

# Sunday Reading.

## JEWISH SYNAGOGUE.

Caught Hold of the Silken Shawl and Kissed It.

The 11th September being the Hebrew New Year's Day, the writer thought that other people beside himself, might be interested in reading a few particulars regarding the Jewish ceremonial worship. Having obtained an invitation, I presented myself at the door of a synagogue, not a mile from Houndsditch, about 8 a. m. I was most courteously received, and was shown to a good seat by the beadle, or church officer as we should call him.

The proportions of the building were fine, and compared favorably with many English churches. The rostrum or platform was in the centre of the building, and was raised some three or four feet. Six parallel rows of oak pews ran down each side of the synagogue, and several more crossed the space behind the platform. The reader in white surplice, or robe, and white satin skull-cap was chanting in Hebrew as I entered, and two more were seated behind him on the rostrum ready to take their turns, the elder of them—a very corpulent man—appearing to be in command.

For the first hour very few people were present, but at nine o'clock the house began to fill, so to speak. Each worshipper had his own numbered pew and locker, where he kept his books of ritual and his mantle. The mantles were about thirty inches wide and three yards long, finished off with long fringe, and crossed at either end by several colored bands, usually nine, though my informant told me there was nothing significant about the number or colors of the bands.

Each male worshipper (who, of course, kept his hat on) caught hold of the silken shawl or mantle at both ends, kissed it in three places, covered his face with it for a few seconds, and then put it round his neck. The female portion of the congregation, according to custom, sat upstairs away from the men. A startling crash drew my attention to the chancel. I discovered that someone had drawn the large curtain from before the "ark." This, I was told, was made of the same species of wood as the original ark of the Covenant.

The doors of the ark were next opened and disclosed several rolls (books) of the law. These were encased in silk bags, the central rods, which protruded, were made of fine gold, the pointers being adorned with precious stones in addition; and, my informant added, "the books are all hand written on parchment and are several centuries old. They were presented to us, and we value them very much."

A goodly congregation having now assembled, a small procession was formed, the leader of which took one roll, or book of the law, from the ark, and marched with it back to the rostrum, where he set it on the floor. The choir, dressed in black velvet gowns, or gowns, and wearing black velvet Edward VII. caps, now mounted the platform and sang—in Hebrew, of course. An intercessory prayer for the Royal family was then offered with great fervor, in English, the congregation responding loyally. Another hymn was sung, and then the blowing of the "cornet" took place. The "cornet" mentioned in scripture was made from a ram's horn, and had no keys. Three separate "calls" were repeated a great many times, and then the procession reformed, took the law back to the ark, the door being shut and the curtain drawn, the rings again making a crash.

The worshippers were most devout and many churches I could name might well copy the Jews in this. Even the little boys sat quite still for three long hours—an almost impossible feat for the average English boy. No one seemed in the least disturbed by the frequent arrival of fresh worshippers. When the pews were filled up I was struck with the resemblance which the gathering had in some respects to the House of Commons on a full night. Everyone was wearing a tall hat, and the number of people who were present would just about fill the house, the Hebrew responses sounding to be as intelligible as certain remarks which I have heard honorable members utter in concert. I passed out and handed the attendant the prayer-book which he had kindly lent me, thanking him at the same time for his courtesy, the like of which I had never experienced in any other church.

## A Clergyman Busy.

Many people think that so far as really hard work is concerned, clergymen have a very easy time of it. Their chief employment, one sometimes hears it said, is to attend tea parties and play lawn tennis. But people who talk like this usually know nothing of the real life of an average town parson. Here, for instance, is the ordinary routine work of a young curate in a parish containing some five or six thousand inhabitants. He took high honours at Oxford before ordination, and receives the munificent salary of £150 a year.

Sunday is, of course, his principal day, and then he usually commences work at eight o'clock in the morning, and does not leave off till after nine at night. First comes a communion service from eight till nine, then Sunday-school from ten till a quarter to eleven, and morning service from eleven to a quarter to one. In the afternoon he has to take another service, and after tea comes church again and a mission meeting. Very often, when his vicar is away, he will preach three times on one Sunday, before a congregation numbering in the morning and evening nearly a thousand people.

