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J. H. Greenstone

SOME EARLY
JEWISH CATECHISMS

An Address

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Some Early Jewish Catechisms

Josephus (*Contra Apion*, II, 16-17) draws a striking comparison between the Jewish system of education and the systems in vogue in Sparta and in Athens. The Lacedemonians taught by practical exercise, not by words, while the Athenians and other Greeks contented themselves with making laws about what was to be done or left undone, but had no regard for the exercise of the laws in practice. "But for our legislator, he very carefully joined these two methods, for he neither left those practical exercises to go on without verbal instruction, nor did he permit the hearing of the law to proceed without the exercise for practice; but beginning immediately from the earliest infancy and the appointment of every one's diet, he left nothing of the very smallest consequence to be done at the pleasure or disposal of the person himself."

This characterization of the Jewish system of education is true, not only for the time of Josephus, but for all subsequent ages of Jewish history. The happy combination of precept and example, of word and deed in the education of the young was the guiding motive of Jewish parents and teachers of all times. Even the few pedagogic principles mentioned in the Bible have this double method in view. One should not only observe the Passover in all its details, but also relate to his child the reason for the observance. The prophets were not satisfied merely with preaching and teaching, they also illustrated their themes by means of concrete examples. The study of the law was important only in so far as it led to the correct practice of the law, and, on the other hand, the ignorant man could not be relied upon to perform his obligations properly.

Of course, Jewish education, as well as Jewish life generally, was mainly religious, and the training of the Jewish child had in view the knowledge and practice of the Jewish religion. When the boy was initiated into the Abrahamic covenant, the congratulations offered to the parents on that occasion included the wish that they might succeed in bringing him up to the study and the practice of religion, to a knowledge of the Torah and the performance of good deeds. Since married life was always regarded by Jews as the only normal and natural life for man, the third element in the blessing included the wish that the parents might see their child happily married. To see their child grow up in Torah and Maasim Tofim (good deeds) was the acme of a parent's desire, and towards this end all education tended. As soon as the child was able to speak, he was taught to recite the Shema and other passages of the Bible, and as soon as he was able to walk he was taken to synagogue, so that he might witness the services and participate in the responses. As the child grew older and began to attend the primary school, he was

at the same time trained in the actual practice of religious observances. He was to carry the prayer-book after his father to synagogue; on Saturday night he was sent home to announce to his mother that the Sabbath was over; he was encouraged to take part in the festivities attendant upon the festival of "The Rejoicing of the Law;" and on the eve of Passover he was as important a member of the assembly as any adult, so that special attractions were provided for him to induce him to stay awake until the Seder was over. And as the child grew older and his knowledge of the Torah increased, his duties and obligations correspondingly multiplied. He was constantly made to feel the relation that existed between his studies and his practice of the religion of his fathers, and this feeling was nurtured and fostered by both parent and teacher. It was the recognition of the great truth that character is merely a bundle of habits, that learning is valuable only in so far as it influenced conduct, and on the other hand that the ignorant cannot be truly pious, that made the Jewish system of education the most effective, accomplishing in the fullest sense the task it had set for itself.

This double aspect of Jewish education, which appears to have been prominent in the minds of our sages and teachers from earliest antiquity, naturally precluded the use of any text-book, specifically designed for the study of religion. Guide-books are of doubtful benefit even to tourists, but the native will scorn the idea of a guide-book to his village or hamlet. What need could the Jewish youth, brought up in an atmosphere that was thoroughly religious, trained to regard God as ever near him, guarding and guiding him on every foot-step, what need could he have for a book on the tenets of his religion? The proselyte may need one, but proselytism was a rare occurrence among Jews, and no special provision was made for them, except perhaps in earlier times, if we assume that the *Didache* is of Jewish origin. The Jewish youth, born of Jewish parents, growing up in the midst of a Jewish community, receiving practical religious training, which made beliefs and observances co-extensive with life, living amidst surroundings where creeds are lived rather than memorized, where dogmas are expressed in nursery rhymes and fairy-tales, rather than in formulae, the Jewish youth brought up under such a system never felt the need for a manual of religious instruction. Nor was there any occasion for such a text-book in order to guard the youth against the attractions that other creeds might offer to him. Hellenistic philosophy never gained a foothold in Judea, and the apologetic literature it called forth in Alexandria had little influence on the bulk of the Jewish community, who would have spurned the very attempt at a reconciliation between Platonism and Mosaism, because it would have suggested a comparison of the two. The Christianity of the Middle Ages was unknown to the majority of Jews because of their abject position in the world, and it would have had

little attraction for them even if it were known to them. Jewish separatism, cautiously guarded by the practice of Judaism, made any incursions of other creeds next to impossible, especially to the child who was carefully watched against any contact with the outside world. Text-books, explaining religious tenets and dogmas by themselves or in comparison with other religions, were thus unnecessary and hence unknown in Jewish literature until very recent times.

