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JOURNAL OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE.

TWENTY-THIRD YEAR—1904—PART I.

Some Early Jewish Bible Criticism.

Annual Presidential Address to the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis.

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THE blank page which many writers upon Jewish history have referred to as existing between the Old Testament and the New is not the only one in the history of the Jews. The discoveries which are being made from day to day are gradually filling out such lacunæ; and we may hope in time to be able to draw a more perfect picture of the literary history of the people. Among the most serious of these lacunæ have been those in connection with the history of the sons of Israel settled in Mohammedan countries during the early period of the ascendancy of Islam. What were the fortunes of those who lived there? What was their relation to the civilizations which had already grown up in these countries? And what was the influence upon them of the new force which had come to dominate the material and spiritual world around them? It is to the various hoards of torn Mss., of bits and scraps of parchment and paper, that we owe the new light shed upon this period; more especially to the Genizah of Cairo, from which we learn so much concerning the spiritual life of the Jews during the period of the Gaonim.

The history of the Bible in the synagogue has still to be written. This is no easy task for the man who undertakes it, as much of the material upon the basis of which the history is to be written has still to be gathered. Yet even the bits of testimony which can now be put together give us a picture somewhat different from that which we are accustomed to see in the handbooks on the subject. In the history of biblical criticism very few words are spared to describe the attitude of early Jewish scholars to the Bible. It is generally believed that that attitude was one of simple faith in the letter of Scripture. The few passages of the Talmudic literature which deal with the canonization of various parts of the Bible, are perhaps

well known to all, and much learning is consumed in dilating upon Baba Batra, p. 14.¹ From these stray passages a leap is at once taken to the Massorites, who are said to have been the first real students of the Bible; and from these to the Grammarians, who discussed philological and grammatical questions in the Bible text. In between comes the Gaon Saadiah, the translator of a great part of the Bible. Abraham b. Meir ibn Ezra is known to the outside world largely because of the quotations from his commentaries to be found in his successor Spinoza. He is a riddle to most scholars, and therefore of much interest. In veiled terms he hinted at his real criticism of the Bible; and he left it to Baruch Spinoza to fashion these criticisms into open speech. For this open speech Baruch suffered at the hands of the synagogue; and it is generally believed that the synagogue effectually prevented, especially in early times, the presentation of any views which might militate against that conception of the Biblical Word which was fostered by the school of Rabbi Akiba. Ibn Ezra usually ends his critical remarks with the behest that "He who understands the difficulty shall keep silence." But free speech was not a dead letter, either outside or inside of the official schools. Though the fact is not generally known, the difficulties which underlie the older and orthodox view of scripture interpretation were quite well understood by the Jewish students of old.

Ibn Ezra and Spinoza are usually accounted the Jewish forerunners of the Christian school of critics founded by Richard Simon and Jean Astruc. But these two sons of the synagogue merely carry on and publish a tradition which can be traced back to the Oriental Jewish schools, and which appears at quite an early date in the Talmudic literature. Many of the difficulties which these acute thinkers found in trying to reconcile the various portions of the Bible with each other, were also observed by those who had been trained in the schools of the Pharisees, though only few traces have survived to our day. The careful and minute study of the Law was bound to bring out the differences and the difficulties which it contained. The spread of such opinions was naturally held back by the reverence conceived for the text, and accordingly we read, "It is forbidden to speak of such and such a thing before an unlearned man" (Ned. 49 a). But we frequently read also such sayings as these: "The Law uses ordinary human language" (Zeb. 108 b *et al.*); "The Law uses

¹ A beginning has been made to collect the scattered references. See M. Eisenstadt, *Ueber Bibelkritik in der talmudischen Literatur*, Berlin, 1894; A. Bragin, *Die freireligiösen Strömungen im alten Judenthume*, Berlin, 1896.

