

II

THE CHRONICLER AND PROPHECY

A FEATURE in the Chronicler's narrative is the prominent position he gave to prophecy in relation to the kingdom. When all Israel came to Hebron and elected David to be their king, they were fulfilling the divine purpose, for their act was according to the word of God through Samuel. Prophecy did more than accept the kingdom, it had been a controlling factor in its foundation; the new institution owed its existence to the will of God revealed through His servants. Similarly, when Jerusalem fell before Nebuchadrezzar, the catastrophe was not wholly due to Zedekiah's breach of his oath of fealty to his suzerain, but was also due to the king's failure to humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet from the mouth of the Lord, II. 36: 12. The neglect of prophecy had been a leading factor in the overthrow of the kingdom which it had helped to found.

These are the two foci round which all C's thoughts about the kingdom in Israel turned. But he did not leave the two judgements isolated, one at the beginning, the other at the end, of his story. He linked them together by a thread which runs through his record of the successive kings. When David received the promise that God meant to make him the first of a dynasty, he also received the reminder that the promise was conditional. The kingdom in Israel depended on the faithfulness of his successors in keeping the divine law and obeying the divine word. The needed divine direction was to be found by them, not merely in the precepts of the law: it was continually revealed through the living voice of prophecy. For C introduced into his narrative a series of prophets who appeared before the successive kings in order to warn them of the policy they ought to follow or to rebuke them for their failure in fulfilling the divine will. How fundamental these stories were to C's thoughts about the

kingdom is clear from the fact that they are all peculiar to his account. Only in one instance did he borrow a prophetic message from his predecessor, when he reproduced almost verbatim the appearance of Micaiah ben Imlah before Jehoshaphat and Ahab at the opening of the campaign against Ramoth Gilead. The chief interest in the one prophetic story which he copied is to be found, as will appear later, in the contrast between its inimitable power and the accounts which derive from his own pen. According to the Chronicler, prophecy, which made the kingdom possible and condemned it in the end, accompanied the institution throughout its course.

The first case occurs at the time of Shishak's invasion of Palestine during the reign of Rehoboam.¹ Here C introduced a prophet Shemaiah who pronounced the invasion to be the divine penalty for the sin of the nation in that it had forsaken its God. When the people repented, the prophet declared that the calamity would not result in their ruin, though it must bring a severe chastisement for their transgression. The divine anger was averted because of this repentance and because some good things were found in Israel; but the kingdom was maintained when king and people obeyed the warning voice of the prophet.

In the reign of Asa Zerah the Ethiopian advanced against Judah with an overwhelming army. The king betook himself to prayer and closed with the petition: We rely on Thee and in Thy name are we come against this multitude. O Lord, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee. The result was that God Himself smote the Ethiopians, leaving to Asa and his army no other task than that of pursuing the broken army, II. 14: 9-14. Thereupon a prophet Azariah ben Oded met the returning conquerors and drove home the appropriate lesson, 15: 1-7. He fortified his sermon by appealing in somewhat puzzling terms to the past experience of the nation, but his main theme was to stress the devotion of the king to the divine will and to

¹ II Chr. c. 12, cf. I Kings 14: 21-31.

encourage him to maintain a similar attitude by the assurance that such conduct could never fail to receive its reward. Apparently the prophet approved in Asa more than his absolute dependence on the divine help, for it is said that the king had already removed the foreign altars and high places, had broken the mazzebboth and cut down the asherim, and had commanded Judah to keep the law and the commandment, 14: 2 f. The prophecy was intended to encourage him to proceed in the same direction, 15: 8. When, however, Asa was attacked by Baasha of Israel, he took a different course, for he bribed the king of Damascus to come to his help. At once Hanani the seer denounced his policy along the same lines as had led Azariah to commend his previous conduct, and declared that the result must be continuous war. The king's act in appealing to Syria was condemned, not because he had allied himself with a heathen power, but because he had sought human help at all. He ought to have trusted his kingdom to the divine support, 16: 1-9.¹

When Jehoshaphat returned from the disastrous campaign against Ramoth Gilead, Jehu ben Hanani met him and declared that the catastrophe was due to the divine anger because of the help which he had given to the wicked Ahab.