The Bible appears to have been the only text-book used in elementary instruction among the Jews. Just as the Manna tasted like milk to infants and like beef to adults, so was the Bible with its simple narratives and pure diction adapted to the needs of young children, while the Halachists and Agadists, philosophers and Kabbalists found in the same book the sources for their teachings and speculations. Putting it symbolically, the rabbis said that the divine utterance at Mount Sinai was adapted to the intelligence and comprehension of all who witnessed the revelation, men, women and children. From the Bible, the child first learned the mechanical reading of the Hebrew language, the translation and idiom, when the language was no more the vernacular, the laws of life and conduct, the history of his people—all that was necessary for the youth to do and to know, he found in this wonderful book. Dogma and creed, not prominent in the Biblical writings, were in consequence not included in the curriculum of the Jewish child. These sank into his consciousness imperceptibly, without catechetic instruction. The main object of the teacher was to make the word of God, as found in the Bible, clear and intelligible to the child's mind. This in itself was not a very easy task, although the difficulty was much lessened with the appearance of Rashi's commentaries. The clearness, brevity and soulfulness of these commentaries made them at once popular with both teacher and pupil, and for many centuries they remained the standard commentaries used in Jewish schools. The use which Rashi makes of Midrash and Halachah in his commentaries helped to lessen the monotony of the study of one book, besides preparing the child for the higher studies which he was soon to pursue. For the Jewish youth was introduced to the study of the Talmud quite early in life, and from that time on this study occupied all his time and energies to the end of his days. To teach religion in the abstract was unknown in the Jewish Cheder, where the whole education was religious, the Bible and its commentaries and the Talmud and its literature supplying all the needs of the early education of the Jewish child. It was only after the Jew forced his way into the outer world, when his interests became more diverse and more profane, when simple economy compelled him to devote only a small fraction of time to the religious training of his children, that the need arose for systematic manuals of religion, and that need was plentifully supplied.

It is not my purpose to discuss now the nature of the Jewish catechisms that appeared in Germany and elsewhere since the period of Mendelssohn. I wish now to treat of two books written previous to that time and designed especially for the use of children. These two books present many interesting points, reflecting the intellectual and social status of the Jews during the time when they were written. They are not taken as types of Jewish catechisms, for there are but few others that may be classed as such. They are almost unique, and although both were exceedingly popular for many centuries, having gone through many editions, they found but few imitators. They were both intended as manuals for children and both failed in their purpose, although both were great favorites with adults. These books are the *Hinuch* (Training), by Aaron Halevi, of Barcelona (c. 1302), and the *Lekah Tob* (Good Instruction), by Abraham Jagel (c. 1595). These two books, having the same purpose in view and sharing the same fate, are still distinct from each other in nature, design and the attitude of their respective authors towards Judaism. The former is written in an unaffected, truly Jewish spirit, making the laws of life and conduct the basis of instruction; while the latter is obviously the result of outside influence, based on Christian models and making creed and dogma most conspicuous. The former is an adaptation of books made for adult Jews for the use of the young, the latter is an adaptation of books made for Christian children for the use of Jewish children.

Rabbi Simlai's assertion that the Torah contains 613 commandments, of which 365 are mandatory and 248 are prohibitive, was apparently a repetition of a tradition current among Jews from ancient times. Many scholars have subsequently endeavored to establish the truth of this statement by actually enumerating the 613 commandments and finding the Biblical basis for each of them. Simon Kahira in his *Halachot Gedolot* was the first to undertake this task, and he had a host of followers among the devotees of all branches of Jewish learning. The codifiers naturally desired to establish such a convenient catalogue of all the Biblical laws, while the liturgists and poets found in this a fertile theme for their compositions, and no less than twelve liturgic poems (*Azharot*) based on this tradition, some of them being used in the service, are known to exist. Jellinek enumerates 144 works dealing with the subject of the 613 commandments in a more or less elaborate form (*Kontres Taryag*, Vienna, 1878), to which should be added twenty-six more added in one of his later works (*Kontres Harambam*, Vienna, 1878). The most systematic arrangement of the commandments is that made by Maimonides in his *Sefer ha-Mizwot*, which in its turn, became the basis for many commentaries, the most notable of which is that of Nachmanides.

