

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

*THE HALACHA AND THE HAGADA.*

ALL who have interested themselves in the endeavour to acquire any knowledge of the Talmud are aware that the Rabbis who have contributed to that strange and enormous encyclopædia of twelve folio volumes, fall into two schools—the Halachists and the Hagadists; and although an Halachist might occasionally indulge himself in Hagadôth, and a Hagadist might sometimes distinguish himself in the Halacha,<sup>1</sup> yet the distinction between the two schools is so radical, that we cannot advance a step until it is completely grasped and understood.

1. The origin, development, and intention of the HALACHA will, I think, be clear to any reader of my papers on the Oral Law in previous numbers of THE EXPOSITOR.<sup>2</sup> The word (of which the plural is Hilchôth or Halachôth) is derived from *Halak*, “to walk,” and simply means a rule, a decisive tradition, “the ultimate conclusion on a matter long debated.”<sup>3</sup> No system of laws, and above all no system so brief as the Mosaic legislation in its earliest form, could possibly include all the vast varieties of human circumstance; and since the law was regarded as infinitely sacred in its minutest regulations, it was

<sup>1</sup> For instance, R. Levi Ben Sisi tried to unite the Hagada and the Halacha, as R. Jochanan Den Zakkai had tried to do before him. Hamburger, s. v. v. Agada and Jochanan.

<sup>2</sup> February, March, and May, 1877.

<sup>3</sup> הלכה, Halachah. “Apud Rabbinos et Thalmudicos est constitutio juris, sententia, decisio, traditio decisa, et usu ac consuetudine recepta et approbata. Secundum quam incedendum et vivendum.” Buxtorf, *Lex. Chald.* s. v. He quotes from the Baal Aruc the somewhat enigmatic definition, “A matter which goes and comes from the beginning to the end,”—which apparently means that the Halacha does not consist of the various statements of the discussion, but is its authoritative conclusion.—Chiarini, *Théorie du Judaïsme*, i. 62.

inevitable that questions should continually arise as to the proper method of understanding or applying it. If, in the nineteenth century after Christ, we have seen a powerful Church distressed and agitated by the archæological discussion of one or two rubrics dealing with matters so apparently unimportant as the position of a Communion Table and the use of half a dozen vestments, it is hardly to be wondered at that Judaism should be profoundly exercised by minutix which to them seemed far more important than the use of chasubles or the position of celebrants. Hence the *thorah shebeal pî*, or "law upon the lip,"—the Oral as distinguished from the Written Law—dates back to very early times. As far back as the later books of the Pentateuch we find decided traces of a growth from earlier and simpler regulations; and we see that, even in the wilderness, events from time to time occurred which necessitated some explanation of laws already promulgated. Such for instance is the scene between Moses and his nephews when he found that they had burnt instead of eating the goat of the sin offering;<sup>1</sup> the decision about the man caught gathering sticks<sup>2</sup> on the Sabbath day; the rule laid down by Eleazar the priest respecting the treatment of spoils of war;<sup>3</sup> the punishment of blasphemy;<sup>4</sup> and others. In later books we trace still further developments, as for instance in the consecration of altars; the laws relating to the monarchy; the entire regulations respecting the building and worship of the temple; the creation of schools of the prophets; of rules respecting the Sabbath;<sup>5</sup> of

<sup>1</sup> Lev. x. 16.<sup>2</sup> Num. xv. 32.<sup>3</sup> Ibid. xxxi. 21.<sup>4</sup> Lev. xxiv. 11.<sup>5</sup> Jer. xvii. 21.

four yearly fasts ;<sup>1</sup> of the three daily prayers.<sup>2</sup> In fact the Bible itself will furnish us with specimens of the five kinds of Halachôth—*written, oral, inferential, customary, and temporary*. These Biblical Halachôth are, however, perfectly insignificant when compared with the subsequent development of the system, during the five centuries which preceded, and the three which followed, the destruction of Jerusalem. These eight centuries are the epochs of the three great schools of Jewish teachers, which are known by the names of the SOPHERÎM, or Scribes; the earlier and later TANAÎM, or Authoritative Teachers; and the AMORAÎM, or Discourers. In these schools originated the vast national literature and tradition which we call by the general name of the Talmud.

