

CHAPTER LVI

THE STRANGER AND THE PROSELYTE

1. Among all the laws of the Mosaic Code, that which has no parallel in any other ancient code is the one enjoining justice, kindness and love toward the stranger. The Book of the Covenant teaches: "And a stranger shalt thou not wrong, neither shalt thou oppress him; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt,"¹ and "A stranger shalt thou not oppress; for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." The Deuteronomic writer lays special stress on the fact that Israel's God, "who regardeth not persons nor taketh bribes, doth execute justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment." He then concludes: "Love ye therefore the stranger; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."² The Priestly Code goes still further, granting the stranger the same legal protection as the native.³

2. We would, however, misunderstand the spirit of all antiquity, including ancient Israel, if we consider this as an expression of universal love for mankind and the recognition of every human being as fellow-man and brother. Throughout antiquity and during the semi-civilized Middle Ages, a stranger was an enemy unless he became a guest. If he sought protection at the family hearth or (in the Orient) under the tent of a Sheik, he thereby entered into a tutelary relation with both the clan or tribe and its deity. After entering into such a

¹ Ex. XXII, 20; XXIII, 9.

² Deut. X, 18-19.

³ Lev. XIV, 22.

relation, temporary or permanent, he became, in the term which the Mosaic law uses in common with the general Semitic custom, a *Ger* or *Toshab*, "sojourner" or "settler," entitled to full protection.¹ This relation of dependency on the community is occasionally expressed by the term: "thy stranger that is within thy gates."² Such protection implied, in turn, that the *Ger* or *protégé* owed an obligation to the tribe or community which shielded him. He stood under the protection of the tribal god, frequently assumed his name, and thus dared not violate the law of the land or of its deity, lest he forfeit his claim to protection.

3. In accordance with this, the oft-repeated Mosaic command for benevolence toward the stranger, which placed him on the same footing with the needy and helpless, imposed certain religious obligations upon him. He was enjoined, like the Israelite, not to violate the sanctity of the Sabbath by labor, nor to provoke God's anger by idolatrous practices, and, according to the Priestly Code, to avoid the eating of blood and the contracting of incestuous marriages as well as the transgression of the laws for Passover and the Day of Atonement. Naturally, in criminal cases such as blasphemy he was subject to the death-penalty just like the native.³ Still, the *Ger* was not admitted as a citizen, and in the Mosaic system of law he was always a tolerated or protected alien, unless he under-

¹ Gen. XXIII, 4; Lev. XX, 35. On the term *Ger* see W. R. Smith: *The Religion of the Semites*, 75 ff.; Bertholet: *Die Stellung d. Israeliten und Juden zu den Fremden*, 28, 178; Schuerer, l. c., III, 150-188; Encyc. Biblica, art. Stranger and Sojourner; Cheyne, *Bampton Lectures*, 1889, p. 429. Commerce between the Phœnicians and Greeks was protected by the Greek god of the stranger (Zeus Xenios); see Ihering: *D. Gastfreundschaft im Alterthum*, *Deutsche Rundschau*, 1887, showing how the Phœnicians developed the *Ger* idea in the direction of international commerce, just as the Jews developed it toward international religion; M. J. Kohler: "Right of Asylum" in *Am. Law Review*, LI, p. 381.

² Ex. XX, 10.

³ Lev. XVI, 29; XVII, 8-15; XVIII, 26; XXIV, 16-29.

went the rite of circumcision and thus joined the Israelitish community.¹

4. With the transformation of the Israelitish State into the Jewish community—in other words, with the change of the people from a political to a religious status,—this relation to the non-Jew underwent a decided change. As the contrast to the heathen became more marked, the *Ger* assumed a new position. As he pledged himself to abandon all vestiges of idolatry and to conform to certain principles of the Jewish law, he entered into closer relations with the people. Accordingly, he adopted certain parts of the Mosaic code or the entire law, and thus became either a partial or a complete member of the religious community of Israel. In either case he was regarded as a follower of the God of the Covenant. In spite of the exclusive spirit which was dominant in the period following Ezra, two forces favored the extending of the boundaries of Judaism beyond the confines of the nation. On the one hand, the Babylonian Exile had visualized and partially realized the prophecy of Jeremiah: "Unto Thee shall the nations come from the ends of the earth, and shall say: 'Our fathers have inherited naught but lies, vanity and things wherein there is no profit.'" ² For example, Zechariah announced a time when "many peoples and mighty nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord," and "Ten men shall take hold, out of all the languages of nations, shall even take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'" ³ Another prophet said at the time of the overthrow of Babylon: "For the Lord will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own

¹ Ex. XII, 48; see Yeb. 46 a-47 b; Mas. Gerim I-III. The opinion of Bertholet and Schuerer concerning the semi-proselyte or *Ger Toshab* is contradicted by both the Book of Jubilees and the Talmudic sources, as will be shown below.

