

## ARTICLE II.

THE CARAITES.<sup>1</sup>

BY THE REV. CHARLES H. BRIGHAM, TAUNTON, MASS.

IN one of the narrow streets of the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem, in a house of moderate size, marked among the rest by its peculiar whiteness and neatness, a small community of some five-and-thirty souls dwell separate from the rest of their race. It is their boast and their consolation that they are the oldest inhabitants of the Holy City since the destruction of the second temple. They have suffered from plague, from famine, from persecution, from apostasy, until their numbers are reduced to this little band; but they still keep their union, their ritual, their purity of doctrine, and the precious volume of their ancient law. Under their house, in a subterranean chamber, lighted through a small square opening in the roof, and by a little glass chandelier with four oil lamps, strangely confusing the artificial with the natural gleam, is the synagogue, which, small as it is, has room for a larger company than the household dwelling above it. Upon the sacred ark is a silver plate inscribed in golden letters with the ancient creed of Israel: "The Lord our God is one Lord." Not from a roll, as in other synagogues, but from a *book* of parchments, the pages decorated with arabesques and illuminated initial letters, is the service chanted. This manuscript bears date of the sixth century, and carries back the possessors to an age earlier than the authentic beginning of the sect; for this little community, gathered in one house, is all that remains here of that important body of reformed Jews, that in the eighth and ninth ages were honored by the name of "Jerusalemites,"

<sup>1</sup> Geschichte des Karäerthums bis 900. Eine kurze Darstellung seiner Entwicklung, Lehre und Literatur mit den dazugehörigen Quellennachweisen. Von Dr. Julius Fürst. Leipzig: 1862. 8vo. pp. vi & 186.

but are better known to us (though not much known to any Christians) by their name of *Caraites*.

The name Caraites, from the Hebrew *Kara*, to read or recite, describes the radical difference of this sect from the other Jewish sects. They are *textualists* in opposition to the traditionalists. They hold to the letter of scripture, in opposition to the forms of its various interpretation, and to the accretions by which the rabbins have overloaded and superseded it. This general difference has always been recognized, though beyond this, the information of scholars concerning the peculiarities of the sect has been sufficiently meagre. Very few eastern travellers have made any mention of their customs, and the studies of orientalists have but slightly noticed their literature and their dogmas. Benjamin of Tudela observes that in Damascus, in the twelfth century, there were about two hundred Caraites and four hundred Samaritans living on friendly terms together, but not intermarrying; yet he does not tell us the names of their rabbins, or the details of their life. The Christian writers rarely even mention the sect. But recent German investigations, particularly by the accomplished scholar Julius Fürst, have brought to light many interesting facts about the origin and early history of the Caraites, and have established its high importance in the development of Jewish thought. In this Article we propose to condense and exhibit some of these facts, and to speak of the Caraites as they were in the days of their influence and their leading teachers. This period of prosperity in the sect was short, lasting only a century and a half. For nearly a thousand years the sect has been in the position of a schism, too insignificant to be feared, living only in a lingering death, its largest communities numbered only by hundreds.

The origin of Caraism is to be found in a period long anterior to its actual beginning as a sectarian system of doctrine. Its source reaches back to that age when the contest of Pharisee and Sadducee first divided the Jewish church. The Sadducees were not in all respects as the

later Caraites. Some things which they denied, the Caraites believed; and some things which they upheld, the Caraites neglected. Yet the ground principle of both sects was the same—opposition to tradition and jealous attachment to the text of the law. Caratism was the resuscitation and regeneration of Sadducism, a thousand years after its first birth. In the fourth century before Christ, a party had arisen in the Jewish community which opposed to Pharisaic gloss and commentary a strict literalism, and denied equally the burdensome additions and the unwarranted mitigations which the rulers of the synagogue—the *soferim* or “scribes”—had brought to the Mosaic code. The Sadducees maintained that man’s will is free, that God is not the author of sin, and that no form of fatalism is taught in the scripture; that the happiness or misery of men is the result of their own choice and conduct, and is the sign, not of divine wrath or favor, but of individual sin or virtue. Finding no doctrine of a future life in the sacred history, they denied all separate existence to the soul, all retribution beyond the present life, and especially that notion of a resurrection which the wars of the Maccabees had confirmed as consolation for Israel in its faintness. They found in the words of Moses no warrant for the idea that the dead should come forth from their graves, or that there should be any renewal of the finished earthly life. To this rejection of all spiritual and future life for man, the Sadducees added a rejection of the Persian doctrine of angels and spirits, which, after the Babylonish exile, had been adopted into the Pharisaic system. The seven archangels of the Book of Tobit, and such visions as those related in the second book of Maccabees, were emphatically denounced as unreal and impious. In their interpretation of the law, while the Sadducees allowed free inquiry, in opposition to the authoritative decisions of the scribes, they were still strict constructionists upon particular statutes. They agreed with the Pharisees in not allowing a daughter to inherit from a father’s estate while sons were alive, but contended that this prohibition did not

apply when only the children of sons were living. They maintained literally the doctrine of retaliation, the eye for eye and tooth for tooth. In their view, the false witness might be put to death only when his lie had actually caused the death of his victim.

