

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF HEROD - THE TWO WORLDS IN JERUSALEM.

It is an intensely painful history, in the course of which Herod made his way to the throne. We look back nearly two and a half centuries to where, with the empire of Alexander, Palestine fell to his successors. For nearly a century and a half it continued the battle-field of the Egyptian and Syrian kings (the Ptolemies and the Seleucidæ). At last it was a corrupt High-Priesthood – with which virtually the government of the land had all along lain – that betrayed Israel's precious trust. The great-grandson of so noble a figure in Jewish history as Simon the Just (compare Eccclus. 1.) bought from the Syrians the High-Priestly office of his brother, adopted the heathen name Jason, and sought to Grecianise the people. The sacred office fell, if possible, even lower when, through bribery, it was transferred to his brother Menelaus. Then followed the brief period of the terrible persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes, when Judaism was all but exterminated in Palestine. The glorious uprising of the Maccabees called forth all the national elements left in Israel, and kindled afresh the smouldering religious feeling. It seemed like a revival of Old Testament times. And when Judas the Maccabee, with a band so inferior in numbers and discipline, defeated the best of the Syrian soldiery, led by its ablest generals, and, on the anniversary of its desecration by heathen rites, set up again the great altar of burnt-offering, it appeared as if a new Theocracy were to be inaugurated. The ceremonial of that feast of the new 'dedication of the Temple,' when each night the number of lights grew larger in the winter's darkness, seemed symbolic of what was before Israel. But the Maccabees were not the Messiah; nor yet the kingdom, which their sword would have restored – that of Heaven, with its blessings and peace. If ever, Israel might then have learned what Saviour to look for.

The period even of promise was more brief than might have been expected. The fervor and purity of the movement ceased almost with its success. It was certainly never the golden age of Israel – not even among those who remained faithful to its God – which those seem to imagine who, forgetful of its history and contests, would trace to it so much that is most precious and spiritual in the Old Testament. It may have been the pressure of circumstances, but it was anything but a pious, or even a 'happy' thought of Judas the Maccabee, to seek the alliance of the Romans. From their entrance on the scene dates the decline of Israel's national cause. For a time, indeed – though after varying fortunes of war – all seemed prosperous. The Maccabees became both High-Priests and Kings. But party strife and worldliness, ambition and corruption, and Grecianism on the throne, soon brought their sequel in the decline of *morale* and vigour, and led to the decay and decadence of the Maccabean house. It is a story as old as the Old Testament, and as wide as the history of the world. Contention for the throne among the Maccabees led to the interference of the foreigner. When, after capturing Jerusalem, and violating the sanctity of the Temple, although not plundering its treasures, Pompey placed Hyrcanus II. in the possession of the High-Priesthood, the last of the Maccabean rulers was virtually shorn of power. The country was now tributary to Rome, and subject to the Governor of Syria. Even the shadow of political power passed from the feeble hands of Hyrcanus when,

shortly afterwards, Gabinius (one of the Roman governors) divided the land into five districts, independent of each other.

But already a person had appeared on the stage of Jewish affairs, who was to give them their last decisive turn. About fifty years before this, the district of Idumæa had been conquered by the Maccabean King Hyrcanus I., and its inhabitants forced to adopt Judaism. By this Idumæa we are not, however, to understand the ancient or Eastern Edom, which was now in the hands of the Nabataeans, but parts of Southern Palestine which the Edomites had occupied since the Babylonian Exile, and especially a small district on the northern and eastern boundary of Judæa, and below Samaria. After it became Judæan, its administration was entrusted to a governor. In the reign of the last of the Maccabees this office devolved on one Antipater, a man of equal cunning and determination. He successfully interfered in the unhappy dispute for the crown, which was at last decided by the sword of Pompey. Antipater took the part of the utterly weak Hyrcanus in that contest with his energetic brother Aristobulus. He soon became the virtual ruler, and Hyrcanus II. only a puppet in his hands. From the accession of Judas Maccabæus, in 166 b.c., to the year 63 b.c., when Jerusalem was taken by Pompey, only about a century had elapsed. Other twenty-four years, and the last of the Maccabees had given place to the son of Antipater: Herod, surnamed the Great.