(1) The SOPHERÎM cover the period from Ezra to Simon the Just (B.C. 458–320), and to them we owe the reading of the Book of Esther at the feast of Purim; the morning and evening repetition of the *Shema Israel* (the prayer, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord!"); the rules about the construction of phylacteries; the public reading of the law in the worship of the synagogues; rules about forbidden marriages; and not a few of the simplest of those decisions and institutions which were afterwards collected in the Mishna. These institutions, sometimes known as the *Mishnalet shel Sopherim*, consist partly of explanations of the written law, and partly of deductions from it, which are generally reasonable and fair, to meet cases with which it had not explicitly dealt.

(2) The period of the TANAÎM begins with the

<sup>1</sup> Zech. viii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Dan. vi. 10.

rise of a Sanhedrin and the disappearance of the Great Synagogue founded by Ezra. The name is derived from *Tana*, "to teach with authority."<sup>1</sup> The early part of the epoch of the Tana'im is marked by the gradual rise of the Chasidim and Tsedakim, in which we have seen the germ of the later Pharisees and Sadducees; and we have already traced the sources of their activity in the mutual attractions and antagonisms between Hebraism and Hellenism, and the deepening necessity that every patriot who held a cosmopolitan spirit to be closely akin to apostasy should add to the impenetrability of that *hedge about the law* which it was the main object of their lives to plant. To the pre-Christian members of this Rabbinic epoch belong the famous couples (Zougôth) :—

Jose Ben Joezer and Joseph Ben Jochanan ;  
 Joshua Ben Perachia and Nitai of Arbela ;  
 Jehuda Ben Tabbai and Simeon Ben Shetach ;  
 Shemaia and Abtalion ;

and, lastly, the two whose diverging schools exercised so vast a subsequent influence, gave to the Talmudic discussions their sharp tone of opposition, and left so many traces of their conflicts in the Gospel narrative,<sup>2</sup> namely,

Hillel and Shammai,

<sup>1</sup> The phrases *Tanu Rabbanan*, "our Rabbis have taught;" *Tani chada*, "so and so has taught;" *Tanina*, "we have a tradition;" *Matknitha*, "it is Mishna," are constant phrases of quotation from the *Barathijôth*, or supplements to the Talmud.—Etheridge, *Heb. Lit.* p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> As I have shewn in my "Life of Christ," *passim*. It was the complaint of some of the wiser Rabbis, that since the disputes of Hillelites and Shammaites had begun, the law had become like two laws; whereas in old days a simple majority of the Grand Sanhedrin had been sufficient to decide every question.—Chiarini, ii. 28. It is said that they originally differed in only three points.—Shabbath, xvii. 1.

the distinguished representatives of Judaism in its mildest breadth and its most virulent bigotry. To Hillel we probably owe the classification of the vast unwritten elements of the Mishna into the six Sedarim, or orders, and the ancient nucleus which was subsequently enlarged into the twelve chapters of the famous *Megillath Taanith*, or Roll of Fasts. Hillel was succeeded by his son Simeon I., and then successively by his descendants, Gamaliel the Elder (Hazzaken) and Simeon and Jochanan Ben Zakkai, who founded the school of Jabne.<sup>1</sup> The later school of Tanaïm began after the destruction of Jerusalem, and continued for three hundred years after Christ, by which time the Mishna had been finally elaborated by Jehuda Hakkodesh (the Holy), emphatically called Rabbi, or Rabbenu,<sup>2</sup> and his immediate disciples.

(3) The AMORAÏM, from *amar*, "to discourse," held a less exalted position than their predecessors.<sup>3</sup> An eminent Amora was a *Tana bathra*, or "last teacher," as distinguished from a *Tana kama*, or genuine Rabbi of the Mishna. Now just as the period of the Tanaïm coincides with the rise and conclusion of the MISHNA, so that of the Amoraïm coincides with that of the GEMARA, and the Gemara stands in the same relation of commentary and supplement to the Mishna as the Mishna does to the Torah, or law. The Mishna is the repetition of the law; the Gemara is the "completion" (*gemar*, "to perfect") of the Mishna, following the same six

<sup>1</sup> About A.D. 80-220.

<sup>2</sup> The Mechiltha of Ishmael Ben Elisha, a commentary (Midrash) in nine treatises (Mesiktôth) on Exodus xii.-xxiii. belongs to this epoch. He died A.D. 121. Jehuda died about A.D. 190.

