

## CHAPTER 7

# NEHEMIAH

At the beginning of this century there were those who questioned whether Ezra had ever existed, but there were very few who found difficulty in the apparent Biblical order of Ezra before Nehemiah. Today few, if any, query Ezra's existence and work, but the question of the relationship of the two men to one another is wide open.

The superficial reader normally assumes that Ezra (Ezr. 7:7) came to Jerusalem some thirteen years before Nehemiah (Neh. 1:1; 2:1) and joined forces with him, when he arrived. When Nehemiah's priority in time was first suggested, it was opposed by liberals as strongly as by conservatives. A stage has now been reached where it is acknowledged that there is little evidence one way or the other. The main points stressed today may be found in the Additional Note at the end of the chapter.

A valuable outcome of the controversy has been that today we have a clearer idea of the work and importance of the two men. We now realize that, though they probably had a common religious outlook, their activity was essentially distinct in motivation and purpose. Hence it seems wiser to ignore the controversy and to deal with the two men separately.

Our knowledge of Nehemiah comes entirely from the Biblical book bearing his name. In Hebrew MSS., not in the printed Bible, it forms part of Ezra. It is generally recognized that it is a sort of appendix to Ezra and that it has been extracted from Nehemiah's diary, or memoirs, to use the usual term. Under circumstances unknown to us, parts of Ezra were woven into these extracts. We can recognize them easily by their style and the absence of the first person singular. The most important sections are 7:73b-9:37; 11:3-36; 12:1-26. Josephus (*Ant.* XI. v. 6-8) clearly had no information apart from our present book, and this he partly misunderstood.

We know nothing of Nehemiah's family beyond his father's name, Hacaliah (1:1; 10:1), or how he came to be attached to the Persian court. He was one of the royal cup-bearers (1:11); quite apart from the fact that there must have been a number of such officials (note that three months elapsed between 1:1 and 2:1 without Nehemiah's being called on to perform his duties), this is the correct translation of the Hebrew. It follows that he was in fact a member of the Persian civil service as well, but it is impossible to suggest what his post may have been, for such household posts were normally linked with other duties. His later activities with their high efficiency suggest that it involved administrative work of some importance. It is not likely that Artaxerxes would have appointed him as governor unless he knew that he had some qualifications for

the post. His position at court and at least one phrase in his Memoirs (6:11) suggest that he was a eunuch, and this is expressly stated in the LXX, though this could be no more than an inference.

A man in his position would have known of Artaxerxes' order about the walls of Jerusalem (Ezr. 4:17-22), but evidently the report that came back merely stated that the king's instructions had been carried out. Gradually the official report will have been amplified by rumours, until in desperation he received permission for his brother, Hanani, to visit Jerusalem. In the winter of 446 B.C. he returned with some Jerusalemites (1:2). Since Nisan (2:1) was the first month of the royal year, we must obviously read "nineteenth" in 1:1; the error, which also includes the omission of the king's name, is due to haplography. The picture they gave far exceeded Nehemiah's worst fears.

The popular, superficial view, which Josephus shared (*Ant.* XI. v. 6), is that the destruction described was that carried out by Nebuzaradan at Nebuchadnezzar's orders (2 Kings, 25:8-10). But this had been done in 586 B.C., well over a century earlier. Nehemiah will have learnt of it as a little boy, and many from Jerusalem will have come and gone in the interval. To hold such a view one would have to adopt Bullinger's hair-brained theory, put forward in the *Companion Bible*, that Artaxerxes was not the first Persian king of that name (464-423 B.C.), but a Median king acting as Nebuchadnezzar's regent during his seven years of madness (Dan. 4). He may well have first been turned to it by Josephus' belief that Nehemiah had been taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, but as with so many of his ingenious explanations, he has found few to follow him.

Once we realize that Neh. 1:3 is referring to a later and quite recent act of destruction, we are able to date and evaluate Ezr. 4:7-23 as was done in the previous chapter. We also realize one of the contributory causes of Nehemiah's fear. He intended asking the king virtually to countermand his previous order. It is true that a loophole had been left (Ezr. 4:21), but the task Nehemiah was taking on himself involved him in no little danger.

