

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 1893, 9.30 A. M.

Mrs. I. S. Moses was introduced by the Chairman as the honorary presiding officer of the session.

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WOMAN IN THE SYNAGOGUE.

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RAY FRANK, OAKLAND, CAL.

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Duality manifests itself in all things, but in nothing is this two-foldness more plainly seen than in woman's nature.

The weaker sex physically, it is the stronger spiritually, it having been said that religion were impossible without woman. And yet the freedom of the human soul has been apparently effected by man. I say apparently effected, for experience has demonstrated, and history records, that one element possessed by woman has made her the great moral, the great motif force of the world, though she be, as all great forces are, a silent force.

It may be true that sin came into the world because of the disobedience of the first woman, but woman has long since atoned for it by her loving faith, her blind trust in the Unknown. Down through the ages, traditional and historical, she has come to us the symbol of faith and freedom, of loyalty and love.

From the beginning, she sought knowledge; perceive, it does not say wisdom, but knowledge; and this was at the expense of an Eden. She lost Eden, but she gained that wisdom which has made sure of man's immortality.

She walked upon thorns, she bled; but so sincerely repentant was she, so firmly rooted had become her faith in the Almighty, that no amount of suffering, no change of time and circumstance, could destroy it. With repentance something had sprung up, and blossomed in her being, an imperishable flower, beautiful, fragrant, making the world bright and sweet.

This flower twined itself round man, its odors refreshed and strengthened him; its essence healed him when wounded, and nerved him on to gallant and noble deeds. It is the breath of life in him, and he must needs be careful of its clinging stems, its tender leaves, for they are rooted in a woman's heart.

In mother, wife, sister, sweetheart, lies the most precious part of man. In them he sees perpetual reminders of the death-sin, guarantees of immortality. Think, woman, what your existence means to man; dwell well on your responsibility; and now let us turn to that part of time called the past, more particularly biblical days. The religious life of the early Israelites is so closely interwoven with their domestic and political life, that it cannot be separated and treated alone. Amidst all kind of tribal and national strife, the search for knowledge of Javeh went on in so even a way, so indifferent to men and things, as no other investigation has done. The soul of mankind could not be quieted concerning this matter, and religion from its very nature evolved itself.

That this was, in its entirety, due to no one people is just as true as that it was due to no one sex.

To the Israelite, because of his sensitive, superior nature, was revealed that first great truth of "I am the Lord thy God," and to them, throughout the generations, was given the command to spread His truth. But when the Lord said to Moses, "And ye shall be unto Me a nation of priests and a holy nation," the message was

not to one sex; and that the Israelites did not so consider it, is proved by the number of women who were acknowledged prophets, and who exercised great influence on their time and on posterity.

The Talmud speaks of seven prophetesses: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther. Ruth not being mentioned in this list, we infer that she was regarded simply as a religious teacher. Except in the Talmud, Sarah is not mentioned as possessing the inspirational power, which made the prophets of old; yet, there is that chronicled of her which gives rise to the assumption that, for a time at least, she was the greatest of them all. For in Genesis xxi. 12 is recorded the only instance of the Lord's especially commanding one of His favorites to listen carefully to a woman: "In all that Sarah may say unto thee, hearken unto her voice."

Evidently, the Almighty deemed a woman capable both of understanding and advising.

That Miriam, the sister of Moses, was a woman of extraordinary mind is evidenced by the words of Moses to herself and Aaron when he journeyed to the mount; and from the prominence given the word *prophetess* prior to recording the words of her triumphant song, it is evident that she must have been one of the leaders in Israel before the journey across the sea was made.

The one compliment paid Moses for his faithful service is that which speaks of him as a man of exceeding modesty; and it is pleasant to reflect that in the words of Israel's greatest woman, Deborah, can be found that same beautiful characteristic. When reminding Barak that, if he goes not alone to smite the foe, to a woman will be accredited the glory, she speaks as though loth that it should be thus; and when, in the name of Javeh, she leads the army, she says not, "I will do this or

that," but, "Barak, up! for this is the day on which God will deliver Sisera into my hands." Of great modesty was this wife of Lapidoth, whether as ruler, warrior, poet or prophet; a woman whose influence in her time was mighty, and whose glorious, inspiring words still live.

