

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות עולם. ירמיה ו' טז

"THE OLD PATHS."—Jer. vi. 16.

NUMBER 6.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1836.

PRICE ONE-PENNY.

WHEN, at the close of the fifteenth century, the Jews were driven out of Spain, some of the magnanimous exiles, who had preferred loss of all things to a compulsory change of religion, arrived at the frontiers of Portugal, and there sought an asylum. A permanent abode was refused, and a temporary sojourn was granted them on two conditions—1st, that each should pay a certain quantity of gold for his admission; and 2dly, that if they were found in Portugal after a certain day, they should either consent to be baptised, or be sold for slaves.* Now Jews of every degree and shade of religious belief will agree with us, that these conditions were most disgraceful to those who imposed them. To refuse gratuitous assistance to the poor and needy, merely because they had been brought up in a different religious faith, was utterly unworthy of those professing faith in divine revelation. To compel the unfortunate to choose between loss of liberty or of conscience was the act of a fiend. But now suppose that the Portuguese had endeavoured to persuade these poor exiles that their conduct, however base it might appear, was commanded by God himself. Suppose, further, that when called upon to prove that this command was from God, they had confessed that no such command was to be found in the written books of their religion, that it was only a tradition of their oral law, do you think that the Jewish exiles would have been satisfied with such proof, and submitted? Would they not, in the first place, have questioned the authority of a command resting merely upon uncertain tradition? And would they not have argued, from the detestable nature of the command itself, that it could not possibly emanate from the God of truth and love? We ask you then to apply these principles to the oral law. The Portuguese refused to perform an act of humanity to the unfortunate Jewish exiles, unless they were paid for it. Your oral law, as we showed in our last number, forbids you to give medical advice to a sick idolater gratuitously. The Portuguese voluntarily undertook to convert the Jews by force. Your oral law teaches compulsory conversion as a divine command. If the oral law could be enforced, liberty of conscience would be at an end. Neither Jew nor Gentile would be permitted to exercise the judgment, which God has given him. His only alternative would be submission to rabbinic

authority, or death. The dreadful command to kill, by any means, those Israelites who have become epicureans, or idolaters, or apostates, is well known,† and sufficiently proves that the oral law recognises no such thing as liberty of conscience in Israel. It pronounces a man an apostate if he denies its divine authority, and demands his life as the penalty. The execution of this one command would fill the world with blood and horror; and recal all the worst features of inquisitorial tyranny. Not now to mention those Israelites who have embraced Christianity, there are in England and every part of Europe many high-minded and honourable Jews, who have practically renounced the authority of the oral law. The rabbinical millennium would commence by handing over all such to the executioner. Their talents, their virtue, their learning, their moral excellence, would avail nothing. Found guilty of epicureanism or apostacy, because they dared to think for themselves, and to act according to their convictions, they would have to undergo the epicurean's or the apostate's fate.

Such is the toleration of the oral law towards native Israelites, but it is equally severe to converts. It allows no second thoughts. It legislates for relapsed converts, as the Spanish Inquisition did for those Jews who, after embracing Christianity, returned to their former faith, and sentences all such to death.

כן נח שנתגור ומל וסבלי ואחר כך רצה לחזור מאחרי ה' ולחיות בר חושב בלבד כשדה מקדש. אין שומעין לו. אלא יהיה כשורא לכל דבר או דבר: "A Noahite who has become a proselyte, and been circumcised and baptised, and afterwards wishes to return from after the Lord, and to be only a sojourning proselyte, as he was before, is not to be listened to—on the contrary, either let him be an Israelite in every thing, or let him be put to death." (Hilchoth Melachim, c. x. 3.) In this law there is an extraordinary severity. The oral law admits that a Noahite, that is, a heathen who has taken upon himself the seven commandments of the children of Noah, may be saved. It cannot, therefore, be said that the severity was dictated by a wish to deter men from error, and to restrain them from rushing upon everlasting ruin, as the inquisition pleads. The oral law goes a little further, and not only will not permit a man to change his creed, but will not even

† Hilchoth Rotzeach, c. iv. 10.

* Jost, volume vii. p. 91.

suffer him to change his ceremonial observances. Though the man should commit no crime, and though he should continue to worship the one true God in spirit and in truth, yet if he only alter the outward forms of his religion, modern Judaism requires that he should be put to death.

