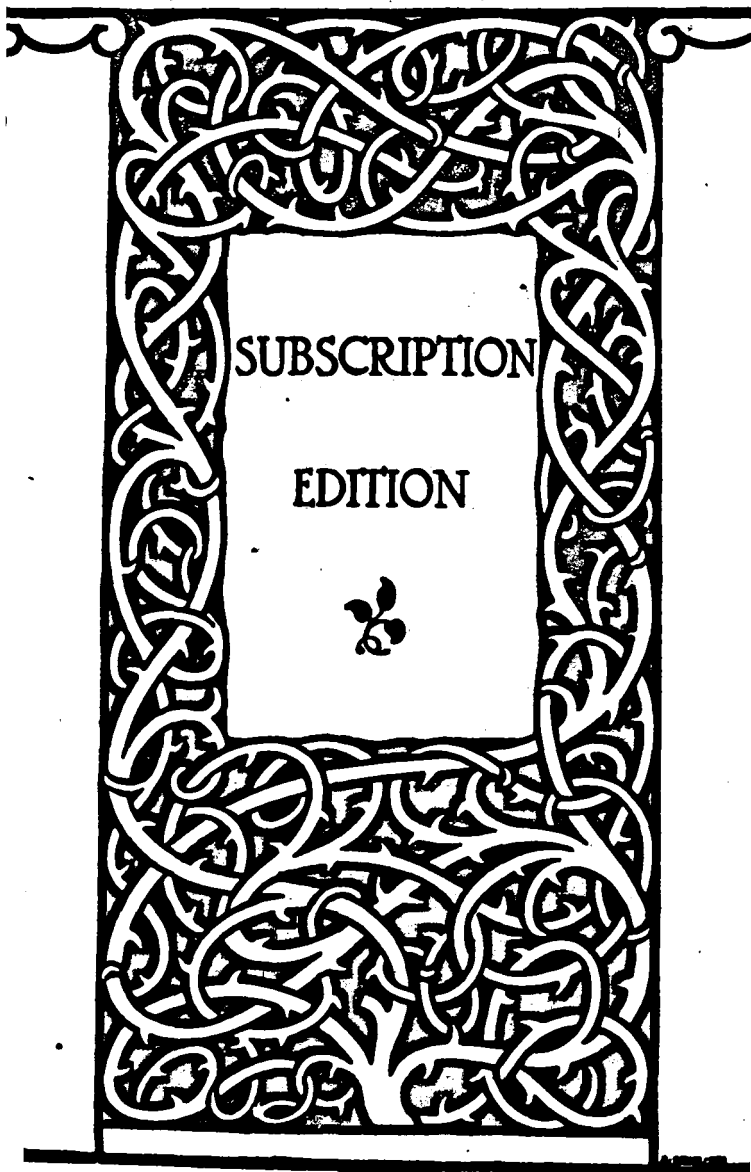


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The Story of the Nations

THE JEWS



THE STORY OF THE NATIONS

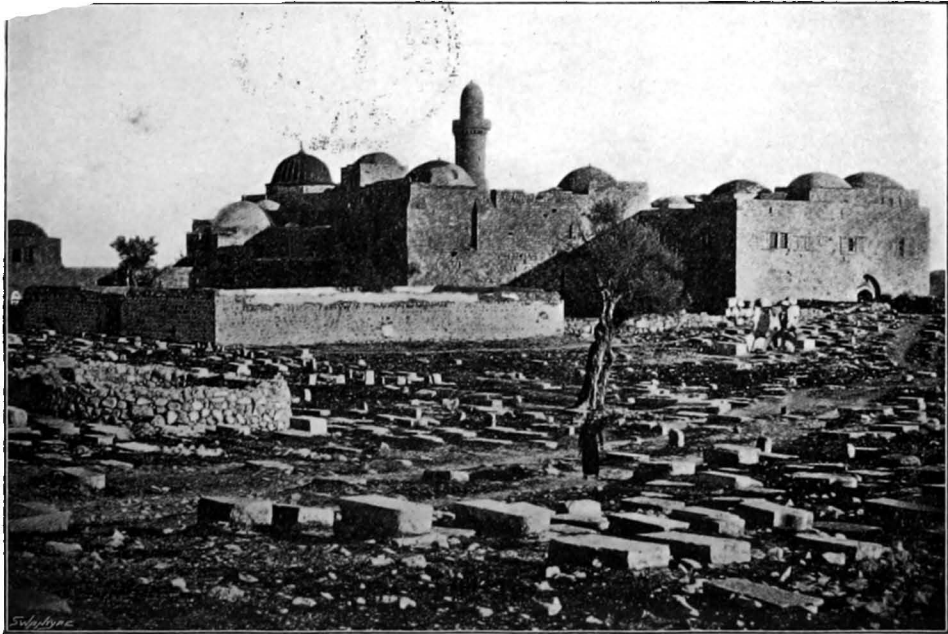
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THE JEWS

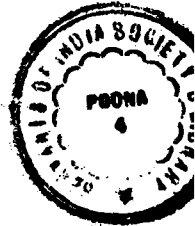
ANCIENT, MEDIÆVAL, AND MODERN

BY

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PREFACE.

To write "The Story of the Jews" for the series in which it is to appear has been a task beset with certain special embarrassments.

