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THE STUDY OF THE TALMUD IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

AT the close of the period of the Geonim, Jewish literature in its various branches found a congenial home in Spain. Transplanted from Babylon to the Peninsula, it ripened there, and produced noble fruit. Among other pursuits, several scholars set themselves the task of codifying the Jewish Law. Their aim in this work was twofold; first, to set the study of the Talmud free from the casuistic pilpul; and, secondly, to obtain clear and definite decisions (Halacha) requisite for the needs of practical life. To secure right conduct, they justly considered, is the purpose of the Talmud; its controversies are, therefore, at best, not an end, but only means to an end. And indeed the majority of these discussions can only be regarded as ornamental appendages to the Torah. Even in Babylon many urged that the debates recorded in the Talmud had no interest for them, and that definite Halacha was what they needed. Their demands received attention. Some of the greatest scholars in Babylon compiled Digests of Jewish Law, e.g., *Halachot Gedoloth*, *Halachot Pesukoth*. In the eleventh century, when Jewish studies were already firmly established in Spain, this short and straight road became the main thoroughfare for scholars. Some wrote digests of the rules relating to some particular side of practical religious life. To this class of works belongs the הלכות גבורה of R. Samuel ha-Nagid of Cordova, the Halachot of R. Isaac ben Judah ibn Giat, the *Book of the Seasons*, of R. Judah ben Barzillai of Barcelona. Others simply compiled the substance of

the accepted Talmudic teaching, retaining the original phraseology. The most notable example of this form of literary activity is the *Hilchot R. Yitzchak Alfasi*. These methods came into use because they answered to the needs of the times. The publication of Alfasi's work was hailed with delight as offering a relief from the burden of the *Pilpul*. Many eminent scholars of that period made it their business to render it as complete and correct as possible. Especially deserving of credit for their labours in this direction are the Talmudists of Provence. R. Meshullam ben Moses of Bèdres includes in his *Supplement* halachot omitted by Alfasi, and replies to the hostile criticisms on that author's work. Others, like Jonathan ben David Cohen of Lunel, and Isaac Abamari of Marseilles, the author of *Ha-ittur*, wrote commentaries on it. Others again, as, for example, R. Ephraim, Alfasi's pupil, R. Zerachia Halevi, author of the *Maor*, and R. Abraham ben David of Pasquières, furnished it with glosses and critical notes. It must not be supposed that any of those scholars who supplemented, elucidated or criticised Alfasi's work, had the least intention of destroying or diminishing its authority. Their motive was a thoroughly praiseworthy one. It was just because they ungrudgingly recognised its importance that they so zealously laboured to correct its errors, and supply its deficiencies.

This tendency to curtail the Talmud and extract its essence reached its highest stage of development in Maimonides. With the object of facilitating and popularising the study of the Law, he resolved to collect all its precepts, and present them in a clear and concise form, eschewing discursive and prolix discussions. He unreservedly declared, in his *Treatise on the Resurrection*, that if the whole Talmud could have been condensed within the limits of one chapter, he would not have taken up two. Maimonides, always open and straightforward, fearlessly stated that his object in writing a Compendium of the Oral Law was to put on one side everything extraneous to the Halacha. For of what use, he asked, in his letter to Aknin, are Rabbinical discussions, controversies, questions, answers, and subtle distinctions to those who wish to learn their practical duties? These discussions, he thought, were not merely superfluous, but prejudicial.

Pilpulim were, in his opinion, a waste of time. He thoroughly appreciated the fact that it was not everyone who could obtain a knowledge of the requirements of our religion by a study of the Talmud, the method and style of which are too difficult for the generality of readers. The writings of the Geonim, again, were not entirely satisfactory. In his time they were

not yet fully understood, and were but ill-suited for purposes of instruction in the definite Halacha. All these considerations induced him to compile a work, clearly exhibiting the results of the Oral Law; a work which should serve, in the first place, as a text book to be studied without controversy; and, in the second, as a book of reference for those whose office required them to give legal decisions, or who wished to ascertain the law on any subject for themselves. It was to present, in a ready and convenient form, all legal details, and thus render all other works superfluous.

