

JESUS AND JEWISH TRADITION

BY ROBERT P. RICHARDSON

ALMOST everyone whose knowledge of Christianity goes beyond that of the Sunday School knows that, besides the four canonical gospels of *Matthew, Mark, Luke* and *John*, there were a number of heretical and apocryphal gospels giving a somewhat different account of the career of Jesus of Nazareth. Comparatively few people, however, even among the cultured and well-read, are aware that in addition to the orthodox and heretical Christian traditions there is a Jewish one which found its final elaboration in a work known as the *Sepher Toldoth Jeshu* or *Book of the Generation of Jesus*.¹ This book has been translated into various modern languages: German, French and English. Yet one would search in vain at the book stores for a copy, and in the catalogues of nearly all libraries the title is conspicuous by its absence. Modern works hostile to Christ and Christianity are to be found in abundance, but

¹ The Jewish life of Jesus is found in several redactions differing materially in both contents and title. Among the titles under which it has been put forth are: *The History of Jeshu the Nazarene*; *The History of Jeshu, Queen Helena and the Apostles*; *The Book of the Condemnation of Jeshu ben Pandera*; *The History of Him who was Hanged*; and *The History of Him and His Son*. The account of the Jewish tradition given in the present article does not attempt to adhere strictly to any single redaction, but note has been made of features in which the various redactions differ when the difference is of any real interest from a historical point of view. Differences in features that are obviously entirely fantastic need not be given such close attention, and in these cases we may follow the most colorful of the several accounts. Texts and German translations of various redactions are given in *Das Leben Jesu nach Judischen Quellen, herausgeben und erlaüttert von Samuel Krauss*, Berlin, 1902. An English version of the Strassburg manuscript of the Toldoth will be found in G. R. S. Mead's *Did Jesus Live 100 B. C.?*, an enquiry into the Talmud Jesus stories, the Toldoth Jeshu, and some curious statements of Epiphanius; being a contribution to the study of Christian origins, London, 1903, a work whose scholarship belies its sensational title. A recent work dealing with the career of Jesus from the modern Jewish point of view and including a critical examination of the Toldoth-Talmud stories is Joseph Klausner's *Jesus of Nazareth, His Life, Times and Teachings*, translated from the Hebrew original by H. Danby, London, 1927.

the typical librarian, no matter what his own religious belief, appears to have a peculiar fear of contact with this medieval anti-Christian book, and there almost seems to be a tacit conspiracy to keep knowledge of the very existence of such a work from the general public.

Towards no other work, save perhaps the *Book of the Three Impostors*² is such an attitude taken. It is wholly unreasonable, for we cannot properly estimate the character of any historical personage unless we know what his enemies have to say about him. To learn this, indeed, often has the effect of heightening our esteem for the victim of a bitter and venomous attack. It is quite natural that Christians, even the most broad-minded, should find the Toldoth repulsive, but it is absurd for anyone to cherish a special abhorrence for this hostile Jewish tale. The Christians who know of it would seem to regard it as the very summit of insult to the memory of Jesus, and are strangely oblivious of the fact that his fame has suffered far more from the deeds of his nominal followers, who have committed in his name all the crimes in the calendar, than from the words of his open opponents.

None the less, to him whose way is that of the philosopher, the attitude of the Toldoth is anything but pleasing, for it is that of religious controversy, not of candid criticism. In the field of religion it has never been the custom to attempt to do justice to one's opponents, and, following the usual precedent, the Toldoth is anxious to heap reproach after reproach on the head of Jesus instead of being content to inquire into his claims and attempt to refute them. Its story makes Jesus an illegitimate child, and not satisfied with setting this forth once for all, continually brings this alleged illegitimacy to the fore in the epithets by which Jesus of Nazareth is designated. Jewish hatred of Jesus was not, it should be noted, a product of persecution by the Christians, for it existed long before Christianity became a power in the state. Already in the middle of the second century, as Justin Martyr testifies, the Jews in all their synagogues, at the conclusion of their prayers, cursed the name and memory of Jesus, the false Messiah. And we even learn from

² *De Tribus Impostoribus*, a work of unknown origin but attributed to various authors, e.g. Averroës and the Hohenstauffen emperor, Frederic II. The "three impostors" are Moses, Jesus and Mohammed, and this work takes the ground that "The greater part of their utterances are so obscure as to be unintelligible, and so badly expressed as to make it evident that these three men did not themselves understand what they were talking about and were only ignorant charlatans." The sayings of Jesus which the author of *De Tribus Impostoribus* had in mind here were probably the theological disquisitions of the gospel of *John* which biblical scholars do not to-day regard as authentic.

