

ORIGINAL POETRY.

"It is a tradition of the early Catholic ages, that a chapel being built on the spot from which Christ ascended, it was found impossible either to pave the place on which he last stood and where the marks of his feet remained, or to close the roof over that place, and which was the path of his ascent."—*W. J. Fox.*

'Tis an old legend, and though born  
In superstition's night,  
Its import beautiful and true  
To those who read it right.

For the dear footprints of our Lord  
Nor time nor art efface:  
Still over earth's dark wilderness  
His glorious steps we trace.

And the bright path of his ascent  
Into the peaceful skies,  
O! what shall veil it to our hope,  
Or close it from our eyes.

Life has wild tracts where we should sink  
In anguish and dismay,  
Had not his patient footsteps passed,  
And sanctified the way.

And death!—before its portals dark  
How should we trembling stand,  
Did not that glorious path reveal  
Jesus at God's right hand.

O! blessed Saviour!—tender guide,—  
Humanity's sweet friend,—  
In life or death, thou, only thou,  
Canst solace or defend.

E. J. D.

Montreal, 1st Nov. 1845.

THE UNITY OF GOD,  
THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURE OF THE  
JEWISH FAITH.

A SERMON

By the Rev. Morris I. Raphael, M. A., D. Ph.

'Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God, the Lord is one!'—DEUT. VI. 4.

This was the sum and substance of the first commandment which the Eternal spoke to their whole assembly on the mount from the midst of the fire, when he said, 'I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; thou shalt have no other gods before me.' All this is condensed in the short but powerfully expressive sentence 'Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God, the Lord is one!' One, absolute, immaterial, indivisible, without equal or associate; without plurality of essence or of person. Eternal, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent, and Immutabile; who alone of all that exists can proclaim himself, I AM, because He is the only one whose existence is inherent, absolute, and unconditional. Immaterial—He is not confined to space, nor subject to the accidents of matter. Eternal—He was without beginning and without end, therefore not subject to the influence of time. Omnipotent—He suffices to himself alone, and requires neither companion nor associate. One—He is perfect. Such is the God who created and who preserves the universe; the God who brought Israel out of Egypt, and whom alone they worship; the God who revealed himself on Sinai's Mount, that his unity might become known to mankind. For the principal object of revelation must be, and is, to place within the reach of man those truths to which his own unaided researches could not lead him, but with which, nevertheless, it is most essential for the welfare of his soul, and the happiness of his species, that he should be acquainted. I say truths to which his own unaided researches could not lead him, for man's researches must ever be guided by his reason, and though religious truth, as such, will always command the assent of reason, or rather, will never present itself, in a shape so questionable as to be rejected by human reason, yet as reason, the attribute of man, is, like himself, finite and limited, whereas, religious truth relates to the attributes of Him who is infinite and unlimited; it follows that human reason unaided by revelation, cannot form to itself any conception of that which is so much purer, holier, grander than itself, and in speaking of which, man is obliged to employ words to which he can attach no clear and positive idea, but which he must define by negatives. Thus it is evident that religious truths of a higher order can only become known to man by means of revelation; a fact, to which, moreover, the experience of all ages and of all nations affords its testimony. For if it had been possible for human research to arrive at such truths, the profound wisdom of a Socrates, the sublime meditations of a Plato, the indefatigable studies of an Aristotle, might have led to results as important, to knowledge as certain, and to authority as generally acknowledged as the legation of Moses. But such was not, and could not be the case, for to none of these great men, though the most celebrated of profane antiquity, though gifted with reason as powerful and penetrating as ever fell to the share of mortal man, to none of them was that granted, the want of which Socrates and Plato deplored, and

without which the highest religious truth remains beyond the reach of man:—namely, that revelation or communication from on high, which, as God alone knows himself and can reveal himself, proves the legation of Moses to have been divine; and by means of which, whatever of religious truth has become known to man, is either founded on that legation or recorded in its history. And of all the truths which that legation has been the means of promulgating, the first is the Unity of God. Indeed to me it appears clear that the chief purposes for which the Jewish religion was founded, for which the law was given, for which so many miracles were wrought, and so many observances were instituted, were—first to impart to mankind in the fullest, clearest, and most authentic manner, the knowledge of that greatest of truths, 'the Lord our God is one'; and, secondly, to preserve that knowledge among them by means of witnesses, with whose very existence as individuals and as a people, and with whose every act of worship, public or private, the profession of this truth, the belief in the unity of God, should become identified to such a degree as to render it the distinguishing feature of their faith. Let me direct your most serious attention to these two points; and may He whose loving kindness is extended to all who approach Him with humility of heart and singleness of purpose, vouchsafe to enlighten your minds and my own, that we may clearly perceive, and duly appreciate, the importance of the inquiry on which we now enter.