¹ In the interests of his theory C here departed entirely from the chronology of Kings. While he followed K somewhat closely in the account of the campaign between Judah and Israel, he made the Israelite attack Judah in the 36th year of Asa: K, on the other hand, made the war between the kings last all their days. Besides, the 36th year of Asa as the date for the outbreak of the war hopelessly conflicts with K's statement that Baasha died in the 26th year of Asa. The usual explanation of the discrepancy is to suppose that here C was following a different source. In my judgement it is more simply accounted for on the view that C adapted his chronology in order to suit his theory. The great deliverance from Zerah, which he alone reported, and which it is very difficult to accept as literal history, must have been followed by a period of peace which was the reward for Asa's trust in God, just as the continuous war and the king's disease in his feet resulted from his faithlessness. Room must be found, even at the cost of upsetting the chronology, for these successive events.

Yet the seer modified the condemnation, because some good elements remained in the king and because he had abolished the asheroth and set his heart to seek the Lord. After this warning Jehoshaphat continued his work of reform by improving the administration of justice, chap. 19. He further proved how well he had taken to heart the lesson he had received, for, when an overwhelming host of enemies from the East invaded Judah, he followed the example of Asa and betook himself to fasting and prayer, chap. 20. Thereupon the divine spirit came upon a levite Yahaziel who promised a complete deliverance from the danger. The faith of the king and the promise of the prophet were justified, for on the following day the invaders were routed without Judah being required to strike a blow.

Again, when Amaziah had gathered an army against the children of Seir, he judged them insufficient for the task and hired a body of troops from Israel. But an unnamed prophet intervened and bade the king recognize that no success could attend him, if he employed men with whom the Lord could have nothing to do, 25: 6-12. Unfortunately, the text of v. 8 is uncertain so that it is impossible to decide whether the prophet's objection was principally directed against the employment of Israelite mercenaries, or whether such tainted support merely aggravated the king's sin in failing to rely on the sufficient help of God. The issue of the campaign may at least justify the latter conclusion, for, while Amaziah won a brilliant victory after he had dismissed the Israelite troops, the disappointed mercenaries fell upon and looted a number of towns in Judah. The author may have wished to point out that, though the king's obedience to the prophetic warning brought his army success, his initial fault in employing men from Samaria did not fail to bring down a merited penalty. After his victory Amaziah took home with him the gods of the conquered people and worshipped them. The act brought a strong protest from another unnamed prophet, but this time the offender, instead of listening to the rebuke, insulted the divine messenger with

the result that he received the promise of his ruin, vv. 13-16. The incident forms in Chronicles the introduction to the disastrous war against Israel.

This series of incidents is not exactly parallel to another series which might be collated, in which a king's defeat was traced to his failure to maintain loyal adherence to the national religion. Outwardly, the special features in the events which have been brought together are that they are all peculiar to the Chronicler and that they are all attended by the appearance of a prophet. But inwardly they are also peculiar in that they introduce a novel standard for the conduct of the kings and of their court. K's customary judgement on the successive kings was based on whether they maintained strict loyalty to Yahwism, with a special attention to whether they observed the law of the single sanctuary. C did not fail to recognize that standard, though it deserves to be noted that he did not always reproduce the strictures of K about the abolition or non-abolition of the high places. But it is significant to discover that he extended the principle of absolute allegiance to Yahweh, and made it cover more than loyalty to the national cult and the law. In everything which concerned the maintenance of his kingdom, a king of Judah must be wholly dependent on the divine help. Even to rely too much on the nation's own strength was to show insufficient trust in God; and to enter into alliance with a foreign power, even if that power were the sister-nation, was to forfeit the divine support. The kingdom which owed its origin to the divine intervention needed no more for its continuance. To seek other help was to question the divine sufficiency to maintain what God had brought into being. When, therefore, C introduced into his narrative the series of prophets who all enforced the same principle, he acknowledged the source from which he derived the new standard which he applied to the kingdom and to its kings. It did not come from the law of Israel, but in his judgement it had formed the burden of prophecy. To him this dogma represented the leading conviction of the pro-

