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: THE MAN OF GOD.



FATHER FELIX. O.M.CAP. L.S.S.

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MOSES—"THE MAN OF GOD"

INTRODUCTION.

We left the **House of Jacob** happily situated in Egypt under the protection of the Patriarch Joseph,⁽¹⁾ but at the beginning of the Book of Exodus a sad change has come about: "**there arose a new king over Egypt that knew not Joseph**" (Exodus 1, 8). There is much meaning in that phrase **knew not Joseph**, as the context shows. A new Egyptian dynasty is in power, and a new policy in force. The Hebrews who had been protected and favoured formerly are bitterly persecuted now, and viewed as aliens and enemies by the ruling powers. In a word, the invading Hyksos have been expelled; the native Egyptians have recovered possession of the Delta.

THE PERSECUTION.

The opposition to the Hebrews was cleverly organised, and the persecution cruelly carried out. Pharaoh first stirred up the racial prejudices of the Egyptians. Then he imposed forced labour on the Hebrews, appointed Egyptian task-masters over them, and thus reduced them to slavery. Pithom⁽²⁾ and Ramesses, two "**cities of tabernacles**" (Exodus 1, 11), i.e., cities containing storehouses for food and munitions of war, were built by the Hebrews under these circumstances. To slavery was added the malignant hatred of the Egyptians, expressed in mockery and open insults. Then when the Hebrews only increased in numbers under the persecution Pharaoh ordered that all Hebrew children of the male sex born thenceforth should be drowned in the river Nile.

MOSES.

A husband and wife, named Amram and Jochabed, of the tribe of Levi, had a daughter, Miriam (the original

(1) No. 3 of this series.

(2) Pithom is believed by some to have been discovered by M. Naville in 1883 at Tell-el-Maskouta; others place it at Tell Artabi. The site of Ramesses is as yet even less certain.

Hebrew form of Mary), and a son, Aaron. A second son was born to them after the edict of Pharaoh. He was "**a goodly child**" (Exodus 2, 2); and natural affection prompted the mother to risk defiance of the cruel edict. She hid him in her home for three months, but it was impossible to continue the evasion. Then she devised a bold plan. "**She took a basket made of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and pitch;**⁽¹⁾ **and put the little babe therein, and laid him in the sedges by the river's brink, his sister standing afar off, and taking notice what should be done**" (Exodus 2 3-4).

It cannot have been by chance, that the basket coffin was put at the very place in the Nile where the king's daughter came to bathe, and in such a position that it attracted her attention. The princess sent one of her maids to fetch the little ark. When she opened it and found within an infant crying, her best human feelings were stirred and she determined to save the life of the infant, although she knew him to be a Hebrew. Miriam, who had been anxiously watching the whole scene, now came forward, and offered to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the child. The princess agreed, and the girl went at once to bring her mother. So the child was reared by his own mother until he was old enough to be admitted into the royal house of Pharaoh; and then he was accepted by Pharaoh's daughter as an adopted son. She named him Moses. The sacred writer says expressly that he was so called because he was taken from the water (Exodus 2, 10), thus deriving the name from the Hebrew **mashah**, 'to draw.' Originally, however, the name was Egyptian, and probably means 'the infant.'⁽²⁾ There is no contradiction involved; for primitive peoples a proper name is never without a meaning, and the Hebrews would naturally seek a derivation of their own for the Egyptian name, Moses.

(1) The basket made of bulrushes would be probably a *coffin* made of the *papyrus plant*. The coffin would deceive the officers of Pharaoh. The papyrus was coated with *bitumen* (slime) mixed with pitch, which mixture "forms a hard glassy wax, perfectly impervious to water." THE LAND AND THE BOOK. By W. M. Thomson, D.D. London, 1859. p.224.

(2) LES HÉBREUX EN ÉGYPTÉ. Par Alexis Mallon, S.J. Orientalia, No. 3. Rome, 1921. p.133.

From his Hebrew home Moses brought religious zeal and sympathy for his own people, while at the court of Pharaoh he received the best administrative, political and military training of the time. In this way did divine providence prepare him for the arduous mission in front of him. "Moses fills a triple rôle in Israel. A Prophet filled with the spirit of God, whose compeer Israel has not seen for the familiarity with which God treated him and the marvels which he wrought (Deuteronomy 34, 10), he enriched the religion of ancient Israel with new and decisive revelations; a political genius of the first order, he grouped together tribes till then with no great cohesion and made of them a solidly organised people; lastly, he was a legislator of broad views, the promulgator of a law which in its essential content kept its value intact until the mission of Israel was accomplished."⁽¹⁾

(1) CHRISTUS. *Manuel d'Histoire des Religions*. By Joseph Huby and others. *La Religion d'Israel* by John Nikel. Paris, 1927. 5 ed., p.876.

THE EXODUS⁽¹⁾ FROM EGYPT.

(Exodus 2, 11-18, 27).

Moses grew to manhood in royal surroundings while another generation of his people groaned in servitude. He saw their sad condition, and his sympathy with them grew. When he was forty years old he saw one day an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew worker and he could restrain himself no longer. Seeing no one near he thought himself unobserved, so he attacked and slew the Egyptian and buried the corpse in the sand. On the following day, however, when he tried to make peace between two Hebrews—who were quarrelling, one of these taunted him with the killing of the Egyptian. Whether the Hebrew on whose behalf he had intervened had told, or another whom he had not noticed, the affair had become public. Pharaoh soon heard of it, and Moses had to flee to save his life. He went to Madian in Arabia, where he married Sephora, the daughter of Jethro or Raguel⁽²⁾. They had two sons, Gersam and Eliezer. Moses spent forty years a shepherd with Jethro.