Four mornings in the week he has to give the children in the day-schools Scripture lessons; and every week night he has to take one or two meetings. Besides this, he must study and prepare his sermons for two or three hours every day, and he is expected to spend each afternoon in visiting his parishioners. Thus the writer has known him on a week day start after breakfast to the schools; then go off to a meeting of district visitors; back to dinner, and off

once more till tea-time, visiting. Immediately after tea he would have to conduct a juvenile service, and that must be over in time to permit him to be at the opening of a public meeting of one of the parish societies. After the meeting was finished, say at a quarter to ten, there would come a committee meeting, which lasted for nearly another hour. Then, on getting home, he must settle over his desk till long after midnight, for a time of quiet study.

Yet, not content with his routine work, he gives free instruction in Latin and Greek to three or four young men in the parish; and he also occasionally manages to contribute to one or two religious magazines. He is honorary secretary to a diocesan clerical society, and is in constant demand as a speaker at special meetings in his district. But in spite of all his work he can find time to go to tea parties, and he plays a capital game of lawn tennis. And wherever he goes he is always voted the jolliest fellow there.

Perhaps our friend may be pardoned for getting indignant when a horny-handed son of toil who works eight hours a day, with Sunday free and a "Saint Monday" religiously observed, tells him that he is only a parson who lives on the fat of the land and does not earn his keep!

## Among the Chinese.

In a letter from Foochow, China, Rev. G. S. Minor, professor in the Anglo-Chinese College there, tells of the religious work among the Chinese. He says in part:

"From the Orient we send greeting. We can dimly see the light. The dark clouds of idolatry and heathenism are rolling away. The Christian dawn is breaking. Great and good work has been accomplished here, but mainly for those who have come from a distance. Hitherto this proud, literary, aristocratic, rich, idolatrous and heathen city has barred its gates and closed its doors, with but few exceptions, to all gospel messengers. In our four churches here we have less than 300 members and a large majority of these are from our schools. But revolution is at hand. Only last Sabbath I had the pleasure of attending divine services at the home of a man who is a first degree literary graduate and the most eminent Chinese physician in all the city, and administered the sacrament of baptism to himself, mother (who is over 70 years of age), and three neighbors. This public demonstration will have a wonderful influence upon the literati. Many of his friends and relatives are literary men and are very friendly to Christianity and we expect them to follow his example in the near future. Just a few weeks ago one of the finest cultured men of the literati refused a position in the government of \$15 a month to teach in our 'high class' girls' seminary at \$15. Few Christians in America even would have done the like. I can but wonder every time I think of it. Not having time to write of the others who are doing more effective work we will speak only of the work in 'Ah Do,' a section of 21 wards, containing over 70,000 people, of which we have been placed in charge. We first asked for resources and were told there were none either in the shape of money or workers, only as the latter could be secured from our schools. In looking over the ground we found only one chapel that would seat about 50 persons, where weekly services were held, a private house where monthly services were held and a girls' day school under the supervision of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. To enter into the details of the progress of the work would weary you, we fear, so we will only say that the church has been enlarged, covering all the ground owned by us, and will now seat 100. Two buildings for school and church purposes have been rented until Chinese New Year (about the middle of February). Three day schools with 123 pupils, one evening school with 65 pupils, three Sunday schools with an average attendance of about 300 have been organized. At each of four places we are holding from one to three weekly services for the men, having the students, local preachers and teachers conduct them as far as possible. The W. F. M. S. ladies, with their students, are doing a great deal of visiting from house to house and are holding two or more weekly services for girls and women. They are reported as being well attended. Much interest is taken.

A great incentive to regular attendance upon our public services is the gift of a picture card. A highly colored advertising card is just the thing. We print Scripture texts upon red Chinese paper and give one to each person attending services, generally a different text each time. When they receive a certain number and can repeat them before the congregation we give them a large card. If they cannot repeat the texts, as many cannot read, we give them a small card. Upon all those cards Scripture texts are pasted, and in this way thousands of Bible promises have been made known to this people, and as many hundreds have been memorized within the past few months.

