THE FRONT DOOR OF PALESTINE.

SOUTHWARD from Damascus runs a great caravan route to Arabia Felix, making Damascus the metropolis—or rather the “cross-roads”—in past days, for Semitic commerce. Along this rude highway have also crept the moving clans who sought in other lands an easier environment. Running nearly parallel with the Jordan, some 30 miles east of it, it traverses the border of the irreclaimable desert. But to the west of the road lie the broad meadows and rolling plains of Moab and Bashan, and the breezy heights of Gilead; not universally tillable, but affording excellent pasturage in the southern region, and becoming marvellously fertile as the road nears Damascus. The possession of this route gives two great advantages to the Oriental nomad. On the one side lies luxuriant pasturage and an excellent water supply, on the other the fastnesses of the desert afford a refuge from superior forces, while the passing caravan affords unlimited opportunities for “blackmail”—an institution as fixed in the East as the East itself. Travellers following in the wake of the Arab trader find they must pay roundly for their passage through savage tribes. “Go not empty into the presence of princes” is an Oriental dictum now hoary with age. Throughout Africa the traveller must fight his way through, or pay toll for the privilege of passing. The Arab trader has established the habit, and the white man must conform to established precedents. So in the East the incessant cry of the submerged tenth is “Backsheesh, howwajji! backsheesh!” while the itching palms of officials create a permanent market for “ointment of Mexico”—to use a Spanish phrase. With these fundamental features of primitive clan life still persistent, we may comprehend the course of development of an ancient Semitic empire. The petty city-state imposes toll for

the right of passage upon the trader—our word “tariff” being derived from this very practice at the port of Tarifa. Raids for plunder begin also to assume larger proportions; the demanding and securing an annual tribute from wealthy neighbors results. That was the whole of international politics in the earliest stages of the Orient. Purely intellectual culture and improved social organization do not appear to have occupied the energies of early Semitic life. They result from the contact with other people. The Semite’s progress in these departments somewhat suggests the progress of a cow tied at the tail of a wagon.

With the wants of a primitive Semitic in mind, it is clear that the broad tract between the Arabian caravan road and the Jordan is an ideal situation for him. Fertile lands well tilled, lay beyond the river; the fruits were to be had for the raiding; while the wealth of the Indies, of Yemen, of Oman and Hadramant, are brought to his door by the traders of the time. Now add the “back-door” road of Palestine, the route through the coast plain and Esdraelon, connecting with the front door route east of the Sea of Galilee, and we have possible the political problem of the ancient world; the ceaseless struggle for the control of the commerce of these two roads.

Now the Hebrew records place this possibility before us as a reality. The Aramaic nomads seize this region; the method of apportionment being “might makes right.” When strife arises, the lot clans gain the tract (the Lôtân of some ancient records: the Rutennu of the Egyptian inscriptions). The other clan, of which Abram is sheikh, secures the less fertile uplands, toward Hebron, and allies itself with three Hittite chieftains; while later Moab and Ammon absorb nearly half the eastern plateau. Later, upon a further division of the clan, a strong tribe seizes the red lands and the rocky ridges south of the Dead Sea, finding strong natural fortresses in the ravines and clefts of the rock, and hewing out remarkable cities there in the solid stone. Later there is another division, and two pastoral clans seize the great plains northeast of the Dead Sea, as far as northern Bashan.

