

enough to use the pretext of a fool. True, prophecy without inspiration, which predicts the future as a matter of fact, is childish and foolish, because no human eye can perceive and no human mind can calculate the innumerable and imponderable effects of the concatenation of human events. But prophecy as a matter of hope, the prediction of the future not as it will be, but as it ought to be, is indispensable for all who have, or desire to have, a clear conception of their duties toward the coming generations. And when we thus try to penetrate the mist that encircles the horizon of the present, a vision unfolds itself before our mind's eye, presenting a picture of the future American Israel. We perceive a community great in numbers, mighty in power, enjoying life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness — true life, not mere breathing space; full liberty, not mere elbow room; real happiness, not that of pasture beasts — actively participating in the civic, social and economic progress of the country, fully sharing and increasing its spiritual possessions and acquisitions, doubling its joys, halving its sorrows; yet deeply rooted in the soil of Judaism, clinging to its past, working for its future, true to its traditions, faithful to its aspirations, one in sentiment with their brethren wherever they are, attached to the land of their fathers as the cradle and resting place of the Jewish spirit; men with straight backs and raised heads, with big hearts and strong minds, with no conviction crippled, with no emotion stifled, with souls harmoniously developed, self-centered and self-reliant; receiving and resisting, not yielding like wax to every impress from the outside, but blending the best they possess with the best they encounter; not a horde of individuals, but a set of individualities, adding a new note to the richness of American life, leading a new current into the stream of American civilization; not a formless crowd of taxpayers and voters, but a sharply marked community, distinct and distinguished, trusted for its loyalty, respected for its dignity, esteemed for its traditions, valued for its virtues, a community as the Prophet of the Exile saw it in his vision: "And marked will be their seed among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples. Everyone that will see them will point to them as being a community blessed by the Lord."

HISTORICAL JUDAISM*

By RABBI SOLOMON SCHECHTER

The Jewish Theological Seminary is still known in many circles as "Schlechter's Seminary." This popularly applied title is a tribute to the fact that under Schlechter's leadership, which began in 1902 and continued until his death in 1915, the ailing Seminary was reorganized and revitalized. Because he was the dynamic leader of the Seminary and because he later organized the United Synagogue and because he impressed the stamp of his own thinking and personality upon both institutions, he is regarded as historically the most important figure in Conservative Judaism. However, it is wise to note that he nowhere set forth a coherent statement of doctrine and position. Indeed, he repeatedly asserted that he was not creating a new party, but reviving a very old one — traditional Judaism, and he generally referred to a Conservative tendency rather than to a Conservative movement.

Schlechter's tendency to "halt between two opinions" is reflected in the selections below. He describes the "Historical School," in the first selection, and seems to approve it intellectually, while confessing, at the end, that he cannot quite stomach it, emotionally. The selections from his very eloquent addresses are those fragments from much longer speeches in which he affirms the historical outlook and the conservative spirit. They are fragments by necessity. There is no complete essay or speech in which he undertakes to define the role and function of a Conservative movement.

Solomon Schechter (1847-1915) studied in European Seminaries and Universities and subsequently taught at Cambridge University. He achieved world-wide renown by virtue of his discovery of the Cairo Genizah and by his extremely felicitous writings on Jewish subjects. To the Conservative movement of future years he bequeathed a seminal phrase — "Catholic Israel" — by which he meant that Judaism has an inner unity which is manifested in the generally accepted sentiment of devoted

* Excerpted from the Introduction to *First Steps in Judaism*, Philadelphia, 1896.

Jews. He left it, too, the legacy of a strong Seminary, with a remarkable group of scholars, and the United Synagogue. One of his more remarkable achievements was that, by dint of his personality, his outlook, and his prestige he imposed a counterweight to the Reform movement in the early years of the century and served as a rallying point for Jews of a Conservative tendency.

In reading the proofs (of this volume) I have been struck by the fact that there is assumed in them a certain conception of the Synagogue which, familiar though it be to the Jewish student, may appear obscure and even strange to the general English reader. For brevity's sake I will call it the High Synagogue, though it does not correspond in all details to what one is accustomed to understand under the term of High Church. The High Synagogue has a history which is not altogether without its points of interest.

Some years ago when the waves of the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament reached the shores of this country (England), and such questions as the heterogeneous composition of the Pentateuch, the comparatively late date of the Levitical Legislation, and the post-exilic origin of certain Prophecies as well as of the Psalms began to be freely discussed by the press and even in the pulpit, the invidious remark was often made: What will now become of Judaism when its last stronghold, the Law, is being shaken to its very foundations?

