

## Chapter XVI

A PICTURE of the economic conditions of lower Galilee can be constructed now to help the student to understand something of the environment of Nazareth. In recent years works have been published which not only cover the researches of scholars of a generation ago, but compare and sift their findings in the light of modern discoveries. To mention three: Dr. Joseph Klausner's *Jesus of Nazareth*, Dr. Eisler's *The Messiah Jesus*, and a particularly interesting short survey of the subject by Dr. Grant, *The Economic Background of the Gospels*. The ground covered by these authors is very wide. The new material gathered by Dr. Eisler is somewhat startling; it must be disquieting to a number of the orthodox to find that John the Baptist and Judas of Gaulon preached the same doctrine. Whether all the conclusions of Dr. Eisler are accepted or not, there remains in *The Messiah Jesus* the extraordinary story of the growth of the revolutionary party under Judas, called Zealots; and this story taken in connexion with the mission of Jesus lights up many dark places in the gospels and helps to clarify obscurities in his sayings.

To appreciate the significance of the movement of Judas, it would be useful if the evidence contained in the books of the prophets, revealing the crushing poverty, the double taxation, the spoliation which seemed to be carried on regularly, were gathered together in a handy form. One great protest against the exactions of Herod reveals that the strict Jews regarded tribute as unlawful. The cost of his great building schemes must have been a frightful burden to a people who,

so far as basic industry was concerned, had little chance to produce sufficient for its families. Famine was always a danger. There must have been frequent clamour against the exactions, for they covered pretty nearly everything that was required; customs, octroi, tariff duties, temple toll, tribute, and tax, there was little that escaped; and to add to all these burdens there was the pernicious system of farming out the collection of taxes. In this connexion there is the story of Joseph the tax-farmer who paid something like sixteen thousand talents a year for the privilege. After about twenty years of collecting he retired, an enormously wealthy man. Small wonder that in the days of Herod there should be bands of robbers roving through the land, that there should be revolutionary parties who "lived in the open," or "in the outside"—on the borders of the desert. Guerrilla warfare near the principal highways must have been almost a daily affair. There was, besides, an Edomite on the throne, placed there by an alien power; a violation of the old right of the Jewish people to make their own kings. The demand laid before Archelaus on his accession called for reduction of the annual payments, the release of the people put in prison for debt under Herod, and the abolition of the merchandise taxes. The description of the conditions towards the end of the reign of Herod, as given by Josephus, in the *Antiquities*, leaves no doubt as to the cultivation of a land for breeding Zealots:

He (Herod) had taken to himself the uncontrollable authority which tyrants exercise over their subjects, and had made use of that authority for the destruction of the Jews, and did not abstain from making many innovations among them besides, according to his own inclinations; and that, whereas there were a great many who perished by the destruction which he brought upon them, so many indeed, as no other history relates, they that survived were

far more miserable than those that suffered under him, not only from the anxiety they were under from his looks and disposition towards them, but from the danger their estates were in of being taken away by him. That he did never leave off adorning those cities that were in the neighbourhood, but were inhabited by foreigners; while the cities belonging to his own government were ruined and utterly destroyed. That whereas, when he took the kingdom, it was in an extraordinarily flourishing condition, he had filled the nation with the utmost degree of poverty; and when, upon unjust pretences, he had slain any of the nobility, he took away their estates; and when he permitted any of them to live, he condemned them to the forfeiture of what they possessed. And besides the annual impositions which he laid upon every one of them, they were to make liberal presents to himself, to his domestics and friends, and to such of his slaves as were vouchsafed the favour of being his tax-gatherers; because there was no way of obtaining a freedom from unjust violence without giving either gold or silver for it.

