

Jewish people requires a national body rooted in its ancient soil in order that it may fulfill its appointed task among the nations; they even go so far as to declare all the achievements brought about by the assimilation of the culture of the surrounding nations to be a deterioration of the genuine character of the Jewish nation. The fact is that, as in nature there is nowhere a resurrection of the dead but an ever renewed regeneration of life, so is the history of the Jew and of Judaism a continuous process of regeneration manifested at every great turning-point of history, when the ideas and cultural elements of a new civilization exert their powerful influence on life and thought. There never was, nor will be an exclusively Jewish culture. It is the wondrous power of assimilation of the Jew which ever created and fashioned his culture anew. That which constitutes the peculiarity of the Jew and his life force is his religion fostered through the ages, preserved amidst the most antagonistic influences and hostile environments, and ever rejuvenated by its unique universalistic spirit when revived by contact with kindred movements. To maintain and propagate this, his religion in all lands and amidst all civilizations, is the task assigned to him by Providence, until God's Kingdom has been established all over the globe.

CHAPTER LV

ISRAEL AND THE HEATHEN NATIONS

1. As there is but one Creator and Ruler of the universe, so there is before Him but one humanity. All the nations are under His guidance, while Israel, His chosen people, points to the kingdom of God which is to embrace them all. Israel was called the "first-born son" of God¹ at the very moment of his election, implying that all the sons of men are His children. All of them are links in the divine plan of salvation. In the same sense God spoke through Isaiah: "Blessed be Egypt, My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance."² As the first page of Scripture assigns a common origin to them all in the first man, so, the prophets tell us, at the end of time they shall all be filled with longing for the one God and form with Israel one community on earth, a great brotherhood of man serving the common Father above.³ Still, the actual world began, not with the unity, but with the wide diversity and dispersion of mankind. The idea of the unity of man came as a corollary to the kindred conception of the unity of God, after a long historical process.

Just as the creation of the world opens with the separation of light from darkness, so the process of the spiritual and moral development of mankind begins, according to the divine plan of salvation, with the separation of Israel from the heathen nations.⁴ The sharper the contrast became

¹ Ex. IV, 22.

² Isa. XIX, 25.

³ Isa. XLII, 4; XLV, 23; LI, 5; Zeph. III, 9; Zech. VIII, 22; XIV, 9.

⁴ Lev. XX, 26; Deut. XX, 16-18; comp. Gen. R. II, 4; III, 10.

between the spiritual God of Israel and the crude sensual gods of heathendom, the wider grew the chasm between Judaism and heathenism, between Israel and the nations. As light is opposed to darkness, so Israel's truth stood opposed to the idolatry of the nations, until Christianity and Islam, its daughter-religions, arose between the two extremes. Henceforth Israel waits with still more confidence for the age whose dawning will bring the full knowledge of God to all mankind, leading the world from the night of error and discord to the noon-day brightness of truth and unity, when a universal monotheism will make all humanity one.

2. Nothing was more remote from ancient Israel than the hatred of the stranger or hostility to other nations, so often attributed to it.¹ In the time of the patriarchs and under the monarchy, the Hebrews fostered a spirit of friendly intercourse with their neighbors, which was often confirmed by peaceful alliances.² Of course, during war time the spirit of hostility had full sway, particularly as ancient warfare imposed a relentless ban upon both booty and human life among the vanquished. But even then the kings of Israel were called compassionate also toward their enemies when compared with other rulers.³ Indeed, the code of Israel is distinguished from all other codes of antiquity by mildness and tender compassion. On the other hand, the God of justice, revealed through Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk, punishes Israel and the nations impartially on account of their moral transgressions.⁴ He avenges acts of treachery, even when committed against pagan tyrants. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?"⁵ Such is the recurrent thought that governs Israel, demanding the same standard of judgment for Israelite and stranger.

¹ Weber, l. c., 57-79.

² Gen. XIV, 13; XXI, 32.

³ I Kings XX, 31.

