

HARMONIES AND DISCORDS

CHAPTER 8

DOGMAS

With Maimonides Judaism achieved a definite shape. Till his time it was relatively fluid. Not only were there differences of rite and custom between various groups of communities. The communities themselves were largely self-regulating; and since they regulated themselves on the basis of Talmudic law, that law was necessarily expanded in use and developed in accordance with need. This was particularly true in the East. In the West, Judaism was beginning to shrink. As the state assumed increasing powers of administration, the sphere of Judaism became restricted. Maimonides himself observes in a letter that the acquaintance of the French Rabbis with the criminal law of Judaism was like that of the Eastern Rabbis with the laws of sacrifice; that is to say, it was a literary knowledge only, derived not from everyday experience in the courts but from books.

We may then take the opportunity to use the vantage point offered by Maimonides to see some of the problems of the Judaism which he expounded and which he helped to perfect and/or petrify.

Maimonides's Deuteronomy (the *Repetition of the Law*) is a repetition of *The Law*, that is, of the Pentateuch in its traditional amplification. It is an exposition of the 'six hundred and thirteen' precepts which, according to Rabbi Simlai (above, p. 78), are contained in the Pentateuch. How Rabbi Simlai arrived at

this figure we do not know. It may not be his at all but traditional. Yet the precision of the figure captured the imagination; and from Talmudic times the equation of Judaism with 613 precepts—no more and no less—became a truism accepted both within the Synagogue and outside it. At fifteen hours a day this would seem to mean about forty precepts an hour, that is, one for every minute and a half; and we are sometimes offered the caricature of the adherent of Judaism frenziedly turning over the pages of his holy books in the search for an appropriate precept the fulfilment of which would make up the required number in the given time.

But there lies here a multitude of fallacies. The 613 include such 'commandments' as the existence of God and his unity; the practice of prayer; the duties of charity and kindness, of telling the truth, of showing respect to parents and the aged, of visiting the sick, of not coveting, of not bearing false witness, of not backbiting, of paying bills promptly, of showing consideration to animals—all of which (and many others with them) constitute the general framework of moral living which is, or should be, always with us. Again, all men live under some system of laws; and if the laws of any developed system were enumerated one by one, they would amount to many more than 613. To live under law means to accept determinate obligations and restrictions on determinate occasions; but the occasions may never arise, or never arise for us, or they may arise for us only at rare moments. If I eat meat, I am bound to see that the animal is killed with a minimum of pain; but it may be that I am a vegetarian. If I build a house, I must take proper precautions for the safety of those living in it; but it may be that I shall never build. I must not insult a judge in court; but possibly I shall never enter a court in my life. Further, a historic code like the Pentateuch deals often with occasions which are past. We are commanded not to sacrifice our first-born to Moloch, but the inclination to do so is unlikely to arise.

So the '613' on inspection get whittled away. One medieval authority estimated that only two hundred and seventy were of

present application, and of these many would not intrude into normal life. Maimonides himself put the number ordinarily practised at sixty.

Yet even when many, even a large majority, of the 613 are seen for various reasons to fade away, there still remain more than would appear to be for our comfort; and the problems they create gave rise to a continuous literature, at least from the days of the confrontation with Hellenism. There emerged two topics which became classic, the one, that of the 'reasons for' the precepts, the other, that of their comparative importance. The former asks why we are commanded to do just this and not that, and whether there is any rational ground for the detail of the conduct prescribed. The latter asks whether the precepts are all of equal value, or whether some of them are 'greater' than others or any one of them 'greater' than all the others. Further, if there is one 'great' commandment, in what relation does it stand to the rest: is it such that in fulfilling it alone we fulfil the whole law and therefore need not trouble ourselves with the rest; or is it additional to the others so that each and every precept remains an independent duty? Or there is a third possibility. The detailed system of the precepts (each of which, when occasion arises, must be observed) may be the expression of one great central requirement which is fulfilled not independently of them but through each one of them and all of them together. As Maimonides says in the Introduction of his *Book of the Precepts* which serves as an introduction to his Deuteronomy: 'It is a mistake to count "Be ye holy" as one precept among the other positive precepts. "Be ye holy" is the command to fulfil the whole law.'

