

CHAPTER LI

ISRAEL, THE PEOPLE OF THE LAW, AND ITS WORLD MISSION

1. Judaism differs from all the ancient religions chiefly in its intrusting its truth to the whole people instead of a special priesthood. The law which "Moses commanded us is an inheritance of the Congregation of Jacob,"¹ is the Scriptural lesson impressed upon every Jew in early childhood. As soon as the Torah passed from the care of the priests into that of the whole nation, the people of the book became the priest-nation, and set forth to conquer the world by its religious truth. This aim was expressed by all the prophets beginning with Moses, who said: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit upon them."² The prophetic ideal was that "they shall all know Me (God), from the least of them unto the greatest of them,"³ and that "all thy (Zion's) children shall be taught of the Lord."⁴ After the people came to realize that the Law was "their wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples,"⁵ they soon felt the hope that one day "the isles shall wait for His teaching,"⁶ and confidently expected the time when "many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths, for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."⁷ Once liberated from the dominance of the priesthood, reli-

¹ Deut. XXXIII, 4.² Num. XI, 29.³ Jer. XXXI, 34.⁴ Isa. LIV, 13.⁵ Deut. IV, 6.⁶ Isa. XLII, 4.⁷ Isa. II, 3; Micah IV, 2.

gion became the instrument of universal instruction, the factor of general spiritual and moral advancement. In addition it endowed humanity with an educational ideal, destined to regenerate its moral life far more deeply than Greek culture could ever do. The object was to elevate all classes of the people by the living word of God, by the reading and expounding of the Scripture for the dissemination of its truth among the masses.

2. Those who define Judaism as a religion of law completely misunderstand its nature and its historic forces. This is done by all those Christian theologians who endeavor to prove the extraordinary assertion of the apostle Paul that the Jewish people was providentially destined to produce the Old Testament law and become enmeshed in it, like the silkworm in its cocoon, finally to dry up and perish, leaving its prophetic truth for the Church. This fateful misconception of Judaism is based upon a false interpretation of the word *Torah*, which denotes moral and spiritual instruction as often as law, and thus includes all kinds of religious teaching and knowledge together with its primary meaning, the written and the oral codes.¹ In fact, in post-Biblical times it comprised the entire religion, as subject of both instruction and scientific investigation. True, law is fundamental in Jewish history; Israel accepted the divine covenant on the basis of the Sinaitic code; the reforms of King Josiah were founded on the Deuteronomic law;² and the restoration of the Judean commonwealth was based upon the completed Mosaic code brought from Babylon by Ezra the Scribe.³ This book of law, with its further development and interpretation, remained the normative factor for Judaism for all time. Still, from the very beginning the Law of the

¹ See Guedemann: *Das Judentum*, 67 f.; *Jued. Apologetik*, 12b; Schechter: *Studies*, I, 233 f., and *Aspects*, I, 116 f.² II Kings XXII, 8 f.³ Neh. VIII-X.

covenant contained a certain element which distinguished it from all the priestly and political codes of antiquity. Beside the traditional juridical and ritualistic statutes, which betray a Babylonian origin, it contains laws and doctrines of kindness toward the poor and helpless, the enemy and the slave, even toward the dumb beast, in striking contrast to the spirit of cruelty and violence in the Babylonian law.¹ In the name of the all-seeing, all-ruling God it appeals to the sympathy of man. These exhortations to tenderness increase in later codes of law under the prophetic influence, until finally the rabbis extended them as far as possible. They held that every negligence which leads to the loss of life or property by the neighbor, every neglect of a domestic animal, even every act of deceit by which one attempts to "steal" the good opinion of one's fellow-men, is a violation of the law.² Hence Rabbi Simlai, the Haggadist, said that from beginning to end the Law is but a system of teachings of human love,³ while another sage tried to prove from the books of Moses that God implanted mercy, modesty, and benevolence in the souls of Israel as hereditary virtues.⁴ In the same spirit Rabbi Meir described the law of Israel as the law of humanity, supporting his statement by a number of biblical passages.⁵

3. But, as light by its very nature illumines its surroundings, so the Torah in the possession of the Jewish people was certain to become the light of mankind. First of all, the book of Law itself insists that the father shall teach the word of God to his children, using many signs and ceremonies that they may meditate on the works of God and walk in

¹ See Gunkel: *Israel u. Babylonien*; Jeremias: *Moses u. Hammurabi*; H. Grimme: *D. Gesetz Chammurabi's u. Moses'*; George Cohen: *D. Gesetz Hammurabi's*; D. M. Mueller: *D. Gesetz Hammurabi's u. d. mosaische Gesetzgebung*.

