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# The Spirit of Early Judaism.

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## Contrast of the Post-Exilic with the Pre-Exilic Age.

Judaism is still a mighty force in the world to-day, and many of its phases are little more than adumbrated in the literature of the Old Testament. By early Judaism we mean the period of four centuries or so from the sixth century B.C. to the second, beginning with the return from the exile and ending with the Maccabean times—the period whose literary reflex is to be found in the books of Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Isaiah 56–66, Ruth, the Priestly part of the Pentateuch, Joel, Jonah, Job, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, Psalms and Proverbs in part, Ecclesiastes, Daniel, Esther, and certain minor fragments. Is the complex movement represented by this heterogeneous literature governed by a single spirit? What, if any, is the unity amid all this incontestable diversity?

Let us glance for a moment at the overwhelming national experience which preceded this movement and which to so large an extent conditioned its life and literature. The exile broke the history of Israel in two. The terms pre-exilic and post-exilic are more than merely chronological: the types of energy and ideal that lie on one side of the exile are in many essential respects different from those on the other. Of course beneath these conflicting types there is a real unity, as there always is and must be alike in every individual and national development. From the beginning to the end the Hebrew remains a Hebrew, just as the Greek remains a Greek and the Englishman an Englishman. Amid much that is very different, the Maccabean struggles repeat the ancient energies and tempers by which, a millennium before, Israel won her victories over the Canaanites and secured the land upon which her mighty work for the world was to be done: the First Book of the Maccabees irresistibly reminds us of the Book of Judges. Just so is the large humanism of the Greek Anthology already anticipated in Homer; and the great labour struggle of to-day, needlessly vexatious as it may be in some of its aspects, is in direct line with the epoch-making challenge which broke upon our history with Magna Charta. All that is true and incontrovertible: there can be no absolute break in a nation's history. One period fades or rather flows into another, and beneath the diversity of the operations of the ages there is one spirit.

It is equally true, however, that there are great convulsions in national and international experience, such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the French Revolution, the great World War, which do not and cannot leave men and nations as they find them. Indeed, this is true of all experience—of the even flow of life as well as of its catastrophic things. The man of seventy is continuous with the boy of seven, yet the subtle interplay of circumstance effects profound and inevitable change. It is a long way not only in time but in thought and in historical and religious experience from the song of Deborah to the one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm, just as it is a long way from Hesiod to Plotinus and from the Beowulf to Browning.

### (i.) Ecclesiasticism.

Now the change which the progress of even peaceful centuries would inevitably have brought over the mind of Israel was immeasurably modified by the catastrophic experience of exile. The most cursory comparison of pre-exilic with post-exilic literature leaves upon our mind the impression that they are the products of altogether different worlds. When we pass from Amos to Malachi we 'are like unto them that dream.' Ezekiel, of course, is the great reminder that the contrasts which seem so startling and radical to us are not to be too sharply drawn, for he, in his own single person, harmoniously blends the opposition of prophet and priest. He looks before and after—back to the pre-exilic movement which in one sense he summarizes, and forward to the post-exilic movement which he, more than any other, inaugurates: he touches Amos with one hand, and Malachi with the other. It is he who compels us to feel the underlying unity between those strangely diverse periods, he incarnates in himself their seemingly conflicting and incompatible interests. If he is the father of Judaism, he is no less surely the heir of the great prophetic movement: he is

the bridge on which we may pass with intelligence from one period to the other.

But even over a bridge we may pass into another land. The spiritual scenery, when we cross by way of Ezekiel, is unlike that which we have left behind. Contrasts abound. In the pre-exilic period, for example, the prophet is in the ascendant, in the post-exilic the priest. There were priests of course in abundance before the exile, as there were prophets, a few, after it. The warfare of the pre-exilic prophets is, to a large extent, waged against the distortions of religion that were supported and encouraged by the priests; and the interest of the post-exilic prophets was by no means confined to ritual and the Temple (cf. Zec $7^{9f.}$, Mal $3^{5}$). But it remains broadly true that the dominating figure of the earlier period is the prophet and of the later the priest. We can trace the transition through Deuteronomy, that glorious book which insists with all a prophet's ardour upon a purified national life, and which yet gathers this national reform round a purified ritual within one exclusive place of worship. We can trace it, too, in the change that came over Hebrew historical writing. In JE, for example, though the narratives sometimes attach to famous sanctuaries like Bethel, the emphasis is upon the great moral ideas and the inspiring conceptions of God and His purpose, upon which the prophets so unweariedly insist. In the Book of Kings, the spirit is no longer prophetic but prophetico-priestly: Deuteronomy has begun to do its work in shaping the historian's approach to fact. The editors eliminate much that would have been of immense interest and value to us, and treat much of what remains in accordance with a scheme by which they pass judgment on kings, with wearisome iteration, according to their attitude to the high places. But post-exilic historians are interested almost exclusively in ritual: this is the dominating interest alike of P and of the Chronicler. The vivid picture of David, for example, drawn by the earlier historians is so overlaid by the Chronicler's ecclesiastical brush as to be almost ludicrously unrecognizable. Nearly every vestige of political interest in ancient warriors and statesmen has vanished: the hands are the hands of the historian, but the voice is the voice of a Churchman. Nothing now matters but the Church.

