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1933

765TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,  
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH, 1933.

AT 4.30 P.M.

DR. JAMES W. THIRTLE, M.R.A.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed.

The CHAIRMAN then called upon the HON. SECRETARY to read the following announcement, which was received by the audience standing as a mark of sympathy and respect:—By the death, on February 4th, of Professor Archibald Henry Sayce, D.D., LL.D., Litt.D., F.B.A., there passed to his rest a scholar of world-wide fame, whose name has long been held in honour in the Victoria Institute. He had reached the advanced age of eighty-seven, and, with the equipment of acknowledged genius, for upwards of sixty years, he occupied a place in the front rank of Oriental Scholarship. Dr. Sayce was a Member of the Old Testament Revision Company from 1878 to 1884, and his contributions to the knowledge of Assyriology (of which he was Professor at Oxford University from 1891 to 1919) were held in universal esteem. In the process of the years he became increasingly distrustful of higher critical theories, especially as they tended to call in question the results of archæological investigation.

By many published works he popularized the fruits of linguistic research, throwing the zest of a pioneer into every detail of antiquarian investigation and the pursuit of philological science. Academic distinctions were conferred upon him from numberless seats of learning.

A full generation ago he read a paper of great value on Cuneiform Inscriptions of Tel el-Amarna before the Victoria Institute, of which Society he was for upwards of 40 years a corresponding Member.

The CHAIRMAN then called upon the Rev. Paul P. Levertoff, D.D., to read his paper on "Some Aspects of Jewish Mysticism."

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*SOME ASPECTS OF JEWISH MYSTICISM.*

By REV. PAUL P. LEVERTOFF, D.D.

FOR the sake of brevity I confine myself to a few illustrations from the Zohar and other Jewish works of a mystical character.

As to the Zohar, its origin is shrouded in obscurity; and it

is not my intention at present to deal with this problem, nor with the genesis and history of Jewish mysticism in general.

In its present form, the Zohar first appeared in Spain in the thirteenth century, and while purporting to be but a commentary on the Pentateuch, it is in reality a thesaurus of mystic contemplations on the Divine Transcendence and Immanence, on Creation and Redemption, on God and Israel, on Israel and the world, on this world and the world to come, on holiness and the "other side"—*i.e.* sin—on life and death, on Paradise and Hell. It is written in Aramaic, and is ascribed to the second century Galilean Rabbi, Simeon ben Yohai.

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In spite of its peculiar (and often bizarre) idiom and method the Zohar is as a jewel set very deep. It is bright, and gleams, but such radiance has to be sought. The masters of its mysteries did not desire knowledge of such mysteries to be widespread; rather, they veiled the glories of which they were cognizant, and guarded the hidden beauty with jealous secrecy. Its language is curt, pre-supposing intimate knowledge of all the sources mentioned in its obscure references: its phraseology is soaked in allusions, not only Biblical but—apparently—contemporaneous; allusions which fascinate by their very elusiveness: such as "The Book of Rabbi Hamnuna the Ancient," which surely suggests all that is venerable in scholars and obscure in learning! But when the beauty is revealed, and the incomprehensible made plain, what splendour remains! how the jewel glows and lightens in its dusty setting! what glories flash and beam within its strange radiant depths!

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Rabbi Simeon, for instance, meditating on the "night watches" and what hallows them: "When the dawn is about to break, the sky darkens; at that moment the spouse enters her husband's chamber; then the sun comes, and it is day. The hours run to their close; night comes, and the light is removed, and all the gates are closed; asses begin to bray, and dogs bark; and all else is still. But with the midnight the King arises, and the Matrona (the Shekinah) sings in the celestial courts; and the King draws nigh to the gate of the Palace, and knocks thereon, crying 'Open unto Me, My sister, My love!' and the gates of light are opened, and He enters in, and has joyous communion