² Jer. XVI, 19.

³ Zech. VIII, 21-23.

land, and the stranger (*Ger*, or proselyte) shall join himself with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob." ¹ The Psalmists especially refer to the heathen who shall join Israel, ² so that *Ger* now becomes the regular term for proselyte. ³

In addition to this inward religious desire we must consider the social and political impulse. The handful of Judæans who had returned from Babylonia were so surrounded by heathen tribes that, while the Samaritans had attracted the less desirable groups, they were glad to welcome the influx of such as promised to become true worshipers of God. The chief problem was how to provide a legal form for these to "come over," *proselyte* being the Greek term for "him who comes over." By such a form they could enter the community while accepting certain religious obligations. In fact, such obligations had been stated before in the Priestly Code, which admitted into the political community as "sojourners" or "indwellers" those who pledged themselves to abstain from idolatry, blasphemy, incest, the eating of blood or of flesh from living animals, and from all violence against human life and property. They were debarred only from marriage into the religious community, "the congregation of the Lord." Henceforth *Ger* and *Ger Toshab* became juridical terms, the social and legal designation of those proselytes who had abjured heathenism and joined the monotheistic ranks of Judaism as "worshipers of God."

5. Thus the first great step in the progress of Judaism from a national system of law to a universal religion was made in Judæa. The next step was to recognize the idea of the revelation of God to the "god-fearing men" of the primeval ages, as described in the Mosaic books, and thus to open the gates of

¹ Isa. XIV, 1.

² Ps. XXII, 30; LXVII, 3; LXVIII, 30 f.; LXXXVII, 4 f.

³ II. Chron. II, 16; XXX, 25.

the national religion for heathen who had become "God-fearing men" or "worshippers of the Lord." Thus the Psalms, after enumerating the customary two or three classes, "the house of Israel," "of Aaron," and "of Levi," often add the "God-fearing" proselyte.¹ The Synagogue was especially attractive to the heathen who sought religious truth because of its elevating devotion and its public instruction in the Scripture, translated into Greek, the language of the cultured world. This sponsored a new system for propagating the Jewish faith. The so-called Propaganda literature of Alexandria laid its chief stress upon the ethical laws of Judaism, not seeking to submit the non-Jew to the observance of the entire Mosaic law or to subject him to the rite of circumcision. The Jewish merchants, coming into contact with non-Jews in their travels on land and sea, endeavored especially to present their religious tenets in terms of a broad, universal religion. As a universal faith forms the background of the entire Wisdom literature, particularly the book of Job, a simple monotheism could be founded upon a divine revelation to mankind in general, corresponding to the one to Noah and his sons after the flood. The laws connected with this covenant, called the Noahitic laws, were general humanitarian precepts. We find these enumerated in the Talmud as six, seven, and occasionally ten. Sometimes we read of thirty such laws to be accepted by the heathen, probably founded upon the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus, at one time central in Jewish ethics.² At any rate, the

¹ Ps. CXV, 11; CXVIII, 4; CXXXV, 20; comp. LXVII, 8; CII, 16; Job I, 1; Tobit LXIV, 6; Sibyll. III, 572, 756; Acts X, 2; XXI, 13; V, 26 f.; XVI, 44; XVII, 4; XVIII, 7; Midr. Teh. Ps. XXII, 29; Lev. III, 2; Mek. to Ex. XXII, 20; see Bernays: *Ges. Abh.*, II, 74.

