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REFORMED JUDAISM.

IN the fifth volume of this REVIEW I ventured to submit some suggestions upon the missionary character of Judaism in relation to those who do not belong to the Jewish race. In that essay I endeavoured to point out that the Jewish religion was one which embodied spiritual conceptions and religious beliefs of a character suitable to the religious needs of men and women beyond the confines of the race of Israel. There may be, and undoubtedly there is, some difference among Jews themselves as to the elements of Judaism which are entitled to command the first place in their own judgment, and which are of universal application. I propose, therefore, to indicate here that there is a certain mission which the House of Israel owes to itself. It is possible that the kind of Judaism which I consider capable of acceptance by non-Jews is not altogether that same Judaism which the mass of the Jewish people recognise as constituting their religion. For example, the mass of Israelites hold to a conception of worship that differs very essentially from that which alone is capable of commending itself to the Western mind, as indeed it is the only one that appeals to those who believe in the diffusion of Israel's faith.

The divergence between Jews of the present generation is a matter which cannot be ignored. For although the fundamental dogma known as the unity of God is accepted by every section of Israelites, there are distinct differences in religious conception between those who may be described as Rabbinical and as Reform Jews. Now, in using these designations, it must be understood that, however reluctant one is to do so, the necessities of language are such that it is scarcely possible to refer to different schools of thought

without the use of some generic terms. The word usually employed as the antithesis of reform is "orthodox." In my view, that expression is logically objectionable in the sense in which it is used by the Jewish Community. What they actually mean by it is not simply conventionality, the sense in which the term is employed in the Anglican Church. They mean that kind of Judaism which rests entirely and exclusively upon Rabbinical authority. That is to say, the Jewish religion in their view is that, and that alone, which has been defined to them by a long series of traditions upheld and transmitted upon the authority of the Rabbis. This is nominally at least the Judaism of the vast majority of Jews in England, counting them in their corporate numbers as so many congregations. The other Judaism for which I would desire vigorous missionary efforts, and which is the only one that can be fully embraced by the modern European or American, is based upon another kind of tradition from that of Rabbinical authority. It is the tradition of the Jewish people testifying to the experience of natural religion, and is interpreted independently of those prescriptions which constitute Rabbinical Judaism. The genius of Judaism is that it is a story of natural religion, of spiritual aspiration among individuals and families through a long series of ages. The revelation of which Rabbinism makes so much is only the tested and recorded result of spiritual experiences. But it is revelation in the supernatural and miraculous sense which stands supreme in the minds of Jews who live under the sway of Talmudical prescription. Traditional Judaism, therefore, has two distinct meanings: (A.) The traditions of Rabbinical authority; (B.) The spiritual experience of the Jewish race. Now, this experience is seen under different aspects, and here again we have the two distinct schools of thought which, for linguistic convenience, I have ventured to designate by the two separate terms of "Rabbinism" and "Reform." One word here as to Rabbinism. I wish it

to be understood that I use that expression in no sense of disrespect. On the contrary, it represents much of the loftiest and purest features of the Jewish religion. The Rabbis as a body have been the true conservators of that very spiritual Judaism in regard to which we modern Jews have still a mission to our own race as well as a mission to the world. Tradition, and indeed Rabbinical tradition, has played a triumphant part in the work of transmitting to us of this age the deepest truths of ages that are passed. Rabbinism therefore is simply a term used here to denote that conception of Judaism, which is commonly, but, I think, inaccurately termed "Orthodox." Now the characteristic of that Judaism, which distinguishes it from the other Judaism which I desire to indicate, is that it places bounds and limits to the expression of the religious idea. Another and highly important feature is that it identifies spiritual religion with ritual. The ritual of Judaism, at once historic, traditional, and possessing the majesty of fixedness, is part, and an inalienable part, of the Judaism of the Rabbinic school. The authority of the Rabbis refuses to entertain the proposition that ritualism may be severed from religion. Judaism in their view has a double aspect, both spiritual and ceremonial at the same time. A transgression against the Ritual Law is equal to a transgression against the moral one. In fact the two are so interwoven that the ethical element is made as applicable to the one as to the other. From their standpoint they are logical in this attitude. For they maintain not merely that the Ritual Ordinances and the Moral Law proceed from the same Divine authority, but that the one is co-ordinate in importance with the other. To disobey the law of circumcision, or to eat forbidden food, or to neglect the observance of the Sabbath is for a Jew of this type just as sinful as it would be for an ordinary person to disregard the laws of charity, the rights of property, or the laws of chastity. This assumption of identity between two things which appear radically different

to the Western mind is a tremendous demand upon the conscience—a demand so great that it is becoming more and more difficult to recognise it in the present generation. Reformed Judaism, on the other hand, recognises an inherent distinction between ritualism and spirituality. The two may be blended. They may work in harmony, and it is therefore possible for a reformer to observe all the minutiae of traditional Judaism, but in his innermost conscience he will preserve a clear line of separation between the two. Hence Reform, in the sense in which I would fain advocate it, does not necessarily involve a violation of those ritual observances which to the old-fashioned Israelite are all important, but it does involve a mental attitude that is distinctly different from that of his so-called “orthodox” co-religionists.