The life of Hannah inculcates more deeply a lesson which we women must learn than that of any of our sex mentioned in the Bible. Greatest and best among women is she who is a wise mother; for the children are the Lord's, the heirs of Heaven. Blessed beyond all is she who dedicates her offspring to the Eternal. Who need wonder at the song which rose so joyously from the heart of Hannah, for she was truly an inspired prophetess, she was a wise mother!

Abigail, Huldah and Esther are the others mentioned in the Talmud. The story of the latter is so well known, her courage and piety are so justly celebrated on our Feast of Purim that I will not dwell longer upon them. From the scarcity of names mentioned, we are not to conclude that only a few women were teachers in Israel at this time; but rather that to woman was entrusted all that appertained to the domestic life; and in the performance of these duties her personality was merged in that of her husband. That she was capable of performing heroic deeds is evidenced by the legends of Jael and Judith. The intense excitement of the periods in which these women lived is supposed to have permitted them for a time to forget strict morality and loving mercy. Crude and almost repulsive in their invention, the narratives serve to show that weak woman was regarded as capable of performing for God and country heroic deeds, deeds from which strong men might have shrunk. Her faith under the most trying circumstances was sublime; and nothing more effective is recorded of piety embracing

death than the martyrdom of the Maccabean Hannah or Miriam, who unhesitatingly gave to immortality herself and her seven sons. Other illustrations pale beside this magnificent heroism of a woman in whom rested the Almighty.

From any point of view, enough has been recorded to show that when she led, she led successfully. However, the ancient Jewish woman was, above all, wife and mother, and as such she was a religious teacher, and closely associated with what might be called the temple-worship of those days. The life of the woman of patriarchal times was clean and elevating, there was nothing slavish about it; and when one considers that the Jewish Law permitted polygamy, and that even with the debasing influences of harem life instituted by Solomon, the Jews became a monogamous people, one can understand the extraordinary influence of the Jewish woman to whom this important fact is due.

"One woman, a good one, is the light of a man's existence," sang an inspired sage.

Women of other nations soon learned to contrast the life of the Jewish woman with their own, and the first converts to Judaism were women from the neighboring idolatrous tribes. The emotional nature of Jewish women made them fit instruments to celebrate the joys of heaven and earth, and the finest things in our sacred literature are believed by many critics to have come spontaneously from our women's hearts and tongues.

If the woman of apocryphal times does not always appear sharply outlined in her work, it is, as we have said, owing to the deep workings of the wife and mother principle, which was striving to manifest itself as the axis of woman's world. Slowly, unevenly, events moved round, and in the Græco-Roman period we find the capricious jolts and jars lessening, until in mediæval

times the Jewish wife represents all that is pure and noble in womanhood.

During the Græco-Roman period, two queens stand out as prominently influencing religious matters. Queen Salome, who was born in Jerusalem about the year 143 B. C., was of great wisdom and remarkable energy. Filled with the spirit of the Chasidim, with ideals pure and lofty, she early resolved to aid the faith in which she believed. The times were among the fiercest recorded by Israel, and great diplomacy was necessary to avoid dissensions. But through disasters of every nature, she remained constant to her principles, and at all times level-headed. Her tact and her power to remain impassive under the most awful circumstances are almost unparalleled in history. Her sole ambition was to preserve to the people their Pharisaic worship, and this she did by the most heroic teachings.

Among proselytes, Helena, Queen of Adiabene, born 152 years B. C., is mentioned in the Talmud as having done much for Judaism. She and her son were both converted to this faith, and in turn became teachers of religion, remaining true to the Jewish nation to the end.