² Tos. Ab. Z. IX, 4; Sanh. 56 b-57; Gen. R. XXXIV, 7; Jubil. VII, 20 f.; Sibyll. III, 38, 762. For the thirty commandments, see Yer. Ab. Z. II, 40 c; Midr. Teh. Ps. II, 5; Gen. R. XCVIII, 9; J. Q. R., 1894, p. 259. Comp. also Pseudo-Phocylides in Bernays' *Ges. Abh.*, I, 291 ff.; Seeberg: *D. beiden Wege u. d. Aposteldecree*, p. 25; Klein: *Der aelteste christl. Katechismus*; J. E., art. Commandments.

observance of the so-called Noahitic laws was demanded of all worshippers of the one God of Israel.

Strange to say, however, this extensive propaganda of the Alexandrian Jews during the two or three pre-Christian centuries left few traces in the history and literature of Palestinian Judaism. Two reasons seem at hand; the growth of the Paulinian Church, which absorbed the missionary activity of the Synagogue, and the effort of Talmudic Judaism to obliterate the old missionary tradition. To judge from occasional references in Josephus and the New Testament, as well as many inscriptions all over the lands of the Mediterranean,¹ the number of heathen converts to the Synagogue was very large and caused attacks on Judaism in both Rome and Alexandria. Josephus tells us that Jews and proselytes in all lands sent sacrificial gifts to Jerusalem in such abundance as to excite the avarice of the Romans.² The Midrash preserves a highly interesting passage which casts light on the earlier significance of the winning of heathen converts, reading as follows: "When it is said in Zephaniah II, 5: 'Woe to the inhabitants of the sea-coast, the nation of Kerethites'; this means that the inhabitants of the various pagan lands would be doomed to undergo *Kareth*, 'perdition,' save for the one God-fearing proselyte, who is won over to Judaism each year and set up to save the heathen world."³ In other words, the merit of the one proselyte whose conversion awakens the hope for the winning of the entire heathen world to pure monotheism, is an atoning power for all. Such was the teaching of the Pharisees, whom the gospel of Matthew brands as hypocrites because of their zeal in making proselytes.

¹ See Schuerer, I. c., 165, 175; Harnack, *D. Mission u. Ausbreitung d. Christentums*, chapter I.

² Ant. XVI, 7.

³ Gen. R. XXVIII, 5; Cant. R. I, 4; see Matt. XXIII, 15; Jellinek, B. H. VI, Introd., p. XLVI.

6. This kind of proselytism was encouraged only by Alexandrian or Hellenistic Judaism. In Palestine, however, the social system of the nation was quite unfavorable to the simple "God-worshiper," who remained merely a tolerated alien, even though protected, and never really entered the national body. Legally he was termed *Ger Toshab*, "settler," which meant semi-proselyte. The type of this class was Naaman, the Syrian general who was instructed by Elijah to bathe in the Jordan to cure his leprosy, and then became a worshiper of the God of Israel.¹ Similarly, whatever the real origin of the proselyte's bath may have been, a baptismal bath was prescribed for the proselyte to wash off the stain of idolatry.² He was regarded as one who had "fled from his former master" (in heaven) to find refuge with the only God;³ therefore he was legally entitled to shelter, support, and religious instruction from the authorities.⁴ Certain places were assigned where he was to receive protection and provision for his needs, but he was not allowed to settle in Jerusalem, where only full proselytes were received as citizens.⁵ According to Philo, special hospices were fitted out for the reception of semi-proselytes.⁶

7. In order to enjoy full citizenship and equal rights, the proselyte had to undergo both the baptismal bath and the rite of circumcision, thus accepting all the laws of the Mosaic Code equally with the Israelite born. Beside this, he had to bring a special proselyte's sacrifice as a testimony to his belief in the God of Israel. In distinction from the *Ger Toshab*, or semi-proselyte, he was then called *Ger ha Zedek* or *Ger Zedek*. This name, usually translated as "proselyte of righteousness,"

¹ II Kings C, 1-15; see LXX to verse 14; Sanh. 96 b.

² See Sota, 12 b; Sibyll. IV, 164; comp. Gen. R. II, 5; J. E., art. Baptism and Birth, New; Enc. Religion and Ethics, art. Baptism, Jewish.

³ See J. E., art. Asenath, and the passages quoted there.

⁴ Sifre and Targum to Deut. XXIII, 16-19.

⁵ Tos. Negaim VI, 2; Mas. Gerim III.

