

# נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם ירמיהו טז

"THE OLD PATHS."—Jer. vi. 16.

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THE favourite Jewish objection to the claims of Jesus of Nazareth is that passage at the beginning of the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast known, and let us serve them, thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet or dreamer of dreams." In citing this passage the Jews take for granted, that the religion of Jesus is essentially different from that of Moses; that it leads to the worship of strange gods: and that it is in fact a species of heathenism, whilst the religion of the oral law, which they now profess, is utterly free from all heathen elements, and identical with the religion of their prophets. All this they take for granted; but the subject is capable of being inquired into. The oral law and the New Testament are both extant, and a little examination will enable us to decide, on rational grounds, whether Judaism or Christianity savour most of heathenism. In our last number, we saw that Judaism contains magic for the Sanhedrin and magic for the people, whilst the New Testament utterly forbids it; in this respect then Judaism resembles the heathen religion. Our business in this number shall be to point out, in astrology, another feature of resemblance. The Talmud and its doctors all agree in asserting the influence of the stars over the fates and fortunes of men. In the first place, the Talmud lays down these general maxims:—

חיי בני ומוצוי לא בוכותא תליא מלתא אלא במזלא תליא מלתא:

"Life, children, and a livelihood depend not on merit, but on the influence of the stars." (Moed Katon, fol. 28, col. 1.)

כל מדכים ומל מעשי:

"The influence of the stars makes wise, the influence of the stars makes rich." (Shabbath, fol. 156, col. 1.) But it also tells us the following particulars:—

דאי מאן דרחד בשבט די גבר ולא חזיא ביה . . . דאי מאן דבתרי בשבט די גבר רגון מ'ש משום דאשילינו ביה מיא דאי מאן דבתלתא בשבט די גבר עתיד חנאי דאי מאן שטמא משום דאבתו ביה עשבים דאי מאן דארבעה בשבט דיא גבר חכים ודחדי מ'ש משום

דאחלו ביה מאור' דאי מאן דבאשטא בשבט דיא גבר נזמל הדסים מ'ש משום דאבתו ביה דגים ועשות דיא מאן דבמעלי שבטא די גבר חזון אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק חזון במצ' דיא מאן דבשבת' דיא שבטא ימרת עלי דאחלו עתיד יומא רבא רשבתא אמר רבא בר רב שילא וקדיש' רבה חקי:

"He that is born on the first day of the week, will be a man excellent, but in one quality only. . . . He that is born on the second day of the week will be an angry man. What is the reason? Because on it the waters were divided. He that is born on the third day of the week will be a rich and profligate man. What is the reason? Because on it the herbs were created. He that is born on the fourth day of the week will be a wise man and have a powerful memory. What is the reason? Because on that day the lights were hung up in the heavens. He that is born on the fifth day of the week will be a benevolent man. What is the reason? Because on it were created the fishes and the fowls. He that is born on the eve of the Sabbath will be a man who makes a circuit. Rav Nachman bar Isaac says, who makes the circuit in the commandments.† He that is born on the Sabbath, on the Sabbath also he shall die, because on his account they profaned the great day of the Sabbath. Rabba bar Rav Shila says, he shall possess an eminent degree of holiness." (Shabbath, fol. 156, col. 1.) Here is completely the heathen doctrine of fate. Not only the external circumstances of fortune, but the moral qualities of the soul are made to depend upon the day of a man's nativity. Whether a man be profligate or holy, according to this doctrine, does in no wise depend upon himself, his own choice, or conscience, but simply on the circumstance of his birth happening on a Tuesday or a Saturday. There is indeed a difference of opinion amongst the Talmudic doctors, as to the nature of the sidereal influence, but all agree in the fact, as may be seen further from the opinion of R. Huna.

לא מל יום גורא אלא מל שעה גורא דיא מאן דבא' די גבר ויחזן די אכל מדליה ושתי מדליה ודחדי גלן אם גניב לא מצלח דיא מאן דבנוכב נוגה די גבר עתיד חנאי די מ'ש משום דאחילידי ביה גורא

\* According to Rashi.

† According to Rashi, one who goes from house to house to get alms.