THE PHARAO OF THE OPPRESSION ?

“Now after a long time the king of Egypt died . . .” (Exodus 2, 23). This text has a close bearing on the question of the date of the Exodus. Reigns of longer than forty years are few. In fact in the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties of Egypt (and the Exodus falls in one or other of these for a certainty) there are only two such reigns; Thotmes III, of the eighteenth dynasty ruled for fifty-four years, and Rameses II of the nineteenth dynasty for sixty-six or sixty-seven years. From the numbers in the Bible the Exodus would seem to be dated at 1449 B.C.⁽³⁾ But biblical numbers are a subject for textual criticism; and on the other hand scholars differ as to the dates of the dynasties in Egypt. Consequently we have no certainty. A first opinion was strongly in favour of Rameses II as being “the Pharaoh of

(1) *Exodus* comes from two Greek words, and means ‘a going out’. It is used for the migration of the Hebrews from Egypt.

(2) Jethro is described as a priest. Raguel, which means ‘friend of God,’ was perhaps an official title.

(3) CHRONOLOGIA VETERIS ET NOVI TESTAMENTI. Auctore Ernesto Ruffini. Rome, 1924. p.90.

the oppression,” and his successor Meneptah I “the Pharaoh of the Exodus.”⁽¹⁾ Later, opinion shifted to Thotmes III and his successor Amenhotep II, the fourth and fifth Pharaohs of the eighteenth dynasty.⁽²⁾ But in recent times there is a reaction to the old Rameses-Meneptah theory.⁽³⁾

THE BURNING BUSH.

At all events that Pharaoh died—be he Thotmes III or Rameses II—from whose displeasure Moses was an exile. After which when Moses one day led his sheep as usual to the mountain range called Horeb he noticed some distance away a bush burning but not being consumed; and he went towards it to seek an explanation. It was a miracle; and God spoke to him revealing Himself as the One True God, Who had spoken to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses was commissioned to return to Egypt and to lead his people to freedom and to the conquest of the land of Chanaan. For all his preparation Moses was diffident of himself. But God assured him of His divine protection; revealed to him the Divine Name—Yahweh;⁽⁴⁾ promised to endow him with miraculous powers, that his words would be divinely inspired, and that Aaron, his brother, would be given to him

(1) LA BIBLE ET LES DÉCOUVERTES MODERNES. Par. F. Vigouroux, S.S. 10th ed. Vol. 2. Paris, 1879. pp.208-211. On page 208 he states that all Egyptologists of the time were agreed in placing the Exodus in the nineteenth dynasty, the only question being under which Pharaoh of the eight. To-day we are less certain of this.

(2) Father Cornely, S.J., gives this as the probable opinion in his day (COMPENDIUM INTRODUCTIONIS in U.T. Libros. Paris, 1914. 8th ed: p.713). More recently this is the opinion favoured by John Garstang (*The Foundations of Bible History*. JOSHUA. JUDGES. London, 1931. p.344). He places the Exodus in 1447 under Thotmes III; similarly John Nikel, Sir Charles Marston, and many others. We may take this as probable.

(3) Thus Father Mallon, S.J., while insisting strongly that it is only a hypothesis gives good reason for the Rameses II—Meneptah theory (LES HÉBREUX, etc., pp. 178-182). But then his dates differ from those of Vigouroux. The wise reader will use great reserve in dealing with theories advanced in popular books. The problem is vast and far from solution.

(4) The Divine Name, *Yahweh*, is a noun from the Hebrew verb ‘to be’ (hawah). The meaning of it, therefore, is ‘the being,’ or ‘he who exists (of himself)’; in terms of philosophy—*ens a se*. For three centuries before Christ the Jews through reverence would not pronounce this name, but substituted for it *Adonai* (lord). *Yahweh* (not *Jehovah*) is now accepted as the correct form.

to support him in his mission. Moses then bade farewell to Jethro, and with his wife and their two sons set out for Egypt.

Moses found Aaron, and together they went to Pharaoh and demanded that the Hebrews be allowed to go a three days' journey into the neighbouring Arabian desert—there to offer sacrifice to God. Pharaoh refused. Then Moses and Aaron organised the people into making a united demand. This only enraged Pharaoh; and he retorted by oppressing them still more. The people now complained bitterly against Moses. He had recourse to God; God assured him of success and sent him back to Pharaoh—this time with power to work miracles. But again his mission was a failure: "**Pharaoh's heart was hardened**" (Exodus 7, 13).

THE TEN PLAGUES.