There is too a further side to the problem. We have been considering it from the point of view of action or 'works'. But beliefs too ('faith') have their claim; and as Judaism came into contact with other cultures and religions, this aspect came necessarily into prominence. That Judaism differed in its outward habit of life was obvious. When the Roman emperor Caligula

failed to persuade a Jewish delegation to acknowledge his divinity, he burst out with the question: 'Why don't you Jews eat pig?' But Judaism differed from Caligula's world not only in refusing to eat pig. It refused to worship Caligula. And it refused to worship not only a living person as deity but any image of deity whatsoever. God, it proclaimed, cannot be imaged. He is uniquely different. He is creator; everything else is created. This absolute distinction between God and any of his creatures produced the absolute prohibition for man to worship not only his fellow man but also ghosts and spirits and indeed any object whatsoever, whether natural or supernatural or man-made.

It was this complete prohibition, and its complete acceptance, which caused astonishment. As we have seen, Tacitus was puzzled by the God of the Jews (above, p. 35). That a whole people should be devoted to a God who had no visible semblance and could therefore be grasped only with the eye of the mind seemed to him so strange and unnatural as to suggest it was a mere cover for political disloyalty.

Thus Judaism had much more to explain to the gentile world than not eating pig; and the puzzle of the ceremonial law was only part of the great puzzle of Judaism's whole attitude to life. Both practice and belief, both works and faith, were stumbling blocks together. And they were met together. The belief was presented as the source of the action, the action as the expression of the belief.

A clear and well articulated example is offered by the so-called *Letter of Aristeas*, said to date at least a century before the Christian era. The author starts his apology for the ceremonial law by laying down general theological principles. He then goes on to decry the practice of polytheism (which he derives from the worshipping of benefactors of the human race), and proceeds:

'When, therefore, the law-giver, who was endowed by God to understand all things, had in his wisdom surveyed each detail, he fenced us about with impregnable palisades and walls of iron, to the intent that we should in no way have dealings with

any of the other nations, pure in body and mind, released from vain ideas, reverencing the one Almighty God above the entire creation. For this reason the priests who lead the Egyptians and have closely investigated many things and been conversant with the world, call us "men of God", a designation which does not belong to the rest of mankind, but to him only who reverences the true God. So then, lest we should become perverted by sharing the pollutions of others or consorting with base persons, he hedged us round on all sides with laws of purification in matters of meat and drink and handling and hearing and seeing.

'For, speaking generally, all things to the natural reason are alike, being all governed by the self-same power, and yet in every detail there is a profound reason why we abstain from the use of some things and share in the use of others. All these ordinances have been solemnly made for righteousness' sake, to promote holy meditation and the perfecting of character.

'For all the winged creatures, of which we partake, are tame and distinguished by cleanly habits, feeding on wheat and pulse, such as pigeons, turtle-doves, locusts, partridges, geese too and all the like. But as touching the forbidden winged creatures, they are wild and carnivorous and use the strength which they possess to oppress the remainder of their kind and get their food by cruelly preying on the aforesaid tame creatures; and not on these only, but they also carry off the lambs and kids, and do violence to dead men and living.

'By these creatures, then, which he called unclean, the lawgiver gave a sign that those for whom the laws were ordained must practise righteousness in their hearts and oppress no one, trusting in their own strength, nor rob one of anything, but must direct their lives by righteous motives, even as the tame birds above mentioned consume the pulse that grows on the earth and do not tyrannize to the destruction of their kind.

'By such symbols, then, the lawgiver has taught the understanding to note that they must be just and do nothing by violence, nor oppress others in reliance on their own strength.'

