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RECENT JEWISH LITERATURE

Jüdische Privatbriefe aus dem Jahre 1619. Nach den Originalen des k. u. k. Haus- Hof- u. Staatsarchivs im Auftrage der historischen Kommission der isr. Kultusgemeinde in Wien herausgegeben von Dr. ALFRED LANDAU u. Dr. BERNHARD WACHSTEIN. Wien u. Leipzig, 1911. pp. XLIX + 133 + 60. with 8 fcss.

THE work under the above title forms the third volume of the "Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutsch-Oesterreich," a serial publication undertaken three years ago by the historical commission of the Jewish community of Vienna. It contains, in the first place, a collection of 46 (or rather 54, since 8 of the numbers contain 2 letters each) letters written by various Jews and Jewesses of Prague in November 1619, shortly after the beginning of the Thirty Years' War. Only six of the letters are written in the Hebrew language, the rest are composed in Judeo-German, which was spoken by nearly all the Jews of Europe at that time. They are all addressed to relatives and acquaintances who resided in Vienna, but, as we see now, were not delivered probably because they were intercepted in the search for political documents. How the bundle of letters happened to come into the state-archives of the Austrian government, where they remained unnoticed nearly 300 years, is a question to which the learned editors confess to have no answer. Certain it is that for a very long time the letters were left untouched until the worms had done their work in eating away the material out of which some of the seals were prepared.

The contents of these letters are of the utmost interest from many a point of view. They represent, to begin with, the first and, perhaps, the only collection of Jewish family-letters of

mediæval times. In the variety of content, in the diversity of human relations that are uncovered before our wondering eyes, in the amazing richness of genuine sentiment displayed by the various writers, revealing to us their loves and petty quarrels, their hopes and fears in their political, religious, social, commercial, and private life—these letters can hardly be equaled by any historical document that has been brought to light through the researches of any Jewish historical commission, with the exception, perhaps, of the documents published by the Deutsche hist. Commission. We stand here, as it were, before a series of rapidly moving pictures, in which all classes of the Jewish community of Prague in the year 1619 are vividly presented. We see their business transactions, their social joys and sorrows, we see the cakes they like, the clothes, and—I beg your pardon—even the petticoats they wear. Forgetting ourselves for a moment we feel deeply moved in reading of the sufferings of the brave Roesel Theomim, daughter of a prominent representative of the Jewish community in Vienna, who had died three years before (1616). For some reason she was left with her children in Vienna, where the cholera had broken out, while her husband, Dr. Aaron Lucerna, or, as he is called in Hebrew, Aaron Maor-Katan, was practicing medicine and very busy in trying to fight off small-pox which was ravaging Prague at that time. She implores him to take her to Prague, as she would prefer to die near him, but owing to the insecurity of the roads in the times of war this was impossible. In a long affectionate letter, beginning with the words "*Herzliebtes Weib, ich hab deine Kines-brief erhalten, ich hab trerin driber gelosen,*" and so forth, he explains to her the great dangers of a journey at the present time and begs her to wait until spring. At the end he does not forget to admonish her that she should not go out in the evenings alone, for, her husband being far away, people might talk evil about her. What happened afterwards we do not know, except that Dr. Lucerna died in Vienna in 1643. It would lead us too far to indicate the contents even of a small portion of these letters, that cover sixty pages in print. As mentioned before, they are written by men and women from all classes of the Jewish community. Of particular interest are two letters because they are written

by no less a man than the famous Yomṭob Lipman Heller, the author of the *Tosefot Yomṭob* on the Mishnah, and his wife Rechle, born Theomim. The great Rabbi who writes here in plain "Jüdisch Teitsch" to his sister-in-law is very anxious to marry off his daughter. He promised to pay 1000 gulden for a son-in-law but would like now to reduce this sum if possible to 800 gulden. I do not know how far the miscarriage of his letter had interfered with the "Shidduch" and whether he succeeded in his attempt to lower the price of his future son-in-law. A conspicuous feature in all these letters is the spirit of love and cordiality in which they are written, the earnestness and religious piety that is discernible even in the ordinary business-letter. Though they were destined to be read only by the nearest relatives, there is nowhere an obscene word as is often the case in private letters written by Germans of that time. Nor is there to be found any harsh expression used by one member of the family against the other. Enoch Hamerschlag, a prominent citizen of Prague, rebukes his son Aaron who had married in Vienna, for devoting too much time to business, neglecting the study of the Torah which is more important than making money. "Had I known that your father-in-law was going to engage you in business instead of making you study the Torah, as he had promised to do, he might have offered me all his fortune, I would never have consented to that marriage. I did not bring you up for business and am afraid that God will punish you for neglecting the study of the Torah. Therefore come back to Prague and I shall engage here the best teacher in town to assist you in your studies" (letter 3a). It is also noteworthy that two letters (Nos. 28 and 29) are written partly in cipher, an enigmatic combination of Hebrew characters contrived for the safe transmission of secrets. No clue whatever could at first be offered by the editors to this cryptography. Several months after the publication of the work, however, Dr. Wachstein renewed his efforts, and this time was rewarded by discovering the device used by the writer and getting thus behind his secrets. In a "Nachtrag" (=Supplement) to the work under discussion published separately during the same year (Leipzig 1911) he betrays them also to the reader, reproducing the two letters in a fully deciphered form. Those, how-