phets in relation to the kingdom, and he did not hesitate to make the course of the history of the kingdom and the fate which befell the successive kings conform to it. The words which he put into the mouth of Jehoshaphat were the epitome of his attitude on the subject: believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established, believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper, 20: 20. Since the earlier half of the saying is the positive form of an oracle which appears in its negative form at Isa. 7: 9, it is evident that he believed himself to be reproducing the prophetic attitude on the question. If he misinterpreted the Isaianic message, it must be added that he did so in numerous company. His view was that of the court prophets who urged Zedekiah into rebellion, because Yahweh must protect His city and the temple within it; and it is still that of all the moderns who believe that Isaiah taught the inviolability of Jerusalem, because its temple was the place which Yahweh had chosen for His abode, and who believe that the prophet saw in the temporary defeat of Assyria the vindication of his dogma.

The series of prophets, however, all of whom rebuke or hearten the kings of Israel, throws light on the Chronicler's idea of the kingdom as well as on his idea of the burden of prophecy. It brings sharply into view how strictly in his judgement the continuance of the kingdom was conditioned by the policy of the royal court. There are expressions employed in the promise of God to raise up and maintain a Davidic dynasty which have led several careful students to believe that a certain Messianic dignity was attached to the house of David. We are not concerned with the general question here, but merely with the particular question as to whether the Chronicler shared that opinion. Von Rad collated the evidence on the subject,¹ and pointed out that the promise to the Davidic king was always conditional on the loyalty of the successive kings to the divine commandments. Writing after Von Rad and recognizing his careful sifting of the relative passages, I agreed with his conclusions

¹ In his *Geschichtsbild des chronistischen Werkes*.

and stated that the figure of the Davidic king never escaped from the limits of time or even from those of human frailty; he, like all his subjects, was under the torah.¹ But neither of us realized the force of this series of prophetic utterances, which prove that to the Chronicler prophecy had always attended the kingdom, and that one of its leading functions had been to guide the kings in the only policy which could guarantee to them the divine protection and support. The Davidic kings were not merely, like all their subjects, under the torah: they were also controlled by the authentic voice of God, uttered by the prophets. Only if they obeyed that voice, could they expect the divine furtherance. Whenever one of the royal line ignored the divine counsel he brought his kingdom into danger, and even to the verge of ruin. Whenever he repented of his disobedience he received the deliverance which only God could bring him in his straits. When, on the other hand, he followed the counsel of the prophet, no enemy, however overwhelming his host might be, had been able to prevail against Israel. The intervention of God had been of such a character in these circumstances that it was impossible to mistake its source, for Israel had required to do nothing but stand still and see the deliverance which God wrought. The continuance of the kingdom had been always conditioned on the obedience of the kings to the word of prophecy which had brought the kingdom into existence. The condition was so absolute in its character that when the last king, ignoring the lessons of the past, despised the message of a prophet, his kingdom fell.

The important place which the Chronicler thus gave to prophecy in the national life makes it natural to ask how he conceived of the institution in itself. He retained a sense of the charismatic character which had belonged to it. For on one occasion he told how the Spirit of the Lord came upon a levite, who did not belong to the court circle, and on another he related that the Lord sent a prophet to Amaziah, from whom the king scornfully demanded whether he had

² *Post-Exilic Judaism*, pp. 192 ff.

ever been appointed to the royal council. He thus retained from the past the independent character of the prophetic message. Throughout all the stories the successive prophets had no hesitation in reproving the royal conduct and, when they supported it, the support was given to actions which conformed with their own teaching. The men were no mere courtiers, lending the support of their authority to the royal policy. In general, however, he thought of the prophets as having a recognized position about the court. When he referred to their writings, as he very frequently did, he had no hesitation in calling them the king's seers. He could even ascribe to David the institution of a guild of levites, all of whose leaders were called seers or prophets, and whose function was to prophesy to the accompaniment of music, I. 25: 1 f. Men could be trained to carry on this most individual function.