In the first place, it may reasonably be doubted whether a faithfully related story of the Jews is suitable reading for immature minds. The prudent parent shrinks from putting into the hands of his child Hamlet, or Lear, or Othello. In the first, the terrible soul agony,—in the second, the ruthless exercise of the most savage passions,—in the third, the malignant, snake-like craft crushing in its folds unsuspecting manly worth and womanly loveliness,—this tragedy of the deepest requires full maturity in order that its lessons may be intelligently received and its power fully realized. Such literature is meat for men, not milk for babes; and it is quite premature to undertake it, until experience has thoroughly settled the character. Has not history as well as poetry its tragedies quite too sombre for childhood,—and among its tragedies is there any quite so dark as the story of the Jews? Where else are problems presented which so defy satisfactory solution? Where else is it necessary to contemplate the play of

spiritual forces so tremendous? Where else is there anguish so deep and long-continued?

A second embarrassment arises from the fact that in the story of the Jews many points are presented with regard to which the feelings of men are so keen and at the same time so conflicting. To-day, throughout the civilized world, many regard the Hebrews with dislike, perhaps aversion, as an unattractive, indeed a dangerous element in society. Certainly this story cannot be written without demonstrating to how large an extent this prejudice is cruel and unjust, however inveterate and explicable,—an effort which is certain, in some quarters, to be ill taken. As regards the ancient period, can the account be given without some attempt to separate fact from myth,—to circumscribe within just limits the natural and the supernatural; and can such discriminations be attempted without giving offence in one quarter or another? Protestant, Catholic, Rationalist, Jew, have, each one, his peculiar point of view,—and each one, if he is at all earnest, regards the matters in dispute as things by no means far off, but of vital, present importance.

The writer of this volume has dealt with these embarrassments as well as he could. As to the first, interpreting in a liberal way his commission “to write a story for the young,” he has tried to adapt his chapters to those in the later stages of youth,—to those, indeed, already standing upon the threshold of maturity. Prominence has been given to the more picturesque and dramatic features of the record. The profundities are only touched upon; the

mysteries of the Cabala, and the inspiration that may lie within the fantastic rhapsodizing of the Talmudists, no attempt has been made to fathom. At the same time, there has been no effort to dwarf and emasculate the absorbing account into the dimensions of a proper "juvenile." Here are details of exterminating warfare, of sharpest torture, of bitterest cursing. Here are presented sages as they study the darkest problems,—poets, as they thrill the human heart-strings with marvellous, subtle power;—characters shining in the very beauty of holiness,—characters, too, black with malignity most appalling. All this stands in the record: to present Israel faithfully, these traits must be given, and the attempt has been made to present Israel faithfully. A tale, it is, full of thrilling fascination and fruitful in instruction; a tale, however, that sobers and that requires soberness in its readers,—the ripeness which comes when childhood has been left behind.

As regards the second embarrassment, it will be at once apparent to the reader that the writer feels that Israel, among the nations, should be regarded with reverence, even with awe, in times modern as well as ancient. In what sense the Hebrews are the chosen people of God,—whether the special protection of Heaven supposed to be extended in ancient times has lasted to the present hour,—whether the sufferings of the race for eighteen centuries are due to the crime committed upon Calvary,—these are questions to which an answer has not been attempted. Among the ancient traditions—whether Heliodorus was driven away from the Temple treasures by Heaven-

sent messengers; whether David heard the voice of God in the rustling of the balsam-trees; whether the sun and moon stood still at Joshua's command, or the angel of the Lord really smote the host of Sennacherib,—such legends as these are given as they stand, with no effort to separate the nucleus of reality from the accretions of fable. The writer cannot hope to escape the condemnation of some critics, perhaps of all. The Supernaturalist will probably find him too indifferent to the miraculous; the Rationalist, too lenient toward ancient superstitions; the Jew, not sufficiently cognizant of the divine mission of Israel upon the earth. The writer can only trust that while dealing with subjects in which the feelings of multitudes are so deeply enlisted and on such opposite sides, he may at least escape the charge of flippancy and irreverence. While the account in the case of many a comparatively insignificant figure is given with considerable detail, the narrative of the Gospels is presented only in outline. That tale, the possession as it is of every memory, it has been thought unnecessary to give with fulness. At the same time it will be evident, it is hoped, that the figure of Jesus has been regarded as possessing sublime, overshadowing importance among those who have come forth from Israel.

As to authorities, the foot-notes must be consulted. The effort has been made to become acquainted with every thing of value contained in our tongue, but the French and the Germans have worked this mine far more thoroughly. In particular, use has been made of the great work of Graetz, "*Geschichte des Juden-*

thums," and of the work of Reinach, "Histoire des Israélites depuis leur Dispersion jusqu' à nos Jours," which appeared in Paris just in time to be made available for this book. Many a picturesque passage has been derived from Heinrich Heine, an apostate from Israel, whose soul, however, always yearned toward the mother whom he had spurned. The vivid portrayal of the circumstances of mediæval Jewish life, given in chapter XI., is an adaptation from his incomplete novel, "The Rabbi of Bacharach," combined with facts derived from Graetz. It enters with profound sympathy and thorough learning into the atmosphere that surrounded the persecuted Hebrews of that sombre time.

In conclusion, while acknowledging obligation to many helpers, the writer desires in a special way to thank Rabbi S. H. Sonnenschein, of St. Louis, and Dr. Abraham S. Isaacs, of the *Jewish Messenger*, of New York, for suggestions and books, which have been of great value to him in his work.

J. K. H.

ST. LOUIS, *November*, 1885.





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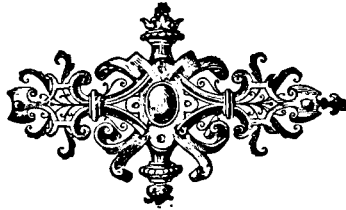
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