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Moses Mendelssohn

AND

Modern Judaism:

A LECTURE,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

U. M. H. A. of Louisville, Ky.

BY

REV. DR. K. KOHLER,

OF CHICAGO.

W. FULL & BROTHERS
LOUISVILLE

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Moses Mendelssohn and Modern Judaism,

BY

D R. K. KOHLER.

GERMANY, the mother country of the Reformation, is also the cradle of Reformed Judaism; and Moses Mendelssohn was to the latter, if not in all, at least in many respects, what Martin Luther was to the former: so that a fair estimation of Modern Judaism is as impossible, without a full glance at Mendelssohn and his influence over his people, as a knowledge of Protestantism is without a view of Luther's life. Whether the inaugurators of a new era in history are to be regarded as the real originators, or merely the instruments and agents of the startling and progressive ideas they represent, is a question at issue between various schools of historians. The fact is, there is some truth in both views. The great leaders of the race are found to be now stirred by a deep motive and inspiration from within, and then again by an irresistible compulsion from without. Like high mountain peaks, they, by their very prominence, catch the first rays of the dawning day to reflect the light as brilliantly as they receive it, awakening the slumbering world through the same voice that roused them. They stand in awe before the divine call they hear, and yet feel too feeble to follow. Had Moses Mendelssohn, at the very outset, realized the great task allotted to him of delivering his people from the bondage of mediæval Egypt, he would certainly, like the son of Amram at the flaming bush, have cast himself down on his face, with the prayer on his quivering lips: "O God, send another one in my stead, for I, with my stammering voice and my uncomely figure, am not fit for Thy message!" He was, indeed, not made of that stuff of which heroes, reformers and revolutionaries are usually built. But just on account of his being, like Moses of yore, one of the meekest and humblest of men, he was probably chosen by Divine Providence to become a guide and a redeemer unto his brethren.

It has often enough, but nevertheless wrongly been said: "JUDAISM HAD NO DARK AGES." To be sure, looking back upon the last four centuries, we find the Jewish people everywhere, except in Holland and the Dutch colonies and some seaports, as a rule, from the heights of knowledge and free research occupied by them when in Spain and Southern France, plunged into a wild sea of mysticism and superstition, which marred their mental and moral welfare, or confined to the narrow citadel of the Talmud, to become entirely estranged to the great affairs of the wide world. Just when the great discoveries of the new world and arts and sciences heralded the approaching morning into Europe, Israel, its watchman in the night, fell asleep, wearied and exhausted at last; and the lamps of knowledge, so long anxiously kept by him, smouldered. Especially in Germany we find the Jews dis severed from all contact with their fellow citizens, in consequence of the incessant tortures and persecutions of the blood thirsty mob, chiefly since the fourteenth century, when, after the Black Death, terrible wholesale massacres drove them in masses to Poland, to settle there until, in the seventeenth century, an outbreak of Slavonic fanaticism brought them back again. Shut up in their ghettos, without a home and without the enjoyment of any freedom, they were cut off from the refreshing stream of general culture, which, up to the thirteenth century, had enlivened their households with German poetry and song, and even induced many to take a prominent part in German minstrelsy and literary tournaments. THEY BECAME LIVING MUMMIES—pitiable ruins of a glorious past. Their entire intellectual life grew stagnant and stale; their views narrow, and their conduct towards outsiders shy, cautious, and anything but frank and manly. German literature, like no other one within Jewish reach, lapsed into neglect and disrepute. Even the use of German letters fell into oblivion. Their language, written only in Hebrew letters, turned into a disgusting jargon—a petrified dialect—rendered unintelligible by a confusion with foreign elements and forms of speech—Hebrew, French, Polish and other words being mixed up with it. Along with this went a barbarous depravation of taste, a lack of ex-

ternal refinement, rendering their habits ever more offensive to foreigners. And this was especially fostered by Polish rabbis, who, engaged as teachers in schools and leaders of congregations, trained the minds of the young only for the brilliant gymnastics of hair-splitting Talmudical casuistry and sophistry, while imbuing them with a dislike for philosophical and general erudition. Nor did the Jewish-German works of instruction and edification, or entertainment, cultivate among the fair sex anything like a sense for beauty and fine, elegant forms.

