

THE SHAMES OF CHRISTENDOM

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

SPAIN

It is sometimes said that it is to the shame of Christianity that, while the Christian treated the Jews with barbarity, the Moslem treated them kindly. This is only partially true. The first impact of Islam upon Judaism was by no means a testimonial to the kindliness of the Moslems, for when the Prophet rode out of the desert a fiery zealot at the head of a flaming horde of swordsmen, his first evangelistic efforts were made amongst the Jews. His method was swift and easy—for the evangelist. Islam or the sword?

A flourishing colony of Jews had long existed in Arabia Felix before Mohammed launched his crusade. It might have been thought that the invincible monotheism of the Jew would have earned him the favour of the prophet. "There is no God but God!"—so far so good. The Jew gave a whole-hearted assent, but when to this was joined the egotistic claim, "and Mohammed is His prophet," he scornfully turned aside, and chose death rather than the denial of his own great men of God. Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah were far greater than Mohammed, and as for a Messiah out of the loins of an alien, it was unthinkable!

The sword of the prophet devoured them in their thousands. The fate of the Jews at Medina is well known. Here some seven or eight hundred men were flung bound into graves already dug, and the fierce swordsmen of the prophet, leaping amongst them, slaughtered them as they lay.

Everywhere in the Arabian Peninsula it was much the same in those first fierce days of zealous evangelism. Elsewhere, though reduced to subjection, they were spared massacre.

In Spain the change of masters from the Roman Catholic to the Moslem was a welcome relief. The condition of the unhappy Jews in this country had been miserable in the extreme. Deprived of almost all the civil and legal rights of the freeman, they were little better than slaves. The most savage penalties were imposed upon them for the observance of their customary rites and ceremonies. Even the keeping of the Passover and the practice of circumcision were denied them. They were subject to confiscation, imprisonment, exile, flogging, and mutilation for the refusal to follow the customs of their Christian fellow-citizens. The extreme penalty of death was often a merciful release. Many Jews complied, at least outwardly, with the demands of their Roman Catholic masters. These were known as Marranos or Crypto-Jews. No wonder that when the Crescent fluttered at the gates of Toledo the Jews threw in their lot with the hosts of the invader and took service under the banners of Islam.

The regime of the Moorish Caliphs in Spain has been called by Milman “the golden age of the modern Jews.” The Jews rose swiftly to a princely opulence, unparalleled before and perhaps since. They held the highest offices of state, and were the trusted servants of the Mohammedan rulers. This magnificence was not confined only to Moslem lands.

Their privilege and power in Spain brought them honor and respect elsewhere.

This splendor was not restricted to commerce and official state alone. The Jew has always been a lover of learning. The Jewish schools of Toledo, Barcelona, Granada, Corona were crowded with zealous scholars. The light of Jewish learning shed its rays far and wide, as the famous schools of Ireland did in an earlier age. Jewish culture in the Golden Age of the tenth century was extraordinarily catholic in its tastes. Rabbinism at this time did not stand for devotion to the arid dogmas of legalistic Judaism. Astronomy and medicine, mathematics and metaphysics were cultivated: even the muses of poetry, music and literature were courted.

The decline of Moslem power in Spain put an end to this splendor. The decay was gradual. Under the early Christian monarchs, like Alfonso VI, the Jews enjoyed considerable freedom.

The Jew has not always been wise in his times of prosperity. He is too liable to fall a victim to a superiority complex that renders him obnoxious to those with whom he has to deal. He is too prone to flaunt his wealth and assert his importance. Ostentation and insolent opulence are not the happiest attributes or allies in securing popularity, and while servility often marks the Jew in adversity, he knows little of the meaning of real humility or self-effacement. It is this unfortunate characteristic as it operates in Palestine to-day which has alienated the sympathies of many Christians who would otherwise have been his friends. Now their sympathy is bestowed upon the “Arab.”

Endurance, courage, patience in suffering, an invincible persistence that will not recognize defeat—these are the splendid qualities of the Jewish character.

Indeed, it may be said that he is much finer and nobler in adversity than in prosperity. Probably if the Jew possessed a little more of the grace of self-effacement he would have needed less to summon to his assistance the shining qualities that have characterized him in the times of darkness and disaster. He has too often drawn upon himself the envy, jealousy and antipathy of less fortunate people by his unhappy manner of wearing his prosperity.

