

anathematized. Knowing, as we do, that the Samaritans had a synagogue of their own at Damascus, it is not improbable that it was among them that he expected to find his victims, among them that he disclosed the wondrous tale of the vision that had changed the whole tenour of his life.

E. II. PLUMPTRE.

A TALMUDIC CRYPTOGRAPHY; AND SOME OF THE RABBIS.

I ENDED my last paper on "Christians in the Talmud" with an allegory, or cryptograph, which there was no space to explain. It was, briefly, the story that Abba Saul, while burying the dead, sank up to the nose in the eye-socket of a corpse, which was said to be Absalom's. Yet Abba Saul was the tallest man of his age; being a head and shoulders taller than Rabbi Tarphon; who was so much taller than R. Akibha; and he than R. Meir; and he than R. Judah; and he than R. Chija; and he than Rabh; and he than Rabh Juda; and he than Adda Dialah—each of these being the tallest men of their respective periods. Adda Dialah was a head and shoulders taller than the pistachio tree of Pumbaditha, and that pistachio tree was twice as high as common people.

This story occurs in Nidda (xxiv. 6; xxv. a),¹ and has often been made a subject of ridicule. Of course, if it were ever meant to be taken literally, nothing could be more revoltingly absurd, or contradictory to Scripture and to common sense. It has been adduced to prove the senseless character of the Talmudic stories;

¹ Nidda is the Seventh Mesikta, or treatise, of the Seder Taharoth ("Order of Purifications"), which is the sixth and last division of the Talmud.

nor was this unnatural so long as its esoteric meaning continued unsuspected and unexplained. If, however, we look a little closer, we shall readily accept the explanation of the story offered by modern Jews, and there may be some interest in doing this, because it will enable us to glance at the names of some of the most celebrated Rabbis which are brought before us in this single paragraph. It is known that some of these Rabbis were the deadliest enemies of the Christian faith, and it is probable that they are here mentioned because the Jews regarded them as the ablest Talmudic controversialists against the Christian teachers.

Let us begin at the end.

1. Common men, it is said, were only half as tall as the *pistachio tree of Pumbaditha*.¹ Since the sense is not literal, "tallness" throughout this allegory can only mean intellectual power; and as the pistachio tree of Pumbaditha may very well stand as an emblem of the Rabbinic school of that place, the obvious meaning is that any average person had only half the knowledge and wisdom of the scholars trained in the methods and lore of the Rabbis of Pumbaditha.

This school is often alluded to in the Talmud. After the return from the Captivity, so many thousands of Jews continued to live in prosperity in Babylonia, that a Jewish proverb says that the exiles who returned to Jerusalem were, in comparison to those who remained in the land of their captivity, as the chaff to the wheat. On the banks of the Euphrates and the Tigris, and as far as the Persian Gulf, vast colonies of Jewish merchants continued to flourish for generations under the

¹ For "pistachio" there appears to be another reading, *prosthebaino*, which may be intended to indicate the leading members of the school.

Arsacid and Sassanid dynasties. They were generally known as the *Gola*, or Dispersion, in Chaldee, *Glutha*, which corresponds to the Greek word *Diaspora*.¹ They had great traditions of their own, and, among other consolations of their exile, recorded that Ezra had built a synagogue at Shafjatib, near the Tigris, which enshrined some of the relics of the Temple, and in which the Jews of the *Gola* believed for centuries that "the Shekinah had been enthroned." But in spite of their national pride they loyally acknowledged the supremacy of Jerusalem, and scrupulously paid the didrachms of the Temple tribute. After the fall of Jerusalem they naturally ceased to send contributions which merely went to swell the riches of the Roman treasury, nor were they inclined to acquiesce without dispute in the supreme authority of the Palestinian *Nasi*. They accordingly established a civil chief of their own, whose title was *Resh Glutha*, or "Prince of the Captivity." This officer was maintained in great wealth and splendour, but his authority was mainly civil, and was successfully resisted by the eminent Rabbis of the Schools which soon became the glory of the Babylonian colonists. The most famous of these Schools of the *Gola* were those of Nehardea, on a canal which united the Tigris and the Euphrates; of Sora (sometimes called Matha Mahasia), on the Euphrates; and of Pumbaditha, which became the most famous of the three, and which stood so high in general esteem as to originate the expression, "the acute scholars of Pumbaditha" (*Charifeda Pumbaditha*),² and the proverb—unfavourable to the use which they made of their acuteness—"if a Pumbadithan accompanies you, change your inn."