Admitting, as every student of Jewish history must admit, the disciplinary value which ritualism possessed in the middle ages, one cannot be blind to the fact that it has had other consequences as well. The extraordinary detail with which ritualism pursued the life of the Israelite, and its extreme rigour, had the effect of deadening, to some extent at least, the natural impulses of the spiritual life. The office of prayer, which is the very rock of the personal religious life, has in itself sustained some injury by the excessive amount of prescription with which it was laden. A child whose earliest conception of prayer is associated with the repetition of lengthy formularies, is apt to become stunted in its spiritual growth. There is little freedom left to the human soul to cultivate its own desire to speak for itself in the Divine Presence. Multitudinous words are set down for its use in a book, and there are not many of those words which can ever become its own natural language. The essence of the religious idea is free communion with God. The shortness of life, the swiftness of time are alone sufficient to prevent the habit of free and spontaneous prayer when the set formularies are so

numerous and often so incomprehensible. The habit of prayer is thus checked at the very period of life when it could best be cultivated. A very simple illustration of this spiritual drawback is the case of grace after meals. A Jewish child brought up under the old system is taught to say by rote after every meal a number of pages which it has committed to memory, instead of uttering some simple and natural expression of its gratitude to God. This illustration can be indefinitely multiplied, covering the entire range of the religious life. Any one who fully carries out the Rabbinical prescriptions as to prayer can find little opportunity for personal communion with God. This is a matter of transcendent importance, for it really covers the whole area of the spiritual life, and lies at the root of that conduct which is founded upon a religious basis. It is notorious that, whilst there are no people who say so many prayers as the "orthodox" Jews, there are none who so rarely pray. The natural prayer is not obligatory, whereas the artificial or prescribed prayer is. To the old-fashioned Israelite, worship means the reading of a book or the recital from memory of that which he once read. He has never acquired the faculty of speaking in the Divine ear exactly what is in his heart.

There can be but little doubt that there are two distinct conceptions of the Jewish religion entertained by persons who are equally attached in loyalty and affection to their race, and who both regard Judaism as a divine message. Moreover, they both believe in the Jewish mission. They differ as to the manner of giving it effect. Between these two kinds of men there are in regard to outward observances very marked differences indeed. And such differences do in truth arise from the contrasts in their actual conceptions of the religious life. Upon the vital subject of divine worship the difference is particularly significant. That which is impressive to the one is repellent to the other. Upon the subject of the manner

in which worship should be conducted, the difference of opinion and of feeling between one Jew and another is probably as wide as anything which distinguishes the Buddhist worship from that of the Greek and Latin Churches. There is scarcely, indeed, a common ground upon this particular subject. The persistent effort on the part of the Rabbinical Jew to preserve every element of Orientalism, in utter disregard of the transformation in his own temperament, and its complete unfitness for Oriental methods, is a point upon which no compromise is possible. This Orientalism in the system of worship, however picturesque as viewed from a distance and observed by an outsider, is to a religious-minded Jew who is not of that school of thought an absolute deterrent. It is an obstacle in his path. Either it alienates him from religious communion with his brethren, or it completely destroys his faculty for worship. No one who is not a Jew can well estimate the appalling effect of the popular Jewish manner of worship upon that Jew who is not in sympathy with it. There are two distinct objects in the Rabbinical form of worship. One is, of course, the spiritual object, that of drawing men's hearts near to their Maker; and the other is to preserve intact the symbols of a remote Oriental ancestry. The combination of these two purposes seems to be a philosophical impossibility, and therefore one of them must be sacrificed to the other. Human nature is constituted in a way which renders the forms that properly belong to one age unsuitable for another. The manner in which people live and express their thoughts must necessarily vary according to the circumstances of time, place, and education. The costume, metaphorically speaking, of ancient Judæa or of the early Roman Empire is not consonant with the idiosyncrasies of later ages and of different countries. The fundamental religious beliefs may be the same, but it is humanly impossible that they can be expressed exactly in the same way. But there are still further differences besides

those of mere climate and period. There are the actual contrasts arising from political and intellectual conditions. The temperament of a human being must necessarily vary when he is living as a pariah in a foreign land, afflicted by persecution, and when he is a free citizen of a State where there is no persecution. There is an unspeakable difference between the conditions of enforced separateness and those of political assimilation. The habit of life is transformed, the individual temperament is changed. To allege that the religious symbols suited to one condition are equally appropriate for another that is totally different is to attempt to do in words what cannot be done in reason. The experiment is doomed to failure. And the experience of the present century in England—the only period when the matter can be said to have been fairly tested—proves that the loss to the cause of spiritual religion is greater than the gain to that of external racial continuity.

