# CHARITY AS TAUGHT BY THE MOSAIC LAW.

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"Sing heav'nly Muse that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed
In the beginning, how the heav'ns and earth
Rose out of chaos. . . . .
And chiefly Thou, O spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples the upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
And madest it pregnant: What in me is dark,
Illumine; what is low, raise and support;
That to the height of this great argument,
I may assert eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men."

This shepherd of Milton's song was Moses, the lawgiver, the simple man of meekness, who alone of all mortals breathed into by the breath of God, stood face to face with Him; who alone of earth's men held converse with Him, and was the elect of righteousness and holiness to receive from the divine spirit the decalogue, so simple in its comprehensiveness that we teach the babe to lisp it, and yet so deep, grand, severe, that it awes the savage in his lawlessness. It is the mighty pile upon which the Christian world rises, and upon which is built the destiny of the whole human race. From these Thou-shalt-nots have risen the nations' glory —morality and lawfulness, and from that solitary Thou-shalt issues the crowning aureole of life, which sits like a star on the mother's brow, and wraps the father in a cloth of purple.

The decalogue attests the sovereignty of God, a teaching which goes like an æolian sigh through the code of Moses: "I am the Lord your God which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt." As a prelude to his grand system of laws, he reminds the Israelites of their deliverance from the taskmasters of Egypt, to render them merciful to the oppressed, and to make them protectors and friends of the downtrodden and all those who sue for mercy from man. "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt." This enslaved condition of the Jews for four hundred years has tempered the spiritual teachings of the world by having developed a Moses. It has put into touch with each other men of widest lives, of extremest education, of conflicting faiths, and this link between men is *Charity as taught by the Mosaic Law;* "it humanizes religion, and religionizes humanity;" it is the ethical basis of Judaism, as Judaism is the bedrock of all religions; whatever may have come after it, there was nothing before. What is the essence of charity as taught by the Mosaic law? It is merciful conduct to man, beast, birds in the air, fruit-bearing trees, to everything animate and inanimate under the wide expanse of heaven. There is a reason for every precept in the Law, and every reason teaches equity, mercy, justice, courage. The Mosaic code has, for its *direct* object, the cultivation of a spiritual and holy life, the inculcation of patience, modesty, humanity, sympathy for the poor and the sick, of help for the weak, of release for the slave, of compassion for the hired man and the debtor, and above all of the necessity of *education*, which is the fountain whence well-springs of good impulses gush. Though the Law impresses the precept of charity on the people—in fact, rabbinical writ says: "He who practices love and charity fulfils the whole law of Moses,"—it does



not commiserate the poor man to the extent of commanding self-abnegation. It says: "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God, which He hath given thee," and the Talmud comments on this: "Whoever wants to enrich the poor must not give more than the fifth part away, otherwise the giver may some day impoverish himself, so that he will be thrown upon society."

This humane and judicious law was carefully observed by the Jews of the Middle Ages, and even to-day, here in our midst, we have Jewish philanthropists who give a tenth of their earnings to the poor and the needy, and though this unselfish charity is unstintingly dispensed, it is given with a wise heart, lest the poor should organize themselves into bands of idle parasites, and paralyze society. When the great philanthropist-banker Itzig, of Berlin, gave wine to the sick and the poor, he persistently asked the return of the empty bottles, to show these helpless creatures that everything was of use, that his wealth did not blind him, that though they had consumed the wine, the vessel which had held it for them could be of further use in serving others.

How beautifully this contrasts with the godless emperors of Rome who lavished wealth indiscriminately, striving to win fame by ill-considered liberality; "they fed the rabble with corn, wine and oil," and thus encouraged idleness and dissipation, countenancing the rich who encroached upon the rights of the poor. This, too, is in opposition to the Mosaic teachings, which insist upon the rich man's calling in the poor to his table, and forbid hurting his feelings by even staring at him while he eats, lest it be taken for the arrogance of riches or the pride of ownership of the food he gave. Says the Law, "If the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge, in any case, thou shalt deliver him the pledge

again, when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment." This would keep the lender to the poor from asking his garments as a pledge; or at least it would secure the garment as a covering for his limbs, when the poor man lay down to sleep. And in addition, it ordains, "When thou dost lend thy brother anything, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge, thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge unto thee." This would prevent the lender from acting in an arrogant manner, or from domineering over the less fortunate man.