² See Chapter LIX.

⁴ Yer. Kid. IV, 1; 65 c.

³ Sota 14 a.

⁵ *Sifra* Ahare Moth 13.

the path of virtue, and that the divine commands should be "in the mouth and in the heart of all to do them."¹ It was made incumbent upon the high priest or king to read the Law at least once every seven years to the whole people assembled in the holy city for the autumnal festival, — men, women, children, and the sojourners in the gates, — so that it should become their common property.² This precept probably gave rise to the triennial and later the annual system of Torah reading on the Sabbath. But in addition to the book of Law the prophetic words of consolation were read to the people, a custom which originated in the Babylonian exile, and was continued under the name of *Haftarah* ("dismissal" of the congregation).³ The seer of the exile refers to these prophetic words of comfort which were offered to the people on the Sabbath as well as other feasts and fasts: "Attend unto Me, O My people, and give ear unto Me, O My nation, for instruction (Torah) shall go forth from Me, and My right on a sudden for a light of the people. . . . Harken unto Me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law; fear ye not the taunt of men, neither be ye dismayed at their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but My favor shall be forever, and My salvation unto all generations."⁴ Moved by such stirring ideals, Synagogues arose in Jewish settlements all over the globe, and the book of the Law, in its vernacular versions, Greek and Aramaic, together with the words of the prophets, became the general source of instruction. In the words of the Psalms, it became "the testimony of the Lord, making wise the simple," "rejoicing the heart," "enlightening the eyes," "more to be desired than gold."⁵ Nay more, the

¹ Deut. VI, 7; XI, 19; XXX, 14; Ex. XIII, 9.

² Deut. XXXI, 12.

³ See Elbogen: *D. Jued. Gottesdienst*, 174 f.

⁴ Isa. LI, 4, 7-8.

⁵ Ps. XIX, 7-10.

study of the Law became the duty of every man, and he who failed to live up to the precepts of the devotees of the Law, the Pharisean fellowships, was scorned as belonging to the lower class, *am haaretz*. Every morning the pious Jew, first thanking God for the light of day, followed this up by thanking Him for the Torah, which illumines the path of life. "The welfare of society rests upon the study of the Law, divine service and organized charity," was a saying of Simon the Just, a high priest of the beginning of the third pre-Christian century.¹ Thus learning and teaching became leading occupations for the Jew, and the two main departments of Jewish literature, correspondingly, are *Torah* and *Talmud*, that is, the written Law and its exposition. Indeed, the highest title which the rabbis could find for Moses was simply "Moses our Teacher." Nay, God Himself was frequently represented as a venerable Master, teaching the Law in awful majesty.²

4. Later under the successive influence of Babylonian and Greek culture, the wisdom literature was added to the Prophets and the Psalms, giving to the whole Torah a universal scope, like that claimed for Greek philosophy. The Jewish love of learning led to an ever greater longing for truth by adding the wisdom of other cultured nations to its own store of knowledge. This motive for universalism became all the stronger, as the faith became more centered in the sublime conception of God as Master of all the world. As the God of Israel appeared the primal source of all truth, so the revealed word of God was considered the very embodiment of divine wisdom.³ In fact, the men of hoary antiquity described in the opening chapters of Genesis were actually credited with being the instructors of the Greeks and other

¹ Aboth I, 2.

² Mek. Beshallah 45 b, note by Friedman; Yalkut Yithro 286.