Such a remark shows a very superficial acquaintance with the nature of an old historical religion like Judaism, and the richness of the resources it has to fall back upon in cases of emergency.

As a fact, the emergency did not quite surprise Judaism. The alarm signal was given some 150 years ago by an Italian Rabbi, Abiad Sar Shalom Basilea, in his pamphlet *The Faith of the Sages*. The pamphlet is, as the title indicates, of a polemical character, reviewing the work of the Jewish rationalistic schools; and after warning up in his attacks against their heterodox views, Basilea exclaims: "Nature and simple meaning, they are our misfortune." By "nature and simple meaning" Basilea, who wrote in Hebrew, understood what we would call Natural Science and Philology. With the right instinct of faith, Basilea hit on the real sore points. For though he mostly argues against the philosophical systems of Aristotle and his commentators, he felt that it is not speculation that will ever seriously endanger religion. There is hardly any

metaphysical system, old or new, which has not in course of time been adapted by able dialecticians to the creed which they happened to hold. In our own time we have seen the glorious, though not entirely novel spectacle, of Agnosticism itself becoming the rightful handmaid of Queen Theology. The real danger lies in "nature" (or Natural Science) with its stern demand of law and regularity in all phenomena, and in the "simple meaning" (or Philology) with its inconsiderate insistence on truth. Of the two, the "simple meaning" is the more objectionable. Not only is it very often at variance with Tradition, which has its own code of interpretation, but it is constantly increasing the difficulties raised by science. For if words could only have more than one meaning, there would be no objection to reading the first words of Genesis, "In a beginning God *enlightened*." The difficulties of science would then be disposed of easily enough. Maimonides, who was as bold an interpreter as he was a deep metaphysician, hinted plainly enough that were he as convinced of the eternity of matter as he was satisfied of the impossibility of any corporeal quality in the Deity, he would feel as little compunction in explaining (figuratively) the contents of the first chapter of Genesis as he did in allegorising the anthropomorphic passages of the Bible. Thus in the end all the difficulties resolve themselves into the one great difficulty of the "simple meaning." The best way to meet this difficulty was found to be to shift the centre of gravity in Judaism and to place it in the secondary meaning, thus making religion independent of philology and all its dangerous consequences.

This shifting work was chiefly done, perhaps not quite consciously, by the historical school which followed upon that of Mendelssohn and his first successors. The historical school, which is still in the ascendant, comprises many of the best Jewish writers who either by their learning or by their ecclesiastical profession as Rabbis and preachers in great communities have acquired some important position among their brethren. The men who have inaugurated this movement were Krochmal (1785-1841), Rapoport, (1790-1867), and Zuntz (1794-1886).

It is not a mere coincidence that the first representatives of the historical school were also the first Jewish scholars who proved themselves more or less ready to join the modern school of Bible Criticism, and even to contribute their share to it. The first two,

Krochmal and Rapoport, early in the second quarter of this century accepted and defended the modern view about a second Isaiah, the post-exilic origin of many Psalms, and the late date of Ecclesiastes; whilst Zunz, who began (in 1832) with denying the authenticity of Ezekiel, concluded his literary career (1873) with a study on the Bible (*Gesammelte Schriften*, i. pp. 217-290), in which he expressed his view "that the Book of Leviticus dates from a later period than the Book of Deuteronomy, later even than Ezekiel, having been composed during the age of the Second Temple, when there already existed a well-established priesthood which superintended the sacrificial worship." But when Revelation or the Written Word is reduced to the level of history, there is no difficulty in elevating history in its aspect of Tradition to the rank of Scripture, for both have then the same human or divine origin (according to the student's predilection for the one or the other adjective), and emanate from the same authority. Tradition becomes thus the means whereby the modern divine seeks to compensate himself for the loss of the Bible, and the theological balance is to the satisfaction of all parties happily readjusted.

Jewish Tradition, or, as it is commonly called, the Oral Law, or, as we may term it (in consideration of its claims to represent an interpretation of the Bible), the Secondary Meaning of the Scriptures, is mainly embodied in the works of the Rabbis and their subsequent followers during the Middle Ages. Hence the zeal and energy with which the historical school applied itself to the Jewish post-biblical literature, not only elucidating its texts by means of new critical editions, dictionaries, and commentaries, but also trying to trace its origins and to pursue its history through its gradual development. To the work of Krochmal in this direction a special essay is devoted in this volume. The labours of Rapoport are more of a biographical and bibliographical nature, being occupied mostly with the minor details in the lives and writings of various famous Jewish Rabbis in the Middle Ages; thus they offer but little opportunity for general theological comment. Of more importance in this respect are the hints thrown out in his various works by Zunz, who was just as emphatic in asserting the claims of Tradition as he was advanced in his views on Bible criticism. Zunz's greatest work is *Die Gottesdienstliche Vorträge* — an awkward title, which in fact means "The History of the Interpretation of the