(§§ 128-48, trans. Thackeray)

The detail may not be convincing, but with one notable addition which we shall see later (pp. 137 f.), the general lines of defence remain constant from the very first. The Jews are the people of God and they bear a definite message as to God's nature. In order to fulfil their function, they must keep distinct; in order to keep distinct, they were subjected to the ceremonial law which is a 'fence' against the irruption of the baser passions; and this law embodies, either explicitly or symbolically, the basic principles of morality.

Thus the earliest apologists tell us that ceremony is an instrument of education and leads man on to the path of the divine. It is action with a rational source and a rational end. 'Faith' and 'works' do not so much go hand in hand. They make up together one indivisible spiritual whole.

Yet one may still ask what the content of faith is. Unfortunately the question is generally put in terms of 'creed' or 'dogma', and we shall have to consider it first under that head. We shall then turn to the cognate, and to Judaism more natural, because more Biblical, theme of the 'reasons for the precepts'. Both themes come to a head in our central thinker, Maimonides, and we shall return to him; for this Hebrew of the Hebrews had in many respects a Greek mind, and through his sense of logic and his passion for precision he brought Judaism into a doctrinal crisis the echoes of which are with us yet.

How Maimonides started the dogma controversy in Judaism can be explained briefly. A passage in the Mishnah says: 'All Israel except the Minim [and certain others] have a share in the world-to-come'. The word Min (of which Minim is the plural) is a Biblical word which means 'kind' or 'class', as in the phrase 'after its kind' in the first chapter of Genesis; and it seems to have acquired the connotation of a man who chose to be a 'special class' on his own and go his own religious way. It thus came to mean a sectary and then, more generally, an infidel or heretic.

Such a vague reference, particularly in so important a

matter, was not good enough for Maimonides; neither was the phrase about participation in 'the world-to-come'. So in his first major work, his commentary on the Mishnah, he inserted a long chapter expounding both terms.¹ In the course of the discussion he laid down thirteen principles as constituting the essence of Judaism.

His list of principles was popularly accepted, for there exist many different versions of it in rhyme; and one of them remains a favourite hymn with the traditional synagogue to this day, being recited by the individual or chanted by the congregation at the beginning or end of the morning and many evening services. In order that we may understand the issue I offer this hymn in Zangwill's translation which although a trifle florid is faithful to the original. (There exists a Hebrew prose version which is also to be found in the traditional Prayer-Book; but it is recent and drawn up in the form of an explicit credo which is far from the Maimonidean formulation. The thirteen principles were never formal 'articles' which had to be 'subscribed to'.)

1. 'The living God, O magnify and bless,
Transcending time and here eternally,
2. 'One Being, yet unique in unity;
A mystery of Oneness measureless.
3. 'Lo, form and body He hath none, and man
No semblance of His holiness can frame.
4. 'Before creation's dawn He was the same;
The first to be, though never He began.
5. 'He is the world's and every creature's Lord;
His rule and majesty are manifest
6. 'And, through His chosen, glorious, sons exprest
In prophecies that through their lips are poured.
7. 'Yet never like to Moses rose a seer,
Permitted glimpse behind the veil divine.

¹ Available in an English version by J. Abelson (*Jewish Quarterly Review*, 1906).

HARMONIES AND DISCORDS

8. 'This faithful prince of God's prophetic line
Received the Law of Truth for Israel's ear.
9. 'The Law God gave He never will amend,
Nor ever by another Law replace.
10. 'Our secret things are spread before His face;
In all beginnings He beholds the end.
11. 'The saint's reward He measures to his meed;
The sinner reaps the harvest of his ways.
12. 'Messiah He will send at end of days,
And all the faithful to salvation lead.
13. 'God will the dead again to life restore
In his abundance of almighty love.
Then blessed be His name, all names above,
And let His praise resound for evermore.'