ever, who have suspected some extraordinary secret behind the occult letters will perhaps feel somewhat disappointed upon now learning their content. For the writer of letter No. 28 only inquires whether he could get in Vienna a loan of a thousand *Schock* (= about 1200 dollars) at "a low rate of interest for a whole year," while letter No. 29 (by the same writer) again shows us the flourishing business of match-making in the Jewish community of Prague. The writer, Judah Katz, obviously anxious to get the mediator's fee, very solicitously recommends to his uncle Abraham Katz in Vienna, a "good-looking learned boy of a fine German family of rabbis, not over fifteen years old" as a prospective bridegroom for the daughter of Abraham's father-in-law. In case the latter should not care for the match, the uncle should approach with the proposal a certain Aaron b. Solomon [Theomim]. The uncle is further requested not to initiate anybody else in the matter, which gives us a hint why the letter was written in cypher. The deciphered portion of the letter is, however, of historical importance, inasmuch as it throws some light on the genealogy and relationship of several prominent rabbis, among them Yomṭob Lipman Heller, mentioned therein.

A few words must be said also about the work of the two editors. Aside from a splendid general introduction, in which the historical importance of the documents is pointed out and the idiomatic as well as grammatical peculiarities of their language are minutely discussed, they give also a carefully prepared transliteration of the Hebrew characters with explanatory notes and very learned bio- and bibliographical discourses on most of the persons mentioned in the letters. Of great importance not only for the historian but also for the student of mediæval German philology is the elaborate glossary in which the most difficult words are traced to their origin. The addition of eight tables showing the facsimiles of twenty letters, in full or in part, and of the seals with their inscriptions (in Latin and Hebrew characters) as they were used in the various families deserves special mention. Among the facsimiled letters is also the one written by Lipman Heller and the one written in cipher (No. 29).

The learned editors evidently realized the great importance of their material and therefore felt justified in spending so much

time and labor on its analysis and scientific fructification for the scholarly world. This view will be shared and their labor appreciated by every one who is interested in the history of mediæval Jewry.

Talmudic Sayings. Selected and arranged under appropriate headings by Rabbi HENRY COHEN. 2d edition. BLOCH PUBLISHING COMPANY, 1910. pp. VIII + 72.

The purpose of this compilation is "to show the purity of Jewish moral teachings and to bring home to the uninitiated some of the beauties of Jewish Ethics, as is contained in the Talmud." The selections are arranged under headings and follow the style of the current quotation-books. The translations are acceptable. The first edition appeared in 1894.

Tales and Maxims from the Talmud. Selected, arranged and translated, with an introduction by REV. SAMUEL RAPAPORT. Together with an essay on the Talmud by the late EMANUEL DEUTSCH. London: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS. 1910. pp. 237.

The author seems to have been conscious of the small value of his compilation, when he found it necessary to include in his publication the famous essay on the Talmud of Emanuel Deutsch. The latter covers the first 70 pages which is followed by an introduction (pp. 72-88), in which the author undergoes the trouble of repeating things generally known. The rest of the book consists of the Tales and Maxims, a compilation of talmudic-haggadic passages in which the author gives rather the sense than a literal translation. The arrangement of the content follows the order of the talmudic tractates. The work may have some value for English readers unacquainted with the original. It is obvious that the author is inexperienced in doing literary work in this department. He has a novel method for indicating a page in the Talmud using a Roman II for *verso*, while his phonetic transliteration of proper names are certainly unacceptable. A few instances of his spelling will show it: Hanassa (for ha-Nasi), Beseira, Shotach, Zockai, Shishes, R. Eloser, Brocoth, Shabboth, etc.

Altjüdische liturgische Gebete. Ausgewählt und mit Einleitungen herausgegeben von Prof. D. W. STAERK. Bonn 1910. 32 pages.

Der Mišnatraktat Berakhoth. In vokalisiertem Text, mit sprachlichen und sachlichen Bemerkungen. Von Prof. D. STAERK. Bonn 1910. 18 pages.

Under the title "Kleine Texte für theologische und philologische Vorlesungen und Übungen" Professor Hans Lietzmann has been editing for several years past a series of small text-books for the use of professors and students of the respective branches. The texts are usually taken from the Old and New Testament or from the apocryphal and Græco-Roman theological literature. The two publications of Prof. Staerk are Nos. 58 and 59 in the collection. The first contains a selection of the most important Jewish prayers, as the *Shema'* with the preceding and following benedictions, the *Y'psi* in its earlier Palestinian version as published by Schechter in the *JQR.*, X, 654 ff., from a MS. of the Genizah, and in the Babylonian version which is in common use, as well as the Sabbath and festival prayers. The arrangement is rather peculiar. After the Musaf-prayer for the Festivals comes the *Habdalah* (but no *Kiddush!*), then the prayer for Friday evening, *Abinu Malkenu*, and two versions of the Aramaic *Qaddish* which conclude the book. Each prayer is preceded by a short introduction giving the history of the prayer and defining its place in Jewish liturgy. The prayers are vocalized throughout (though not always correctly); short philological and explanatory notes are given under the text only in cases where the respective words are not found in the Hebrew-Aramaic dictionary of Gesenius-Buhl.

