נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם · ירמיה ו׳ טז׳

"THE OLD PATHS."—JER. vi. 16.

NUMBER 46.] FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1836. [PRICE ONE-PENNY

MODERN Judaism, or the religion of the oral law, cannot bear the slightest investigation. Its existence depends altogether upon a blind faith. As long as a man is willing to deliver up his understanding into the hands of the rabbies, and at their bidding believe that his right hand is his left, as they require; so long he may be a zealous professor of Judaism. But, the moment that he begins to think and to reason, and to compare his traditional faith with the doctrines of Moses and the prophets, he must begin to doubt, and if he really has a love for the law of God, he must ultimately renounce that superstition which caused the destruction of the temple and all the subsequent calamities of his people, and still enslaves the greatest portion of his nation. It matters not at which point he views it—its theoretic principles and its practical effects equally condemn it, and prove that it is so far from being a revelation from God, that it is not even the work of good or wise men. The doctrine of the Sanhedrin, which we lately considered, exhibits it as a spiritual despotism the most intolerable; but the utter contempt with which it looks down upon the female portion of mankind makes it to this hour a positive curse to the daughters of Israel, and proves that it does not proceed from Him who created male and female, and pronounced a blessing upon the one as well as the other. One of the prominent characteristics in every false religion is the degradation of womankind. The Mahometan imposture debases women to the level of the brute creation. Judaism places them in the same category with slaves. In Mahometan countries, women are deprived of all culture of head and heart. Rabbinism, as we saw in No. 3, pronounces that fathers are exempt from all obligation to teach their daughters the law of the Lord: but we must proceed to consider fully *the estimate which Rabbinism teaches the Jews to form of their daughters, their sisters, their mothers, and even the wife of their bosom:* and in doing this we shall not go to the opinions of the ignorant, the vicious, or the superstitious, but to the standard books of the nation. It is not possible to produce in English much of the slanderous assertions contained in the Talmud; many are too bad for translation, but still enough can be brought forward to prove satisfactorily that the rabbies look upon womankind with contempt. It is generally agreed that Rambam or Maimonides, was one of the most learned and enlightened of the rabbies, and yet the contempt which he felt for the female head and heart appears very plainly in the following passage:—

אל יאמר אדם הריני עושה מצות התורה ועוסק בחכמת׳ כדי שאקבל כל הברכות הכתובות בה או כדי שאזכה לחיי העולם הבא ואפרוש מן העבירות שהזהירה תורה מהן כדי שאנצל מן הקללות הכתובות בתורה או כדי שלא אכרת מחיי העולם הבא · אין ראוי לעבוד השם על הדרך הזה שעובד על דרך זה הוא עובד מיראה ואינה מעלת הנביאים ולא מעלת החכמים · ואין עובדין ה׳ על דרך זה אלא עמי הארץ והנשים והקטנים שמחנכין אותן לעבוד מיראה עד שתרבה דעתן ויעבדו מאהבה:

"Let not any man say, Behold I perform the commandments of the law, and study in its wisdom, in order to obtain the blessings written therein, or to be worthy of the life of the world to come: and I abstain from the transgressions against which it warns, in order to be delivered from the curses written in the law, or that I may not be cut off from eternal life. It is not right to serve God in this way, for he that serves thus, serves from fear, and that is not the degree to which the prophets and wise men attained. No one serves God in this way, except unlearned men (amharatzin), women, and children, whom they accustom to serve from fear, until their understanding increases, so that they may serve from love." (Hilchoth T'shuvah, c. x. I.) Here Maimonides sinks women down to the level of children, and even classes their moral and intellectual faculties with those of the despised *Amharatzin.* We saw in No. 1 that an *amhaaretz* is of so little value, that his life is not considered more precious than that of a fish, and such it appears was Rambam's estimate of the value of a woman. This most learned rabbi considered it impossible for a woman to love God or to serve him aright: and when he wished to warn the Jews against serving God in an erroneous manner, he actually tells them not to serve Him as the women do. A more debasing imputation cannot be cast upon a human being than this, that he is physically incapable of loving God or

