

Christianity in Talmud and Midrash
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This book presents a careful collection and a minute discussion of all the references in Talmud and Midrash to Jesus and to the heresy designated by these Jewish writings as Minuth. The contents are ordered as follows: In the introduction the author renders a more than usually lucid account of what is comprised in the voluminous bodies called Talmud and Midrash and of how other collections stand related to these, an account for which many a reader who, not being a Jewish scholar, has lost his way in the confusing terminology as frequently given, will be grateful to him. The first division is made up of the passages collected from the Rabbinical literature: A. Passages relating to Jesus; B. Passages relating to Minim, Minuth. Under the latter head the subdivisions are: 1. Descriptions and definitions of Minim and Minuth; 2. Polemical encounters between Jesus and Minim; 3. Polemical allusions to Minim, Minuth; 4. Miscellaneous passages referring to Minim. The second division deals with the general results obtained by induction from the collected data and deals again separately with the Jesus-tradition and the Minim. In the division containing the passages the author proceeds very methodically, giving each time a careful translation, to which he appends a commentary and a discussion of the chronology of the Rabbinical authorities on whose names the tradition is given. (At the close of the book all these passages are printed in the original.) The comments will to many a reader give the first inkling of what the text means, so obscure and enigmatical is the latter in many places. The author exhibits great skill in expounding it, although occasionally he himself is compelled to own that he does not understand the meaning of a given passage. On the whole, however, the reader who would expect the subject to be dry and uninteresting will be agreeably disappointed. There is a peculiar quaintness and naïveté in these conceits of the Jewish Rabbis which gives them a certain charm; especially their interpretations of Old Testament passages in the interest of meeting the heretical exegesis of the Minim are remarkable for their Rabbinical flavor. As regards the concrete results from the point of view of an increase of our knowledge of the life of Jesus and the early history of Christianity, it must be confessed, and the author himself confesses, that these are immaterial. We learn nothing new from these Jewish traditions that we did not know from the Gospels. In no case, as the author himself tells us, is there ground to correct the Gospel account by the help of the Talmud; it is the Gospel account rather which throws light upon the Talmudic tradition (p. 82). In many cases it is evident that we have to deal not with genuine Jewish tradition come down independently of the Gospel tradition or the written Gospels, but simply with a Jewish version or perversion of knowledge obtained from the Christian sources themselves. Perhaps, the most extreme wing of New Testament critics, who have in all seriousness begun to doubt whether Jesus was an historical character, can learn from the Talmudic accounts about Jeshu ben Pantiri, Jeshu ha-Notzri and Ben Stada that Jesus really existed (p. 359). Whether genuine Jewish tradition lies at the basis of the statement that Jesus was born out of wedlock, so that we should have here a Jewish version of the fact of the supernatural birth of the Savior, is not easy to tell. The peculiar representation that Jesus' mother was "Miriam, the dresser of women's hair" (Miriam Magaddela Nashaia), which seems to be an echo of Miriam Magdalaah, i.e., Mary Magdalene, is not decisive, since this might just as well have been derived from historic reminiscence as from confused knowledge of Gospel tradition. Taking the facts as a whole, it is astounding how little impression the great figure of Jesus seems to have made upon the legal tradition of Judaism. Not even the central fact of his having laid claim to Messiahship has been remembered. So confused is the account that his death is located at Lud,

instead of at Jerusalem, and attributed to stoning. The question might be put whether, in view of these meager results, the amount of labor spent upon this part of the work seems justified. Still, even though the results are small and negative it is of some value to have thoroughly canvassed the subject and established the facts once for all. It should be added that, according to a note on page 35, the author professes to have done no more in the section relating to Jesus, than to rearrange the material and modify some of the conclusions of Laible's work, *Jesus Christus im Talmud* (1871).

Of a more substantial and positive character are the discussion of the passages relating to Minim and Minuth and the conclusions drawn from this in the second division of the book. As to the name Min Herford is of the opinion that it can be explained from the common Hebrew word Min, denoting kind, species (cf. "sect," "haireisis"), but that through the similarity between its synonym Zan ("kind") and Zanah, "to commit whoredom," Min obtained the connotation of one who commits religious adultery. The Minim are not heretics in general, but a peculiar kind of heretics coordinated with other kinds. They are as a rule Jews by birth, and their specific difference seems to be that they are false at heart and do not necessarily proclaim their apostasy, because they continue to mingle with the Jews in their religion. The author reaches the conclusion that in most cases the Minim of the Talmud are Jewish Christians. In this he takes issue with Friedländer, who in a series of writings has advocated the view that the Minim are mostly Gnostics, and built on the references to them the theory that there was Gnosticism among the Jews of a pre-Christian date. Herford adduces many convincing reasons for reducing the extravagant claims of Friedländer, and exposes in not a few points the inexcusable carelessness of the latter's method of argumentation. He shows that what is said about the belief of the Minim in "the two powers" cannot relate to the Gnostic Demiurge and the highest God, because these two powers are associated in the creation of the world, in which the Supreme God of the Gnostics had no share, and that therefore there must be a reference in these "two powers" to the Christian association of Jesus as divine with the Father. Still, it remains somewhat doubtful in our mind whether our author has not run into the opposite extreme to Friedländer's contention, by hardly allowing any place at all for the Gnostics among the Minim. In his recent work, *Die religiösen Bewegungen innerhalb des Judenthums im Zeitalter Jesu* (1905), Friedländer emphatically repudiates the view imputed to him, as if all Minim were without exception Jewish Gnostics. Some reserve may also be in place with reference to the peculiar form in which Herford carries out his hypothesis of the Jewish-Christian character of the Minim. He thinks that the references to "the two powers" presuppose a knowledge of the Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and makes this Epistle mark a crisis in the history of Jewish Christianity, viz., the definite separation of the Jewish Christians from the synagogue, by which they became Minim. The question of the nationality of those to whom the Epistle is addressed is still *sub judice*, and in simply taking for granted that the first readers were Jewish Christians in Palestine the author gives the impression of dealing too easily with a difficult problem simply because it fits in with his hypothesis. But apart from this, we believe that the whole tenor of the Epistle is against the view that the readers were now first awaking to the consciousness of their religious distinctness from Judaism. Nor is it necessary to account for the Talmudic references to the Christian Christology and other points by assuming knowledge of this one particular writing of the New Testament. We certainly may believe that in the time spoken of there were Jewish Christians in Palestine who believed in the divinity of Jesus.

A slip is the statement on page 106 that James the brother of Jesus was put to death 44 A.D.