Jewish writings that in these early days a pious rabbi who, notwithstanding his rejection of the Messianic claims of Jesus, believed that the latter's name had power to work wonders, preferred to see a relative who had been bitten by a serpent die rather than permit him to live at the cost of being healed by a friendly neighbor in the name of Jesus. The hatred of the Jews for Christianity was not, in fact, primarily the fault of the Christians. It was due to that fierce intolerance which characterizes monotheism and makes Judaism, Christianity and Mahommedanism compare so unfavorably with the relatively tolerant pagan religions.

In the Jewish tradition Mary, the mother of Jesus, was betrothed to a good rabbi who "was learned in the law and feared heaven greatly." In the neighborhood however dwelt a certain worthless and licentious youth named Pandera. Mary's betrothed, the story tells us, was in the habit of going in unto Mary at night "after the manner of men," a feature of the tale which implies that the Jews of the period were somewhat free and easy in their pre-marital customs, and one night when the rabbi was at the synagogue, Pandera came in the darkness in his place. Believing him to be her promised spouse, after some weak protests on the ground that she was then in a state in which by Jewish Law even married women must keep apart from their husbands, Mary allowed Pandera to work his will upon her, the result being the conception of Jesus. Later in the night, after Pandera had withdrawn without detection of the fraud, the real betrothed came to Mary, and being reproached for coming twice in the same night, learned what had taken place. Apparently any pity for Mary in her predicament did not enter the head of the pious rabbi; his only care was for himself, and when it became manifest that Mary was with child, the betrothed said: "She is not with child by me; shall I abide here and hear my shame every day from the people?" So he "arose and went to Babylon" after which he passes out of the story. The suspicion that rested on Pandera was made a certainty by his boasts of his amorous exploit, and some years later he is even said to have confessed his crime before a rabbinical investigating committee.³

³ The different redactions of the Toldoth show a variation in the name of the seducer who in some is called not Pandera but Joseph ben Pandera, Mary's betrothed being designated as Jochanan, while in others the former is called Jochanan ben Pandera and the latter Joseph. In the oldest Jewish tradition the seducer, a soldier, appears to have been designated simply as Pandera, and Jesus was called "ben Pandera," that is, son of Pandera. Early Christian writers seem to admit that there was a tradition ascribing the name Pandera or

Abandoned both by her betrothed and the father of her child, Mary struggled bravely to do her best for the son to whom she gave birth. She named him Jehoshua, after her brother, but later "when his corrupt birth was made public" we are told "they called him Jeshu," that is "may his name and memory be blotted out," there being thus put in evidence the kindly way in which the pious Jews dealt with the unfortunates in their midst. Mary managed to provide a teacher for Jesus, and gave him what among the Jews passed for an education. He was duly instructed in Talmudic lore, and, as he showed himself to be intelligent "became wise in the Halacha and learned in the Horah and the Talmud." In fact we are told he learned more in a day than other pupils could learn in a year. In consequence he grew conceited and lost all respect for his elders. One day passing by some teachers of the Law Jesus was seen to omit the customary salutation, and instead of walking by with his eyes cast modestly to the ground, strode along with his head erect, paying no attention to the rabbis seated at the door of the synagogue. From this behavior alone one of the wise rabbis knew at once (we are told) that Jesus was of illegitimate birth, while another contended that the boy had been conceived at a period in which a woman could not lawfully have to do with man, and a third went further and informed his colleagues that both stigmas must be attributed to the impudent youth.⁴

Panthera or Panther to Jesus, and sometimes it was explained that the father of the husband of Mary had Panther as surname to Jacob, and sometimes that the name pertained to Mary's own pedigree, her grandfather having been known as bar (= ben) Panther. It has however been thought that the name really arose from a pun: that the opponents of the Christians, hearing them speak of Jesus as the son of a virgin (*parthenos*), called him in mockery the son of a panther (*panther* or *panthera*), this animal being sometimes taken as a symbol of licentiousness. In the Talmud Jesus is also called "ben Stada," which according to one rabbinical commentator arose from the nickname Stada having been given to Mary because she was unfaithful (*stath da*) to her husband. One redaction of the Toldoth represents Mary as actually married, not merely betrothed, and in fact, in the Jewish view, betrothal was almost on a par with matrimony.