## Book of Proverbs.

It was written in poetry, and contains about 1,000 of the 3,000 proverbs of Solomon. The whole book abounds in allusions, now found for the first time and precisely applicable, to the age of Solomon; to gold and silver and precious stones; to the duties and powers of kings; to commerce. The Book of Proverbs is not on a level with the Prophets or the Psalms. It approaches human things and things divine from quite another side. It is the philosophy of practical life. It is the sign to us that the Bible does not despise common sense and discretion. It impresses upon us in the most forcible manner the value of intelligence, prudence, of a good education. Above all, it insists over and over again upon the doctrine that goodness is wisdom, and that wickedness and vice are folly.—Dean Stanley.

## Different Kinds of Sextons.

A sexton, like a poet, is born. A church, in order to peace and success, needs the right kind of a man at the prow, and the right kind at the stern—that is, a good minister and a good sexton. So far as we have observed, there are various kinds. The fidgety sexton. He is never still. His being in any one place proves to him that he ought to be in some other. In the most intense part of the service, every ear alert to the truth, the minister at the very climax of his subject, the fidgety official starts up the aisle. The whole congregation instantly turn from the consideration of judgment and eternity to see what the sexton wants. The minister looks, the elders look, the people get up in the gallery to look. It is left in universal doubt as to why the sexton frisked about at just that moment. He must have seen a fly on the opposite side of the church wall that needed to be driven off before it spoiled the fresco, or he may have suspicion that a rat-terror is in one of the pews from the fact that he saw two or three children laughing. Now, there is nothing more perplexing than a dog-chase during religious service. Give my love to the sexton, and tell him never to chase a dog in religious service. Better let it alone.

The lazy sexton does not lead the stranger to the pew, but goes a little way up the aisle, and points, saying, "Out yonder!" You leave the photograph of your back in the dust of the seat you occupy; the air is in an atmospheric haze of what was left over last Sunday. Lack of oxygen will dull the best sermon, and clip the wings of gladdest song, and stupefy an audience. People go out from the poisoned air of our churches to die of pneumonia. What a sin, when there is so much fresh air, to let people perish for lack of it! The churches are the worst ventilated buildings on the continent. No amount of grace can make stale air sacred. "The prince of the power of the air" wants nothing but poisoned air for the churches. After audiences have assembled, and their cheeks are flushed, and their respiration has become painful, it is too late to change it. Open a window or door now, and you ventilate only the top of that man's bald head, and the back of the neck of that delicate woman, and you send off hundreds of people coughing and sneezing. One reason why the Sabbath is so wide apart is that every church building may have six days of atmospheric purification.

The good sexton is the minister's blessing, the church's joy, a harbinger of the millennium. People come to church to have him help them up the aisle. He wears slippers. He stands or sits at the end of the church during an impressive discourse, and feels that, though he did not furnish the ideas, he at least furnished the wind necessary in preaching it. He has a quick nostril to detect unconsecrated odors, and puts the man who eats garlic on the back seat in the corner. He does not regulate the heat by a broken thermometer, minus the mercury. He has the window-blinds arranged just right—the light not too glaring so as to show the freckles, nor too dark so as to cast a gloom, but a subdued light that makes the plainest face attractive. He rings the bell merrily for Christmas festival, and tolls it sadly for the departed. He has real pity for the bereaved in whose house he goes for the purpose of burying their dead—not giving by cold, professional manner the impression that his sympathy for the troubled is overpowering by the joy that he has in selling another coffin. He forgets not his own soul; and though his place is to stand at the door of the ark, it is surely inside of it. After a while, a Sabbath comes when everything is wrong in church; the air is impure, the furnaces fail in their work, and the eyes of the people are blinded with an unpleasant glare. Everybody asks, "Where is our old sexton?" Alas! he will never come again. He has gone to join Obed-edom and Berechiah, the doorkeepers of the ancient ark. He will never again take the dusting-whisk from the closet under the church stairs, for it is now with him "Dust to dust."

## Be Faithful in Little Things.

"The best portion of a good man's life—the little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love."

Little only in the eyes of the world, where fame, power, wealth and position overshadow true nobleness of soul, and the tender sympathies that are balm to another's woe. In the eyes of the Master, sublime.

