

By the middle of the fifteenth century, the Albigensian heresy had become nearly extirpated by the Inquisition of Aragon; so that this infernal engine might have been suffered to sleep undisturbed from want of sufficient fuel to keep it in motion, when new and ample materials were discovered in the unfortunate race of Israel, on whom the sins of their fathers have been so unsparingly visited by every nation in Christendom, among whom they have sojourned, almost to the present century. As this remarkable people, who seem to have preserved their unity of character unbroken, amid the thousand fragments into which they have been scattered, attained perhaps to greater consideration in Spain than in any other part of Europe, and as the efforts of the Inquisition were directed principally against them during the present reign, it may be well to take a brief review of their preceding history in the Peninsula.

Under the Visigothic empire the Jews multiplied exceedingly in the country, and were permitted to acquire considerable power and wealth. But no sooner had their Arian masters embraced the orthodox faith, than they began to testify their zeal by pouring on the Jews the most pitiless storm of persecution. One of their laws alone condemned the whole race to slavery; and Montesquieu remarks,

Retrospective view of the Jews in Spain.

side of the breast; to attend mass every day, if he had the means of doing so, and vespers on Sundays and festivals; to recite the service for the day and the night, and to repeat the *pater noster* seven times in the day, ten times in the even-

ing, and *twenty times at midnight*! (Ibid. chap. 4.) If the said Roger failed in any of the above requisitions, he was to be burnt as a relapsed heretic! This was the encouragement held out by St. Dominic to penitence.

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without much exaggeration, that to the Gothic code may be traced all the maxims of the modern Inquisition, the monks of the fifteenth century only copying, in reference to the Israelites, the bishops of the seventh.<sup>5</sup>

Under the  
Arabs.

After the Saracenic invasion, which the Jews, perhaps with reason, are accused of having facilitated, they resided in the conquered cities, and were permitted to mingle with the Arabs on nearly equal terms. Their common Oriental origin produced a similarity of tastes, to a certain extent, not unfavorable to such a coalition. At any rate, the early Spanish Arabs were characterized by a spirit of toleration towards both Jews and Christians, "the people of the book," as they were called, which has scarcely been found among later Moslems.<sup>6</sup> The Jews, accordingly, under these favorable auspices, not only accumulated wealth with their usual diligence, but gradually rose to the highest civil dignities, and made great advances in various departments of letters. The schools of Cordova, Toledo, Barcelona, and Granada were crowded with numerous disciples, who emulated the Arabians in keeping alive the flame of learning, during the deep darkness of the middle ages.<sup>7</sup> Whatever

<sup>5</sup> Montesquieu, *Esprit des Loix*, liv. 28, chap. 1. — See the canon of the 17th council of Toledo, condemning the Israelitish race to bondage, in Florez, *España Sagrada*, (Madrid, 1747-75,) tom. vi. p. 229. — *Fuero Juzgo* (ed. de la Acad. (Madrid, 1815,) lib. 12, tit. 2 and 3,) is composed of the most inhuman ordinances against this unfortunate people.

<sup>6</sup> The Koran grants protection to the Jews on payment of tribute. See the Koran, translated by Sale, (London, 1825,) chap. 9.

<sup>7</sup> The first academy founded by the learned Jews in Spain was that of Cordova, A. D. 948. Castro, *Biblioteca Española*, tom. i. p. 2. — Basnage, *History of the Jews*, translated by Taylor, (London, 1708,) book 7, chap. 5.

may be thought of their success in speculative philosophy,<sup>8</sup> they cannot reasonably be denied to have contributed largely to practical and experimental science. They were diligent travellers in all parts of the known world, compiling itineraries which have proved of extensive use in later times, and bringing home hoards of foreign specimens and Oriental drugs, that furnished important contributions to the domestic pharmacopœias.<sup>9</sup> In the practice of medicine, indeed, they became so expert, as in a manner to monopolize that profession. They made great proficiency in mathematics and particularly in astronomy; while, in the cultivation of elegant letters, they revived the ancient glories of the Hebrew muse.<sup>10</sup> This was indeed the