Whatever is thought about the list (and it gave rise to violent controversy), there is no doubt that it achieved Maimonides's object, which was to give stability to the theory of Judaism. In particular, the precise affirmations of the first five (the existence, the unity, the incorporeality, the eternity and the sole worshipfulness, of God) may be said to have created Jewish theology. No such clear statement on the nature of God had been given in the Synagogue before. True, it is all 'in' the Hebrew Bible, 'in' the Talmud, 'in' later Rabbinic writings. But there is in them much else too; and we need to be told what 'in' them is essential and is to be emphasized, what peripheral and to be explained away. This guidance was given boldly by Maimonides.

In order to make his results acceptable Maimonides sought and found in the old literature many useful tools to his hand. For example, the Talmud had declared (though in another context altogether) that Scripture 'uses the language of men'. Maimonides seized on the phrase and made it central. Since God is manifestly, and (on philosophical lines) demonstrably, incorporeal, the verses in the Bible which declare him incorporeal are those which are to be taken literally; all the rest

(the 'outstretched hand'; the 'nostrils which smell' the smoke of sacrifice; the 'ancient of days' 'seated on a throne') are the 'language of men'. They are not scientific statements but poetic metaphors, a concession to our weak understanding.

It is all very rational and very helpful and indeed very sound, but it entailed one unfortunate human consequence. If, as Maimonides thought, he had truth, every other view was false; and people who, with the truth before them, adhere to false belief, are clearly Minim, heretics, and have no portion in the 'world-to-come'. Thus Maimonides with his systematic mind, though with the best will in the world, thrust men out of Judaism instead of keeping them in; and thrust them out by virtue of a definition, which, by laying down a boundary (and a boundary not of religious practice but of intellectual belief), put many plain people on the wrong side.

For there were (as there are still) many plain people who believe that somewhere 'up there' there is a Heaven, and in Heaven there is an 'ancient of days' seated on a throne and stretching out a saving hand in order to help a good man out of his difficulties. They might not have thought their position out. They might have had no position to think out. Metaphysically they might be in error. But are they in error *religiously*; and are they, because of a metaphysical error, cut off from eternal bliss? Is the Last Judgement an examination of our knowledge of philosophy or (as the Talmud affirmed unequivocally) a weighing of our good and evil deeds?

Thus the fixing of Judaism within a determinate creed led to a revolt against the very idea of a creed; and the outcry of the plain man in the thirteenth century, taken up again and again in the history of Judaism, led to what has been neatly called the 'dogma of the dogma-less-ness' of Judaism. For this last paradox there is much to be said; and the weakness of Maimonides's own position could not be made more manifest than by the story told by a sixteenth-century chronicler that, when Maimonides's opponents gained ground, they effaced his name

and honorific appellations from his tombstone, substituting the curt inscription: 'Here lies a heretic (Min)'

For our present purpose the topic may be best considered under two heads: (a) Are there beliefs (as distinct from practices) which are fundamental to Judaism in the sense that if they are accepted, Judaism is affirmed, if they are rejected, Judaism is denied; (b) if there are such fundamental beliefs, have they been put into words and formulated authoritatively?

A summary answer to both questions would have to be no; but in each case the answer, and more importantly the question, needs modification. For the ideas involved in the terms 'belief', 'authoritative formulation', 'fundamental' and 'acceptance and denial', do not seem to be at home in Judaism.

This is not to say that they have no meaning, or that no meaning can be found for them. But the very fact that the existence of dogma in Judaism is a subject of apparently endless controversy suggests not so much the fluidity of Judaism as the difficulty of grasping it in these terms. It is well to realize that this holds not of Judaism alone. A recent student writes of Hinduism:¹

'While it is not at all clear what Hinduism is, it is clear that it is not many things with which it may be superficially compared. It is not, for example, a sect or a church in any Western sense. There is no general council which lays down doctrine, no episcopal bench or convocation or assembly which determines policy, no list of incumbents available in reference books, no set of rules to be found in manuals. Yet it is certainly a religion for all that. But it is not a religion in the usual Western sense. There are no dogmas to be accepted by all, no doctrines of universal application, there is no *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*.