Nameless on the scroll of fame, but inscribed in imperishable characters in the recording angel's book.

Unremembered by the giver, but creating, perhaps, an everlasting impression on some struggling soul—giving it renewed courage and hope, and a feeling that it is not quite alone on its weary journey to the common goal.

We cannot all dazzle the world by great wealth, few of us can win its applause by brilliant talents or electricity by a God-given genius, but all may strive to be "faithful in little things" by giving help and comfort to those around us—in short, by being a true and honest member of the Heartsease Circle—and thereby learn one of the secrets of a happy life.

Ah, genius burns like a blazing star, And fame has a honeyed urn to fill; But the good deed done for love, not fame, Like the water cup in Master's name, Is something more precious still.

## Charity.

I do not mean the charity that consists of alms-giving alone, but the charity that "thinketh no evil." Oh, my sisters if we all exercised this charity daily, would it not be the speediest way of ourselves answering the prayer "Thy kingdom come?" There is much of sin and evil in the world, many "whitened sepulchers" walk among us, but God is judge of all, and you and I—ah, must we only see the wrong?

"You are deceived in that person," Madam Suspicion declared to me the other day. "He is a hypocrite and utterly devoid of principle," and I, remembering said person's kindness and tenderness of heart, refused to agree with her. Time may prove her right, but I would rather be imposed upon now and then than to go through life expecting to find insincerity

and falseness in all my seeming friends. Do not think I am asking you to look leniently upon real sin; it is the always thinking there is sin. And if it is there, none but our Father knows how they were tempted. Shall we draw back our skirts lest they touch us? Would you and I, inheriting the same temperament, surrounded by the same temptations, have proved stronger? God knows, and He alone.

Are we always charitable to our loved ones? Humanity is weak and tired and worn out. We give the trifling word, the uncharitable remark, whose memories will sometimes sting us. George Eliot says: "When death, the great reconciler, comes, it is never our tenderness we repent of, but our severity."

"Speak gently to the erring one; Oh! do not thou forget, However darkly stained by sin, He is thy brother yet; Heir of the self-same heritage, Child of the self-same God, He has but stumbled in the path Thou hast in weakness trod."

"Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

## Described Them All.

A well-known Episcopalian minister tells the following pretty good story:

A few days ago I was engaged in missionary work in the West, and one afternoon I alighted from the train at a small station and, after walking a short way, I accosted an old farmer and told him the nature of my business. The old man seemed quite pleased and ventured the information that he was an Episcopalian and would like to have me hold a "meeting," at his house, a large, roomy farmhouse, which he at once conducted me to. He showed me every kindness possible, and with his team drove all about the scattered neighborhood informing the people of the service, which I was glad to hold. We had nearly a hundred out in the evening, and all seemed very interested and attentive, although I could see that few of them, if any, had ever attended such a service before.

The next morning, as I was leaving, I thanked my host for his hospitality and asked him what parish he belonged to.

"Don't know nuthin' 'bout any parish," was his answer.

"Well, what diocese do you belong to?" I inquired.

"There ain't nothing of that sort in this part of the country that I ever heard of," he replied.

"But who confirmed you?" said I.

"Nobody," he returned.

"But didn't you tell me you were an Episcopalian?" I asked him in astonishment.

"Oh, yes," said the old man, "I'll tell you how that is. Last spring I went down to New Orleans visitin', and while I was there I went to church, and it happened to be an Episcopalian one, and among other things I heard 'em say that they'd left undone them things they'd oughter done and done them things they'd oughter done, and I said to myself 'that's jest my fix, too,' and since then I've always considered myself an Episcopalian."

"Well," said I as I shook the old man's hand, "if your ideas of an Episcopalian are correct we are the largest denomination in the world."



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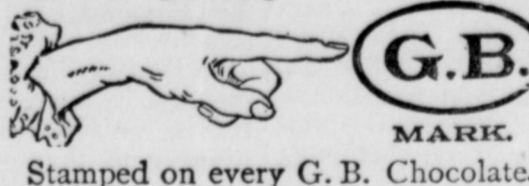
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