An obscure and humble teacher of Barcelona, living at the end of the thirteenth century, conceived the idea of

making the 613 commandments, properly explained and elucidated, the basis for the first text-book of Jewish religious instruction for the young. Practised in the art of teaching and possessed of genuine piety and broad sympathies, Aaron Halevi was best fitted to execute such a plan. He does not tire in disclaiming all originality for his work, except in its form of presentation. In his modesty, the author did not even think it necessary to affix his full name to his book, and it was only recently that the identity of the author was established by a German Jewish scholar (D. Rosin, *Ein Compendium der juedischen Gesetzeskunde aus dem vierzehnten Jahrhundert*, Breslau, 1871). The purpose of the book is given in the author's prefatory remarks. In order to observe the various commandments, our author says, it is, of course, necessary that one should first know them. Hence it was established by our sages that a portion of the Torah should be read in the synagogue every week, so that in many communities the whole of the Torah is completed every year. Since, however, these 613 commandments are scattered throughout the Pentateuch amidst other matter, it is likely that some of them will be passed unnoticed. "Therefore, have I, the humblest of my tribe, the disciple of disciples, a Jew from the tribe of Levi of Barcelona, seen fit to describe the commandments in the order of the weekly sections of the Torah, so that my son, the youth, and his companions, the children, might be aroused to examine the number of the commandments after they studied the weekly section of the Torah." This purpose the author constantly had in view and frequently alluded to it in the course of the book. The simple language employed and the methodic presentation, as well as the religious fervor which pervades the whole book, make it an excellent compendium of Jewish practice and belief.

The author adopted the following system: The name of the section of the Torah is first given and the number of positive and negative commandments found therein indicated in the superscription. Every commandment is then treated in the following fourfold manner: (1) The commandment is stated and the Biblical verse upon which it is based is quoted. (2) The reason for the commandment is given. (3) The details of the law, as elaborated by the rabbis, are enumerated. In this our author relies mainly on the works of Maimonides and other codifiers. (4) The application of the law to time, place and person, as well as the punishment for its violation, are given. In giving the reasons for the commandments, the author studiously avoids all metaphysical discussion and always endeavors to find an ethical or psychological reason for the law. His strong moral sense and his deep insight into the workings of the human mind, as displayed in the reasons which he assigns to the various laws, were probably the main elements that made for the popularity of the book. In section XX, endeavoring to explain the prohibition against the breaking of a bone in the paschal

lamb, the author enters into a lengthy disquisition on the influence of mechanical acts on human conduct. He wishes here to reply to an imaginary objection of his son to the necessity of so many symbols and ceremonies in connection with the Passover celebration. Such a question, he says, is apt to occur to a youth who has not had sufficient experience in life. Man is influenced by his deeds. His feelings and even his judgment frequently follow the tendency of his acts. Even the most righteous man, if he be compelled to engage constantly and for a long period in evil deeds, will in the course of time become bad. Therefore, it is necessary, that we engage in deeds that tend toward the fear of God and the observance of His laws, so that our thoughts and emotions become pure and godly. In a similar manner, the prohibition against using iron in the construction of the altar is explained (section XL). Iron is symbolic of destruction and bloodshed, and it would have a bad effect on our morals if we were to use such a metal in the construction of the altar which was to be the symbol of forgiveness, peace and blessing. The same reason is assigned to many other ceremonial laws (section CCLXXXV).