'Opinion then is not the criterion of Hinduism. Is it to be found in ceremonial? A man may perform ceremonies without number and recite texts without limit, but if he fails to observe

¹ Percival Spear, *India, Pakistan and the West*, O.U.P., ed. 2, 1952 pp. 57-59

certain rules of life they will be of no avail for he will not be considered a Hindu.

‘Is it then a matter of duties and observance of rules only?’

‘Here again there is no one thing necessary to salvation. Observance of rules without ceremonies will not do any more in the long run than ceremonies without rules. A man may show great laxity in his ceremonies provided he performs certain basic duties; he may be lax in his duties, provided he is punctilious in ceremonies; he may show a certain slackness in both provided he neglects neither entirely. But if he does so he will be no longer reckoned a Hindu.

‘And what will happen to him then? The answer is—nothing overt, nothing violent, nothing immediate. Is there then no tribunal before which he can be brought, no Inquisition to judge him, no Court of Discipline to punish him, no penitents’ bench on which to place him? The answer is again in the negative.

‘Is Hinduism, then, simply a matter of custom—peculiar and complicated, but still custom? The answer again is in the negative. The customs would not hold together if they were merely customs, and represented no values, and the existence of values implies ideas to formulate them.

‘Does Hinduism, then, have a creed or a doctrine or a decalogue after all? The answer here is no longer purely negative. Hinduism contains values.’

As, of course, does Judaism; but the point is that when we ask about the existence in Judaism (and according to Dr. Spear, in Hinduism too) of fundamental beliefs authoritatively formulated and denied at one’s peril, and still more when we assume that such beliefs are identical with the whole of Judaism, we are speaking an alien idiom.

To make an obvious first point, Can it be said in our sense that the men of the Bible ‘believed’? They undoubtedly felt, sometimes so vividly that they ‘saw’ (‘In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw’) and ‘heard’ (‘Speak, Lord, for thy servant

heareth'), or were affected with a general terror ('I heard and my belly trembled'; 'a horror of great darkness fell upon him'; 'there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones'), or (on the contrary) a sweetness ('and it was in my mouth as honey'; 'taste ye and see that the Lord is good'). But the English word 'belief' implies the acceptance (often on non-logical grounds) of an intellectual proposition, not (as does the Hebrew word of which it is the conventional equivalent) trust in a person. When the redeemed slaves from Egypt, faced with the barrier of the Red Sea, '*believed in God and in Moses his servant*', they would have been hard put to it, one imagines, to express their 'faith' in a form of words. They 'went forward'; and when they were safely across, they broke out not in a confession but in a song of praise and thanks.

Broadly speaking, the same attitude is found in Rabbinic Judaism. A passage in the Mishnah reads:

' . . . If happening to pass behind a Synagogue or living in a house next to a Synagogue a man hears the sound of the ram's horn or the reading of the Scroll of Esther—if he put his heart to it, he complies with the requirement of the law; if he does not, he does not comply. Although this one heard and that one heard, this one put his heart to it, this one did not put his heart to it.

““And it was that when Moses lifted up his hand, then Israel prevailed; when he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed” (Exod. xvii, 11). Did Moses's hands make the battle or break the battle? It is to teach us that when Israel looked above in submission to their Father in Heaven they conquered, when they did not, they fell. In the same way we read: “Make thyself a brazen serpent and set it on a standard; and if a serpent bite any man, the man shall look on the brazen serpent and live.” (Num. xxi, 8) Did the brazen serpent give death; did the brazen serpent give life? No! The meaning is: When the Israelites looked above and subjected their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were cured; if not, they were destroyed.’

Here too there is no enunciation of a theoretical content.

A man is exhorted to carry out a precept with active intention, not to be just a casual or passive onlooker; and the Mishnah uses the Biblical story homiletically in order to enforce the point that what is required is a positive act of significant worship.

