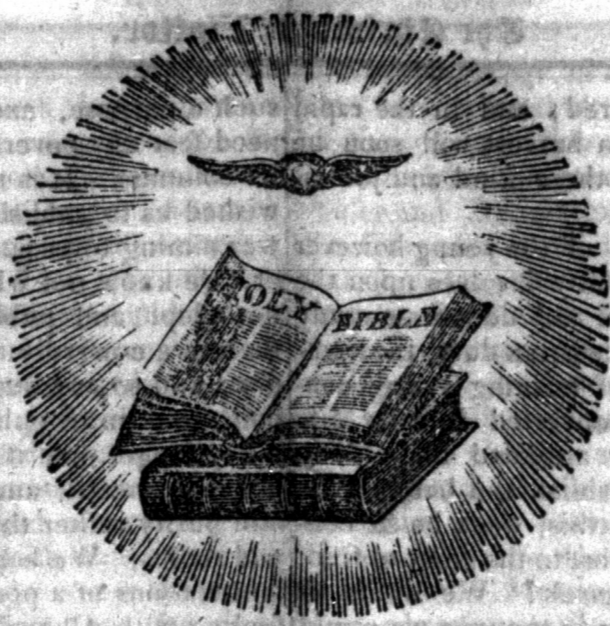


# CHRISTIAN



# VISITOR.

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REV. E. D. VERY,

"BY PURENESS, BY KNOWLEDGE—BY LOVE UNFEIGNED."—ST. PAUL.

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## THE DARK VALLEY.

There is a path of fear which all must tread,  
Nor one may hope to 'scape the gloomy road;  
Sorrow and mourning make it their abode,  
And night o'erhangs that valley of the dead;  
Chill is the frozen air, and comforted  
By mortal help no traveller may be;—  
So near the confines of eternity,  
No sound of earth can reach it; yet is one,—  
One who himself hath trod the dreary waste,—  
The guide of all who trust him; nor alone,  
Hath ever friend of his that portal passed:  
He who was dead and liveth, from his throne  
Sunshine eternal pours, in living ray,  
Unfading radiance, o'er the pilgrim's way;  
And shows him bright, beyond the mortal  
gloom,  
The pearly gates of his immortal home.

Hackney, JOHN H. CUZNER.

## THE JEWS' QUARTER IN PRAGUE.

One of the most remarkable localities in Europe is the "Ghetto," or Jews' Quarter in Prague. Untouched for centuries, and until of late years undisturbed by the visits of curious Christians, it is one of those rare spots where the very form and spirit of antiquity have not yet given way to modern enterprise and change. Some description of its physiognomy and the curious Hebrew traditions, of which it is the source, will be interesting to the readers of *The Tribune*.

The "Ghetto" lies in the northern part of Prague, not from the Moldau. Approaching it from the Christian part of the city, one generally sees a group of Jew porters sitting at the entrance. In those crooked, dwarfish, and antiquated men, the enormous strength which they exhibit in their profession, would not be suspected. One of the gray-haired, shriveled and wrinkled porters, almost crawling in his gait, not unfrequently carries, for a mile or two, immense chests and coffers, or the whole furniture of a family. With the exception of Amsterdam, there is no city in Europe, whose Jewish population is accustomed to such severe physical labour.

The *Breitgasse* (Broadway) is the principal street of the "Ghetto." Here everything is dark and forbidding; below, gateways and stairways where a lantern would not be out of place at noonday; above, roofs of hundredfold slants, shooting over the high rows of houses on each side and forming narrow, airy bridges for pigeons and sparrows. Each story has its separate family, for more than 7,000 souls are clustered together in the "Ghetto," the few favoured Hebrews who live in the other parts of the city being obliged to pay large sums for the privilege. The confusion, noise and movement in the street, on account of the crowded state of the quarter, is a marvel to behold, and impresses one with somewhat of the same feeling with which, when a child, he looked into a fantastic picture-book. At the Jewish festival of "Purim," when Israel celebrates its delivery from the hands of Haman, the Ghetto is half a fairy city, half a Gipsy camp. Stately Judiths and Esthers, chanting the love-songs of Schiller with the whining tone of their dialect, go in masks from house to house, while the old women in gilded caps, the sturdy beggars, the cripples and cheese-rabbis, (so called) seem more like masks than actual characters. A discordant, continual cry, which might be taken as an expression of either joy or wo, peals from the brilliantly-lighted synagogues; screaming cooks run against each other with their shallow pans of that national Jewish dish, which is older than the Egyptian pyramids, and which the Bible alludes to as the "flesh-pots of Mizraim."—In the garrets the children of the beggars hold a jubilee over the strongly-spiced dishes which

have been sent them in charity; in the third story the dealer in old clothes tells his family about the old times when it was dangerous for a Jew to go outside of the Ghetto on Good-Friday; but in the first story all is brilliance and Parisian perfume, and the rich Israelites, dressed in the latest style, go through with their dances and *tableaux vivants*.