### *The Building of the Walls*

When the time came for Nehemiah to go on duty again, his mourning and fasting had left their marks on him; this was immediately noticed by the king's keen eye, as his cup-bearer brought him the royal cup. Since the highest honour that could be offered a subject of the king of Persia was to be allowed to enter the royal presence—note the hedging round of the royal person in Est. 4:11—it is clear that sadness was in itself an affront to his majesty, an affront that would normally be punished by death. The king's question made Nehemiah realize that it was a case of now or never.

His words may have been bold, but we cannot doubt that his knees knocked together. It should be noted that he very carefully did not mention the name of Jerusalem; it might have reminded the king too easily of his fairly recent decree. His explanation of his sadness was based primarily on filial piety, "the place of my fathers' sepulchres". The king's answer, "For what do you make request?", was equivalent to a recognition that Nehemiah's signs of grief were

justified.

Nehemiah sent up a wordless prayer to "the God of heaven", apparently the official title of Jehovah among the Persians, cf. *Ezr.* 1 : 2; 5 : 11; 6 : 9, and asked for permission to rebuild. Even now he did not mention the name of Jerusalem, though the mention of Judah would have made its identification easy, had the king wished to take the trouble. At this point it is mentioned that the queen, the king's main wife, was sitting with him. This suggests on the one hand that it was a fairly informal occasion, for the queen would not normally appear at a larger dinner party, cf. *Est.* 1 : 10ff. That meant too that those courtiers who had been bribed by the Samaritans, cf. *Ezr.* 4 : 5, were not present to raise any objection. On the other hand it must mean that Nehemiah had somehow won the queen's favour. The suggestion sometimes made that she was Esther has nothing to commend it, for she belonged to the previous reign, that of Xerxes. It does, however, support the idea that Nehemiah was a eunuch with access to the harem.

Artaxerxes gave him leave of absence for a limited period of time (2 : 6). Nehemiah does not mention how long it was, because it was clearly lengthened at a later date. It could hardly have been the twelve years that elapsed before he returned to report (5 : 14). What is more, there is no suggestion that he was made governor at this point, though this was soon added. It is likely that the queen continued to pull strings on his behalf. Nehemiah kept his requests moderate, asking merely for a passport and an order for timber. The king gave him in addition an official escort.

As the story develops, it becomes clear that Nehemiah was a rich man. He had a considerable body of his own servants with him, whether slaves or employees (4 : 16; 5 : 10, 16). He was also able to keep open table at his own expense, without being a burden on the impoverished district of Judah (5 : 14-18). This enables us to understand better the dilemma of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, and his advisers, Tobiah and Geshem.

Until Nehemiah's coming Sanballat's power extended almost certainly over Judea as well. It follows that Nehemiah must have been given the position of Tirshatha, or governor, before he started his journey. It was clear to Sanballat that Nehemiah was a rich and influential courtier, for the time being at least high in the king's favour. At the same time he did not know exactly what powers he might have been given, and Nehemiah took good care not to let him know. So Sanballat did not really venture to try and stop him in case he was acting within his instructions, and he did not dare to denounce him, lest trying to hurt a royal favourite might rebound and harm him. It had been easier for him, when the walls had first been repaired. Whoever "the Jews that came up from you" (*Ezr.* 4 : 12) may have been, they evidently did not create as imposing an effect as Nehemiah.

We can no longer identify the line of walls described in 2 : 13-15 with any certainty. Until recently it was assumed that the walls of Jerusalem under the later monarchy coincided, except perhaps in the north, with those in the time of Christ. It followed that this would have been the line followed by Nehemiah also. Today the opinion is gradually winning its way, that at least in the

south monarchical Jerusalem never crossed the Central Valley to what is now called Mt. Zion. If that is so, and I am personally convinced that the view is correct, Nehemiah was concerned only with the eastern hills of Ophel, Zion and Moriah, with perhaps an extension to the north-west. Excavations have shown that the Babylonian destruction had been so thorough that Nehemiah, or more likely his unfortunate predecessors, was not able to follow the original line of Jebusite and Davidic fortifications, but had to build higher up the slopes of Ophel.\*

The first reaction of Sanballat and his counsellors was to suggest rebellion (2:19). Since Nehemiah was a royal favourite, this was in itself absurd, but they hoped that he would produce his permission from the king, and this would give them some idea how they might react. Nehemiah's answer was that the building was religious in nature and therefore was of no concern to the Samaritans.