hyperbolic language" (Hull. 90 *b*); and even "The Parashiyot are not in logical order" (Jer. *Sheb.* vi. 1), in answer to questions put by individual scholars. We are, however, not so much concerned with the answer they gave to these and to various other questions; rather with the fact that the questions themselves were asked. Thus, the difficulty in regard to the creation of man, where in one case both male and female are said to be created at one and the same time, while in the other case the creation of woman was separate from that of man, is clearly felt. The same is true in regard to the difficulty of Japheth's being in one case the older brother, and in another case the younger brother of Shem. The problem in regard to the length of time spent by the children of Israel in Egypt, whether 400 or 430 years, is also specifically mentioned; and in fact it is added that the actual time there spent was only 210 years. In like manner the Talmudists call attention to the fact that in Deuteronomy, Aaron is said to have died in Moserah, but according to the account in Numbers, in Hor; that Samson judged in Israel for 40 years (Judges 15³⁰), but in another passage 20 years (16³¹); that David ruled for 40 years (1 Ki. 2¹¹), but according to another account (2 Sam. 5⁵) 40½ years; that Baashah cannot have waged war with Asa in the thirty-sixth year of the latter's reign (2 Ch. 16¹), since he is said in 1 Ki. 16⁸ to have died in the twenty-sixth year of Asa. In the earliest historical attempt of the Jews, the "Seder Olam,"³ all this material is gathered together in an attempt at a chronological reconstruction. One is even surprised to find in Talmudic literature evidences of an endeavor to explain the supernatural in the Bible by natural phenomena. One teacher even goes so far as to declare that the flood did not cover the whole of the inhabited world; another, that the Shekinah never came down from heaven; a third, that Moses and Elijah never ascended thither; and a fourth, that the ravens who are said to have supplied the prophet Elijah with food were not ravens at all, but either two men of the name of Orbim, or inhabitants of a place called Oreb.

I do not say that these represent the official exegesis of the schools; but they show us that another exegesis really existed. Under peculiar circumstances it was bound to crop up with alternating force. Such a revivification of these doubts and questions we meet with in what up till now has been considered an obscure corner of the Jewish world — in Persia. No portion of the history of religion is quite as interesting as is that which comprises the dying years of the Zoroastrian faith. The battle between Aryan

³ See the latest editions by B. Ratner, Wilna, 1897, and by A. Marx, 1903.

and Semite for the religious domination of hither Asia had been a battle to the death. From the earliest periods that we know of, these peoples had stood opposed to each other. The conquest of Babylonia by Elam was always religious as well as political. The gods of Babylon were carried off to Susa; and on the return wave of conquest were carried back again to their homes on the Tigris and the Euphrates. Cyrus, a Mede (or a Persian, if you wish), did indeed conquer Babylon; but he did so by practically becoming a Babylonian in religion, and his Zoroastrian successors worshipped in the temples of the conquered ones. It was to Cyrus and Darius that the Jews owed permission and power to rebuild their ancient shrine. But it was the Judaism that developed from these shrines which drove the Mazdean faith back to its ancient confines. It made its way through Syria into Adiabene, and drew the royal house there away from the Zoroastrian faith.³ When the daughter faith entered upon its realm of conquest it followed the mother in this direction as well. The worship of the Persian Magi at the cradle of the Christian Saviour is a fitting symbol of the subjugation of the Persian religion before the new faith. What the early and middle-age Christian church had to suffer in its fight with Zoroastrianism is clearly seen in the many accounts preserved for us in the Syriac Acts of the Martyrs. Christianity was followed by Islam; and with the battle of Kadisiyyah began the systematic extermination of the pure worship of Ahuramazd. The division of the Mohammedan world into Shiah and Sunnah,⁴ the Mahdi belief which ever and anon threatens to tear the world of Islam apart, are even present-day reflexes of this conflict.

Zoroastrianism was thus at war with the three great products of Semitic religious thought. The part taken by Judaism is not always apparent; but large numbers of Jews must have been present from early times in Persian lands. Carried thither by conquering

³ See Marquardt, *Osteroptische und ostasiatische Streifzüge*, pp. 228 *et seq.*

⁴ This remains true whatever the final judgment may be as to the origin of Shi'ism. Wellhausen has recently tried to show that it has its origin in Judaism; see his "Die religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam" in *Abhand. der Königl. Gesell. der Wiss.*, Göttingen, 1901, v. part 2, p. 90; which has wrongly been denied by Hartmann (*Theol. Lit. Zeit.*, 1902, 10, p. 306), who goes back still farther — to the Babylonian cycle of religious ideas. I. Friedländer, in his inaugural lecture at the University of Strassburg, Nov. 15, 1902, makes Shi'ism a direct outcome of Jewish Messianic preaching. See *Festschrift zum siebenzigsten Geburtstage A. Berliners*. Frankfurt, 1903, pp. 116 *et seq.* Cf. also Goldziher in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, 1903, No. 42, col. 253 b.

