

The problem of evil is generally recognized as the crux of theism, and current events have brought that problem sharply before men's minds. It is a subject of frequent reference in the pages before us. The point on which Dr. J. Scott LIDGETT chiefly insists is that while the Bible bears witness to the Fatherhood of God we are too apt to think of evil as casting doubt, not upon the Divine Fatherhood, but upon the Divine omnipotence—an abstraction that arose with the allied conception of Divine sovereignty in the course of Church History. We do not say, If God is our Father, whence comes evil? We are inclined rather to say, If God is omnipotent, whence comes evil?

Under the concept of God as fatherly, as compared with that of God as omnipotent, one may make more, it is contended, of the instrumental or disciplinary view of evil (over and over again Keats' description of the world as the 'vale of soul-making' is quoted). Naturally, as Dr. Scott LIDGETT says, the existence of suffering staggers

the materialist, who is inevitably a Hedonist. From time to time also it well-nigh overwhelms the sensitive and sympathetic, even though they may not subscribe to materialism. All such overlook the many elements of beneficence by which suffering serves vitality and promotes efficiency. St. Paul even bids us rejoice in our tribulations, and Jesus, as we are told, was 'made perfect' through sufferings.

This general consideration is applicable even to the problem of sin. St. Augustine could exclaim, *Felix culpa*. To 'soul-making' freedom, with all its risks, is essential. And if we do not yet see the end of the world-process in what St. Paul terms 'the restitution of all things,' we do find ourselves implicated in a compensatory system, having its checks and its counter-checks, through which evil is being eliminated and the eventual ascendancy of good secured. Even the present incursions of power-politics and violence will not hinder the final consummation.

Cults of To-day.

V. British Israel.

BY THE REVEREND J. R. COATES, M.A., SELLY OAK COLLEGES, BIRMINGHAM.

THE success of heresies and unorthodox cults is a measure of the failure of the Church. As with Spiritualism, Christian Science, and Adventism, so with 'British Israel': its propagandists minister to real human needs, and its plausibility is largely due to its ingenuity in relating the Bible to contemporary experience and current affairs. Its theories are not supported by modern scholarship. Many of them are ridiculous. Yet there are said to be two million believers, and it may be suspected that many more are haunted by an uncomfortable feeling that there may be something in it.

What then is 'British Israel'? What is wrong with it? Why does it appeal to so many? And what should the Church do about it?

THE IDEAS.

(1) It is contended that the British and the Americans, with some other kindred peoples, are physically descended from the Ten Tribes of Northern Israel. This is based on the fact that the Bible records the removal of Israel to Assyria and Media (2 K 17⁶), and leaves them there. The

gap between 722 B.C. and to-day is filled in with speculative history and ethnology.

'Getae, Massagetae, Sacae, Scythians, Goths, Ostro-Goths, Dacians, Khumri, Milesians, Danes, Jutes, Angles, Saxons, Normans—with many another name that could be added—ALL, at last, either by trade, or simple migration, but mostly by fierce fighting and conquest the one of the other, FOUND THEIR WAY INTO THESE "ISLES OF THE WEST." They were "sifted among the nations," as God said they should be, but not a "GRAIN" has been lost, and out of them all have truly evolved the English, Scotch, Irish, Welsh of the British Empire, and the American of the United States' (L. Sapsworth, *The Bible Arch of British Israel Truth*, 94).

(2) The British Throne is the Throne of David, from whom our royal family is descended. The connecting link is a daughter of Zedekiah, the last Davidic king in Palestine. She went to Egypt with Jeremiah and Baruch after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Jer 43⁵⁻⁷).

'There is a very strong Irish tradition which maintains that a learned prophet, with a princess and a scribe Brug (or Baruch), arrived in Ireland

from Egypt before 500 B.C. and that the princess was married to the then Heremon—ruling prince of Ireland. Tradition is, of course, not documented history. But it is a *fact* that this particular tradition fits the prophecy, and that no other chain of circumstances—documented or otherwise—in the history of the last twenty-five centuries can be fitted to the prophecy' (L. Buxton Gresty, *Blind is My Servant*, 46).

The reference is to Jer 1¹⁰ and Ezk 17²²⁻²⁴.

(3) After the division of the kingdom in the tenth century B.C., 'Israel' always means the Ten Tribes as distinct from Judah.