The settlement of Pompey did not prove lasting. Aristobulus, the brother and defeated rival of Hyrcanus, was still alive, and his sons were even more energetic than he. The risings attempted by them, the interference of the Parthians on behalf of those who were hostile to Rome, and, lastly, the contentions for supremacy in Rome itself, made this period one of confusion, turmoil, and constant warfare in Palestine. When Pompey was finally defeated by Cæsar, the prospects of Antipater and Hyrcanus seemed dark. But they quickly changed sides; and timely help given to Cæsar in Egypt brought to Antipater the title of Procurator of Judæa, while Hyrcanus was left in the High-Priesthood, and, at least, nominal head of the people. The two sons of Antipater were now made governors: the elder, Phasaelus, of Jerusalem; the younger, Herod, only twenty-five years old, of Galilee. Here he displayed the energy and determination which were his characteristics, in crushing a guerilla warfare, of which the deeper springs were probably nationalist. The execution of its leader brought Herod a summons to appear before the Great Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, for having arrogated to himself the power of life and death. He came, but arrayed in purple, surrounded by a body-guard, and supported by the express direction of the Roman Governor to Hyrcanus, that he was to be acquitted. Even so he would have fallen a victim to the apprehensions of the Sanhedrin - only too well grounded - had he not been persuaded to withdrawn from the city. He returned at the head of an army, and was with difficulty persuaded by his father to spare Jerusalem. Meantime Cæsar had named him Governor of Coelesyria.

On the murder of Cæsar, and the possession of Syria by Cassius, Antipater and Herod again changed sides. But they rendered such substantial service as to secure favour, and Herod was continued in the position conferred on him by Cæsar. Antipater was, indeed, poisoned by a rival, but his sons Herod and Phasaelus repressed and extinguished all opposition. When the battle of Philippi placed the Roman world in the hands of Antony and Octavius, the former obtained Asia. Once more the Idumæans knew how to gain the new ruler, and Phasaelus and

Herod were named Tetrarchs of Judæa. Afterwards, when Antony was held in the toils of Cleopatra, matters seemed, indeed, to assume a different aspect. The Parthians entered the land, in support of the rival Maccabean prince Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus. By treachery, Phasaelus and Hyrcanus were induced to go to the Parthian camp, and made captives. Phasaelus shortly afterwards destroyed himself in his prison, while Hyrcanus was deprived of his ears, to unfit him for the High-Priestly office. And so Antigonus for a short time succeeded both to the High-Priesthood and royalty in Jerusalem. Meantime Herod, who had in vain warned his brother and Hyrcanus against the Parthian, had been able to make his escape from Jerusalem. His family he left to the defence of his brother Joseph, in the inaccessible fortress of Masada; himself fled into Arabia, and finally made his way to Rome. There he succeeded, not only with Antony, but obtained the consent of Octavius, and was proclaimed by the Senate King of Judæa. A sacrifice on the Capitol, and a banquet by Antony, celebrated the accession of the new successor of David.

But he had yet to conquer his kingdom. At first he made way by the help of the Romans. Such success, however, as he had gained, was more than lost during his brief absence on a visit to Antony. Joseph, the brother of Herod, was defeated and slain, and Galilee, which had been subdued, revolted again. But the aid which the Romans rendered, after Herod's return from Antony, was much more hearty, and his losses were more than retrieved. Soon all Palestine, with the exception of Jerusalem, was in his hands. While laying siege to it, he went to Samaria, there to wed the beautiful Maccabean princess Mariamme, who had been betrothed to him five years before. That ill-fated Queen, and her elder brother Aristobulus, united in themselves the two rival branches of the Maccabean family. Their father was Alexander, the eldest son of Aristobulus, and brother of that Antigonus whom Herod now besieged in Jerusalem; and their mother, Alexandra, the daughter of Hyrcanus II. The uncle of Mariamme was not long able to hold out against the combined forces of Rome and Herod. The carnage was terrible. When Herod, by rich presents, at length induced the Romans to leave Jerusalem, they took Antigonus with them. By desire of Herod he was executed.