To emancipate the Jewish people from this self-imposed exile, and lead them back to the great world around them, was no easy task. Political rulers would not undertake it, as Christian prejudice beheld in the deplorable condition of the Jews an irredeemable curse of God Almighty. Nor would, by mere enlightenment, any Jewish reformer have succeeded to accomplish it; as his efforts would instantly have been crushed by the storm of opposition he had roused in his own camp. But look, how the bright sun enters as a conqueror into a world enwrapped with night! As a king of beauty, clad in purple, riding on his golden chariot, he draws all beings with winning love to his majestic realm of light; while darkness hastens away in terror. Thus the light of truth enters through the morn-gates of beauty into the human heart. Not as a keen intellect and a great genius, with a sharp unrelenting sword of truth, but as a most beautiful soul, as a sweet and perfect personality, soliciting general admiration by his tenderness and wide sympathies, Mendelssohn became the regenerator of his people.

A boy fourteen years of age, timid and shy, hunchbacked and stuttering, our Moses, the son of a poor Jewish teacher and writer of Hebrew scrolls, by the name of Mendel, in the city of Dessau, stood, some day in the year 1743, at the Rosenthaler gate in Berlin, asking, like all Jewish foreigners, for a permit to enter the city; and, when examined as to his vocation and means of support, he could only stammer forth the words: "Rabbi David Frankel." David Frankel, one of the few liberal-minded rabbis then living, had in the very same year moved from Dessau to Berlin, following a call as rabbi there. When

in Dessau he had been the youth's teacher. Admiring his precocious talents and brightness, he not only loved to walk with him on the plains of rabbinical knowledge, then acquired by all Jewish boys, but also allured him to soar up into the lofty regions of philosophy, following the keen flights of the great Maimonides. He had kindled great zeal and thirst for learning in the lad's breast to induce him to sacrifice many a night's rest to his noble pursuits, whereby he indeed injured his delicate frame, nervous attacks curbing his straight stature. Now he was gladly received by the Berlin rabbi, who obtained for him a free lodging in a friend's house; and, in order to support his life, paid him a few pennies per week for copying for him a new Talmud commentary just ready for the press. With this small income, barely sufficient to save him from need and despair, he prepared himself for the rabbinical career. But his mind, craving for knowledge, could not bear the self-reproach of being, like his fellow students and co-religionists, unable to read a German book. Jewish history and literature condemned such fatal ignorance and barbarity. He seized upon the first German work that came within his sight, bought it, and, like a thief in the night, groped, by dint of deciphering and guessing, into its meaning. It was a book on Protestant Theology, which, as he mastered it, opened a new field of speculation before him. Once the father of the Bleichroeder family in Berlin, his fellow-student to whom he imparted his scanty knowledge of German, fetched him, at his request, a German book; and, being thus met by the superintendent of the Jewish relief, was instantly, in spite of Mendelssohn's intercession, compelled to leave the city. Under such difficulties and dangers Mendelssohn got the first glimpse of general culture. Soon afterwards he was so fortunate as to become acquainted with an enlightened Polish rabbi, who, from a Hebrew translation of Euclid, gave him instruction in mathematics, and turned his mind to philosophical studies; then with another Jewish scholar, who taught him the first rudiments of Latin; and finally with Dr. Gumperz, of Berlin, the first Jew who earned the Doctor's diploma in a German university, who awakened his in-

terest for modern languages and philosophies, and to whose influence it was chiefly due that the rabbinical candidate turned into a devotee of modern literature and philosophy.

After seven years of hard toil and untiring study, Mendelssohn accepted an engagement as teacher in the house of Mr. Bernard, a Jewish silk manufacturer at Berlin, which he after a few years exchanged for the position of book-keeper in the manufactory, in which he remained for life. In the very same year his fate was sealed by being introduced by Dr. Gumperz to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, at a game of chess, an old favorite play of Jewish thinkers. Lessing loved the Jews, as he did all those proscribed and hunted down by prejudice. Unlike Frederick the Great and the Königsberg philosopher Kant, he could not behold in them a nation of tricksters and deceivers, but men as whole-souled and generous as their Christian abusers, whenever they were offered the opportunity to unfold their noble qualities. With this view he had already, in the year 1749, as a lad of twenty years, in anticipation of his great drama—"Nathan the Wise"—written his little comedy entitled "The Jews." Therein a Jew is represented as putting, by his generosity and broad liberality of views, all his prejudiced Christian friends to shame. Here at once Lessing met the Jew of his poetical vision, a real man flushed with lofty ideas, the very type of the despised and scoffed-at nation, but with the fire of heaven beaming in the eye and with words of wisdom sweet like honey flowing from the trembling tongue. Here was the philosophy of the day, broad yet bombastic, offered with a deep, glowing pathos to touch the springs of the heart, the philosophy of Leibnitz with its central idea of human perfectibility, as widened and flattened by the Wolfian school, presented in words which, when dwelling on human rights, fell like music upon the ear; or, when expressing indignation at human self-degradation, reminded, like those of Isaiah, of the wild roar of the sea. With the glance of genius, Lessing detected the precious pearl in the unseemly shell. And Mendelssohn, with his tender, sympathetic nature, could not help admiring the superior qualities of the fulminant thinker whose

