

THE DECLINE
OF THE WEST

PERSPECTIVES OF WORLD-HISTORY

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the image of their god. Here, in exile, with every Jewish eye turned by the Persian victory to the Zoroastrian doctrine, the pure Judaic prophecy (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah) passes into *Apocalypse* (Deutero-Isaiah,¹ Ezekiel, Zechariah). All the new visions of the Son of Man, of Satan, of archangels, of the seven heavens, of the last judgment, are *Persian presentations of the common world-feeling*. In Isaiah xli appears Cyrus himself, hailed as Messiah. Did the great composer of Deutero-Isaiah draw his enlightenment from a Zoroastrian disciple? Is it possible that the Persians released the Jews out of a feeling of the inward relationship of their two teachings? It is certain at any rate that both shared one popular idea as to last things, and felt and expressed a common hatred of the old Babylonian and Classical religions, of unbelievers generally, which they did not feel towards one another.

We must not, however, forget to look at the "return from captivity" also from the point of view of Babylon. The great mass, strong in race-force, was in reality far removed from these ideas, or regarded them as mere visions and dreams; and the solid peasantry, the artisans, and no doubt the nascent land-aristocracy quietly remained in its holdings *under a prince of their own*, the Resh Galutha, whose capital was Nehardea.² Those who returned "home" were the small minority, the stubborn, the zealots. They numbered with their wives and children forty thousand, a figure which cannot be one-tenth or even one-twentieth of the total, and anyone who confuses these settlers and their destiny with Jewry as a whole³ must necessarily fail to read the inner meaning of all following events. The *little world of Judaism lived a spiritually separate life*, and the nation as a whole, while regarding this life with respect, certainly did not share in it. In the East apocalyptic literature, the heiress of prophecy, blossomed richly. It was a genuine native poetry of the people, of which we still have the masterpiece, the Book of Job — a work in character Islamic and decidedly un-Jewish⁴ — while a multitude of its other tales and sagas, such as Judith, Tobit, Achikar,⁵ are spread as motives over all the literatures of the "Arabian" world. In Judea only the Law flourished; the Talmudic spirit appears first in Ezekiel (chs. xl, et seq.) and after 450 is made flesh in the scribes (Sopherim) headed by Ezra. From 300 B.C. to A.D. 200 the Tannaim ("Teachers") expounded the Torah and developed the Mishnah. Neither the coming of Jesus nor the destruction of the Temple interrupted this abstract

¹ Isaiah xl-lxvi. For the critical questions arising on Deutero-Isaiah see Dr. T. K. Cheyne's article "Isaiah" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, the same scholar's summary in *Ency. Brit.*, XI ed., article "Isaiah," or G. Moore's summary, *Literature of the Old Testament*, Ch. XVI. — Tr.

² This "King of the Banishment" (Exilarch) was long a conspicuous and politically important figure in the Persian Empire. He was only removed by Islam.

³ As Christian and Jewish theology both do — the only difference between these is in their respective interpretations of the later development of Israelite literature (recast in Judea as the literature of Judaism), the one inflecting it towards Evangelism, the others towards Talmudism.

⁴ Later it occurred to some Pharisee mind to Judaize it by interpolating chs. xxxii-xxxvii.

⁵ See the articles "Tobit," etc., in *Jewish Encyclopædia* and *Ency. Biblica*. — Tr.

scholarship. Jerusalem became for the rigid believer a Mecca, and his Koran was a Code of laws to which was gradually added a whole primitive history compounded of Chaldeo-Persian motives reset according to Pharisaic ideas.¹ But in this atmosphere there was no room for a worldly art, poetry, or learning. All that the Talmud contains of astronomical, medical, and juristic knowledge is exclusively of Mesopotamian origin.² It is probable, too, that it was in Mesopotamia, and *before* the end of the Captivity, that there began that Chaldeo-Persian-Jewish formation of sects which developed into the formation of great religions at the beginning of the Magian Culture, and reached its climax in the teaching of Mani. "The Law and the Prophets" — *these two nouns practically define the difference between Judea and Mesopotamia*. In the late Persian and in every other Magian theology both tendencies are united; it is only in the case here considered that they were separated in space. The decisions of Jerusalem were recognized everywhere, but it is a question how widely they were obeyed. Even as near as Galilee the Pharisees were the object of suspicion, while in Babylonia no Rabbi could be consecrated. For the great Gamaliel, Paul's teacher, it was a title to fame that his rulings were followed by the Jews "even abroad." How independent was the life of the Jews in Egypt is shown by the recently discovered documents of Elephantine and Assuan.³ About 170, Onias asked the King for permission to build a temple "according to the measurements of the Temple in Jerusalem," on the ground that the numerous non-conforming temples that existed were the cause of eternal bickerings amongst the communities.

One other subject must be considered. Jewry, like Persia, had since the Exile increased enormously beyond the old small clan-limits; this was owing to conversions and secessions — *the only form of conquest open to a landless nation and, therefore, natural and obvious to the Magian religions*. In the north it very early drove, through the Jew State of Adiabene, to the Caucasus; in the south (probably along the Persian Gulf) it penetrated to Saba; in the west it was dominant in Alexandria, Cyrene, and Cyprus. **The administration of Egypt and the policy of the Parthian Empire were largely in Jewish hands.**

But this movement *came out of Mesopotamia alone*, and the spirit in it was the Apocalyptic and not the Talmudic. Jerusalem was occupied in creating yet more legal barriers against the unbeliever. It was not enough even to abandon the practice of making converts. A Pharisee permitted himself to summon the universally beloved King Hyrcanus (135-106) to lay down the office of High Priest because his mother had once been in the power of the infidels.⁴ This is

¹ If the assumption of a Chaldeo-Persian prophecy corresponding to Isaiah and Zarathustra be correct, it is to this young, inwardly cognate, and contemporary astral religion (and not to the Babylonian) that Genesis owes its amazingly profound cosmogony, just as it owes to the Persian religion its visions of the end of the world.

² S. Funk, *Die Entstehung des Talmuds* (1919), p. 106.

³ E. Sachau, *Aramäische Papyros und Ostraka aus Elephantine* (1911).

⁴ Josephus, *Antiq.*, 13, 10.