

THE CHASSIDIM.

BY

S. SCHECHTER.



A Paper read before the Jews' College Literary Society,

NOVEMBER 13TH, 1887.



Reprinted from THE JEWISH CHRONICLE.



LONDON:

“JEWISH CHRONICLE” OFFICE,
2, FINSBURY SQUARE, E.C.

—
1887.

In Affectionate Memory of

MY FRIEND THE LATE

DR. P. F. FRANKL,

Rabbi in Berlin.

ז"צ"ל

THE CHASSIDIM.

BY S. SCHECHTER.

Throughout the whole of that interesting field of Theological Literature which deals with the genesis and course of religious movements, there are probably none of these whose history, even whose name, is so little known to English students, as that of the Chassidim. And yet it would be difficult to point, in comparatively recent times, to a Dissenting movement more strikingly complete in its development, more suggestive of analogy, more full of interest in its original purpose, more pregnant of warning in its decay.

The Hebrew word "Chassidim" merely means "the Pious," and appears to have been complacently adopted by the early apostles of the sect. But the thing—Chassidism—was, in its inception at all events, a revolt among the Jews of Eastern Europe against the excessive casuistry of the contemporary Rabbi. It was in fact one more manifestation of the yearning of the human heart towards the Divine idea, and of its ceaseless craving for direct communion with God. It was the protest of an emotional but uneducated people against a one-sided expression of Judaism, presented to them in cold and over-subtle disquisitions which not only they did not understand, but which shut out the play of the feelings and the affections, so that religion was made almost impossible to them.

Some account of the sect is the more necessary because, although the Chassidim have not been wholly ignored by historians or novelists, the references to them have generally, for perfectly intelligible reasons, been either biassed or inaccurate. The historians who have treated of them have been almost exclusively men saturated with Western culture and rationalism. To them the rude and uncouth manifestations of an undisciplined religious spirit could not be other than repellent; to them Chassidism was a movement to be dismissed as unæsthetic and irrational.

To the purposes of fiction the romantic side of Chassidism lends itself readily, but the novelists who have used this material have confined themselves to its externals. Indeed to have done more would have involved a tedious and unremunerative study of difficult Hebrew texts, an undertaking not to be expected from the most conscientious writers of this class. Thus Franzos in his references to the Jews of Barnow describes faithfully the outer signs of the man, his long coat and tangled curls, but the inner life, the world in which the Chassid moved and had his being, were unknown to him and are therefore unrecorded.

As to my treatment of the subject, I confess that there was a time when I loved the Chassidim as there was a time when I hated them. And even now I am not able to suppress these feelings. I rather tried to guide my feelings in such a way

as to love in Chassidism what is ideal and noble, and to hate in it what turned out bad and pernicious for Judaism. How far I was successful is another question. At least I endeavoured to write this paper in such a spirit. But of one thing I must warn you, The desire to give some clear notion of the leading ideas of Chassidism compelled me to quote some passages in which the Chassidim spoke in very offensive terms of their opponents. In justice to these I must remind you that unfortunately religious struggles are usually conducted on the most irreligious principles. Thus the Chassidim imputed to their antagonists, the contemporary Rabbis, many vices from which they were free. Certainly, there was, as you can read in every history of our religion, something wrong in the state of Judaism. But I know people who maintain that there is something very wrong in the present state of Judaism, and who despair of a regeneration. But surely this is a silly exaggeration. The Chassidim also exaggerated. It would be better to take but little heed of their accusations and dwell more on that which was spoken in a kind and loving spirit.

As to the literature of the subject, I can only say here that I made use of every book I could consult, both in English and foreign libraries. But I cannot pledge myself to be what Alcharisi called a *חמור נושא ספרים* "a donkey which carries books." I exercise my own choice and my own judgment on many points.

As an active force for good, Chassidism was short-lived. For, as I propose to show, among its central tenets there lurked the germs of the degeneracy which so speedily came upon it. But its early purposes were high, its doctrines fairly pure, its aspirations ideal and sublime.

The founder of the sect was one Israel Baalshem, and the story of his parentage, birth, and childhood, and the current anecdotes of his subsequent career play a considerable part in Chassidic literature. But the authentic materials for his biography are everywhere interwoven with much that is pure legend and with much more that is miraculous. This was, perhaps, inevitable, and is certainly not an unfamiliar feature in the personal histories of religious reformers as presented by their followers and devotees.

The sayings and doings of Baalshem are an essential—perhaps the most essential—portion of any account of the sect. For Baalshem is the centre of the Chassidic world, and Chassidism is so intimately bound up with the personality of its founder that any separation between them is well nigh impossible. To the Chassidim Baalshem is not a man who established a theory or set forth a system; he himself was the incarnation of a theory and his whole life the revelation of a system.

Even those portions of his history which are plainly legendary have their uses in indicating the ideals and in illustrating the aspirations of the early Chassidim; while their circulation and the ready credence they received are valuable evidence of the real power and influence of Baalshem's personality.

In the tale as told by the sect little is omitted of those biographical accessories which are proper to an Avatar. There is all the conventional heralding of a pre-ordained advent; all the usual signs and portents of a new dispensation may be recognised in the almost preternatural virtues of Baalshem's parents, in the miraculous Annunciation and exceptional circumstances of his nativity, and in the early indication of a strong and fearless individuality. Everywhere it seems to be suggested that Baalshem from his infancy was conscious of a lofty mission. It is already in tender years that he is made to give evidence of an indifference to conventional restraints and accepted ideals.

Rabbi Eliezer and his wife, the parents of Baalshem, dwelt, as the story goes, in Moldavia. They are described as a pious and God-fearing couple, who, when they

had already reached old age, were still childless. They are accredited with a spoilsome rectitude, which was unimpaired by a long series of strange vicissitudes and misfortunes.

Ultimately, an angel of God appeared to Eliezer and announced that as he had successfully withstood all the temptations and sufferings by which he had been tried, God was about to reward him with a son, who was destined to enlighten the eyes of all Israel. Therefore his name should be Israel, for in him the words of Scripture were to be fulfilled, "Thou art my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." In due course the promise was fulfilled, and to the aged couple a son was born, who was named Israel according to the angel's word. The date of Baalshem's birth is about 1700; his birthplace, a hitherto unidentified village in Bukovina, which the authorities call Ukop, then belonging still to Roumania. The child's mother died soon after he was weaned, and his father did not long survive her. But before Eliezer died he took his child in his arms, and blessing him, bade him fear nought, for God would always be with him.

As Eliezer had been greatly honoured in the community in which he lived, his orphan son was carefully tended and educated. He was early supplied with an instructor in the Holy Law. But though he learned with rare facility, he rejected the customary methods of instruction. One day, while still quite young, his teacher missed him, and on seeking found him sitting alone in the forest that skirted his native village, in happy and fearless solitude. He repeated this escapade so often that it was thought best to leave him to follow his own bent. A little later we find him engaged as assistant to a schoolmaster. His duty was not to teach, but to take the children from their homes to the synagogue and thence on to the school. It was his wont while accompanying the children to the synagogue to teach them some solemn hymns which he sang with them. In the synagogue he encouraged them to sing the responses, so that the voices of the children penetrated through the heavens and moved the Divine father to compassion. Satan fearing lest his power on earth should thereby be diminished, assumed the shape of a werewolf, and appearing before the procession of children on their way to the synagogue, put them to flight. In consequence of this alarming incident the children's services were suspended. But Israel, recollecting his father's counsel to fear naught, besought the parents to be allowed to lead the children once more in the old way. His request was granted, and when the werewolf appeared a second time Israel attacked him with a club and routed him.

