The Life and Character of Saul.

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A man's character can be regarded as something given, and his life as produced from it by the action on it of the forces of his environment. This convenient distinction, and particularly convenient assumption of character as a given and constant quantity is the more justifiable when the man's life is studied during a period when his character has matured. We are told that Saul began to reign when he was thirty years old. Without attaching too much importance to the actual figure given, it may be fairly concluded from the general tenor of the First Book of Samuel that when Saul became king he had already made his mark, and that his character was developed. The transition from the hero of Israel to the gloomy suicide may be legitimately studied by first considering his character at his accession and interpreting his after career by the action on this of his environment.

The life of the first king of Israel is naturally and effectively divided into two periods by his final rebuff at the hands of Samuel. His character at his accession may be gathered from his actions and experiences during the period extending from a short time before his election to the kingship to the sparing of Agag after the slaughter of the Amalekites. Whatever view is entertained of the historical trustworthiness of 1 S 9–15, these chapters certainly contain a vivid and, on the whole, a consistent impression of Saul's character during the first period of his life. Only by accepting this general impression can any satisfactory endeavour be made to estimate Saul's character. During the first of these two periods Saul's life was determined and shaped by the continuous and potent operation on his character of two of the most powerful of the three most potent of his environmental influences. These were, firstly, the desperate straits in which the Israelites found themselves; and, secondly, the influence of Samuel. In both cases various inconsistencies in the narratives preclude the drawing of a picture complete in every detail. Nevertheless, there is no real difficulty in realizing the essential nature of the influence exerted on Saul either by the times in which he lived or by Samuel. The general impression made by the narratives is vivid and to a very great extent consistent. The same applies to the influence of David on Saul. This influence constitutes the third of the three most potent environmental influences acting upon Saul. This force operated during the second period of his life. A real impression of Saul's life and character is thus obtainable from the Book of Samuel.

It is well known that there are two different accounts of the events leading up to Saul's election as king. One of these represents Samuel as choosing Saul by lots in answer to the demands of the elders for a king. This narrative is contained in 1 S 8. 10^{17-27}, and is usually regarded as the later of the two. It is characterized by Samuel's reluctance to accede to the wishes of the people. Its chief value lies in the presentment of Samuel's attitude to Saul—an attitude which he certainly displayed later on in the monarch's life. There can be little doubt that the eleventh chapter of Samuel gives the true impression of Saul's election to the kingship. It connects this with the victory of Saul over Nahash the Ammonite. Nahash descends upon Jabesh-gilead and threatens to put out the right eye of every man. The news reaches Saul in the fields; he calls upon the hosts of Israel, and leads them to victory against their cruel foe. The Ammonites are scattered before Israel, and in front of all the people Saul the deliverer is made king. 1 S 9. 10 are generally taken in connexion with this narrative. They describe a preliminary anointing of Saul by Samuel, and are characterized by Samuel taking the initiative in the election of the king. The contrast between this attitude and Samuel's alleged reluctance in the latter narrative helps to bring out the effect of the wave of feeling in favour of Saul in carrying him to the throne. It is evident that the son of Kish rose to Israel's emergency, and by rising to it became her acknowledged king. The Philistine and the Ammonite were the king-makers. Israel had to fight for her life—the Philistine had his heel on her neck, and Saul was her deliverer.

Saul, then, was a soldier king. He had courage and resolution, and could strike hard and sure.

These qualities brought him at a bound from the plough to the throne. This meteor-like movement contrasts sharply with the figure crouching behind the baggage presented in the later account. But this incident undoubtedly gives a true impression of Saul. It is important to realize that Saul exhibited the military character in its best form. He was as modest as he was brave and determined. On this point both stories are agreed. The earlier narrative states that when Saul met his uncle after his interview with Samuel, he said nothing to him 'concerning the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake.' In the later narrative his modesty makes him hide behind the stuff.

His skill and judgment appear to have been equal to his valour. 'When Saul saw any mighty man, or valiant man, he took him unto him.' Saul's organizing power can be fairly read into these lines. He kept a firm hand upon his people. He restrained them from 'eating with the blood,' after they had 'smitten the Philistines from Michmash to Ajalon.' His kingly justice appears in his treatment of his son Jonathan. When Jonathan had transgressed his command—though unwittingly—at the battle of Michmash, Saul would have inflicted the death penalty had the people not entreated him.

But if Saul could be just, he could also be magnanimous. 'He held his peace' when 'certain sons of Belial said' at his accession, 'How shall this man save us?' In the earlier account of this incident, the generosity of Saul contrasted with the cry of the people to have them put to death. It is noteworthy that both stories emphasize Saul's modesty and clemency. Thus Saul, the taker of cities, could also rule his own spirit.

There is a beautiful little touch in 1 S 9^5, 'When they were come to the land of Tuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us.' Saul was considerate as well as magnanimous.