But the tender care of the oral law is not limited to the narrow confines of Judaism, it extends also to the heathen, amongst whom it directs the true faith to be propagated by the sword. First, it gives a particular rule. In case of war with the Gentiles, it commands the Jews to offer peace on two conditions—the one that they should become tributaries, the other that they should renounce idolatry and take upon them the seven precepts of the Noahites, and then adds—

ואם לא השלימו או שהשלימו לא קבלו שבע מצות
עשרין עמדם מלחמה חורגין כל הזרים הגדולים
ובהוצן כל ממונם ושם ואין חורגין אשה ולא קטן
שנאמר חנושים וחסין וכו' :

"But if they will not make peace, or if they will make peace but will not take upon them the seven commandments, the war is to be carried on against them, and all the adult males are to be put to death; and their property and their little ones are to be taken as plunder. But no woman or male infant is to be put to death, for it is said, 'The women and the little ones' (Deut. xx. 14), and here little ones means male infants." (Hilchoth Melachim, c. vi. 4.) Now what difference, we would ask, is there between the conduct here prescribed, and that actually practised by the Portuguese, at the period above referred to, and thus described by a Jew:—"At the expiration of the appointed time, most of the Jews had emigrated, but many still remained in the country. The King therefore gave orders to take away from them all their children under fourteen years of age, to distribute them amongst Christians, to send them to the newly-discovered islands, and thus to pluck up Judaism by the roots. Dreadful was the cry of lamentation uttered by the parents, but the unfortunates found no mercy." "Do you condemn this conduct in the Portuguese? Be then consistent, and condemn it in the Talmud too. As for ourselves, we abhor it as much, yea more, in those calling themselves Christians. We look upon the actors in that transaction as a disgrace to the Christian name, and the deed itself as a foul blot upon the history of Christendom. But we cannot help thinking that, dreadful and detestable as this mode of conversion is, it pleased God in his providence to suffer wicked men thus to persecute Israel, that the Jews might have a practical experience of the wickedness of the oral law, and thus be led to

reject such persecuting principles. The Jewish nation rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, and preferred the oral law. This law, not dictated by a spirit of retaliation upon the Portuguese, but invented by the Pharisees centuries before Portugal was a kingdom, commanded the Jews to convert the heathen by force, to murder all who would not consent to be thus converted, and to take away the children. And God suffered them to fall into the hands of men of similar principles, who took away their children, attempted to convert themselves by force, and sold for slaves the Jews who refused to be thus converted; so that the very misfortunes of the nation testify aloud against those traditions which they preferred to the Word of God. But perhaps some Jew will say that this is only a particular command, referring to the nations in the vicinity of the land of Israel. We reply, that the command to convert the heathen by force, is not particular, but general, referring to the whole world. If the Jews had the power, this is the conduct which they are to pursue towards all the nations of the earth.

וכן צוה משה רבינו מסי הגבורה לכוף את כל באי
העולם לעבל מצות שנצטוו בני נח. וכל מי שלא
קבל ידור :

"And thus Moses, our master, has commanded us, by divine tradition, to compel all that come into the world to take upon themselves the commandments imposed upon the sons of Noah, and whosoever will not receive them is to be put to death." (Hilchoth Melachim, c. viii. 4.)

Such is the Talmudic system of toleration, and such the means which it prescribes for the conversion of the world. We acknowledge that persons calling themselves Christians have had an oral law very similar in its principles and precepts, but we fearlessly challenge the whole world to point out any thing similar in the doctrines of Jesus Christ, or in the writings of his apostles. The New Testament does, indeed, teach us to seek the conversion of the world, not by force of arms, but by teaching the truth. "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. xxviii. 19.) In the parable of the tares and wheat, Jesus of Nazareth hath expressly taught us that physical force is not to be employed in order to remove moral error. The servants are represented as asking the master of the house, whether they should go and root out the tares that grew amongst the wheat, but the answer is, "Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind

* Dr. Jost's *Geschichte der Israeliten*, vol. vii. p. 93.

them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." (Matt. xiii. 24—43.) He tells us expressly to have nothing to do with the sword, "For all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword." (Matt. xxvi. 52.) And therefore the apostle says, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." (2 Cor. x. 4.) Here again, then, there is a great difference between the oral law and the New Testament. The former commands that the truth be maintained and propagated by the sword. The latter tells us that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Which, then, is most agreeable to the doctrine of Moses and the prophets? We answer fearlessly, the means prescribed by the New Testament, for—

1st, No instance can be adduced from the Old Testament, in which God commanded the propagation of the truth by the power of the sword. The extirpation of the seven nations of Canaan is not in point, for the Israelites were not commanded to make them any offer of mercy on condition of conversion. The measure of their iniquity was full, and therefore the command to destroy every soul absolute. Neither in the command referred to by Mamonides is there the least reference to conversion. It simply says, "When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: and when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword. But the women and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself." (Deut. xx. 10—14.) Here is not one word said about conversion, or about the seven commandments of the sons of Noah. The command itself is hypothetical, "When thou comest nigh unto a city;" and therefore gives no colour nor pretext for setting out on a war of conversion, "to compel all that come into the world." As it stands, it is a humane and merciful direction to restrain the horrors of the then prevailing system of warfare; and beautifully exemplifies the value which God sets upon the life of man, whatever his nation or his religion. He will not suffer it to be destroyed unnecessarily; and even in case of extremity, he commands the lives of the women and the children, who never bore arms against Israel, to be spared. There is not a syllable about forcing their consciences: that is all pure gratuitous addition of the oral law,

which turns a merciful command into an occasion of bigotry and religious tyranny.