with the souls of the righteous. Then is he indeed blessed who at that moment of time, when all the world is still and dark, being drowned in sleep, shall arise and be joined with the lightful glories of eternity, giving himself up to the study of the Torah ! Such an one shall not be solitary, though he be alone in wakefulness ; neither shall darkness encompass him, though he have but one candle ; for the majesty of the heavenly spheres shall shine through the open gates of the Palace, and enshroud him as with a mantle and canopy of light, and all the attendants and companions of the Shekinah shall join with him in praise and worship of the King. Then shall the firmaments re-echo the praiseful pœans of His subjects. But not all the nearer songs of His supernal hosts shall be so pleasing unto His ears as that song which ascends from this world, so far away. . . . The night passes, the dawn breaks, and at that moment when the sky is darkened the King and the Shekinah unite in joy, and He reveals celestial and hidden beauties to Her and all Her train, and presents them with gifts of unimaginable splendour ; and he that is below is joined unto them that are above. Blessed indeed is he who is numbered among them ! ”

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Blessed indeed. How mournful a beauty is envisioned here ! The pious worshipper, rising “ when all the world is still and dark, being drowned in sleep,” to be “ joined with the lightful glories of eternity ” ; who shall yet never be encompassed by darkness or solitude, though he be “ alone in wakefulness ” and “ have but one candle.” . . . Would not the small light flicker and toss in the deep midnight, casting strange shadow-shapes on wall and floor ; and with the gathering dawn grow dim, guttering at last to nothingness, as the first shafts of light pierce the dark room, falling, perhaps, on a sleeper grown weary of night-watches ? . . . But his vigil will have brought its own reward, “ for the majesty of the heavenly spheres shall shine through the open gates of the Palace and enshroud him as with a mantle and canopy of light, and all the attendants and companions of the Shekinah shall join with him in praise and worship of the King.”

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This is indeed the wistful vision of eyes grown weary with long watching, of hearts made but more fervent by hope’s defer-

ment, of certainty untouchable and profound because set on a distant and a perfect goal. The serene exactitude of vision, the calm passion, were only attainable at the greatest possible price—complete self-surrender to the will of the Holy One—blessed be He!—entire absorption in the study of His Torah. The arrogance of righteousness is also present in full measure, but it is of a character naïve and utterly sincere. Evil-doers are to be shunned: for instance, a man whose lips are thick is . . . “a man of strife and mischief . . . he has, moreover, an evil tongue and no sense of awe. He is a man who appears to be pious but is not, and one must not have any dealings with him, because all his words come from his mouth alone, but not out of himself.” What precision, what exactitude, what inescapable wisdom—in a word, what common sense! And what excellently paired bad qualities—an evil tongue and no sense of awe! One begins to realize the importance of this last fault’s opposite: the virtue of a sense of awe, which must surely have been more highly valued, and have attained a higher pitch of intensity and perfection among the members of that esoteric fellowship, than in any other circle afterwards. The wild glories of their vision were made subject to the sanity of a Divine order, and informed with the reverence which alone made daring possible. Their faith cast out fear, that perception might be complete.

“ Rabbi Jose, the son of Rabbi Jehuda, said that the Israelites at Mount Sinai saw more of the Divine than the prophet Ezekiel, they being perfectly united with the supernal Wisdom. They beheld five different grades which symbolized five voices, through which the Torah was given—the fifth being “the voice of the trumpet”; but Ezekiel saw only five lower degrees: whirlwind, great cloud, fire, the brightness, and the colour of amber.” What strange and lovely symbols! “The brightness.” One thinks of some hue of fire unimaginably bright. And thus the people is exalted above even the prophet; and more: even the Lord Himself depends, as it were, on Israel’s prayers which, ascending, make more joyous the praises of His supernal courts, and are joined with those in a completer harmony of worship, so strengthening the Lord by their prayer, and increasing His glory by their praise.