search after truth was ever quick in dispelling all mists of error on his path. So they clasped each other's hand for immortal friendship; clinging unto each other as the tender ivy does to the strong oak tree, and the robust man to the graceful and delicate woman. Daily they conversed with each other, Lessing suggesting ever new subjects while controlling the discussion, and Mendelssohn ever emitting sparks of wit and wisdom from his overflowing heart.

In his retiring modesty good Moses would never have ventured to step before the public as an author but for his friend Lessing. While discussing a work of Shaftesbury, Mendelssohn happened to say: "I could write a book like that myself;" whereupon Lessing replied: "Why, then, write one!" After a while Mendelssohn gave him a manuscript containing "Philosophical Discussions," dwelling on the relations of Leibnitz, the first German philosopher, to Spinoza, the great Jewish thinker of Amsterdam. Lessing kept the manuscript for months, and at last returned it—to Mendelssohn's great surprise—in print. His success encouraged the latter to join Lessing in his endeavor to deepen and purify German life and literature from French parasitism, which had so long been sapping the old oak tree of all its strength, and to ennoble and beautify the German language, which then appeared to the great Prussian King, according to his own saying, "good enough for brutes." In order to render German thought and sentiment again dominant in the land, in place of Voltarian rallery and French frivolousness, the pious Jew and the fiery German patriot united in studying the laws of beauty and harmony, the rules of style and fine arts, and reviewing the literature of the day in æsthetical works and papers. The pupil of the "Juden Schul" became a leading master in æsthetics, and would not shrink even from censuring, of course couched in most reverential and pleasant words, a work of King Frederick himself for his flat denial of the soul's immortality and his French propensities. Of course, flatterers did not fail to accuse the Jew before the King; but Mendelssohn, when summoned before the royal scoffer, humbly said: "A royal author is like

a king playing at ninepins, who is always bound to submit to the verdict of the insignificant bowling boy." The proud King, however, never forgave him. For a long time he refused to bestow upon him the title of citizenship, in spite of his friend D'Alembert's solicitation; nor would he ever allow Mendelssohn's name to be enlisted among the members of the Royal Academy, as proposed, although the same had outrun the great Kant with his academical prize-essay, and already earned a world's reputation by his "Phædon." This fine dialogue, written in 1767, after the model of Plato, to prove, by modern arguments, borrowed from the Wolfian philosophy, the soul's immortality and the inviolable holiness of human life (emanating from discussions on the subject with his lamented young friend Abbt), was everywhere welcomed like a soothing balm upon the bleeding wounds of the age. It intended to stem the growing tide of French atheism; which, declaring man to be a mere machine, showed its damaging effect by many suicides then occurring in all circles, and worked like an epidemic upon many a noble youth. *Even Frederick the Great*, was in the habit of carrying poison in his pocket, in order to use it in case of any failure of his plans. The timely and elegantly written work, translated into many languages, spread the author's fame. From all sides came scholars and princes to see the "modern Socrates," and letters, to pay homage to or to consult with the wise Moses at Berlin.

Having thus far, in his shyness, refrained from publicly discussing religious opinions and alluding to his Jewish persuasion, he was quite unexpectedly challenged by Lavater, an eccentric Swiss clergyman and admirer of his, who, in a translation of a French work on the "Proofs of Christianity," dedicated to him, solemnly implored him to either refute the arguments therein presented, or, in case of their approval, to do what prudence, truthfulness and honesty would command him, Socrates-like, to do. The good, peace-loving soul felt sorely wounded at thus seeing his holiest thoughts dragged upon the dusty arena of public discussions. Still he had to reply; and he did it with such dignified calmness and touching sweetness,

as to render it a triumph of the Jewish cause. In pleasant, and at the same time most impressive words, he declared his life-long conviction to be on the side of his unfortunate co-religionists, by whom to abide he ever felt prompted only by truth, as he conceived it, though worldly prudence might dissuade him. And as to miracles, they could be taken as proofs of any other religion as well as of Christianity. There was but one voice, who of the two proved to be the superior — whether the modest Jew, or the obtrusive Christian. In a most interesting private correspondence, dogmatic Christianity was contrasted with cosmopolitan Judaism; the one as laying all stress on beliefs, the other on virtuous deeds. But, as was to be expected, Mendelssohn's much desired privacy was encroached upon by visits and communications from high and low, from literary vagabonds, and from crowned patrons of literature; all of whom were surprised to see the marvelous man, showing so few of those qualities commonly attributed to the Jew, and so many of the accomplished gentleman.