To vanquish Pharaoh's obstinacy God visited Egypt with ten plagues each of increasing severity. First the water of the Nile and of its tributaries, lakes and cisterns was changed into blood. The second was a plague of frogs; the third of mosquitoes.⁽²⁾ The fourth plague of flies, and the remaining six plagues differed from the first three in that they did not affect Gessen where the Hebrews lived. At the fourth plague Pharaoh was thoroughly frightened, and he began to offer concessions. He would allow the Hebrews to offer sacrifice—but in Egypt. Moses refused this condition because, he pleaded, they must sacrifice animals which the Egyptians held sacred. Pharaoh surrendered, and promised to allow them to go three days' journey into the desert if only the plague would cease. But when Moses removed the plague Pharaoh broke his promise. Then followed promptly the fifth plague of a murrain among the cattle of Egypt; the sixth of boils on men and beasts; the seventh of thunder and lightning, and hail, which killed men and animals, and destroyed herbs and trees. Again Pharaoh surrendered, but only to relent as before. The courtiers intervened now, and Pharaoh was forced to recall Moses and

(2) The exact nature of this (third) plague has long been a problem. Our (Douay) version calls it the plague of *sciniphs*, which is only a transliteration of the Hebrew word—*kinnim*. Brown-Driver-Briggs (Hebrew Lexicon) translate it as *gnats*. Vigouroux, Fillion, Mallon think that there is question of *mosquitoes*.

Aaron. He offered this time to allow the men of the Hebrews to go; but the women and children, the flocks and possessions were to be left behind. Moses rejected this condition. The eighth plague of locusts resulted only in another broken promise from Pharaoh. After the ninth plague of darkness he was willing to allow the people to go, but not their flocks and herds.

THE PASCH AND THE TENTH PLAGUE.

The tenth plague—the death of the firstborn of every family in Egypt from Pharaoh's to the least of his subjects—was the most appalling of all; and it broke down finally the king's resistance. Very special preparations were made for this visitation. God commanded that in each household of the Hebrews a lamb was to be killed, roasted whole, and eaten without the breaking of a bone. The day was appointed—the fourteenth of the Hebrew month, Nisan.⁽¹⁾ With the lamb were to be eaten bitter herbs (symbolical of the bitter persecution they had endured in Egypt), and unleavened bread. They were to eat standing, with their loins girded and staff in hand—this and the unleavened bread were symbols of hasty preparations for a journey. The blood of the lamb was to be sprinkled on the lintels and doorposts of the Hebrew houses. At midnight the destroying angel passed through Egypt and slew the firstborn in every house which was not sprinkled with the blood of the lamb.

The same manner of killing and eating the lamb with the same ritual was appointed to be observed annually on the same date (14th Nisan). The festival was called the **Phase** or **Pasch** (Passover).⁽²⁾

THE EXODUS.

Pharaoh now summoned Moses and Aaron and bade the Hebrews depart; while the Egyptians, terrified by the plague, urged them to go speedily and presented them with gold and silver vessels and clothing. Seventy persons of the House of Jacob had come to Egypt; now after 430 years they had increased to about two millions.

(1) Nisan would correspond to the latter half of our March and the first half of our April approximately.

(2) From the Hebrew word *pesah*—a passing over.

Led by a miraculous pillar of cloud by day which at night became a pillar of light the immense multitude took their journey from Ramesses to Soccoth. From this their natural route would be due eastward, but under divine guidance they went southward instead of Beelsephor.⁽¹⁾ By this time Pharaoh had perceived to his intense disappointment that they were not returning to Egypt. He located their position, and with his army set out in pursuit. "Humanly speaking, the Israelites were lost: before them to the south rose Gebel Attakah; from north and west came the Egyptian army; on the east was the Red Sea."⁽²⁾ They fully realised this themselves, and bitterly reproached Moses for leading them into a death trap. All this, however, was designed to make the miracle of their rescue the more impressive. Moses stretched his hand over the Red Sea. The water divided, and a passage was made through the sea for the people. Meantime the pillar of cloud moved to the rear of the Hebrew host giving them light but keeping the Egyptians in darkness. When all the Israelites had crossed safely to the other side the Egyptians followed in pursuit. But when these were between the divided waters Moses stretched forth his hand again. The sea flowed back; and Pharaoh and his army were drowned.

The journey was now southward along the Arabian shore of the Red Sea; to Mara, Elim, and on to the desert of Sin. Here the people murmured again, and God sent them quails for food and also miraculous bread which they called **manna**. At Raphidim Moses struck with his staff a rock of the Horeb range of mountain, and water came copiously to relieve their want. Here also a new obstacle appeared: the Amalecites, a wild desert people, attacked the Hebrews. Moses appointed Josue to lead the fighting men while he with Aaron and Hur went to the crest of a hill in full view of the battlefield to pray for victory for his people. The Amalecites were routed. Jethro came to meet Moses here, and advised him on the manner of organising and ruling the people.

(1) This is the only one of these stages in the journey for locating which we have anything like certitude. It would be at the north-western point of the Gulf of Suez.

(2) HISTOIRE DE L'ANCIEN TESTAMENT. Par Monseigneur J. B. Pelt. 7th ed. Paris, 1922. Vol. 1, p.222.

MIRACLES.

In the attacks made by the rationalists on the Catholic doctrine of miracles generally these miracles of which we have just been treating received special attention. A miracle is an extraordinary occurrence, perceptible to the senses, wrought by divine power **outside** (i.e., beyond or above) the ordinary natural laws. To argue that a miracle is impossible because it would denote a change of plan in the divine mind shows a wrong idea of a miracle and a wrong idea of God. A miracle is not **against** the ordinary providence of God—it is **above** or **beyond** it; and God is a free agent, eternal, omnipotent, unchanging. Miracles are part of the plan of this order which unfolds itself successively in time to us, but which is foreseen in its entirety to the infinite wisdom of God.