Dr. Eisler quotes the following from *The Capture of Jerusalem*, by Josephus: "In his time (i.e. the administration of Coponius) there was a man at Galilee who upbraided the Jews, because, though of the seed of Abraham, they were now doing menial service and paying taxes to the Romans, and because they had accepted mortal masters after forsaking one who was immortal. The name of this man was Judas, and he found a way to live in the outside, and one not corresponding (to that) of others." Eisler remarks that the phrase "to live in the outside" refers to the habit of the followers of Judas, who, rather than be oppressed by foreign rule, preferred the regions of the mountains, woods, and deserts, where subsistence was reduced to the merest vegetarian diet. There was, besides, another reason for preferring the wild, almost inaccessible places to the villages of Galilee; i.e. there were no tax-gatherers there, and, as the Zealots strictly upheld the old

law concerning tax and tribute, they escaped the ignominy of having to pay that price for freedom. This is an important point and will later appear to be a crucial one in connexion with many of the sayings of Jesus. The Zealots had no doubt experienced the full effect of the census and general assessment of property under Coponius and Quirinius in the sixth century. The indignation of every class was aroused by the crushing impositions levied by the Romans. There was a poll tax on each individual, and for the first time women and slaves were included. There was an income tax, moreover, and a percentage on the herds of cattle; and the tax on the land was to be paid out of the produce of the harvests. The economic unrest which was stirred up by the Romans grew in intensity during a period of sixty-five years, accompanied by bitter strife. Bands of secret assassins made travel over the great highways extremely hazardous; there are many references in Josephus to sudden attacks upon small companies of Roman soldiers.

It must not be forgotten that the old theocratic idea of God's kingship over the Hebrews lay at the basis of the revolt. There seems to be no evidence of a political struggle, that is, a substitution of one political form of government for another. Nor was it a religious struggle, for the Romans were content to let the Jews worship in their own way so long as they submitted to the forms of taxation they introduced. To turn the fertile valleys of Galilee into places of desolation could only be accomplished by an imperial power. How rich Galilee was in natural resources is described by Josephus: "The soil is universally rich and fruitful and full of plantations of trees of all sorts in so much that it invites the most slothful to take pains in its cultivation, by its fruitfulness; accordingly, it is all cultivated by its inhabitants, and no part of

it lies idle." Similar descriptions are to be found in the works of Latin authors. The period to which Josephus refers must have been one many years earlier than that of Herod. Perhaps he quotes from reports of the time of the Maccabees. It is not reasonable to conclude that he refers to a Galilee after the census of Quirinius. It can be shown from the sayings of Jesus that cultivation must have been carried on by the vast majority of the natives under extreme hardship. The land was inalienable under the old law, but the rulers did not hesitate to confiscate the estates of families who opposed their will. Under Herod many noble families suffered the loss of their estates. How the priests fared in Galilee under Roman double taxation can only be imagined. Whether the milking process of the imperial power left anything for them cannot be determined, for there seems to be no reliable evidence of the amount collected in tithe after the census. Schürer says:

The contributions which the priests received from the people for their support before the Exile were variable and irregular. After the Exile, they were immeasurably increased. In this connexion it is noteworthy how greatly the priesthood grew in power and influence under the new order of things which succeeded the Exile. The truth is that this increase in power was not only the cause of their increasing claims to authority, but also a result of the enlargement of their material income. The later scribes, who were not always favourably minded towards the priesthood, were unable to alter the situation: for the priestly law had long been accepted as the Law of God. Indeed, the scribes succeeded only in still further increasing this traditional source of priestly income. Upon the principle that a man acquired the more of merit in the sight of God as he the more punctiliously and readily fulfilled the requirements of the law, they interpreted the legal obligations almost wholly in a sense favourable to the priests. And so we behold the remarkable state of affairs of a time when men had already begun to look upon the hierarchy with suspicion, and yet laboured might and main to

establish still more securely the privileges and prerogatives of the priestly class.

This reveals a condition that does undoubtedly explain the denunciation of the priestly class by the prophets. Probably it is no exaggeration to say that agriculture was tithed to death. There are stories in Hebrew literature which reveal the rapacity of the priests. Eisler quotes one told by the rebel leader Korah:

