

Jochanan ben Zakkai, the teacher of our Rabbi Eliezer. Did our author deem it dangerous to expose his own identity? Did he not run the risk of being placed under the ban for the daring displayed in writing his book? What name was more honoured, in spite of the excommunication which had made it so prominent, than Rabbi Eliezer the Great, who is quoted in Mishnah and Talmud more frequently than any one of his contemporaries?

The book enjoyed considerable popularity in Jewish circles in former days, for there are more than two dozen editions. There is also a Latin version with an elaborate commentary by Vorstius (1644), indicating a certain interest in the book even in non-Jewish circles. The first edition was printed in Constantinople in 1514, the second edition appeared in Venice, 1544, the third edition was published in Sabbioneta in 1567. Later editions of value are those of Amsterdam and Prague. The folio edition of Rabbi David Luria (Vilna, 1837) is the best extant. His critical commentary is a mine of valuable information which has been constantly laid under contribution in the preparation of the notes in the present volume. The editions of Brode and Einhorn have also been consulted.

The text adopted for translation is a valuable unedited MS. belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna. This treasure contains not only the entire work as printed in the various editions, but a small section of the last chapter which has never been printed. Wertheimer's *Botte Midrashoth*, iii. pp. 29-34, contains a parallel text to the last chapter, but not as complete as our MS. text. The MS. is probably the work of a Spanish scribe of the twelfth or thirteenth century. It was formerly the property of N. Coronel. In very many instances the text preserved in the MS. is superior to that contained in

the printed editions. The MS. used by the editor of the edition *princeps* was fairly accurate, as this text is on the whole correct and consecutive. This edition was used by the editor of the beautiful second edition, in which some of the errors incidental to a first edition have been rectified. This text has been used by all subsequent editors and was adopted by Vorstius for his Latin version.

In addition to Epstein's MS., the present writer has used an old MS. fragment of the astronomical chapters (VI.-VIII.) belonging to the Rev. Dr. M. Gaster, and also his MS., which, however, is incomplete. Several fragments from the Cairo Genizah belonging to Mr. Elkan N. Adler, M.A., have been collated. The Genizah fragments belonging to the Cambridge University have been copied by Dr. A. Marmorstein and his transcript has been used. The MSS. of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, have also been collated. The fragment MS. in the British Museum, edited by Horowitz, has likewise been consulted.

In the printed texts there are fifty-four chapters, whereas in our MS. there are only fifty-three chapters, due to the fact that the last two are combined into one. In its present form the book is undoubtedly incomplete. In all the editions the last chapter breaks off in the middle of a sentence. The MSS. referred to in the Jewish Encyclopedia (x. p. 59b) have not been available.

§ 2. Plan and Contents of the Book

The book, as we now know it, is, in all probability, a composite work, consisting of three originally distinct sections. The object of one of these parts was to describe in

detail the "ten descents" from heaven to earth, which God is said in Holy Scripture to have made in the past. The books of old told of the Ascension of Isaiah, as well as of the Assumption of Moses and other worthies; our book essayed the more sacred task of revealing the ten Divine descents on earth. The purpose of the *Pistis Sophia* is somewhat similar, of course from the standpoint of the Christian gnostic. The last chapter in our book deals with the eighth descent. The missing part of the work is claimed to be preserved in the text published by M. Friedmann in the *Pseudo-Tanna de be Elijahu*. The authenticity of this material has, however, not been established thus far.

Another section incorporated in our present work professed to give a detailed account of Rabbinic mysticism, more particularly the ancient mysteries of the Creation (Ma'aseh Bereshith), the Divine Chariot (Ma'aseh Merkabah), as well as the secret of the Calendar (Sod Ha-'Ibbur) and the secret of the Redemption (Sod Ge'ullah). The mysteries of the heaven above, the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth are all revealed. Paradise and Gehenna, this world and the new world, are all explored. We hear of the Ministering Angels, Sammael and the angels "who fell from their holy place in heaven," and also concerning Leviathan and Behemoth. The life hereafter, the resurrection of the dead, and the Messianic Age are discussed. The doctrine of the "Last Things," usually known as Eschatology, is not entirely forgotten.