Scriptures as Forming a Part of the Divine Service." Now if a work displaying such wide learning and critical acumen, and written in such an impartial spirit can be said to have a bias, it was towards bridging over the seemingly wide gap between the Written Word (the Scriptures) and the Spoken Word (the Oral Law or Tradition), which was the more deeply felt, as most of Zunz's older contemporaries were men, grown up in the habits of thought of the eighteenth century — a century distinguished both for its ignorance of, and its power of ignoring, the teachings of history. Indeed it would seem that ages employed in making history have no time for studying it.

Zunz accomplished the task he set himself, by showing, as already indicated, the late date of certain portions of the Bible, which by setting the early history of Israel in an ideal light betray the moralising tendency of their authors, and are, in fact, little more than a traditional interpretation of older portions of Scripture, adapted to the religious needs of the time. Placing thus the origin of Tradition in the Bible itself, it was a comparatively easy matter for Zunz to prove its further continuity. Prophecy and Interpretation are with him the natural expressions of the religious life of the nation; and though by the loss of Israel's political independence the voice of the prophets gradually died away, the voice of God was still heard. Israel continues to consult God through the medium of the Scriptures, and He answers His people by the mouth of the Scribes, the Sages, the Interpreters of the Law; whilst the liturgy of the Synagogue, springing up at the time when Psalms were still being composed, expands in its later stages through the work of the Poets of the Synagogue into such a rich luxuriance "that it forms in itself a treasure of history, poetry, philosophy; and prophecy and psalms are again revived in the hymnology of the Middle Ages." This is in brief the lesson to be learned from Zunz's *Gottesdienstliche Vorträge* as far as it deals with the significance of Tradition; and it is in the introduction to this work that Zunz expresses himself to the following effect: Indispensable is the free Spoken Word. Mankind has acquired all its ideal treasures only by Word of Mouth; an education continuing through all stages of life. In Israel, too, the Word of Instruction transmitted from mouth to mouth was never silenced.

The historical school has never, to my knowledge, offered to the

world a theological programme of its own. By the nature of its task, its labours are mostly conducted in the field of philology and archaeology, and it pays but little attention to pure dogmatic questions. On the whole, its attitude towards religion may be defined as an enlightened Scepticism combined with a staunch conservatism which is not even wholly devoid of a certain mystical touch. As far as we may gather from vague remarks and hints thrown out now and then, its theological position may perhaps be thus defined: — It is not the mere revealed Bible that is of first importance to the Jew, but the Bible as it repeats itself in history, in other words, as it is interpreted by Tradition. The Talmud, that wonderful mine of religious ideas from which it would be just as easy to draw up a manual for the most orthodox as to extract a *vide-mecum* for the most sceptical, lends some countenance to this view by certain controversial passages — not to be taken seriously — in which “the words of the scribes” are placed almost above the words of the Torah. Since then the interpretation of Scripture or the Secondary Meaning is mainly a product of changing historical influences, it follows that the centre of authority is actually removed from the Bible and placed in some *living body*, which, by reason of its being in touch with the ideal aspirations and the religious needs of the age, is best able to determine the nature of the Secondary Meaning. This living body, however, is not represented by any section of the nation, or any corporate priesthood, or Rabbihood, but by the collective conscience of Catholic Israel as embodied in the Universal Synagogue. The Synagogue “with its long, continuous cry after God for more than twenty-three centuries,” with its uninterrupted succession of Prophets, Palmists, Scribes, Assideans, Rabbis, Patriarchs, Interpreters, Elucidators, Eminences, and Teachers, with its glorious record of saints, martyrs, sages, philosophers, scholars, and mystics; this Synagogue, the only true witness to the past, and forming in all ages the sublimest expression of Israel’s religious life, must also retain its authority as the sole true guide for the present and the future. And being in communion with this Synagogue, we may also look hopefully for a safe and rational solution of our present theological troubles. For was it not the Synagogue which even in antiquity determined the fate of Scripture? On the one hand, for

example, books like Ezekiel, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes, were only declared to be Holy Writ in virtue of the interpretation put upon them by the Rabbis: and, on the other hand, it was the veto of the Rabbis which excluded from the canon the works that now pass under the name of Apocrypha. We may, therefore, safely trust that the Synagogue will again assert its divine right in passing judgement upon the Bible when it feels called upon to exercise that holy office. It is “God who has chosen the Torah, and Moses His servant, and Israel His people.” But indeed God’s choice invariably coincides with the wishes of Israel; He “performeth all things” upon which the counsils of Israel, meeting under promise of the Divine presence and communion, have previously agreed. As the Talmud somewhere expresses itself with regard to the Book of Esther, “They have confirmed above what Israel has accepted below.”

