

THE SETTLEMENT OF MANASSEH EAST OF THE JORDAN.

By THE REV. M. H. SEGAL, M. A.

I.

THE chief source of our knowledge respecting the settlement of Manassite clans on the east side of the Jordan is found in Numb. xxxii, 39-43. This passage relates that the children of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead, captured it, and expelled its Amorite inhabitants; that Jair the son of Manasseh went and captured their villages which he named after himself, and that Nobah went and captured Kenath with its dependent

towns and called it after his own name. These events are stated to have taken place in the Mosaic age and before the conquest of Western Canaan. Confirmation of this latter statement is found also in the following list of passages in the Hexateuch: Numb. xxiv, 14, 15; Deut. iii, 13-15; iv, 43; xxix, 7; Josh. 1, 12; xii, 6; xiii, 29-31; xiv, 3; xvii, 1 sqq.; xviii, 7; xxii, 1 sqq., 7 sqq. In spite of this long array of positive statements, modern criticism has denied the Mosaic date of the Manassite settlement east of the Jordan. Following Ewald (*Hist.*, II, 299 sq., etc.), most modern scholars hold that the conquest of Northern Gilead by Manasseh was accomplished by a reflux of emigration from the western side of the Jordan. This return of the Manassites to the east is said to have taken place "between the age of Deborah and that of the 'Jahvist.'"¹

The first question that suggests itself is why our records should have been so persistent in disguising the true character of this alleged eastward movement of the Manassite clans. In the case of the Danite movement to the North the compilers of our records allowed the true tradition to survive (Judges xviii). What moved the compilers to adopt a different attitude to the Manassite movement eastwards? The re-emigration theory has no answer to this question. Further, it cannot be said that this theory is in itself more probable than the traditional account preserved in our records. All historical considerations are against it. The flow of immigration in Palestine has always gone from east to west, and not from west to east. While it is reasonable to assume with our records that, like Reuben and Gad and so many other Bedawi tribes before and after them, a number of Manassite clans, weary with their long wanderings and precarious existence in the wilderness, had striven to secure a settled home in the first hospitable territory they could reach, it is difficult to believe that after a long sojourn in the more civilized west, these clans would have emigrated to the comparatively wild and rude districts of the east. We are told that the cause of this supposed re-emigration from west to east was the lack of room for the two tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim in the single tribal territory which they had secured in the west, and their inability to conquer more land from their Canaanite neighbours. But we know that Manasseh was the first-born of

¹ Cf. Driver in *Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible*, III, 232b, with the references in the note.

Joseph, i.e., originally the dominant and more powerful tribe; and that the Machirites were the most warlike members of Manasseh (cf. Josh. xvii, 1). Is it likely that the Machirites would have given up voluntarily their fertile lands in the west to their less powerful tribesmen, and wandered out in search of a new home in the difficult country across the Jordan? And what would the Gadites have said to such an invasion of their territory by fellow-Israelites? Would they not have met the Manassite invaders with the sane stout resistance with which the Gileadites in Jephthah's time met the invasion of the Ephraimites (Judges xii, 4-6)? Finally, the age of Deborah, subsequent to which this Manassite re-emigration to the east is said to have taken place, marked the final triumph of Israel over Canaan and the permanent consolidation of the Israelitish position west of the Jordan. Is it credible that in that period powerful clans like the Machirites and Jairites would have felt compelled to retreat before the defeated Canaanites, and to seek a new home in the distant parts across the Jordan? Nothing but really strong and decisive evidence should induce us to accept such an improbable theory. Let us see whether the evidence adduced in favour of the re-emigration theory is really of a decisive character.

It is claimed that Numb. xxxii, 39-42, is a fragment which originally formed part of an account of the conquest after the death of Moses, like the account preserved in Judges i (cf. Gray, Numbers, p. 437 seq.). The fragmentary character of our passage is, indeed, quite evident. Still there is no proof that the source from which this fragment is derived had represented the conquest as having taken place subsequent to the Mosaic age, and by emigrants from the west. On the contrary, the wording of the passage seems to support the view represented by our present records. If the writer had believed the Machirites to have come from the west he would have used the expression **ויעברו**, "they passed over," viz., the Jordan, instead of **וילכו**, "they went," v. 39. So also in vv. 41, 42, he would have said **ויעבר** "he passed over," instead of **וילך**, "he went." In fact, it is not unlikely that the insertion of the fragment was made by the author of the rest of the chapter. Verse 33 need not be condemned as a late interpolation (Gray, op. cit., p. 432). That half Manasseh did not join Reuben and Gad in their negotiations with Moses for the grant of the trans-Jordanic territory may be explained by the different character of their respective positions.

