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ÉFÉS DAMMIM.

A SERIES

OF
CONVERSATIONS AT JERUSALEM

BETWEEN

A PATRIARCH OF THE GREEK CHURCH

AND

A CHIEF RABBI OF THE JEWS,

CONCERNING THE

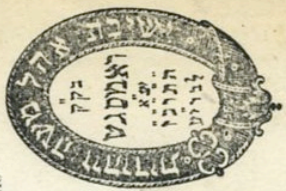
Malicious Charge against the Jews of using Christian Blood.

BY J. B. LEVINSOHN.

TRANSLATED FROM THE HEBREW AS A TRIBUTE TO THE
MEMORY OF THE MARTYRS AT DAMASCUS,

BY DR. L. LOEWE,

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND, OF THE ASIATIC
SOCIETY AT PARIS, ORIENTAL LINGUIST TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE DUKE OF
SUSSEX, AND AUTHOR OF THE "ORIGIN OF THE EGYPTIAN LANGUAGE,"
AND OF "LETTERS FROM THE EAST."



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PREFACE.

It is presumed that all well-informed classes of society in this country are, in some degree, acquainted with the late cruel persecution of the Jews at Damascus. That persecution involved a prejudice from which the Jewish people have, at various times during the last six hundred years, suffered much affliction, in all parts of Europe where the progress of civilization and knowledge had been but slow; though it has not existed in any other region, except where Christians had settled whose enlightenment had not kept pace, as in the recent case of the Christians at Damascus, with that which now happily pervades this division of the world throughout. Thanks be to the Almighty! there is no reason to fear that the frightful prejudice will ever again be entertained in this country, which occupies so prominent a station in all that pertains to wisdom, justice, and humanity; here, at all events, the Israelites are safe; * it cannot, therefore, be otherwise than a

* The writer's assertions on this head are fully sustained by the unanimous meeting of so many influential and learned British Christians at the Egyptian Hall, on Friday, July 3, 1840, for the purpose of expressing their sympathy with the Israelites, and their earnest wishes for the success of Sir Moses Montefiore, pre-

source of delight to all truly enlightened subjects of the British monarchy, to be made fully aware that the kind and fraternal sentiments expressed by them concerning the Israelites on the melancholy occasion referred to, are justified not only by reason, but by the records of the most veracious historians, and the special testimony of some of the brightest ornaments of the world's literature: and it is to serve the double purpose of affording some pleasure to all those who have taken an interest in this cause, and to gratify the innocent pride of his own nation and himself,—such pride as a wrongfully aspersed people cannot help but feel when, after a long period of affliction, a righteous and powerful judge proclaims to the world that they are free from evil, and they are enabled to lay before the world a load of evidence in their favour, in addition to that on which his judgment has been founded—that the writer hereof submits the annexed work to the British public.

It is a translation of an elaborate work written in the form of a series of colloquial discourses between two learned men of different religious creeds, one being represented as a Patriarch of the Greek Church at Jerusalem, and the other a Chief Rabbi of the Jews at the same place; from which discourses inferences are finally drawn which furnish a complete refutation of

viously to his starting on his mission to the East. This meeting may be considered the most glorious evidence of intelligence and religious toleration that is to be met with in the annals of mankind.

the appalling charge against the Israelites of privily taking the lives of Christians, in order to obtain blood to use in certain of their religious ceremonies: the author of the work is J. B. Levinsohn,* a Jewish subject of his august Majesty the Emperor of Russia, of whose impartial rule, and benign protection of those who submit to his dominion, whatever their faith may be, this is one of the most conspicuous results. I ought not to omit to state, in this place, that the Israelites at large owe a heavy debt of gratitude to his Imperial Majesty, for the kindness of his behaviour to their brethren residing in his territory; and, indeed, all who cherish principles of toleration and justice, must acknowledge that his actions in regard to them must tend to benefit all mankind. I herein allude to the schools which, under his Majesty's auspices, are to be erected in various parts of his dominions, for the instruction of such Israelites as may be too poor to obtain a proper education from their own resources, and in which, all who may choose to enter them are to be placed on a footing equally as advantageous as that of any other class of people within his Majesty's realms: by this measure, the Emperor will teach his subjects in general, one of the most salutary and effective lessons that ever emanated from any ruler whose name is to

* J. B. Levinsohn is now living at Krzemnitz; this work was written by him in the year of the Creation 5594, on the occasion of a persecution being raised at Soslow in Poland.

be found in the annals of the world. Whatever opinions may be held by different classes of society throughout Europe, regarding the Emperor's political conduct in connexion with the most notorious events of his reign, I have nothing whatever to do; no monarch or statesman has ever yet been so fortunate as to secure for himself the commendations of all men; but there are few persons, I presume, that will attempt to deny, that in the management of the domestic affairs of his realms he has been characterised by the strictest impartiality, and that no one kind of people, of the great variety of all religions that acknowledge his power, are placed in a state of humiliation for the gratification of another. Had there been a different state of things in existence in the Russian empire, it is probable that the genius and learning of Levinsohn would never have been stimulated to produce this work, which, to all his nation, is indeed an inestimable boon.