kings and in the search of homes and trade, they made their way far inland. The Book of Tobit shows us settlements at Ecbatana and at Rai. The wife of Yezdegert I. (399-420), Shasyan Dokht, was the daughter of the Jewish Resh Geluta.⁸ They settled in far-off Bokhara, where even to-day an important community with an extensive literature still exists, and from Persia penetrated into India and China. They must have continued the quiet and unostentatious propaganda which characterized them in other parts of the world. They, too, suffered direst persecution, and their Holy Book had to bear the brunt of the Zoroastrian attack. Of the Koran the Persian polemicists had to speak in a guarded manner, for the strong arm of the sovereign power threatened reprisals. The Old Testament, however, was sacred to both Jews and Christians; and in attacking it they could give free rein to their love of controversy and of religious discussion. Characteristic of their attitude is the saying reported in their great religious compendium, the *Dinkard*, which in iii. chap. 82 (or 80, ed. Behramji), contains a long exposition in answer to a Jew who had attacked Zoroastrianism on account of the Khetukdas, or marriages between kinsfolk. "All wickedness has been known to arise through the devilish faith of the Jews. Thus, the world becomes better through the Mazdazyanians and gets ruined through the Jewish abomination" (p. 456). "Again, a check should be given to the advancing strength and the attack of the Yahud religion of Rum and the Masahiya religion of Khavar (West) and the Mani religion of Turkestan, lest their wickedness and degradation should enter into our coreligionist friends and the purity of our religion, which is older than that of Rum, should be dimmed" (*Dinkard*, chap. 29, ed. Behramji, i. 24). In the "Shāyast-lā-Shāyast" or "The Proper and the Improper," a sort of Zoroastrian Leviticus, it is said, "of a pure law are we of the good religion—of a vile law are the Zandik, the Christian, the Jew, and others of this sort" (West, *Pahlavi Texts*, Oxford, 1880, i. p. 296). A searching examination was

⁸ See the paper of James Darmesteter, *La Reine Shasyan Dokht*, in *Actes du huitième Congrès des Orientalistes*, ii. pp. 193 et seq. Leiden, 1893. Mention might also be made of the wife of the Exilarch Bostanai, who is said by tradition to have been the daughter of a Persian king, Chosroes II. See *Jewish Encyclopædia*, iii. 330. It is possible that there were early translations of the Scriptures into Pahlavi; see my remarks in *Jewish Encyclopædia*, iii. 190, and compare *Zeit. Hebr. Bibl.* vii. 50. It is interesting to note that some of the fragments of Ben Sira came from Persia. See Schürer, *Gesch. des Jüd. Volkes*, 3d ed. iii. p. 163. A Persian translation of the O. T. is mentioned in the *Dabistan*, tr. by Shea and Troziers, ii. p. 293.

made of the Jewish scriptures, and treatises were composed to show the many contradictions and inconsistencies which they contained. One such in Pahlavi has come down to us, in the Shikand Gumanik Vijar—the “Doubt Dispelling Explanation,” written by one Mardan-Farukh, son of Auramazd-dad, about the year 850. Its chapters 13 and 14 contain a virulent and powerful attack upon the earlier part of the Book of Genesis, down through the history of Abraham, from the pen of such a polemicist.⁶

What the Jewish answer to these attacks was we do not know; but it is curious to see that they were not without effect upon the Jews themselves. The rationalistic criticism which inspired those who had nothing to lose by attacking any part of the Bible must have eaten its way into their communities as well. It is natural that all but the faintest traces of this influence should have been lost or suppressed. One or two such traces have happily been preserved.

There was a Jewish rationalistic Bible critic of that kind in the ninth century in the far-off province of Balkh. His name was Ĥiwi or Ĥayawai.⁷ He was answered by the Caraites Musa al-Zafarani,⁸ and by the great defender of Rabbinical Judaism, Saadiah of the Fayyum. His criticism must have been as violent as that which he had learned from his Persian teachers; and it is no wonder that the adversaries of this man, who advanced two hundred objections to prove the non-divine character of the Bible, added after his name, “May his bones rot” or “May God curse him,” and almost uniformly changed it from al-Balkhi into al-Kalbi. The influence of his Persian surroundings is shown in two of his theological criticisms. “Why,” he asks, “did God leave the pure angels and choose His dwelling-place among men?”—a quotation cited both by Judah ben Barzilai in his commentary to the Sefer Yesirah and by Saadiah.⁹ Now, in the Shikand Gumanik (xv. 31) the

⁶ See James Darmesteter, “Textes Pehlvis relatifs au Judaïsme” in *Revue des Études Juives*, xviii. 1 et seq., xix. 41 et seq.