¹ James i. 1; Peter i. 1.

² Grätz, *Gesch. d. Juden*, iv. 346, 270.

2. Whatever may have been the general attainments of the Pumbadithans, they were entirely surpassed by ADDA DIALAH; they could not—as we might say colloquially, using the very same expression—“reach up to his shoulders.” Over this Adda Dialah some uncertainty seems to hang. According to one account, he was merely a servant of the synagogue; according to another, “Dialah” means “the period,” and Adda is the author of the calendar which is still in use.¹

3. Yet Adda stood far below Rabh Juda, the tallest, *i. e.*, the ablest and most learned, man of his age. This RABBI JUDA BAR JECHESKEEL (born A.D. 220, died A.D. 299) was the founder of the school of Pumbaditha, over which he presided for forty years. In this high position he contributed much to the peculiar dialectic method adopted in the Talmud. His name stands very high among the Talmudists, who have given him the title of *Shinnana*, “the subtle.” He was chiefly conspicuous for opposing with his utmost energy all attempts to return from Babylonia to Judæa; for emancipating the Rabbis from the authority of the Resh Glutha; and also for the fanatical accuracy on which he insisted in proving purity of blood. It was this genealogical bigotry which made him say of the Palmyrene Jews—who had by no means maintained the purity of their race—that “Israel must establish a new festival when Tadmor was destroyed.” He even kept his son Izaak long unmarried, because he could not feel entirely satisfied as to the stainless Jewish lineage of any family with which he could ally himself. He usually delivered his Halachôth in the names of Rabh and of Samuel, but his brother R. Ami openly declared

¹ Some confused account of him may be found in the *Bibliotheca Hebraica* of Wolf, i. 109.

that his reports of these decisions were entirely untrustworthy. The remark is perhaps one of many signs that his fanatical insistence on pure Hebrew descent had roused against him a host of bitter enemies.

4. Yet more eminent than Rabh Juda bar Jecheskeel was the celebrated ABBA AREKKA, president of the schools, first of Nahardea and then of Sora, and usually distinguished by the title of RABBI. He died A.D. 243, and his revision of the Mishna constituted the text of the Babylonian Talmud.¹ He is the author of the Siphra, a comment on Leviticus, and the Siphri, a similar comment on Numbers and Deuteronomy. He had some share in arranging the Pentateuch into books, texts, and chapters, and he contributed some of the finest prayers to the Jewish liturgies. He occupied the same distinguished position among the Jews of the Gola as was occupied by Rabbi Jehuda—the editor of the Mishna—among the Palestinian Schools. Rabh was a veritable Hebrew of the Hebrews, being scarcely less particular than his disciple Rabbi Jehuda as to purity of race; and yet so contemptuous an opponent was he of that Shammaite decision respecting the invalidity of divorce except in cases of unfaithfulness, that he is one of the Rabbis who was shameless enough, on arriving at a town, to send round the crier to announce that he would marry any woman for one day.² Modern Jews declare in his defence that this was not done out of licentiousness, but because he chose to embrace the loose view of the school of Hillel, which

¹ Etheridge, *Hebr. Lit.* p. 157.

² Kiddoushin, 1; Bab. Joma, f. 18, 1. See, on the controversy about the *ervath dabhar* (Deut. xxiv. 1, 2), “nakedness of a matter,” my “Life of Christ,” ii. 150. It is said that Rabh did this when he went to Darsisa, whither he used to go frequently; and the same disgraceful story is told of Rabh Nachman at Sacnezib. Lightfoot, *Hor. Hebr.* ad Matt. xix. 3.

declared that the "matter of nakedness" (the *ervath dabhar*), which Moses had allowed to be a sufficient ground for divorce, might be explained to mean that a man might divorce his wife for almost any reason—even, as R. Akibha said, "if he saw another woman who pleased him better;" even (we find in Gittin)¹ "if she put too much salt in his soup." The energetic adoption of this debasing view was meant, however, not by way of honour towards Hillel, but solely with a view to *flouting the Christians*, who—in accordance with the express teachings of Christ respecting the question which had been so long and so fiercely agitated in the Jewish schools—attached so high an importance to monogamy and to the absolute sacredness of the marriage tie.