The second work is, as its title indicates, a vocalized edition of the Mishnah Berakot. It is worked on the same plan as the preceding number. The notes, however, are here divided into two sections. The upper section is purely philological, explaining (I have noticed a number of errors) Mishnic terms and words not found in the biblical dictionaries, while in the second lower division the attempt is made to acquaint the beginner with the

content of the Mishnah and with the principle underlying the divergent views of the authorities in question. Both publications will on the whole serve their purpose.

The Significance of Judaism for the Progress of Religion. Address delivered by HERMANN COHEN, professor of philosophy in Marburg. Berlin-Schoeneberg 1910. 18 pages.

Prof. Cohen tries to define the place of Judaism among the world's religions. He designates morality as the goal towards which religion is advancing, or, as he terms it, the idealization of religion. It, therefore, remains to show that Judaism in its fundamental thoughts is striving after this idealization. The author thus takes up the most important principles of Judaism for a philosophical discussion and examination, arriving at the conclusion, that "the genuine living God, whom the prophets of Israel made to be God of Israel and God of mankind, breathes only in social morality and in cosmopolitic humanity."

Dr. UMBERTO CASSUTO, *La Famiglia Da Pisa*. Estratto dalla *Rivista Israelitica*, anni V-VII. Firenze 1910. 82 pages.

The history of the famous Italian family of Da Pisa has been treated by various authors, especially by the late David Kaufmann in a series of interesting articles in the *REJ.*, V, 26-34, recently republished in the *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II, from the original German MS. The author of this work, however, has made use of fresh materials, which he discovered in various Italian archives. Cassuto begins his work with the earliest known progenitor of the family, a certain Mattathiah (surnamed מן הכנסת or מביית אל i. e. *de Synagoga*) of Rome (fourteenth century). The famous banking house of this family had its beginnings in S. Miniato in 1393, when Mattathiah b. Shabbethai da Roma first settled there and engaged in the banking business which in 1406 was considerably extended by his youngest son Jehiel, who opened the main branch of the firm in the city of Pisa. Hereafter the family becomes known under the name of Da Pisa, and the bank established by them takes rank as one of the most important financial institutions of the time and plays no small rôle in the

history of Italy. The author devotes considerable space to the activities and vicissitudes of the bank under the various principalities of Italy. Of greater importance, however, is the fact, brought out prominently by the author, that the members of the family for a period of nearly two centuries were not only leaders in the world of finance but were also very prominent Jewish scholars and communal workers. Especially known as a talmudist was Abraham b. Isaac da Pisa (died 1554), while Jehiel Nissim da Pisa (died 1574) attained prominence through his defense of religion against philosophy in a work entitled *מנהג קנאות*, which was published by Kaufmann in 1898. Cassuto briefly reviews the history of the family down to the present time, and includes at the end of the work (pp. 59-61) a genealogical tree reaching to the year 1665, and, what is more valuable, a reproduction of Hebrew, Latin, and Italian documents drawn from archives (pp. 62-82).

Une Mission de l'Alliance au Yemen. Par YOMTOB SEMACH. Paris (1910). 122 pages.

The book is a diary describing minutely the author's observations during his travels among the Yemen Jews, covering a period of five months (January to May, 1910). He includes in his account facts of interest bearing on the beliefs and superstitions, religious observances, social customs, and general conditions of the Yemen Jews. Towards the end of the volume is a carefully prepared statistical table showing the number of Jews residing in the various cities and villages of the province as well as their occupations. He visited 150 towns totaling a Jewish population of 12,026. The whole diary proves interesting reading.

Jüdisches und Heidnisches im christlichen Kult. Eine Vorlesung von GERHARD LOESCHE. Bonn 1910. 36 pages.

JESUS did not intend to bring a new religion and, therefore, did not create any new system of religious rites and ceremonies (*Kult*). When in spite of this a new religion was promulgated under his name, this religion had of necessity to create for itself also a system of ceremonies. A careful examination of this

Christian system of rites by the author reveals to him the fact that it contains nothing original, that the most important religious institutions of the Church—calendar, week, festivals, liturgy, hours of worship, Christmas, Communion services, worship of saints, etc., were borrowed either from the Jews or the heathen. Having thus stripped the church of all originality, he does not draw any practical consequences, but concludes with the ominous remark that the church began as a Jewish sect and subsequently became a world-religion only through assimilating also the elements of heathendom.

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