serving him aright. If he had asserted that since the fall of Adam, the whole human race is far gone from original righteousness, and that therefore the love of God is not in them, he would have said what is asserted in Scripture: but the opinion that women, that is, one half of the human species, have a physical incapacity to love and serve God; and that we are to regard them as a sort of finger-post for pointing out error, or a notorious example of that irreligion which we are to avoid, is to blaspheme the Creator, and to hold up the whole female sex to the universal scorn of their sons, their brothers, and their husbands. It may be said, in palliation of so foul a libel, that Rambam lived amongst Mahometans, and that he insensibly imbibed the opinions of the followers of the false prophet. Now it is most true that he could never have learned this sentiment from Christians. The New Testament does not teach us to look upon women as Amharatzin, but to regard them as rational and responsible beings, capable of doing God the same acceptable service as men, liable to the same awful judgment, and partakers of the same blessed hope. This apology, if true, would only serve to excuse Rambam; it would not defend the sentiment itself, but on the contrary, stamp it as Mahometan. It is not true, however, that Rambam imbibed this notion from intercourse with Mahometans: he learned it in the oral law, which has such a low opinion of women as to pronounce their testimony invalid.

עשרה מיני פסלות הם כל מי שנמצא בו אחד מהן חרי הוא פסול לעדות · ואלו הן · הנשים · והעבדים · והקטנים · והשומים והחרשים · והסומים · והרשעים · והבווין · והקרובים והנוגעין בעדותן · חרי אלו עשרה :

"There are ten sorts of disqualification, and every one in whom any one of them is found, he is disqualified from giving evidence; and these are they—women, slaves, children, idiots, deaf persons, the blind, the wicked, the despised, relations, and those interested in their testimony — behold, these are ten." (Hilchoth Eduth., c. ix. 1.) Now, it will be observed that these ten classes may be reduced to two—those who are disqualified by physical or intellectual infirmity, as children, idiots, deaf and blind persons; and secondly, those whose moral integrity is exposed to suspicion, as slaves, wicked and despised persons, relations, and those who have an interest in the cause. To one of these two classes women must belong: they are disqualified either because of incapacity, or because their moral feeling may not be trusted, and in either case are treated with a most unmerited contempt. It is true that the rabbies endeavour to prove that the law of Moses excludes women from giving testimony, saying—

נשים פסולות לעדות מן התורה שנאמר על פי שנים עדים לשון זכר ולא לשון נקבה :

"Women are disqualified by the law from giving testimony, for it is said, 'At the mouth of two witnesses,' where the word witness is of the masculine, not the feminine gender;" but this proof is altogether inconclusive; on the same principle it might be proved that women might break all the ten commandments, for they are all given in the masculine gender. Indeed it is self-evident that God could not have given a law so absurd. There are thousands of cases, where, if women could not give evidence, all the ends of justice would be defeated. Take, for instance, the famous judgment of Solomon, where the two women laid claim each to the living child. In this case there could be no testimony but that of the women themselves, and Solomon did not send them away because they were women. Take also the case of Boaz and Ruth. When Boaz wished to marry Ruth, it was necessary first to redeem the inheritance, and for this it was absolutely necessary to prove that Ruth was the wife of Naomi's son. But there was no testimony but that of the women themselves. Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon, were all dead, and the marriage had taken place in a foreign land, yet we do not read of any difficulties being raised. Boaz himself, Naomi's kinsman, and the elders of Israel, appear all to have been perfectly satisfied. The disqualification of women, therefore, was not ordained by Moses, but is the invention of the rabbies, and shows that the rabbies had so low an opinion of the intellect or the integrity of women, as to think either that women are so half-witted as not to be fit to give testimony, or so dishonest as not to be trusted in the testimony which they may give.

