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THE WOMEN OF ISRAEL

OR, CHARACTERS AND SKETCHES
FROM THE HOLY SCRIPTURES,
AND JEWISH HISTORY

VOLUME 2

GRACE AGUILAR



CAMBRIDGE

The Women of Israel

*Or, Characters and Sketches from the
Holy Scriptures, and Jewish History*

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THE
WOMEN OF ISRAEL;

OR,

CHARACTERS AND SKETCHES FROM THE HOLY
SCRIPTURES, AND JEWISH HISTORY,

ILLUSTRATIVE OF

THE PAST HISTORY, PRESENT DUTIES, AND FUTURE
DESTINY OF THE HEBREW FEMALES, AS BASED
ON THE WORD OF GOD.

BY

GRACE AGUILAR,

AUTHOR OF "RECORDS OF ISRAEL," "SPIRIT OF JUDAISM, ETC.

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CONTENTS OF VOLUME II.

FOURTH PERIOD.—<i>The Monarchy.</i>		Page
Chapter I. Michal		3
Chapter II. Abigail		24
Chapter III. Wise Woman of Tekoah.—Woman of Abel — Rispah.—Prophet's Widow		47
Chapter IV. The Shunammite		68
Chapter V. Little Israelitish Maid.—Huldah		90

FIFTH PERIOD.—<i>Babylonian Captivity</i>	
Chapter I. The Captivity.—Review of Book of Ezra.— Suggestions as to the Identity of the Ahasuerus of Scripture —Choice of Esther	111
Chapter II. Esther Continued	127
Chapter III. Esther Concluded	139
Chapter IV. Review of Events narrated in Ezra and Nehemiah	168

SIXTH PERIOD.—<i>Continuance of the Second Temple.</i>	
Chapter I. Review of Jewish History, from the Return from Babylon to the Appeal of Hyrcanus and Aristobulus to Pompey	181
Chapter II. From the Appeal to Pompey to the Death of Herod	199
Chapter III. From the Death of Herod to the War	210
Chapter IV. The Martyr-Mother	222
Chapter V. Alexandra	240
Chapter VI. Mariamne	270

SIXTH PERIOD.— <i>Continued.</i>		Page
Chapter VII.	Mariamne Continued . . .	293
Chapter VIII	Mariamne Continued . . .	313
Chapter IX.	Mariamne Concluded.—Alexandra.—Salome	333
Chapter X.	Helena.—Berenice . . .	359
Chapter XI	General Remarks . . .	388

SEVENTH PERIOD.—*Women of Israel in the Present, as influenced by the Past.*

Chapter I.	The War and Dispersion.—Thoughts on the Talmud . . .	403
Chapter II.	Talmudic Ordinances and Tales . . .	421
Chapter III.	Effects of Dispersion.—General Remarks . . .	441

FOURTH PERIOD.

WOMEN OF ISRAEL DURING THE CONTINUANCE
OF THE MONARCHY,

COMPRISING, WITH OTHER SKETCHES,

MICHAL, ABIGAIL, THE SHUNAMMITE,
AND HULDAH.

VOL. II.

A

FOURTH PERIOD.

CHAPTER I.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MONARCHY.—PATRIOTISM OF THE WOMEN OF ISRAEL.—MICHAL.

WE are now come to an important change in the history of Israel; the first step to her downfall, and the first opening for the fearful flood of misery and crime which nationally and individually deluged Judea. We allude to the election of an earthly king, and the establishment of a temporal monarchy. In vain the prophet Samuel reasoned and implored, beseeching them to rest contented with the government already established; and in the deepest humility of spirit prayed unto the Lord. "Hearken unto the voice of the people, in all that they say unto thee," was the gracious answer, "for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected ME, that I should not reign over them." Awful words, and most awfully fulfilled! The infinite mercy of Israel's God would not reject His people, though they had rejected Him; but in the very gratification of their desire to have a king they received their chastisement; a chastisement not of a year's, or a century's continuance, but lasting through ages and ages of crime, misery, expulsion, persecution, and working against unhappy Israel even at this present day.