And in their religious customs and observances the Sadducees were in many things rigid iconoclasts. They absolved the people from the duty of daily sacrifice; rejected the libations of water from the feast of tabernacles; left the wearing of phylacteries free to individual taste and choice; forbade the lighting of lamps on the eve of the Sabbath, since the Mosaic law expressly forbids all kindling of fires on that day (in this respect directly contradicting the injunction of the Pharisees to light lamps in sign of joy on the day of joy and honor); ordered that no warm food should be eaten on the Sabbath day; and prohibited all connubial intercourse on the Sabbath. Many of these peculiarities of the Sadducaic system appeared in the Caraitic teaching; while some of them, especially those concerning the future state, were not adopted by the later heretics. The beginnings of Sadducism were earlier than the age of Alexander the Great, and in the year 333 B. C. the sect had its teachers. A hundred and twenty years before Christ it had reached its greatest influence and its highest point of development. In the apostolic age it had already begun to decline, and in the talmudic age its writings were only fragmentary comments upon the Mosaic law in the spirit of ancient Sadducism. Before the year 500 of our era, Sadducism had ceased to exist as a school of thought or as a separate sect. The Sadducees had long since been fused with the Pharisees, and in the common suffering from heathen oppressions, differences had been forgotten and a full affiliation realized. Nevertheless a foundation had been laid for future heresies; and along with the fuller rabbinical traditions in the Jewish church, there was now the tradition of literalism.

This ancient Sadducism was the earliest and the most important precursor of the Caraitic sect. Another and

nearer preparation for Caraimism came in the awakened critical sense of the sixth century, and in the speculations and inventions of the Masorites. The examination of the language of the scripture, of the form and inflection and sound of the words and letters, which the *Nikkuds* of Acha of Irak (Babylon), and Mocha of Tiberias, systematized and made popular, opened the way for a new development of the textual spirit. The marks and accents of the Masora were indeed additions to the text, but they were not intended as additions, but only as signs. Accent and quantity, Keri and Kethib and Dagesh, only helped to fasten attention to the strict letter of the text. The Masora was but the improvement of the alphabet and grammar of the language. It was the formation of a new Hebrew, enlarged and improved. It is not a little remarkable, however, that Acha and Mocha both wrote their Masoras in the Aramaean dialects of their native provinces.

The labors of Acha and Mocha were continued in Babylon by Chabib, and in Tiberias by Pinchas, each of these teachers becoming the head of a school, and venturing beyond the accents and vowels in their dealing with the text of scripture. Pinchas was not merely the author of a complete Masoretic arrangement of the words of the scripture, but was also the first who had dared to arrange the Mosaic writings into rhythm and verse. In the treatise *Soferim*—the last effusion of the ancient talmudic spirit, the last important work of the school of Tiberias—we have not only Masoretic speculations upon accents and letters, but freer description of the proper material for rolls of the law, alphabetical prayers for the synagogue, acrostic poems and forms of prayer in the new Hebrew style. In the seventh century the manuscripts of the Bible were greatly multiplied. It became a pious duty and delight of the scholars of the rabbins not only to study, but to *copy* the text of the sacred volume; and this habit of transcribing became a ground of more exclusive literalism. One of these manuscripts, if we may believe Abraham Sacculd, who found it in Africa

about the year 1590, was composed as early as the year 600 in the city of Hilla, near the ruins of ancient Babylon, and remained for ages a principal authority in questions of Masoretic dispute. Other manuscripts of great value came down from this century to the Middle Age, of which the most noted are those of Jericho, Jerusalem, and Sanbuk, the Damascene manuscript (Sepher Damaski), and the Great Cyclikon, or *Machasora*, arranged for the complete ritual of the year. Another preparation for Caraism is in the writings of the Jewish physicians, who made the sacred text the basis of their medical and hygienic inquiries. Asaph of Jericho wrote, about the year 630, a book on the healing art, which was widely copied and held in high authority. His direction was followed by numerous successors, some of whom even partially adopted the religion of Islam, and were received into the courts of the caliphs. Other secular studies, too, were joined to the rabbinical lore. Jews were found to write and translate in Arabic the sentences of the the Lord's volume, and the songs of the synagogue. The second half of the seventh century is especially marked by these accommodations of Judaism to the newly arising Arabic literature. These defections from the sacred custom of the people prepared the way for Caraism by the shock which they gave, by the reaction which they aroused. The departure from the strict law of scripture seemed naturally to bring in this worldly alliance with a false religion and its unworthy dialect.

In the first half of the eighth century, the way for Caraism was still more directly prepared by the appearance of heretical teachers, claiming to be prophets and Messiahs. About the year 720 there appeared in Syria a reformer whose name, taken from his native town in Lower Galilee, has come down to us as Serini. He preached openly a return to the scriptures as authority, a rupture with all talmudic traditions and claims, and announced that he was sent to redeem and lead Israel back to its own land, and to drive out the intruding Arabs. Many thousands followed

his standard, flocking to it from all parts of the world. Even many of the Spanish Jews left their goods to be confiscated, in their blind devotion to this new Messiah. The end of his attempt, as might have been predicted, was only disaster and ruin to his followers. Yet the "Serinites," as these followers were called, were for the most part obstinate in their schism, and very few of them returned to talmudism after their leader's discomfiture.

