

## A WORD TO THE PUBLIC.

WITH this volume Section Moed (Festivals), the weightiest and most difficult of the six Talmud sections, becomes complete. Students of the Talmud will observe that while the old edition contains twelve treatises, we have embodied thirteen, taking one--viz., Tract Ebel Rabbathi--from Section Nezikin (Damages), for reasons which will be stated further on.

Section Festivals contains all the Halakhoth (ordinances) pertaining to the Sabbath, to festivals, semi-festivals, fast-days, feast-days, and days of mourning, and stands practically independent of all other sections, inasmuch as we have been careful to cull all matter bearing upon the subjects discussed in this section from the other sections, and to insert the same in its proper place. (See Betza, p. 45.) [1](#)

And now that by the grace of the Almighty we have succeeded in editing and translating an entire section of the Talmud, a work that, with due modesty, we can claim stands unique in the annals of literature, we deem it but fair to explain to our readers the method adopted by us in the accomplishment of this task, and demonstrate as well the innovations and changes introduced in comparison with the original, ancient edition. They are:

(a) In the original the name of each separate treatise alone indicated its contents, while the chapters into which such treatise was subdivided were known merely by the words with which they began. We have, however, headed each chapter with a line or two giving in succinct form the subjects discussed therein.

(b) Rashi's commentary, without the aid of which even students of the original Talmud cannot comprehend the intricate meanings of portions of the text, we have, wherever practicable, embodied *in* the text, denoting such commentary by the use of parentheses, and where this was not feasible on account of the

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vagueness of the phraseology and its inseparability from the text proper, we have made the commentary an integral part of the text.

(c) Wherever Rashi's commentary was insufficient or rather vague, and we were in consequence compelled to make use of one of the several other commentaries forming part of the original Talmud, we have added a footnote giving the name of the other commentator and the reasons for taking his opinion. (See Erubin, p. 211)

(d) The frequent repetitions of discussions, some literally alike and others having a similar tendency even though employing a change of terms, occurring in the several sections and

corresponding treatises, we have translated once only. We have been careful, however, to mark such places where a repetition occurs and is not embodied, giving the name of the treatise and the page where it can be found. In this section, now completed, we have also omitted some discussions which are repeated in treatises where they are more pertinent. There they will appear in due time, and where they are at present lacking, a notice to that effect will be found, and the place of their proper insertion is denoted. (See Succah, p. 48.)

(e) The original Talmud, with its innumerable biblical quotations, nowhere indicates where such biblical quotations may be found, simply stating: "It is written," etc. One savant named Joshua Boas went to the trouble of publishing a work called "Thora Or," in which he provides each biblical quotation found in the Talmud with its place in its respective book and chapter without naming the verse; but, either through misprints or negligence, they are for the most part incorrect. In our edition we give the book, chapter, and exact verse of each biblical quotation, as well as its correct form, as far as obtainable.

(f) We have, wherever necessary, made a footnote explaining the much-encountered Talmudic peculiarity of dividing up a word so as to put a different construction upon its meaning, and thus obliterate its actual linguistic purport. Wherever a word is totally untranslatable the fact is recorded and the word circumscribed likewise in a footnote. We have also had occasion to refer the reader, for the elucidation of some passages, to our previously published works, but in no case is such reference absolutely necessary.

(g) It has become necessary in some cases to provide a treatise with a special introduction or an appendix, or both, and

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this we have done whenever it seemed to us to facilitate the understanding of such treatise.

(h) Wherever the Talmud made use of a Greek word, naturally in Hebrew letters, and consequently at times incorrectly, we have, to avoid errors, rendered the word into pure Greek. In a doubtful case we have appended a footnote giving the word in several versions and emphasizing the one most likely to have been the correct one. (See Erubin, p. 208.)

(i) While any index of subjects treated in the Mishna and Gemara is impossible for reasons we have already explained in the few lines heading the synopsis of Volume I., we have provided each volume with a synopsis of a sufficient scope to enable the reader to find any subject of peculiar interest to him without perusing the entire volume.

(j) Wherever two disputing Amoraim are not of the same period--on the contrary, were in existence a century or so apart--we have called the attention of the reader to this in a footnote explaining who the discussing teachers were, their probable names, etc.

(k) Whatever misprints occurred in the original edition of the Talmud we have carefully corrected, and have explained their probable origin and cause. (Erubin, p. 192.)

(l) The absence of commentaries to the tracts Shekalim and Ebel Rabbathi gave us an

opportunity to add our own comment, which we have done with as much care and zeal as possible.

Finally, we call attention to the explanatory remarks printed on the reverse of the title-page of each volume.

Now it remains for us to state the reason why we embody the Tract Ebel Rabbathi in this section.

Maimonides tried to find some explanation for the sequence of sections and tracts of the Talmud, and whether he succeeded in this endeavor or not we will leave to the decision of the reader. At all events, as far as the Tract Ebel Rabbathi is concerned, he could not give any reason why it should have found a place in the Section Nezikin (Damages).

As a matter of fact, the Tract Ebel Rabbathi is not among the thirty-seven main tracts comprising the Babylonian Talmud, but is accounted one of the minor tracts written after the original was finished. Yet it would be decidedly wrong to class Ebel Rabbathi with the minor tracts, and for the reason that in a number of instances we find a passage in the Talmud reading, "We have learned in Ebel Rabbathi," proving conclusively that

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it antedates the final completion of the original Babylonian edition.

The bibliographers Zunz and N. Bruell endeavored to prove that the Tract Ebel Rabbathi, so frequently mentioned in the Talmud proper, is not identical with the one found among the minor tracts, and Dr. Mielziner, in his Introduction to the Talmud, adds: "It seems to be a reproduction of the same with later additions." We do not care, as the Talmud says, "to put our heads between the mountains," and contradict these learned gentlemen, although they have not quoted by a good many all the quotations of Ebel Rabbathi used by the Talmud, and we have found that all quotations from Ebel Rabbathi are verbatim reproductions from the tract now before us. Be this, however, as it may, this tract is the *only* source in the Hebrew code from which the ordinances and laws pertaining to the mode of procedure with dying, dead, burials, and mourners, in vogue even at this day with all classes of Jews, emanate. Were we to leave this tract untranslated, the Section Festivals would be incomplete.

It must be borne in mind that laws pertaining to mourners are thoroughly discussed in one of the tracts of Section Festivals, Moed Katan, and hence our, we hope valid, excuse for embodying the Tract Ebel Rabbathi as part and parcel of that section. We wish to call attention to the fact, however, that such mourners' ordinances as had no connection with festivals and feast-days we have eliminated from the original tract in which they were contained, and have transferred them to Ebel Rabbathi, where they properly belong.

Having thus, in this introduction, outlined as fully as possible our method of disclosing the weighty contents of Judaism's greatest example of literature to laymen and those of the archæological students unacquainted with the idioms employed by the Talmudic teachers, we lay our work open to the critics and invite, in all honesty of purpose, scholarly, pithy criticism. So far we have: only been favored with spasmodic efforts at criticism, consisting mainly of dissenting opinions as to the use of a term or the spelling of a word taken from the Hebrew and

transcribed into, English. What we would appreciate, however, is a fair and just summarizing of the work as a whole, of its value as such, and of its merit in facilitating the general knowledge among laymen, Gentiles and Jews alike, of ancient customs, ordinances, laws, and usages.

M. L. R.

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## Footnotes

[iv:1](#) This is only one instance where this policy was pursued. There are, of course, countless others, too numerous to mention.

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[Next: A Letter From Prof. Dr. M. Lazarus](#)