REVIEWS

STRACK'S 'INTRODUCTION TO THE TALMUD'.

Einleitung in Talmud und Midraš von H. L. STRACK. (Fifth edition : G. H. Beck, München, 1921.)

So familiar to students is Strack's 'Introduction to the Talmud' that for many years past it has been unnecessary to cite it by more than the opening word of the German title. First published in 1887 as a reprint from the *Real-Encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, it has gone through several editions in its volume form. Each edition was an improvement on its predecessor, and with the appearance of the fourth edition in 1908 the work seemed to have reached a point of definitive excellence. But the author has disposed otherwise. He has now so revised and enlarged the book that the old title no longer suffices. What used to be known as the *Einleitung* will remain the *Einleitung*. But it is now 'Einleitung in Talmud und Midraš' while it used to be 'Einleitung in den Thalmud'. The change is due to the addition of a long and valuable section on the Midrash. This is an entirely new feature.

Strack's book needs neither review nor description. Indeed a review of a classic would almost be impertinent. Not that every reader would agree with every one of the author's statements and conclusions. Thus I cannot persuade myself that what Justinian prohibited as *Deuterosis* in his famous rescript of the year 553 was the Mishnah. The whole context (*Nov.* 146) indicates that the emperor was referring to the use of Bible translations in the Synagogue, and that while advocating the LXX he permitted Aquila but absolutely forbade the Targum. Still, Strack has the weight of authority on his side. So he has with regard to the problem of the commission of the oral traditions to writing. I entirely agree with his view that this must have begun at a relatively early date, and that assuredly the Mishnah was written as well as compiled by Judah the Patriarch c. A. D. 200. Strack at every point provides the necessary references to materials for the decision of all such problems. Thus the literature of Sherira's Letter is fully given. Sherira in 987 addressed his famous epistle to Kairuan in which he discussed the history of the Oral Tradition with a critical acumen rare for his age. The curious thing about the Letter, however, is that it has survived in two recensions, the 'Spanish', which represents Sherira as favouring a written text of the Mishnah, the other the 'French', in which an

opposite view is recorded. So up to date are Strack's bibliographies that he mentions in advance Dr B. Lewin's elaborate Haifa edition which only saw the light of publication many months after Strack's reference to it. Lewin's book is to be dated 1921, not 1920. While speaking of the bibliographies in Strack's *Einleitung*, it is interesting to note how rapidly literature on the Talmud grows. Thus since Strack came to hand there have been published (among other works) A. Cohen's excellent English translation of the Talmudic tractate *Berakot* (Cambridge University Press), B. Halper's fine *Anthology of Post-Biblical Hebrew Literature* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America), and a very competent and useful *Short Survey of the Literature of Rabbinical and Mediaeval Judaism* by Oesterley and Box (S.P.C.K.). To this must be added the same Society's series of Mishnah (and Tosefta) tractates in English (in which the most recent volume is Dr Lukyn Williams's *Berakoth*), and Dr Greenup's *Sukkah* in the Hebrew text. Naturally enough there are gaps in Strack's lists of English publications since 1913. The war sadly interrupted the flow of literature from land to land, and the marvel is not that some things are lacking but that so very many are included. Strack's industry and care are beyond praise.

The *Einleitung* remains indispensable for English students, despite the fact that they are far more favourably placed than they were when Strack's first edition appeared. There are, for instance, the articles by Bacher and Theodor in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, by Schechter in the Extra Volume of *Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible*, by S. A. Cook in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (for Schiller-Szinessy's brilliant eccentricities the older edition should also be consulted), the *Survey* by Oesterley and Box, and, to name but one other essay, Strack's own contribution to vol. i of the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. In this last-named article (on Anti-Semitism) Strack has much to say about the Talmud. One passage is worth referring to because Strack substantially repeats it on p. iv of the Preface to his *Einleitung*: 'There is no truth whatever in the assertions that the Jews seek . . . to keep the Talmud secret. . . . As a practical proof that Christians are not dependent for a scientific judgement regarding the Talmud on what a Jew may think fit to communicate, it may be mentioned that the present writer in 1887 wrote an introduction to the Talmud without having asked or received the slightest detail of information from Jews or Jewish Christians. *The Talmud contains no report or statement which the expert Christian scholar cannot discover.*' Our English Lightfoot could have said the same; his *Horae* are the result of his own independent research. But it is significant of a certain type of German prejudice that Strack should feel impelled to make this protestation. The Talmud, as he says sarcastically, is only a hidden book to the class who, failing to give the

necessary labour to the understanding of the original, would find Caesar's *Gallic War* also a sealed book.