Maimonides' admirable work caused a great stir on its first appearance. It was eagerly and universally studied. Nor did it lack detractors. If hostile critics found fault with its author for omitting to mention the authorities whence he drew his results, they too, however, admitted its important and unprecedented character. If hostile criticism confessed so much, the encomiums of its admirers may be imagined. Most of the Rabbis in Africa and Spain regarded it as the quintessence of the Torah. They studied it, taught from it, felt that it emancipated them from the bondage of pilpul. The author had written to his favourite disciple that he had composed the book, in the first instance, for his own private use, to save himself the trouble of continual researches into the same subjects. He thus hoped to gain the leisure he needed for philosophical studies, which, he thought, would lead him to a knowledge of God and his attributes, the summit of all knowledge. Similar considerations earned for Maimonides the gratitude of his contemporaries. Hispano-Jewish scholars cherished the same interest in secular as in Jewish studies. Linguistics, poetry, rhetoric, philosophy were sedulously cultivated by them. With all these pursuits we can quite understand how they lost, in a large measure, their taste for casuistry. They desired to be relieved from Talmudical disquisitions in order to fulfil their many other intellectual obligations.

In Germany and France, however, a different state of things had always prevailed. Instead of condensing the Talmud, and extracting its essence of Halacha, divested of casuistic wrappage, the French and German scholars added to its already unwieldy bulk a mass of new discussions. For the Talmud was to them the highest and most comprehensive of sciences; its folios contained, they thought, all that was worth knowing. The reason is obvious. Apart from the Talmud, they had absolutely no intellectual occupation. Their surroundings were different from those of their brethren in the Peninsula. There the general community felt an in-

terest in science, which the Jews shared. The inhabitants of France and Germany, on the other hand, were at that time totally ignorant. Their Hebrew fellow-citizens had thus no impulse from without to cultivate secular subjects. Even Hebrew and its grammar were studied scientifically but by few. R. Machir composed a work on Hebrew Roots, called the "Alphabet of R. Machir," often quoted by Rashi; R. Menachem ben Chelbo wrote an exegetical commentary on the Pentateuch, to which Rashi frequently appeals in support of his explanations. Jacob ben Yakar, the aged teacher of Rashi, whom the latter described as his "master in Scripture and Gemara" (Pesachim 111a), seems also to have studied literal Biblical exegesis. Rashi's commentaries often mention R. Joseph Karo, and Rashbam calls him "our colleague." Before Rashi's time, however, we find neither in France nor in Germany any literal expositor of the Scriptures. Rashbam (on Genesis xxxvii. 1) indeed expressly says, "Our predecessors in their piety cultivated Homiletical expositions, and were never trained to search out the real meaning of the text." Rashi also indulges in Hagadic exegesis; but still a large portion of his commentary is scientific, and in accordance with the spirit of the Hebrew language. His method of literal exposition was followed by his grandsons, Rashbam and Rabbenu Tam, unrivalled in France and Germany for their scholarship. The Poetanim may be here omitted, as most of them did not write in accordance with the rules of Hebrew grammar. There was thus an absolute difference between the Spanish style of Talmudic study and that in vogue in the north. The whole range of the early literature of France and Germany does not exhibit the least tone of a desire to systematise Jewish science. It does not contain a single work which aims at the concise statement of the laws that govern Jewish life. All the writings of this school which deal with legal decisions are full of discussions and distinctions, and are bulkier than the Talmud itself. The compilations of R. Asher and Mordecai are apt examples. It is a remarkable and striking fact that at the beginning of the twelfth century a new tendency already showed itself in Spain. Profound and brilliant scholars, steeped in the general culture of their age and country drew, nevertheless, their inspiration in Talmud from the French school, whose method almost entirely superseded that hitherto current. Before the period of Maimonides the literary productions of the northern school were comparatively unknown to Jews of Spain and the East. R. Abraham ben David's *Book of Tradition* contains no mention of Rashi. R. Tam, Rashi's grandson, is indeed named;