<sup>3</sup> About A.D. 220-498.

orders, and composed of much the same elements, namely, quotations from the Law, Halachôth, Hagadôth, &c. The two together constitute the Talmud proper.<sup>1</sup>

Now the Gemara is very largely composed of discussions about minute points of ritual, often dealt with by contradictory decisions of the Rabbis, and further confused by wide varieties of custom. These discussions are given at length, and when the several Rabbis have argued, illustrated, or stated their views, the authoritative decision is given in the words, *The Halacha is with such an one.*

Let us take an instance—the first that comes to hand out of thousands—from the Bab. Berachôth (fol. 43, b).

“The Rabbis have taught, if one brings perfumed oil (for cleansing) and myrtles, one ought, according to Shammai, to bless first the oil, then the myrtles; according to Hillel, one does it in the inverse order. I am of the opinion of the former, said R. Gamaliel, because from oil one derives *two* sources of enjoyment, the odour and the anointing; while from myrtles one only derives the enjoyment of the sweet scent. This opinion, says R. Jochanan, serves for an Halacha. When R. Papa was at the house of R. Houna, son of R. Ika, they brought them perfumed oil and myrtles. He took some, and blessed *the myrtles before the oil.* ‘Master,’ they asked him, ‘are you not of the same opinion on the subject of

<sup>1</sup> The Gemara contains many TOSEPHÔTH (from *yasaph*, “to add”), or *appendices* to the Mishna; and many BARATHIÛTH, or laws EXTRA to the Mishna (from *baria*, exterior). These are not authoritative unless they coincide with the Mishna; just as the TOSAPÔTH, or additions by the later Rabbis to the Gemara, are not authoritative if they contradict the Gemara.

the Halacha which one ought to follow ?' 'According to Raba,' said he, 'the opinion of Hillel serves as the Halacha.' This, however, is not the case, and he only said so to excuse his error."

Halachôth like these were part of the infinitely intricate network of protection adopted by Mosaism against foreign encroachments ; and they were quite sufficient to occupy years of infructuous study, and to fill up every moment of the lives which they rendered so strenuously useless, so laboriously frivolous. They affected the minutest particulars of synagogue worship and the entire ritualism of feasts ; they were mixed up with every province of family life ; they even pervaded the whole national institutions. Some of them are so ancient that we find them distinctly established at the epoch of the Septuagint translators, who in not a few instances (*e.g.*, when they render Exodus xii. 15 by the *destruction*—*αφανιῖε*—of all leaven ; Exodus xiii. 6 by wearing the phylacteries *in front of*—*πρὸ*—the eyes ; and Exodus xxii. 7 by an allusion to the custom of having found property *cried*—*περὶ ἀπολείας τῆς ἐγκαλουμένης*)<sup>1</sup> are even influenced by Halachôth in the manner of treating the sacred text by words which they alter and introduce. It was a remark of R. Ishmael, a Rabbi of the century after the destruction of Jerusalem, that in three instances the Halacha went beyond the written law,<sup>2</sup> viz., in the rules about covering the blood of a beast or fowl caught in hunting ;<sup>3</sup> in the number of instruments with which the hair of a Nazarite might be cut ; and the writing materials necessary for the "book" of

<sup>1</sup> *Frankl Vorstudien*, pp. 90, 95.

<sup>2</sup> *Sota*, f. 16, a. *Hamburger Talm. Wörteil.* l. v. Halacha.

<sup>3</sup> *Lev.* xvi. 13.



divorcement, where the Halacha permitted not only a *Sepher*, or "book," but even olive leaves. The Halacha went, however, as we have seen in a previous paper, much farther than this. It laid down extravagant rules about tithes, it abolished the drinking of the water of jealousy, and established Hillel's ingenious device of the *Prosbol*, to get rid of the commercial inconveniences of the Sabbatical year. Many of the Halachôth may have been inevitable, if any semblance of obedience to the law was to be preserved without utterly disturbing the conditions of life, completely as they had been altered by the course of the centuries which had elapsed since the legislation of the wilderness; but others of these "rules" were tyrannous and burdensome, and to this day continue to be a source of needless vexation to the most scrupulously orthodox among the Jews. And it would have been better in the first instance frankly to admit the principle of modifying the law—where the divinely-ordained circumstances of life rendered it obviously advisable to do so—rather than hypocritically to undermine it under pretence of profound reverence. It must have had a most injurious influence on the conscience of the Rabbis, and it must have stamped their religious convictions with a sense of unsatisfying hollowness, to profess that every curl and corner of a letter was sacred, and yet to deduce from them Halachôth which in a number of cases rendered the Law itself contradictory or obsolete.