The extreme modesty of the author is evident in many passages of the book. In explaining the law pertaining to the wearing of fringes on garments, the author says: "If you will examine this, my son, and it will appear to you proper to contradict my views in this or in any other place, do not hesitate to do so because I am your father and teacher. Such destroying, I call building up." Modern pedagogues will no doubt argue that a teacher must be positive in his assertions, should never hesitate in presenting an opinion, must not arouse in the minds of his pupils the slightest suspicion that he is uncertain about any of his statements. Such a statement, as quoted above, may be condemned by modern educators as unpedagogic. Similar utterances are found in several other places, where the author feels his inability to give an adequate and satisfactory reason for certain laws (e. g. section CXXVI, leaven in sacrifice; section CLII, impurity). We may even question the propriety of the whole system for elementary instruction. The subjects treated are too many and too detailed for youthful comprehension. The author sometimes forgets the audience that he is addressing and enters upon discussions that will appear foreign and unnecessary to the uninitiated youth. The enterprise of basing an exposition of Judaism on the 613 commandments, in accordance with a rigorous plan, which will inevitably become labored and involved when carried out in detail, will appear to us as unnatural and ill adapted to the purpose in view. These and many other objections may be raised against the usefulness of a book like the *Hinuch* for primary religious instruction. We must not forget, however, the great difference in the status of Jewish education between the time of our author and our present period. When the main and only occupa-

tion of the child was the study of the Bible and the Talmud, a youth of twelve or thirteen was sufficiently advanced in his studies to appreciate fully a book like the *Hinuch*. The child was initiated into the labyrinth of Talmudic discussion when he reached the age of seven. At that tender age, he was already made acquainted with the dialectics of the rabbis, the detailed discussion of laws and ordinances that would appear most abstruse to a modern youth, he already felt the yoke of the Torah with all its weight. It would be refreshing to him to turn to a book like the *Hinuch*, where he could find the same laws presented simply and concisely, flavored with that spiritual condiment characteristic of the book and its author, where he could find moral and psychological reasons for laws, instead of the positive "so it is written," to which he was accustomed, where dogma, creed and custom are imbued with a freshness and simplicity that appeal and arrest the attention. What would be regarded as incomprehensible to a modern Jewish youth, seemed plain and attractive to the youth who once learned "to swim in the sea of the Talmud."

It is true, however, that the book, although very popular, was not used as a text-book for children, the purpose for which it was intended. This was not because of any fault in the construction or presentation of the subject matter, but rather because there was no call for such a book in the method then pursued in the instruction of the young. Adults studied it with avidity, especially such as did not have the opportunity of an intimate acquaintance with the Talmud and the codes. It has been translated into several European languages, and only recently a learned rabbi composed an extensive commentary on the book, from the Halachic standpoint, in three folio volumes (*Minhat Hinuch*, by Joseph b. Moses of Tarnopol, Lemberg, 1869). It appears also that societies and circles existed in various communities for the avowed purpose of studying this work. They would read every week the section based on the weekly portion of the law, and conclude the book at the end of the year amidst great rejoicing and merry-making. In my copy of the *Hinuch*, Venice, 1600, there is pasted in a manuscript copy of a poem,* which the society *Beruche-El* of Ferrara, who studied the book every Sabbath, sang at its conclusion on Elul 27, 1828 (5588). The testimony borne by this poem to the value attached to this book by the Jews of that time, fully justifies all claims made for it by modern Jewish scholars.

Throughout the Dark Middle Ages, there was no Christian land where the Jews enjoyed so much freedom as in Italy, the seat of Catholicism. We need not enter here on a discussion as to the reason for this apparently peculiar phenomenon. Suffice it to say, that the spirit of liberalism that always pervaded Italy also affected the attitude of the Italian nobleman, poet and scholar toward the Jew. While the clergy put forth every effort to persecute the Jews and restrict their

* Given in Appendix, p. 14.

rights, they were often thwarted by the cynical poets and the more sagacious nobles, who looked upon the Jews as a useful element in the population. This was especially true in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the spirit of the renaissance held sway over all Italy. While the Jews of Germany and other lands were kept in constant humiliation and subjection, so as to make them look upon the outside world with suspicion and disgust, finding peace and rest only when completely isolated from the rest of mankind, not knowing nor wishing to know what was going on outside of the Ghetto walls, the Jews of Italy, although not entirely free from persecution, still kept in close touch with the work and progress of their neighbors and took part in the great revival of letters that had its inception in that country. The Jews of Italy did not produce great men or original thinkers as did the Jews of Spain, France and Germany. To use the phrase of one of our modern historians (Guedemann), the Jews of Italy served as the middlemen in the domain of science and learning as they did in the realm of commerce. They made the philosophy and the wisdom of the East accessible to the Western world by means of their numerous translations of Hebrew and Arabic works into Latin. It is due to a great extent to the efforts of Italian Jews that the nations of Europe awoke from their long sleep of ignorance and superstition to enjoy the light of wisdom ushered in by the period of the renaissance. Always alert, always progressive, always ready to assimilate the best and noblest that they found among their neighbors, the Jews of Italy form a distinct and unique group in the history of the Jews in the Middle Ages.

