

*LINES OF DEFENCE OF THE BIBLICAL
REVELATION.*

V. THE BIBLE OF THE JEWS.

IF any one glances over a copy of the Rabbinic Bible, he will assuredly be struck by the care and trouble which the Jews have devoted to their Sacred Books. The vocalization and intonation of each word are elaborately marked by a system which also indicates the place of each word in the sentence. At the end of the column peculiarities are noted and registered with an accuracy which should prevent the possibility of alteration or error. Side by side with the Hebrew text is a translation into Aramaic, the language spoken by the Jews when they first left off Hebrew. References are further attached to many of the texts, guiding us to the vast volumes which contain the Tradition, or Talmud, which also claims Divine authority. The works which bear that name ordinarily occupy sixteen folios. Finally the text is surrounded by a series of commentaries which embody the results of grammatical, lexicographical, and archæological studies. Compare this with what the Indians have done for their Vedas, and it will be doubtful whether the advantage rests with the Indians.

But, alas! there is a difference. The Indian can start an idea and the Jew cannot. The whole of the work at which we have glanced—points, accents, Massorah, Talmud, grammar, lexicography—is borrowed; there is scarcely a trace of originality anywhere. The Jews have in religious matters no ideas of their own. This is to our science what the Pythagorean proposition is to trigonometry, or the law of equal pressure to hydrostatics. Abandon that principle and traps of all sorts will ensnare you; keep firmly to it, and the source of every morsel of non-Biblical literature which the Jews possess will become clear.

The relation between Jews and Christians was from the first exceedingly hostile. We find in the Acts of the Apostles that the work of the Christian missionaries is definitely opposed by the Jews in the different towns whither the Apostles travel. Until the fall of Jerusalem the Jews had it in their power to persecute, and they exercised that power with cruelty.¹ The fall of Jerusalem limited that power, but it did not limit their hatred. For the fall of Jerusalem had been foretold by Christ, and that prophecy was preserved in a document composed in the Hebrew of the time. The realization of the prophecy may have caused some conversions, but in most cases it would excite only greater animosity.

When Constantine made Christianity the state religion, the Christians had it in *their* power to persecute,² and probably sporadic cases of persecution of Jews by Christians had occurred before. From the time of the conversion of the Empire this persecution increased in fierceness, and this insane policy laid the seeds of greater disasters than its authors deemed possible. Races of the stuff of the Anglo-Saxons would, under this persecution, have migrated to new lands and founded new nations. The Jews have no such enterprise, and so they wait.

Certain Jewish families had fled from persecution to free Arabia,³ where their descendants adopted the language and the manners of the Arabs. The poems of Samuel of Tayma are incorporated in the ballad book of the Arabs,⁴ and in martial spirit they are second to none in the collection. Not one of his tribe, the author boasts, ever dies in his bed. When taunted with the paucity of its numbers, it replies that the great are few. The death of a chief, however,

¹ Justin, *Dialogue*, § 17.

² Bedjan's *Acta Martyrum*, i. 335.

³ Compare the Armenian historian, Kyrakus (Venice, 1865), p. 33. The *Aghani*, xvi. 94-96, has only fables.

⁴ *Hamasah*, ed. Freytag, p. 49.

leaves another ready to speak the language and do the deeds of the brave.

Mohammed, when starting his calamitous career, was brought into contact with these Arabized Jews, and found them dangerous enemies. He took in many a Christian, and at an early part of his career obtained refuge for his followers in Abyssinia; but he never took in the Jews. Had the Jewish tribes been united, they might have crushed him ere he became powerful; but the Jews invariably divide when outside pressure is relaxed, and Mohammed cut them off in detail. His earliest efforts were thus helped by Christians and impeded by Jews, whence the Koran is favourable to the former and hostile to the latter. But when Islam became a mighty empire, things changed. The Jews were a force which could not hinder Islam, but which had power to help it; whereas the *jihad* was now directed against a powerful Christian state, which was fast becoming aware of its danger. And now, for the persecutors of the Jews too, the day of reckoning had come. Plato well warns the states against being double, *i.e.* against harbouring a class who have an interest in the state being upset; and such an interest any class that is systematically oppressed must have. The Arabian hordes, after defeating the incompetent Christian generals in the field, proceeded to besiege the towns; there were Jews in those towns, and they opened the gates. Thus was the conquest of Asia Minor¹ and of Spain² facilitated. The Jews had taken advantage of the opportunity of making friends with the new power, and the benefit which they had conferred was not forgotten. The terms which Islam granted the Jews were far better than those which they got from Christianity till long after the Reformation. Isolated rulers like the insane Al-Hakim ill-used them terribly;³ but under ordinary

¹ Dionysius of Tell Mahré, ed. Chabot, p. 27, 3.