⁶ Philo, De Monarchia, I, 7.

obviously possesses a deeper historical meaning. The Psalmist voices a pure ethical monotheism in his query: "O Lord, who shall be a guest (*Ger*, sojourner) in thy tent?" which he answers: "He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness and speaketh truth in his heart."¹ But the legal view of the priestly authorities was that only the man who offers a "sacrifice of righteousness" and pledges himself to observe all the laws binding upon Israel might become a "guest" in the Temple on Zion, an adopted citizen of Jerusalem, the "city of righteousness."² In illustration of this view a striking interpretation to a Deuteronomic verse is preserved: "They shall call people unto the mountain, there shall they offer sacrifices of righteousness: that is, the heathen nations with their kings who come to Jerusalem for commerce with the Jewish people shall be so fascinated by its pure monotheistic worship and its simple diet, that they will espouse the Jewish faith and bring sacrifices to the God of Israel as proselytes."³

The prominence of the full proselyte in the early Synagogue appears in the ancient benediction for the righteous leaders and Hasidim, the Soferim and Synedrion, the ruling authorities of the Jewish nation, where special mention is made of "the Proselytes of (the) Righteousness."⁴ These full proselytes pushed aside the half-proselytes, so that, while both are mentioned in the earlier classification, only the latter are considered by the later Haggadah.⁵ With the dissolution of the Jewish State no juridical basis remained for the *Ger Toshab*, the "protected

¹ Ps. XV, 1-2; see Cheyne's Commentary.

² The article *ha Zedek* seems to point to Jerusalem, called "the city" or "dwelling place of righteousness" (*Zedek*). See Isa. I, 21; Jer. XXXI, 23; L, 7. Comp. "Gates of righteousness" (*Zedek*) for the Temple gates, in Ps. CXVIII, 19, and the ancient legendary hero of Jerusalem, *Malki-Zedek*, Gen. XIV, 18; Josephus, J. W. VI, 10; Epis. Heb. VII, 10; and *Adoni Zedek*, first king of Jerusalem, Josh. X, 3.

³ Sifre and Targum to Deut. XXXIII, 19.

⁴ Singer's *Prayerb.*, p. 48.

⁵ See Mek. Mishpatim XVIII; comp. A. d. R. N. XXXVI ref. to Isa. XLIV, 5.

stranger." R. Simeon ben Eleazar expressed this in the statement: "With the cessation of the Jubilee year there was no longer any place for the *Ger Toshab* in Judæa."¹ We read in Josephus that no proselytes were accepted in his time unless they submitted to the Abrahamic rite and became full proselytes.²

However, as Josephus tells us, a strong desire to espouse the Jewish faith existed among the pagan women of neighboring countries, especially of Syria.³ The same situation existed in Rome according to the rabbinical sources, Josephus, Roman writers, and many tomb inscriptions.⁴ Conspicuous among these proselytes was Queen Helen of Adiabene, who won lasting fame by her generous gifts to the Jewish people in time of famine and to the Temple at Jerusalem; her son Menobaz, at the advice of a Jewish teacher, underwent the rite of circumcision in order to rise from a mere God-worshiper to a full proselyte.⁵ The Midrash⁶ enumerates nine heathen women of the Bible who became God-worshipers: Hagar; Asenath, the wife of Joseph, whose conversion is described in a little known but very instructive Apocryphal book by that name;⁷ Zipporah, the wife of Moses; Shifra and Puah, the Egyptian midwives;⁸ Pharaoh's daughter, the foster-mother of Moses, whom the rabbis identified with Bithia (*Bath Yah*, "Daughter of the Lord");⁹ Rahab, whom the Midrash represents as the

¹ Arak. 29 a.

² Vita 25.

³ J. W. II, 20, 2.

⁴ Josephus: Ant. XIII, 9, 1; II, 3; XVIII, 3, 5; XX, 8, 11; Mek. Bo XV: Beluria (Fulvia or Valeria); Schuerer, III, 176; *Gemeindeverf. v. Juden in Rom*; Graetz: *D. juedisch. Proselyten im Roemerreich*; Radin: *Jews among Greeks and Romans*, p. 389. See also Crooks: *The Jewish Race in Ancient and Roman History*.