Some twenty years later, another Messiah arose at Ispahan in Persia, whose Sadducism was still more pronounced than that of the Galilean Serini. His name was Abu Isa Ishak Ben Jakub Obeid-Alla. He organized an army of ten thousand adherents to overthrow the Islamite government; but his army was speedily defeated and dispersed at Rai in the province of Chorassan. His moral code had features of ascetioism. He allowed no divorce for any cause, even for adultery, and taught that the marriage bond was eternal, — a sign of the connection of Israel with Jehovah, — and that the temporary permission of divorce in the former time was only a concession to human sin. He regulated the feast-days by the solar and not, as the rabbins reckoned, by the lunar year. Like the ancient Rechabites, he forbade the use of wine, and joined to this a prohibition of animal food. While he upheld the prayer of the rabbins, with its eighteen eulogies, and enjoined its strict use upon his followers, he increased the seasons of daily prayer from *three* to *seven*, after the manner of the Arabs. Most of his reforms were orally taught, but he left some writings of poetry and ritual, which Ben Hadassi stigmatizes as arbitrary and without the prophetic spirit. Scharastani says that Abu Isa wrote a book which rejected all religious offerings. His followers were called the Isawites or the Ispahanites; and the sect had a name to live for some time after the death of its leader.

About this time, too, there were living in the neighborhood of Rai, the Banu Musa, a tribe of Jews which had separated themselves from the talmudic Jews; they had neither

Mischna nor Gemara, knew nothing of the Tannaim, the Gaonim, the Amoraim, and the Saboraim, very rarely were visited by any rabbinical teacher, and used in their worship only the ancient Hebrew tongue. Abu Isa endeavored to interest them in his revolutionary movement, but with what success it is not related.

To all these immediate precursors of Caratism, — such isolated tribes as the Banu Musa; the Jews dwelling among Arabs, and adopting their tongue; the sects, such as the Serinites and the Isawites, which openly rejected talmudism; the Grammarians and Masorites, the new Hebrew poets and physicians, whose secular studies seemed to cast contempt on the lore of the schools, — must be added also the protest which the bolder exilarchs had given for a century and a half against the arrogance and the exclusiveness of the heads of the schools. As early as A. D. 600 the exilarch Kafnai had claimed and exercised an independence of these spiritual dictators, and his example had been followed by Chaninai, Bostanai, Chasdai, Solomon and David, and Chananiah, a contemporary with the founder of Caratism. Scheriva, in his chronicle, complains that these rulers did not hesitate to speak their dislike of the teaching of the schools.

But closer still to the beginning of Caratism were a class of teachers whose relation to Anan its founder was something like that of Erasmus to Luther. Among these "fathers of the Caraites," as they are called, are mentioned Genai ben Baruch, Anan's teacher, who wrote a ritual afterwards adopted by the heretical leader; Frajinus, Elisha, and Chanoba, interpreters of the Pentateuch, and honored in the memorial prayers of the Caraites; Obadiah of Bazra, surnamed *Hu-maschil*, the *sagacious* one, who wrote wisely upon the laws of the Pentateuch; Abu Nissi Noah, who wrote acrostics and alphabetic poems; and Judah the Persian, who wrote an astronomical calendar, in which he reckoned the years and the months according to the course of the sun.

From this survey of the antecedents of Caratism we



discover the three radical negations which Sadducee doctrine suggested: the denial (1) of the traditional oral law, (2) of the interpretation of the written law by such tradition, and (3) of the development of the written law by the logic and the subtlety of authorized doctors. The three ground-principles of Caraitic doctrine answer to these three Sadducaic negations. The other preparations of Caraimism were only auxiliary to this Sadducaic chief direction. The rabbinical foes of Caraimism saw in it only Sadducism revived. The Caraites themselves rejected the name of "Sadducees," on account of its heretical sound, and from its connection with some opinions which they were far from maintaining; but their writers refer the origin of the sect to a time anterior to the appearance of their champion, and admit that the foes of the ancient Pharisees are naturally friends to those who forsook the later rabbins.

The founder of the Caraitic sect was Anan ben David, a grandson of the exilarch Chasdai, who held that office among the Jews in the caliphate from A. D. 700 to 730. He was born in Bet-zur (probably another name for Bazra), about the year 700, educated doubtless in all the learning and philosophy of the wisest of his time and race, in the Thora and Talmud, and prepared for his future dignity as successor in the line of exilarchs. His bitterest enemies allow his large scholarship and his eminent gifts. He understood and wrote, with equal facility, the Aramaic idiom as taught in the schools of Babylon, the Hebrew as the language of the scriptures and the Mishna, and the Arabic as the dialect of the land and of its learned men in Bazra and Kufa and Bagdad. With the Mutazila, the heterodox religious philosophy of Islam, which Mazil taught in Bazra in 740, he had acquainted himself; and he had personal intimacy with some noted reformers, particularly with Obadiah and Noah. He knew also of the fanatical movements of Serini and Abu Isa, though he was far from any sympathy with their Messianic pretensions. As the natural heir to his uncle Solomon in the position of exilarch, he thought it best

to remove nearer to the seat of power, and in 754 transferred his residence from Bazra to Bagdad, at this time the capital of the Abbasside caliphs. In the year 760 his uncle died; but the dignity which he expected of succession to the exilarchate was not conferred upon him. His heresies had become too open and noted and had drawn too many adherents not to excite serious opposition. The Gaon Jehudah at Sora and the Gaon Dudai at Pumbadita both protested against his election to so responsible a place, for which soundness in the faith was a prime and indispensable requisite. His younger brother Chananiah, though far his inferior in learning, had the merit of faith in the rabbins, and was named for the office. Anan was not disposed, however, to submit meekly to such a slight, and his partisans encouraged him to appeal to the caliph against the decision of the colleges. At first the caliph was disposed to favor his claim; but when it was urged that Anan was a follower of that Abu Isa who had stirred up sedition, and caused so much trouble in the realm, the favor was changed to persecution, and the defeated claimant was sent from Bagdad to seek, with his partisans, some more congenial home. The refuge which he chose was the old city of Jerusalem, that ancient centre of the tribes, — now almost a ruin and quite deserted by the race of Israel. In the year 760, when Anan built his synagogue on the side of Zion, no sound of Jewish worship was heard there, and all offerings of piety had long since ceased. The walls of that synagogue were standing in the time of the first crusade, and the Caraites to-day believe that they are worshipping on the spot where their founder blessed the stones which he laid. The Caraites held its first assembly nearly in the place where the Christian sect held its first assembly. With the establishment of the community the schism became formal and open; and the disappointed heir to the honor of David's throne inaugurated in the city of David's son a new reign and dynasty. No authority was asked from the schools or the doctors, but the head of the sect proceeded to make for it laws and to decide its place.

