

The Maccabæan

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF JEWISH LIFE AND LITERATURE

Vol. I

November, 1901

No. 2

The Internal Jewish Question: National Dissolution or Continued Existence

SOME of the most uncompromising opponents of Zionism concede to the movement the attribute of spirituality. They go so far as to maintain that it is the only movement in the Judaism of to-day that deserves to be described as spiritual. Yet the Zionist who depends for the steadfastness of his purpose and the strength of his conviction upon the concessions of the adversary, will find the concession of spirituality a rope of sand. These apparently generous opponents bestow with one hand only to take with the other. Their approval is followed by a "but." They express doubt in the ability of Jews to govern themselves, which is tantamount to mistrust at once in the spiritual strength of the Jew and his practical skill. They confess fear of a movement that purposes to concentrate Jews in one locality and constitute them a body independent of other peoples in the making of its laws and the guarding of its welfare. For a state Jewish in composition and complexion, they foresee anarchy and corruption within, war and annihilation from without. They hold that Jewry would gather itself together from all corners of the globe for a Nero of the Jew-haters the better to fell the whole nation at a single blow, and they prophesy that floundering Jewry will prove its own Nero.

Of such paradoxes is Jewish history made up: libraries of books have been written to solve the mystery of a nation stripped of land and language, existing for centuries; and now it is feared that the same nation cannot live, or cannot live worthily, if it should come into possession of its land and its language.

The commendation of the adversaries of whom we are speaking is tainted with the time-worn fallacy that there is such a thing as a good theory which yet is incapable of being applied in practice. Or it rests upon a puerile misunderstanding of the term spiritual, a blurred notion that spiritual is synonymous with Utopian, and

that what is visionary is admirable solely because it is visionary,—a transfer to the moral sphere of the principle on which young authors and readers admire "fine writing."

Their distrust is a serious indictment, more sweeping than they seem to know. It is distrust, not only of the efficacy of the Zionist movement, of the comity of the nations, of the powers and the character of the Jew, but, bluntly, of Judaism itself. The inference from their inconsistent opinions of Zionism is that Judaism is what its enemies for two thousand years have been asserting it to be, an effete system, a dead-alive issue, an agglomerate of legal quibbles and antiquarian curiosities, without generative power or progressive vital impulse; at best, an utopian vision whose realization would be an anachronism.

Nothing but the event can demonstrate whether a plan for the Jewish State worked out by Zionists assembled in council will prove in all its details practicable and wise. The point under debate is not, however, whether a scheme formulated by Zionists will turn out a good working plan. The question is whether the fundamental proposition set up by Zionism, namely, that the Jewish problem will be solved by the restoration of Jewish nationality, is true, and is capable of realization in one form or another.

The doubters cannot be silenced by being reminded of the diplomatic genius of a Beaconsfield, or the statemanship of a Lasker, or the mastery of jurisprudence by a Judah P. Benjamin, or the patriotic activity of a Riesser, a Crémieux, and a Luzzatti. They will reply, and with some degree of justice, that the ability and achievement of such Jews must be regarded as the product, not of Jewish genius, but of Jewish genius influenced, moulded, and perhaps transformed, by forces lying outside the Jewish range. If David Ricardo, Ferdinand Lassalle, Karl Marx, and Eduard Bernstein be cited to them as evidence that the

Jewish mind is alive to the problems of modern society, it serves only as a suggestion of the pitfalls the Jewish State will encounter in endeavoring to reconcile latter-day perplexities with the directness of ancient Jewish law, with its stern denunciation of usurious encroachment by capital, with its unsophisticated solution of the property difficulties of Zelophchad's daughter. And where is the guileless Zionist who would dare point, by way of refutation, to the political achievements of Moses, David, Solomon, and Ezra? On all sides he would be pierced with historical taunts read as prophecies: how again and again the people rebelled under Moses, even in the wilderness, where they must still have remembered vividly that God Himself, upon eagle's wings, had borne them away from Egyptian oppression; how the prowess of David had served to call down upon the Israelites bloody wars with the neighboring nations; how Solomon's glory and pomp had been a shining veil under which teemed the corruption that divided the kingdom after his death, and bred a progeny of evils ending only with the extinction of the First Commonwealth; and how Ezra's strenuous Judaic spirit conjured up the sceptre of religious strife, and sowed the seed of dissension in almost every Jewish home.

