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CRITICAL NOTICES.

The Ideal in Judaism and Other Sermons.

By the Rev. MORRIS JOSEPH. (London, 1893.)

IT is no little pleasure to have been called upon to write a notice of the volume of sermons which the Rev. Morris Joseph has given to us under the name of "The Ideal in Judaism."

It is not perhaps quite easy for a minister of another creed to estimate aright the value of sermons preached to congregations whose whole method of looking at religious questions is, by tradition, so different from any to which he has been accustomed; but yet no one who has the cause of religious truth at heart can for a moment doubt the great value of sermons so simple in style, so sympathetic in tone, so direct in their aim, as those which are before us. Mr. Joseph has, presumably, to minister to a congregation of well-to-do intelligent people, who have the special opportunities of doing good, and the special temptations for evil, which a comfortable position in the world affords; and it is most reassuring, in the face of the taunts so commonly levelled at religious teachers in our day, to find such plain, straightforward speaking about the dangers of idleness and luxury. There seems to be a consensus of opinion that religion has concerned itself all too little during the last half century with the things of this present life. We have allowed our people to gather enormous fortunes without leading them to enquire into the methods by which they have amassed their wealth; we have too often allowed our poor to remain in a temporal condition so degraded that it has been no wonder that they have given but a feeble response to the message of joy in the next world with which we have tried to comfort them in this. We have taken no care to relieve the miseries of their present condition, or to put them into such tolerable physical circumstances as shall enable them to give some time to the consideration of those things which lie beyond the sphere of merely animal life. They cannot listen to us, because, like the children of Israel of old, they are weighed down by anguish of spirit and by cruel bondage.

Mr. Joseph speaks with no uncertain sound about the importance of a carefully ordered life, of "plain living and high thinking" for the attainment of the spiritual life. It is for this end that he conceives the sanitary laws of the Pentateuch, at least in part, to

have been enacted ; so that the people of Israel might be taught by a carefully disciplined life, by the avoidance of much that was in itself innocent, and the performance of many duties in themselves irksome, to gain self-mastery in large things through learning its value in things of lesser importance.

“The separation of Israel is not the sole object which these precepts are designed to accomplish. Moral purity is their aim. For what does obedience to them involve but the best form of self-restraint—the restraint of the animal appetite? Looking at the whole body of Levitical legislation, and seeing how it evidently aimed at the regulation of sensual desires of all kinds, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that this was one of the objects of the dietary laws So long as self-conquest is noble, so long will these laws be worth preserving, and obedience to them be a mark of nobility.”

Again, in commending simplicity and abstinence, Mr. Joseph quotes a most beautiful saying of R. Meir on the value of these habits in the formation of religious life, “This is the way of the religious life: thou shalt eat thy morsel of bread with salt and drink water by measure, sleep on the earth, and live a life of sorrow. Do this, and thou shalt be happy.”

I have quoted these passages, because I think that nothing can be more important just now to the cause of religion than that all teachers and preachers should speak definitely and clearly about the extreme danger in which those stand who are trying to combine the pursuit of ease and the possession of wealth with the service of God. We have neglected to teach the value of this present life as a discipline for the life which is to come, because we have forgotten the eternal import of trifling actions, the infinite value of the commonplace.

I cannot help thinking that this is a point in which we of different religions can make common cause even now. The Old Testament is full from beginning to end of this teaching of the sacredness of secular life, the need of consecration of time and energies for eternal purposes ; could we not preach more energetically than we do this much forgotten truth? Mr. Joseph holds this belief to be at the root of all which is noblest in Judaism, and if this is so, as we may well believe, undoubtedly this doctrine will bear abundant fruit in noble work for God and man. “This sanctification of the home is,” he says, “of course only one instance of the transfiguration of the common elements of life which is so characteristic of our religion. Judaism claims for the ideal the whole domain of the actual ; it has annexed the world, and established there the kingdom of heaven.”

Of very great interest is the sermon on "the Sacrificial Rite." The writer quotes opinions of great authorities which are of extreme interest to show how early it was recognised that mere bloodshed could have no value in the sight of God. He has scant sympathy with those Jews who look forward to a revival of animal sacrifices, who "picture men as taking up once more with the effete ceremonial of a semi-civilised world." No doubt it is hard to picture in our day a recrudescence of the sacrifice in this sense, or to sympathise with those who could wish for such a thing; but, I confess, I was disappointed that Mr. Joseph enters so slightly, and treats, as I cannot help thinking he does, so contemptuously, the religious observances of the Old Testament. "Our conception of God will not permit us to think that he, who is infinitely higher than the most exalted ideas that we can form of him, can find delight in the burning sacrifice." Quite so, but did God not really delight in the sacrifices of old? Surely, the motive which prompted Abraham to offer the only sacrifice of which he knew, his dearest possession, is one which demands even now our reverence. The form of his devotion is horrible, but the devotion itself is to all ages our example. It is, to my mind, a thought which fills one with reverence for the long suffering goodness of God, that He should have accepted in such imperfect forms the universal instinct in man of the desire for union with Himself which has been broken by sin, and the desire for self-consecration through self-sacrifice to His service.