The position of the mediæval woman differed from that of her ancient sister. Forced by circumstances at times to become a leader, her personality no longer merged itself in that of her husband, but ran parallel with his. Tribal wars for political supremacy did not now agitate the people, for existence had, in most cases, become an individual struggle. The princes of Judah were dethroned, their lands, the possession of strangers; yet the law lived, better understood and more sacredly guarded than ever. That this was owing, in the greatest degree, to the women is shown by the numbers mentioned in the Talmud as learned mothers and teachers. The Jews were stripped of many precious things by

their oppressors, oftentimes their relentless persecutors, yet the Torah held such consolations that the family-home became to the Jew the most beautiful, the most sacred thing in the world. Of the love of a pure wife and reverent, obedient children, nothing could rob him, and he was, indeed, blessed beyond all that sought to harm him. The prophecy of Lemuel's mother had been faithfully realized; and as we look through the mist of centuries, the sunlight clears grayness, and we read: "Many daughters have done virtuously; but thou excellest them all."

True help-mate was the mediæval woman, combining with greatest intelligence, stern purpose and the softest maternal qualities.

During the period of happiness permitted them by Moorish and Spanish rule, our women rose to eminence intellectually and socially. But note how the learning always leaned toward the elevation of the home. That part of the Bible which concerned the home life became their especial study, and as practical preachers of religion, they have never been excelled, for they practiced what they preached.

Among the women of early mediæval times, Ima Shalom, Rachel and Beruria are representative. The father of Ima was president of the Sanhedrim, and a descendant of Hillel. Her husband, the most noted rabbi of his day, found in her an intellectual equal, and many were the knotty questions submitted to her judgment. Had it not been for the self-sacrificing and deeply religious nature of Rachel Sabua, history would scarcely have had an Akiba, while Beruria, wife of Rabbi Meir, who lived about 100 A. D., was of such powerful intellect that she became noted throughout the land. All that she said concerning disputed points of the Halacha received the attention of her contemporaries. Poetry and prose testify to her worth.

Graetz mentions Bellet, the daughter of Menachem, who lived in Orleans in the year 1050 A. D., as one who was talmudically learned, and who taught the women of her town their religious duties. Hannah, sister of Rabbi Jacob Tam, of Orleans, and a whole circle of learned women in the family of Rashi, of whom may be mentioned Rachel, his daughter, and Anna and Miriam, his granddaughters, were highly educated, and acted as teachers of religion. They paid particular attention to instructing women regarding culinary matters, on which Mosaism laid the greatest stress.

Zunz calls the mother of the chief rabbi of France, Mattathias Ben Joseph Provenci, and wife of Rabbi Joseph Ben Jochanan, "well nigh a lady rabbi," and accords her great praise for her original and sensible interpretation of the dietary laws.

Rabbi Samuel ben Hallevi, who flourished in Bagdad in the year 1200, had a daughter, Bath Hallevi, who delivered in public biblical lectures to men. She was screened from her audience by sitting in a kind of box whose windows had in them panes of opaque glass.

A rabbinical college had for its principal Miriam Shapira, and her lectures to the students are said to have compared favorably with those of her contemporaries. Dolce, wife of Rabbi Eleazer ben Jehudah Rokeach, of Worms, a remarkably learned woman, lived a saintly life, preaching to the women their duties. She with her two children died the death of a martyr, being slain by the Knights of Malta, at Erfurt, in 1214.

In the Hebrew encyclopædia compiled by Dr. Goldman and his associates, and edited in Warsaw in 1818, is found an account of a remarkable woman, Donna Benvenida Abarbanel. Her husband was treasurer of the king of Naples, and into her charge the prime minister of Naples gave the education of his daughter, the

princess Leonora. The intelligence and righteousness of Donna Benvenida were known throughout the land, and her association with the princess continued long after the latter's marriage. It is said that her royal charge esteemed her as a mother, and that in all her work this good Jewess never forgot her creed and her people.

Inasmuch as all appertaining to Judaism belongs to the temple, so the connection of this great woman with the synagogue is not to be doubted.

In about 1532, the priests who presided over the Inquisition petitioned the king to drive out the remnant of Jews from southern Italy. The petition was granted. But Donna Benvenida, with great diplomacy, succeeded through the princess in having the edict revoked. From various writings by the clever men of that day, one learns that the highest praise was given this woman.