That much of this argumentation is specious, giving prominence only to the facts that favor doubt of Jewish ability to organize and govern, could easily be shown, if it were worth while. We can afford to disregard it, for Zionism rests its case, not upon what some Jews have or have not done, but upon what all Jews may do by reason of the progressiveness, the native forces, the potentialities of Judaism.

If Zionism had but one Jewish question to solve, the external one—the question created by anti-Semitism and industrial and economic disturbances, then the solution it proposes, the re-establishment of the Jewish life for the Jew, might well awaken misgivings. An impulse shaped by such accidental considerations might bring together irreconcilable elements not to be fused into a national unit.

Besides the external Jewish question, there is an internal one, the Jewish question created by the needs of the Jew as such, the question of national dissolution or of continued existence, together with the terms on which continued existence will be a blessing to the race and to mankind.

It has become almost an axiom with the reader of Jewish history, that the construction and elab-

oration of the Talmudic system has been the vital principle of Jewish longevity. In obedience to a trustworthy instinct, the Diaspora disregarded the ordinary laws of organization. The Jews would have suffered more than they did, had they not appeared weak collectively. To escape annihilation they had to forego every endeavor to hold themselves together as a nation by means of external bonds. Parallel with the need for such caution ran the intense desire to remain a unit. National ingenuity, unconsciously elaborating a plan of safety, pushed into the foreground a factor peculiarly Jewish. Wherever the Jew may have been, his Talmudic education identified him with the Jew in every other part of the world. While he was drinking in the cultures of Spain and the Arabs, of France, Italy, and Germany, he was counteracting, by doses of the Talmud,—an extract from his very own flesh and bones,—whatever anti-Jewish elements the foreign civilizations held in solution. So effectual was the Talmudic discipline, that in spite of the self-effacement he has had to practice, and the external and internal disintegrating influences to which he has been exposed, the Jew is as certainly a Jew now as he was at the beginning of the dispersion.

For two thousand years these disciplinary tactics were successful. To-day, however, he who runs may read that the Talmudic inspiration has lost itself like a river in a sandy waste. The bond of fifty generations has been ruptured, no one knows how, and twentieth century Israel is left without a national anchor: "All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his way." Because they realize and deplore the state of affairs, the opponents of Zionism are willing to concede spirituality to the movement they condemn. Spiritual they must, indeed, acknowledge it to be, when in the place of the indifference and the wordy disunion of yesterday, they to-day see national feeling revive at the call of Zionism, and Hebrew language and literature resuscitate under its touch.

Not that the possibilities of the Talmud have been exhausted, not that it has yielded up all its secrets valuable to the sciences, not that its store of ethics has been consumed or its principles superseded. So little is this true that after fifteen hundred years of its study, the Jews, eminent for their ability as translators, have not succeeded in putting it into a modern or into any other language to their own Hebraic satisfaction. To be mindful of its unexplored regions does not contradict the patent fact that the people on the

whole have been diverted from it. More and more they have been leaving it to scholars to be dissected and analyzed scientifically; less and less they have been impelled by its animating force, and this in spite of the fact that they owe it the position they hold in the world of to-day. They play their honorable and useful part, because they are dowered by ancestral Talmud study with intellectual alertness and spiritual endurance. Freighted with the heritage and trained by the discipline of the East, they have become equal co-workers with the West.

The question arises, and this is the internal Jewish question: How long can the effects of the Talmudic discipline outlast itself? Can the Jew go on forever drawing upon his reserve stock of "Jewishness?" At this point Zionism and its adversaries part company.

The indifferent and the despairing hold that there is no balm in Gilead for the Jewish disease. They interpret Israel's needs as his death-knell. The time has come, they say, for the Jew to permit his personality to be merged in that of the nations with whom he has been a sojourner during the dispersion. He no longer has a mission to proclaim to them. Racially, nationally, and religiously, those who speak thus have become so far estranged from the heart of Judaism that they do not understand the accent of its need.

Others, afflicted with mental myopia and emotional "shortness of spirit," stand so close to a few of the many aspects of Judaism, that they cannot take in the potentialities of the whole. They maintain, the life led by the Jew during the Talmudic age to be the only possible Jewish life. It keeps the Jew apart and thoroughly Jewish, and at the same time it keeps him in contact with the nations before whom he is to stand as the witness of God. Theoretically there may seem to be other possibilities, but they are so remote from the present-day Jew that they are foregone failures. If the Jew but persists long enough in the effort to revivify the Talmudic life, the olden spirit is bound to return, and the dry bones must live.

