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BENTWICH'S PHILO

Philo-Judaeus of Alexandria. BY NORMAN BENTWICH. Philadelphia: THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY OF AMERICA, 1910. pp. 7 + 273.

MR. BENTWICH has given us in the volume under review an eminently readable and up-to-date monograph on a great writer who has suffered undeserved neglect on the part of Jews. His is not the only case in which the Rabbinic application of the biblical *לֹא תִלְכוּ* וּבַחֲקוֹת הַנְּגִימִים has resulted in ironic situations not at all creditable to Jewish sense of humor or of fitness.

To illustrate from examples still evident at the present day, biblical grammar, biblical interpretation, and biblical criticism have been taken so well in hand by Christian scholars that Jews have assumed the rôle of interested onlookers. Only recently has there been a stir in the Jewish camp, expressing the sentiment that we must once more make the Bible our own.

Now there are signs that the Talmud, too, will soon cease to be a *terra incognita* to our Christian friends. Schürer and Strack are the pioneers, and Margolis's Grammar (he is a Jew) will make it easier for the younger Christian Semitists and theologians to follow in Strack's footsteps. Shall we attribute the growing neglect of the Talmud in certain Jewish circles to the circumstance just pointed out?

In ancient times the Septuagint translation was abandoned by the Jews because the Christian Church adopted it, and the caricature of Aquila was substituted in its place. The same fate has befallen Philo, who, with all his extravagance, unreality, and absolute want of the historical sense, was at heart a loyal and enthusiastic Jew. His treatises and his sermons are not inferior to the Palestinian and Babylonian Midrash, and if they had been studied by the Jews of the succeeding centuries, would have kept

alive a broader culture among the Jews of the early Middle Ages, and would have prepared them for a more general and more intelligent reception of the spirit emanating from the Judæo-Spanish writers.

Philo's language, it is true, was against him, since the bulk of the Jews who lived in Palestine, and especially in Babylon, in the following centuries, did not know Greek. At the same time it would seem that the very circumstance that the New Testament writings were in Greek made that speech a *lingua non grata* among the Jews.

It seems, according to some, that Jews had a hand in translating the Scriptures into Syriac (Peshitta) in Mesopotamia in the second century.

In the succeeding centuries, especially in the fifth and sixth and following, i. e. in Talmudic times, and in Mesopotamia, the Talmudic land, the Nestorian and Monophysite Christians were extremely active in conducting theological and scientific schools in which the scientific material wholly, the theological for the most part, was derived from Greek sources. There was an important school of translators in Edessa, in the fourth and fifth centuries, in which Greek works of theology, philosophy, and science were rendered into Syriac by Christian scholars. Similar schools were established soon after in Nisibis and Gandisapora. The Jews living in those lands could thus without any difficulty, had they been so disposed, have had access to the Greek language and its literature. But there seems to be no evidence in the Rabbinic writings that there were any relations of an intellectual character between the Babylonian Jews and the Mesopotamian schools of the Syrian Christians.

Philo, it seems clear, was not known to the Talmudists. Poznański's article in the *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 1895, calling attention to a possible trace of Philo in a Karaitic fragment or two of the ninth or tenth century is extremely interesting, though not quite conclusive. The one passage upon which he bases his chief claim, in which reference is made to the "Muḳaddamāt (Introductions) of the Alexandrian" and his answers given to the question, why God gave the ten commandments in the desert and

not in an inhabited land, has a remarkable resemblance to an extant passage in Philo. At the same time it is sufficiently divergent in the classification of the answer and in the example to one part of it to make it doubtful whether it was taken directly from Philo.

Azariah dei Rossi in the sixteenth century was the first to make an attempt after sixteen centuries of neglect to rehabilitate Philo among the Jews, and ironically enough he had to have recourse to a Latin translation made by Christians.

In other words, it was Christians during that long interval who kept him for us in the original, and who translated him. The early Christian church had a great fondness for him, and cited him next to Plato to prove that even in pre-Christian times an intimation of the Trinity was vouchsafed to certain wise men. A passage was selected in his treatise *De Abrahamo* in which, commenting on the various names of God in the Bible, he distinguishes in particular three, which he renders in Greek, ὁ Ὄν, Θεός and Κύριος. These correspond to יהוה (איהיה), אלהים, and אנני. The first is the Father of all, he says, standing in the middle, and guarded on both sides by his two eldest and nearest Powers, the Creative and the Regal, so that he gives the mind the appearance sometimes of one, sometimes of three. (Δορυφορούμενος οὖν ὁ μέσος ὑφ' ἑκατέρας τῶν δυνάμεων παρέχει τῇ ὀρατικῇ διανοίᾳ τοτὲ μὲν ἐνός τοτὲ δὲ τριῶν φαντασίαν).

Dei Rossi's praiseworthy endeavor was, however, abortive, and Philo had to wait for the nineteenth century to receive the treatment he deserves at the hands of Jewish scholars. As a philosopher and theologian he had been adequately studied and expounded by historians of Greek philosophy, as well as by those who were tracing the antecedents and origins of Christian theological dogma.

The Jewish writers, therefore, for the most part endeavored to establish his position as a Jew, in particular the relations of his exposition of the Bible to the Palestinian Haggadah and Halakah.

Bentwich summarizes for the non-specialist in pleasant fashion Philo's environment, life, character, and teaching in its various phases and relations.

He vindicates his hero's Jewishness against all aspersions, in which laudable attempt he is quite successful if regard is had purely to Philo's intention. The matter is debatable if we extend the defense to Philo's method and actual achievement. He sailed close to the wind in his allegorizations, on the one hand, in his personifications on the other. The one was in danger of leading, as it actually did in Christianity, to antinomianism, the other to pluralism. There was some justification in a critical period for repudiation of his method on the part of the Synagogue.

Interesting is the author's discovery of a progress in Philo's ethical doctrine from his earlier to his more mature writings. In the former, we are told, he is an uncompromising ascetic, in the latter an advocate of the middle way, and sensible of the importance of social life.

The author lays stress on Philo's missionary aim. Moses he holds out as the greatest of all men, and the most perfect that ever lived; the law of Moses as the only enduring law, stamped with the seal of nature, and alone capable of bringing about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Bentwich's book fills a long-felt want, and forms a valuable addition to the Society's publications and a fit companion to the volumes on Maimonides and Rashi in the series of Jewish Worthies, of which it forms a part.

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