³ B. Sira XXIV, 8-10; comp. Bousset, l. c., 136 f.

nations.¹ We read a strange story by a pupil of Aristotle that the great sage admired a Jew, whom he happened to meet, as both wise and pious, so that the little Jewish nation was often considered, like the wise men of India, to be a sect of philosophers.² Indeed, Judaism became a matter of curiosity to the pagan world on account of the Synagogue, which attracted them as a unique center of religious devotion and instruction, and especially because of the Bible, which was read and expounded in its Greek garb from Sabbath to Sabbath. The Jewish people raised themselves to be a nation of thinkers, and largely through association with Greek thought. For example, in the Greek translation of the Scriptures all anthropomorphic expressions are avoided. As the personal name of Israel's God of the covenant, JHVH, was replaced by the name *Adonai*, "the Lord,"³ the universality of the Jewish God became still more evident. Thus the pagan world could find God in the Scriptures to be the living God who dwells in the heart and is sought by all mankind. The Jew became the herald of the One God of the universe, his Bible a book of universal instruction. Many of the heathen, without merging themselves into the community of the covenant people and without accepting all its particularistic customs, rallied around its central standard as simple theists, "worshippers of God," or "they who fear the Lord," according to the terminology of the Psalms.⁴

5. An old rabbinical legend, which is reflected in the New Testament miracle of Pentecost, relates that the Ten Words of Sinai were uttered in seventy tongues of fire to reach

¹ See Josephus: *Cont. Apion.* II, 36 f., 39; Aristobulus in Eusebius: *Prep. Ev.* XIII, 121, 413; *Cuzari*, I, 63 f.; II, 66; comp. Cassel, l. c. ad loc.

² Josephus, l. c., I, 22; Gutschmidt: *Kleine Schriften*, IV, 578; Th. Reinach: *Textes Relatifs au Judaïsme*, 11-13.

³ J. E., art. *Adonai*.

⁴ Ps. CXV, 11; CXVIII, 4; comp. Bernays: *Ges. Abh.*, II, 71; Schuerer, l. c., III, 124 f.

the known seventy nations of the earth.¹ We are told that when the people entered Canaan, the words of the Law were engraved in seventy languages on the stones of the altar at Mount Ebal.² That is, the law of Sinai was intended to provide the foundation for all human society. One Haggadist even asserts that the heathen nations all refused to accept the Law, and if Israel also had rejected it, the world would have returned to chaos.³ Israel was, so to speak, *forced* by divine Providence to accept the Law on behalf of the entire race. Hillel, under the Romanized reign of Herod, was fully conscious of this world-mission when he said: "Love your fellow creatures and lead them to the study of the Law."⁴

6. The outlook for the Jewish people, however, became darker and darker through its struggle with Rome. The fanatical Zealots entirely opposed the spreading of the knowledge of the Torah among those who did not belong to the household of Israel.⁵ Then the Church sent forth her missionaries to convert the pagan world by constant concessions to its polytheistic views and practices. The seed sown by Hellenistic Judaism yielded a rich harvest for the Church, even though it was won at the sacrifice of pure Jewish monotheism. The Ten Words of Sinai, the Mosaic laws of marriage, the poor laws, and other Biblical statutes became the cornerstone of civilization, but in a different guise; the heritage of Judaism was transplanted to the Christian and Mohammedan world in a new garb and under a new name. Henceforth the Jew, dispersed, isolated, and afflicted, had to struggle to preserve his faith in its pristine purity. The very danger besetting the study of the Law during

¹ Shab. 88 b.; Ex. R. V, 9; Tanh. Shemoth, ed. Buber, 22; Midr. Teh. Ps. LXVIII, 6; Acts II, 6; Spitta: *Apostelgeschichte*, 27, referring to Philo II, 295.

² Sifre Deut. XXXIII, 2; XXVII, 8; Sota 35 b.

³ Shab., 88 a, b.

⁴ Aboth I, 12.

⁵ J. E., art. Zealots.

the Hadrianic persecutions, which followed the Bar Kochba revolt, increased his zeal and courage. "Devoid of the Torah, our vital element, we are surely threatened with death," said Rabbi Akiba, applying to himself the fable of the fox and the fishes, as he defied the Roman edict.¹ The fear lest the Torah should be forgotten, stimulated the teachers and their disciples ever anew to its pursuit. The Torah was regarded as the bond and pledge of God's nearness; hence the many rabbinical sayings concerning its value in the eyes of God, which are frequently couched in poetic and extravagant language.² The underlying idea of them all is that Israel could dispense with its State and its Temple, but not with its storehouse of divine truth, from which it constantly derives new life and new youth.

