

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

I. "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.

2. The Bible contains two answers: the first by Ezekiel, priest and prophet; the other by the great unknown seer of the Exile whose words of comfort are given in the latter part of Isaiah. Ezekiel gave a stern and direct answer: "The nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity because of their iniquity, because they broke faith with Me, and I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they fell all of them by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions did I unto them; and I hid My face from them. Therefore thus saith the Lord God: Now will I bring back the captivity of Jacob, and have compassion upon the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name. And they shall bear their shame, and all their breach of faith which they committed against Me."¹ These words are echoed in the harrowing admonitory chapter of Leviticus, which, however, closes with words of comfort: "And they shall confess their iniquity . . . if then perchance their uncircumcised heart be humbled, and they then be paid the punishment of their iniquity; then will I remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land."² This view of divine justice as external and punitive was basic to the Synagogue liturgy and the entire rabbinic system. The priestly idea of atonement, that sin could be wiped out by sacrifice, made a profound impression, not only upon individual sinners, but also upon the nation. Hence it was applied especially to the people in exile when they could not bring sacrifices to their God. Still, one means of atonement remained, the exile itself, which could lead the people to repentance and finally to God's forgiveness.³ Thus the people retained a hope of return from their captivity. They were assured by their

¹ Ezek. XXXIX, 23-26. ² Lev. XXVI, 40-42. ³ I Kings VIII, 47-50.

prophetic monitors that the faithful community of the Lord would again be received in favor by the God of faithfulness. They even built their hope upon the portions of the Law, which was read to assembled worshipers that they might know and observe it on their return to the land of their fathers. Israel could say with the Psalmist: "Unless Thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction."¹ According to a Palestinian Haggadist, "Israel would never have persevered so long, had not the Torah, the marriage contract of Israel with its God, pledged to it a glorious future on the holy soil."² Wait patiently for God's mercy, which in His own time will rebuild Israel's State and Temple!—this is the keynote of all the prayers and songs of the Synagogue.

3. But the great seer of the exile, whose anonymity lends still greater impressiveness to his words of comfort, stood on a higher historical plane than that of Ezekiel the priest. He witnessed the transformation of the entire political world of his time through the victory of Cyrus the Mede over the Babylonian empire, and thus was able to attain a profounder grasp of the destiny of his own nation. Hence he was not satisfied with the view of Ezekiel. The latter had applied the popular saying, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge,"³ to refute the belief that an individual was punished for the sins of his fathers; but he failed to extend this doctrine to the whole nation. Whatever sins were committed by the generation who were exiled, their children ought not to suffer for them "in double measure."⁴ Moreover, the realm of love has a higher law than atonement through retribution. Love brings its sacrifice without asking why. By willing sacrifice of self it serves its higher purpose. He who struggles and suffers silently for the good and true is *God's servant*, who cannot

¹ Ps. CXIX, 92. ² Pesik. 139 b. ³ Ezek. XVIII, 2. ⁴ Isa. XL, 2.

perish. He attains a higher glory, transcending the fate of mortality. This is the new revelation that came to the seer, as he pondered on the destiny of Israel in exile, illumining for him that dark enigma of his people's tragic history.

The problem of suffering, especially that of the servant of God, or the pious, occupied the Jewish mind ever since the days of Jeremiah and especially during the exile. The author of the book of Job elaborated this into a great theodicy, speaking of Job also as the "servant of the Lord."¹ Whatever pattern our exilic seer employed, beside the chapters about the Servant of the Lord,² whatever tragic fate of some great contemporary the plaintive song in the fifty-second and fifty-third chapters referred to (some point to Jeremiah, others to Zerubabel),³ or whether the poet had in mind only the tragic fate of Israel, as many modern exegetes think; in any case he conceived the unique and pathetic picture of Israel as the suffering Servant of the Lord, who is at last to be exalted:⁴

"Behold, My servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. According as many were appalled at thee — so marred was his visage unlike that of a man, and his form unlike that of the sons of men — so shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard shall they perceive. Who would have believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he shot up right forth as a sapling, and as a root out of a dry ground;

¹ Job I, 8; II, 3; XLII, 7, 8.

² Isa. XLII, 1 f.; XLIX, 1; L, 4; LII, 13-LIII, 12.

³ See Ibn Ezra, quoting Saadia; Ewald and Giesebrecht, commentaries; Sellin: *Serubabel*, 96 f., 144 f.; also Davidson, l. c., p. 356-398.