'The separate destinies of Israel and Judah had been settled by God long before the split. This is evident even as far back as the Exodus, for we read (Ps 114²) that "When Israel went out of Egypt, Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion"' (Gresty, p. 46).

(4) God's promises of conquest and expansion for Israel are obviously fulfilled in the British Empire, with its centre in 'the isle beyond the sea' (Jer 25²²). Specially noteworthy is our possession of Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Haifa, Suez, etc., in view of the promise to Abraham: 'Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies' (Gn 22¹⁷).

(5) The languages of the United Kingdom contain many words akin to Hebrew. Thus 'Britain' is from B'RITH (covenant); 'Tara' from TORAH (law); 'Cymru' from OMRI (king of Israel); while 'Scot' is from SCYTHIAN (one of the stages between Israelite and British); and 'Saxon' is just ISAAC'S SON.

(6) Many traits of character are identical.

'Our modern traits of obstinacy and impatience of strict authority are perfectly reflected in the many stern rebukes delivered to ancient Israel. "Ye are a stiff-necked people," fumed Moses. "Thou art obstinate; thy neck is an iron sinew and thy brow brass," complained Isaiah. And Isaiah's bitter commination: "Woe to the drunkards of Ephraim!" brings forcibly to mind the hard-drinking habits, not only of our ancient Anglo-Saxon forbears, but also those of more recent times. Our nation's easy-going guilelessness—we trusted Hitler, it must not be forgotten—is surely indicated by: "Ephraim is a cake not turned"—i.e., half-baked' (Gresty, *Op. cit.* 36).

Let us now examine briefly these six points, and one or two others.

THE FALLACIES.

(1) 'British Israel' is one of a long series of efforts to find the Lost Tribes. Since the ninth century many theories have been put forward, suggesting widely different localities as their abode, e.g.—Arabia, Abyssinia, East Africa, Afghanistan, North America, Japan.

Most modern students, however, agree with Dr. Adolf Neubauer that the search is vain. 'To

come back to our original question, Where are the Ten Tribes? We can only answer, Nowhere. . . . A greater part of them remained in Palestine, partly mixing with the Samaritans and partly amalgamating with those who returned from the Captivity of Babylon. With them many came also from the cities of the Medes, and many, no doubt, adhered to the Jewish religion which was continued in Mesopotamia during the period of the Second Temple. As to the prophetic promise that they will be gathered together in the Messianic time, we follow Akiba, who said that they will never return. . . . We can only say to those who are searching for the Lost Tribes in any part of the United Kingdom—England, Scotland, Wales or Ireland, what we said some years ago to the late great champion of the theory that the Welsh are the Lost Tribes. After expounding for more than half an hour his theory that the Cymri derive their name from Omri, and abusing our great Celtic scholar Professor Rhys for taking another view on grounds of philology and ethnology, he asked our own opinion, which we gave him in the following words: "My belief is that you are more lost than the Ten Tribes"' (*Jewish Quart. Rev.*, i. 422).

(2) Jeremiah's call to plant is naturally associated with his constructive teaching, e.g. concerning the New Covenant. There is no sort of connexion between this and the (much later and probably scribal) saying in Ezk 17²². Gresty makes an unfortunate reference to the Hebrew here. 'We reasonably deduce that the "tender twig" is one of the king's young daughters, particularly as the Hebrew for this expression denotes the feminine' (*op. cit.* 45). The word for 'a tender one,' like 'it' in the following verse, is masculine. The king's daughter cannot possibly be meant. And 'the mountain of the height of Israel' simply cannot mean a new land, as Gresty says it does. This is typical of 'British Israel.' It is just slipshod ignorance posing as originality. It may be added that the journey to Egypt was against the will of God (Jer 43⁷).

(3) Both the writers quoted make use of *Nehe-miah*, but fail to see that in this Book Judah is Israel—or all that remains of it. (See Neh 2¹⁰ 7⁷. 61. 73 9¹. 2 10³⁹ 11⁸. 20 12⁴⁷ 13³.)

(4) No doubt Pantellaria, Lampedusa, and Sicily will now be added to the list of 'gates.' But (*pace* the late Lord Fisher) the word 'gate' in Gn 22¹⁷ merely stands for 'cities'—as it reads in the Septuagint. There is a similar misunderstanding in the case of the word for 'isle' (Jer 25²², etc.), which really means 'coastland,' as noted in the R.V. margin, and cannot possibly refer to Britain.

