

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם ירמיהו טז'

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THE Jews of the present day have got one religion—the Christians have got another. It is much to be desired that all the sons of men should have the one true religion, but, as this is not likely to be the case for some little time longer, it becomes those who differ to examine the nature and grounds of their differences. Whatever Jews may think upon the subject, Christians feel themselves bound to inquire whether they have really erred so grievously as modern Judaism asserts. The oral law brings no less a charge against them than this, That they are guilty of idolatry, and therefore in a worse state than even the Mahometans.

כל גוי שאינו עובד ע"מ כבוד אלו והשמימאליים ייבן אסור בשתייה ומותר בהנייה וכן הורו כל הגאונים אבל הנוצרים עובדי ע"מ הם וסתם ייבן אסור בהנייה :

"As to those Gentiles who, like the Ishmaelites, are not idolaters, their wine is unlawful to drink, but is lawful for purposes of profit, as is taught by all the Gaons; but Christians are idolaters, and their wine, even such as has not been used as wine of libation, is unlawful even for purposes of profit." (Hilchoth Maakhaloth Asuroth, c. xi. 7.) These words are very plain, and are confirmed by the practice of rabbinites in every part of the world, who abstain as carefully from the wine belonging to Christians, as their forefathers would have done from the idolatrous libation of the Canaanites. Jews, therefore, cannot be astonished if we examine with care a religion that brings against us so grave an accusation, and endeavour to defend ourselves against the charge. We might ask them, whether they behold in our churches any of the emblems of idolatry. We might refer them to the ten commandments written up in the most holy place of our sacred edifices. We might quote from the New Testament many warnings against idolatry as plain and as solemn as any to be found in the law of Moses; but there is a previous question to be considered, and that is, What is the character of that system, which witnesses against us? Is it worthy of credit—can its testimony be depended upon? If the oral law be really from God, and if its teachers should appear as faithful depositories of divine truth, their testimony would have great weight. But if the rabbies be detected as daring corrupters of divine revelation, and their religion be proved to be a perversion of the law of Moses, then

this charge must fall to the ground as unworthy of all credit; and this is what we assert. We have already given many reasons in support of this assertion, and now add some more which we find in the laws about נסך "wine of libation," which laws appear to us to be not only unwarranted additions, but unmerciful, uncharitable, and irrational.

We do not mean to deny that it is utterly unlawful to partake of wine that has been consecrated to idols; on the contrary, we would assert this as zealously as any Israelite. Concerning things offered to idols, the New Testament says, "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils." (1 Cor. x. 20, 21.) Let not therefore any Israelite think that we wish to defend what is contrary both to the Old and New Testament. But though fully convinced of the unlawfulness of drinking wine or any thing else consecrated to the service of idolatry, we confess that we cannot see why it is unlawful to make use of wine not consecrated to idolatry, simply because it belongs to, or has been touched by, a Gentile; and yet this is the rabbinic law.

יין הגויים שאין אנו יודעין אם נתנסך או לא נתנסך יהוא הקרא סתם ייבן אסור בהנאה כמו יין שנתנסך דבר זה מגזירת הסופרים הוא והשוהה מסתם ייבן רביעית מכין אותו מכת מרדות: וכל יין שיגע בו הגוי דרו זה אסור שמא נסך אותו שמהשבה הגוי לעבדה כוכבים ומזלות הא למדת שייך ישראל שגע בו הגוי דינו כסתם ייבן אסור בהנייה :

"Wine belonging to Gentiles, of which we do not know whether it has been consecrated or not, and what is called *common Gentile wine*, is unlawful even to make a profit of, just like wine that has been consecrated; and this is by the decree of the scribes. Who-soever drinks so much as one quarter measure of this common Gentile wine is to be flogged with the flogging of rebellion. All wine also which a Gentile touches is unlawful because he may have consecrated it, for the thought of a Gentile is to idolatry. Hence thou hast learned, that concerning wine belonging to an Israelite which a Gentile has touched, the law is the same as in the case of common Gentile wine, which is unlawful even to make a profit of." (Ibid., 3. 4.) Now in this law we have first the unauthorised additions of the rabbies.

We have already granted, that wine, and everything else, consecrated to the service of idols is unlawful, but with this the rabbies are not content. They forbid wine that was made by, or ever in the possession of, a Gentile, or even if a Gentile has touched it, and that not only to drink it, but to make any use of it, or to sell it, or to be in any way employed about it, so as to make any profit by it.

