

THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN THE TALMUD.

THE courteous criticism of Mr. G. A. Cooke upon my remarks in the *EXPOSITOR* for September on certain Talmudic references to the Blessed Virgin, together with letters which have reached me from other Semitic scholars, has convinced me of the importance of the considerations which I adduced, as well as satisfied me of their substantial accuracy. And I am not without hope that I shall be able, by a few additional references and some extension of the comparative method which I employ, to secure Mr. Cooke as an ally, in which case the article will not have been written in vain. I will even venture to say that he will not be able to decipher the Talmudic texts with which he is so familiar, unless he plows with my heifer or with some stronger animal of the same breed; for it is certain that those whom he calls the "competent Talmudic scholars," after centuries of study, unrivalled in patient devotion to their text, have done next to nothing to make the Talmud available for the study of history or of the evolution of doctrine. In the case of such passages as relate to the Christian religion this might be due to intentional fuliginosity (if I may coin a word), but it cannot be the case that the whole of the Talmud has been wilfully obscured, and therefore the difficulties of its interpretation lie (i.) in the manner of its composition, which was by gradual deposit without regard to chronology, and (ii.) in the method of its study, which has been too much detached from the adjacent literatures of the world. I fancy that Mr. Cooke himself is as yet too much in the net of the Talmudists. His article, however, is valuable and instructive, and will be generally appreciated.

Returning then to the subject which I introduced to the readers of the *EXPOSITOR*, let me take the two leading

passages in the order in which I introduced them. First of all, I showed that Laible was correct in identifying Mary the woman's hair-dresser of the Talmud with Mary Magdalene and with Mary the Virgin. I did not know at the time that I had the support of Dr. Neubauer for this interpretation, but as he has since informed me on the point, I hasten to do him justice by printing in full the passage in *Géographie du Talmud*, in which he makes this explanation of the name of the Magdalene.

P. 14. " Si la leçon du Talmud de Babylone est exacte, Césarée était appelée également שר מגדל ou שר, 'tour forte' ou 'tour du prince.' Dans le dernier sens on l'appelle aussi מגדל נשיא; c'est de là, croit on, que provient le nom¹ de מרים מגדלא נשיא, 'Marie de Césarée.' Nous préférons la traduction 'Marie de Magdala.' Marie la mère de Jésus est surnommée également Marie Migdala Nassi, dans les Talmuds, par confusion avec Maria Magdalena."

Dr. Neubauer's interpretation, then, agrees with mine so far as regards (i.) the etymological meaning of the name Magdalene, (ii.) the confusion between the Magdalene and the Blessed Virgin. In which connection two things are to be noted, the one that the explanation is made through the *Aramaic* root גרל, to plait, and not through the Hebrew; the other that, as I have shown, the confusion was common in those portions of the Early Church that lie most nearly adjacent to the Jewish centres of learning.

And it follows from this that in passages where there are exegetical and etymological subtleties we must be prepared to go outside the strict Hebrew into Syriac and even into Greek, as well as to consult the early Christian writers of the East, who remained for a long time, practically Judæo-Christian in their methods of interpretation. My contri-

¹ *Tal. de Bab.*, traité Haguiga, fol. 4b. Des commentateurs expliquent ce nom par " Marie la coiffeuse."

bution to the subject consists in the light that I throw upon the Talmud from the adjacent and parallel Syriac literature.¹ And this contribution might be made much more extensive, for, once the attention is drawn to the subject, it will be found that the attempts to explain the name of the Magdalene are traceable right through the Syriac literature, and not only as I pointed out, in Bar-Salibi, and that the confusion between the two Marys is very early in the Syrian Church. It must have been early, if it existed at all. For example, it will, I think, be found that the Syrian commentator Isho'dad has the same series of explanations of the name of the Magdalene as occur in Bar-Salibi. They are a part of the regular Syrian Targum upon the Gospel.

Further than this, it is easy to see that the interpretations in question are not borrowed from the Jews; they are simple and natural and obviously original in the Syriac. They reduce to two classes: (i.) Magdalene "the plaiter," which is the Aramaic explanation; (ii.) Magdalene, the woman of "the tower," which is the Hebrew explanation; in which latter case it only remains to identify the tower alluded to.

There cannot be a doubt then that the Talmudic "*women's plaiter*" is a later form and not the original interpretation. And consequently Mr. Cooke cannot be right in suggesting that Mary of Cæsarea might be a misunderstanding or variant interpretation of the Talmudic מרים מנרלא נשיא, *i.e.*, Mary of the prince's tower, the prince being Cæsar. A reference to the Syriac tradition shows that the reason why Cæsarea came to be suggested as the native place of Mary was because they were in search of a tower, and the favourite identifications were with Turris

¹ For this reason it was not necessary to tell me, as Mr. Cooke does, that the passive participle of צלוב was צלוב in Hebrew, any more than it is necessary to repel the interpretation of Magdalene because it is made through the Syriac.

Stratonis, *i.e.*, Cæsarea, or with the tower of Siloam. The Syriac tradition is quite clear on these points; and, therefore, whenever in the Talmud we find any allusion to "Mary the women's hair-dresser" or "Mary of the tower" or "Mary who rears children" (using a third Hebrew etymology) we are to replace all of these by the primitive Mary Magdalene.

The mother of Jesus is, therefore, according to the Talmud, Mary the Magdalene, who is, according to the fancy of the interpreter, Mary the plaiter, *or* Mary the plaiter of women's hair,¹ *or* Mary of the tower (the tower being Cæsarea, Siloam, or any other tower, real or imaginary), *or* Mary the rearer (of מררקי), whatever may be the meaning of the bracketed expression.