² Makkari, i. 166, 7, etc.

³ Ibn Iyās (Cairo, 1311 A.H.), i. 52.

governors they enjoyed very tolerable privileges, and on many of them posts of importance and distinction were conferred.

To some unknown Jew Mohammed owed his notion of a Divine revelation, and not a little of the matter of his Koran. The form of it he owed to the old Arabian Prophets, and this combination produced a new idea. This was that the inspiration of a book consisted in its sound. For the quasi-rhyme is characteristic of the Koran, and this cannot be reproduced in another language. Whereas, then, it had long been the custom of Christians to translate their sacred books into the vernaculars of the countries where they proselytized, this could not be done with the Bible of the new religion. Instead of accommodating itself to other nations, other nations had to accommodate themselves to it. Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Spain, Persia, Central Asia, were perforce Arabized.

If the inspiration of a book consist in its sound, some obvious inferences follow. It should be communicated orally, and there should be no variations. In practice these two inferences are hard to combine. The first Caliph wished to combine them, but he had to give way; he allowed the Koran to be compiled. The second inference was drawn by the third Caliph Othman; he caused an official edition to be issued, and had all unofficial copies destroyed. This service cost him his life.

To those whose native language is not Arabic acquaintance with the alphabet is of very moderate help in reading texts. The old Kufi character is puzzling even to experts; the foreigners who had now to use the Koran for devotional purposes could either make nothing of it, or, by mispronouncing it, rendered the inspired word of none effect. The fourth Caliph, Ali, introduced some vowel signs to help the Persians, and possibly thereby won their undying attachment; at least it is difficult to conjecture any other

grounds for it. The whole of the system as developed is of native growth, save one suggestion which may have come from Syrian Christians,¹ there is nothing in it which is not derived from the Arabic alphabet.

Although the art of writing is said to have been encouraged by Mohammed, the use of it appears to have been confined to the Koran, and ephemeral communications such as letters, for rather more than a century after the Flight. Good authorities inform us that the first book composed in Arabic after the Koran was of the year 120 A.H., or later.² Even till late times the Arabic idea of a book was something like "a memoria technica, to be supplemented by oral tradition" rather than a subject for independent study. Everything seems to confirm the statement that has been quoted; and where we meet with conflicting assertions, e.g., that a scholar who died in 124 A.H. used to spend the whole day with his *books*,³ we must regard them as anachronisms, or possibly explain them of ephemeral documents, such as the second Caliph is reported to have composed.⁴ The Jews in the Koran are called the people of the Book, and the idea that a nation should possess only one book probably came from them. If there were other books in Arabic besides the Koran, the Koran would be less holy than the Jewish Bible, for the Jews had no other book. The anecdote which connects the burning of the Alexandrian library with the Caliph Omar may be insufficiently attested, but it does him no injustice. Sprenger accepts a story that the dying Prophet wished to compose a code, but was forbidden by Omar on this ground. At the battle between Ali and Mu'awiyah, the followers of the latter were told to attach their Korans to their lances, and

¹ *i.e.* the place of the vowel *fathah*.

² Ghazzali's *Ihya* (Cairo, 1306 A.H.), i. 65.

³ Ibn Khallikan, i. 572.

⁴ *Muwatta*, ed. Zurkani (Cairo, 1279 A.H.), ii. 375.

hold them up. There being no other books in existence, Ali's followers immediately recognised them. Thus for the 120 years mentioned there was only one Arabic book. All else was transmitted orally.

The needs of a great empire presently proved too much for Omar's theory. Government is possible only where there are rules, and these must be the outcome of experience. The Prophet's practice was naturally taken as the norm of legislation and administration; where that failed, the practice of his successors. The first person who broke the ice is said to have been a certain Ibn Juraij,¹ who compiled a book of Tradition, consisting partly of interpretation of the Koran. Presently authors began to multiply; and while the field of Tradition and Law was naturally the most cultivated, other studies also began to find adherents.

For the language of the Koran was becoming antiquated, and that of the Moslems changing. Presently steps were taken to record the intonation authorized by famous readers, and to note down minute varieties of pronunciation. Those who had anecdotes to tell of the occasions on which certain texts had been "revealed," were not slow to make capital out of them. Hence that small volume, the Koran, by the year 200 of the Hijrah, has become the nucleus of a vast literature, which is constantly on the increase.

When once the idea that the Koran was the only book that might be written had been banished, attempts were made to collect and save every relic of Arabic antiquity. Grammars and dictionaries were compiled, the information being ordinarily derived from Bedouin chiefs, who were supposed to know. Tribal lays were collected and edited; chairs of archæology were founded, at any rate temporarily; and long journeys were undertaken by those who wished to acquire as full a knowledge as possible of the intricacies of

¹ Ghazzali, l.c.

the Arabic language, and of the history which explained the allusions in the old lays and proverbs.

