

of such unusual circumstances that something became now possible of which the history of the world gives no second example; that a few clever and determined men could force an absolutely fictitious, artificially thought out, and exceedingly complicated history of religion and culture upon a whole people under the guise of time-hallowed tradition. The process is quite different from that of the Christian councils, where it was decided that man must believe this and that, on the ground that it was eternal truth. Dogma in our sense of the word is foreign to the Jew; for the materialistic view which prevails wherever the Semitic spirit rules even if only, as here, as *spiritus rector*, every conviction must rest on an historical basis. And thus the new Jehovah-faith, the new rules for the temple-cult, the many new religious laws,* were introduced as historical things which had been ordained by God of old and had since then been constantly observed except by apostate sinners. The beginning was made by *Deuteronomy* before the Captivity; but that had only been a timid attempt, and, in fact, not a very successful one in presence of the still vigorous popular consciousness. Now the situation was quite changed. In the first place the Captivity had, as I have already said, cut the historical thread, and secondly, the exiles who returned consisted chiefly of two classes: on the one hand of the poorest, most ignorant and dependent of the people, on the other of Priests and Levites.† The richer more worldly inclined Jews had preferred to remain in the foreign land; they felt themselves more comfortable there than in

the Jews to-day is explained by the fact that they are at home in no language—for a dead language cannot receive new life by command—and the Hebrew idiom is just as much abused by them as any other.

* Law and religion, one should never forget, are to the Jew synonymous (see Moses Mendelssohn).

† Cf. Wellhausen: *Israel. und jüd. Geschichte*, p. 159. The same author writes in his *Prolegomena*, p. 28: "From the exile the nation did not return, but a religious sect only."

their own community, but they remained (at least the majority remained) Jews—partly, doubtless, because this faith suited them; partly because of the privileges which they knew how to assure to themselves everywhere, among the first of which was exemption from military service.* It is easy to see how the priesthood now had both these elements in its hand—the ignorant

* From the standpoint of the philosophy of history we should certainly explain this peculiar preference of the Jews for a more or less parasitic condition, by their long dependence upon Israel. It is at any rate very noteworthy that the Judeans did not wait for the Captivity (still less for the so-called scattering) to show their preference for this life. In a number of cities on the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates Israelite seals of older epochs have been found, and already at the time of Sennacherib, i.e., a hundred years before the first destruction of Jerusalem, the greatest banking house in Babylon was Jewish; this firm, "Egibi brothers," is said to have occupied in the East a position similar to that of the Rothschilds in Europe. (Cf. Sayce: *Assyria, its Princes, Priests and People*, p. 138.) I hope we shall hear no more of the nursery tale that the Jews "by nature" are peasants and only became usurers in spite of themselves during the Middle Ages, because they were cut off from every other occupation; if we read the prophets carefully we shall see how often they complain of usury, which serves the rich as a means of ruining the peasants; we should call to mind the famous passage in the Talmud: "Whoever has 100 Gulden in commerce can eat flesh every day and drink wine; whoever has 100 Gulden in agriculture must eat herbs and vegetables, and also dig, be wakeful and in addition make enemies. . . . But we are created that we may serve God; is it then not right that we should nourish ourselves without pain?" (Herder, from whom I quote the passage, adds, "Without pain certainly! but not by fraud and cunning," *Adrastea* v. 7). We should also read *Nehemiah*, chap. v., and see how, when the Jews neglected everything to build the destroyed temple again, the councillors and priests took advantage of the solemn moment to practise usury and to sweep in the "fields, vineyards, olive-groves and houses" of their poorer comrades among the people. Nothing in the Aryan Medes is so strange to the Jews as the fact that they do not "regard silver nor delight in gold" (*Isaiah* xiii., 17); and among the most fearful curses with which Jehovah threatens his people in case of disobedience there is one which says (*Deut.* xxviii): "that the Jew will no longer lend money to the stranger"! We should remember, too, that in the book of *Tobias* (about a hundred years before Christ) an angel is sent from Heaven to enforce the payment of the gold which is invested in the neighbouring countries at compound interest (chaps. v. and ix.). It should be mentioned in this connection that already at the time of Solomon the Jews were the horse-copers of all Syria (Sayce: *Hittites*, p. 13).

under such conditions could the faith, as Ezekiel taught it, have been imparted and the new law with its countless prescriptions have become the rule of life? The unnatural product of an overheated priestly brain would within a generation have been consigned *ad patres*. But the Jews did not form an independent State. They had returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of a half-Persian agent, who undoubtedly had definite instructions to support the priests and on the other hand to put down every movement of political ambition. As soon as the religious party saw the work which had just begun endangered by the events just mentioned, they sent to Babylon for help. In the first place reinforcements consisting of priests and scribes were sent; those were chosen who, with Ezra—"the clever scribe"—at their head, wished to set up the Thora; they brought with them also kingly edicts and money.* But even this did not suffice; a man of action was needed, and so the cup-bearer of King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah, was despatched to Jerusalem, armed with dictatorial power. Energetic measures were at once taken. Those worshippers of Jehovah who did not belong officially to the Jewish people were rejected "with horror"; not faith but genealogy was henceforth to be the decisive thing; all Jews who had married non-Jewesses must get a divorce or emigrate; in the book of *Leviticus* the law was inserted: "I have severed you from other people that ye should be mine" (xx. 26). Henceforth no Jew was

* Ezra brought from the king in money alone £250,000! The authenticity, or at least essential authenticity, of the Persian documents quoted by Ezra has in spite of the views of Wellhausen and others finally been proved by Eduard Meyer: *Die Entstehung des Judentums* (1896), pp. 1-71. This settles one of the most important questions in history. Any one who has read the little but very complete book of Meyer will understand his conclusions: "Judaism originated in the name of the Persian king and by the authority of his Empire, and thus the effects of the Empire of the Achemenides extend with great power, as almost nothing else, directly into our present age."