⁴ The earliest reference to Jesus to be found in the Talmud fastens on him the stigma of illegitimacy, and takes as authority Rabbi Simeon ben Anzai, who claimed he had found this recorded upon a "genealogical" roll in Jerusalem." One redaction of the Toldoth names as the third rabbi to whose unerring eye both procreation stigmas were manifest, Rabbi Akiba, a bitter opponent of Christianity and revered among the Jews as one of the very greatest of their leaders. The Talmud itself has a story of how a boy (whose name is not given) once passed some rabbis without salutation. Just as in the Toldoth tale, two of the rabbis disputed as to which stigma rested on the boy, and Akiba declared that both were to be imputed to him. Challenged to prove it, he went to the boy's mother, and found her sitting in the market place selling pulse. He said to her: "My daughter, if thou tellest me the thing which I ask thee,

Still more offensive to the rabbis was the incident which took place somewhat later. Being in the synagogue while teaching was going on, Jesus seized a moment when there was a lull in the talk, and began putting forth "Halacha" or interpretation of the Law, all his own. Naturally the rabbis were highly indignant, and one of them said to the presumptuous youth: "Hast thou not learned that he who giveth forth a Halacha in the presence of his teacher is worthy of death?" In no whit abashed however Jesus replied: "Who is the teacher and who the scholar?" implying that he himself was the better qualified of the two, and proceeded to argue with the rabbis. Here obviously we have the Jewish version of the biblical story of Jesus expounding the Law to an admiring audience in the Temple at Jerusalem.⁵

The Jewish story goes on to say that after Jesus had shown his disrespect for the rabbis he was denounced "by the blowing of three hundred trumpets" as of impure birth and unfit to come into the congregation, and it was resolved unanimously by the teachers of the Law that as punishment for having been disrespectful to them he must undergo death by strangulation, so that he was obliged to flee. One tale is that he merely went into hiding in upper Galilee, but the favorite one makes him take refuge in Egypt where he learned magic. What he learned here was however only a stepping stone to further necromantic powers, for he had in mind schemes requiring a much more potent instrument. This he found in the Shem Hamphorash, the Ineffable Name of God, which was known only by the consonants, JHVH, in which it was ordinarily written, these giving no clue to its proper pronunciation. Jewish legend said that he who could pronounce this name properly had at his command the highest of all magic, and could work whatever wonder he might list. Now there was in existence, as Jesus knew, a stone dating back to the time of the patriarch Jacob on which the name was inscribed in a way indicating how it ought to be pronounced.

"I will bring thee to eternal life." She replied: "Swear it to me." Thereupon, says the Talmud, this godly Rabbi Akiba "took the oath with his lips, while he cancelled it in his heart." He then proceeded to question her, and learned that his surmise about the boy was correct. The Jews who greatly cherished Rabbi Akiba, apparently thought his behavior on this occasion was without reproach, but those who are not afflicted with racial or religious prejudices cannot but feel that the pious rabbi, by what he did, affixed upon himself a stigma vastly greater than that born by the woman and her son.

⁵ For the probable genesis of the biblical story of Jesus teaching his elders the Law at the tender age of twelve, see an article by the present writer, *Jesus and His Family*, in *The Open Court* for February 1929.

Through King David this stone had been discovered and placed in the Temple. "For when David laid the foundation of the Temple he found a certain stone at the mouth of an abyss on which the Name was engraved, and taking it up deposited it in the Holy of Holies." Known as the Foundation Stone it was regarded as of great importance in the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement when the High Priest solemnly laid his censor upon it. In this stone the Wise Men had soon sensed danger, for, said they, if the heedless youth of our people get knowledge of the Name of God they might so use it as to bring destruction upon the world. Just why the Name could not be used for good as well as for evil, and why it was not resorted to in order to free the Jewish people from the Roman yoke and bring back the glories of the kingdom of David and Solomon the reader is not told. At all events, to keep the Name ineffable, the Wise had placed two brazen lions (or, as some redactions say, brazen dogs) one on each side of the entrance to the Holy of Holies, and then by means of magic had given these metal images vocal powers for use in emergencies. In case anyone went into the Holy of Holies to learn the pronunciation of the Name, the brass lions would roar at him so terrifyingly that in his fright he would forget all he had learned within, while if he carried on his person anything in writing the lions would not permit him to pass.

The wily Jesus easily overcame the obstacle of the brass lions. After finishing his course in magic he left Egypt and came once more to Jerusalem, where, the story tells us, for him to enter the place in which the stone reposed "it was necessary for him to use magic and incantations; otherwise how could the most holy priests, the descendants of Aaron have allowed him to go therein?" Thus gaining access to the Holy of Holies, Jesus carefully copied on a piece of parchment the indications of the way in which the Name of God ought to be pronounced. He then cut a slit in his flesh near the hip with a knife, utterance of the Name preventing any pain being felt. Uttering the name a second time he caused the flesh to heal up immediately over the parchment, and now proceeded to leave the chamber. As he passed through the doorway the brass lions did their duty, and their roars took away from Jesus all recollection of the pronunciation of the Name, but once safely away from the Temple the dauntless youth pulled out his knife, cut open his thigh, and taking out the parchment was now monarch of all he surveyed.