Reuben and Gad asked for the transference to themselves as their sole possession of territory which had been conquered by all Israel, and was, therefore, the property of the whole nation. Half Manasseh, on the other hand, did not ask, for the transference to themselves of national property. The territory about which they were concerned was already their own exclusive possession, because it had been conquered by themselves, and without the aid of the rest of Israel. All that Manasseh required was that Moses should ratify their conquest, and give it national recognition, so that they might retain for all time its undisputed possession as their officially-recognized tribal territory. This recognition was granted by Moses, as reported in vv. 33, 40; Deut. iii, 13-15.

It is further argued that the notice of Jair the Gileadite in Judges x, 3-5, proves that the conquest reported in Numb. xxxii, 41, must have taken place in the period of the Judges.¹ But Judges x, 4, does not say that the thirty sons of Jair the Judge *conquered* the *Havvoth-Jair*. It only states that to these sons belonged the thirty cities called *Havvoth-Jair*. This would rather seem to imply that the actual conquest of the *Havvoth-Jair* had taken place long before the rise of Jair as Judge. If we grant the identity of Jair the Judge with Jair of Numb. xxxii, 41; Deut. iii, 14. the statement in Judges 3, 4, will then mean that for a certain period the clan of Jair acquired a leading and authoritative position in Israel, and that the thirty members of this Jair clan occupied the thirty cities known as *Havvoth-Jair*. There is, however, nothing in the passage to indicate the actual period when the *Havvoth-Jair* first came into the possession of the Jairites.

Again, it is argued from Judges v. 14 ("Out of Machir came down governors"), that in the time of Deborah Machir still dwelt in the western side of the Jordan, thus proving that the statements in Num. xxxii, 40; Deut. iii, 15; Josh. xiii, 29-31, are unhistorical, and that the Machirite settlement in Gilead must have taken place after the age of Deborah. Here again the evidence does not warrant the conclusion drawn from it. There is nothing in the passage to show that in the time of Deborah there were no Machirites in Gilead. All that the passage proves is that in the time of Deborah there were Machirites in the west which is quite a different thing. The existence of Machirites in the west is conceded by all our

¹ Cf. Selbie in Hastings' *D. B.* II, 312a.

sources. Thus, according to Numb. xxvi, 29 (cf. also Gen. 1, 23), Machir was the only son of Manasseh, and the Manassite clans were all descended from Machir. It follows, therefore, that the Manassites who dwelt west of the Jordan were also Machirites. But even according to the genealogy in Josh. xvii, 1 sqq., where Machir is only the firstborn of Manasseh, there were still Machirites dwelling in the west beside the Machirite settlement in Gilead, viz., Zelophehad and his clans who are reckoned as descendants of Machir (Josh. xvii, 3-6), and Abiezer (Judges vi, 11 sqq.) who is no doubt identical with Iezer, the son of Gilead, son of Machir (Numb. xxvi, 29, 30).

Finally, Josh. xvii, 14-18, is cited as a proof that originally the whole of Manasseh was settled in the west. In that passage the children of Joseph complain that Joshua had given them only one "lot," although they formed a numerous people. In reply to this complaint Joshua advises them to extend their territory by clearing away the forest of the hill country. It is argued¹ that if half Manasseh had already been settled in Gilead from the time of Moses, the Josephites would not have complained of having received but one portion in the west, since they also had a territory in the east; and further that Joshua would have advised them to send to this eastern territory those of their tribesmen who could not find a home in the west. But there is not much force in this argument. The complaint of the Josephites is not that the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim had altogether received but one "lot"; but rather that Joshua had given them no more than one "lot" for all the numerous people they had to provide for, namely in the west. As regards Joshua's answer, it may be assumed that Joshua would have been unwilling to advise the return of the superfluous population to the east. Such an action would have proclaimed both to the Canaanites as well as to the Israelites the failure of the invasion, and the inability of Joshua to redeem his promise of a home to all the Israelites who had followed him across the Jordan.

This is all the evidence which, as far as we can gather, can be produced in support of the re-emigration theory. It is obviously quite inadequate to upset the repeated assertions of our records, backed as they are by the important historical considerations enumerated above.

¹ Budde in his *Richter und Samuel*, p. 33 sq.; Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 438.

II.

We may conclude this discussion with a brief examination of the interpretation which the re-emigration theory has led many scholars to put upon the last-named passage in Josh. xvii, 14-18. This interpretation is fully developed by Budde,¹ who is followed in the main by Holzinger, Bennett and Kautzsch in their commentaries on Joshua, and also by others. Budde holds that originally this passage formed the introduction to the narrative of the Manassite conquest of Gilead found in Numb. xxxii, 39-42. Joshua's reply to the Josephites' complaint of lack of territory was that they should go across the Jordan, take possession of the hill country of Gilead, and hew down its forest. The redactor, however, who was anxious to remove the contradiction between this account and the oft-repeated tradition of the Mosaic date of the Manassite settlement in Gilead, deliberately altered the text, expanded it, and re-arranged its parts, in order to conceal its true meaning, and make it say something quite different from what it meant to say.