⁵ Josephus: Ant. XX, 2-4; Yoma III, 10; Yoma 37 a.; Suk. 2 b; B. B. II a; Gen. R. XLVI, 8.

⁶ Midrash Tadshe in Jellinek: B. H. III, 111; Epstein: *Jued. Alterthumskunde*, XLIII.

⁷ See J. E., art. Asenath.

⁸ Comp. Sifre Num. 178.

⁹ I Chron. IV, 18; Meg. 13 a.

wife of Joshua and ancestress of many prophets;¹ Ruth and Jael. Philo adds Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, as a type of a proselyte.²

8. Beside the term *Ger*, with its derivatives, which gave legal standing to the proselyte, the religious genius of Judaism found another term which illustrated far better the idea of conversion to Judaism. The words of Boaz to Ruth: "Be thy reward complete from the Lord thy God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to take refuge,"³ were applied by the Pharisean leaders to all who joined the faith as Ruth did. So it became a technical term for converts to Judaism, "to come, or be brought, under the wings of the divine majesty" (*Shekinah*).⁴ Philo frequently expresses the idea that the proselyte who renounces heathenism and places himself under the protection of Israel's God, stands in filial relation to Him exactly like the born Israelite.⁵ Therefore Hillel devoted his life to missionary activity, endeavoring "to bring the soul of many a heathen under the wings of the *Shekinah*." But in this he was merely following the rabbinic ideal of Abraham,⁶ and of Jethro, of whom the Midrash says: "After having been won to the monotheistic faith by Moses, he returned to his land to bring his countrymen, the Kenites, under the wings of the *Shekinah*."⁷ The proselyte's bath in living water was to constitute a rebirth of the former heathen, poetically expressed in the Halakic rule: "A convert is like a newborn creature."⁸ The Paulinian idea that baptism creates a new Adam in place of the old is but an adaptation of the Pharisaic view. Some ancient teachers therefore declared the proselyte's bath more important than circumcision, since it forms

¹ Meg. 15 b.

² Philo: *De Nobilitate*, 6; II, 443.

³ Ruth II, 12.

⁴ Ab. d. R. N., ed. Schechter, 53 f.; Shab. 31 a; Lev. R. II, 8.

⁵ See Bertholet, l. c., 285-287.

⁶ Ab. d. R. N., l. c.

⁷ Mek. to Ex. XVIII, 27.

⁸ Gen. R. XXXIX, 14; Yeb. 22 a; comp. Pes. VIII, 8.

the sole initiatory rite for female proselytes, as it was with the wives of the patriarchs.¹

9. The school of Hillel followed in the footsteps of Hellenistic Judaism in accentuating the ethical element in the law;² so naturally it encouraged proselytism as well. The Midrash preserves the following Mishnah, handed down by Simeon ben Gamaliel, but not contained in our Mishnaic Code: "If a *Ger* desires to espouse the Jewish faith, we extend to him the hand of welcome in order to bring him under the wings of the Shekinah."³ Both the Midrash and the early Church literature reveal traces of a Jewish treatise on proselytes, containing rules for admission into the two grades, which was written in the spirit of the Hellenistic propaganda, but was afterward rewritten and adopted by the Christian Church. The school of Shammai in its rigorous legalism opposed proselytism in general, and its chief representative, Eliezer ben Hyrcanos, distrusted proselytes altogether.⁴ On the other hand, the followers of Hillel were decidedly in favor of converting the heathen and were probably responsible for many Haggadic passages extolling the proselytes. Thus the verse of Deutero-Isaiah: "One shall say, 'I am the Lord's,' and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel" is peculiarly applied in the Midrash. The first half, we are told, denotes two classes of Israelites, those who are without blemish, and those who have sinned and repented; the second half includes the two classes of proselytes, those who have become full Jews (*Gere ha Zedek*) and those who are merely worshippers of God (*Yir'e Shamayim*). A later Haggadic version characteristically omits the last, recognizing only the full converts (*Gere Emeth*) as proselytes.⁵ The

¹ Yeb. 46 a; comp. Josephus: Ant. XX, 2-4.

² Shab. 31 a.

³ Lev. R. II, 8.

⁴ Gen. R. LXX, 5; B. M. 59 b.