2dly, As God has given no command to propagate religion by the sword, so neither has He given any countenance to such doctrine, by the instrumentality which He has employed for the preservation of religion in the world. He did not choose a mighty nation of soldiers as the depositories of his truth, nor any of the overturners of kingdoms for his prophets. If it had been his intention to convert the world by force of arms, Nimrod would have been a more suitable instrument than Abraham, and the mighty kingdom of Egypt more fitted for the task than the family of Hebrew captives. But by the very choice He showed, that truth was to be propagated by divine power working conviction in the minds of men, and not by physical strength. It would have been just as easy for him to have turned every Hebrew captive in Egypt into a Sampson, as to turn the waters into blood; and to have sent them into the world to overturn idolatry by brute force; but He preferred to enlighten the minds of men by exhibiting a series of miracles, calculated to convince them of his eternal power and Godhead. When the ten tribes revolted, and fell away into idolatry, He did not employ the sword of Judah, but the voice of his prophets, to recal them to the truth. He did not compel them, as the oral law would have done, to an outward profession, but dealt with them as with rational beings, and left them to the choice of their hearts. Nineveh was not converted by Jewish soldiers, but by the preaching of Jonah. So far is God from commanding the propagation of religion by the sword, that He would not even suffer a man of war to build a temple for his worship. When David thought of erecting a temple, the Lord said unto him, "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth." (1 Chron. xxii. 8.) Thus hath God shown his abhorrence of compulsory conversion, and in all his dealings confirmed his word, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." (Zech. iv. 6.)

3dly, God has in his Word promised the conversion of the world, but not by the means prescribed in the oral law. His promise to Abraham was, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. xxii. 18.) Now this can hardly mean that his descendants are to treat all nations, as the Portuguese treated the Jews. The lxxiid Psalm gives rather a different view of the fulfilment of this promise. It promises not a victorious soldier like Mahomet, but one "in whose days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace so long

as the moon endureth. . . . All nations shall call HIM blessed." The prophet Isaiah tells us "that out of Zion shall go forth (not conquering armies to compel, but) the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Zechariah says, "He shall speak peace to the heathen;" and declares that the conversion of the world will not be the reward of conquest, but the result of conviction. "In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, *for we have heard that God is with you.*" (Zech. viii. 23.) Here again, then, you see that whilst the oral law differs from Moses and the prophets, the New Testament agrees with them. Account, then, for this extraordinary fact, that whilst the whole Jewish nation lost the great and glorious doctrine of liberty of conscience, it has been preserved for you and for all mankind by Jesus of Nazareth. Just suppose that the principles of the Talmud had triumphed, either amongst the Jews or the Portuguese, what would have been the consequence to the world? If the Talmudists had attained to supreme power, we should have had to choose between compulsory conversion and the sword. If the Portuguese had attained to universal dominion, both you and we should have had the alternative of compulsory conversion or the fires of the inquisition. In either case, the noblest and most precious gift that the God of heaven ever sent down to earth, liberty of conscience, would have been extinct. But, thank God, the doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth has triumphed over the oral laws of both Jews and Portuguese, and the result is, that both you and we have the liberty of worshipping God according to the convictions of our understanding and the dictates of our conscience. Behold, then, how you are indebted to Jesus of Nazareth. Without him you would not have known religious liberty, either theoretically or practically. He is right on this all-important point, whilst those who con-

demned him to death and rejected his claims are wrong. If he was not the true Messiah, but only a pretender, how is it that God has made him and his doctrine the exclusive channel for preserving the truth of his Word, and conveying such blessings to you as well as to us Gentiles? If the Pharisees were right in rejecting him, how is it that God has rewarded their piety by giving them over to such gross delusions, and making them the transmitters of doctrines, which would fill the world with blood and hatred and discord, and make even the truth odious in the eyes of all mankind? For ourselves we cannot help coming to the conclusion, that He who has taught us mercy and love to all men, and delivered both you and us from such horrors—and who, in doing this, rose above all the doctrines of his nation and his times, was taught of God, and is, therefore, the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

Certain it is, that this doctrine has already been a blessing to the world; and that until your nation embrace this doctrine, at least on this one point of love and toleration, it is impossible that the promised glory and pre-eminence of the Jewish nation should come. With such principles as are inculcated in the oral law, a restoration to the land of your forefathers would be no blessing. It would only realize all the legislative and religious speculations of the Talmudists, and arm them with the power to tyrannize over their more enlightened brethren. It would be the triumph of tradition over the Word of God, and that the God of truth will not permit. It would be to instal the spirit of intolerance and persecution on the throne of love and charity, and that God will not suffer. The Talmud, then, is a main obstacle in the way of God's fulfilling his promises to the nation, because it incapacitates Israel for the reception or the right employment of the promised blessings. Is it not, then, the duty of all Jews who desire and long for the glory and the happiness which God has promised, to lift up their voice with power, and to protest against that system which prevents the fulfilment of God's promises; and by all lawful means to endeavour to deliver their brethren from the bondage of such intolerance?

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

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