החמירו חכמים בנאמם כינם להיות דמיו אסורין כדמי יין שנחנכך לענ'ם לשיכך גוי ששכר את ישראל לששת עמור בין שכרו אסור : וכן השוכר את החמור להביא עליו יין או ששכר ספינה להביא בה יין ששכר אסור אם משות נתנו לו יוליכין לים המלח : ואם נתנו לו בשכרו כסות או כלים או פירות דברי זה שירוקן ואתן ויקבור חמור כדי שלא להנות בו שכר לגוי חמור לרכוב עליו הניחו עליו לוגין של יין שכרו מותר :

“The wise men have been very strict with respect to the common Gentile wine, and have pronounced its price to be unlawful, as that of wine which has been consecrated to idolatry; therefore, if a Gentile have an Israelite to labour with him, in any thing concerning wine, his wages are unlawful. In like manner, if he hire an ass, or a ship, to carry wine, the hire thereof is unlawful: and if it be given to him in money, he is to throw it into the salt sea. But if the hire be given him in clothes, or vessels, or fruits, he is to burn them, and to bury their ashes, that no profit may arise therefrom. But if an Israelite has hired an ass to a Gentile to ride upon, and he lays upon it bottles of wine, then the hire thereof is lawful” (Ibid., c. xiii. 15, &c.). For all this there is no authority whatever in the law of Moses,—it is a pure invention of the rabbies, who had but little respect for the divine law, and no consideration at all for the necessities of man. It is evident that these additions must, in many cases, become so many impediments in the way of earning a subsistence. The proprietor of a ship, or the owner of cattle, is cut off from one source of employment and profit. Now, even in the case of the rich, though they may feel it less, this is an unjustifiable severity; but in the case of the poor, it becomes a most cruel oppression. In the wine-countries, for example, a poor Jew might perchance find employment with some of the growers of that article; but the rabbies have declared that honest industry, in a matter which God has nowhere forbidden, is unlawful, and the fruits of it so abominable, as to be fit only for destruction. In this city, also, many examples of the absurdity and cruelty of this law might be found. Suppose that a Christian wine-merchant should wish to employ some one or more of those numerous Israelites, who are destitute of the means of earning a livelihood, and should therefore offer him a situation, either in his cellar or his counting-house, the rabbies say that he dare not accept of it: and

that it is more pleasing in the sight of God that the man should go about idle, and that his family should starve, than that he should labour honestly, and do what God has permitted. Who is there, except the rabbies themselves, who does not see that such a decision is irrational, oppressive, and unmerciful, not now to speak of its injustice to Christian nations, by classing them with the idolaters of Canaan? But take another case, suppose that some Christian, finding a Jewish family in deep distress, some of the members perhaps recovering from sickness, to whom a little wine might be beneficial, gives them a bottle of wine, What are they to do with it? May they make use of it to strengthen their exhausted frames? The rabbies answer, No. May they sell it, and with the money purchase food, or some other necessary of life? The rabbies answer, No. What then are they to do with it? The rabbies answer, Destroy it, destroy what would recruit your fainting bodies—what would purchase bread for your starving children—destroy what might perhaps save your life, simply because we have forbidden it; and it is more important that our unauthorised laws should be preserved inviolate, than that you should be comforted or strengthened or relieved in your misery. This is the mercy of Judaism. But we have not done yet. Suppose that the mother of the family should begin to reason, and say, This wine would preserve my poor child's life; a little of it would strengthen me, and enable me to tend the sick bed with more alacrity; God has nowhere forbidden it. She accordingly administers to her child, and partakes herself, when some Rabbinic zealot enters and perceives what she has done. Now suppose that the ministers of the oral law had the liberty to follow out all its enactments, what would be the consequence? The poor woman would be summoned before a *בית דין*, a tribunal; the oral law would be opened, and her sentence be, The flogging of rebellion, as we have cited above. Is this merciful, is it just, is it rational? Is there any thing like it in the New Testament, or in the religion of Jesus of Nazareth? The oral law says that we are idolaters, but is it worthy of credit? Can any reasonable man place confidence in the teaching of those who are so senseless as to forbid a perishing fellow-creature to make use of proffered relief, and so merciless as to flog him with the flogging of rebellion, if he regards God's permission more than their prohibition? But it is not only absurdity and cruelty, which here are to be noticed, there is also a certain measure of that cleverness which we have remarked on former occasions, which provides for the transgression of the law, and the retaining of the merit of keeping it. The above extract says, “If an Israelite has hired an ass to a Gentile to ride upon, and he lays upon it bottles of wine, then the hire thereof is lawful,” and on this principle