7. One important question, however, remains, which must be answered: Has the Jewish people, shut up for centuries by the ramparts of Talmudic Judaism, actually renounced its world mission? In transmitting part of its inheritance to its two daughter-religions, has Judaism lost its claim to be a world-religion? The Congregation of Israel, according to the Midrash, answers this question in the words of the Shulamite in the Song of Songs: "I sleep, but my heart waketh."³ During the sad period of the Middle Ages, Judaism in its relation to the outer world slept a long winter-sleep, now in one land and now in another, but its inner life always manifested a splendid activity of mind and soul, exerting a mighty influence upon the history of the world. It was declared dead by the ruling Church, and yet it constantly filled her with alarm by the truths it uttered. The Jewish people was given over to destruction and persecution a thousand times, but all the floods of hatred and

¹ Ber. 61 b.

² Weber, l. c., 46-56; he fails completely to grasp this spirit.

³ Song of Songs, V, 2.

violence could not quench its flame. Its marvelous endurance constituted the strongest possible protest against the creed of the Church, which claimed to possess an exclusive truth and the only means of salvation. To suffer and die as martyrs by thousands and tens of thousands, at the stake and under the torture of bloodthirsty mobs, testifying to the One Only God of Israel and humanity, was, to say the least, as heroic a mission as to convert the heathen. Indeed, the Jew, in reciting the Shema each morning in the house of God, renewed daily his zeal and faith, by which he was encouraged to sacrifice himself for his sacred heritage.

8. But the cultivation of the Torah, obligatory upon every Jew, effected more even than the preservation of monotheism. Alongside of the Church, which did its best to suppress free thought, Islam provided a culture which encouraged study and investigation, and this brought the leading spirits in Judaism to a profounder grasp of their own literary treasures. Bold truth-seekers arose under the Mohammedan sway who had the courage to break the chains of belief in the letter of the Scripture, and to claim the right of the human reason to give an opinion on the highest questions of religion. The leading authorities of the Synagogue followed a different course from that of the Church, which had brought the Deity into the sphere of the senses, divided the one God into three persons, and induced the people to worship the image of Mary and her God-child rather than God the Father. They insisted on the absolute unity and spirituality of God, eliminated all the human attributes ascribed to Him in Scripture, and strove to attain the loftiest and purest possible conception of His being. It took a mighty effort for the people of the Law to reexamine the entire mass of tradition in order to harmonize philosophy and religion, and invest the divine revelation with the highest spiritual character. This mental activity exerted a great influence

upon the whole course of thought of subsequent centuries and even upon modern philosophy. Again Israel became conscious of his mission of light. Jewish thinkers, often combining rabbi, physician, and astronomer in one person, carried the torch of science and free investigation, directly or indirectly, into the cell of many a Christian monk, rousing the dull spirit of the Middle Ages and bringing new intellectual nurture to the Church, else she might have starved in her mental poverty.

The Jews of Spain became the teachers of Christian Europe. The forerunners of the Protestant Reformation sat at the feet of Jewish masters. Jewish students of the Hebrew language, scientifically trained, opened up the simple meaning of the Scriptural word, so long hidden by traditional interpretation. The Lutheran and the English translations of the Bible were due to their efforts, and thus also the rise of Protestantism, which inaugurated the modern era. Yet this intellectual revival, this wonderful activity of various thinkers among medieval Jewry, required a soil susceptible to such seeds, an atmosphere favorable to this intense search for truth. This existed only in the Jewish people, since the universal study of the Torah brought it about that "all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" even while dense darkness covered the nations of the medieval world.

9. We must not underrate the cultural mission of the Jewish people, with its striking contrast to the New Testament point of view, which created monasteries and the celibate ideal, and thus discouraged industry, commerce, and scientific inquiry. Dispersed as they were, the Jewish people cultivated both commerce and science, and thus for centuries were the real bearers of culture, the intermediaries between East and West. While the Church divided mankind into heirs of heaven and hell, thus sowing discord and hatred, the little group of Jews maintained their ideal of an undivided

humanity. But even their industrial and commercial activity had more than a mere economic significance. Forced upon the Jew by external pressure, it was favored by Jewish teaching as a means of promoting spiritual life. Not poverty and beggary, but wealth begotten by honest toil has the sanction of Judaism in accordance with the saying "Where there is no flour for bread, there can be no support for the study of the Torah."¹ Moreover, the rabbis interpreted the verse, "Rejoice, O Zebulun, in thy going out, and thou, Issachar, in thy tents,"² as meaning that Zebulun, the seafarer, shared the profit of his commerce with Issachar, who taught the law in the tents of the Torah, that he, in turn, might share his brother's spiritual reward. Indeed, the Jew used his gains won by trade in the service of the promotion of learning, and thus his entire industry assumed a higher character. Our modern civilization, with its higher values of life, owes much to the cultural activity of the medieval Jew, which many leaders of the ruling Church still ignore completely. It is true that the hard struggle for their very existence kept the people unconscious of their cultural mission, and only now that they have attained the higher historical point of view can they exclaim with Joseph their ancestor: "As for you, ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."³ The fact is that Jewish commerce has been an important cosmopolitan factor in the past, and is still working, to a certain extent, in the same direction.⁴

