

THE TALMUD.

MANY people do not know what the Talmud is, and some may be like him of whom we are told in the "Quarterly Review," that he thought the Talmud was a Jewish rabbi. It is not a rabbi, but a book, which ancient rabbis compiled, and which modern rabbis hold in very high esteem. There is a well-known sentence in one of the Jewish books which says, "The Scripture is like water, the Mishnah like wine, and the Talmud like spiced wine;" the meaning of which is, that the Scripture is good, but that the traditions of the elders are very much better. Thus in the Synagogue, as in the Church of Rome, the fathers and tradition are honoured at the expense of the inspired writers. It is as it was when our Lord said, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men;" and "Ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition."

The Talmud must not be confounded with the Targums, which are a kind of version of Old Testament books, whereas the Talmud is a collection of the opinions of ancient Jewish doctors on all sorts of subjects, secular as well as sacred. The foundation of the Talmud, or traditional law of the Jews, is called the Mishnah, which consists of six parts, arranged under different headings. The first part, entitled "Seeds," commences with a chapter on prayers or blessings, and then goes on to treat of tithes and gifts, the Sabbatical year, the prohibition of mingled seeds and materials, and other matters. The second part, on feasts, treats of Sabbaths and holy days, and the ceremonies and sacrifices which belong to them. The third part, on "Women," is occupied about betrothal, marriage, divorce, vows, etc. The fourth part, on "Damages" or "Injuries," deals with sundry legal and commercial questions, idolatry, witnesses and punishments, moral maxims, etc. The fifth part, "Sacred Things," treats of sacrifices, the first-born, the temple, and various matters of ritual. The last part, on "Purifications," touches upon a host of topics connected with things clean and unclean.

It will be seen at once that the Mishnah is not for general reading, so much as a book of reference for the priests and doctors. But the Mishnah is not the whole of the Talmud. There is the Gemara, which bears some resemblance to a commentary, but is in fact a collection of sayings and opinions, including stories of the most extraordinary kind. Some of the lesser sections of the Mishnah have no Gemara or commentary, though most of them have, in one or other of the two forms in which the Talmud exists. These two forms of the Talmud are called the Jerusalem and the Babylonian, because one appeared in Palestine and the other in Babylonia.

The Mishnah was completed early in the third century after Christ, by rabbi Judah, surnamed the Holy. After the Mishnah came the Gemaras. The first, that of Jerusalem, was really compiled at Tiberias, about the close of the fourth century; and the second, or that of Babylonia, was drawn up at Syra, in Babylonia, a few years later, though not completed till the end of the fifth century. It is not possible to say what alterations have been made in these writings since then, under Christian influence or otherwise, but they do not now exist in complete form. And no wonder; for few books have been persecuted more than the Talmud, as no people have been more persecuted than the Jews.

The learned writer in the "Quarterly Review," (Oct. 1867), to whose article we have already alluded, says of the Talmud: "Ever since it existed—almost before it existed in a palpable shape—it has been treated much

like a human being. It has been proscribed, and imprisoned, and burnt, a hundred times over. From Justinian, who, as early as 553 A.D., honoured it by a special interdictory Novella, down to Clement VIII and later—a space of over a thousand years—both the secular and the spiritual powers, kings and emperors, popes and anti-popes, vied with each other in hurling anathemas and bulls, and edicts of wholesale confiscation and conflagration against this luckless book. Thus, within a period of less than fifty years—and these forming the latter half of the sixteenth century—it was publicly burnt no less than six different times, and that not in single copies, but wholesale, by the waggon-load. Julius III issued his proclamation against what he grotesquely calls the 'Gemaroth Thalmud,' in 1553 and 1555, Paul IV in 1559," (when it is said 2,000 copies were burnt), "Pius V in 1566, Clement VIII in 1592 and 1599. The fear of it was great indeed. Even Pius IV, in giving permission for a new edition, stipulated expressly that it should appear without the name Talmud." The mention of the popes' permitting a new edition, reminds us that although the work was printed correctly at first, the inquisitors afterwards took care to sift it, and to alter it where it seemed hostile to Christianity. They could not altogether destroy it, and so they tried to correct it. This is much to be regretted, as few even among Hebrew scholars can have access to the earliest complete edition, printed at Venice in thirteen volumes, 1520—1523.

