

THE JEWISH FAITH IN THE MILLENNIUM.

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"THE belief that Jesus would return to earth in the near future formed, according to Schleiermacher, the basis of the theory of final redemption with the early Christians; and Dorner considers it the first dogma laid down by the rising Church.

"Misgivings and consequent doubts sprang up only with the widening breach between Jewish and Gentile converts. As long as Christianity was viewed merely as a reformed Judaism, as the fulfilment of the Scriptures; as long as the Jewish nation retained in the eyes of the followers of Jesus its prerogatives and high vocation among the nations of the earth, no reluctance was felt to identify the great hope with the national restoration of Israel. It appeared but natural that the place where the Messiah suffered defeat should also witness his final triumph. Such a consummation would silence all doubts as to his authority forever. Israel had rejected him. Israel should be the first to receive him, repent and lead the rest of mankind to the foot of the cross, and thereby the Scripture should be fulfilled.

"But time wore on without bringing the looked-for reappearance of the Messiah. Christianity meanwhile left its native soil more and more behind, carrying the cross beyond the seas and into distant lands; while at home disaster after disaster devastated the land and drove its inhabitants in scattered fragments among the Gentiles for shelter. The preachers of the new faith chafed under what they considered an unnecessary burden – nay, a positive hindrance to the success of their missionary labors. Unfortunate people are always unwelcome; the defeated are undesirable companions of those who mean to conquer the world. In the case of the Jews, there was superadded the scorn bred by the thought that their downfall was the vengeance of the gods whom they denied and despised. To be thrown together with this wandering tribe was very undesirable to the Christians – nay, appeared as [R2314 : page 169] a stumbling-block

in their way. Can it not be removed? Can the stigma not be got rid of? A new interpretation of the passages in the Bible predicting the restoration of Palestine as the beginning of the new and better order of things on earth was sought and, of course, found.

"Divorce!" became the shibboleth of many leading spirits. 'No Judaism!' grew into a cry like 'No Popery!' in later England, and for the most part carried the day. In others, however, the first dogma of the Church held its own and gained new strength as the Christian writings were being gathered together, and the New Testament appeared as 'sacred Scripture' by the side of the Jewish canon. The words are all too clear and definite to be easily interpreted away. Endless controversies ensued, which are not finished to-day. Everybody knows what part the 'second advent' played in the history of the Church. There were times when large numbers of Christians actually prepared for the wonderful event, and if a recent statement made on good authority may be trusted one-half of the English clergy are firm believers in the primitive dogma, and are laboring to prepare the world for the impending manifestation of Christ.

"It is a great pity that the 'No Judaism!' cry was ever mingled with the disputes of the new faith. Had it never been heard, why, the truth must have become apparent that the breach between the old and the new covenants was not nearly as wide as it seemed to be: that mother and daughter were not fatally separated, and might pursue their own ways as friends and not as foes. The dearest hope the Israelite nourished in his bosom during all his wanderings – what was it but the coming of the Messiah, the Goel (Redeemer), the Savior of his people; the one who would rebuild **[R2315 : page 169]** 'the fallen Tabernacle of David' and restore his throne to greater than its pristine glory! That was the same throne on which the Christian expected Jesus to sit, surrounded by the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel and the resuscitated saints and martyrs, who should there receive their final reward. Jew and Christian hoped that Jerusalem would rise from her ruins, change her sackcloth and ashes for robes of honor, and, instead of being despised, become the desire of all nations.

"The question who that chosen vessel of God would be, whether the one who in his own person shared the fate of Jerusalem, or one who had not yet been seen on earth – could that be of greater weight than the common belief that he would unfailingly appear? A scion of the house of David he would be, an Israelite after the flesh, a ruler of his own people. If he should reveal himself as the man of sorrow who was nailed to the cross, the Jews would be the first to do him homage. Here was a clear and firm point of contact, strong enough to keep the two faiths together until 'the day of his coming.' But the new faith had grown into churches – churches of various tongues and divers nationalities, split up into sects, warring with each other about subtle points of dogma and ceremonies and persecuting one another with ruthless hatred.

"Amid these ever-growing conflicts Christianity was lost. I mean Christianity as it came from the lips of its Jewish teacher. His living words had congealed into creeds and systems, which, passing through the hands of writers of greatly divergent minds shaped these words – could it be otherwise? – into likeness with themselves. Powerful organizations arose which so far overshadowed their common origin that the Jew was mentioned only for condemnation, as the hater of the cross and the enemy of the Gospel, a tool of the devil to obstruct the kingdom of Christ. Yet half of his contention was widely conceded; *viz.*, that the work of the Messiah was not complete; that it had been only preparatory for the final redemption of the world.