In his 14th year Israel became a beadle at the Beth Hamidrash. Here he assiduously but secretly pursued the study of the Law. Yet being anxious that none should know his design, he read and worked only at night, when the school-room was empty and the usual scholars had retired. During the daytime he slept, so that he was popularly believed to be both ignorant and lazy. Despite these precautions, however, his true character was revealed to one person. A certain holy man, the father of a young student at the college, had discovered some old manuscripts which contained the deepest secrets. Before his death he bade his son repair to Ukop, Israel's birthplace, telling him that he would find one Israel, son of Eliezer, to whom the precious documents were to be entrusted. They possessed, so the old man declared, a certain mystic and heavenly affinity with Israel's soul. The student carried out his father's instructions, and at last discovered the object of his search in the beadle of the Beth Hamidrash. Israel admitted him to his friendship and confidence on the condition of secrecy as to his real character. The student, however, paid dearly for this acquaintance with Israel. Contrary to Baalshem's advice, he entered upon a dangerous incantation in the course of which he made a mistake so serious that it cost him his life.

Upon the death of his friend, Baalshem left his native village and settled as a teacher in a small town near Brody. Here, although his true mission and character were still unknown, he became much respected for his rigid probity, and was frequently chosen as umpire in disputes among Jews. On one of these occasions he arbitrated with so much learning and impartiality that not only did he satisfy both parties, but one of them, a learned man of Brody, named Abraham, offered him his own daughter in marriage. Israel, to whom it had been revealed that Abraham's daughter was his predestined wife, immediately accepted the offer and the act of betrothal was drawn up. But wishing his true character to remain unknown he stipulated that Abraham, although a "Talmud Chacham" (scholar or student) himself and therefore presumably desirous that his daughter should marry a scholar, should omit from the betrothal deed all the titles of honour usually appended to the name of a learned bridegroom. While returning to Brody Abraham died, and Gerson his son, a scholar still greater and more celebrated than his father, was surprised and shocked to find a deed of betrothal among his father's papers from which it appeared that his sister was to wed a man with apparently no claim to scholarship or learning. He protested to his sister, but she declined to entertain any objections to a marriage which her father had arranged. When the time for the wedding was at hand, Israel gave up his post as teacher, and repaired to Brody. Disguised as a peasant he presented himself before his future brother-in-law, who was then fulfilling some high judicial function. Gerson taking him for a beggar offered him alms, but Israel refusing the money asked for a private interview stating that he had an important secret to reveal. He then, to Gerson's surprise and disgust, explained who he was and that he had come to claim his bride. As the girl was determined to obey her father's will the affair was settled and the day fixed. On the morning of the wedding Israel revealed to his bride his real character and mission, at the same time enjoining secrecy. Evil fortunes would befall them, he said, but a better time would eventually follow.

After the wedding, Gerson (having in vain attempted to instruct his seemingly ignorant brother-in-law, decided to rid himself of his presence. He gave his sister the choice of being separated from her husband, or of leaving the town in his company. She chose the latter, and thereupon the two left Brody and began a life of hardship and suffering. Israel chose for his new home a spot on one of the spurs of the Carpathian mountains. No Jews lived there and Israel and his wife were thus separated from the society of their fellows in a life of complete and unchanging solitude. Israel dug lime in the ravines among the mountains, and his wife conveyed it for sale to the nearest town. Their life at this period seems to have been one of great privation, but the harder Israel's outward lot, the more he increased in spiritual greatness. In his solitude he gave himself up entirely to devotion and religious contemplation. His habit was to climb to the summit of the mountains and wander about rapt in spiritual ecstasies. He fasted, prayed, made continual ablutions, and observed all the customary outward and inward exercises of piety and devotion.

After seven years, Gerson, who was well aware of the bitter poverty which his sister endured, relented and brought her and her husband back to Brody. At first he employed Baalshem as his coachman, but as he proved wholly unfit for this work Gerson rented a small inn in a remote village, and there established his sister and her husband. The business of the inn was managed by the wife, while Baalshem passed most of his time in a hut in a neighbouring forest. Here he once more gave himself up to meditation and preparation for his future mission, and here a little later when nearly 42 years of age, to a few chosen spirits, afterwards his most fervent disciples, he first revealed his true character and mission.

From this point unfortunately the materials for a continuous biography are wanting; we next hear of Baalshem discharging the functions of an ordinary Rabbi at Miedzioboz in Podolia, but for the remainder of his personal history we have to be content with detached anecdotes and fragmentary passages in his life, the sum total of which goes to show that he resided in Podolia and Wallachia, teaching his doctrines to his disciples and "working Wonders." He does not seem to have figured as a public preacher, nor has he left behind him any written work. He appears rather to have used the method familiar to students of Greek philosophy, of teaching by conversations with his friends and disciples. These conversations and the parables with which they were largely interspersed were remembered and stored up by his hearers. By his neighbours the country folk, Baalshem was regarded simply as "a man of God." He was allowed to pursue his course undisturbed by persecution of the serious character which his more aggressive successors provoked. Such of the Rabbis as were aware of his existence despised him and his ways, but the Rabbinical world was at that time too much occupied in the controversy between Eybeschütz and Emden to concern itself with the vagaries of an obscure and apparently "unlearned" eccentric. Baalshem also took part in the disputes which took place in Lemburg (1757?) between the Rabbis and the Frankists, who denounced the Talmud to the Polish Government and wanted to have all the Rabbinical books destroyed. Baalshem suffered from this excitement in a most terrible way. The abrogation of the Oral Law meant for him the ruin of Judaism.

Baalshem in forming the little band of devoted followers who were destined to spread a knowledge of his creed travelled considerably about Wallachia. He at one time decided to make a pilgrimage to Palestine, but when he reached Constantinople felt himself inspired to return and continue his work at home. He died at Miedzioboz on the eve of Pentecost, 1761.

After his death his disciples, of whom one Beer of Mizriez was the most prominent, undertook the proselytizing mission for which Baalshem had prepared them, but from which he himself appears to have abstained. They preached and taught in all the provinces of Russia where Jews may reside, in Roumania, and Gallicia. The number of the sect at the present day is probably about half a million.

Returning now to Baalshem the founder, it may be noted that his appearance as a teacher and reformer was accompanied and justified by a customary and adequate number of miracles. To one disciple he revealed secrets which could have become known to him only by divine revelation; to another he appeared with a nimbus round his head; on the evidence of others we learn that he "made the lame dance and the blind see; the sick were healed and the dead were raised, and demons left off possessing men and animals." According to the Chassidim Baalshem performed all the recognized signs and marvels which have ever been the customary minor characteristic of men of similar type in similar environment. When Baalshem desired to cross a stream, he spread forth his mantle upon the waters, and standing thereupon passed safely to the other side. Ghosts evacuated haunted houses at the mere mention of his name. Was he alone in the forest on a wintry night, he had but to touch a tree with his finger tips and flames burst forth. When his spirit wandered through the angelic spheres, as was frequently the case, he obtained access to Paradise for millions of pining souls who had vainly waited without through long thousands of mournful years. These and other miracles need not be examined. Here, as in the case of other such blissful seasons of grace, they were the ephemeral though important accessories in establishing the inspired character of his utterances and the authority of his injunctions. It is not as a worker of miracles, but as a religious teacher and reformer that Baalshem is interesting.

Properly to understand the nature and special direction of his teaching, it is

necessary in some measure to realize the character of the field in which he worked ; to consider, in other words, the moral and religious condition of the Jews in those districts where Chassidism first took root.

In a Hebrew Hymn, written about 1000 A.C., and still recited in the synagogue on the Day of Atonement, the poet expresses the strange and bitter fortunes of our race in touching words of mingled sorrow and exaltation.

Destroyed lies Zion and profaned,
Of splendour and renown bereft,
Her ancient glories wholly waned,
One deathless treasure only left ;
Still ours, O Lord,
Thy Holy Word.

