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Spinoza, Baruch. 1945-1954.

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Anti-Thesis Club
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BARUCH SPINOZA

In the figure of Baruch Spinoza we have one of the most colorful and at the same time controversial personalities of Jewish history. Scholarly evaluations of his importance range all the way from highest praise to uttermost condemnation.

The historian Renan has called Spinoza the greatest Jew of modern times. the philosopher, Kastein expresses an opposite point-of-view. He says, "We shall not yield to the temptation to claim for Judaism men of outstanding intellectual gifts, merely because they happen to have been born Jews. For this reason we shall omit all discussion of a figure like that of Spinoza. Spinoza the philosopher was a Jew only by birth. His work can lay no claim to Jewish ideology, and merely proves that the intellect of the Jew is capable of covering an extremely wide range."

Thus it is clear that we can find no unanimous discision in regard to the importance of Spinoza. Regardless, However, of whether some choose to claim Spinoza as a great son, or disclaim him as valueless from a Jewish point-of-view, he is undoubtedly a tremendously significant figure and deserves our consideration.

The main outlines of his life are well known. He received a traditional Jewish education, gradually broke away from the orthodox position, was excommunicated for his heresies, and died a pauper at a young age, having published several works which were late destined to bring him world fame.

But in order truly to understand his life, we must view it

in context. The background of the times is essential for an appreciation of why he acted as he did, why the Jewish community adopted the only course open to it in excommunicating him, and why his significance was not recognized for some hundred or more years.after his death.

From approximately nine hundred to fourteen hundred A. D. the Jews lived in Spain in an atmosphere so friendly and stimulating that this period of Jewish history has been called the Golden Age of Spain. During these several hundred years a magnificent culture developed. The greatest Jewish poetry and science of the medieval period are the product of this Golden Age in Spain, where there were no restriction, no prohibitions, no discriminations. Men rose to high positions; families accumulated wealth; the universities welcomed Jewish scholars; the State entrusted official rank to many who were qualified. All in all, this whole era with its spirit of equality of opportunity for the Jew, with its galaxy of great and famous personalities, with its extensive literary and scientific productivity, did much to bolster the ego of the people, to strengthen their faith in themselves, to undergird their morale - so that when the great blow fell, they were better equipped to stand up under the shock. The great blow was the order of expulsion for all Jews from the Peninsula of Spain in the year 1492.

It must be said that the fate of the Jews in Spain was directly linked with the fate of the Moors. When the religion of Mohamed was established in the seventh century, it rapidly spread westward across North Africa inflaming with its missionary

zeal all whom it influenced. Less than a century after Mohammed's Hegria in 622, the Moslem world was prepared to set out on its course of conquest for Allah. After having expanded through Arabia, the Middle East and North Africa, it was but logical for the new religion to sweep across the narrow Strait of Gibralter for a direct assault upon Christian Europe. So inspired was the Moslem attack, so fanatical was its driving force, so breath-taking its advance, that in a few short years the Moors had invested all of Spain, climbed the Pyrenees Mountains, and were actually half way across France, aiming ever northward toward the heart of Europe, before they were stopped by a coalition of Christian kings at the battle of Tours in .

And then slowly the Moorish tide began to roll backwards; They gave ground in France, slowly were pushed backward over the Pyrenees, and were engaged in Spain in constant battle for the next five hundred years, attempting to keep their hold on the peninsula. It was a continual process of war and struggle, with the kings of the Christian states in the north ever pushing the Moors south, south, south, until finally in 1492, King Ferdinand captured the last Moslem stronghold of Granada, on the southernmost tip of Spain, and pushed them back across Gibraltar into North Africa, thus making of Spain a totally Christian country once again. It was in the same year of 1492 that Spain threw off the last vestige of Mohammedan influence, that she also threw out her Jewish population.

You remember it was said that the fate of the Jews was directly linked with the fate of the Moors - and it is now clear how this relationship operated. The Golden Age of Spain, that

period of brilliant freedom, may properly be said to have existed mainly in those parts of Spain where the Moors were in control. In Mohammedan Spain there was a Jewish Golden Age - in Christian Spain there was not. And as the Moslems were pushed ever southward, so did the bulk of the Jewish population retreat with its benefactor, with the result that the final defeat of 1492 was a double one. When Granada fell and the Moors were expelled, the Jews presented and easy mark and they too were expelled a few months later. Four or five individuals escaped to the New World aboard Columbus' convoy; the great majority of the Jews went to Turkey where they were offered refuge; a sizable number went to Italy and North Africa; some went to Holland which provided religious freedom. Only the Jews known as Maranos were allowed to remain in Spain after 1492.

Marranos were Jews who were converted and baptized as Catholics. This forced conversion began in 1391, when a huge massacre occured in Toledo. The ~~fol~~ subsequent period of ecclesiastical terrorism lasted one hundred and one years until the final expulsion. During the course of that century, under the pressure of steadily increasing persecution, many thousands of Jews accepted the alternative to death which was offered by the church - namely baptisim and submission to the authority of the church and its Inquisition. The Inquisition had been instituted for the purpose of investigating and punishing Catholic heretics, and did not have jurisdiction over Jews. But the Jewish converts, the Marranos, were legitimate prey for the masked agents of Torquemada; and the Lord help those who were found practicing their Jewish religion in secret. Hundreds were

discovered and burned at the stake - many thousands were never found out; but their lives were filled with daily peril.

These Marranos were allowed to remain in Spain after 1492 so long as they practiced their newly acquired Christianity. But for many life under these conditions was unbearable and there was a constant trickle of emigration - families desiring to escape and live their lives openly. One such family, named Espinoza, left Spain in 1640 and moved to Amsterdam, where there was a growing Jewish group. There they openly professed their Judaism, changed their name from the Spanish form, Espinosa, to the more Jewish Spinoza and enrolled their eight year old son, Baruch, nee Benedict, in the Jewish school of Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel, the same who prevailed upon Cromwell to readmit Jews to England.

Young Spinoza, living in this openly Jewish environment, received a traditional education in Bible, poetry, and Hebrew grammar. At the age of fifteen he was introduced to the study of the Talmud itself, that huge compendium of law and folk-lore. At ~~the~~ about the same age he began to express certain doubts and questions to his teachers, based upon his reading of Maimonides and Ibn-Ezra (two famous free-thinking Jews) and upon his reading of outside literature in Latin.

Spinoza became a pupil of the great Christian philologist, Dr. Franz van den Enden, who lectured in Amsterdam. Here he came into contact with learned Christian youths who strongly influenced his mind. Not only his fellow students but also his teacher was tremendously responsible for the shaping of his thought. Ven den Enden was a man of skeptical and satirical make-up, who ridiculed

religious customs and prejudices and exposed their weaknesses. These revolutionary ideas excited Spinoza's mind. The more imbibed from outside sources, the more his own logical thinking developed, the more did he become alienated from Judaism in its rabbinical-legalistic and its mystical-cabalistic trappings. Asthe great historian Graetz describes it:

"Indpendent, judicial reason, which disregards what is traditional or hallowed by time, and follows its own laws, became his mistress. To her he dedicated pure, undivided worship, and she led him to break with inherited views. All that cannot be justified before the inexorable tribunal of clear human vision, passed with him for superstition and clouded thought, if not actual frenzy. His ardent desire for truth, pure truth and certaintiy, led him to a complet breach with the religion endeared to him from childhood; he not only rejected Talmudical Judaism, but also regarded the Bible as the work of man. The apprent contradictions in the books of Holy Scripture appear to have first raised his doubts as to their inspiration. It must have cost him a hard struggle to give up the customs and opinions endeared to him through manifold ties, and to become, to a certain extent a new man. For Spinoza was quite as much a moral character as a deep thinker. To hold anything as false in theory, and yet from fear, custom, or advantage to adopt it in practice was impossible for him.

He was differently constituted to his revered master Descartes, who kept away from the church the torch of truth which he had kindled, made a gap between theory and practice to avoid offending that church, and, for example, vowed a pilgrimage to our Lady of Loretto for the success of his system and its destructive tendency. According to Spinoza's idea every action ought to be a true reflection of reason. When he could no longer find truth in Judaism, he could not bring himself to follow its ritual precepts. He ceased to attend the synagogue, cared no longer for the Sabbath and the festivals, and broke the laws concerning diet. He did not confine himself to the renunciation of Judaism, but imparted his convictions to young men who sought his instruction."

Representatives of the community of Amsterdam, both religious and secular grew increasingly alarmed at this estrangement and even hositlity on his part. Fugitives were ever coming from Spain and Portugal, who had forfeited high positions and staked life and property to remain true to Judaism. Others still in Spain allowed themselves to be cast into the dark prisions of the Inquisition, or with cheerful courage mounted the funeral pyre. A series of martyrdoms occured even at the moment when Spinoza was scoffing at the faith of his fathers. Could the Jewish leaders of Amsterdam allow Spinoza to keep mocking the martyrs, to tell the thousands of victims that they were suffering for the sake of a delusion, and antiquated error called Judaism?

The Court of Rabbis at first did not proceed severely against him, for he was respected because of his modest nature, strict moral character, and great learning. Furthermore, they

did not wish to exert the full rigor of rabbinical law against him, in order not to drive him into the arms of the church, for that would have had a very depressing effect upon the Marranos suffering in Spain and Portugal.

The rabbis, therefore, privately offered Spinoza, through his friends, a yearly pension of a thousand gulden on condition that he take no hostile step against Judaish, and show himself from time to time in the synagogue. But Spinoza, though young, was of so determined a character, that money could not entice him to abandon his convictions or to act the hypocrite. He insisted that he would not give up freedom of inquiry and thought. He continued to impart Jewish youths doctrines undermining Judaism.

So the tension between him and the representatives of Judaism became daily greater; both sides were right, or imagined they were. A fanatic in Amsterdam thought that he could put an end to this breach by a dagger-stroke aimed at the dangerous apostate. He waylaid Spinoza at the exit from the theatre, and struck at the philosopher with his murderous weapon. But the latter observed the hostile movement in time, and avoided the blow, so that only his coat was damaged. Spinoza left Amsterdam to avoid the danger of assassination and betook himself to the house of a friend.

Reconciliation between Spinoza and the synagogue was no longer to be thought of. The rabbis and the secular authorities of the community pronounced the excommunication upon him, proclaiming it in the Portuguese language on a Thursday, Ab 6th (July 24th), 1656, shortly before the fast in memory of the destruction of Jerusalem. The sentence was pronounced solemnly in the synagogue from the pulpit before the open Ark. The

sentence was as follows:

> "The council has long had notice of the evil opinions and actions of Baruch d'Espinosa, and these are daily increasing in spite of efforts to reclaim him. In particular, he teaches and proclaims dreadful heresy, of which credible witnesses are present, who have made their depositions in presence of the accused."

All this, they continued, had been proved in the presence of the elders, and the council had resolved to place him under the ban, and excommunicate him.