⁵ Mekilta, l. c.; comp. Ab. d. R. N. XXXVI, ed. Schechter, 107.

following parable in the spirit of the Essenes illustrates their viewpoint. In commenting upon the verse from the Psalms: "The Lord keepeth the strangers," the story is told: A king possessed a flock of sheep and goats and noted that a deer joined them, accompanying them to their pasture and returning with them. So he said to the herdsmen: "Take good care of this deer of mine which has left the free and broad desert to go in and out with my flock, and do not let it suffer hunger or thirst." Likewise God takes special delight in the proselytes who leave their own nation, giving up their fellowship with the great multitude in order to worship Him as the One and Only God, together with the little people of Israel.¹ Similarly the Biblical verse concerning wisdom: "I love them that love me, and those that seek me earnestly shall find me"² is referred to the proselytes, "who give up their entire past from pure love of God, and place their lives under the sheltering wings of the divine majesty." All these Midrashic passages and many others are but feeble echoes of the conceptions of the Hellenistic propaganda, which were so ably set forth by Philo and the Book of Asenath. Indeed, Judaism must have exerted a powerful influence upon the cultured world of Hellas and Rome in those days, as is evidenced both in the Hellenistic writings of the Jew and in the Greek and Roman writers themselves. Their very defamation of Judaism unwittingly gives testimony to the danger to which Judaism exposed the pagan conception of life, and to the hold it took upon many of the heathen.³

10. The reaction against this missionary movement took place in Judea. The enforced conversion of the Idumeans to Judaism by John Hyrcanus benefited neither the nation nor the faith of the Jew, and turned the school of Shammai, which belonged to the party of the Zealots, entirely against the whole

¹ Midr. Teh. Ps. CXLVI, 9; Num. R. VIII, 2.

² Prov. VIII, 17; Num. R., l. c.

³ Schuerer, l. c., III, 4; Radin, l. c.

system of proselytism. On the whole, bitter experience taught the Jews distrust of conversions due to fear, such as those of the Samaritans who feared the lions that killed the inhabitants, or to political and social advantage, like those under David and Solomon, or in the days of Mordecai and Esther, or still later under John Hyrcanus.¹ Instead, all stress was laid upon religious conviction and loyalty to the law. In fact, Josephus mentions many proselytes who in his time fell away from Judaism,² who may perhaps have been converts to Christianity. The later Halakah, fixed under the influence of the Hadrianic persecution and quoted in the Talmud as Baraitha, prescribes the following mode of admission for the time after the destruction of the Temple, omitting significantly much that was used in the preceding period:³ "If a person desires to join Judaism as a proselyte, let him first learn of the sad lot of the Jewish people and their martyrdom, so as to be dissuaded from joining. If, however, he persists in his intention, let him be instructed in a number of laws, both prohibitory and mandatory, easy and hard to observe, and be informed also as to the punishment for their disobedience and the reward for fulfillment. After he has then declared his willingness to accept the belief in God and to adhere to His law, he must submit to the rite of circumcision in the presence of two members of the Pharisean community, take the baptismal bath, and is then fully admitted into the Jewish fold." It is instructive to compare this Halakic rule with the manual for proselytes preserved by the Church under the name of "The Two Ways," but in a revised form.⁴ The mode of admission in the Halakah seems modeled superficially after the more elaborate one of the earlier code, where the Shema as the Jewish creed and the Ten Commandments, possibly with the addition

¹ Yeb. 24 b; Yer. Kid., IV, 65 b.

² Yeb. 47 a; comp. Mas. Gerim I.

³ See J. E., art. Didache and Klein, I. c.

⁴ Apion, II, 10, 3.

of the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters of Leviticus and the twenty-seventh chapter of Deuteronomy, seem to have formed the basis for the instruction and the solemn oath of the proselyte.