5. Greater even than Rabh was his uncle, RABBI CHIJA, the contemporary and colleague of R. Juda Hakko-desh, whose memory and knowledge were such that it was said that "if the law were lost, he would be able to restore it from memory." Almost all that we hear of this Rabbi is so winning, that he stands next to "the sweet and noble Hillel"—if not even before him—in our esteem. When Rabbi Juda asked the Prophet Elijah "whether there were any living men so pious as the old patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?" he said, "Yes; there are R. Chija and his sons."² One of the beautiful stories of his gentleness is that when Rabh was sick, and in consequence lost his memory, R. Chija with patient tenderness recalled to him by slow degrees his former knowledge. "I took care that the Law should not be forgotten," he once remarked to R. Chanina. "I sowed flax, knitted nets, caught deer

¹ Gittin, f. 90, 1; Meuschen ad Matt. v. 31.

² Babha Metzia, 85, b.

with them, gave the venison to orphans, and with the skins made rolls on which to write the Scriptures. Where there was no schoolmaster, I taught the five books of Moses to five children, and the six books of the Mishna to six boys, and taught them to teach to one another what each had learnt.”¹ And yet R. Chija was so humble that, whereas, on hearing this story, Rabbi (who used to speak of him as “the man of his counsel”) exclaimed, “How great are the deeds of R. Chija!” he himself said to R. Hannina, “You will rival me.” Though he sprang from a noble and priestly family, he was exceedingly poor, and having left his native Babylonia for Judæa, he was long supported by the tithes given to him by the wealthy House of Silvani, in Tiberias. Having, however, on one occasion declared something to be unlawful for them which another Rabbi permitted, they revenged themselves by withdrawing his income; and he then determined that he would never again accept tithes from any one, lest, by doing so, his impartiality should be corrupted. In order to secure a maintenance, he was therefore obliged to travel as an emissary of Rabbi to foreign lands. The devoted study of Chija was however given so exclusively to the Oral Law (*Thorah Shebeal pî*), that he entirely neglected the Written Law; and being asked on one occasion why the word “good” does not occur in the Decalogue, he gave the startling reply that “he scarcely knew whether that word occurred there or not.”²

¹ Babha Metzia, 5, a. Anecdotes about him are found in Chagiga, I, 76, d; Nedarim, xi. *ad fin.*; sc. Grätz. iv. 305.

² Babha Kama, 56, a. Other passages, however, attribute to him a considerable knowledge of Scripture. Among other critical views, he held that the Book of Job was the work of a Gentile. See Hamburger, *Realencycl.* ii. s. v. Chia.

6. To RABBI JUDA, who surpassed R. Chija, we have already alluded. He was to the Palestinian Jews and the school of Tiberias what Rabh was to the Jews of the Gola and the schools of Sora and Pumbaditha. The Talmudists delight to heap upon him titles of respect and eminence. He is Hannasi—the Nasi or President, *κατ' ἐξοχήν*; he is Hakkodesh, “the holy;” he is Rabbenu, “our master;” he is Rabbi Rabba; and he is emphatically RABBI, who need be alluded to by no other name. So vast was the influence which he wielded, that, during his lifetime, he was *sole* President of the Sanhedrin, and the offices of second and third presidents—the Ab beth din and the Chacham—were thought superfluous. The Talmud says of him, that never since the days of Moses had authority and knowledge of the Law been so completely united in one person.¹ The Jews, in order to connect him with R. Akibha²—“one sun rising as another set”—say that he was born A.D. 135, in the year that Akibha died. Besides his other gifts and attainments, he was so wealthy as to originate the proverb that “his cow-stalls were more valuable than the treasuries of the king of Persia;” and his steward became rich by only selling the sweepings of them. His munificence to the poor, and especially to poor students, greatly tended to enhance his fame. But the most enduring monument of that fame is the complete elaboration of the Mishna. Up to his time it had been

¹ Bab. Sanhedr. 36, a.