The Jews of Spain certainly drew upon themselves in great measure the sufferings that began about the eleventh century. This, of course, can never be advanced as an excuse for the barbarity of Christian usage of the Jew. It may to some extent explain, but it certainly does not exonerate.

Religious feeling unquestionably aggravated the antagonism. The intolerant policy of the Roman Church in all ages towards those who differ from her would certainly have involved them in official persecution, but they would have been spared a great deal of the daily and hourly humiliation and suffering. They might even have won private compassion and sympathy, while they endured public and official persecution.

In Spain the respect and ascendancy which they had so justly earned by their distinguished scholarship, administrative ability and commercial enterprise, stemmed for a time the flowing tide of suffering which had already overwhelmed the Jews of other lands; but about the middle of the thirteenth century the flood had set in strongly.

The badge which marked the Jew from the Gentile, and had been compulsory in other countries since the beginning of the century, was now made obligatory in Spain under penalty of a heavy fine or, in default, scourging. Gradually Gentile enmity grew. Personal outrage increased in frequency. Individual insult and ill-usage developed into general persecution. We read of wholesale murders of men, women and children in isolated areas. Ultimately Jew-baiting became a pious practice. Their influence at court, begotten of their wealth, was in time overborne by popular hatred and private rapacity.

The time came when the protection they enjoyed as the protégés of kings, who themselves exploited their wealth whilst defending them from the avarice of others, was powerless to save them. Murmurs began to be heard in Spain of the charge, common elsewhere, of the “blood ritual.”

It was alleged that the Jews offered up sacrifices of Christian children, whom they kidnapped for that purpose. They were accused, too, of poisoning wells. Even the Black Death which swept over Europe in the fourteenth century was attributed to Jewish agency. Wild and unfounded as these charges were, they had their result in massacres of Jews in several places in Spain. It was not until clerical bigotry methodically set to work that the full flood of anguish poured over the unhappy people.

It was in the middle of the fifteenth century that the storm of the Inquisition burst upon Spain.

We are perhaps accustomed to think of this institution as being launched against Protestantism. It was originally established by Innocent III early in the thirteenth century as a check to heresy. It was not until its terrors were hurled against the Jews that we hear much about it. Torquemada, that coldblooded torturer whose bigotry bordered upon Insanity, used its powers to the full.

The natural piety and kindness of the good Queen Isabella were poisoned by the venom of the Grand Inquisitor’s implacable resentment of religious liberty. Isabella’s tenderness was stifled by her religion, and she threw in her lot with the most bloody and shameful institution that has defaced the Christian Church. Christ was crucified afresh in the Inquisition. All that His loving and gracious spirit ever enjoined was cynically violated. It was a cruel outrage on the name of the gentle and generous Saviour of mankind.

In the name of Him who came **“to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,”** the hearts of the men and women were rent with anguish; in the name of Him who came to set the captive free, they were flung into foul dungeons to rot amongst vermin; in the name of Him who came to set at liberty them that are bruised, their bodies were broken, tortured and burnt.

If there were ever any doubt about the natural depravity of man, the history of the Inquisition should set it at rest. It was this instrument that was so unsparingly used against the unfortunate Jews.

“The Marranos (Crypto-Jews) and their Jewish sympathizers . . . were decimated, mulcted, and mutilated at the average annual rate of six thousand, roasted or ‘reconciled’ (not including an unknown number of orphaned children doomed to starvation) or vice” (*Israel in Europe*, by G. F. Abbott, Macmillan).

The Devil never devised a more effective instrument for Jewish scorn and hatred of the name of Christ than the Inquisition. Few places have witnessed such foulness as the Quemadero, or Place of Burning, in Seville. A high platform occupied the center; at each corner of the platform was a statue said to represent one of the four Major Prophets. To this awful place miserable creatures who had pined in filthy cells, been torn upon the rack, tortured until they were almost robbed of reason and yet had bravely refused to deny the faith of their fathers, were dragged.

Every accompaniment that could inspire terror was heaped upon them. They were garbed to represent Devils. A long yellow frock covered them from head to toe, surmounted by a high conical cap and decorated with a flaming cross, hideous demon figures and the lurid fires of hell.

These wretched victims were bound to the figures of the prophets. A further horror was added when the decayed bodies of Jews who died in their faith were dug out of their graves, piled upon the center of the scene, and set on fire, so that dead and dying together dissolved in flames and smoke.