This tendency on the part of the Italian Jews had its disadvantages as well as its advantages. The constant contact in which they were brought with the Christian community, often made them forget the tremendous difference that existed between their culture and the culture which they were invited to embrace and to confuse the needs of the outside community with their own needs. This is a natural phenomenon, with which we meet throughout the course of Jewish history, beginning with the Alexandrian period to the golden age in Spain down to modern times in Germany and America. Not satisfied with participating in the works and efforts of the world around him, the Jew is anxious to introduce these works in his own immediate sphere, regardless whether these will conduce to the welfare and improvement of those for whom he intends them. The fact that a certain mode of procedure was advisable and perhaps even necessary for the Hellenic neo-Platonists, or for the Arabic Mutazillists or for the German Protestants, does not make it feasible or practicable for Jews, reared on an entirely different culture and saturated with entirely different ideals. Such tendencies, however, are perfectly natural and to be expected in a nation that has lived in Gölus so long and that is so alert and progressive as the Jews have always been. Tran-

sient and ephemeral these movements will always be, the real Jewish spirit will sooner or later assert itself and assign the productions of such movements, great and important though they be, to their proper position in the vast treasure-house of Jewish culture, but they are natural under the circumstances and will constantly reappear, as long as the Jew is a wanderer in lands that are not his own, coming in contact with civilizations that are not his own. We may regret the waste of effort, which might have been productive of much greater good if directed in the proper Jewish channels, but we are unable to prevent it. We might speculate on the subject whether from the Jewish standpoint, Philo and Maimonides would have written better philosophy, Emanuel of Rome would have composed greater poems and some of our modern artists would have produced better paintings if they had remained uninfluenced by outside environment, but we cannot change the fact nor can we prevent its repetition.

The rise of the Protestant Reformation in the beginning of the sixteenth century, by its fundamental principles, compelled its votaries to begin a strenuous campaign for elementary religious education. They felt that since man was made responsible for his own faith, the source of which is placed in the Bible, it was necessary that every one should learn to understand the Bible and the religion based upon it. Hence, Luther wrote his first catechism in 1520, and followed it up with several others, which were adopted by his followers and formed the models for all later Protestant works of that nature. The Catholics, who had paid no attention to primary religious instruction, were aroused to activity by the appearance of the Protestant catechisms, suspecting that these would be the most effective means for propagating the opposition to the dominant church. The Council of Trent then authorized the publication in 1566 of a Catholic catechism, which was prepared under the auspices of the Archbishop of Milan. This, however, was more of a systematic presentation of Catholic dogma than a text-book for children. Under the direction of King Ferdinand V., Peter Canisius prepared his larger catechism in 1554 and a smaller one in 1566. A number of other catechisms followed, almost all in the usual form of question and answer, as the demand for them increased with the growth of the influence of Protestantism.

This movement, simultaneously begun by the two opposing factions in Christendom, aroused an Italian Jew to prepare a similar work for the Jewish youth. Abraham Jagel, living at the end of the sixteenth century, has the distinction of being the author of the first Jewish catechism, written in the usual catechetical form. As has been shown by various writers (D. Oppenheim in *Hebraische Bibliographie*, VII., 19; Maybaum, *Abraham Jagel's Katechismus Lekach-Tob*, Berlin, 1892, etc.), Jagel was familiar with both catechisms of Canisius and modelled his book, *Lekach Tob*, directly after the works

of the Catholic author. In his introduction, Jagel says that in condensing all the laws and beliefs of Judaism in a few principles, simply put and clearly presented so that the average child might understand them, he merely followed the precedent set by the prophets, who also endeavored to condense the whole Torah in a few or even in one maxim. He disclaims all originality for his work, and expressly says that he gathered the several opinions of the sages that preceded him and put them in a small book, which should be placed in the hands of children, who should study it and know it from cover to cover.