The usual curses were pronounced upon him in presence of scrolls of the Law and finally the council forbade anyone to have intercourse with him, verbally or by writing, to do him any service, to abide under the same roof with him, or to come within the space of four cubits' distance from him, or to read his writings. Contrary to wont, the ban against Spinoza was stringently enforced, to keep young people from his heresies.

The rest of his life, which ended in 1677, when he was but forty-five years of age, was spent mainly outside of Amsterdam, in various small villages, where he supported himself at the trade of lense-grinding and busied himself with his writings. He never again had contact with Jewish people or things. The Jews of Amsterdam, increased in number by now to four thousand families, undertook to erect a synagogue, a magnificent structure, which was completed in 1675 and dedicated with the help of many friendly Christians. Spinoza happened to be in the city at the time of the dedication ceremonies, and may have laughed at the great rejoicing of his former co-religionists, thinking it folly. Yet the building of this synagogue in a city which but a hundred years before had tolerated no Jews and had even supported a Spanish Inquisition, was loud testimony to exactly that type of

freedom of thought for which he strove so valiantly and so prematurely. Spinoza died a year or two later, a pauper, unmourned and comparatively unimportant - his ideas first achieving significance a full century later, when the Encyclopedists in France and Tom Paine in America expressed the same views which resulted in the two great liberal revolutions of the eighteenth century.

Spinoza's "Theologico-Political Treatise" was his greatest work. Therein his prime object was to state the thesis that freedom of thought <u>can</u> be permitted without prejudice to religion or the peace of the state; furthermore, that it <u>must</u> be permitted, for if it were forbidden, religion and peace could not exist in the state. But this apologia for freedom of thought is very hard for Spinoza to state effectively, because of certain other beliefs he held. He believed that might was right; that the state was the most mighty instrument, and that therefore the state possessed the authority to decree what was right. Everyone is bound to unconditional obedience. The government alone has the right to control religious affairs and to define all moral law as well as religious law. This is extremely tyrannical, and apparently stifles freedom of thought. Only through some sophistical quibbling was Spinoza able to rescue his doctrine of freedom of thought and free expression of opinion. He did so as follows: Every man has the right of freedom of thought by nature, the only right which he has not transferred to the state, because it is essentially inalienable. It must be conceded to everyone to think and judge in opposition to the opinion of the state, even to speak and teach, provided this be done with reason and reflection, without fraud, anger or malice, and without the intention of causing a revolution.

His notion of God is contained in his other great work, "The Ethics". He believes that God is the soul independent substance of the universe. The whole universe, all individual things and their active powers, are not merely from God, but of God. God is known to man through two attributes - extension (body) and thought (mind). Mind and body, thought and extension, are attributes of God and not independent of Him. God is the cause of everything in the universe. He is both thinking and extended substance. God is a thought in the human mind and He is a tree in the forest. Thus, God is all and all is God. This is clear pantheism.

God, for Spinoza, is neither personality nor consciousness. He is not characterized by intelligence, feeling, or will. His actions are not directed by purpose. All the ideas in the universe and all the forms in the universe added together constitute the thought and the extension of God. Thus God can influence both the world of thought and the world of things because actually He is both and is thus being Himself.

What is man's place in this system? In Spinoza we find a complete abandoning of the idea of freedom. His philosophic system is absolutely deterministic. Everything in the universe follows from something else in a definite causal chain each link of which is necessarily connected with the one preceding and the one following. While God, the underlying substance of all things and all thoughts, is free, the individual thing or thought cannot be free but is determined by its past history. Thus, there cannot be any such thing as a free will. Man is fooled into thinking he is free because he does not see the chain of causes

which determine his action. Indeed, any object equally ignorant might think that it was free. But when man comes to understand the causal chain, he realizes that he is in no way free. The greatest peace of mind which man can achieve is an "Intellectual love of God, which simply means an increased comprehension of the succession of causes and effects. This comprehension, this higher insight into the nature of God will result in tranquility of soul; whereas a clouded intellect will lead a man to fight futilely against his predetermined environment.

With this conception of God and moral action it is not surprising that Judaism found no favor in Spinoza's eyes. Judaism lays down directly opposite principles - beckons man to a high, self-reliant task, and proclaims aloud the continual progress of mankind in simple service of God, which means victory over war, poverty, and other human evils.

He also came into conflict with Judaism because of his doctrine of the state. When Palestinian State was destroyed, the natural rights of the Hebrews were transferred to the conqueror, he believed, and all the laws of Judaism were to be thereby abolished. Consequently, Judaism for him reached its end more than two thousand years ago. Moreover, with his theory of the preeminence of the state, he conceded to every government the right to suppress Judaism and use force against its followers, to which they ought meekly submit. The funeral pyres for Marranos were, according to Spinoza's system, doubly justified; one, citizens have no right on rational grounds to resist the recognized religion of the state and secondly, it is folly to profess a two-thousand year dead Judaism and to sacrifice oneself for it.

Incomplete as is this presentation, it gives us some idea as to why things worked out as they did. The Jews of the newly

founded community of Amsterdam, home of refuge for the many who sacrificed much in order to reach it and profess their religion, could only act in one possible manner toward this man who was debunking everything they believed in. It would be expecting more than human conduct for them to have acted any differently. They excommunicated Baruch Spinoza out of necessity - for he was threatening their ~~own~~ entire way of life. As for him, neither ~~he~~ could he have prevented the workings of his own inner dynamics. Free thinker, believer in reason above tradition, seaxcer after truth, he spoke out sharply against rigid legalism, against superstition, against blind acceptance of dogma and doctrine. Thus, even had he wished to be friendly to his fellow Jews, even had he desired to deal kindly with them, he would not have been able to do so in oppositinn to the deep inner convictions which drew him off on to the pathway of a solitary traveller. Both Spinoza and the Jewish community operated on the basis of sheer compulsion - and the result is history.

As one last word, it seems that an evaluation of Spinoza reveals many weaknesses in his system - the most glaring and shocking being his definition of the state and man's submissive relation thereto. Only that in his philosophy which seems to be of genuine worth is his insistence upon freedom of thought. This is his greatest contribution. ~~He~~ This doctrine we recognize today as the basis of our liberal societies in the world. Spinoza thus stands out mainly because he was one of the first figures in the modern world who cut through the fog of obsucring superstition and looked ahead to a world of free thought. What Luther did for the Christian religion Spinoza did for the Jewish. Therein, and perhaps in very little else lies the greatness of Baruch Spinoza.

Man & State — 218-9

Theory of God & Universe 33 * (269 *)

Good & Evil 100

God 127-8

Free Will 156

Mind & Matter 269

I. Describe framework of times - 17th cent.

1) Inquisition + Copernicus
2) New community in Amsterdam, unfounded, uncertain
3) Menasseh ben Israel in England
4) Jews in New Amsterdam.

II. Life of Spinoza

III. Beliefs.

2) Kastein –

"We shall not yield to the temptation to claim for Judaism men of outstanding intellectual gifts, merely because they happen to have been Jews. For this reason we shall omit all discussion of a figure like that of Spinoza.

Spinoza the philosopher was a Jew only by birth. His work can lay no claim to Jewish ideology, and merely proves that the intellect of the Jew is capable of covering an extremely wide range."

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1) Renan has called Spinoza the greatest Jew of modern times.

Regardless of whether some Jews do choose to claim him as a great one, or declare him as unimportant from a Jewish point of view – he is undoubtedly a tremendously significant figure and deserves consideration.

The main outlines of his life are well known. He received a traditional Jewish education, gradually broke from the traditional position, was excommunicated for his heresies, and died a pauper at a very young age; having published several works later destined to become extremely significant.

But in order truly to understand his life, we must view it in context – The background is essential for an appreciation of

why he acted as he did, why the Jewish community adopted the ruling course from to it - and why his significance was not recognized for some hundreds + more years.

For several hundred years Jews had lived in Spain in an atmosphere so friendly and stimulating that this period of Jewish history has been called The Golden Age of Spain. The dates of this Golden age are approximately 900 - 1400 A.D., and during these centuries a magnificent culture developed. The greatest Jewish poetry and science of the medieval periods are the products of this Golden Age in Spain - where there were no restrictions, no prohibitions, no discriminations. Men rose to high positions; families accumulated wealth; the universities welcomed Jewish scholars; the state entrusted official rank to many who were qualified. All in all, this whole era with its spirit of equality & opportunity for the Jew, with its galaxy of great & famous personalities, with its extensive literary and scientific productivity - did much to bolster the ego of the people, to strengthen their faith in themselves, to underpin their morale - so that when the great blow fell, they were better equipped to stand up under the shock. The great blow was the order of expulsion for all Jews from the peninsula of Spain in the year 1492.

It must be said that the fate of the Jews in Spain was directly linked with the fate of the Moors. When the religion of Mohammed was established in the 7th century, it spread rapidly westward across North africa inflaming with its missionary zeal all whom it influenced. Less than a century after Mohammed's hegira in 622 the Moslem world was prepared to set out on its course of conquest for Allah.

After having expanded through Arabia, the Middle East and North Africa, it was but logical for the new religion to sweep across the narrow strait of Gibraltar for a direct assault upon Christian Europe. So inspired was the Moslem attack, so fanatical was their driving force, so breath-taking their advance, that in a few short years, they had invested all of Spain, climbed the Pyrenees and were actually ~~aim~~ half-way across France, aiming ever northward toward the heart of Europe, before they were stopped by a coalition of Christian Kings at the battle of Tours in ——.

And then slowly the Moorish tide began to roll backwards. They gave ground in France, slowly were pushed back over the Pyr., and were engaged in Spain for the next 500 years ~~in Spain~~ in the effort to keep some hold on the peninsula. It was a continual process of struggle and battle, with the Kings of the Christian states in the north ever pushing the Moors south, south, south, until finally in 1492, King Ferdinand captured the last Moslem stronghold of Granada, on the southern-most tip of Spain, and pushed them back across Gibraltar into North Africa, ~~leaving~~ Thus making of Spain a totally Christian country once again. It was in the same year 1492 that Spain threw off the last vestige of Mohammedan influence that she also threw ~~off~~ out her Jewish population.

~~And so it is then that~~ You remember we said that

The fate of the Jews was directly linked with the fate of the Moors - and it is now clear how this relationship operated. The Golden Age of Spain - the period of brilliant freedom - may properly be said to have existed ~~only~~ mainly in those parts of Spain where the Moors were in control. In Mohammedan Spain there was a Jewish Golden Age - in Xian Spain, there was not. And as the Moslems were pushed ever southward by the advancing Xian forces, so did the bulk of the Jewish population retreat with their benefactors - with the result that the final defeat of 1492 was a double one. When Granada fell and the Moors were expelled from the soil of Spain, ~~There~~ the Jews were an easy mark and they were expelled a few months later. Some of the ~~more~~ individuals escaped to the New World aboard Columbus' convoy - the bulk of the Jews went to Turkey where they were offered refuge; ~~some~~ a sizable number went to North Africa and settled various communities there; some went to Holland which ~~offered~~ provided religious freedom. Only the Jews known as Marranos were allowed to remain in Spain after 1492.