From the book of the memorial of the dead of the Jewish congregation at Worms, I have taken the following names, they serving to show what the women of Israel at this time did for religion. Here is an epitaph: "Eva, daughter of Isaac Leipnitz, wife of Abraham Samuel, Rabbi of Worms. Her name shall be remembered because she was profoundly learned, and because she was conversant in the Bible and all its commentaries and the Midrash. There was no woman before her so deeply learned." "Remembered, the aged Rebecca, daughter of Jeremiah Neustadt, because she regularly attended synagogue, morning and evening, devoting all her life to benevolence. She spun without charge *Tzitzith* for all who needed them, and gave of her own money to the synagogue." "Remembered, the pious and esteemed Miriam Sinzheim, daughter of Joseph Sinzheim of Vienna, who went regularly to the synagogue, morning and evening, praying with devotion and giving all her life to benevolence. She supported students of the Bible

in various congregations, especially in ours of Worms. She builded the synagogue of the great Rabbi Rashi (Solomon ben Isaac), establishing free seminaries and stipending students." Women of the nineteenth century! These are but a few names from among the many on the old grave stones, testifying to the splendid work done for the synagogue by women, at a time when obstacles made up their lives. In the early part of the eighteenth century, Krendel Steinhardt, a member of a gifted family of rabbis, obtained distinction for her knowledge of the festival prayers, the *Machsor*, and for cleverly interpreting the Midrash. She was known as the "Rebbezin." Sarah Oppenheimer, daughter of the chief rabbi of Prague, wrote a *Meghilla*, a scroll of the book of Esther, while Sprenza Kempler, blessed with beauty, knowledge and piety, could quote the Mishna from memory. Bienvenida, wife of Rabbi Mordecai, of Padua, was of such rare intelligence that she held disputations on the Talmud and the Mishna with some of the greatest scholars of her day.

The list is a long one, and each name reflects intelligence and piety. But enough has been given to disprove all doubts as to the Jewish woman's capability in religious matters, both as pupil and instructor. If to the men of these times be accorded credit for having performed their duties well, if as scholars, as expounders of the Law, they live in fame, what shall we say of the women who, under the most adverse circumstances, rose to eminence in this same field of labor? With one or two exceptions, they were all wives and mothers, most of them wives of rabbis, and in the discharge of their duties no one thing was done at the expense of another.

Intellectually they were the compeers of their husbands; practically, they excelled them. They built synagogues, controlled colleges, and stipended students. All in all, they have in the past earned the right to

the pulpit, even as nature created their sensitive beings to act as its finest interpreter.

Jewish woman had earned the right to the pulpit, though she never formally asked it of the people, but that they would not have wholly opposed it, may be inferred from a romance of Bernstein's, "Voegele, der Maggid," probably founded on facts.

Voegele was an itinerant preacher, and that she combined the lovable qualities of the woman with her chosen work is shown by the fervent words of the hero who says to her, "Your hand makes the *Bethhamedrash* light." To our times and to our country in particular, the Jewish woman is indebted for many changes in her relation to the synagogue, and this progress is mainly due to one man, whose decided stand as a liberalist, in all matters concerning woman and her work, earns our hearty thanks. I refer to our revered rabbi, Dr. Wise, of Cincinnati.

With added privileges and numberless innovations, let us see what is the religious status of the Jewish woman of to-day. Compare her with the woman of the Apocrypha we will not, for it would be unjust to both. The one was the result of a great spiritual revelation and chaotic material circumstances pressing against and whirling round each other, leaving as a resultant the keen-visioned, practical woman of the Middle Ages, one whose knowledge was of men, and whose wisdom was of God. Calamitous as were the days, our mothers rose to meet them, each time victorious. Their children received, as a heritage, patience, courage, fidelity, reverence, honest, God-fearing souls, the richest treasures of men. What matter how the winds of fortune blew, the Jew was secure from total shipwreck. He carried as a talisman the instructions of his mother. When persecution drove him from shore to shore, he journeyed across unknown seas, and finding a new Canaan cried, "Hear, O Israel,

the Lord our God, the Lord is one!" and so dedicated a new home.