The Greeks of antiquity were likewise munificent in their gifts, but with the ulterior object of displaying their wealth to the populace; it was a sort of advertisement for the rich man; but the Jews of this time were practicing the *letter* of the Law. Almost in every town there were synagogues, where not alone the one, true God was worshiped, but where instruction was given, and charity practiced in all its branches.

The Jews have a sympathetic, responsive nature, and on account of the hardships undergone by their race, they are so knitted in soul to one another, that they nurse their sick, help their poor, soothe the widow and the orphan, and entertain the stranger, from instinct as much as from education. Consequently, all this civilizing humaneness was found in towns where Israelites dwelt, and up to the destruction of the Second Temple, they lived in the spirit of the Law.

Then came Christianity, a modification of these practices under better organization, learned from the Romans, for the latter have excelled, in history, as leaders and organizers. In addition to Christianity's having this incalculable advantage, it had converts from every quarter, who willed large sums to its institutions, and consequently put it in possession of a large territory. This



left the Israelites in fewer numbers, and made them fall back into a solidarity of purpose, which intensified their brotherhood and their sympathies for one another.

However, though Christianity grew abroad, and was enriched by Roman converts, who enabled it to do much fine charity, its ethics were nourished at the bosom of Mosaic teachings; virtues were adopted from the Mosaic code, and the merciful words, "When thou cuttest down thy harvest in thy field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow;"—this merciful precept had lain in the heart of Jesus along with the love of the man, Moses, who bequeathed it to his people.

The widow and the orphan claimed the especial love of the legislator, and everywhere he speaks of them, and enjoins man to be concerned about them, and provide for their wants.

"When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the bough again; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless and for the widow."

"When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward, it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless and the widow," for out of the mighty depths of his heart, he foresaw that woman, clinging in her nature, would be doubly weak when the stronger arm was snatched away, and with her children would be among strangers. While the letter of the Law commands commiseration for the widow and the fatherless, it is in the *spirit* of the Law that the Israelite best serves the Master, a spirit that can best be understood by God, for the Jewish heart goes out to these unfortunates, expands for them, and contracts again with them enclosed. The strong man takes charge of the widow's affairs, advises her, comforts her, and in every provision includes her before himself. If the fatherless lose this

last, loving parent, the orphan is adopted, taught in the Law, given a trade together with the more fortunate child, and when ready for matrimony, if a girl, a good husband is secured for her, nor is she left portionless; if a man, a good wife is sought for him, and in most instances he is provided with the means for establishing a household. Jewish Orphan Aid Societies have existed in large and small communities from the early centuries. We have them in almost every town and city in the United States; and they give sums of money and outfits of necessary clothing to the orphan. In Europe, among many, is the society founded in Berlin by Daniel Itzig, providing liberal dowries for poor brides. This is a duty of the Jew to an orphan.

Together with the widow and the orphan is mentioned the stranger. The stranger, supposed to have left his country, his kinspeople and familiar scenes, so dear to the heart, his body worn with travel and emotion, sometimes with hunger and thirst, must be allowed to gather the fruits of the field, left for him by the gleaners, that he may sustain life, as the story of Boaz and Ruth well illustrates. The stranger is invited to the homes of his brethren in faith, and is compensated there for what he has left in his own land. The stranger is coupled with the brother, "And if thy brother has waxed poor, and fallen in decay with thee, thou shalt relieve him, *yea, though he be a stranger* or a sojourner; that he may live with thee." This is one of the beautiful qualities of the family life of the Jews; their concern for one another, their respect for father and mother, and their cheerful hospitality. In Jewish communities there also exist brotherhoods, which have for their purpose benevolence to the stranger, who may chance among them, and one historian tells us that, in many instances, a poor Jew has traveled through the greater part of



Europe without much more than a penny in his pocket, his brethren feeding and clothing him, and then giving him a letter of recommendation to his co-religionists in the next town to which he wanted to go.