Rabbi Eleazar meditated on the words of the Psalm: "God be merciful to us." Said he: "King David rose, and praised and thanked the Holy King, and when the north wind awoke and touched the strings of his harp, so that it made music, David began to study the Torah. Now, what was the song of the harp? Come and see! When the Holy One moves towards the chariots and the hosts, to give nourishment to all those supernal beings—as it is written: 'She riseth while it is yet night, and giveth food to her household and a portion to her maidens'—all are filled with joy and song. They begin their hymning with the words: 'God be merciful unto us, and cause His face to shine upon us'; and the north wind, when it awakens and breathes upon the world, sings: 'That Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy salvation among all nations'; and the harp, when it is played upon by that wind, sings: 'Let all peoples praise Thee, O God, let all the people praise Thee'; as for David, when he was awakened, the Holy Spirit roused and moved him, and he sang: 'Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our God, shall bless us; God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.' This he sang in order to draw down the goodness of the Holy One from above to the earth below. Later, David harmonized all these songs into one psalm, a unity of praise formed in the power of the Holy Spirit."

Thus the Zohar, that "Bible of the mystics"—which, in common with most bibles, is more talked about than known—sums up in a characteristically pictorial and luminous imagined scene the essence of ideal worship, which in its pages becomes real and constant. That a psalm of David originated in the manner so logically and intimately described here seems natural and inevitable when one has for a little steeped oneself in the atmosphere of legend and poetry with which this, perhaps the most unorthodox "commentary" ever penned, is crammed! In itself, the quoted extract exemplifies all that can be said of the perfect act of worship, its intention, necessity, and inner compulsion. David's praise, and the praise of the north wind and of the harp were a unity of devotion and ecstasy, "formed in the power of the Holy Spirit." And the supernal beings, they who began it, were filled with joy and with song, because of the presence of their King in their midst. And what was the end to which their hymning tended? There were two: one, that which is actually mentioned as David's reason for singing,

namely, the desire to draw down the very essence of the Holy into the places of common mortal life ; and secondly, the other purpose, which is unhinted at here, because there is no necessity for reminder, since it is the final aim and all-pervading theme of the whole Zohar and the reason at the back of the whole order of its philosophy—namely, the desire to effect and complete the unity of all things in one volume of glory and perfection—union of the different aspects of the Divine Personality ; union of the two ultimate aspects of the universe, Justice and Mercy ; union of the celestial and terrestrial spheres ; union of God and Man. But whereas in too many modern minds too great a stress is laid upon this last unifying intent in its subjective aspect, in the minds of the unknown spiritual artists whose testament and apologia the Zohar is, even the mystical idea of fusion with the Divine is subject to (and but a part of) the yet higher aim of glorifying ever more perfectly the Divine Itself.

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Thus man becomes at once more humble and more noble— an instrument only, but actually an instrument with power to exalt and aid the splendour of the majesty of the Most High ! No theory of worship can approach this in its dignity, its objectivity, its stupendous simplicity. There is no room here for mere emotional satisfaction, self-glorification or cold righteousness : everything glows and burns with the bright steady flame of self-forgetful ecstasy, of will concentrated fiercely on one point and to one end, of heart subdued by the discipline of the spirit, until the point is reached where the suppliant becomes the giver, the co-operator, the partaker of delight, one with the celestial life of praise, his heaven begun while yet on earth, this world being but a prefiguring of what is above, man but a lesser copy of angels, his world a lesser heaven, or, if he will it so, a lesser Gehenna, if he choose to be ruled by those principalities of evil, the rulers of “ the other side,” who are yet themselves within the Creator’s scheme, being the “ Lords of Judgment ” by whose accusations the self-destroyed soul may be duly punished, though even for such there is some final hope.

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In this all-embracing scheme of life, whose universe, being at once limitless and God-created, must of necessity include all things in the gigantic sweep of Divine intention, the incompre-

hensible is not caged nor is poetry tied down into bundles of formalism, but, perhaps because of the long silent watches of mystical contemplation which at last receive their reward in this wise—for “at present there is indeed an appearance as of separation between the Creator and His Creation . . . because of the scum of wickedness which as yet still clings to the hem of the garment of righteousness, and therefore, although even in this time we proclaim the Unity we do so silently . . . But in the time that is to be, when the Messiah will reign and sin be banished, then shall that Unity be proclaimed openly . . .”—the Divine somehow comes down at some unremarked moment into the simple ways of men, and is found in their midst, become familiar and comprehensible at last; and what wealth of Christward implication could one find in an interpretation of the Zohar in the light of Messianic fulfilment!