The little skirmish with Lavater, however, was the forerunner of a greater battle, fought by him in common with his friend Lessing in the interest of religious tolerance and enlightenment. The Alsatian Jews being threatened with expatriation in consequence of agitations, partly due to Voltairian malice, had applied to Mendelssohn for a memorial to be presented to the French government in their behalf. And he prevailed upon his friend Dohm, the great Prussian statesman, to write, in 1781, his famous work on "The Social Amelioration of the Jews;" in which a most excellent and stirring plea was, in the name of humanity, of justice and political wisdom, offered for the emancipation of the sadly oppressed nation. But in claiming for them not only all civil rights as members of the State, but also all those ecclesiastical rights exercised by the Christian church within her fold, particularly insisting upon the rights of excommunicating and punishing renitents, Dohm trespassed upon the sacred principles of liberty and religious tolerance maintained by Mendelssohn. Having induced his younger friend, Dr. Marcus Herz, to translate Manasseh ben

Israel's long forgotten "Defense of the Jews," written for Lord Cromwell against the opponents of the admission of the Jews into England, he published it with a preface, in which he, in most eloquent words, stated his own views in regard to ecclesiastical power. After dwelling on the impossibility to eradicate Christian prejudice which, chameleon-like, only changed its colors during the ages, but ever remained the same, he boldly denies the very right of existence of a church arrogating to herself a privilege of the State, viz.—the power to punish and to reward. Religion, he says, requires no arm; it is all heart and spirit. Its purpose is to elevate and to admonish, particularly the erring and the fallen. Like Solomon's Temple, the house of God must be opened unto all believers or unbelievers. Finally, he appeals to the Jewish rabbis to abolish anathemas and other tokens of intolerance. "Love, in order to be loved!" is his concluding word. Did the departed spirit of Lessing hover over the bereft friend when he thus advocated the rights of humanity? What had become of the Jew who swore by the thunders of smoking Sinai? He was, indeed, in an anonymous letter, charged with having deserted Judaism, as based on the Mosaic legislation, and requested openly and unreservedly to embrace Christianity. Then he rose to his full height, and wrote his master-work—"Jerusalem, or Religious Power and Judaism."

As Lessing and Reimarus, his fellow-workers for enlightenment, had drawn a sharp line between Creed and Divine Revelation, Mendelssohn quite as characteristically distinguished between Church and Religion. Religion, he says, must convince and persuade, but not threaten and bribe. Temporal punishments, as usurped by the Church, belong to the State, the power controlling and ruling human actions. Religion, whose province is human sentiment and thought, the springs and motive powers of the heart, ought only to inspire and to instruct, to exhort and to reason. Only, by trespassing upon the rights and privileges of humanity, the Church as a religious power can enforce and constrain her rules like the State. The true daughter of God, however, wears no sword, nor does she punish

and reward. She is all love and truth. As to Judaism, it is actually a revealed legislation rather than a revealed religion; a theocratic institution, built upon natural religion, common to all men. God did not speak of His relation to man and the world on Sinai, but gave commandments as a Ruler to the Israelitish people He chose as His priest among the nations. All the penalties enacted by the Mosaic legislation are only inflicted on wrong-doers, but not on wrong-thinkers; actual violations of the laws, but not false beliefs, were to be punished. The truths about God and the future life are everywhere presupposed as the common patrimony of mankind, found by the help of reason, but nowhere enforced as beliefs. The Hebrew does not even possess a word for dogmatical belief or creed; knowledge of God is the aim of Judaism. Maimonides, trying to formulate a Jewish creed in thirteen articles of faith was opposed by Crescas and Albo, who reduced them to the number of three, such as will ever form the basis of natural religion common to all men. As regards the ceremonial laws of Judaism, they were intended as living symbols and helps to perpetuate these divine truths among the Jews as a nation of priests, without ever leading to misconception and fatal errors, such as brought about by pictures and visible signs, which had, in the course of time, led other nations to idolatry. And these ceremonies are to serve as a common bond between all the Jews, in spite of all mental reluctance, ever to be kept by every descendant of Jacob, until a new divine revelation, as public and solemn and as clear and definite as the first one on Sinai, will abrogate them.