Another consequence of this conception of Tradition is that it is neither Scripture nor primitive Judaism, but general custom which forms the real rule of practice. Holy Writ as well as history, Zunz tells us, teaches that the law of Moses was never fully and absolutely put in practice. Liberty was always given to the great teachers of every generation to make modifications and innovations in harmony with the spirit of existing institutions. Hence a return to Mosesism would be illegal, pernicious, and indeed impossible. The norm as well as the sanction of Judaism is the practice actually in vogue. Its consecration is the consecration of general use. — OR, in other words, of Catholic Israel. It was probably with a view to this communion that the later mystics introduced a short prayer to be said before the performance of any religious ceremony, in which, among other things, the speaker professes his readiness to act “in the name of all Israel.”

It would be out of place in an introductory essay to pursue any further this interesting subject with its far-reaching consequences upon Jewish life and Jewish thought. But the foregoing remarks may suffice to show that Judaism did not remain quite inactive at the approach of the great religious crisis which our generation has witnessed. Like so many other religious communities, it reviewed its forces, entrenched itself on the field of history, and what it lost of its old devotion to the Bible, it has sought to make up by a renewed reverence for institutions.

In this connection, a mere mention may suffice of the ultra-Orthodox party, led by the late Dr. S. R. Hirsch of Frankfurt (1808-1889) whose defiance of reason and criticism even a Ward might have envied, and whose saintliness and sublimity even a Keble might have admired. And, to take an example from the opposite school, we must at least record the name of that devout Jew, Ostas Schorr (1816-1895), in whom we have profound learning combined with an uncompromising disposition of mind productive of a typical champion of Radicalism in things religious. These men are, however, representative of two extremes, and their followers constitute mere minorities; the majority is with the historical school.

How long the position of this school will prove tenable is another question. Being brought up in the old Low Synagogue, where, with all attachment to tradition, the Bible was looked upon as the crown and the climax of Judaism, the old Adam still asserts itself in me, and in unguarded moments makes me rebel against this new rival of revelation in the shape of history. At times this now fashionable exaltation of Tradition at the expense of Scripture even impresses me as a sort of religious bimetalism in which bold speculators in theology try to keep up the market value of an inferior currency by denouncing loudly the bright shining gold which they would have us believe, is less fitted to circulate in the vulgar use of daily life than the small cash of historical interpretation. Nor can I quite reconcile myself to this alliance of religion with history, which seems to me both unworthy and unnatural. The Jew, some writer aptly remarked, was the first and the fiercest Nonconformist of the East, and so Judaism was always a protesting religion. To break the idols, whether of the past or of the present, has always been a sacred mission of Judaism, and has indeed been esteemed by it as a necessary preliminary to the advent of the kingdom of God on earth. One of its daily prayers was and still is: "We therefore hope in Thee, O Lord our God, that we may speedily behold the glory of Thy might, when . . . the idols will be cut off, when the world will be perfected under the kingdom of the Almighty." It bowed before truth, but it had never made a covenant with facts only because they were facts. History had to be re-made and to sanctify itself before it found its way into its sacred annals. Nor did Judaism make a virtue of swallowing down

institutions. Such institutions as crept into it in course of time had, when the Synagogue was conscious of their claims to form part of religion, to submit to the laborious process of a thorough adaptation to prophetic notions before they were formally sanctioned. But when this process was deemed impossible or impracticable, Judaism boldly denounced the past in such fierce language as the prophets used and as still finds its echo in such passages of the liturgy as "first our ancestors were worshippers of idols and now God has brought us near to His service"; or "But of a truth, we and our ancestors have sinned."

However, it would be unfair to argue any further against a theological system which, as already said, was never avowed distinctly by the historical school—a school, moreover, with which speculation is a matter of minor importance. The main strength of this school lies in its scientific work, for which Judaism will always be under a sense of deep gratitude. And living as we do in an age in which history reigns supreme in all departments of human thought, we may hope that even its theology, as far as it goes, will "do" for us, though I neither hope nor believe that it will do for those who come after us.

