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“Chanukah and Christmas,” 1902 December 28.

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(Please return copy to Rabbi Moses J. Gries, 45 Oakdale St., City)

CHANUKAH AND CHRISTMAS

Christians and Jews are celebrating Feasts of Light. Jews cannot live unconscious of the great world life of which we are a part. We cannot be blind and deaf to the happy joyous life of the holiday season. Man "wants to be happy." It is the holiday longing. 'Tis a natural human desire of the ^{human soul} spirit. We Jews may join heartily in the greetings of the season, wishing our non-Jewish friends a merry Christmas and a happy New Year; and Jewish employers, rightly enough, may remember with gifts and greetings the non-Jews who with them have toiled and struggled through the year.

Jews will not celebrate the Christian Christmas as a substitute for the Jewish Chanukah. Both are Feasts of Light. Both emphasize some great fundamental principles of life, but in historical association and traditional observance they are unlike.

Mankind has always celebrated its nature festivals, and the changing seasons have appointed their time. All peoples rejoiced in the rebirth of the world, and spring festivals are in the calendar of all religions. The harvest festival seems universal. Thus the winter solstice seems to have been the time appointed for a festival antedating both Chanukah and Christmas. It is a part of the sun-worship, older than history. Christmas in origin is the heathen festival of the winter solstice, and perhaps ~~our time~~ of Chanukah has a like relation-

ship. The nature festivals came first, and the historical associations were given later.

It is nothing new to declare that Christmas is not the historical birthday of Jesus. Not until the end of the fourth century was December 25th generally accepted as the day. Legendary are the stories of the birth of Jesus. Kindred legends arose about the founders of great nations and great religions. Jews cannot accept that interpretation of the words of Isaiah, which on Christmas Day are read in the church, as the ~~prop~~hecy foretelling the miraculous birth of Jesus seven hundred years after the time of Isaiah. "Immanuel" signifies not "man joined with God," prophesies not the Christ that is to be, but points directly to the Prince of Judah who is to arise in Israel.

The origin of Christmas is manifest in the customs of the festival. ~~I~~^f Christmas trees with glowing lights illumine the homes of the rich and the poor and the evergreen wreaths hang in the windows of shops and houses, we are but perpetuating the heathen customs for the adornment of their idols and their homes. The use of the tree is known among many heathen nations. In China before the common era, the tree was ornamented with lamps and with flowers. Some one has called it the "celestial sun-tree." We find the green tree among the pagan Germans, prophetic of the dawn of the returning life of nature. During the Saturnalia in Rome, temples and houses were

bedecked. Thus the world perpetuates customs whose origin it repudiates. Not so many centuries since, the Puritans celebrated no Christmas, but sought rather to abolish it, with its customs suggestive of superstition and inclining to disorder. It has been the genius of Christianity to adopt heathen festivals and adapt them to its own uses.

The Christmas festivities are unnatural in Jewish homes. None but must welcome the glad tidings, "Peace on earth, good-will to men." But thoughtful Jews cannot but remember that the night of the nativity too often was a night of terror to the unfortunate Jews. In some nations calling themselves Christian, whose rulers are Christian, peace and love have not yet given way to hate and oppression.

Jews as well as Christians may gladly sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will to men." Both may sincerely accept the supreme lesson of this season--true human brotherhood. We Jews need to remember and to remind the world that Christianity, born of old mother Judaism, here reveals its Jewish origin. False is that interpretation of Christianity which declares that Christianity had and has power by breaking away from and forgetting its Jewish origin and teachings. Christianity is surrendering its once distinctive dogmas and pushing into the background its once dominant theology. Mankind is refusing to believe the miraculous birth of Jesus and the oneness of Jesus with God. The power of Christianity today is its moral power, the ethical interpretation

of life, the ethical emphasis. Here Christianity is Jewish in spirit, in principle and in origin.

Judaism did not and does not possess the genius of Christianity for compromise and adaptation. The Chanukah Feast commemorates not alone the Maccabean victory--it typifies the Maccabean and the Jewish spirit. The Maccabees would not surrender to nor compromise with Syrian idolatry. Through all the centuries and today, Judaism will not surrender nor compromise.

AMERICAN JEWISH

Christmas and Chanukah are Feasts of Light--heralds of peace. The spirit and the message are Jewish and Christian. The dream of peace, which has stirred the hearts of the greatest souls of all generations, was proclaimed by the seers and singers and preachers of Israel. Israel's mission was and is peace. The Maccabees were valiant soldiers. They fought not for conquest. They were soldiers of God. They fought for temple and their homes. They gave their lives to establish freedom and peace. Israel has been a light-bearer, to lead and bring light unto the nations.