This was the first of the Maccabees who fell victim to his jealousy and cruelty. The history which now follows is one of sickening carnage. The next to experience his vengeance were the principal adherents in Jerusalem of his rival Antigonus. Forty-five of the noblest and richest were executed. His next step was to appoint an obscure Babylonian to the High-Priesthood. This awakened the active hostility of Alexandra, the mother of Mariamme, Herod's wife. The Maccabean princess claimed the High-Priesthood for her son Aristobulus. Her intrigues with Cleopatra - and through her with Antony - and the entreaties of Mariamme, the only being whom Herod loved, though in his own mad way, prevailed. At the age of seventeen Aristobulus was made High-Priest. But Herod, who well knew the hatred and contempt of the Maccabean members of his family, had his mother-in-law watched, a precaution increased after the vain attempt of Alexandra to have herself and her son removed in coffins from Jerusalem, to flee to Cleopatra. Soon the jealousy and suspicions of Herod were raised to murderous madness, by the acclamations which greeted the young Aristobulus at the Feast of Tabernacles. So dangerous a Maccabean rival must be got rid of; and, by secret order of Herod, Aristobulus was drowned while bathing. His mother denounced the murderer, and her influence with Cleopatra,

who also hated Herod, led to his being summoned before Antony. Once more bribery, indeed, prevailed; but other troubles awaited Herod.

When obeying the summons of Antony, Herod had committed the government to his uncle Joseph, who was also his brother-in-law, having wedded Salome, the sister of Herod. His mad jealousy had prompted him to direct that, in case of his condemnation, Mariamme was to be killed, that she might not become the wife of another. Unfortunately, Joseph told this to Mariamme, to show how much she was loved. But on the return of Herod, the infamous Salome accused her old husband of impropriety with Mariamme. When it appeared that Joseph had told the Queen of his commission, Herod, regarding it as confirming his sister's charge, ordered him to be executed, without even a hearing. External complications of the gravest kind now supervened. Herod had to cede to Cleopatra the districts of Phoenice and Philistia, and that of Jericho with its rich balsam plantations. Then the dissensions between Antony and Octavius involved him, in the cause of the former, in a war with Arabia, whose king had failed to pay tribute to Cleopatra. Herod was victorious; but he had now to reckon with another master. The battle of Actium decided the fate on Antony, and Herod had to make his peace with Octavius. Happily, he was able to do good service to the new cause, ere presenting himself before Augustus. But, in order to be secure from all possible rivals, he had the aged Hyrcanus II. executed, on pretence of intrigues with the Arabs. Herod was successful with Augustus; and when, in the following summer, he furnished him supplies on his march to Egypt, he was rewarded by a substantial addition of territory.

When about to appear before Augustus, Herod had entrusted to one Soemus the charge of Mariamme, with the same fatal directions as formerly to Joseph. Again Mariamme learnt the secret; again the old calumnies were raised - this time not only by Salome, but also by Kypros, Herod's mother; and again Herod imagined he had found corroborative evidence. Soemus was slain without a hearing, and the beautiful Mariamme executed after a mock trial. The most fearful paroxysm of remorse, passion, and longing for his murdered wife now seized the tyrant, and brought him to the brink of the grave. Alexandra, the mother of Mariamme, deemed the moment favorable for her plots - but she was discovered, and executed. Of the Maccabean race there now remained only distant members, the sons of Babas, who had found an asylum with Costobarus, the Governor of Idumæa, who had wedded Salome after the death of her first husband. Tired of him, as she had been of Joseph, Salome denounced her second husband; and Costobarus, as well as the sons of Babas, fell victims to Herod. Thus perished the family of the Maccabees.