And this divine Word it was, which our ancestors have sought to preserve intact through so many centuries of persecution, and for the sake of which no labour seemed too severe, no sacrifice too large. "Bethink Thee, O God," exclaimed one of our ancient sages, "bethink Thee of Thy faithful children who, amid their poverty and want, are busy in the study of Thy Law. Bethink Thee of the poor in Israel who are willing to suffer hunger and destitution if they can secure for their children the knowledge of Thy Law." And so indeed it was. Old and young, weak and strong, rich and poor, all pursued that single study, the Torah. The product of that prolonged study is that gigantic literature which, as a long unbroken chain of spiritual activity, connects together the various periods of our chequered and eventful history. All ages and all lands have contributed to the development of this supreme study. For under the word Torah was comprised not only the Law, but also the contributions of later times expressing either the thoughts or the emotions of holy and sincere men ; and even their honest scepticism was not entirely excluded. And as in the canon of the Bible, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon found place in the same volume that contains the Law and the Prophets, so at a later time people did not object to put the philosophical works of Maimonides and the songs of Abul Hassan on the same level with the Code of Alfassi and the commentaries on the Bible by Rashi. None of them was declared infallible, but also to none of them, as soon as people were convinced of the author's sincerity, was denied the homage due to seekers after truth. Almost every author was called Rabbi or Rabbenu (our master), and nearly every book was regarded more or less as a contribution to the great bulk of the Torah. It was called "Sepher," and was treated with a certain kind of piety. But by a series of accidents too long to be related here, sincerity ceased and sport took its place. I am referring to the casuistic schools commonly known by the name of Pilpulists, who flourished in the last two centuries preceding ours. To the authors of this unhappy period, a few glorious exceptions always allowed, the preceding Jewish literature, did not mean a "fountain of living waters," supplying men with truth and religious inspiration, but rather a kind of armoury providing them with juristic cases over which to fight, and to out-do each other in sophistry and subtlety. As a consequence they cared little or nothing for that part of the Jewish literature that appeals less to the intellect than to the feelings of men. In short, religion consisted only of complicated cases and innumerable ordinances, in which the wit of these men found delight. But the emotional part of it whose root is the Faith and Love of men, was almost entirely neglected.

But it was precisely these higher religious emotions that were Baalshem's peculiar province, and it was to them that he assigned a place in his religious system befitting their importance and their dignity. And the locale of his ministrations was curiously adapted for such propaganda. To that universal study of the Law of which we have just spoken there was one exception. That exception was amongst

the Jews in the territories which bordered on the Carpathian Mountains, and comprise the principalities of Moldavia, and Wallachia, Bukovina and the Ukraine.

It is historically certain that the first arrival of the Jews in Roumania was at a very early date, but there is no trace of any intellectual productivity among the immigrants until recent times, and it is admitted that the study of the Law was almost entirely neglected. It was in these districts of mental, and perhaps we might add of even spiritual, darkness that Chassidism took its rise and achieved its first success. "The sect of the Chassidim," says one of the bitterest but most trustworthy of their opponents, "first gained ground in the most uncivilised provinces; in the wild ravines of Wallachia and the dreary steppes of the Ukraine."

Apart from the genius of its founder, Chassidism owes its rapid growth to the intellectual barrenness of these districts as compared with the intellectual fertility of the other regions where Jews most thickly congregated. The Roumanian Jews were to some extent under the jurisdiction of the Rabbis of Poland. Now the Poles were celebrated even in Germany for the elaboration of their casuistry. These over-subtle Rabbis delighting in the quibbles of their sophistry, and reducing religion to an unending number of juristic calculations and all sorts of possibilities and impossibilities, were but too apt to forget the claims of feeling in their eager desire to question and to settle everything. They may have been satisfactory guides in matters spiritual to the men of their own land, but they were of no avail to their Roumanian brethren who failed to recognise religion in the garb of casuistry. It was, therefore, not surprising that a revolt against the excess of intellectualism should have sprung up and flourished in those districts where the inhabitants were constitutionally incapable of appreciating the delights of argument. The field was ready, and in the fulness of time came the sower in the person of Baalshem.

In the above estimate of the Polish Rabbis there undoubtedly lurks a touch of exaggeration. But it represents the view which the Chassidim themselves took of their opponents. The whole life of Baalshem is a protest against the typical Rabbi thus conceived. The essential difference in the ideals of the two parties is perhaps best illustrated in those portions of their biographical literature where legend treads most closely upon the heels of fact. The hero of Polish Rabbinic biography at five years of age can recite by heart the most difficult tractates of the Talmud, at eight he is the disciple of the most celebrated teacher of the time, and perplexes him by the penetrative subtlety of his questions; while at thirteen he appears before the world as a full-fledged Doctor of the Law.

The hero of the Chassidim has a totally different education, and his distinctive glory is of another kind. The legendary stories about Baalshem's youth tell us little of his proficiency in Talmudic studies; instead of sitting in the Beth Hamidrash with the folios of some pilpulistic treatise spread out before him, Baalshem passes his time singing hymns out of doors, or under the green trees of the forest with the children. Satan, however, says the Chassid, is more afraid of these innocent exercises than of all the controversies in the Meheram Shiff. It was through external nature, the woods of his childhood, the hills and wild ravines of the Carpathians where he passed many of his maturer years, that Baalshem, according to his disciples, reached his spiritual confirmation. The Chassidic hero had no celebrated Rabbi for his master. He was his own teacher. If not self-taught, it was angelic lips, or even the divine voice itself, that taught him the higher knowledge. From the source whence the Torah flowed, Baalshem received heavenly lore. His method of self-education, his ways of life, his choice of associates were all instances of revolt; not only did he teach a wholly different theory and practice, but he and his disciples seemed to have missed no opportunity of denouncing the old

teachers as misleading and ungodly. Among the many anecdotes illustrating this feature it is told how once on the evening before the great Day of Atonement, Baalshem was noticed by his disciples to be, contrary to his usual custom, depressed and ill at ease. The whole subsequent day he passed in violent weeping and lamentations. At its close he once more resumed his wonted cheerfulness of manner. When asked for the explanation of his behaviour he replied that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that heavy accusations were being made against the Jewish people and a heavy punishment had been ordained upon them. The anger of Heaven was caused by the Rabbis whose sole occupation was to invent lying premisses and to draw from them false conclusions. All the truly wise Rabbis of the olden time (such as the Tanaim, Amoraim and their followers whom Baalshem regarded as so many *saints and prophets*) had now stood forth as the accusers of their modern successors by whom their words were so grossly perverted from their original meaning. On this account Baalshem's tears had been shed, and his prayers as usual had been successful. The impending judgment was annulled. On another occasion when he overheard the sounds of eager, loud discussion issuing from a Raboinical college, Baalshem closing his ears with his hands, declared that it was such disputants who delayed the redemption of Israel from captivity. Satan, he said, incites the Rabbis to study those portions of Jewish literature only on which they can whet the sharpness of their intellects, but from all writings of which the reading would promote piety and the fear of God he keeps them away. "Where there is much study," says a disciple of Baalshem, "there is little piety." "Jewish Devils" (שרין יהודאין) is one of the numerous polite epithets applied to the Rabbis by the friends of Baalshem. "Even the worst sinners are better than they; so blind are they in the arrogance of their self-conceit that their very devotion to the Law becomes a vehicle for their sin." It will be found when we deal with the more positive side of Baalshem's teaching that this antagonism to the attitude and methods of the contemporary Rabbis is further emphasized, and it will readily be seen that his whole scheme of religion and of conduct in relation to God and man rendered this acknowledged hostility inevitable. In approaching this part of our subject it should be remembered that, as stated above, Baalshem himself wrote nothing. For a knowledge of his sayings we are therefore dependent on the reports of his friends and disciples. And it is not unfrequently necessary to supplement these by the teaching of his followers, whom we may suppose in large measure to have caught the spirit of their master. Unfortunately the original authorities are in a difficult Hebrew patois which often obscures the precise meaning of whole passages.