the owner of a ship or a waggon may let either generally for the transport of merchandize, and provided the word *wine* is not mentioned, the Gentile may transport his wine, and the Jew lawfully receive and use his money, though if the word *wine* had been mentioned, the money would have been so unlawful, that it ought not even be given to relieve the wants of the poor, but thrown into the salt sea. Here the rabbies betray their own insincerity, and their unbelief in their own enactments, by their determination to evade their severity, whenever it interfered with their own interests. But even if there were no cruelty, no contempt for the law of God, and no evasion, the effect of multiplying such observances is to lead away the mind from the weightier matters of religion. The ignorant think, even whilst they are violating the ten commandments, that, if they abstain from Gentile wine, they are fulfilling a most meritorious duty, and making compensation for their other transgressions. Indeed the rabbies themselves are not free from this effect, if we may judge by the following passage:—

וזה גרה במסיבת של ישראל היין מותר שאיכות
עליה לא תגע אבל וזנה ישראל' במסיבת גרים ימה
שלמיה בכליה אסור מפני שדון נורעין שלא מדעת :
“If a Gentile harlot be at an entertainment of Israelites, the wine is lawful, for their fear is upon her, so that she would not touch it. But if an Israelite harlot be at an entertainment of Gentiles, her wine that is before her in her own vessel is unlawful, because they may touch it without her knowledge.” (Ibid., c. xii. 26). Now if men or women are so wicked as to be found in such circumstances, in the open disregard of God's law, is it not deceiving them to tell them, or to lead them to suppose that there can be any merit in any mere ceremonial observance, even though it should have been ordained by God himself: and is it not straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel, to forbid a poor perishing Jew to taste wine touched by a Gentile, and to allow it to those who are feasting with a harlot? Perhaps some one will reply that it is on account of the idolatry of the Gentile; but we have seen in the first extract given in this paper, that if wine be touched even by a Gentile who is not an idolater, it is unlawful for a Jew to drink it; so that to be a Gentile at all is in the eyes of the rabbies a greater degradation and of more contaminating influence, than to be guilty of gross immorality. Now we appeal to the good sense of every Israelite, whether this is not to exalt vice, and to degrade humanity? God chose a people to himself, Israel is that people; we honour them as such: but, is that any reason why Israel should trample upon the ties of our common humanity, and look upon the touch even of a Gentile who fears God, as so defiling that it makes wine unfit for the use of a Jew. How are peace and charity ever to pre-

vail between Jews and Gentiles, so long as this is looked upon as religion? Yea, and how is true religion and true fear of God ever to prevail amongst the mass of the Jewish community, so long as they are taught that Israelites guilty of immorality are more holy than a Gentile who fears God, and that sin is not so dreadful as uncircumcision? The object of such commands was plainly to prevent all social and friendly intercourse between Jews and Gentiles under any circumstances, and to build up an eternal wall of separation between them. This is very different from that national and official distinction instituted by God himself. The object of God's choice was not to put an end to the practice of love and charity between the Jews and all the other nations of the earth, but to cement the bonds of affection. He made Israel the depository of his oracles, that they might communicate the truth to other nations, and that thus the nations should feel gratitude for the benefit conferred, and the Israelites feel that affection for the nations, which a teacher naturally feels for those who, by his instrumentality, have forsaken error and embraced the truth. The oral law prevents the fulfilment of the divine law, and cuts asunder also these ties of amity and peace. It makes it impossible for Israel to communicate any blessing, and for the Gentiles to receive any blessing at their hands, and goes far towards throwing suspicion on the divine law. If there were no other medium of communication, than the rabbies, between the divine law and the world, the worship of Jupiter and Bacchus and all the other heathen deities would still prevail. How could the nations ever have been converted by those who taught them, in the first place, that God is such a respecter of persons, as to think immorality in a Jew less contaminating than the mere external touch of a pious Gentile? Reason revolts at such profane absurdity, and therefore if God had had no better messengers and representatives of his truth, idolatry would still continue. Some may reply, idolatry does still continue, such at least is the sentence of the oral law, and, though grieved that any should be so blind as to bring such a charge against Christianity, we are by no means angry or offended at it. If the Jews still believe in their own religion, and therefore think that Christians are idolaters, it is their bounden duty to say so. But then we ask in reply, if Christianity be idolatry, how is it that its doctrine is more pure, more merciful, more charitable, and more rational than that of the oral law? Christianity has no ceremonial laws to be observed by those who feast together with harlots—Christianity nowhere sentences the poor to flogging, because they partake of what God allows—Christianity nowhere represents God as an unjust and impartial judge, who looks not at moral good