The writings of Anan are unfortunately lost, and we are mainly indebted to the statements and allusions in the works of the Arabic historians Makrisi, Masudi, Sharastani, and Abulfeda for our knowledge of his doctrinal system. The ground principles of this system are the unity of God and the justice of God. Under the principle of unity, Anan taught substantially the *spirituality* of God; or rather, he denied the literal exactness of those phrases which assimilate God to man. Every comparison, in the scripture, of the divine Being with created things, every word which describes the form and movement, the change or the passion, of the Infinite One is to be interpreted allegorically. Properly speaking God has no attributes, and his strict unity forbids any division or any analysis of his functions. Under the principle of God's *justice*, Anan taught the freedom of the human will, the right of the human understanding to test all forms of wisdom and all rules of life, and the distribution of reward and punishment according to human character and choice. The dogmatic scheme of Anan was in substance that of the Mutazilite sect of the Mohammedans, and that of the ancient Sadducees, with the exception of the limitation of life to the earth, on which Anan pronounced no opinion.

Consistent with these general views — the right of reason to interpret the scripture, the freedom of the human will, and the separation of God from all direct influence in human affairs — are the views of Anan concerning the founder of Christianity and the founder of Islam. He acknowledged Jesus as a true prophet for the heathen and an instructed scribe for the Jews, a teacher to the Gentiles of the word clearly revealed, and a restorer to Israel of the purity of that ancient word. The Jews in their blindness quite misunderstood this purpose. The legends of the evangelists about his miraculous birth and ascension are not to be credited, but his claim to be Paraclete may be allowed, since that is according to the letter of prophecy. Jesus, in Anan's judgment, was always a faithful Jew, careful to

observe the statutes of Moses, and had never the intention to establish any new religion. His object was only to regenerate Judaism, to enlarge its reach and sway, to call back its primitive simplicity, and to fulfil its original and providential design.

And with equal candor, Anan admitted the divine mission of the Arabian prophet. Mohammed was not a blasphemous impostor, but a genuine reformer, who came to break the idols of his tribes and to bring in the worship of the one true God. For the Arabs the Koran is a holy book, and may pass as the word of God. But for Israel, the Bible, the law, is better, because older, and because it is the source from which the doctrine of the Koran is drawn. These notions concerning the nature of the Deity and the mission of the prophets of Christianity and Islam were probably written in Arabic, in a book which the historian Jefet quotes under the title of "*Fadalkah*," or "Summary" of doctrine, a word corresponding to the Aramaic *Sechom* and the Masoretic *Jochen*, and to the Latin "Summa Theologiae."

More significant than these scanty remains of Anan's dogmatic teaching are the evidences of his method in the interpretation of scripture. He absolutely rejected the existing Mischna and Gemara, and advised his followers to a fresh and free study of the sacred word. Yet he accepted withal the thirteen rules of exegesis of Rabbi Ismael, and authorized them as the best and the necessary postulate of all useful study of the scriptures; and by the aid of these rules he composed a Commentary on the Pentateuch, and a collocation of the Mosaic statutes, for the right direction of his followers. Both these works are largely quoted in the writings of the Caraites and of the Jewish rabbins. From these frequent quotations, we are able to mark the character and extent of Anan's variation from the rabbinical teaching.

The first of the practical heresies of the Caraites was his alteration of the calendar, or rather his restoration

of the ancient calendar, which was in use when the temple was still standing. By his innovation the month began, or "was born," when the first line of its young crescent became visible, and not according to any fixed system of cycles and intercalary months. Each month had its own length, of twenty-nine or thirty days, as the case might be, to be decided by close watching for its new light. The effect of this change was to bring confusion into the celebration of the feasts, and to dislocate the adjustment of the sacred times with the natural seasons. Anan's year was made to begin, not with Tischri, according to the rabbinical reckoning, but with Nisan, the month of the passover. The Jewish *Rosh-Hashana* became in his system the *Yom Teruah*, the "day of trumpets." Ibn Ezra, in his Commentary on the Pentateuch, attacks and satirises these inconvenient changes; and the followers of Anan were not careful in this regard to keep the instruction of their teacher. If Ben Jerochim defends this from the letter of the law, it is from pride rather than from faith in the system.

In the arrangement of the feast-days of Israel, Anan reckoned eighteen days in the course of the year. The three principal feasts—the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths—are enjoined in the scriptures as "*Nature-feasts*," rather than memorial seasons, in honor of national events. The passover is the feast of the first barley-harvest; the feast of weeks is the feast of the wheat-harvest; and the feast of booths is the feast of fruit, wine, and autumn grain harvest, closing properly the industrial year. Historical and national feast-days are set by Anan in the second rank. In regard to the proper time for killing the paschal lamb, he taught, in opposition to the rabbins and in conformity with the Samaritan custom, that it should be in the interval between sunset and darkness. In the same interval, too, must be baked the unleavened bread. The feast of weeks was appointed, not on the sixth day of Sivan, as the rabbins taught, but for the first Sunday after the seventh Sabbath after the passover. The directions of the rabbins about the

size and ornaments of the huts on the feast of tabernacles he rejects as wholly unwarranted by the Mosaic injunctions.