but he, too, was known to the writer only by report. That Tosafist's fame was due perhaps to his intimate relations with Provençal and Spanish scholars. Abraham Ibn Ezra, for one, admired him immensely for his Talmudical erudition and general attainments. But the French method gradually gained a footing in Spain, where it found appreciative admirers. Two circumstances contributed to this recognition. The first is to be found in the leading part which the French scholars took from the beginning in the controversy that raged about Maimonides' writings. Their extensive and profound attainments, particularly in Talmud, and their distinguished piety, attracted a throng of Spanish students to their colleges to receive instruction from their lips, and induced many others to read their books. It must, in the second place, be remembered that the period was one of persecution in France as well as in Germany. Many Jewish scholars fled from those countries, and carried their learning and methods of study with them. During the first Crusade we read already of an eminent scholar, Perigors, who left France, settled in Cordova, and became the teacher of R. Isaac ben Baruch Ibn Albalia, a contemporary of Isaac Alfasi. He was followed at intervals by other learned men. Numerous persecutions took place in the thirteenth century, both in France and Germany, particularly about the year 1301, the date of the expulsion of the Jews from the former country. It was at this time that R. Ashur ben Yechiel was forced, on account of some charge, to flee from Germany to Spain, where he settled in Toledo. During this persecution possibly R. Moses de Leon left France, and took up his residence in Spain. The line of communication by which the French method of study entered Spain was Provence, which lies between the two countries. The Provençal scholars were celebrated long before the time of Maimonides. They accepted, developed, and helped to disseminate the French method. Of these it is enough to mention the following:—Zerachia Halevi of Lunel, author of *Haneoroth*, who continually quotes and discusses Rashi's comments, occasionally also those of R. Tam; Abraham ben David, of Pasquières, celebrated for his strictures on Maimonides, habitually uses Rashi, whom he terms the French Rabbi; in his commentary to the *Sifra* he mentions also the new French scholars, the first Tosafists; his father-in-law, Abraham ben David, the ecclesiastical chief of Narbonne and author of "Eschol," quotes the French Rabbis in many places. So, by degrees, their system spread in Provence, and thence found its way into Spain. In the generation after Maimonides most of the Spanish scholars had familiarised themselves with

and adopted it, and may already be regarded as the products of cross influences.

Maimonides' expectations were thus disappointed. When zealots disparaged and attacked his work, he consoled himself, in a letter to Aknin, with the hope that in the next age, when envy and the lust of supremacy would no longer warp men's judgment, it would be universally accepted as the sole guide, and all other writings in the same branch of literature would occupy the attention only of those who have nothing else to do with their time. This confident expectation was not realised. Hatred and jealousy had, in the next generations, already died, but there were still many who took delight in what he had condemned as a waste of time. One half of his prediction, however, came true. Israel acknowledged, as he had anticipated, the value of his work. But the rest of his hope—that his compilation would efface all other halachic literature—was falsified by events. The method of the French scholars continued to flourish, and became popular in Spain itself. Maimonides' Digest, intended by its author to check discussion, furnished food for fresh controversies. No book has called forth more casuistry than the *Yad ha-chazakah* itself.

Towards the close of the twelfth and the commencement of the thirteenth centuries, Judæo-Spanish thought experienced a complete transformation. Foreign elements were taken up in the science of religion. In the fields of religious philosophy the seeds of Cabbala were sown. And among the groves of Talmudic science, planted by former generations of Spanish scholars, offshoots of French Pilpul were set. The first to accept the French system of study was R. Moses ben Nachman (1195-1270). His first teacher was a celebrated Talmudist—R. Jehuda—whose parentage and birthplace are both unknown. He himself tells us, however, that he was a pupil of R. Isaac b. Abraham, a brother of R. Simson of Sens,¹ and, therefore, most probably also a Frenchman. Nachmanides' second teacher was R. Ezra, certainly a native of France.² In several of his writings Nachmanides' quotes the early Tosafists, discusses

¹ Vide Collectanea on *Pesachim*, 117.

² References to R. Ezra will be found in *Tosafoth Baba Bathra* 28a, and to R. Ezra ha-nabi in *Tosafoth Gittin* 88a, and *Tosafoth Shevuoth* 25a. The context in Gittin, where R. Jehuda refutes R. Ezra's explanation, clearly shows that R. Ezra ha-nabi of this Tosafoth is not identical with R. Ezra, teacher of R. Jehudah. R. Azriel is also frequently mentioned in Tosafoth, and must, apparently, have lived long before Nachmanides. R. Ezra and R. Azriel, who, according to Recanate Commentary on the Pentateuch נש"ך ד, were Nachmanides' teachers, were not the Tosafists of those names. As far as I know, they are not mentioned in Nachmanides' Talmudical writings.

their explanations, and speaks of them with great reverence. Once he says,¹ "The French sages have gained over the majority to their views. They are our teachers, who elucidate all obscurities." These terms sufficiently indicate the high esteem in which he held the French masters, to whom he awarded the palm over all their contemporaries, and to whom he thought everything in the law was plain. In another passage,² where he congratulates himself on his explanation of a passage in the Gemara, he writes, "I do not believe that any one has ever explained it in this way, unless it be one of those who know everything and teach everything." Again, "It is impossible that the French scholars, thoroughly versed as they are in Halacha, should not already have said this." This unqualified praise he did not accord indiscriminately to all the French scholars. He knew well enough that the modern representatives of that school, who pushed Pilpul to the verge of absurdity, were not to be put in the same category with their predecessors. Of them he said that "They try to force an elephant to pass through the eye of a needle."³