The book was hailed by the great Königsberg thinker as a gladdening token of a new era of enlightenment, not only for the Jewish, but for the human race. Mirabeau wished to see it translated into every modern language. It was, indeed, the ripest and sweetest fruit of the Wolfian philosophy, combined with some of the best ideas of Spinoza and Maimonides. Of course, it surpassed the comprehension of the Jewish people as a class, and, therefore, created much greater sensation outside of their pale. They only gloried in the credit their admired co-relig-

ionist reflected on them. But to bask in the sun of truth, and breathe the invigorating air of freedom, while his brethren groaned under the yoke of abuse and superstition so far beneath him, could anything but gratify the new Moses. Yet he was of too conservative a spirit to indulge in reformatory overthrow of endeared old customs and beliefs. Except, when asked for his opinion on the custom of early burials, he declared the practice a horrid crime; and, save a general remark made by him about abuses, which, like the rust of age, had crept into the Jewish religion, he said and committed nothing to excite the suspicion of the most orthodox. His household and private life was still regulated after the prevailing custom, and his interest in the affairs of the Jewish congregation manifested by many literary works he gladly undertook for them. Thus, he composed hymns and sermons for especial occasions, wrote a German compendium of the Jewish civil laws, and formulated a Jewish oath for the Prussian government. All he desired and urged was improvement in taste, refinement in style, and purity in language. With this view in mind, he undertook, in the first instance, for his own two boys, then for his people at large, the translation of the five books of Moses into pure German. He was not in the least prepared for public disapproval, and still less for an anathema from the old-fashioned rabbis, anxious as he was to translate the Biblical text in strict accordance with tradition. Still, though thus received, he persevered in the work, with the assistance of Solomon Dubno, Hartwig Wessely, Herz Homberg, and other learned friends, who furnished the Hebrew commentary, while others lent their influence and substantial support to carry it through. The translation, put at first into Hebrew letters, effected, like Luther's Bible, a perfect revolution in the Jewish camp. It was the death-knell of the barbarous Polish school system. The year 1780 marks a new era in Judaism. His translation of the Psalms and a few other Hebrew songs, a work of fine artistic skill, exerted a more decided influence on Christian theologians, particularly on Herder, the regenerator of Biblical knowledge. Mendelssohn intended also to translate the rest of the Bible; but he was urged, by his friendship for Lessing, to build to him

a monument, who, in his "Nathan the Wise," had erected one to him, and did so at the cost of his life. He meant to write Lessing's biography, but was prevented by the charge of Spinozism, made by Jacobi against the latter. Utterly shocked, he published his "Morgenstunden," an exposition of his philosophical system, with a tribute of honor to Spinoza, and also to Lessing, in whose name he refuted the former's views. God, he most exquisitely remarks, loses nothing of His sublime majesty by our attributing to Him personal care for the smallest of His creatures, or else yon noble French King would have forfeited his royal dignity by allowing an ambassador to witness his playing hobby-horse with his child. As the rabbis say, God's true greatness consists in His very condescension to the humblest of beings.

Like Moses of old, Mendelssohn wrote the last lines of his book, and another article in defense of Lessing, with tears. It was his death. Still, he was spared the greater grief to see the fearful havoc wrought in his own house, and in the circle of his next and dearest friends, by the influence of the very culture and refinement he had so nobly aspired to. His life was a charming May-day, bright and mild, in advance of Spring, which is ushered into a world held under Winter's frosty reign only amidst the roaring of thunder and flashes of lightning by destructive storms and tempests. His very personality was a promise of the blessed land in store for his people, but he was not to apprehend at what sacrifice it was to be obtained. Showing the possibilities of a Jew, he roused the ambition of his brethren to follow. His Pentateuch translation formed for all the bridge to the long neglected general culture. His pupils or apostles, as we may call those who used, every Sabbath afternoon, to assemble in his house for philosophical and religious discussions with their master, scattered the seeds of his liberal teachings abroad, continuing, as they intended, his work in papers, through free schools and in Jewish societies, organized for the purpose of enlightenment and the social elevation of the Jews, already during his life and with his assistance. Yet there was something in Mendelssohn they could neither inherit nor

