



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE NATIONAL IDEA IN JUDAISM.

ONCE find a man's ideals, it has been well said, and the rest is easy; and undoubtedly to get at any true notion of character, one must discover these. They may be covered with close conventionalities, or jealously hidden, like buried treasures, from unsympathetic eyes; but the patient search is well worth while, since it is his ideals—and not his words nor his deeds, which a thousand circumstances influence and decide—which show us the real man as known to his Maker. And true as this is of the individual, it is true in a deeper and a larger sense of the nations, and most true of all of that people in whom for centuries speech was impolitic and action impossible. With articulate expression so long denied to them, the national ideals must be always to the student of history the truest revelation of Judaism; and it is curious and interesting to trace their development, and to recognise the crown and apex of them all in battlefield and in "Vineyard," in Ghetto and in mart, unchanged among the changes, and practically the same as in the days of the desert. The germ was set in the wilderness, when, amid the thunders and lightnings of Sinai, a crowd of frightened, freshly-rescued slaves were made "witnesses" to a living God, and guardians of a "Law" which demonstrated his existence. Very new and strange, and but dimly understood of the people it must have been. "The lights of sunset and of sunrise mixed." The fierce vivid glow under which they had bent and basked in Egypt had scarcely faded, when they were bid look up in the grey dawn of the desert to receive their trust. There was worthy stuff in the descendants of the man who had left father and friends and easy sensuous idolatry to follow after an ideal of righteousness; and they who had but just escaped from the bondage of centuries, rose to the occasion. They accepted their mission; "All that the Lord has spoken we will do," came up a responsive cry from "all the people answering together," and in that supreme moment the ill-fed and so recently ill-treated groups were transformed into a nation. "I will make of thee a great people;" "Through thee shall all families of the earth

be blessed;" the meaning of such predictions was borne in upon them in one bewildering flash, and in that light the national idea of Judaism found its dawn; they, the despised and the down-trodden, were to become trustees of civilization.

As the glow died down, however, a very rudimentary sort of civilization the wilderness must have presented to these builders of the temples and the treasure cities by the Nile, and to the vigorous resourceful Hebrew women. As day after day, and year after year, the cloud moved onward, darkening the road which it directed, as they gathered the manna and longed for the fleshpots, it could have been only the few and finer spirits among those listless groups who were able to discern that a civilization based upon the Decalogue, shorn though it was of all present pleasantness and ease, had a promise about it that was lacking to a culture "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." It was life reduced to its elements; Sinai and Pisgah stood so far apart, and such long level stretches of dull sand lay between the heights. One imagines the women, skilled like their men-folk in all manner of cunning workmanship, eagerly, generously ransacking their stores of purple and fine linen to decorate the Tabernacle, and spinning and embroidering with a desperately delighted sense of recovered refinements, which, as much perhaps as their fervour of religious enthusiasm, led them to bring their gifts till "restrained from bringing." The trust was accepted in the wilderness but grudgingly, with many a faint-hearted protest, and to some minds in some moods slavery must have seemed less insistent in its demands than trusteeship.

The conquest of Canaan was the next experience, and as sinfulness and idolatry were relentlessly washed away in rivers of blood, one doubts if the impressionable descendants of Jacob, to whom it was given to overcome, might not perchance have preferred to endure. But such choice was not given to them; the trust had to be realised before it could be transmitted, and its value tested by its cost. With Palestine at last in possession of the chosen people, the civilization of which they were the guardians by slow degrees, became manifest. Samuel lived it, and David sang it, and Isaiah preached it, and the nation clung to it, individual men and women, stumbling and failing often, but dying each, when need came, a hundred deaths in its defence; perhaps finding it on occasion less difficult to die for an idea than to live up to it.

The securities were shifted, the terms of the trusteeship changed when the people of the Land became the people

of the Book. The civilization which they guarded grew narrowed in its issues and limited in its outlook, till, as the years rolled into the centuries, it was hard to recognize the "witnesses" of God in the hunted outcasts of man. Yet to the student of history, who reads the hieroglyph of the Egyptian into the postcard of to-day, it is not difficult to see the civilization of Sinai shining under the folds of the gaberdine or of the *san benito*. It was taught in the schools and it was lived in the homes, and the Ghetto could not altogether degrade it, nor the Holy Office effectually disguise it. Jews sank sometimes to the lower level of the sad lives they led, but Judaism remained unconquerably buoyant. Judaism, as they believed in it, was a Personal Force, making for righteousness, a Law which knew no change, the promise of a period when the earth should be filled with the knowledge of the Lord; and the "witnesses" stuck to this their trust, through good repute and through evil repute, with a simple doggedness which disarms all superficial criticism. The glamour of the cause, through which a Barcochba loomed heroic to an Akiba, the utter absence of self-consciousness or of self-seeking, which made Judas in his fight for freedom pin the Lord's name on his flag, and which, with the kingdom lost, made the scrolls of the Law the spoil with which Ben Zaccai retreated,—this was at the root of the national idea, and its impersonality gives the secret of its strength. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name!" This vivid sense of being the trustees of civilization was wholly dissociated from any feeling of conceit either in the leaders or in the rank and file of the Jewish nation. It is curious indeed to realize how so intense a conviction of the survival of the fittest could be held in so intensely unmodernized a spirit.