I. The chief purpose for which the Jewish religion was founded, was, first, to impart to mankind in the fullest, clearest, and most authentic manner, the knowledge of that greatest of truths, 'The Lord our God is one.'

If we carefully examine the most ancient and most trustworthy of historical records, the sacred Scriptures, we find that man, in the exercise of that free will with which the Creator has endowed him, soon became disobedient; and that the more he yielded to his own passions, to his sensuality, his vanity, and his sordid selfishness, the more he became estranged from that Being who is all-perfect, and from that truth which it behooved him to cherish; and though a sense of his own weakness and of his dependence on some superior or controlling influence, taught man the necessity of propitiating whatever was greater and mightier than himself, it was not to the Eternal that he directed his thoughts. He raised his eyes to heaven and beheld its hosts, but did not inquire 'who created these.' He felt the genial warmth of the sun, and he worshipped; he admired the pale light of the queen of night and of her radiant attendants, and again he worshipped; he heard the loud peals of the thunder, and was alarmed, he saw his favourite deities obscured, and he trembled. Wherever he looked around him he beheld evidences of power far surpassing his own, and he bent before them. But he beheld those powers acting in so many various and even conflicting ways that he could not, because he would not, trace effects so dissimilar to one first great cause. Therefore his imagination influenced alike by his hopes and by his fears, depicted each manifestation of the workings of nature as the act, either of some malignant being to be dreaded, or of some beneficent being to be thanked; in the former case his terrors extorted the same adoration, that in the latter his gratitude and expectations prompted him to yield. We cannot with certainty decide how soon this worship of strange gods began to be practised by man. Tradition tells us that as early as the days of Enosh, the third in descent from Adam, mankind began to transfer their worship from the Creator to the creature; for from Him who gifted them with reason to the offspring of their own imagination. One would have thought that the fatal catastrophe which befel that sinful race must have impressed on the minds of the chosen few who survived the waters of the deluge, a feeling of awe and of love for the power that preserved them; but few as there were, there was a Ham among them; and he who drew down upon his head the just malediction of an outraged parent, could not have been very scrupulous or attentive to the instruction of his own children. Once more mankind forsook their God! How soon after the deluge they relapsed into the worship of idols sacred Scripture does not tell us; but that the defection began early and was by no means confined to the descendants of Ham, is proved to us by the words of Joshua, who addressing the Israelites, says, 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel; beyond the river your fathers dwelt of old, Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor, and worshipped other gods.' (Joshua xxiv. 2.) That it was not long before the adoration due to the Creator degenerated still further, and that along with, or as representing, the powers of nature, men began to worship idols, images made by human hands, is proved to us by the words of Laban, who, when some figures (Teraphim) had been carried away from his house, complains 'why hast thou stolen my gods?' (Gen. xxxi. 30.) And that this vain belief, this outrage on reason and religion spread more and more, and grew stronger and stronger, is proved to us by the fact, that though in the days of Abraham there was a Melchizedek, a priest of the Most High God, and who as a priest, must have had a congregation of faithful to which he ministered; that though Joseph, when addressing Pharaoh of his days, directs the king's thoughts to God, who alone can ease his mind, 'God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace;' (Gen. xli. 16) and in return hears the king confess the power of God, 'Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art;' (ibid. 30.) yet when, a few generations la-

ter, Moses presents himself before Pharaoh in the name of the Eternal God, so completely is all trace of that name lost, that the king at once confesses his ignorance, and exclaims, 'I know not the Lord.' (Exodus v. 2.)

