

A JEWISH RABBI IN ROME.

WITH A COMMENTARY BY BEN ISRAEL.

Fifteenth Century. Reign of Sixtus IV.

Rabbi Ben Ezra to his dearest friend,
Rabbi Ben Israel, greeting—May the Lord
Keep thee in safety! I am still in Rome,
And, after months of silence, now redeem
My pledge to tell you how this Christian world
(Which here I came to study), nearly viewed,
Strikes me, a Jew, born, and with steady faith
In all the Law and Prophets of our land.
Still, though a Jew, it is the Truth I seek—
Only the Truth—and, come from whence it will,
I greet it with bent head and reverent heart.
I am a seeker;—though my faith is firm,
I will not tie my mind in knots of creeds.

No more preamble. I am now in Rome,
Where our Jehovah rules not,—but the man
Jesus, whose Life and Fate too well we know,
Is made a God—the cross on which he died
A reverend symbol, and his words the law.
His words, what were they? Love, good will to man,
His kingdom? Peace, His precepts? Poverty.
Well, are they followed? That's the question now.
What fruit have they produced?

One moment, first.
I think not ill of him. He was sincere,
Lofly of thought, a pure idealist.
Possessed, indeed, by visionary dreams,
But wishing ill to no one, least of all
To us, and to our Faith, which was his own.
I will not say he was entirely wrong
In the strong censures that he laid on us:
For we had many faults—were, as he said,
Only too much like whitened sepulchres.
And then, no good man is entirely wrong,
And none entirely right. The truth is vast,
And never was there Creed embraced it all.
Like all enthusiasts he beheld his half,
Deemed it the whole, and with excess of zeal
Pushed his ideal truth beyond the stretch
Of human practice. Most of what he taught
The wise and good of old had said before.
His healing skill, this sect calls miracles.
A hundred others had as well as he.
And for that claim his followers set up:
And he, perhaps (though here there is much doubt)
Asserted of himself, that he was sent
Messias, King of Kings, to save the world.
This, surely, was no crime deserving death.
No mere opinions, void of acts, are crimes.

Besides, what sect or creed was ever crushed
By cruelty? Our error was perverse,
Willful, nowise. Had we but spared his life,
He would have passed away as others pass,—
Simon and John and Apollonius,
Judas of Galilee, and many more.
But, no! we lifted him above the rest:
Made him conspicuous by his martyrdom.
Watered with blood his doctrine; fired the hearts
Of those who loved him with temperate zeal
And wild imaginations, till at last
They thought they saw him risen from the dead.
Our folly (call it by its lightest name)
Nourished the seed into this mighty sect.
That takes his name and worships him as God.

Setting aside the superstitious part,
I ask, What were the doctrines that he preached,
And that his followers with their lips profess?
Love! Peace! Goodwill to man! This was the gist
Of all he taught. Forgive your enemies!
Seek for the lost sheep from the fold that stray!
Harm no one! For the prodigal returned
Kill the fat calf! Be merciful to all!
Who are the enemies, prodigal, lost sheep,
To whom their mercy, love, care, gifts are given?
Not we, the Jews, in truth. Is it for us
They kill the calf? Are we the enemies
That they forgive? Have they goodwill for us?
Not they! They hold us rather like fowl swine,
Abuse us—lay great burdens on our backs,
Spit on us—drive us forth beyond their walls,
Force us all slavish offices to do—
And if we join their sect, scorn us the more.
If those are blessed, as he says, whom men
Revere and persecute, most blest are we!

Yet was not Jesus, first of all a Jew—
Even to his death a Jew? Did he renounce
His strict faith in the Prophets and the Law?
Never! "I come not to destroy," he said,
"the Law or Prophets, only to fulfil."
So, too, his preaching, whatever it was,
Was to the Jews. The miracles he wrought
Were for the Jews alone. "I am not sent,"
These are his words,—but unto the lost sheep
Of Israel's house: my bread is not for dogs.
Who were the dogs to whom he thus refused
To lend his healing hand? What had she done
Who asked his service that he scorned her thus?
She was from Canaan, or a Greek—no Jew.
This was her crime. "Tis true that, touched at last
By those sad humble words of hers, the dogs
May eat the crumbs dropped from the master's board,"
He made her an exception to his rule,
But still his rule was this. This his first rule.
No! But it was! Remember the rich youth
Who prayed to be his follower: "Two things,"
He said, "are needful." First, that you obey
The Law and Prophets—that is, a Jew;
And then the second, that your wealth and goods
You sell, and give the proceeds to the poor.
First be a Jew, then poor. Renounce all wealth;
Keep nothing back. These are conditions prime,
Refusing which, your following I reject.