⁴ Amos I-II; Isa. XXIX-XXXIII; Jer. XXV f.; Hab. I.

⁵ Gen. XVIII, 25.

3. The simple sense of justice inherent in the Jewish people admits so little difference between our own God-consciousness and that of others, that Scripture represents the Philistine King Abimelech as receiving a warning from Abraham's God JHVH.¹ As the Bible holds up Job, the Bedouin Sheik, as the pattern of a blameless servant of God and true lover of mankind,² so the Talmud cites the Philistine Dama ben Nethina as an example of filial piety.³ Altogether, the merits of the heathen receive their full measure of appreciation throughout Jewish literature,⁴ even though a narrow dissenting view occurs now and then.⁵

4. Still from the very beginning a tendency to relentless harshness existed in one direction, when the pure worship of Israel's one and only God was endangered. The early Book of the Covenant forbade every alliance with idolatrous nations,⁶ and the Deuteronomic Code made this more stringent by prohibiting intermarriage and even the toleration of idolaters in the land, lest they seduce the people of God to turn away from Him.⁷ The Pharisean leaders, the founders of Rabbinism, went still further by placing an interdict upon eating with the heathen or using food and wine prepared by them, thus aiming at a complete separation from the non-Jewish world.⁸

The contrast between Judaism and heathenism was further heightened by the view of the prophets and psalmists, showing that the great nations were the very embodiment of idolatrous iniquity, murderous violence and sexual impurity, a world of arrogance and pride, defying God and doomed to perdition, because they opposed the kingdom of God proclaimed by Israel.⁹ Henceforth the term "the nations"

¹ Gen. XX, 3.

² Job XXXI.

³ Kid. 31 a.

⁴ Tos. Sanh. XIII, 2; B. B. 10 b.

⁵ See Lazarus: *Ethics*, 49 and appendix.

⁶ Ex. XXIII, 32.

⁷ Deut. VII, 2; XX, 16 f.

⁸ Shab. 27 b; Jubil. XXII, 16.

⁹ Isa. LX, 12; LXIII, 6; LXVI, 14 f.; Zech. XIV, 2 f.; Joel IV, 9-19; Jer. X, 25; Ps. IX, 16, 18, 20; X, 17.

(*goyim*) was taken by the religious as meaning the wicked ones, who would not be able to stand the divine judgment in the future life, but would go down to Sheol, or Gehenna, to fall a prey to everlasting corruption, to the fire that is never quenched.¹

5. Yet such a wholesale condemnation could not long be maintained; it was too strongly contradicted in principle by the prophets and Psalmists, and quite as much by the apocalyptic writers and Haggadists of later times. The book of Jonah testifies that Israel's God sent His prophet to the heathen of Nineveh to exhort them to repentance, that they might obtain forgiveness and salvation like repentant Israel.² Heathenism is doomed to perish, not the heathen; they are to acknowledge the heavenly Judge in their very punishments and return to Him. Such is the conclusion of all the exhortations of the prophets predicting punishment to the nations. Moreover, those heathen who escape the doom of the world-powers are to proclaim the mighty deeds of the Lord to the utmost lands. Nay, according to the grand vision of the exilic seer, among the many nations that shall assemble at the end of days to worship the Lord in Zion, select ones will be admitted to the priesthood with the sons of Aaron.³ The name *Hadrak*, understood as "he who bringeth back," suggested itself to the rabbis as a title of the Messiah, the converter of the heathen nations.⁴ So in both the Talmud and the Sibylline books⁵ Noah is represented as a preacher of repentance to the nations before the flood, and accordingly the latter book adjures the Hellenic world to repent of their sinful lives before they would be overwhelmed by the flood of fire at the great judgment day. In the same spirit the Haggadists tell that God sent Balaam, Job, and other pious men as

¹ Tos. Sanh. XIII, 2.

² Jonah III-IV.

³ Isa. LXVI, 19-21.

⁴ Zech. IX, 1; Cant. R. VII, 10.