I am aware that in making such special allusions to Russia, I have been digressing from the main and legitimate object of a preface. But, in consequence of what lately came to pass in the East, I consider that it is essential for the cause of the whole of the Jewish nation, that some comments should be made on the actions of those whose influence, either favourable or adverse, is of a nature to affect them; and I conceive that nothing of that kind can be said anywhere so appropriately as in juxtaposition with this work, and the

preface is the only place that I can make use of for such a purpose.

The author of this translation is personally acquainted with most of the sufferers who still survive at Damascus, and was so with those whom their cruel judges tortured into the grave; and their great worth, and respectable station in that city, were often spoken of and testified by him, in his "Letters from the East," published in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judeniums*, at a time when none of them had the slightest idea of being involved in so dire a calamity: the reader will, therefore, readily conceive how excessively their misfortunes must have excited the writer's feelings, and will be induced to make such allowances for the warmth and discursiveness of his style and sentiments as, under other circumstances, he would not be justified in soliciting. In order to render the translator's motives for undertaking this task still more explicit, and the better to give him an opportunity of making some comments on certain subjects which are set forth in the work, so that the reader may more easily comprehend them, it is necessary to refer to some of the most conspicuous features in the late persecution.

When it became known that the priest Thomaso had mysteriously disappeared, seven individuals were charged with having decoyed him into their power, and with having murdered him amongst them; it was positively asserted that these seven had been seen all together in the afternoon of the day of his disappearance in the

house of David Harari. One of the seven, however, offered to produce, as evidence to disprove this, two persons, one a Mohammedan and the other a Christian, who were sitting with him in his own house all that day and the greater portion of the ensuing evening. A child of his had just died, and, according to the precepts of the Jewish law, he was compelled to remain in his house during seven days from its decease, in a state of mourning: that day was one included in the seven, and these persons came to condole with him on his loss. Had these witnesses been allowed to come forward, the whole of the case must have fallen to the ground at once, in spite of the malicious craft and cunning which the originators of the charge displayed; for as they were in nowise connected with the Jews, their testimony must have been received as valid; and the absence of one out of the seven being proved, the charge, specially implicating the seven, could not have survived for a moment. But this man was instantly put to the torture; and though they were all subjected to the most horrible appliances that the human mind can conceive, yet the mode of torture used with him took effect so speedily, that he died before any of his friends could have any chance of putting forward the witnesses referred to. He was still included in the accusation, for now he could only testify his innocence to his Maker.

There was another remarkable circumstance, which shows how determinedly the charge was carried over

every impediment that truth and justice opposed to it. Three ministers of the Jewish congregation were, at the outset of the calumnious report, commanded by the governor to discover the criminals; these three straightway repaired to the synagogue, and having summoned all their brethren that could come into their presence, made a proclamation that, if any Jew knew aught that might lead to the detection of the criminals, he should instantly communicate it to them, under pain of excommunication, which is the most serious punishment that the Jewish clergy can inflict, and which every Jew contemplates with the utmost dread. The rabbies likewise enjoined all their auditors to make diligent search for the criminals for the honour of the nation at large. In consequence of this proclamation, a young man, a Jew, who kept a tobacco-nist's shop in the Mooslimin quarter, just without one of the city gates, came forward, and stated that he had seen the priest and his servant pass by his door at six o'clock in the evening of the day on which he was last seen, which he the more clearly remembered as he then solicited them both to purchase *toombak* of him.

In the accusation against the seven, it was stated that the priest was last seen at David Harari's house at half-past four. This evidence, then, tended strongly to refute the accusation; but the ill-fated youth was directly arrested as an accomplice, and hurried into eternity simultaneously with the first of the seven.

Thus the testimony that could not have failed to weigh on the minds of the multitude was entirely suppressed; and the multitude were now induced to raise a clamour against the unfortunate prisoners; and the individuals in office, whose actions can clearly be traced to motives of revengeful jealousy, excited against the most distinguished Jews in Damascus by certain circumstances which had long since occurred, took shelter under this clamour, and gratified their atrocious malice not only with impunity, as regarded the major part of the inhabitants of the place, but with the approbation due only to a rigid act of justice. On nearly all former occasions, when the Jews have been persecuted in consequence of the superstitious impression that they used Christian blood in their Passover ceremonies, similar means have been practised to stifle the voice of truth, and similar feelings of revenge have, without doubt, first kindled the flame of persecution. The reader is particularly requested to note the coincidence between the proceedings of the semi-barbarians at Damascus in the present age, and those of the judges who lived in the dark ages of superstition in other parts of the world.