I see you gravely shake your head at this;
But read the records,—you will see I'm right.
Jesus, let me repeat it yet again,
Was first and last a Jew; never renounced
That faith of ours: taught in the Synagogue;
Quoted the Prophets; re-affirmed the Law;
Worked with the Jews, and only healed the Jews,
And held all other nations but as dogs.

* (Commentary by Ben Israel.)

I've read the records carefully again;
It goes against my will—still, I admit,
Ben Ezra may be right. Here let me note
One case that he perchance has overlooked—
That of the Publican named Zaccheus.
This man was rich, and, curious, sought to look
On Jesus,—for this purpose climbed a tree.
Jesus, perceiving him, proposed himself
To be his guest; at which a murmuring went
Among his followers,—for this wealthy man
Was, as they said, a sinner, or no Jew.
But I note this, that Zaccheus on the spot
Surrendered half his goods unto the poor.
Ere Jesus went into his house; and then,
And not till then, said Jesus—"On this house
This day salvation cometh, forasmuch
As he, too, is a son of Abraham!"
That is, a Jew. Again, where did he send
His twelve disciples (Judas 'mid the rest)
To preach the Gospel? To the Gentiles? No!
This he forbade,—but "unto the lost sheep
Of Israel's house." And one case more I note—
That of the woman of Samaria,
To whom he said (his followers murmuring

And second (mark this well, and ponder it),
He was a Communist—denied the right
Of private wealth; ordained a common purse
To be administered for all alike.
And all rejected who refused him this.
"Tis easier for a camel to pass through
A needle's eye"—these are his very words.
Than that a rich man should inherit heaven.
A rich man, mind you, whether good or bad.
What was the moral of his parable
Of Lazarus and Dives? What offence
Did Dives, that in everlasting fire
He was condemned to suffer? What good deed
Did Lazarus that he at last should lie
On Abraham's bosom in eternal bliss?
Nothing! The beggar, Lazarus, was poor;
Dives was rich. This was the crime of one,
The virtue of the other. Not one hint
Of any other reason for the hell
Of heaven that he adjudged them,—not one word
That Dives was not charitable, kind,
Generous, a helper of his brother man—
No accusation, save that he was rich.
No word that Lazarus, with all his sores,
Possessed one virtue save that he was poor.
Nay, more: when Dives in his torment sued
For mercy, what did Abraham say to him?
You for your evil deeds must suffer now!
No! but, "You had the good things on the earth,
Lazarus the evil. Therefore, now, to thee
Is torment given—comfort unto him."

Working to pile up wealth Jesus abhorred.
"Each man for all," he said, "and all for each.
Take no thought of to-morrow—for the day
Sufficient will be given. No sparrow falls
Save through God's law. The ravens of the air
Sow not and reap not, yet God feedeth them.
The lilies of the field nor toil nor spin,
Yet Solomon was not arrayed like them.
Why, then, take thought of raiment and of food?
Leave all to God. Blessed are ye, the poor!
God's kingdom shall be yours; but ye, the rich,
Woe unto you!" This was his life and text.
Once only—so the record goes—a rage
Seized upon Jesus, when, with whip and thong,
The money-changers—all who bought and sold—
He from the precincts of the temple drove.
Saying, "Tis writ, This is the house of prayer,
But ye have made it a den of thieves."
Let this show what he thought of such as these.
Those who were with him knew and did his will.
Lived in community of goods, renounced
All private wealth. This doctrine, too, they preached
After his death; and all who joined their sect
Sold their possessions, houses, treasures, lands,
And paid the price into the common store,
To be administered to each one's need.
They did not seek by subterfuge and trick
To cling to Mammon while they worshipped God.