Now the importance of this road becomes the more marked,

when we find these kindred clans struggling persistently with each other for the control of this road. We find David endeavoring to establish his authority in this region, and destroying the commanding Ammonite fortress; finding also that he must contest its possession with the original Aramaic clans centered at Damascus, the Mesopotamian and Egyptian empires being disastrously weak and anarchic at the time. The Hittite federation being a thing of the past, and the northern Aramean power not being fully developed, David has temporary success; but the control is speedily lost by his successors. Rather than fight Aram, Solomon tries to establish a new route across the desert south of Damascus; a scheme which is revived with much better success in Græco-Roman times, as the ruins of Baalbek testify. We may also remember Solomon's effort to divert traffic at the southern end of the road by seizing the Gulf of Akaba; a direct result of his policy being a diplomatic visit from a Sabaran princess. We find Amaziah later striving to regain control of the road by reconquering Edom, which Solomon had lost; while Samaria and Aram are for years at war over the tract, the strategic fortress of Ramoth-Gilead being the centre of the struggle. Aram's position is desperate in this period; for Assyria has cut off her control of the eastern overland route to India—travelling along which Aramean traders had carried the alphabet into the Punjab. Samaria by reason of her natural position controls the sea-coast road to Egypt; Babylon is mistress of the route through the Persian Gulf; Tyre controls the Mediterranean. If Aram cannot control the direct southern route from Damascus, her control of the overland route to the sea-coast of Asia Minor will be largely deprived of value. Samaria's position is similar; her control of the Egyptian road could be of value only so long as she had a free outlet to the eastward; while Mesha of Moab has no interest in their differences, so long as he can collect toll from caravans of any people, bound north or south; a thing which Israelite traders would prevent; and Mesha, so soon as he is independent, manifests no desire to conquer western Israel, or to extend his dominion beyond the fortified cities that control this road.

This barely suggests the field of action, and the political signifi-

cance of tribal struggles. Looking now at Western Palestine, it is clear that an immense difference from the beginning could be predicted of the development of the tribes. Northern Israel could not possibly escape contact with the world and collision with the world-powers of the time. She would be involved in their movements in spite of herself. All that is meant by culture, learning, art, commerce, would in some measure flow through her territory. She was as certainly predestined to be cosmopolitan, liberal and humane, if she could maintain herself, as Jerusalem was destined to be conservative, provincial, narrow and even bigoted. The latter could not readily get in contact with the cultured world. Could or would the world come to her? Not while Samaria stood. Jerusalem was a mountain town, out of the track of the world's commerce. No Assyrian would meddle with her, if she did not go out of her way to meddle with him. No Necho cared to give her a passing thought, if she would let the Esdraelon commercial road alone. The world's armies could march to and fro through the coast plain, but none would climb her barren hills, if she kept the peace.

The Dead Sea protected her eastern border. Moab and Ammon and Edom held the fortresses beyond. Samaria on the north protected her from interference from that quarter, but absorbed the culture to be derived in that position. Even Philistia in her effort to dominate Israel fought for Dothan, Megiddo, Gilboa, little concerned about the passes from the Shephelah into Southern Judah. No wonder that Judah came to feel a peculiar sense of protection in the hills of Zion. It was the "accident" of her geographical position. So Isaiah in his disputes with Ahaz and Hezekiah, that Judah had only to let the world-powers alone, and they would let her alone. If she would raid the coast plains, or meddle with the politics of the region, entanglement with Assyria was certain. Beyond the coast plain lay a sea whose harborless eastern shore afforded little opportunity either to go out or to come in; a steady northward current was ever bringing Nile mud to make new banks and shoals, so that the "isles of the sea" were not disposed to exploit this coast nor to explore its *hinterland*. Such was the situation of Judah with regard to the "hindersea."

But at her front door, "Oedemah," the situation was different. Save for the precipitous edges of the Ghor, the land was defenseless. The fords of the Jordan were too numerous for that stream to be considered a serious barrier. Raids from the great table-land beyond the Jordan might be looked for at any time; as well as immigration of those disposed to adopt a more settled life. We catch glimpses here and there of such events. But this influx was naturally of a people in a more primitive social and religious state. The tendency of such influences was to retard progress. It is but natural that Judah then should remain for centuries more heathenish than Israel ever was, as Ezekiel declares.

We have already seen that from this difference in the geographical situation of the northern and southern kingdoms some very important consequences follow. Northern Israel was from the beginning to the end compelled to be more warlike, and to take a ceaseless interest in world-politics. She could take the initiative, or stand steadfastly upon the defensive, waiting till she was attacked. But fight she must, against the leading empires of the time. If, on the other hand, she strove to secure herself by diplomacy, she was placed the more surely under the influence of peoples more cultured and experienced than herself. The warlike spirit is shown in the early attitude of Mt. Ephraim toward her neighbors, and her real hegemony. The ceaseless struggle makes militarism prominent; the northern prophets are inevitably affected, suggesting and advising in the matter of campaigns. The "pretorian guard" becomes dominant; revolution after revolution originates in the army, with the "captain of the host"; in its latest and proudest days, Amos invades the domain of the mighty Jeroboam II., to sneer at the "war hunger" of the great nobles, to denounce the oppressiveness of this militarism, and to announce vengeance for the revolutionary tactics of Jehu. The influence of cultured peoples is suggested by the earlier and more rapid development of literature and religion in the northern kingdom; and the influence of that development is in part suggested by the Josianic reform, which made it possible for a pious northerner to consent to worship with his southern brethren. Such centralisation of worship was impossible while the two divisions were

