

JESUS IN THE TALMUD.

BY ALBERT J. EDMUNDS.

RABBI Michael Rodkinson is bringing out a second edition of some of the volumes of his English Talmud. We would seize upon this opportunity to urge upon him the desirability of omitting or suppressing nothing. In Vol. II. of his first edition of Tract Shabbath, p. 243 (N. Y., 1896), there is missing an important reference to the Christian Gospels. We are told that Rabbi Meir (middle of the second century) called them "the Roll of Wickedness," and Rabbi Yochanan "the Roll of Iniquity,"—this last being a pun upon the Greek *Evangelion*—עֵן בִּילִיִּין. My authority is Hershon's *Talmudical Commentary on Genesis*, edited by Wolkenberg, which is full of passages relating to the New Testament as well as the Old. Immediately preceding the text in question, Rodkinson translates a passage concerning two third-century doctors arguing about the books used at the *Be Abhidon* (which Hershon renders "House of Perdition," with a gloss saying that it was "a place of public discussion between believing and unbelieving Jews"). Certain doctors also, we are told, visited or avoided the House of Perdition and the House of Nitzarphi (or Nitzrephe). Hershon suggests that the latter means Nazarenes, but Rodkinson does not translate it, saying that these names are much discussed. In all kindness, and purely in the interest of knowledge, we would venture to ask him to state, in his next edition, what the various interpretations are. The days are gone by when facts are to be feared. In this Republic, so full of learned Hebrews, is there not one who would gather together all the references to Jesus in the two Talmuds?¹ I have made such a collection from French and English translations, but would not be so presumptuous as to present it to the world without a knowledge of Hebrew. The reader,

¹ Bernhard Pick published just such a collection in 1887, but the book is out of print.

however, may like to know where some of these texts are to be found (in addition to Hershon, already quoted). First, there is the good old *Horæ Hebraicæ et Talmudicæ* of John Lightfoot (Cambridge and London, 1658–1678, often republished). Then there is the chapter on Mishnical and Talmudical Writers in Nathaniel Lardner's *Jewish and Heathen Testimonies* (London, 1764, republished in his collected works, both in the eighteenth century and the nineteenth). There are several Talmudic passages about Jesus in Erwin Preuschen's *Antilegomena* (Giessen, 1901). Wünsche's book on Gospels and Talmud, however, is more devoted to the illustration of the Gospel allusions to Jewish customs and doctrines than to explicit accounts of Jesus. Horne, in his great Introduction to the Scriptures, so frequently reprinted and never useless, though antiquated, briefly alludes to the subject, but without sufficient fulness or precision.

What ought to be done is to translate Wünsche's book, and add to it all the passages overlooked by him.

There is just one text to which I should like to call attention, because of its curious account of an exposition by Jesus. This passage, though not very friendly to the Master, has about it the ring of veracity. For my part, it always brings me face to face with Him in a most vivid manner, and, even as a Christian, I prize it highly. Unfortunately it contains an allusion to a sanitary apparatus which has caused an editor like Lardner to mutilate it; but squeamishness is no part of science, and we want this text also honestly translated. The passage is from the Tract Avoda-zarah (on foreign religions), and relates a story about Rabbi Eliezer (first century) being arrested as a Christian. He denied the charge, but went home almost inconsolable. His pupil Akiba (afterwards the great organiser of Judaism against Christianity) rallied him by pointing out that his arrest had been a punishment for a secret leaning that he once had toward Christianity. The crest-fallen doctor replied that it probably was, for he once was walking through the market-place of Sepphoris, when he was accosted by James, the disciple of Jesus the Nazarene. James said to him: "It is written in your law: 'Thou shalt not bring the hire of an harlot or the price of a dog into the house of the Lord thy God.'" He then asked him whether it would be right to use such money for building a house of convenience for the High Priest? Eliezer was silent, whereupon James continued: 'I have been thus taught by Jesus the Nazarene: 'Of the hire of an harlot hath she gathered them, and unto the hire of an harlot shall they re-

turn' [Micah i. 7], i. e., let it be applied in a way similar to that in which it was obtained."

It seems to me that this mystical explanation of Scripture is quite in keeping with the Lord's habitual exegesis. See, for example, Mark xii. 26, 27; 36, 37.