But though men forgot their God, He did not forget them. Not only did he continue to them his manifold bounties, without which they could not exist even one moment, but while they, in the perverse abuse of their own free will, sought to rivet firmer and firmer the chains of superstition and ignorance, He, in the fulness of mercy, provided for them the means of returning freely and without constraint, to light and to truth. Among the myriads who prostrated their reason and wilfully closed their mind's eye, there was one man who looked around him and reflected. Nature, in the vastness of its immensity, attracted his notice, and while he admired the creation, his soul gradually became conscious of the Creator. Tradition tells us that Abraham recognised God in His works, and when he did so in humility and devotion, Revelation was afforded to him to guide and purify his meditations. His faith was put to many a test, his constancy had to pass through many an ordeal; but his faith still clung to the assurance, there is one El Shaddai, 'Almighty God'; and his constancy was rewarded with the promise, that in his and his posterity all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Thus strengthened by a knowledge of the truth, Abraham went forth, the missionary of the Lord. Wherever he came he proclaimed the name of the Eternal and Indivisible One, and thus once more a ray of light and of truth broke through the general gloom. The work thus begun by Abraham was continued by his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob; and that which had been the faith of one man, became the belief of a family. Yet among the millions of idolaters, throughout the wide extended sway of craft and ignorance, the influence of one family must of necessity, have been very limited. Therefore it was provided that that family should increase and become a nation; and in order to preserve the descendants of that family from mixing and becoming lost amongst the crowds that surrounded them, in order to keep them isolated and distinct, they were transplanted to a country, the inhabitants of which, were averse to strangers in general, and to shepherds especially,—disdaining intercourse or connexion with this alien race. And, as mankind is most strongly attracted by contrast, it was so ordained, that when the descendants of this family had increased and multiplied, and were become a nation, they should be placed in the most abject and degraded condition—that of slaves—used with barbarous cruelty; and that they should be so placed in the most civilized country of the ancient world, but which, at the same time was the stronghold of idolatry.

If we look at the condition of mankind at the time when Moses entered on his legation, we shall find that, throughout the whole earth there existed not at that time one nation or tribe—probably not many individuals—who knew and adored the Creator. The scanty remains of primitive knowledge, faint gleams amid the general gloom, were hidden by interested men, enveloped in mysteries and disguised by types. The few who were initiated into these mysteries, held that it was needful to practice on the weakness of the multitude, and that it was dangerous to afford the common people a knowledge of truth; and so effectually did they disguise and conceal it, that in process of time even the initiated lost the key to the types and mummeries they had to pass through, and were but one remove above the general ignorance of the mob whom they deluded. Thus the darkness of falsehood overspread the earth; despotism and priestcraft were the twin excrecences to which that darkness gave birth, and by which it was fed. Temples were erected to all the passions, diseases, fears, and evils to which mankind are subject. Suited to the character of these divinities was the worship offered in their fane. Absurdity, impurity, and cruelty contended for mastery in their rites. Beastly intoxication was an act of adoration to one, public prostitution to another of these foul creations of a diseased imagination. Human victims bled upon their altars. The cries of infants consumed by a slow fire in the embraces of a brazen image; of boys being whipped to death before the altar of a female divinity, were held to be music grateful to the ears of the gods; and all these horrors emanated from Egypt, the parent of civilization, which also became the parent of idolatry to the surrounding nations. The power of evil, of falsehood, of superstition had reached its height; and truth, which had sheltered within the household of Abraham, seemed to lose its last adherents, when the descendants of Jacob, slaves in Egypt, were made to join the foul rites of their masters.

But mankind is not destined for ever to be the victim of error. In the moral as in the physical world, in religion, as in every other branch of knowledge, the triumph of truth, though slow, is sure; the downfall of error, though long delayed, is not the less certain. The Great Being who called the universe into existence, and who wills the happiness of all his creatures, still pardons their backslidings and deigns to extend His protection unto them. At the very time when the reign of darkness seemed most firmly established, the victory of light was most sudden and complete. Moses, the messenger of God, appeared. 'Truth and liberty' were the potent words which he proclaimed. Before the power delegated unto him, the lofty fabric, reared by superstition, crumbled into dust. Vain were the struggles of despotism and the efforts of priestcraft; the first step towards the regeneration of mankind was effected in the liberation of Israel.