What should a Christian do, then, who accepts
The doctrines that this master, nay, this God
(For so they call him), clearly thus appoints?
Live by them, should he not? Not by blank words
Affirm them, but by all his acts and life.
First, love to God—and love to man as well.
Then peace, forgiveness, kindness, poverty.
What is the Christian practice? War—the sword
As arbiter of all disputes of men—
Reprisals,—persecutions unto death
For all who differ from them—Peter's sword
That Jesus bade him sheathe,—no simple lives
Of frugal fare and pure beneficence,
But luxury and imperious tyranny
In all high places,—all in earnest strife
To pile up wealth for selfish purposes.
Each greedy for himself, the wretched poor
Down trodden, trampled on,—the Church itself,
Splendid with pagan, cruel in its power,
Pride rampant, basking through a thousand maws,
Power, like a ravening wolf among the lambs,
Worrying the weakest,—prayers, lip-deep, no more—
The devil's work done in the name of God.

Such is the spectacle I see in Rome.
Among the poms in which this Christian Church
Invests its pageants, oft I think of him
Whom they pretend to worship, and his words
Come back to me with which he once reproved
Our priests of his own days. The world, indeed,
Has but one pattern for its worldliness,
Or now, or then, 'tis evermore the same.
If we of old were stiff-necked in our pride,
Desiring power instead of godliness,
Avid of pomp,—these Christians are the same:
They will not follow either God or Christ.
"Thus saith the Lord, Stand in the ways, and see;
Ask, where is the good way, and walk therein,
And so ye shall find rest unto your souls.
But they replied, We will not walk therein."
Thus Jeremiah,—Jesus much the same.
Long prayers, low bowings in the market-place,
Chief seats in synagogues, upper rooms at feasts,
Finelinen, costly dresses, pompous rites,
Grand ceremonials, purple trailing robes,
Embroidered hems, and wide phylacteries,—
All this he scorned. Well, still we see the same.
For all his scorn, among his followers,
His very words describe these cardinals
As they were made for them alone,—not us.
Not we alone were whitened sepulchres;
Robbed widows, orphans, every one for greed:
This Church still robs them, wears its purple robes,
Prays at the public corners of the streets,
Nor even the outside of the pinner cleans.

And what thinks Jesus of it?—if, indeed,
He from beyond can look into their hearts,
Who call upon his name and preach of Peace.
Foul hypocrites, who feed their hungry flocks
With husks of dogmas and dead chaff of talk,
And trample virtue down into the mire.

I ask myself, do these men ever think
Or weigh their master's teaching, practice, words,
That thus by rote, like empty formulas,
They gabble them, as senseless parrots talk.
Doctrine and life to him were one. To these
Doctrine from life is utterly divorced.

Whatever Jesus was, this Church, these men,
Are none of his,—or ours; his words alone
They worship like a fetish; without sense.
His real inner teaching they reject;
Nay, are afraid to look it in the face,
And seek its meaning, lest it come to this,
That they must choose between the things he would,
And what they covet dearer than his life.

That he should speak to her): "Salvation comes
But to the Jews." Doubtless, as well we know,
It was unlawful for a Jew to eat.
And bide with those who were uncircumcised.
Upon this point, long after he was dead,
Extreme contention 'mid his followers rose.
If Gentiles, ere they had been circumcised,
Into the Christian faith could be baptized—
Some holding full adherence to the law
A prime condition,—some, that it sufficed
If his main principles were recognized;
But this I merely note. It seems quite clear
That only Jews at first could join the sect.

"Here I, Ben Israel, note the curious case
Of Ananias and Sapphira, struck
By sudden death; because of all their wealth
They kept a part back for their private use—
Tempting by this the Lord, as Peter said.
But where are the Almighty's lightnings now

Jew as I am, in view of them, at times
I long to see some real Christian sect
Ready to take the system that he taught,
And try it in this world,—not talking Peace,
Good-will to men, Love, Justice, Charity,
But living it in very deed,—a sect
That should abjure all individual greed,
All competition for a selfish end,
And joining, make one common purse for all,
As Jesus did among his followers.
Would it succeed? Ah, you and I are Jews;
Jesus has no authority with us.
But were we Christians, and not hypocrites,—
Did we believe that he was really God,
Or even that his mission was divine,
How should we dare to gloss his teachings o'er,
And twist his doctrines so that they should fit
Our worldly needs, and in the very face
Of his plain orders seek some verbal trick
To warp them to the life we like to lead!

The Eternal One must needs look down and smile
At these base wriggings of His creatures here,
Filled with ad and pity, too at their offence,
Seeing them do, with His name on their lips,
All he forbids, and dreaming none the less
They only shall be saved,—all others damned.