This change in the spirit of historical writing is but the reflex of the change that had passed over the people. They had once been a nation, they are now only a Church. As a nation they had never been great in the sense in which Assyria or Egypt was great, except to a certain degree during the reign of David. But size is no measure of a nation's greatness any more than of a man's, and Israel had been great in its political as in its religious soul. Menaced by great empires more or less continuously for four centuries, she had clung throughout it all with desperate tenacity to what independence was possible for her. The stubborn defence of Samaria for three years (724–721 B.C.) and of Jerusalem for a year and a half (588–586) amid unimaginable horrors, shows how fiercely her people valued their political status among the nations of the world. But all this passes with the exile. Her territory for long after the return consisted of little more than the fields and villages for a space of ten or fifteen miles around Jerusalem. She is now a Church—a nation no more.

National life, if so with any propriety it might be called, now gathers round the Temple: the leaders of her religious life are consequently priests. It is at this point that the contrast between the pre-exilic and the post-exilic period is most striking. One wonders what Amos would have thought of Malachi. We think of the immortal challenge, 'Was it sacrifices and offerings that you brought Me in the wilderness, O house of Israel? (Nay, verily; but now, as then) let justice roll on as water, and righteousness like a perennial stream' (Am $5^{25.\ 24}$); and we ask ourselves what fellowship the man who hurled such a challenge could have had with the man who urged that God demanded these very sacrifices and offerings, and that to withhold them was robbery which brought down His curse. 'You rob Me in the matter of tithes and offerings, you are cursed with the curse, for you rob Me' (Mal $3^{8f.}$). To the one the power of God depended on hating the morally evil, and loving the morally good (Am $5^{14f.}$), to the other it depended upon bringing the whole tithes into the treasury (Mal $3^{10}$). A greater contrast it would be scarcely possible to imagine, yet it is broadly typical of the pervasive contrast between pre-exilic and post-exilic prophecy. It is not merely that in the later day the priest is the dominant religious figure, but that the prophet, when he does appear, speaks with the accent of the priest. The God of Amos says, 'I hate, I despise your feasts ($5^{21}$), the

God of Hosea demands mercy, *not sacrifice* (6[6]); but the interest of Haggai and Zechariah gathers upon the Temple, and of Malachi upon its worship.

(ii.) SCEPTICISM.

Another distinguishing feature of the post-exilic age in contrast with the pre-exilic is its note of intellectual challenge. Scepticism there was before the exile, but it is only feebly and intermittently vocal and never long sustained (cf. 2 S 3[33], Jer 12[1f.]). There is nothing like a deliberate and reasoned challenge of the ways of God with men. But during or just before the exile the note begins to be distinctly heard—at first only in the form of a popular proverb (Jer 31[29], Ezk 18[2]), but a proverb which crystallizes reflexion on the experience of at least two generations and expresses a cynical view of history, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, but it is the children's teeth that are set on edge.' The exiles to whom Ezekiel ministers bluntly express their doubt or denial of God's justice. 'The way of the Lord is inequitable' (18[25. 29] 33[17]), they say, and Ezekiel with equal bluntness has to remind them that it is not the Lord's ways but their own that are inequitable (18[29]). By the time of Malachi, however, a century and a quarter later, scepticism is in full blast. Short as that book is, it unmistakably reveals an atmosphere of discussion and challenge even among the circles of the pious. A protest from his audience runs throughout the book. Whatever he says is immediately disputed—'but ye say.' The book opens on a note of challenge. 'I have loved you, saith Jehovah. *But ye say*, Wherein hast thou loved us?' (1[2]). And so again and again. '*But ye say*, Wherefore?' (2[14]). 'Ye have wearied Jehovah with your words. *But ye say*, Wherein have we wearied Him?' (2[17]). 'Return unto me. *But ye say*, Wherein shall we return?' (3[7]). 'Ye rob Me. *But ye say*, Wherein have we robbed Thee?' (3[8]). It is not without justice that Malachi levels at them the charge, 'Your words have been stout against Me, saith Jehovah' (3[13]), though they are hardly conscious of the gravity of their challenge and of the essential scepticism of their temper—'*But ye say*, What have we spoken against Thee?' The men whom Malachi addresses are disappointed, embittered, and angry at God's conduct of the world's affairs. 'Where is the God of justice?' they ask (2[17]). They are not afraid to deny in words half sorrowful, half bitter, that there is a moral order at all: the world is turned upside down. All that they can see through their tears is a definitely immoral order. They say, 'Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of Jehovah, and he delighteth in them' (2[17]). 'It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge and that we have walked mournfully before Jehovah of Hosts? And we' are constrained by the logic of fact to 'call the proud happy; yes, it is those that work wickedness that are built up, those who thus test God that escape' (3[15]). The interesting point is that these are not the words of wicked men: it is 'those who feared Jehovah that spoke thus with one another' (3[16]); and the prophet has to console them by assuring them that God is writing their names in a book which will keep Him in mind, in the great day, of their fidelity.