One day there came a widow and two orphans who owned a field and wished to till it. Then said Moses: "Thou shalt not employ ox and ass together at the plough." When they wished to sow, he said: "Thou shalt not sow thy field with two kinds of seed"; when they would reap, he said: "Gifts for the priests, first tithe and second tithe, must be given." . . . There was now nothing left for the widow (to do) but to sell the field. She did so and bought two lambs, to turn them to account and clothe herself with their wool. When the lambs had young, Aaron came and made his claim: "The firstlings you must give me as wages, for so has Jahveh commanded: every firstborn," etc. . . . And when the time came for shearing the lambs, he said: "The best of the shearing of the sheep must thou give to me." Then the widow could no longer comply with these demands and decided to kill the lambs and consume them. But when she had killed them, Aaron said: "The shoulder, the two cheeks, and the maw must ye give to me." Then the widow protested: "Though I have even killed the lambs, yet I cannot get rid of this man; the lambs are a votive on behalf of me." Aaron replied: "Then are they wholly mine, for thus saith Jahveh: every devoted thing shall belong to thee." And he took the lambs and departed, leaving the widow and orphans lamenting. Thus did they treat these poor wretches when they appealed to the Lord.

The civil and religious taxation of the Hebrews at the time of Jesus is estimated by Dr. Grant to have reached between thirty and forty per cent of the produce. This seems to be a

moderate estimate. From the evidence of the extortion and rapacity both of the Romans and the priestly classes, it is readily conceived why the mission of John the Baptist took hold of the poor. Whether John were allied to Judas or not, there is no doubt that both in different ways represented the same ideal: namely, that only the coming of the kingdom on earth could save the people from utter destruction. Dr. Eisler, in *The Messiah Jesus*, makes out a most interesting case for the association of Judas and John the Baptist. John was a man "from the outside"; he lived on natural fruits and herbs. It is not easy to follow Eisler through all of his analysis of the mission of John; but, taking his review as a whole, it throws much needed light on the conditions of Galilee and relates these conditions with the missions of Judas and John. It is when he tries to reconcile the idea of "The kingdom of God is within you" with a political revolution that his findings become unsatisfactory. He says: "Notwithstanding the meaning of the phrase, 'the kingdom of God is within you' . . . it would be a great error to regard the kingdom announced by Jesus as a purely spiritual state without any political significance whatever." His reason for stressing a political aspiration on the part of Jesus and his followers is to fit it in with the old prophecy of what he calls the Deuteronomic Royalty Law.

In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Dr. Klausner quotes from the statements of the Jewish delegation which went to complain before Augustus against Archelaus, immediately after Herod's death:

He (Herod) committed acts of tyranny which might have made an end of the Jews, and also devised new things according to his own mind which were contrary to the spirit of the Jews; and he killed many men with a cruelty unparalleled in history.

Worse still was the lot of those who remained alive, for not

only did he oppress them but also threatened to confiscate their property. The cities which were near by the land of Israel he be-decked and adorned without end at the expense of his plundered subjects. He reduced the people to abject poverty though he had found it, apart from exceptional cases, in a condition of wealth. The property of the higher families—whom he had condemned to death on the slightest pretext—he confiscated, and those whom he suffered to remain alive he deprived of their wealth. Not only were the taxes levied on all the inhabitants year by year exacted mercilessly and by force, but it was impossible to live without bribes to himself, and to his domestics, and his friends and officers who were entrusted with the gathering of the taxes.

It was impossible to speak of his corruption of virgins and wives; after he had done these wicked things when drunk and without witnesses, those who had suffered preferred to remain silent as though nothing had happened rather than publish such things abroad. And so Herod had behaved to the Jews with a cruelty as great as though a wild beast had been given rule over mankind. Though the Jews had before suffered many hardships and oppressions, their history had never known so great an affliction as they had suffered at the hands of Herod.

Such were the conditions in the days of Herod, and after his death there was no relief. Three or four years before the birth of Jesus, the great revolt under Judas began. At Sepphoris, only a short journey from Nazareth, Judas attacked the king's armoury and put the fear of himself on the whole of Galilee. It is said that thousands and tens of thousands followed Judas and joined the Zealots, and for over sixty years they led the riots and revolts which became almost incessant in the land. Spies were everywhere, and the people who could not flock to the standards of Judas were downtrodden and overcome by fear. Only those of any strength and vitality joined the rebels. Klausner, in summing up the consequences of the political upheaval, says:



In Galilee Gentiles were numerous, and it had never been a centre of the Law or a place of resort for high priests or the richer classes; it had no cities approaching the scale of Jerusalem, nor, till the time of Antipas, even towns of the scale of Jericho. In Galilee were to be found neither Pharisees learned in the law nor Sadduceans or Boethuseans, nor any of the richer and more powerful classes who acquiesced in Roman domination; there remained only the two dissimilar types: Zealots of the party founded by Judah the Galilean and Zadok the Pharisee, numerous in Galilee (though not as a sect) from the time of Hezekiah the Galilean; and the "meek upon earth," and the many varieties of the mystic, visionary type—"quietist Pharisees," Essenes, and the like. All who had strength enough to take up the sword joined themselves with the Zealots; the rest were more or less akin in spirit to the "meek upon earth," who abandoned interest in temporal things to dream of a future life, a life based on the ethics of the prophets and the messianic idea. The Zealots, too, as well as every type of Pharisee and the Essenes, held most strongly to those same conceptions, but in the thoughts of the "meek" they assumed a more imaginative and mystic form.

It was from these circles of the "meek" that Jesus and his new teaching sprang.

Klausner says that the Jews at the time of Jesus were essentially an agricultural people, but this does not mean that agriculture was the one pursuit. Large numbers of the people had drifted into other trades, and the changes in ownership of the soil had brought new labour conditions and new avenues of employment in connexion with its administration. Most of Galilee seemed to be under cultivation, like a great garden, Josephus says; the wheat was famous, the crops of other cereals abundant. In vegetables, the country was rich, and there was abundance of fruits of many kinds, and nuts; oil was plentiful, the olive in some districts highly praised; the date palm gave oil and honey, and, according to Pliny, was a great source of wealth. The fishing industry round about Lake

Galilee was famous. If the description of the promised land included Galilee, who can doubt that the children of Israel who settled to the west of the lake lived in a land without scarceness? It was, indeed, "a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness; thou shalt not lack anything in it." There are many works from pre-Christian sources which refer to the natural conditions of Galilee and Judea, and they tell of the richness and the abundance of the fruits of the earth, justifying the promise of Moses when he took the Hebrews out of Egypt. Klausner says: "There were hundreds of villages in Galilee round which small-holders held the land and made merely a living." He also says:

These "small-holders" lived by the labour of their hands. They, their wives and children, did their own ploughing and sowing, reaping and sheaf-binding, threshing and winnowing. Most of their produce they reserved for their own household needs, and the rest was brought to the town and either bartered or sold for money to procure absolute necessities. Such a peasant was not able to lay by any wealth, and one or two years of bad seasons or illness would be enough to deprive him of his property and reduce him to the status of a hireling or labourer, or even cause him to be sold into slavery to a richer landowner because of his debts. In any case, some of his children would be forced to become hirelings or labourers, since the small-holding sufficed only for the eldest son who received a "double share" of their inheritance. The other sons, not having land enough for their needs, were, in spite of themselves, turned into members of the "proletariat," the class which owns nothing but its powers of work. When no work is forthcoming they are reduced to the level of "unemployed labourers," and become beggars or robbers and brigands.

This statement omits the effect of tax and tithe. Though there were bad seasons, or the small-holder suffered through illness, it is not improbable that the holding would yield on the average enough to tide the family over lean years. Taxes

today in America and England make it impossible for numbers of agriculturists to live decently.

If there were large estates in Galilee, and there seems to be much evidence of this, the old system of not parting with the land outright must have long been disregarded. This would account for the extremely hard conditions of the smallholder, who probably was left with the poorest land, and explain the richness of yield of the big estate that could be tilled with slave labour. Anyway, it seems reasonable that the "land-shark" took every opportunity of laying a good field when he conducted the business of laying field to field. The scholars have not yet decided the question of the great differences met with in the authorities, who all agree Galilee had a fruitful soil, and yet, according to some, a large part of the population was reduced to penury, if not slavery, and, according to others, there were beautiful, busy cities, indicating generally a thriving people. This difference of opinion in a way, perhaps, accounts for the slight references in many works to the Zealot movement just before the time of Jesus. Some authors scarcely mention it, and yet it is the most significant economic factor connected with the land of Jesus at the time of his birth. It is strange how this has been overlooked by so many writers of the life and times of Jesus. Few seem to understand that the luxurious city is nearly always a corollary of an impoverished people. Klausner speaks of the wealthy proprietors and he says they were few; it would not require many, if the land had been monopolized to any great extent. A few wealthy proprietors can own large tracts of land, as modern investigators know. The practice of leasing land for agricultural use is cited many times in the old Hebrew texts. No doubt the Roman land syndicates would see that the best parts of the country were taken and added to farms when the

