

## The Danites During the Judges.

For the Review.

In a recent publication highly commended throughout the English speaking world there appears this passage: The last named rivals of Israel (*i. e.* the Philistines) extruded a whole tribe from its allotted territory. Its transfer in a body to a remote region in the North, doubtless with the concurrence of all the rest of Israel, indicates the strength of tribal cohesion . . . at a comparatively late date in the Epoch of the Judges.

The tribe to which reference is made in this statement is that of Dan. The event in the tribe's history which the writer has in view is that recorded in Judges xviii. And his interpretation of that event is that the entire tribe, at that time migrated from their home in the South to a new home in the North. The usually received interpretation is that only a part of the tribe undertook to migrate. The interpretation of this author evidently is that the entire tribe migrating in a body made their future home in the distant North.

Unusual though this view is a careful study of the narrative will discover considerable evidence in its favor. In the first verse of the chapter (Judges xviii) the entire tribe is represented as seeking an inheritance. In the second verse the entire tribe is represented as choosing five men and sending them forth to spy out the land. Additional evidence is afforded by verse nineteen. In that passage the migrating body is spoken of as a tribe; moreover in verse thirty the descendants of these Danites are spoken of as the tribe of Dan. In verse eleven the phraseology would suggest that the six hundred warriors were only a part of the tribe. If however other passages made it certain that the entire tribe did migrate at this time it would not be difficult to interpret verse eleven into harmony. Did this chapter then contain all the information that we have in reference to the history of the Danites perhaps the obvious interpretation would be that the entire tribe did, at this period, leave their former home in the South for a new home in the North. But there is evidence external to this chapter that must be taken into consideration in coming to a decision. Some of this external evidence will be found to support the foregoing interpretation. There is for instance the reference made to this tribe in the prophecies of Ezekiel. The prophet has a vision in which he sees the partition of the land among the tribes of Israel. In that vision he sees the territory of Dan and the territory of Asher lying side by side without any reference to territory allotted to Dan elsewhere. Such association of the territory of these tribes might be taken to imply that, in the traditions of the people keeping alive the history of the past these tribes were placed side by side. This would not have been the case did the body of the tribe continue to dwell in the distant South. For Asher was in the extreme North, and the original home of Dan in the extreme South. There is also the a priori consideration that the strong tribal sentiment would make the migration of the whole tribe desirable and therefore probable, in the necessity of the migration of a part. Thus very considerable evidence can be adduced both from the story of the migration as we have it in Judges and from external sources, in favor of the above interpretation.

But what to some will appear stronger evidence can be adduced in favor of the usually received interpretation. There is for instance the fact that the career of Samson was subsequent to this migration. If the opening verse of Judges xviii is to be taken as a statement of fact and not as a complaint on the part of the Danites, it follows that the migration narrated took place even before the death of Joshua and therefore, long years before the time of Samson. But should this evidence be explained away by holding that the verse is not a statement of fact there remains other evidence. There is the fact that the young Levite who occupies so prominent a place in the story was a grand-son of Moses (Judges xviii. 30 R. Version.) and must therefore have antedated Samson unless that giant of strength flourished at a far earlier period than is usually supposed. From this it follows that the migration preceded Samson's time. There is also the fact that Mahanah-dan was a well known town when Samson lived (Judges xiii. 25) But this town received its name during the migration of the six hundred (Judges xviii. 12). Hence it follows that Samson lived subsequent to the migration. But in Samson's time the Danites were a considerable influence about Zorah and Eshtaol (Judges xvi. 31) Therefore only a part of the tribe migrated to the North at this time. Still more convincing

evidence is afforded those who believe in the historic character of the Pentateuch, by the census taken shortly before entering the Promised Land and recorded in the book of Numbers. According to that census there were at that time upwards of sixty-two thousand able bodied men in the tribe of Dan. To suppose that at any time during the period of the Judges this number had become reduced to six hundred is to suppose some overwhelming disaster concerning which history is silent and from which the other tribes did not suffer. In other words it is to suppose the extremely improbable. But unless the able-bodied men had become reduced to six hundred the entire tribe did not at this time migrate to the distant North. Therefore for those who hold strict views on inspiration this argument is most convincing. But even for those who do not hesitate to question the credibility of certain parts of the Pentateuch the usual interpretation of this narrative is the most consistent. Those writers suppose that Judges was written about the time of Josiah and that Numbers was written some time after the captivity. This would separate the two historians by a period of one hundred and fifty or two hundred years. Now the interpretation that regards the migration under consideration as the migration of the entire tribe asks us to believe that during this period of one hundred and fifty or two hundred years the current tradition regarding the numerical strength of the nation during its early history had changed so much that the later writer recording the tradition of his day gives the strength over a hundred times greater than the earlier writer recording the tradition of his day. This is asking us to believe what is almost incredible. The fact that it was the custom to chronicle important events in the national annals only goes to make the demand on our credulity all the greater. Thus for those who do not hold strict views on inspiration as well as for those who do, the usual interpretation is the most consistent.

Nor is there any difficulty in harmonizing the narrative in Judges with this interpretation. All that is required to harmonize Judges xviii. 12 is to suppose that the tribe at large sanctioned the colonizing scheme in which the inhabitants of Zorah and Eshtaol were leaders. Nor is there anything improbable in such a supposition. Indeed the usual method of relieving congested centres in these early times was to hive off a part of the population into colonies more or less remote. If the population within the limits of Dan became congested through the pressure of the Philistines and Amorites upon its bounds what would be more natural than to seek relief in a colonizing scheme. As for Judges xviii. 19 it is enough to suppose that the sin of boasting has not been confined to the vain ambitions of modern times. And Judges xviii. 30 will present no difficulty when it is remembered that for some reason the writer of this story was more interested in the colony than in the parent tribe. Judges xviii. 11, it need not be said, finds a more natural rendering in this interpretation. Nor is there any difficulty encountered in the evidence external to the narrative of Judges. The fact that Ezekiel in his vision places the territory of Dan hard by that of Asher can be explained from two facts *viz.* that Ezekiel's partition of the land was ideal and that Asher and Dan were associated in the early literature of Israel especially in the book of Numbers. In reference to the tribal sentiment it is enough to say that it could not prevent the bi-section of the tribe of Manasseh and so could not be relied upon to prevent a colony breaking away from the tribe of Dan.

Thus it appears that there is good reason to abide by the ordinary interpretation of this Bible story.

We cannot live on probabilities. The faith in which we can live bravely and die in peace must be a certainty, so far as it professes to be a faith at all, or it is nothing. There is a power in the soul, quite distinct from the intellect, by which God is felt. The Christian knows through the heart.

The best antidote against the poison of sin, is, to walk in the Spirit, to be much in conversing with spiritual things; to mind the things of the soul, which is the spiritual part of man, more than those of the body, which is his carnal part; to commit ourselves to the guidance of the Word, wherein the Holy Spirit makes known the will of God concerning us, and in the way of our duty to act in a dependence on his aids and influences.

A miserly man who insisted that he was a proportionate giver, explained that he gave in proportion to the amount of religion he possessed.