The book itself begins with the first conversation between the teacher and his pupil. The pupil greets the teacher on entering, and being asked who he was, he says that he is a Jew born in the image of God. The discussion at once turns on the point of the purpose of existence. The pupil declares that he was born to serve God without the expectation of any reward, although the reward is sure to come in the next world. To the rabbi's question as to the means by which we might expect to inherit the world to come, the pupil is made to declare the three cardinal principles of religion—faith in God, trust and love. In describing the principle of faith, the youth is led to enumerate the thirteen creeds of Maimonides, being frequently interrupted by the teacher, thereby eliciting further explanation and elaboration. Trust in God is the next point discussed, which is made to include divine providence, God's kindness to all creatures and, as a corollary, the doctrine of prayer. Love of God and love of all his creatures are then made the basis for the whole Law. There are seven deadly sins which men must shun—idleness, pride, gluttony, sensuality, anger, stinginess and jealousy, all of which have their corresponding virtues. After enumerating several other sins that are hateful to God and summarizing the whole system as laid down, the teacher asks the pupil what difference there is in the knowledge one has of these matters from tradition, as he has it, and the knowledge which one obtains by reasoning these things out for himself. To this the pupil replies that while the difference is not apparent to him, still he thinks that it would be more satisfactory if the teacher were to explain to him these principles so that his belief might be strengthened thereby. The teacher is very much pleased with the answer and gives him a lengthy discourse on proper religious and moral conduct, with which the book concludes.

While it is evident that our author modelled his work after the Catholic catechisms current in Italy in his time, the Jewishness of the book is made conspicuous on every page. The frequent resort Jagel has to quotations from Bible and Talmud, the skillful turn he gives to anything distinctly Christian into a characteristic Jewish belief or dogma, made his book acceptable to the Jews, who, for the most part were unacquainted with his models. In defining the principle of

faith, Jagel adopts almost the same wording as used in the catechism of Canisius, but while the latter follows this up with an enumeration of the twelve apostolic creeds, the former puts in the mouth of the pupil the thirteen creeds of Maimonides. In accordance with the Talmudic decision (Berachot 12a) not to recite the Ten Commandments in connection with the reading of the Shema during service, so that the heretics should not say that these only were given by God, Jagel omits the enumeration of the Ten Commandments, which is found in the Canisian catechism. The idea of placing the whole religion on the three principles of faith, trust and love, including love of God and love of man, is not distinctly Jewish, although in consonance with Jewish teaching. The elaboration of the seven cardinal sins, the six other sins "that God hates" and the four sins "that cry out for vengeance," with their corresponding virtues, would never occur to a Jew, uninfluenced by other teachings, who wished to formulate a text-book of religion for the Jewish youth. Jagel's little book was accorded a warm welcome by Jews, who regarded it as an excellent compendium of Musar, one of the many religio-ethical treatises that appeared during the Middle Ages. Isaiah Horowitz, Jagel's contemporary, quotes lengthy passages from the *Lekah Tob* in his great work (*Shene Luhot ha-Berit*). Several Latin translations of the work have appeared, others are still in manuscript, and the first Yiddish translation was published in Amsterdam in 1658, only half a century after the publication of the original, and an English translation (London, 1721) also exists. The book was very popular, but it also failed in its purpose to become a manual for the young, as did its forerunner the *Hinuch*. What the Spanish author, inspired by a truly Jewish conception of religion and writing his work in the spirit of Jewish training and practice, could not accomplish, the Italian Jew, endeavoring to introduce a foreign system and following a foreign model, could never hope to accomplish. The Jewish method of instruction, as followed until the end of the eighteenth century, had no need for catechisms.

The famous Latin maxim that "books have their own fates," or the bolder rabbinic assertion that even the scroll of the law which is deposited in the ark is subject to the whims of fortune, still holds true. Aaron Halevi's *Hinuch* has for a long time been classed among Halachic books, Abraham Jagel's *Lekah Tob* found its place in Jewish literature in the catalogue of Musar books, while the large number of Jewish catechisms produced in Germany during the first half of the nineteenth century, fashioned after the books of that nature in use in the Protestant Church, are now almost entirely forgotten, known only to the bibliographer or antiquarian. The course of Jewish education has changed during the past century, together with the great many other changes in the economic, political and social life of the Jew. Jewish life has become more complex, and in order to