Marranos were Jews who were converted and ~~&~~ baptized as Catholics. ~~This process began just 100 years before the final expulsion.~~ In 1391 a huge pogrom and massacre occurred in Toledo and the period of ecclesiastical terrorism began which was to last for 100 years until the final expulsion. During the course of these 100 years and under the pressure of never-ending persecution, many thousands of Jews accepted the alternative to death offered by the Church -

That alternative was baptism and submission to the authority of the Inquisition. In all fairness, the Inquisition did confine itself to back-sliding Catholics - it was instituted for the purpose of investigating and punishing Catholic heretics - and as such did not have jurisdiction over Jews. But the Jewish converts, the Marranos, were legitimate prey for the masked agents of Torquemada, and the Lord help those who were found practicing their Jewish religion in secret. Hundreds were discovered and burned at the stake - many thousands were never found out.

These Marranos were allowed to remain in Spain after 1492, but as long as they secretly practiced there was a constant trickle of emigration - families desiring to live openly and in freedom. One such family, named Espinoza, left Spain in 1640, and moved to Amsterdam, where they openly professed their Judaism, changed their name from Espinoza to Spinoza, and enrolled their 8-year old son, Baruch, [redacted] in the Jewish school of Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel, the same who prevailed upon Cromwell to readmit Jews to England.

Young Spinoza, living in the newly-acquired Jewish environment, received a traditional education in Bible, poetry, Hebrew grammar, and at the age of 14-15 was introduced to the Talmud itself, that huge compendium of law and lore. At about the same age, he began to express certain doubts and questions to his teachers, based upon his reading of Maimonides + Ibn-Ezra (free-thinking Jews) and upon his reading of outside literature in Latin.

He became a pupil of the great Jew philologist, Dr. Franz van den Enden, who lectured in Amsterdam. Here he came into contact with learned Jew youths who strongly influenced his mind. Also van den Enden was tremendously responsible for the shaping of his Thought. Van den Enden was a man of skeptical and satirical vein, who ridiculed religious customs & prejudices and exposed their weaknesses. These attitudes excited Spinoza's mind to meditation. The more he imbibed ideas from outside sources, the more his own logical understanding developed. The more did he become alienated from Judaism, in its Rabbinical (ie. legalistic) and Kabbalistic (ie. mystical) trappings.

Quote from Graetz – p. 89, 90.

The representatives of the community of Amsterdam, both religious and secular, grew increasingly alarmed at this estrangement and even hostility on his part. Fugitives were even coming from Spain and Portugal, who forfeited their high position, and staked life and property, to remain true to Judaism. Others let themselves be dragged to the dark prisons of the Inquisition, or with cheerful courage mounted the funeral pyre. A series of martyrdoms occurred while Spinoza was assisting at the faith of his fathers. Could the Jewish leaders of Amsterdam allow Spinoza to keep mocking the martyrs, to tell the Thousands of victims of the Inquisition that they were suffering for the sake of a delusion, for some antiquated error? called Judaism?

The court of rabbis at first did not proceed severely against him, for he was respected on account of his modest nature and strict

moral character. Furthermore, they did not wish to exact the full rigor of Rabbinical law vs. him, namely, excommunication, in order not to drive him into the arms of the Church, for that would have had a very depressing effect upon the Marranos still living in Spain + Portugal.

Quote p. 93-94

The rest of his life, which ended in 1677, when he was just 45 years of age, was spent mainly outside of Amsterdam, in various small villages, where he supported himself at the trade of lens-grinding and busied himself with his writings. He never again had contact with Jewish people or things. The Jews of Amsterdam, increased in number to 4000 families, undertook to erect a synagogue, a magnificent structure, which was completed in 1675, and dedicated with the help of many friendly Xians. Spinoza happened to be in the city at the time of the dedication ceremonies, and may have laughed at the great rejoicing of his former co-religionists, thinking it folly. Yet the building of this synagogue in a city which just a hundred years before had tolerated no Jews + had even supported a Spanish Inquisition, was loud testimony to the growing freedom of the times. Spinoza died a year or two later, a pauper, unmourned, and comparatively unimportant - his ideas just achieving significance a full century later.

Spinoza's Philosophy

"Theologico-Political Treatise"

His prime object was to spread the conviction that freedom of thought can be permitted without prejudice to religion or the peace of the state; furthermore, that it must be permitted, for if it were forbidden, religion & peace could not exist in the state.

But this apologia for freedom of thought is very hard for Spinoza, because of certain other beliefs. He believed that might was right; that this would result in mutual destruction; therefore might was delegated to an instrument called the state; and the state decreed what was right. This is tyrannical, and apparently stifles freedom of thought. Spinoza is able to reduce freedom of thought only by some sophistical fibbling. p. 97 (Record p. 96 on separate sheet for possible reading.)

God

The whole universe, all individual things and their active powers, are not made from God, but of God.

~~God is known to man through two attributes — extension (thus body) and thought (mind)~~ Frost p. 127

Main Place

G. 99-101

Frost 156

With this conception of God and moral action it is not surprising that Judaism found no favor in Spinoza's eyes. Judaism lays down directly opposite principles — beckons man to a high, self-reliant task, and proclaims aloud the progress of mankind in simple peace of God, holiness and victory over war, poverty, and other human evils.

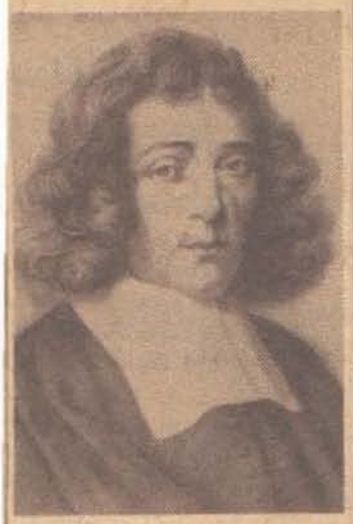
Because of his doctrine of the state he also came into conflict with Judaism. His Thesis was that with the destruction of the Jewish state by the Babylonian King, etc. P. 106

P. 107

Incomplete as is this presentation, it gives us some idea as to why things worked out as they did. The [illegible] of the newly-founded community of Amsterdam, home of refuge for the many who sacrificed greatly in order to reach it and profess their religion, would only act in one hostile manner toward this man who was debunking everything they believed in. It would be [illegible] for other than human conduct for them to have acted any differently. They excommunicated Baruch Spinoza out of necessity. for to us Christianity

Their entire way of life. As for him, neither could he have prevented the workings of his own inner dynamics. Free-Thinker, believer in reason above tradition, searcher after Truth, he spoke out against rigid legalism, against superstition, against blind acceptance of dogma & doctrine. Thus, even had he existed to be friendly to his fellow-Jews, even had he desired to deal kindly with them, he would not have been able to do so in opposition to the deep convictions that drew him off on the path of a solitary traveller. Both Spinoza and the Jewish community operated on the basis of sheer confusion — The result is history.

As we last word, it ~~would~~ seems to me that an evaluation of Spinoza ~~would~~ reveals many weaknesses in his system - The most glaring and shocking being his definition of the state and man's submissive relation thereto. Only That in his philosophy which seems to be of genuine worth is his insistence upon freedom of thought. This doctrine we recognize today as the basis of our liberal societies in the world. Spinoza then stands out among as one of the first figures in the modern world who cut through the fog of obscuring superstition and looked ahead to a world of free Thought. What Luther did religiously. Spinoza & Descartes did philosophically. And perhaps in nothing else therein lies ~~his~~ the greatest worth of Baruch Spinoza.



Baruch de Spinoza, from an engraving by E. Fessard.

sible criticism" in which the State Department "and our Allies are condemned willy-nilly, no matter what they do."

Senator Wiley said that "contrary to the condemnation which has been unleashed against the State Department itself, I believe that Dulles and Under Secretary of State [Walter Bedell] Smith ought to be commended for the judicious and understanding course which they carried out in relation to the very difficult circumstances of the Geneva conference." He went on:

"Many of the critics of the present armistice agreement never offered a reasonable practical alternative and many of these same critics will be fighting tooth and nail against United States military commitments for the proposed Southeast Asia pact."

The Wisconsin Republican insisted he personally would have opposed sending United States forces to Indochina, but, "like most Americans, I want America and other free nations to take a stand now while there is still time in relation to the rest of Southeast Asia."

ENVOY MAY BE NAMED

Capital Sees Cambodia Post for Robert McClintock

Special to The New York Times.

WASHINGTON, July 24—State Department sources indicated today that the United States soon would be represented in Laos and Cambodia by diplomats who will reside in those countries.

At the present time, the three associated states in Indochina are represented individually in Washington but the United States is represented in the three Indochinese states by Ambassador Donald G. Heath, with headquarters at Saigon, Vietnam.

Official sources declined to confirm reports that Robert M. McClintock, career diplomat and chargé d'affaires at Saigon, would be named Ambassador to Cambodia, but other informants indicated he would be a reasonable choice for the still-to-be-created assignment.

SPINOZA PROJECT STIRS AMSTERDAM

But Synagogue Board Rejects Idea of Reviewing Ban Laid Down in 1656

Special to The New York Times.

AMSTERDAM, the Netherlands, July 18—A proposal to revoke the Seventeenth century excommunication of the philosopher Baruch de Spinoza has been rejected by the leaders of the Portuguese Jewish community here, descendants of those who originally banned the eminent scholar.

The idea of reconsidering the 300-year-old measure arose from an article by David Ben-Gurion, Israel's former Prime Minister, in the Tel Aviv daily newspaper Davar.

Mr. Ben-Gurion wrote that the ban on Spinoza could not be continued in Israel, a free country, and added that it was a national and cultural duty to see that a complete Hebrew edition of Spinoza's works was published.

In 1656—the Jewish year 5416—the leaders of the Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam branded Spinoza's work heretical and dangerous for the faith. The lay leaders of the synagogue announced the excommunication decision. The original record is preserved in the synagogue here.

Presumably, the synagogue elders were merely announcing a decision of the rabbinate. The current synagogue board, therefore, left the ultimate decision on whether to do anything about the centuries-old excommunication to the community's Chief Rabbi, Salomon Rodrigues Pereira.

The old Rabbi was emphatic today in expressing his intention to do nothing about the old measure. "No rabbinate has the right to review a decision of previous rabbinates, unless it is greater in number and wiser," he said.

This was well known in Jewish tradition, the spiritual leader said, adding, "I don't consider myself wiser than those who came before me."

This did not mean that Rabbi Rodrigues Pereira would not have liked to review the 1656 measure if tradition did not bar the way. Given the age in which Spinoza lived and the nature of his beliefs, the excommunication was justified, the Rabbi thought.