. . . . .

Said Rabbi Simeon : “ It is written : ‘ And she (the Shunamite) said unto her husband : ‘ Behold now, I know that this is an holy man of God which passeth by us continually. Let us make him a little chamber on the wall, and let us set before him a bed, a table, and a stool, and a candlestick.’ ’ Here,” he said, “ we have an allusion to the Order of Prayer. ‘ *Behold now, I know,*’ refers to the concentration of will during prayer ; ‘ *that he is a holy man of God,*’ refers to the supernal world where He sits on the throne of His glory, and from whence emanate and proceed all sanctifications and blessings, which issue forth from the source of all bounty and grace, to enlighten, purify and sanctify all worlds, both above and below, in the splendour of His might and the tenderness of His merciful kindness ; ‘ *passeth by us continually*’ : of all the sanctifications with which the worlds above are nourished He also sanctifies us here below, and of all blessings that are above we also partake, for there can be no completion of the sanctification above without sanctification below ; as it is written : ‘ I shall be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel.’ Therefore, ‘ *Let us make a little chamber*’ : let us have corporate worship and an ordered service, that we may supply by our hymns of praise and our prayers a pleroma of energies to the Shekinah (the Immanental Aspect of the Divine Personality)—‘ *a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick.*’ By our evening prayers we provide Her with a bed ; by our

hymns of praise and by reciting the sacrifice in the morning we provide Her with a table. By the morning prayers, which are said sitting and with the proclamation of the Divine Unity (the *Shema*) we provide Her with a stool; and by means of those prayers which must be said standing (*Amidah* is the name of these) and of the *Kaddish* and *Kedusha* prayers and benedictions, we provide Her with a candlestick. Blessed is the man who thus concentrates daily on giving hospitality to the Holy One! Blessed is he in this world and blessed in the world to come. For these four potencies equip the Shekinah with beauty, joy, and colourfulness, that she may greet Her Spouse with delight and ecstasy day by day, through the worship of the Holy People . . . Therefore, the Holy People must direct its mind towards the supernal world, and prepare for the Lord of the House a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick, in order that perfection and harmony may reign undisturbed every day, both above and below.

“At the time when Israel is proclaiming the Divine Unity with a perfect intention, a light comes forth from the hidden supernal world, and divides into seventy lights, and those seventy lights into seventy lightful branches of the Tree of Life. Then the Tree and all the other bright-leaved trees of the Garden of Eden emit sweet-smelling savours and praise their Lord . . . and all the supernal potencies unite in one longing and one will, to be united in perfection, without any separation soever. Blessed is the people which perceives these things, ordering its prayers in accordance with this mystery of the Faith!” The present, however, is a time of pregnancy. The child (the people of God) is in the mother’s womb; its breathing organs (organs for the reception of God’s Spirit) are still without function. This embryonic life is the period of Israel’s exile. The Messianic Age will be a time of spiritual birth and growth. The Messianic days are days in which all creation, even the animal world, will know God as in the days before the Fall. The Messianic Revelation will be more perfect than that on Sinai. Then it was but momentary—a glimpse; in the New Age it will be permanent and continuous. All we see now is the mirrored reflection; then it will be the reality that we see. The least in that Age shall be greater than the greatest of these days.