The hand of the maddened tyrant was next turned against his own family. Of his ten wives, we mention only those whose children occupy a place in this history. The son of Doris was Antipater; those of the Maccabean Mariamme, Alexander and Aristobulus; another Mariamme, whose father Herod had made High-Priest, bore him a son named Herod (a name which other of the sons shared); Malthake, a Samaritan, was the mother of Archelaus and Herod Antipas; and, lastly, Cleopatra of Jerusalem bore Philip. The sons of the Maccabean princess, as heirs presumptive, were sent to Rome for their education. On this occasion Herod received, as reward for many services, the country east of the Jordan, and was allowed to appoint his still remaining brother, Pheroras, Tetrarch of Peræa. On their return from Rome the young princes

were married: Alexander to a daughter of the King of Cappadocia, and Aristobulus to his cousin Berenice, the daughter of Salome. But neither kinship, nor the yet nearer relation in which Aristobulus now stood to her, could extinguish the hatred of Salome towards the dead Maccabean princess or her children. Nor did the young princes, in their pride of descent, disguise their feelings towards the house of their father. At first, Herod gave not heed to the denunciations of his sister. Presently he yielded to vague apprehensions. As a first step, Antipater, the son of Doris, was recalled from exile, and sent to Rome for education. So the breach became open; and Herod took his sons to Italy, to lay formal accusation against them before Augustus. The wise counsels of the Emperor restored peace for a time. But Antipater now returned to Palestine, and joined his calumnies to those of Salome. Once more the King of Cappadocia succeeded in reconciling Herod and his sons. But in the end the intrigues of Salome, Antipater, and of an infamous foreigner who had made his way at Court, prevailed. Alexander and Aristobulus were imprisoned, and an accusation of high treason laid against them before the Emperor. Augustus gave Herod full powers, but advised the convocation of a mixed tribunal of Jews and Romans to try the case. As might have been expected, the two princes were condemned to death, and when some old soldiers ventured to intercede for them, 300 of the supposed adherents of the cause were cut down, and the two princes strangled in prison. This happened in Samaria, where, thirty years before, Herod had wedded their ill-fated mother.

Antipater was now the heir presumptive. But, impatient of the throne, he plotted with Herod's brother, Pheroras, against his father. Again Salome denounced her nephew and her brother. Antipater withdrew to Rome; but when, after the death of Pheroras, Herod obtained indubitable evidence that his son had plotted against his life, he lured Antipater to Palestine, where on his arrival he was cast into prison. All that was needed was the permission of Augustus for his execution. It arrived, and was carried out only five days before the death of Herod himself. So ended a reign almost unparalleled for reckless cruelty and bloodshed, in which the murder of the Innocents in Bethlehem formed but so trifling an episode among the many deeds of blood, as to have seemed not deserving of record on the page of the Jewish historian.

But we can understand the feelings of the people towards such a King. They hated the Idumæan; they detested his semi-heathen reign; they abhorred his deeds of cruelty. the King had surrounded himself with foreign councillors, and was protected by foreign mercenaries from Thracia, Germany, and Gaul. So long as he lived, no woman's honour was safe, no man's life secure. An army of all-powerful spies pervaded Jerusalem - nay, the King himself was said to stoop to that office. If pique or private enmity led to denunciation, the torture would extract any confession from the most innocent. What his relation to Judaism had been, may easily be inferred. He would be a Jew - even build the Temple, advocate the cause of the Jews in other lands, and, in a certain sense, conform to the Law of Judaism. In building the Temple, he was so anxious to conciliate national prejudice, that the Sanctuary itself was entrusted to the workmanship of priests only. Nor did he ever intrude into the Holy Place, nor interfere with any functions of the priesthood. None of his coins bear devices which could have shocked popular feeling, nor did any of the buildings he erected in Jerusalem exhibit any forbidden emblems.

