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A NEW JEWISH NOVEL.

The World and the Cloister. A Novel. By OSWALD JOHN SIMON.
(2 vols. 1890.)

MR. OSWALD SIMON is an idealist. This accounts both for the strength and the weakness of his book. As an idealist the goal to be desired is for him nothing less than unity of religion, in which humanity will form one great holy brotherhood, with bye-laws from that code which is the inheritance of Israel; but as such he little reckons with the obstacles preventing the attainment of this goal. "He cometh leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills," and gets a glance into the promised land, into which neither he nor his contemporaries nor many future generations will come.

But this is only an amiable weakness, and we must not complain too much of it. It is now nearly a generation since Daniel Deronda set out for a wedding trip to the Holy Land, full of hopes and ideals. But not much was heard of him, nor did he find such a great following as his well-wishers expected. We are rather afraid that Deronda's enthusiasm was quenched a little when he saw that the realisation of his hopes is in the first instance very much a matter of shillings and pounds, of which the noble, but unpractical Mordecai knew nothing. He might also have found that "to bind our race together in spite of heresy, for our religion united us before it divided us," is a much more difficult task than he had thought. People are determined to keep up the divisions, and to place each other without the pale of Judaism. And as to the Gwendolens they (the Jewish ones at least) are now worse than ever. To judge from their latest novels they look again at the world from the Monaco point of view, everything being to them—religion, marriage, calling—nothing else but a game, the success in which depends entirely on accomplishment in the art of cheating. And what is still worse is that they want to persuade us that they give us only facts.

But if these be facts they are brutal facts, and Mr. Simon has done well in dispensing with them, and transporting us into a region of the noblest aspirations and purest ideals with which his book is permeated. This he was able to do by a strong appeal to the past, when "there was self-negation" even "on the part of men and women who have not been trained in the monastic life," who have shown "examples of heroism more signal than the accumulated incidents of the whole body of Christian saints," and by placing an unbounded faith in the future, when "the Supreme Being, as the Parent of all, will be recognised as the greatest bond between men and nations, so great a bond, indeed, that all differences sink into a subordinate place."

It is true that Mr. Simon, overpowered by the glorious vision of a remote future, is rather inclined to see the present in much brighter colours than it really is. M.P.'s in the close of our century, for instance, are not supposed to be in search of a religion. Generally they are satisfied in conforming to that of their constituency, and it happens only very seldom that their religious aspirations mount higher than the stairs which lead to their platform. We may also remark that Roderick is a little too much of a rationalist for us. Indeed, it would seem to us that Mr. Simon's hero has too good a lot in this world. Without the least personal animosity to Roderick, we should have liked to see him go through some great spiritual crisis, followed by those mental agonies for which the Psalms form the only cure which Providence has prepared for us. Again,

instead of passing his time in yachts and drawing-rooms, where, as it would seem, both salvation and politics are the subject of intrigue, we should have preferred him to mix a little with some simple-minded people whose religion is a warm and real expression of the heart. In this case Roderick would have shown more sympathy with ceremonies and observances that do quicken spirituality, though we can quite appreciate the notions of those who prefer "religion without form" to "form without religion."

But it must not be supposed that Mr. Simon's ideals are so much in divergence with reality as these minor points would suggest. Irene's exaltation over the "two distinct propositions: first, the historical national sentiments of the Hebrew race, bearing traces of great antiquity; and, secondly, those essential elements of the Jewish faith which represent universality," which may be described as the racial and the missionary elements in Judaism, expresses fully the sentiments of the great majority of those of our generation who still take the trouble to think over our position and destination in the history of mankind. We must say that personally we are not very fond of this over-emphasising of the racial element which degrades Jews into a kind of "Monotheistic breed," and makes religion a mere matter of blind instinct.

However, here again the force of Mr. Simon's idealism asserts itself, and ennobles everything on which he touches. To him this racial element only serves to show that the Jews have the innate ability for their mission, which consists in proclaiming the name of God—and God alone—to the world, for which Mr. Simon pleads with the ardent faith worthy of such a sublime idea, an idea which has animated all our sages, from those who compiled our prayer-book down to the latest historians in the present century. The following passage displays the feelings of Mr. Simon's heroes when they enter the synagogue on their wedding-day:—"They saw before them the two tablets of stone holding up the Ten Commandments, and in them they saw not a tomb nor an image, but the imperishable corner-stone of the world's civilisation." We have no doubt that this faith will prove contagious to the reader, who, after having finished the book, must feel that he has spent an hour with one whose heart is pure, whose mind is noble, and who has something to say to the world worth listening to.

S. SCHECHTER.
