

THE INFLUENCE OF THE JEWS UPON CIVILIZATION

by

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CHAPTER THREE

THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES

The greatest contribution of the Jews to civilization and to society is the Bible. All other contributions, important as they are, fade into insignificance when placed beside the one great gift. What would the world be without it? In his volume, *The Jew As A Patriot*, Madison C. Peters wrote: "The most highly civilized and the most intelligent people, the most just and reasonable laws, and humane and charitable institutions are to be found only in those countries where the Jewish Bible rules. Where there is no Bible there is no liberty. To it we owe more liberty and civilization than to any source or power."

Further in his book, Mr. Peters added: "This Book which attends us in our sickness and when the fever of the world is on us, tempers our grief to finer issues, enables us with a bright eye and without fear to take the death angel by the hand, to tread the way through the dark valley, bidding farewell to wife and babes and home, in the consolation of meeting in gladness beyond the tomb; this Book on which men rest their dearest hope, and which tells us of earthly duties and inspires us with heavenly rest and heavenly reunion . . . for this Book we are indebted to the Jews."

Israel Zangwill refers to the influence of the Bible in his *Voice of Jerusalem*: "From century to century, even unto this day, through the fairest regions of civilization, the Bible, written entirely by Jews, dominates existence; its vision of life molds states and societies, its text confronts us on every hand, it is an inexhaustible treasury of themes for music and pictures. Its Psalms are more popular in every country than the poems of the nation's own poets. Beside this one Book in its infinite editions, with all the good and ill it has done, all other nations' literature seems 'trifles light as air.'"

Colonel Frederick Palmer, whose position as war correspondent all over the world for nearly thirty years, enables him to pass judgment, pays his tribute to the Book of a Thousand Tongues:

"The Book of a Thousand Tongues has given the world the greatest of civilizations, which we like to think is at its best in America. The agnostic, who holds that the Old Testament is only tribal folklore and that the New is founded on the gospel of an itinerant dreamer under the spell of an illusion, is himself bred through centuries of background into the Christianity he criticizes. His thought, the moral and spiritual side of his conduct, have been irresistibly shaped by the supreme inheritance which is this atmosphere that he breathes.

“But for the Book of a Thousand Tongues, the northern ‘Aryans’ might still be living in stinking wattled huts and clad in filthy, untanned skins; and the rest of Europe continuing the Dark Ages in unbroken decadence, with the population kept down by massacres and scourges. Our own country might still be an undeveloped land of Indian tepees with medicine men making magic and Indian braves in their war feathers dancing around the painted post.”

Daniel Webster also paid tribute to the Jews: “I feel, and have ever felt, respect and sympathy for all that remains of that extraordinary people who preserved through the darkness and idolatry of so many centuries, the knowledge of one supreme spiritual being, the Maker of heaven and earth, and the Creator of man.

“The Hebrew Scriptures I regard as the fountain from which we draw all we know of the world around us, and of our own character and destiny as intelligent, moral and responsible beings . . . We are indebted to the Jewish nation for revealed religion, for the most important blessings and refinements of civilized life, and for all well-grounded hope of immortal bliss beyond the grave.”

When the whole of the ancient world lived in darkness, God chose the Jews as the recipients of His revelation, and throughout the darkest periods of world history Israel was the bearer of God’s truth. There were times when even Israel lapsed into idolatry, but always there were seven thousand who did not bend the knee to Baal. Toward the beginning of the Christian Era, the light flickered a bit, but it was not quenched. Rather, it might be compared to the torch which the Greek relay runners carried. It was passed from the earlier followers of our Lord to the later ones, until, finally, it burst into a greater and brighter flame and enlightened mankind more than it had ever done before.

Without the Bible there would be no Christianity. Harnack, in his *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, admits that “the missionary character of early Christianity was only a repetition of the missionary spirit of the Judaism of the time which was a preparation for the Christian mission.” If we appreciate God’s Word, we should feel ourselves indebted to Israel for its origin.

What contribution has the Jew made to Christianity? Everything. Without the Old Testament there would be no New Testament. Their relationship is that of mother and child. During our Lord’s conversation with the woman of Samaria, after she had discovered that He was a prophet, she said unto Him, “**Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.**” Jesus replied: “**Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews**” (John 4:20-22). Through this lesson, Jesus conveyed to the woman of Samaria, and through her to all the world, the everlasting debt of gratitude which we owe to the Jews.

The Apostle Paul asks, “**What advantage then hath the Jew?**” And with him, we answer, “**Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.**”

Further, in the same letter to the Romans, Paul writes: “**Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whom are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all God blessed for ever**” (Romans 9:4, 5).

Who taught you tender Bible tales
Of honey-lands, of milk and wine?
Of happy, peaceful Palestine?
Of Jordan's holy harvest vales?
Who gave the patient Christ, I say
Who gave your Christian creed? Yea,
Who gave your very God to you?
Your Jew! Your Jew! Your hated Jew!

- Joaquin Miller

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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