

RABBINIC EXEGESIS.

HAVING traced the slow growth of the Oral Law, by a system of incessant accretion, from the simple elements of Mosaism to the traditional minutiae of the Pharisees, and having shewn the vast and utterly exaggerated importance attached to it, and the grounds on which the Jewish doctors defended their devoted reverence for directions so intrinsically worthless,—I shall proceed, in this paper, to give specimens of the mode of Scriptural interpretation which were current in the Jewish schools, and to trace them, so far as is possible, from their earliest recognizable germs down to their ultimate Kabbalistic developments.

One of the earliest references to a definite *system* of minute exegesis occurs in the Talmudic story of that famous dispute between Hillel and the Benî Bethyra,¹ which ended in the triumphant establishment of the former as the leading member of a new school.

Herod, after first selecting an obscure Babylonian named Hananel to be High Priest,² allowed the young and beautiful Aristobulus IV. to succeed to that office. But the jealousy of the sanguinary tyrant was soon kindled by the extraordinary popularity which Aristobulus enjoyed, both as a prince of a beloved race, and as a youth of singular attractiveness and promise; and the minions of Herod, by a base and cruel conspiracy, drowned the young Asmonæan, under pretence of mere rough sport, while he was

¹ *Fer. Pesachim*, vi. 1.

² *Jos. Ant.* xv. ii. 4.

bathing at Jericho.¹ Joshua Ben Phabi succeeded him, and then Herod nominated Simeon, son of Boethos, to the High-Priesthood, and strengthened the union between Throne and Altar by marrying his beautiful daughter, who, like Herod's first wife, bore the name of Mariamne. From that time forward, until the destruction of Jerusalem, the Pontificate continued in the hands of these powerful Boethusim, who simply shared its dishonoured functions with one or two other families equally aristocratic and equally Sadducean. The Rabbis of the leading schools withdrew from all close participation with this cabal of priestly foreigners, and we have already seen that Shemaia and Abtalion maintained towards them a position of armed neutrality. This "*Couple*" of Rabbis seems to have been immediately followed by the Beni Bethyra, whose antecedents and history are singularly obscure.² On one occasion, however, during their presidency of the schools, the 14th of Nisan happened to fall on a Sabbath, and there arose a very serious question as to whether the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb ought to be permitted or postponed. Then for the first time some mention was made of a certain Babylonian named Hillel, who

¹ The tragic story of the drowning of Aristobulus, under pretence of sport, may be found in Josephus.

² The remark of Grätz (iii. 167), that Herod assigned them a territory in Batanæa, in which they founded the city of Bethyra, seems to be a mere baseless conjecture. The words *Bith Thira* mean a watch-tower, and are the Chaldaic equivalent for "Mizpah." (Derenbourg, *Palest.* p. 179.) The name was therefore common, and is found in Judges x. 17, as well as in Samuel, &c. But how the name Beni Bethira was acquired, and whether the Bethyr from which they derived it was the city afterwards so famous in the history of the rebellion of Barkochba, we cannot tell.

had been a pupil of Shemaia and Abtalion, and who might, it was hoped, be able to decide the question. He was sent for, and questioned on the subject. "Have we not," he asked, "many other sacrifices which are permitted on the Sabbath?" It might have been supposed that this reference to the well-known rule that "there was no Sabbatism in the Temple,"—or that, in other words, the duties of public worship superseded the Sabbatic regulations,—would have been regarded as decisive; but the only answer was a contemptuous remark that they could not have expected anything better from such as he. Hillel then proceeded to support his view by three methods of interpretation, afterwards universal, but to which this is probably the earliest formal allusion, viz.,—(1) Analogy, (2) The argument *a fortiori*, and (3) Equivalence.

(1) *By Analogy*.—Since the daily sacrifice is offered by the community, and supersedes the Sabbath, the Paschal sacrifice should also supersede it.

(2) *A fortiori*.—If the daily sacrifice, the neglect of which does not involve the consequence of excision from the congregation, supersedes the Sabbath, *a fortiori* the Paschal sacrifice supersedes it also, since to the neglect of it this penalty *is* attached.