(5) If all 'British Israel' arguments were as entertaining as these delightful derivations, the

reading of its books would certainly have its compensations. 'Cymru' is perhaps the most intriguing. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* gives its origin as Old Celtic COMBROGES (compatriots). But that is far too tame. We must go back to the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser and Sargon (why not Shalmaneser too, a century earlier, and the Moabite Stone?) to find the début of Wales on the stage of history in the person of the father of Ahab, who 'dealt wickedly above all that were before him' (1 K 16²⁵). Which no doubt explains many things.

(6) The Israelites were obstinate and given to over-indulgence in liquor—a half-baked people. The Anglo-Saxons are like that. Therefore they are Israelites! Logic is not a strong point with 'British Israel.' Neither is a sense of humour.

(7) But the discussion of details is endless and generally fruitless. The whole thing is wrong from the start in its conception of the Bible. Law, Prophets, Writings, Gospels, Epistles—all are on the same level, to be read as flat, mathematical prose. The Old Testament is more important than the New—excepting the Book of Revelation. The Word of God is a sort of Bradshaw's Timetable in cypher, instead of being 'living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, . . . quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.'

(8) A more serious criticism of 'British Israel' would seem to be that it disregards the words of John the Baptist: 'Begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham our father,' and has not pondered sufficiently Paul's saying, 'He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly.' May we not also appropriately quote the Lord Himself? 'The flesh profiteth nothing.'

(9) Perhaps the final charge against 'British Israel' should be that it is too dogmatic. Its air of infallibility must awaken our pity. Its intolerance betokens hidden fear, and if there is any cure for this it will be in psychotherapy, involving re-education. But if curing be beyond most of us, prevention may be within our powers. We must try to understand the hunger which drives people to swallow such strange food.

THE APPEAL.

Why does this sort of thing appeal to modern men and women?

(a) It may be suggested that those who accept it are captivated by what appears to be Biblical sanction for the *Herrenvolk* type of patriotism; and that may be true in some cases. But no sweeping condemnation will suffice. We must try to sympathize with the people though we reject the doctrine. It is clear that they are very patriotic, and want to be religious in their patriotism.

(b) They want to understand their Bibles, and to find out in what sense 'This means me.'

(c) They are feeling after a philosophy of history; and try to see Bible history as an integral part of world history which gives meaning to the whole.

(d) They are hungering and thirsting for the living God who is working out His eternal purposes here and now.

(e) Unconsciously they seek an adequate doctrine of the Church, the Israel of God.

THE MORAL.

What then are we to do about it? Our brief study shows that in 'British Israel' many people find satisfaction for needs which ought to be supplied more adequately by the Church in its regular ministries. The following matters seem to be especially important in relation to the needs noted above.

(a) The consecration of patriotism. No doubt the war is helping to clear our minds on this subject, but we still have a long way to go.

(b) More and better Bible teaching. Fuller study of the successive codes of Law as landmarks of social and religious progress towards the Sermon on the Mount. Deeper treatment of the Prophets as miracles on the way to the Incarnation. Closer relating of Old and New Testaments. Better presentation of the Christian experience behind the New Testament.

(c) Larger treatment of the later literature of the Old Testament, in which Hebrew faith replies to the challenge of Greek humanism; with special attention to the philosophy behind apocalypse. In every pulpit there ought to be courses of sermons on *Daniel* and *Revelation*, and study of these Books in every Bible Class. Nothing is more relevant to the crisis of to-day.

(d) All Bible teaching and preaching should be animated by the faith expressed in the name JEHOVAH, proclaiming the God who authenticates Himself as livingly present to men in concrete historical situations. (Not 'the Eternal' but 'the Omnitemporal'.)

(e) The doctrine of Israel must be central, as it was for Jesus, and must be presented historically, as exhibiting the unity of the Bible and the meaning of the universe.

NOTE.—The following books may be recommended: Cook, *The Old Testament: a Reinterpretation*, and *The 'Truth' of the Bible*; Dodd, *History and the Gospel*; Gillet, *Communion in the Messiah*; Hebert, *The Throne of David*; Kiddle, *Revelation*; Lüthi, *The Church to Come*; Macmurray, *The Clue to History*; Phythian-Adams, *The People and the Presence*; Wells, *Daniel, a Modern Prophet*. 'British Israel' books are published by Robert Banks & Sons, London and Commonwealth Publishing Co., Birmingham.