We have now seen something of the growth, nature, and tendency of the Halachôth. They were the most essential parts of the Rabbinic *Seyag la-*

*thorah*; <sup>1</sup> they were the work of the religious understanding, and they tended more and more to crystallize the broad and symbolic institutions of the Mosaic legislation into a formalism at once deadening and meaningless. The Mishna itself consists to so great an extent of Halachôth, that in the Jerusalem Talmud it is called Halacha without further distinction. <sup>2</sup> And this would have been a logical distinction to observe between the Mishna and Gemara, seeing that many Rabbis regarded Hagadôth as mere unauthoritative illustrations, which should therefore have been excluded from the authoritative text. Hagadôth do, however, occur not only in the celebrated *Pirke Abhôth*, or "sayings of the Fathers," and *Middôth*, or "temple measurements," but, according to Zunz, in no less than twenty - six of the treatises of the actual Mishna.

2. Utterly different from the Halacha—different in character, different in scope, different in importance, different in estimation—is the HAGADA; and as our estimate of the Talmud must largely depend on our due appreciation of this great branch of it, which constitutes indeed the main part of the Gemara, we must now proceed to give some account of its nature and origin.

Hagada (in its Aramaic form, Agada, Agadtha) is a Hebrew word from the verb נגד "to say, relate,

<sup>1</sup> Hedge about the Law.

<sup>2</sup> Munk, *Berachôth*, p. xi. The Talmud Jerushalmi is the Mishna, with the Gemara of the Palestinian Amoraim,—a school which consisted of such men as Chaia, Ben Chanina, Rav, Bar Kappara, and Abihu. The date of its completion is about A. D. 390. The Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Babli) is mainly due to the lectures of the celebrated R. Ashi (born 351, died 427), who thereby earned the title of Rabbana, as Jehuda Hahboded had earned that of Rabbenu, "our Rabbi," for his share in the Mishna. It was completed and sealed by P. Jose, A. D. 498.

explain," &c.<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, it consists of narrative, legend, poetry, exegesis, instruction, allegory, and all the teaching on those branches of knowledge which have no immediate connection with orthodox practice.<sup>2</sup> It is in its widest sense the expression of religious feeling. If any one will examine the definitions of it proposed by Zunz, Frankl, Derenbourg, Ginsburg, &c., he will I think come to the conclusion that it might be represented in English by "Homiletic Literature."<sup>3</sup> This equivalent would especially apply to the Hagada in its original sense, as the word was used in the second and third centuries after Christ. It subsequently acquired a looser and more extensive meaning, in which it included the entire circle of scientific teaching; but originally nothing would have been called a Hagada which was not connected with (1) Exegesis, the translation and explanation of Scripture, and all such polemical and apologetic matters as arose out of it; 2. Ethics, illustrated by proverbs, exhortations, topics of warning and comfort, often conveyed in imaginative forms; 3. Dogma and ritual; 4. Mystic teaching, including the Kabbalistic methods of interpretation, the *Pardes* and *Geneth*, which we have already illustrated; 5. Prayers, poems, and emotional

<sup>1</sup> Hagada (אגדה) —narratio, enarratio, historia jucunda et subtilis discursus historicus aut theologicus de aliquo loco scripturæ jucundus, animum lectoris attrahens.—Buxtorf, *Lex. Chald.*

<sup>2</sup> I shall throughout make free use of Hamburger, and of the few others who have written on the subject with full knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> It might be thought that this corresponded more nearly to Midrashim, but the Midrashim consisted largely of Hagadôth. "Midrashim," says Ibn Ezra, "are of various kinds. Some of them are secret enigmas and sublimely exalted parables; others serve merely to refresh the fatigued understanding; others fill up the *lacuna* of Scripture. Allegories are like robes—some cling to the body and are as fine as silk; others coarse as sackcloth," &c.

utterances in general. It falls into three forms, namely, the expository, which is simple and scientific; the allegoric and symbolical; and the hyperbolic. In these respects it bears a close analogy to Midrashic literature in general, and to modern sermons in particular; nor can we be surprised that its allegoric and hyperbolic branches, consisting of fables, legends, anecdotes, marvels, enigmas, and myths, has almost absorbed the notice accorded to the whole range of Hagadôth.

