

CHAPTER XLVI

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE RACE

1. In every system of belief the object of divine care and guidance is the individual. His soul and his conscience raise him up, especially according to the Jewish doctrine, to the divine image, to Godchildship. His freedom and moral responsibility are the patent of nobility for his divine nature; his ego, controlling external forces and carrying out its own designs, vouches for his immortality. Nevertheless the spirit of the Biblical language indicates rightly that the individual is only a son of man, — *ben adam*, — that is, a segment or member of the human race, but not the perfect typical exemplification of the whole of mankind. From the social organism he receives what he is, what he has, and what he ought to do, both his nature and his destiny; and only in association with the community and under the guidance of the highest ideal of humanity can he attain true perfection. Only mankind as a whole, in its coöperation, as it extends over the vast expanse of the earth, and in its succession which reaches through the centuries of the world's history, can bring to full development the divine image in man, his moral and religious nature with all its varied potentialities. It is man collectively who in the first chapter of Genesis receives the command to subject the earth with all its creatures to his cultural purposes.¹ In whatever stage of culture we meet

¹ See J. E., art. Adam, and Jellinek: *Bezelem Elohim*, Sermon IV. The term *humanity* arose among the Stoics. See Reizenstein: *Wesen u. Werden d. Humanität*; comp. Schmidt, *Ethik d. Griechen*, II, 324, 477; and Zeller, *Griech. Philo.* III, 1, 287, 299. For the rabbinical *Berioth* for humanity see B. Sira, XVI, 16.

man, his modes of thought and speech, his customs and moral views, even his spiritual faculties are the result of a long historic process of development, the product of an extremely complicated past, as well as the basis of a future which expands in all directions. The ancients expressed this in their suggestive way, remarking in connection with the verse of the Psalm, "Thine eyes did see mine unformed substance, and in Thy book they were all written,"¹ that at the creation of the first man God recorded the succession of races with their sages, seers and leaders until the end of time.² And when the Haggadists say that in creating man God took dust from every part of the world, so that he would be everywhere at home,³ again they were thinking of mankind. Similarly in the passage from the Psalms, "Thou hast hemmed me in behind and before," they explain that God made the first man with two faces, one looking forward and the other backward, that is, with a Janus head; and thus they regard man in his relation to the past and the future, in his historic continuity.⁴ As both physically and spiritually he is the heir of innumerable ancestors who have transmitted to him with their blood all their idiosyncrasies and capacities in a peculiar combination, so will he transmit both consciously and unconsciously the inherited possessions of mankind to future generations for continued growth or for degeneration. He forms but a link in the great chain of history, whose goal is the perfected ideal of humanity, the completed idea of man. This was the underlying thought of Ben Azzai in his dispute with R. Akiba, who held that the principal maxim of Jewish teaching is "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." In opposition to this Ben Azzai presented as the most important lesson of the Bible

¹ Ps. CXXXIX, 16.

² Midr. Teh., ad loc.; Pesik. R. XXIII; Gen. R. XXIV, 2; Sanh. 38 b after *Seder Olam* at the close.

³ Gen. R. VIII, 1.

⁴ Eodem; Midr. Teh. to Ps. CXXXIX, 5; Ber. 61 a.

the verse which says, "This is the book of the generations of man; in the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him."¹ The godlikeness of man develops more and more through the evolution of the human race. This is the basic force for all human love and all human worth.

2. This social bond existing between the individual and the race imposes upon him in accordance with his occupation certain duties in the same degree as it confers benefits. Ben Zoma, a colleague of Ben Azzai, expressed this as follows: When he saw great crowds of people together, he exclaimed, "Praised be Thou who hast created all these to serve me." In explanation of this blessing he said, "How hard the first man in his loneliness must have toiled, until he could eat a morsel of bread or wear a garment, but I find everything prepared. The various workmen, from the farmer to the miller and the baker, from the weaver to the tailor, all labor for me. Can I then be ungrateful and be oblivious of my duty?"² In the same sense he interprets the last verse in Koheleth, "This is the end of the matter; fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." That is to say, all mankind toils for him who does so. Thus does human life rest upon a reciprocal relation, upon mutual duty.³

3. Man is a social being who must strike root in many spheres of life in order that the variegated blossoms and fruits of his spiritual and emotional nature may sprout forth. The more richly the communal life is specialized into professions and occupations, the more does the province of the individual expand, and the more difficult it is for him to attain perfection on all sides. According to his faculties and predisposition he must always develop one or the other side of human endeavor and pursue now the beautiful, now the good, now the true and now the useful, if as the image of God he is to emulate

¹ Gen. R. XXIV, 8.