The knowledge which these writers seek to inculcate is therefore the knowledge of God's inner essence. It is not attained by processes of rational thinking, but by the cultivation of immediate fellowship with God under discipline to His Spirit. But though at present we see only the mirrored reflection, we already appreciate the salient fact that God loves us ; and it is upon this basis that knowledge of the inner being of God is built. The history of the Divine dealings with Israel signifies this one thing—God knows and loves His people. Great must be the love of the king who stoops to a poor man, freeing him from his misery, and bringing him to the palace and there manifesting to him love and friendship. Thus does God deal with Israel. Israel is God's poor man. Out of this little world He has chosen the people of Israel and united Himself with them. It is Divine love which runs like a golden thread through history from the very creation of the world itself. God in His relations with man on earth has shown Himself as a King who desires to make His abode with us here below. The higher His Being the lower is He able to condescend. God willed to be among the small and despised, not as a Sultan ruling in his palace, hidden in person and ruling by power only, but as a good and wise king whose one desire is to draw his subjects to himself—a king who, also out of love for his own, forsakes his palace and dwells among his people in order to unite himself with them, that they may see more of his glory and learn more of his character.

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Creation is indeed significant of God's perfection. In creation God has, by an act of self-limitation, created conscious beings, in order that they may have, first, the joy of realizing their self-hood, and then of realizing their Creator, and of receiving Him into their innermost life as their Father and King. The proof of God's love lies less in the fact that He raises creatures to Himself than in that He stoops to have His tabernacle among men, and thus reveals Himself to them.

A beautiful simile illustrates this point—It is as though a man, accompanied by his young son, were climbing a mountain. As the father reaches the summit, he turns to find that the son is far below ; but they can still see one another. The son longs to reach the father ; but the higher he gets the more strenuous becomes the task. What does the father do when

he sees the intense desire on the part of the son to come to him? He can restrain himself no longer, but comes down to meet him. Even so God in answer to the strivings of the mystic soul. In this connexion Isa. liii, 7, is interpreted as a figure of God's condescending love.

The two types of knowledge are further illustrated by a reference to the fact that the prophets always compare the ideal wonders of the Messianic Age with the wonders of Divine Providence in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, rather than with the wonders of the Divine Power in creation. The great significance of the redemption from Egypt is not the revelation of God's power, but of His condescending love to Israel. Of this we have an illustration as follows: A king invited the representative men of his country to a royal banquet. The rarest dishes were provided, and the guests might help themselves at will. One there was among the guests, however, for whom the king cherished feelings of especial love; for him the king selected a portion from one of the simplest dishes, and placing it upon a golden platter, he himself carried it to his friend. God's dealings with Israel have been ever thus.

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The "fathers," Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are called the chariots of God. Hence every Israelite is supposed to possess two souls: a divine soul, which comes directly from God Himself; and a "natural" or "animal" soul, which comes from the "other side" of God. Israel is called the "son of God"; for even as the very toes of the child have their origin in the parents, so has the "divine" soul, of even a sinner, its origin in God; it emanates from God, and unites itself with his "natural" soul, in order to spiritualize it. It descends from the heights of Heaven, in order to ascend, after having changed the natural into the divine, the material into the spiritual. The metaphor of the grain of wheat is often used to illustrate the energizing of this divine soul. As the grain must enter into the earth, in order to bring forth fruit, so must the divine soul enter into man's innermost nature, and be quite absorbed by it, if it is to bring forth spiritual fruit.

A king lost a costly pearl. He sent his three sons out to find it. The first set out, glad to be free from the restraint of his father's presence. He cared neither for the pearl, nor for his father. He never returned, but spent his life following his own

pleasure. The second set forth, made a hasty search, and quickly returned to his father's house. Not because he loved his father so greatly, but because he was loath to be away so long from the comforts of his home. Now the third set out, full of sorrow at leaving his home and his beloved father, but determined, notwithstanding all his own suffering and separation, to stay away and make diligent search until he should find the pearl, because he knew what great joy the finding of it would give to his father.

#### DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Dr. Thirtle) said: I am sure I carry the desire of all present when I ask for a cordial vote of thanks to Dr. Levertoff for the paper read in our hearing. It was a pleasure last session to hear Dr. Levertoff on a subject demanding a profound acquaintance with Jewish thought; but to-day, if a comparison may be allowed, the lecturer has placed the Institute under a still greater obligation, as he has led us into the deeps of Oriental conceptions, call it mysticism, philosophy, or theosophy—"waters to swim in."

