Today, we live in a society that tolerates difference, advocates pluralism, refrains from judging others, promotes personal achievement, admires individualism and questions authority. All are positive aspects of our lives and of the freedom we cherish. We would likely be hard pressed to choose to give up even one of these attributes.

But can there be too much of a good thing? Sometimes, yes—and a new book one of these attributes.

What is Reform Judaism? What is Reform Judaism? What do Reform Jews believe? How do Reform Jews act?

Limitless flexibility, coupled with an individual's freedom to choose what and how much to observe, can hinder the development of a coherent set of principles and beliefs to guide an adherent of the movement. As Rabbi Kaplan notes: "The very mention of the words 'requirement' and 'obligatory' sends many Reform Jews screaming to the hills."

No religious requirements or obligations often serve as a kind of default definition of Reform Judaism. Rabbi Kaplan's own Jewish background is a decidedly mixed bag, running a gamut from Reform to Orthodox and back to Reform.

His parents, who affiliated with Reform temples, sent him and his sister to a day school in Manhattan. He is a graduate of the Orthodox Yeshiva University, with rabbinic ordination from the Reform Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem and a PhD in history from Tel Aviv University.

Rabbi Kaplan, 53, has been rabbi of United Congregation of Israelites in Kingston, Jamaica, since 2011. He has written extensively on American Judaism and Reform Judaism.

Taking it as an unshakable guiding principle, Rabbi Kaplan assumes that in order to know where one is headed one needs to know where one has been. So with each theme or issue he addresses, he describes the background and development of the Reform movement. The result for a reader is a valuable understanding of the beginnings of the movement in Germany some 200 years ago, how and why it changed, its transition to America and its evolution to our own day.

The "most radical decision [of the early Reformers] was to reject the binding nature of Jewish law...none of the beliefs or practices would be obligatory," writes Rabbi Kaplan. It is a decision that has remained at the heart of the Reform movement, even as the approach to ritual and observance has changed. The development of the American Reform movement began around the mid-19th century, with German-Jewish immigration to this country. Institutions were developed, religious positions set out, differences were aired.

With regularity, the pendulum swung to the left, to the right, back toward the center as the movement defined and re-defined itself.

It also became involved in political and social issues, positions that were accelerated during two world wars. After World War II, the Reform movement grew rapidly. In 1940 there were 265 Reform congregations; in 1955, there were 520. Social justice came to be a defining element during the 1950s and '60s and beyond, as expansion of the movement continued—791 congregations, encompassing some 1.3 million members, in 1978.

But numbers did not tell the full story. The movement itself was foundering, and prominent leaders such as Rabbi Alexander Schindler and Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk introduced changes that further broke with tradition, including paternal descent and the rabbinic ordination of women.

So the movement has continued its reforming beginnings, continually seeking to find a balance between theology and practice, spirituality and belief, ethics and action, all within the framework of Judaism, a system that, according to Reform, is itself changing. It's a tall order.

In The New Reform Judaism, Rabbi Kaplan looks to the challenges of the Reform movement today squarely in the eye, and presents his analysis and his suggestions. They will likely not be acceptable to many Reform Jews, but what he offers is a bold, exciting way forward that is not only possible at the same time, presents its own challenges to the movement.

His conclusions may inspire a renewed dedication to the movement: "While finding room for these many perspectives, Reform Judaism should focus on what the nineteenth-century reformers called ethical behavior...the idea that there is one and only one God, and that God demands ethical behavior..."}

"Can we make our faith..." Please turn to page 7.
A prescient 1914 vision of Islamic London

By DANIEL PIPES

EXACTLY ONE CENTURY AGO, the renowned British writer G. K. CHESTERTON (1874-1936) — called by his admirers the greatest writer and thinker of the 20th Century — published a curious novel titled The Flying Inn.

On the cusp of World War I, he imagined the Ottoman Empire conquering Great Britain and imposing Shari’a law.

Chesterton rides this implausible scenario as a vehicle to ridicule progressivism — that same arrogant, “scientific,” top-down, and leftist approach to government that characterizes the Age of Obama.

While Conservatives did not escape his criticism, in The Flying Inn it was progressives whose failings Chesterton mandatorily exposed ("The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes," he later wrote).

Along the way, Chesterton’s vision of an Islamic capitulated island has arresting features deserving celebration on its centenary.

CHESTERTON tells of a war in which “the greatest of the Turkish warriors, the terrifying Osma Pasha, [had] for his courage in war and his cruelty in peace” wins a famous victory over British forces, leading to the occupation of England, to Turks taking over the constabulary, and the growing influence of an “enriment Turkish mystic,” one Mustafa Hamon, who argues for such Islamic customs as not eating pork, prohibiting representing images, taking off shoes off at the front door, and practicing polygamy.

But the most prominent Islamic custom, and the one around which The Flying Inn revolves, is Om- an Pasha’s desire for the destruction of vineyards and the banishment of alcohol.

Lord Philip Elywood, an eager, progressive dhimmi adopted of Armenia, passed in 1909 a prohibition of alcohol which allowed only minor exceptions: buildings with inn signs outside them (pending their universal disappearance) and any tavern supplying holes (for (of course) members of parliament, Claridge’s Hotel and the Criterion Bar. Otherwise, pubs served lemonade, tea and other of what Chesterton doubts “Saracen drinks.”

Taking advantage of the fact that the former islephate, a valiant Irish sailor and an English publican roll through the countryside carrying with them the sign of “The Ship” pub, a giant leg of rum, and a great drum of cheddar cheese.

Their bacchanalian exploits, and Lord Elywood’s growing fury, make up the bulk of this fantasy novel, culminating in an English revolt against Elywood, against Londonistan, against all-fez-wearing Turkish police force, and their totaler ways.

Hating “the fact of being crushed by the weapons of men brown and yellow which had made the English what they had not been for centuries. Their hero insu

LONDON LETTER

LONDON LETTER

If we don’t learn, amusingly, that Elywood wrote a big-

double emblem … combin-

ing cross and crescent.

We learn, amusingly, that Elywood wrote a big-

11 for the Progressive Pot-

entes series, anticipating (among other books) Patrick SEALE’S puff biography of Hafez AL-Assad.

Today’s Left finds excuses for female genital mutilation and woodwind and donned Western girls ab-

ducted to Turkish harems on the grounds that “there should be no new distur-

bance of whatever sensa-

tive or domestic ties have been formed.”

Echoing today’s progressives, he argued that Turkish women enjoy “the highest freedom” while belittling the lot of their British counterparts.

Likewise, Chesterton anticipated other themes then non-existent and now in full bloom.

Elywood speculated about our own day: in “a century or two to come,” said, “we may see the cause of peace, of science and of reform, everywhere supported by Islam.”

In this spirit, he advo-

cate “a Europe not anything, something that Islam immigration has achieved in our day.

The Turkish mystic Ammon, who argued for such Islamic custo-

mings with inn signs outside for the destruction of wine

ergies and the banish-

ing cross and crescent.”

To think that Englishmen would soon return to this would have been.

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