² “Mar said, ‘On the day when R. Akibha died, Rabbi was born; on the day when Rabbi died, Rabh Jehuda was born; on the day when R. Jehuda died, Rabba was born; on the day when Rabba died, Rabh Asshi was born.’ It teacheth thee that no righteous man departs before another equally righteous is born; as it is said, ‘The sun rises and the sun sets’ (Eccles. i. 4). The sun of Eli had not set before that of Samuel rose” (1 Sam. iii. 3).—Kiddoushin, 72, 2.

considered almost an impiety to reduce to writing even a single Halacha of the Oral Law; but the logic of facts is irresistible, and R. Juda saw that unless it were now published in an authoritative form it might at any time be forgotten or corrupted. It is true that some Halachôth must have been committed to writing before his time, in such a way as especially to reflect the views of R. Akibha and R. Meir, but Rabbi reduced to order and system the conflicting testimonies, and supported by reasoning and by references the best-established conclusions. His work was at first known as the Mishna of R. Juda; but its authority so completely transcended that of all other Rabbis, that his work became known simply by the name of "The Mishna" (*i.e.*, the repetition of the Law), and was disseminated throughout the world among all Jewish communities. His hostility to Christians is best illustrated by his saying that heretics (Minim)¹ have no share in the future life.

7. Yet R. MEIR was greater even than Rabbi. He is one of the most original of the Rabbis, and his life was singularly varied and eventful. His real name was Miasa, probably a corruption of Moses, and his name Meir means "the Illuminating," in accordance with his title of "the Light of the Law." He was not of pure Hebrew extraction, and the Jewish assertion that he was descended from Nero—whom they believe to have escaped from his pursuers and become a convert to Judaism—may perhaps be intended as an insult

¹ The derivation of the word is disputed. One account derives it from the initial letters of the words, "believers in Jesus of Nazareth" (מאמיני ישוע נצרי). This way of forming words and names by initial letters was common among the Jews (compare Rashi, Rambam, Makkab, &c.), and I have illustrated it in a previous paper in THE EXPOSITOR on Rabbinic Exegesis.

to the Christians, who fancied that Nero would return to life as the Antichrist. He was probably born in the Cappadocian Cæsarea, and his profession was that of a copyist of the Scriptures, in which his success was partly due to his consummate knowledge of the Masoretic punctuation, and partly to the secret of rendering his ink bright and durable by an infusion of blue vitriol. On one occasion, not having a manuscript of Esther at hand, he wrote out the entire book from memory, without a single mistake. The subtlety of R. Akibha attracted him, and he left his former teacher, R. Ishmael, to become one of Akibha's most honoured pupils. He stands pre-eminent among the Rabbis for his wit, his fables, his large-heartedness, his charity, and his adventures. He was liberal enough to maintain a friendship with the heathen philosopher, Euonymos of Gadara, and his kindly breadth of character induced him to labour to bring about the repentance and forgiveness of the wretched apostate *Acher*. The real name of this unfortunate person was Elisha ben Abayu, and he was famous for his learning, until becoming acquainted with "heretical" writings—probably those of the Gnostics—he not only abandoned his religion, but plunged into the gross immorality which some of the Gnostic sects deliberately defended. Hence the Jews, obliterating his real name, called him *Acher*, "another," just as they would not name a pig, but called it "the other thing." R. Meir, however, would not desert the fallen Rabbi, even though the people indignantly called him *Acherim*—an anagram of *Acher* and *Meir*. To defend himself, he said that when he found a rotten pomegranate, he threw away the rind but ate the kernel. His intercourse with Euonymos he justified

by the remark that God had said, "*Man* shall observe the Law, and walk in it; not Priests, nor Levites, nor even Israelites, but *men*;" so that the Gentile who keeps the Law is as much to be honoured as the high priest." His learning was so remarkable, that the Talmudists gave him the title of "the rooter up of mountains"¹ and said that "were a man but to grasp the staff of R. Meir, he would become wise."² The one fault of this eminent Rabbi seems to have been a certain jealous opposition of the authority of Rabbi Simon ben Gamaliel, when he became the Nasi and founder of the school of Tiberias. It is in consequence of this that the name of R. Meir scarcely ever occurs in the Mishna. Rabbi Juda Hakkodesh resented Meir's opposition to his father, and whenever he has occasion to refer to any of his decisions, does so without mentioning his name.