⁵ Sanh. 108 a; Sibyll. I, 129 f.

prophets of the heathen to teach them the way of repentance.¹ And the rabbis actually say that, if the heathen nations had not refused the Torah when the Lord offered it to them at Sinai, it would have been the common property of all mankind.²

6. The leading minds of Judaism felt only pity for the blind obstinacy of the great mass of heathen, who worshiped the creatures instead of the Creator, or the stars of heaven instead of Him who is enthroned above the skies. They regarded heathenism either as evidence of spiritual want and weakness, or as the result of destiny. Indeed, the words of the Deuteronomist sound like an echo of Babylonian fatalism when he asserts that God himself assigned to the nations the worship of the stars as their inheritance.³ Later the opinion gained ground that the heathen deities were real demons, holding dominion over the nations and leading them astray.⁴ The exilic seer attacked idolatry most vigorously as folly and falsehood, and thus the note of derision and irony is struck by Deutero-Isaiah, the Psalms, and in many of the propaganda writings of the Hellenistic age, in their references to heathenism.

On the other hand, it is very significant that the Palestinian sages and their successors condemned heathenism as a moral plague, conducing to depravity, lewdness, and bloodshed. They regarded the powers of the world, especially Edom (Rome), as being under the dominion of the Evil One, and therefore doomed to perish in the flames of Gehenna. As they rejected the Ten Commandments out of love for bloodshed, lust, and robbery, so, according to the Haggadists, they will be unable to withstand the last judgment and will

¹ B. B. 15 b; Seder Olam R. XXI. ² Mek. Yithro V; Ab. Z. 2 b-3 a.

³ Deut. IV, 19; XXIX, 25; Jer. X, 16; B. Sira XVIII, 17; comp. Bousset, l. c., 350.

⁴ Jubil. XI, 3-5; XIX, 20; Enoch XV; XIX; XCIX, 7; see Bousset, l. c., 350-351.

suffer eternal punishment. Since their one desire was to enjoy the life of this world, their lot in the future will be Gehenna; while the gates of the Garden of Eden will be open for Israel, the people oppressed and sorely tried, yet ever faithful to the covenant of Abraham.¹ Of course, this view implied both comfort and vengeance, but we must not forget that the harsh statements contained in the Talmud owe their origin to bitter distress and cannot be considered Jewish doctrines, as unfriendly critics frequently do.²

7. As has been shown above, the dominant view of the Synagogue is that eternal salvation belongs to the righteous among the nations as well as those of Israel. In this sense, Psalm IX, 18, is understood to the effect that "all those heathens who have forgotten God will go down to the nether world."³ One of the sages expresses a still broader view: "When judging the nations, God determines their standard by their best representatives."⁴ Many rabbis held the belief that circumcision secured for the Jew a place in "Abraham's bosom" while the uncircumcised are consigned to Gehenna, thus assigning to circumcision a corresponding place to that of baptism in the Christian Church. This belief seems to be based upon a passage in Ezekiel, where the prophet speaks of the *arelim*, or "uncircumcised," as dwelling in the nether world.⁵ But a number of passages in the Talmud, especially in the Tosefta,⁶ show that circumcision was not believed to have the power to save a sinner from

¹ Yeb. 98 a, ref. to Ezek. XXIII, 20; Ab. Z., l. c. In this sense we must take the Talmudic passage: "Israel are really men, not the heathen," Yeb. 61 a; B. M. 114 b; B. B. 16 b; whereas the passage, Lev. XVIII, 5, "which man doth to live thereby," is declared to include all who observe the laws of humanity, *Sifra eodem*; Midr. Teh. Ps. I, 1-2.

² Lazarus, l. c., 49. ³ Tos. Sanh. XIII, 2. ⁴ Yer. R. Sh. I, 57 a.

⁵ Ezek. XXVIII, 10; XXXI, 18; XXXII, 19-32. Possibly the prophet in speaking of *arelim* had in mind the Babylonian *Arallu*, "the nether-world"; see Ex. R. XIX, 5; Gen. R. XL, VIII, 7; Tanh. Lek Leka, ed. Buber, 27.