Nachmanides was modest in the extreme. In the letter which he sent to his son from Jerusalem he exhorts him especially to cultivate humility, "the noblest of all virtues." An examination of his methods in Jewish studies and of the judgments he pronounced exhibits his deep reverence for the earlier authorities, and his dread of dissenting from their views, even when he felt sure they were wrong. Once, it is said, he expressed himself in the following terms: "Though this is not quite clear, yet we shall bow unquestioningly to the judgment of our predecessors."⁴ This extreme deference led to the complete suppression of his own independent views—supported though they might be by sound arguments—in cases where earlier Rabbis, and especially the Geonim, had pronounced a decision, even if no other authorities agreed with them. According to him, "any practice introduced by the Geonim was inviolable."⁵ The same sentiment made him their consistent defender and champion. Yet, without prejudice to our appreciation of Nachmanides' noble virtues, his profound Jewish lore and brilliant secular attainments, we cannot but assert that this blind devotion to his predecessors was a defect. It forced him, sometimes, out of the path of strict truth. His

¹ Introduction to the Treatise on ריני דגרמי.

² Collectanea on *Berachot*, 50a.

³ *Chidushin Jebamot*, 20b.

⁴ *Asifat Zekenim* on Chethuboth, quoting Shilté Ha-giborun.

⁵ Collectanea on *Megilla*, 21b.

first attempt in the character of an apologist was the *Wars of the Lord*, an answer to Zerachia Ha-levi's criticisms on Alfasi. His arguments in this work are often specious, and will, in many parts, not commend themselves to impartial readers. In his introduction he confesses as much: "Though we do not conceal the difficulties and perplexities of the work, still we shall ever defend our great teacher's (Alfasi's) words, even when we are conscious that they are not in entire accord with the plain meaning of the Talmud." In his old age he attacked Maimonides' *Book of the Commandments* because its enumeration of precepts was different to that given in the *Halachot Gedolot*. He tells us in the preface to his Criticism that, throughout his life, he consistently defended the earlier Rabbis, and that his only desire was to establish their authority. This kind of defence, indeed, is "vigorous and rigorous," but not very favourable to impartiality.

It is very difficult, however, to reconcile Nachmanides' modesty with the tone of many of his criticisms. His own productions he frequently praises, and dwells most emphatically on their excellence and truth. Innumerable are the explanations which he thus seals with his own approval. This weakness, common to many Jewish authors, particularly of the later school, and from which all Nachmanides' modesty could not save him, seems hardly consistent with true humility. It is very strange, too, that Nachmanides does not scruple to blame others for this literary vice, of which he was himself so guilty. He quotes, for instance, a boast of R. Abraham ben David that he had never been anticipated in a certain explanation, and sarcastically comments, "The explanation is from Rashi. All that the author adds is the self-praise."¹ And here we come upon the second fault in Nachmanides' character. With all his modesty and piety he could not refrain from using the weapons of sarcasm and denunciation, a sure sign of intolerance against his opponents. Some passages of his rejoinder to the criticisms of the *Maor* are very cruel. We are not aware that this bitterness of tone was at all called for. He himself has frequently to admit that his adversary was right; and in many places, where he attempts a refutation, he is fully aware of the weakness of his argument, and that its sole justification is the desire to defend Alfasi. He himself acknowledges that his work contains numerous expositions of Talmudic passages which are far from giving the true sense, and are propounded because they are convenient for his purpose.

¹ *Collectanea on Berachot*, 50.