What shows the wide departure from the older position is to recognize the character of the message which the men brought. It has become stereotyped, for all the successive prophets really say the same thing. There is a lack of individuality about their words, and one cannot escape from the sense that each of them was repeating what it was the recognized thing for a prophet to say. The Chronicler was following a tradition which he did not vary, except in its terms. The older prophets followed tradition, but that took the form of certain great convictions which the men applied to the conditions and circumstances of their own time. There was room for individuality of outlook and judgement, not merely for variation of language. Now the men conform to a pattern, and almost subscribe to a dogma. When C quoted in its entirety from K the encounter between Ahab and Micaiah ben Imlah he showed himself sensitive to the power of the older prophecy, but unconsciously he invited comparison between that vivid story and his own tame accounts. In contrast with the tremendous figures of Elijah and Amos and Hosea C's prophets are colourless and thin, and have become mouthpieces of a recognized message.

The historian belonged to a time when prophecy was on its death-bed, as an active force in the life of the nation. Men could still read and admire the great messages which had come down from the past, but they were no longer able to prophesy. Israel had passed from the period of creation with its ferment and its place for personal conviction, and had reached the period of the makers of systems, the theologians and the ecclesiastics. The institution had arrived and was busy with its customary task of canalizing the fruitful and dangerous religious tides in the national life.

But the spirit of the past was not yet dead. Though men could not prophesy themselves, they remained conscious of the value of one of the peculiar and most powerful factors in their national life. A man who could not write the story of his nation without a constant reference to prophecy and its work was alive to its worth. It had contributed an invaluable element to that kingdom which was now a mere memory. The kingdom of Israel had not been a shortlived example of the many which appeared in the ever-changing pattern of its world. What was distinctive in it had not been entirely derived from the temple and its cult which still survived: it had in part been due to the succession of men who had borne constant and fearless witness to standards of life which, because they were eternal, ought to influence so mutable a thing as a royal policy.

A further evidence of the value which the Chronicler attached to prophecy is to be found in the extent to which he referred his readers to sources of that character in the conclusions he appended to the life of each of the kings. For David he cited the words of Samuel the seer, of Nathan the prophet, and of Gad the seer, I. 29: 29; and for Solomon the words of Nathan the prophet, the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and the visions of Iddo the seer, II. 9: 29. The acts of Rehoboam were written in the words of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer II. 12: 15; the rest of the acts, ways, and sayings of Abijah in the midrash of Iddo the prophet, II. 13: 22. The rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat were

to be found in the words of Jehu ben Hanani which are inserted (or who is mentioned) in the book of the Kings of Israel, II. 20: 34. Information concerning the sons of Joash and the greatness of the burdens upon or against him, and concerning his restoration of the temple is to be found in the midrash of the book of the Kings, II. 24: 27. The rest of the acts of Uzziah did Isaiah ben Amoz the prophet write, II. 26: 22; the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and his good deeds were written in the vision of Isaiah ben Amoz the prophet in the book of the Kings of Judah and Israel, II. 32: 32. The rest of the acts of Manasse and his prayer and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the Lord were preserved among the acts of the Kings of Israel: his prayer also and all his sin and trespass before he humbled himself were written in the history of Hozai, for which the LXX reads the seers, II. 33: 18 f.

The list contains only the references which are peculiar to C; a complete list would require the inclusion of those which are common to him and K. It is also a feature of his account that his appeals to supplementary sources of this character are more frequent in the earlier period of the kingdom, and that after Hezekiah and Manasse they disappear.

Another feature of the series of oracles and the incidents in which they are imbedded is that there is no evidence of their having received any serious attention from the reviser; any notes added to them are negligible.

It is clear, then, both from the extent to which he referred to the works of the prophets and from the oracles which he inserted in his own narrative, that the Chronicler felt himself in sympathy with, or even wished to be regarded as continuing this type of literature. And it is possible to recognize already how far his work departed, not merely from our modern method of writing history, but from the method in which the authors of Samuel and Kings wrote it. With the means at their disposal these men did place David in the stream of the national life, and show to some extent how