The possibility of a third book in our work is to be detected in the fragment of a Midrash on the *Shemoneh 'Esreh* (the Jewish prayer *par excellence*), which is contained in the latter part of the "Chapters." Whether the three chapters (VI.-VIII.) dealing with the Calendar are an integral part of

the section previously discussed or whether they belong to the actual *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* is a moot point, which cannot be decided off-hand. The result of the combination of the different sections may be seen in the repetition of several narratives (*e.g.* the creation of Adam), in obvious contradictions (*e.g.* Chapter III. and Chapter XVIII.; Chapter XXX. and Chapter XXXI., on the question of the difference between the ages of Isaac and Ishmael), and finally in the absence of consecutive order in the arrangement of the material. Likewise, the order in which the different chapters are arranged is a further proof of the composite nature of the entire book. Moreover, the first two chapters form an independent section which has been prefixed for the purpose of providing a preface in order to justify the authorship attributed to Rabbi Eliezer. The two chapters are entirely biographical, setting forth the call of Rabbi Eliezer. Our contention as to the relation of these two chapters towards the rest of the book, as we now know it, seems to be supported by the fact that the MS. of the first part of our book in the British Museum begins at Chapter III. of the printed text. The same fact applies to the portion of our book which has been incorporated by R. Asher Ha-Levi in his *Sepher Ha-Zikhronoth* (Bodleian MS. Heb. d. 11, No. 2797). Dr. Marmorstein finds in MS. Adler (522, p. 143b), Chapter XLIV. quoted. This corresponds to Chapter XLII. in the printed texts. Again, on p. 79a, Chapter XLI. is mentioned, corresponding to Chapter XXXIX. in our text. In Gaster MS. (9) ten anciently written chapters have been inserted which are all enumerated as though the book began with Chapter III. This clearly shows that in some MSS. the first two chapters were missing, and, as we have suggested, did not form part of the original work.

Chapters III.-XI. deal with the work of the Creation.
 Chapters XII.-XX. refer to Adam and Eve.
 Chapters XXI. and XXII. give the story of Cain, Abel, and the other descendants of Adam and Eve.
 Chapters XXIII. and XXIV. contain the history of Noah and his sons and the narrative of the Flood.
 Chapter XXV. sets forth the sin and doom of Sodom.
 Chapters XXVI.-XXXI. cover the life story of Abraham, including the story of the 'Akedah (or the binding of Isaac).
 Chapters XXXII. and XXXIII. deal with the life of Isaac.
 Chapter XXXIV. is devoted to an account of the resurrection of the dead.
 Chapters XXXV.-XXXVII. present the story of Jacob's life.
 Chapters XXXVIII. and XXXIX. refer to Joseph.
 Chapter XL. discusses the signs given by God to Moses.
 Chapter XLI. is concerned with the revelation on Sinai.
 Chapters XLII. and XLIII. (which are evidently out of place) contain the narrative of the Exodus (which should precede the story of the revelation on Sinai).
 Chapter XLIV. unfolds the history of Amalek.
 Chapters XLV.-XLVII. set forth the story of the Golden Calf.
 Chapter XLVIII. resumes the subject of the Exodus.
 Chapters XLIX. and L. give the story of Haman and Mordecai.
 Chapter LI. is eschatological.
 Chapter LII. describes the wonders of old.
 Chapter LIII. reverts to the history of Israel in the wilderness, e.g. the "Brazen "Serpent and Miriam.