prepare the youth for that complex life, great economy of time and energy must be employed, sound judgment must be exercised in preparing a course for his religious training. The best that we may expect to accomplish with the average Jewish child at present in the short time that we snatch for his religious instruction is to direct him to assume a correct attitude toward his religion and his history. We cannot expect any more to make of our children specialists in Talmudic lore, which was the aim and cherished hope of every Jewish parent in the bringing up of his child, when Jewish law was the basis of instruction, the Talmud and the codes the text-books. But to shift the emphasis from law to dogma is against the spirit of Jewish tradition and Jewish culture, it is foreign to the whole fabric of Judaism, which is primarily a historic religion, relying on practice and observance as the best means for its continued preservation. R. Jacob Mollin, a German rabbi of the fifteenth century, strongly objected to the translation into German verse of the thirteen creeds, because, he says, these include only the main elements of the Jewish religion, but none of the numerous practical laws which Israel is commanded to observe. The point of emphasis in modern religious instruction should be made the historic value of custom and creed, practice and belief, rather than creeds and beliefs in the abstract. An observance or a dogma is Jewish, not merely because it is found in Bible and Talmud, but also because it was observed and followed by Jews for many centuries under various conditions. The Jewish child should be impregnated with a strong Jewish historic consciousness, he should be made to feel the intimate relation that exists between himself and all the generations that preceded him and all that will come after him, he should be made to see clearly and constantly the hand of God in Jewish history, the special Providence that guided Israel throughout the many centuries of its existence. Laws and ceremonies should be presented to him not only from the standpoint of their intrinsic religious or national value, but also from the point of view of the increased significance each one assumed through its constant observance by generations of his own ancestors, the added meaning given to each one by the memories of sufferings or triumphs clustering around them. The child will thereby be imbued with a deep love for his religion, its dogmas and practices, with a broad sympathy for the lives and conduct of his ancestors and with a strong Jewish consciousness that will protect him against all the temptations that the outside world might offer him. A text-book, in which laws and creeds are properly treated and the historic basis and growth of each fully emphasized, is the manual that is needed in the religious instruction of the modern Jewish youth.

APPENDIX

The following poem is a copy of a manuscript pasted in a copy of the *Hinuch*, which is now in my possession. It is written in a cursive Italian script, but perfectly legible. The edge, where probably the name of the author is given, is cut off with a pair of scissors, so as to make it fit in the book. The poem presents many points of interest. The style is labored in several instances, although as a whole it is a fair specimen of the neo-Hebrew poetry of that age.

I am indebted for the English rendering of the poem to Mr. C. David Matt. The translator had a difficult task before him, which he accomplished admirably well.

שירה וזמרה לשורר ולזמר בסיום ספר החינוך
בישיבת פרוכי אל בעיר פירארא
העושים מידו יצת בשבתו וזה היה בש"ק פ' נצבים
שנת התקפ"ח ז"ך לחדש אלול.

א.

אתי תקחו כגור תקעו יופר
על ספר החינוך כיום נגמר
עליו צדיק יפרה בדמות המר
עליו ישמור מצות תרו"ג מספר
קחל—
מרם צאת שנה ממוכם תלבישו
את תלמודם מכם לא כן תמישו

ב.

בינו רעיו תוטב בכליל ספרו
יפה מתוק לחיך אל כל אדם
נער בחור ישב בל יהיה נרדם
להגות יום יום תוכו ובאוצרו
קחל—
ראשו כתם פז בל יבול עלהו
ולעומתו ינצור תורה אשרהו

ג.

כפיט ודין נפסק ובכל מצוה
את ישב מוסרה מאיר אותה
שמה משום סביב את מבעתה
חינוך לעער היא כי כן התוה
קחל—
קורא עמה לאמר הטו אזנים
כי כן דרך לעלות אל השמים

ד.

את ציוניו עושה אל כל מנון
לידע במקור הדיון ולמי הפין
דולג מתר אל הר זה כמקפין
וכפי ענין קונה קנין בנין
קחל—
הילך חוזר ואיר ישר כנהו
סובב סובב מאיר משכן נוהו

ה.