The Jews were far too poor to hire professional stonemasons. Nehemiah decided that the best guarantee of honest work would be to let the wealthier homeowners and their clients work on those sections of the wall that guaranteed their own safety. Those who were not directly involved were allocated the remaining stretches. This will also have minimized the dislike of many of the free farmers to taking orders and have introduced a healthy sense of rivalry between group and group. It should be noted that none of those mentioned as having come to Jerusalem with Ezra (Ezr. 8:1-14) seem to have taken any part in the rebuilding. For the implications of this fact see Additional Note.

There were influential families in Jerusalem, whom we shall meet later, who were on the best of terms with the leading families in Samaria. There were also not a few who had lost face over the disastrous earlier attempt to rebuild the walls. So when Sanballat and Tobiah mocked the new attempt (4:2f.), it was intended to drive a wedge between these people and Nehemiah. His intense anger is an indication of its considerable success (4:4f.). It is clear that the text of 4:2 is corrupt, though it cannot be reconstructed with any certainty. At any rate we can be sure that "Will they sacrifice?" is out of place, for there is no evidence that the sacrifices had been interrupted, even when the rebuilding of the walls had been stopped.

The failure of the mockery made Sanballat and his allies realize that drastic measures were called for. The Persian authorities did not permit local fighting, but the distances, even within the satrapies, were so great, that anyone able to carry out a sudden stroke might hope to have the *fait accompli* accepted by the higher powers. If Sanballat could destroy Nehemiah's work more or less overnight, then the satrap of Beyond-the-River might well acquiesce, the more so as he or his predecessor had probably approved of the accusation of Ezr. 4:11-16.

This explains their plot (4:7, 8). It might serve to frighten the Jews (4:11), or they might catch them unawares. Fortunately, Nehemiah was able to obtain information about their plans from Jews living in the border districts (4:12). So whenever their forces drew near to Jerusalem, they found the people under

\* Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Jerusalem*, pp. 78-104, 107f.

arms, which destroyed any hope of the immediate success essential for their plan.

The only hope left to them was to strike at Nehemiah directly. Four times Sanballat and Geshem invited him to meet them somewhere in the plain of Ono. Ono lay in the coastal plain about six miles north of Lydda. From the time of Sennacherib's invasion in 701 B.C. it had become an area of special administration lying between the Assyrian provinces of Samaria and Philistia. This status had continued under the Babylonians and Persians. So, from one point of view, it was neutral ground for both sides. What they wanted to do we do not know. "But they intended to do me harm" (6:2) was not a Divine revelation given to Nehemiah, but his interpretation of the situation. They may very well have won over the Persian representative in Ono to their side. There was after all, apart from hurt dignity, nothing to prevent their visiting Nehemiah in Jerusalem. Finally they had to fall back on veiled threats of denunciation to the Persian king (6:6-7).

Their last weapon was bribery. The prophets had not quite reached the stage depicted in Zech. 13:2-6, but they had fallen on such evil days that they were glad to accept payment for prophesying against Nehemiah's policy. The words of Noadiah and the rest seem to have been too crude to call for further description (6:14), but Shemaiah's attempt was more subtle. He was a man of good family, as is shown by his grandfather's name being mentioned as well as his father's. On the excuse that he was not able to go out—"who was shut up" (6:10)—he invited Nehemiah to come and visit him. When he did so, he was greeted with a prophetic "oracle" that there was a plot to assassinate him at night, and that he should take refuge in the Temple. Shemaiah would accompany him, though no reasons were given why he should do so (6:10). He may well have been a priest or Levite. When we realize that the temple complex had its own walls and gates, though not of a nature to arouse suspicion, there is no reason for supposing that it was a suggestion that Nehemiah should take refuge in the sanctuary itself. Nothing in Nehemiah's answer supports this, and it would have been intrinsically so absurd, that there was no hope that it would catch him.