Zionism takes an altogether different view of the situation. It is more hopeful: it repudiates the inference from present confusion that the Jew has ceased to be an independent agent of civilization. Though he may no longer be an eloquent witness or a persuasive missionary, Judaism has lost none of its vitality, and he can again become its exponent by living a Jewish life. Yet Zionism is not heedless of facts: it sees and frankly

acknowledges the need of the Jew to undergo a process of rejuvenation from which he shall emerge a Jew — a Jew with Jewish ideals and Jewish aspirations drawn from the very source of Judaism. And Zionism is more resourceful and more energetic: it will not accept Talmudism as the exclusively normal and as the final Jewish state; it discerns other possibilities, and is prepared to try them.

Zionism is not only hopeful, not only alive to existing conditions, resourceful, and energetic; it is also practical, and never more so than when it resorts to the Talmudic age for instruction.

The Talmudic age was ushered in by one of the most notable struggles recorded in history, the resistance offered to Rome by the Jewish Commonwealth. Could the Jews assume that their dispersion was the will of Providence until they had taken every step to avert what in their human judgment seemed inevitable ruin? To-day human judgment tells the Jew that he has before him national dissolution, national stagnation, or national rehabilitation. When he succumbs in the struggle for the last, then Zionism will believe that the Jew must submit passively to one of the other two fates, accepting it as the decree of God.

Another lesson Zionism has learned from the example of the Talmudic age. The Diaspora was not preserved by a force of its own. The stream of salvation flowed down the ages from the central points of Jewish nationality in Palestine, the schools established long before the final catastrophe and the school established when the catastrophe was seen to be inevitable. Again, strong as the national impetus was that issued from these original centres, it would have grown sluggish, if subsidiary centres had not formed themselves from time to time, first in Babylonia, then in Africa, in Spain, in France, in Italy, in Germany, and in Poland. Where the most original and abundant Talmud work was done, there for the time was the centre of Judaism, with that country rested the Jewish hegemony, thither resorted in person or by letter all aspiring Jewry.

It is only since the other day that no such dominating Jewish centre has existed — since democracy has been in the ascendent, while the Jewish democracy has been steadily losing its cohesion. In the disorganized condition of the Jewish people, the very circumstances of "modern life that are calculated to diffuse knowledge and all good — rapid means of communication and

transportation in league with the art of printing — tend to dissipate the Jewish spirit, if here and there it still emanates from a chosen mind or tender heart. Without the democratic substratum, the peaks totter; without the collective powers of democracy directed to one point, the forces of crystallization are inoperative.

These two lessons, then, the Talmudic age bequeaths to Zionism: resistance and centralization.

And what then? Having roused the Jewish nation to a sense of the importance of struggling for its existence, and having brought the struggle to the successful issue indicated by the establishment of a Jewish natural centre, what does Zionism propose next?

Zionism proposes the living of the Jewish life by the Jew, and it believes that its proposition is realizable because Judaism is a complex and a progressive system, and because the Jew is at once a son of the East and of the West, a dreamer of divine dreams, yet responsive to the calls of modern life.

Judaism is a complete and exhaustive system. It is not merely a code of laws for the government of a commonwealth; not a literature couched in a language of its own; not a body of moral ordinances; not a digest of religious regulations with practices and ceremonies. Were it only one or only all of these, or were it anything that can be dissected, enumerated, labeled, and classified, Zionism might believe that the inherited cumulative powers of scattered Jewry, under a "spiritual" impetus of some sort, a consciousness of shortcoming and inadequacy, would suffice to work out and put into currency the inspiration of Judaism. But Judaism is far more. It is a system of living, an all-embracing theory, a varied, multifarious civilization, providing for every human emergency, equal to every human need, with room for every human endeavor — and holding out every divine hope. We have long been accustomed to regard it only from the last point of view, as a religion inculcating the highest and leading to the highest. Yet we have missed, or have not always been conscious of, the best of this point of view — that religion, being the culmination of the art of living, is inclusive of all the arts of life; and the Jewish religion is distinguished from every other religion in that it avowedly regulates the details of practical life.