Anan's theory of the Sabbath was far more strict than that of the rabbins. Jews living in a heathen city were not permitted to go out of their houses at all on that day; and in a Jewish town they might only go from their houses a distance of two thousand ells, and that within the limits of the town. Circumcision was not allowed on the Sabbath, since the wound might require some aid of healing, which was on that day unlawful. Sexual connection on that day was strictly prohibited. The Talmudists, on the contrary, had made sexual intercourse a duty on the Sabbath day, supporting themselves on the word of Isaiah, which says that the Sabbath should be a *delight*. No fires were allowed by Anan to be kept on the Sabbath. The Talmudists had explained the verse in Exodus (xxxv. 3), to prohibit the *kindling* of fires on that day, but not their *preservation after they were kindled*. Lamps might be kept lighted, if they were only lighted before the set of the sun. Bread, too, might be baked on the Sabbath if only the process of baking were commenced early enough. Against these evasions Anan's voice was decided — they were simply profanations; and the Caraites not only sat in cold and in darkness on the eve of their day of rest, but avoided in their walks on that evening the sight of any lighted chamber. Nothing warm on that day, whether for food or for comfort, should be allowed to the faithful.

In other points of practical observance, the commentary of Anan departed widely from the rabbinical teaching. In the list of impure birds, he included common poultry, and would not suffer a cock or a hen to be brought to the altar as an offering. All fowls sipping water and sitting upon their broods are impure. The command to wear phylacteries he explained to mean that the sacred words should be fixed in the head and in the heart. His construction of the law of divorce and the law of inheritance was different from

that of the rabbins, though we are not enabled to know in exactly what particulars. Indeed, from the fragmentary character of the accounts of Anan's special interpretations upon the Pentateuch, it is difficult to draw out the Mosaic statutes as he arranged them, or to know how many of the Talmudic glosses he distinctly rejected.

Beside these separate hints of Anan's exegesis and ritual teaching, we may notice three positive positions and directions which his teaching gave in the formation of his sect :

1. He announced the right of all new religious teachers, of all religious reformers, to a respectful hearing : they were not to be dismissed as fanatics, or stigmatized as blasphemers, but to be judged according to their purpose and their claim. Caraimism has never been intolerant of the prophets of other faiths, and has used no violence to suppress their extravagances. It has preferred to live in peace with the men of other creeds, and even with hostile Jews. To this day, the stranger, of whatever lineage, is welcomed and kindly treated in the Caraitic communities of Constantinople and Jerusalem, and is allowed to learn from them their own state and hope — a privilege which intercourse with orthodox Jews will not give him.

2. Anan announced the right and the duty of free inquiry, whether upon the extent of the clear Mosaic statutes, or upon the meaning of the dark passages of the scripture. In their free inquiry, there should be no respect of persons, no deference to authorities and no fear of men. Brother may differ from brother and father from son ; and the difference is good, if it is a proof of honesty and freedom. The teaching of Anan did not consolidate Caraimism into an unchangeable doctrine, but allowed variations ; and later writings of the sect distinctly charge that its founder was not infallible and had taught some errors with his truths. Sahl, a Caraitic, writing in A. D. 950, says : " Say then not, how shall we come to the practice of the law, since the sons of the scriptures are so discordant with each other ? Whom of our leaders shall we follow ? Know rather that the sons of the

scripture do not say: 'We are your leaders.' They have not exhibited their views to force the people to go after their way; they would only be known as investigators, seekers, interpreters, availing themselves of the labors of their faithful predecessors. They say to their brethren: Search, examine, press in, and decide, and then practise that which is established by your own knowledge and proof."

3. And with these principles of free speech and free inquiry, Anan proclaimed the duty of missionary labor and the dignity of the prophetic office. Himself an exile for the sake of the faith, he enjoined his followers to sacrifice comfort and earthly advantage in the propagation of their truth, not to fear abuse and persecution, but to strive unto the end. Family ties were not to hinder missionary zeal. Anan's counsel to his followers was substantially that of Jesus to his disciples. Unlike the rabbins, he encouraged the gathering in of proselytes from the heathen world, and would not allow that the promises of the Bible were confined to Israel after the flesh. His missionaries wandered not only in the lands where the Jews had their seats, but were found in lands where the Hebrew tongue and ritual had become obsolete. Jerusalem was only the head and centre of the sect. It was not a simple schism only, but the beginning of a new religious community. Makrisi derives the name *Caratism* from the missionary zeal of the sect. They were the criers, the preachers. The Caraites were not, however, willing to allow this theory of their name.

The separation between the party of the rabbins and the new Sadducee became soon complete. There were mutual criminations and anathemas, and Anan excepted from his charity the "Gaons" of the school and the rulers of the synagogue. He forbade his disciples from visiting their houses or their places of worship, from eating with them, marrying with them, or having any, except the most formal, intercourse with them. He chose Jerusalem and Mount Zion, not only as the sacred place which might bless his new sect by its



traditions, but as the site most removed from rabbinical intrigue. Yet from this "seat of the Caraites," he sent his disciples to the Talmudic seats, to disturb the ease and security of the teachers of tradition, and break the chains which rabbinism had bound around the Jewish church. In some instances these missionaries were drawn into the snares of the rabbins, and consented to compromise the new faith with the old, so that other messengers had to be sent to watch the first messengers and bring them back to the faith.