Nehemiah answered, "Should such a man as I flee?" He meant that he would lose all respect as governor, if he were to run away from a threat of this kind. Then he added, "And what man such as I could go into the temple and live?" Evidently there was a further obstacle which did not affect everyone. The simplest explanation is that Nehemiah was a eunuch and thereby debarred from the temple area (Deut. 23:1). By following what claimed to be a Divine oracle Nehemiah would have put himself in a position where he would lose all influence. His official position might have saved him from punishment, but any claim to be acting in God's name would have lost all hope of being believed. We must always beware of so-called guidance which flies in the face of God's clear revelation.

Mockery, intimidation, treachery and false oracles had all failed. In the incredibly short time of fifty-two days the work was finished (6:15). The minimum length we can ascribe to the finished wall is 4000 yards, or nearly two and

a half miles. Even if we make full allowance for the fact that it was more repair than new building, and that many of the stones previously used had been left lying about, cf. 4:2, it was a prodigious effort. We can understand the workmen's complaint, as they sang,

“The burden-bearers' strength is failing;  
the rubble is so very much;  
we are not sufficient  
to build up the wall” (4:10).

Something of the stress and strain may be seen in the fact that Nehemiah, though he was accustomed to the fastidious cleanliness of the Persian court, did not even undress at night or change his clothes.

Great must have been the rejoicing, when the day of dedication came. It began with purification ceremonies of an unspecified nature (12:30). These were followed by a great procession along the walls. The people were divided into two groups. Starting at the south end of the city they marched to the sound of psalms, one group along the east wall and the other along the west wall, until they met again at the Temple, where the festivities were continued.

Though no political advantage followed, and shortly after Nehemiah's time we find a Persian, Bagoas, as governor, the Jews in their dispersion now had not merely a religious but also a political centre. How far this was an advantage is a question that must wait until we have all the facts before us.

#### *Nehemiah the Social Reformer*

Since Nehemiah's building work was finished in the first half of September (6:15), it must have been begun in July immediately after the cereal harvest had been brought in but before most of the summer fruits were ripe. To the hard work were added the stress and strain of outside threats, the summer heat and the attempts to rescue the fruit harvest as well. It was apparently the women who broke down first and revealed social conditions that Nehemiah had never guessed (5:1).

There seem to have been three groups of persons principally involved. There were the proletariat (5:2), who long before had lost their land. Indeed it is not improbable that this loss had taken place before the fall of the monarchy and had never been reversed at the return from Babylonia, cf. p. 11. Since the work on the walls was unpaid, it was the last straw. They were selling their sons and daughters as slaves so as to buy corn to keep themselves alive—the Hebrew text has been corrupted, cf. NEB. Then there were those who had been hit by the recent drought and had had to mortgage their fields (5:3). Their supplies were running out and they saw that they were in danger of having to follow the example of the first group. The third group was only starting on the slippery downward slope; they had been hard hit by taxation demands, but they knew that once they were in debt there would be little chance of saving themselves (5:4). The chief fear of all of them was for their children.

There was a vicious circle involved. The small farmers had not been hit only by the droughts, for when they had exhausted their stores, they found that the

cost of grain had shot up. The hoarders and profiteers who then lent them money to buy food then foreclosed on the farms, or on the children, if there was no ground left. All this was perfectly legal, though the Law of Moses had sought to remove the inhumanity from it. Its regulations, if carried out, would have prevented the development of any large slave population or of a large landless proletariat, but could not prevent much suffering in the short term. The rich doubtless pleaded their heavy losses, when the walls of Jerusalem had been thrown down again.

When Nehemiah first arrived, he was too concerned with his main purpose to realize how serious the economic position was. As a result he and those who had come with him had lent money and grain to those who had turned to them, probably in the hope that those from outside might be more humane than the rich of Jerusalem (5 : 10). After due deliberation he called the nobles and officials together and tried to make them realize what they had been doing (5 : 6). This was obviously without effect, so he called a general meeting of the people.

He pointed out a paradox to them. The Jews of the Eastern dispersion in Babylonia and Persia tried, so far they were able, to buy back and set free any Jewish slaves they heard of. This laudable practice remained for many centuries a first call on Synagogue funds. But here in Judea men were being sold as slaves, whom his friends at home would later have to buy back. To this those responsible could find no answer.