Had the end and aim of Moses' mission been only to free the descendants of Jacob from bondage, and to constitute them into a nation, that might have been effected at once, by a power whom nothing can resist. It was to raise the standard of truth, which once unfurled, is never to be lowered. It was to consolidate the opposition to error, an opposition which the unceasing efforts of error, for upwards of thirty centuries, have not been able to overcome. Therefore it was that gradually every hope the Egyptian placed in the protection of his divinities was made to fail him, as one after another, the most potent of them bent in lowly submission at the bidding of the man commissioned by God. As animate and inanimate creation, the luminaries of heaven and the beasts of the field were alike worshipped by the Egyptians, so the supremacy of the one true God was manifested over each of them. And at the announcement of each new wonder, Moses was directed to declare it was done that men might know the Eternal, and that his name might be proclaimed over all the earth—and it was so proclaimed. One, at least, among the nations of the earth had learned to know the Lord. They in whose behalf the first great victory over evil and fraud had been achieved, were also the first who, in the fulness of freedom and conviction, had proclaimed his supremacy in the memorable words, 'This is my God and I will praise Him; the God of my father and I will exalt Him.—The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.' From the shores of the Red Sea, where they had beheld the power of the Creator over the elements, they were led on to Mount Sinai, that there, as had been foretold to them, they might serve the Lord; and become the witnesses of his unity as they had been witnesses of his power, his justice, and his mercy. Six hundred thousand men, with their wives and children, heard the voice of the Lord proclaim, 'I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other gods before me.' Six hundred thousand men, with their wives and children, heard and repeated the divine precept, 'Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God the Lord is one!' Thus a host of witnesses was raised, whose evidence it has never been possible to discredit; and thus the purpose for which Abraham had been chosen, for which the Israelites had been delivered, for which the Jewish religion, taking its date from Mount Sinai, had been instituted, was accomplished; for the unity of God was made known to mankind, and that knowledge was preserved by means which the experience of thirty centuries has proved to be efficient. And as this was the chief purpose for which the Jewish religion was instituted, so for that same purpose it still stands erect among the many and conflicting systems of faith, which, in that long interval, have arisen and fallen, and those that still survive. Whichever of these has admitted the doctrine of the unity of God, has derived its knowledge of that doctrine from the inspired records of the Jewish religion, and supports itself by their authority. Whilst every system which does not admit this most sacred doctrine meets with a flat contradiction in those records, the divine inspiration of which, admitted by all believers in revelation, cannot be better proved than by the direct and pointed manner in which they meet and refute every departure from this truth, that may have been promulgated by systems which did not come into existence till centuries after the sacred canon of the Old Testament was closed. To the idolater these records briefly but decidedly pointed out his fatal error. (Isaiah xlv. 9.) 'The makers of images are altogether vanity; their detestable divinities avail them not; a declaration again and again repeated. To the Sabean, who claimed worship for the heavenly bodies, these records point out a higher power, saying, 'Raise your eyes on high—who created these? He fixes the numbers of the stars, and has given names to them all.' When men, unable to account for the origin of evil, asserted that the government of the world was contested by two independent principles, the one of light and good, the other of darkness and evil, the sacred records of our faith vindicated the absolute unity of the first great Cause, and declared in the name of the Lord, (Isaiah xiv. 1.) 'I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.' When in after ages the doctrine was propounded that divine justice required a vicarious sacrifice, a divine redeemer, who should redeem mankind by taking upon himself and removing their sins, these sacred records rejected the doctrine by declaring, (Isaiah xlii. 25.) 'I, even I, am He who blot out their transgression because of me, and thy sins I will not remember.' And when the doctrine was propounded that the deity is a plurality of persons, proceeding one from another, those sacred records met the assertion by the solemn declaration, 'Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his redeemer, the Lord of hosts:—I am the first and I am the last, and beside me there is no God.' (Isaiah xlv. 6.) Each attempt to set up an associate to his supremacy, Holy Writ rejects with the words of the Lord, 'I am God, there is no other:—my glory will I not give to another.' And every denial of His absolute and indivisible unity it refutes in the emphatic words of our text, 'Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God, the Lord is one!' And, as thus the religion resolves itself into one great truth, into which all its records may be condensed, we are warranted in saying that the chief purpose for which the Jewish religion was instituted, was to impart to mankind, in the fullest, clearest, and most authentic manner, the knowledge of that greatest of truths, 'The Lord our God is one.'