transmit; and this was his splendid and rare harmony of mind and heart, of the Jew and the man, in which the old and the new were so sweetly blended. They turned their whole attention to the latter, ousting the former, and thus creating a rupture. Indeed, the storm was already brewing afar during Mendelssohn's later years. He forecast it when regretting that his weakness prevented him from following the all-crushing Kant. This Robespierre of the intellectual world had then already laid his ax to the very foundation of the so-called enlightened philosophy, with its natural religion theory. By his sharp analytical powers he upset all theology built on the infallibility of human reason, showing all our conceptions and perceptions to be forms emanating only from our own mental fabric, while the reality of things lies beyond the reach of man. Common sense being thus dethroned, critical and historical research joined the French Revolution in undermining all religious and secular authorities by those very weapons wielded by Reimarus and Lessing, whom their friend Mendelssohn, with his philosophy of human happiness, utterly shrunk from following. The world was drifting far away from the old landmarks; could Mendelssohn's followers maintain them? They had already, during his lifetime, pointed to the inconsistencies in his own system, when he insisted on having the old ceremonial laws, although they be dead and no longer intelligible forms, forever preserved as marks of Jewish fellowship in place of the Christian dogmas; whereas he elsewhere denounced religious practices, without meaning, as obstacles to true religiousness. They, as cosmopolitans and German citizens, objected to the idea of being obliged to uphold what Mendelssohn termed a theocratical or political institution given to the Jews in Palestine. And this view, bluntly expressed by Solomon Maimon, a characteristic combination of an intellectual giant and a moral wretch, was indeed the signature of the Post-Mendelssohnian age. There, on the one hand, a decrepit world was swept away by the wild storm of the French revolution; and, on the other, a spring-tide of vigorous new life carried along young Germany, elated by enthusiastic visions and fancies. The full-

bred Jews of Berlin, Königsberg and Vienna, in contrast with the narrow-minded Christian philisters, following Mendelssohn's example, opened their parlors to the great men of the world, the keen and brilliant representatives of these revolutionizing ideas, and became infatuated with their dazzling modern views—to turn into frivolous French cosmopolitans, or to become eccentric and passionate German adorers of Christian art and literature, nay, of romantic Christian bigotry and licentiousness, as was the sad fate of Mendelssohn's talented daughters and their lady friends. Apostasy and wholesale baptism became the ruling fashion. Mendelssohn's children did, all but one, embrace Christianity. Consternation and despair befell the enlightened Jewish circles of Berlin so as to induce David Friedländer, Mendelssohn's most intimate friend and the most generous propagator of his ideas, in their name to offer terms of compromise to official Christianity, which were, however, happily refused. Was Judaism really a mummy, which crumbles into pieces when brought into contact with the fresh air of freedom? Was the life infused into its veins and arteries by the new movement again ebbing away forever to leave it a corpse? A storm wind from the West came to dispel the oppressive clouds thickening the air. The mighty combat between the French ideas of revolutionary cosmopolitanism and the rising power of Protestant Germany decided first on the battle field of Jena in favor of the one, and finally at Leipzig in favor of the other, exercised a determining influence on the progress of modern Judaism.

While pointing with pride to the noble Mendelssohn, Mirabeau and Abbe Gregoire had succeeded in emancipating the Jews in France; but Napoleon, the step-son of the Republic, turned them also into glowing French patriots. Intending to use them as instruments for his far-reaching plans, probably with especial regard to Palestine, he convoked an assembly of Jewish notabilities, and after this also a Jewish Synhedrion, in order to be assured of their loyalty and patriotism rather than of anything else. Ever since then the Jews and Judaism have been recognized and respected in France by the people and the

government, without, however, making any great headway in regard to the inner reform or enlightenment except through the influence of imported German ideas. In Germany and the Austrian empire with its surroundings, a reaction in philosophy and literature, as well as in religion and politics set in, checking the broad philanthropic tendencies of the Mendelssohn school by royal edicts; and the Jews, who had so bravely fought on the battlefield against the Frenchmen, looked in vain for an acknowledgment of their rights as citizens, as accorded to their brethren beyond the Rhine. Violent outbursts of fanaticism in German literature, as well as on the streets of the cities, reminded the German Jews of their being still regarded as foreigners in the land which Mendelssohn and Lessing had roused from sleep, and in the morning-song of which, as offered by its great poets, they themselves had so heartily joined. Henceforth the struggle for their social and political emancipation occupied all hearts and minds. Many a noble champion of liberty staggered and stumbled, misled by the most Christian labyrinthic Hegelian philosophy, or from sheer despair. Still, even as deserters of the Jewish flag, many a one, like Heine and Boerne, helped in compelling prejudice to surrender. Brilliant Jewish talents on every field of literature, science and art, in industry and politics, rendered the social recognition of the so long oppressed an irrevocable fact, and the political one, finding in Gabriel Rieser so influential and admirable an advocate, could no longer be withheld either.