Nehemiah then acknowledged that he and his companions were not without blame in the matter. They would set the example which he urged them to follow, viz. the return of the pledges taken, whether lands, houses or persons, and a remission of the actual debt. The details have been blurred by the rendering of RV, RSV. Nehemiah did not accuse them of taking interest, which was illegal, but of laying a burden on them (see vv. 7, 10) by the taking of these pledges. Then it was not a question of a hundredth (5 : 11) but of the debt as a whole. NEB renders, "You are holding your fellow-Jews as pledges for debt (v. 7) . . . Let us give up this taking of persons as pledges for debt (v. 10) . . . their olive-groves and houses, as well as the income in money, and in corn, new wine, and oil" (v. 11). The rendering of JB is essentially the same. The chief creditors were unmoved when they met Nehemiah in a small group, but in front of the people as a whole, especially after the governor had set an example, the desire to keep a good name in public forced their hand.

There are loans which are a pure matter of convenience, and little, if anything, can be urged against them. Other loans are intended to facilitate purchases which can always be easily turned into cash once again. Once again there is little objection that can be raised. But where the loan is for daily bread and the clothing needed, if one is to do one's work, the borrower is in a very serious position. His optimism tells him that there is a better day coming, but it does not always come. Even if he does not have to pay interest, the loan becomes an ever heavier burden, dragging him down and down. Worst of all is if he has to pledge his land or the tools of his trade, for thereby he has mortgaged the future as well as the present. The Biblical ideal is that one should give

and not lend in all these and similar cases.

Nehemiah's initiative could have led to a really new social beginning, but the rich had acted under pressure and not from conviction. For the moment Nehemiah had drawn the community sufficiently closely together to enable it to survive the storms that were threatening it, but even though he reinforced his plea by his constant example as long as he remained governor (5:14-18), there grew up an ever widening gap between rich and poor that was to bear very bitter fruit in the future.

He was soon to realize that he had not been forgiven by the rich. In 6:17-19 we read of the treacherous relations of many of the nobles with the Samaritan leaders. The oath of v. 18 probably refers to business dealings, for it can hardly have anything to do directly with marriage links.

### *The Repeopling of Jerusalem*

The use of "city" in our standard translations of the Old Testament is highly misleading, for the settlements so entitled had only this in common, that they were fortified. Many of them by our modern concepts would have been villages; few were towns or even cities. As has been the case with us until fairly recently, there was a real difference in the nature of village and town life.

In Babylonia most of the exiles must have earned their living by working on the land or as artisans. It is true that we know of the Jewish bankers or money lenders, the Murashu family in Nippur in Babylonia,\* but they probably started their business after the return of the exiles under Zerubbabel, i.e. under non-exilic conditions. As a result only a relatively small proportion of those who returned had any special interest in settling in Jerusalem. The damage done to the houses there had been greater, and so the task of rebuilding would be the harder. It was mainly those who had links with the Temple, the higher priestly families, the goldsmiths and perfumers, and those involved in administration that settled there.

So long as Jerusalem consisted mainly of strongly built aristocratic houses, it mattered little whether they were many or few, close together or scattered. Once the walls had been rebuilt, there had to be sufficient men in the city to man them. Indeed, at first Nehemiah had to take stringent precautions to guard against a sudden raid, especially at dawn and dusk (7:1-4). The heads of the various more important families soon moved to Jerusalem, if they were not there already (11:1, 3). Some, seeing the need, moved there of their own free will (11:2). For the rest lots had to be cast so as to bring up the population to the required minimum, one-tenth of the complete population.

We know from New Testament times something of the very great poverty that existed in Jerusalem alongside very great riches. It may well be that Nehemiah's efforts artificially to establish the city had much to do with this. Under the Persian rule trade to and from Egypt went mostly by sea via the Phoenician ports. So there will not even have been much trade to enrich the city up among the hills.