Would Jesus' plan succeed? The world thus far
Has taken another path,—we most of all,—
Believing not in him, nor in his scheme;
But dreaming—shaking, as it were, from me
All usages and habits of the world.
At times I stretch my mind out in the vague,
And seek upon this plan to build a world.
No property, but that which all should own
With equal rights,—the product of all work
Held for the common good in trust for all;
All, to the lowest, to be clothed, fed, housed,
Freed from necessity and from the wolf
Of hunger, and the pains and pangs of life;
Each having claims on all to do the task
Best fitted for his powers, tastes happiness;
Each as a duty bound to do his share,
And not to be a drone within the hive.

What glory might the world then see!—what joy!
What harmony of work! what large content!
What splendid products of joint industry!
All tolling with one purpose and one heart;
No war, no waste of noble energies,
But smiling peace, the enlarging grace of art;
Humanity a column with its base
Of solid work, and at its summit crowned
With the ideal capital of Love!

This is a dream that turns this world of ours
Quite upside down:—I'll say no more of it.

And yet one word more, lest you deem me fool!
Think not I dream: none but a fool could dream
Equality of rights,—that is, the claim
To Justice, life, food, freedom in the bound
Of common benefit, involves the claim
To equal virtues, powers, intelligence.
Since God in these unequal shaped us all,
And fitted each one for his special end,
So should the wise, just, virtuous take the lead,
Or all at once is lawless anarchy:
For what more fatal, hopeless, than a scheme
Where wise and good, and foot and knave alike,
Own equal powers and rights in government?

But how secure the leadership to those
Whom God hath made for leaders! Ah, my friend,
That is the question none hath ever resolved;
For liberty, at best a negative—
Mere freedom from restraint—engenders soon
License and tyranny,—dire positives:
Just as Aurelius, best of emperors,
Regot for son the cruel Commodus.

Danger on all sides threatens government.
Choose you a king,—the very best is weak,—
And fierce temptation dogs the path of power.
Choose you the Demos,—it perchance is worse.
For then, as in an agitated sea,
The frothiest ever to the surface swims,
Caprice, rage, panic, interest, sway the mob;
Justice is overborne, wisdom lies low,
And noisy ignorance, swollen by the breath
Of blatant demagogues, wrecks the lost state.

Why I—But because the eager lust of men,
The godless strife of utter selfishness,
Makes of the world a blind and brutal herd,
All crowding on, devoid of common aim,
Each going his own way to make his path.

(To be continued.)

GLITZ.

I had been reading "Barnaby Rudge," and,
in a fit of speculation, embracing that feature of
the book which brings into consideration that
subtle turning of the mind to scenes and events
that have brought to its possessor calamity and
suffering, and which constitutes the strongest
form of fascination known to psychology, I
wandered absently out of my apartment, and,
arriving at the door of my hotel, saw Glitz
shuffling along the sidewalk and peering hun-
grily in at the dining-room windows.

Glitz had formerly been a waiter in the estab-
lishment, and during my summer absence, I
found, upon inquiry, had been dismissed for ex-
cessive tippling; but I had conceived a liking
for the old fellow during a long course of faith-
ful service, and it occurred to me to bring him
along with me to my room and hear the story of
his misfortune from his own lips.

It was too evident that the poor old boy had
fared hardly since his dismissal, although his
threadbare garments were brushed with a reck-
less disregard for their frailty, and there was
still that scrupulous nicety about his linen that
had made him peculiarly acceptable about one's
table. Still, he was deplorably seedy, and I
noticed that his hands shook and his eyes were
watery and wandered as he followed me up the
stairs.

Dickens was doubtless accountable for the
idiosyncrasy, but as I motioned my convey to a
seat by the fire and leisurely relapsed into my
own comfortable easy-chair, the impression took
hold upon me that something besides a love of
spirits had contributed to bring Glitz to his
present unhappy condition, particularly as, on
reflection, I brought to mind the years of so-
briety and thrift through which I had known
him.

Why, being, as many besides myself could
attest, a capable and discreet waiter, had he
not sought and obtained another situation, in-

stead of constantly returning to haunt the scene
of his former labours in an idleness foreign to
his training and habit?

