

**NATIONAL IDEALS
IN THE OLD
TESTAMENT**

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National ideals in the Old Testament by Henry J. Cadbury

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PREFACE

DIFFERENT theories have held the field with regard to the controlling factor in the destiny of nations. In the older study of history, especially of the sacred history contained in the Bible, God was regarded as the supernatural cause of every national disaster or development. Secular history has long been studied as the history of governments, with emphasis upon the military relations between states. Battles were the decisive events and "big battalions" were the accompaniments or the expressions of Providence. More recently the economic interpretation of history has come to the foreground, and the fate of nations has been said to depend on natural resources, commerce, and the appetitive and competitive motives which material needs stimulate.

Against these extreme views, whether superhuman or purely material, the influence of national ideals deserves emphasis. There is a collective human idealism of which neither economic determinism nor supernatural Providence is wholly independent. The folk songs, the war cries, the moral standards, and all the influences of civilization and religion have often determined a nation's history quite apart from the working of military

and economic factors. Ideals as well as expectation of profit have guided the course of events and animated national conduct. Providence has found expression through patriot and prophet, and through the developing experience of nations, no less than by miracle and military intervention. History must be interpreted spiritually as well as materially, naturally as well as supernaturally.

The correct interpretation of history is more than an academic question. It affects directly the conduct of individuals and society. The forces which seem to men effective in the past are the very forces on which they will pin their faith for the future. If we accept the apocalyptic interpretation of history as the inexorable working of a Divine plan, we shall merely await in passive reliance the unaided intervention of God to create the consummation of his will. All human endeavor will seem useless to hasten or to hinder his purpose. If on the other hand we accept the economic, the military, or the political interpretation of the past, we shall use our effort to secure economic, military, or political readjustment in the future. These are indeed the varied hopes of many men to-day—premillenarianism, socialism, militarism, democracy are some of the names for them. But if we believe spiritual forces and ideals are the real determinants of human life and progress, then our interest and our effort will be directed toward the creation of

a new public conscience, of a spirit of brotherhood, and of all the higher qualities of personal and social life. We shall interpret the movements of our time not as the unwinding of a divine machine nor as the conflict of states and systems, but as a conflict of ideals. "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now," and we shall appreciate with Paul "that the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God." "The revealing of the sons of God"—this simple realization of Christian ideals in all the relations of men and nations is the

"One far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."

The purpose of the chapters that follow is to sketch in outline some of the striking and influential ideals which were held by the Hebrew nation or its leaders through the thousand years of its history covered by the canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament. This study has been the natural outgrowth of an impulse given by the Great War for the comparison of national standards and aspirations. But it may be predicted that a few years will not make obsolete the analysis of these questions nor make valueless the study of the idealism in great nations of the past. An ancient and remote nation like Israel provides

a field where such study can be carried on without passion or prejudice.

It is a strange fact that so little investigation has been made of the subject. Even the study of political theory usually omits the ancient Orient altogether and begins in Greece only with Plato and Aristotle. Although the Bible has been studied from nearly every conceivable view-point, one cannot easily name any treatise that attempts to describe the development of its national ideals. This volume is not an effort to supply that lack so much as to call attention to it. A thorough and less popular study of the subject by a competent Old Testament scholar would be a useful contribution to modern political thought as well as to a knowledge of the Bible. As will be evident to the reader, the author has essayed no independent historical or critical investigations. He is indebted to the current English and American commentaries and general works about the Old Testament such as are mentioned in the foot-notes. In the quotations from these books the spelling Jehovah has been substituted for Yahweh and other forms of the Divine name in order to be consistent with the usage of the Bible text adopted.

As a background for the study the author has adopted that reconstruction of the history of Israel which appears to be most generally accepted by historical criticism, although he is fully aware of the objections to which this reconstruction is

open from more than one direction. Perhaps two other criticisms will occur to the reader: the failure to emphasize in conventional fashion the development of Hebrew religion, and the omission of the New Testament. Both are due to the limited purpose of the book, in aiming to focus attention upon a single phase of a significant national history. The religious meaning of the Bible has so long overshadowed in our minds its social and political significance that it may be well here for the sake of clearness to leave theology in the background. It cannot be completely separated even from patriotism and politics. The implications of early Christianity for national ideals are also an essential supplement to the study of those ideals in Hebrew history.

To the editors of *The Homiletic Review* and of *The World Tomorrow* the writer expresses thanks for permission to reprint from their columns Chapter XX and Chapters XI, XII, XVII, and XXII, respectively.

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