Centuries have passed; the wilderness is the pride of the world, for it is all a land of freedom, of homes; and the Jew, we find him so grateful that he has well-nigh forgotten to what he owes his salvation. He has forgotten, else how explain the empty temples, the lack of religious enthusiasm, lack of reverence of children for parents, lack of that sacred home life which has made us an honored place in history? That our women have not made of themselves Dinah Morris and "Voegele der Maggids" we can forgive, but that we have removed so many of the ancient landmarks which our fathers established, can we forgive ourselves for that?

That we have not possessed ourselves of the wisdom of her who builded her own house can hardly be pardoned us, for what can replace the priceless love which has bound the members of the Jewish family to each other and to their God? Learning is not wisdom. Innovation is not progress, and to be identical with man is not the ideal of womanhood. Some things and privileges belong to him by nature; to these, true woman does not aspire; but every woman should aspire to make of her home a temple, of herself a high priestess, of her children disciples, then will she best occupy the pulpit, and her work run parallel with man's. She may be ordained rabbi or be the president of a congregation—she is entirely able to fill both offices—but her noblest work will be at home, her highest ideal, a home. Our women, living in a century and in a country which gives them every opportunity to improve, are not making the most of themselves, and to the stranger, the non-Jew, who views us critically, we are not entirely an improvement upon our mothers of old. We may dress with better taste, we may know more *ologies*, we may

discuss high art, but we no longer offer up such reverent homage to the Almighty, as that which was given in times of direst distress and persecution, and which yielded so rich a harvest as an America, in which to enjoy life and liberty to the utmost. How is this liberty enjoyed? Go to the synagogue on Friday night; where are the people? Our men cannot attend, keen business competition will not permit them. Where are our women? Keener indulgence in pleasures will not permit them. Where are the children? Keenest parental examples of grasping gain and material desires will not permit them, and so the synagogue is deserted. Go there on a Saturday, the day of rest, of holy convocation. Where are the people? Our men are at their shops, our women doing the shopping, calling, or at the theatre; *every one and everything can be attended to but God. For Him they have no time.* With whom lies the blame? Where are the wise mothers of Israel to-day? As we sow, so we must reap. Costly temples with excuses for congregations will not do, friends. Better the old tent for a dwelling, the trees and skies for synagogues, and reverent, God-fearing men and women, than our present poor apology for religious worship.

The world calls the nineteenth century Jew materialistic, the Jew denies it, but denial is not refutation.

It is time we stopped calling ourselves chosen, it is time we stopped living upon our past, time we prove we have been chosen a nation of priests by fulfilling His law. Many an one has been chosen for some noble mission who never attempted its completion, and it would be illogical to credit such an one with any great merit. That we are now in the position of backsliders is owing to us women.

Where are the Hannahs who cry as she of old, "For this lad did I pray; and the Lord hath granted me my

petition which I asked of Him. Therefore also have I lent Him for my part to the Lord; all the days that have been assigned to him shall he be lent to the Lord."

Sisters, our work in and for the synagogue lies in bringing to the Temple the Samuels to fulfil the Law. As mothers in Israel I appeal to you to first make of our homes temples, to rear each child a priest by teaching him to be true to himself.

If the synagogues are then deserted, let it be because the homes are filled, then we will be a nation of priests; edifices of worship will be everywhere. What matter whether we women are ordained rabbis or not? We are capable of fulfilling the office, and the best way to prove it is to convert ourselves and our families into reverent beings. To simply be ordained priest is not enough, and the awful punishment which befell Eli is the best illustration of this. Nothing can replace the duty of the mother in the home. *Nothing can replace the reverence of children, and the children are yours to do as ye will with them.*

Mothers, ye can restore Israel's glory, can fulfil the prophecy by bringing the man-child, strong love of the Eternal, to his Maker.

The Rev. Dr. I. S. Moses, of Chicago, was called upon to discuss the paper, "Woman in the Synagogue." Miss Rebecca Lesem, of Quincy, Ill., then read a portion of a paper on "Advance Sabbath School Work," prepared for the Sabbath Visitor Association.