Violence of criticism is yet more marked in his controversies with Ibn Ezra. A work of Nachmanides which gained him lasting fame is his Commentary on the Pentateuch. It appears, however, that, among the motives which induced him to undertake it a spirit of rivalry and antagonism towards Ibn Ezra was prominent. His expositions of the Bible had already in Nachmanides' time obtained for its author a high place in literature, both in France and in Spain. R. Tam, of the former country, corresponded with Ibn Ezra, addressing him as his friend, and once wrote to him in the following terms: "I am a slave of Abraham [Ibn Ezra], unto him I do homage." Maimonides also valued Ibn Ezra's writings, and in a letter to his son, says: "Abraham Ibn Ezra's lucidity is like that of the Patriarch, his namesake." Ibn Ezra's commentaries were extremely popular. But certain of his explanations show a disregard to tradition, and on that account displeased the pious Nachmanides, who resolved to discount them and neutralise their effect by a rival commentary. In his preface he remarks: "With Ibn Ezra we shall have an open quarrel, though we entertain for him a secret liking." Of the secret liking there is little evidence, but enough, and too much, of the open quarrel. Nachmanides adds sometimes to his criticism remarks that are highly unbecoming. What can, for instance, be more offensive than the following: "Molten gold should have been poured down his throat." The heinous crime that Ibn Ezra had committed, and which deserved such a dreadful punishment was only this—that he had rejected a Hagadistic and irrational explanation! It must be noted that Nachmanides himself does not accept the explanation, and takes refuge, in his embarrassment, in the mysteries of the Cabbala, the foundation, according to him, of the Torah.¹ And so he repeatedly pours contempt and ridicule on Ibn Ezra.²

For Maimonides, indeed, he did not merely *profess* friendship, but cherished a real love. In an Epistle to the French Rabbis he warmly defended that great luminary against the detractors who had impugned his orthodoxy and disparaged

¹ Commentary on וינש פ'.

² In his commentary to חיי שרה פ' Nachmanides says: "This man boasts of his secrets; may he be stricken dumb, and no longer be able to deride our sages' words." In בשלח פ' Ibn Ezra suggests that the phrase זכרון בספר (Ex. xvii. 14) refers to the "Book of the Wars of the Lord." Nachmanides thereupon comments: "These words are nothing but a pretext." When discussing the meaning of Azazel, he ironically exclaims, "R. Abraham is a faithful confidant, who closely guards the secret. I shall act the tale-bearer, and reveal it." At the end of בחוקותי he warns the reader not to be misled by Ibn Ezra's sophisms.

his scholarship. Yet he, too, suffered more than once from Nachmanides' unmeasured strictures. In his Commentary (Gen. xviii.) he quotes Maimonides' *Guide*, and adds, "This contradicts the Scripture; it must not be believed." On the text (Gen. iv. 3), "And Cain brought an offering," etc., he concludes his remarks with the sentence, "This will close the mouths of those who astound us with the reasons they give for sacrifices." The allusion here is, of course, to Maimonides. As already remarked, the tendency to invective was a radical fault in Nachmanides, too strongly rooted in his nature to be overcome by his humility.

When we come to examine Nachmanides' own character and career, he strikes us as a mass of contradictions. Now he figures as a zealous, fearless, and impartial controversialist; and again, as a partisan of the early authorities. He appreciates and eulogises scientific speculation, while he is, at the same time, a devotee of the Cabbala, the spirit of which is antagonistic to science. A literal expositor of the Scriptures, he is devoted to homiletics and allegory, and expounds texts in the spirit of hagada and mysticism. These inconsistencies become intelligible when we contrast his intellectual character with that of Maimonides. R. Moses ben Nachman, unlike R. Moses ben Maimon, had no fixed rule to guide him in his study of Judaism. The latter's researches clearly exhibit one sure principle, which may be expressed as follows: In practical religion every law and custom must be respected for which a reliable tradition exists; in dogma whatever is confirmed by common sense and consistent with reason should be accepted. But anything that science rejects, reason fails to support, and is destitute of traditional proof, is not entitled to our credence. Even if it be found in the Talmud, it may be regarded as the isolated opinion of an individual. This, however, is not the view of Nachmanides. His timorous faith and simple piety would not permit him to reject anything that the early authorities had said. The very fact of their having said it was, in his eyes, a sufficient ground for its acceptance. And thus, though he liked literal exegesis, he by no means neglected Midrash, which, he thought, contains the germ of tradition. Speaking of Nimrod, he animadverts on Ibn Ezra's literal interpretation of the phrase "a mighty hunter" after the following fashion: "His views do not commend themselves. They are a justification of wicked men. Our Rabbis had a tradition that Nimrod was wicked, and that the phrase 'a mighty hunter' means a 'hunter of men.'" Nachmanides explicitly states that Midrashic and mystical interpretations are traditional. Profuse are his