The Sanhedrin did exist during his reign, though it must have been shorn of all real power, and its activity confined to ecclesiastical, or semi-ecclesiastical, causes. Strangest of all, he seems to have had at least the passive support of two of the greatest Rabbis - the Pollio and Sameas of Josephus - supposed to represent those great figures in Jewish tradition, Abtalion and Shemajah. We can but conjecture, that they preferred even his rule to what had preceded; and hoped it might lead to a Roman Protectorate, which would leave Judæa practically independent, or rather under Rabbinc rule.

It was also under the government of Herod, that Hillel and Shammai lived and taught in Jerusalem: the two, whom tradition designates as 'the fathers of old.' Both gave their names to 'schools,' whose direction was generally different - not unfrequently, it seems, chiefly for the sake of opposition. But it is not correct to describe the former as consistently the more liberal and mild. The teaching of both was supposed to have been declared by the 'Voice from Heaven' (*the Bath-Qol*) as 'the words of the living God;' yet the Law was to be henceforth according to the teaching of Hillel. But to us Hillel is so intensely interesting, not merely as the mild and gentle, nor only as the earnest student who came from Babylon to learn in the Academies of Jerusalem; who would support his family on a third of his scanty wages as a day labourer, that he might pay for entrance into the schools; and whose zeal and merits were only discovered when, after a severe night, in which, from poverty, he had been unable to gain admittance into the Academy, his benumbed form was taken down from the window-sill, to which he had crept up not to lose aught of the precious instruction. And for his sake did they gladly break on that Sabbath the sacred rest. Nor do we think of him, as tradition fables him - the descendant of David, possessed of every great quality of body, mind, and heart; nor yet as the second Ezra, whose learning placed him at the head of the Sanhedrin, who laid down the principles afterwards applied and developed by Rabbinism, and who was the real founder of traditionalism. Still less do we think of him, as he is falsely represented by some: as he whose principles closely resemble the teaching of Jesus, or, according to certain writers, were its source. By the side of Jesus we think of him otherwise than this. We remember that, in his extreme old age and near his end, he may have presided over that meeting of Sanhedrin which, in answer to Herod's inquiry, pointed to Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah. We think of him also as the grandfather of that Gamaliel, at whose feet Saul of Tarsus sat. And to us he is the representative Jewish reformer, in the spirit of those times, and in the sense of restoring rather than removing; while we think of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, in the sense of bringing the Kingdom of God to all men, and opening it to all believers.

And so there were two worlds in Jerusalem, side by side. On the one hand, was Grecianism with its theatre and amphitheatre; foreigners filling the Court, and crowding the city; foreign tendencies and ways, from the foreign King downwards. On the other hand, was the old Jewish world, becoming now set and ossified in the Schools of Hillel and Shammai, and overshadowed by Temple and Synagogue. And each was pursuing its course, by the side of the other. If Herod had everywhere his spies, the Jewish law provided its two police magistrates in Jerusalem, the only judges who received remuneration. If Herod judged cruelly and despotically, the Sanhedrin weighed most deliberately, the balance always inclining to mercy. If Greek was the language of the court and camp, and indeed must have been understood and

spoken by most in the land, the language of the people, spoken also by Christ and His Apostles, was a dialect of the ancient Hebrew, the Western or Palestinian Aramaic. It seems strange, that this could ever have been doubted. A Jewish Messiah Who would urge His claim upon Israel in Greek, seems almost a contradiction in terms. We know, that the language of the Temple and the Synagogue was Hebrew, and that the addresses of the Rabbis had to be 'targumed' into the vernacular Aramæan - and can we believe that, in a Hebrew service, the Messiah could have risen to address the people in Greek, or that He would have argued with the Pharisees and Scribes in that tongue, especially remembering that its study was actually forbidden by the Rabbis?