With all these real and essential qualities he was every inch a king. 'He was higher than any of the people from the shoulders upwards.' His personal dignity is indicated in the phrase, 'Is Saul also amongst the prophets?' The origin of this saying is referred to on two occasions in the Book of Samuel. On both occasions Saul is represented as acting in an unseemly manner, and the saying probably arose out of Saul's departure from his usually dignified bearing.

Saul, then, stands out as a kingly figure, valiant in battle, wise in counsel, firm in the exercise of authority, considerate of others, and generous in the hour of triumph. Little wonder that when David looked upon him he loved him.

Saul was a religious man. This is apparently indicated in such statements as 'God gave him another heart.' But his religious nature also appears in many of his actions. Saul's religion must, of course, be judged not so much by his actual beliefs and practices as by the spirit behind them. To a modern mind his belief in the efficacy of sacrifice, and in the notifications of the Divine will received from it, are in themselves superstitions. His appeals to Jehovah through dreams and through the Urim, his confidence in the protective power of the ark, his subservience to Samuel in connexion with the details and order of sacrifice, represent beliefs that the advances of thought have killed. But the nobility of his spirit bears witness to the reality of his religion, and the very crudeness of many of the beliefs of the time helps to reveal the real religious spirit behind. Saul rose above the ideas of his time when he spared Agag, and in thus rising indicated the nobility of his spirit.

It was Saul's religion that brought the full weight of Samuel's influence to bear upon him. This influence finally resulted in the king's downfall. Of the two great forces acting on Saul during the first period of his life, one made for his honour, and the other for his dishonour. Israel's necessity made him king—Samuel's priestly authority brought about his downfall. Samuel stood to Saul as the representative of Jehovah. It seems almost inevitable that in an age like Samuel's, in which crude and barbarous ideas of God almost appear to smother higher and nobler conceptions, that the spiritual advisers of the people should often work serious mischief. Samuel was unquestionably a great and good man. Setting aside his apparent practice of sacrificing on 'High Places,' which must have helped to associate the Israelitish religion with the Canaanitish worship, his influence on the people generally was for good. Unfortunately he used his priestly authority to confine Saul within the limits of the beliefs of the times, and ruined his life. In so doing he acted according to

his lights; and his recorded mourning for Saul shows that to the last he retained his affection for him. The older story represents Samuel favouring the accession of Saul; in the later account he bitterly opposes it. It is possible that in the great national emergency Samuel may have realized the wisdom of placing the military power in the hands of a young and vigorous ruler. It is equally possible that when the imminent danger was passed, Samuel may have realized the sin of the people in taking unto themselves a king. This would be the form in which he expressed his indignation at the transfer of the civil power from his own hands to those of Saul. It does not follow that his final attitude towards Saul was determined by jealousy or envy. Doubtless he had some personal feelings in the matter—for it is human enough to dislike the loss of power. It is, however, but just to Samuel to suppose that he considered his own deprivation of power as in effect an insult to Jehovah. As the representative of the national deity, it was right and fitting that the full power of government should be in his hands. This seems to be the general impression gleaned by the modern mind from a perusal of the First Book of Samuel. It was not the first time in human history, nor the last, in which the priest has tried to retain the civil and military power as well as the spiritual. In this particular instance the popular voice was too strong and united for successful opposition by the priest. It may also well be the case that it took some time for Samuel to realize all that was involved in Saul's election. In any case he had to yield to the national necessity, and was thus led to emphasize his authority as priest.

According to the story the first actual collision took place at Gilgal. It is impossible to say how far this evidently misplaced account contains the actual historical facts, but it doubtless accurately reflects the relations between Samuel and Saul. Samuel had instructed Saul to wait seven days for him at Gilgal. Meanwhile the Philistines were mustering in force, and the terrified Israelites were only kept together with difficulty by Saul. Fretting at the delay, and finding that Samuel did not appear at the end of the appointed time, Saul offered the burnt-offering himself. In all probability the king was not even technically in the wrong, but, in any case, to wait for Samuel while his army melted was obviously a foolish policy. He believed in the efficacy of the burnt-offering, and with a soldier's eye saw that the blow must be struck at once. He therefore set about to secure the Divine favour without delay. Samuel does not on this occasion seem to have taken the heart out of the king by his prophecy that his kingdom should not continue.