(3) *By equivalence*. It is said of each sacrifice—the daily and the Paschal—that it should be performed "*at its due season*;"¹ and since this, in the case of the daily sacrifice, is interpreted to mean "*in spite of the Sabbath*," it ought to be so interpreted of the Paschal sacrifice also.

Nothing could exceed the cogency of these ob-

¹ במועדו

vious and common-sense methods of exegesis, but they only provoked the sons of Bethyra to the contemptuous remark, "What could one have expected of a mere Babylonian?" The dispute continued all day, but the Benî Bethyra remained entirely unconvinced by Hillel's reasonings; until at last he said to them, in despair or in triumph, "May I be punished if my decision was not communicated to me by Shemaia and Abtalion."

The effect produced by this remark was extraordinary. One would have thought that there was no amazing merit in recollecting a mere scrap of the Halachôth, and that it was much more meritorious to bring reason and good sense to bear on the solution of an undecided precedent. But to think thus was wholly alien to the Rabbinic adoration of authority; and although there is no explanation of Hillel's concealment of what one is tempted to call "the trump card" of authority, which he finally produced to support the rejected power of logic, he had no sooner uttered this appeal to the names of the last-honoured *Zougôth*, than he is instantly lifted up and established in the high post of *Nasî*, or President! The title applies, not apparently to the Sanhedrin (if the despicable shadow which usurped the title could at this time be regarded as a Sanhedrin at all), but to the Schools. No sooner had he been thus appointed *Nasî*, than Hillel used his new authority to reprimand the Benî Bethyra, *not*, however, as we might have expected, for neglecting his irresistible arguments but because they had, on their own shewing, paid insufficient reverence to the authoritative decisions

which their predecessors had traditionally delivered, but which they had suffered to lapse into oblivion. "Whose fault was it," he asked, "that you were obliged to have recourse to a Babylonian? Was it not your own, for not having sat attentively at the feet of Shemaia and Abtalion, the two great men of the age, who dwelt amongst you?"

The three rules here illustrated belong to the *Seven*—called *Middóth*—which are usually assigned to Hillel, all seven of which he is said to have applied on this occasion during his day's discussion. Whether they were original, or whether he had derived them from Babylon, is not known. The reason why he applied them before proceeding to adduce his traditional Halacha, was perhaps to avoid those *collisions* of conflicting authorities which make so strange a jumble of later Talmudism, and which were afterwards mainly due to the disputes of the Hillelites and Shammaites. There is, however, little that is original about these *miadóth*; and if, as some have fancied, our Lord Himself referred to them,¹ He may most certainly have done so without any knowledge whatever of Hillel, seeing that they are as old as the most rudimentary form of logic. The method *a fortiori* is found, as the Jews themselves observed, in Numbers xii. 14, and the rule of *analogy* had been already applied by Simeon Ben Shetach long before, in a question relating to the punishment of false witnesses. And although it might have been hoped that Hillel's *miadóth* would have had the effect of superseding a mere reference to authority,

¹ Inference from major to minor, or from minor to major, Matt. vii. 11, x. 29; analogy, xii. 5, &c.

they not only failed to do this, but caused much deeper mischief. Under R. Ismael Ben Elisa these rules swelled from seven to thirteen, and under R. Eliezer Ben Jose to *thirty-two*, and subsequently to *forty-nine*, admitting of applications so complicated and so preposterous, that, in the hands of a teacher like the celebrated Akibha, the original text became of little or no importance, and, by the aid of numberless *Halachôth*, anything might be deduced from the Mosaic Law which pleased the ingenuity or met the fancy of any celebrated doctor. Even R. Akibha met with opponents courageous enough to denounce the frivolous complexity of his system. "Expound and expound all day long!" exclaimed to him indignantly R. Jose the Galilean, and R. Eliezer Ben Azaria, "still thou canst neither add to nor take from the written word." "I can stand it no longer, Akibha!" bitterly cried R. Tarphon, in the middle of one of his cobweb spinnings; "how long will you patch things up in this arbitrary fashion?" "You are the man," said R. Doza Ben Hyrkan, "whose fame reaches from onè end of the earth to the other; yet you are not fit to be even a cowherd."¹ "Not even to be a shepherd," was Akibha's ironical or humble reply. R. Jose Haglili, who often victoriously opposed the reasoning of Akibha, was called by R. Tarphon "the horned ram," because he conquered the butting of Akibha.²

The various lines of Biblical interpretation in the Talmudistic and Kabbalistic schools were subse-

¹ Jebamôth, 17.

