

I

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

קבלת עול מלכות שמים

*I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage.*

EXOD. XX, 2.

Life as lived should be the flower of knowledge; but in order that life may blossom out of knowledge, knowledge alone is not enough. The knowledge with which you have enriched your mind must be applied to *yourself*; you must recognize what you know as appertaining to you; you must transfer it from the mind to the heart, which decides your course of action; it must penetrate you through and through, it must become part of yourself. Then only will it become the basis of your activity. It will become your life. I

So also with the highest of all concepts—God. Your idea of God may be something more than the mere result of a chain of reasoning pursued in total abstraction from the outside world. You may have beheld God directly in Nature or perceived Him in history. Holy Writ may have spoken to you as it did to generations before you in its God-revealing narratives. But you may have grasped all this only with your mind and stored it in your memory. This is not enough. So long as you do not receive God into your heart as *your* God, and embrace Him with your whole being as your God, so long as this concept is a mere denizen of your brain, so long will this sovereign idea be without influence on your actual life. 2

You may, again, recognize the world as the temple of God's omnipotence, without, however, feeling that every spot on which *you* tread in this temple is hallowed to God. You may recognize in the multitude of created beings a great concourse of the servants of God, without, however, regarding and feeling *yourself* as also a creature and a servant of God. You may have recognized the lofty vocation of Israel as God's instrument in history for the education of the human race, without feeling *yourself* to be in every fibre a son or daughter of Israel. So long as this is so, your knowledge is barren. The flower of actual life does not spring from it.

It is for this reason that Israel's life-history opens with the words: 'I, the Lord, Who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, I the Lord am *thy* God.' 3

'I'—a personality standing independently, outside of and above the universe. 'I am the Lord'—Who in My love called the universe into being and with My love sustains the host of living creatures. I with My love destined the human race above all others for a full and free unfolding of its powers, and guide its generations in a steady progress, linking past, present and future. For this loving education of the human race I 'brought thee out of the land of Egypt,' intervened in the process of world history, and revealed Myself to you above all others as omnipotent Creator, Governor, Sustainer and Ruler of Nature, and as Creator, Governor, Judge and Educator of men and nations; wherefore you must not give the lie to your people's history, even if all the world should deny Me. 'And Who brought thee out of the house of bondage'—became your Creator a second time, so that while every man, as My creature, is called upon to be My servant, you have a double duty to devote yourself with all your power as an instrument of My service.

- 4 'I the Lord am *thy* God'—I am your Creator, your Lawgiver, your Judge; the Director of your thoughts, your feelings, your words and your actions. Every one of your internal and external possessions has come to you from My hand; every breath of your life has been apportioned to you by Me. Look upon yourself and all that is yours as My property, and devote yourself wholly to Me, with every fraction of your property, every moment of your time; with mind, feeling, bodily strength and means, with word and action. Be the instrument, the agent of My will with all that has accrued or will accrue to you; and so join freely the choir of creation as My creature, My servant, as a man and an Israelite.¹
- 5 Here is the threshold of Jewish life, the condition and basis of all that follows. Come then, young man and young woman of Israel. If all that I have hitherto written² has not been written in vain, if the spirit of the Torah has spoken to the ear of your own spirit, and you have learnt to behold God in the world, in humanity and in Israel, if you have learnt the true worth of humanity and of Israel and your heart swells at the thought that you yourselves bear the name of human being and Israelite, then advance here to the threshold of Israel's life-temple, and dedicate yourselves to live as men and Israelites. Come forward and accept God, give yourselves to your God, and dedicate yourselves to Him as His servants, with all that is yours, at every moment and with every breath of your lives, servants of His will—men and Israelites.

¹ The German original has the expression *Mensch-Jissroel*. On this term see Additional Note A., Vol. I, p. 271.—*Ed. Note*.

² The Torah up to the Revelation on Sinai, to the development of which the first part of *Moriah* is principally devoted, and of which Letters 3–9 of the *Nineteen Letters on Judaism* contain a sketch. (See Additional Note B., Vol. I, p. 272.)