

THE POETRY OF THE TALMUD

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649743117

The poetry of the Talmud by S. Sekles

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S. SEKLES

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OF THE TALMUD**

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BY
S. SEKLES.

NEW YORK :
PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR.
1880.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1880, by
S. SEKLES,
in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

STEAM PRESS OF
H. O. A. INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL,
76TH ST., NEAR THIRD AVE.

Prüfungs-
20
1882
1883
1884

PREFACE.

OURS is the century of research and exploration. The weird autographs of former civilizations have been deciphered. The early beginnings of history have been successfully reached. The lurking places of antiquity, so mysterious in their origin and solemn in their associations, have disclosed their secrets. From mount, and cliff, and sepulchre what wondrous lights have been shed, recompensing man for his courage, endurance, insight, and enterprise. It is once more the legend of enchantment, and modern science has broken the spell and bidden a world again arise.

Prominent among the monuments of antiquity, which have been made the subject of modern research, is the Talmud.

To the historian and general reader it may not appear with the fascination with which the Sphinx is invested, but to the student of literature and to the descendant of that race, whose ancient history it illumined, it must possess a peculiar interest. Its age, its history, its character, its encyclopædic contents, and the hundreds of men whose opinions it cites, its wealth of illustrations and anecdotes, its flood of light on Jewish thought and customs, and the veneration with which it is regarded by numerous descendants of those whose names and views it has immortalized—surely, no obelisk or temple ruins can compete with this work.

And apart from the question of archæology, the student's

interest is further enhanced by the reflection that the Talmud is recognized as an authority in the religion and ceremonial of the large majority of the Jewish race wherever scattered.

During the ages when the Jews remained strangers to the outside world, formed a state within the state and were excluded from participation in secular studies, they exhausted all their mental abilities in penetrating into the secrets of the dialectical debates in the Talmud, whose ethical axioms became the guide of their lives.

It was reserved for our age to study the Talmud not merely for its ethical and religious value, but also for its literary, historical, and scientific value.

Within recent decades the territory of the Talmud has been diligently explored—chiefly by German authors—for its contributions to the better knowledge of antiquity; information in respect to the sciences of medicine, zoology, botany, astronomy, mathematics, etc., have been collected and commented upon. They have given the results of their labors in monographs of more or less value, the whole forming a kind of Talmudical library and an introduction to the work itself, often of exceeding value to the specialist and of signal utility in popularizing the study of the Talmud.

Nor is this renewed activity limited to Jewish scholars; learned Christians, especially students of Oriental languages, eagerly strive to gain new light for their studies from the pages of the Talmud.

In the present volume, the author introduces the reader to fragments of Oriental poetry, scattered through the pages of Talmudical literature. He has collected some of the proverbs,

hymns, songs, and parables. In its preparation the author's greatest difficulty has been the abundance of material, but he has sought to enll the best selections, and trusts that he has been successful.

He has consulted the works of previous laborers in this field, and his grateful acknowledgments are especially due to Graetz, Delitzsch, Dukes, and Hamburger for the assistance their works have afforded him. Nor can he in this connection omit to express his thanks to the kind friends who have aided him in the revision of his work, among others to Miss Deborah Kleinert and Mr. A. Henschel for their poetical renderings.

In the hope that this volume may serve to awaken fresh interest in the Talmud among the people and throw new light on its character and contents, the author intrusts it to the reader.

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