The Ghetto of Prague is a little world in itself, rich in traditions and monuments of the past. Its origin goes far back into the times of the Pagans. Long before the days of King Herod—according to the current legend—there lived in Palestine three virtuous men of the race of David, to whom God revealed the future in a dream. In order to spare their descendants the sight of the desolation of which Judea was to be theatre, they took up the pilgrim's staff, and left the Promised Land, in company with their wives and children.—The image of the many-branched candlestick in the Temple at Jerusalem, with all its burning lights, appeared in the air before them, as a guide. Thus they came further and further to the West. During their long pilgrimage they did not cease to praise the Lord by diligent study of the Talmud, and this preserved them from all dangers. Whenever the little caravan was attacked, its members began that curious pantomime which accompanies the reading of the Talmud, with clapping of hands, agitation of the body and loud outcries; whereby both savage beasts and wild Pagans were alarmed, and took flight. Once, however, the Sabbath was violated: the first star had appeared in the sky, one Friday evening, when a boy among them broke a sappling in the woods, to cut a staff. The image of the burning candlestick immediately vanished; the caravan fell into confusion, went astray and separated. It so happened that a part of the pilgrims reached Toledo in Spain, another part the town of Worms, and a third part settled on the right bank of the Moldau, before either a German or a Slave had trodden the soil of Bohemia. Their families increased so fast, in consequence of their piety, that in the course of a single generation, there were several synagogues erected in Prague.

The "*Altneuschul*," as it is called, is the oldest synagogue in the quarter. For many centuries it was entirely choked and buried in the earth, and only discovered and exhumed in the time of Wallenstein. A stone stairway leads downward to its entrance, as to a vault; the interior is built in the old Judean style of architecture. Pillars, ceilings, walls and galleries are as black as coal. This fact has no ordinary significance. The synagogue remains to this day a place of wonder, since it is reported to have given in the early times of the settlers, regular intelligence of the fate of their home in Palestine. When Titus led his legions against the City of David, the pillars of the synagogue, according to the old legend, began to tremble; the doors of the Ark flew open with a sound of lamentation, and the holy parchment upon which the Books of Moses were inscribed, unrolled of itself until the Chapter of blessings and curses were visible. Then arose great weeping and lament among the old men and children. The young men, however, armed themselves, and set out to the rescue of the Holy City, with a warlike young Rabbi at their head. Scarcely had they passed without the gate of their city when the knees of their leader began to tremble, and his feet were rooted to the earth. "I am like the ass of Balaam," he cried: "I see warning visions—they come up from the earth and down out of the clouds, and beckon me to return." Then exclaimed several: "Thou hast not repeated thy morning prayer with due devotion, or hast omitted a sentence therefrom. Let us choose another leader who

is undefiled." But it happened to all as to the young Rabbi, so they turned sorrowfully homeward, and Jerusalem was lost.

When the eventful day came when Zion fell and Jerusalem was destroyed, the synagogue was suddenly filled with thick Egyptian darkness. The congregation fled in terror from the temple, but lo! the sky was as blue and clear as ever. Shuddering, they comprehended the meaning of the sign; they commenced a fast, rent their best garments, and strewed the ashes of desolation upon their heads. After seven days the mysterious darkness disappeared from the synagogue, but the white walls remained as black as the charred cedar joints of the Temple of Jerusalem. The night of that exile which was thenceforth the doom of the scattered Children of Israel, remains as a perpetual admonition upon the walls. Their blackness is holy; no human hand dares to remove it; the blasphemous finger would wither, that dared to scratch them. But on the Day of Redemption the stain will disappear of itself, and the walls of the consecrated edifice suddenly beam with a diamond lustre, like the gates of Heaven.—Since the fall of Jerusalem; therefore, the curse in common use among the Jews of Prague is: "Be ye blackened!"

Any change in the structure and decoration of this half subterranean temple is forbidden. During the last century, a sexton ventured to attempt to drive a nail into the walls. The ladder on which he ascended tumbled down, hammer and nails fell out of his hands, and he remained a whole hour hanging dead in the air. At last he was gradually lowered to the earth by invisible spirits, and only came to life again after he had been dressed in the garments of the grave. This man, on whose countenance a smile was never afterwards seen, saw and heard all that was passing around him while he lay in the trance—the lamentations of his children, the voices of his friends and acquaintances, and even the tears and kisses of his wife which he felt like melted lead on his face, without being able to move. While hanging in the air, he beheld terrible sights with the inward eye. What they were, he confided to no one, except the celebrated "Hoch Reb Lob," a most wise and powerful Rabbi, to whom he confessed.