This, however, he seems to have done when he finally discomfited Saul after the defeat of the Amalekites. On this occasion the unfortunate king was actually persuaded that he had forfeited the Divine favour by showing mercy to a defeated foe, and by retaining some of the Amalekite herds for sacrifice. So great was the influence of Samuel, that Saul felt it needful to repent for his act of clemency. It should be borne in mind that at this stage the accession would not necessarily pass from father to son, and that the influence which Samuel still possessed would make his words no empty threat. The characteristic feature of the narrative is the refusal of Samuel to accept Saul's repentance. It is possible that this feature may be due to later redaction of the story. Later on it would, of course, be evident that as a matter of fact the kingship passed from the house of Saul to that of Jesse, and this, taken in conjunction with the manifest favour shown by Samuel to David, might have given rise to the present version of the story. The description of the rejected repentance, however, seems rather gratuitous unless there was some real foundation for it. The notion of a merciful God did not seem to have dawned fully upon the mind of Samuel. Indeed, it could hardly be otherwise, with a priest fresh from the sacrifice of his conquered foe.

Saul's apparent weakness in allowing Samuel thus to deal arbitrarily with him, must be ascribed to his reverence for Samuel as the mouthpiece of Jehovah. It was this religious reverence that made him the prey of a deep religious melancholia. His belief in Samuel led to the belief in the withdrawal of the Divine favour. This belief in the withdrawal of the Divine aid produced much the same effect as if God had actually deserted him. He became moody and morose, he sat in his tent while David fought the battles of Israel, and his glory and his strength departed from him. His continued belief in Samuel's Divine authority made permanent the eclipse of his spirit, and is pathetically illustrated in the closing drama of his life. His final appeal to Jehovah through the Urim and the sacrifice fails him, and in his despair he appeals to

the resurrected spirit of Samuel. The ominous words of the shade crush whatever hopes he may still have entertained, and he dies, defeated, on his own sword.

The stern decree pronounced against Saul by Samuel contrasts sharply with Nathan's treatment of David. David's sin was worse from every point of view than that of Saul. Apart from this there is a striking analogy between the lives and characters of the first two kings of Israel. In the nature of things both owed their elevation to the throne to military prowess. It is perhaps natural enough that the shameless behaviour of David in the eyes of Michal when he danced before the ark should compare with the time when Saul lay all night unclad under the influence of prophetic frenzy. Similar circumstances and practices produce similar conduct. But the well-known magnanimity of David towards Saul and his 'mighty men,' exhibits a disposition of the same order as that of Saul. The general parallelism of their lives extends to their both sinning against Jehovah—David's sin being of a very real order—and to their repenting of it.

The difference between the treatment accorded to the two erring monarchs cannot lie in the greater heinousness of Saul's transgression. Saul's alleged crime can be legitimately referred to a generous motive, David's crime was foul and dastardly. If the story as it stands is not the outcome of an endeavour to explain the waning of the house of Kish, and the waxing of the house of David, then Samuel cannot be acquitted of a serious error. To reject Saul and announce David as the divinely appointed supplanter of his house, was the best means he could possibly have adopted for arousing the demon of jealousy. It is not difficult to see in this action on the part of the prophet a fertile cause of the disunion which might well have proved fatal to the interests of Israel in the field, and thence to her very existence as a nation. As it was, the mistake of Samuel's life made the operation of the third great force acting on the destinies of Saul one of destruction rather than of benefit. This is the tragedy of Saul's life—that he was ruined in body and in spirit by Samuel's imperfect conception of the Divine, above which we can see that he himself had begun to rise.

Literature.

PROFESSOR G. A. SMITH'S 'JERUSALEM.'

JERUSALEM: THE TOPOGRAPHY, ECONOMICS, AND HISTORY FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO 70 A.D. By George Adam Smith, D.D., LL.D. With Maps and Illustrations. Two Vols. Price 24s. net. (*Hodder & Stoughton.* 1908.)

STUDENTS of Professor G. A. Smith's *Historical Geography of the Holy Land* have awaited eagerly the appearance of this great work, in which many points are dealt with on a scale that was impossible in the earlier publication. There has been a natural anxiety to know what additions, in the opinion of so trustworthy a judge, have been made to our knowledge of the Holy City by recent excavations and studies. Perhaps we shall best consult their convenience by giving, in the first place, an account of the general plan of the work before us, and then selecting a few points for special notice.

Vol. i. is divided into an Introduction ('The Essential City,' which is a good specimen of our author's power of word-painting) and two Books. The first of these, dealing with the Topography of Jerusalem, discusses in ten chapters: the site of the city; facts and questions in the ancient topography; the geology; earthquakes, springs, and dragons; the waters of Jerusalem (including the rainfall and other natural conditions, the springs—real and reputed, the identification of the springs, the reservoirs and aqueducts); Zion, Ophel, and the 'City of David' (the arguments from topography and archæology, the Biblical evidence as to Zion, history of the name 'Ophel,' history of the name 'David's burgh' or 'City of David,' the tradition from Josephus onwards that the City of David lay on the south-west hill, the return to the east hill); the Valley of Hinnom; the Walls of Jerusalem (the present city walls, proofs of the ancient walls up to Titus and their limits, the historical evidence, the evidence of the excavations, the three north walls); the name 'Jerusalem' and its history; other names for the city.