² See the reference to the Sifras and Tosephtas, in which these passages of arms occur, in Hamburger's *Talmud. Wörterb.* ii. p. 36.

quently summed up in the memorial word PARDES, viz. :—

(1) *Peshat*, “explanation” of the simple word and sentence.

(2) *Remez*, “hint” as to laws, &c.

(3) *Darûsh*, “homily,” inferences, paraphrases, &c.

(4) *Sod*, “mystery,” in which allegory plays a large part.

“In these various directions the Law,” say the Rabbis, “can be expounded in forty-nine different manners;” and it was a current maxim in the school of R. Ishmael¹ that a teacher can explain a verse in a multitude of different ways, as a hammer dashes a rock into many fragments.

It would be tedious to follow the dreary ingenuity of the Halachists through the multitudinous pettinesses of which the Talmud is the treasury or the tomb. But some of the methods of the Kabbalah are intrinsically interesting and historically illustrative from their very ingenuity. The date and origin of the Kabbalah are extremely uncertain. The word is correlative with Massorah. Massorah means “transmission,” and Kabbalah means “reception,” both words having reference to the Oral Law. The Jews refer the doctrines of the Kabbalah—the strange cosmogony with its *En Soph*, or “Illimitable,” its ten *Sephôrôth*, or “Intelligences,” its *Ets Chaiim*, or “Tree of Life,” and *Adam Kadmon*, or “Primeval Man,” and its obviously Neoplatonic psychology—to Abraham, who derived it ultimately from Adam, who was initiated into its mysteries by the angel Raziel. Its doctrines are found in the *Jetsirah*, or

¹ Sanhedrin, 34.

“Book of Creation,” and the Zohar, or “Book of Brightness,” and the germs of the system, or at any rate of some of its pretended methods, may probably be found about the time of the Exile. Its subsequent development was due to the Jewish Schools of Alexandria, which revelled in a mixture of Pythagoreanism, Platonism, and Oriental Philosophy. Modern Kabbalists divide their science into the speculative part and the practical part. The speculative part is occupied with the names of God, angels, demons, and mystic exegesis. The second is a kind of magical science, equally useless and contemptible. The speculative part of the Kabbalah is loosely divided into the Cosmogony (*Maase Bereshith*) and the History of the Heavenly Chariot (*Maase Mercava*); but Munk,¹ to whose account I am much indebted, divides it into symbolic, dogmatic, and purely speculative.

It is the former of these divisions alone—the symbolic—with which we have here to do. It is an esoteric system of interpretation, which deduced from Scripture a sense widely different from the literal. Its three methods were summed up in the memorial word *Geneth*, which stood for the initial letters of the Hebraized Greek words *Gematria*, *Notarikon*, and *Themourah*, of each of which we will furnish a few instances.

I. GEMATRIA is simply a distortion of the Greek word *Geometria*. It consisted in giving numerical values to the letters of a word, and then connecting it with any other word the letters of which furnished the same numerical value. Thus the Hebrew word

¹ “Palestine,” p. 520, *et seq.*

for Messiah furnished the numerical value 358; and as this was also furnished by the word *Nachash*, "serpent," they inferred that the Messiah was the promised Seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head. Again: since Gog and Magog yield by numerical equivalents the number 70, they always considered that 70 was the number of the nations of the world. Again: since the letters of the name Eliezer give 318, they inferred that, when Abraham pursued the army of Chedorlaomer (Gen. xiv. 4), Eliezer alone was worth all the rest of the host. Another curious and apparently very ancient application of the rule is found in the fact that, whenever a Nazarite undertook his vow, without specifying the time of its duration, he was (as appears from *Siphri*, the Rabbinic Commentary on the passage) to be a Nazarite for thirty days, simply because, in Numbers vi. 5, "He shall be holy," the יהיה, "he shall be," = $10 + 5 + 10 + 5 = 30$. It might have been supposed that such a method was nothing, in fact, but a harmless play of fancy, being only, as a friend observes, an expansion of Scriptural interpretation into the number of positive integral solutions of an indeterminate equation. Indeed, so far, it might be considered in no respect more reprehensible than the fancies of early Christian writers about Abraham's 318 servants; as, for instance, when it is argued that, because $\tau\iota\eta$ is the Greek alphabetical notation for 318, the τ symbolizes the cross, and the $\iota\eta$ the first two letters of the name of Jesus, so that the victory of the servants is a direct type of Christ's victory by means of the cross. But unhappily this Gematria furnished the Jews with a ready means of