The originality of Baalshem's teaching has been frequently impugned, chiefly by the suggestion that he drew largely from the Zohar. This mystical book, "the Bible of the Cabbalists," whether we regard its subject matter or its history and influence, is unique in literature. Its suppositious author is a great Rabbi of the 2nd century, but the real writer is probably one Moses de Leon, a Spanish Jew who lived eleven centuries later. The book is one of the most interesting literary forgeries, and is a marvellous mixture of good and evil. A passage of delicate religious fancy is succeeded by another of gross obscenity in illustration and suggestion; true piety and wild blasphemy are strangely mingled together. Baalshem undoubtedly had studied the Zohar, and he even is reported to have said that the reading of the Zohar had enabled him to see into the whole universe of things. But for all that Baalshem was no copyist; and the Zohar, although it may have suggested a hint to him here and there, was not the source whence his inspiration was drawn.

Its attraction for Baalshem is sufficiently explained by the phantastic, imaginative and emotional nature of its contents. It lent itself more easily than the

older Rabbinical literature to new explanations unthought of by its author. But even the Talmud and the Midrashim became apocalyptic to the heroes of Chassidism. Nay, the driest and most legal disquisitions about *meum* and *tuum* could be translated into parable and allegories and symbols full of the most exalted meanings. Baalshem, like every other religious reformer, was partially the product of his age. The influences of the past, the history and literature of his own people, helped to make him what he was. But they do not rob him of his originality. He was a religious revivalist in the best sense ; full of burning faith in his God and his cause ; convinced utterly of the value of his work and the truth of his teaching.

Although there can be no real doubt of Baalshem's claim to originality, it should be borne in mind that his teaching is not only distinctively Jewish, but that for every part of it parallels and analogies could be found in the older Hebrew literature. Indeed it is not wonderful that in a literature, extending over 2,000 years, of a people whose chief thoughts have been religious, and who have come in contact with so many external religious and philosophic influences, the germs can be discovered of almost every conceivable system, and the outline of almost every imaginable doctrine.

The keynote of all Baalshem's teachings is the Omnipresence, or more strictly the Immanence, of God. This is the source from which flows naturally every article of his creed ; the universality of the Divinity is the foundation of the entire Chassidic fabric. The idea of the constant living presence of God in all existence permeates the whole of Baalshem's scheme ; it is insisted on in every relation ; from it is deduced every important proposition and every rule in conduct of his school.

All created things and every product of human intelligence owe their being to God. All generation and all existence spring from the thought and will of God. It is incumbent upon man to believe that all things are pervaded by the divine life, and when he speaks he should remember that it is this divine life which is speaking through him. There is nothing which is void of God. If we imagine for a moment such a thing to be it would instantly fall into nothingness. In every human thought God is present. If the thought be gross or evil, we should seek to raise and ennoble it by carrying it back to its origin. So if a man be suddenly overwhelmed by the aspect of a beautiful woman, he should remember that this splendour of beauty is owing to the all pervading emanation from the divine. When he remembers that the source of corporeal beauty is God, he will not be content to let his thought abide with the body when he can rise to the inward contemplation of the infinite soul of beauty, which is God. A disciple of Baalshem has said : Even as in the jewels of his beloved the lover sees only the beauty of her he loves, so does the true lover of God see in all the appearances of this world, the vitalizing and generative power of his divine master. If you do not see the world in the light of God you separate the creation from its Creator. He who does not fully believe in this universality of God's presence has never properly acknowledged God's Sovereignty, for he excludes God from an existing portion of the actual world. The word of God (to Baalshem, a synonym of God himself), which "is settled in heaven" and "established on earth," is still and always speaking, acting, and generating throughout heaven and earth in endless gradations and varieties. If the vitalizing word were to cease, chaos would come again. The belief in a single creation after which the Master withdrew from his completed work, is erroneous and heretical. The vivifying power is never withdrawn from the world which it animates. Creation is continuous ; an unending manifestation of the goodness of God. All things are an effluence from the two divine attributes of Power and Love, which express themselves in various images and reflections.

This is the doctrine of universality in Chassidism. God, the father of Israel God the Merciful, God the All-powerful, the God of Love, not only created every-

thing but is embodied in everything. The necessity of belief in this doctrine is the cardinal Dogma. But as creation is continuous so also is revelation. This revelation is only to be grasped by faith. Faith, therefore, is more efficacious than learning. Thus it is that in times of persecution, the wise and the foolish, the sinner and the saint are wont alike to give up their life for their faith. They who could render no answer to the questions of the casuist are yet willing to die the most cruel of deaths rather than deny their faith in the One and Supreme God. Their strength to face danger and death is owing to that divine illumination of the soul which is more exalted than knowledge.

We should thus regard all things in the light of so many manifestations of the Divinity. God is present in all things; therefore there is good, actual or potential, in all things. It is our duty everywhere to seek out and to honour the good, and not to arrogate to ourselves the right to judge that which may seem to be evil. In thinking therefore of a fellow man we should above all things realize in him the presence of the spirit of good. Whence we have the Doctrine that each of us, while thinking humbly of himself, should always be ready to think well, and always slow to think evil, of another. This explains the Chassidic attitude towards erring humanity. Baalshem viewed human sin and infirmity in a very different light from that of the ordinary Rabbi. Ever conscious of the Divine side of Humanity, he vigorously combated the gratuitous assumption of sinfulness in man which was a fertile subject with contemporary preachers. They, among the Roumanian Jews as in other communities, delighted chiefly to dwell on the dark side of things and found their favourite theme in elaborate descriptions of the infernal punishments that were awaiting the sinner after death. It is related how on one occasion Baalshem rebuked one of these. The preacher had been denouncing woe to an audience of whom he knew nothing whether for evil or for good. Baalshem indignant at this indiscriminative abuse and conceited arrogation of the divine office of judgment turned on him in the following words, "Woe upon thee who darest to speak evil of Israel! Dost not know that every Jew, when he utters ever so short a prayer at the close of day, is performing a great work before which the angels in heaven bow down?" Great, as it would seem, was the value set by Baalshem upon the smallest evidence of the higher nature in man, and few there were, as he believed, who, if their spirit was not darkened by pride, did not now and again give proof of the divine stamp in which God had created them. No sin so separates us from God that we need despair of penitence. From every rung of the moral ladder, no matter how low let man seek God. If he but fully believe that nothing is void of God, and that God is concealed in the midst of apparent ruin and degradation, he will not fear lest God be far from him. God is regained in a moment of repentance, for repentance 'transcends the limits of space and time.' And he who leads the sinner to repentance causes a divine joy; it is as though a king's son had been in captivity and were now brought back to his father's gaze.

Baalshem refused to regard anyone as wholly irredeemable. His was an optimistic faith. God was to be praised in gladness by the dwellers in this glorious world. The true believer recognising the reflection of God in every man should hopefully strive, when that reflection was obscured by sin, to restore the likeness of God in man. The peculiar detestability of sin lies in this, that man rejects the earthly manifestations of the Divinity and pollutes them. One of Baalshem's disciples delighted in the saying that the most hardened sinners were not to be despaired of but prayed for. None knows the heart of man and none should judge his neighbour. Let him who burns with zeal for God's sake, exercise his zeal on himself, not others. Baalshem said, "Let no one think himself better than his neighbour, for all serve God; each according to the measure of understanding which God has given him."