But this degradation of the female character is not confined to the rabbinic courts of law. They have dared to carry it even into the house of God, and to make it prominent in the public worship of the Creator. The oral law has ordained that no public worship, nor indeed many religious solemnities, can be performed, unless there be ten persons present, but from this number it has carefully excluded the women, determining that—

ואלה העשרה צריך שיהו כולם בני חורין וגדולים שהביאו ב' שערי' :

"It is necessary that all these ten be free and adult men." (Orach Chaiim, 55.) So that if there should be ten thousand women in the synagogue, they are counted as nobody, and unless there be ten men there can be no service. Hence it is that the daughters of Israel are never suffered to appear as participators in the worship of God, but are compelled to look on from a distance, as if they had neither part nor lot in the matter. Now what reason is there why women should not

be regarded as worshippers? Are they not rational beings? are they not creatures of God? are they not heirs of immortality just as well as the men? Will they not join in the praises of the redeemed in Paradise; or is the Mahometan doctrine true, that women have no souls? Certainly, when one looks at the Jewish synagogue, one would think so. Before marriage the women never go there at all, and after marriage how seldom. On the Barbary coast they hardly ever go, and in Poland how common is it, whilst the men are in the synagogue at prayer, to see their wives outside loitering and chatting, as if the public worship of God was no concern of theirs. Even in this country the attendance of females is not at all equal to that of the men. How contrary is this state of things to the command of God in the Psalms, "Both young men and maidens; old men and children; let them praise the name of the Lord." (Psalm cxlviii. 12, 13.) And again, "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord." (Ps. cl. 6.) How different is the condition of the Jewish females under the oral law, from that described by Moses:—"When Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her, with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously." (Exod. xi. 21.) Then the women were permitted to unite in the noblest work that can engage the soul of human beings, the praises of our God. But now they are shut out, according to the ordinance of the rabbies—they are not reckoned amongst God's worshippers, and if ten thousand of them should go to the synagogue, unless there should also be a sufficient number of men, a disciple of the rabbies would count them as nobody, and not think it worth his while to read prayers for them. A law like this cannot possibly proceed from God, He makes no such difference between male and female.

לא בגבורת הסוס יחפץ לא בשוקי האיש ירצה׃

"He delighteth not in the strength of the horse; he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man." (Ps. cxlvii. 10.) "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. li. 17.); no matter whether it be male or female.

But the oral law is not content with degrading women by refusing to number them as a part of the congregation, it actually prescribes a form of daily prayer expressive of their contempt. Every day the men say—

ב״א ה״ אלהינו מלך העולם שלא עשני אשה׃

"Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God! king of the universe, who hath not made me a woman." Whilst the women are directed to say—

ב״א ה״ אלהינו מלך העולם שעשני כרצונו׃

"Blessed art thou, O Lord our God! King of the universe, who hath made me according to his will." (Daily Prayers, p. 6.) The proud benediction of the men is founded altogether on the oral law, which promises rewards not to the state of the heart, but to the external operation of keeping God's commands, and as many of them cannot be kept by the women, intimates that the men will have a greater reward. This prayer, or rather thanksgiving, refers especially to the study of the law, from which they suppose the woman to be dispensed, and for which they expect no small reward in the world to come, and upon which they pride themselves, particularly in this present life. The man who remembers the day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, or bears in mind that the distinction of sex, like the difference of rank or office or nationality, is only for this world, will find but little reason for offering up any such thanksgiving. He knows that God will render to every human being, not according to sex, but according to deeds; and feeling that all, both male and female, are sinners, will see that such arrogance is unbecoming at all times, and particularly odious at the moment when he comes to ask pardon of Him "who spieth out all our ways." Instead of despising others, under the pretence of thanking God, the truly devout man will be much more ready to take up the language of David, and say—"Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified."

It appears, from these quotations, that Maimonides did not learn his contempt for womankind from the Mahometans, but from the oral law and the prayers of the synagogue. Modern Judaism disqualifies a woman from giving evidence, shuts her out from the study of God's word, excludes her from the number of his worshippers, and even in its prayers to God pronounces her as nothing better than a heathen, or a slave; for in the preceding benedictions, the man says first—"Blessed art thou, O God, &c, who hath not made me a heathen;" then, "Blessed art thou, &c., who hath not made me a slave;" and, finally, "Blessed art thou, &c., who hath not made me a woman." Now we ask every Jew and Jewess, into whose hands this paper may fall, whether a religion which teaches one-half of the human race to despise and degrade the other half, can possibly come from God? or whether it is not the invention of narrow-minded and vainglorious men? Even reason itself would tell us that God would never teach us to despise the works of his own hands, and still less to hold up the mother who bore us, or the companion who has shared all our joys and sorrows, to the scorn of a privileged class