The study of the Halacha demanded severe efforts of memory, and its exposition to popular audiences was impossible without demanding close attention to dry, abstruse, and unpractical minutiae. An enumeration of Halachôth would resemble a chapter out of a legal digest or a book of precedents; and if delivered in a religious assembly, would be like a sermon full of recondite arguments about albs and stoles. It is not at all astonishing that even the most staunch Halachists had to break their weary monologues by jests, appeals, exclamations, anecdotes, which would put them a little more on a level with their more popular Hagadic brethren. Thus R. Akibha, noticing on one occasion the somnolence of his auditors, suddenly woke them up by exclaiming, "*A woman in Egypt once bore 600,000 sons;*" and when he had thus startled his listeners into attention, proceeded to explain that he meant Jochebed, the mother of Moses, who renewed the youth of the people of Israel. The story resembles that of a modern preacher who once arrested the placid "folding of the hands to sleep" of an afternoon congregation by beginning his sermon with the

words, "A man was hanged at Tyburn last Friday;" and of another who suddenly shouted out, "Fire, fire!" and in answer to the alarmed inquiries of a congregation now thoroughly awake, quietly explained that he meant "in hell." In point of fact there is a great analogy between the oratorical touches and methods of the Hagadists and those adopted for the same general purpose by the preaching friars of the middle ages.

It is easy from these remarks to see that, though Rabbis so eminent as Jochanan Ben Zakkai, Joshua Ben Chananja, Ishmael, Akibha, Tarphon, Eliezer Ben Hyrkanos, were famous for their skill in the Hagada, it was a species of teaching which was liable to gross abuse, and one upon which, partly because of its extreme popularity, many Halachists would be likely to look with very jealous eyes.<sup>1</sup> On one occasion Akibha interrupted Pappus in the midst of his Hagada with the cry, "*Enough, Pappus!*" and he was himself more than once abruptly called to task. "*How long dost thou profane the God-head?*" exclaimed R. Jose the Galilean. "*What hast thou to do with the Hagada? stick to the rules about the Negaim (cleansings of lepers) and Ohaloth (purification of tabernacles),*" said R. Eliezer Ben Azaria. "*Wrong, Akibha! angels don't eat,*" was the pithy interruption of R. Ishmael. On one occasion, when R. Neharai was telling an Hagada that the children of Israel had brought figs and pomegranates for their children from the depths of the Red Sea, R. Gamaliel could not refrain from uttering

<sup>1</sup> It was a Rabbinic proverb that רבוי אנדה מושכים הלב—"The words of the Hagada attract the soul."

a contemptuous remark on his appetite for the marvellous.

But since the Hagada itself is so comprehensive a term, and the adoption of its methods might be either sober and interesting or audacious and absurd, it is hardly to be wondered at that the opinions of the Rabbis about it were very various. When R. Jizchak, in the third century, complained that people were more eager to listen to it than to the Mishna, R. Levi apologetically observed that, in old days, when the Jews were wealthy, they could study the Halacha, but that now, in their poverty and subjection, they needed the consoling and inspiring brightness of the Hagada. "The Hagada," said R. Abbahu, "is like the wares which every one can afford to buy." It was in fact the small change of religious teaching.<sup>1</sup> Its allegories were intended partly to explain, partly to conceal; its enigmas were meant to shroud sacred mysteries;<sup>2</sup> its lively sallies were meant to relieve the severity of Halachic teaching, so that a modern theologian compared the Hagadôth of the *Siphri* to wine that refreshes the heart.<sup>3</sup> Maimonides regarded them as all meant to convey a hidden sense, which he says shines like gold through a silver covering,—quoting Proverbs xxv. 11, "A word spoken upon wheels (E.V. 'fitly spoken') is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." In this aspect the most rigid Halachist need have felt no jealousy of the Hagada, and the soft answer of R. Abbahu, the Hagadist, to the jealousy of R.

<sup>1</sup> Chiarini, *Théorie du Judaïsme*, ii. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Maimonides, *More Nebhochim*.