⁶ Tos. Sanh. XIII, 4-5; Rosh ha Shana, 17 a.

Gehenna. On the other hand, we have the great teaching of R. Johanan ben Zakkai in opposing his disciple Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, telling that the sacrifices which atoned for the sins of Israel are paralleled by deeds of benevolence, which can atone for the sins of the heathen.¹ Both the Talmud and Philo state that the seventy bullocks which were offered up during the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles were brought by Israel as sacrifices for the seventy nations of the world.²

8. Where no cause existed to fear the influence of idolatry, friendly relations with non-Jews were always recommended and cultivated. A non-Jew who devotes his life to the study and practice of the law, said Rabbi Meir, is equal to the high priest; for Scripture says: "The laws which, if a man do, he shall live by them," implying that pure humanity is the one essential required by God.³ Indeed, Rabbi Meir enjoyed a close friendship with *Ænomaos* of Gadara,⁴ a heathen philosopher spoken of admiringly in Talmudic sources and placed on a par with Balaam as noble representatives of heathendom. Obviously this good opinion was held, because both spoke favorably of Judaism, whose "synagogues and schoolhouses formed the strongest bulwark against the attacks of Jew-haters." Other friendships which were described in popular legends and held up as examples for emulation are those between Jehuda ha Nasi and the Emperor Antoninus (Severus)⁵ and that of Samuel of Babylonia with Ablat, a Persian sage.⁶

9. The Mosaic and Talmudic law prescribed quite different treatment for those heathen who persisted in idolatrous

¹ B. B. 10 b; A. d. R. N. IV.

² Suk. 55 b; Pesik. 193 b; Philo; Vita Mosis, 2 f; De Special; I, 3; II, 104, 227, 238.

³ *Sifra*, Ahare Moth 13.

⁴ Gen. R. L; LXV, 16; Ruth R. I, 8; J. E., art. *Ænomaos*.

⁵ J. E. art. Antoninus in the Talmud; Kraus: *Antoninus*.

⁶ Ab. Z. 30 a.

practices and refused to observe the laws of humanity, called the seven Noahitic laws, as will be explained more fully in the next chapter. No toleration could be granted them within the ancient jurisdiction; "Thou shalt show them no mercy" was the phrase of the law for the seven tribes of Canaan, and this was applied to all idolaters.¹ Hence Maimonides lays down the rule in his Code that "wherever and whenever the Mosaic law is in force, the people must be compelled to abjure heathenism and accept the seven laws of Noah in the name of God, or else they are doomed to die."²

On the other hand, in the very same Code, Maimonides writes in the spirit of Rabbi Meir: "Not only the Jewish tribe is sanctified by the highest degree of human holiness, but every human being, without difference of birth, in whom is the spirit of love and the power of knowledge to devote his life exclusively to the service of God and the dissemination of His knowledge, and who, walking uprightly before Him, has cast off the yoke of the many earthly desires pursued by the rest of men. God is his portion and his eternal inheritance, and God will provide for his needs, as He did for the priest and the Levite of yore."³

10. To be sure, a statement of this nature presents a different judgment of heathenism from that of the ancient national law. But the historical and comparative study of religions has caused us to entertain altogether different views of the various heathen religions, both those representing primitive stages of childlike imagination and superstition, and those more developed faiths which inculcate genuine ideals of a more or less lofty character. Certainly the laws of Deuteronomy, written when the nation had dwindled down to the little kingdom of Judæa, and those further expounded in the Mishnah enjoining the most rigorous intolerance toward

¹ Deut. VII, 3; Sanh. 57 a-59 b.

³ H. Shemitta we Yobel XIII, 13.