From this position it is a natural step to Baalshem's view upon prayer. He is reputed to have said that all the greatness he had achieved was the issue not of study but of prayer. But true prayer "must move," as Baalshem phrased it, "in the realms above," and not be concerned with affairs sublunary. Your prayer should not be taken up with your wishes and needs, but should be the means to bring you nigh to God. In prayer man must lay aside his own individuality, and not even be conscious of his existence; for if when he prays, Self is not absolutely quiescent, the object of prayer is unattainable. Indeed it is only through God's grace that after true prayer man is yet alive; to such a point has the annihilation of self proceeded.

It may be necessary to caution the reader against ascribing to Baalshem any modern rationalistic notions on the subject of prayer. The power of prayer, in the old-fashioned sense, to produce an answer from God was never doubted by Baalshem for a moment. Baalshem's deity is not restricted towards any side by any philosophic considerations. All Baalshem meant was that any reference or regard to earthly requirements was unworthy and destructive of this communion of man with God. The wise man, says Baalshem, does not trouble the king with innumerable petitions about trifles. His desire is merely to gain admission into the king's presence and to speak with him without a go-between. To be with the king whom he loves so dearly is for him the highest good. But his love for the king has its reward; for the king loves him.

It has already been implied that with regard to our duty towards our fellow man we must not only honour him for the good, and abstain from judging the evil that may be in him, but must pray for him. Furthermore we must work for his spiritual and moral reclamation. In giving practical effect in his own life to this doctrine Baalshem's conduct was in striking contrast to that of his contemporaries. He habitually consorted with outcasts and sinners, with the poor and uneducated of both sexes whom the other teachers ignored. He thus won for his doctrines a way to the heart of the people by adapting his life and language to their understanding and sympathies. In illustration of this, as well of his hatred of vanity and display, it is told how on the occasion of his being accorded a public reception by the Jews on his arrival at Brody, instead of addressing to them in the conventional fashion some subtle discourse upon a Talmudical difficulty he contented himself with conversing upon trivial topics in the local dialect with some of the less important persons in the crowd.

This incident is perhaps the more noteworthy because it occurred in Brody which was at that time a seat of learning and Rabbinic culture, and where for that very reason Chassidism was never able to gain a foothold. It is probable enough that Baalshem in his visits to this town kept aloof from the learned and the wise, and sought to gather round him the neglected and humbler elements of Jewish society. It is well known that Baalshem consorted a good deal with the innkeepers of the district, who enjoyed a very low reputation among their brethren.

This line of conduct gave a fair opening for attack to his opponents, an opportunity of which they were not slow to avail themselves. Baalshem was pointed at as the associate of the lowest classes. They avenged themselves for his neglect and hostility to the learned by imputing the worst motives to his indifference to appearances. He was accused of idling about the streets with disreputable characters, and one polemical treatise draws the vilest inferences from his apparent familiarity with women. To this charge Baalshem's conduct, innocent in itself, gave some colour; for his views and habits in relation to women marked a strong divergence from current customs. The position of women in contemporary circles was neither debased nor inevitably unhappy, but it was distinctly subordinate. Their education was almost entirely neglected, and their very existence was practically ignored. According to the Chassidic doctrine of Universality, woman was necessarily to be honoured.

All Jews," says one Chasid, "even the uneducated and the women, believe in God." Baa'shem frequently associated with women, assigning to them not only social equality, but a high degree of religious importance.

His own wife he revered as a saint; when she died he abandoned the hope of rising to Heaven while yet alive, like Elijah of old, saying mournfully that undivided such translation might have happened, but for him alone it was impossible. Then again in a form of religion utilising so largely the emotions of Faith and Love there was a strong appeal to the female mind. The effect of this was soon evident and Baalshem did not neglect to profit by it. Among the most devoted of his early adherents were women. One of them was the heroine of a favourite anecdote concerning Baalshem's work of Love and Rescue. It is related that in a certain village there dwelt a woman whose life was so disgraceful that her brothers at last determined to kill her. With this object they enticed her into a neighbouring wood, but guided by the Holy Spirit Baalshem intervened at the critical moment, and dissuading the men from their purpose, rescued the sinner. The woman afterwards became a sort of Magdalen in the new community.

Above we have endeavoured to throw together in some order of sequence the doctrines and practical rules of conduct which Baalshem and his early disciples seem to have deduced from their central idea of the omnipresence of God. This was necessary in order to give a connected idea of their creed, but it is right to say that nowhere in Chassidic literature have these deductions been logically collated. Perhaps their solitary attempt to formulate and condense their distinctive views is confined to a statement of their idea of piety or service of God, and an examination of three cardinal virtues, Humility, Cheerfulness and Enthusiasm. What the Chassidim held as to true service brings into relief Baalshem's characteristic manner of regarding the Law.

By the service of God was generally understood a life which fulfilled the precepts of the written and oral law. Baalshem understood by it a certain attitude towards life as a whole. For as God is realised in life, each activity of life when rightly conceived and executed is at once a manifestation and a service of the Divine. All things have been created for the glory and service of God. The smallest worm serves Him with all its power. Thus, while eating, drinking, sleeping and the other ordinary functions of the body are regarded by the old Jewish moralists as mere means to an end, to Baalshem they are already a service of God in themselves. All pleasures are manifestations of God's attribute of love; and so regarded, they are at once spiritualised and ennobled. Man should seek to reach a higher level of purity and holiness before he partakes of food and drink, than even before the study of the Law. For when the Law had once been given by God the whole world became instinct with its grace. He who speaks of worldly matters and religious matters as if they were separate and distinct, is a heretic.

Upon the continual and uninterrupted study of the Law, Baalshem lays but little stress. He accepted the ordinary belief that the Law (by which term are included not only the Pentateuch, but the whole Bible and the major portion of the old Rabbinic literature) was a revelation of God. But as the world itself is equally a divine revelation the Torah becomes little more than a part of a larger whole. To understand it aright one needs to penetrate to the inward reality—to the infinite light which is revealed in it. We should study the Law not as we study a science for the sake of acquiring knowledge (he who studies it so has in truth been concerning himself with its mere outward form), but we should learn from it the true service of God. Thus the study of the law is no end in itself. It is studied because, as the word of God, God is more easily discerned and absorbed in this revelation of Him than in any other. The Torah is eternal, but its explanation is to be made by the

spiritual leaders of Judaism. It is to be interpreted by them in accordance with the Attribute of the age. For he regarded the world as governed in every age by a different Attribute of God—one age by the Attribute of Love, another by that of Power, a third again, by Beauty, and so on—and the explanation of the Torah must be brought into agreement with it. The object of the whole Torah is that man should become a Torah himself. Every man being a Torah in himself, said a disciple of Baalshem, has got his Abraham and Moses, but also his Balaam and Haman: he should try and expel the Balaam and develop the Abraham within him. Every action of man should be a pure manifestation of God.

The reason why we should do what the Law commands is not to gain grace thereby in the eyes of God, but to learn how to love God and to be united to Him. The important thing is not how many separate injunctions are obeyed, but how and in what spirit we obey them. The object of fulfilling these various ordinances is to put oneself, as it were, on the same plane with God, and thus in the ordinary phrase of the religious mystic to become one with Him, or to be absorbed in Him. People should get to know, says Baalshem, what the unity of God really means. To attain a part of this indivisible unity is to attain the whole. The Torah and all its ordinances are from God. If I therefore fulfil but one commandment in and through the love of God, it is as though I have fulfilled them all.