Jesus now proceeded to make his debut before the public. He

gathered an audience around him, and told the people that the imputations his enemies had cast upon his birth were false, and were occasioned by the fact that he was the son of God and born of a virgin. The clerical clique that had circulated false stories about him were, he said, mindful only of their own advantage and were animated by the desire to have power over the people and lordship over Israel. Asked to show a sign as evidence that he was really the Messiah, and having brought to him a man lame from birth who had never been able even to stand on his feet, Jesus by pronouncing over him the Name, gave the cripple the power of walking. They brought him a leper, and Jesus promptly healed the man. They dug into an old tomb, and finding a skeleton of dry bones, brought it to Jesus. The latter gave the bones a covering of flesh and blood, and he that had been dead stood up alive. And when the people saw this they fell down and worshipped him, saying: "Verily, thou art the son of God."⁶

Tidings of what Jesus had done was brought to Jerusalem, and "then the profligate rejoiced greatly, but the old men, the devout and the wise, wept bitterly; and in the greater and the lesser Sanhedrin there was sore lamentation." Finally it was resolved to lure Jesus to Jerusalem that he might be destroyed, and accordingly Ananias and Ahasias, described as "the most honorable men of the lesser Sanhedrin," went to Jesus and "when they came unto him fell down upon their faces and worshipped him, that they might increase his iniquity." Their primary object in pretending to believe in Jesus was however to persuade him to come to the capital and appear before "the Queen," for by a curious anacronism, Jewish tradition ascribes rulership of the land of Israel in the time of Jesus to the Maccabean king, Alexander Jannaeus and his widow. After the death of the former in 76 B. C., the latter, Alexandra Salome, took the throne and reigned until 67 B. C., and it is in her reign that the trial and execution of Jesus is supposed to have taken

⁶ The original Talmud story, of which this is the outgrowth, does not make any mention of the Shem Hamphorash. There Jesus relies on Egyptian magic alone, and, in order to smuggle out of Egypt the necromantic formulas, is obliged, according to one narrative, to make an incision in his flesh to hide the parchment on which they are written, but according to another merely writes or scratches them on his skin. Evidently the tale is the Jewish counterpart of the Christian legend of the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt through which was brought about the fulfilment of the "prophecy": "Out of Egypt did I call my son." It has been remarked that the alleged sojourn of Jesus in Egypt between the time of his dispute with the rabbis and that in which he appeared as an evangelist would serve to fill a notable gap in the gospel account of the career of the Prophet of Nazareth.

place. It appears indeed that the Toldoth known to Agobard in the ninth century and one of the two mentioned by Schemtobion Schaprut in the fourteenth, date the career of Jesus in the time of Tiberias and even make him have an audience with that emperor. Misdating of the story in the manuscripts now extant may have originated in a subterfuge of the Talmudists who to avoid trouble with the Christian authorities of Europe, besides using this device, in many passages designated Jesus as "a certain one" or by a pseudonym (e.g. ben Pandera, ben Stada, Balaam). By so doing, when it was alleged that the Talmud maligned the character of Jesus, the Jews could plead that this was a mistake; that the person referred to could not be Jesus since he neither bore the name of the latter nor had lived in the same period, and some Jewish apologists even went so far as to assert that the "Jeshu" Talmud passages had no reference to Jesus. But quite aside from intentional inaccuracies there are in the Jewish tradition historical blunders showing astounding ignorance on the part of the redactors. Alexandra is given the name of Helena, and confused with Queen Helena of Adiabene, and sometimes even "Queen Helena, the wife of Constantine" (i.e. St. Helena, the mother of constantine) is brought on the scene three hundred years before her time. And we have already seen that David, instead of Solomon, is represented as laying the foundation of the Temple.

Before going to Jerusalem, Jesus performed new wonders in the presence of certain messengers that had been sent by the Queen. He had the people make clay images of birds, lambs, asses and oxen, and when they were brought to him the magic of the Shem Hamphorash quickly gave life to these figures of clay. The birds flew up in the air and the quadrupeds ambled around in the grass. A great millstone was set before him, and he launched it on the sea and made it float on the surface of the water as lightly as though it were an egg shell. As he seated himself on it a gentle breeze blew Jesus and his improvised boat over the water, and he amused himself by catching fish and throwing them to his disciples who ate them. Bidding the emissaries of the Queen hasten to Jerusalem and tell her what they had seen, Jesus leisurely followed. Before the Queen he staged his miraculous performances for her benefit, and all the people were amazed. As proof that he was the Messiah, he cited the Old Testament texts used by Christians in later days for this purpose, and the Wise Men of Israel, utterly failing to see the want

of cogency in these citations, could only say that the hoped-for Messiah would show still other signs, and in particular that it had been written of him that "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth." Greatly impressed by the miracle worker, the Queen refused to condemn him, and the rabbis were in despair.