⁷ The pronunciation is not certain. Hayawai is a form known to the Arabs; see al-Dhababi's *Mushtabih*, ed. de Jong., pp. 92, 182. Saadiah, in his *Kitāb al-Amanāt*, ed. Landauer, p. 37, has חַיְוַי. Al-Ḳirḳisānī has this reading as well as חַיְוַי; see A. Harkavy, *Studien und Mittheilungen*, v. p. 147. Hebrew authorities write the name חַיְוַי.

⁸ See *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vii. 707.

⁹ Judah b. Barzilai, *Commentar zum Sepher Jeairu*, ed. S. J. Halberstam (Berlin, 1885), p. 21. Saadiah mentions a special treatise “Kitab al-Rudd ala' Ĥiwi al-Balkhi”; but whether by himself or by another is uncertain. It is not mentioned in Steinischneider's “Saadia Gaon's arabische Schriften” in *Gedenk-*

same point is made against the Christians. "Why did God leave the holy place, the celestial spheres, and go into the body of a woman?" In another place it is said that Hiwi objected to the teaching of the oneness of God, a point which must often have been made by the Persian polemicists; and which even in much earlier times had been answered by the writer of the second half of Isaiah.

To turn for a moment to Hiwi's exegesis, it is interesting to note that he was in a measure a sort of early Bishop Colenso. From the Talmudic and Midrashic literature he gathered the various inconsistencies and difficulties which individual teachers had mentioned; without, of course, accepting the explanations they offered. Thus he calls attention to the discrepancy between 2 Sam. 24⁹ and 1 Chron. 21⁶, in regard to the census taken by David, which the rabbis and Saadiah explain by calling to aid 1 Chron. 27¹, where the twenty-four thousand men are mentioned who served the king every month; or to the discrepancy between 2 Ki. 8²⁶, where Ahaziah is said to have ascended the throne in his twenty-second year, and 2 Chron. 22², where this is said to have been his forty-second — the rabbis and Saadiah explaining the forty-two to be the number of his mother's years. Quite rationalistically modern is his theory that the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14²⁷) was made possible by the variations between the ebb and flow of the tide, or his explanation that the manna in the wilderness (*ibid.* 16¹³) was nothing supernatural, but the Persian *Tarjabin*; or that Moses' face had become pale (Ex. 34²⁹) by reason of his long fast upon the mountain. Still more interesting is the fact that he seems to have composed some sort of a revised and expurgated text of the Bible. Solomon ben Yeruham, a Caraitic opponent, speaks of his Targum; and a later historian, Abraham ibn David, makes use of the expression, "he invented a Torah" (*בדה מלכו תורה*).¹⁰ There must evidently be something of truth in this report, for Saadiah saw teachers of the young using such a book, or writing from it on the tablets employed in the schoolroom. According to the Gaon, Hiwi's works were known for sixty years after his death.¹¹

What would we not give to-day for a few fragments of this early sceptic and commentator's work, no matter how rabid his attacks may

buch . . . an David Kaufmann (Breslau, 1900), pp. 144 *et seq.* (= *Bibl. Arabico-Judaica*, Frankfurt, 1902, § 31).

¹⁰ Abraham ben David in Neubauer, *Mediaeval Jewish Chronicles*, i. 66.

¹¹ Harkavy, *l.c.* p. 176.

have been? Perhaps some Oriental Genizah may yet satisfy our longing. There must have been others of his kind in the lands of the East; for such things do not crop up in isolated individuals.

A proof of this has been given us by the Cairo Genizah again, in the few pages rescued by Professor Schechter from some such work of an early sceptic, and published in the thirteenth volume of the *Jewish Quarterly Review*.¹² His name is hidden from our sight—his place of birth, his doings; even more completely than are those of the sceptic of Balkh. Twelve pages have escaped the ravages of time; but so completely had the author hidden his identity that more than that number of questions in regard to him have to remain unanswered. Written in the fashion of Arabic literati, in the rhymed prose so often affected in the Gaonic period, the twenty-two sections of his work, with their alphabetic acrostics either direct or in reversed order, are made up almost wholly from the most various parts of the Bible—to one not versed in the text they may well seem nothing more than macaronics. Commencing with the Book of Genesis, he runs right through the Bible, pointing out every possible difficulty and every probable contradiction. One is instinctively reminded, as was Professor Schechter himself at first, of the criticism of Hiwi of Balkh; but chronological difficulties stand in the way, since Bacher has proven that he makes a distinct reference to the Palestinian Gaonate in the eleventh century.¹³