It was only natural that the gloomy experiences of the three or four centuries that succeeded the exile should confirm the sceptical temper of men who faced the facts and refused to be comforted either by illusory hopes for which they could see no foundation, or by such a faith as that of the Chronicler which seemed equally able to ignore the facts of the present and to adapt to his own rigid scheme the inconvenient facts of the past. To this temper immortal expression has been given by the incomparable writer of the Book of Job. Sometimes it flashes out in a simple passionate challenge:

> He destroyeth both guiltless and guilty.
> When the scourge bringeth sudden death,
> The despair of the blameless He mocketh.
> He hath given up the earth to the wicked;
> He veileth the face of its judges.
> If it be not He, who then? (Job 9[22-24]).

Sometimes it utters itself in a wail over the unutterable misery in which all human life is enveloped:

> Hath man on the earth not a warfare,
> With days like the days of a hireling? (7[1])
> Man that is born of a woman
> Is of few days and full of trouble (14[1]).

But at other times it launches forth in a protest, as sustained as it is fierce, against the whole order of the world. Never has a more furious challenge been hurled against it than in the bitterly eloquent words beginning with—

> Why are wicked men suffered to live,
> To grow old and wax mighty in power? (21[7]).

and ending with the wonderful lines:

> One dies with his strength unimpaired,
> In the hey-day of ease and prosperity;
> Filled are his buckets with milk;
> His bones at the marrow are moistened.
> And one dies with soul embittered,
> With never a taste of good.
> In the dust they lie down together;
> The worm covers them both (21[23-26]).[1]

Job is not here simply lamenting that the bad prosper while the good suffer; that would be at least an order, albeit an immoral order. He is saying something far more terrible than that. He is saying that not only is there no moral order, there is not even a definitely immoral order; anything may happen to anybody. There is simply no order at all. It is easy to see in all this the reflex not only of a sorrowful individual experience, but of the general sorrow and confusion of the times in which the unhappy writer lived.

The same challenge we hear later, but without its thrill of moral passion, from the writer of Ecclesiastes. He, too, maintains alternately, like the writer of Job, that the order of the world is immoral, and that there is no order at all. The good fare badly and the bad fare well; and, a few verses further on, all fare alike—at least in the end. 'Here is another of the anomalies to be found upon the earth—honest men who fare as if they had been scoundrels, and scoundrels who fare as if they had been honest men' (Ec 8[14]). 'The fate of all is alike—of saint and scoundrel, good and bad, pure and impure, those who do and those who do not practise sacrifice. Good man and sinner fare alike, those who take oaths and those who are afraid to take them' (9[2]).[2] A fragment, fortunately preserved, of another baffled thinker, helps us to feel how wide-spread and how paralyzing was the sense of inability to solve the weary world-problem:

> I have wearied myself, O God,
> O God, I am wearied and spent;
> For dull as a brute am I,
> Not a man with the mind of a man.
> I have not learned wisdom,
> And nothing I know of the Holy One.
> Who hath climbed the heavens and come down?
> Who hath gathered the wind in his fist?
> Who hath tied in a garment the waters,
> Or set up the bounds of the earth?
> What is his name, or his son's name?
> For surely thou knowest (Pr 30[1-4]).[3]

There is nothing that in the least resembles these elaborate sceptical challenges in pre-exilic literature. They are the thoughts of disillusioned members of a sorrow-stricken age, an age of books and meditation which have brought no comfort, or light, or healing.

> Books are so many, their making is endless,
> And study protracted but wearies the flesh (Ec 12[12]).

[1] I quote from my translation in *The Wisdom Books in Modern Speech*, p. 51 (Jas. Clarke & Co.).

[2] *Loc. cit.* p. 185.

[3] *Loc. cit.* p. 160.

# Contributions and Comments.

## Modern Greek and the New Testament.

In The Expository Times, xxv. p. 54 f. (cf. *ib.* xxxi. p. 421), Dr. Rendel Harris drew attention to an interesting passage in Professor Masson's *Prolegomena* to his translation of Winer's *Grammatik des Neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms*, in which Masson showed the value of Modern Greek for the better understanding of the Greek of the New Testament. That was in 1859; but I am now able to supplement that testimony by another about eighty years earlier, drawn from a contribution to the *Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift* of 15th May 1920, by Nikos A. Bees (*βέης*). In his article Bees recalls the work of the distinguished Swedish scholar, Jacob Jonas Björnståhl († 1779), who undertook many archæological journeys in the Near East. Björnståhl was in the habit of communicating the results of these journeys in a series of letters to his friends, some of which were afterwards translated into German with the title: *Jakob Jonas Björnståhls Briefe auf seiner ausländischen Reisen an den Königl. Bibliothekar C. G. Gjörwell. Aus den Schwedischen übersetzt von Christ. Heinrich Grosskurd.* I have been unable to see a copy of this volume which was published in Leipzig and Rostock in 1783; but the following