<sup>3</sup> Beer, *Gesch. des Unterrichts*. 235. Prag. 1832. The *Siphri* is a commentary on Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Chija, the Halachist— who was angry at the greater number of his listeners — was excellent in its modesty and spirit.<sup>1</sup> “A seller of jewels,” he said, “has fewer customers than a seller of fuseaux”— not, as Rashi observes, that the Hagada is necessarily less valuable than the Halacha, but that R. Abbahu wished to soothe the wounded self-love of R. Chija, though his own anecdotes were worth the subtilities of the other.

There can be no doubt that the Hagadôth in their Demonology, and in other subjects of which they dealt, descended very low, and must be branded not only with silliness, but even with prurience and obscenity. And this perhaps is one of the reasons why some of the Rabbis both hated and denounced the Hagada,<sup>2</sup> looking on those who taught it as, at the best, imaginative and ignorant dilettanti, but sometimes even as veiled apostates and secret favourers of heresy; a scorn which the Hagadists repaid by contemptuous allusions to the dry-as-dust minutiae and hair-splitting pedantries of the rival school. While some sentences of praise may be quoted from the Talmud, the condemnations of the Hagada are more decisive. “Obviously,” said R. Jonathan, “we teach no Hagadôth to the men of the south, because of their pride; or to the Babylonians, because of their ignorance of the law.” Speaking of the lower class of Hagadôth— those which are called “disgraceful” (*Hagadôth shel dôphî*), R. Joshua Ben Levi said that it was profitless to invent, and a

<sup>1</sup> *Sota*, f. 40, a (Chiarini, i. 275).

<sup>2</sup> There are other and very remarkable reasons, with which I must deal elsewhere. The differences between the Halachic and Hagadic schools were very deeply seated.

waste of time to listen to them; and R. Seira angrily called the Hagadistic books "books of sorcery;" and when asked the reason for his indignation, said, "Ask the books themselves, and they will tell you."

I have already noticed the fact that the Jews themselves hold different opinions about the Hagada, some of them regarding its more extravagant developments with natural and undisguised contempt; others, like Maimonides, seeing the possibility of allegoric explanation. It is even said that Maimonides intended to write a work which should do for the Talmudic Hagadôth the same service that his More Nebhochim was intended to do for the difficulties of the Bible. The intention, however, was not carried out, and if Maimonides had ever seriously faced the task he would probably have found it impossible or valueless. Here and there no doubt a meaning may be deciphered beneath the wild absurdities of Oriental fancy; but in many instances the attempt to turn the Hagadôth into consistent allegory would be about as foolish as the Christian explanation of the Iliad by the monk in the *Gesta Romanorum*, where Helen figures as the soul and Paris as the devil. The great Moses Ben Maimon has, however, left his opinion on record when he quotes a passage from the Talmud, in which the Rabbis say that just as if a person loses in his house a pearl or a piece of money, and lights a farthing candle and finds it, so parables are in themselves valueless, but by their means we get to understand the words of the Law.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> More Nebhochim, Pref. He proceeds to apply his principle to Prov. xxv. 11, Gen. xxviii. 12, &c., and makes some very sensible remarks about not pushing the explanation into all details.



In the forty-third chapter of his Third Part he makes an interesting allusion to Rabbinic allegories. "Our Rabbis," he says, "take great delight in allegories, and make frequent use of them, *not because they think that this is the mind and sense of Scripture*, but to delight the reader, and by way of pleasant enigma." He proceeds to say that those who ridicule them as a mere distortion of the meaning of Scripture, and those who attribute to them a traditional and Kabbalistic value, are equally mistaken, their true character being enigmatical. Thus when R. Kappara explains Deuteronomy xxiii. 13 to mean (by reading  $\text{אָזְנֵי}$  for  $\text{אָזְנֵי}$ ) that a man ought to put his finger in his ear when he hears anything impure, it would be astonishing if that great Talmudist meant to imply that Moses meant "finger" by "paddle," and "ears" by "weapon," but he merely uses an elegant allusion or enigma to convey a wise warning; and this is the meaning of all the allegoric explanations where you are told *to read not so-and-so but so-and-so*.<sup>1</sup> He himself explains the four kinds of boughs which the Jews were ordered to carry at the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. xxiii. 40) as a sign of joy for the departure from the desert, seeing that they combine beauty, scent, and vitality, and are yet easily procurable, rejecting the allegoric meaning supplied by the Rabbis. "Beware," he says in another place,<sup>2</sup> "that you take not these words of the Hachimim literally, for this would be degrading to the sacred doctrine, and sometimes to contradict it. Seek rather the hidden sense, and if you cannot

<sup>1</sup> אל תקום כד אלה נד. See Eisenmenger. Entd. Judenth. i. viii.