It is here worth while to digress for a moment, in order to say a word about this Elisha ben Abayu, who is hardly ever referred to except under his nickname of Acher, or sometimes in the plural, Acherim. Many strange stories are told about him, and some have even fancied that the name itself is only an invention; that it means, "God the Saviour, Son of the Father," and is one of the secret names under which the Talmudists hid their allusions to Christ. In this conjecture there is no probability, and marvellous as are the tales which are mixed up with his name, there seems to be no reason to doubt his historic existence. Much that is narrated of him is an oblique polemic against Chris-

¹ Cf. Matt. xvii, 20; xxi. 21. The title was given to Resh Lakish, &c. See Berachôth, 64, 1; Lightfoot, *Hör. Hebr.* xxi. 21.

² Jer. Nedarim, ix. 41, 6; Grätz, iv. 191.

tianity. It is said, for instance, that he saw Metatron sitting, by permission, to record the merits of Israel, and exclaimed that "it was laid down by the wise that in heaven there was no sitting, nor short sight, nor anger, nor fatigue. Are there then *two* principles?" Upon this they brought forth Metatron, and gave him sixty lashes with a rod of fire, to shew that he is not superior to other angels. Metatron, by way of revenge, obtained leave to erase the merits of Acher as one who was a great student of the Law, and a Bath Kol exclaimed, "Return ye backsliding children (Jer. iii. 2), except Acher." Acher then said, "If I am banished the world to come, I will enjoy this world," and plunged into licentiousness. R. Meir made many attempts to reclaim him, all of which were frustrated by direct supernatural interferences. On one occasion, for instance, seeking for a human Bath Kol, he persuaded Acher to come to twelve schools with him in succession, and ask the boys a text. At the first school, the first boy who was asked, said, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa. xlvi. 22). The accidental replies of the boys were equally unfavourable at every school, until at the last a boy recited, "But unto the wicked, saith God, Why dost thou declare my law?" (Psa. l. 16). This boy happened to be a stammerer, and instead of "and to the wicked" (וְלֹא־יָדָע), Acher thought he mentioned his own name, "and to Elisha" (וְלֵישָׁעָא), and was so furious with him, that but for R. Meir, he would have cut the boy into twelve pieces, and sent one of them to each school.

When he died, it was decreed that he should neither be summoned to judgment (in consideration of his knowledge of the Law), nor be allowed to enter Para-

dise. But R. Meir expressed a wish that smoke might issue from Acher's grave, as a sign that he had been judged (which he thought would be better for him), and sent to hell. This accordingly happened, and R. Jochanan then said, "Who could snatch him from me, if I take him by the hand to lead him into Paradise?" Accordingly, when R. Jochanan died, the smoke disappeared from Acher's grave.

His fall was attributed to the study of heretical books, which were observed to fall from his lap after his lectures. The Jerusalem Talmud gives a somewhat different version of his death, and accounts for his heresy by his mother having, during her pregnancy, passed an idolatrous (Christian ?) place of worship, and eaten (the Lord's Supper ?) and been "infected by that heretic;" *i.e.*, having shewn leanings to the acknowledgment of Christ.¹

8. R. Meir with all his fame was not so "tall" as R. Akibha. There can be little doubt—as will be indicated by the sequel of the cryptograph which has suggested this paper—that all or nearly all of these Rabbis are selected for mention *from their known hostility to Christians*, and from the ability with which they argued against them. In R. Akibha we have the very coryphæus of the polemical activity of the Jews against the new religion. He was the glory of the School of Jabneh, to which city (Jamnia) the Sanhedrin was removed on the fall of Jerusalem; but his

¹ This differs from, but is much more accurate than the "weird story" told by M. Deutsch in his celebrated but most delusive article (*Remains*, p. 15). I borrow it from Mr. Hershon's Commentary on Genesis, *drawn exclusively from Talmudic writers*, which it is hoped may shortly appear in an English form, and which ought to receive due support from all who wish to know what the Talmud really is.

