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CRITICAL NOTICES.

A Translation of the Treatise Chagigah.

A Translation of the Treatise Chagigah. From the Babylonian Talmud. With Introduction, Notes, etc. By the Rev. A. W. STREANE, M.A. Cambridge University Press, 1891.

MR. STREANE'S volume deserves, and will receive, the cordial welcome of all English students of the Talmud. It is a useful and meritorious effort to place at least one of the smallest tractates of the Babylonian Talmud within the intellectual reach of those to whom the original presents insuperable difficulties. But Mr. Streane's attempt cannot fail to re-open the whole controversy on the possibility of translating the Talmud at all.

No literature can ever be the possession of the multitude unless it can dispense with a guide. A country is not opened up to civilisation when a few adventurous spirits have found their way to its heart. Until its highways have become the ways of common tread, which he who will can traverse, it remains in the control of the professional explorer. In this sense we fear the Talmud can never become a popular book; the "general reader" can never hope to see more of the country than the guide chooses to show him. For, though it has been committed to writing, the Talmud remains an oral tradition, which a living expounder alone can adequately convey to another. We do not mean to imply that translation is quite impossible, and that efforts towards that object should be deprecated. But Mr. Streane himself would be the first to admit that his version is by no means easy reading. If a translation is to be of real service, the text of the Talmud cannot be rendered exactly as it stands. Mr. Streane's version is in places quite bewildering, and this is no fault of the translator. Yet it is not the fault of the original either, for whatever the Rabbis were not, they were close reasoners. The difficulty is one arising from the method in which the Talmud is written, and that it is not quite impossible to cope with it has been shown clearly enough by that renowned Talmudist, Friedmann of Vienna.¹ Not to trans-

¹ דבר על אודות התלמוד (Pressburg : 1885.)

form this review into an essay, we must briefly state the conclusion at which this authority arrived. The translator must not take the Talmud as he finds it, and translate it word by word, for thereby confusion becomes worse confounded. He must first separate the main line of argument from the accessories, added sometimes in most intricate ramifications to the main line, and he must show, by printing in varying types, the points at which the main line of thought is interrupted and resumed. Technical terms must be altogether left untranslated, for they have no strictly accurate equivalents in other languages. Friedmann prints some representative extracts to show how the Talmud would look thus arranged, and at the invitation of the Oriental Congress, held in Vienna in 1888, edited tractate *Makhoth* in accordance with his plan. May it be hoped that one of the Congresses to be held shortly in London will take the matter in hand, and will entrust to Mr. Streane, or to other available scholars, the task of attempting, on lines similar to those suggested by Friedmann, the translation of some representative passages from one of the Talmudic tractates?

The preceding remarks deal with fundamental principles; it remains to speak of Mr. Streane's performance on its own merits. It bears the mark of patience and care, as well as of a no mean acquaintance with the language and style of the Talmud. The translation of technical phrases, however, occasionally leads to a misinterpretation. Thus, on p. 3 of the translation, "there is a Baraitha, A deaf man is like a fool and a child," does not convey the true sense, for קִרְתִּי merely refers to the preceding Mishnah, which is about to be explained. A similar remark applies, *e.g.*, to the opening words of the second paragraph of p. 122, where the Mishnah and not a Baraitha is cited. In the same paragraph (on p. 3) the words שְׂדֵיבְרוּ חֲכָמִים בְּכֹל מְקוֹם mean less "as wise men have everywhere said," than "wherever the sages employ the term." Mr. Streane's notes are usually very full, and the historical help they supply is most useful. Yet the addition of a brief explanation of the context, of the interpolation of apparently irrelevant passages, might often have greatly facilitated the student's labour of following the argument. Talking of the notes, it is somewhat strange to find such frequent references to Wolf, Bartolucci, and Etheridge, to the utter exclusion of the important works of modern scholars. Equally strange is the omission to mention the *Varia Lectiones* of Rabbinoicz, which would have supplemented some of Mr. Streane's notes. Thus, on p. 117, note 5, a reference to the Munich MS. would have shown that the reading is נָל, and not נָלִי. Bacher's *Agada der Babyl. Amoræer*, p. 148, might have been quoted on p. 119, note 1, and 137, note 2, for it is the most

important contribution to the subject. But we have no space to enter into a minute criticism of the notes; the following points must suffice: תנו רבנן (p. 11, note 2) so far from always introducing something pre-Christian, mostly does the reverse; nor is the distinction drawn (p. 13, note 4) between בשלמא and הניח, a tenable one. On page 19, for "weighs out for us both light and heavy" the translation should be "has made the light as important as the heavy" (ששקל עליו הכתוב קלות כחמורת). In p. 55, note 4, the explanation offered of the absence of a commentary on Genesis corresponding to those on the other books (*e.g.*, Mechilta on Exodus), though very ingenious, can scarcely be accepted. The *Bereshith Rabba*, which is one of the oldest of the Midrashim, filled the gap which Mr. Streane finds, but which, in fact, has no existence. No commentary of authority supports Mr. Streane's note 9, or p. 65; nor is there, as far as we know, any Talmudical or Midrashic passage that justifies the statement (p. 71, note 1) that "Tradition said that there were 250 points of difference between the Law and Ezekiel." The note (p. 81, 4) to "wrapped himself up" omits to allude to the fact that a Talmid Chacham was very particular to appear in a dignified costume, and thus the phrase acquired quite a conventional signification. On page 117 the omission to refer to Rabbinovicz has produced an unintelligible rendering, for the reading should be מישום כלי, which gives very good sense, "for the weight of the vessel must be taken into account." Sometimes one might feel inclined to divide the paragraphs differently. Thus, on p. 121, the new paragraph should not begin at the words "Rab Papa," but with "But let us consider." Several other notes might be questioned, and some uncritical explanations are propounded, which are obviously inadmissible. But we have no further space to deal with details, however important they may be.

Though it will be seen from what precedes that Mr. Streane's work is marked by some defects, it will, we are certain, have a stimulative effect on the study of the Talmud, and the learned translator has earned our thanks for a very conscientious attempt to supply a real need.

I. ABRAHAMS.