It is really a matter of surprise that a work so large and so much persecuted should have been preserved through above a thousand years in manuscript. The Jews appear to have early copied and circulated it, so that if it was destroyed in one place, it was safe in another. And then, under the Mohammedan rule, the Jews were often favoured, and encouraged to pursue their studies. In Spain, for instance, this was the case; and the Talmud was copied, and translated and expounded there, by learned Jews during several centuries. Eminent Hebrew scholars settled in the south of France, and there also the Talmud, though persecuted by the Romish Church, was still studied. In Italy, too, the Jews found a lodgment at various points, and we have seen that Venice was the place where the whole Talmud was first printed. Whatever befel, the Bible, the Targums, and Talmud were the inseparable companions of the Jew, whether in prosperity or adversity.

The reader of the New Testament will remember the allusions to the honour in which the Jews held the opinions and even the idle fictions of their ancestors and their teachers. In fact, a body of traditions had already grown up, and was regarded with veneration. These traditions and stories went on increasing, and the love for them continued. When, therefore, they came to be embalmed in the written volumes of the Mishnah and Gemara, they were a source from which the teachers of the people derived both authority and information. With the loss of their national existence, and of an authorised government able to rule, the Talmud became of immense importance. It amplified and decided the meaning of the written law, and, claiming a sacred character, it could be appealed to in all cases of difficulty. On these and other accounts the Jews clung to it with wonderful tenacity, as they do to this day. They would listen to the "fathers," when they would scarcely heed a living teacher, without their authority to back him.

But, apart from all external considerations, there are reasons in the Talmud itself why it should be studied, not only by the Jew but by the Christian. It contains the collective thoughts of many men of different ages

and countries, upon a multitude of subjects, and scraps of information not to be found elsewhere, much of it both curious and useful. We can learn from it what the Jews of the ages before and after Christ thought of many portions of the Old Testament, and how they reasoned on philosophy, science, politics, and religion. We hear them speaking again in their peculiar style. We have their very words, as well as their ideas; and it requires but little imagination to picture the living Hillel or Gamaliel of the times of Christ. It is possible to compare their words and sayings, as well as their modes of thought, with much that we find in our New Testament; and if we do this, we shall encounter curious and startling analogies. It will be seen that in the New Testament we are in company with men of the same race and period, and that our Lord and his apostles used very much the same words and imagery as the rabbis, though they adapted them to higher and more spiritual ends. Nay, some of the better utterances of the Talmud correspond with some striking passages in the Christian Scriptures. The writer in the "Quarterly" says, "Were not the whole of our general views on the difference between Judaism and Christianity greatly confused, people would certainly not be so very much surprised at the striking parallels of dogma and parable, of allegory and proverb, exhibited by the Gospel and the Talmudical writings. The New Testament, written, as Lightfoot has it, 'among Jews, by Jews, for Jews,' cannot but speak the language of the time, both as to form, and, broadly speaking, as to contents. There are many more vital points of contact between the New Testament and the Talmud than divines yet seem fully to realize; for such terms as 'redemption,' 'baptism,' 'grace,' 'faith,' 'salvation,' 'regeneration,' 'Son of man,' 'Son of God,' 'kingdom of heaven,' were not, as we are apt to think, invented by Christianity, but were household words of Talmudical Judaism, to which Christianity gave a higher and purer meaning."

