

THOUGHTS ON JUDAISM

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Thoughts on Judaism by Lily H. Montagu

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BY

LILY H. MONTAGU

Author of "Broken Stalks"

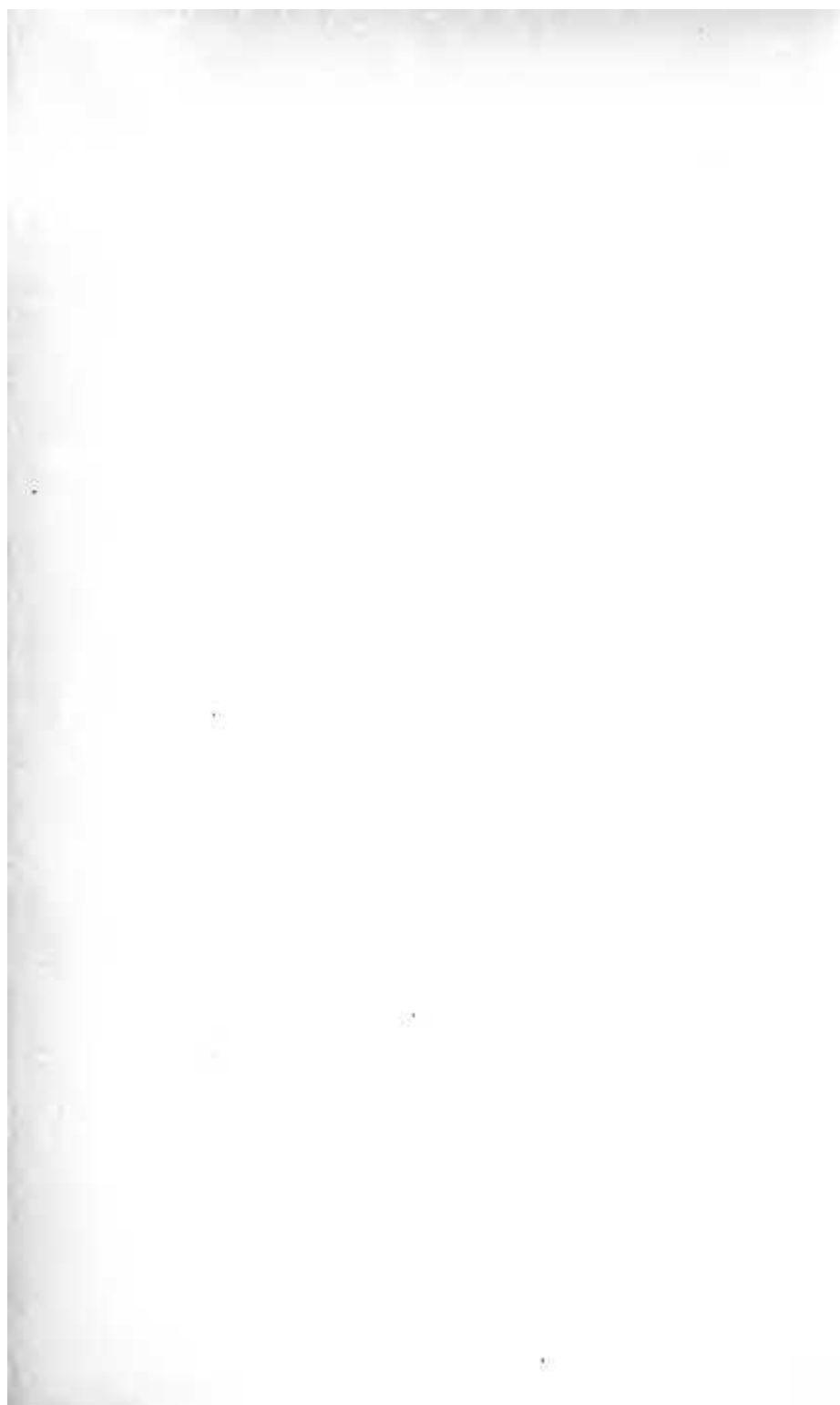


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INTRODUCTION

THIS little book purposes to explain my conception of Judaism as a living religion. In endeavouring to answer the questions—What are the vital principles of Judaism? Why are they vital? How can they be applied to modern life?—I have ventured to reveal my own faith, for the experience of one soul, however unimportant in itself, may serve as a testimony to the living faith which is among us. Clearly there can be, on my part, no claim to any authority whatever; nor do I pretend that my conception of Judaism is novel. It owes a great deal to Mr Montefiore's essay on "Liberal Judaism," though the point of view is not everywhere the same. But, like Mr Montefiore, I too

have ventured to work on constructive lines, and to give, however briefly and imperfectly, a personal presentment of Judaism. I have written in a dogmatic strain, not assuredly because I am not painfully conscious of my own limitations, but because there is a large body of Jews who require the construction, at any rate in outline, of a definite theory of their faith. They are anxious to realise and to transmit Judaism as a living faith, but have no time or inclination to work out the principles and deductions of such a faith for themselves. This class includes busy men and women who "have enough to do already without thinking very much about their religion." There are others who think Judaism all right in its proper place, but do not believe it affects *them* more often, perhaps, than two or three times a year. They cherish certain prejudices which belonged to their parents, and when they attend synagogue, are glad that it should recall memories of their infancy. Therefore they resist the bogey of "reform," but their religion has merely an impersonal interest.

It makes no demands on their lives; it is no real help to them. Then there are the parents who want their children to be faithful to Judaism, but cannot see how they can attach them to a doctrine, which appears to them to be obsolete. There are the conscientious teachers who long to make their lessons alive and interesting, but who themselves have not yet *quite* assimilated the spiritual strength which they would transmit. All these people seem to feel that Judaism, without dogma, is too shadowy a faith to be really acceptable to them. There is also that large section of Jews who, like myself, are seeking to understand the value of their spiritual inheritance, and who may feel sympathy with some of my conclusions.

I have tried to remember the point of view of these various classes, and in a practical manner to satisfy some of their needs. My effort may perhaps stimulate others in the same direction, and with better results. Thus points of religious agreement rather than differences are emphasised,

and it is proved that the same Ideal of Righteousness inspires all sections of our community. The variety of conceptions held by believing Jews, are at once a peril and a blessing to Judaism. For what are the reasons for this variety? In the first place, since the authority for our creed rests in human conscience, its phases must be as varied as individuality itself. Secondly, Judaism has always been closely connected with life, and life becomes more complex as civilisation develops.

Judaism is the hallowing of existing ideals, and ideals shift from generation to generation. A religion which rests on conscience is a robust religion, and makes a supreme demand on all human faculties. It claims the highest life from its devotees. The close connection between religion and life is clearly the ideal which all cults emphasise. How then is the variety a peril? It gives an excuse to the indifferent to devote their minds to other causes, instead of attempting to realise the principles of Judaism. They argue that a religion which depends on the