far apart in their religious doctrines and purposes. The northern elements in Deuteronomy we cannot discuss here.

In the south, *per contra*, the assailants of Judah could be expected at the "front door." They were of her own kith and kin; Kenites and Edomites were constituent parts of the early clan of Judah. Relations with Moab were familiar. All these were not greatly different from the primitive people of Judah, these raiders, or home-seekers, they were not organized empires. Pastoral and nomadic, they had no world-politics nor world-ambition. They could exert no influence for progress; make no contribution to culture. Such influence as they could exert would be for the retention of primitive modes of life and the earlier crude religious ideas. Judah could not gain from her contact with them any experience in organized warfare. The sudden foray, the tactics of the desert; beyond these there is no hint of development in these semi-nomadic peoples. Judah's one general learned much, no doubt, from his alliance with the methodical Philistine. We may expect, in consequence, that the ideal of Judah would be more peaceful; but in like manner it is certain that the idea of a mission to the world would be much harder to produce in this uncultured people of the hills. The active interest in world-politics soon produces prophets in the north who consider themselves charged with missions to Sarepta, to Cherith, to make kings in Syria, to go to Nineveh and cry against it; to set up and pull down kings. The "stormy petrels" of their time, they are ever to the front in time of war or trouble. But nothing could be more unlike the southern prophet. He wishes to be let alone; he wishes Judah to be let alone. If the king has military aspirations, the prophet declares he prefers a prince of peace. The world empires can take care of themselves. The great chasm between the Pharisee and Sanhedrim on one side, and the Galilean Carpenter and Fisherman on the other is becoming discernible. If the Galilean zealot was too full of the old militarism of the days of Elisha, he at least was full of the idea of a world-mission. While he mis-estimated in a measure the purport and scope of his mission, he had not the narrow exclusiveness toward the Gentile that characterised the pedantic ritualist of the south. Nor did he care for the forms of

the latter, nor for his consequent sneer at the Galilean: "This people that knoweth not the law is accursed." While the southern priest would not touch a world's burdens with one of his little fingers, the Galilean would move some of them, if he knew how.

Such is a bare suggestion of what it would take many pages to elaborate. How the two different ideals of destiny and method were utilised in the production of the environment through which the Nazarene and his co-laborers were to come, and what was His attitude toward each element of the Jewish atmosphere, may be left largely to the reflection of the reader. Certainly He was more northern than southern.

It may be added that the habit of centuries clung to the Judean to the last. To the east he looked for light: the children of the east were the wise in his eyes. From Babylonian schools came the legislation and priestcraft of Ezra: in the same schools the earlier Targums grew. There is no more suggestive reversal of Jewish prejudices than in the tale of the wise men who turned their faces westward, seeking for light. Yet so it was to be. From the west came the Jew's intellectual enlightenment, Hellenism, even though he knew it not. And in the Hellenised Jews the Galilean Carpenter found the great nucleus of His church, the great opponents of Jewish narrowness, and an early martyr to a broader faith. The southern Jew could not set his face in this direction. Accustomed to the yearly influx of ancient conservatism from the east, speaking of the east as the "front," he resolutely sets his back to all that the west implied, the Arabian caravan road — that meant Aram, Mesopotamia, Hanan, Armenia, Babylonia, Arabia, Persia, even India, to him: all his ancient world and ancient order of ideas. Nothing new, no element of progress, could come to him thence. Over this same road later came the great Arabian in whom Khadijah believed when no one else would: and immediately there came into being a new synonym for fanatical conservatism. From the northern kingdom, by the great highways there, have come those great elements in the Hebrew religion that make for the progress and liberty of the world.

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