Indeed, it was a peculiar mixture of two worlds in Jerusalem: not only of the Grecian and the Jewish, but of piety and frivolity also. The devotion of the people and the liberality of the rich were unbounded. Fortunes were lavished on the support of Jewish learning, the promotion of piety, or the advance of the national cause. Thousands of votive offerings, and the costly gifts in the Temple, bore evidence of this. Priestly avarice had artificially raised the price of sacrificial animals, a rich man would bring into the Temple at his own cost the number requisite for the poor. Charity was not only open-handed, but most delicate, and one who had been in good circumstances would actually be enabled to live according to his former station. Then these Jerusalemites - townspeople, as they called themselves - were so polished, so witty, so pleasant. There was a tact in their social intercourse, and a considerateness and delicacy in their public arrangements and provisions, nowhere else to be found. Their very language was different. There was a Jerusalem dialect, quicker, shorter, 'lighter' (*Lishna Qalila*). And their hospitality, especially at festive seasons, was unlimited. No one considered his house his own, and no stranger or pilgrim but found reception. And how much there was to be seen and heard in those luxuriously furnished houses, and at those sumptuous entertainments! In the women's apartments, friends from the country would see every novelty in dress, adornment, and jewellery, and have the benefit of examining themselves in looking-glasses. To be sure, as being womanish vanity, their use was interdicted to men, except it were to the members of the family of the President of the Sanhedrin, on account of their intercourse with those in authority, just as for the same reason they were allowed to learn Greek. Nor might even women look in the glass on the Sabbath. But that could only apply to those carried in the hand, since one might be tempted, on the holy day, to do such servile work as to pull out a grey hair with the pincers attached to the end of the glass; but not to a glass fixed in the lid of a basket; nor to such as hung on the wall. And then the lady-visitor might get anything in Jerusalem; from a false tooth to an Arabian veil, a Persian shawl, or an Indian dress!

While the women so learned Jerusalem manners in the inner apartments, the men would converse on the news of the day, or on politics. For the Jerusalemites had friends and correspondents in the most distant parts of the world, and letters were carried by special messengers, in a kind of post-bag. Nay, there seem to have been some sort of receiving-offices in towns, and even something resembling our parcel-post. And, strange as it may sound, even a species of newspapers, or broadsheets, appears to have been circulating (*Mikhtabhin*), not allowed, however, on the Sabbath, unless they treated of public affairs.

Of course, it is difficult accurately to determine which of these things were in use in the earliest times, or else introduced at a later period. Perhaps, however, it was safer to bring them into a picture of Jewish society. Undoubted, and, alas, too painful evidence comes to us of the luxuriousness of Jerusalem at that time, and of the moral corruption to which it led. It seems only too clear, that such commentations as the Talmud gives of Is. iii. 16-24, in regard to the manners and modes of attraction practised by a certain class of the female population in Jerusalem, applied to a far later period than that of the prophet. With this agrees only too well the recorded covert lascivious expressions used by the men, which gives a lamentable picture of the state of morals of many in the city, and the notices of the indecent dress worn not only by women, but even by corrupt High-Priestly youths. Nor do the exaggerated descriptions of what the Midrash on Lamentations describes as the dignity of the Jerusalemites; of the wealth which they lavished on their marriages; of the ceremony which insisted on repeated invitations to the guests to a banquet, and that men inferior in rank should not be bidden to it; of the dress in which they appeared; the manner in which the dishes were served, the wine in white crystal vases; and the punishment of the cook who had failed in his duty, and which was to be commensurate to the dignity of the party - give a better impression of the great world in Jerusalem.

And yet it was the City of God, over whose destruction not only the Patriarch and Moses, but the Angelic hosts - nay, the Almighty Himself and His Shekhinah - had made bitterest lamentation. The City of the Prophets, also, since each of them whose birthplace had not been mentioned, must be regarded as having sprung from it. Equally, even more, marked, but now for joy and triumph, would be the hour of Jerusalem's uprising, when it would welcome its Messiah. Oh, when would He come? In the feverish excitement of expectancy they were only too ready to listen to the voice of any pretender, however coarse and clumsy the imposture. Yet He was at hand - even now coming: only quite other than the Messiah of their dreams. 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become children of God, even to them that believe on His Name.'