

JESUS IN THE SYNAGOGUE.

Such was the title of a discourse delivered a few months ago before a Jewish congregation, in a Jewish synagogue, by a Jewish rabbi – Joseph Krauskopf – from a purely Jewish standpoint. It may be regarded as one of the straws in the wind which shows that the blindness of Israel is beginning to be turned away. It is noticeable also that it indicates no disposition to accept the traditions of "Christendom" concerning Jesus – "the pagan myths and heathen doctrines which his later disciples fastened on his name" – but the Lord's own beautiful teachings and character as presented in the New Testament are set forth as worthy of Jewish admiration and study.

The following is an extract from the discourse, from the *Jewish Exponent*:

Even in the synagogues, and especially in the more liberal ones, the long and dearly cherished idea of the *Alone Chosen People*, of the *Only Favorites of God*, is fast losing its hold. Closer attention is being paid to such teachings as prophets like Micah stamped upon the pages of the Bible – that not the accident of birth among a certain tribe or race, but the practice of justice and mercy and humility, constitutes the *Chosen of God*; or to such Talmudic teachings as that which declares that the righteous of all nations and creeds will share in the happiness of future life. There, too, poet and dramatist, skeptic and scientist, prophets and reformers, liturgies and Bibles, of other nations and religions, meet with a hearty welcome in pulpit and pew, and their teachings, when noble, are reverentially listened to and taken to heart.

There is, however, with the vast bulk of them, one conspicuous exception. There is one illustrious reformer who

meets with a scant welcome in the synagogue, if he is at all admitted. His very name grates on the Jewish ear. Many of even the most liberal among them, who listen enraptured to beautiful teachings of Hindoo or Parsee or Arabic or Greek or Roman prophet or reformer or moralist, instinctively recoil from every mention of that reformer and moralist who stands nearest to us of them all, whose teachings are almost identical with ours, who is of our flesh and blood, our kinsman, our brother, a Jew like ourselves, our teacher, like our Moses, our Isaiah, our Hillel. There are some even in this liberal congregation who would rather have such subjects as this not touched upon. Others are probably already squirming in their seats, and to endure this discourse to its end will put their patience and good behavior to a severe test. Others, not connected with us at all, have been in a state of excitement, if not indignation, ever since they read the announcement that to-day's lecture theme would be "*Jesus in the Synagogue*," and are sitting in impatient suspense, expecting any moment to hear of our wholesale baptism, of our obliterating [R1499 : page 70] the word ISRAEL from the honored name of our congregation, of our turning bodily from monotheistic Judaism over to our arch-enemy, to Trinitarian, Man-worshipping Christianity.

There is certainly in all that we have so far heard or seen concerning the historic Jesus nothing so un-Jewish, or anti-Jewish, or unmonotheistic, that his name should grate on the ears of his own brethren. He certainly bears no responsibility for whatever pagan myth and heathen doctrine later disciples fastened on his name, that now the Jewish synagogue, in which he himself once worshiped, should be closed against him. There is certainly nothing in what he has taught or said so repugnant to the Jewish sense of right, to Biblical or Talmudic ethics, that while one may with impunity quote Ingersoll or Huxley or Haeckel or Buddha or Seneca or Lucretius in the Jewish pulpit, he cannot, for the most part, quote even such excellent lessons as

are contained in [R1500 : page 70] the Nazarene rabbi's *Sermon on the Mount* without incurring displeasure, or opposition, or interdiction.

This morning I shall select, from a large number at hand, just a few parallels between the sayings of Jesus and those of our other ancient Jewish savants, that you may convince yourselves how, by barring out from our synagogues the ethical sayings of Jesus, we close our doors to the noblest maxims in our own Biblical and Rabbinical literature.

[These we omit, for brevity. – EDITOR.]

Here are a dozen precepts from the first chapter of the *Sermon on the Mount*, and a dozen corresponding ethical maxims from Jewish Sacred Writings. With these passages before us (and what is true of these twelve passages is true of almost all the other ethical sayings of Jesus), which are identical in thought, frequently also in words, with those of Biblical and Talmudic writers, none of which are new, all of them fluent on the tongue of every cultured Jew at that time, wholly free from heathen mythology and from Gnostic theology and mysticism, how can we justly bar our doors to his ethical teachings, and extend a hearty welcome to identical teachings not only of other Jewish, but also of pagan, even agnostic, savants? With this knowledge of the parity of their ethical teachings before us, with the assurance that he himself taught nothing un-Jewish, said nothing unmonotheistic, is in no way responsible for the wrong done to Israel by his worshipers, what else does his banishment from his people, the exclusion of his teachings from Jewish homes, schools and synagogues, the Jewish aversion to his name, what else does it mean, if not visiting the guilt of deluded man-worshipers upon the innocent head of one like ourselves, and in purity of life and in excellence of teachings better than most of us?