the past had made his life-work possible, and how the same past set limits on what he could do. They never hid the fact of the radical division in the nation, which his personality had overcome, but only with difficulty and only for a time. In the same way they made him the founder of a dynasty, but confessed that even his immediate successor only reached the throne through a harem-intrigue. The Chronicler did not see the figure of David in the light of history: he saw him, as it were, *sub specie aeternitatis*, which meant to the Hebrew that he saw the king to have been the instrument of the divine purpose in Israel. David was designated by a prophet for the throne before he reached it, and he was elected by the whole nation, when God had intervened to blot out the house of Saul. His dynasty had endured, not because the successive kings had been able to make good their claim to the throne, but because God had promised to build him a house. The kingdom as well as its founder was an instrument by which God purposed to work out His will for His chosen people. Because it was such an instrument, it could rely on His support, for He would intervene to protect it against all its enemies. In order that it might realize its function in the world, God had sent a succession of prophets, through whom the successive kings were reminded that they were chosen to serve a greater will than their own. When the men listened and obeyed, when they acknowledged that the protection of their God was sufficient for Israel, He had intervened and had made good His promise. But when the dynasty refused to listen, and when its last king turned his back on the divine warning, the kingdom came to its end. It had failed to fulfil the purpose which its God had in mind when He brought it into being.

Yet that was not and could not be the end, for there could be no end to the purpose of God with His nation. So the Chronicler wove into the history of the kingdom the history of the temple and supplemented the account of his predecessor by this record. The first king, himself divinely elected, planned the sanctuary for his people. He laid down

the lines along which its building was to be carried out, and determined the functions of the ministers who were to conduct its worship: he even chose its site. In every stage of his growing scheme and in every part of the plans he formed he was guided by revelation. After every desecration of the sacred building came a reforming king who restored the conditions which had been designed by its founder, for these had been invested from the first with divine authority. The kingdom, as an institution, had failed; but it did not disappear, until it had brought into existence an institution which outlasted itself. The Davidic dynasty had been disloyal to the conditions on which alone it could expect to be continued. But through its best representatives the house of David had built up something which could endure to be the centre for Israel's life.

The author of Kings had written the history of the time when Israel had taken its place among the nations of the world. Under David Judah and Samaria and Transjordan had been blended into a unity which gave them strength to assert their independence, and even to conquer some of the surrounding nations. He had collated the records of the past and attempted to trace the varying fortunes which had attended the successive kings. Yet the story which he had to tell was in the end the record of a failure, and could at best remind his people of the greater past which had once been theirs, though now it had disappeared. It could not give them anything which was fitted to help them in their dolorous present or to enable them to face the future.

The Chronicler believed in the future, because he believed that his people was elect after the counsel of God. To him the kingdom was but one stage in the long road down which its God was leading Israel. Therefore, although the institution had collapsed and could never return, it had sheltered the germ which could maintain the nation's life. He added to what his predecessor had told the story of the temple, dwelling on how the first king planned it with loving care, and how his true successors did not fail to restore it to

its true place in the national life. For he was writing to and for a generation which had recovered from the disaster of the Exile and had begun to plan a polity which made the cult the centre for Jewry. Convinced himself that this was the hope of Israel, he sought to convince his fellow Jews of the thing in which he believed. He was not writing history; he was writing a tract for his times, in which he used history, in order to enforce his convictions. He was attempting to extract from the past the lessons which it could supply in order to guide the future. The end at which he aimed affected even his style. Compared with Kings, his review of the history of the kingdom can only be called flat and dull. All the picturesque elements in the record, stories like those of David's flight from Jerusalem, or the meeting of Micaiah ben Imlah with Ahab, or the account of the plague in David's day, with their vivid lights on men's character and their power to show the past in its concrete reality, have either been borrowed or omitted by him. His material was forced to submit to the end which he had in view. Every man who is engrossed in his own task produces work which is tame and dull to a later generation. The sermons and pamphlets which were written to serve one time are apt to appear unreadable when that time is past. They demand that men put themselves back to a distant point of view, before later men can even begin to measure and appreciate their influence.

The Chronicler was not writing history: he was attempting in his own way to determine what men might gather from the review of their past as to the ways of God with the Israel which He had made His own. If we define *midrash* as an interpretation of history, the use of the past to discover its meaning in order to illuminate and guide the present, then *midrash* was no sporadic element which crops out here and there in his treatment of his theme, but was of the essence of his work. His method also was no novelty in the life and literature of Israel, for the men who wrote the patriarchal narratives had already used it.