getting rid of any obnoxious passage or expression, and this might be done with fatal effect. Thus, for instance, nothing is more remarkable in early Jewish history than the entire absence of that national exclusiveness by which they were afterwards characterized. They were accompanied from Egypt by a mixed multitude, and actually Moses, their own Moses, was so far from having originally attached scrupulous importance to any admixture of blood with other races, that of his two wives, the first was a Midianite and the second an Ethiopian. Now, the murmurs of Miriam and Aaron against this Ethiopian marriage were a type of that arrogant and haughty nationality which became subsequently so predominant; and in order to get rid of a most unpleasant admission, the Kabbalah took the word *Koosith*, "Ethiopian," and finding that it yielded the number 736, which is also yielded by the Hebrew words for "fair of eyes," they softened down the obnoxious alliance into the marriage of Moses with a beautiful woman, and therefore robbed themselves of the rich lesson of tolerance and humanity which they might otherwise have learnt.

2. The process of NOTARIKON consisted in making words or sentences of the united final or other letters of another word or sentence. Thus, in Exodus xx. 2; out of the word *anoké*, "I," they made the Hebrew sentence, "I have written and revealed for thee my nature."¹ Out of the word *Mizbeach*, "an altar," they got the four Hebrew words for forgiveness, worship, blessing, life. In

¹ See other instances in Hamburger's *Talmud. Wörterb. c. v. Schrift.*

I Kings ii. 8, out of the word *nimretseth*, a "grievous" curse, they deduce that Shimei called David "an adulterer," "a Moabite," "a murderer," an "apostate," and "abhorred," because the Hebrew words for those terms of opprobrium begin respectively with *n*, *m*, *r*, *ts*, and *th*. And since, in Genesis ii. 3, the words, "God created and made," are in Hebrew, "*Bara Elohim, laasôth*," they got out of these two words the word *Emeth*, "Truth," and said that "truth" was the object of creation. Again: out of the letters of the word Abraham they got the initials of the Hebrew words for "Father of many nations;" and they regarded the word ADaM as a sign that the *Messiah* would be descended from *Adam* through *David*. That the Christian fathers inherited some of the traditional methods of the Jewish Kabbalah, may be seen from the fact that, out of the same word *Adam*, they got the four Greek words *anatolê*, *dûsis*, *arktos*, *mesêmbriz*, *i.e.*, east, west, north, south; and argued from this, or rather illustrated by this fancy, the supremacy of man throughout the visible universe.

3. The word THEMOURAH means "change," or "commutation," and it consisted in various interchanges of letters of the alphabet, for concealment or similar purposes. It is especially interesting because there seem to be three distinct instances of it in the Bible itself. The first and simplest form of Themourah consisted in substituting for each letter the one which corresponded to it in position at the other end of the alphabet. Thus, since the Hebrew alphabet runs as follows: A, B, G, D, H, V, Z, &c., R, SH, TH, the proposed interchange was called *Ath-*

bcsh, because *sh* was substituted for א, *th* for ב, &c. Thus, in Jeremiah li. 41 (cf. xxv. 26), we find the unknown word Sheshak, and no Christian interpreter had any notion why it was used or what it meant till Jerome had learnt the secret from his Jewish instructor in the Hebrew language. Substitute for *sh*, *sh*, *k*, the letters which correspond to them at the *beginning* of the alphabet, and you get *Babel*, or “Babylon,” and the secret stands revealed. Another curious instance occurs in the first verse of the same chapter. The words are, “Behold, I will raise up against Babylon, and against *them that dwell in the midst of them* (*lebh kamai*) that rise up against me, a destroying wind.” Now, in this passage, no meaning could be attached to the italicized words until it was revealed by Jews that they are another instance of Athbash; for, substituting for *lebh kamai* the letters in corresponding position,¹ we find that we get the word *Kasdīm*, or Chaldeans, and the verse becomes abundantly clear. Originally, no doubt, the custom of using the Athbash may have been dictated by policy and terror, because it furnished a very simple cipher; but afterwards it was evidently used by way of fancy or ornament.