As to the miracles in **Exodus** in particular: in the Sinai peninsula of Arabia there is a natural effect produced by climate, sun and wind combined, which at a distance resembles a burning bush. In Egypt the Nile rises yearly and floods the Delta country, the water becoming a reddish brown from the mud which is carried in solution. This mud in turn when deposited is a breeding-ground for frogs, mosquitoes and flies. Then there is the Egyptian **khamassin**, a hot wind from the desert which brings sand and causes dense darkness. Natural manna is found in Arabia, and water is found under rocks in the most unlikely places. Hence, it is argued, the events above are natural events used by Moses for his purpose.

Such argument not merely ignores but goes directly contrary to the text and context of the biblical narrative. The Red Nile appears yearly in July; Moses turned **all** the waters of Egypt into blood in February.⁽¹⁾ From the Burning Bush God spoke to Moses and confided to him his mission—a mission which not only was he not expecting, but was very slow to undertake. The plagues began and ceased at the command of Moses. The manna was provided in great quantity at the prayer of Moses when the people required food. That these miracles reproduce certain features natural to the countries where they occurred is part

(1) We can date this from the tenth miracle—14th Nisan.

of the **divine economy of miracles**: "An additional recommendation of the Scripture miracles is their appositeness to the times and places in which they were wrought; as, for instance, in the case of the plagues of Egypt, which . . . were directed against the prevalent superstitions of that country.⁽¹⁾

CHAPTER II.

MOUNT SINAI AND THE LAW.

(Exodus 19-30; Leviticus; Deuteronomy 5-30).

Three months had passed since the Israelites quitted Egypt, and now they were at Mount Sinai. Through Moses as mediator God proposed to make a solemn covenant here with His chosen people; and the people agreed. Three days were spent in religious preparation; and on the morning of the third day thunder, lightning and dense clouds on the peak of Sinai proclaimed the presence of God to the awe-stricken multitude in the valley below. Moses went to the top of the mountain to hear the divine instructions.

THE DECALOGUE.⁽²⁾

The law given to Moses is very extensive and detailed, but at the outset a summary of the whole moral code is given in the Ten Commandments. These contain the primary precepts of the natural law; they answer to the purpose and needs of man's rational nature; consequently they can no more change than human nature can. Our Lord renewed them in the Sermon on the Mount: "**Do not think that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil**." (St. Matthew 5, 17). What Our Lord did was to interpret them more clearly and more fully. The ten commandments direct human conduct in our relations with God, ourselves, our fellow-men. Thus, they are the foundation of true piety, of civic peace, of social

(1) *ESSAYS ON MIRACLES*. By John Henry Cardinal Newman. 8th ed.. (of Longman's). p.25. The Egyptians worshipped the Nile; also frogs, bulls and serpents.

(2) i.e., the ten commandments, from the Greek *deka* (ten) and *logos* (word). They are called "*the ten words*" in Deuteronomy 10, 4 and Exodus 34, 28.

order and of domestic harmony. "They have always been esteemed as the most precious rules of life and are the basis of all Christian legislation."⁽¹⁾

With the ten commandments Moses, under divine inspiration, gave the Hebrews many laws which are a development of the moral code contained in the decalogue; detailed regulations for divine worship (especially for sacrifice and a priesthood); and wise rules for the civil government and social organisation of the nation;—in a word, moral, ceremonial and civil laws.

THE PENAL CODE.

The death penalty was decreed for idolatry; for blasphemy; for violation of the Sabbath; for striking or cursing one's father or mother;⁽²⁾ for murder; for adultery and certain other gross sexual crimes. The long list need cause no surprise when it is remembered that we are dealing with ancient times and with people whom Moses, their leader, described as "**stiffnecked**," (Exodus 32, 9), i.e., incorrigible. Indeed, compared with ancient codes generally the law of Moses is exceedingly mild. Thus in the penalty of scourging the number of strokes must not exceed forty⁽³⁾ (Deuteronomy 25, 3), whereas in ancient Roman law (rightly regarded as the best of all human codes) there was no such limit imposed, and slaves were sometimes flogged to death.⁽⁴⁾

MORAL LAWS.

Kindness to strangers and hospitality are recommended in several places; and benevolence to widows and orphans: "**If you hurt them they will cry out to me and I will hear their cry**" (Exodus 22, 23). Almsgiving and thought for the poor are encouraged; the cornfields and the vineyards are not to be stripped bare at the harvest time so that the needy may have the gleanings (Leviticus 19, 9-10).

There are humane rules for the treatment of animals; "**If**

(1) *CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA*: under the word *Commandments*.

(2) This law is quoted by Our Lord in St. Matthew 15, 4.

(3) In practice the number was thirty-nine, through fear of exceeding the legal number: "*of the Jews five times did I receive forty stripes, save one.*" (2 Corinthians 11, 24).

(4) Cicero gives a concrete instance, *In Verrem*, v. 54.

thou meet thy enemy's ox or ass going astray, bring it back to him. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lie underneath his burden, thou shalt not pass by, but shalt lift him up with him" (Exodus 23, 4-5). "Thou shalt not plough with an ass and an ox together" (Deuteronomy 22, 10). "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out thy corn on the floor" (Deuteronomy 25, 44). (1)

Necromancy, sorcery, divination, calumny, detraction, hatred, theft, extortion, fraud and usury are severally and sternly condemned: "Let the balance be just and the weights equal; the bushel just and the sextary equal" (Leviticus 19, 36).