Thus 'belief' would seem to be the wrong pivot on which to make Judaism turn. 'Faith' is better; and the old Rabbinic commentary on the verse about the Israelites' 'believing in the Lord and in Moses his servant' gives vivid expression to what may be called the religious syllogism with its movement from the seen darkness of this world to the unseen light of another and better. Yet even the word 'faith' bears a suggestion of the acceptance of a proposition. The best word to meet the facts is probably 'trust'; in which case it groups itself with another set of Biblical terms altogether, with the connotation of 'taking refuge with'. It is the 'taking of refuge with God' (the English Revised Version says 'putting trust in' God) which according to Isaiah (lvii, 13) gives 'inheritance in God's holy mountain', not the adherence to a doctrine formulable in terms of belief. The heart of the problem is touched by the medieval controversy on the question whether it is a 'positive precept' (as we might say, a 'duty') to believe in God. Maimonides said that it is and treated it as one of the 613. His critics said violently and bitterly that it is not. Faith can be nurtured, trained, encouraged, promoted, but it cannot (they said) be the object of a command. It is rather (and the point is an excellent one) *the root of* the precepts and the source of our adherence to them. Nor is it, they added, equivalent to the acceptance of a logical proposition. To 'believe *in*' is not the same as to 'believe *that*'. Trust in God and the belief that God exists are two different and distinct things.

But even if there are beliefs in the sense of accepted opinions in Judaism and even if (as in that case may be presumed) some of them are more fundamental than others, it would be difficult to put the finger on the determining authority or even on what

might be considered a determining authority. On questions of practice there are definite rulings and their source is (as a rule) traceable and identifiable; but this is not so in questions of belief. In the ultimate guarantee the Scriptures? They are not a book but a library and contain many and varying theological opinions dating over many centuries; and even if these are reconcilable, the principle of reconciliation has to be first discovered and agreed upon, and experience has shown this to be difficult. The Mishnah? But one of its notorious characteristics is that it makes hardly any pronouncements on matters of belief. Aggadah? One of the notorious characteristics of Aggadah is that it records too many. Talmud proper? Its decisions are on matters of law. Maimonides? It is just on his theology that he met with uncompromising opposition. Later masters? There have been in the history of Judaism many and various individual religious thinkers; but their very variety on points of opinion is sufficient indication that no one has the authority of a Council or Synod. The Prayer Book? Here perhaps we have an indication of at least a popular standard: but again, although there is a fairly firm tradition as to the fundamental structure of the Prayer Book which goes back to pre-Rabbinic times, and although its evolution for at least a thousand years can be fully traced in extant texts and documents, by its very nature as a book of devotion it does not enter into theoretical discussions and like most prayer books it contains diverse layers of material. The truth seems to be that the only authority in matters of belief in Judaism is that of factual acceptance; and this has varied, at least in precision and emphasis, in different environments and different ages.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. There is, of course, a consensus of feeling and opinion which one may call by various names and which is manifested in leading personalities. My point is simply that if we wish to understand Judaism, we must try and avoid the tangles in which the common associations of the word 'dogma' tend to involve us. For dogma is a belief (or set of beliefs) formulated in words and accepted by authority;

and if there exists in Judaism a consensus of opinion, it is that Judaism is something other and more than dogma in this sense; there is required action ('works'). There may be disputes on the nature or quantity of the 'works' required but that 'works' are required is not disputed. Ceremony and ritual may be reduced to a minimum. Old schedules of moral duty may be revised. Ideas once on the periphery may be made central, ideas once central may be silently allowed to slip into the periphery or beyond. But that something of positive action is an essential ingredient in Judaism would be affirmed by all. The action may be expressible in a proposition; but the acceptance of the proposition is not the same as the performance of the action and is no substitute for it.

And it should be remembered that the most extreme Maimonidean never thought otherwise. When the thirteen principles were enumerated, it was their practical consequences which were envisaged and held before the mind. That God gave the Torah to Moses (the 8th) and that it is inviolable (the 9th) are not Platonic affirmations about the existence (and the pre-existence) of a divine 'logos', although these too can be found in Rabbinical, and even Biblical, literature. They are the very positive warnings that not one jot or tittle of the Law can be abrogated and that we have to maintain every single one. 'All our actions are watched and we shall be punished for our misdeeds and rewarded for our virtues' (the 10th and 11th). This is an admonition to keep straight, to pursue the good and avoid evil; which again is not a loose generality since the reference is to specific good and specific evil deeds.

