

## INTRODUCTION.

The persecutors of the Talmud during the period ranging from the first century B.C., when it began to take form, to the present day, have varied in their character, objects and actions. In one respect, however, they all agreed, namely, in their general wish to destroy its existence. Careful consideration of its many vicissitudes certainly justifies the assertion that the Talmud is one of the wonders of the world. During the twenty centuries of its existence not one of them has passed without great and powerful enemies vying with each other and exhausting every effort to destroy it; still it survived in its entirety, and not only has the power of its foes failed to destroy even a single line, but it has not even been able materially to weaken its influence for any length of time. It still dominates the minds of a whole people, who venerate its contents as divine truth, and countless numbers have sacrificed their lives and their possessions to save it from perishing.

A review of its persecutors, before going into their history would not be amiss. They are the Seleucidae, in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Roman Emperor Nero, Domitian, Hadrian, etc., the Samaritans, the Sadducees, Boethuseans, the followers of Jesus, and all the sects opposed to the Pharisees.

Before the development of the Talmud had been completed, when hardly a single section had been arranged systematically and written down, it having been known merely as oral teaching in the mouths of the sages, and reconsidered and analyzed constantly by their disciples in the colleges, it was violently attacked. But no sooner had the Talmud been completed in Babylonia, and the Saburites had put their seal upon it, so to speak, deciding that nothing was to be added to or [subtracted](#) from, when Justinian decreed practically its death; that is to say, what amounted to the same thing, capital punishment to all those who were occupied in its study (550). Then followed the Karaites, in the days of the Gaonim, who seriously threatened

its existence. Time and time again they triumphed over Talmudic Rabbis and were near making an end of the Talmud and of them. The Rabbis next encountered the Popes. From the time of Pope Innocent III., the Talmud was burned at the stake in nearly every century from the 11th to the 18th, in Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and many other countries, and in the 18th, also in Poland by the Frankists, by Bishop Dembovski, where copies were dragged through the streets of the city, tied to horses' tails and then delivered to the executioner to be burned at the stake in Kamenetz, Lemberg, Brody and elsewhere. In most places, before it was resolved what was to be done with Talmud, the Israelites were forced to dispute with its enemies, and had to pay heavy fines for arriving late to the dispute, as well as for being vanquished in argument, the judges, being their enemies. Still what has been the result? The Talmud exists to-day, and not one letter in it is missing. It is true, the persecutions against it are not yet at an end; accusations

and calumnies by its enemies, under the new name of anti-Semites, are still directed against it, while the government of Russia legislates against and restricts the rights of the nation which adheres to the Talmud. No modern persecutions, however, can seriously endanger its existence, and it would appear that the Talmud will also survive them and continue as long as the sky spans the earth.

A desire to know all that has befallen the Talmud and all its vicissitudes since its inception would require the reading of all the scattered passages in countless volumes which have been compiled in various ages, languages, and countries. Its history, however, has never yet been written by a single author. Treaties on the Talmud itself, or on certain subjects contained therein, have briefly related part of its history, each according to the subject and the aim of its theme. Such are the works of Zunz and Grätz, the one dealing with rabbinical literature, and the other writing concerning the history of the Jews. Similarly the historians of the world, relating in detail the occurrences of every century, have briefly made mention of what happened to the Talmud in each century. Even in the year there appeared a pamphlet entitled "Anklager und Vertheidiger des Talmud" (accusers and defenders), by Dr. B. Kurrein, of Frankfort-on-the-Main, apparently giving the entire history of

p. 3

the Talmud from its origin to the present time, but it contains only dates (and not even these in full) and not occurrences. No mention is made of Karaites, who persecuted it in the times of the Gaonim, or of the Frankists of the 18th century, of its fate during the 15th century; the Pfefferkorn and Reuchlin episode is mentioned only in part, and by no means satisfactory to the reader curious about the details, not to speak of the Rohling-Bloch, at the end of the 19th century. It is, indeed, a matter of astonishment that hundreds of books have been written about the Talmud by exponents of all sects and in all ages, to say nothing of the extensive modern literature dealing with the Talmud in whole or in part, amounting to thousands of volumes--in particular a work, "Dikduke Sophrim," published in the last century, containing only the dates and publishers' names of the various editions of the Talmud, in seventeen large volumes, with a comparison of all words and letters of the different editions and manuscripts, and this only of two-thirds of the Talmud--the fate of the Talmud, the charges brought against it, the repeated persecutions, the burning at the stake, have not been recorded in a separate work, as though unworthy of notice. It has been thus left for us to supply the deficiency. For we, who have taken upon ourselves the difficult task of editing the old Talmud, to punctuate it in conformity with works in other languages, to systematize and arrange it for a new edition, and to translate it into a modern language, deem it our duty to collect into one book all the records of the vicissitudes of the Talmud in a systematic manner, at the same time stating the causes of many occurrences.

It is quite true, that in many places we have been constrained to be brief where a more ample account would not have been out of place, but it must be borne in mind that to expatiate on every incident would lead to the writing of a volume equal in bulk to the Talmud itself, perhaps even larger, and time would not permit such an undertaking. In one respect, however, we will do our duty; we will arrange all the events chronologically, and we have taken pains to denote the time and place of different events and likewise to name the persecutors of the Talmud. We trust this volume will meet with a favorable reception from the readers, for our work was done conscientiously, and to the utmost of our talents. To save space, we have not on every

p. 4

occasion mentioned the authorities from whom we derived our facts, but only when we had to refer the reader for details to other books we gave the name and page of the book. We may state, however, that the sources on which we have drawn are all the books which speak of this subject, viz.: the Talmud itself, the books of the Gaonim, and those written on this topic in the Middle Ages, as well as the extensive literature relating to it of the last century, from Zunz, Jost, Herzfeld, Graetz, etc., to the pamphlet we have mentioned. At the conclusion of the book the reader will find an explanation of the method employed in the new edition and translation of the Talmud, and at the same time a full introduction. We made it as lucid as possible, and also endeavored to reply to some criticisms that have appeared in various periodicals since the new publication had first appeared.

MICHAEL L. RODKINSON.

NEW YORK, *AUGUST*, 1903.

---

[Next: Chapter I: Origin of the Talmud](#)