The alteration in the manner of public worship which has been effected among the English Jews in the present century is almost infinitesimal. Substantially they worship in the same manner as their ancestors did a thousand years ago, and as their brethren do in the present day throughout Russia and Poland. There is no correspondence whatever in the change of their ritual observances with the other changes that have come over every other department of their lives. Neither is there any prospect that within the lines of Rabbinical Judaism an organic change will take place. A change not less than that which distinguishes the Oriental from the Occidental is the aim of that reform which I would advocate; and such a change would not be regarded as permissible by any Rabbinical authority as at present constituted. What, then, is the future of Judaism? Historical continuity, no doubt, is assured; identity of forms and ceremonies is guaranteed; but what of spiritual expansion within these restrictions? What of the real message of religion so carefully treasured by countless generations? Can English and

American Jews be sure that their descendants will be able to receive that message through a medium which is growing less and less serviceable to each successive generation? This is the problem for the present generation of English-speaking Jews and Jewesses. Can we pretend that the outward forms of religion have the same attribute of eternity which belong to those divine truths which they are said to represent? Is not the idea of eternity, or at least of unalterableness, the special and exclusive attribute of what is abstract? In dealing with this question it seems necessary to refer briefly to the common opinion that outward forms are of little or no consequence. By a strange paradox, this is the answer put forth by Rabbinical Jews to those who now desire organic changes in the ritual. But in reality, these very people hold forms to be of so much consequence that they will not yield even to the bitter cry that such observances fail to appeal to the present generation. It is, however, a broad truth of singular import that outward forms are not casual and trifling things. They profoundly affect the inner springs of religion, both on its spiritual and its moral sides.

In ordinary affairs, outside the sphere of religion, external forms are of so much consequence that many are unable to digest food which is perfectly healthy unless it is prepared and served in a particular way. There is no greater popular fallacy than the cry that external manners and outward things are of little consequence. Numerous illustrations could be cited to show that, in various stages of civilisation which represent different conditions of men and women, such matters are in reality quite vital. In religion, more than in most things, outward forms constitute all the difference which distinguishes the natural temperaments of one group of people from another. This accounts for the fact that Christianity, which is fundamentally the same, so far as the central doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is concerned, to every Christian in Europe, yet presents the extraordinary varieties which may be instanced

by the mention of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Salvation Army. As to doctrine, the differences are as nothing compared with their concurrence upon the questions of the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection. They differ largely as to externals and to discipline. And yet, if it were not possible to be a Christian except upon the terms of the Salvation Army, or upon those of the Church of Rome, Christendom would be enormously diminished. The same truth is even more applicable to the Jewish religion. Even if such a Reformed Judaism as I desire were in existence, its differences from Rabbinic or traditional Judaism would be mainly in the sphere of outward forms, and only slightly in that of Dogma. There would inevitably be a striking contrast between a Rabbinic synagogue and a Reformed one; but the faith would be practically identical. The position of Rabbinic Judaism, on the other hand, is this:—You can only belong to the Jewish religion on certain terms. Here comes the need for that revolution which the present generation of emancipated Jews is called upon to institute. We claim to profess the same faith as the author of the 143rd Psalm. We desire that same free communion with the Eternal Spirit which the Israelite who composed that Psalm enjoyed. We claim to hold that communion in our own way, and not according to prescription. I know I shall be told that such a claim will be the forerunner of many sects within Judaism. And here it is necessary to speak of sects.