And now let us return to the Jews, enjoying reasonable protection under the ægis of the Caliphate, and in many places privileged above other followers of sacred books owing to the service they had rendered in securing the conquest of Islam.

There were two callings especially which brought them into contact with Christians and Mohammedans. One of these was the wine trade. Although the drinking of wine was forbidden by Mohammed, for many centuries drunkenness was rather encouraged at the Caliph's court. Not only were many famous poets notorious winebibbers, but the praise of wine became one of the recognised subjects of versification. The keepers of places of entertainment of this sort were either Jews or Christians. Abu Nuwas,¹ the chief of the Arabic encomiasts of wine, tells us how he and his companions went into one of these shops.² The *zunnar*, or girdle, told them that the keeper was not a Moslem; "so we thought better of him than he deserved. 'You are a follower of Jesus son of Mary, we presume?' He flushed up, and said, No! He was a Jew, one of those who profess to be your friends, while inwardly they detest you. We asked him his name. 'Samuel,' he replied; 'but I call myself Abu Amr; I have no son named Amr, but the name is an easy one to pronounce.'" Ibrahim of Mausil³ related how, when summoned to Rakkah by Harun al-Rashid, he fell in with a Christian wine dealer, the excellence of whose wine caused him to delay three days at the tavern. The excuse which he gave for his delay thoroughly satisfied the Caliph, who himself summoned the wine dealer, and, after confirming Ibrahim's judgment of his wine, rewarded him richly. These taverns,

¹ Ob. 810 A.D.

² *Divan* (Cairo, 1898 A.D.), p. 273.

³ *Aghani*, v. 12. He died in 828 A.D.

then, were places where Jews, Christians, and Mohammedans met in a friendly manner; and though the meetings sometimes resulted in brutal outrages,¹ it is probable that they often went off harmlessly, and did something to allay the bitterness of fanaticism.

A far more honourable calling which served to conciliate the members of the three religions was that of medicine. The fact of a physician being a foreigner seems often to win him confidence; and during the Caliphate the practising physicians seem regularly to have been Jews or Christians.² Nothing was known of the science of medicine beyond what Hippocrates and the Greek school had discovered; their works were translated by Christians³ into Syriac and Arabic, and perhaps, at an earlier period, into Pehlevi; men of science like Avicenna here and there added an original observation, but this was rare. The great physicians appear to have admitted members of all recognised religions to their courses; and those who compiled medical biographies narrate the lives of the physicians irrespective of their religion. The social intercourse established at these classes led to free discussion of religious topics. A great Christian doctor,⁴ being ridiculed for taking part in the ritual of a Christian Church, waited till some of his pupils had returned from the pilgrimage at Meccah, to ridicule them in turn on the subject of their antics there. Owing to the study of medicine being part of a cyclopædic curriculum, the teaching of it was often associated with the higher education, which included the sciences whence the material for religious metaphysics was drawn. Hence we find a science of comparative religion figuring among those pursued by the Mohammedans. The actual practice, however, as has already been said, appears to have been left

¹ *Aghani*, *passim*.

² Zamakhshari on Sura iii. 137. Ibn Abi Usaibi'ah, *passim*.

³ Rarely by Jews.

⁴ Ibn Abi Usaibi'ah, i. 240.

mainly to Jews and Christians. In the anecdotes of the third Mohammedan century the Jewish doctors speak Persian.¹ By the fourth century they have taken to writing Arabic. As in several other departments of Jewish literature, the most celebrated medical treatises are by Moses Maimonides, contemporary and physician of Saladin; but it is unlikely that they are the best.

We have now to figure the Jews, possessed of their unpointed Bible and no other Hebrew literature,² brought into contact on friendly terms with Mohammedans, when the attention of the literary world is being attracted by the collections of Traditions, the grammatical treatises, the dictionaries, and collections of poetry and archæology which mark the second century of Islam. It is not difficult to reproduce in thought some of the scenes.

A Jewish physician finds a patient engaged in solacing himself with his Koran, and foregoes his fee on condition of being initiated in the mysteries of that volume. He observes that the pronunciation of the words is secured by vowel signs and other marks, and learns that great importance is attached to the style of reading authorized by certain scholars at the capitals. An idea enters his mind that at least as much might be done by the Jews for their Bible, and that it would be wise to record the proper pronunciation of the words before it has more seriously degenerated.³ The wisdom of this suggestion meets with the approval of those to whom he dares to communicate it.⁴

¹ *Aghani*, passim.