Human nature is an extraordinary complex of qualities. Even the gentlest of men and tenderest of women have, like Isabella of Spain, brought themselves to commit the most appalling crimes in defiance of their noblest instincts. Marcus Aurelius and Sir Thomas More, in fact, and Cardinal Newman, at least in theory, reconciled themselves to systematic cruelty towards those who endangered institutions which they held dear. God is love, and he who sins against love, sins against God. If we cannot win men to the cause of Christ by love, the endeavor were better not made at all, for in attempting to win them by the methods of the Inquisition we shall destroy our own souls without saving theirs.

The Inquisition failed, as persecution always must. Even upon the blood-besotted mind of Torquemada the consciousness of this failure was forced at last. He could not crush out the Jewish faith by the horrors of the thumb-screw, the rack and the stake. So long as a Jew lived within the Kingdom of Spain, so long would the faith of Judaism flourish there too. The Jew must be expelled. Ferdinand and Isabella, whose vision was not so dimmed by bigotry as Torquemada’s, were alarmed at this decision.

They saw clearly that the prosperity of Spain depended largely upon her Jewish citizens. Their reluctance to adopt this course was strengthened by the offer of a number of the wealthiest Jews of a gift of thirty thousand ducats to the national coffers as the price of the continued domicile of the Jews in Spain.

Abarbanel, a Jewish scholar, waited upon the King and Queen to make an appeal, but Torquemada stormed into the audience chamber, and, holding a crucifix on high, cried with dramatic fury: "Behold Him. Judas sold Him for thirty pieces of silver. Will you sell Him now for thirty thousand ducats? Take Him and sell Him, but ye will render your account to God," whereupon he laid the crucifix at their feet and went out as suddenly as he had entered. Terror-stricken by this theatrical frenzy, Isabella and the King gave way.

The cruel edict of expulsion was issued in March 1492. Four months were allowed the exiles to make their preparations. The forced and hurried realization of Jewish securities involved a heavy depreciation in their market value. Many of the Jews were pauperized. Furious and merciless efforts at "conversion" were made by the implacable persecutors during the last four months of the Jewish residence. The miserable victims of their cruelty robbed, racked and ruined, still held out tenaciously.

Imagination can only faintly grasp the full implication of this expulsion.

For over twelve centuries the Jews had lived in Spain. Their roots were deeply planted in the soil. Now, impoverished and hopeless, they made their way from all parts of the country by devious routes to the sea. Grey-haired men, scholars and gentlemen, who had given of their best to Spain, left it, impoverished of all but their faith.

Their Spanish friends who would have helped them dared not, for fear of the ferocity of Torquemada, give a word of sympathy or extend a hand to help. They looked on and saw the sorry bands of exiles, weary, dusty, footsore and hungry, passing through their towns and villages. Little children hung on to the skirts of their parents and tottered across miles of country. Mothers, emaciated and weak, hugged their infants to their breasts and staggered onward to the sea, where a still worse fate awaited them.

Numbers perished from privation and exposure on the way. Of those who reached the coast, some were taken aboard ships, where, after being robbed by the sailors, they were flung into the sea.

Others, reaching Africa, died at the hands of savage men, or beasts scarcely more savage. A large number reached Italy, and one cannot restrain a shudder of horror as one reads of the awful inhumanity into which men under the influence of a gross and horrible travesty of religion can fall.

A ship full of Jews was landed at Genoa and lay upon the mole. Weak from want of food and dying of thirst, they were approached by priests. To starving mothers whose babes hung at their dry breasts, these dehumanized monsters offered food, drink and clothing if they would be baptized. A few, tortured beyond endurance, gave way; but the vast majority of these heroic men and women died with their children and babes rather than prove apostate.

A pestilence which ravaged Italy shortly after was attributed, and perhaps rightly, to infection from these diseased and dying Jews. It was a terrible retribution for the reception given to them.

Spain, too, suffered by this exodus, and the day of its national glory darkened into twilight. The departure of the distinguished and able Jews who had contributed so much to the national splendor, the political ascendancy and the commercial prosperity of Spain was the death-knell of Spanish supremacy. From the moment of their exile national decline set in, until Spain sank from her position of ascendancy to being a fourth- or fifth-rate power.

“The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea those nations shall be utterly wasted” (Isaiah 60:12).

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