Of a far slower and more tender growth was their religious reform. Of course, the very watchword reform implied, contrary to the nihilistic tendencies of the age, preservation of Judaism. It desired to inspire the ancient faith with fresh hope, to kindle the holy fire anew on the deserted altar of God, and to infuse a new life into the despondent and torpid hearts. Originating in the Philanthropic schools in Cassel, Seetzen and Wolfenbüttel, founded by the enthusiastic and generous Israel Jacobson after the model of the Mendelssohn free schools, it intended only to render instruction more impressive by the introduction of regular Sabbath services, with songs and sermons in the vernacular, and of the rite of confirmation as the solemn

close of the school course. The great success Jacobson met with induced him to transfer the reformed service from the school-house to the Synagogue, and to render it more solemn by the stirring peals of the organ; and, in this way, to introduce it in Berlin and in other cities. Of course, many were startled to see the venerable and chaste Jewish matron thus put into the dress and ornament of Christianity, her daughter. She looked rather gay and coquettish. Still it pleased, it edified, and finally won and saved many of the lost, the wavering and despairing members of modern Israel. But after all it was not wine, pressed from the sweet grapes of Palestine, but water; no substantial bread, to feed the hungry, but sweatmeats and wafers. Common-place wisdom and shallow morals were offered from pulpit and desk, but Judaism, as a historical religion, was ignored; and still more so in private life, where a continued, but unavoidable, disregard of the dietary, the purity and the Sabbath laws inspired the modern Jew with anything but confidence in the endurance of his religion.

In order to rouse a better self-consciousness, and thus bring about a better appreciation of the essence, aim and drift of modern Judaism, a revival of Jewish learning and a deeper insight into Jewish history were required. It was in Poland, near the Austrian frontier, where the seeds of the Mendelssohn school at last yielded fine crops. Rappaport's and Krochmal's brilliant and suggestive inquiries struck out new paths in the study of Jewish history and rabbinical literature; while in Berlin, the eminent genius of Dr. Zunz cast, by his epoch-making works, a flood of unexpected light upon the glorious path of Judaism. A large host of other scholars joined him. Long hidden veins of Jewish thought and poetry were disclosed before the amazed eyes. Judaism was filled with pride, beholding the great treasures heaped up in its mines, waiting only for help to dig and bring them to light. So Germany, the workshop of critical and historical research, became the home of Hebrew studies, German literature the storehouse of Jewish learning and Jewish history. But the fact that Judaism was thus found to be, not a ruin, but a healthy and ever fresh growth, ever changing its forms, while maintaining its spirit, no stiffened corpse but a

living and progressive power, gave the reform movement a solid basis, a soul, and firm principles. Abraham Geiger started an inner reform of Judaism, rallying under the banner of Progressive Rabbinitism a large number of the prominent Jewish scholars of the age around him, to deepen Jewish knowledge by new inquiries, and, at the same time, apply the result to practical life. Could, indeed, Mendelssohn's view of a stable and immutable Judaism, or the idea advocated by some of his school of a retrogression to Mosaism, be upheld in an age characterized by the spirit of historic critical inquiry; in an age which was, ever since Hegel, Schelling and F. A. Wolf, bent upon dissolving fixed notions and beliefs, like fixed stars, into myths, and showing all history, language, law and religion to be an evolution of the divine mind in man? Rabbinical and Biblical Judaism was also proved to be in a perpetual process of growth and development. And, from this view, the young and the apparently foreign child, Reform, was, like Moses found in the river Nile, handed over to its Jewish mother to be nursed. Still, for the sake of gaining freedom for his own theoretical radicalism, Geiger, being afraid of drawing the last consequences, grew more conservative in practice and indefinite in his positive views and ideas, instead of reconciling both, as he had intended. Thus, the way was paved for Dr. Holdheim, as the leader of Radical Reform, in the name of the great Messianic mission of the Jewish people for mankind, to discard all ceremonial laws as obsolete and no longer obligatory for the present age of Jewish naturalization among the various nations. And although history has, in the shape of many disappointments and failures, given its verdict in disfavor of such radical measures, as the transfer of the Sabbath to Sunday, and inter-marriage, radical reform succeeded not only in stemming the tide of apostasy and licentiousness, till then prevalent in large cities among the wealthier and more refined classes, but also in stating and defending the positive views and principles of Judaism once for all time. In opposition, however, to the extreme left, occupied also by Dr. Einhorn and Dr. S. Hirsch, a right wing was formed in the rabbinical conferences by Dr. Frankel, the leader of the positive or conservative historical school; while Dr. Philippssohn, the editor of the *Judenthums-*