The translator had the honour of accompanying his truly illustrious friend, Sir Moses Montefiore, in his recent self-imposed, generous mission to the East,*

* It is probable that few people have heard of any other than the last journey performed by Sir Moses Montefiore; by that alone he has certainly obtained the applause of civilized men of all conditions;

and, consequently, was present at his interviews with Mohammed Ali at Alexandria; and, from what thus came to his knowledge, he feels bound to acquit the Pacha of entertaining the prejudice himself. His reception of Sir Moses and the other members of the mission was characterised by great courtesy; and his whole behaviour was such, as plainly evinced that he would have granted all the privileges which were asked for the Jews almost on the very first application for them, had there not been some influence secretly at work, which, for awhile, counteracted the exertions made in their behalf. That Mohammed Ali had not sanctioned the persecution himself was made fully apparent; indeed, the entertaining of the

even many of his own nation are, without doubt, unacquainted with his benevolent exertions in that region on a previous occasion; but the writer thinks that he will be only discharging a just duty by here recording the fact, that two years prior to the lamentable events at Damascus, Sir Moses, and his lady also, as on the late mission, with the writer in their company, explored the Holy Land, and some of the adjacent countries, for the sole purpose of using those things with which God has blessed them for the good of their species inhabiting those regions, without respect to their descent or faith. Where poverty does exist in those places, it is of a most heart-sickening character, and is frequently attended by withering disease; but wherever sickness and want were to be found, Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore made their way; and whoever the afflicted might be, they experienced their bounty. Yet even this was not their first visit to the Holy Land; some twelve years ago they were at Jerusalem, with objects in view similar to those just described. The writer has some reason to fear this record of their philanthropy will not be in perfect unison with the sentiments of Lady Montefiore or Sir Moses; but, by inserting it, he has, at least, satisfied his own conscience.

prejudice would have been quite inconsistent with the Pacha's sagacity and knowledge of mankind; and the only inference that can be drawn from his behaviour in connexion with that affair is, that, in the peculiar position in which he was then placed, he was afraid to do anything which might seriously displease any of the agents of France, lest they should interfere, to his disadvantage, with the negotiations he was then carrying on with the hopes of securing France as his political friend. Potentates whose names will live for ever in history, and whose virtues will ever be cited as worthy of imitation, have, when placed in situations of great political difficulty, been compelled to sanction measures which their consciences disapproved of; and there is ample reason for thinking as favourably of Mohammed Ali.

What has just been advanced respecting the ruler of Egypt, implicates, indeed, to a great extent, the French consul at Damascus in the persecution; but it would be a puerile absurdity to affect not to know that that personage took a most active share in the transaction; too much reason have the Jews who survive it to remember his persevering efforts against them. It is really a lamentable thing that, in these days of civilization, a representative of one of the most enlightened nations of Europe should enact the part of a fanatic of the middle ages. But, though it is unhesitatingly asserted that the Egyptian Pacha was for a time influenced by this agent, it cannot for a moment be supposed that his conduct was

authorised or approved of by the French Court, or the French people; for when, on his return from his mission, successfully terminated, Sir Moses, in company with the writer, obtained an audience of the King of the French, and presented his Majesty with a copy of the Sultan's firman in favour of the Jews under his government, his Majesty most warmly congratulated him on his success, and demonstrated the most perfect satisfaction; and his Majesty's sentiments were echoed by every Frenchman whom Sir Moses encountered.

It must be a source of much satisfaction to the Israelites in the Turkish realms, and to all friends of justice and humanity in the world, to find that so wise and considerate a prince as the present Sultan has ascended the throne at Constantinople. The firman which, by the instrumentality of Sir Moses Montefiore, has been issued in favour of the Israelites, sheds more lustre on the Turkish diadem than the brightest gem that was ever placed in it by the artificer in gold and precious stones. The following is a *verbatim* translation of that important document, and there can be little doubt that the reader will peruse it with much interest.

A Firman addressed to the Chief Judge at Constantinople, at the head of which HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY THE SULTAN has written with his own hand the following words:—

“ Let that be executed which is prescribed in this Firman.”

An ancient prejudice prevailed against the Jews. The ignorant believed that the Jews were accustomed to sacrifice a human being, to make use of his blood at their feast of the Passover.

In consequence of this opinion, the Jews of Damascus and Rhodes (who are the subjects of our empire) have been persecuted by other nations. The calumnies which have been uttered against the Jews, and the vexations to which they have been subjected, have at last reached our Imperial Throne.