humble birth prevented his elevation to the presidency of the School. His intense hatred of the true Messiah is shewn by his eager support of the truly preposterous claim of the impostor Bar Chocba. Numbers of the anecdotes respecting him point to the one desire and object of his life, which was as far as possible to consolidate Judaism, and to interpret the Law in such a way as to make its meaning most opposed to the teachings of Christianity. Thus, when a question arose as to whether it was lawful to destroy the books of the Mins, seeing that they frequently contained the name of God, he decided unhesitatingly that they ought to be destroyed; because in preparing "the ordeal of jealousy," to test an unfaithful wife, the name of the Lord written in "the book of curses" was to be blotted out by the bitter water.¹ "How much more ought it to be done in the case of those heretics who sow hatred between the congregation of Israel and their Father in heaven!" I have already alluded, in a previous paper, to the scrupulosity about ablutions which made him ready to endure the agony of thirst, rather than forego the traditional Halachôth on the subject; and there can be little doubt that his persistence was rendered more obstinate by the determination to discountenance the teaching of our Lord.² Even his last word was an intended protest against the doctrine of the Trinity. He was led forth to execution at the time when every faithful Israelite was bidden to offer up the *Shema*—the liturgical form, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." His flesh was torn to pieces with pincers by the executioners, but he still merely continued to repeat, "The

¹ Num. v. 23.² Matt. xv. 20.

Lord is ONE." His constancy made them suppose that he was protected by sorcery, but he said to them that he had always explained the duty of "loving God with all the soul" to mean loving Him even at the cost of life itself; and he had often wondered whether he should ever have the courage to do this. He was now proving that he had this courage, and he died with the words, "the Lord is one," upon his lips, lengthening out to the last gasp the word *echâd*, one. A thousand maxims are attributed to him: he is regarded as a second Ezra, a second Moses, and was said to be one of the four who "entered Paradise" in innocence.¹ They applied to him the text, "Draw me, we will run after thee;"² and said that when the ministering angels wanted to prevent his immediate entrance into bliss without undergoing judgment, "the Holy One, blessed be He! exclaimed, Leave that aged man alone, for he is worthy to enjoy my glory."

9. Yet even Akibha stood but up to the shoulders of R. Tarphon. Why this particular Rabbi is endowed with such an exalted pre-eminence, is not clear. He is supposed to be the same person as the R. Tryphon who is the Jewish interlocutor in Justin Martyr's "Apology." This would alone mark him out as a conspicuous opponent of the Church of Christ. His antagonism is further shewn by his agreement with R. Akibha in the decision about the lawfulness of burning the Gospels, in spite of their containing the name of God. "May I lose my son," he exclaimed, "if I do not fling these books into the fire whenever they come into my hand, sacred name and all." To him also is attributed the sentiment that it would be better to die

¹ Chagiga, 14, 2; 15, 1, 2.

² Cant. i. 4.

of the bite of a serpent than to fly from it into a temple of the Mins. Lastly, there is one of his sayings, which, as is by no means unfrequently the case with those of the Rabbis, seems to be a direct imitation of, or parody on, a passage of the Gospels. He complains of his generation that if one said to a neighbour, "Take the mote out of your eye," he replies, "Take the beam out of your own."¹ It will be observed that he uses the proverb in an unfavourable sense, as though indignant with some Christian who had made this very reply to him on being reproved for some fault. R. Tarphon presided at Lydda and Jabneh, where he sat under the shadow of a dovecot, and perhaps in a vineyard, since about this time *Kerem* ("vineyard") is a name applied to the gatherings of Rabbinic scholars.²

10. We come, lastly, to Abba Saul, who for the purposes of the story is represented as greater than all these leaders and teachers of the Rabbinic Schools of Palestine and Babylonia. He is best known as the author of that strong denunciation of the Sadducean families who, at the time of our Lord, monopolized the High-Priesthood, which throws so lurid a light on the degradation of that office. "Woe to the Boëthusim; woe to their bludgeons! Woe to the family of Hanan (Annas);³ woe to their viper hissings! Woe to the family of Kanthera; woe to their (libellous) pens! Woe to the family of Ishmael ben Phabi; woe to their fists! They are themselves High Priests, their sons

¹ Erachim, 15, 6; Derenbourg, p. 379.

² Friedman connects the word with *Kerem*, in the sense of "gather together." It is usually explained by the sort of orderly quincuncial array in which the scholars sat.