I hope I shall not be considered over-confident in saying that this obscure and involved tradition is now reasonably clear. We have traced it to its fountain-head in the Gospel story, and the primitive comments thereupon.

And now we come to the second of the two passages, *viz.*, that in which the Blessed Virgin is represented in Gehenna. I freely admit that my solution of the difficulty in this passage is doubtful, and the more so because I am here deserted by Laible and Neubauer, and have to face some incisive criticism from Mr. Cooke. At the same time I am pretty sure that if I am wrong, I am not far from being right. And perhaps a slight change in the presentation of the subject will clear away some of its difficulties and show the direction in which the solution must lie.

It will be remembered that in the passage quoted from *Chagiga*, it was said that, according to R. Lazar ben Jose, a devout person saw Mary, the daughter of Eli Betzalim, suspended by the paps of her breasts. R. Jose ben

¹ I see no reason to invent a new Magdalene, as Mr. Cooke suggests, following Levy, for the story of R. Bibi. The passage in question is not history. And if it were, we should have two new Mary Magdalenes, neither of whom is known, except for their connection with the last hours of R. Bibi.

Chanina says, further, that the hinge of hell's gate was fastened in her ear. And we are further told that this punishment was to be continued until the coming of Simeon ben Shetach.

Mr. Cooke argues that this is not necessarily a vision of the *Inferno*, but merely a dream in which certain dead persons appear in various circumstances. The circumstances cannot be infernal, because it is not said that what happens to Simeon ben Shetach happens in Gehenna. If the gate of hell is not in hell, it would be a problem in ecclesiastical geography to determine its location: has some Talmudic Samson carried it off to some other place? In that case a part of the hinge would be left behind, and the torment alluded to becomes impossible. The dead persons, therefore, appear in hell, for where the gate of Gehenna is, it may be presumed that Gehenna itself is to be found.

But Mr. Cooke says, further, that the immediately preceding story about the death of Ben Maon, the tax-collector, shows that we are not to regard the Apocalypse as seriously meant, for the tax-collector was seen walking in gardens and parks, and by springs of water, trying to drink by the bank of a river, without being able to reach the water.

Is it possible that Mr. Cooke has failed to recognise the figure of Tantalus; and does he suppose that Tantalus was anywhere out of hell, or that a more diabolical torture could be conceived than thirst amid streams that recede from the lips?

Mr. Cooke's illustration that this is not exactly a vision of Gehenna, proves the very opposite. The people are certainly in hell; and the descriptions find their parallel in the Greek underworld, and in the Peter Apocalypse; and as far as the treatment of individually objectionable characters goes, in the *Inferno* of Dante.

Mary, the daughter of Eli Betzalim, was therefore consigned to hell by the Talmud, in the same sense as Brutus and Cassius, or Francesca di Rimini, by Dante.

And this clears the discussion, for we are now able to apply an important Jewish canon with regard to the retribution in the next world, namely, that the punishment of the sinner is by the member that sinned. I will not accumulate passages from the Talmud to prove this; it is a well-known principle and is not confined to the Jewish world. The Peter Apocalypse is full of it; and the Syriac literature, from which we draw so many illustrations, reproduces the Jewish rule exactly. For example, a reference to Mösinger's Commentary of Ephrem shows the following instance:

“ Per membrum quod deliquit, Zachariam
puniri oportuit.”

If we leave out the name Zacharias, we have the Jewish rule; and indeed it is a common rule of Eastern religious thought.

We are therefore led to seek for the sins of Mary, the daughter of Eli Betzalim, in the sinful members, viz.: her breasts and her ear. And neither of these appears to be affected by the accepted Talmudic solution, which is that her father was an objectionable person, whose nickname was Leaves of Onions, for so they interpret Eli Betzalim; an explanation which can only be met with the words “*risum teneatis, amici?*” It surely must be admitted that Mary was an objectionable person herself; the Talmud would never consign her to hell, and to such arduous hell, because her father was disagreeable. Moreover, it is not proved that to be called “Leaves of Onions” is an objectionable term; it might be in the West, but not in the East. We are therefore obliged to seek a more reasonable solution than that of the “competent Talmudists” which Mr. Cooke has endorsed.

My own solution is that, underlying the name Eli Betzalim will be found an allusion to either the Cross or the Crucified. I freely admit that my explanation (Mary, the daughter of Eli, the mother of the Crucified) does not seem sufficiently simple. Another solution has been proposed to me by an excellent Talmudic scholar, which is that as *עלם*, *i.e.*, idol, is the Jewish esoteric term (by assonance) for the Cross, that we may read the passage: "He saw Mary, the daughter of Eli, hanging on a cross by her breasts," and I think this is a better solution than mine, though it would perhaps be objected that the use of "idol" for "cross" cannot be carried so far back as to furnish the explanation. But, whatever may be the exact solution, I think we have come very near to it, and that the whole passage will presently be cleared up. Mr. Cooke's objections to Gehenna have been dissipated, and it only requires now the courage to forsake the traditional and unnatural explanation of the Talmudic schools, and to substitute for it the explanation which, if they have not forgotten, the Jewish teachers are unwilling to disclose.

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JEREMIAH: THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE.

VII. THE FUTURE.

"DEAD nations never rise again" is the aphorism of a modern poet. Nations have, like individuals, their seasons of development, when their genius unfolds its qualities and their contribution is made to the progress of the world; but, when this flowering time is past and the winter of decay overtakes them, there is no return possible to the place of power. In favour of this view of history a formidable array of facts might be adduced. Nothing in human affairs is more striking than the fourth-rate position