There was a time in every country when there was an intolerance of sect, and when uniformity was the watchword. The word uniformity has lost its charm and the word sect has lost its sting. The fundamental dogmas of Judaism are of such incomparable breadth, and the racial tie of Israel is so incalculably strong, that even the multiplication of religious sects within Israel's fold presents no cause for disruption or alarm. We have reached a stage in

the history of Judaism, and in the history of our race, when there is room, ample and abundant, for varied expressions of those Hebrew truths which are eternal. But this fear of sects becoming numerous is misplaced. For from the very nature of the case they could not number more than they do at present. We already possess the two distinct rituals or *Minhagim* of the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim, with their different Hebrew pronunciations, and their separate organisation and government in the same town. Then come the Reform synagogues, already established in England, America, and Germany, of which scarcely two are exactly alike. These reforms, so far as England is concerned, have been what I would respectfully describe as timid and tinkering. Not one of them has effected that organic change in the externals of public worship which is so urgently required. There should be a definite change in our attitude towards those forms which have no justification in the present age, except that they are traditional. I freely admit the powerful claim which that word tradition has upon the intellectual judgment of every thoughtful person. But what I contend is that the tradition of the spiritual religion of Judaism is being sacrificed for the tradition of its mediæval customs. The shell of Judaism is being studiously preserved, while the religion of the Hebrew prophets and psalmists is becoming obscured. The revision of the Prayer Book is of vital consequence. The prayers require to be reset and recast, in order to express at once the historical continuity of Israel and the religious thoughts of people of our own time. It is surely incongruous that the prayer which is offered in a London synagogue for the Queen and her Government should be expressed in precisely the same words that are used in Russia for the Czar and his rule. If they are appropriate in the one case, they must be inappropriate in the other.

It would appear that the reason for the strong opposition to reform is due to the obscuration of the supreme elements

of the Jewish religion. And what are these elements? Do they begin and end with the unity of God? Surely not! The people of Israel have transmitted a religion which I believe is adaptable to persons of every race and clime. It certainly includes faith in the Universal Father of the spirits of all flesh. And that faith is free from the terrors of a God of wrath, of an angry Deity, of a God who has accursed his own children, and made it necessary to ransom them afresh. The Hebrew conception of God,—knowing no need of mediation, holding forth free access for the human conscience to its Creator,—is this not a message of inestimable bounty to the world at large? The question arises, Do Jews themselves comprehend what it is which the religious genius of their race has revealed to mankind? Judaism, freed from its racial padlocks, becomes transformed into a religion at once limitless in its application and divine in its essence. Christianity in its earlier history did but faintly translate to a pagan world the inspiration of its Hebrew founders. Christianity is itself an earnest of a world-wide Theism, and of a kingdom of heaven which is within. Judaism in its ultimate expansion—not in the Churches founded at Calvary, but in the wider and more Catholic Church founded out of a fresh reform within the Synagogue itself — is nothing short of a message to mankind betokening the love of a universal God and the brotherhood of the human race. Bursting the bounds of locality and the limits of a family tradition, it is destined to become the religion of a larger humanity than any which is at present embraced either within the Western or the Eastern Churches of Christendom. Judaism, with its independence of the crushing dogma of the Fall and of the normal perdition of the human soul; Judaism, with its glowing optimism of free salvation to all human beings, with its consecrated fire of passionate devotion to a Being without form or shape, and with its fervid love of a tender Deity who is merciful and long-suffering,

has without doubt a future of statelier and of more soul-stirring magnitude than any religion which the history of the world has produced. The justification of long ages of separation, sometimes enforced from without, not infrequently established from within, will become manifest in the sight of those very people who have wailed and prayed over a so-called Christ-rejecting people. Continuity will be established between one era in the history of this world-famed ancestral faith and another. The work of the Apostles in the first century of the Christian era will come to be regarded as an instalment of the Hebrew message to the world. Christianity, in its later and broader developments will carry with it so many tokens, one by one, of the simpler and sublimer Theism of which it is only the preparation.

All this progress and advance depends upon the Jews themselves, upon those who are emancipated. It rests with us to elect between archæology and religion. The problem forces itself upon modern Jews here in England whether they will be content to keep their treasure locked up in dusty safes, and hidden from the view of mankind, or make it known and spread it broadcast.

The whole of this problem resolves itself into the question of reform. Do the Jews themselves rightly understand what it is they have suffered for through the ages? Have they themselves a right conception of the faith which is in them? Are the Jewish people, as a body, conscious of the fact that their religion is essentially a universal religion, and that it is one which is specially capable of satisfying the natural cravings of the human soul? It is doubtful whether these facts have been realised. It is more than probable that under the dominion of Rabbinical prescription the ordinary view entertained by Jews and Jewesses of their religion is that it is entirely a family religion, and one not designed for the spiritual requirements of other people. It is not brought home to the conscience of the Jewish community that their fondest