apologies for deviating from the Rabbinical explanation. "As Rashi," he says, "who is so careful to follow the Hagadic interpretation, also gives the literal sense, we are permitted to do likewise. For there are innumerable ways of explaining the Torah, just as there are many differences of opinion among our sages." We can also understand how, with his extensive range of secular attainments, he cherished so intense a devotion to Cabbala, on its speculative, as well as on its practical sides. In his exposition of the text (Gen. v. 2) he quotes Sherira Gaon on physiognomy and chiromancy. Nachmanides' sermon also contains the following passage quoted by Jellinek in his work on Cabbala, Part II., p. 5. "The Gaon's remarks on the text 'Male and female created he them,' refer to the lines of the hand and the art of palmistry, which is connected with it and is still practised." In his Introduction to his Commentary on the Torah, he touches upon the Cabbalistic combinations of letters. On the text "And Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah" (Gen. iv. 22), he refers to spells by which to conjure up spirits. There are many passages in his writings to the same effect which we might quote, but they would take us beyond our present purpose. Maimonides exclusively directed his attention to the practical conclusions of the Talmud. The object of that work, he considered, was to teach right conduct; it was never, in his opinion, intended to become a subject of study. But Nachmanides, with his casuistical discussions, made a science of the Talmud. Despite his panegyric of the *Mishnah Torah*, we cannot believe that he was satisfied with the underlying motive and purpose of that work, which was to get the gist of the Talmud free from extraneous matter, and so put a stop to Talmudic discussion. All Nachmanides' writings show that his own aim was very different. As we have already stated, he appropriated the French method of study, and transplanted it to Spanish soil.

A Spaniard by birth, in sentiment and disposition, Nachmanides was an exact copy of the French scholars. Naturally keen-witted, he was, like them, an acute casuist and controversialist, most skilful in reconciling contradictions and solving difficulties. We might almost apply to him R. Tam's remark about himself, "Even when two passages positively conflict, I can reconcile them, not to speak of lesser difficulties."¹ Hence his disapproval of new readings. "Emendations of texts are a great sin," he declares.² Naturally a man of

¹ *Sefer ha-Yashar*, 78 b, Ed. Vienna.

² *Chidushim Baba Bathra*, 134 a.

Nachmanides' keen intellect, who did not find it a hard task to elucidate obscurities, reconcile contradictions, and justify existing readings, felt no need of corrected texts. We can well believe what later writers have told us, that when the Tosafot were almost forgotten, in consequence of the numerous persecutions, their place was taken by the *Nqvellae* of Nachmanides, which, indeed, are, in style and spirit, simply a branch of the old Tosafist stock.

Nachmanides, in his extreme piety, also resembled the French scholars. His teacher in Cabbala was, according to some, R. Eleazar of Worms. This, however, is not quite clear, for, in his letter to the French scholars in Maimonides' defence, passages from the *Rokeach* are quoted, in which the author, Eleazar of Worms, is mentioned, but he is not entitled Nachmanides' master. This, however, is quite certain, that his books were studied by the younger scholar. Nachmanides' acknowledged teachers in Cabbala, R. Azriel and R. Ezra, were possibly of French origin.¹ Up to his time there was no scholar in Spain who showed such devotion to this science as Nachmanides. Steeped in its fantasies, he tried by the aid of the rich imagination with which he was endowed to ascend to the mystery of the Deity. In his views and sentiments, Nachmanides thus inclined, as we have seen, to the French rather than to the Spanish school.

His relation to Maimonides is still an unsolved riddle. Maimonides was a man of logical and scientific mind; his religion was guided by reason, he revered the Talmud, and yet was not afraid of declaring some of its dicta to be the isolated opinions of individuals, and therefore baseless and unauthoritative. Maimonides regarded the Pilpul as a thorny maze which it was a sheer waste of time to thread; he derided the Cabbala and condemned its practice as a

¹ It is not quite clear that R. Azriel and R. Ezra, to whom reference has been made in note 2, p. 294, and who were undoubtedly French, are identical with Nachmanides' teachers of the same names. Doubt has also been expressed as to whether R. Azriel and R. Ezra were two individuals or one. Writers, quoting from R. Azriel's works, have called the author R. Ezra. See *Jellinek's Cabbala*, Part I. p. 34, where four passages are pointed out in *Recanate*, in which the two names are confounded. This argument, I must confess, does not quite convince me. The confusion of names certainly proves inaccuracy on the part of the quoter, but not the non-existence of one of the scholars quoted. If anything, it is evidence that they were distinct individuals. Riconti mentions them together, as we have pointed out in note 2, p. 294. In *ש"ך* 'E *Recanate* writes, "He (*i.e.* R. Abraham ben David) handed it down to his son, R. Isaac the blind, . . . who communicated it to his two disciples, one of whom was R. Ezra, the expositor of Canticles, and the other R. Azriel. Their successor was Nachmanides." These, briefly, are my reasons for mentioning both names in the text.