But though the English reader is now more fully provided with helps, Strack's *Einleitung* must continue to be the main guide of any serious student of the Talmud. The merits of the *Einleitung* are many: it is well arranged, its biographies of the leading Talmudic Rabbis, 'Schriftgelehrten', are concisely adequate, its elucidation of technical terms is precise and accurate, its account of 'Hermeneutics' is peculiarly lucid, its exposition of the contents of the Talmudic and other Rabbinic texts is more than adequate, for it is generously copious, its judgements are moderate and well-founded, its historical surveys impartial, while its analysis of the value of the Talmud will commend itself to the humanist. It is a standard work of the best type. Yet Strack seems never to be satisfied himself that he has done all that could be done. Thus in the present edition he has incorporated a fresh chapter of considerable value. All the older (and some of the newer) Jewish authorities cite the Talmud not by Tractate and folio, but by chapter heading. Strack gives us now (as others of course have done before him) an alphabetical list of these chapter headings. While on the subject of the method of citing the Talmud, I might be allowed to allude to an interesting fact. Our present pagination derives from Bomberg's Venice edition (1520-1523); all subsequent editions have adhered to his numbers. But Bomberg himself did not number the leaves until he had proceeded some way with his first volume. Like a wise editor he did not hesitate to introduce a useful change *after* he had printed off some sheets.

Besides, however, such innovations as the alphabetical list of chapter headings, the fifth edition of the *Einleitung* is enriched with an entirely new section on the Midrash. Strack realizes that Midrash is not merely an exposition of the Biblical text, but that it is a vital phase of the life of the people. Of course it also had a scholastic tendency, and much of the Midrash that has survived is technical and halachic (legal) as well as popular and homiletic. The student will find a trustworthy guide through the intricacies of date and structure. One remark on Genesis Rabbah will be read with the utmost satisfaction. Referring to J. Theodor's masterly edition of this Midrash, which was interrupted by the war, Strack notes: 'die baldige Vollendung der wichtigen Arbeit ist gesichert'. The present writer has Dr Theodor's personal assurance that the manuscript is already complete. It is a strange fact that we are still so badly provided with critical texts of the early Rabbinical works, the Talmud included. There does not even exist a critical edition of the whole of the Mishnah, though the manuscript and other materials for such an edition are already ample. With the Midrash the case is a good deal better; Friedmann, Weiss, and

Buber did much for the Midrash text in a former generation, though their learning was more conspicuous than their critical judgement. H. S. Horovitz's edition of the Sifrê to *Numbers* (1917) marks a new epoch. Students of the Talmud have Rabbinovicz's *Variae Lectiones*, and, better still, the facsimile of the complete Munich MS of the Babylonian recension. For this, as for so much else of aid, the student is indebted to Strack himself. And though he admits, as from the nature of the case any conscientious scholar must admit, that his *Einleitung* still needs a good deal of supplementation to make its bibliographies complete, yet Strack may rest content with the degree of perfection that he has now reached. He characteristically informs us that he has never known an 'eight hours day'. Obviously this is the truth, for the collection, sifting, and valuation of so many thousands of pamphlets and volumes represent a patient industry as well as a rare capacity.

Strack's new edition is, then, a great performance. In his latest preface he thanks friends in Holland, England, and the United States for enabling him to publish this enlarged version of his book. He justly finds herein a proof that, despite the war, German scholarship is still appreciated in foreign countries. Prof. Strack need be under no apprehension that his work will fail to attract readers in England because of the recent painful breach between our country and his. And though the present work stands out as a splendid performance, yet in a sense its most important service lies in its future promise. The labour and the research which he has consecrated to it are but the prolegomena to a yet greater work. For Dr Strack concludes his preface by the announcement that this Introduction is the forerunner to a larger work on which he has been engaged for twenty years. This larger work is nothing less than a 'Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Midrash', which the author hopes to begin to print immediately, with the collaboration of Paul Billerbeck. Strack was 73 years old on May 6, 1921, and it says much for his unimpaired vigour and enthusiasm that he can, at such an age, contemplate the completion of so great and arduous an enterprise. He may confidently anticipate a cordial welcome in England to a work for which he is so eminently qualified.

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