MARRIAGE.

It was forbidden to the Israelites to marry those outside their own nation, and especially the Chanaanites, on account of the danger of perversion. The reality of this danger is clear from a concrete instances in Leviticus 24, 10-14, where the son of a Hebrew mother named Salumith and an Egyptian father had to be executed for blasphemy. They were required furthermore to marry from their own tribes—this to maintain intact the lands and possessions of the several tribes. For this same end the levirate law was renewed by which her brother-in-law must marry a widow who had no son to inherit the family name and property.

Polygamy and divorce were practised by the surrounding peoples, and these evils against the unity and indissolubility of matrimony had crept in among the Hebrews also. Moses could fight these abuses only indirectly. In Genesis 2, 22-24 he makes prominent statement of the divine decree concerning the unity of matrimony and its indissolubility; and all through the law the ideal of matrimony as one, permanent and holy is in evidence. To check divorce he instituted the "bill of divorce" (Deuteronomy 24, 1-4), which was intended "to make the husband desist from his intention (of divorcing) by creating delay and bringing the matter before the scribes who would dissuade him." (2) Then a woman divorced a

(1) Grain was threshed by walking oxen over it.

(2) St. Augustine. *Contra Faustum*, lib.xix,c.26.

second time could not re-marry her first husband, "because she is defiled, and is become abominable before the Lord. . ." (Deuteronomy 24, 4) (1)

SLAVERY.

An Israelite could become a slave for theft when unable to restore; or for debt. But he was never a slave in perpetuity. He became free again when the debt was paid; or when the sabbatical or jubilee year came, every seventh and fiftieth year respectively. This is in contrast to ancient pagan codes of law.

THE CEREMONIAL LAW.

Unlike the moral law the ceremonial was only temporary, giving figures of the realities to come with the Redeemer: "a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things" (Hebrews 10, 1). Detailed instructions were given for the appointment and consecration of priests; the building of a sanctuary; public and private worship of God; sacrifices and festivals. Aaron was divinely chosen to be the first high priest; his sons were appointed priests; and the office was to be hereditary in their families. The men of the tribe of Levi were to serve the sanctuary; and the Book of Leviticus a special code of laws for the duties of priests and levites, and the order of sacrifices and ceremonies.

THE TABERNACLE.

The sanctuary—the first church raised to the One True God—of necessity took the form of a tabernacle (literally—a tent) or moveable house since the people were (and were

(1) "The existence of the practice of divorce is assumed and restricted. Not merely does it receive no positive sanction, but it is tacitly reprobated. The Hebrews were not as yet fitted for anything higher. Among barbarous people a wronged husband often holds it to be his strict right to kill his unfaithful wife. It was better that an Israelite should believe himself free in such a case to put away his wife, than that he should adopt the far more criminal alternative." CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE. By George Hayward Joyce, S.J. London, 1933. p.273. Our Lord restored marriage to its original ideal unity: "Because of the hardness of your heart (i.e., combined ignorance and obstinacy) Moses wrote you that precept (of making out a legal form of divorce) . . . What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (St. Mark 10, 5-9).

to remain for forty years) nomads without fixed abode. A rectangular space, 150 feet by 75 feet was first fenced about but open to the sky. This was "**the court of the tabernacle**" (Exodus 27, 9); and as far as the entrance to the tabernacle it was open to all the Israelites. At the western end was the roofed tabernacle, or sanctuary proper, 45 feet by 18 feet,⁽¹⁾ with a **veil** or curtain at the entrance. This again was divided by a second veil into "**the Holy** (place)" and "**the Holy of Holies**" i.e., the most holy place (Hebrews 9, 2-3). Priests and levites could enter the holy place, but only the high priests could enter the inner sanctuary, and that only once a year on "**the day of atonement**" (Leviticus 23, 27), the tenth of the Jewish month Tishri.⁽²⁾

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT.

In the **holy of holies** was the **Ark of the Covenant**, the most sacred possession of the Hebrews, the throne of Jahwe where He visibly manifested His presence. It was a chest or oblong box of acacia (setim) wood, 3 feet 9 inches long by 2 feet 3 inches broad and high, covered with a golden plate called **the propitiatory**, ornamented with a crown of gold and two figures of angels. In the Ark were placed the two stone tablets of the decalogue, and near it a written copy of the whole law of Moses. In the Holy Place were the altar of incense, the golden seven-branched candlestick, and the table for the twelve loaves of the proposition (Exodus 25, 30). In the court were the altar of holocausts and the "**brazen laver**" (Exodus 30, 18), a large vessel of bronze for the ritual washings.

LEGAL CLEANLINESS.

The prohibition to eat blood was renewed (Deuteronomy 15, 23); also the law of circumcision on the eighth day (Leviticus 12, 3), a law which seems to have fallen into neglect even in the case of Moses' own son (Exodus, 4, 25). The distinction between clean and unclean foods was also renewed and clarified (Leviticus 11). Various causes gave

(1) According to Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3, 6, 3. But the reading is uncertain; another reading gives 45 feet by 15.

