

JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

THERE has been a revival of interest in the Bible. The reports of its sale tell us of the extraordinary demand for it. Department stores compete with one another in trying to obtain the purchase of the whole output of a publishing house. How is this to be explained? For long years the Bible was a book that was not read. I have lived through a period when the Bible disappeared from the household and, indeed, I have noticed how it lay neglected on the lectern. Sometimes I have shuddered while listening to a stammering, feeble-voiced cleric hurry through the lesson of the day without once showing that he realized the spiritual value of the sentences he read.

About the middle of the eighteenth century, several French writers not only denounced the Bible as a book of myths unworthy of credence by a rationalist, but also censured the church and everybody connected with it. Pseudo-atheism spread, and with the coming into vogue of the natural sciences, the Book which had

guided men for over a thousand years was the subject of unrestrained criticism launched by such famous scientists as Tyndall and Huxley, and politicians and publicists after the type of Charles Bradlaugh and Robert Ingersoll.

The great harm that was done cannot be attributed to the honest atheists. Those I have known were intellectual men who really desired knowledge and sought it, but unfortunately could not find it in a form that rid them of their doubts. Some of them were students of the Bible and admitted it was indispensable literature. Huxley himself declared he was "seriously perplexed to know by what practical measurement the religious feeling, which is an essential basis of conduct, is to be kept up, in the present utterly chaotic state of opinions in these matters without the use of the Bible."

Rousseau was responsible for the report which gained widespread currency that Voltaire was an atheist. It was not true. Alfred Noyes traces that report to its source, in his remarkable biography of Voltaire. He presents the truest picture of the great French satirist I have found. In his discourse to the French Academy, La Harpe, the famous critic, quoted Voltaire's well-known line: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him," and then added, "Voltaire was at least one of the most steadfast worshippers of the Godhead."

No, the Bible has not suffered at the hands of sincere atheists and agnostics. I attribute the loss of interest in it to the neglect of the clergy when they trembled at the names of Huxley, Tyndall, and the rationalists during the last half of the nineteenth century. In the so-called conflict between religion and science the clergy did not take a worthy part, and it was left to philoso-

phers, metaphysicians, and men like Matthew Arnold to enter the lists against the forces that hailed science as the liberating agent of a new era. Alas, where is science now? Sir James Jeans says the time has come for reflection and that science had better not make any more pronouncements on its rôle for the present. In spite of the bitter controversies of the past two hundred years, the Bible has weathered all storms and is now hailed by the greatest archaeologists as history. If the clergy of today knew the historical value of the work, they might, by taking it up seriously, fill their churches with people eager for knowledge of the wonders it contains. Now let us review briefly the dual subjects dealt with in the first two lectures. Here we shall find in the chapters of the Bible that justice and the economic settlement upon the land of Canaan by the Israelites were always thought of synonymously. It was the removal of the landmark that brought injustice and evil upon the tribes. Perhaps the revival of interest in the Bible is an indication that men and women, in the introspective moods which the troubles of our times force upon us, are searching for some hope to which they may cling, some order of society that will be a refuge and a strength to them in the evil days to come. Let those who will, thrust the charge of escapism at the Bible readers; but they ought to remember that some of the finest epochs in the history of the English people—at any rate since the days of Alfred the Great—have had for their blossoming the soul's desire to find spiritual consolation in the things that endure forever. I do not wonder that the persistence of evil hurts the conscience of mankind and spurs us to action in seeking to be rid of the dread of it. I count no less than twenty distinct periods in the history of the English people

when they have turned from woe to the things that bring solace to the mind and balm to the spirit. That is an extraordinary record.

So in pursuing our subject we ought to realize that time, *qua* time, is a small matter in God's universe. We say it is so many thousands of years since Moses led the children of Israel from Egypt out of bondage to the land of promise. And we are prone to think that we are divided by so many millennia from the children of Abraham. It is a delusion, however, for we are now in Egypt; we are bond slaves, and it was no Hitler, nor Stalin, nor Mussolini, nor Churchill that made us so. We ourselves are guilty of the crime and, as Joseph Butler says:

. . . We may, by rashness, ungoverned passion, wilfulness, or even by negligence, make ourselves as miserable as ever we please. And many do please to make themselves extremely miserable—i.e., to do what they know beforehand will render them so.