This viewpoint has not won unanimous approval in the Jewish community here, which was sharply reduced by Nazi oppression during the war. In the polemics that followed Mr. Ben-Gurion's article, some felt the excommunication had been a tragedy and should, if possible, be rectified.

But the synagogue board is solidly behind its rabbi.

Amsterdam Jewish Community Will Not Revoke Old Ban On Spinoza

NEW YORK — (JTA) — A proposal to revoke the Seventeenth Century excommunication of the philosopher Baruch de Spinoza has been rejected by the leaders of the Portuguese Jewish community here, descendants of those who originally banned the eminent scholar, the New York Times reported from Amsterdam. The suggestion to reconsider the 300-year-old measure came from David Ben-Gurion, Israel's former Prime Minister.

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The current synagogue board, the Times report says, left the ultimate decision on whether to do anything about the centuries-old excommunication to the community's Chief Rabbi, Salomon Rodrigues Pereira. The old Rabbi was emphatic in expressing his intention to do nothing about the old measure. "No rabbinate has the right to review a decision of previous rabbinates, unless it is greater in number and wiser," he said. This was well known in Jewish tradition, the spiritual leader said, adding, "I don't consider myself wiser than those who came before me." The Synagogue board is solidly behind its rabbi, the Times reported.

MEMO

FOR YOUR INFORMATION—

I hope this is sufficiently legible to be of value

Bob

Bob Gordon

Spinoza, Unforgiven for 300 Years

Free Thinking Philosopher, Excommunicated by Amsterdam Rabbis for Flouting Beliefs of the Jews, Produced Writings That Strongly Influenced Modern Thought

"BY THE sentence of the angels, by the decree of the saints, we anathematize, cut off, curse and execrate Baruch Spinoza. . . . with all the curses which are written in the book of the law. Cursed be he by day, and cursed be he by night; cursed when he goeth out, and cursed when he cometh in. May the Lord pardon him never. . . . There shall not be man speak to him, no man show him any kindness, no man come nigh him."

With these "amenities" the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam in 1656 took leave of their erring brother Baruch Spinoza, better known to posterity as Benedict Spinoza, the philosopher. Henceforth he would be as a dead man to them.

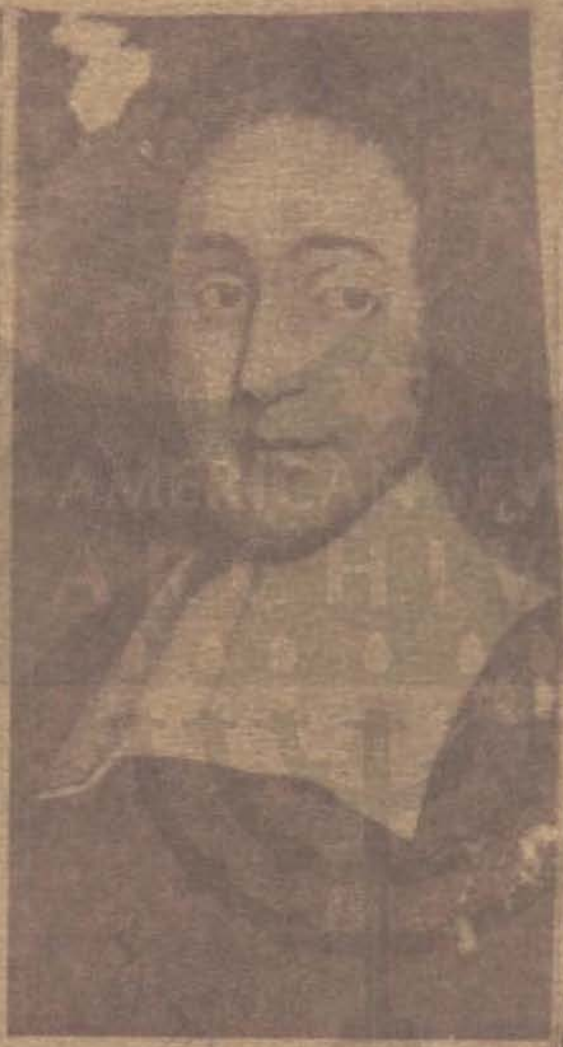
A few days ago the descendants of these Portuguese Jews, sadly decimated by the Nazis in World War II, were asked to consider the stern decree of their ancestors. The proposal came to them from David Ben-Gurion, former prime minister of Israel, who announced that the ban on Spinoza would not be continued in the free state of Israel and suggested that it should be revoked.

But the leaders of the Portuguese colony in Amsterdam rejected the plea, answering that it is not customary to review the decision of a higher rabbinate. So the curse still rests upon him.

Family Prospered Under the Moors

The offense was that he had spurned the ritual laws by eating swine's flesh at a gentile's table; he had declared that the Jewish Scriptures nowhere taught the incorporeality of God, the immortality of the soul or the reality of angels. This was blasphemy by the man whose first name—Hebrew Baruch or Latin Benedict—means "blessed."

Descendants of Sephardic Jews in Spain, the Spinozas had for centuries enjoyed wealth and honors there under the mild rule of the Moors. But when the latter were driven out of Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella, Jews were forced to become Christians or to leave the country. In either case they usually forfeited their wealth. Greedy Ferdinand, said ironical historians, discovered gold in Israel about the same time he discovered it in America.



Spinoza, beloved and cursed

From Spain these Sephardic Jews migrated to Portugal and then to Holland, arriving in that 17th century haven for dissenters shortly before the Pilgrims. They first settled in the Vlooienburg folly of Dutch district in Amsterdam, and it was there that Baruch was born in 1632. His father Michael, though a leader of the synagogue, was a man of shorter destiny. He never made enough as a conveyant to get his family out of the squalid Vlooienburg.

Began Study Under Gentile at Age of 19

By the time he was 19, Baruch was thoroughly grounded in Hebrew lore and literature.

One of his teachers was Rabbi Morteira, who later uttered the excommunication but at the time was "amazed that a young man of such penetration should be so modest."

Spinoza was 19 before he began to study Latin with a freethinking gentile teacher, Franciscus van den Ende. Though most future rabbis studied this "priest's language," many of them had a hard time/error in doing so. But Baruch persisted and eventually mastered Latin. He read all the philosophical works available in it, especially the new treatises of Descartes, with whom he disagreed and Hobbes, who became his friend.

His 'Ethics' Not Ordinary Literature

Later he also wrote all his own books in Latin, but he never became an outstanding stylist. In fact, he regarded language as a tool for logic. His greatest work the "Ethics," is not literature in the usual sense at all, as the surprised reader will find on paging through it, but a series of propositions and proofs requiring just as much concentration, and offering just as much or as little satisfaction, as a textbook in geometry. Spinoza is the Euclid of philosophy.

MILWAUKEE JOURNAL

AUG 8 1954

Rabbis Offered to Pay for Loyalty

There was only one romance in Spinoza's life, and details of this are not well authenticated. It seems that he became fond of his teacher's frail but brilliant daughter, Clara van den Ende, and would have married her, had she not accepted another suitor who gave her a costly string of pearls. From that time on Baruch knew that "our greatest joy exists in our love of God and every love of necessity results from the acknowledgment of God."

Already in the [illegible] of [illegible] school, fellow students, suspecting young Spinoza of free thought, tried to entrap him with a set of questions: "Has God a body? Are there angels? Is the soul immortal?" The answers he gave were [illegible] considered [illegible].

After his father's death, Baruch's widowed brother-in-law, a [illegible] zealot, brought matters to a head. He roiled up Baruch's half-sister Rebecca, and the two of them made life so unbearable for Baruch by their spying and [illegible]

[illegible] that he moved to the home of his teacher, van den Ende. Rebecca now claimed all of the father's inheritance on the grounds that her brother had disqualified himself by consorting with gentiles — and free thinking ones at that. Spinoza took the case to the Dutch courts, won it, then gave back his share to Rebecca, keeping only a bed and a blanket.

The rabbis, however, could no longer ignore his apostasy. They argued with him, even offered him an annuity of $500 if he would

remain externally loyal to the synagogue. According to one story, Spinoza countered the Rabbi Morteira's threat of excommunication by telling him that, in return for the trouble which Morteira had taken to teach him Hebrew, he was quite willing to show him how to perform the excommunication in all its [illegible].

Baruch was absent when the curse was read to the wailing note of a ram's horn, while black candles were [illegible] one by one until the room, [illegible] of the [illegible] was in [illegible] darkness. [illegible]

Became Expert in Lens Grinding

During the rest of the 20 years remaining to him, he studied, developed his philosophy, wrote his books. He refused financial help, once turning back most of an inheritance bequeathed to him by a rich friend, and learned to grind lenses to support himself. There was a great demand for lenses, owing to the new inventions of the microscope and telescope.

He was happiest in the company of the small dissenting sects of Holland, but always welcomed the celebrities who came to see him in growing numbers after the publication of his first book, a critical treatment of the Old Testament. All who knew him described him as the gentlest and most lovable of people. He indulged in a pipe of tobacco occasionally, but in little else. "A man is never the better for having a fine gown," he said.

His abstemious life in a room filled with glass dust hastened the malady that ate away his lungs. But he was happy. "To discover a new principle makes life worth living," he said.

Spinoza's impact upon subsequent thought can be judged by the opinions expressed by philosophers since his time."

If Napoleon had been as intelligent as Spinoza, he would have lived in a garret and written four books.—Anatole France.

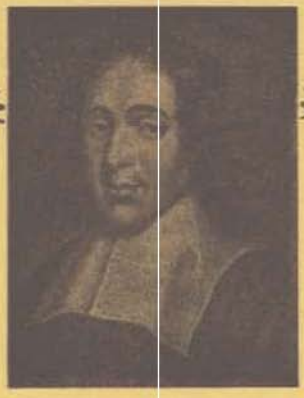
I am a believer in the god of Spinoza.—Albert Einstein.

Nietzsche says somewhere that the last Christian died upon the cross, but he had forgotten Spinoza.—Will Durant.

Spit upon this grave! Here lies Spinoza. Would that his words were buried with him! Then the spiritual plague would end its ravages.—Colerus Thimmius, preacher in Middleburg.

His philosophy, which is packed into the "Ethics," a [illegible] page book published anonymously after his death, has become an integral part of modern thought. Goethe was [illegible] by the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Lessing and Herder [illegible] [illegible] and Lessing modeled his Nathan the Wise partly after him. Emerson's transcendentalism is a version of Spinoza's belief that the highest form of knowledge comes through intuition, or the ability to view things "sub specie aeternitatis" — under the aspect of eternity. Politically, Spinoza came close to democracy, glorifying the freedom of the individual and the life of reason. To him all nature — including human nature — was a manifestation of God — this was what he meant by the corporeality of God. [illegible] [illegible] Shaw's "life force." Though [illegible] of atheism in his day, he has since been called "the god intoxicated man," and Ernest Renan, speaking at the unveiling of Spinoza's statue in Amsterdam in 1882, said: "The truest vision ever had of God came perhaps here."

