

## PREFACE.

THE ancient authors used to begin the prefaces to their works with the proverb "*Sepher be Lo Hakdamha kegnph be Lo nechamaha*," which means "A book without a preface is similar to a body without a soul"; and, indeed, this proverb remains forever true. At the time we began our translation of the Talmud, we were aware that to the study of it a clear preface which should explain its nature and the character of the sages mentioned in it was necessary, as without it there would be great difficulty for students in catching the real meaning, and in some places the reader would be confused, not being aware of its history and of the names mentioned--who these were and when they existed.

With this in mind, we had already prepared the present work in 1897, when only a few volumes of our translation had been issued. Although we gave a brief general introduction to the first volume of the translation, and also some prefaces and introductions in the succeeding volumes, they do not suffice for the student who desires to have a clear idea of all that he is studying.

However, the translation has taken up so much of our time that it has hitherto been impossible for us to look up everything pertinent to our purpose that has been written and to submit it in presentable form. Now, after the completion, with the Divine help of the two large sections, containing twenty-seven tracts, and in response to many inquiries from the reading public for some explanations, we find that now is the time to put forth this work; and, instead of adding two more volumes to the translation of the Talmud in the current year, we have decided to furnish the two volumes which form our "History of the Talmud."

It may be inferred that what was written several years ago has had to be thoroughly revised and corrected, according to the literature which has appeared since that time. There is an

old witticism, "*Koshe Atika Me Chadtha*"; *i. e.*, "It is more difficult to correct an old thing than to write a new one"; and, as a matter of fact, it has taken a great deal of time to make the necessary changes and corrections in what we had written. As a natural consequence, the work is enlarged, and many chapters have been added since the issue of our prospectus. All this concerns the first volume of this work, as it relates to the history of the Talmud only, as to which there has been little new information. True there have been some new dissertations on the Talmud in Germany, but they do not add much to our knowledge concerning it, and may therefore be ignored.

The second volume, however, we have had to recast and rewrite. In this labor the wonderful work of that western light which was recently extinguished--we mean the Rev. Dr. Mielziner--"Introduction to the Talmud," which has reached a second edition and has been so favorably received by all students of both continents, was of great service to us. As Dr. Mielziner's work contains essentially all that concerns the Talmud itself, we resolved to take it

as a text for our historical introduction, adding and abating as we deemed necessary. We have done so, also, with the second part, "The Ethics of the Talmud," which he arranged so admirably. Here, also, we have added whatever, according to our knowledge, there was left for us to bring to the attention of the reader.

Now, the work being finished, we regard it as a suitable preface to our translation and one which will enlighten the understanding of the reader in many places. At the same time, it seems to us to be interesting to the general reader who has neither time nor inclination for the study of the Talmud.

This is all we need say in the preface, referring the reader for more details to our introduction, which follows.

THE AUTHOR.

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