We have now briefly to refer to the three virtues to which the Chassidim assigned the highest place of honour. Of these the first is called in Hebrew "Shifuth" (שפיטות), and is best rendered by our word Humility, but in Chassidic usage it includes the ideas of modesty, considerateness, and sympathy. The prominence given to these qualities is in sharp contrast to the faults of conceit, vanity, and self-satisfaction, against which Baalshem was never weary of protesting. He regarded these as the most seductive of all forms of sin. But a few minutes before his death he was heard to murmur, "O vanity, vanity! even in this hour of death thou dardest to approach me with thy temptations: 'Bethink thee Israel, what a grand funeral procession will be thine because thou hast been so wise and good.' O vanity, vanity! beshrew thee." "It should be indifferent to man," says the master, "whether he be praised or blamed, loved or hated, reputed to be the wisest of man, kind or the greatest of fools. The test of the real service of God is that it leaves behind it the feeling of humility. If a man after prayer be conscious of the least pride or self-satisfaction, if he think, for instance, that he has earned a reward by the ardour of his spiritual exercises, then let him know that he has prayed not to God but to himself. And what is this but disguised idolatry? Before you can find God you must lose yourself." The Chassidim treated Shifuth from two sides: a negative side in thinking humbly of oneself, a positive in thinking highly of one's neighbour, in other words the love for our fellow man.

He who loves the father will also love his children. The true lover of God is also a lover of man. It is ignorance of one's own errors that makes one ready to see the errors of others. "There is no sphere in heaven, where the soul remains a shorter time than in the sphere of merit, there is none where it abides longer than in the sphere of Love."

The second Cardinal Virtue is "Cheerfulness," in Hebrew "Simchah" (שמחה). Baalshem insisted on cheerfulness of heart as a necessary attitude for the due service of God. Once believe that you are really the servant and the child of God and how can you fall again into a gloomy condition of mind? Nor should the inevitable sins which we all must commit disturb our glad serenity of soul. For is not repentance ready at hand by which we may climb back to God? Every penitent thought is a voice of God. Man should detect that voice in all the evidence of his senses, in every sight and sound of external nature. It is through his want

of faith in the universality of God's presence that he is deaf to these subtle influences and can read only the lessons which are inscribed in books.

The reader will be prepared to learn that Baalshem taking this cheerful view of things was opposed to every kind of asceticism. Judaism, it is true, has never much encouraged ascetic doctrines or practices. But, from whatever causes, persecution or the like, there had no doubt been just at this time and place a few enthusiastic spirits in the community who had taken to an ascetic life. To one of these, a former disciple, Baalshem wrote. "I hear that you think yourself compelled from religious motives to enter upon a course of fasts and penances. My soul is outraged at your determination. By the counsel of God I order you to abandon such dangerous practices, which are but the outcome of a disordered brain. Is it not written 'Thou shalt not hide thyself from thy own flesh'? Fast then no more than is prescribed. Follow my command and God shall be with you." On another occasion Baalshem was heard to observe that it is a machination of Satan to drive us into a condition of gloom and despondency in which the smallest error is regarded as a deadly sin. Satan's object is to keep us away from the true service of God, and God can only be truly served from a happy and confident disposition. Anxious scrupulosity in details is therefore to be avoided. It is advice of the Devil to persuade us that we never have done and shall never do our duty fully, and that moral progress is impossible. Such ideas beget melancholy and despair, which are of evil.

The third virtue is called in the Hebrew Chassidic literature "Hithlahabuth" (התלהבות), and is derived from a verb meaning "to kindle" or "set on fire." The substantive "Hithlahabuth," so far as I am aware, was first coined by Baalshem's followers. It is best rendered by our word "Enthusiasm." Every religious action, to be of any avail, must be done with enthusiasm. A mere mechanical and lifeless performance of an ordinance is valueless. A man is no step nearer the goal if he thinks forsooth that he has done his duty when he has gone through the whole round of laws in every section of the code. This essential enthusiasm is only begotten of Love. The service of fear, if not wholly useless, is yet necessarily accompanied by a certain repulsion and heaviness, which effectually prevent the rush and ardour of enthusiasm. The inspiration of true service is its own end. There is no thought of this world and there is none of the world to come. In the Talmud there is frequent reference to one Rabbi Elisha Ben Abujah, an apostate from Judaism, who, when urged to repent, replied that repentance was useless and that for this mournful belief he had direct divine authority. For he had been told by a voice from heaven that even though he repented he would be excluded from sharing the happiness of the world to come. Of him it was said by one of the Chassidim, "This man indeed missed a golden opportunity. How purely could he have served God, knowing that for his service there could never be a reward!"

From the conception of Enthusiasm springs the quality of mobility suggesting spiritual progress and commonly opposed by Baalshem and his followers to the dull religious stagnation of self-satisfied contemporaries. Man should not imagine himself to have attained the level of the righteous; let him rather regard himself as a penitent who should make progress every day. Always to remain on the same religious plane, merely repeating to-day the religious routine of yesterday, is not true service. There must be a daily advance in the knowledge and love of the Divine Master. Mere freedom from active sin is not sufficient; such negative virtue may be but another word for the chance absence of temptation. What boots it never to have committed a sin if sin lies concealed in the heart? It is only the uninterrupted communion with God which will raise and ennoble your thoughts and designs, and cause the roots of sin to die. The patriarch Abraham, without any command from God, fulfilled the whole Torah, because he perceived that the Law was the

life of all created things. In the Messianic age the law will no longer seem to man as something ordained for him from without; but the law will be within the hearts of men; it will seem natural and self-evident to them, because they will realise that God and life are manifested through the law.

Baalshem who dealt largely in parable has left the following, which we may fitly add to our somewhat inadequate presentment of his doctrine.

There was once a king who built himself a glorious palace. By means of magical illusion it seemed as if the palace were full of devious corridors and mazes, preventing the approach to the royal presence. But as there was much gold and silver heaped up in the entrance halls, most people were content to go no further, but take their fill of treasure. The king himself they did not notice. At last the king's intimate had compassion upon them and exclaimed to them, "All these walls and mazes which you see before you, do not in truth exist at all. They are mere illusions. Push forward bravely, and you shall find no obstacle."

We must not interpret the parable to mean that Baalshem denied the reality or even the importance of the actual phenomenal world. The very contrary is the truth. The world is for him full of God, penetrated through and through by the divine, and therefore as real as God himself. It was quite in Baalshem's manner when one of his disciples declared that only fools could speak of the world as vanity or emptiness. "It is in truth a glorious world. We must only learn how rightly to make use of it. Call nothing common or profane: by God's presence all things are holy."

Above we have reviewed the essential doctrines of Baalshem and his immediate followers; we have now to see how they fared at the hands of the sect which he founded. This is a sad part of our task, for the subsequent history of Chassidism is almost entirely a record of decay. As formulated by its founder the new creed amounted to a genuine Reformation, pure and lofty in ideal. After his death unhappily it was rapidly corrupted and perverted. This was due almost exclusively to the dangerous and exaggerated development of a single point in his teaching. That point, the honour due to the divine in man, was relatively a minor article in the original creed. But the later Chassidism has given it a distorted and almost exclusive importance wholly out of proportion to the grander and more essential features of Baalshem's teaching, until the distinctive feature of the Chassidism of to-day is an almost idolatrous service of their living leaders, or Zaddikim. What little there is to say of the history of the sect after Baalshem's death would be unintelligible without some explanation of the origin and growth of this unfortunate perversion.

It has been explained that Baalshem laid but little stress upon the study of the Law or the observance of its precepts in themselves, but regarded them only as means to an end. The end is union with God. Man has to discover the presence of God in the Divine word and will. Now this mystical service of God, although perhaps sufficing to sensitive and enthusiastic natures, is scarcely plain or definite enough for ordinary men. Few can realize abstractions: and yet fewer can delight in them and find in their contemplation sufficient nurture for their religious needs. What then had Chassidism to offer to the ordinary majority who could not recognise God in all the plenitude of His disguise? The want of something tangible whereon to fix the minds of the people, which has confronted the teachers of so many creeds, was also encountered by the Chassidim, and they unfortunately found their way out of the difficulty by relying on and developing their doctrine of man's position in the universe. Man's ideal is to be a law himself; himself a clear and full manifestation of God. Now, not only is he God's servant and child,

but in highest development he becomes himself a part of God albeit in human shape so that he may become wholly one with his divine Father. But if man may reach this highest level of holiness, he is virtually a kind of God-man, whom his fellow-men of lower levels perceive by reason of his manhood, but whose essential office consists in raising them up to God by reason of his Divinity.

