

Sadducees: We Have Them Yet

By Louis Wallis

THE PHARISEES: The Sociological Background of Their Faith.

By Louis Finkelstein, Professor in the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. 2 vols., Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1938.

The enormous influence of a monopolistic landed class upon Jewish life in the period of the New Testament, and the growth of religious parties around this controlling economic fact, will surprise those who have thought of Judaism and Christianity in terms of mere ideologies, without reference to actual, objective conditions of life prevailing at that far distant epoch of history.

The great Jewish landholders were a Tammany-group, maintaining a firm grip on the priestly offices and revenues in the Temple at Jerusalem. Without vital interest in religion or the Holy Writings of the Hebrew prophets, they mortgaged the nation. Their origin was traced back to "Zadok," the priest appointed by King Solomon; and hence the name of their party, the "Zadokites" or "Sadducees." They denied the resurrection of the dead, and were in favor of compromising Jewish religion with foreign cultural influences.

But on the other hand, in opposition to these economic and priestly exploiters of the nation, were the "Pharisees" representing the middle class composed of merchants and artisans. They were the liberal and progressive element in Jewish society; confessing belief in the resurrection, and emphasizing the Hebrew prophets of olden times who denounced land monopoly and condemned all entanglement of Israel with foreign cults and gods.

Struggling for generations against the Sadducees, the Pharisees were eventually victorious in impressing their standpoint upon the nation. It was the influence of the Pharisees, working against the priestly aristocracy of the Temple, which resulted in that most democratic feature of

Judaism—the Synagogs in the towns outside the capital. Here, in these community centers, the Jew found that he could worship without any Sadducean, priestly intermeditation; and here, in these local gatherings, a more popular, democratic religion grew up which, instead of offering slain animals, offered prayer,—all of which constituted an important step in culture. And not only did the Pharisees establish the Synagog; but, through the work of their scribes, they collected, edited, and made numberless new copies of the ancient prophetic and historic writings; thus producing what was virtually a new thing, the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, as a widespread popular instrument of moral and spiritual education.

Judaism in its fully characteristic phase, then, resulted from the devotion of the Pharisees to prophetic monotheism at a very difficult period of the world's history; and in establishing the Synagog, the Pharisees laid the foundation of the Christian Church. That the Pharisaic party also developed influences which clouded the idealism of their movement is true. But here again, we find a glaring example of that non-sympathetic criticism by outsiders which condemns a whole party or an entire nation because of its shortcomings and partial failures.

The term "Pharisee," when used in Christian nations, has meant "hypocrite," "religious formalist," etc. The injustice of this usage was first clearly demonstrated by a Christian scholar within the English Established Church, Dr. Travers Herford, whose books, "Pharisaism" (1912) and "The Pharisees" (1924), have done much to enlighten the educated world. Dr. Herford, however, lacked the sociological equipment needed for making the subject stand out as a living reality.

But this deficiency is made up in masterly fashion by the work before us. Professor Finkelstein shows us Jerusalem, with its aristocratic and fashionable quarter located on the western hill, where stood the

mansions of the Sadducean ground landlords who enslaved both city and country. Then we are shown the lower parts of Jerusalem, swarming with multitudes of shop-keepers, artisans and day-laborers, crowded together in slums where the value of mere space had become so high that whole families lived in rooms twelve feet long and eight feet wide. The dramatic rise in land values during the thousand years from the time of David is pointed out by comparing the early passage in the book of Samuel where fifty shekels of silver are paid for a site which the author of Chronicles a millenium later thought was worth six hundred talents of gold.

Setting out from this practical point of view in the daily life of the people, Professor Finkelstein shows the development and interaction of Sadducees and Pharisees and their significance in the complicated growth of Judaism. His book should be in every divinity and public library, and in the hands of all scholars who would speak with authority on a much misunderstood theme.