Near the graveyard, which stands in the middle of the Ghetto, the residence of the great Rabbi is still pointed out, and the garret where he passed long Summer days and Winter nights in cabalistic studies. Here he was waited upon by "Golem," a slave made of clay, to whom, with the assistance of the Magi, he had given life, in order that no one born of woman, no being darkened by the breath of earthly passion, might approach him. So holy was the Rabbi, that even in the distance, the guilty and impure were troubled by his glance. A look of his eye compelled liars and slanderers to speak out their most secret thoughts and criminate themselves. The pious Empress, Maria Therese, once came to Prague, and determined to drive the Jews out of the land. Mighty advocates, high officials, even Catholic Priests, won by precious gold, endeavoured in vain to soften her heart. When "Hoch Reb Lob" heard this, he took the huge Chaldaic folio in which he had been reading and set out to visit the Empress. He crossed the bridge, and when he had reached the city on the other side, a great crowd of curious Christians collected around him, and cries of contempt arose on all sides: he smiled and passed on. The gilded state-carriage of the Empress, drawn by six horses came at full speed down the hill from the Palace of the Hradschin. "Hoch Reb Lob" stationed himself at the foot of the hill, and lifting his arm, cried in a loud voice: "Halt!" This bold-

ness exasperated the crowd to fury, and women and children pelted him with mud and stones. But the stones turned into cherry-blossoms, and the mud fell like a rain of apple-blossoms on his furrowed brow, his silver-beard and his broad shoulders. The carriage stood suddenly still in the midst of the descent; the six horses tossed their manes, champed their bits, struck out wildly with their hoofs, threw their heads nearly to the earth in terror, then plunged again in the air, but could not move a step. "Mighty Empress!" cried "Hoch Reb Lob," "I swear by the Almighty God, thou wilt change thy mind before the sun goes down, and my people shall live in peace, till the Moldau flows over the towers of the Hradschin!" He then turned and walked slowly homeward through the awe-stricken crowd, carrying his Chaldaic folio; and in the same hour the Empress tore in pieces the decree which she had already signed for the banishment of the Jews.

The Cemetery is a most dismal place.—There the wind blows over the rank, unmown grass around the tombstones, and rustles the boughs of the neglected trees which lift their crooked trunks here and there. Many of the stones are centuries old, decaying and half sunken in the black soil. Snow and rain have worn away the sharp Hebrew characters, and only the mossy, scroll-like heads of many others are to be seen among the grass, or a pair of hands of carved stone, denoting that there moulders one of the tribe of Aaron. Inside of the cemetery walls every foot of earth is composed of the dust and crumbling bones of the dead, but their rest is never disturbed in order to give place to the newly departed. Each one keeps possession of his narrow house, for the orthodox Jew thinks that economy of space which is so greatly to the interest of the living, an infamy when applied to the dead, and whenever it is possible, he makes the severest sacrifices to obtain for himself and his fathers an everlasting property for their mortal remains. The cemetery has been full as far as the memory of the place reaches, and the dead are now buried in a spot outside of the city. Around the old graves cluster the lofty, toppling, crowded houses of the living, but no one ventures to enlarge his room at the cost of disturbing his ancestors, whose names are mostly forgotten, whose race has often been long extinct. This piety, however, will vanish like the legends, whose source has been sealed since the commencement of this century.

Such a place as the Ghetto is rich in specimens of humanity as quaint and antique as itself. One of the most curious characters which one meets in Prague, is the old pedlar, a dealer in small wares, such as fishbones, knitting implements, needles and the like.—He may be seen at all seasons and in all weathers, going the rounds, calling attention to his wares with a long nasal cry. Notwithstanding the toilsome nature of his business, the scanty returns it yields and the general contempt with which he is looked upon, he plods through year after year, feeling a kind of satisfaction in knowing that the prejudice against his race is growing less and less. "In the *Jesuitengasse*," he says, "it is a long time since I have been drenched with water from the windows, and the children in Smichow are not so dangerous as formerly." Thus consoling himself he goes along the street, repeating his shrill cry. At the door of a brewery he sees a lusty apprentice with a green cap on his head, and a whitish moustache just sprouting on his upper lip. He smiles in secret, for he remembers how, many years ago a wicked boy burned off half his beard while he lay asleep beside the steps of a beer house. In his wrath at this disfigurement, he had