The few chosen spirits who through the successful persistency with which they have sought God in all things have become, though yet on earth, absorbed in Him, are known in Chassidic literature by the name of the "Zaddikim." The Hebrew word Zaddik means "just" or "righteous," and the term was probably chosen in conscious opposition to the title of Rabbinic heroes, "Talmude Chachamim" (disciples of the wise). For the Zaddik is not so much the product of learning as of intuition: his final consummation is reached by a sudden and direct illumination from God. The Zaddik not only resembles Moses, but in virtue of his long communion with the Divine, he is also the true child of God. He is moreover a vivifying power in creation, for he is the connecting bond between God and his creatures. He is the source of blessing and the fount of grace. Man must therefore learn to love the Zaddik, so that through the Zaddik he may win God's grace. He who does not believe in the Zaddik is an apostate from God. Here then we have the fatal exaggeration to which we have alluded, and here its logical consequence. The step to man-worship is short.

This peculiar doctrine of the Intermediary soon became the distinguishing feature of Chassidism. By a Chassid was understood not a man who held such and such opinions in theology and religion, but a believer in the Zaddik and one who sought to attain salvation through the worship of the Zaddik. Every other doctrine of Chassidism was rapidly pushed into the background and overlooked. Even the grand and fundamental doctrine of Omnipresence in the Creation was veiled by the special presence in the Zaddik. Chassidism became mere Zaddikism, and its subsequent history is identical with the downward development of that cult.

Whether Baalshem named his successor is doubtful. But the lead after his death was assumed by his disciple Beer of Mizriez. This man's conversion to Chassidism was an important event for the new community; his piety and learning were beyond dispute, and, whereas during Baalshem's life Chassidism had found its chief adherents among the lower classes of society, Beer managed to gather round him many of the most learned among his contemporaries. It was these new and ardent disciples of Beer to whom the expansion of Chassidism is chiefly due. They came together from many quarters: and after Beer's death separated and preached the new doctrine far and wide. Many even went forth during the life-time of their master, and at his command, to found fresh branches of the new sect. Like Beer their main efforts were directed to win over the educated sections of the Jews. The elder men paid little heed to their word, but the youths just fresh from their casuistic studies, which had sharpened their wits and starved their souls, lent a ready ear and an eager heart to the new doctrine. The uneducated were by no means excluded; to them Chassidism held out a deeper consolation and a grander hope than the current Rabbinism of the age; they therefore joined the young community in large numbers without any special effort being necessary to gain them over.

In their methods of Prayer, the Chassidim most prominently differed from the older communities. Laying as they did supreme stress on the importance and efficacy of prayer they soon found it necessary to secede from the existing synagogues and erect separate buildings for themselves. The usual salaried Reader "with the beautiful voice and empty head," who naturally regarded his function as a matter of business, was done away with and his place taken either by the Zaddik himself or by some other distinguished person in the community. The Chassidim also effected

many changes in the liturgy. Instead of the German they adopted the Portuguese ritual. They excised many prayers which, lacking the authority of antiquity, were cumbersome in form or objectionable in matter. They inserted new prayers and hymns of their own. They paid little regard to the prescribed hours at which public worship should be held. Prayer began when they had got themselves into the proper devotional frame of mind. Frequent ablutions, perusal of mystical writings, introspective meditation were the means by which they sought to gain the befitting mood. The prayers themselves were accompanied by the usual phenomena of religious excitement. Some in the zeal of their devotion began to dance; others were rapt in a motionless ecstasy; some prayed aloud; others in solemn silence. They justified their abrogation of fixed hours for prayer by the saying that you cannot order a child when to speak with its father: such restraint were fit only for slaves.

As a rule the larger number of the younger Chassidim were able to devote their whole time to religious exercises. It was the custom among the Jews in Eastern Europe for the young men to live at the expense of their own or their wives' parents, in order that they might give themselves up entirely to religious study. According to the old notions this meant the study of the Talmud and its Commentaries; the Chassidim who cared little for the legal side of Jewish literature betook themselves to the literature of morals (ספר מוסר) and mysticism. No small part of their time was taken up with endless conversations about the Zaddik, his piety, goodness and self sacrifice and the wonderful miracles which he had wrought. If a Zaddik was living in his own town, the youthful Chassid spent as many hours as he could in the Zaddik's company, in order to observe and study this embodied Torah as constantly as possible. Where no Zaddik was at hand, periodical pilgrimages were made to the town in which he lived, and endless were the tales which were afterwards repeated, to those who were obliged to stay at home, of the Zaddik's marvellous wisdom and extraordinary deeds. The last hours of the Sabbath day were looked upon as a special season of grace, and the Chassidim were therefore in the habit of collecting together in the waning of the Sabbath and celebrating the so-called "Supper of the Holy Queen." The meal was accompanied by the usual conversations as well as by hymns and prayers.

The Chassidim were second to no other sect in their loyalty and affection for each other. No sacrifice for a brother Chassid was too great. They knew no difference of rich and poor, old and young, wise and ignorant; for they all, with one accord, worshipped one common ideal, the Zaddik, who in his exalted position was equally raised above them all. Before him all minor differences of rank disappeared. When he travelled, a Chassid had no scruple in asking for lodging or entertainment in the house of any Chassid who could afford to give them. If he was in money difficulties the purse of his host was at his disposal. If that was not sufficient, it was supplemented by a grant from the fund of the community. These gifts were not looked upon in the light of charity either by giver or receiver; they were made to the Zaddik to whom all Chassidim alike were debtors. It sometimes even happened that a Zaddik said that the son of that rich merchant was to marry the daughter of a poor schoolmaster, and both parties were equally delighted to fulfil the wish of their beloved chief.

It may easily be imagined that the innovations of the Chassidim provoked the wrath of the orthodox communities. But in their detestation of the Rabbins the Chassidim returned in full measure all the hatred they received. The Zaddik is the Moses of his age: the Rabbis its Korah and Abiram. Where the Chassidic party in any community gained the upper hand, the Rabbi was deposed and a Zaddik, if that were possible, elected in his place. The issue of these bitter attacks upon the old

nobility of the Jewish race was a rigorous persecution. In many places the Chassidim were excommunicated, in others their leaders were publicly scourged and put into the stocks. Their books were burnt and their synagogues forcibly closed. But persecution produced only the usual result of increasing the popularity and the numbers of the sect. The devotion of the Chassidim to each other and to their common cause was increased a hundred fold by suffering. In one case a distinguished Zaddik was accused of treason, before the Russian authorities, and was thrown into prison. In Russia, however, the power of money is considerable, and on payment of a large ransom not only was the beloved Zaddik released but as an obvious consequence his reputation greatly profited: the day of his release was celebrated as a yearly festival, while his sufferings were regarded by his followers as a sin offering that atoned for the iniquities of his age. From this time the government maintained a purely neutral attitude towards the new sect, and ere long the persecution by the orthodox ceased.