הוא מאן דבטוב ידי גבר נחיר וחיבים משום דסמי' דדומה הוא הוא מאן דלבלנה ידי גבר סבל מרעין בנאי וסחי' סחור ובנאי אבל דלא דליה ושחיה דלא דליה ורודי כסן אם נגב מצלח האי מאן דבשנתו ידי גבר מושבחה בשלן ואיה דאמר כל דמחשבין עלהי בשלן האי מאן דבצדק ידי גבר צדק אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק וצדק במצות האי מאן דבמאדים ידי גבר אשד דמא אמר רב אשי א' אוסמא א' גבנא א' מחולא אמר רבא אגא במאדי' הואי אמר אבי' מר נמי עניש וקסל וכו' :

"These things do not depend upon the sidereal influence of the day, but on the sidereal influence of the hour. He that is born under the influence of the sun will be a splendid man, eating and drinking of that which belongs to himself, and will reveal his secrets: if he be a thief he will not prosper. He that is born under Noghah (Venus), will be a rich and profligate man. What is the reason? Because on it the fire was created. He that is born under Kochav (Mercury) will be a man of strong memory, and wise, for Mercury is secretary to the sun. He that is born under the influence of the moon, will suffer much, building and destroying, destroying and building: eating and drinking what does not belong to him, and a keeper of his own secrets. If a thief, he will prosper. He that is born under Shabthai (Saturn), will be a man whose thoughts come to nought, but some say those, that think against him, shall come to nought. He that is born under Tsedek (Jupiter) will be a righteous man. Rav Nachman bar Isaac says, righteous in the commandments.\* He that is born under Maadim (Mars) will be a shedder of blood. Rav Achai says, either a letter of blood, or a thief, or a circumciser. Rabbah said, I was born under Mars. Abbai answered, Therefore you are fond of punishing and killing." (Shabbath, *ibid.*) In this passage, the heathenism is still more apparent. It is notorious that the ancient Greek and Roman idolaters considered Venus as the patroness of profligacy, Mercury as the god of eloquence and learning, Mars as the god of war, and behold! here in the oral law you have the very same doctrine. "If a man be born under Venus, he will be a rich and profligate man; if under Mercury, a man of strong memory and wise; if under Mars, a shedder of blood." The habits of the mind are here also expressly attributed to the influence of the planets, and a thief has got the promise of success, if his nativity happened under the influence of the moon. What then becomes of human responsibility, and how does this doctrine agree with the words of Moses, "Behold I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live?" (Deut. xxx. 19.)

\* Rashi says, a man who is liberal in almsgiving.

It will be replied by Talmudists, that the oral law also says:—

אין מול לישרא :

"Israel is not under the influence of the stars." We shall, therefore, consider that passage in its context which immediately follows:—

רבי הניא אומר מול מחכים מול מעשיר ויש מול לישרא רבי יוחנן אומר אין מול לישרא ואודא רבי יוחנן לשעמיה דאמר רבי יוחנן מניין שאין מול לישרא שנאמר מה אמר ה' אל דרך הגרים אל הלמדו ומארתו השמים אל תחתו כי ידעו הגרים מחמה ידעו הגרים ולא ישרא אומר רב אין מול לישרא דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב מניין שאין מול לישרא שנאמר ויוצא אותו הדוצה אמר אבהם לפני הקב"ה רבונו של עולם בן ביתי יורש אותי אמר לו לאו כי אם אשר יצא ממעד אמר לפני רבונו של עולם כסחלתי באיבשגנינות שלי ואיני ראוי להלירך די אמר לו צא מאיבשגנינות שלך שאין מול לישרא :

"Rabbi Chanina says, the influence of the stars makes rich, the influence of the stars makes wise, and Israel is under that influence. Rabbi Jochanan says, Israel is not under the influence of the stars, and Rabbi Jochanan helped his argument, for Rabbi Jochanan says, From whence is it proved that Israel is not under the influence of the stars? Because it is said, 'Thus saith the Lord, learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.' (Jer. x. 2.) The heathen, but not Israel. Rav says, Israel is not under the influence of the stars, for Rabbi Judah says, Rav says, From whence is it proved that Israel is not under the influence of the stars? From that which is said, 'And he brought him forth abroad.' (Gen. xv. 5). Abraham said before God, Lord of the world, 'One born in my house is my heir.' God replied not so, but 'He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels.' Abraham replied, I have consulted my astrology, and am not fit to beget a son. God said, Go forth from thy astrology, for Israel is not under the influence of the stars." (Shabbath, *ibid.*) Now this passage, if taken in the most favourable point of view, proves only that Israel is not under the influence of the stars; but this exception proves to demonstration that the oral law teaches, that all other nations are under that influence. According to this doctrine, all the Gentiles, and of course Christians among the number, are given up to unchanging and unchangeable fate. They are good and bad, rich and poor, happy and unhappy, according to the sidereal influence at their nativity, and consequently are utterly irresponsible for their actions. A Gentile thief, or murderer, or adulterer, is not so, because he yielded to temptation, or to evil disposition, but because he happened to be born under the