(2) *Tishri* would correspond to our mid-September to mid-October.

rise to legal defilement, e.g., touching a corpse. Leprosy, ever the scourge of eastern countries, was given in charge to the priests because medical science was unknown. The priests diagnosed the disease or certified to its cure.⁽¹⁾

Many of these ceremonial laws are directed to hygiene and public health, but underlying them is always the divine purpose of keeping the Hebrews separate from the surrounding idolatrous nations: "**I have separated you from other people that you shall be mine**" (Leviticus 20, 26). Also there is the higher purpose still of educating them to holiness by means of these distinctions between clean and unclean in material things. Take, for instance, the prohibition (in Deuteronomy 14, 21; Exodus 23, 10; 34, 26): "**Thou shalt not boil a kid in the milk of its dam.**" This practice is regarded as brutal; it is also "a gross unwholesome dish,"⁽²⁾ and lastly it is used in the heathen worship of Asherat, the Phoenician god of fertility.⁽³⁾

THE CIVIL LAW.

The Hebrews of the Old Testament had a unique political constitution—they were a **theocracy**.⁽⁴⁾ God was the supreme and sole ruler, judge and lawgiver; Moses and those who succeeded him (even the kings) were but deputies of Yahweh. They were the **Chosen People** of God; their civil laws were religious laws; all the legislation of Moses was inspired. This does not mean that all the civil laws were new. No, what was good in the patriarchal code and tribal customs was retained and re-enacted. This is the reason that there are many points of resemblance between the laws in the Bible concerning property, the administration of justice, social and national policy, and the laws on the same matters in the code of Hammurabi, the great law-giver of

(1) This illustrates the incident in the Gospel (St. Luke 17, 12-19) where Our Lord commanded the ten lepers: "*Go, shew yourselves to the priests.*"

(2) *THE LAND AND THE BOOK*, p.95.

(3) This is clear from inscriptions on the Ras Shamra tablets, discovered in northern Syria in 1929. *VERBUM DOMINI*. Vol. 16. (1936). pp.142-148 and 174-183.

(4) From the Greek *Theos* (God) and *Krateia* (government).

Babylonia.⁽¹⁾ The Hebrews had their origin in Babylonia, and had brought these tribal laws thence. But in no human code is found anything approaching in dignity, simplicity, depth and comprehensiveness the sublime summary of the whole moral law contained in the decalogue of Moses.⁽²⁾

CHAPTER III.

IN THE DESERT.⁽³⁾

(Exodus 30-40; Numbers; Deuteronomy 1-4 and 31-34).

Moses first committed the moral code to writing. Then he had an altar raised at the foot of Mount Sinai and victims slain in sacrifice. Half of the blood of these victims was poured on the altar. Moses read the law to the people, and then the remainder of the blood he sprinkled on the book of the law and on the assembled people. This done Moses went up to the summit again to receive further revelations; and after six days spent alone in prayer God called him into the cloud which was the sign of the divine presence. There he remained for forty days alone with God.

The forty days were nearly ended, but when Moses was not returning the people in the plain beneath became restive, and clamoured to Aaron that he should make them an idol which they might worship. The idolatry with which they were familiar in Egypt had a fatal attraction for them which at first sight causes surprise. But the formula used in Holy Scripture to describe idolatry sheds light on the matter: **"the people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play"** (Exodus 32, 6). The word **play** in the original means 'to laugh' or 'to jest'; it has reference to the lewd songs and dances, the wild uncontrolled mirth in which the idolaters indulged when they had sated themselves with the victims

(1) The code of Hammurabi is not entirely an original either: "it also is the codification of customs which had long been in use in Babylonia and the countries of Asia Minor where Babylonia had an influence." CHRISTUS, p.891.

(2) ". . . the code of Hammurabi is purely a civil and penal code of law, in which the author is guided by utilitarian principles solely; his principal object is to protect property." CHRISTUS, p.891.

(3) *Desert* here and in the Bible generally means merely land which is not cultivated and not irrigated; by no means, however, a sandy waste. Compare in the parable of the lost sheep: "*Doth he not leave the ninety-nine in the desert. . . ?*" (St. Luke 15, 4).

killed for the idol. Idol-worship had no seriousness, no reverence about it. It consisted of feasting and coarse merriment alternately.

THE GOLDEN CALF.

In a moment of weakness Aaron yielded to the popular clamour; he took the ear-rings of the women, and had the gold in these fashioned into the image of a calf. This they set up on a pedestal as an idol, and proceeded to adore. Moses was made aware of what had happened by a divine intimation, and he was commanded to go down and intervene. He hastened down to the plain where the people were. He had with him the two stone tablets which he had received from God—the ten commandments divinely engraved on them. When he came face to face with the idolaters his indignation and disgust overcame him; and he flung the tables of the law from him and broke them—a sign that the covenant was broken to which they had so recently given their approval. The first law of the ten was violated; the law which is the foundation of all the others: **"I am Yahweh thy God . . . Thou shalt not have strange gods before me"** (Exodus 20, 2-3).

Moses seized the idol; smashed it to powder; threw the powder in the stream which supplied them with water, and made the people drink it. Next Aaron was severely rebuked for his weakness. Then Moses rallied the fighting men of his own tribe (of Levi), and sent them to put the ringleaders to the sword. About 23,000 were slain. But Moses still loved his people—stiffnecked as they were; and he pleaded with God in moving words for their pardon: **"either forgive them this trespass, or if thou do not, strike me out of the book that thou hast written"** (Exodus 32, 31-32). God therefore commanded him to procure anew two stone tablets. With these he went up to the summit and remained again for forty days; and God inscribed once more the ten commandments. The covenant was renewed.