The cessation of persecution may possibly be accounted for by the fact that Chassidism as a secession soon ceased to be formidable. There were early divisions within the sect. Even Beer's disciples began to quarrel over theological differences and to found separate communities. When once the course of corruption and spiritual decay had begun, it was the interest of the false Zaddikim to accentuate these differences. Each Zaddik sought to have a whole little sect to himself, from which to draw an undivided revenue. And each deluded little sect as it arose boasted of the exclusive possession of the true Zaddik. The logic of these wrangles may be illustrated by the following dialogue. One Chassid said to another, the adherent of another Zaddik: "My Zaddik very frequently interviews angels." "How do you know it," asked the unbeliever? "Well," answered the former, "he himself has confessed it." "But perhaps he lied," replied his adversary. "Oh you obstinate fool," the zealous Chassid cried, "is it imaginable that a man who speaks with angels would utter an untruth?"

It must not be supposed that these strictures apply to the whole class of Zaddikim. The greater number of Baalshem's leading disciples as well as Beer's were beyond question men of pure, unalloyed piety, who would have rejected with scorn any idea of making a trade of their sacred profession. Their motives and their zeal were alike ideal. Many gave up highly-paid posts as Rabbis before they joined the new sect. Some emigrated to Palestine to lead a holy life on holy ground, others sought to become religious specialists, following out practically, although with some exaggeration, a favourite doctrine of the Founder, that he who observes but one commandment devotedly and lovingly, may reach the goal desired: the union with God. Thus one Zaddik made it his business never to tell the smallest falsehood, whatever the cost or the inconvenience of truth might be. It is related that the Russian Government, suspecting the Jews of his town of smuggling, consented to withdraw the charge if he declared his brethren innocent. Having no alternative but either to bring misfortune on his brethren or to tell an untruth, he prayed to God to save him from this dilemma by sending death upon him. And lo! when the officials came to fetch him before the law court they found him dead. Another thinking that the commandment in Exodus xxiii. 3 relating to the help that should be given to a neighbour or enemy when "his ass is lying under its burden," was practically unobserved, devoted himself to its fulfilment. He was continually to be seen in the streets, helping one man to load his waggon, and another to drag his cart out of the mire. A third made the service of the oppressed his religious speciality. It is said that one day his wife having had a quarrel with her maid, was setting out to the magistrate of the town to obtain satisfaction. Noticing that her husband was about to accompany her, she asked him whither he was bound. He replied "to the magistrate." His wife declared that it was below his dignity to take any part in a quarrel with a servant. She

could deal with the matter herself. The Zaddik replied, "That may be, but I intend to represent your maid, who when accused by my wife will find no one willing to take her part." And then bursting into a passion of tears, he quoted Job xxxi. 13, "If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me, what shall I do when God riseth up?"

Several Zaddikim were learned men and thinkers of no ordinary kind. The works of Solomon Ladiar or of Mendl Vitibsha read with attention and without Western preconceptions, certainly give the impression of both originality and depth of thought. But most characteristic of all is the passionate yearning of authors such as these towards the Divine. The reader is astonished and moved by the intense sincerity and ardour of their longing after God. But despite the adherence of these worthy men, the fate of Chassidism, as a regenerative force, was sealed from the day when Zaddikism replaced the original doctrines of the sect.

For apart from the obvious theological considerations already suggested, there are two points of inherent weakness in the cult of the Zaddik which naturally doomed it to perversion and failure. The necessary qualifications for "Zaddikship" are wholly undefined. We hear a great deal about what a Zaddik actually is, but we hear very little about what he should be. The Zaddik has many virtues, but we are nowhere told what are his indispensable qualifications. Moreover, the Zaddik is a being who can be comprehended by the understanding as little as an angel or as God Himself. He is realised by faith, not conceived by thought. Hence there is no human test of a true Zaddik except the test of miracles; and every student of religious history knows the deceitful character of that test.

The second source of danger arose from the Chassidim holding it to be their sacred duty to provide for the Zaddik a life of comfort and ease. The Zaddik must pursue his divine avocations undisturbed by grosser cares. But what were the consequences? The Chassidim believed they could win the grace and blessing of the Zaddik by the richness and variety of their gifts. A Zaddik's career became a very profitable concern. The result of both defects was that not only was the opportunity given for every scheming charlatan to become a Zaddik, but inducements were offered to make the deception lucrative. Hence the anxiety of the false Zaddikim, already noticed, to found separate communities.

Among the Chassidim of to-day there is not one in ten thousand who has the faintest conception of those sublime ideas which inspired Baalshem and his immediate disciples. It is still the interest of the wretched ringleaders of a widely spread delusion to crush and keep down every trace of reflection and thought so that they may play at will with the conscience and purses of their adherents. That the cult of the Zaddikim has not led to yet more disastrous consequences is solely due to the fact that the Chassidim in general have remained faithful to the Law. It is the Law against the excessive study of which the original Chassidim protested, that has put limits to the license of its modern false prophets.

Amid much that is bad, the Chassidim have preserved through the whole movement a warm heart, and an ardent, sincere faith. There is a certain openness of character and a ready friendliness about even the modern Chassidim which are very attractive. Religion is still to them a matter of life and death. Their faith is still real enough to satisfy the demands of a Carlyle, but it is diverted and wasted upon unworthy objects. If Chassidism is to be reformed, its worship must no longer be of man; it must be brought back again to the source of all Beauty, all Wisdom and all Goodness; it must be restored to God.

SELECTED AUTHORITIES.

HISTORICAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL WORKS : Grätz (XI. including the polemical literature quoted in Note 2), Jost, Peter Beer, M. Bodeck (Seder H' Doroth H' Chadash, Lemberg, 1865), A. Walden (Shem H' Gedolim H' Chadash, Warschau, 1864), Finn (Kirjah Neemanah, Wilna, 1860), D. Kahana (Eben Ophel in the periodical H' Shachar IV.), Zederbaum (Kether Kehunah, Odessa, 1863).

ESSAYS AND SATIRES : T. Erter (H'Zophe, Wien, 1858), S. Szantó (Jahrbuch für Israeliten p. 108-178, 1867), A. Gottlob (in his periodical H'Boker Or III.), L. Löw (Ben Chanajah II.), Rudermann (H'Shachar VI.), T. Perles (Kerem Chemed II.), Rapoport (Nachlath Jehuda Lemberg, 1873, p. 10), Fröhlich (H'Maderich, Warschau, 1876, p. 63 seq.), Ben Seeb (pseud. Chut H'Meshulash, Odessa, 1874), S. Maimon (Autobiographie, Berlin, 1792). Compare also the Hebrew novels by P. Smolensky, L. Gordon, M. Brandstätter, A. Gottlob and B. Horowitz (German).

OCCASIONAL REFERENCES to the liturgy or the system of the Chassidim in the "Responses" of R. Ezechiel Landau, Moses Sopher, E. Flekeles and T. Steinhart, and in the works of Israel Samostsch, Salomon Chelma and Chayim Walosin. Compare also Zunz (Gottesdienstliche Vorträge, p. 477) and L. Löw (Mannheimer Album, Wien, 1874), Senior Sachs (H'Techiya, I. 61) and B. L. Zeitlin (Chasuth Kashah, Paris, 1846). The best book on the whole subject is E. Zweifel's work Shalom Al Israel (Zitomyr 1868, III. parts) which I strongly recommend to students.

The books written by the Chassidim would amount to more than 200. They are catalogued by Bodek and Walden. I shall only draw the attention of the student to the works of Beer, Salomon Ladier and Mendel Witbsker on one side, who developed the theory of the Immanence, and those of Nachman Braslaw and Melech Liezensker, who, on the other hand, carried the theory of Zaddikism to its utmost consequences. The student will find a fair collection of sayings and sentences arranged according to theological subjects in the books Derech Chassidim and Leshon Chachamim (Anon., Lemberg, 1876).

To Mr. CLAUDE G. MONTEFIORE I owe my best thanks for the English translation of this Paper as well as for many suggestions on the subject.