But the Eternal would not expose them to these terrible effects of their own choice without warning, and

by the mouth of Samuel He told them of all the evils they would experience under earthly kings, and that they would cry out in their distress unto the Lord, and then He would not hear them; but still they persisted in the very face of that prophetic word. God granted indeed their request. The people with the wildest rejoicings received a king, and beheld a monarchy established; but the awful effects thence ensuing ought to convince us, that the granting our requests is not always the evidence of the Lord's love and approbation. Better, far better, to rest in Him, and submit to His will, however it may interfere with our own short-sighted wishes, than persist in their accomplishment, and so weary our Father in heaven with repinings and complaints, as to make Him grant that in anger, which in love He would refuse. We should, indeed, bring before Him all our wishes, through the blessed medium of prayer; but such prayers should ever be coupled with the entreaty for grace to meet His will, whatever it may be; to submit uncomplainingly to His decision; and still to realise His love, however He may ordain disappointment. To such prayers we are assured, through the promises of His Word, that He will deign to reply; but for the mere entreaty for the gratification of earthly wishes, the proneness to complain and repine at the faintest semblance of denial, O let us remember the misery hurled upon Israel by the granting their request for a king, and take warning. It is thus that, even in our history, the Word of God may instruct and guide us, and give us lessons for daily life and individual petitions from national examples.

The monarchy of Israel lasted for the period of four

hundred and fifty years, and thus presents us with a fourth division of our subject; the social and domestic condition of the Women of Israel during its continuance being a remarkable proof for or against our argument, that no law transmitted to us by Moses commanded our degradation. By a careful study of their positions, as displayed in the various sketches of female character found in the historic books, we shall be able at least to discover if indeed there were any human laws or customs at work counteracting the elevating and spiritualising influence of the statutes for woman's benefit enjoined by Moses. The fearful crimes, and awful state of anarchy and rebellion, during the kingdom, will not indeed allow us either the variety or the completeness of female characters, as displayed in our first and third periods; nor shall we find such beautiful lessons guiding us individually; still, in the brief sketches brought before us, there is sufficient for our conviction that, as women of Israel, we are as elevated and spiritualised as the most exacting nations can require; and that *if we are* degraded, socially and individually, in the mind of any man bearing the honored name of Jew, it is in direct contradiction to the laws of God, and completely opposed to the practice of Judaism, even in that period when her followers were sunk to the lowest ebb of misery and sin.

The establishment of the kingdom had in all probability less influence on the social position of the Hebrew women than on any other class, until the universal wickedness spread even to them, and caused the prophetic denunciations against their sins, as distinct from those of man. The first mention of women in this

period, is their coming forth from all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, after the destruction of Goliath by David, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music; evidently a voluntary act, and marking their social position to have been one of perfect freedom, and also of some influence, else their ascribing to David the glory of slaying his ten thousands, and Saul only his thousands, would not have caused the king so much disturbance. We learn, too, from this account, that the gifts of song, and the dance, and playing upon divers instruments, had not at all degenerated in the Israelitish women since the time of Miriam, when they echoed back Moses's song of praise. The skill in these accomplishments argues an education both polished and refined, very superior to the instruction accorded to the women of contemporary nations. Examples of intellect and judgment we have had already, and shall have again; therefore it is also clear that their education was not confined to mere superficial accomplishment, which is often supposed the only instruction necessary for woman. The song, and dance, and knowledge of musical instruments, were but a small portion of the female Hebrew's acquirements; but that they are expressly named more than once in the Word of God, should encourage us alike in their cultivation and in their *enjoyment*, granted as sources of recreation, of innocent pleasure, and yet more as the means of sacred rejoicing. To abuse them, by making them sources of envy and display, and all kinds of ill-feeling, or to undervalue and despise them as snares and foolishness, must both alike be wrong, and prevent the perfection of the heart towards God. He endowed

us not with talents to lie unused, but to make others happy, and to increase our own innocent and healthful resources, and create an ever-gushing spring of gratitude towards Him.

