

of the East, and the "Diamond Cutter"<sup>1</sup> is supposed to come closest to its philosophy, the underlying idea being that Buddha existed from the beginning as the primitive principle of the world to become incarnated in Gautama Siddhartha. Prajna Paramita, however, is the spirit (similar to the Christian Holy Ghost) through whom the world-formation takes place and in whom the divine dispensation of the course of events finds a representation.

At the Prajna Paramita Conference other Asiatic religions are welcome, and among them the Hindus of East India have been especially invited. Mr. Babu Norendronath Sen will be the authorised delegate of the Hindus, and he, although a Brahman, is for this occasion very probably the most appropriate representative of his country, for on several occasions he has exhibited his friendliness toward Buddhism; when the Maha Bodhi Society, on the full moon day of May, celebrated the Buddha's enlightenment, he presided over the meeting and made the following remarks: "We have no cause of quarrel with Buddhists. Let us be friends and brothers once more. The study of Buddha's life and teachings will do Hindus nothing but good. Considering the relations that obtained between them for many centuries, Hindus and Buddhists should try to be friends again. Hinduism and Buddhism remained side by side in peace and amity throughout India for several centuries."

#### ELISHA BEN ABUYA.

*The Chicago Israelite* with reference to the Rev. Bernard M. Kaplan's article<sup>2</sup> on the famous Jewish apostate Elisha Ben Abuya, surnamed Acher, says:

"Following the modern method of essay writing, and combining, as Rabbi Kaplan did, the historical and the romantic, I am rather surprised that he did not take advantage of the character of Elisha's daughter, mentioned in at least two places in the Talmud. I look for an amplification of this article by Rabbi Kaplan, or by some aspiring Zangwill, who is searching for rich and original material in Jewish folklore."

We agree with our contemporary that the character of Acher is an exceedingly good subject for a historical novel; but in calling attention to this tempting project we venture to state our own conception of the famous Jewish apostate. The strange fact that to his dying day he remained a friend of the greatest and most prominent rabbis of his age, in our opinion contradicts the statement made that he turned traitor to his own kin and served as a spy to the persecutors of his people. A man of his enormous learning cannot have been a vulgar criminal, nor if he remained in constant friendly contact with the leading men of his race, can he have been a traitor of Jewish tradition and nationality. The easiest explanation of the contradictory character seems to be that being a philosopher and probably a radical free thinker, he was hated and despised by the Jewish bigots who denounced him as an unbeliever, an atheist, and a traitor to Jewish tradition. We know very well how far the hatred went against Spinoza, and fanatics never distinguished between unbelief and crime. The suggestion that he would be capable of betraying his countrymen would easily change into an actual denunciation that he did it; and if Roman persecutors succeeded in discovering that the Jews continued in their Jewish habits and customs, they would naturally turn on him and declare that he had been the man who betrayed them. He may have had faults, he may even

<sup>1</sup> *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XLIX.

<sup>2</sup> Published in *The Open Court* for August 1902 under the title "The Apostate of the Talmud."

have been a libertine, but in my opinion it is not probable that the report of his treason is reliable, or its historicity even probable.

Rabbi Kaplan calls gnosticism the last flicker of dying paganism, and in this connection we call our readers' attention to our articles on gnosticism and kindred subjects which appeared some time ago in *The Monist*. Gnosticism, in our opinion, is indeed a last flicker of paganism, but it is at the same time the dawn of Christianity. Gnosticism is a religious movement which may be regarded as the initiation of a new faith. When through the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great, the barriers of the several nationalities, especially that between the Greeks and the Asiatics, broke down, people of different race and religion met for the first time in a friendly exchange of thought, and by contrasting their different beliefs a powerful fermentation set in which, moreover, was fertilised by thoughts of Indian missionaries who preached the doctrines of the great religious leaders of Brahmanism, Buddhism, Jainism, and other Eastern faiths. Thus, the doctrines of the ancient Babylonian religion, purified by Zoroastrian monotheism, were mixed with Indian, Syrian, Jewish, Greek, and Egyptian notions, and the result was a movement the intensity of which came to a climax in the time of Christ. Gnosticism antedated Christianity, and when Christianity appeared Gnosticism at once fell in with it, but with the growth of the Christian Church it soon came to be considered as a mere Christian sect.

That Elisha Ben Abuya was affected by gnosticism is but natural; that it should have been the cause of his apostasy may be true according to our conception of gnosticism, for gnosticism is different according to our definition of it. If we consider it as the whole movement in its full breadth, we ought to look upon it as one of the most powerful factors that produced Christianity. If, however, we take it in the sense in which the Church Fathers understood it, it is a mere Christian sect the vagaries of which provoked criticism and caused its early disappearance from the pages of history.

That the story of Elisha Ben Abuya is a most exquisite subject for a Zangwill or a Franzos, or any scholarly author who writes novels depicting Jewish life, there is no doubt; but if anyone undertook the task it would be highly desirable that he should delineate the character of Acher in a sympathetic spirit and in the light of analogous Jewish characters, viz., Spinoza, Mendelssohn, Heine, etc.,—men who dared to advance far beyond their own time, who read the traditions of their people in the light of a higher philosophical understanding, and thus became suspected as apostates, without necessarily thereby becoming traitors to their own people.

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#### BOOKS FOR THE YOUNG.

Vast as juvenile literature is, selection for critical and classical taste is not easy, and a glance at the ordinary publishers' or literary list will show that the emphasis is only too seldom placed on what is best and noblest in literature. We are glad therefore to be able to commend to the attention of our readers four books from recent juvenile literature that meet the most exacting requirements. Three of these books are new prose versions of the classic tales of the *Odyssey*, the *Æneid*, and *King Arthur*; the fourth is a new compilation,—*A Book of Verses for Children*, by Edward Verrail Lucas.<sup>1</sup>

This anthology of verse for the young is not the first successful compilation

<sup>1</sup> Henry Holt & Co., New York. Pp., 548. Price, cloth, \$2.00.