It surely cannot be because of his opposition to, and scathing denunciation of, that barren ceremonialism and formalism which with many of his time had taken the place of pure religion, for, in truth, much fiercer were the denunciations of prophets like Isaiah, who inveighed against similar hypocrisies and ceremonialisms in their times. Much louder was their cry that it is not the fast, not sacrifice, not constant prayer, that God wants – nothing but clean hands, a pure heart, blessed deeds. More eager, and more successful even, were Rabbi Hillel and his school, who flourished shortly before the advent of Jesus, in their opposition to the rigorous legalism, profitless verbalisms and quibbles of the corrupted Pharisaism of their time.

With what justice, again I ask, do we banish him from our midst, whose very love for downtrodden Israel deluded him and his disciples into the belief that he was the expected Messiah, the "King of Israel," for which delusion he suffered as did many an unfortunate enthusiast before him, from the Roman tyrant a traitor's death? With what justice do we banish him, whose pure life, and beautiful teachings, and kindly deeds, whose gentleness and sympathy with the lowly and weak, whose unsparing severity on the haughty and hypocritical, are beautiful illustrations of what noble character, what exemplary specimens of humanity, Jewish home life, Jewish schooling, Jewish religion, can unfold and ripen? Why banish him, who has won a vast portion of humanity for civilization, for peace and good will, not by means of foreign dogmas or intricate theological abstractions and mysticism, but almost exclusively through such sublimely beautiful precepts and parables and incidents, as the *Sermon on the Mount*, the parable of the good Samaritan, his tenderness toward the little ones, the freedom of his intercourse with the lowly, that are all Jewish, that sprang from, and were nurtured on, Jewish soil? Why banish such an illustrious scion of our race, one of our best proofs to a prejudiced world of what the Jew really was, still is, and ever shall be?

To all such questions answer we have none, save that of deep rooted antipathy, engendered and nurtured by eighteen centuries of Christian cruelty and injustice toward the Jew. That antipathy, though pardonable, is much to be regretted. By banishing him, for no wrong of his own, we ourselves strengthened in those [R1500 : page 71] that worshiped him the belief that we were in reality the wicked people for which they held us, that we were his executioners, who gloried in the deed, that we delighted in nothing more than in reviling and in cursing him. By banishing from us the godly man we strengthened our persecutors and his followers in the belief that he was the Man-God, that their cruel treatment of us was the visitation of God for our spurning his only-begotten Son. By closing, even in these days of kindlier Christian treatment of the Jew, our synagogues to Jesus and to his teachings, while we open them wide to those of illustrious Mohammedan, heathen or skeptic, we confirm the Trinitarian's belief that we are stricken with spiritual blindness.

It is not with spiritual blindness that we are stricken, but with a blindness to our own and our religion's best interest. There has been enough of antipathy, and too much of unjust visitation of others' guilt upon an innocent head. The recognition which proud, intensely patriotic France has recently shown to the genius of a hostile nation, surely we ought to show to a genius who is at the same time our own brother, of our own flesh and blood, and whose genius was all drawn from our soil.

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I AM MY BELOVED'S.

Thy spirit, Lord, has filled my life
With sweetness and with love intense.
I love to live to do thy will,
Until thou'rt pleased to call me hence.

I love to sit at thy dear feet,
And learn of thee thy will, thy mind.
And thou dost teach me lessons sweet,
And learning these, great peace I find.

Thou'rt ever ready to bestow
A blessing fresh, so rich and rare;
And as we're filled with thy great love,
To that extent all things seem fair.

The sweetest portion of my days
Is spent just here, low at thy feet.
Words fail to tell how deep the joy.
The hour is holy when we meet.

How gladly will I hail the day
When I shall see thee as thou art,
And be made like thee, precious One,
And of thy glory share a part.

– S. J. McPHAIL.