mania;¹ and applied the text "The fool believes everything" to those who formed cabbalistic combinations of letters.² Should we expect him to find a friend in Nachmanides, his exact opposite in all these points? Yet so it was, strange though it may seem. Nachmanides took up Maimonides' cause against his assailants in France generally, and Montpellier in particular, with the energy of a sincere admirer. He defended the *Madda* and the *Moreh*, and emphatically dwelt on the integrity and piety of their author and on his substantial services to the cause of Judaism. Among the Jews of Spain and France, says Nachmanides, never has there arisen Maimonides' equal. The detractors of that great luminary were overwhelmed by him with a flood of indignation. "Out of hatred and malice," he said, "have you published wicked charges, which it is a sin to hear or repeat, much more to record." One who defended Maimonides so zealously must have been a true friend. But in this, as in so many other respects, Nachmanides was inconsistent. Although he refers to Maimonides in terms of exaggerated respect, and declares that the Diaspora had no counterpart to him, yet in another passage he condemns his opinions most strongly. We have already pointed out, more than once, that this was an uncontrollable weakness in Nachmanides' character. We must not infer from the strong disapproval he expressed of some of Maimonides' views that he was his opponent universally. Like all Spaniards, he was proud of his countryman and of his works. The eulogy, in his letter to the French Rabbis, of the greatness of Maimonides' character, of his wisdom, goodness, and religiousness, are not the utterances of an antagonist. But this admiration and esteem notwithstanding, he refused to denounce, as some in Spain and Provence had done, those French scholars who had libelled Maimonides and placed his works in the Index Expurgatorius. The fact is that Nachmanides esteemed the French scholars as highly as he did Maimonides. He revered them as saints on earth. And perhaps it was friendship for them, rather than love for the Spaniard that, prompted his effort to make them change their attitude towards Maimonides and his writings, and his attempt to allay the storm their excommunications had raised. The communities, he felt sure, would pay no heed to their denunciations, and refuse to obey their injunctions. Such an open contempt of their authority Nachmanides regarded as an insult offered to the Torah, for the scholars of France were, in his eyes, princes of Jewish

¹ *Guide of the Perplexed*, Part I., c. 61.

² *Ib.*, 62.

learning, surpassing all their contemporaries in depth of erudition and in acuteness. They taught him their method of Talmudic study, which differed so widely from that of Maimonides and his Spanish predecessors. And he was the first to plant an offshoot of that method on Spanish soil.

R. Meir Halevi Abulafia, of Toledo, an opponent of Maimonides and of his philosophical teaching, was already an adherent of the French school. But his Talmudical studies did not make the same mark as those of Nachmanides; the latter may therefore be styled the leader of the movement.

The French Rabbis were opposed to Maimonides on two grounds. They objected, in the first place, to the *Madda* and *Moreh* on the score of the philosophical views enunciated in those books, particularly to the ideas expressed in them concerning the life hereafter, the resurrection, the eternity of the Cosmos, ideas which Maimonides had asserted were the teaching of Judaism. Such views French ears had never before heard, and French minds could not quite assimilate them. They had been accustomed, in all these matters, to accept literally the pronouncements of the Talmud. Here Nachmanides could not agree with the French school. But they also looked with dislike on Maimonides' plan of condensing the oral law, and giving a digest of its rules without proof or discussion. Their antagonism, on this point, was founded on a radical difference of principle. The view of Maimonides and his Spanish fellow-thinkers was, as we have already said, that the Talmud is a means to an end; a science the study of which should lead to practice. The French School held that the casuistic study of the Talmud was an end in itself. Although the scholars of France, who opposed the great Spaniard, protested that they had nothing against Maimonides the Talmudist, but that their sole quarrel was with Maimonides the philosopher, still there is hardly room for doubt that in their hearts they condemned his halachic labours, the motive and guiding principle of which were so repugnant to them. This dislike R. Simson of Sens did not take the trouble to conceal. In one of his Responsa to R. Meir Halevi,¹ he writes, "No one ought to expend labour on sealed books." This remark certainly refers to Maimonides' *Mishnah Torah*. And thus we have a French scholar, who was regarded in his day as an authority, publishing his conviction that the *Mishnah Torah* of Maimonides is undeserving of serious study. The reason of his dislike is obvious. The aim of the work, which was to put a stop to discussion,

¹ Letters to R. Meir Halevi, p. 131, ed. Par's, 1871.

did not commend itself to him, opposed, as it was, to the method and principle of the French school, then and since.