Most of the accounts of the ordering of the Temple personnel are clearly not

\* Cf. DOTT, pp. 95f.

taken from Nehemiah's Memoirs, so we cannot know how much part he took in this work. The probability is that he kept himself clear of it. First of all he was a layman, and probably one excluded from the Temple worship at that. Secondly, he would not wish to create a precedent, which might allow a later Persian governor to interfere with the ordering of the Temple administration. Probably he confined himself to the everyday routine of government.

Then after twelve years he returned to the royal court (5:14; 13:6). No indication is given why he should do so. Some have suggested that he could see problems looming up, which he did not consider himself competent to deal with. It may be that one of the many accusations made by his enemies had raised suspicion, and he had to go and answer charges laid against him. It may have been simply for business and personal reasons. Be it as it may, it is clear that as soon as he had gone, most of the abuses he had kept down with a strong hand broke loose.

### *Nehemiah's Second Governorship*

Since we do not know why Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes, we can have no certain idea when he came back. The completely vague phrase, "after some time" (13:6), which should not be interpreted of too brief a period, suggests that his return had been more than merely a routine leave.

The course of events is not too clear, because we cannot date "on that day" (13:1). It cannot refer to the hallowing of the walls, for Eliashib's desecration of the Temple had taken place before "that day" (13:4). Had it happened as early as all this, Nehemiah would have dealt with the trouble at once.

So much is clear. Eliashib, the high priest (3:1), had a grandson who was Sanballat's son-in-law (13:28). It is probable that Tobiah was also connected with Sanballat by marriage. Hence there was some link between Eliashib and Tobiah, which is not given more closely in 13:4. The high priest placed a large room in the Temple courts at the disposal of his relative in law. This may suggest that the Ammonite was actually being admitted to the worship of Jehovah.

The day came, however, when the people realized that Ammonites were among those who had no place in Israel's worship (13:1-3). They accepted the law, apparently without dissent, but the high priest shrugged it off. There was very little or nothing that the people could do to influence a high priest, if he decided to ignore the law. It was only after a very bitter struggle that the Pharisees were later able to enforce some of their views on the Sadducean priests.

When Nehemiah returned, he very soon discovered what had happened; he brushed aside all precedents and protocol. Though very often the actions done at the command of a highly placed person are so expressed that one might think that he had done it personally, here, however, it is highly probable that Nehemiah did some of the throwing out with his own hands. We are reminded of our Lord's cleansing of the Temple, and then too the flaming anger of the one who acted gagged any protest by upset ecclesiastics.

There are probably many Christians who, in theory at least, agree that tithing is a wise and proper activity, but who fall far short of their ideal. Effective tithing calls for careful organization, and it may be bookkeeping. There

are no indications that Nehemiah's contemporaries objected in principle to the paying of tithes, but without an effective organization much would be overlooked. Then, when they were brought in, their distribution would be largely in the hands of the priests. With a high priest like Eliashib, there would be little zeal for fair dealing among his subordinates, so the Levites and Temple singers had abandoned their duties in order to till their own fields. It is true that the priests were also among the losers, but they had also income from the sacrifices. This too Nehemiah put right, apparently without any protests from the Temple authorities. This shows to what extent he had increased in stature in the course of the years.

Laxity in the sanctuary was inevitably accompanied by laxity in everyday life, and this in turn was quite obviously shown in the way the Sabbath was kept. For the countryman there is always one particular temptation. Though nature normally knows little of the rush that marks our city life, there comes the moment, generally in harvest, when all its powers seem to unite in one great spate. Then it seems to man that he must work while he can. That is what Nehemiah saw happening (13:15). The other thing was an example of normal human logic. The farmers round Jerusalem came up to the city for the Temple-worship on the Sabbath, for the Pharisaic concept of the Sabbath-day's journey had not yet been introduced. In addition, whatever the history of the Synagogue, it must be regarded as virtually certain that it played no part in Judea at this time. So it seemed only fitting and right to them that they should combine religion and profit, first the worship and then the market, and to the citizens of Jerusalem it seemed right also. So well known had the Jerusalem Sabbath market become that traders came from afar to it. Nehemiah had no time for "ifs and buts" but made an end of it all with a high hand.