Who was this early critic of the Bible? From references in the fragments which have been preserved we know that he came originally from Tubal; but it is quite uncertain what country he designates by this name. One may hazard a guess that it lay somewhere in the Northeast; considering its connection in Ezekiel with Gog and Magog. In the Midrash, however, Tubal refers to some part of Asia Minor, perhaps Bithynia¹⁴; but it seems likely that our critic uses it in a more general sense. He was only eighteen years old when he set out as a wandering scholasticus to study in the schools of the great teachers. He carried with him his paternal fortune, which he wished to lay at the feet of those who should instruct him. As little as we know whence he came, so little do we know where he finally settled.

¹² *JQR.* xiii. pp. 345 *et seq.*; cf. Bacher, *ibid.* pp. 741 *et seq.*; Poznanski, *ibid.* pp. 747 *et seq.*; Porges, *ibid.* xiv. pp. 129 *et seq.*

¹³ *JQR.* xv. 83.

¹⁴ See Kohut, *Aruch Completum*, i. 149, s.v. תּוּבָל. Curiously enough Tubal is occasionally used for Spain; see Abraham Zakut, *Sefer Yuhasin* (ed. Filipowski), p. 232 b.

He travelled a great distance eastward, encompassing land, sea, and desert (if the word used for the latter is not a play upon the Arabic designation of Mesopotamia¹⁵), and settled in what he terms the Golah. I take this to mean Egypt, which is often designated in this way by contemporary writers, and where at this period a new Gaonate had arisen directly dependent upon Palestine.¹⁶ Here he studied the Bible for many years, both in the original and in an Arabic translation. He himself composed a number of books (perhaps three) dealing directly with the Scriptures. Is the fragment in question a part of one of these books? For the present the question must remain unanswered.

We have in these fragments one of the oldest summaries of Bible difficulties which has come down to us. The author evidently made use of all the helps and aids which were available at his day. He was evidently acquainted with the works of the Massorites of Tiberias; for the fragments open in the midst of a long tirade against them, who, he says, believed they knew the Bible through and through because they had so carefully noted its wording. The uselessness of their mechanical work, upon which they vaunted themselves so much, is clear to him. He has also studied the grammarians, and from them he had gained little that was helpful. He says explicitly that he found no explanation of certain verbal difficulties — why a number of words occur in transposed stems גרע and רגע; מצר and פצר; פרג and פרג; לעג and לעג; מלתעות and מתלעות. He is even in doubt in regard to the *Taw* at the beginning of certain words, whether it is radical or servile. He next turned to the lexicographers, and his search there was equally fruitless; certain expressions and words in the Bible are unintelligible. — What is a *homer* of wheat? What is a *letek*? And he asks the Bible expounders what is the real sense of numerous passages which have troubled commentators from time immemorial. It is evident that he rejected all the explanations hitherto offered. But far more serious than these verbal difficulties are those of a very different character. Our author is no mere criticiser; he is a real critic — not only a literary one, but a religious one also. Brought up probably in the atmosphere of a strict belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and of its verbal inspiration, his study of the Bible had raised doubts in his mind that the wisdom of the schools

¹⁵ Jazirah.

¹⁶ See the references which I have given in *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, v. 60. The Egyptian Gaonate was fashioned after that of Palestine, rather than after that of Babylon; see *JQR.* xv. 82.

could not satisfy. He had become in a measure a sceptic of the truth of the Bible narrative and almost of the God in whose name the prophets spoke. One can almost feel with him as he treads upon the thorny track of his more philosophical exegesis. The difficulties that confronted him in the Bible text may be summarized under three heads.

The first of these comprised the difficulties in regard to the numbers mentioned in the Bible and the various chronological data which it contains. From Genesis to Chronicles he finds such difficulties and discloses them with pitiless logic. I have said before that many of these, if not most of them, were known to the Talmudists; but without mentioning them especially, he evidently rejects as impossible their attempts at harmonizing the evident contradictions. A second class of difficulties are of a more philosophical nature. What had human-kind to eat during the time between Adam and Noah; seeing that the command to eat flesh is not given before Genesis 9^{2, 9}? How was Adam nourished in paradise? Why did he procreate Seth "in His image," and not Cain and Abel? Did he only continue to preserve this "image of God" when he was a hundred and thirty years old? "Did the contradictory actions of the Deity in the Balaam episode presuppose the existence of a second God?" he asks.

