

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE POLEMICS AND THE ATTACKS UPON THE TALMUD IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

The nineteenth century was the jubilee of the Talmud's 2,000 years since its beginning, and the twelfth century since its conclusion, in which it overcome all attacks directed against it and remained safe, not only bodily but spiritually. This did not prevent the anti-Semites from renewing the persecutions and the accusations of it with increased energy.

Although the accusations were not brought to a public dispute, and to the intervention of the government, still the polemics in books and pamphlets were greatly increased by different persons in different countries. We do not desire to linger on these books, as their discussion would take up too much time and space, still we cannot refrain from mentioning them briefly, as they pertain to the history of the Talmud.

In 1848, A. Büchner, a teacher in Warsaw, printed a book, "Der Talmud in Seine Nichtigkeit," and according to Strack, Jacob Kittseer also printed a volume called "Inhalt des Talmuds und seine Autoritat," etc, both in the German language. The contents of these two books were mainly attacks upon attacks, and accusations upon accusations, rained down upon the Talmud in general and its followers in particular.

At the same time a missionary, McCaul, printed a book in the English language, entitled "The Old Paths," and S. Hoga, an apostate and also a missionary, translated it into Hebrew. The latter edition was distributed gratis and in tens of thousands

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among the Hebrews. We cannot deny that it was somewhat effective, as it caused many Jews to embrace Christianity.

At about the same time Isaac bär Levinson of Kremenetz, named the Russian Mendelssohn, wrote a book, entitled "Teuda b'Israel," in which he collected all the savings of the Talmud relating to the following topics, (*a*) that every Jew is obliged to learn the language of his country; (*b*) to engage in scientific pursuits; (*c*) that he must learn some trade and occupy himself, if possible, with agriculture, and (*d*) that he must be patriotic to his country, and must respect the laws of his country just as much as the laws of the "Torah," etc., etc. This book was so excellent that the eye of Nicholas I., Emperor of Russia, was attracted to it and he assisted Levinson both morally and financially. Finally he presented him with 3,000 roubles to enable him to publish his later works, "Zerubbabel," in which he proved the falsehood of the misinterpretations of McCaul in every respect, "Beth Jehuda," and "Efes Damin" (no blood), written against the blood accusation. His books were so effective that as a result McCaul's books were almost ignored.

The later affair in Alexander II.'s reign, however, we intend to elaborate on more fully, as at that time it created a great stir in Russia.

In 1876 a Roman Catholic priest, Lyotostansky by name, who embraced Greek Catholicism, published a book in the Russian language which he entitled, "Upotreblayut li Jewreay christansky Krov?" (Do the Jews need Christian blood for religious purposes?)

This book, which contains about 300 pages, was dedicated to Alexander III., then Crown Prince of Russia. He accepted the dedication with thanks to the author.

Lyotostansky, desiring to have the thanks of the Crown Prince publicly made known, printed posters announcing the Crown Prince's thanks for the dedication, and set them up everywhere, even on the railroad cars.

The dailies and periodicals in Russia also announced the works favorably owing to the fact that the book found favor in the eyes of his highness, the Crown Prince. The contents of the book are chiefly attacks upon the Talmud, accusing it of being the source of all the bad customs of the Jews, etc.

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A meeting of the prominent Jews was then called and resolutions were passed as follows:

*First*, that Lyotostansky's attacks upon the Talmud itself should be silently ignored, for a debate on this subject in Russia would do the Jews more harm than good.

*Second*, to republish and distribute the voluminous book of Prof. Chwolson, who was a Christian, which defends the Talmud in general, and conclusively proves, both theoretically and practically, that the blood accusation is a trumped-up affair, and that all investigations in many countries have shown that no instance occurred in which the Jews used Christian blood.

*Third*, to republish the "Ukase" (decree) of Nicholas I., which declared that no blood accusation for religious purposes should be directed against the Jews as a people, and that if it should happen that a Jew be accused of murdering a Christian, he should be tried as an individual merely.

As is well known, there are people who endeavor to benefit themselves from all current calamities, and to announce themselves as leaders without considering that from such actions the calamity or affliction may become still greater.

At that time there were two such men, one in Russia and one in Austria, who desiring to make themselves popular, endeavored to place themselves in the front ranks of the defenders of Judaism for their own benefit.

In Russia there was Alexander Zederbaum, publisher of the periodical "Hamelitz" in St. Petersburg, a man of little knowledge, and who was never fitted for a public debate. He

challenged Lyotostansky to a public debate, which, however, the latter declined to accept.

The real leaders of Israel, like the well known S. I. Fünf of Wilna and Perez Smolensky, editor of the "Hashachar" in Vienna, and others, were angry because of Zederbaum's challenge, believing that such a challenge had caused an extremely unfavorable impression upon the Russian people, especially as the newspapers declared that Lyotostansky's declination was due to the fact that the alleged leader of the Russian Jews was an ignoramus.

The very learned Lazar Zweifel, teacher of the Rabbinical Seminary in Zhitomir, who, besides publishing a great book in

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Hebrew, entitled "The Defender," against Lyotostansky's book, appealed in our periodical "Hakol," Vol. I. No's 27 to 31, to his co-religionists in Russia that they should appoint a committee to petition the Czar, Alexander II., to forbid all polemics about the blood accusation in newspapers, books or pamphlets, for such incitations always do harm to the government itself.

However, Zweifel's appeal was a voice in the desert, as the attempts upon the life of the Czar, in which, to our sorrow, some of our race took part at that time, made it impossible to bother the Czar with such petitions.

We may say, however, that even in this case the Talmud itself was saved, and the government did not stop the publication and circulation of it in Russia and even the study of it in the Jewish schools and institutions. Even in the curriculums of the institutes for Hebrew teachers, established by the government, some tracts of the Talmud were inserted.

Alas, we cannot say that the blood accusation by Lyotostansky had no effect; as in 1882, there were massacres in many cities where Jews dwelt. Although these were secretly instigated by the government itself from a political standpoint, the provoking of the mob was on the basis of the blood accusation. [1](#)

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