As he went round the streets of Jerusalem to see what else might have happened while he was away, he was struck by the number of children playing in the streets who did not seem to be able to speak Hebrew. He soon discovered that these were the children of mixed marriages. The important thing was not that they spoke their mothers' languages, but that they had not learnt Hebrew (13:23f.).

In our modern world it is normally regarded as a sign of a reactionary mind, if one queries the wisdom of intermarriage. It is, however, God's will that a marriage should result in a new unity, a unity which demands a certain amount of renunciation on both sides. Far too often this is found to be too big a price to pay, once the first flush of love is past. This was the case with some of these mixed marriages in Jerusalem. These foreign women may or may not have accepted the religion of their husbands, but their hearts were still in their old homes. As a result their children, when they grew a little older, would find themselves torn between two societies and feel themselves at home in neither.

Nehemiah, unlike Ezra, was not moved by any general religious theories. He was influenced by practical considerations, and the very real religious danger involved. At the same time, as a practical man of the world, he did not try Ezra's exaggerated methods of dissolving marriages, some of which may have existed for a considerable time. That which was had to remain, but he

tried to ensure that intermarriage would cease. We are not told who those were whom he beat and mishandled (13:25), but they were probably rather the fathers of those who had contracted the marriages than the culprits themselves, for they would normally have approved and sometimes even actively favoured the mixed marriages, most of which will have been entered on for financial reasons (cf. Mal. 2:11, 13-16).

The most notorious case of mixed marriage was that of one of the high priest's grandsons, who had become son-in-law of Sanballat of Samaria (13:28). Evidently Nehemiah felt that a drastic example was called for and he banished him from Judah. He is very often identified with the Manasseh of whom Josephus tells in *Ant.* XI. vii. 2; viii. 1, 2, who became the first Zadokite high priest of the Samaritans. Josephus places the incident three generations later and makes no link with Nehemiah. On the other hand he is so notoriously unreliable for this period, that it is not impossible that it was for this banished priestling that Sanballat built the temple on Mt. Gerizim, cf. pp. 64-66.

While chs. 8-10 are certainly not part of Nehemiah's Memoirs, the absence of Ezra's name in ch. 10 strongly suggests that it should be separated from the two preceding chapters and be regarded as an agreement with the leaders of the people, which Nehemiah made after his drastic spring-cleaning on his return. Apart from Nehemiah himself and his secretary Zedekiah, it was signed by 21 priests, 17 Levites and 44 representatives of the people as a whole. It is remarkable that we do not have Eliashib's name, but closer inspection suggests that probably five and possibly all the priestly signatures are family names, Seraiah, cf. Ezr. 7:1, 2 Ki. 25:18, 1 Chr. 6:14f., representing the high priestly clan. In this way all the priests were committed by the heads of their clans. The names of the Levites are equally representative, as may be seen by comparing them with 8:7.

With two exceptions the points promised are just those that had particularly involved Nehemiah. There was the promise to avoid mixed marriages (10:28-30), Sabbath trading and the exacting of debts in the seventh year (10:31). There was the institution of a Temple tax, later to be raised from a third to half a shekel per annum and the organization of a wood offering. The fact that these are not earlier mentioned is no indication that they did not form part of Nehemiah's programme. Finally there was the organization of first-fruits and tithes, which we know to have been his concern.

In the East Nehemiah had accepted Ezra's ideals and interpretation of the Law. He did not have the spiritual standing to introduce them to or enforce them on the Judean community, but his practical wisdom created the setting in which they could flourish. Whatever some of the later effects of his measures, they did also create the setting in which the rabbinic understanding of the Law could be enforced and so Jewry gradually became the people of the Book.

His end is wrapped in silence. His tomb is not shown by tradition. The very brevity and misunderstanding in Josephus' account in the *Antiquities* shows that there were many who had no interest in keeping his memory green, while religiously he was outshone by Ezra. We do not know whether he died suddenly in office, worn out by his many labours, or whether he returned to a lonely and

childless home in the East with only his deeds to keep his memory alive among men.