influence of the Moon, or of Mars, or of Venus. This is the religion of the oral law, on the most favourable view of the case, and consequently God is represented first as a partial governor, who gives constitutional advantages to one favourite nation, which He withholds from all others; and then, secondly, as an unjust judge, who punishes the Gentiles for doing what the irresistible influence of the stars compelled them to do. This doctrine is of itself sufficient to prove that the oral law is not of God, and that as a religion it stands upon a line with the heathen and Mahometan systems of fate, and is consequently infinitely below Christianity. The New Testament recognises no system of favouritism, but represents God as a just judge, "Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. ii. 6); and all men as responsible for the evil which they commit. "There is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law." (Ibid, 11, 12.) This is a view worthy of the Divine character, whereas the astrological system of the oral law, which represents God as giving up all nations to the influence of the stars, and then punishing them for following that influence which He himself ordained, is nothing short of blasphemy, and is much more akin to heathenism than to the doctrine of Moses and the prophets. But, secondly, this passage of the Talmud contains two statements directly contradicting each other. Rabbi Chanina says, Israel is under the influence of the stars—the others say, Israel is not under the influence of the stars; whichever statement we receive as true, the other is necessarily false, and therefore the oral law contains falsehood, and therefore is unworthy of credit. 3dly, The story which is here given of Abraham has falsehood on the face of it, and after all does not disprove, but rather confirms, the doctrine that Israel, as well as the other nations, is under the influence of the stars; for as Rashi tells us, Abraham and Sarah escaped from their sidereal destiny only by changing their names. Rashi's words are—

אמי לו צא מאיזשגנינות שלך שראיה במלך שאיך  
 שרד להעמיד בן אברהם אין לו בן אבל אברהם שי לו  
 בן שרי לא הולד אבל שרה הולד אני קורא לכם שם אדר  
 וישתנה המלך :

"God said to Abraham, Go forth from thy astrology, for thou hast seen in the stars that thou art not to have a son. *Abram* is not to have a son, but *Abraham* is to have a son. *Sarai* is not to bear a child, but *Sarah* shall bear a child. I call you by another name, and thus the influence of the stars will be changed." (Com. in Gen. xv. 5.) Here it is plainly intimated, and that in the name of God him-

self, that Abraham and Sarah were both under the influence of the stars, and that if they had not changed their names, they never could have had a child. This was evidently Rashi's opinion; and when we remember that the majority of the Jews in the world implicitly follow Rashi's interpretation, we may conclude that this is the prevailing doctrine. And perhaps some of the readers of this paper may even know instances of Jews who, led by this interpretation, have actually changed their name, in the hope of bettering their luck, or even of escaping from death. But however that be, it is easy to show that the Talmud and the rabbies generally believe in the astrological influence of the heavenly bodies. In addition to the passages already cited, the Talmud says expressly—

בזמן שהחמה לוקח סימן רע לאומות שלם לבה  
 לוקח סימן רע לשומאיהם של ישראל ממני שישאל  
 מונחן ללבה ואומות העולם לחמה לוקח במורה סימן  
 רע לישבי מורה במשבר סימן רע לישבי משבר וכו' :

"An eclipse of the sun is an evil sign to the nations of the world. An eclipse of the moon is an evil sign to Israel, for Israel reckons by the moon, the nations of the world by the sun. When the eclipse happens in the east, it is an evil sign to the inhabitants of the east. When it happens in the west, it is an evil sign to the inhabitants of the west," &c. &c. (Succah, fol. 29, col. 1.) The rabbies who have lived since, teach the same doctrine. For instance, Saadiah Gaon, speaking of the manner in which the influence of the stars is modified by the signs of the zodiac, says—

תצמיח שמקצת כוכב חללונו במול טוב ומקצתו  
 דאחר במול רע. ולאדם שידעה לו אחרו מול ידה לו  
 בראשונה טוב ולאחריתו רע :

"Sometimes the course of a star is partly in a good sign and partly in a bad sign. The man born under this will first prosper, and then suffer adversity." (Comment. in Sopher Jetsirah, fol. 98, col. 1.) He also explains, there, how it is possible for astrologers to foretell sickness and death; but this is enough to show his opinion, and what he had learned from the Talmud. The writings of Aben Ezra bear the same testimony. For instance, in his commentary on the ten commandments, he says—