Is it not probable that in an early stage of civilisation men could not attain to anything higher in idea than the willing surrender of the property they valued most highly? It remained for a latter age to learn that God demands a more costly sacrifice, the sacrifice of the consecrated life, and the obedient will.

Probably Mr. Joseph would allow all this at once; but he does, I confess, give me the idea that he thinks there is but little to be learnt from the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law. To a Christian, who is accustomed day by day to commemorate a sacrifice of Will and Life, it seems not unnatural to look for some reminder in a sermon on sacrifice that the demand of God for sacrifice continues the same, though the material must now be more costly, because personal.

If I were asked to say what there is in this volume which makes a Christian feel that there is (in spite of much that is beautiful and helpful for Christians as well as Jews) yet a very real need left unsupplied and almost unacknowledged, I should say, unhesitatingly, that it is the conception of God which runs through these sermons, which would seem, I think, to any one brought up in Christianity, painfully cold and distant.

To a Christian, God is so much more than the "Almighty, Supreme

and awful Being," or the "one impalpable, all-powerful." God is to us the very life of all created things ; not seated in remote majesty in a heaven infinitely distant, ruling justly, contemplating serenely all beings He has made ; but dwelling with men, living in human souls, inspiring by His indwelling spirit every noble action, revealing Himself in every human character, sharing human suffering, entering Himself into the conflict with sin and suffering—bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows.

There is a great revelation, as it seems to me, in Judaism, of the righteousness and holiness of God, a sense of His majesty and immensity of which we Christians perhaps too often need to be reminded ; but we cry out for a God who will not sit up there in heaven, making no sign, giving up nothing Himself, having no share in his creature's crowning virtue, the gift of *self*-sacrifice. It is man's noblest endowment that he can give *himself*, body and soul, for a cause or a person he loves. Is this a faculty in which he is superior to God ? Has God never come down from that far-off throne, and given up something which is of His own essence, something which involves a real *self*-surrender, out of love for men ?

If this is not so, then surely He is deficient in what man rightly regards as the crown of holiness, and we cannot worship Him, much less love Him. He may terrify us with the thunder of Sinai, He may awe us into reverence by His unapproachable holiness, but the fact will remain, that a poor woman who willingly gives up her life for her child, will be far nobler than He.

I do not, I need hardly say, mean to imply that this ideal of God is lost in Judaism ; but I do think that any Christian reader will feel at once, after reading this volume, that it does not occupy the same place here as it would among Christians. "The Lord is one," is the battle cry of the Jew, we are told ; "God is Love" is the motto of the Christian. It is when God reveals Himself in human character that He appeals to the love as well as the awe of His children.

" So the All-Great were the All-Loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice,
Saying, " O heart I made, a heart beats here !
Face my hands fashioned, see it in myself !
Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee."

One is struck by the almost entire absence of any reference to the Founder of Christianity. One does not expect, of course, that he should occupy the same prominent place which he would in a volume of Christian sermons, but with Mr. Montefiore I think that "the

teaching of a Jew whose life and character have been regarded by almost all the best and wisest people who have heard or read of his actions and his words as the great religious exemplar for every age, is surely *à priori*, as we might say, worth the attention of Jewish readers." Mr. Joseph only refers once or twice to him, and then in not very laudatory terms.

His treatment of Christianity again is, I think, not over sympathetic.

Christianity is not essentially a "dogmatic" religion in the sense that it revels in promulgating dogmas. It is dogmatic, because owing to the exigencies of controversy it has been obliged, reluctantly and in self-defence, to meet, as best it might, false or imperfect views of God. Judaism is mainly undogmatic, I venture to think, because by the accident of its position it has been out of connection with great systems of philosophy, either Greek or Oriental.

Certainly, Anglican Churchmen are not bound blindly to accept every word of the Gospel narrative as absolutely true, unless they can be proved to be so by competent authority. Any one who has read Prof. Sanday's Bampton Lectures will see for himself how possible it is for an orthodox Christian to be ready to welcome the fullest enquiry into the historical sources of his religion.

It is unfortunate that both Christians and Jews are too apt to look at the worst side of their opponent's case in order to strengthen their own; one knows how too often Judaism is misrepresented by Christians; one could only wish that Mr. Joseph could have taken a more kindly view of Christianity in his sermon on "Judaism and Christianity." Perhaps as yet we can hardly hope to understand one another, but no doubt we are more ready to do so than ever we have been in former days.

I cannot help expressing a wish that Mr. Joseph would give us some day a volume of selections from the writings of Jewish Fathers, which are practically unknown to Christian readers, and which, judging by the few quotations in this volume, would be of the deepest interest both to Christians and Jews. Also I should like to plead for a sermon some day on the relation of Jewish symbolism to Art; the subject has been ably dealt with by Mr. R. H. Hutton, but still much remains to be said on the subject.

I wish other Christians could read, as I have been able to do, this volume; we have doubtless much to learn from one another, and if the reading of these sermons does not make a Christian less happy in his own creed, it does at least give him a very sincere respect and affection for those who are fighting the battle of God in another part of the field.

HAROLD ANSON.