The people contributed generously the materials for the Tabernacle and its furnishing; and Beseleel of the tribe of Juda with a group of chosen craftsmen set to work according to the directions given to Moses on the mount. All was completed on the first day of the second year, that is to say

a year after the Exodus from Egypt. Moses dedicated the sanctuary and consecrated Aaron and Aaron's four sons to the priesthood. The visible sign of God's approval was given at the rite when the pillar of cloud moved and rested over the Holy of Holies. The holocaust or wholeburnt sacrifice offered after the consecration of Aaron and his sons was consumed by a miraculous fire. The Ark of the Covenant was henceforth to lead them in their journey; the miraculous fire was to be kept continually renewed. At a later period Nadab and Abiu, two of Aaron's sons, were slain by God for using in their censers fire which had been taken from another source than this sacred fire (Leviticus 9, 24).

THE MARCH FROM SINAI.

On the twentieth of the second month the Hebrews left Sinai—the Levites in front carrying the Tabernacle and all its furniture. They came to Haseroth where Moses was again annoyed by the complaints of the people who had grown tired of the sameness of the manna and now clamoured for meat. God sent them flocks of quails to silence their complaints. While they were encamped here a more petty annoyance (but so terribly human!) fell to Moses: Miriam and Aaron quarrelled with him **"because of his wife the Ethiopian"**⁽¹⁾ (Numbers 12, 1). Miriam (who apparently was chiefly to blame) was stricken with leprosy, and cured only at the prayer of Moses.

Arrived at the desert of Pharan Moses sent from Cadesbarne a man from each tribe to view the country of Chanaan, with an eye especially to its defences. The spies returned after forty days bringing grapes of the country, and full of admiration for its fertility; but ten of them (all except Josue and Caleb) gave a discouraging account of the possibility of conquering the inhabitants. Fresh murmurs arose against Moses; the people proposed to choose a new leader to bring them back to Egypt; and when Josue and Caleb tried to hearten them the multitude became angry and threatened to kill them. For this distrust in God's promise of protection they were condemned to wander in the desert for forty years, i.e., until all those over twenty years (except Josue and

(1) *Ethiopian* is a vague designation; here it must refer to Madian, the country of Sephara.

Caleb) would be dead. Next they were ordered to go southward, but again they disobeyed, and this time insisted on attacking the Chanaanites. They had gone only a short distance, however, when the Amalecites and Chanaanites swooped down on them and drove them to flight as far as Horma.

CORE, DATHAN AND ABIRON.

Still another trouble arose for Moses. He certainly had to endure much contradiction from those for whose salvation he had devoted his life at the call of God; and Scripture tells us that **"Moses was a man exceeding meek above all men that dwelt upon earth"** (Numbers 12, 13). At the same time it must be remembered that of his long period of thirty-nine years in the desert we have not a complete history, but only a few selected incidents. These incidents, moreover, were selected for a religious purpose, viz., to teach future generations; and hence they are mainly cases of sin followed by retribution.

This time Core, Dathan, Abiron abetted by Hon and two hundred and fifty others wished to usurp the office of the priesthood. Their punishment was swift and terrible: the earth quaked beneath them and destroyed Core, Dathan and Abiron with their tents and possessions; while fire came from the sanctuary and killed Hon and his adherents. Even this did not end the matter. On the morrow the people attacked Moses and Aaron for having caused the slaughter of the previous day, and to punish this rebellion a plague cut off more than 14,000. To end the schism once and for all Moses then placed the rod, the symbol of office, of the head of each tribe (including Aaron's, as head of the tribe of Levi) in the sanctuary. On the following day Aaron's rod was found to have grown miraculously and put forth leaves and blossoms; while the others were unchanged. This was the divine proof that the priesthood was exclusively for the family of Aaron.

DEATH OF MIRIAM AND AARON.

A second time they came to Cadesbarne, and here Miriam died and was buried. Again the people murmured—this time

for lack of water. Moses and Aaron had recourse to God; and Moses was commanded to strike the rock with his rod of office. Moved by some imperfection of will (the nature of which is not clear, but which would seem to be impatience) Moses struck the rock **twice**, and for this he was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. Soon after Aaron died at Madera; and his son Eleazar, succeeded him in the office of high priest.

BALAAAM.

Further attempts of the Israelites to reach Chanaan were frustrated by the Edomites in the southeast and the Chanaanites in the south. They were thus compelled to change their route so as to avoid the Edomite territory, and this took them to the east of the Dead Sea through the Syrian desert and on to the boundary of Moab. It was at this stage of their journey that serpents were sent to punish them for another outbreak of rebellion, when Moses erected a bronze serpent and all who looked on it with faith and repentance were cured.

From this point onwards the fortunes of war are decidedly in favour of the Hebrews. Sehon, king of Hesebon (the Capital of the Amorrites) who had lately conquered Moab, came to oppose them; but he was defeated and slain in battle. A similar fate befell Og, the king of Basan, who fought them at Edrai. They now moved into Moab. Balac, the king of Moab, not yet recovered from his defeat by Sehon was thoroughly frightened by the arrival of Sehon's conquerors. He sent all the way to Mesopotamia to a soothsayer named Balaam, asking him to come and to curse the Israelites for him. Balaam, warned by God, hesitated to come. A second embassy brought him; but on the journey God rebuked him first through means of the ass which he was riding, **"the dumb beast used to the yoke, which speaking with man's voice, forbade the folly of the prophet"** (2 St. Peter 2, 16); and then through means of an angel. Then God sent him, unworthy though he was (for God is free to choose and use His instruments); but compelled him to **bless** the Israelites instead of cursing them. God compelled him

also to foretell the glorious future of the Messianic nation: **"A star shall rise out of Jacob and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel. . . ."** (Numbers 24, 17)⁽¹⁾

BEELPHEGOR.