"But this availed nothing, and the chasm was dug out deeper and deeper, which kept the two faiths apart – at what cost to the very purposes which were nearest the heart of Jesus we leave unsaid here. Instead of it let us refresh our hearts at the thought that after all the idea of a Millennium has not been lost to us – nay, that its kernel of truth is better understood now than ever before. For what it has failed to do in olden time, and must fail to do as long as it remains covered with dogmatic shells, it has begun to achieve in its liberated state. There is abroad now a new spirit of fraternity and community of sacred interests among the various religions; a desire for cooperation in those things good and true

and helpful which are the very beginning of the Kingdom of God on earth. If the Christian thinks he must do that service in the name of his Redeemer, that need not hinder his neighbor of a different belief from grasping his hand and becoming his fellow laborer. If the Jew is seen to do Millennial work, why should the Christian keep aloof? God has made all nations not only of One flesh, but also of One heart and of One mind; planted in each the same hope, the same pity; tries them all by the same sorrows, and gathers them all at last to the same earth. As in all things, so Heaven can only help us to peace and good will if we are earnest and zealous in seeking and pursuing them.

"What is the Millennial outlook at present? For the Jew; disheartening to almost despair, sadder even at the end than it was at the beginning of the century. The paeans with which he hailed 'the era of enlightenment' have died away from his lips. He stands aghast at the cruel rebukes he receives everywhere. The **[R2315 : page 170]** age of persecution has returned for his brethren in many lands. For what sin or misdeed? I will speak frankly; he who is branded as an unbeliever had only too much faith in the professions of his Christian surroundings. He flung himself into the currents of life, as they opened for him, with the ardor of youth; but when he reaches the desired shore in larger numbers than pleased his competitors he is pushed back and all the hateful vocabulary of scorn, abuse and calumny emptied on him with new vehemence. It is impossible for the non-Jew to realize the bitterness of soul which this disenchantment awakens in the Jew. Once he could bear it all in patience, because he felt the hand of God in it and thought it his portion during the dispersion; he walked his thorny path, as one of his poets sang: –

"His eye to earth, his heart to heaven.

"Now, his manhood rises against the injustice he suffers; the free man in him writhes under the indignities heaped upon him, and he has unlearned to seek and find compensation in the synagogues or in the Talmud.

"But for all that the Jew stands at his post and defends his old flag. He will not recede a hairbreath from the ground so far gained. Firm in his oldtime tried and fireproof faith in the coming of the Millennial Messiah, he labors on; where that is made impossible by the iron hand of his oppressor, he practices the art no one has learned better than he – 'to stand and wait.' Whether that coming of the Messiah will be the first or the second, no matter, if only the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven.

"It is not the will of man to direct his steps, says Scripture; nor in that of mankind either. Civilization, and it alone, is sought – and behold, Millennial fulfilment comes with it unsought and inevitably. The spirit cannot be restrained nor put behind prison doors; it moves where it listeth. Freedom of speech, *e.g.*, our undisputed possession, cannot coexist with church tyranny. The open court of an untrammelled press is the best safeguard of public justice. As it is shown in France, frenzied by artificially fanned passions to blindness, the combined power of civil and military authorities cannot wholly silence the voices, growing louder every day, which demand justice, justice at all hazards.

"Electricity quickens thought as well as muscle; the telephone sharpens the mental as well as the bodily ear. Growing ease and comfort in our homes, in travel, in the sickroom, make us more sensitive for the sufferings of those who are deprived of them, and also for the aches of the soul and the stings of conscience. Organized handicraft and manual labor have increased the sum of manhood among us a million times. Despite their many drawbacks the unions are a splendid school for self-discipline and self-government. They have taken the sons of toil out of their isolation, taught them the value of social order and of subordination to established laws. States within the states support each other as the pillars do in the steel framework of our modern towers of Babel. It was the confusion of tongues that marred the plan of the first one. Our workingmen understand each other; there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard intelligently. The bugbear of a war between capital and labor is fading more and more into air, for it would be just as

wise as a war would be between the wheel of an engine and the steam that drives it. Our societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, can they fail to make cruelties to man more and more hateful?

"With the doors of our public schools open to all comers, with our colleges and universities freeing themselves ever more from dogmatic fetters and sectarian narrowness; with free libraries, increasing every year by the thousands, reaching the most outlying districts and offering their treasures to the cottager in village or hamlet; with our Chautauquas and other active societies for the diffusion of knowledge; with our charities becoming wiser and more truly charitable as the spirit of humanity spreads, and with Toinby halls and settlements and sisterhoods and brotherhoods for personal service finding ever greater favor; with pulpits on all sides in which the religion of truth is taught as well as the truths of the religion for which they stand – thus splendidly equipped we may surely approach the gateways of the centuries with the calm composure born of the confidence that humanity has now advanced too far to be forced backward to any great distance or checked for any length of time.

"Our faces are firmly set toward the rising sun, and wherever light and love and right prevail God is present and is worshipped by all his servants in divers forms, yet One in spirit and aspiration. What if our songs are 'Songs before Sunrise,' and many deep shadows of uncovered wrong and unredeemed oppression cover still the earth – the watchman on the hill cries, 'The morning cometh' and 'The counsel of the Lord standeth forever.'"
