



SUNDAY READING

TOLD BY THE TALMUD.

The Curious Collection of Traditions Found in that Book.

The collection of Jewish traditions, known as the Talmud, contains a vast number of stories, apologies, and jests. But extravagantly puerile as some of these romances, many of them are full of bitter wit, and keen mockery. Lord Bacon said of some of them that "they would serve for winter talk by the fireside," and we therefore offer no apology for briefly referring to a few of these flights of eastern imagination.

The wicked city of Sodom appears in these tales as a mocker and perverter of all justice. In the Talmud any peculiarly flagrant satire on just judgment is attributed to the judges of Sodom. Thus when one had cut off an ear of his neighbor's ass, the judges said to the owner, "Let him have the ass till the ear is grown again, that it may be returned to thee as thou wishest." When any one had wounded his neighbor, they told the wounded man "to give him a fee, for letting him bleed." A toll was exacted in passing a certain bridge; but if any one chose to wade through the water, or walk round about to save it, he was condemned to a double toll. Eleazar, Abraham's servant, came hither and they wounded him. When before the judge he was ordered to pay his fee for having his blood let, Eleazar flung a stone at the judge and wounded him. "What meanest thou?" said the judge. Eleazar replied, "Give him who wounded me the fee that is due to myself for wounding thee." The people of this town had a bedstead on which they laid travellers who asked to rest. If any one was too long for it, they cut off his legs; and if he was shorter than the bedstead, they strained him to its head and foot. When a beggar came to this town, every one gave him a penny on which was inscribed the donor's name; but they would sell him to bread, nor let him escape. When the beggar died from hunger, they came about him, and each man took back his penny.

The Miltonic and Homeric battles pale beside the extravagant fancies of the Rabbins. Mountains are torn up and hurled with ease, and creatures arise too terrible for the weaker flights of our imagination. One of these, a bird, when it spreads its wings, blots out the sun. An egg from another fell out of its nest, and the white thereof broke, and glued about 300 cedar trees, and overflowed a village. One of them stands up to the lower joint of the leg in a river, and some mariners imagining the water was not deep, were hastening to bathe, when a voice from heaven said, "Step not in there, for seven years ago there a carpenter dropped his axe, and it hath not yet reached the bottom."

Their powers of exaggeration are not, however, confined to purely imaginary tales. They extend to Biblical events and incidents. Thus it has always been a moot point what the manna rained from heaven upon the wandering Israelites really was. The Rabbins only, however, require a hint to expand it into a real historical explanation. Thus we are told in the Bible that the taste of it was "as a water made with honey." This at once expanded into a declaration that it was "like oil to children, honey to old men, and cakes to middle age."

This sounds rather an odd arrangement to modern taste, but our fanciful friends do not stop at this comparatively bold statement. This wonderful manna had every kind of taste except that of cucumbers, melons, garlic, onions, and leeks; for these were the Egyptian roots which the Israelites so much regretted to have lost. This manna had, however, the quality to accommodate itself to every palate, and "to those who did not murmur in the wilderness it became fish, flesh, or fowl."

Like some worthies of more modern days, the Rabbins never advance any absurdity without nailing it with Scripture, and to prove their assertions, they quote Deut. ii. 7, where it is said—"Though the great wilderness, these forty years, the Lord thy God hath been with thee, and thou hast lacked nothing." St. Austin repeats this explanation of the Rabbins, that the faithful found in this manna the taste of their favourite food. However, the Israelites could not have found all the benefits the Rabbins tell us of, for in Numbers xi. 6, we are told they exclaimed—"There is nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes!" They had just said that they remembered the melons, and cucumbers of which they had eaten so freely in Egypt.

The Rabbins add that the manna fell in such quantities that the Kings of the east and the west beheld them. This they founded on the 23rd Psalm—"Thou preparest a table before me in presence of mine enemies." A forced interpretation surely, and slender enough to support so fantastic a story.—Selected.

The Lesson of the Rich Fool.

On one occasion, while Jesus was addressing the multitude, his discourse was broken in upon by a most inopportune interruption—not this time of hostility, not of ill-timed interference, not of overpowering admiration, but of simple policy and self-interest. Some covetous and half-instructed member of the crowd, seeing the listening throngs, hearing the words of authority and power, aware of the recent discomfiture of the Pharisees, expecting, perhaps, some immediate revelation of Messianic power, determined to utilize the occasion for his own worldly ends. He thought—if the expression may be allowed that he could do a good stroke of business, and most incongruously and irreverently broke in with the request—"Master speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance

with me." Almost stern was our Lord's rebuke to the man's egotistical self-absorption. He seems to have been one of those not uncommon characters to whom the whole universe is pervaded by self; and he seems to have considered that the main object of the Messiah's coming would be to secure for him a share of his inheritance, and to overrule this unmanageable brother. Jesus at once dispelled his miserably carnal expectations, and then warned him, and all who heard, to beware of letting the narrow horizon of earthly comforts span their hopes. How brief, yet how rich in significance, is that little parable which he told them of the rich fool who, in his greedy, God forgetting, presumptuous selfishness, would do this and that, and who, as though there were no such thing as death, and as though the soul could live by bread, thought that "my fruits," and "my goods," and "my barns," and to "eat and drink and be merry," could for many years to come sustain what was left him of a soul, but to whom from heaven pealed as a terrible echo to his words the heart-thrilling sentence of awful irony, "Thou fool, this night!"—Farrar.

A STORY OF THE CROSS.

The Figure of the Sacrifice Carved Out of the Solid Rock.

The following passage from Shorthouse's "Blanche Lady Falaise" will show how well worth reading, not only for the thoughts that are in it, but as a specimen of fine diction:

It was carved altogether out of the massive rock; it was not, so at least it seemed to me, a mechanical image or figure, but seemed to be dimly while perfectly shaped, and to show itself as through a veil, as much in a certain vagueness and mystery of thought and feeling, as though it were striving and growing into existence by the gradual and earnest creation of a devout servant of his art, who had sought and found, by prayer and fasting, his ideal in the stony rock. As we neared it the rainbow hues faded; yet it seemed to me that there still lingered over it, or it may have been that it was only in my eyes, some delicate coloring, some faint memory of those heavenly tints.

It was a true Calvary of the orthodox type. It consisted of the three crosses with their suffering burdens, and a foundation of skull and bones, with two figures standing beneath the crosses, more roughly and carelessly worked—St. John and the Virgin mother in a swoon.

There might be something conventional in the treatment of the two thieves—the one writhing with strained and contorted limbs; the other in a rapt attitude of ecstatic gaze. But, if it were so, it seemed only to supply two needed forms of type—the one the restless, unsubdued human nature; the other the stolid, consecrated life. It was evident that the sculptor's thought had been concentrated upon the central figure.

Those momentous hours, laden with the destinies of unimagined existence, were, so at least it seemed to me, drawing to an end. The regal admission into Paradise, the human message His mother and to His friend, the cry of suffering, even the agony of self desertion by His Father and His God—all these were over. The last stage of this journey—the pilgrimage of the Son of God had arrived. "It is finished," was bitten into every line, graven by the iron chisel into the dark grey stone.

I have heard that some one says that Wordsworth evoked a sort of soul in matter, and, no doubt, all inanimate beings—plants and flowers and trees—have a certain sort of instinct if not of soul; but here, in the centre of this great Calvary, there was visible a soul in the stolid rock.

For in this figure of a sacrifice that redeemed the world, there was manifested such a sympathy between the genius that grasped the artist's chisel, and the so-called dead rock that lent itself in indescribable shades of light and delicacies of shadow, to the ideal that lifted a world of pollution and death into one of healthy breezes and of hope, that, as we stood before it, we could no longer wonder that peasants, in their holiday dress, came up the pass to worship with serious and mournful faces, and went back, down the path, singing hymns of joy, that they were delivered from their sins.

For in this chief figure—this figure that realised the death of God, down-pressed and over-weighted as it was—it was perceptible that the defeat and disaster, however perfect and complete—and no work could give the idea of more perfection and completeness of suffering and oppression, and of defeat—was not such as ordinary men call by these names; that even in the moment of death's triumph the victory was not with death; that the defeat and oppression—the weight of suffering and of grief—were not such an ordinary man; that the death was not such as awaits a mortal who has finished his course, but such death as may be imagined of a pilgrim-God.

Over the whole Calvary, above the rough grotto-work that fringed the recess which gave scope for the relief of the figures, like a halo above the sacred scene, were these words, fastened into the rock in iron letters, moulded, no doubt, ages since in the iron-works in the valleys—

Vere languens nostros ipse tulit, et dolores nostros ipse portavit.

Used Them as a Test.

An American vessel was once boarded by a Malay merchant in the Indian seas, and almost the first question was if he had any books or tracts to dispose of? "Why do you want them?" you cannot read them?" asked the captain. "True, said the Malay, but I have a use for them. If one of your people or an Englishman comes to trade with me, I give him a tract and watch what he does with it. If he reads it soberly, and treats it with respect, I take it he is honest, and will not cheat me; if he throws it down with an oath, I'll have nothing more to do with him, for he can't be trusted."

NEWS AND NOTABILLIA.