It would be certainly an error to say that Christianity invented the terms just mentioned; but it would be no less an error to say that the Talmudists invented them, or more than one or two of them, for they are nearly all to be found in the Old Testament. However, it is curious to notice the frequent mention of "baptism" as a religious ceremony, in the Talmud. But Mr. Deutsch, the writer of the article in the "Quarterly Review," goes on to mention the Talmudical condemnation of lip-service and other abuses, which we also find in the Old Testament. The most remarkable example, perhaps, quoted by him, is "that grand dictum, 'Do unto others as thou wouldst be done by,'" which, he says, was spoken by Hillel, who died ten years after the birth of Christ, "not as anything new, but as an old and well-known dictum that comprised the whole law." The law said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. xix. 18); and an apocryphal book said, "Do to no man that which thou hatest;" and Hillel's words were, "Thou shalt not do to thy neighbour that which is hateful to thyself, for this is the whole law." The least we can say is that the words of Tobit come nearer to those of Hillel than the words of Christ, which are far more comprehensive and emphatic than either.

With regard to many of the resemblances between the Talmud and the New Testament, we have no difficulty; they represent modes of thought and forms of speech which were common among the pious Jews before and after the time of our Lord. There are other resemblances which infidels and sceptics have caught at, under the notion that the New Testament is indebted to the Talmud. A moment's reflection will generally set us

right, if we but remember that the Mishnah was not composed till long after the New Testament, and the Gemara at a still later period. It is more likely that the Talmudists imitated portions of the New Testament, than that the evangelists and apostles imitated the sayings and stories current among the Jews.* Whatever view we take, such similarities are incidental proofs of the genuineness of the Christian Scriptures.

The excellence of many of the moral and religious maxims of the Talmud is beyond all dispute, and they might be quoted as interesting illustrations of the manner in which the teachings of the Old Testament influenced the Jewish mind. Even heathen writings supply us with admirable precepts and sentiments; but the Hebrews were far in advance of them, as might be expected, from their writings being divinely inspired. Bearing in mind that the Jewish Scriptures were the professed foundation of sacred studies among the rabbis, we shall look in their writings for a clear statement of leading doctrines. Nor shall we be disappointed; for while, as on moral questions, there is foolish and idle speculation, there are also utterances of the truest and grandest principles. Happily, the men who rejected the Gospel of Christ, and perverted some of the more spiritual teachings of the Old Testament, retained not a few of the lessons which had been given by divine revelation. So that while the Talmud only reflects faithfully some portions of the ancient law, and distorts others, there are many things in it to which a Christian can turn with pleasure.

Of the "scientific" and "philosophical" parts of the Talmud, its grotesque legends, and its laborious trifling, this is not the place to speak. But, multifarious and heterogeneous as are its contents, it is a book which is interesting to us, and of immense importance to the Jew. As our readers will have already inferred, it throws light upon the views and habits of the Jews before and after Christ, and it may serve to illustrate some things in the New Testament. This is why it interests us; but to the Jew the Mishnah is the "Oral Law" which Moses taught, and was handed down by word of mouth from age to age until it was written. He therefore views it as of divine authority; while the Gemara is scarcely, if at all, less revered as embodying the opinions and collective wisdom of the fathers. "The Talmud," says a modern Jew, "is a complete system of all our learning, and a comprehensive rule of all the practical parts of our laws and religion."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

CHAPTER I.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN was the last lineal descendant of a Quaker family, who are supposed to have left England and settled in America under the auspices of William Penn. Little is known of his ancestors beyond the fact that they were a hardy race who fought with adverse circumstances in the forest and the wilderness, and trusted solely to their own energy and perseverance to conquer the difficulties that lay in their path. Thomas Lincoln, the father of Abraham Lincoln, was living in Kentucky, at a spot which was then a part of Hardin county, and distant about seven miles from Elizabeth Town, the county-seat. Our artist, who was employed to illustrate

* In our hearing, lately, when a sceptical Jew was urged with the doctrinal clearness of the Talmud on some great points, he immediately replied that the Talmud was not written till long after the Gospel was everywhere published, and that no doubt the rabbis learned very much from Christianity, which they so far imitated in self-defence. We think there is, at least, a nucleus of truth in this suggestion.