There now comes on the scene the hero of the Jewish story who, strange to say, is Judas Iscariot. Upon the condition that the Wise Men of Israel take upon their shoulders the guilt of the sin he will have to commit in carrying out the plan, Judas agrees to imitate Jesus in unlawfully obtaining knowledge of the Shem Hamphorash so that he can duplicate the performances of the false Messiah. The offer is accepted, and Judas duly braves the brass lions, and leaves the sanctuary, carrying imbedded in his flesh the parchment on which is written the Ineffable Name. Once more Jesus is brought before the Queen. Staging a new miracle, he raises his hands like the wings of an eagle, and uttering the Almighty Name, flies up like a bird and soars in the air. But Judas comes forward and, asserting that this is no proof that Jesus is the Messiah for he himself can do the same, likewise invokes the Name and flies up after Jesus. The two struggle in mid-air, and Judas finding Jesus too strong for him befouls his antagonist and himself by ejecting a bodily fluid supposed to be especially detrimental to ritual purity. Both being now made unclean, the virtues of the Shem Hamphorash are of no avail to either until purification has been accomplished, and consequently the two fall to earth together.

The Wise Men now seize Jesus, and proceed to convince the Queen that he no longer has supernatural powers and hence cannot really be the son of God. Binding him they fasten a stinking woolen cloth over his eyes and nose, and then seventy elders armed with cudgels of seventy different kinds of wood, olive, fig, pomegranate, etc. strike lustily one after another at their helpless victim, demanding that he prove his claims to supernatural knowledge by telling who has struck him and with what kind of wood. The conjectures with which Jesus replies proving wholly wrong, the Queen consents that the Wise Men should deal as they choose with the false Messiah. The pious elders now debate what they should do to Jesus. Some propose to hew him to pieces instantly; others to torture him for a month before killing him. The most proper thing to do first, some opine, would be for every good Israelite to spit in his face and strike him a blow, the men using their staffs, the women

their sandals. But it is finally decided to begin by mocking his pretensions to kingly dignity, and a crown of thorns smeared with pitch is put upon his head.

In the meantime the friends of Jesus had been getting together, and three hundred and ten of his disciples came and overpowering the tormenters of Jesus carried him off in safety to Antioch. Jesus there underwent ritual purification, after which he was able to use the Name as of yore, and once more he stepped on the stage as a worker of miracles. Judas however went in disguise and "mingled with the wicked fellows" (i.e. the followers of Jesus), and one night, when Jesus was in a deep sleep, enchanted him and entering his tent had no difficulty in cutting open the thigh, imbedded in which the precious parchment was always kept by Jesus, and carrying this away without waking the sleeper. With no record of the Ineffable Name, and no recollection of how it ought to be pronounced, Jesus was powerless to work further wonders. So he resolved to go to Jerusalem on the next Passover and repeat the trick of eluding the guard of the brazen lions. Accordingly, a few days before Passover, Jesus, riding on an ass, with his followers around him, made triumphant entry into the city. When in Jerusalem Jesus was careful that he and all his disciples should be garbed alike, and it was hence necessary that he should be identified before he could be arrested. According to some redactions of the Toldoth this was done by Judas, who in disguise had been accepted as a new disciple, but according to other redactions one of the three hundred and ten original disciples betrayed him. To avoid breaking the oath that all his disciples had sworn "by the ten commandments" not to say which among them was Jesus, the betrayal was accomplished by the man falling down before Jesus and pretending to worship him, at which sign the agents of the authorities, who had gone out to the Mount of Olives and mingled with the crowd, seized Jesus and brought him in captivity to Jerusalem. In the reason here given for indicating indirectly which of the assemblage was Jesus instead of simply pointing him out, we have what may be a piece of good tradition, since it affords a reasonable explanation of a rather puzzling part of the gospel story of the betrayal.

Sentence of death was soon passed on Jesus by the greater and the lesser Sanhedrin. No details of the trial are given in the Toldoth, but the Talmud is more circumstantial. It tells us that according to custom no traps are set to make criminals betray them-

selves except in the case of the most heinous of all crimes: "leading astray to idolatry." In this case however it is legitimate to adopt a scheme which, as we subsequently learn, was used against "ben Stada" (i.e. Jesus). "If the enticer has made his enticing speech to two, these are witnesses against him, and lead him to the court of justice, and he is stoned. But if he has used the expressions, not before two but before one, the latter should say to him: 'I have friends who have a liking for that.' But if he is cunning, and wishes to say nothing before the others, witnesses are placed in concealment behind the wall, and the remark is made: 'Now tell me once again what thou wast saying to me, for we are alone.' If he now repeats it, the other says to him: 'How can we forsake our heavenly father and go and worship wood and stone?' If then the enticer is converted, well and good, but if he replies: 'This is our duty; it is for our good' then those who are standing behind the wall bring him before the court of justice, and he is stoned." In the case of Jesus, two "disciples of the Wise" were secreted in the inner room of a house, and Jesus was brought into an adjoining room where there was a lighted lamp, so that the hidden spies could see his face as well as hear his voice. These two witnesses duly testified against Jesus and he was condemned to death. If this be an authentic tradition, the fact that such deceit should have had to be resorted to will explain why the Christian account of the trial speaks of the difficulty the Sanhedrin had in finding witnesses against Jesus, and why the two who at last came forward are, in the gospel story, described as "false witnesses," though what they testified was actually the truth according to the account of the gospels themselves.