² *δευτέρωσις* in Epiphanius, Jerome, etc., is a mistranslation of *Mishnah*, which means "Oral Tradition." That they were not written appears from Epiphanius. The correct translation is *ἀγραφος παράδοσις*. A line of Shammakh (contemporary of Omar I.) is quoted in *Lisan al-Arab*, ix. 46, about the way in which the Jewish doctors at Tayma write Hebrew, but it seems to refer to the writing of charms.

³ Jerome's teacher mispronounced badly.

⁴ That the Jews consciously imitated Mohammedan practices is acknowledged by Maimonides, *Letters* (Amst., 472), p. 18a.

At first the method that occurs to him is to use the vowel signs invented by the Arabs ; but, as it would be highly improper to place these on a copy of the sacred text, his second thought is *to take down the pronunciation of the best readers in Arabic letters*. This is no conjecture ; the British Museum contains a considerable number of Karaite MSS. in which the Hebrew text is transliterated into Arabic and pointed. It is soon seen that the Arabic vowel system is insufficient to represent the variety of the Hebrew vocalization ; so the physician asks one of his Christian colleagues to tell him how the Syrians deal with their Bible. He is shown a Nestorian text ; and the Nestorian system will evidently serve the purpose far better than the Mohammedan. This is in effect adopted wholesale ; a few traces of the Mohammedan system are left ; but while in the " Assyrian " system these are still distinguishable, they are very faint in that which finally prevailed. On the other hand, there is very little that the Nestorian system does not explain at once. The differences are chiefly due to the reasonable desire to avoid the confusion caused in Syriac by the juxtaposition of several different systems of points.

The Karaites, who represent the conservative party among the Jews, adhered to the plan of employing the Arabic script for pointed texts till the end of the tenth century. The inconvenience, however, was so great that they were finally compelled to allow the points to appear on the sacred page.

The earliest Jewish writers¹ whose works we possess are well aware that the vocalization of the Old Testament is a recent achievement. That in the main it is correct need not be doubted ; but the nuances and minutiae which it displays can have no scientific value. The exact colouring

¹ So Seadyah.

of a vowel is not transmitted with accuracy for a period of 1,000 years. The stout volumes in which German writers have collected all these minutiae would have produced a curious sensation on those readers who deliberately invented many of them in order to be able to rival the "various readings" of the Koran.

The process of recording the pronunciation of itself introduced Othman's theory of literal and consonantal inspiration. In the Talmud this theory does not ordinarily appear. On the contrary, the Rabbis correct the text with great license and with extreme infelicity. We are not entitled to regard their corrections as meant otherwise than seriously.

When the services of Mohammed to mankind are reckoned up, it will be remembered that it is due to him that the vocalization of the Hebrew Bible has been preserved.

When the vowels had been fixed, the grammarian could commence operations. Where the Arabic grammars provided guidance, the Hebrew grammarians got on tolerably well; elsewhere they blundered badly. It would seem that even the names of their books were borrowed from those of the Mohammedan doctors.

In Jewish literature of the 11th century¹ Moses is spoken of as "the Apostle" or "the Prophet," without further qualification. How comes Moses to be an Apostle, a name which belongs to the Christians? Clearly, because Mohammed is the Apostle *par excellence* to the Moslems. How then can the Jews dispense with one? The same writer proceeds to enumerate the "sources of law"; they are three: the Book, Consensus of authorities, and Analogy. A member of the rival sect would doubtless have enumerated four, giving Tradition the second place. Those who

¹ *Sefer Ha-Miswoth* (Bodleian MS.). So too R. Bachya, *Chobath ha-Lebaboth* (Warsaw, 1875), ii. 11, 150.

are acquainted with Mohammedan law are very familiar with the source of this discussion. The same four sources are enumerated by Mohammedan lawyers, only with them the question is whether Analogy counts or does not count. The whole of this doctrine of sources of law is therefore borrowed by the Jews from the Moslems. Next we observe that those who recognise Tradition as a source of law ascribe the tradition to Moses. Writers of the tenth century are aghast at the audacity of ascribing the Jewish tradition to Moses.¹ When the Jewish tradition does little else than collect the opinions of doctors who lived well within the Christian era, how can it be by Moses? To this question there is a very practical answer. The Mohammedan tradition goes back to Mohammed; the Jewish tradition cannot be less respectable in its line than the other. Since Moses is to the Jews what Mohammed is to the Moslems, the Talmud must go back to Moses. This argument carried the day.²

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(To be concluded.)

¹ Salmon Ben Jerucham, in Fürst's *Litteraturblatt des Orients*, 1846.

² In the document printed by Gallandius, ii. 329, the Mishnah is said not to be by Moses. Cf. Maimonides, l.c. 19b.