CHRISTOPHER [illegible]



BARUKH SPINOZA

THE STRANGE DEATH OF BARUKH SPINOZA

By

ELI A. ALMI

SCI-ART PUBLISHERS
Harvard Square
Cambridge 38, Mass.

AMONG E. A. ALMI'S WORKS ARE:

ETERNAL FRONTIERS

OUR UNFINISHED WORLD

MY CREDO

LEGENDY ZYDOWSKIE
O POWSTANIU

MENTSHN UN IDEEN

DI REYD FUN BUDDHA

MENTSH UN VELT

MOMENTN FUN A LEBN

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PRINTED IN U. S. A.

FOREWORD

By A. A. Roback

Mr. Almi, who, early in life, began as a journalist, has written numerous essays of a philosophical nature. His works on Eastern philosophy and culture show a keen understanding of the subject. One of the most productive writers in Yiddish, he is also one of its most versatile representatives, having won laurels as a publicist, feuilletonist, parodist, memoirist, literary critic, and poet. At least one of his books has been translated into Polish—a collection of folklore. Three of his books have appeared in English.

His startling theory in regard to Spinoza's death gains credence as we ponder the fact. Why others should not have been equally puzzled by the lacunae in the biographical accounts is in itself a puzzle. Probably Spinoza's tubercular constitution and low vitality brought on by malnutrition, and further undermined by a vocation which would tend to fill his lungs with dust, as well as his arduous labors, and, for all his complacent philosophy, an apprehension over his fate, despite the comparatively tolerant environment in Holland, might have diverted our attention while reading Spinoza's biography, thus preparing us for the acceptance of the usual accounts. The author, in examining the details anew, has rendered a service to biographical philosophy and whether we endorse his view or not, the irony of a great philosopher—one of the foremost in history, dying at home, with no one around to offer assistance or even being able to report what had happened—affords us enough food for furious thought. Since the names of Spinoza and Socrates have often been associated, the possible assassination of Spinoza adds another link to the bond.

Cambridge, Mass.
New Year's Day, 1952

THE STRANGE DEATH OF BARUKH SPINOZA

By Eli A. Almi

All the world knows that Spinoza died of tuberculosis. His biographers have all said so quite explicitly—that he died on the afternoon of Sunday, Feb. 21, 1677 of the lung malady from which he long had been suffering. To venture any doubts on this score—to suggest that he may not have died a natural death after all, but was assassinated, makes me, I am aware, court the tag of sensationalism, a hazard, I must assume nevertheless.

Many years ago, on rereading the biography of Spinoza, the peculiar circumstances of his sudden demise, at first perplexed me. When I, returned to the subject, years later, in connection with my study on the similarities between Buddhism and Spinoza's pantheism, I was led to re-examine the issue; and my questionings and suspicions strengthened into the certain conviction that Spinoza died a martyr's death—at the hands of an assassin, a fate too which, I think, he was not unapprehensive of.

The "facts" of his death, as presented by his biographers, are scant and easily reviewable. They tell us that on the aforementioned Sunday afternoon, Feb. 21, 1677 he died at the home of the painter Van der Spyck, where he, at the time, had his lodging.

On the day previous, on Saturday afternoon, we are told further, Spinoza descended from his two-room suite to smoke a pipe and chat pleasantly with members of the Van der Spyck family, on a variety of topics, notably the sermon which the Lutheran pastor had delivered that day.

The following morning, before the Van der Spycks left for church, Spinoza came down again, and there was more

conversation between the philosopher and the Van der Spycks. We are told that a physician arrived and prescribed chicken broth for Spinoza. The Van der Spycks did not depart for church until Spinoza had partaken of the broth with noticeable relish. They then went to church, leaving the philosopher alone with the physician.

When they returned, after church service, they found Spinoza dead. They were stunned, the biographers declare. The body was alone. There was no sign of the physician, not even as much as a note left behind.

Who was the physician?

Here our biographers differ. It is commonly assumed that he was Dr. Ludewyk Meier, but Freudenthal, who derives his information from the Dutch writer, V. Meyer, names another, a Dr. Schuler.

Why the dubiousness? Can we be certain it was either one? Such trivial details, as the chicken broth and the zest with which Spinoza ate—are established, but we cannot seem to ascertain who the physician was, in this instance, even though Spinoza numbered among his acquaintances but few medical men, including Dr. Jean Maximillien Lucas, one of his biographers.

When did the mysterious physician leave the Van der Spyck home, before, or after, Spinoza succumbed? This question could surely have been easily answered at the time, but we are left in the dark. If he left before, he must have been aware that his patient's condition had become aggravated. How could he leave his patient alone, under such circumstances, when the least he could do would be to call one of the neighbors or even summon the Van der Spycks from church.

Again, if the mysterious physician was present at his death, how came he to leave without notifying one of the neighbors or at least leave a note?

Found missing from the philosopher's writing table was a knife with a silver handle, and a book. Who took them?

The conjecture that the physician appropriated them as his fee seems hardly tenable. An object such as a knife, however, might have been attractive to one breaking in with sinister motives.

Spinoza was a consumptive. The trade which he followed —grinding lenses—certainly did his health no good. But his industry in that occupation and his writing in the last days do not jibe with the picture of a dying man. He does not conform to the typical picture of the consumptive weakened by his disease, taking to bed, whilst his strength ebbed out day by day until the final expiring gasp. On the contrary, as we have noted, on the day before and on Sunday, the day of his death, he conversed pleasantly and smoked his pipe.

Physicians tell me that sudden death, in tubercular cases, occurs only in the event of hemorrhage. But there is no hint of a hemorrhage in Spinoza's case. Van der Spyck, a very talkative person, and one even given to a little fanciful stretching of the facts on occasion, as some of his biographers attest, did not so much as suggest anything about a hemorrhage.

We are told that he felt weak, which was natural for a consumptive, and that a physician came.

Did the physician come of his own accord, or was he summoned? If Spinoza called the physician—he must have done so through another—there were no telephones in the 17th century. In that event, surely Van der Spyck must have known his identity and Dr. Lucas, as well as the other biographers who drew upon him for their facts, should have been able to learn his identity.

How is it that with such assiduous biographers, avidly seizing on every unimportant detail, we are left in utter ignorance as to the manner of his death? Did he suddenly grow weaker? Did he make an outcry? Did he fall to the ground? Of all these matters we have no hint, although it should have been easy to obtain the answers.

When we consider these peculiar facts, it seems to me we have no alternative but to conclude that Spinoza was murdered. Perhaps, it was committed by poison administered to him in his chicken broth. Perhaps the murderer was some unknown party who came after the Van der Spycks had left and Spinoza was alone with the physician, or after he had gone, or possibly there was some larger conspiracy of a group behind the act. I lay myself open, I know, justly here to two questions: (1.) What possible motive could any individual or group have for such a crime? (2.) How is it that none of Spinoza's friends or biographers ever raised the issue about his sudden death? Why did some three hundred years have to pass for the issue to be raised by the present writer?

The answer to the first query is readily apparent in every biography of Spinoza. The most casual reading of such a work will at once discredit any notion that "the lonely philosopher of Amsterdam" lived the life of a cloistered thinker, detached from all mundane problems. He took an active part in the community life—in the very thick of things. He executed some diplomatic missions, associated himself with some of the dissenting Christian sects, engaged in the ceaseless controversy of his day between the Church and State and his writing of the *Theologico-Political Tractatus* brought him a host of enemies.

His life was threatened on many sides. The fact is he lived in a perpetual state of fear, cautiously watching his step and taking care to live near his powerful friend, Jan de Witt, the Chief of State, who was his protector. The philosophical calm, which was of the essence of his philosophy, has served unwittingly to dissimulate the fiery passions which surrounded him and were ready to leap upon him. They become plainly evident from any careful study of his biography.

The answer to the second question is simpler still. The

reason that his death aroused no suspicions was because he was known to be a sufferer from tuberculosis. It was taken for granted naturally that this illness brought him to his grave.

Most people do not get suspicious in such matters. Dead men tell no tales, and we do not usually pry into the grave. I do not think it far-fetched, however, to surmise that some of Spinoza's friends entertained suspicions but found it expedient to remain silent. To do otherwise would be more than expose a crime. To do otherwise, for the Christian friends of Spinoza, would have been to destroy the legend they had so artfully constructed about "the intolerant Jewish community" which has expelled its great son, through the terrible ban of excommunication, and how he had found "a world of tolerance and love" in the embrace of those not of his own fold.

It may not be amiss here to note an indicative circumstance in connection with his burial. The body of Spinoza lay four days before it was given interment. Why? The answer commonly given, that Spinoza had left no money for burial is absurd in the light of the fact that he numbered so many rich and influential friends.

Was the reason perhaps that his friends were at a loss as to how to deal with the situation? Should they publicize the fact of his murder or hush up the affair? They finally decided on the latter course.

The liberal Christian world, keenly conscious of the intolerance in Christendom, the violence of the Inquisition in Catholic countries, felt it necessary above everything to maintain the legend that at least one island of Christian tolerance existed in Holland. They soothed their conscience too with the story that the Jews, themselves the principal victims of Christian intolerance, exhibited the same intolerance where they had jurisdiction.. Even the most philo-Semitic Christian liberals made it a point to emphasize again and again the fact of Jewish intolerance, pointing

first to the case of Uriel Acosta, and later, that of Spinoza.

These liberals, many of them disciples of Spinoza, did not comprehend the fact that the bans imposed by the Synagogue on Acosta and Spinoza, aside from the Jewish ground, had other and stronger motivation, namely, the fear of the Christian environment in which they dwelt.

Holland, it is true was a veritable paradise compared with other lands, as far as the Jew was concerned, but heresy and unbelief did not escape condemnation there either. A fierce battle was taking place in Holland among the various Christian minority sects, and between the dominant reformed Church and the State.

The Jews of Holland, recent fugitives from the Inquisition, could not forget the *autos da fé* and trembled at the Christian reaction to the Jewish heretics, who, after receiving the hospitality of Holland, turned about face and, by their heresy, undermined the Bible, basic to both Christianity and Judaism. That the Jewish community as a whole would be held responsible for the acts of individual Jews—that lesson had been engraved on their minds very deeply through their long history.

There was, to be sure, also the Jewish motive, the fear that the spread of unbelief would cause inner degeneration and sap the Jewish strength at a time when foes attacked it from without. This heresy denied the fundamentals of the *Torah* and the *Talmud*, and made a mockery of the sufferings and rationale of their whole existence. It meant in effect that the thousands of Jews who were dying in the flames of the *autos da fé* with the *Sh'ma Yisroel* on their lips were perishing in vain.