<sup>8</sup> In addition to their Talmudic lore and Cabalistic mysteries, the Spanish Jews were well read in the philosophy of Aristotle. They pretended that the Stagirite was a convert to Judaism and had borrowed his science from the writings of Solomon. (Brucker, *Historia Critica Philosophiæ*, (Lipsiæ, 1766,) tom. ii. p. 853.) M. Degerando, adopting similar conclusions with Brucker, in regard to the value of the philosophical speculations of the Jews, passes the following severe sentence upon the intellectual, and indeed moral character of the nation. "Ce peuple, par son caractère, ses mœurs, ses institutions, semblait être destiné à rester stationnaire. Un attachement excessif à leurs propres traditions dominait chez les Juifs tous les penchans de l'esprit: ils restaient presque étrangers aux progrès de la civilisation, au mouvement général de la société; ils étaient en quelque sorte morale-

ment isolés, alors même qu'ils communiquaient avec tous les peuples, et parcouraient toutes les contrées. Aussi nous cherchons en vain, dans ceux de leurs écrits qui nous sont connus, non seulement de vraies découvertes, mais même des idées réellement originales." *Histoire Comparée des Systèmes de Philosophie*, (Paris, 1822,) tom. iv. p. 299.

<sup>9</sup> Castro, *Biblioteca Española*, tom. i. pp. 21, 33, et alibi. — Benjamin of Tudela's celebrated Itinerary, having been translated into the various languages of Europe, passed into sixteen editions before the middle of the last century. *Ibid.*, tom. i. pp. 79, 80.

<sup>10</sup> The beautiful lament, which the royal psalmist has put into the mouths of his countrymen, when commanded to sing the songs of Sion in a strange land, cannot be applied to the Spanish Jews, who, far from hanging their harps upon the willows, poured forth their lays

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golden age of modern Jewish literature, which, under the Spanish caliphs, experienced a protection so benign, although occasionally chequered by the caprices of despotism, that it was enabled to attain higher beauty and a more perfect developement in the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, than it has reached in any other part of Christendom.<sup>11</sup>

Under the  
Castilians.

The ancient Castilians of the same period, very different from their Gothic ancestors, seem to have conceded to the Israelites somewhat of the feelings of respect, which were extorted from them by the superior civilization of the Spanish Arabs. We find eminent Jews residing in the courts of the Christian princes, directing their studies, attending them as physicians, or more frequently administering their finances. For this last vocation they seem to have had a natural aptitude; and, indeed, the correspondence which they maintained with the different countries of Europe by means of their own countrymen, who acted as the brokers of almost every people among whom they were scattered during the middle ages, afforded them peculiar facilities both in politics and commerce. We meet

with a freedom and vivacity, which may be thought to savour more of the modern troubadour, than of the ancient Hebrew minstrel. Castro has collected, under Siglo XV., a few gleanings of such, as by their incorporation into a Christian Cancionero, escaped the fury of the Inquisition. *Biblioteca Española*, tom. i. pp. 265-364.

<sup>11</sup> Castro has done for the Hebrew, what Casiri a few years be-

fore did for the Arabic literature of Spain, by giving notices of such works as have survived the ravages of time and superstition. The first volume of his *Biblioteca Española* contains an analysis accompanied with extracts from more than seven hundred different works, with biographical sketches of their authors; the whole bearing most honorable testimony to the talent and various erudition of the Spanish Jews.

with Jewish scholars and statesmen attached to the courts of Alfonso the Tenth, Alfonso the Eleventh, Peter the Cruel, Henry the Second, and other princes. Their astronomical science recommended them in a special manner to Alfonso the Wise, who employed them in the construction of his celebrated Tables. James the First of Aragon condescended to receive instruction from them in ethics; and, in the fifteenth century, we notice John the Second, of Castile, employing a Jewish secretary in the compilation of a national Cancionero.<sup>12</sup>

Persecution  
of the Jews.

But all this royal patronage proved incompetent to protect the Jews, when their flourishing fortunes had risen to a sufficient height to excite popular envy, augmented, as it was, by that profuse ostentation of equipage and apparel, for which this singular people, notwithstanding their avarice, have usually shown a predilection.<sup>13</sup> Stories were circulated of their contempt for the Catholic worship, their desecration of its most holy symbols, and of their crucifixion, or other sacrifice, of Christian

<sup>12</sup> Basnage, *History of the Jews*, book 7, chap. 5, 15, 16. — Castro, *Biblioteca Española*, tom. i. pp. 116, 265, 267. — Mariana, *Hist. de España*, tom. i. p. 906; — tom. ii. pp. 63, 147, 459. — Samuel Levi, treasurer of Peter the Cruel, who was sacrificed to the cupidity of his master, is reported by Mariana to have left behind him the incredible sum of 400,000 ducats to swell the royal coffers. Tom. ii. p. 82.