According to the Talmud, for forty days before the execution of Jesus a herald went around crying: "Jeshu goeth forth to be executed because he has practiced sorcery, and seduced Israel, and estranged them from God. Let any one who can bring forward any justifying plea for him come and give information concerning it." Later on a certain Rabbi Ulla opined the authorities had been far too indulgent in giving Jesus this chance of being exonerated. Said Ulla: "Dost thou think that he belongs to those for whom a justifying plea is to be sought? He was a very seducer, and the All-merciful has said: 'Thou shalt not spare or conceal him.'" And in reply it was explained that neither mercy nor justice played any part in the attitude of the Sanhedrin, but that Jesus had been allowed

this forty days' grace because "his place was near to those in power," i.e. because he had relatives or connections who stood high in governmental circles. However the delay did not save Jesus, for no one came forward in his behalf.

The Talmud and the Toldoth know of no intervention of Roman procurator or Roman soldiers in the condemnation and execution of Jesus. The Jews of olden time were anxious to claim for themselves all the glory (as they deemed it) for both. Nor is there any question of crucifixion in the Jewish tradition, though this punishment was by no means unknown among the Jews, Alexander Jannaeus having at one time crucified no less than eight hundred Pharisees. According to the Jewish story, Jesus was stoned to death and his body subsequently hung upon a post. When it came to hanging up the corpse it was found that this could not be accomplished with any ordinary wood. For Jesus, foreseeing his tragic end, had, when in possession of the Shem Hamphorash, put a charm on all trees so that the wood of none of these was able to support his body. Posts of each of the seventy different kinds of woods to be found in Palestine were tried in turn, and all broke down under the weight. In those days it was deemed advisable to hang up the dead body of a false prophet so that there could be quoted against his memory the text: "A curse of God is he who is hanged," and the Wise Men were in despair, for the common people began to murmur that the strange behavior of the wood was evidence of the great godliness of Jesus. Once more Judas came to the rescue, fetching from his garden a tremendous cabbage stalk taller than a palm. As Jesus had not been thoughtful enough to bewitch the cabbages, this held the body aloft when the latter was hung upon it. And fearing lest the reader should be inclined to doubt that such a cabbage stalk could have been at hand, the veracious chronicler remarks that it is no unusual thing, even "unto this day," for overgrown cabbage plants to be found in the neighborhood of Jerusalem so large that a single one yields a hundred pounds of seed!

In the afternoon the body was taken down and buried, not put in a tomb as the Christian tradition would have it. "The apostates wept over his grave," the Toldoth tells us. Subsequently the body was secretly unearthed and hidden, and when people came to the grave they found it empty. In one of the early anti-Christian tradi-

tions transmitted to us by Tertullian, the grave was in a market garden, and so many people came to visit it that the gardener, to save his vegetables from being trampled under foot, took away the body that there might no longer be any inducement for crowds of visitors to flock to his garden. The Toldoth ascribed the emptying of the grave during the night to a gardener who overhearing a plot of some of the disciples of Jesus to steal the body from the grave and then pretend their master had ascended to heaven, forestalled them, and taking away the body by night reburied it in his own garden.

The disappearance of the body caused the followers of Jesus again to raise their heads. The priestly party was denounced by "the apostates" who said to them: "Ye have slain God's anointed," and even the Queen wavered and began to blame the priests. Now however the gardener came forward and, for thirty pieces of silver, disclosed where the body lay. The Rabbis tied it to the tail of a horse and dragged it all around Jerusalem, amid great rejoicing on the part of their adherents. The Clericals then got permission from the Queen to deal as they pleased with the followers of Jesus, many of whom they killed.