Let it be recognized at the outset that a man may be learned in the Hebrew language, Biblical and post-Biblical, and at the same time be ignorant of the Kaballah, and such aspects of Jewish learning as have been sampled before us to-day. The lecture to which we have listened could only come from a specialist—one who has appreciated (and made his very own) thoughts belonging to a past time—one who, so to say, has lived and moved and had his being in areas of contemplation that have small meaning for the Western mind in modern times. Yet, what a wealth of mental and spiritual truth, truth in its splendour, is at the command of the man who studies the Zohar, whether he be an acknowledged scholar like Dr. Levertoff, or some man of dreams and little beside living the life of a recluse in some little-known alley or court in Whitechapel.

Just here is a region of thought where, a generation ago, it was my pleasure to meet the eminent Dr. Ginsburg, and it has been a peculiar satisfaction in more recent times to make the acquaintance of Dr. Levertoff, who is widely recognized as a fully-equipped exponent of Jewish mysticism, having gained in this regard a reputation which is acknowledged by leaders of Jewish culture, who permit

the word) forgive him his devotion to the Gospel in presence of the patent fact that he sustains the honourable position of an authority on Jewish mystic lore.

It has been our privilege to listen to a remarkable utterance. Questions in dispute, in particular as to the authorship of the Zohar, have been left on one side, and they may be left; but the spirit of the Zohar has been invoked for our instruction. The very name—"Brightness"—has its attraction; and from first to last one feels that the contemplative writer, whatever his tribe or century, moves in a sphere at once ample, fruitful, and gorgeous. Think of it, to have the heart guided along thoughts, to quote an opening paragraph of the paper, "that embrace the Divine Transcendence and Immanence, Creation and Redemption, thoughts on God and Israel, Israel and the world, this world and the world to come, holiness and sin, life and death, paradise and hell." What thinkers were those who wrote (and read) such documents, and should we feel disposed to fear that in some cases such men lost themselves in the mazes of an endeavour to relate and unify things natural and spiritual, temporal and eternal, yet one thing is certain, there must have grown out of such contemplations a sense of worship, spiritual and profound—"Jehovah our God, Jehovah is One."

The lecture has been, from one point of view, a series of pictures—similes have abounded, while metaphors have served as the warp and woof of things affirmed of the Divine Being; and if the Uncreate, the Infinite God, seemed to elude contact with the human soul, yet in the order of Providence, means were supplied whereby the banished of the sons of men could be restored to the Divine favour. All the while, throughout the lecture, we have been encouraged in the thought of the Divine Unity, majestic and sublime, in things of time and eternity, of earth and heaven, and of the universe, however expansive and mighty the idea might really be. There have been no signs of loose ends in the forms of thought; the creative order was complex, but likewise as perfect as it has been ornate, and the Jewish mystics assuredly had visions that substantiate to the full the expectation of the great Apostle of the Gentiles—a time when "God shall be all and in all."

If in form and frame the mysticism of the Jews is Oriental, and of necessity so, yet was it characterized by a marvellous universality in application: in its overflow no conception of the Creator was

obscured, no need or desire of the creature was passed by or ignored. Did the Reality of Heaven demand the outreaching of human desire, with an assurance of answered prayer and satisfied need? Indeed so; hence we see that the visions of the mystics embrace the very practical consideration of creatures hungering for the Creator; or should we not rather say (as the mystics put it) that the Creator hungered for the creature, calling such into being, and in due time ensuring their communion in his own perfect nature? Did not the ancient writer (in Proverbs) speak of God as "having His delight among the sons of men?"