That the Chronicler did not incorporate Nehemiah's Memoirs in his history but only used them as a sort of appendix is easy to explain. His work was concerned mainly with the history of the Davidic monarchy and of the Temple. Since Nehemiah did not fit in directly with either, he had no clear place in the story. It is harder to explain why future tradition neglected him in contrast to its glorification of Ezra. The simplest explanation is that religious conformity is almost always easier for man than social righteousness. It was easy for the rich and mighty, whether priests or laity, to accept Ezra's interpretation and enforcement of the Law. Nehemiah on the other hand offended both the priests and the wealthy leaders of Jerusalem's society. They accepted the greater security and political importance which Nehemiah had procured for them, but they found it hard to forgive the unavoidably dictatorial methods by which they were secured.

### ADDITIONAL NOTE

#### *The Relationship of Ezra to Nehemiah*

Most of the major controversies concerning the interpretation of the Old Testament have stemmed from *a priori* theories about revelation and prophecy. The problem of the relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah arises entirely from the Biblical evidence itself.

The evidence of Scripture itself seems quite simple. Ezra went to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezr. 7:7); Nehemiah returned in the twentieth year (Neh. 2:1). The implementation of Ezra's mission had apparently to wait until the coming of Nehemiah (Neh. 8), although he had acted vigorously about mixed marriages almost as soon as he had arrived in Judea (Ezr. 9, 10).

The denial by some extremer scholars that the royal instruction to Ezra (Ezr. 7:12-26) could possibly be genuine has led to a closer study of its terms. This has created an increasing willingness to accept it and so has brought a greater awareness of the problems inherent in the story. Put briefly the central one is that Ezra returned in 458 B.C. with full powers to enforce the Mosaic Law, yet he did so only in the governorship of Nehemiah (444 B.C.). The most popular and indeed the only cogent explanation is, to quote Stafford Wright's words about Ezra, "Although his commission did not extend to rebuilding, he was keen enough on the new wall to thank God for it in ix. 9. He need not have taken part in the building himself. But, when the enemies destroyed the new walls, Ezra's stock would fall immediately."\* A theory based on no evidence can hardly be held to be convincing. The same applies to the suggestion that Ezra had returned after dealing with the mixed marriages (Ezr. 9, 10). Both theories fail to give due weight to the drastic powers given to Ezra (Ezr. 7:25, 26), which did not depend on popular acceptance.

Scholarly opinions have been strongly divided, the line of demarcation

\* *The Date of Ezra's Coming to Jerusalem*<sup>2</sup> (1958).

having little to do with the traditional division of conservative and liberal. At first very many accepted the statement in Ezr. 7:7 that Ezra returned in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, but of Artaxerxes II, i.e. 398 B.C. Stafford Wright's argument in *The Date of Ezra's Coming to Jerusalem* has however, caused many to abandon this view. Most popular today is probably the view first put forward by Wellhausen that we should read "the twenty-seventh year" in Ezr. 7:7, i.e. 438 B.C. Rudolph argues that once a figure is accepted as corrupt there is no merit in playing around with it, and he puts Ezra's visit between Nehemiah's two governorships.\* This view has received little approval but there is very much to be said for it.

When we come to the actual arguments taken from the text itself, they are remarkably unconvincing and most have been used by both sides. There is, however, one argument that has tilted the scales so far as I am concerned. With one doubtful exception none of those named as returning with Ezra is recorded as taking part in the rebuilding of the wall in Neh. 3. The one possible exception is Hattush (Ezr. 8:2, Neh. 3:10); when we compare these with 1 Chr. 3:22, we shall probably decide that it is purely the result of a fairly common name, cf. Neh. 12:2.

In fact the whole controversy is intrinsically of very little importance, for the two men, Ezra and Nehemiah, were essentially working for different ends, even if their religious outlook was identical. So they have been treated separately, and if desired the chapter on Ezra may be read before that on Nehemiah. Once it is realized that Nehemiah is essentially an appendix to Chronicles-Ezra, and that it is easy enough to identify Nehemiah's Memoirs, the arrangement suggested of Ezra's activities does no violence to the text.

Anyone wishing to immerse himself in the arguments pro and con can refer to H. H. Rowley, *The Chronological Order of Ezra and Nehemiah*, reprinted in *The Servant of the Lord*.

\* *Ezra und Nehemia* (HAT—1949).