Emanuel Swedenborg's "Areana Coelestia" was printed when the author was 61.

Mrs. Moorhouse, wife of the Bishop of Manchester, is said to enjoy the reputation of having opened more bazaars during her life than any other woman in England.

The new president of the Swiss republic, who has held the office during the six previous terms, is a Calvinist clergyman and was regarded until lately as one of the best all-round athletes in Switzerland.

Benjamin Harrison, President of the United States, was once president of the Indianapolis Young Men's Christian Association. He has recently made a liberal donation toward the building debt.

The Rev. Arthur H. Stanton (Father Stanton), has just entered on his thirtieth year as curate of St. Alban's Holborn. During the whole of that period Mr. Stanton has worked without any stipend. He is now to take a much deserved vacation for a year.

Dr. Kohn (or Cohen), the poor canon, son of Israelite peasants, who was recently raised to the richest archbishopric in Europe, that of Olmutz, went to meet his father and mother at the railroad station, where he kissed their hands in lowly humility and affection, and has installed them in his episcopal palace.

A little deaf and dumb girl was once asked by a lady, who wrote the question on a slate, "What is prayer?" The little girl took the pencil and wrote the reply, "Prayer is the wish of the heart." So it is. Fine words and beautiful verses said to God to make real prayer without the sincere wish of the heart.

Dr. Barry, canon of Windsor, and late primate of Australia, is one of the best public readers in England, sharing this supremacy with the Bishop of Ripon. Whenever he is in residence at Windsor he has invariably an exceptionally large audience, attracted chiefly by a desire to hear his sonorous reading of the lessons.

Mrs. John Ogilvie Roobach, of Mystic Conn., has a copy of the prayer book printed in the Mohawk language for the Rev. John Ogilvie, assistant minister of Trinity church, New York, in 1769. Only twenty copies were printed. Mr. Roobach, it is said, has received an offer of \$1,000 for the book from the British museum.

When Rev. D. Parker Morgan became rector of the Church of the Heavenly Rest, New York, ten years ago, his inheritance appeared to be empty pews and a debt of \$250,000. Now the church is crowded and is practically clear of all obligations. Dr. Morgan's income from wedding fees alone is over \$5,000 a year. These are his wife's perquisites, and she spends them all in charities.

A recent government report shows that in India there are 133,954 public and private schools. In these there were gathered 3,368,930 boys and 313,717 girls. This reveals the low estimate the Hindoos and Mohammedans place on the education of girls. About 68 per cent. of the scholars were Hindoos, 23 per cent. Mohammedans, and 2.50 per cent. native Christians. One-half the native Christians were girls.

According to the last census of the United States, the grand total for all denominations is as follows: Organization 163,787; church edifices, 139,832, with a seating capacity of 42,682,049; halls, schoolhouses and private houses occupied as places of worship, 23,453; value of church property, including only church edifices and their sites and furniture, \$680,758,756; communicants or members, 20,488,797.

Regarding the appointment of Mgr. Sottili, Cardinal Gibbons says that "with the growth in numbers of permanent rectors the power of the priesthood is increased, and they are made more and more independent of their prelates. The holy father has, therefore, found it necessary to appoint Papal delegate in this country, making him the vicegerent of the Pope and conferring supreme control on matters of discipline."

At the last meeting of the Diocese Board in Toronto, it was announced that the debt on the Diocese of Algoma, which has for so many years hampered the movements of Bishop Sullivan, had at last been cleared off. Mrs. Sullivan, who was in attendance, was almost overcome when the news was announced. The Doxology was sung in thanksgiving. The intelligence was cable to the Bishop, who is at present sojourning in England for the benefit of his health, which had become completely undermined by the preying anxiety engendered by the heavy obligations resting upon his diocese. A large portion of the debt had been raised by the untiring efforts of the Toronto ladies.

Swedenborgianism and Buddhism are the latest religious movements gaining headway in Paris. Several hundred of the former have erected near the Pantheon a chapel in which a lawyer preaches every Lord's Day. They also publish a journal, in which the apex of the spirit is reported. The Neo-Buddhistic faith is fostered by the Orientalist, Dr. Rosny, and one paper claims 50,000 adherents. The creed demands repentance, love for all creatures, including animals, which can be transformed into mortal beings, and therefore ought not to be killed. Every outward cult is rejected, but socialistic principles are taught. "No one is allowed to possess more than he earns by his day's labor," is one of their doctrines.