This becomes more apparent when we look at some other lists of essential doctrine. A very early one is that of Philo:¹

'By his account of the creation of the world of which we have spoken Moses teaches us among many other things five that are fairest and best of all.

'*Firstly* that the Deity is and has been from eternity. This with a view to atheists, some of whom have hesitated and have been

¹ *De Opificio Mundi* § 170 f. (trans. Colson and Whitaker).

of two minds about his eternal existence, while the bolder sort have carried their audacity to the point of declaring that the Deity does not exist at all, but that it is a mere assertion of men obscuring the truth with myth and fiction.

'*Secondly*, that God is one. This with a view to the propounders of polytheism, who do not blush to transfer from earth to heaven mob-rule, that worst of evil polities.

'*Thirdly*, as I have said already, that the world came into being. This because of those who think that it is without beginning and eternal, who thus assign to God no superiority at all.

'*Fourthly*, that the world too is one as well as its Maker, who made His work like Himself in its uniqueness, who used up for the creation of the whole all the material that exists; for it would not have been a whole had it not been formed and consisted of parts that were wholes. For there are those who suppose that there are more worlds than one, while some think that they are infinite in number. Such men are themselves in very deed infinitely lacking in knowledge of things which it is right good to know.

'*Fifthly*, that God also exercises forethought on the world's behalf. For that the Maker should care for the thing made is required by the laws and ordinances of Nature, and it is in accordance with these that parents take thought beforehand for children.'

That these are not theoretical propositions only can be seen from Philo's own summing up in which he emphasizes their moral implications for moral living:

'He that has begun by learning these things with his understanding rather than with his hearing, and has stamped on his soul impressions of truths so marvellous and priceless, both that God is and is from eternity, and that He-that-really-is is One, and that He has made the world and has made it one world, unique as Himself is unique, and that He ever exercises forethought for His creation, will lead a life of bliss and blessedness, because he has a character moulded by the truths that piety and holiness enforce.'

The essence is thus not belief alone. Intellectual truths mould character and are themselves enforced by (as they are manifested in) a pious and holy life.

All this we may look upon as Aggadah (above, p. 77); and as in every other matter when we seek decision, we should ask whether it ever became Halachah, and if so, in what form and with what content. Aggadah becomes Halachah under the pressure of the need for action, and there is one obvious practical case where the problem of 'dogma' arises not for theoretical discussion but for definite action. This is the case of a proselyte. We may therefore reduce our problem to concrete terms by asking what in fact is laid down by the Halachah to be taught to the convert to Judaism. The Codes are united and explicit (I quote the last, the standard Shulhan Aruch of the sixteenth century, *Y.D.* paragraph 268, which is a verbal transcription from Maimonides's Code, itself repeating, with the significant addition printed here in italics, an early Talmudic passage):

'If a Gentile comes and asks to be accepted as a convert, they say to him: why ever do you wish to become a convert to Judaism? Do you not know that Jews today are thrust aside and despised and tossed about and made to suffer?

'If he says: "I know it and I am not worthy to be associated with them", they accept him at once *and make him acquainted with the principles of religion, namely, the unity of God and the prohibition of idolatry, and on this matter they prolong speech with him*; and they make him acquainted with some minor commandments and some major ones.'

We have thus the same result as we found in other circumstances. Judaism appears as the acceptance of monotheism, the repudiation of idolatry, and some major and minor commandments; but the detail—what monotheism means and what it implies and involves; what idolatry is, and in what manner it is to be repudiated; which are the minor and major commandments to be presented first—all this is not laid down, presumably

because it cannot be legislated for. As the Talmud says elsewhere: Every generation has its own needs and its own wise men to meet them, and every teacher and student has his own language and his own style.