Mosaic charity inculcates fellowship, a responsiveness to the joy or the sorrow of others, be they kinsmen or strangers. "Thou shalt not oppress a stranger, for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."

There is a very fine, humanizing law on usury, which says, "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of anything that is lent upon usury," and this law was observed until the early Middle Ages, when the Jews were forced into disregarding it by being deprived by the rulers of countries of other channels of livelihood. The precept taught the lesson to lend to the poor without exacting pay for what was lent, so as not to make the poor poorer, and as Philo interprets it, "Considering that *gratitude* may in some degree be looked upon as interest repaid at a more favorable season for what was lent in an hour of necessity."

Mercy, twin sister of charity, is extended also to the hired man, "The wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning." This is a consideration the heart can readily understand, for the laborer fortifies his strength with thoughts of his pay and of the comfort it will afford those dependent upon him, and if, when the sun sets upon him, his heart is cheerful, he brings better strength to his labor the following day, while if he is tricked out of his wages, in addition to his waste of energy, he suffers disappointment, which eats away his manhood, a quality of suffering which we are forbidden to inflict upon beasts, for "thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the

corn." With the same divine conception of mercy, instruments of labor are forbidden to be taken away or taxed, if their owner needs them to gain a livelihood: "No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge; for he taketh a man's life to pledge." Would not this mean, besides, preparing poverty for a man who would otherwise be happy, because industrious? Thus, when the unfortunates are committed to the charity of man, the wisdom of the Law streams forth like the word *God*, written on the mitre of the high priest. Everything has a claim on man's mercy, and the Mosaic code would have the creature made "in the image of God," resemble his Creator by cultivating in him the divine attributes of *virtue*, *justice* and *mercy;* many splendid blossoms have bloomed on the tree of life, and showered down leaves to make a soft bed for the poor, and have shed fragrance, and lent strength to those who needed comforting.

In every century Mosaic charity has communicated its spiritual essence to society at large, and has given to the needy a friend and support. Antiquity records the charity of Helena, Queen of Adiabene, and her son Monabazus, both proselytes to the Jewish faith, who labored to relieve the people during the great famine in Judæa by distributing food and money among them, and down through the roll of ages we come to our modern times! Moses Montefiore and his gentle wife Judith exemplified, in the highest degree, what charity was, taught by the Mosaic law. Fancy these two inspired beings moving calmly side by side to relieve stricken families of whatever faith, wherever found, crossing seas to pour gold and comforting words upon suffering fellow-creatures in the Holy Land. Then, when this sympathizing wife is laid in the bosom of the earth, look once more at this angelic old man, ninety-seven



years old, braving the dangers of a long journey again, his seventh trip to Damascus, to let fall his charity like the soft dew from heaven.

Regard the multiplicity of charities of Judah Touro. Besides endowing orphan asylums in many cities of the United States, he left fifty thousand dollars for the poor in Jerusalem. And who can estimate the charities of the Rothschilds! they support whole towns in the Holy Land, and in European cities, schools, colleges and synagogues are drawing their maintenance from their coffers, while, but a short while ago, one of their chateaux with its beautiful grounds was converted into a home for the poor and the sick.

Baron Hirsch may be called the noblest exponent of Mosaic charity, and if the stones preached sermons, and if the stars above were tongues, they could not tell of the many hearts he soothes, the many agonies he palliates, the many lives he saves for usefulness.

