The great teachers of Judaism and Christianity

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THE GREAT TEACHERS OF
JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

By CHARLES FOSTER KENT

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PREFACE

The nucleus of this book was a series of lectures on "The Aims and Methods of Israel's Teachers" given at Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco at the invitation of the Sunday School Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of California. The same course of lectures has also been given wholly or in part at the University of North Dakota, Washburn College, Yankton College, the University of Kansas, the University of Missouri, the Hebrew Union College, the University of Cincinnati, and the Syrian Protestant College at Beirut, Syria, as well as before many groups of Sunday-school workers. The original treatment of the subject has been enriched by the results of inspiring conferences with those actively engaged in the work of religious education. One fact has constantly come to the front: it is that the Christian Church at large and even the great majority of its active teachers are only partially acquainted with the deeply significant educational traditions which gather about the beginning of Judaism and Christianity. An intimate acquaintance with the character, aims, and methods of the great religious teachers who have recorded their work not only in the Bible, but also in the very bone and marrow of our modern civilization, is the first requisite in the practical equipment of a modern religious teacher. The wonderful
teachers of the past have a message full of inspiration and suggestion for those dealing with the same human problems. To present these historic facts briefly but clearly, and to interpret the message of these early teachers to their successors to-day, is the aim of this volume.

Westmore, Vermont, C. F. K.
July, 1910.
I

THE SECRET OF ISRAEL'S CONQUERING POWER

It is a profoundly significant fact that the roots of the two great expanding religions of today—Christianity and Islam—sprang from the soil of Judaism. The truths first enunciated by Israel's prophets, priests, and sages among the secluded hills of Palestine have permeated the whole world and molded the faith of nearly half the human race. What is the explanation of this mighty power which has not only preserved the Israelitish race intact through centuries of oppression and persecution, but also conquered the hearts and minds of the most advanced nations of the earth? The first reason is to be found in the character of Israel's faith as it unfolded under the influence of the remarkable experiences through which the nation passed. But the character and growth of Israel's faith only partially explain its conquering power. To retain its hold upon a race, as has Judaism, a religion must be effectively instilled into the minds of each succeeding generation. It must also be ever developing, so as to adapt itself to the needs of each age and individual. In the fact that the great founders and interpreters of Israel's religion have been from the first faithful and skilled teachers doubtless lies the reason why it still dominates, in ever-increasing measure, the ideals and beliefs of mankind.
Judaism's Emphasis on Teaching

Teachers of Judaism and Christianity

Judaism has always been in the truest sense a teaching religion. It has depended primarily for its perpetuation and extension not upon preaching, or upon creeds, or upon the mere forms of worship, but upon the personal touch of the teacher and those taught. It has also strongly emphasized the supreme importance of the definite and continuous education of the individual, beginning with earliest childhood. "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; and thou shalt impress them upon thy children, and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. Thou shalt bind them as a reminder on thy hand, and have them as bands on thy forehead between thine eyes, and thou shalt mark them on the posts of thy house and on thy doors" (Deut. 6. 6-9).

Moreover, the religious teachers of ancient Israel were fully awake to the importance of question and answer: "When thy son asks thee in the future, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which Jehovah our God hath commanded you? then shalt thou say to thy son, We were Pharaoh's slaves, in Egypt; but Jehovah brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand; and Jehovah performed before our eyes great and destructive signs and wonders, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household; and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers" (Deut. 6. 20-23). The result was that among the Israelites
The Secret of Israel’s Power

the practical science of education was developed as among no other ancient people, except possibly the Greeks. In no other nation was such high honor and respect paid to the scholar and teacher. The pictures of the rich and noble youth sitting deferentially at the feet of some famous rabbi, as he plied his humble trade and at the same time taught his disciples, are among the fairest and most significant that come to us from classic Judaism. To-day there still remains in the mind of every faithful Jew an instinctive and deep respect for the learned teacher and rabbi. The well-known zeal and skill of the Jew in the pursuit of learning are in all probability the fruits of this same hereditary instinct.

A further explanation of Israel’s conquering power lies in the fact that its teachers sought not merely to instruct but to educate. Abstract theology was to them practically unknown. Their creed was expressed in laws intended to develop a right personal attitude toward God and man and to lead to worthy and effective action. As the Great Teacher truly said: to love the Lord with all one’s powers and might and the neighbor as one’s self was the essence of Israel’s law. It was upon the development of the individual man that the ultimate emphasis was placed.

To make his development complete and rounded different classes of teachers were required to meet his many-sided needs. Three distinct types of teachers arose in early Israel, each with its distinct tasks and contributions to the development of the individual and the nation,
In threatening the life of the prophet Jeremiah his foes incidentally brought these three classes into close connection and contrast: "For the teaching shall not depart from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet" (Jer. 18. 18). By specific instructions in regard to each man’s obligations to God, to the state, and to his fellow men, by personal counsel and practical instruction and by authoritative message the priests, the wise men, and the prophets not only molded Israel’s faith and ideals, but also guided the thoughts, the morals, and the acts of each individual. Their character and work alone explain how a mixed group of rude Semitic nomads in time became a prophetic nation at whose feet the most progressive races of the earth have learned the fundamental truths of ethics and religion.

The scriptures of the Old Testament as a whole are the clearest indices of the character, aims, and methods of Israel’s religious guides, for they are the notes from the classrooms of these early teachers. It is only in the light of the aims and methods of these teachers that the Old Testament writings can be fully understood. An intensely practical, didactic purpose characterizes them all. It was the educational motif, the desire to develop character by the presentation of truth in effective form, that gave rise to the Old Testament. If Israel’s religion had not been a teaching religion and its guides teachers, there would have been no Old Testament.

Later Judaism, recognizing the true character of these writings, rightly designated them col-