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MISS SMITH : AN ARGUMENT.

MR. SMITH, in the foregoing supposition, finding himself drifting away from the faith to which he was born, seeks, like the King of the Khozars, a new anchorage elsewhere on the sea of religions. Mr. Smith is, in fact, in search of a faith, and Judaism may reasonably be called upon to formulate its claim to Mr. Smith's consideration. That is to say, the Judaism of those who hold, as I do, that their religion has a direct duty to make converts. In Mr. Smith's case, however, we are dealing with hypotheses and possibilities. The actual conversions to Judaism which take place at the present time, are almost exclusively confined to one particular class. It is not Mr. but Miss Smith who plays in them the principal part. They are conversions which are the condition precedent to a marriage in which, while the bridegroom is a Jew, the bride was born a Christian. Either, for the sake of his family or from personal conviction, the Jew is unwilling to marry one not born a Jewess unless she consents to join his religion. Such marriages are not wholly exceptional even now. They may possibly become more frequent in the future. The liberal Christian and the liberal Jew, finding that their actual religious opinions are closely similar, may argue that it is only an artificial barrier which separates their union. It is a difference of labels, not one of conviction, which keeps them apart. Is, then, Miss Smith justified in formally "becoming a Jewess"? As it is she who seeks Judaism, and not Judaism which seeks a convert, the onus of defending her action falls on her. It is she, and not Judaism, that must plead in justification.

At the first glance her conduct looks simply immoral.

It looks like an abandonment of principle in order to effect a coveted end. But Miss Smith would perhaps be able to set her conduct in a less unfavourable light. She would say: It is true that I should probably not have dreamt of becoming a Jewess had I not become engaged to a Jew. But I should not have become engaged to a Jew, had I not been half-way towards becoming a Jewess—as much of a Jewess as he is of a Jew. He and I were all along in intellectual sympathy, and, by giving and taking on both sides, our agreement is now complete. I was not in any real sense of the word a Christian when I met him; and, though I frankly repeat that I might never have conceived the idea of accepting Judaism had I not accepted him, still I am conscious of no wrench in becoming a Jewess; even less am I conscious of any hypocrisy or dishonesty.

One must not forget that all conversions are, in a sense, the result of accident. The right mind comes under the right influence, and the right effect is produced. But it will always be something of an accident for the right people to be thrown together. Surely one sees that this is true, from the prevalence of schools of thought and feeling. Men often are what they are because they went where they went, and grew to love certain of their teachers. A man goes up to Oxford and tries for a scholarship. He fails at Balliol, but succeeds at Christ Church. May not this accident produce some important differences in the whole after-life of his mind and character? Hence I hardly see that Miss Smith is to be taunted with weakness, or even selfishness, because, falling into a Jewish circle and under the influence of affection, she feels attracted towards Judaism in a way that would not have suggested itself to her but for an accident of fortune. She must show us, however, that she *was* so attracted; that, though the initial step was prompted by other than religious motives, nevertheless she did eventually feel that Judaism was a religion that offered enough

to her to induce her to break even the feeble bonds that attached her to her past, and to accept a new spiritual future.

Women much more than men have a firm belief in Providence. Many Christians, especially women, are deeply impressed with the phenomenon of the persistence of Israel amidst the revolutions and crises of ages. Nay, the conviction that a righteous God governs human affairs, and that things are as they are because God so wills them to be, is so much more clearly justified by the permanence of the Jewish race than by any other instance of history, that Judaism *ab initio* would have its attraction for our supposed Miss Smith. She had given up her dogmatic beliefs, but had not abandoned her belief in Providence. That belief is the last belief to leave a doubter's heart. Miss Smith knew how Judaism had survived when so many other religious systems had faded into nothingness, or had been absorbed into Christianity. She felt drawn to the side of those who, clearly the rejected of men, were as clearly the darlings of heaven.