of human beings. And yet this is what the oral law does, and thereby shows that it does not proceed from Him who inspired Moses and the prophets. The writings of the Old Testament furnish no warrant for female degradation. They commence by telling us that the woman as well as the man was formed in the image of God, and that though woman was first led into transgression, yet that she should have the honour of giving birth to Him who should bruise the serpent's head. (Gen. iii. 15.) They tell us further, that when God was pleased to give the commandments from Sinai, that he exacted of all children to honour the mother as well as the father.—"Honour thy father and thy mother." But how is it possible for any one to honour his mother who despises her as an inferior being, does not look upon her as fit to give evidence in a court of law, and even makes it a matter of public thanksgiving that he is not like her? Surely such an one is much more like him of whom it is said—

נסיל אדם בוזה אמו׃

"A foolish man despiseth his mother." (Prov. xv. 20.) The oral law is, in this respect, altogether inconsistent with the law of God. The former tells fathers to leave their daughters without any religious education, and the latter supposes that they have been so well taught as to be able to teach their sons. Thus Solomon says, more than once, "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother," תורת אמך. (Prov. vi. 20.) But how is it possible for those Jewish mothers, in Poland or Africa for instance, who cannot even read themselves, to teach their sons? or, even suppose they could read, how can a son believe in his mother's instruction when the oral law tells him that she is not qualified to give testimony? But the Bible does not teach us merely to have a respect for our own mother, but shows us generally that God is no respecter of persons, and that he bestows his gifts upon all. It presents to our view many women, as Sarah, Rebecca, Miriam, Deborah, and Hannah, as examples of piety, and informs us that in the time of salvation, he will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh, without any distinction of sex or nation. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." (Joel iii. 1. In the English Bible ii. 28.) Yea, as if to mock the rabbies and the oral law, God adds, that it shall be given even to the male and female slaves.

וגם על העבדים ועל השפחות בימים ההמה אשפוך
את רוחי׃

"Yea, even upon the servants and handmaids, in those days, will I pour out my Spirit." The two classes of human beings whom, next to the *Amharatzin*, the oral law treats with the most indignity, are women and slaves: but God's thoughts are not like the rabbies' thoughts, and he, therefore, graciously stands forth as the vindicator of the oppressed, and promises even to these classes the gift of prophecy. Here again, then, we see that "as far as the east is from the west," so different is God's law from the present religion of the Jewish people. The religion of the rabbies is a grinding tyranny, oppressive to the Gentiles, to slaves, yea, and to all unlearned Jews, and that does not even spare the wives, the mothers, and the daughters of Israel. Wherever the oral law can have its full sway, as in Mahometan countries, the women are left totally destitute of learning and religion—they are not even taught to read. In not one of those countries is a school for female children to be found. It is only in Christian lands that the daughters of Israel get any education, or ever attain to anything like that station which God destined them to fill. Wherever the light of Christianity shines, however feeble, it ameliorates the condition of the female portion of the Jewish nation, and compels even the disciples of Rabbinism to take a little more care of their souls and their intellects. Jewish females are therefore deeply indebted to the doctrines of Jesus of Nazareth. If he had not risen up against the oral law, they would be universally classed with slaves, idiots, and Amharatzin. He has delivered them from this degradation. Let them then consider the religion of Jesus, and the religion which the rabbies have taught them, and then let them decide which is most beneficial to their temporal and eternal welfare. The religion that comes from God must be beneficial to all his rational creatures. A religion that oppresses or disdains any one class, and deprives them of religious instruction, cannot come from him.

London:—Sold at the London Society's Office, 16, Exeter-hall, Strand; by James Duncan, Paternoster-row; and B. Wertheim, 57, Aldersgate-street. This publication may be had by applying at No. 5, No. 7, or No. 13, Palestine-place, Bethnal-green; also at No. 10, New-street, Bishopsgate-street.

Macintosh, Printer, 20, Great New-street, London.