<sup>13</sup> Sir Walter Scott, with his usual discernment, has availed himself of these opposite traits in

his portraits of Rebecca and Isaac in *Ivanhoe*, in which he seems to have contrasted the lights and shadows of the Jewish character. The humiliating state of the Jews, however, exhibited in this romance, affords no analogy to their social condition in Spain; as is evinced not merely by their wealth, which was also conspicuous in the English Jews, but by the high degree of civilization, and even political consequence, which, notwithstanding the occasional ebullitions of popular prejudice, they were permitted to reach there.

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children, at the celebration of their own passover.<sup>14</sup> With these foolish calumnies, the more probable charge of usury and extortion was industriously preferred against them, till at length, towards the close of the fourteenth century, the fanatical populace, stimulated in many instances by the no less fanatical clergy, and perhaps encouraged by the numerous class of debtors to the Jews, who found this a convenient mode of settling their accounts, made a fierce assault on this unfortunate people in Castile and Aragon, breaking into their houses, violating their most private sanctuaries, scattering their costly collections and furniture, and consigning the wretched proprietors to indiscriminate massacre, without regard to sex or age.<sup>15</sup>

In this crisis, the only remedy left to the Jews was a real or feigned conversion to Christianity. St. Vincent Ferrièr, a Dominican of Valencia, performed such a quantity of miracles, in furtherance of this purpose, as might have excited the envy of any saint in the Calendar; and these, aided by his eloquence, are said to have changed the hearts of no less than thirty-five thousand of the

<sup>14</sup> Calumnies of this kind were current all over Europe. The English reader will call to mind the monkish fiction of the little Christian,

"Slain with cursed Jewes, as it is notable,"

singing most devoutly after his throat was cut from ear to ear, in Chaucer's Prioress's Tale. See another instance in the old Scottish ballad of the "Jew's Daughter"

in Percy's "Reliques of Ancient Poetry."

<sup>15</sup> Bernaldez, Reyes Católicos, MS., cap. 43. — Mariana, Hist. de España, tom. ii. pp. 186, 187. — In 1391, 5,000 Jews were sacrificed to the popular fury, and according to Mariana, no less than 10,000 perished from the same cause in Navarre about sixty years before. See tom. i. p. 912.

race of Israel, which doubtless must be reckoned the greatest miracle of all.<sup>16</sup>

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The legislative enactments of this period, and still more under John the Second, during the first half of the fifteenth century, were uncommonly severe upon the Jews. While they were prohibited from mingling freely with the Christians, and from exercising the professions for which they were best qualified,<sup>17</sup> their residence was restricted within certain prescribed limits of the cities which they inhabited; and they were not only debarred from their usual luxury of ornament in dress, but were held up to public scorn, as it were, by some peculiar badge or emblem embroidered on their garments.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> According to Mariana, the restoration of sight to the blind, feet to the lame, even life to the dead, were miracles of ordinary occurrence with St. Vincent. (*Hist. de España*, tom. ii. pp. 229, 230.) The age of miracles had probably ceased by Isabella's time, or the Inquisition might have been spared. Nic. Antonio in his notice of the life and labors of this Dominican, (*Bibliotheca Vetus*, tom. ii. pp. 205, 207,) states that he preached his inspired sermons in his vernacular Valencian dialect to audiences of French, English, and Italians, indiscriminately, who all understood him perfectly well; "a circumstance," says Dr. McCrie, in his valuable "History of the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Spain," (*Edinburgh*, 1829,) "which, if it prove any thing, proves that the hearers of St. Vincent possessed more miraculous powers than himself, and that they should have

been canonized, rather than the preacher." p. 87, note.

<sup>17</sup> They were interdicted from the callings of vintners, grocers, taverners, especially of apothecaries, and of physicians, and nurses. *Ordenanças Reales*, lib. 8, tit. 3, leyes 11, 15, 18.

<sup>18</sup> No law was more frequently reiterated than that prohibiting the Jews from acting as stewards of the nobility, or farmers and collectors of the public rents. The repetition of this law shows to what extent that people had engrossed what little was known of financial science in that day. For the multiplied enactments in Castile against them, see *Ordenanças Reales*, (lib. 8, tit. 3.) For the regulations respecting the Jews in Aragon, many of them oppressive, particularly at the commencement of the fifteenth century, see *Fueros y Observancias del Reyno de Aragon*, (*Zaragoza*, 1667,) tom. i. fol. 6. — *Marca Hispanica*, pp.