The idea of their trusteeship was a sheet anchor to the Jews as the waves and the billows passed over them. In the fifteen hundred years' tragedy of their history there have been no *entr'actes* of frenzied stampede or of revolutionary revengeful conspiracy. A resolute endurance, which, characteristically enough, rarely approaches asceticism, marks the depth and strength and buoyancy of the national idea. Trustees of civilization might not sigh nor sing in solitudes; nor with the feeling so keen that "a thousand years in Thy sight are but as a day," was it worth while to plot or plan against the oppressors of the moment. Time was on their side, and "that which shapes it to some perfect end." And this attitude explains, possibly, some unattractive phases of it, since however honestly the individual consciousness may be absorbed in a national

conscience, yet the individual will generally, in some way, manage to express himself, and the self is not always quite up to the ideal, nor indeed is it always in harmony with those who would interpret it. When a David dances before the Ark it needs other than a daughter of Saul to understand him. There have been Jews in David's case, their enthusiasm mocked at; and there have been Jews indifferent to their trust, and Jews who have betrayed it, and Jews too, and these not a few, who have pushed it into prominence with undue display. The infinite changes of circumstance and surrounding in Jewish fortunes no less than differences in individual character have induced a considerable divergence in the practical politics of the national idea. The persecuted have been exclusive over it, and the prosperous careless; it has been vulgarized by superstition, and ignored by indifferentism, till modern "rational" thinkers now and again question whether Palestine be indeed the goal of Jewish separateness, and make it a matter for academic discussion whether "Jews" mean a sect of cosmopolitan citizens with religious customs more or less in common, or a people whose religion has a national origin and a national purpose in its observances. With questioners such as these, Revelation, possibly, would not be admitted as sound evidence in reply, or the promise "Ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" would, one might think, show a design that ritual by itself does not fulfil. It was no sect with "tribal" customs, but a "nation" and a "kingdom" who were to be "holy to the Lord." But though texts may be inadmissible with those who prefer their sermons in stones, yet the records of the ages are little less impartial and unimpassioned than the records of the rocks, and doubters might find their answer in the insistent tones of history when she tells of the results of occasional unnatural divorce between religion and nationality among Jews.

There were times not a few, whilst their own judges ruled, and whilst their own kings reigned in Palestine, when with a firm grip on the land but a loose hold on the law, Israel was well nigh lost and absorbed in the idolatrous peoples by whom they were surrounded; when the race, which was ceasing to worship at the national altars, was in danger of ceasing to exist as a nation. Exile taught them to value by loss what was possession. "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" was the passionate cry in Babylon. Was it not the feeling that the land was "strange," which gave that new fervour to the songs, choking off utterance and finding adequate expression only in the Return? Did Judas, the Maccabee, understand something of this as he led his patriotic

“zealous” troops to victory? Did Mendelssohn forget it when, nineteen hundred years later, he emancipated his people from the results of worse than Syrian oppression, at the cost of so many, his own children among the rest, shaking off memories and duties as lightly as they shook off restraints? Over and over again in the wonderful history of the Jews, does religion without nationality prove itself as impossible as nationality without religion to serve for a sustaining force in Judaism. The people who, while “the city of palm trees” was yet their own, could set up strange gods in the groves were not one whit more false to their faith, nor more harmful to their people than those later representatives of the opposite type, Hellenists, as history calls them, who built a temple, and read the law and observed the precepts, whilst their very priests changed their good Jewish names for Greek sounding ones in contemptuous and contemptible deprecation of their Jewish nationality. One inclines, perhaps, to accentuate the facts of history and to moralise over the might-have-beens where these fit into a theory; but so much as this at least seems indisputable—that those who would dissociate the national from the religious, or the religious from the national element in Judaism attempt the impossible. The ideal of the Jews must always be “from Zion shall come forth instruction, and the word of God from Jerusalem;” and to this end—“that all people of the earth may know thy name, as do thy people Israel.” This is the goal of Jewish separateness. The separateness may have been part of the Divine plan, as distinctive practices and customs are due in the first place to the Divine command; but they are also and none the less a means of strengthening the national character of the Jews. Jewish religion neither “happens” to have a national origin, nor does Jewish nationality “happen” to have religious customs. The Jewish nation has become a nation and has been preserved as a nation for the distinct purpose of religion. This is the lesson of history. And this is its consolation: that the faithful few who see the fulfilment of history and of prophecy in a restored and localised nationality—a Jerusalem reinstated as the joy of the whole earth; the careless many who, in comfortable complacency, are well content to await it indefinitely, in dispersion; the loyal many, who believe that a political restoration would be a retrogressive step, narrowing and embarrassing the wider issues; the children of light and the children of the world, the spiritual and the *spirituel* element in Israel, alike, if unequally, have each their share in spreading the civilisation of Sinai, as surely as “fire and hail and snow and mist and stormy wind”

all "fulfil His word." The seed that was sown in the sands of the desert has germinated through the ages, and its fruition is foretold. The promise to the Patriarch, "I will make of thee a great nation," foreshadowed that his descendants were to be trustees, "through them shall all families of the earth be blessed." There are those who would read into this national idea a taint of arrogance or of exclusiveness, as there are some scientifically minded folks, a trifle slow perhaps, to apply their own favoured dogma of evolution, who can see in the Exodus only a capriciously selected band of slaves, led forth to serve a tribal deity. But the history of the Jews, which is inseparable from the religion of the Jews, rebukes those who would thus halt midway and stumble over the evidences. It lifts the veil, it flashes the light on dark places, it unriddles the weary puzzle of the travailing ages, leaving only indifferentism unsolvable, as it shows clear how the Lord, the Spirit of all flesh, the universal Father, brought Israel out of Egypt and gave them name and place to be his witnesses, and the means he chose whereby "all families of the earth should be blessed."

KATIE MAGNUS.