A modification of Athbash was Albam, which consisted in writing the alphabet in two columns, thus :

A	L
B	M
G	N
D	S
&c.	&c. ;

and then substituting for each letter the one in the

¹ כשדמ is by Athbash the equivalent of לב קמי.

opposite column. Of this, too, there is very possibly an interesting example in Isaiah vii. 6, "Because Ephraim, Syria, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, . . . and set a king in the midst of it, even *the son of Tabeal*." But who is Tabeal, and why should *his* son be set up, and for what reason is he nowhere else alluded to? Apply the *Albam*, and "Tabeal" simply gives you "Remaliah" again; and there can, I think, be very little doubt that Isaiah simply uses it by way of scornful variety, or perhaps because these threats had at their origin been at first concealed under a secret watchword of conspiracy.

Yet another transposed alphabet gave the Atbach, an ingenious system by which all the pairs of letters that make 10, 100, 1,000, are classed together, and the letters of each pair are commuted. There is no even probable instance of its use in the Bible, but it has been applied to Proverbs xxix. 21, to explain the word *mánón*, which occurs nowhere else, by substituting for it the equivalent, "*gnehdah*," "testimony."

A third species of Themourah was simple transposition of the letters of the word which was to be manipulated. Thus, because Malachi is easily transposable into Michael, there rose the current fancy that Malachi was only an angel in guise of human flesh.

It will be obvious that the reverence for words so full of hidden and mystic significance would become more and more superstitious. Accordingly, in the hands of teachers like Akibha, the whole Bible became an immense series of infinitely numerous

enigmas, as a training-ground for Rabbinic ingenuity. Already, in *Pirke Abhôth* (v. 22), we find the rule, "Turn it (the Law) over and over again, for everything is in it, and will be discovered therein;" and commentators of the school of Akibha held that, just as there is meaning in "every fibre of an ant's foot or a gnat's wing," so is there in every letter and tittle, or horn of a letter, in Scripture. Thus every "and" (*aph*), "also" (*gam*), and sign of the accusative (*eth*) case, is supposed to possess a special significance.¹ Thus, not to be needlessly lengthy over these minutiae (illustrative, as they are, of the dust that gathered on the ceremonies of a dead religion), if, in Genesis xii. 1, it is said that "the Lord visited *eth*-Sarah," it means that *with* her He visited also other barren women; and in 2 Kings ii. 14, "He *also* (*aph*) smote the waters," it means that Elisha performed more miracles at the Jordan than Elijah; and if, in 1 Samuel xvii. 36, we find, "Thy servant slew also too (*gam aph*) the lion, also (*gam*) the bear," the three particles imply that he slew three other animals beside the two mentioned. In this sort of way the Rabbinic exegesis becomes an elaborate system in which "nought is everything and everything is nought."

It was this stupid fetish-worship of the dead letter—a superstition which invariably and inevitably involves the murder of the living spirit—which led to the superfluous folly of counting the letters of the Law, which were said to be 815,280, the middle letter of the Pentateuch occurring in Leviticus xi. 42. The

¹ These rules will be found at length in Dr. Ginsburg's art. *Midrash* in Kitto's "Bibl. Cycl."