11. As long as the Jewish people possessed a flourishing world-wide commerce, unhampered by the power of the Church, they were still joined by numerous proselytes in the various lands and enjoyed general confidence. Indeed, many prominent members of the Roman nobility became zealous adherents of Judaism, such as Aquilas, the translator of the Bible, and Clemens Flavius, the senator of the Imperial house,¹ and many prominent Jewish masters were said to be descendants of illustrious proselytes.² All this changed as soon as the Christian Church girded herself with "the sword of Esau." From that time on proselytism became a peril and a source of evil to the Jew. The sages no longer took pride in the prophetic promise that "the stranger will join himself to Israel," nor did they find in the words "and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob" an allusion to the prediction that some of these proselytes would be added "to the priesthood of the Lord," as some earlier teachers had interpreted the passage.³ R. Helbo of the fourth century, on the contrary, explained that proselytes have become a plague like "leprosy" for the house of Jacob, taking the Hebrew *nispēhu* as an allusion to the word *Sappahat*, "leprosy."⁴ Henceforth all attempts at proselytism were deprecated and discouraged, while uncircumcised proselytes, — probably meaning the persecuting Christians — were relegated to Gehinnom.⁵

¹ Git. 56 b; Ab. Z. 10 b; on Clemens see Graetz: H. J. II, 387-389; but see literature in Schuerer, I. c., III⁴, 169.

² Git. 56 b-57.

³ Ex. R. XIX, 4; comp. Midr. Teh. Ps. LXXXVII, 4, ref. to I Sam. II, 36 and Isa. LXVI, 2; comp. Bacher: *Agada d. Palest. Amoräer.*, III, 45, 363.

⁴ Yeb. 47 b; 109 b; Kid. 70 b, ref. Isa. XIV to Lev. XIV, 56.

⁵ Ex. R. XIX, 5.

12. This view was not shared by all contemporaries, however. R. Abbahu of Cæsarea, who had many an interesting and bitter dispute with his Christian fellow-citizens,¹ was broad-minded enough to declare the proselytes to be genuine worshipers of God.² Joshua ben Hanania encouraged the proselyte Aquilas and prognosticated great success for proselytes in general as teachers of both the Haggada and Halakah. So other Haggadists urged special love and compassion for the half-proselyte,³ and entertained a special hope of the Messianic age that many heathen should turn to God in sincerity of heart.⁴ At all events, it was considered a great sin to reproach a convert with his idolatrous past.⁵ Indeed, the phrase, "they that fear the Lord," used so often in the Psalms, is referred by the Haggadists to the proselytes; true, the chief stress is laid upon the full proselytes, the *Gere Zedek*, but a foremost place in the world to come is still reserved for God-worshipers like the Emperor Antoninus.⁶ Thus Psalm CXXVIII, which speaks of the "God-fearing man," was applied to the proselyte, to whom were therefore promised temporal bliss and eternal salvation, rejoicing in the Law, in deeds of love and bounteous blessing from Zion.⁷ While the Halakah remained antagonistic to proselytism on account of its narrow adherence to the spirit of the Priestly Code, the Haggadah exhibits a broader view. Resonant with the spirit of prophecy, it beckons to all men to come and seek shelter under the wings of the one and only God, in order to disseminate light and love all over the world.

13. Modern Judaism, quickened anew with the spirit of the ancient seers of Israel, cannot remain bound by a later and altogether too rigid Halakah. At the very beginning of

¹ See Bacher, l. c., II, 115-118.

² Num. R. VIII, 1.

³ Gen. R. LXX, 5.

⁴ Ab. Z. 3 b.

⁵ B. M. 59 b.

⁶ Midr. Teh. Ps. XXII, 34; here also a later Haggadist removes the reference to the half-proselytes. See Buber, l. c.; Yer. Meg. I, 72 b.

⁷ Num. R. VIII, 10.

the Talmudic period stands Hillel, the liberal sage and master of the law, who, like Abraham of old, extended the hand of fellowship to all who wished to know God and His law; he actually pushed aside the national bounds to make way for a faith of love for God and the fellow man. For this is the significance of his answer to the Roman scoffer who wanted to hear the law expounded while he was standing on one foot: "Whatever is hateful to thee, do not do to thy fellow man! That is the law; all the rest is only commentary."¹ Thus the leaders of progressive Judaism also have stepped out of the dark prison walls of the Talmudic Ghetto and reasserted the humanitarian principles of the founders of the Synagogue, who welcomed the proselytes into Israel and introduced special blessings for them into the liturgy. They declare again, with the author of Psalm LXXXVII, that Zion, the "city of God," should be, not a national center of Israel, but the metropolis of humanity, because Judaism is destined to be a universal religion.²