And when she came to closer quarters with Judaism, she found nothing to repel her. She found Jews outwardly marked by some peculiar customs, some of those customs ugly, others rather too puerile, most of them pretty and suggestive, all of them quaint, and none of them wanting in refinement. She found that where these customs seriously interfered with convenience the customs mostly went to the wall. Just the very laxity that many Jews from within—even liberal Jews—lament, made Judaism seem to her from without a possible religion for a new-comer to accept without intolerable irksomeness. That her adoption of Judaism would involve the adoption of some strange customs, she knew. She knew that she would be expected to keep the Passover, perhaps to fast on the Day of Atonement, and to learn a few words of Hebrew. But she had been even to so-called orthodox synagogues in which "leaven" had been moralised away, and she had heard

from Jewish pulpits that fasting counted for very little. So that she was not much alarmed by fearing that the yoke of the law would crush her when it fell upon her neck. A little weight is comforting. It exercises the muscles and encourages the bearer of it to drink in the healthy air in deeper and more frequent draughts. And it is a matter of common observation that those who have fretted against the pressure of their chains are the first to forge new chains for themselves. The ceremonies of Judaism, when lightly borne as "liberal" Jews bear them, thus even prove a charm rather than a deterrent to an outsider, to whom they possessed the additional attraction that they were novel.

Yet a new religion must not merely be non-repellent, it must not merely be pallidly attractive; it must be enticing before the convert can expect others to believe in his sincerity. Miss Smith is ready with her answer. Judaism is enticing to her. She has talked it over in every aspect, and she has been astonished to find how easily the formulæ of Judaism can be expressed in modern terms. The same remark she hears applied to Christianity, and also to Islam; nay, European exponents of Buddhism and Oxonian Hindus make identical claims for their respective faiths. But in all these cases the claims are put forward esoterically, for the appreciation only of select audiences. Judaism modernised itself in its ghettos; and Miss Smith felt more and more drawn to the prayer-book used in the *cheder* of the *chevra*, and, in substantially the same form, in the synagogue of the "Aufgeklärten." She once heard a lecture by Dr. Andrew Wilson, in which he maintained that the future of religion lies with Judaism, because Judaism, though faulty, has least to unlearn. This she feels to be true. No form of Christianity can exist without some special relation to the noble personality of Jesus. And, herein lies the crux of the difficulty; the more certain sections of Christians question the old orthodox view of the Christ, the more they became unhistorical

and the more hopelessly reactionary. The views, for instance, in Gore's Bampton Lectures and Caird's Gifford Lectures are alike unhistorical, alike reactionary. They both would put a *terminus ad quem* to the march of human intellect. They both tell or imply that the ideal morality and finest conception of God had already been attained twenty centuries ago. And so long as any teacher of religion is placed in this unstable position, so long as he is elevated—with whatever qualifications, couched in whatever Hegelian or semi-scientific technicalities—to this unnatural pedestal, so long must the religion identified with him be unhistorical and incapable of real progress. Miss Smith was quite prepared to accept the Jewish criticism that this view of Jesus' work as a religious teacher was only possible to those who shut their eyes to the evidence. She said plaintively: Better orthodoxy than this.

Judaism as it had been expounded to her was not susceptible of quite the same criticism. In Jewish circles she knew that there were many who looked upon the precepts of *their* religion as final. But the finality, even with them, was ever changing its date; it was ever coming nearer our own times. She heard that nowadays the controversy raged round the *Shulchan Aruch*, a work based, it is true, on earlier authorities, but none the less a modern codification, in which the individuality of its author had a large share. She knew that though the old-schooled Rabbis of to-day would perhaps put their views of tradition in, obsolete and painfully crude terms, yet the essence of the teaching of even those men implied the underlying postulate that tradition had never died, that it still bound the present to the past and the future with an organic and living bond. Just because Judaism was *nullius addictum jurare in verba magistri*, it might aspire to become the repository of the world's teaching. What a conglomerate she found it! She found its students reading with equal piety the Bible, the Talmud, the mass of commentaries and books written in mediæval ages, and the works of Rabbis who died but

yesterday. The only books not read were the books of Rabbis still alive to-day. But to-morrow she knew some of them, too, would die, and their works be added to the honoured stores of traditional treasure.