These two fears—of degeneration within and fear of the reaction of the Christian world without—motivated the behavior of the Amsterdam Jewish community in dealing with heretics; and of the two, the more impelling was the latter.

Spinoza became increasingly an embarrassment to the

Christian world—both among the sects among which he mingled and with the ruling Calvinist-Reform clergy. To have moved against him was, however, impossible. The liberal civil government at the head of which stood Jan de Witt entertained the most cordial feelings toward Spinoza. Further, the reformed church, while not shrinking from calling to sharp account the heretics from within its own ranks, was wary with regard to an outsider of the standing of Spinoza in the learned world. The smaller sects with which Spinoza consorted came to regard him inevitably also as a thorn in the flesh, but could not go out in open action against him because of the very principles of freedom which they avowed.

The only way for his enemies, individual or group, to deal with him was to liquidate him, as we would say today. It may be that some of Spinoza's friends suspected, or were more positively aware of his murder—as surely must have been the case of Dr. Lucas, as we shall see later—and concluded that the policy of expediency was to hush it up—in order to avoid a scandal. The deed had been done. It could not be undone.

It may well be that the story of the Jewish fanatic who rushed at Spinoza with a dagger—before his excommunication—was concocted and spread after Spinoza was already in the embrace of "religious tolerance," in order to cast suspicion on the Jews. The story had it that the would-be assailant attempted to run a dagger through Spinoza as he was coming out of a theatre, or, as another version has it, out of a synagogue. Most of the biographers dismissed the entire story as a myth.

As said previously, the danger threatening Spinoza was constant—enjoying an "armistice" only for so long as it was thought his ideas were in harmony with the "new environment. As soon as the challenging nature of his ideas became apparent, the emerging hostility in Holland and other countries served to alarm Spinoza. Conceivably,

Spinoza's concern may have transcended the personal. He may have realized what the Jewish community of Amsterdam had known all along: that his teachings constituted a menace for the Jews as a whole.

That his Jewishness was not forgotten and that the menace of his ideas to Christendom was perceived became evident more patently in an incident at Voorburg, a suburb of The Hague, where Spinoza had taken up residence in 1663. In 1665, the Reformed Church in this locality chose a new pastor, and a bitter fight was waged between the orthodox and the liberal elements. A petition favoring a liberal pastor, presented by Spinoza's landlord, was denounced by the orthodox side of the church as the work *"of a certain Spinoza, a Jew by birth, an atheist and scoffer at religion and an evil citizen of the republic, as many of the learned men and clergy can testify."*

The tempest in this little surburb but mirorred a nation-wide conflict, making it very plain that the tolerance of Holland was less than complete; and the Jews, refugees from the Inquisition of Catholic states, must heed their step. The more we study the situation then existing in Holland, the better we appreciate why the Jewish community of Amsterdam acted as it did in the Spinoza affair.

The virulence of the struggle between the church and state was to be seen in the way in which the Church utilized any and every occasion—a plague—a military defeat—to unseat the liberal chief of state, De Witt, and the Reformed Church exerted itself, not without some successes, in curbing freedom of thought. In 1662, the province of Friesland imposed several penalties on "the servants of the devil", as the Quakers, Mennonites, Unitarians, and other liberal sects were branded, and in 1664, the Amsterdam Magistracy prohibited the preaching and advocacy of Mennonite doctrines.

His biographers tell us that Spinoza was particularly alarmed over the incident at Voorburg, when he was

branded an infidel and evil citizen of the republic. His fears must have been accentuated, when the two brothers, John and Adrian Koerbagh, the former, a theologian, and the latter, a student of law and medicine, were arraigned on charges of heresy, criticism of the Bible, the Catechism and the dogma of the Trinity. John was unfrocked by the religious tribunal but, after expressing penitence, was reinstated. Subsequently, however, he offended again, and was sentenced to a year in prison, but after serving ten weeks, was released on further assurances of penitence.

His brother, Adrian, who wrote two books critical of church doctrine, fared much more harshly. In the latter's trial, the name of Spinoza was dragged in, although Adrian maintained that his views had not been influenced by Spinoza. The indictment charged him with "immoral teachings and practices", although no attempt was even made to introduce a scintilla of evidence on this score. One of the "holy tribunal" demanded that the defendant be penalized by having the thumb of his right hand amputated, tongue pierced, and his person confined to hard labor in prison for thirty years. The tribunal's verdict was less severe. He was sentenced to ten year's imprisonment, but died after serving one year.

In 1670, Spinoza changed his residence from Voorburg to The Hague. For about a year, he resided at the home of the widow Van Vellen, but in May 1671, he moved to the Van der Spycks. At the time, he had already completed his *Theologico-Political Tractatus,* and part of it had been published. Although the work was written with extreme caution, the "tolerance" exhibited in the case of the two Koerbagh brothers so alarmed him that he would not permit the *Theologico-Political Tractatus* to carry his name as the author, or even the name of the publisher. The name of the printer was also changed from Christoffel Koenrads, Amsterdam, to Henricus Kunrath, Hamburg.

But his precautions were of no avail. It was quickly realized who was the author and a storm of outcries against the "godless book" and the "atheistic Spinoza" arose from Holland and neighboring countries, and no amount of denying, on the part of Spinoza and his friends, of the charge of atheism, availed to stem the rising fury.

The clergy of all faiths called for the suppression of the book and of any further works by the same author. Synods and Councils sought to outdo one another in urging the suppression of the "blasphemous" work.

As long as Jan de Witt stood at the helm of civil affairs, these hostile forces were powerless to harm Spinoza. Spinoza himself, however, was so terrified by the mounting storm that he forbade the translation of the book, from the original Latin, into Dutch, which would have made it available to a large reading public.

In 1672, Spinoza lost his shield, his great and powerful friend, Jan de Witt. The French army under the command of Prince Condé had launched an unexpected invasion of Holland, and the enraged Dutch people, blaming de Witt for the defeat, seized him and murdered him together with his brother, Cornelius.

Prince Condé, desiring to make the acquaintance of the author of the *Theologico-Political Tractatus,* invited Spinoza to be his guest at Utrecht, where he had established his residence. Spinoza consulted with the Dutch authorities about accepting the invitation, aware of the possibilities of its misconstruction by the populace, and finally on their advice decided to accept, apparently with the intention of seeking to obtain some concessions for Holland from the victorious French invaders.

Arriving at Utrecht, however, Spinoza found that the Prince had left. His aides, nevertheless, accorded Spinoza every respect and urged him to wait several weeks for the Prince's return. When word came that he would not come back, Spinoza returned home.

Colerus, Spinoza's friend and biographer, relates on the basis of information given him by the Van der Spycks that fear was entertained that the mob might harm Spinoza, but the danger, in this case, subsided.

Spinoza himself told of the fury against him in a letter to Henry Oldenburg, Secretary of the British Royal Society, with whom he had become acquainted on the latter's visit to Holland. In this letter, Spinoza writes that he is being attacked on all sides, and that he has resolved to postpone the publication of the *Ethics,* adding "my cause grows daily worse."

Spinoza was speaking with philosophical restraint. Actually the opposition to him was assuming sinister proportions on all sides—in the circles of the Reform church as well among the sects with which he had some contacts, and the populace in general, that would not countenance his "atheism" and "blasphemy."

Lucas, writing of his death, speaks in a strangely mysterious fashion, as cited by Freudenthal in the second volume of his Spinoza biography (pages 300-301)

> It was a stroke of no small luck, for Spinoza to escape the storm before his death, which his enemies had prepared for him. They had caused him to be hated by the people because he had shown the means whereby to distinguish superstition from true piety and to repress superstition.

Just what did Lucas mean by the expression "escape the storm before his death"?

The next sentence is even more bafflingly significant.

Our philosopher should esteem himself happy, not only in the renown of his life but in the circumstances of his death. *He looked death straight in the eyes . . . as though he were prepared to sacrifice himself for his enemies, that their memories might not be besmirched with his murder.*

Ordinarily, Lucas writes very clearly. Why does he suddenly turn enigmatic?

His words have been interpreted to mean that it was the good fortune of Spinoza that he died a natural death and thereby spared his enemies the need of murdering him. In that way, he escaped "the storm over his death which his enemies had prepared."

As we ponder these unclear sentences in connection with the entire picture as we have seen it, we must arrive at a contrary interpretation, that not only was it planned to murder him, but that he was, in point of fact, murdered; and that Lucas—and not he alone—actually knew of the murder. Thus, the storm over his death was avoided. The matter was hushed up, "that their memories might not be besmirched with murder."

In "their", I think, we may include not only Spinoza's enemies but the whole "tolerance environment" whose reputation and honor was at stake and which Lucas also sought to shield as much as possible for reasons of "national honor" or the fear of other consequences, not too difficult to imagine. This explains the stammering sentences of Lucas, whose writing otherwise presents no perplexity.

How are we to explain Spinoza's consorting with the various sects in Holland?

Freudenthal concludes that Spinoza, disillusioned in Judaism to which he had been previously deeply attached, felt a spiritual void, which he sought to replace by a new grasp and affiliation. In his associations with the Mennonites and Collegiants, he sees the religious drive in Spinoza seeking to draw from the fount of religiously inspired Christians of the sects an intimate acquaintance with Christianity.

The unsoundness of this interpretation must be patent to any objective student of Spinoza's life and thought. Spinoza's severance from the Jewish community arose from his scathing and radical criticism of the religious postulates common to both Christianity and Judaism; and as for gain-

ing an insight into Christianity, the sources of that faith were obviously as open to him as those of Judaism.

Martineau, another biographer, is on firmer ground, when he holds that Spinoza was attracted by the fraternal companionship of these sects, their tolerance, and even more fundamentally their support of the free republic under De Witt. It was not a religious but a political and social affiliation. The religious sects in the aggregate were a mainstay of the free Dutch government against the onslaughts of the Reformed Church. In religious matters, Spinoza was at one with them, only in their points of negation, not in their positive beliefs.