Were we not touched deeply with the passage in which it was declared that "the final aim and all-pervading theme of the whole Zohar—and the reason at the back of the whole order of its philosophy," is found in a desire "to effect and complete the unity of all things in one volume of glory and perfection—union of the different aspects of the Divine Personality; union of the two ultimate aspects of the universe, Justice and Mercy; union of the celestial and terrestrial spheres: union of God and man." Here, assuredly is a place for Messianic doctrine (whether recognized or not); and in some cases at least we find the mystics allowing for this doctrine as a divine fact. Do we not find a trace of this—plainly indicated by Dr. Levertoff—in allusion to "the time that is to be," when the Messiah will reign, and sin be banished? Here we are in the presence of the sublime outlook of which we commonly speak as "the consummation of all things," demanding for its expression apocalyptic terms, more or less familiar? Now, indeed, we contemplate the supreme harmony, the subject of prophetic reference and unfolding, in the Old Testament and the New, and demanded alike by the Theology of the Synagogue and the Church; and the mystics were not without the support, moral and spiritual, that came from such doctrine of last things—unity out of complexity, "God all and in all."

We must have gathered with satisfaction the point that the mystics held with energy the idea that in His very nature the Infinite had a desire to become manifest and known; hence, the purpose of creation, a purpose co-eternal with Deity, who, as shown by emanations and intelligences, realized, so to say, the essential means between the Infinite and the finite, the spiritual and the natural. Men used to say that God "made all things out of nothing." But if the mystics give us guidance, we find it more

reasonable to affirm that, the base of things created, was found in essential properties of the Infinite God : all time being His and all space His : with other possible elements as the " outskirts of His ways." Here we reach a doctrine of unity which dominated the minds of the mystics—*God first, God midst, God last.*

With these few words it gives me profound pleasure to call for a vote of thanks to our lecturer ; and the vote was accorded with acclamation.

Rev. Dr. H. C. MORTON said : I desire to join in the thanks to Dr. Levertoff for his paper, and not so much to make a speech as to ask a few questions. Dr. Levertoff has in the main given us just illustrations of the Zohar, and the first question in my mind is whether this is rightly called " mysticism." Mysticism should have its philosophic side, its theory of the Absolute and the relation of Man thereto : then this is worked out in experience, actual union with the Divine being established by certain practices, and commonly without any historical revelation, being guided instead by an inner illumination. Is not the Zohar rather a book of devotion ?

Rabbi Simeon is quoted, on 2 Kings iv, 9 and 10, expounding a beautiful little incident as intended to bring before us in figures the immanental aspect of Divine personality. Can that be seriously advanced ? or is any such treatment of Scripture justifiable ?

Our attention is necessarily arrested by the references to the Shekinah. The feminine pronoun is used concerning it, with capital—" Her " : and the feminine patronymic, the " Matrona," is applied to it. Is there any doctrine of the Divine Personality intended here ? and why the feminine gender ?

Toward the close of the paper an element of psychology enters in. " The fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are called the chariots of God. Hence every Israelite is supposed to possess two souls : a divine soul, which comes directly from God Himself ; and a natural or animal soul, which comes from the other side of God." What is the sequence of thought marked by " hence," the ground on which the startling suggestion is made that an Israelite has two souls ? Does " the other side here mean, as in the first paragraph, " sin " ? By " soul," in common speech, we intend the whole of the spiritual as opposed to the physical side of human nature : and I

am wondering if this is a considered doctrine of Israelite nature as distinct from the rest of the Human Race ?

Just one other question upon which I should be grateful to Dr. Levertoff for light. What aspirations or thoughts and longings, passing beyond the scope of the Old Testament, does the Zohar express ? Does it register progress and lead onward toward the mystery of Christ ?

Mr. PERCY O. RUOFF said : This paper is marked by literary charm, and gives a clear and fascinating insight into the Zohar. It is remarkable how striking the contrast is, that the masters of the mysteries of the Zohar do not desire the knowledge of these mysteries to be widespread, but the Bible proclaims its infinitely higher truths to all " who have ears to hear."

The exalted descriptions of spiritual communion cited from the Zohar might prove a vigorous incentive to the Christian to seek after a deeper communion with God in prayer and worship, as by faith he enters " into the Holiest."

Dr. Levertoff is perhaps too dogmatic about the origination of Psalm lxxvii, when he describes it as " natural and inevitable."

It would appear that there is much in the Zohar that might be applied to the records of Christ's life in the Gospels. This fact invests it with supreme interest.