הדבור הרביעי דבור השבת כנגד גלגל שבתי כי חכמי  
 הנסיון אומרים כי לכל אחד והמספרים שי יום ידוע  
 שבו שבו יראה כחו הוא בעל השעה האי ביר וכן  
 במות בעל השע' הראשונה בלילה ואומרים כי  
 שבתי ומאדים הם מוכבים המזיקים ומי שיהל מלאכה  
 או ללכת בדרך באחד משניהם כשהם מושלים יבא ליר  
 נזק על בן אמו קדמוניו שנתן רשות להגל בלילי רביעות  
 ובלילי שבתות הינה לא תמצא בכל ימי השבוע לילה  
 ויום זה אחר זה שימשלו אלו שני המזיקים בהם רק

ביום הזה עלקין אין ראו להצטק בו בדברי העולם רק  
ביראת השם לבדו :

“The fourth commandment is that respecting the Sabbath, and answers to the orb of Saturn; for the experimental philosophers say, that each one of the ministering servants has a certain day of the week in which he exhibits his strength, and he is master of the first hour in the day, and thus it is also with him who is master of the first hour in the night. They say, also, that Saturn and Mars are the two hurtful stars, and whosoever begins a work, or to walk in the way, when either of these two is in the ascendant, is sure to fall into harm. Therefore our ancients have said, that permission is given to do injury on the nights of the fourth and seventh days of the week. And behold, thou wilt not find, in all the days of the week, a night and a day, one after the other, on which these two hurtful stars rule except on this day; therefore it is not suitable on it to engage in worldly affairs, but to devote it entirely to the fear of God.” This exposition shows that Aben Esra believed in astrology, and that the power of the stars extended to Israel as well as to the other nations, nay the power of the stars to do harm is here made the foundation of the command respecting the Sabbath-day. A man, whose mind was not thoroughly imbued with faith in astrology, could never have been led even to entertain such an opinion, when God himself has assigned another and entirely different reason for the institution of the Sabbath. But indeed it is not necessary to go to the rabbies to prove that modern Judaism teaches astrology. That common wish which one so often hears amongst the Jews, even at the present day, כול טוב, *mazzal tov*, or good luck, has its origin in the doctrine of the Talmud, and shows how universally it has been received. And thus we see the influence which the oral law has had in leading away both learned and unlearned from the Word of God, and of spreading amongst them, as a tradition from Moses, what is merely one of the numerous errors of heathen idolatry. The heathen worshipped the host of heaven. The sun, and the moon, and other heavenly bodies, they considered as deities; it was, therefore, natural for them to suppose that they exercised an influence over the affairs of men. The Chaldeans were especially devoted to this doctrine, and had almost exalted it to

the rank of a science. From them, probably during the Babylonish captivity, the Jews learned this system; and though altogether idolatrous in its origin, and learned from idolaters, it was congenial to the minds of the superstitious rabbies, and was, therefore, introduced into the oral law, where it has ever since continued. The oral law has, therefore, in this respect adopted heathen doctrine, and teaches heathenism. Every Jew who wishes his neighbour כול טוב, *mazzal tov*, uses a heathen idolatrous expression—sanctioned, indeed, by the Talmud, but utterly repugnant to the doctrine of Moses. But where will he find in the New Testament any warrant either for such doctrine or such a wish? The New Testament is entirely free from all shadow and tincture of this heathenism. Your oral law has taught you that the course of events depends upon the stars. Jesus of Nazareth has taught us, that the ordering of all events, even the minutest, proceeds from our Heavenly Father. He says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” (Matt. x. 29, 30.) Jesus of Nazareth, therefore, whom you are afraid to follow, lest he should lead you after other gods, directs all his followers to the one living and true God, the Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer of all things. Those men, on the contrary, who crucified Jesus of Nazareth, and that oral law which you prefer to Christianity, have led you away from the doctrines of Moses and the prophets to the principles of heathenism. The general doctrine, that the moral nature, the weal and wo of men, are altogether dependent upon the stars, is not Mosaic, it is heathen; and the particular details concerning the influence of Venus, Mars, and Mercury, are plainly the offspring of the worst part of heathen mythology. If, then, Jews believe in this Talmudic astrology, they approach very nearly to heathenism, and such has been the case with the majority and the most learned of the nation for the last eighteen hundred years. If from the unavoidable influence of Christian knowledge, they now reject this portion of the oral law, they declare that all their most learned rabbies have been in gross error, and that the oral law, which led them astray, is not from God, but, on the contrary, in one of its most important features, a mere copy of idolatrous heathenism.

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