⁴ Isa. LII, 13-LIII, 12. In LIII, 9, we should read "the evil-doers" instead of "the rich" by a slight amendment of the text.

he had no form nor comeliness, that we should look upon him, nor beauty that we should delight in him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of pains, and acquainted with disease, and as one from whom men hide their face; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely our diseases he did bear, and our pains he carried; whereas we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded because of our transgressions, he was crushed because of our iniquities; the chastisement of our welfare was upon him, and with his stripes we were healed. All we, like sheep, did go astray, we turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath made to light on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, though he humbled himself, and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away, and with his generation who did reason? For he was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due. And they made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich his tomb; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to crush him by disease; to see if his soul would offer itself in restitution, that he might see his seed, prolong his days, and that the purpose of the Lord might prosper by his hand. Of the travail of his soul he shall see to the full, even My servant, who by his knowledge did justify the Righteous One to the many, and their iniquities he did bear. Therefore will I divide him a portion among the great, and he shall divide his soul with the mighty; because he bared his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

4. Whatever be the historical background of this great elegy, our seer uses it to portray Israel as the tragic hero

of the world's history. His prophetic genius possessed a unique insight into the character and destiny of his people, seeing Israel as a man of woe and grief, chosen by Providence to undergo unheard-of trials for a great cause, by which, at the last, he is to be exalted. Bent and disfigured by his burden of misery and shame, shunned and abhorred as one laden with sin, he suffers for no guilt of his own. He is called to testify to his God among all the peoples, and is thus the *Servant of the Lord*, the atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind, from whose bruises healing is to come to all the nations, — an inimitable picture of a self-sacrificing hero, whose death means life to the world and glory to God, and who will at last live forever with the Lord whom he has served so steadfastly. Our seer mentions in earlier passages the Servant of the Lord who “gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; and hid not his face from shame and spitting.”¹ Yet “he shall set his face like a flint,” so that “he shall not fail nor be crushed, till he have set the right in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his teaching.”² Still more directly, he says: “And He said unto Me, ‘Thou art My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’ . . . It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the offspring of Israel; I will also give thee for a light of the nations, that My salvation may be unto the end of the earth. Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to him who is despised of men, to him who is abhorred of nations, to a servant of rulers: kings shall see and arise, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the Lord that is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel, who hath chosen thee.”³

5. It was, however, no easy matter for men reared in the old view to reach the lofty conception of a suffering hero. Even the dramatic figure of Job seemed to lack the right

¹ Isa. L, 6.

² Isa. XLII, 4.

³ Isa. XLIX, 1-6.

solution. Job protests his guiltlessness, defies the dark power of fate, and even challenges divine justice, but God himself announces at the end that no man can grasp the essence of His plan for the world. A later and more naïve writer, who added the conclusion of the book, reversed Job's destiny and compensated him by a double share of what he had lost in both wealth and family.¹ As if the great problem of suffering could be solved by such external means! Neither would the problem of the great tragedy of Israel, the martyr-priest of the centuries, the Job of the nations, ever find its solution in a national restoration. A mere political rebirth could never compensate for the thousandfold death and untold woe of the Jew for his God and his faith! But the people at large could not grasp such a conception as is that of Deutero-Isaiah's of the mission of Israel to be the suffering servant of the Lord, the witness of God — which is “martyr” in the Greek version, — the redeemer of the nations. They were eager to return to Palestine, to rebuild State and Temple under the leadership of the heir to the throne of David. But when their hope had failed that Zerubbabel would prove to be the “shoot of Jesse,”² the prophetic elegy was referred to the Messiah, and the belief gained ground that he would have to suffer before he would triumph.³ Thus many a pseudo-Messiah fell a victim to the tyranny of Rome in both Judæa and Samaria, — for the Samaritans also hoped for a Messiah, a redeemer of the type of Moses.⁴ Finally a belief arose that there would be two Messiahs, one of the house of Joseph, that is, the tribe of Ephraim,

¹ Job XLII, 10-17.

² The disappointment is especially voiced in Ps. LXXX, 16 f.; LXXIX, 40-46.

³ See Targum and Abrahanel to Isa. LII, 13; comp. Pes. R. XXXVI-XXXVII; Sanh. 98 b.

⁴ He is called Taeb “Moses redivivus,” after Deut. XVIII, 18. Merk, E. *Samarit. Fragment ueb. d. Taëb*. See Bousset, l. c., 258; J. E., art. Samaritans.

who would fall before the sword of the enemy,¹ and the other of the house of David, who was to conquer the heathen nations and establish his throne forever.²

The Church referred the pathetic figure of the man of sorrow to her crucified Messiah or Christ. Yet he who was to be a world-savior bore through his followers damnation to his own kinsmen, and thus was rendered the chief cause of the persecution of the martyr-race of Israel.