The third class of difficulties are, however, far more serious: those which touch upon theological matters. He finds his greatest difficulty in squaring his own views on the Deity with those which seem to result from a study of the Bible. It is especially the dogma of the justice of God that troubles him. Was it right that God prefixed a time for the generations of the flood, "Yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years"; or that he promised Abraham, "So shall be thy seed," but immediately added, "thy descendants shall dwell in a strange land"; that he ordered Balaam to go with the officers of Balak and was then angry at his going? How could a just Deity visit upon Jehu the blood of Jezreel, or commend David through the prophet Nathan and then forbid him to build the temple? Where is the justice of God's killing the wife of Ezekiel in the plague or of telling Hosea to take a wife of doubtful character? How could he give to the children of Israel cities of refuge "for all generations," knowing that they were to go into exile as a punishment for their sins? Are then the words of the writers and the prophets not to be believed? At various places he injects remarks which in his mouth seem like scoff and ridicule. "The word of the Lord must be right in all the Bible";

"How wonderful a counsel is this that the Lord has given"; "Where is the pity of former times, O God, kind and clement, who pardons all sins?" This approaches dangerously near the point at which the author of the "Mistakes of Moses" arrived. And yet, even in his trouble of soul, he never wanders completely away from his ancestral home. His questions remain questions. He does not draw the almost logical conclusions of the difficulties which he has raised. He remains a sceptic, searching for the light and willing to receive it from whatever source it may come.

As such a sceptic simply, he had written his treatise. I cannot believe that he merely intended to ridicule the Massorites by pointing out the real difficulties contained in the Biblical word, as has been suggested by Porges.¹⁷ For that purpose it would not have been necessary for him to disclose so many of what he considered to be the inconsistencies in the Bible. Though we cannot tell what the first leaves, which for the present must be considered lost, may have contained, he would certainly have referred in the further parts of his treatise to these Massorites had he had them only in view. He seems rather to direct his criticism against all the official schools of the Jews of his day, whether Massorites, Talmudists, or Caraites. He inveighs against the Gaon, against the schools in Babylonia, against those in Palestine. His eulogium of the schools and of the power of the Gaon is evidently said in a jeering manner, "Happy the people who are thus!" He calls his brethren those that limp or halt, using a picture taken from the writings of the prophets Micah and Zephaniah; for all of them have no real idea of the difficulties of the Scriptures. He himself must have suffered persecution; for he complains that all those who were stubborn, and were thorns in the sides of the powers that be, were put outside the congregation as if they were lepers. I take it that he probably belonged to one of the many sects of his time who were powerfully influenced by the polemics of Persian religious teachers. I have said that he has undoubted points of contact with the Bible criticism of which Ḥiwi was the most pronounced exponent. This is seen especially, I think, in his remarks concerning the first chapter of Genesis — which were not omitted, or contained in the missing portions, as has been supposed. After a scoffing preamble in which he bids his adversaries answer him from the text of the Bible itself, he says: "Surely the judgments of God are just; let them be examined from one end to the other,

¹⁷ See citation in note 12.

let them give their testimony and justify themselves as God has commanded they should." He then continues with rhetorical irony: "I will not ask thee concerning the Fashioner of the heavens, how and what he did. I know thy intelligence does not equal such a task, for who can wittingly count the heavens, seeing that man is like unto vanity? Darkness and light, how did the Great Workman fashion both, where is the place of darkness, and in what manner was light created in its proper season?" It is just these questions which are discussed at length in the criticism contained in the *Shikand Gumanik*. His polemic also in regard to the inconsistencies in the Biblical laws defining the degrees of prohibited marriages may also have some connection with his Persian home.

Himself, then, a propounder of riddles, he has left us the greatest riddle of all in his own person. He may, however, be taken as a good representative of a type of criticism which at one time must have had followers in the synagogue. Many hundred years separate him from another great Bible critic; and it is not without interest to see that a number of the difficulties cited by our unknown author, reappear in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of Spinoza. It would be interesting to speculate whether we are not here in the presence of an early forerunner of the great pantheist; and we might perhaps find some additional excuse for his criticism of the Bible, if he was, as has been said of Spinoza, "God intoxicated," and desirous of finding his own ideas in the ancient literature of his people. This much at least is certain, that Spinoza's criticism was not developed outside of the influences under which he had been reared; but that it represents a line of thought which had been present in the Jewish schools for centuries before his time.