

**JEWISH HISTORY  
AND LITERATURE;  
PP. 3-53**

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**MAURICE H. HARRIS**

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# Jewish History and Literature

A COURSE OF LESSONS FROM THE RISE OF THE KABBALA  
TO THE EXPULSION OF THE JEWS BY SPAIN

BY  
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THE FOURTH SYLLABUS IN THE COURSE IN THE  
Chautauqua System of Education  
Department of Jewish Studies

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1-30-39

## Course in Jewish History.

### INTRODUCTION.

These Courses in Jewish History have so far appeared in three syllabi, arranged in sixteen lessons each, by Prof. Richard Gottheil. They began with the Post Exilic period and ended with the Spanish Era. They are based on the translation of Graetz's "History of the Jews," issued by the Jewish Publication Society of America (office 1015 Arch Street, Philadelphia)

In continuing this course from the period up to which Professor Gottheil had so ably brought it, I will preface the lessons with some of his "Directions for Use" that preceded each of the courses:

- " 1) Study the lessons carefully in accordance with the 'Suggestions' given, writing out in a separate notebook the answers to these suggestions.
  - " 2) At the end of each lesson close all books and do the work called for in the 'Tests and Reviews.' These may be written into papers as elaborate as time affords. Local circles can also use these "Tests and Reviews" as topics for essays and discussions.
  - " 3) Note clearly the distinction between the 'Required Books' and the 'Recommended Books.' The former are named at the head of each lesson. These *must* be read. The latter are named after each lesson. These *may* be read.
- "The more thorough student will not be satisfied with simply following the 'Required' readings. It will be found of great advantage in 'Circles' to assign the 'Recommended' readings to the different members, each taking one book and reporting on the author's views and treatment of the period.
- "No one system of study can be prescribed; each student *must have his own*; but use paper and pencil freely.

Do not be afraid to mark up books which are your own property. . . . As you read make extracts and notes, not only in accordance with the suggestions in the lesson, but also according to your own judgment. These suggestions are not exhaustive, they are only meant to serve as directives. . . .

In doing work demanded under the 'Tests and Reviews' do it conscientiously. Be careful that whatever you write be good in diction and style. Clear diction goes hand in hand with clear thinking."

This course begins with the rise of the Kabbala in the thirteenth century and closes with the Spanish Expulsion in 1492. It is a fitful period and, for the Jews, one more of shadow than of light. It covers, probably, the darkest of their dark ages; a story not of one but of many expulsions. It depicts monkish fanaticism at its worst.

From a literary point of view, it is a distinct decline from the Spanish Era preceding. It is in a period of intellectual decay, that Mysticism flourishes. Though it records some great names too—Nachmanides, Gersonides, Immanuel, Chasdaï Crescas, Abarbanel.

But it is a stirring era of deep and varied interest. If it depicts the Black Death and the Inquisition, it also shows the emergence of Poland, the Hussite movement, the foundation of the Turkish Empire and the dawn of the Renaissance. With all of these incidents the Jew is brought in touch, and the student will find a knowledge of them necessary.

I have endeavored, like my predecessor, to present the Suggestions impartially. Of course, it is impossible for a Jew to survey his past quite objectively. Here is a dark story of suffering and sacrifice shot through with gleams of momentary tolerance. Let us be candid enough to recognize that while there were many martyrs, there were some traitors. The latter rather than the former contribute the tragic element to Israel's history. This conflict between the ideal and the sordid is going on still.

So the study of this history may help the Jew of to-day *to see himself mirrored*; it thus becomes an important feature *of his religious education*



## LESSON I.

1200-1236.

## I. Required Reading.

Graetz, History of the Jews, vol. iii., pp. 546 to 569.  
 Encyclopedia Britannica, Article "Kabbala."

## II. Suggestions.

1. The philosophy of Maimonides did not create two divisions in Israel, but emphasized an inevitable distinction, always present though at time latent, *i. e.*, unquestioned faith versus rationalism. This had already characterized the divergence between Rabbinites and Karaites, especially when the latter were influenced by the Mohammedan Mutazalist philosophy. Look back Graetz iii., p. 148.

2. But we now meet three divisions:

- a) The Halachists or Literalists.
- b) The Maimunists or Rationalists.
- c) The Kabbalists or Mystics.

This third class was a would-be escape from dry legalism on the one hand and scepticism on the other.

3. Mysticism is pseudo-philosophy. Instead of deducing principles by painstaking and logical reasoning, it takes the easier path of fancy and lets the imagination run wild; it is often nothing more than *dogmatism* in poetic and weird disguise.

4. Kabbala was a subdivision of mysticism. Compare with it the gnostic philosophy. Graetz, ii., p. 374. Its allegoric interpretation of Scripture finds its counterpart in the Philo-Alexandrine School in the "twilight of Greek Philosophy."

5. *Abrahams*, however, in the "Jewish Life in the Middle Ages" presents us also with its brighter side and its poetic possibilities. "It was in the main a powerful spiritualizing force; the mystics were the best prayer-writers of the Middle Ages." "It gave to children the boy angel Sandalphon, the patron saint of youthful joys." (See Longfellow's poem.)

6. *Joseph Jacobs* declares that the first knowledge of *Æsop* gained in England was derived from a Latin translation of *Berachya*. He, therefore, calls *Berachya* "the most important English Jew in mediæval Jewish literature."

### III. Tests and Reviews.

1. Give a brief account of the rise of the Kabbala. Outline its system.
2. Give its theories of *a*) Advent of Messiah; *b*) Prayer; *c*) Future Life; *d*) Ceremonial Laws; *e*) Sacrifice; *f*) Creation.
3. What School of Poetry did Alcharisi represent, and what class of literature did he and his colleagues introduce?
4. What was *Berachya's* chief work; what is said of his style?
5. What sanction did the Jewish badge indirectly give to the masses?
6. State the different steps of Frederick II.'s controversy with the Church.

7 Summarize the items of Frederick I. of Austria's "Royal Decree of the Jews."

8. Contrast the two Fredericks.

#### IV. Recommended Reading.

##### *Kabbala :*

Abrahams: "Jewish Literature," J. P. S. A. (1899), ch. xvii.

" "Jewish Life in the Middle Ages," p. 152.

##### *Berachya :*

Joseph Jacobs: "Jews of Angevin England," p. 165.

Neubauer: "Jewish Quarterly Review," vol. ii., p. 520.

##### *Frederick II. :*

Draper: Intellectual Development of Europe, volume ii., pp. 66-73.

##### *Jacob Anatoli :*

Abrahams: Jewish Literature, pp. 148, 149.

##### *Alcharisi :*

Abrahams: Jewish Literature, pp. 131-132.

Karpeles: Sketch of Jewish Literature, (J. P. S. A.) pp. 210-213.