transfer could be done "legally." The pernicious system of farming the land out to tenants, who sometimes got as little as a quarter of their produce for themselves, was practised in Palestine, but to what extent it is hard to say. One of the parables of Jesus refers to this system, and it is not likely that he would refer to some rare occurrence in speaking to a class who undoubtedly suffered under practically all of the systems of Roman administration of the land. The conditions of labour show all the inequalities that are patent under any system of land monopoly, no matter when or where. Slaves there were in Palestine who, when they worked, had bread, but there was another large class who could be sometimes free and sometimes slaves for six years. Their lot was, on the whole, perhaps worse than that of the out-and-out slave. The old regulations of the time of the settlement were long forgotten, and the bond servant in the house was, by the time of Jesus, very like a chattel and not as well cared for as a horse. Klausner says: "The primitive relationship prevailing between master and slave in a country where the simple life was the rule and the democratic Pharisaic spirit was much in evidence, surely removed the possibility of cruelty and persecution; none the less, a master could scourge an idle or disobedient slave and treat him altogether as an inferior being." It is to be noticed in many of the works of recent publication that there is little reference to the old rule laid down in Deuteronomy of the status of the Hebrew servant, the conditions of his period of servitude, and the rewards he received at the end of his term. All that had been long forgotten. Undoubtedly, the cruel treatment meted out to slaves by Roman owners was not less in the provinces than in Italy, and one may be sure that many Hebrews who were forced into slavery in Palestine felt the full Roman severity, little heed being paid to the regulations

of the slaves' own people. When, under conditions of land monopoly, the free man lost his property and entered the slave market, it would not matter under Imperial Rome what nice distinctions of labour had been practised by the stock he came from. Therefore, at the time of Jesus, there must have been a large body of people always on the borderline of the freedom of the small-holder and the slavery of the landless man. This surely proves the frequency of the revolts of the Zealots and the source from which they drew their support.

The conquerors of Palestine usually taxed every commodity the people used. Whether the tariffs were scientific or not, the people suffered from them just as severely as if a commission of fiscal scientists chose the commodity and the size of the duty. At one time, Klausner says, there was a poll tax, a salt tax, a "crown tax" (crowns of the bride and bridegroom), a land tax, a cattle tax, and a tax on the fruit trees. Under Herod, Josephus says, there was a demand from the nation to abolish the "annual tax," and the "tax which was levied indiscriminately on everything bought and sold in the market." Klausner says: "It was apparently from that time—that of the Romans and their agents, Herod—that the name 'publican' became synonymous with robber, brigand, ruffian, murderer, and reprobate; one whose evidence was invalid, whose money could not be accepted as alms for the poor, nor used in exchange, since it was suspected of having been acquired by robbery." He cites nine Hebrew authorities for this statement, and he says that the Procurators taxed more heavily even than Herod; besides the taxes on commodities, the Romans inflicted water taxes, city taxes, road taxes, and house taxes. Pliny says "that at every stopping-place by land or sea some tax was levied." Still, some Jews, it is said, were able to amass riches; they must have been landlords or manufacturers.

Klausner says that great landlords and rich bankers did very well under Roman administration. Small wonder the poor became poorer and the destitute and unemployed increased. Great masses of the people were crushed and helpless under the awful burden of taxes, and, as beggary increased, brigandage, highway robbery, and revolt were of daily recurrence. The robust of the outcasts sought refuge in "the caves and the desert places, and the rocks and crevices of the mountains." Just as it was at the time of Sir Thomas More, when he said: "If you do not want cut-throats, thieves, and beggars, cease making laws that make cut-throats, thieves, and beggars." More said in *Utopia*:

The rich men not only by private fraud, but also by common laws, do every day pluck and snatch away from the poor some part of their daily living. So, whereas it seemed before unjust to recompense with unkindness their pains that have been beneficial to the public weal, now they have to this their wrong and unjust dealing (which is yet a much worse point) given the name of justice, yea, and that by force of a law. Therefore, when I consider and weigh in my mind all these commonwealths which nowadays anywhere do flourish, so God help me, I can perceive nothing but a certain conspiracy of rich men procuring their own commodities under the name and title of commonwealth. They invent and devise all means and crafts, first how to keep safely, without fear of losing, that they have unjustly gathered together, and next how to hire and abuse the work and labour of the poor for as little money as may be.