Since Judaism is coextensive with life, it is progressive. Even in the Talmudic age, in spite

of one-sided development and timid self-effacement, Judaism did not stand still. The innovations and modifications were tentative, slow, cautious, but frequent enough and of a nature to testify to its undying vitality. In fact, the whole Talmudic phenomenon is an illustration of its progressive, revolutionary capabilities.

Now, as for the agent by whom the potentialities of Judaism are to be turned into realities when once its roots are replanted in their native soil. Miraculously the Jew has been preserved. The miracle cannot be its own end. Preservation in the face of persecution argues only the possession of negative virtues in the Jew, of powers of endurance and suffering, virtues and powers that do not suffice to build up and maintain a State. If during the Talmudic centuries he has not given proof of adaptive talent and initiative, then he is not ready for independence — he must remain under the tutelage of Western nations. But on this score there is no need for fear. When the Jew stepped out of the Ghetto, he became the co-worker of the West, not only well-trained for its tasks, but also well-informed upon its problems. Ghetto walls were never so high, Talmud folios never so absorbing, the times never so dark, but that the Jew took note of the passing show and studied the eternal verities the other nations were discovering. Who says otherwise does not know the Ghetto Jew. What he lacked was neither knowledge nor training, but only form, only the tact to make his personality and his abilities prevail.

So the Jew has completed his *Wanderjahre* in the West, and is now on his way back to his home, the centre of his national being, to settle down to his master-work for civilization — to live fully and honestly the truths he has proclaimed from the beginning of history.

These two, Judaism and the Jew, have been waiting for each other, each keeping itself pure for the other. Judaism has remained what it was, its native force undiminished, its powers unabridged, its compass not in the least narrowed by the necessarily one-sided life its adherents have had to lead as Jews. The Jew comes back to it laden with the fruitage of Western, practical, scientific civilization, yet a Jew with all his Jewish traits, abilities and aims intact, needing only to submerge himself in the undefiled and never-failing waters of Judaism to make of him a missionary who will command attention and win hearts and minds. The Jew will return bringing with him experiences gathered in the coun-

tries in which he dwelt, and finding in his native environment the spirit according to which his experiences will be moulded anew. The potentialities of Judaism will be made realities by its skilled and faithful adherents. To it they will devote themselves, illustrating its system and applying its theories in the varying circumstances of life. Its spirit will pervade their work and their play, their hours of devotion and their hours of struggling for material existence. They will consecrate to it their spiritual endeavors and their normal toil, their intellectual, physical, and moral strength, their heart, soul and might. Jewish vitality — the vital abilities of the Jew and the vital force of Judaism—will be poured like a stream into the sciences, the industries, the arts, the literature, the political activity, the daily humble walks of the Jew. His going up and his going down in the land will be Jewish. If Zionism is, indeed, a spiritual force, then it has the power to make its adherents not only shout until they are red in the face, but also live out Jewish ideals in religion, in philosophy, in government, in business, in every work of hand and brain. The world has not progressed beyond the need of Jewish instruction, but the Jew can be a witness and a missionary only if he is permitted to interpret the lessons of Judaism as his peculiar nature and his peculiar discipline enable him to interpret them. And so will arise the fabric of Jewish civilization, granting shelter and oppor-

tunity to the Jew, and instruction and inspiration to the world.

The Jew who fears to make trial of this complete Jewish life lays himself open to the suspicion of insincerity in his professions regarding the spirituality of Talmudic Judaism. Talmudism is nothing but all this many-sided Jewish life concentrated — put into portable shape for the Jew during his *Wanderjahre*. It is all there, though all under the one name, religion. When the Jew makes for himself a home in which he can live out the whole Jewish life honestly, every conception of Jewish living side by side with every other conception of it, each made clearer by attrition with every other, then religion will still be all-embracing, but not all-exclusive. The whole of life will subserve the religion of the Jew, and his religion will penetrate every one of his activities. He will at last be at one with himself, his life will be a unit, and as a unified force it will operate in the modern world.

"Difficulties!" says George Eliot's Ezra. "I know there are difficulties. But let the spirit of sublime achievement move in the great among our people, and the work will begin."

If Zionism is this, it is spiritual, and if truly it is spiritual, it can be made practical reality.

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