

ARTICLE VIII.  
ETHICS OF THE FATHERS.\*

*A Tractate of the Mishna, with the Commentary of Maimonides thereon.* Translated and annotated by ALEXANDER MEYROWITZ, M. A., Ph. D., Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages and Ancient History in the University of Missouri.

PREFACE.

The following work is a translation of the best and most instructive part of the Jewish literature called Mishna. The Mishna is the text of the Talmud. The word Mishna means repetition; and, according to the Jewish belief, it is the only true commentary on the Pentateuch, imparted by God himself to Moses after imparting to him the text. This commentary Moses

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The Reverend Dr. S. S. Laws, President of the State University of Missouri, has done us and the readers of the REVIEW a favor in procuring us this article from the learned translator, Dr. Meyrowitz, now a devout Protestant Christian, but a Jew by blood, who is master of both biblical and rabbinical Hebrew. He has doubtless given us a most accurate version of this specimen of the Talmud. Archæologists tell us that this compilation of Jewish traditions, the Talmud, consists of two parts: the Mishna, or text, and the Gemara, or commentary thereon. But the portion of the Mishna given here has no Gemara of the earlier Rabbis. Dr. Meyrowitz gives us, instead, the exposition of Maimonides, a learned Jew, who lived six centuries after the Talmud was compiled. Our author also adds some explanations of his own, which are placed as notes in the margin, enclosed in brackets, thus, [ ], and also signed Tr. (translator).

The strange literature of the Talmud formerly received much attention from some learned Christians, such as Lightfoot. But their works are rare, costly, and voluminous, and inaccessible to most Presbyterians. We therefore present our readers this specimen; in which rabbinical ideas are as exactly reproduced as an English dress will permit; that we may have some actual knowledge of the modes of Jewish thought, and may be able to appreciate our Saviour's verdict on the "traditions of the elders." The triviality and error of many of their rules are no measure of the value of this knowledge to us, and of the article which presents it. The reader will not fail to notice the progress of error in uninspired tradition. Maimonides is worse than the Mishna.

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is said to have delivered to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the prophets, as the reader will find in the first section of the following article. The Mishna was at first oral, but the compilation of it was made by Rabbi Jehuda, the holy, about one hundred years before Christ; whilst the commentary on it, which passed under the name of Gemara, *i.e.*, completion or complement, was not finished till the end of the fifth century. The Mishna is certainly the oldest part of uninspired Jewish literature; its language is purer than that of the Gemara, and it is, in a literary point of view, next to the later prophets. Let it here be remarked, that the simple study of the Old Testament, the Mishna, and the Gemara, is considered by the Jews the most pleasing act in God's sight. The Talmud says: "Whosoever is occupied with the study of the Law"—and under the word Law they understand all the three above-mentioned compositions—"is released from observing any other of God's commandments." Yet, in their perverse pride, they say (Baba Meziä, fol. 33, col. 1): "Whosoever studies the written word of God possesses virtue, but receives no reward; whosoever studies the Mishna possesses virtue and receives reward; but there is nothing higher than the study of the Gemara."\*

By keeping these Talmudistical notions in mind, many a passage which occurs in the Mishna will be better understood. The commentary on this Tract of the Mishna, here translated, is composed by Rabbi Moses, son of Maimon, generally called Maimonides. He was born at Cordova in Spain A.D. 1131. The early part of his education was under his father, the later under Rabbi Joseph, son of Mages, and also under the learned Arabian, Iben Thophail and Averroes. Maimonides was perfect master of the Hebrew, Chaldee, Arabic, Turkish, and Greek languages; was a very great admirer of Aristotle; and made himself familiar with all the branches of philosophy and mathematics written in those languages. He was also well informed in Jewish divinity and jurisprudence. His extraordinary accomplishments excited the envy and ill-will of some of his own nation

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\* *How true the words of Christ* : "Thus ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your traditions" (Mark vii. 13).

in Cordova; hence, before he was yet of the age of thirty, he left Cordova for Egypt. His great medical skill caused him to be appointed chief physician to Saladin, Sultan of Egypt; and he died in Egypt A. D. 1205. When the Jews speak of him now, they use the proverbial saying, "From Moses to Moses, there arose none like Moses,"—*i.e.*, from Moses, son of Amram, to Moses, son of Maimon. The first of his productions, in order of time, was his commentary on the Mishna. It was originally written, like most of his works, in Arabic, and translated into Hebrew by Rabbi Jehuda Aben Tiben. Our Tract, like many others, has no Gemara. Let, now, the indulgent reader, if he can, imagine the difficulty of translating a translation of an Oriental work into our Occidental English. It is quite an impossibility to render Maimonides's commentary literally into English. The Hebrew phraseology is so ornamental, that the English idiom cannot bear it, and its literal rendering would be quite unintelligible to the English reader. The translator was, therefore, sometimes, forced either to omit or to add, so as to give faithfully the full meaning of the commentator. In some places of this Mishna, where its sense seemed to have been quite plain to the commentator, but rather obscure to the English reader, I have given my own explanations, marked Tr. (*i.e.*, translator).

Should this translation find favor with the *literati* of my adopted country, and add but the least to the great knowledge of its *savans*, I shall feel myself greatly gratified, as an instrument in the hand of the Lord, who wills, for the sake of his righteousness, to magnify the law and make it honorable (Isaiah xiii. 21).

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