Mohammed said, "Solomon was sent by God to illustrate His attribute of wisdom, Jesus, His righteousness, and Moses, His providence." Would it not appear that such men are sent always to confirm a providence which never lessens? For "Mercy, first and last, shall brightest shine." Almsgiving is a cardinal requirement of the Law. The first fruits of corn and wine and oil and flocks were to be given to the priests, because in their holy office they could not till the ground, or tend the herd, and supplementing this there is the finest of human laws:

"Six years let the inhabitants of the land enjoy the fruits as a reward for the acquisitions which they have made and for the labors which they have undergone in cultivating the land; but for one year, namely, the seventh, let the poor and needy enjoy it."

Can we overestimate the quality of these precepts? One of the Greek philosophers has said about them,

"Who would deny that these go to the very furthest extent of humanity, unless he had tasted of this sacred code of laws only with the edges of his lips, or unless he had not reveled in its sweetest and most beautiful doctrines?"

These doctrines are like strands of assorted pearls, and lie deep in Jewish hearts; they are the strength of their strength, and appeal to the reason and the tenderness of Jews. Like a cry come up these words to them, "For the poor shall never cease out of the land, therefore I command thee, saying, thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor and to thy needy in thy land."

This age is made glorious by its development of woman; little by little she has pulled herself up from depths, in which she was but little above or better than the brute animal.

Who in the whole history of the world was the first to elevate woman? to teach delicacy to woman? to command honor of woman, and to insist upon her rights? It was this same law-giver, Moses, who has purged and cleansed the morals of the world from the inner circle to the greatest. He purified thoughts about woman, and created for her a place in life, next in dignity to man. And as dews from heaven bring forth the sweetness from the rose to exhale upon the air, so have these tender laws about woman, this care and love developed her heart, and the world is happier for having had noble women who are sainted in the minds of men because of their charity and soft comfortings.

We have spoken of Judith Montefiore as her husband's inspiration, how she helped him in his humanitarian work, but she did much charity of her own accord. She gave from her own means in a queenly and gracious manner regardless of the creed of the beneficiary; it was



the needy human being she sought to befriend, not the adherent of a church or the believer in a dogma.

In Berlin and Vienna there lived benevolent daughters of Daniel Itzig, nine sisters, cultured, beautiful and gracious, each possessing many accomplishments, and trained to be merciful to the needy, and good to the poor and the sick.

Here, in America, there issues a light from the grave enshrining Rebecca Gratz, a Philadelphian. She attended the synagogue on every Sabbath, and during her whole beautiful life "never went astray in the slightest instance" from ancestral teachings, and her charities, many and far-reaching, were conceived in a liberal spirit. She included suffering humanity in her plans of mercy, and refused to draw the line at creed; her heart was a mine of compassion for those who most needed it, and she bestowed it lavishly upon them. She founded the first Hebrew Sunday School in America, and was its superintendent for thirty-two years, and helped to found the Foster Home, the Fuel Society, the Sewing Society and the Hebrew Benevolent Society. Her friend was Washington Irving, who was a great admirer of her mind and heart, and history has it that once, when visiting at the home of Walter Scott, he learned of "Ivanhoe," then in process of writing, and that Scott was casting about to introduce a Jewish heroine into the novel. Irving described Miss Gratz, and grew so enthusiastic over her that Scott drew a character from his description. When his book was completed, he asked Irving how the "Rebecca" of "Ivanhoe" corresponded with his original; it is, indeed, a fit monument unto so sweet a life as Rebecca Gratz lived.

And now while we write of noble women who lived with their palms turned outward, and illustrated Mosaic charity, let us not forget a great woman whom the

Talmud honors with the name of "daughter of God," that woman whose maternal affections beatified her life, and who clasped to her womanly heart the crying child from out of his green cradle, wherein he rocked upon the water, the Egyptian princess, Pharaoh's daughter—who adopted the babe, and cared for it, and loved it with a mother's love, and called him Moses.

Thus God chose a woman to execute His design to preserve to the world the greatest good it has ever known, through this man Moses, whose laws will last until heaven comes down to earth, and God walks abroad on the face of the deep.

For, to quote Moses' own words, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb and as the showers upon the grass."