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INTRODUCTION

THE history of the Children of Israel is marked by three great interventions of the Lord for their salvation: first, the salvation of Israel from bondage in Egypt, secondly the salvation of the tribe of Judah from captivity in Babylon, and thirdly the salvation of both Jew and Gentile from the power of sin by the Messiah, our Lord Jesus. The first deliverance was in the main material, a deliverance from physical bondage, and it affected, as far as we know, every member of the Israelite race. The second deliverance was partly material and partly spiritual, because it was not only a political or social deliverance, but it also gave liberty for the practice of their religion. It only affected a certain proportion of the Jews, for the more materialistic among them preferred to abide in Babylon. The third deliverance was entirely spiritual, and affected only a small proportion of the Jews: it was only a small 'remnant' who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. For us who believe in Him it is one of the most striking facts of all history that He, the Saviour of the world, came of the Jews, and that yet to the Jews as a whole He proved a stumbling-block rather than a Saviour. It is unquestionable that the Jewish birth of our Lord ought to have been an advantage to the Jews, ought to have brought salvation very near to their doors. And as we do not believe in a God who acts by mere caprice, we must believe that His choice of Judaism as the earthly home of His incarnate Son was in accordance with a plan of salvation for the world in which Judaism was destined to play an important part. It is not here disputed that the doctrines of Judaism were made to a large extent the basis of the doctrines of Christianity.

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The fact that the mass of the Jews failed to rise to the opportunities of Christianity gave St Paul "great sorrow and unceasing pain" in his heart, and indeed that must be the feeling of every Christian, whether of Israelite or Gentile birth, who sympathetically considers the story of the Chosen People. Failure there undoubtedly was, and failure cannot be predicated of God but only of men. For so great a failure as this, in face of the many promises of God, we must look not to the ordinary weaknesses of humanity, the hardness of heart and stiffness of neck which are to be found in every nation under heaven, but to some more definite rejection of God's will and to the adoption of some opposing principle. It would only be a superficial view of the case to suppose that the whole fault lay with the priests in Jerusalem, in the days of our Lord, who clamoured for His crucifixion. The principles which actuated their conduct did not originate in their life-time, but rather had their roots in past history. It is not sufficient to say that the people as a whole never rose to the spiritual heights of the prophets. It is not expected in any nation that the mass of the people should reach the level of their prophets. Nor is any fault to be found with the prophets, for verily they rose to some of the greatest heights of divine inspiration. The question that we ask is, Why did prophecy die out? The main purpose of this book is to enquire into the period when prophecy was dying out, and to consider how far the failure of Judaism was due to the religious and political principles which gained the upper hand at the very foundation of Judaism, *i.e.* in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. when, under Persian suzerainty, a Jewish state was founded with its centre at Jerusalem on the

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site of the old Southern kingdom of Judah. Sir G. A. Smith¹ speaking of Judaea and her people has said, "At all times in which the powers of spiritual initiative or expansion were needed, she was lacking, and so in the end came her shame. But when the times required concentration, indifference to the world, loyalty to the past, and passionate patriotism, then Judaea took the lead, or stood alone in Israel, and these virtues even rendered brilliant the hopeless insane struggles of her end." We shall see that in the Persian period of her history Judah lacked the spiritual initiative and expansion which were needed to fulfil the task to which she had been called.

It will be hard for a Jew to read these pages, written from the standpoint of one who sees in Christianity the fulfilment of the hopes of ancient Israel. And yet I would humbly express the hope that what is written here may help the Jews in their Zionist aspirations of the present time. For there is danger lest this movement should be spoiled, even by those who have religion at heart, by a narrowness of outlook restricted to the children of Israel. Dr Gaster has recently said², "The Jewish Commonwealth is to give to the world a lead, not only in the new interpretation of ancient truths, but also in the practical application of the ancient laws, towards the solution of many of the social problems which so much oppress and darken the life of the inhabitants of Europe and America." And again he says³, "Unless the religious spirit is allowed to take a new flight, and unless the Jews feel themselves to be

¹ *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, p. 259.

² *Zionism and the Jewish Future*, ed. by H. Sacher (1916), p. 97.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 98.

the messengers of God's truth, no gathering, no talking of Jewish nationality has any meaning, or will have any beneficial result either for the Jews or for the rest of the world. The Jewish regathering is to be of great moment in the history of the emancipation and progress of mankind. Only from this point of view has Zionism a meaning and Judaism a justification." But in the very same volume in which Dr Gaster has penned these fine words, another writer, Nahum Sokolow, one of the most ardent Zionists, painting the picture of a typical "New Jew," makes him say¹, "Here (*i.e.* in Palestine), in joyous industry, in struggle for life, I affirm myself among the sons of earth, as a man after my own fashion. And though I do not care much for missions to the world, I think none the less that in this man-like shape the world will understand me much better. Let them come and see me. I am living Judaism." The Zionist movement to-day needs the "powers of spiritual initiative and expansion" of which G. A. Smith spoke, as much as they were needed at the return of the Babylonian *golah*. In the latter they were lacking, as we shall see. Will they be lacking again to-day, as they are apparently in Sokolow's typical "New Jew"?

However, this book is an historical study, and not directly concerned with the present day. But history has its lessons. And this period of Jewish history has a lesson, for Jews and Christians alike, that truth cannot be held in a closed fist but will burn the hand of him who tries to enclose it; that true religion is a living and a growing organism, whose life depends upon its continual expansion, and whose fate is determined if it be allowed to become pot-bound.

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 233.

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NOTE:—References to Scripture texts are always given to the chapter and verse of the Hebrew or Greek original. When the numeration is different in the English Versions it is given in brackets afterwards.