מו לא יקנה ספר חינוך נקרא
מו לא ירוין ליקח מצוה עליון
איך יכנה עליו את אפריון
בלתי יבין ישכיל מצוה תורה
קחל—
אם כן איפוא את כתובם האירו
ולגשמתכם את כתר דת העשירו

א.
 מה לי אל סוחר שוק לכנס ממון
 מה לי לסרסור עם לרבות אוצר
 מה לי להגוני לאמר לי צר
 מקום לסחורתי לממן ממון
 קהל—
 את אלה יעזבו ובלכתם קבר
 קראו להם בשמם (מ) שביתו שבר

ב.
 (א)
 מיפחת הליום חזקו חזקו
 הנם מצות אל חי צור עולמים
 ישרים מגנזכי רום כל רמים
 לא יעזבו אישים כזהם ישקו
 קהל—
 עפעפכם תשאו ולרכ תחזינה
 וקדוש ישראל עיניכם תראינה

ג.
 השכונים עשו בפעולתכם
 אם תשוה הוא בכל את מספרם
 תחזו הוטב מי חסרונם גרם
 קומו גדר תעשו תוך עריכם
 קהל—
 מצות בשמירתם תוך גלותינו
 יהיו נחשכים גם על לא מלאנו

ד.
 המה לנו מינגב גם מגדל עוז
 וכמו כנפי יונה כסף נחפה
 ישנאת המערער במ הקוץ כפה
 תרכה לישורון עם קרו מעוז
 קהל—
 בנצור מצות חכמי הדת על יתר
 המה נחשכים אל מספר כתר

נפשי תגיל ב"ה.

A Joyous Song Chanted at the Completion of the Study of the Book "Hinuch," at the Yeshibah Beruche El (God's Blest) in the city of Ferrara, who studied the book every Sabbath. This took place on Sabbath Nizzabim, the 27th day of the Month of Elul, in the year 5588 (1828).

I.

Come, take the harp with me and sound the horn
 This day, the book "Hinuch" completed is,
 And like the palm, through it the pious bloom
 And of the precepts fill the allotted tale (613).

Chorus

Invested shall ye be of their reward
 Ere close of year,—cease not from study now.

II.

O friends, mark well the virtues of the book,—
 And who the man that would not relish it?
 Let adolescent youth nor graybeard, lag
 Daily to pore o'er treasures there contained.

Chorus

His head as precious gold, unwithered was
 His leaf,—for him the Law holds guard.

III.

Replete with precepts it decides the Law's
 Involved decree,—glow with moral light
 (Each chapter bears the designating name)
 In truth designed for youth's enlightenment.

Chorus

Hark how it calls: "Incline your ears,
 The way is mine to win the bliss of Heaven."

IV.

Each mandate bears its numbered sign. Unto
 Its source it may be traced; the student may
 Pass hastily from topic unto topic
 And let the knowledge gained accord with each.

Chorus

Who cons the book shall found his dwelling firm
 And his abode be lustrous round about.

V.

The book called "Hinuch" who would not acquire?
 Who 'd not strive for the mandates of the Lord?
 Or who could rear on it his canopy,
 Except he fathom well the Law's behest?

Chorus

Then let your dwelling be illumined bright
 And crown your soul with diadem of Law.

VI.

What matter that the merchant hoard his coin?
 What matter that the agent masses wealth?
 What if the dealer store his varied wares
 Until the filling coffers overflow?

Chorus

All these they leave behind,—and in the grave
 * Their name is but reproach for evil deeds.

VII.

Sustain the Levite's hand with fond embrace,—
 With them the Eternal's precepts e'er abide,—
 Whose root is in the Almighty's hidden realm
 * And nourish without fail their devotees.

Chorus

Would you set eyes on Israel's Holy One?
 Then on your teacher gaze with reverent look.

VIII.

Of your achievements, be your reckoning,
 If they indeed complete the needed tale,
 And if there be aught lacking whence the cause?
 Arise, and mend; go rear the warding hedge.

Chorus

In exile when commandments are obeyed
 E'en those yet unfulfilled bring their reward.

IX.

They are to us a shielding tower of strength,—
 * As silver-covered wings unto the dove—,
 No hate shall wreak 'gainst them, but its own hand
 Be maimed, and Jeshurun gain new might.

Chorus

The sages' seven precepts well observed
 Will make the crown (620) of mandates all complete.

May my soul rejoice in the Lord.

* The Hebrew text is ambiguous here.



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