

OUR CHILDREN'S CIRCLE

Conducted by COUSIN HELEN

OUR MOTTO:

"Do not unto others, what you would not have others do unto you."

"A little child shall lead them."—Isaiah xi. 6.

My Dear Little Cousins,

I am sure you have all heard of the Talmud and this week I want to tell you something about this wonderful collection of books in which the "Laws" of the Jewish people are written.

The Rabbis said that the Law was made for man and man was not made for the Law and that it was necessary to add to the commands in the Bible by way of explanation in order that people might understand their real meaning. When a decision was given by one of the leading Rabbis on a Law in the Bible and if the other Rabbis agreed to this, it became almost as much of the "Law" as the original command to which it was added. These additions and explanations were handed down from generation to generation, and after a time it became necessary to put all the parts of the Law into proper order.

The great Rabbi Hillel commenced this important work and other Rabbis such as Akiba and Meir continued the task which was finally completed by Rabbi Judah Hanasi (the Prince) about the year 220. The laws so put together were called the "Mishna," which was divided into six great divisions.

The Rabbis had always had discussions on the exact meaning of particular laws and the completion of the Mishna caused these discussions to increase. They would discuss a law; one of the Rabbis would give his opinion and another would oppose and so an argument would arise, during which various stories and proverbs were told. These discussions and explanations of the Mishna were also collected and this collection was called the Gemara. The Mishna and Gemara together form the wonderful literature called the "Talmud."

Halacha and Agada.

If we study the Talmud we find that besides the discussion and argument about the Law, which is called Halacha, there are beautiful legends and stories called Agada. These legends are very interesting and show that the Rabbis although they were very particular about the Law, also had very strong imaginations and were not always serious minded.

The great German-Jewish poet Heine described the Agada as follows:—

Beautiful old stories
Tales of angels, fairy legends,
Stilly histories of martyrs,
Festal songs and words of wisdom;
Hyperboles, most quaint it maybe;
Yet replete with strength and fire,
And faith—how they gleam,
And glow and glitter.

The main purpose of the Rabbis however, was the discussion of points of Jewish law—the Halacha and it was by the teaching of the "Law" that the Rabbis of old saved Israel's faith after the destruction of the Temple. When the Temple was in ashes Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai escaped from the besieged city of Jerusalem and went to Jabneh where he preserved the beautiful thoughts and wise laws which had grown up in the course of many years.

There is a little conversation between two Rabbis which shows the difference between Halacha and Agada. A Rabbi who taught the Halacha said to another who was learned in Agada: "Look, how people run after you while my lectures are empty!" "Yes, that is very true," was the reply, "but I sell only glittering coloured pebbles that are of very little value, whilst you sell diamonds for which there are very few buyers."

Your loving,

COUSIN HELEN.

The Rodriguez-Lopez Chamber Concert.

The intimate atmosphere of Electricity House once more lent itself admirably to a delightful performance of chamber music by Jose Rodriguez-Lopez last Tuesday evening. This was the second of his current series of three chamber concerts. He was supported by Harry Terhart (violin), Walter Swanson (viola), Eric Leftwich (cello), Blanche Gerstman (double bass) and Michael McGrath (clarinet). In the first half of the programme Anny Lambrechts sang two groups of songs. For her first group she selected three arias by Adam Krieger and in these seventeenth century compositions the true purity and resonant, controlled quality of her voice were more successfully revealed than in the second group consisting of two arias for contralto from Bach cantatas. But the whole of her performance was most delightful and the audience thoroughly enjoyed listening to her beautiful voice.

The *piece de resistance* of the evening was the Schubert "Trout" Quintet. The rendering of this very melodious work was most enthusiastic and spirited and the audience were so filled with the sheer joy of the players that, in response to their insistent applause, the fourth movement had to be repeated. The performance was most satisfying and the ensemble perfect.

The final concert in the series will take place at Electricity House on Wednesday 6th December.



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