prayers are those in which every religious nature in Christendom delights. The very fact that every nation of Christendom has unreservedly taken into its own language the prayers and hymns of the Jewish psalmists is a conclusive proof that Judaism, as expounded in those Psalms, is the religion of a much larger world than the people of Israel. Such a Psalm as the 143rd, to which I have already alluded, and a number of others, show that the religious genius of Israel has touched the keynote of the universal religious consciousness. The 51st Psalm is one more among many illustrations. Again, the 103rd, the 139th, and the 90th Psalms all reveal spiritual experiences which are neither national nor communal, because they are unspeakably human. It has never been suggested that compositions of this character have not proceeded out of the inmost sanctuary of the Jewish religion. Nor are we aware that either Greek or Roman has bequeathed to the Western World anything precisely of this nature. The real verities of Judaism are just those thoughts and aspirations to which Psalms like these give utterance, not its ritual or its rabbinical observances. The soul to which that wonderful verse in the 143rd Psalm is a reality, namely, "Teach me to do thy will; . . . thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness"—that soul has grasped the substance of spiritual religion which can never be bettered either by the most elaborate ritual or the most complex metaphysical creed. No religious voice in Europe could ever venture to dispute this proposition. Many have sought to fit into those words, and into others like them, some creed which was not in the mind of the person who first conceived them. But what we may claim for Judaism is that the thoughts, the strivings of every devout soul, are just those thoughts and those strivings which constitute the substance of the Hebrew Faith. A God, who is the perfection of love as well as the perfection of knowledge, is the highest Being who has ever been conceived. No race and no Church have contemplated a Deity with attributes

more universal than these. It was a retrogression on the part of Paul, when he stooped to represent God with human passions, requiring a compromise between the demands of his justice and the demands of his mercy. Paul, I would venture to submit, had not fully grasped the highest ideal of Deity as we find it in such Psalms as those I have mentioned, and in the Jewish Liturgy of a later date. We have in the New Testament and the Apocrypha other instances of the intensity with which individual Israelites had apprehended the Divine Being. "In my Father's house are many mansions," and "Inasmuch as ye do it to the least of these ye do it unto me," and "Pray to thy Father which is in secret," are all so many fragments of religious genius, which abundantly testify to the universality of the religious idea as conceived by the spokesmen of the Jewish race. With his usual picturesque exaggeration the late Lord Beaconsfield observed in his life of Lord George Bentick that "No one ever wrote under the inspiration of the holy spirit except a Jew." There was development, however, in those writings, and one Jew excelled another time after time in his wider conception of a Universal God. More than one Rabbi of the middle ages has excelled some of the Apostles in his conception of God. But none of them have surpassed, if any have reached, the spiritual heights which were attained by the unknown Hebrew who composed the 139th Psalm. Here we have the story of the individual soul, stripped of nationality and caste, in its personal and secret relations with the Divine Being. Here is likeness to God. Here is affinity between the created and immortal soul on the one hand, and the eternal Divine Fountain of Love on the other. In connection with such language terms like those of "Jew" and "Gentile" shrink into nothingness, and we have before us the abstract human and the abstract Divine singularly blended into a harmony, which can only be

likened to that of mother and child. The tenderness and catholicity of this Psalm unmask the false theory that, up till the Christian era, Judaism conceived a God of vengeance and a tribal God. If in the age of Christ reform within the Jewish community had been possible, a very different religious history would have followed from that which has disfigured the face of Europe for a thousand years and more. Still, in spite of the compromise of the first of those centuries, the spiritual genius of the House of Israel has slowly penetrated the Western mind. In every translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as in their use in the New Testament, we perceive the message of Judaism to mankind. At the present time we find in England a true religious bond between the educated Christian and the educated Jew. There is scarcely any difference at all between the Christian Theist and the Reformed Jew. If Jews and Christians would each in their turn recognise this bond, and seek to cultivate it, a new era would be initiated in the religious history of mankind.

The special object of this essay is to place before my own brethren in race and creed the paramount claims of that kind of reform which seems essential to the furtherance of Israel's mission. We stand in need at the present moment of a loosening of the tie which has so long bound the ritual of one particular age to the changing religious sentiments of all subsequent ages, a tie which tends to suffocate those religious sentiments with the strings of an antique but outworn ritual. We require to adapt our eternal faith to the changed temperament and the altered education of new generations. The future triumph of Judaism can never be thwarted, but it may be delayed by a want of proportion in our estimate of the relation in which an historic ritual stands to permanent truths. So long as we permit our youth to discover that the first kindling of the religious flame within them takes place in a Christian place of worship and not in a Jewish one, we are

retarding the progress of our Mission. There is every reason why this grave difficulty, so loosely and lightly estimated by the general community of Jews, should speedily be obviated. When we have removed this one obstacle, then indeed will Jews and Christians be able to unite in the utterance of those striking words, " Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which shall be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

OSWALD JOHN SIMON.