<sup>2</sup> Pherush Hammishnaioth (Etheridge, p. 183).

find the kernel leave the shell alone, and confess, 'I cannot understand this.'

But modern Jews for the most part freely admit, with Professor Hurwitz in the Introduction to his Hebrew Tales, that "the Talmud contains many things which every Jew must sincerely wish had never appeared there, or should at least long ago have been expunged from its pages. . . . Some of these Agadatha are objectionable *per se*, others are indeed susceptible of explanations, but without these are calculated to produce false and erroneous impressions. Of the former description are all those extravagances relating to the extent of Palestine, the dimensions of Gehinom, the size of Leviathan and the *shor habar*, the freaks of Ashmodai, &c., idle tales, borrowed most probably from the Parthians and Arabians, to whom the Jews were subject before the promulgation of the Talmud." <sup>1</sup> He accounts for their preservation by the extraordinary intensity of that spirit of hero-worship which led the Jews to attach extravagant importance to anything which any Rabbi had said. Like most educated Jews who are not steeled by invincible prejudices, he admits that the Talmud contains many errors, contradictions, and weaknesses (as was indeed inevitable in a heterogeneous encyclopædia of civil law, natural science, and religious precedent); but he does not hesitate to avow his doubts whether there exists any uninspired work of equal antiquity that contains more interesting, more various and valuable information, than that of the still existing remains of the Hebrew sages. That these remains are indeed profoundly

<sup>1</sup> Ap. Etheridge, p. 184.

interesting and of inestimable value, we admit ; and I may express my individual conviction that the gain of mastering them would well deserve the life's devotion of a Christian scholar. But this interest and value are not at all, or only to a very small extent, intrinsic, but almost exclusively archæological and historic. There is little or nothing in the way of elevating thought or moral teaching in the Talmud, which may not be acquired with infinitely greater ease, and in infinitely greater abundance, elsewhere. To represent the Talmud as a great storehouse of literary and ethical gems, is simply to throw dust in the eyes of the credulous. It is in reality a huge rubbish heap, containing indeed some few gems—already widely known and easily procurable—but far fewer than are contained in any literature of such enormous extent.

Resemblances between Christian and Rabbinic teaching have often been paraded. It is hardly surprising that they should exist when we remember the date of the completion of the Mishna and Gemara, so many generations after the death of Christ. There is more beauty and poetry in a single book of Homer, I had almost said in a single ode of Horace, than in the entire Mishna. There is, transcendently, more wisdom and depth in a single chapter of St. John or St. Paul, than in all the folio volumes of the Talmud put together. And yet the heap of what time has now reduced to rubbish was not always equally worthless, and it is now worth study as a strange and instructive memorial of an obsolete past. The Kjökken-mödings of Denmark are of no value, yet what a light have they thrown on the condition

of vanished races! The value of the Talmud consists, not in what it says, but in the light which it throws upon the character of Judaism and the dawn of Christianity. The Talmud has been much misunderstood, mainly from a mistaken view respecting the Hagadôth, of which I have just been speaking. In one further paper I hope to unfold some of their peculiarities and secrets, and must then leave the subject in far abler and better hands, content if I have in any way called attention to its importance.

FREDERIC W. FARRAR.

NOTE.—I am glad to take this opportunity of calling attention to the Talmudic labours of Mr. P. J. Hershon, who has published (in Hebrew) an edition of the Book of Genesis, accompanied by exclusively Rabbinic commentaries. So few are able to read Rabbinic Hebrew, that a translation of this valuable work has been undertaken by the Rev. M. Wolkenberg, and will shortly be published. Mr. Hershon has a similar work on Exodus ready for publication, if he receives sufficient encouragement, and it is of such extreme importance that the Talmud should be better known, that I can only express a hope that his labours may meet with the encouragement which they deserve.

---