Destitution is never the choice of a naturally
frugal man, such as this one had always ap-
peared to be, and I now remembered to have
been told that he had daily been seen in the
vicinity of the house since the time of his dis-
missal, arguing that he had made little or no
effort to get employment elsewhere.

On the strength of these cogitations I opened
my inquiry, and immediately saw that I had
struck the keynote of his distemper, since, draw-
ing himself together with a shiver, and glancing
fearfully over his shoulder in the direction of
the door, as if apprehending some intrusive and
dangerous witness to what he was about to dis-
close, the old man answered:

"Monsieur is in the right; it is not the
drink that has brought old Glitz to the trottoir
—it is one *edech*—one fancy most horrible, that
only the abstinence gives to him the courage to
support it."

Few people are superior to the throbs of grati-
fied vanity incident to finding one's convictions
borne out by the elucidation of facts. My in-
terest was now fully awakened, and, with a little
encouragement both with words and from a cut-
glass decanter always kept within convenient
reach in case of emergencies, I brought my
visitor's courage up to the point of telling his
story, which, owing to a difficulty I experienced
in phoneticising, I am reduced to giving, divest-
ed of the charm of his quaint Swiss idiom and
pronunciation.

"It was some time before monsieur went
away to his sojourn by the sea, and on a stormy
Sunday evening, that I received an order for
dinner to be served, *en tête-à-tête*, in No. 58
just across the corridor from the door o
m'sieu's own apartment.

"It was a very pretty little dinner, and feel-
ing myself confident of a fine *pourboire*, I made
myself the assurance that it should be hand-
somerly served.

"On presenting myself to lay the cloth, I
found within the *salon* a gentleman, *tres dis-
tingué* in his appearance, but with a hard frown
upon his face of which I could not approve, since
his companion was a lady, charmingly *petite*,
who seemed to see the sun, moon and stars all
shining magnificently around his unappreciative
head.

"At a glance I became aware that here was
some grand unhappiness, and that the little lady
had somehow to contend with the gentleman's
obstinate will, for which I was extremely sorry,
having had all my life the greatest sympathy
with *le beau sexe*, which has become my ruin,
hélas!

"The *garçon* who has pride in his profession
has always to feel himself afflicted when, having
served a dinner of merit, he has to remove *plat*
after *plat* untasted; but, so strongly was the
sentimental part of my nature engaged on this
occasion that this gross injustice failed to pro-
duce the least mortification, and I found myself
watching the *mignonne* face of the lady with the
most painful anxiety, since the time was ap-
proaching when I must quit the apartment, and
her companion, whose face had grown moment
by moment more hard and frowning, had al-
ready drank more wine than is good for the dis-
cretion of a man who does not eat at the same
time.

"I quite brought myself to a condition of
terror on madame's account, and indeed there
was a tear sparkling in her beautiful black eyes
when it at last occurred that I could no longer
make pretext for lingering in the *salon*, and in
spite of the gentleman's most forbidding air I
said, upon retiring:

"I shall have pleasure to answer the bell
immediately, should my further attendance be
desired."

"However, and although I remained in the
corridor during every available moment of the
evening, there came no summons to re-enter the
apartment, and indeed I found myself in no
further connection with No. 58 until a week later,
when again I was instructed to serve dinner in
the *salon*, and, from the wines ordered, made
myself certain that it was the same party whom
I should serve.

"Very good! My impressions had not con-
tributed to my disappointment. On going in to
prepare the table it was to the same little, dark
lady, and to the same colossal blonde gentleman
that I paid my *dévoir*—quite the same both, and
yet at once I told myself that madame was not
so small nor m'sieur so large as at first they had
appeared to me.

"Again the dinner was most beautiful—
m'sieur had certainly received an education most
excellent—but again the most artistic creations
were suffered to be removed comparatively un-
touched, although, much to my bewilderment,
it transpired that such food as was taken was
consumed by m'sieur, and that it was the glass
of madame that most frequently required to be
filled.

"Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the
change, that, by long experience in the obser-
vation of the countenance, which is one of the
most important branches of my profession, I
was enabled to discover to have taken place in
the mood of the little lady. 'It still was but a
canary-bird in the talons of the culture.' I re-
flected, and upon retiring again said, but ad-
dressing myself to m'sieur, although my atten-
tion was solely directed to madame:

"I shall be within sound of the bell should
m'sieur require anything further."

"Still, as before, the bell did not ring—there
was no additional service required in the *salon*