Before we go deeply into the subject of the conditions under which the Israelites were to settle in Canaan, let me first ask you to rid your minds of the nonsense promulgated by the superficial atheists and arrogant pseudo-rationalists who prepared the way for Karl Marx and his followers. Do not be afraid of the term or concept God.

There is no excuse today for a Georgist to submit to the browbeating I suffered when I was a young man by those who scoffed at religious literature. Think of the position of George nearly three generations ago and what he had to face! He never flinched. He found (as I found much later in life) that of all the mental lumber rooms there is none so cluttered up with the rags

and tatters of cast-off garments of thought as the minds of the people whose sources of knowledge are the tracts and pamphlets written by extremely superficial thinkers. Where George was unafraid to enter, you with perfect surety may gain entrance to the halls of knowledge in which he found the inspiration that produced his great work.

Joseph Butler frequently referred to the Author of our nature. And after all the spiritual and intellectual vicissitudes of the past two hundred years, *The Analogy of Religion* survives as one of the greatest works of our era. It was unanswerable then; it is unanswerable now.

Sir James Mackintosh called the *Analogy* "the most original and profound work extant in any language on the philosophy of religion." As an introduction to Joseph Butler's masterpiece I would advise you to find Matthew Arnold's severely critical lecture given to the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, called "Bishop Butler and the Zeit-Geist." It is in Arnold's *Last Essays on Church and Religion*.

So in taking the Bible, which more fully and more precisely describes the penalties that fall upon a people who neglect justice, we shall meet the term God on nearly every page. Be not alarmed. It never did anybody any harm yet, and to it may be attributed many of the greatest achievements wrought by men. If you abandon God, you abandon justice, the justice we are seeking. You cannot have the one without the other. If you are timorous about using the term, then no one will object if you substitute the phrase "the Author of our nature," as Joseph Butler did.

And remember, no scientist yet—from the days of Lucretius down to Einstein—has found a substitute for God. Indeed, Marx had to get rid of him altogether

because he could not proceed with his theory of surplus value unless he abandoned justice. It was essential for his purpose because it was found later that the distribution of wealth that was produced under Socialism should be for the equal benefit of all. That is, the unequal output of each laborer should be pooled for the purpose of distribution. Away went justice! With the result that today the produce of labor is shared by so many non-producers that year after year the laborer himself is afflicted with poverty.

The Bible is the standard work that demonstrates clearly the economic basis for society and the right of the individual to the produce of his labor. We shall see what happened to the people when they violated the economic law of the Author of their nature.

The promise in the First Covenant is:

I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you of their bondage . . . I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God . . . and I will bring you unto the land . . . and I will give it you for an heritage. . . .

When Moses explained to them the law laid down in the covenant, the people at Sinai declared: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." The promise of obedience was willingly rendered and fixed in their mind. Keep the law,

for the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates, a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; and whose stones are iron, and out of whose

hills thou mayest dig brass. When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

I have taken the trouble to find out whether this was a true promise, whether such things were there, and I am satisfied that they were to be obtained in abundance. Moreover, I have been to the land and have opened my eyes and my ears, and from what I have seen and heard I can assure you that all these things were to be obtained if the covenant were obeyed. Think of it! An economic paradise! No tax, no tribute, no material debt, no Egyptian slavery. And one of the most significant things in the conditions is that Moses knew that wages are not paid from capital, for it is laid down to the producer: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of *mine* hand hath gotten me this wealth." This passage is a jewel for us, but I am sorry to say we have not taken it and polished it for our use.

Then there follows this extraordinary instruction:

But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth the power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

So neither to the landlord nor the capitalist must labor look for the opportunity to produce wealth. Not until George wrote *Progress and Poverty* was there a work on political economy, the science of the production and distribution of wealth, which so clearly informed the reader of the right material way to make himself happy.