In the usual Toldoth story the gardener hides the body under a brook (or irrigation canal) which he turns out of its course for that purpose. This feature of the tale, as it stands, is an unintelligible complication, and is apparently derived from a more primitive version. The version known in the ninth century to Agobard, Bishop of Lyons, related that the body was originally buried by the side of a canal which at night overflowed its banks and carried away the body and the latter could never afterwards be found. This would seem to be the original tale, the embellishment that the body was ultimately recovered and dragged through the streets of Jerusalem being evidently a fiction of later date. In some versions of the story the "canal" was said to be the place where the rubbish of the city was disposed of, and the implication would seem to be that after the execution of Jesus his body was contemptuously thrown on (or given shallow burial in) the city refuse heap by the side of a stream. Here, perhaps, is a trace of authentic tradition. Heavy rains could easily have brought about enough of a flood to wash the body away, and deposit it covered with rubbish in some distant place. It is however doubtful whether a disappearance of the body regarded at the time as mysterious, even by the Christians.

ever took place. For no such thing is ever mentioned by Paul in his Epistles, though he again and again sets forth what he deems to be the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, which is the cornerstone of all his own teachings. And another Toldoth story, unearthed in 1610 by George Sandys during his travels in the Levant, put forward as the facts in the case that Jesus "being dead they buried him privately in a dung-hill lest his body should have been found and worshipped by his followers." In fact as the grave of Jesus, a religious leader put to death by the government, could easily have become a rallying ground for malcontents, the authorities would have been well advised to keep its location a secret. In recent times realization of the dangers arising from the grave of a prophet was shown by the British when, after the conquest of the Sudan in 1898, they destroyed the tomb of the Mahdi, burned his body and threw the ashes into the Nile. And commenting on this Sir E. A. Wallis Budge remarks that "had the building been allowed to stand, and the body to remain in its grave, the tomb would have become the center of fanaticism and revolt."

The malignancy of the clerical party towards Jesus did not cease with his death. Years afterwards they sardonically spoke of a gallows on which criminals were executed as "the lecture room of ben Pandera." The disciples of "Balaam," i.e. the Christians, have hell as their inheritance, says the Talmud. In the eyes of the rabbis Jesus had been guilty of the gravest of all crimes: the daring to oppose the priestcraft that dominated the Jewish people. How serious a sin this was esteemed may be judged from the fact that the Mishnah tells us: "It is more culpable to teach contrary to the precepts of the scribes than contrary to the Torah itself." There are, we are told, four punishments dealt out to those who dare oppose the teachers of the Law: banishment, stoning to death, strangling (or hanging) and beheading. The shameful death of Jesus did not, in the view of the rabbis, atone for his sin, and in one passage of the Talmud we are told that the spirit of Jesus appeared at what we would now call a spiritualistic seance, and gave an account of how he was suffering on the other side of the grave for his misdeeds while on earth! The story goes that a Roman, a relative of one of the emperors, had various spirits conjured up, and inquired of them which religion was favored in the next world. At modern seances it is difficult to get a precise answer to such questions: the spirits who make their appearance are unwilling to

give any denomination the preference, and confine themselves to vague generalities. But in this case every spirit conjured up, that of Jesus included, promptly replied that heaven's favorites were the Israelites. And, unlike modern spirits, Jesus had no tale of the happiness he had experienced in "Summerland," but instead told how his fate in the beyond was to be tortured by immersion in "boiling filth," the place of this boiling filth being, as we learn in another Jewish tradition, the very bottommost pit of hell.

In this Talmud tale the spirit of "Balaam" as well as that of "Jesus" appears at the seance, the abode of the former being given as the place of "boiling pollution." If this is not a rhetorical device of reduplication it runs counter to the usual view that the "Balaam" passages in the Talmud refer to Jesus. And we might parenthetically suggest that if Balaam is not Jesus it is probably Paul who is meant. For Paul appears to be designated as Balaam in the *Revelations of John*, the last book of the New Testament. In II, 14 we read: "But I have a few things against thee [the Christian Church in Pergemum] because thou hast there some that hold the teachings of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication." Biblical critics regard this passage as aimed at the Pauline faction in the Christian Church, it having evidently been written by one of those Jewish Christians who taking the stand of the heretical Ebionites and upholding the Mosaic Law as still binding upon Christians and still counting the latter as among the children of Israel, held in abomination the innovations that Paul introduced into Christianity. And Balaam here would seem to be Paul, while Balak may very possibly be intended for Peter. The Toldoth gives us a hint as to why Paul might have been nicknamed Balaam by the Jews who abhorred Christianity. For it shows that the pious Israelites held Paul to have really rendered a service to Judaism by casting aside the regulations of Jewish Law for his flock, since this had as result the withdrawal of the Pauline Christians of Jewish origin from the community of Israel. And just as Balaam, called upon to curse Israel, blessed it instead, so Paul, who by becoming a Christian leader was expected to harm Israel, proceeded to confer upon it a benefit. Thus it may be possible to solve a question usually regarded as insoluble: why Balaam should have taken as a pseudonym for an *enemy* of Judaism.