³ I have pointed out, in my "Life of Christ," the important bearing of this passage on the events which led to his arrest and condemnation.

are Treasurers, their sons-in-law Captains of the Temple, and their servants beat the people with their staves!" When we read these charges of nepotism, greed, and violence, we are not surprised at the treatment which Christ and his apostles experienced at the hands of these worldly conspirators.

11. What, then, is meant by Abba Saul being occupied in burying the dead, and sinking up to the nose in the eye-socket of a dead body?

"To eat of the sacrifices of the dead"¹ means to take part in idolatry; "to bury the dead" is to refute some system of heathen philosophy or worship.

"The eye" of this system is its very central life and power. To sink up to the nose in anything is almost to be suffocated. "Accordingly Abba Saul meant that in trying to master some philosophical system of the Gentiles, he had unawares felt himself so dangerously entangled as to be scarcely able to breathe: but that when at last he succeeded in freeing himself, . . . they told him that this system was the spirit of Absalom's life."² "There can be no doubt," continues the Jewish author from whom I have just quoted, "that the legend covered by the name of Absalom is that of *the Nazarene*." The cryptograph, therefore, has this meaning: A very eminent Rabbi—a Rabbi so eminent as to surpass, in the opinion of some writers, even such glories of the law as Rabbi, and Rabb, and R. Meir, and R. Akibha—admits that he found among the Gentiles a remarkable orbit of an eye, *i. e.*, a deep system of philosophy; and that when, with great difficulty, he succeeded in extricating himself from it, they told him that it was the outline of Christianity.

¹ Psa. cvi. 28.

² *Talmudische Studien*, R. Joshua ben Hanania, p. 4.

As this will be, for the present, the last of my papers on this subject, I will make one or two remarks.

1. This explanation of so apparently absurd a story will shew us the devices to which the Talmudic writers were driven to resort in order to convey their thoughts without subjecting themselves to dangerous persecution. When, therefore, we find anything unusually absurd in the Talmud, before contemptuously dismissing it as a mere grotesque legend, we should try to see if it involves any esoteric argument against Christian belief.

2. We find a remarkable confirmation of the Gospel narrative in the fact that, in the three first centuries, even enemies so deadly as Abba Saul, and Legalists so eminent as Acher, were barely able to resist the evidence in its favour.

3. We see in this and similar narratives a very decisive proof that the leading Rabbis of the Talmud were perfectly familiar with Christian writings. Since, therefore, the Mishna was not thrown into form till fully two centuries after the death of Christ, no possible importance can be attached to the asserted independence and originality of those moral truths in the Talmud which are ostentatiously contrasted with passages in the Gospels. Not in one single instance can any sentiment be adduced from the Talmud which is in the least degree equal in force or in insight to the utterances with which they are compared. They are always inferior, often distorted and perverted. But, at the best, is there the very slightest evidence to shew that they were not directly or indirectly plagiarized from the pages of Christian books, or the lips of Christian teachers? Do not the facts alluded to in this

paper alone shew how easy it was for the Rabbis to rekindle their poor and smouldering torches at the fiery fount of Christian inspiration, and how certain it is that they availed themselves of the opportunity? Of all the attempts to dim the moral splendour of the Christian revelation, none appear to me so intrinsically weak and worthless as those which would elevate any or all of these Rabbis into moral rivalry with Christ. Had He been in the remotest degree on a par with Hillel, or Rabbi, or Akibha, or Chija, or Meir, Christ could not have been Christ at all, and his title to the adoration and allegiance of the human race would have shrivelled up to nothing. The very best of all their sayings, even when directly borrowed from his teachings, would scarcely have been worthy of his lips; and there is many a folio page of their vain, frivolous, and sometimes even obscene, wranglings, which it is impossible that He could have uttered at all without ceasing to be what He was, and without descending, not only to the low level of merely human wisdom, but even into the deep abysses of human folly and ineptitude. The Rabbis might have addressed their rejected Messiah in the same spirit in which Satan addresses the sun.

O thou, that with surpassing glory crown'd,
Look'st from thy sole dominion, like the god
Of this new world; at whose sight all the stars
Hide their diminish'd heads; to thee I call,
But with no friendly voice, and add thy name,
O Sun! to tell thee how I hate thy beams!

F. W. FARRAR.