After sixty years of close study (and do remember this: in that period I have passed through all the vicissitudes of rationalist thought and radical literature of the

myth-busters), I have not found a single thing that is required by man today that was forgotten in the provisions laid down in the covenant. But let us ask: How were men to enjoy these goodly things? And how were they to be secured in the wealth which their hands produced? Now we come to the essential condition upon which the settlement was made. It is this:

Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it.

I searched for years the literature of the pulpit, but failed to find any reference whatever to the understanding of what this meant to the Israelites. It seemed to me that the neglect of the prelates was deliberate, and perhaps here we hit upon one of the chief reasons why the church has failed to hold the people. Since the Peasant Wars and the so-called Peace of Westphalia, few of the clergy of the Christian denominations have turned to this all-important condition in the covenant. Later on I shall refer to one or two who must have been conscious of it and, although they did not especially single it out, their writings undoubtedly show that they knew of it. Now think of the importance of this basic law, which is undeniably essential in a system of equality of opportunity. Give heed to the following words:

And the Lord thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good . . . I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life that

both thou and thy seed may live. That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him; for he is thy life and the length of thy days; that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Was ever a more terrifying warning given to a people? And why should it not have been obeyed by those who had been led from the bondage of Egypt? They had been told what the prelates have so neglected to tell us: "He is the rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are just: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."

There it was. They had to determine their choice; life or death. If anyone be in doubt of the wisdom of the First Covenant and the vital necessity of every person obeying its law, let him read the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy and understand the penalties that were to come for its violation. In this chapter are set down the most awful punishments to follow disobedience that any literature has revealed. They are more terrible than any described in the laws of Manu or Dracon. More terrible, indeed, than the penalties to be found in the sacred books of the Hindus. And yet there is not one that has not been visited upon the people. All herein described have afflicted man through the centuries and generations since the making of the covenant. Even down to this day the reverberations of the curses launched at the time of the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan are heard and felt and feared by all the nations of the earth. Ponder this:

The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand;

A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young:

And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee.

What is the fear in the hearts of those of our people who are returning to the Bible? Perhaps they really do not know themselves, but maybe the pricking of conscience in this respect is turning them from cowardice to a yearning for wisdom. And where but in this Book is wisdom to be found? It is not only the history of the Israelites. Pray do not delude yourselves with the foolish notion that science can save you from the curse. The Bible describes the fate that has befallen all people.

There is a saying, which has become hackneyed, that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. The trouble with so many of these maxims we hear at a time of crisis is that they are not remembered before the crisis arises. We seem to wait until we are in trouble before we realize that we were warned how to avoid it but neglected the law and the warning. In the Book of Joshua I find an appropriate statement on this point, which says:

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

This does not say: Remember the Book of the law when you get into trouble. It clearly and definitely tells

you that, if you want to keep out of trouble, you must constantly think of the law. Therefore, I should like to change the old phrase to make it read as follows: "Eternal meditation upon the law is the price of liberty." This calls for a studious people, folk who appreciate the high endowment conferred on them and who wish to use their faculties for intellectual enjoyment through which they may seek a higher plane of culture and refinement. Work this out for yourselves. Suppose there is a system of equality of opportunity and the laborer is not divested of the wealth he produces. What will he do with his spare time when there are no politicians to keep him poor? Surely he will strive to understand the law that enables him to produce freely because, so long as it be maintained, he has the time to perfect his own life spiritually and intellectually. Without the debilitating effects of poverty will he be a dull clod that will not use his mind for the purpose of securing himself in his happiness? Indeed, the covenant was made for this particular purpose, and over and over again the Israelites were reminded of that. But they did not meditate day and night. They became smug and self-satisfied. They forgot the travail of their forefathers. They thought they knew better than Moses. With what result? The evil days came upon them again, and their lot was no better than it had been before the yoke of bondage was broken in Egypt and they crossed into Canaan.

I wish to leave it to you to take up the work seriously and read it for yourselves. So I will take a jump of about fifteen hundred years and come down to the days of Micah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Here we reach a period when the fortunes of the Israelites were at the lowest

ebb, when the great inheritance had passed out of their hands and they had become debt slaves.

. . . We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards.

Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards.