² Tos. Ber. VII, 2; Ber. 58 a.

³ Ber. 6 b; Shab. 30 b; see Rashi (against Bacher: *Ag. Tann.*, I, 432).

the Ideal of all existence, the Pattern of all creation. Consequently he may reflect some radiance of the divine glory in his character and achievements, whether as moral hero, as sage and thinker, as statesman and battler for freedom, as artist, or as the discoverer of new forces and new worlds; and yet the full splendor of God's greatness is mirrored only by mankind as a whole through its ceaseless common action and interaction. Therefore Judaism deprecates every attempt to present a single individual, be he ever so noble or wise, as the ideal of all human perfection, as a perfect man, free from fault or blemish. "There is none holy as the Lord, for there is none beside Thee," says Scripture.¹ Instead of extolling any single mortal as the type or ideal of perfection, our sages rather say with reference to the lofty characters of the Bible: "There is no generation which cannot show a man with the love for righteousness of an Abraham, or the nobility of spirit of a Moses, or the love for truth of a Samuel."² That is to say, every age creates its own heroes, who reflect the majesty of God in their own way.

4. As man is the keystone of all creation, so he is called upon to take his full share in the progress of the race. "He who formed the earth created it not a waste; He formed it to be inhabited," says the prophet.³ True humanity has its seat, not in the life of the recluse, but in the family circle, amid mutual love and loyalty between husband and wife, between parents and children. The sages, with their keen insight into the spirit of the Scripture, point to the fact that it is man and wife together who first receive the name of "man," because only the mutual helpfulness and influence, the care and toil for one another draw forth the treasures of the soul, and create relations which warrant permanency and give promise of a future.⁴

¹ I Sam. II, 2.

² Gen. R. LVI, 9.

³ Isa. LXV, 18; see Yeb. 62 a.

⁴ Gen. R. XVII, 2.

5. Still the family circle itself is only a segment of the nation, which creates speech and custom, and assigns to each person his share in the common activity of the various classes of men. Only within the social bond of the nation or tribe is the interdependence of all brought home to the consciousness of the individual, together with all the common moral obligations and religious yearnings. Through the few elect ones of the nation or tribe, God's voice is heard as to what is right in both custom and law, and through them the individual is roused to a sense of duty. It is society which enables the human mind to triumph over physical necessity by ever new discoveries of tools and means of life, thus to attain freedom and prosperity, and, through meditation over the continually expanding realm of God's world, to build up the various systems of science and of art.

6. But the single nation also is too dependent upon the conditions of its historic past, of its land and its racial characteristics, to bring the divine image to its full development in a perfect man. Humanity as a whole comes to its own, to true self-consciousness, only through the reciprocal contact of race with race, through the coöperation of the various circles and classes of life which extend beyond the narrow limits of nationality and have in view common interests and aims, whether in the pursuit of truth, in the achievement of good, or in the creation of the useful and the beautiful. Only when the various nations and groups of men learn to regard themselves as members of one great family, will the life of the individual find its true value in relation to the idea and the ideal of humanity. Then only will the unity and harmony of the entire cosmic life find its reflection in the blending of the factors and forces of human society.

7. Judaism has evolved the idea of the unity of mankind as a corollary of its ethical monotheism. Therefore the Bible begins the history of the world with the creation of Adam and

Eve, the one human pair. The covenant which God concluded after the flood with Noah, the father of the new mankind, has its corresponding goal at the end of time in the divine covenant which is to include all tribes of men in one great brotherhood; and so also the dispersion of man through the confusion of tongues at the building of the Tower of Babel has its counterpart in the rallying of all nations at the end of time for the worship of the One and Only God in a pure tongue and a united spirit on Zion's heights.¹ Whatever the civilizations of Greece and Rome and the Stoic philosophy have achieved for the idea of humanity, Judaism has offered in its prophetic hope for a Messianic future the guiding idea for the progress of man in history, thus giving him the impulse to ceaseless efforts toward the highest of all aims for the realization of which all nations and classes, all systems of faith and thought, must labor together for millenniums to come.

¹ For the term *Aguddah Ahath* in the New Year and Atonement Day Prayer, Singer's *Prayerbook*, p. 239, comp. Gen. R. LXXXVIII, 6, and XXXIX, 3.