

# HOW TO REACH THE JEW FOR CHRIST

by

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE DAWN OF LIBERTY

This lesson will be studied under four headings:

- A. The Renaissance and Reformation.
- B. Liberty in Holland.
- C. Oliver Cromwell.
- D. Equality in France, Germany and England.

#### A. THE RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

The Roman Catholic Church was responsible for the Dark Night of Jewish history. Blatantly proclaiming that she possessed the keys to heaven, Rome tried to add the earth to her “spiritual” possessions. But Rome did not remain unchallenged: two great antagonists, the Renaissance and the Reformation, were to appear on the scene. Rome demanded a monopoly on the intellect. The Renaissance demanded intellectual independence. Against Rome’s demand for spiritual supremacy, the Reformation arose and declared spiritual independence.

The Renaissance brought a short-lived toleration for the Jews. The popes and leading churchmen came under its spell. For a while they were too enlightened to persecute. But a reaction took place in the Church. Led by Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, new persecutions broke out and once more misery was the possession of the Jews.

At the most, the Renaissance was a literary revival. It had no spiritual aspirations. Its ideals were pagan. This was not true of the Reformation. The Reformation stood for spiritual independence. Led by Martin Luther, it seemed as if the Jews would benefit by the new movement. Early in his career, Luther wrote a tract entitled “*Jesus Was Born a Jew*.” In this tract he said:

They (the Jews) are blood-relations of our Lord, and if it were proper to boast of flesh and blood, the Jews belong to Christ more than we . . . We must exercise not the law of the Pope, but that of Christian love.

But Luther was a man of changing moods. Toleration, to Luther, soon came to mean toleration for himself. In his later life, he became more intolerant of the Jews than the popes! His treatment of the Jews will always remain a dark stain on the noble name of Luther.

## **B. LIBERTY IN HOLLAND**

It remained for liberty-loving Holland to carry out the principle of toleration for the Jews. After one of the world's most heroic revolutions, Holland freed herself from Romanist Spain. She was sick of Romanist despotism; she resolved to share with the world the freedom which she had bought with blood and tears. Holland became a veritable City of Refuge for the Jews. Here the Jews found liberty. But the Jews themselves were very, very slow in learning the lesson of tolerance, as their treatment of Spinoza only too sadly testified.

## **C. OLIVER CROMWELL**

Meanwhile, in England, Oliver Cromwell arose against the pretensions of Rome. The time was now ripe for the Jews to do something. The Rabbi of Amsterdam, Manasseh Ben Israel, seized the opportunity and made urgent appeals for the return of the Jews to England. Cromwell was won over; he called a conference to deliberate the matter, but he failed to win his point. Cromwell, however, gave to individual members of the Jewish race his personal permission to settle in England.

## **D. EQUALITY IN FRANCE, GERMANY AND ENGLAND**

### *1. In France*

In Continental Europe, the spirit of toleration began to manifest itself about the middle of the eighteenth century. The new spirit made itself felt particularly in France, where Diderot and the Encyclopedists fought against the demands of the Roman Catholic Church. During the French Revolution, thanks to the slogans, "The Rights of Man," and "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity," the Jews were formally enfranchised. Later in French history, Napoleon the Great revived the Sanhedrin. Soon afterward, the Jews obtained complete political and civil equality.

### *2. In Germany*

In Germany, the movement of toleration was held in check under the cruel regime of Frederick the Great. During the latter part of the eighteenth century, a German poet named Lessing wrote a play which was to revolutionize the German opinion of the Jews. The name of the play was *Nathan the Wise*. The hero of this play was a Jew, and for the first time in German dramatics a Jew was recognized as a human being. Lessing used as his model for the hero a young Jewish student named Moses Mendelssohn. These two, Lessing the poet, and Mendelssohn the philosopher, raised to a high standard the cultural and intellectual status of the race.

The work of Lessing and Mendelssohn was checked, however, under successive German reigns, particularly that of Bismarck. It was not until 1871, after the war with France, that political privileges were conceded to the Jews.

### *3. In England*

In England, prejudice against the Jews lingered long. In 1830 a bill was presented to the House of Commons which would give the Jews the privileges of Parliament. It was defeated by a large majority. Public opinion changed slowly. Civil privileges were conceded to the Jews, but Baron Lionel de Rothschild was returned to Parliament five times and was not allowed to vote! It was not until 1858 that Jews were allowed to sit and vote in Parliament.

### **EXAMINATION**

1. Explain the effect of the Renaissance and the Reformation on Jewish history.
2. Describe the attitude of Martin Luther towards the Jews.
3. How were the Jews treated in Holland?
4. Who was Manasseh Ben Israel? What did he do for the Jews?
5. How and when was equality for the Jews finally obtained in—
  - a. France?
  - b. Germany?
  - c. England?

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