Not that Judaism is to follow the proselytizing methods of the Church, which aims to capture souls by wholesale conversion without due regard for the attitude or conviction of the individual. But we can no longer afford to shut the gate to those who wish to enter, impelled by conviction or other motives having a religious bearing, even though they do not conform to the Talmudic law.³ This attitude guided the leaders of American Reform Judaism at the rabbinical conference under the presidency of Isaac M. Wise, when they considered the admission of proselytes at the present time. In their decision they followed the maxim of the prophet of yore: "Open the gates (of Judaism) that a righteous nation may enter that keepeth the faith."⁴

14. It is interesting to observe how Philo of Alexandria contrasts those who join the Jewish faith with those who have

¹ Shab. 31 a.

² See com. to Ps. LXXXVII, and LXX version.

³ Yearb. C. C. A. R., 1891, 1892, 1895.

⁴ Isa. XXVI, 2.

become apostates. The former, he says, become at once prudent, temperate, modest, gentle, kind, human, reverential, just, magnanimous, lovers of truth, and superior to the temptations of wealth and pleasure, whereas the latter are intemperate, unchaste, unjust, irreverent, low-minded, quarrelsome, accustomed to falsehood and perjury, and ready to sell their freedom for sensual pleasures of all kinds.¹ In the times of Hellenic culture apostasy made its appearance among the upper classes of the Jews. As the higher-minded among the heathen world were drawn towards the sublime monotheistic faith of the Jew, so the pleasure-seeking and worldly-minded among the Jews were attracted by the allurements of Greek culture to become faithless to the God of Israel, break away from the law, and violate the covenant. Especially under Syrian rule, apostasy became a real danger to the Jewish community, and many measures had to be decided upon to avert it. The desertion of the ancestral faith was looked upon as rebellion and treason against God and Israel.² With the rise of the Christian Church to power and influence the number of apostates increased, and with it also the danger to the small community of the Jews in the various lands. In the same measure as the Church made a meritorious practice of the conversion of the Jews, whether by persuasive means or by force and persecution, the authorities of Judaism had to provide the Jew with spiritual weapons of self-defense in the shape of polemical and apologetic writings,³ and to warn him against too close a contact with the apostate, which was too often fraught with peril for the whole community. As a number of these apostates became actual maligners of the Jews under the Roman empire, a special malediction against sectarians, the so-called *Birkat ha-Minim*, was inserted in the Eighteen Benedictions

¹ Philo, *De Penitentia*, 2.

² See J. E., art. *Apostasy and Apostates*.

³ See J. E., art. *Apologetic and Polemical Literature*.

under the direction of Gamaliel II.¹ "Those who have emanated from my own midst hurt me most," says the Synagogue, referring to herself the words of the Sulamite in the Song of Songs.² While every other offender from among the Jewish people is declared to be "brother," notwithstanding his sin,³ the apostate was declared to be one from whom no free-will offering was to be accepted,⁴ and to whom the gates of repentance and the gates of salvation are forever closed.⁵ The feeling of bitterness against him grew in intensity, as throughout Jewish history he often played the despicable rôle of an accuser of his former coreligionists and betrayer of their faith. The modern Jew also, though he sympathizes with every liberal movement among men and respects every honest opinion, however radically different from his own, cannot but behold in the attitude of him who deserts the small yet heroic band of defenders of his ancient faith and joins the great and powerful majority around him, a disloyalty and weakness of character unworthy of a son of Abraham, the faithful. Since the beginning of the new era in the time of Mendelssohn, apostasy has made great inroads upon the numerical and intellectual strength of Judaism, especially among the upper classes. It is no longer, however, of an aggressive character, but rather a result of the lack of Jewish self-respect and religious sentiment, against which measures tending to a revival of the Jewish spirit are being taken more and more. The Jews are called by the rabbis "the faithful sons of the faithful." The apostate must be made to feel that he is of a lower type, since he has become a deserter from the army of the battlers for the Lord, the Only One God of Israel.

¹ Ber. 28 a; Singer's *Prayerb.* 48.

² Deut. XXV, 3 and Sifre ad loc.; Sanh. 44 a.

³ Sifre Num. 112; R. H., 17 a; Tos. Sanh. XIII, 5.

⁴ Cant. R. I. 6.

⁵ *Sifra* Wayikra 2.