When Nehemiah heard the great cry of the people he rebuked the leaders and the nobles and said unto them:

. . . Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. . . .

Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them.

Then we learn of the great meeting that took place in the water gate. This was perhaps the most singular gathering of which we have record, for its purpose was to hear the law of the Book read by the scribe. He stood in a pulpit and opened the Book in the sight of all the people and they stood up: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

And we are told that, when they heard the words of the law, all the people wept. Then followed a scene of much rejoicing and the gladness was great. The story as it is told here of the restoration of the land to the people should be read in connection with the Book of Micah, for in it we learn of the severe economic affliction that was visited upon the children of Israel. It is the old, old story of removing the boundary stones, of

taking a slice of your neighbor's land, of exacting tribute, and reducing the peasantry to peonage.

. . . We be utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people: how hath he removed it from me! turning away he hath divided our fields.

The dreadful lamentations of the Prophets were all of the same character, and in book after book we read of the removal of the boundary stones. In Haggai there is a verse that might have been written by a prophet of our day, if we had one:

Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

In the days of Hosea "the Princes of Judah were like them that removed the bound." In the Book of Ezekiel we find the same story:

. . . O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice, take away your exactions from my people. . . .

The Book of Proverbs gives us many references of the removal of the landmarks. The 24th chapter of Job vividly describes the evils that follow the injustices of removing the landmarks. Here in this book is the complete story of economic wrong. Immanuel Kant said of it: "The existence of the Bible, as a book for the people, is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced. Every attempt to belittle it is a crime against humanity."

I agree. But I would add: Deliberately to neglect it

as a source book of the finest passages in *Progress and Poverty* is a crime for which ignorance is no excuse.

Have you any conception of what this Book has meant to the English people—the people who speak the Saxon tongue? Do you know what it has done for the literature of our folk? Think of what has gone into the perfection of English speech since Wyclif's day; of all the treasures that we revere in verse and prose! What would the men of Elizabeth's day have done without this work? Nay, let us come to a later period and ask ourselves to what extent did those great prose writers of the past two centuries depend upon the King James Version?

I should like to know how you are going to fit yourselves for delivering the gospel of *Progress and Poverty* if you are not familiar with the Book that shaped not only George's thought but inspired his pen? I have known agricultural laborers, who spoke every day the dialect of their shire, go lay-preaching on the Sabbath and read with sense and understanding chapters from this Book. Their uncouth speech and their strange inflections of dialect disappeared and, as I have heard over and over again, their tongues seemed to be charmed with the passages which they uttered, and exceeded in beauty anything heard from the gilded lecterns of the cultured clergy. Moreover, there is no work in which the power of imagery is wrought to so high a degree of perfection. Think of the poetry the Bible contains and think of the poets whose works reflect the debt they owe to it! Look, as I have done, through the works of English poets, and mark the passages which sound a biblical note. Try to count the phrases current in English speech whose source is the Bible.

It is difficult to understand how people today who read the dispatches in the newspapers can neglect to read chapters in the Bible which describe the iniquities of the nations and the anger of the God of the Hebrews at the sinfulness of those who wage war. Turn to the 34th chapter of Isaiah and read it. Its awful grandeur and striking literary worth are comparable to some of the world's masterpieces to be found in the Sibylline oracles.

And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls.

The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest.

Can you imagine a greater scene of desolation? And tell me, do you know any book a newspaper correspondent can write on this conflict that is taking place which would give you a description so vivid as this I have quoted?

But in Isaiah you not only learn the lesson of war and what war meant to Jew and Gentile six or seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, but you will also find some of the greatest poems of the promise of joy and gladness that appear in any literature. Turn to chapter 58:

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy justice shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.

Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away

from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day:

And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.

In closing I wish to give to you a passage that Henry George loved dearly, for it contains the very bone and sinew of the real body of his work. And so wonderful is this passage that I have heard uncouth, almost illiterate, farm laborers speak by heart these verses in political meetings and thrill their hearers (who, of course, knew their Bible) with the glorious promise contained in them:

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.

And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and

they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.

They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

Remember: "Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." Is not that the whole burden of the philosophy of Henry George?