But a short time has elapsed since some Jews dwelling in the Isle of Rhodes were brought from thence to Constantinople, where they had been tried and judged according to the new regulations, and their innocence of the accusations made against them fully proved. That, therefore, which justice and equity required, has been done in their behalf.

Besides which, the religious books of the Hebrews have been examined by learned men, well versed in their theological literature, the result of which examination is, that it is found that the Jews are strongly prohibited not only from using human blood, but even that of animals. It therefore follows that the charges made against them and their religion are nothing but pure calumnies.

For this reason, and for the love we bear to our subjects, we cannot permit the Jewish nation (whose innocence of the crime alleged against them is evident) to be vexed and tormented upon accusations which have not the least foundation in truth, but that in conformity to the Hatti Scherif which has been proclaimed at Gulhane, the Jewish nation shall possess the same advantages, and enjoy the same privileges, as are granted to the numerous other nations who submit to our authority.

The Jewish nation shall be protected and defended.

To accomplish this object, we have given the most positive orders that the Jewish nation dwelling in all parts of our empire shall be perfectly protected, as well as all other subjects of the sublime Porte, and that no person shall molest them in any manner whatever (except for a just cause), neither in the free exercise of their religion, nor in that which concerns their safety and tranquility. In consequence, the present Firman, which is ornamented at the head with our "Hoomaicon" (sign manual), and emanates from our Imperial *chancellerie*, has been delivered to the Israelitish nation.

Thus you, the above mentioned judge, when you know the contents of this Firman, will endeavour to act with great care in the manner therein prescribed. And in order that nothing may be

done in opposition to this Firman, at any time hereafter, you will register it in the archives of the tribunal; you will afterwards deliver it to the Israelitish nation, and you will take great care to execute our orders and this our sovereign will.

Given at Constantinople, the 12th Ramazan, 1256 (6th November, 1840).

To attempt to analyse the foregoing imperial edict, or to draw any conclusions from the circumstances which it refers to, could not answer any serviceable purpose here; for it would in some measure anticipate the arguments which are set forth against the terrible prejudice in the work that follows, and which are given with more cogency than the translator would be able to invest his own ideas with.

The reader shall not be withheld from the commencement of the work longer than it will take me to make a few necessary observations respecting the manner of the translation. It will be seen that much learning and research are exhibited in the dialogues, and nearly every argument that is advanced in the course of them for the purpose of refuting the atrocious accusation, is extracted from the works of Christian authors whose merit and veracity have been universally acknowledged. Some slight liberties the translator has been compelled to take with the original; but nothing has been done with it that does in any way interfere with the drift of the reasoning, or any one of the sentiments; in nothing has it undergone the slightest alteration that has reference to time, place, or person; but only in those modes of speech which, if

translated literally, would have made the language rather uncouth, and the author's ideas not quite so comprehensible; and in one or two assertions, founded on the author's imperfect acquaintance with the customs of a nation that he has happened to mention: in the latter case, as the proposition had not any connexion with the main thread of the discourse, a slight omission has been made.*

Having given this explanation concerning the following pages, I invoke on my undertaking the blessing of the Almighty, and earnestly commend the work to the reader's most serious attention.

L. LOEWE.

55, MANSSELL STREET, GOODMAN'S FIELDS,
The 8th day of Elul, 5601.

(25th of August, 1841.)

The first anniversary of the liberation of the Jews at Damascus.

* The translator thinks it proper also here to state, that he does not always concur with the opinions of the Jewish Rabbi Maimoon; but he has not invariably recorded his dissent in the shape of notes at the particular passages to which he makes exceptions, fearing that by so doing he might divert the reader's attention from the drift of the discourse.

INTRODUCTION.

(MAIMOON ENTERS THE HOUSE OF SIMMIAS, AND ON SEEING SIMMIAS BOWS TO HIM TWICE.)

MAIMOON. God be with thee, Patriarch of the Greek Church.

SIMMIAS. Chief Rabbi of the Israelites, may God bless thee. Friend Abraham Maimoon, may thy arrival in this place prove auspicious. I have been most anxious to see thee, and so have thy brethren that dwell here. Is peace with thee, my friend? And tell me, I pray, how fares thy brother, the Lord Jacob Maimoon? he that is one of the seven ministers of the Sultan at Constantinople.

MAL. I am well, my lord: and so also is my brother Jacob, who has been mindful to enquire after thy welfare. My lord, pray tell me if the Governor of Jerusalem has received the Sultan's firman.

SIM. He received it eleven days ago. The *Sheikh el Islam* and myself were summoned into his presence to hear the whole of it read; and it exactly corresponds with the copy which thou didst send me a few days previous to the arrival of the official document. The substance of it is as follows:—The Greek Church, which is