But all states suffer in the same way, once the landmarks are removed, and the history of the removal of landmarks in England from Henry the Seventh all the way down to the beginning of the nineteenth century can be read in numbers of works devoted to the crime of enclosure without economic return. The enrichment of the landlords at the ex-

pense of the tillers of the soil marks always the beginning of the decline of a civilization.

The tariff decree of Palmyra, A.D. 137, given by Dr. Grant in his work, *The Economic Background of the Gospels*, is almost as comprehensive as the Smoot-Hawley tariff, and it is to be supposed the Palmyra tariff was like many more. Few protectionists realize how very old the tariff game is, few understand the baneful effects of the fiscal systems of the past; the blessed word "scientific" has completely befogged the makers of tariffs; they somehow imagine under the term "scientific" something new and less baneful can be invented. Now the "shibboleth" of Cobden has come home in a most awkward way, and the paltry shifts protectionists make, now they see that their "scientific" tariffs will not work scientifically, seem craven compared with the out-and-out banditry of the old Corn-Law Tories. Why tariffs should do now what they could not do in classical times, is inexplicable. The Greeks, the Romans, and the Hebrews were tariff-taxed almost to extinction; why the Americans, the English, and the French should be taxed into prosperity, no one pretends to say. The United States and France, in spite of tariffs, for a time made the rich richer, and the effect of making the poor poorer was not noticed so long as there was plenty of land to be opened up in the United States and the majority of the French families were proprietors of land. But it is to be noticed that the tighter land monopoly becomes, the higher the tariff creeps, until a period is reached when the poor in the towns have lost the sense and opportunity of escaping to the country. The artificial attractions of the towns hold them in a grip, and even at a time like this, when the value of land has fallen swiftly under the depression, there is little or no response worth noticing to the schemes to take men from the cities

and start them on the land. The purpose of tariffs is to raise prices, so the candid protectionist says, and now, under the highest tariffs, commodity prices have fallen and have not been so low for many years, in some cases for generations, and industry is stagnant.

It is bad enough in all conscience to levy taxes on wealth as a system, but to tax a people who considered tribute to be not only unlawful, but unholy, was the height of imperial stupidity. The Hebrews had known a system practically free of tax; there was the tenth to the tribe of Levi, because it had no inheritance. It is true, under priestly rule the original tenth was not only increased, but many ways were devised to filch from the people more and more of their produce. Still, the memory of the old system persisted long, and every prophet of consequence protested against the exactions of the priests which helped to reduce the people to poverty. What was well-nigh unbearable from the priests became a burden too great to be borne when the conqueror laid his heavy hand upon the Hebrews. It was bad enough to pay tribute to the conqueror; it was worse to recognize a human ruler. Klausner says: "During the census of Quirinius, realizing that its motive was to enslave them and to drain fresh taxes out of them for the good of the Roman leech, they (the Maccabees) appealed to the Jews to rise unanimously against the Romans. How could a Jew serve flesh and blood! God alone was King of Israel and not any idolatrous Roman Emperor."

Renan seems to be the one writer of the nineteenth century who appreciated this question of tribute and tax as it affected the Hebrews. He says: "God being the sole master whom man ought to recognize, to pay tithe to a secular sovereign was, in a manner, to put him in the place of God. Completely ignorant of the idea of the state, the Jewish theocracy only



acted up to its logical induction—the negation of civil society and of all government. The money of the public treasury was accounted stolen money.” The Talmud is explicit upon this point. It is only in recent years that the economic conditions of Galilee, and this great question of the payment of tribute and taxes to the conqueror, have received the attention the subjects deserve.