Nor did the women of Israel refrain from *national rejoicing*. They were not confined to their own narrow spheres, feeling no interest beyond. They did not smile to scorn the holy feeling of patriotism, which should awaken every female heart to the joys and griefs, triumphs and defeats of her country, as if they were her own. They encouraged, they rejoiced in it; and its very possession and display proves their equality with man as citizens of Israel, and children of the Lord. We never find patriotism in a degraded position—the slave knows not even its name, much less the glow, the enthusiasm with which it lights up our being. It is in itself a refining and spiritual principle, intimately connected with our higher selves. To the Israelites it must have been yet more powerful than to any other nation, for their beautiful land was the direct gift of God; and bearing every sabbatical year miraculous witness of His unceasing love, in permitting the sainted earth to give forth of itself sufficient for the holy people, that they might not have the temptation of *necessity* to disobey their law. Israel in captivity may not indeed be enabled to realise the same feeling of *amor patriæ* as Israel in Judea; yet let us not forget that we are exiles, and sometimes cast a longing look of lingering love to that land which is still ours, and which will once again, at the mandate of the Lord, spring up in renewed and renovated loveliness, to welcome home the weary wanderers “from the north, and from the south, and from

the east, and from the west." Did we sometimes think of Judea as our own land, we should not regard our destined return to Jerusalem either with direct unbelief, or as a change from the creature comforts which we may be enjoying in our captivity, not at all to be desired. Daily is the prayer for the rebuilding of Jerusalem offered up; yet how very many are those who, while they would think the omission of that petition almost sin, yet so little enter into its spirit, as to shrink from even the thought of returning unto our own most holy land.

Nor does this feeling towards Jerusalem interfere with the emotions which we all ought to experience towards the lands of our adoption—"Seek the peace of the city (or land) whither I have caused you to be carried away captives," the Lord Himself proclaimed through His prophet Jeremiah, "and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." What injunction can be stronger or more solemn than these words, directing even our prayers, and thus at once reproving the scoffers who scorn the idea of individual petitions benefiting a nation? That Israel is deeply susceptible of a love of country distinct from the love borne towards Judea, is beautifully and forcibly exemplified in the history of her expulsion from Spain, and of her secret existence there in the very midst of danger, and death if discovered, when so many other lands offered a secure retreat. And shall not we, respected and at peace as we are, in free and happy England, encourage this refined and holy feeling, and "pray unto the Lord for it," as for our own bright land? By woman, even more than man, should this emotion be experienced—

for how heavy would be her burthen, if the peace of home were liable to be disturbed. Let us then remember our privileges and duties as women of Israel, and bid our own hearts to glow with patriotism, alike in mourning fondness for Judea, as in grateful and prayerful affection for the lands blessing the exile with liberty and rest; that we may unconsciously imbue the hearts of our sons with the same elevating and purifying emotions, and behold them, while glorying in the sacred name they bear, as heritors and future denizens of the land of promise, ever ready to stand forward as able citizens and valiant defenders of their adopted homes.

In confirmation of our theory, that in the earlier history of Israel one wife was the natural and legal position of woman, we find that Saul had no more—or more than the one would have been specified, as in the case of the other kings. He had two daughters, Merab and Michal. Of the former, little is mentioned; except that she it was, who was the first offered to David as an incitement to fight for Saul; who, already envious and malignant, thought to slay the valiant youth by the hands of the Philistines, and thus save himself all shame. But the Lord was with David, and had departed from Saul; and the young man must evidently have won the promised reward, for we read in Holy Writ, “It came to pass at the time when Merab should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife;” a course of acting exactly such as we should expect from the capricious tyrant which Saul had become. Still David, with a single mindedness and simple confidence only found in early youth, and in a youth of virtue, seems to have trusted and fought again; and this