fact that the word for glory, *kebhôdah*, is in Haggai ii. 9 spelt without the final letter ן, which stands for five, led the Jews to look out for five things, which, though present in the first, were wanting to the second Temple, and these five things were, among other various enumerations, sometimes reckoned as being the Shechînah, or "cloud of glory," the Urim, the Holy Oil, the fire from heaven, and the Spirit of Prophecy. The importance attached to various letters is illustrated by the story of Rabbi Honna, that, since the letter Yod was turned out of the name Sarai, it was compensated by the addition of a *h* both to Abraham and Sarah, which thus divided the Yod (=10) into two *h*'s, each of which stood numerically for five. In the Jerusalem Sanhedrim the Book of Deuteronomy prostrates itself before God, and complains (on what grounds I cannot understand) that Solomon, by his shameless polygamy, has turned it out of the letter *nashîm*, "women;" whereon God replies that Solomon, and a thousand like him, shall perish, but not the letter *Yod*.¹ Once more: in Psalm cxlv. 16 the verse ought to begin (since this is one of the alphabetical Psalms) with the letter *n*. The letter *n* is, however, omitted, either by the accidental loss of a verse² or for some other unknown cause. This exercised the ingenuity of the Rabbis, and Rabbi Johanan suggested that the reason was because the verse which predicted the fall of Israel begins with this letter (Amos v. 2).³

¹ Gfrörer. *Jahrhundert d. Heils*. i. 236.

² In the LXX. a verse is found here which would in Hebrew begin with *Nun*.

³ See *Bab. Berachôth*, i. (Schwab. 233.) It is, however, very re-

And yet, as we have already seen in the dishonest application of the Kabbalistic Gematria to the objectionable word *Koosith*, "Ethiopian woman," in Numbers xii. 1, so in other instances this irrational reverence for the letter did not prevent the Jews from tampering with it when occasion required. Perhaps the most flagrant instance of this is to be found in Judges xviii. 30. In that passage there can be but little doubt that the wandering Levite who first serves Micah and his very irregular ephod and teraphim for the very small remuneration of his food, a suit of clothes, and ten shekels a year, and who afterwards so readily assents to be a priest of the Danites in Laish, and the founder of a hierarchy of rivals to the priests at Shiloh, is Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son, not of Manasseh, but of no other than MOSES himself. We can easily understand that if the Jews were, not unnaturally, vexed and astonished to learn that the second wife of Moses had been an Ethiopian, they were still more indignant to find that the grandson of their heroic and immortal legislator was the meanly-paid Levite of a schismatic and semi-idolatrous worship. There stood the word MÔSHEH, מֹשֶׁה. Suspend a little, timid, furtive, dishonest *n* (*Nun*) above the *sh* (*Shin*),—thus, מֹשֶׁה,—and you have a sort of vague suggestion that there

markable that Rabbi Johanan does not use the words "the fall of Israel," but, by a remarkable antiphrasis, curiously illustrative of the superstition which attached to the mere sounds of words, substitutes for it the reverse, namely, "the fall of the enemies of Israel." Another Rabbinic way of getting over this painful verse was to imagine a disjunctive accent in the middle of it, thus: "The virgin of Israel is fallen: she shall no more (fall): rise!" and in Psalm cxlix. 14, "The Lord upholdeth *all them that fall*," Rabbi Nachman bar Isaac sees a prophetic allusion of David to this very verse of Amos.

is a *doubt* about the reading, and that possibly this Jonathan was a son (or descendant) of Gershom, the son, not of Moses, but of Manasseh. Nor was it long before some bolder "liar for God" took down this "suspended *Nun*," as it was called, from its gallows, and dishonestly interpolated it into the body of the word, to save Moses from the reproach of being the progenitor of an apostate. "Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of MANASSEH," is accordingly the received reading both of the English Version and of many manuscripts of the Septuagint; and it is from the Samaritan Version, the Latin Vulgate, and other quarters that we discover the true reading and detect the fraud into which the Masoretic scribes were gradually tempted. A dishonest manipulation of the text, a baseless Kabbalistic exegesis of it, were the natural rebound, the almost necessary reaction of the spirit revolting from the impossible and injurious bondage to its mere written or articulate vocables.

F. W. FARRAR.

THE CHRIST OF THE RESURRECTION.

THERE have been times in our life when, first awaking from a deep and heavy sleep, we have seemed for the moment to have lost the thread of our consciousness; and we have asked ourselves the strange questions, "Who am I?" "Where am I?" Between the yesterday and the opening to-day, there has rolled the silent oblivious stream we call sleep, and for the time the operations of the mind have been suspended. But soon, as consciousness returns,