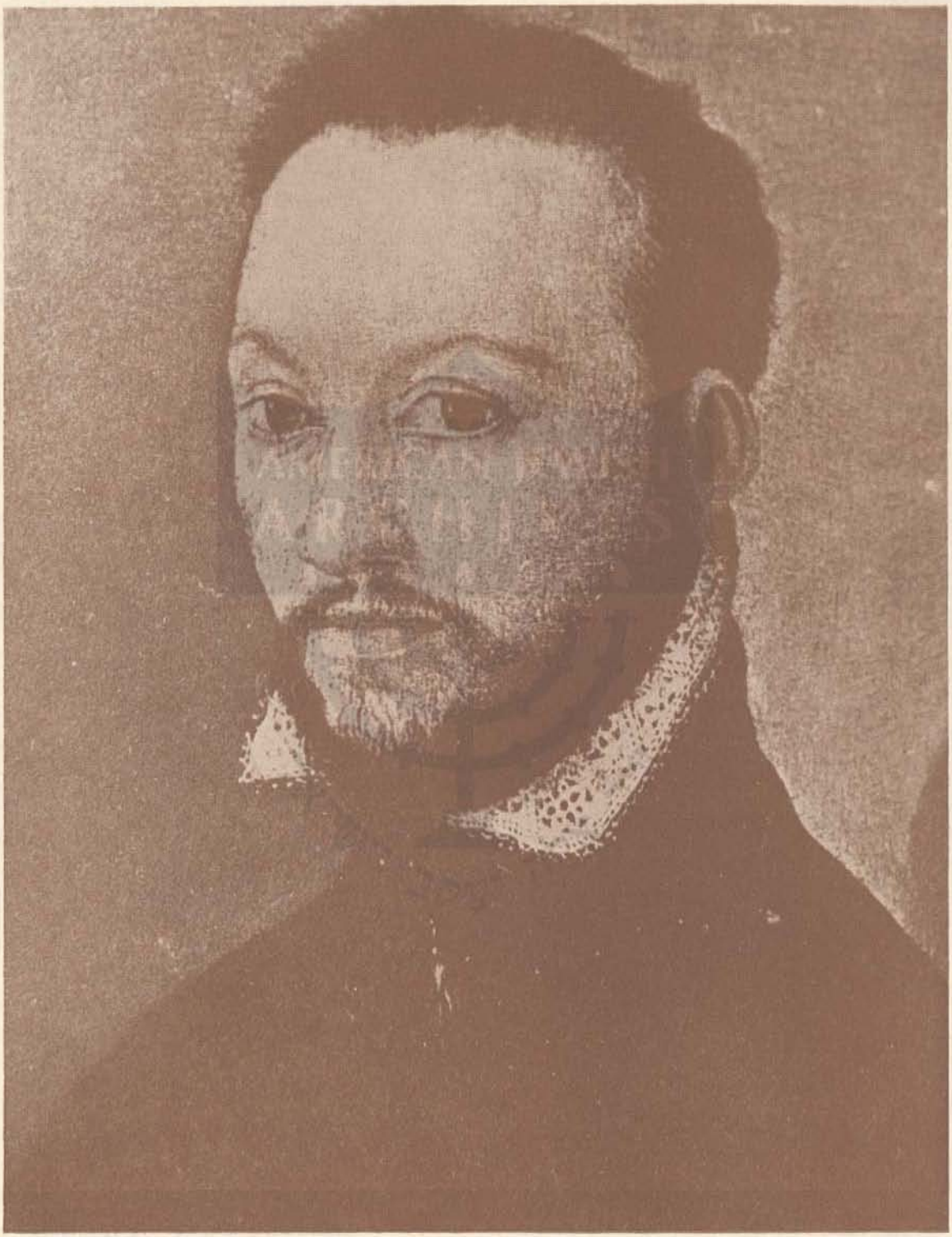
The sects received him as a believer, since he had evinced much sympathy for some of their objectives as mentioned. Inevitably, however, they were to be disillusioned. After the publication of his *Theologico-Political Tractatus,* the common ground under them was removed and a united front of hate on the part of the Reformed Church and the sects confronted him.

The Amsterdam Jewish philosopher thence became completely isolated, scorned by all, save the small circle of friends, which included perhaps the mysterious doctor who "forgot" to submit a report of the circumstances of his sudden death.

B — Baruch

BARUCH SPINOZA
(at the age of 28)

From ERNST ALTKIRCH's *Spinoza im Porträt*
(Jena 1913)



The Striving of Saul Morteira

By Emil Bernhard-Cohn

WHEN I arrived in Amsterdam at the end of 1936, fleeing from the Nazis, my depressed state of mind kept driving me out of doors, and so I wandered for hours at a time through the market-places and along the canals of the old Dutch capital. I was still overwhelmed by the terror of events I had lived through: my trial by the special court, the torture of the hours in prison, the menace of the concentration camp, and finally flight. Yet all this remained alive within me not as a nightmare; it was rather like some binding thought that would not let me free, confronting me again and again with the question how it was possible at all, after four centuries of widening liberties, for such a reign of violence to raise its head among men once more, and in so abominable a form as I had just experienced on my own self.

Thus it was not merely the lack of anything to do but a deep inner agitation that drove me along the Amsterdam canals during those days. I scarcely saw the people who passed by me, I frequently stood on some corner brooding for minutes at a time, then again would begin walking more and more rapidly, at the same debating with myself so audibly that people stopped to stare at me.

One day chance led me into an old bookshop, where a hunchbacked little man sold antiquities and folios in addition to his commonplace books and other odds and ends. While browsing around I picked up an old worn Hebrew book entitled *Sefer Oghur*, which I made out to have been printed in Venice by Marco Antonio Justinian in 1545. It was very badly preserved and marked with many marginal scribblings. I bought it for a moderate price and went home.

The author wishes to dedicate this story gratefully to Dr. Israel S. Wechsler, of New York.

Having more time than I needed, I sat down one evening to see whether I could decipher the scrawlings on the inside of the cover. It was an old cursive Hebrew script which differed considerably from that used nowadays. In addition, the strokes were so faded that scarcely could I make my way among them. Suddenly, I felt as though I had been struck a blow on the chest. For in the midst of that flood of writing I fell on two non-Hebrew words: *"Zeer ongelukkig!"* There they were, written plainly in Dutch: "Very unhappy!" With driving haste I searched to find somewhere the name of the owner who had written down these words, and the date as well. For the date must be just as decisive as the name of the man who had been so unhappy.

It was long past midnight before both were found, beneath the Venetian printer's sketch of the Temple in Jerusalem: *"Morenu Rabbi Saul ben Rabbi Pinhas Halevi."* And opposite on the yellowed inside cover: *"Rosh Hodesh Av 5416—Zeer ongelukkig!"*

Deeply moved, I sat for a space in nerveless silence. Then I began to calculate the corresponding date in the Common Era. In my excitement I made a number of errors, but finally I settled on it: the first day of *Av* in the Hebrew year 5416 was a July day in 1656. But why had the rabbi been so very unhappy? What was the significance of the date?

So tired I was scarcely able to think any longer, and with my eyes hurting, I put out the lamp on my table and sat in the dark. As one does in the dark, I began musing. Rabbi Saul Halevi—who on earth could he have been? Scenes came and went, forms pressed forward and fell back. And all at once I saw the unhappy man before me, in the flesh, immortalized by Master Rembrandt in his "Portrait of a Rabbi": thick-set and strongly built, solemn-eyed and broad-bearded, with a wide-brimmed hat on his powerful head and the heavy chain of his station around his neck—Rabbi Saul Morteira of Amsterdam!

THE talmudic student Baruch Spinoza had caused his teachers a great deal of perplexity and disquiet before the three rabbis—Saul Morteira, Isaac Aboab and Daniel Fonseca, the tribunal of the Amsterdam community—made up their minds to decree his

final excommunication from the Synagogue. In speaking with him they had been amicable, especially Morteira who bore the young man a great love and was well aware of the divine spark within him. They had gone further: they declared themselves ready to waive his attendance at the talmudic school if only he would remain at one with the Synagogue and its teachings. And they had even obtained an excellent scholarship for him from the Amsterdam community, which would have given the impoverished and orphaned youth a life of study free from care.

They had cautioned him three times, at intervals of a month each. At last, since nothing proved of any avail, they had excluded him from the talmudic academy, which meant much the same as forbidding the students to have any intercourse with him. And, indeed, which of the boys or young men would have dared to? For months now they had been slipping past their pale, narrow-chested fellow-student, who kept insisting that God and Nature were two names for one and the same thing, that everything else was mere superstition. They knew very well what it meant for Baruch to be called into their teachers' room again and again.

Only a few of the meaner spirits among them, the petty and the envious, hung about the guileless youth, egging him on to speak his mind and then reporting everything to the teachers. The gentle Morteira was displeased; but Aboab, the fanatic, even praised them for it and urged them to go on listening to that extraordinary young man whose eyes glowed with the passion of his thought. Daniel Fonseca, the third rabbi, taciturn by nature, looked on at everything in silence. But when it came to the final decision he went over to Aboab's side, and Rabbi Saul Morteira was outvoted.

So it came about that on July 26, 1656, in the Johan Daniel Myer Plein Synagogue in Amsterdam, to the sound of the ram's horn, the ban was proclaimed which excluded Baruch Spinoza from the Synagogue and from the Jewish community for all time.

On that day, to be sure, young Spinoza was not yet a world-famous philosopher, but he was simply a highly gifted student. But since then, for three centuries, no one has influenced, transformed, and revolutionized the thought of the world as did he. Yet in speaking of Baruch Spinoza today who remembers the three rabbis of

Amsterdam who excommunicated him? They have fallen into oblivion. It is related only that after this dismal act Rabbi Saul Morteira returned home completely shattered, shut himself up in his room, nor let himself be seen in public for a week.

Now after close to three hundred years I was sitting in the midnight darkness of a room in the same city of Amsterdam with Rabbi Saul Morteira's book on my knees. The chaos of my intellectual world, in ruins for months, began to take on shape under the profound emotion which overcame me. Manifestly I had just come upon a gap in the barrier of history, and through this gap was seeing a vision accorded hitherto to no one.

PUTTING the parchment roll with the Hebrew text of the excommunication in his pocket, Rabbi Saul Morteira had gone home to await his beloved pupil, Baruch Spinoza, whom he had summoned for one last talk. It was going to be a good talk, he was resolved on that, although he was painfully conscious that after what had happened there was little hope of bringing back the wanderer to the right path. But God was great, and with His help, and with benevolent sternness and fatherly kindness, perhaps at the last moment the calamity might yet be averted.

So Rabbi Saul sat in the narrow study of his house and waited. In his ears still sounded the harsh voice of the fanatical Aboab, for whom he harbored contempt because he had no understanding of what was at stake. If young Spinoza had only agreed to show himself three times a day in the synagogue for prayers, it would have been enough. "Let him write what he wants, it's all nonsense anyhow," Aboab had said.

Morteira, who possessed great learning and was a philosopher himself, had read every line Baruch brought in to him with an attentiveness mingled with terror and admiration which often made him, the teacher, turn pale with excitement while reading. What a youth! What a mind! What cogent reasoning!

Now he sat staring into the waning hearth-fire and waited. At last there was a knock at the door, and at the Rabbi's "Come in!" Baruch Spinoza appeared on the threshold of the room.

His entrance affected the Rabbi almost like a physical pain.

Not only because young Spinoza was his most beloved student. For Morteira perceived the uselessness of this conversation at once, as he gazed into the firm serene eyes of the young man. It is true Spinoza looked pale; but then he always did, since he bore within him the germ of his prematurely dead mother's affliction. No, it was not a pallor due to any agitation. Should he not have cast down those quiet eyes of his, or at any rate looked off to one side? But there in complete self-possession stood the young man, barely twenty-four years old, with his flat chest and somewhat overhanging nose—certainly not handsome nor even particularly impressive except for the astonishing serenity and unconcern of those brown eyes. Didn't Baruch know what was happening, what threat hung over him? For that matter, it had already ceased being a mere threat and was now an accomplished fact.