6. We learn, however, from Origen, a Church father of the third century, that Jewish scholars, in a controversy with him, expressed the view that the Servant of the Lord refers to the Jewish people, which, dispersed among the nations and universally despised, would finally obtain the ascendancy over them, so that many of the heathen would espouse the Jewish faith.³ Most of the medieval Jewish exegetes, including Rashi, who usually follows the traditional view, refer the chapter likewise to the Jewish people. As a matter of fact, the earlier chapters which speak of the Servant of the Lord can have no other meaning, while many points in the description of the suffering hero, especially the reference to his seed after his death, do not fit the Nazarene at all. Hence all independent Christian scholars to-day have abandoned the tradition of the Church, and admit that Israel alone is declared by the prophet to be the one singled out by God to atone for the sins of the nations, to arouse all humanity to a deeper spiritual vision, and finally to triumph over all the heathen world.⁴

7. Thus the strange history of the martyr people is put in the right light and the great tragedy of Israel explained. Israel is the champion of the Lord, chosen to battle and suffer for the supreme values of mankind, for freedom and justice,

¹ Suk. 52 a; Jellinek: B. H. III, 141 f; Schuerer, l. c., II, 535.

² J. E., art. Messiah. ³ Contra Celsum I, 155.

⁴ See commentaries of Cheyne, Duhm, Giesebrecht, and others.

truth and humanity; the man of woe and grief, whose blood is to fertilize the soil with the seeds of righteousness and love for mankind. From the days of Pharaoh to the present day, every oppressor of the Jews has become the means of bringing greater liberty to a wider circle; for the God of Israel, the Hater of bondage, has been appealed to in behalf of freedom in the old world and the new. Every hardship that made life unbearable to the Jew became a road to humanity's triumph over barbarism. All the injustice and malice which hurled their bitter shafts against Israel, the Pariah of the nations, led ultimately to the greater victory of right and love. So all the dark waves of hatred and fanaticism that beat against the Jewish people served only to impress the truth of monotheism, coupled with sincere love of God and man, more deeply upon all hearts and to consign hypocrisy and falsehood to eternal contempt. Such is the belief confidently held by the people of God, and ever confirmed anew by the history of the ages. "He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand up together; who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me?"¹ Thus speaks the Servant of the Lord, certain that he will finally triumph, because he defends God's cause, and is bound indissolubly to Him.² Indeed, God says of him: "Surely, he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of Mine (his) eye."³

8. The great importance which the rabbis attached to Israel's martyrdom is shown by the following remarks in connection with the laws of sacrifice: "Behold, how the Torah selects for the sacrificial altar only such animals as belong to the pursued, not the pursuers: the ox which is pursued by the lion; the lamb which is pursued by the wolf; the goat which is pursued by the panther, but none of those

¹ Isa. L, 8-9.

² Comp. Pesik. 131 b; Ex. R. II, 7.

³ Zech. II, 12. See Geiger: *Urschrift*, 324, as to the Soferic Emendation.

which feed on prey. In like manner God chose for His own the persecuted ones: Abel, who was persecuted by his brother Cain; Noah, who was derided by the generation of the flood; Abraham, who had to flee before the tyrant Nimrod; and Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, who met with unkindness from their own brothers. In the same way God has chosen Israel from among the seventy nations, as the lamb hunted, as it were, by seventy wolves, that it should bear His law to mankind."¹ This idea is expressed also in the Haggadic saying: "Those shall be privileged to see the majesty of God in full splendor who meet humiliation, but do not humiliate others; who bear insult, but do not inflict it on others; and who endure a life of martyrdom in pure love of God."²

Indeed, the medieval Jew accepted his sad lot in this spirit of resignation. But the modern Jew is in a different situation. In the mighty effort of our age for higher truth, broader love and larger justice, he beholds the nearing of the prophetic goal of a united humanity, based on the belief in God, the King and Father of all. Accordingly, modern Judaism proclaims more insistently than ever that the Jewish people is the Servant of the Lord, the suffering Messiah of the nations, who offered his life as an atoning sacrifice for humanity and furnished his blood as the cement with which to build the divine kingdom of truth and justice. Indeed, the cosmopolitan spirit of the Jew is the one element needed for the universality of culture. On the other hand, the world at large is to-day learning more and more to regard the superb loyalty of the Jew to his ancestral faith with greater fairness and admiration and to accord larger appreciation to him and his religion. Once the flood of hatred, dissension, and prejudice that brought such untold havoc shall have disappeared from the earth; once religion emerges from the nebulous

¹ Pesik. 76 a; Eccl. R. III, 19; Lev. R. XXVII, 5.

² Yoma 23 a, referring to Jud. V, 31.

atmosphere of other-worldliness, and directs its longing for God toward a life of godliness on earth in the spirit of the ancient prophets, then the historic mission of the Jew will also be better understood. Israel, the hunted dove, which found no resting-place for the sole of its foot during the flood of sin and persecution, will then appear with the olive-branch of peace for all humanity, to open the hearts of men that all may enter the covenant with the universal Father. Then, and not till then, will the shame of those thousands of years be rolled away, when the world will recognize that not a Jew, but *the* Jew has been the suffering Messiah, and that he was sent forth to be the savior of the nations.