and evil, but at a man's nation. Christianity teaches that true religion is that of the heart—that at the day of judgment mercilessness will obtain no mercy, and that God is the God of the spirits of all flesh. Let then the lovers of the oral law account for this fact, that Christianity, which they call idolatry, teaches a doctrine that glorifies God and benefits all men; whilst Judaism, which they say is the truth, teaches a doctrine dishonouring to God, oppressive to the Jews, and degrading to all other nations. Some Jews will reply, that Christians are not idolaters; then we ask such persons how they can pretend to profess Judaism, which has asserted the contrary for so many centuries, and also acted upon this principle, prohibiting all intercourse, as much as Moses did in the land of Canaan. Either Christianity is idolatry, or Judaism is false; there is no alternative. Every Jew, therefore, who asserts that Christians are not idolaters, pronounces of Judaism that it is false. Let all such persons then deal honestly, let them renounce what they do not believe; and let them denounce to their brethren what they think it necessary to disavow before Christians. They are bound to do this, not only to renounce the injustice with which the oral law treats Christians, but to take away the cruel and oppressive yoke which bows down their brethren the Jews. If Christianity be not idolatry, then all the laws concerning *יין*, “wine of libation,” are utterly out of place in this country. Then poor Jews may accept of Christian bounty, and the offices of kindness and charity may be practised between Jew and Christian. Those Jews therefore who profess to believe that Christians are not idolaters are bound, by their obligations both to Jews and Christians, to protest against the oral law, and publicly to disavow all belief in it. So long as they do not make such a public disavowal, their professions of love and charity and respect for the religion of Christians must be looked upon as hollow and insincere. So long as they make such professions, contrary to the oral law, and yet frequent the worship of the synagogue, which asserts the divinity of the oral law, they must be regarded either as persons who have motives for professing what they do not feel, or who want moral courage to renounce what they disapprove. These remarks apply particularly to those Israelites

who have practically forsaken Judaism, who associate with Christians, eat Gentile food, and drink Gentile wine, and some of whom perhaps even deal in it as an article of merchandize. Such persons, though Israelites by nation, are not Jews by religion, at least according to that sense in which the word Jew has been used both by Israel and Gentile nations for the last two thousand years. Such persons cannot pretend to be professors of the Jewish persuasion. Any one who is in the habit of drinking Gentile wine has practically forsaken Judaism, just as much as if he had assumed the turban and professed himself a Mahometan. It becomes such persons especially to make a stand against the oral law, and to declare publicly what their religion is, and whether they have any fixed principles at all. They cannot be regarded as Christians, for they have not been baptized; they cannot say that they are Jews, for they have forsaken Judaism; they cannot assert that they have the religion of Moses, for unless that religion be found amongst Christians, it does not exist. There is no body of religionists to be found in this country who profess themselves Mosaists. In the synagogue the oral law is professed; in the Church Christianity is professed: but where is the place of worship frequented by those who have forsaken Judaism without embracing Christianity? Such persons appear in a light that is not at all advantageous to their principles. In private they profess to abhor the intolerance of the oral law, they violate its precepts, and yet on the occasion of the great Jewish fasts and festivals they are to be seen in the synagogue joining in the worship, and observing the rites of the oral law. What then are we to believe concerning such persons? Are they indifferentists who have no religion at all? or are they secret admirers of the oral law, who, for worldly purposes, deny it when occasion suits, and conform to it when the conscience is uneasy? We are far from pronouncing them either one or the other, but simply propose these questions for their own consideration, remind them of the equivocal light in which they appear, and would give them advice similar to that of Elijah to their forefathers. If the oral law be true religion, profess and practise it. If the oral law be erroneous, superstitious, and uncharitable, renounce it openly and honestly.

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