When she talked over this view of tradition with "liberal" Jews, who had thought the matter out, she found the result even more satisfying. She found that it was not necessary for the Jew, as it had been for her while still in name a Christian, to distort phrases in order to extort meanings in accord with growing experience. She found a complete readiness to accept the new facts of experience *as new facts*; she found a keen, almost too keen, outlook kept for such new facts, and a place being found for them in Judaism. She was at first astonished, afterwards charmed, to hear that traditional Judaism thought a good deal more of tradition than it did of the Bible. It was rather a surprise to her to meet a man who thoroughly disbelieved the old notion of inspiration, who refused to behold Moses on Mount Sinai, and yet in a sense revered the bulky tomes of the Rabbis. He said: "You will be told that reformed Judaism has gone back to the Bible, that therefore Judaism is doomed when the Bible no longer can stand the onslaughts of its critical foes. But this is a mistake. Wherever reformed Judaism has gone back to the Bible, it has rested on a foundation of sand; its edifice fell before it was built up. In Judaism there have been no fruitful reforms on Mosaic lines; and therefore it is that Jewish orthodoxy is so strong to-day. For orthodoxy—the orthodoxy of the ignorant, uncultured Russian Jew—has in it the seed of life; Mosaism is a sound enough staff, but so dry in parts that it will crumble if you try to rest your whole weight on it. My view of reform—and this view is coming, I believe, to be appreciated by many thoughtful Jews—is that it must accept Mosaism *only as a link in religious tradition*. Judaism to revert to the Pentateuch, with its half-truths and whole errors, its superstitions and its sacrificial code—perish the thought!" So

far, she was quite at one with him; she, too, rejected all forms of religion that wrote themselves out in books. "The *finis* of the book is the *finis* of the religion," she said. "But what does your Judaism offer in place of a book-religion? Can I ask myself to reject a definite yoke in order to put myself under an indefinite one? It is not lighter because it is so vague, this religious tradition of yours. How can I tell that it is not an invention of your own, that the real Judaism is not quite another thing? And if you mean that your Judaism is simply a go-as-you-please, cannot I and you better go as we please without labelling ourselves Jews, without rendering ourselves liable to possible troubles and certain misunderstanding?"

There is just space enough left to give his rather ragged answer: the rest of Miss Smith's justification, history fails to reveal:—"Yes, in a real sense this Judaism of mine is my own invention. Certainly I speak for myself only, not for my fellows in religion. No individual Jew can speak in the name of Judaism. If he asserts such a claim the voice of Jewry will combine to contest the claim and disown the claimant. If we Jews all believed the same thing we should all believe falsely. As we believe different things, we may possibly all be believing truly. This is no paradox; it is a truism. It is of the essence of a living tradition that at any given moment it numbers in its ranks representatives of various stages of life and decay, individuals who are at different stages in its historical development. At any moment it shows all its past as well as all its present. It cannot show all its future. But surely you cannot charge this view specifically with vagueness unless you mean that a religion is vague which makes you think, which forces you to examine your religious consciousness, before you take a single new step. 'This is a religion for philosophers, not for ordinary men and women!' you retort. But ordinary men and women are already satisfied with their ordinary guides; they can live by the formulæ into which they were born. It is the philosophers,

if you like the word, that ought to be always revising the formulæ, always re-editing the guide-books. And only a traditional religion can suffer this revision and re-editing, and still live and thrive ; nay, not suffer it, but demand it. And if you agree that you feel the force of this faith in a constant and direct communion between God and man, you cannot avoid labelling yourself. You already belong to Judaism, call yourself what you will. For, if I read the history of my religious community aright, Judaism has been ever progressing towards the perfecting of its doctrine of God and his relation to man. The world has accepted the morality of the prophets, has gone beyond it. But it is Judaism alone that has gone much beyond their religion. And just in its highest flights Judaism, so far from remaining esoteric, has become popular. It is glorious to feel that when you have peeled off the crust of ceremony and the heaviness of habit from the least 'enlightened' of Jews, you find in his heart of hearts the best and most hopeful conception of religious truth. Most hopeful, because it is still only the seed, the seed from which growth will yet proceed."

I. ABRAHAMS.