The Hebrews now came to Settim on the eastern side of the Jordan nearly opposite Jericho. Near them was the city of Peor or Phogor, the centre of the degraded and sensual cult of the Moabite god, Baal—whence the city was named Beelphegor (the god of Phogor). The Israelites were lured into joining the Moabites in their hideous worship, and for this crime 24,000 of them were slain.

THE DEATH OF MOSES.

The chosen people were almost in sight of the Promised Land; the forty years were ended; a new generation had grown up and were ready to conquer Chanaan. But a new leader must cross the Jordan with them, because Moses was not to finish the task which he had begun, for his strange failure at Cadesbarne. God revealed to him now that his work was soon to be ended, and mercifully promised him a view of the long desired Promised Land. Nowhere does Moses appear so great as here. He accepted the divine will without a murmur; his only thought was for his people that they would have a good leader in his stead; and he asked God to designate the man. Josue was appointed to succeed him. Moses summoned the people and in the presence of the high priest formally named Josue to the supreme command of the nation; exhorted the people to follow him, and to keep the divine law: **"I call heaven and earth to witness this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose therefore life . . ."** (Deuteronomy 30, 19). He blessed the twelve tribes of Israel severally as Jacob had done before. One last mission remained. He ordered the people to attack the Madianites who had led them into idolatry. The

(1) This is a Messianic prophecy. But whether it refers directly to Christ; or directly to David, and indirectly to Christ of whom David is a type or figure, is a question among Catholic scholars. The former view is defended in: INSTITUTIONES BIBLICAE. Rome, 1928. Vol. 2; lib. 1; pp.182-183.

battle was a complete victory for the Israelites; the opposing forces were completely routed, leaving all the spoils of war in the hands of the victors. Among the slain were five kings of the Madianites, and Balaam, the soothsayer.

The territory thus conquered together with that of Sehon and Og Moses permitted to be occupied by the tribes of Ruben and Gad and half of the large tribe of Manasses, on condition that the fighting men of these tribes would take their part in the conquest of Chanaan.

Moses then went up to Mount Nebo in Moab, and from the peak Phasga viewed long and wistfully the **"land flowing with milk and honey"** (Numbers 14, 8) which God had promised to the descendants of Abraham. Then he died. He was a hundred and twenty years old, but **"his eye was not dim, nor was his natural vigour abated"** (Deuteronomy 34, 7).⁽¹⁾ He was buried by angels **"in the land of Moab over against Phogor and no man hath known of his sepulchre until this present day"** (Deuteronomy 34 6). His tomb was concealed by God probably to prevent the Israelites from worshipping him with divine cult. The people mourned him for thirty days, and **"there arose no more a prophet in Israel like to Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face."** (Deuteronomy 34, 10).

⁽¹⁾ According to the Hebrew text; by a strange reading the Vulgate has: ". . . . neither were his teeth moved."

CONCLUSION.

1. No event in their history appealed so forcibly to the religious and national sentiments of the Jews as did the Exodus from Egypt. It gave a name to the second book of the Bible; it was commemorated annually in the greatness of the festivals of the Old Law—the Pasch; it is recalled frequently in the Psalms; it is mentioned in the first of the ten commandments as a claim of God on His Chosen People, second only to His claim on them as Creator: **"I am Yahweh, thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house (i.e., place) of bondage"** (Exodus 20, 1).

2. The Exodus has a very special appeal for Christians also: **"All these things happened to them in figure; and they are written for our correction (i.e., admonition), upon whom the ends of the world (i.e., the last, the New Testament, epoch) are come"** (1 Corinthians 10, 11). The deliverance from Egypt was a figure or type or historical prophecy of the Redemption; the Slavery in Egypt of the bondage of sin; Pharaoh of Satan; Moses of Christ. The manna was a figure of the Most Blessed Eucharist: **"Moses gave you not bread from heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the desert, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven: that if any man eat of it, he may not die"** (St. John 6, 32—48-50). The Paschal lamb is a figure of Christ—the perfect sacrifice of the New Law:

"Now Christ our Paschal Lamb is slain
The Lamb of God that knows no stain."⁽¹⁾

3. For the same twofold reason, therefore, because He is our Creator and our Redeemer, does God demand of us homage and worship, gratitude and love; the observance of the commandments which He promulgated in the thunders of Sinai, and of which Our Lord said: **"till heaven and earth**

⁽¹⁾ Hymn for Vespers in the Divine Office for Easter.

pass, one jot, or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled (i.e., till the end of time)" (St. Matthew 5, 18). These ten commandments are reducible to two: love of God and love of our fellowmen: "**Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength**" (Deuteronomy 6, 4-5). Service to God is incomplete and impossible without service of our fellowmen; and so the second is: "**Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**" (Leviticus 19, 18).⁽¹⁾

(1) Our version has *friend* for *neighbour*; but that it should be *neighbour* is clear from the original, and also from comparison with the Gospels—St. Matthew 22, 39; St. Mark, 12, 31: VERBUM DOMINI. Vol. 1 (1921). pp.27-28.

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