Anan died in Jerusalem in 765, five years after his schism was fairly decided. In this short time he had gathered around him a numerous community and had organized branches of his sect in Egypt, West Africa, Syria, Babylon, and Persia. The first name given to the sect was that of Ananites, as the disciples of Christ were called Christians. But as the sect increased, and as in the exercise of free inquiry its teachers came to differ, a distinction was made between the Caraites in general and the Ananites in special. The later writers mention four peculiarities of the Ananites: that they were willing to study the *Mischna* of the *Talmud*; that they reckoned the month from the sight of the moon's crescent, instead of from the conjunction of the moon and earth; that they had a different construction of some statutes; and that they denied the right of the elders and the exilarchs to any special authority. The same phenomenon appears in the Christian church, in which a sect are separated from the church and called "Christians," to signify, not their general belief, but their peculiar opinion and practice.

The son of Anan, Saul by name, assumed the title of exilarch and *Nasi* (or prince), at his father's death, but was insignificant both as a leader and as a writer. His literary labor, so far as we know, was confined to "Notes upon the Decalogue," in which he attempted to show that all the statutes of Moses were contained in the ten commandments. His son Josiah, a grandson of Anan, was still more insignificant. The teaching of the founder of Caraimism was not perpetuated in the line of his household, but

eminent disciples, Malich ben Harmala and Nissi ben Noah. Of Malich we know comparatively little. He speculated upon the doctrine of the resurrection which Anan had quietly borrowed from the rabbins, and maintained that not all the dead would be raised at the last day, but only those who had been favored with the divine revelations. Of Nissi ben Noah we have a fuller account. He was a companion and friend of Anan, and shared his studies at Bazra. His early life was one of hardship, privation, and wandering, in which his resolute determination to master the learning of the schools prevailed over every hindrance. He became expert in the tongues, learned Hebrew and Aramaic from the rabbins, Greek and Latin from the priests; in Babylon studied the Masora; examined works of philosophy and logic; investigated religious systems; till in the end, by his own restless thirst for knowledge, he was brought to the Holy City, the head and mother of the Caraites household. When he came to Jerusalem, as he says, he found everything in confusion. There was no orderly system of doctrine, and the interpretations of scripture were as various as the interpreters. Anan had been dead only fifteen years, and already his work was threatened with ruin and seemed to be almost beyond recovery. Nissi resolved to write a commentary on the literal sense of scripture, and, unlike his predecessors in the sect, to write it in Hebrew and not in the Aramean, which had become the shame rather than the honor of the ancient people. The name of the great work of Nissi ben Noah was *Bitan ha-Maschilim*, the "Palace of the Teachers." It was a comprehensive explanation of the Mosaic laws and a complete institute of Caraites theology, showing its positive and its negative side alike. It denounces, without stint the rabbins and their teaching, calling them wranglers, brawlers, and blasphemers. The preface is curious, from its detailed statement of preliminaries to be settled in the profitable study of every book, whether of scripture or of secular wisdom. These preliminaries are *eight* in number: to know 1. the purpose and end of the

work, that the reader may judge impartially and not ascribe to the composer a plan which he did not have; 2. the profit of the work to the readers; 3. the name of the work and its *nickname*, and the reason for these; 4. the name of the composer, compiler, or editor, as the case may be; 5. the relation of the work to similar preceding works, whether it is a continuation or a development; 6. the prefatory advices which are essential to understand the work; 7. to what class of works it belongs and for what class of readers it is written; 8. the method and the divisions of the work.

This great work of Nissi ben Noah, invaluable as an exposition of Caraim, is unfortunately lost and is known to us only in the accounts of other teachers. Next in the order of time among the Caraitic teachers was Benjamin ben Moses, called Nahawendi, from the name of his native city, in the mountain land of Media. His fame and influence were at their height about the year 800. He was not only an authority in Persia, where he was even able to convert the Moslems to the faith of the Bible, but his decisions were sought and respected in Babylon and Palestine. He professed to know and to reveal doctrines which were not disclosed to Anan, but which the Caraites believed had been taught to him by Anan's grandson Josiah, at this time exilarch at Jerusalem. Among his numerous works are mentioned a Commentary on the Pentateuch; an Explanation of Isaiah, in which he denies the supposed Messianic prophecies; a Commentary on the Book of Daniel, in which *days* are made to mean *years*; a Commentary on the Five Megilloth, — the Canticles, Ruth, Esther, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes, — interpreting the first and last of these allegorically; a Book of Commands, based on the Caraitic customs; and a Catalogue of practical Mosaic statutes, prepared in Hebrew, which was called, in his honor, the Nassath-Benjamin. Besides these exegetical and practical works, Nahawendi seems also to have composed a dogmatic work, in which were speculations about God and creation and the soul. The soul, in his view, had no separate

existence, but is only part of the body, and can expect no life and no retribution apart from its bodily connection. God comes into no immediate relation with the world. His creation and providence are all through mediators, second causes, spiritual forces (*δυνάμεις*), words (*λόγοι*), angels of various ranks and degrees. Nahawendi denied that God spake directly to Moses, or that any word had come to patriarchs and prophets from one too exalted for all human intercourse, and would allow no anthropomorphic conceptions of the divine nature. In several minor points of practice he departed from the teaching of Anan, particularly as to the observance of the Sabbath, the killing of the paschal lamb, and the validity of the marriage bond. A lawful marriage, according to Nahawendi, requires more than purchase, contract, and cohabitation; it must have the preliminaries of betrothal, taking home, bridal presents, religious covenant, and the presence of witnesses, to be lawful.