² H. Melakim VIII, 9-10.

every vestige of paganism, had only a theoretical value for the powerless Jewish nation; while both the Church and the rulers of Islam were largely guided by them in practical measures. The higher view of Judaism was expressed by the last of the prophets: "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name is great among the nations; and in every place offerings are presented unto My name, even pure oblations, for My name is great among the nations," saith the Lord of hosts."¹ The fact is that heathenism seeks the God whom Israel by its revelation has found. In this spirit both Philo and Josephus took the Scriptural passage, "Thou shalt not curse God," taking the Hebrew *Elohim* in the plural sense, "the gods"; thus they said a Jew must not offend the religious sense of the heathen by scorn or ridicule, however careful he must be to avoid the imitation of their practices and superstitions.²

As a matter of fact, the Code of Law aimed to separate Israel and the nations in order to avoid the crude worship of idols, animals and stars practiced by the heathen of antiquity. It was not framed for masters like Socrates, Buddha, and Confucius, with their lofty moral views and their claims upon humanity. The God who revealed himself to Abraham, Job, Enoch, and Balaam, as well as to Moses and Isaiah, spoke to them also, and the wise ones of Israel have ever hearkened to their inspiring lessons. Their words are echoed in Jewish literature together with Solomon's words of wisdom. Plato, Plotinus, and Aristotle received the most friendly hospitality from the rabbinic philosophers and mystic writers of Jewry, and so Buddhist sayings and views penetrated into Jewish ethics and popular teachings. Both the

¹ Mal. I, 11.

² Ex. XXII, 26; Philo II, 166; Josephus: *Ant.*, IV, 8, 10; *Con. Apio.*, II, 34; comp. Kohler: "The Halakic Portions in Josephus' Antiquities," in H. U. C. Monthly III, 117.

Jew and his literature are cosmopolitan, and Judaism never withholds its appreciation of the merits of the heathen world.¹

11. We must especially emphasize one claim of the Jewish people above other nations which the rabbis call *zekuth aboth*, "the merit of the fathers," and which we may term "hereditary virtue." The election of Israel, in spite of its own lack of merit, is declared in Deuteronomy and elsewhere to be due to the merit of the fathers, with whom God concluded His covenant in love.² The promise is often repeated that God will ever remember His covenant with the fathers and not let the people perish, even though their sins were great; therefore the rabbis assumed that the patriarchs had accumulated a store of merit by their virtues which would redound before God to the benefit of their descendants, supplementing their own weaknesses.³ This merit or righteousness of the fathers formed a prominent part of the hope and prayer, nay, of the whole theological system of the Jewish people. They regarded the patriarchs and all the great leaders of the past as patterns of loyalty and love for God, so that, according to the Midrash, Israel might say in the words of the Shulamite: "Black am I" considering my own merit, "but comely" when considering the merit of the fathers.⁴ Whether this store of merit would ever be exhausted is a matter of controversy among the rabbis. Some referred to God's own words that He will ever remember His covenant with the fathers; others pointed to the verse in Deutero-Isaiah: "For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from

¹ See Meg. 16 a; J. E., art. Aristotle; Neumark, l. c., Index: Aristoteles, Plato, Plotin; comp. Bahya: *Hoboth ha Lebaboth*, and other medieval philosophic works.

² Deut. IV, 37.

³ Ex. XXXIII, 12; Lev. XXVI, 42; Ex. R. XLIV, 7-8; Lev. R. XXXVI, 2-5.

⁴ Cant. R. I, 5.

thee, neither shall My covenant of peace be removed," which they interpreted symbolically to mean: when the merit of the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel is exhausted, God's mercy and compassion for Israel will be there never to depart.¹ Translated into our own mode of thinking, this merit of the fathers claimed for Israel signifies the unique treasure of a spiritual inheritance which belongs to the Jew. This inheritance of thousands of years provides such rare examples and such high inspiration that it incites to the highest virtue, the firmest loyalty, and the greatest love for truth and justice. Judaism, knowing no such thing as original sin, points with pride instead to hereditary virtue, deriving an inexhaustible source of blessing from its historical continuity of four thousand years.

¹ Isa. LIV, 10; Shab. 55 a; comp. S. Hirsch: "The Doctrine of Original Virtue" in Jew. Lit. Annual, 1905; Schechter, l. c., 170 f.