After the execution of Jesus, the Toldoth tells us, his disciples fled from Jerusalem and scattering themselves throughout the world "mised the peoples, but everywhere they took refuge God sent his judgment upon them and they were slain." Among the followers of Jesus were "twelve men (base offspring of foul ravens) who wandered through twelve kingdoms, and spread false doctrines among mankind." Five important disciples are specifically mentioned as having been killed by the Jews, their names, according to the Talmud, being Mathai, Nakkai, Netzer, Bunni and Todah. And the pious narrator tells in glee, how, in sending these men out to be slaughtered, the rabbis amused themselves by grimly making jesting word-plays on the name of their victims.

The rabbis were unable to murder all the Christian propagandists, and many Jews listened to them and became "apostates." The apostates reproached the Israelites who remained true to the faith with having slain God's anointed, while the Israelites replied with the taunt: "Ye are children of death because ye have believed in a false prophet!" Nevertheless the apostates "went not forth from the congregation of Israel," and there was contention and strife resulting in "confusion of prayers and much loss of money."⁷

It was hence resolved to "root out these wicked men from the community of Israel that they should have no more any part or heritage with the Israelites." And to accomplish this the rabbis had recourse to their usual policy of dissimulation and deceit. According to Jewish tradition it was Paul, the Christian saint, who carried out this plan. The original name of Paul, the Toldoth asserts, was Elijahu, and he was "very learned in the scriptures." He never became a Christian at heart, but agreed to feign to become one if the other Wise Men of Israel would take upon their shoulders the sin he committed in doing this. The agreement having been made, he learned the pronunciation of the Ineffable Name in the usual way, went to the Christians and, announcing himself as one sent to them by Jesus, performed miracles until "they fell down before him and said: 'Truly thou art the messenger of Jesus, for thou hast shown us marvels as he did.'" The consequence was that the Christians "added foolishness to their foolishness." Paul gave out, as the commands of Jesus transmitted through him, that the Christians should remove themselves from the Israelite community,

⁷ One redaction puts it more specifically: "And they made Israel lose much money which went into the hands of non-Jews."

should "profane the Sabbath," keeping Sunday in its stead, and should replace all the Jewish holy days with new ones of their own. They were ordered also to give up the practice of circumcision, and to eat ritually impure foods. "Whatsoever God created in the world" ordained Paul "from the smallest gnat to the mightiest elephant, pour forth its blood upon the ground and eat it." The precepts of the Sermon on the Mount were, according to Jewish tradition, due to a clever trick on the part of Paul, who put them forth, not in good faith, but in order to enable the Jews to maltreat the Christians with impunity. "All the evil that the Jews do unto you accept in love and good will" said Paul. "If one of the Jews compel you to go a mile, go with him twain; if a Jew smite you on the left side, turn not to him the right also; if a Jew revile you, endure it and return it not again as Jesus endured it; in meekness he showed himself, therewith he showed you also meekness as he practiced it, that ye might endure all that any should do to you. At the last judgment Jesus will punish them, but do ye have hope according to your meekness." And we are told that "Elijahu, who gave them these laws, laws that are not good, did it for the welfare of Israel, and the Christians call him Paul. After he had introduced these laws and commandments, the erring ones separated themselves from Israel, and the strife ceased." Some redactions give Peter instead of Paul the credit for separating the Christians from the Jewish flock. Others bring both Peter and Paul on the scene, both being represented as at heart faithful to Israel and posing as Christians only in order to do injury to the followers of Jesus. At all events there was in this devious way attained the happy result that the Christians "have no part and lot in Israel. They are accursed in this world and accursed in the world to come" says the Toldoth, which concludes with the pious hope that now may "the Lord bless his people Israel with peace."⁸

It will be observed that this hostile account, instead of discrediting Jesus, really redounds to his honor, and there is thus no justification for Christians desiring to keep it sunk in oblivion. No imputations that can be deemed really serious are cast on Jesus by the Jewish story. Nothing hateful in either word or deed is ascribed to him. Aside from the charge that he, without justification, called

⁸ Some redactions append an episode dealing with the Nestorian schism in the Christian Church in A. D. 431. The narrator says exultantly that Nestorius "departed from them [the main body of Christians] and made a mock of them just as the heretics had laughed at the Wise Men [of Israel.]"

himself the son of God, this tradition accuses Jesus merely of practicing sorcery and opposing the dominant clique of priests. The worst that his Jewish enemies have to say about him in no way effects any disparagement of Jesus. When we hear what they have to say about their victim all our sympathy goes out to him, all our antipathy to his persecutors. On the other hand the revelations which the "Wise Men" of ancient Jewry make of their own mentality and morality is simply appalling. To pass judgment upon them we have no need to inquire whether the events narrated in the Jewish story ever really took place; it is enough to know that the spiritual leaders of the Jewish people complacently boasted of deeds of the most disgraceful description as having been committed by their own party. Cruel and merciless, ignorant and superstitious to an extent unparalled, to them justice and fair dealing were unknown. And we may not unaptly characterize the Jewish story of Jesus as a record of rabbinical deceit and dishonor.