After Nahawendi, the next conspicuous Caraitic doctor was Daniel ben Moses el-Kumassi, supposed to be a younger brother of the above mentioned Benjamin. He flourished from 820 to 860. Only a few specimens of his teaching are cited. Among these is a permission to kill on the Sabbath the paschal lamb, if the day of preparation comes on the Sabbath, but with the reservation that *only one lamb* is to be killed, and this to serve as the sacrifice for all Israel. Contemporary with Daniel was a certain Bochtan, who reckoned the pentecost feast as seven weeks from the barley harvest, without regard to the feast of the passover. More important than these was Judghan of Hamadan in Media, who taught that the law has both an outer and an inner sense, and must be at once literally and allegorically explained; that the soul of man passes from body to body, sometimes losing and sometimes gaining by the change. The Messianic claim which Judghan advanced discredited him with the great body of the sect, and he was regarded by the more sober as a schismatic and a visionary. A

considerable party, nevertheless, continued to observe his ascetic rules, to repeat his prayers, to neglect, according to his injunction, all celebration of the feasts, and to believe that his death was only apparent, and that he would come back to teach and judge the world.

The Messianic fanaticism was carried to still greater extremes by Schadgan, who abrogated not only all feasts, but all laws concerning food and purification, and by Muschka, who preached that war and the sword, as much as prayer and fasting, were needful to bring the deliverance of Israel. Abu Imnan el-Safarani also taught in Persia the doctrine of the separation of God from his creation, of the metempsychosis of the soul, and retribution in this transmigration, as the soul received a higher or lower form in its new body; and left behind him a sect of followers, who for many ages were called Tifisites or Meswites. Another Caraites sect, about the middle of the ninth century, were the Ocharites, so called from two teachers of Ochar on the Tigris, Ismail and Abu Musa. More influential than these were the Baalbekites, a sect which followed the word of Mesui of Baalbec, a strict critic of all violations of the Sabbath. Other Caraites sects of this period were the Margharites, who insisted upon the mission of angels and the work of Jehovah only through agents and subordinates; the Galutites, who strangely likened God to men, and described the size and shape of his bodily organs; the Scharistanites, who maintained a spiritual sense in the scripture and that twenty-four verses of the law were lost; the Irakians, whose heresies were mainly in the construction of the calendar; the Palestinians, to whom the scribe Ezra was a true "son of God," and probably the restorer of the law; the "El Garija," who humanized God, and reckoned the months from the *full* moon; the "El Karija," a half-Samaritan sect, who kept in general assembly their Sabbaths and feasts, and drank out of dried gourds to avoid the risk of impurity; and the Mograbites of Northern Africa, which seem to have been only a Caraites variation of a Moslem sect.

Two Moslem sects, in fact, had large influence upon the progress of Caraitic opinion, and may not be neglected in the notice of its history. These sects are the Mutazilites, who denied corporeal attributes to the Deity, separated him from direct connection with men, and asserted the freedom of human choice, and Ascharites, who asserted the constant action of Deity in human affairs and that all things, both good and evil, are from him.

In the second half of the ninth century the Caraitic doctors, if less influential than those who went before them, were much more numerous. We hear of David ben Boas, the fifth exilarch in Jerusalem since Anan, and of his commentary on the law; of Abu Ali Saadiah, and his son Ali-ha Levi, both exegetical writers; of Joseph ben Bachtani of Bagdad, a famous grammarian, some of whose readings of the law were quite peculiar, especially the explanation of the golden rule: not "thou shalt do the same good to thy neighbor as to thyself," but "thou shalt keep away from him the evil that thou keepest from thyself;" of Moses ben Adonim of Darah in North Africa, a poet as well as an interpreter; of Meborach ben Nathan, who composed laments and elegies for the days of fasting and atonement in Jerusalem; of Judah ben Alan, who wrote not only elegies, but also a grammar and a dictionary; of Abulfarag, whose Arabic commentary on the Pentateuch is celebrated by many writers; and, in Persia and Babylonia, of Ibn Sitha and Samuel Ibn Sakawiah, at once grammarians and philosophers.

The most remarkable Caraites of this period, however, were Eldad ha Dani, the traveller, and Chani-el Balchi, the rationalist. Eldad was a Median, and took his surname "ha Dani" from the tribe of Dan, to which he pretended to belong. His journeys were widely extended, through Arabia, Persia, Egypt, Africa even to Morocco, and everywhere he gathered a store of legends, and inquired into the faith of the people. The traces of him are finally lost in Spain, where his stories were heard and believed by his Jewish

brethren. His most interesting narratives are those which pretend to tell of the remnant of the ten tribes, their laws, their customs, and their condition. According to his statement, Hebrew was a living language in these communities, though they were able also to use the dialects of the many countries through which they were scattered. The scripture, and not the Talmud, was their authoritative book. They had indeed a Talmud of short sentences, in a Hebrew dialect, which had come down directly from Moses and Joshua, but this was without fulness or beauty of style. He identifies the ten tribes with the Banu Musa, that heretical sect mentioned earlier in this paper. Eldad's statements are not to be implicitly received; and it is quite certain that he did not travel as an authorized Caraites missionary. Yet he does not seem to be a deceiver, and the accounts which he gives of the condition of the Israelites in the countries which he visited are doubtless his real impressions. He was rather a sagacious and enterprising observer than a skilled man of letters.