10. New and great tasks have been assigned by divine Providence to the Jew of modern times, who is a full citizen in the cultural, social, and political life of the various nations.

¹ Aboth. III, 21.

² Deut. XXXIII, 18. See Gen. R. XCIX, 11.

³ Gen. L, 20.

⁴ See J. E., art. "Commerce"; American Encyclopedia, art. Jewish Commerce; Publ. Am. Hist. Soc. X, 47; Schulman in *Judaean Addresses*, II, 77 ff., and Lecky: *Rationalism in Europe*, II, 272.

These tasks are most holy to him as Jew, the bearer of a great mission to the world, which is embodied in his heritage, the Torah. However splendid may have been his achievements in the fields of industry and commerce, of literature and art, his own peculiar possession is the Torah alone, the religious truth for which he fought and suffered all these centuries past; this must forever remain the central thought, the aim of all his striving.¹ Every achievement of the Jewish people, every attainment in power, knowledge, or skill, must lead toward the completion of the divine kingdom of truth and justice; that for which the Jew laid the foundation at the beginning of his history is still leading forward the entire social life of man to render it a divine household of love and peace. In order that it may carry out the world mission mapped out by its great seers of yore, the Jewish people must guard against absorption by the multitude of nations as much as against isolation from them. It must preserve its identity without going back into a separation rooted in self-adulation and clannishness. Instead, the great goal of Israel will be reached only by patient endurance and perseverance, confidently awaiting the fulfillment in God's own time of the glorious prophecy that all the nations shall be led up to the mountain of the Lord by the priest-people, there to worship God in truth and righteousness. The Law is to go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, as a spiritual, not a geographical center. This vision forms the highest pinnacle of human aspiration, rising higher and higher before the mind, as man ascends from one stage of culture to another, striving ever for perfection, for the sublimest ideal of life. This is characteristically expressed by the Midrash, which refers to the Messianic vision: "And it shall come to pass in the end of days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the

¹ See Saadia: *Emunoth*, III, 17, quoted by Schechter: *Aspects*, 105.

mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills."¹ "One great mountain of the earth will be piled upon the other, and Mount Zion will be placed upon the top as the culminating point of all human ascents." Taken in a figurative sense, in which alone the saying is acceptable, this means that all the heights of the various ideals will finally merge into the loftiest of all ideals, when Israel's one holy God will be acknowledged as the One for whom all hearts yearn, whom all minds seek as the Ideal of all ideals.

¹ Isa. II, 2; Micah IV, 1; see Pesik 144 b; Midr. Teh. Ps. XXXVI, 6; LXXXVII, 3.

CHAPTER LII

ISRAEL, THE SERVANT OF THE LORD, MARTYR AND MESSIAH OF THE NATIONS

1. "If there are ranks in suffering, Israel takes precedence. If the duration of sorrows and the patience with which they are borne, ennobled, the Jews are among the aristocracy of every land. If a literature is called rich which contains a few classic tragedies, what shall we say to a national tragedy lasting for fifteen hundred years, in which the poets and the actors are also the heroes?" With these classic words Leopold Zunz introduces the history of sufferings which have occasioned the hundreds of plaintive and penitential songs of the Synagogue described in his book, *Die Synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters*. They are the cries of a nation of martyrs, resounding through the whole Jewish liturgy, and appearing already in many of the Psalms: "Thou hast given us like sheep to be eaten; and hast scattered us among the nations. Thou makest us a taunt to our neighbors, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us. All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten Thee, neither have we been false to Thy covenant: Nay, for Thy sake are we killed all the day; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord? Arouse Thyself, cast not off forever. Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression?"¹ Thus the congregation of Israel laments; and what is the answer of Heaven?

¹ Ps. XLIV, 12-25.