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Their state  
at the acces-  
sion of Isa-  
bella.

Such was the condition of the Spanish Jews at the accession of Ferdinand and Isabella. The *new Christians*, or *converts*, as those who had renounced the faith of their fathers were denominated, were occasionally preferred to high ecclesiastical dignities, which they illustrated by their integrity and learning. They were intrusted with municipal offices in the various cities of Castile; and, as their wealth furnished an obvious resource for repairing, by way of marriage, the decayed fortunes of the nobility, there was scarcely a family of rank in the land, whose blood had not been contaminated at some period or other, by mixture with the *mala sangre*, as it came afterwards to be termed, of the house of Judah; an ignominious stain, which no time has been deemed sufficient wholly to purge away.<sup>19</sup>

Notwithstanding the show of prosperity enjoyed by the converted Jews, their situation was far from secure. Their proselytism had been too sudden to be generally sincere; and, as the task of dissimulation was too irksome to be permanently endured, they gradually became less circumspect, and exhibited the scandalous spectacle of apostates returning

1416, 1433. — Zurita, *Anales*, tom. iii. lib. 12, cap. 45.

<sup>19</sup> Bernaldez, *Reyes Católicos*, MS., cap. 43. — Llorente, *Hist. de l'Inquisition*, préf. p. 26. — A manuscript entitled *Tizon de España*, (Brand of Spain,) tracing up many a noble pedigree to a Jewish or Mahometan root, obtained a circulation, to the great scandal of the country, which the efforts of the government, combin-

ed with those of the Inquisition have not been wholly able to suppress. Copies of it, however, are now rarely to be met with. (Doblado, *Letters from Spain*, (London, 1822,) let. 2.) Clemencin notices two works with this title, one as ancient as Ferdinand and Isabella's time, and both written by bishops. *Mem. de la Acad. de Hist.*, tom. vi. p. 125.



to wallow in the ancient mire of Judaism. The clergy, especially the Dominicans, who seem to have inherited the quick scent for heresy which distinguished their frantic founder, were not slow in sounding the alarm ; and the superstitious populace, easily roused to acts of violence in the name of religion, began to exhibit the most tumultuous movements, and actually massacred the constable of Castile in an attempt to suppress them at Jaen, the year preceding the accession of Isabella. After this period, the complaints against the Jewish heresy became still more clamorous, and the throne was repeatedly beset with petitions to devise some effectual means for its extirpation.<sup>20</sup>

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Charges against them.

A chapter of the Chronicle of the Curate of Los Palacios, who lived at this time in Andalusia, where the Jews seem to have most abounded, throws considerable light on the real, as well as pretended motives of the subsequent persecution. "This accursed race," he says, speaking of the Israelites, "were either unwilling to bring their children to be baptized, or, if they did, they washed away the stain on returning home. They dressed their stews and other dishes with oil, instead of lard ; abstained from pork ; kept the passover ; ate meat in lent ; and sent oil to replenish the lamps of their synagogues ; with many other abominable ceremonies of their religion. They entertained no respect for monastic life, and frequently profaned

<sup>20</sup> Mariana, Hist. de España, tom. ii. p. 479. — Pulgar, Reyes Católicos, part. 2, cap. 77.

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the sanctity of religious houses by the violation or seduction of their inmates. They were an exceedingly politic and ambitious people, engrossing the most lucrative municipal offices; and preferred to gain their livelihood by traffic, in which they made exorbitant gains, rather than by manual labor or mechanical arts. They considered themselves in the hands of the Egyptians, whom it was a merit to deceive and plunder. By their wicked contrivances they amassed great wealth, and thus were often able to ally themselves by marriage with noble Christian families.”<sup>21</sup>

It is easy to discern, in this medley of credulity and superstition, the secret envy, entertained by the Castilians, of the superior skill and industry of their Hebrew brethren, and of the superior riches which these qualities secured to them; and it is impossible not to suspect, that the zeal of the most orthodox was considerably sharpened by worldly motives.

Be that as it may, the cry against the Jewish abominations now became general. Among those most active in raising it, were Alfonso de Ojeda, a Dominican, prior of the monastery of St. Paul in Seville, and Diego de Merlo, assistant of that city, who should not be defrauded of the meed of glory to which they are justly entitled by their exertions for the establishment of the modern Inquisition. These persons, after urging on the sovereigns the alarming extent to which the Jewish leprosy pre-

<sup>21</sup> Reyes Católicos, MS., cap. 43.