Chawi-el-Balchi, the Caraites freethinker, is pronounced by Fürst to be "the first rationalistic critic of the Bible." In him were brought to their point and focus all the cavils and doubts of the preceding centuries upon the rabbinical teaching. His name El-Balchi is derived from his native city, Balch in Bactria. He flourished after the year 880. He wrote an Arabic translation of the Pentateuch with rationalistic notes, in which he denied that the world was created out of nothing; asserted that Moses availed himself of the ebb tide in crossing the Red sea; said that the miraculous manna was only the sweet exudation of a tree of the desert; that the glow on the face of Moses was only the repulsive sharpness from his emaciated features after forty days of fasting, which the people could not bear to look upon. Another important work of El-Balchi was the *Sepher ha Theanot*, the Book of Exceptions, which asks many strange questions concerning the sacred narratives: Why did God order sacrifices in the temple, when the Deity need not to be

fed? Why should lamps be on the altar, if God needs no light? Why should God have left his angels and come down to sinning men? Ten affirmations of El-Balchi concerning scripture singularly remind us of the controversies of our present time: that what the scripture is, cannot be exactly known; that it contains contradictions and discrepancies; that it has some statements which are irrational, and others clearly incredible; that the whole ritual system is incoherent and evidently not intended to be permanent; that any revelation is improbable, as an unnecessary condescension of Jehovah; that God needs none of those shows and offerings which the laws of worship prescribe; that circumcision is absurd, in seeking to improve man by mutilating him; that it is ridiculous to suppose the ashes of a red heifer to have cleansing power; that the ceremony of the scape goat is impious; and finally, that it is needless cruelty for the priest to wring the neck of an innocent beast because its owner has touched a dead body. The heresies and blasphemies of El-Balchi were severely denounced by the Caraitic writers of his own and succeeding ages; but he is not for this reason to be excluded from the sect, many of whose principles he carried out.

Yet the Caraitism of that early time is not to be regarded as a form of rationalism, or as mainly a criticism and negation of sacred truths. It was a genuine movement of faith, excited and sustained by a religious spirit. Its principles were religious as well as rational, and it sought to know and to show the true sense of the word of God. It respected the voice of the synagogue so far as this kept to the word of the scripture. It was not a protest against revelation, but against the things added to revelation. It sought only the more to justify and to fasten the written commands of God as binding in the practice of men.

In the year 900, the Caraitic sect had become everywhere recognized as the especially Biblical section of the Jewish church. It had communities, organized and flourishing, in all the lands from India and the Caucasus to the centre of



Africa and the Atlantic shore. It had a colony in the Crimea, which has kept its seat to our own day. On the last leaf of an old manuscript of the Bible in Odessa, it is noted that in Kertch, which an ancient tradition calls Sepharad, in Unchat and Sulchat at the foot of mount Agrimisch, and in Kafa, afterwards called Theodosia, in the year 900 communities were living, who had only the scripture, and had never seen the light of rabbinical doctrine. In the year 957, the note goes on to say, missionaries came from Jerusalem with the genuine rabbinite doctrine, which they preached with such effect that not less than two hundred families were converted from Caraimism.

Caraimism reached, in the year 900, its highest point of development. The opposition which it awakened was the means of restoring the rabbinical party and of bringing out champions for the faith of the schools, who were able to reinstate in the reverence of the Jewish people the traditions of the oral law. And Dr. Fürst closes his survey of the early history of Caraimism with a frank acknowledgment of its value as a reviving influence for effete Judaism. "The Caraitic rivalry," he says, "was necessary to arouse rabbinism from its lethargy, to turn it to the grammatical study of the Hebrew tongue and of the sciences of medicine, astronomy, and mathematics. The Caraites broke the torpidity of the scribe interpretations of the law, frightened off the traditionalists from their toying with numbers and letters, put a stop to the expositions of the Midrasch and Haggada, which had lost all creative power. The Midraschic interpretation, so monotonous and yet taken for genuine exegesis, was forced by the influence of Caraimism to become practical and real. Rabbinism was obliged to consent to unfold Judaism after a philosophical method, if it would set aside the reproaches of the Caraites. But for Caraimism also was this age (900) very critical. The endless variety of opinion upon dogmas, the most wayward, arbitrary, and contradictory views in interpretation, called out by the freedom of inquiry in the scripture, the manifold

divisions in the sect, and the tendency to freethinking, — all this must be fatal to the community as soon as any strong foe should rise against Caratism. The champion of rabbinism against Caratism, to whom more than to any other the defeat of the sect as a growing heresy is to be ascribed, was the Egyptian Saadia ben Joseph, who died in 942 as the head of the Jewish school at Sura. From his writings Dr. Fürst has drawn many of the details concerning the sect and the teachers, of whom he was the victorious foe.

The Caraites ceased after this time to have much literary significance. But the communities, which still remain, preserve in their customs, the lost record of Anan and his followers. When Dr. Frankl, in his Eastern journey some eight years since, visited the Caraites synagogues of the *Beni Hamikra* in Constantinople, he was surprised to notice that nearly all the congregation were gathered in the outer court, while the inner room of the synagogue was almost empty. He was told that the reason of this was that some of them had been in contact, on the day before, with a dead body, and that the majority probably had, on that day, "known" their wives, but on account of the Sabbath, had not been able to purify themselves by a bath.