In the second half of the book we see the fragment of the Midrash on the *Shemoneh 'Esreh*, furnishing a series of links connecting the various sections of this part of the book. Thus the first benediction is referred to in Chapter

XXVII. in connection with Abraham. The second benediction occurs in Chapters XXXI. and XXXIV., in connection with Isaac. The third in Chapter XXXV, (Jacob), the fourth in Chapter XL. (Moses), the fifth in Chapter XLIII. in connection with Manasseh and Nineveh, the sixth in Chapter XLVI. in connection with Israel in the wilderness, the seventh in Chapter LI. (Messianic), and the eighth in Chapters LII. and LIII. (Miriam). The fact that only eight descents and only eight benedictions are dealt with in the book is noteworthy, and points to the present incomplete condition of the work.

§ 3. Our Book in Jewish and Christian Literature

The book is usually known by the title *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*. Our MS. uses this designation, adding " Ha-Gadol " (" the Great "). The first to quote our book are the Geonim or Rabbis of Babylon, see *Siddur* of Rab 'Amram (c. 850 C.E.), p. 32a. Machzor Vitry (ed. S. Hurwitz), p. 117, quotes our book by the title "Perakim" ("The Chapters "). In the Tosaphoth to Kethuboth, 99a, R. Tarn calls it Haggadath de Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos." The 'Arukh terms it "Baraitha de Rabbi Eliezer." Dr. Marmorstein finds our book mentioned in Midrash Ha-Chefez (B.M. 2351, p. 89b) under the title of "Mishnah de R. Eliezer"; the same designation occurs in a bookseller's catalogue of the twelfth to thirteenth century, see J.Q.R. xiii. p. 53.

The usual title *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* is employed by Rashi (e.g. on Gen. xxvii. 9 ; Deut. xii. 17; Jonah i. 7), Jehudah Ha-Levi (Khazari iii. 65 and iv. 29), and Maimonides (Moreh Nebukhim i. 70 and ii. 26). For further references see the excellent chapter on our book in Zunz,

Gottesdienstliche Vorträge der Juden (2nd ed.), p. 283, note f.

In addition to the writers and books mentioned in the previous paragraphs, quotations from our book are to be found in R. Achai Gaon in *She'eloth*, in Natronai Gaon in *Chemdah Genuzah* No. 93, in R. Moses of Coney's *S.M.G.*, in *Halakhoth Gedoloth* (ed. Hildesheimer, p. 5), in *Midrash Haggadol* (ed. Schechter), *Midrash Agadah* (ed. Buber), *Jalkut Shim'oni*, *Jalkut Makhiri*, *Midrash Sekhel Tob* (ed. Buber), also in the commentaries on the Pentateuch by R. Bcchai and Nachmanides, as well as in the latter's *Torat Ha-Adam*, and many other books too numerous to mention.

In addition to the bibliography to be found in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (x. p. 60a) and in Wolff, *Bibl. Hebr.* i. p. 173, iii. p. 110, and iv. p. 1032, the following references have been furnished by Dr. Marmorstein:

Zakuto, *Juchasin*, p. 52b (the first to cast a doubt on the authorship of R. Eliezer).

'Azariah de Rossi, *Meor 'Enayim*, ch. xliii.

Rapoport, in *Kerem Chemed*, vii. p. 41.

Steinschneider, *Polemische und Apologetische Literatur*, p. 339 ; *Z.D.M.G.* xxviii. 640 ; *H.B.* v. 15 and 120, viii. 7, and ix. 3.

The periodicals *Keneseth Ha-Gedolah*, i. 165; *Ha-Maggid*, xii. nos. 26 ff.; *R.E.J.*, iiv. 66; *M.G.W.J.*, 1893, p. 253; *J.Q.R.* iv. 622, and *J.Q.R.* (new series) i. pp. 64 f.

Graetz, *M.G.W.J.*, 1859, p. 207; *H.B.* xiv. 7; *Geschichte*, iv. p. 223 ; and *Z.D.M.G.* xxviii. 645.

Epstein, *Eldad*, p. 76; and

Chwolson, Ssabier, i. p. 98.