zeitung, remained in the center. But the storm of opposition these reformatory movements met with in the orthodox camp roused even there new mental life and energy. Thus modern Judaism, revived all over the world by the labors of modest Moses Mendelssohn, is found to-day everywhere nobly represented by theological schools, growing in strength, budding and blossoming, and promising golden harvests for the future, to be gathered by the future theological systems. Through self-knowledge to self-respect and self-perpetuation, has become the battle-cry all along the line.

On the virgin soil of America, radical, which means principled and positive, Reform Judaism caused a great revival of our cause. Orthodoxy, which draws its strength from old institutions and venerable authorities, has been, in this young progressive and practical land, gradually melting away as the snow before the approaching summer. Reform tuned the hearts to new strains of devotion, roused fresh interest in, and reflected new credit on our noble bequest of the ages. It built everywhere gorgeous temples, and rallied the scattered sons of Israel around more elevated standards of humanity, while showing progress and enlightenment inscribed on the glorious banner of Judaism. It was chiefly due to Dr. Einhorn's energy and firmness, to the inspiring power of his words, to the irresistible force of his arguments in his writings, and, above all, to his ingenious model prayer-book, that Jewish reform in America, attempted here and there without clearness of principles, at once assumed an imposing attitude; and, by its impressive and attractive form, became a universal success. But let us not forget, it did not work as a domestic and natural growth, but as a foreign importation; not as a gradual and historical development, but by steam pressure, quickly and often unsparingly. Hence, the common erroneous view of reform as being destructive, negative, and revolutionary. Hence, we find progress and enlightenment hailed and applauded by the Jews in general all the more, if it is the annihilation of all belief, the eradication of the entire past. Hence, shallow cosmopolitanism and flat morals, built on the drift-sand of French positivism and nihilism, are regarded by the half-enlightened masses as the very pinnacle of modern

wisdom and the last goal of Jewish reform. Yet Judaism is not merely a fine basket with fruits, a variety of moral lessons plucked from the tree of life, but the tree itself, planted in a nation's heart as its soil; not merely a fine lake of crystal water, but a perennial fountain, together with the rock of the ages. Like the stars in heaven, it must turn upon its own axis in order to pursue its course. Being progressive, by its very nature it requires a conservative spirit, not to galvanize dead forms, but to animate the living souls with sincere faith in its great mission and in God, its master, with a desire for self-preservation based on self-consciousness. Atheism and doubt have ever proved in history to be grave-diggers of dying, not builders of rising worlds and epochs. In order to strike deep roots into our soil, American Judaism must learn before all self-respect and self-knowledge; it must find susceptible hearts—souls hungry after Jewish knowledge, which the various institutions of learning, established and planned, are destined to spread. In this respect, the Young Men's Hebrew Associations and similar literary societies will, I trust, serve along side of the congregations as mighty factors in the elevation and healthy progress of Judaism. Their talents and labors will amply help us in preparing substantial and delicious food, derived from the rich store-house of the Jewish-German literature for the mind, and in producing fresh and home-spun Jewish poetry and song, to inspire the hearts with love for our great cause. And thus I feel confident, American Judaism will become one day the commanding leader of Modern Judaism, the pioneer of a religion of humanity, preserved and guarded by the Jewish race, to shine with the brightness of reason, and to glow with the holiest fire of aspiration after the ideal of the good, and the true and the beautiful, as we behold it in a living and personal God.

As to your Association in this city, you need but follow the young, energetic and inspiring leader in your midst, in order to be sure of success in the right direction. As for us all, we shall always look upon Moses Mendelssohn, the pious Jew and the glowing patriot, the regenerator of Judaism, as our model, to combine ardent love for our race with love for our country, zeal for the common cause of humanity with faithfulness to our mission as priests of mankind, unfaltering faith in God with faith in man.