"Sit down, my son," said Rabbi Saul, himself gazing down at the floor, only to look up again directly, constrained to recognize his own embarrassment.

The young talmudic scholar sat down opposite his teacher. There was a brief silence.

"I did not have you come to me again because I think myself capable any longer of shaking you in your convictions. I mean, this is not for your sake but for mine; frankly, I am very disturbed and feel a need to justify myself. It is true, I think, that I have done everything a teacher can do for his pupil under such circumstances; nevertheless, I do not wish to have omitted anything. I want my conscience to be clear in this matter before the Lord's eternal Judgement Seat. As you know, my son, we made you certain proposals. . . ."

"I do not wish to offend you, Rabbi," the young man interrupted, lowering his gaze for the first time. "Do you mean the stipend?"

"Let us not speak of the stipend, my son; it was not my doing. Moreover, you may rest assured I have complete faith in the purity and integrity of your thought and your scholarship, which you have repeatedly referred to."

"I think rightly."

"To the point," said Rabbi Saul, tersely and quietly. "The

main thing still is that in you for the first time since the days of the Nazarene a man has arisen in our people who teaches the word of God, it is true, but different from the way of our fathers. If you were only to say Nature, without insisting that God and Nature are one and the same thing, it would be a different matter, though even then not altogether settled."

The Rabbi was silent, as though expecting some response. But none came. He continued: "Go on writing, Baruch! Write whatever you please, only leave God out of it! That is how you confuse people. Because you don't really believe in Him."

A sudden flush passed over the face of the young philosopher. "You have acknowledged the integrity of my thought, Rabbi. Isn't that contradicted by what you've just said to me? I would consider it arrogance to tell anyone something like that."

Morteira opened his eyes wide, but controlled himself.

"My son," he said, "I am sorry, but since you refer to it again I may presume that you can confess as freely as you think. May I put an open question to you?"

"Certainly."

"Do you still pray every morning, midday, and evening, according to our law?"

For a moment the young man hesitated, then replied, "No."

"I knew you were no longer capable of addressing God. But that is the decisive point. For three thousand years we have spoken to Him three times a day—and in this the other nations have followed us. That is precisely what He is: the One Spoken To! My son, if you take a child and name him Baruch, he will turn into the man Baruch, and no philosophy will ever be able to turn him into anything else. He will remain the Baruch of his father's house and of his childhood memories, the Baruch of the children's school and the talmudic school. So God remains God alone because for three thousand years that is how He has been spoken to and called upon. Do not speak of God, my son, do not do it because it is against your own integrity and uprightness. Speak of Nature, if you mean Nature; but to mean Nature and say God is against all honesty and confuses people's minds."

The young man was visibly aroused. His eyes glowed with a

violent desire for refutation, then while he spoke their light passed into a fire of selfless enthusiasm.

"But that's not true, Rabbi," he cried. "I do believe in Him and love Him! I have put myself to the test and cannot be in error. Only my love is different from yours. He is my greatest happiness and the goal of all my actions. You believe in His promises; I do not. I love Him with no hope of any reward and with no fear of any punishment. So my love is free of self-interest. I pronounce the 'Hear, O Israel!' not only twice a day, but over and over again without cease, and with a boundless devotion which makes me one with Him: 'The Lord is One!' It is just this being one with Him and His eternal Nature that is my faith. You must understand! I understand your faith, but truly, Rabbi, I say to you—"

"Stop! stop!" Rabbi Saul broke in with a cry. "I cannot follow you. Also I must call your attention to this—I still see you as my pupil—you say 'I' a little too often to me. You seem to resemble the Nazarene in that also. 'You have been told—but truly *I* say unto you!' and, 'I and the Father, the Father and I!' We know all that. But we Jews are more accustomed to saying 'You' than 'I'." That may be the reason we could never follow the Nazarene any more than we can follow you now, my son. And more than that: we not only address Him, the Almighty and All-Knowing God; we also feel ourselves spoken to by Him. Think of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, and all the Prophets, think of each one of us, how we feel the finger of God directed at us on the sacred Day of Atonement, touching our breast, making a shudder run through us: 'Thee do I mean, O Son of Israel!' And still more: it was given to us, to us alone among all the peoples, to see His finger uplifted in admonition, as a father admonishes his child: 'Thou shalt—and thou shalt not . . . !' The Ten Commandments, Baruch! How do you expect to begin with this 'I' of yours, this ego, and your love, as you picture it, and arrive at an ethical code—without the world's sinking back into barbarism and the blackness of night?"

"Only through reason, Rabbi," quietly said the young man. "Virtue means ordering one's behavior according to the laws of reason. Behavior according to the nature of one's own ego is virtuous behavior."

"Once more, the ego!"

The young man took a deep breath, then shrugged his shoulders. "Your thought is different from mine. You cannot understand me." It was as though he now wished to break off the conversation.

"One more moment!" cried Morteira. "We must settle this"—his voice rose—"mercilessly, once and for all! The day before yesterday you sent me a few pages in which you expressed your conviction that within the Nature you call God everything was accomplished in accordance with eternal laws and regulations—that is, everything, every event and every action had its cause, and this cause had its cause, and so on to the ultimate cause, which you dare to call Nature and God. Are you aware that in this you are denying the freedom of the human will?"

"I am sorry to have to express it so nakedly. Certainly, I deny it."

Rabbi Saul Morteira rose to his feet and stood there in all his great breadth—he was not very tall, but his mighty chest heaved in his agitation, and in this impassioned agitation he began to speak: "And kindness? Humanity? And pity? Love of your fellow? Justice? Show me where they are, young Baruch, and what will happen to them? And education? How shall we educate our children? And law? How shall the law be laid down when robbers, thieves, and murderers come before us? And society, how is it to be set up? Here are the strong, there the weak; here the oppressor, there the oppressed! And all these scoundrels, rascals, thieves, murderers, robbers behaving—what was that you said?—according to the eternal laws of their nature. Young man, Baruch Spinoza, how do you picture the future of the human race without freedom of the human will?"

Unperturbed, almost coldly, the young man looked at his teacher, who was quite beside himself. "I have always endeavored to order my way of life," he said, "according to the laws of reason and of my own nature. Have you had anything to find fault with?"

"Oh, no! No, no, no! Far from it! Quite the contrary—that's just what upsets me. You've always been gentle, kind and virtuous, a genuine example to all the students."

"Ergo?"

"Oh, no, you can't escape so easily when what I am asking you about is the future of the human race." He had quieted down and sat a moment in silence. He resumed: "Now I am looking beyond you and speaking generally. Listen to me. Everything we have in the way of lovingkindness is only a heritage. Now it is *I* speaking of causes and not you. It is because thousands of years have gone down the royal road of our forbears that it is given to us to be virtuous, and given to you to call attention to your own virtuousness. Forgive me! It is our fathers' way of life, which was good in the eyes of the Lord, which has been able to lull our inborn evil impulses to sleep. Yours also, my son, who are now—though you don't seem to be aware of it—engaged in sating yourself with crumbs left over from your ancestors' board. My son, I should be ashamed to skim the cream off the milk and pour out the rest before swine, as you are doing. Once again, forgive me! But do not evade me. What is your conception of the future?"

And once again Baruch became heated, the fire of conviction rising in his eyes. "The law of our divine reason is a good law. Believe me, Rabbi, a magnificent age is coming. People will use their reason, as I have used it, and will study as I have studied. They will make discoveries we have no notion of today, and inventions we don't allow ourselves to dream of, and at the same time everyone will only have to obey—I repeat the word—obey the law of his own nature in order to find the right path. Aren't we still living now in a world of despotism and slavery? Why should our reason be incapable of transforming this world into a society of freedom and democracy?"

"Gently, gently, one thing at a time! Let us continue speaking of progress, and these discoveries and inventions. You think people will learn to fly, do you?"

This sounded like mockery. The young thinker caught it up, and parried its scornfulness by taking it in earnest: "Why should they not learn to fly since they have invented printing and gunpowder also?"

"Yes, to be sure, in order to put it into cannon and murder people!"

"People have been murdered even without cannon."

"And perhaps they'll also make these cannons fly and shoot down on people from above!"

This was more than mockery, and now Spinoza rose to his feet. "Rabbi, let us put an end to this. It will help us no further."

Rabbi Morteira rose too and seized Spinoza firmly by the arm—this student who dared break off a conversation with his teacher.

"Yes," he spoke low, with suppressed rage, "I want to put an end to it, but I shall not let you go without telling you something of the future which you won't forget." Then his voice rising, but speaking more slowly, with tense earnestness: "I know the divine spark that the Holy One, Blessed be He, has placed within each of us, and of which He has given you—I know it—more than to many others. But I also know His Commandment and know that it is not within us but above us. If you are right and not I, young man, then a time will come when they will appeal to this reason about which we have disputed so much in these painful weeks. Men, whole generations of men will come, who will all behave by the laws of their nature, as you put it, and each one according to the laws of his own nature, of course—the thief according to his thievishness and the killer according to his nature of killer. And they will call this thieving, murderous self-seeking nature of theirs sacred, perhaps just because you will have taught them to." He gave an involuntary shudder. "I still have no wish to believe that, but I fear it!" He grew more agitated. "And in this sacred selfishness of their nature, their leaders will despoil countries and enslave peoples. And of course, of course they'll fly!"

Now the Rabbi, breaking into a fury, shook his student so that he jerked back and forth on his arm. "And why not? Has it not already been written for us to read in our ancient *Book of Zohar,* which is a thousand years old, that if it were possible to span the earth with a wire then it would necessarily be possible for men to communicate with each other from one end of the world to the other? Take that wire and span the earth, Baruch! Learn to fly, young Spinoza! And do not forget the cannon either, you profligate, you who dare appeal to God when you mean nothing but your own nature and your reason, yours, yours, yours! Keep saying 'I' and go on living your virtuous life, which I won't question in you, how-

ever much it may be only the shadow of your fathers which has fallen over you. Go! Go! Go! I want to see no more of you! Go and leave me alone!"

Thus Rabbi Saul Morteira cried out in his anguish, and Baruch Spinoza was already outside the door when he heard a voice echoing behind him: "But every day and every hour repeat to yourself that you made your old teacher, who loved you unhappy unto death!"

Baruch could still hear that, but not the whispered prayer which the heavy man, sunk deep in his chair, sent up to heaven from trembling lips: "Help, O Eternal God, help Thy world, for" - and how he quoted from the Book of Kings - "they will forsake Thy covenant, throw down Thine altars, and slay Thy prophets with the sword; and none shall be left."

Menorah J. Winter 1947