on the street, and enters the palace to proceed to a royal meal ; when he is through

he says: "See now to this cursed woman and bury her; for she is a king's daughter."

But there were still many royal princes in the capital Samaria. Therefore Jehu writes to the chief officials there: "Ye have arsenals and fenced cities; look ye out the best and meetest of your master's sons, and set him on his father's throne and fight for him!" For reply the intimidated people ask his orders. Thereupon he wrote: "If ye be on my side, take ye the heads of your master's sons and bring them to me to Jezreel." The horrible order is executed, seventy royal princes are murdered, and their severed heads packed in baskets and sent to Jezreel. There Jehu has them piled in two pyramids beside the city gate and feasts his eyes on the terrible sight, casting to the people that stood about a cynical witticism.

Now he starts for the capital of the kingdom, having first caused all the friends, supporters and officials of the overthrown dynasty remaining in Jezreel to be slain. On the way there is more bloody work. At Beth-ekeb he meets a party of forty-two persons of distinction. They profess themselves royal princes from Jerusalem, coming to visit Ahaziah and Jehoram in Jezreel. Jehu has them seized, and the forty-two princes of the house of David follow the seventy of the house of Omri. Thus he enters Samaria.

A supposedly religious movement had brought him to the throne; he now paid in his own fashion those who had elevated him. He makes proclamation: "Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much." He makes pretence as though he would offer his coronation-sacrifice in the temple of Baal erected by Ahab, and summons thither on pain of death all worshippers of Baal. When they were all in the trap, he had them cut down by the guards and desecrated the temple in the most brutal manner. Of course, the boards were now swept clean in Samaria also, and all the relatives, friends, supporters, and officials of the exterminated royal house were slaughtered. The peace of the grave dwelt in Samaria.

The fanatical prophets could not have chosen for the execution of their purpose a more unholy instrument than this bloodhound; even a century later, almost, Israel still stands aghast at the memory of this horror, and the prophet Hosea sees in the bloody deeds of Jehu an unatoned guilt which rests upon the kingdom and its royal house, and can be atoned for only by the destruction of both. And if ever in history God himself has clearly spoken and pronounced condemnation upon human delusions, it

was here : by the fall of the house of Omri Israel itself was brought to the brink of destruction, and the reign of Jehu and of his son, Jehoahaz, is the most miserable period that Israel ever experienced.

It is one of the most remarkable ironies of fate that these murders which were alleged to have been done to the honor of God, and which actually did completely root out the worship of Baal in Samaria, led in Jerusalem to exactly the opposite result. King Ahaziah and forty-two princes of the royal house had succumbed to the murderous steel of Jehu ; how will the future of Judah fare ? A wholly unexpected turn of affairs ensues. When the queen-mother, Athaliah, learns that her son is dead, she proceeds to finish Jehu's work, and has the whole royal family put to death. Only one little grandson, Ahaziah's one-year-old son, Joash, escaped her frenzy ; a sister of Ahaziah, Jehosheba, who was married to the priest Jehoiada, saved her little nephew and concealed him in the temple from his grandmother.

Athaliah now assumes the reigns of government as sovereign queen. She seems to have met no opposition ; Judah submitted with just as much resignation to Athaliah and her wickedness as had Israel to Jehu and his monstrous deeds. Athaliah now erected at Jerusalem a temple of Baal, and, if we may credit the report which even gives us the name of the priest appointed by her, celebrated the worship of Baal officially. It is asked, What can have moved Athaliah to turn thus sadly against her own flesh and blood ? How is it possible that a grandmother would have her own grandchildren exterminated ? On this very point an explanation is not far to seek. Conditions in the Orient are such that the first lady of the land is not the wife but the mother of the king ; she is the only person to whom the king himself, the sovereign lord of all, shows reverence and even submission—whom he recognises as superior to himself ; he goes to meet her, does obeisance to her, seats her at his right hand. So we see that the position of the queen-mother was actually a court office, and the highest of all ; King Asa formally deposed his wicked mother from this dignity. The moment her grandson ascended the throne Athaliah would have been compelled to vacate this first position in the kingdom in favor of her daughter-in-law, and her proud heart could not bear this. Lust of power and the gift for ruling,—generally, alas ! combined,—must have impelled her and made a fury of her ; it is possible also that the thought arose that the ruling house in the little land of Judah should not fare better than that in her own mighty

Israel,—if she could have had her way the house of David would have perished from the earth. But God held his hand over it; He cared too much for it to let the family be destroyed by an inhuman woman.

The destruction of the house of Omri and the catastrophe in the house of David constitute a milestone in the history of the people of Israel at which we may tarry and turn away overcome. Unspeakable horrors at Samaria, unspeakable horrors at Jerusalem, and the curtain falls on blood and corpses. Is this terrible picture an omen for the future? Yes, and no. In the next chapter we shall see both kingdoms fall, but their fall is not a blood-curdling melodrama, rather a genuine tragedy; they fall like heroes, after a manful struggle with destiny, and there is a mitigating feature: they fall, indeed, but they do not perish: new life will spring from the ruins.