The learned lecturer refers to the great significance of the redemption from Egypt as " not the revelation of God's power, but of His condescending love." But in a very large number of instances, *e.g.* Psalm lxxviii, it is the mighty power and acts of God that are appealed to, although, of course, it would be impossible to dissociate His dealings with Israel from His love.

Rev. H. S. CURR, B.D., B.Litt., said : I wish to associate myself with the preceding speakers in thanking Dr. Levertoff for his admirable paper. It has been full of instruction, as well as abounding in fine imaginative touches. I cannot lay claim to any specialized knowledge of Jewish mysticism, and I must accordingly confine my remarks to one or two points at which the paper touches the New Testament and Christianity.

The use of words and imagery, with which all students of the New Testament are familiar, in the document under discussion,

struck me as interesting. There was the allusion to "seeing in a mirror" (1 Cor. xiii, 12; 2 Cor. iii, 18); the reference to the grain falling into the ground (John xii, 24), a statement parallel to our Lord's estimate of John the Baptist (Luke vii, 28), even the common phrase, "Come and see" (John i, 39). These passages seem to suggest that the Jewish mystics clothed their thoughts in words, derived from a circle of expressions, common to Jewry. The differences, however, are as arresting as the resemblances. The use made by the Jewish mystics of the figure of the corn of wheat falling into the ground, typical of the union of the Divine with the human, is good, but the symbolism of John xii, 24, is better. There it becomes a parable of the Atonement.

Again, it may be remarked that Christianity affords room and opportunity for all the experiences described by the Jewish mystics. There is the same sweetness, and the same subtlety, but in Christ there is a corrective provided for the subjectivity and vagueness, which are the perils of mystical emotion and experience.

I was particularly struck with the little apologue of the king and his favourite guest. It seemed to symbolize, after a fashion, the Incarnation, God's unspeakable gift to man in the earthen vessel of a human body, and a human life.

#### LECTURER'S REPLY.

I greatly appreciate the kind remarks of the Chairman and other speakers. The restrictions of time and space make it impossible for me to give an adequate exposition of the metaphysical basis of the Zohar, and to answer all the questions asked by Dr. Morton, Mr. Ruoff, and Principal Curr. The few illustrations from my own English translation of the Zohar on Exodus (Soncino Press, 1933) were meant to show that traditional Judaism has no lack of spiritual fervour. That the Zohar is a "book of devotion" is true enough, but it is something more . . . For a more systematic treatment of the subject I may be pardoned for referring to my book "Die religiöse Denkweiss der Chasidim" (Leipzig University Publications, 1918).

As to the allegorical method of Scriptural interpretation, the Zohar is not more fantastic than the Alexandrian School, or even than some devotional Christian commentaries, on the Song of Songs,

for instance. From the purely exegetical point of view, the Zoharic exposition of the passage referred to by Dr. Morton is of course wholly unjustifiable, but we are concerned with the trend of thought read *into* the Scriptural text. *Shekinah* (feminine gender) denotes even in Rabbinic literature the Divine Presence, God manifesting Himself, especially in light and glory. It is in this technical sense, denoting the localized presence of the Deity, that *Shekinah* is most significant in Zoharic literature.

It is impossible to deal with the psychology of the Zohar in a few minutes, but I may point out that also the Christian Aphraates (Hom. VI, 13) speaks of the double entity of the soul. An Israelite, by virtue of being "a son of Abraham" ("God's chariot") receives at birth a "divine soul," emanating directly from God, as well as a "natural" soul which comes from the "other side" of God. The term "other side" is based on the words (Exod. xxxiii, 23): "and thou shalt see my back," and in this connection it does not denote—as often elsewhere—the material world, the world of "shells," but a lower emanation of the Divine. I need only refer to St. John i, 12-13, to show the contrast between this Gnostic conception and Christian truth, but nevertheless, the very thought-forms and the sometimes almost Johannine colouring of some portions of the Zohar, which deal with the "unio mystica" of the soul with God, have not infrequently led a "Zoharic" Jew onward toward the mystery of Christ.