

## ARTICLE X.

## SEMITIC NOTE.

## A JEW ON THE MISSION OF JUDAISM.

IN the *Fortnightly Review* for October, 1896, Dr. Oswald John Simon has a very interesting article on the "Mission of Judaism," which is striking not merely for the point of view of Judaism itself, but also as evidence of what is taking place in the minds of a certain class of Jews in the effort to become assimilated to the rest of the world in character, habits, and thought. That there should be any extensive desire to become thus amalgamated with the remaining faiths of the world in the practical aspects of religion is itself a suggestive circumstance.

In this connection there is a fact important to the understanding of the New Testament, especially the Pauline letters, which, though not new, may with wisdom be frequently emphasized. It is this: Christianity had, according to the New Testament writers, especially Paul, its greatest antithesis not in heathenism, but in Judaism. And the larger part of Paul's literary activity was spent in demonstrating this truth. Christianity in its universal aspect seemed to Paul, and the rest, to stand diametrically opposed to the fundamental idea of Israel, namely, an exclusive people with a peculiar history, revelation and a peculiar destiny. Not that they ever thoroughly freed themselves from the nomenclature of exclusive Judaism, but that, when they really reached the heights of Christianity, they saw a world-wide and human faith contrasted with an exclusive and national one.

Dr. Simon, after calling attention to the need for sympathy with Judaism and its religion, as necessary for its best interpretation, a statement undeniably a true one, proceeds to combat the idea that Judaism is in any sense an exclusive faith. Israel's very nationality is, he says, suspended, and the Jew is of every nation in the world; while, by intermarriage, he has lost himself as an exclusive being in many cases. Still he says, that the Jew everywhere must still be conscious of the *Covenant of Israel*, and from this he will never be free. If it be alleged that the Jews had a peculiar history, laws, and had a kind of separateness as their distinctive feature of national growth and expansion, he says simply that this is a mistaken idea. The Ten Commandments were given to the Jews, but they were simply publishers for the world. So also of other great and fundamental truths of the belief. Jewish nationality, he affirms,

is merely a spiritual matter, and in that sense calculated to become the broadest basis for a world-wide spiritual nationality into which all men may come. The genius of the Jewish religion, according to this writer, is, strangely enough, *universality*. And in this universality lies its [Judaism's] conception of the Supreme Being. All other theistic conceptions are mere secessions from this one, universal conception which is said to be "*inherent*" in Judaism.

The writer does not stop with this singular point of view, for a "believing Jew." He even offers a line of practical approach, beginning with an assimilation with Unitarianism, and the elimination from the Jewish liturgy of relics of exclusive nationalism, and the adoption even of the Christian Lord's day, for uniformity of worship, and the leaving of many matters of ritual and personal government to the liberty of the individual. A full and comprehensive plan for an all-inclusive Judaism is thus offered. Christianity, he says, has superseded Paganism, but Judaism has never been superseded, and survives in the Christian belief.

Nor do the person of Christ and the reading and study of the New Testament offer insurmountable barriers. Christ as a Jewish teacher can be read and his words pondered and honored, of course with very different interpretations than those common, and much of the Old Testament may wisely be set aside for portions of the New, which are more profitable. He recalls having heard the Vedas read with approval in Westminster Abbey, and thinks a Judaistic congregation might with equal equanimity hear the words of Christ and Paul. Judaism is the sole impersonal, and therefore truly unselfish, religion; and such an one alone can be universal, and to this standard all the world can with satisfaction come.

This is a strange program from a Jew surely. But one wonders what becomes of the *Covenant of Israel* if the revelation to the Jews was not a peculiar one, nor they the custodians of the faith destined, in its fulfillment through Christ, to become the redemption of mankind. Judaism has not been superseded, this is true,—it has been fulfilled; and that is precisely the point. Christianity loses its rationale entirely on the theory of a world-wide Judaism. Christ himself becomes an uninterpretable being on such a theory of the mission of the Jews. Paul's great argument was that Jesus was the Messiah, and that the fulfillment of the prophetic hope was the dissolution of Judaism and its transformation into Christianity. It was not destruction truly, it was completion and expansion; and this is the very point upon which the disciples one after another had to break with Judaism. Under some theories of Christ's work and the New Testament, that universalizing process has not yet been comprehended; but an intelligible universal Christianity, which is the good tidings of great joy to all people, must be this, or merely another link in the narrow national faith of Jews.

The Jews as "publishers" is itself an interesting figure. The most conspicuous of the internal trials of the newly-founded Christian church

arose over just the matter as to whether the Jews were to publish their truths. So far as we are able to judge, the Jew was the most rigorous disciplinarian imaginable for the proselytes who accepted his faith ; and, from his point of view, he was right. He was Jehovah's special care and concern ; and it was this consciousness that made his nation so incomprehensibly great, in the world history, when his numbers and resources are considered. It is a never ceasing miracle of history that, out of so obscure a nation as the Jews, through Christ, there could arise such tremendous social and religious revolutions as Christianity has wrought. It was his exclusiveness that did it. It was the fact that he was separate ; that he did not court world-wide influence and expansion. It was the preservation of Israel's national and religious solidarity that made Christianity itself a logical possibility from such a source.

All this need not, however, be discussed again here. The main fact about the article quoted is the readiness to yield the last citadels of Judaism, namely, nationality and peculiarity, together with rites, symbols, holy days, liturgy, and all, to become a part of the world-wide movement of assimilation and religious unity. It is an interesting phenomenon. Such tolerance of Christ and the New Testament may well foreshadow a wider acceptance and a fuller mastery of the Pauline Christology, with the ultimate result of still wider acceptance of the gospel of Christ in its simple and apostolic sense. It will indeed be a universal Judaism which, when it reads the splendid prefigurations of the Messiah, will in the same breath lift up triumphant shouts of allegiance to Christ, and sing aloud on the heights, Hosanna to the Son of David ! This is He ! Blessed is he that cometh in Jehovah's name !