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CRITICAL NOTES

THE CRITICISM OF THE GAAL NARRATIVE (Jud. ix. 26-41)

THE story of Gaal (Jud. ix. 26-41) cannot stand in its present position. As Dr. G. A. Cooke remarks on verse 42: "After the Shechemites have suffered the severe defeat just described, and Abimelech has retired and dwelt at Arumah, it is incredible that, on the next morning, the people should come out of the city as if nothing had happened, and that Abimelech should be able to surprise them by the same device which had proved so successful the day before." He thinks verses 42-49 "a second account of Abimelech's attack on Shechem, originally following 22-25." This view, however, only raises fresh perplexities. It is difficult to believe that the destruction of the city and its sowing with salt (ver. 45) is sheer invention, for the narrative is old, and there would have been historical knowledge as to whether the city was destroyed or not. But, if we accept this, and regard the earlier passage as a duplicate, we cannot understand either how the Gaal story came to be invented or how the view that Shechem had not been destroyed found acceptance. The truth is that both narratives (ver. 26-41 and 43 ff.) have the appearance of being strictly historical, and the difficulties arise not from their contents but from their present position.

It is suggested that the solution should be sought in another direction. The Gaal narrative perhaps lacks a beginning, telling who Gaal was and how Abimelech appointed Zebul as his governor of Shechem; but, subject to that, it looks like a thoroughly credible piece of historical writing. What is wrong is its position. It is earlier in time than the events that brought about the destruction of Shechem. If it be placed before verse 22 or 23, the difficulties disappear. It relates to the first symptoms of disaffection in the town. These Abimelech sought to meet by less severe measures than ultimately proved necessary. Gaal and his brethren were expelled, and it was hoped that the

evidence given of military power would prove sufficient to insure loyalty. Verses 22 ff. tell of the failure of that hope.

Verse 42 cannot stand as at present. If "the people went out into the field" before Abimelech was told, it is not clear how they could have come forth out of the city in verse 43 after he had subsequently laid his ambush. For the words "on the morrow that the people went out," reads "when the men went forth"; but *d* and the Ethiopic, which agree otherwise with *M. T.*, omit the second "and" (*R. V.* "that"), which suggests that either the first or the second clause of the verse is an insertion. On the whole, I think it most likely that the entire verse is due to editorial efforts to make the narrative read after the Gaal episode had been put where it now stands. The words "and they told Abimelech" resume the words "and it was told Abimelech" of verse 25, which now precedes the Gaal narrative.¹ Such a resumption is not uncommon where something is inserted in the text. A clear instance is found in *Num. xxi.*, where verse 31 resumes verse 25 after the insertion of verses 26 ff., in which a commentator quotes a poem that has nothing to do with the Israelite conquest. Similarly, in *Ex. vi.*, verses 28-30 resume verses 10 ff., the narrative having been interrupted by the insertion of the earliest form of the narrative which now intervenes.² Hence I think that the resumptive words were written at the time the Gaal narrative was placed there, and that the reference to the morrow was subsequently added to smooth the difficulties created by its presence in the wrong place.

The view that *Jud. ix. 26-41* constitutes a misplaced narrative which has lost its introduction is strongly confirmed by the results of recent researches into the earlier form of the Old Testament books. Time and again we come across phenomena which point to their one-time transmission in the form of libraries of short writings, rather than of long rolls. Thus we read of the book of the generations of the

¹ *Cp. C. F. Burney, Judges (1918), p. 268.*

² *Cp. BS, April, 1919, pp. 201 f.*

heaven and the earth (Gen. ii. 4, LXX), the book of the generations of man (v. 1), the book in which Moses was to write about Amalek, etc. Misplaced narratives like Gen. xxxviii., Ex. xviii., xxxiii. 7-11 (which should follow xiii. 22) point in the same direction, as do the numerous colophons of the Pentateuch and the presence of fragments of the historical narrative in unsuitable positions in Deuteronomy (iv. 44 ff., x. 6 f.).¹ In the Book of Joshua the evidences of this are so striking as to make anything beyond a bare reference superfluous.

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AFTER THE WAR — WHAT?

PEACE is at last declared between the five great Powers. But fifteen or twenty of the smaller Powers are still in deadly conflict in an attempt to adjust their frontiers; and the whole world is in a state of unstable equilibrium. Social conditions are everywhere unsettled, putting into the foreground political problems that in every nation will test not only the skill of the leaders but the stability of the people as a whole. What the outcome will be is not within the province of human wisdom to forecast. Democracy is in a fair way to be tried; but it is by no means certain that the "voice of the people" will be the "voice of God." Democracy no less than autocracy has its perils. Meanwhile it will be profitable for the scholarly world to resume its old-time activity. One of the greatest calamities connected with the war has been its interruption of the work of scholars in every department except those relating to the devising of means for promoting the destruction of anything that should help the enemy. Biblical criticism, especially, has been almost at a standstill. In the revival of interest that is sure to follow the advent of peace, it is to be hoped the field of criticism as well as of politics will be free from the domination of the autocratic methods that have prevailed.

¹ See further the articles in BS for Jan. and April, 1918.