Now, it may be questioned whether we have a right to impute to an ancient author such an act of deliberate falsification of his sources. Granted even that he was capable of such dishonesty, would he have gone about it in such a clumsy, awkward fashion? Who forced him to introduce altogether this disjointed fragment in his Book of Joshua? If he found the contents of the fragment objectionable, why did he not leave it alone, and thus save himself the task of re-writing it?

But apart from these general considerations, it is clear that Joshua's words can only refer to a forest situated within the western territory of the Josephites. The expression "Get thee up to the forest" (v. 15) only suits a situation where the persons addressed are at the foot of the mountainous forest. If Joshua had meant to say that the Josephites should go across the Jordan and then up to the forest of Gilead, he would surely have expressed himself more clearly by using the term "crossing over" (עבר).² Further, had Joshua meant that the Josephites should invade the woodland of Gilead and conquer it from its Amorite inhabitants, as the Manassite clans are reported to have done in Numb. xxxii, 39 sqq.,

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 32-39, 87; *Judges*, p. 12 sq. Cf. also Gray, *ibid.*

² Cf. Driver in Hasting's *D.B.*, III, 231a.

he would have made some allusion to fighting the Amorites, say **וּנְלַחֲמַת בְּאֲמֹרֵי וְהוֹרִשְׁתּוּ**. Joshua speaks merely of clearing away some jungle (**וּבְרֵאתוּ**), vv. 15, 18) which the Josephites might easily accomplish by the force of their large numbers and their great physical strength.¹ This proves conclusively that the forest was already in the possession of the Josephites, and that nothing more was necessary than to reclaim it and make it fit for human habitation.

Budde argues that since the "hill country of Ephraim" is spoken of in v. 15 as separate and distinct from the forest, therefore the "hill country" in v. 18, which is said to consist wholly of forest, cannot be the hill country west of the Jordan, and must perforce be identical with the hill country of Gilead. This argument assumes that the term "hill country of Ephraim" is used in our passage to comprise the whole mountainous district south of Jezreel. But this is by no means the case. It is true that in later times, when Ephraim had become predominant in Israel, the whole hill country south of the Great Plain was often² spoken of as "the hill country of Ephraim." but this could not have been the case in earlier times when Ephraim was still considered the younger and less important member of the House of Joseph. Thus, the term "hill country of Ephraim" is used in this undoubtedly ancient passage to designate only a limited, probably the central, portion of the western hill country. Further, v. 18 is not, as is often assumed, a mere repetition of the advice given in v. 15. It introduces a new and important fact in the clause "and the goings out thereof shall be thine." Joshua tells the Josephites in v. 18 that if they cleared away the forest as he advised them in v. 15, they would secure not only the whole of the hill country, but also the "goings out thereof," viz., the valley bordering on the forest, and would thus have more than one "lot." For the possession of the whole hill country, including the reclaimed woodland, would enable them to prevail against the Canaanites of the valley, in spite of their iron chariots.

The text of the passage still remains rather obscure in parts, particularly in v. 18 with the awkward arrangement of its six short

¹ **כַּח**, v. 17. This term is never used of military strength.

² But not always; cf., for example, Judges vii, 24; 1 Sam. ix, 4, etc. Similarly the term "House of Joseph," which here comprises the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, was later extended to embrace all Central Israel; cf. 2 Sam. xix, 21; Amos v, 6, 15; Zach. x, 6; also Ps. lxxx, 2.

clauses. Nevertheless, the general meaning is quite clear, and there is no need to resort to the violent changes proposed by Budde. We may summarize its contents as follows: (V. 14) The Josephites complain that though they were a numerous people, yet Joshua had given them but one "lot." (V. 15) Joshua replies that if they were too numerous to find room in the hill country of Ephraim in, the central portion of the mountainous district south of the Plain of Jezreel), they should go up farther north,¹ and reclaim the wooded parts of the "hill country," (i.e., north of the "hill country of Ephraim"). (V. 16) The Josephites object that even the whole hill country thus cleared of the forest would not suffice for their needs; and as for going still farther north of the hill country, viz., into the valley, they could not do it, owing to the possession of iron chariots by the Canaanites. (V. 17) Joshua finally replies that considering their numbers and strength for labour, they should not eventually have one "lot" only; (v. 18) for they could take possession of the whole hill country by clearing away the forest, and then they would also secure the low country bordering on the forest (the goings out thereof"); for after they had reclaimed the woodland, they would be able to overcome the Canaanites in spite of their iron chariots.

¹ This does not necessarily imply that the wooded parts of the hill country were higher than the non-wooded parts.. The verb **עלה**, "to go up," is regularly used of going to the north, and its converse **ירד**, "to go down," of going to the south. Cf. Numb. xiii, 22; 1 Sam. xxiii, 25; xxiv, 1; xxv, 1. See Ibn Ezra on Gen. xxxviii. 1; Ex. xxxiii, 1.