Comparing the census returns of 1890 with such statistics as can be got from denominational sources, in the last ten years the episcopal church has a net gain of 165,000 members, or 48 per cent.; the congregational of 128,000, or 33 per cent.; the regular baptists, north, south and colored, of 868,000, or 37 per cent.; the Lutherans, all branches, of 487,000, or 68 per cent.; the presbyterians, all branches, 356,000, or 39 per cent.; the methodist episcopal of 522,000, or 30 per cent.; the methodist episcopal, south, of 488,000, or 57 per cent. These denominations represented in 1890 an aggregate of 10,216,000 communicants, against 7,202,000 in 1880, showing a net gain in the ten years of 3,014,000, or nearly 42 per cent. As the growth of the population of the country in the same period was less than 25 per cent., these churches have gained 17 per cent. in excess of the increase of the population.

Messages of Help For The Week.

Sunday: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith to the churches." Rev. 2. 7.

Monday: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." John 14. 1.

Tuesday: "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High: to show thy loving-kindness in the morning and thy faithfulness every night." Psalm 121. 1, 2.

Wednesday: "The discretion of a man defereth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression." Proverbs 19. 11.

Thursday: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Heb. 3. 12, 13.

Friday: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." James 1. 12.

Saturday: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good. And the evening and morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And he rested on the seventh day and sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his work." Gen. 1. 31, and Gen. 2. 1, 2, 3.

Born to be a King.

Louis XVI. and his beautiful and unfortunate queen had died on the scaffold in the Place de la Revolution. The boy, who ought to have inherited the throne of France, and who, in fact, though he never reigned, has been numbered as Louis XVII. in the roll of monarchs, was left a prisoner. Evil had brought forth evil, as ever. An oppressed people had been roused to a spirit of devilish revenge. The child, it is said, was not only to be kept a prisoner and deprived of whatever rights he might be supposed to possess to the throne of his father, but all that was good in his nature was to be, if possible, destroyed. Evil men placed around him were to train his mind to evil thoughts, his heart to evil feelings, his lips to unlovely words. Naturally he suffered. But now and again, it is said, as his tormentors seemed to go beyond the limits of his endurance, or when God's voice prevailed in his young soul against them, the unhappy boy would wake up to higher things, and exclaim in anguish, "I can't say it, I can't do it, for I was born to be a king." *Noblesse oblige* is a noble principle for all. In times of temptation, on the very edge of a precipice of evil, we, too, if we are trained by grace to remember, with something like habitual recollection, the dignity of belonging to an immortal, may be helped to turn with scorn and strength upon the tempter, and exclaim in a higher, nobler sense, "I cannot, I will not; I was born to be a king!"—Canon Knox-Little.

The three-penny bit would seem to be falling out of favor with church goers, or, at any rate, with those who attend St. Paul's Cathedral, London. Of silver coins, sixpences are in the greatest vogue, an analysis of a recent collection in St Paul's showing 564 of these pieces, as against 219 three-penny bits. Even the shillings outnumber the latter.

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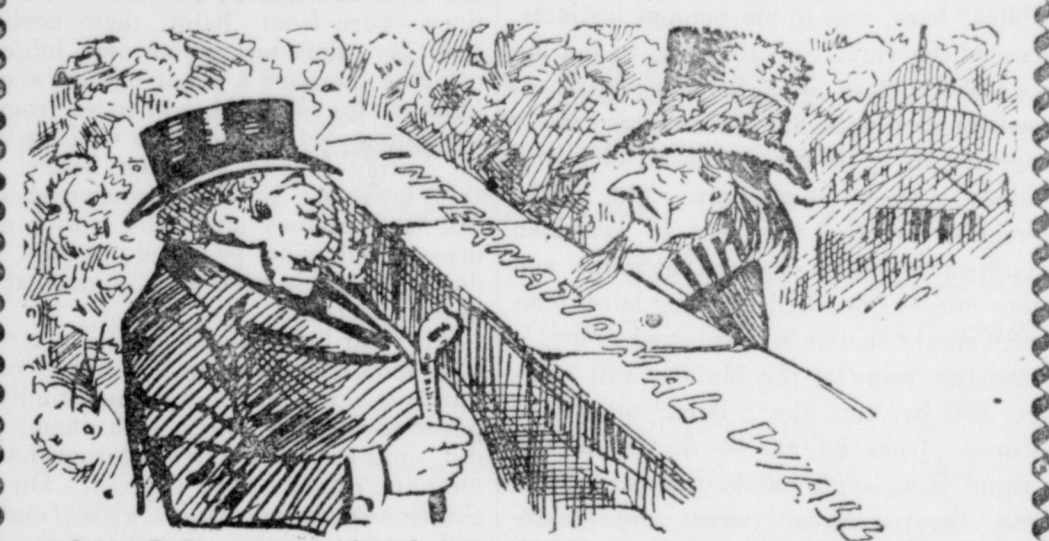
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