In the generation after Maimonides a reconciliation took place between the French and Spanish schools, the latter adopting the method of the former. Maimonides' principle had to give way before that of the French scholars.¹ R. Meir Halevi Abulafia, the Spaniard, completely accepted the French mode of study. Of this there is ample evidence in all his writings, and particularly in his criticisms on the Mishnah Torah.

Nachmanides writes in one place, "I was under the necessity of asking R. Meir Halevi"; elsewhere he says, "I consulted R. Meir, the prince of the Levites. 'The lips that answer aright deserve kisses.'"² Nachmanides and Solomon ben Aderet often quote him; and all the excerpts from his works that have come under my notice, as well as his criticisms of Maimonides, convince me that he must have been a keen casuist.

The next prominent Spanish disciple of the French school was R. Jonah of Gerona, a teacher at Toledo. He was a relative of Nachmanides and the favourite disciple of R. Solomon ben Abraham min hahar. He obtained considerable notoriety through his attacks on the *Madda* and *Moreh*. How entirely he had adopted the French system may be seen in the commentary to Alfasi on Berachot, written by one of his disciples, but mainly founded on his teaching.³

The only exception is R. Menachem ben Solomon of the family of Meir, and therefore styled *Ha-meiri*. He states, at

¹ See Dr. M. Güdemann's *History of Culture and Education among the French Jews*, pp. 67, etc.

² *Collectanea Berachot*, ch. 8, *Likutim* Baba Bathra, 33b. The *שׁוֹרֵי* refers to the latter passage in his *Responsa*, No. 392.

³ R. Jonah, of Gerona, was a kinsman of Nachmanides, as appears from the letters in which he bitterly complains of those who cast aspersions on the purity of R. Jonah's family. See *Collection of Letters* edited by Halberstamm, Nos. 9 and 10. In the *Novellae* on Alfasi to Berachot, ascribed to R. Jonah, but really by R. Jonah's pupil, the passage occurs (c. i.), "Such was my teacher Nachmanides' custom, but my master R. Jonah, etc." The phrase "my master" simply and without additions, refers to R. Jonah. The author was also a pupil of Nachmanides, whose explanations he always speaks of as "communicated by my teacher Nachmanides." When the commentary was written, both teachers must have been still living, for in the majority of instances the abbreviation *נ"ר* is added after their names. Where *ל* occurs, it is the addition of a copyist. The discussion about R. Jonah in the *Shem Hagedolim* is superfluous. My notices sufficiently demonstrate that he was a relative of Nachmanides. His *שׁוֹרֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה* and *סִי הִירָאָה* were published several times. There are also *Novellae* by him on Baba Bathra and Sanhedrin, for an account of which see *Shem Hagedolim*. Solomon ben Adereth's *Novellae* also mention a *סִימְנַלַּת סְתָרִים* by this author.

the end of the Introduction to his commentary on Aboth, that his teacher was R. Reuben b. Chayim. The *Shem Hagedolim* is wrong in asserting that he was a pupil of R. Jonah. The *Meiri* composed a work in Alfasi's manner, but in the Hebrew diction of his day, on all the thirty-six treatises of the Babylonian Talmud. In a few of these, the compilation also reproduces the discussion. This is particularly the case with the digest of Betzah, which is intermingled with Pilpul, so that we might suspect it to be by another hand, but for the fact that the author quotes his relative R. Nathaniel ben Meir of Trinquetaille, whose father, R. Meir, he also mentions as a kinsman in the Introduction to his commentary on Aboth. In the opening remarks of the first chapter of his treatise on Betzah, he quotes an explanation from his *בית הברירה* which proves that the two are distinct works. He pays attention to the Hagadoth in many parts of his work, not merely explaining them, but treating them, like Maimonides, as of equal authority with Halacha. The *Meiri* was born 1249, and did not attain old age. Rashba's Responses contain many answers to him. Solomon ben Adereth is mentioned by him in terms of commendation at the end of the Introduction to his exposition of Aboth. Excepting then the *Meiri*, nearly all the Spanish Talmudists of that period abandoned the principle of the early Spaniards, and followed in the footsteps of the French scholars, but the leader in the movement was, undoubtedly, Nachmanides. He was the chief authority of his time, regarded as the personification of Jewish scholarship, and he it was who gave the stamp and direction to the intellectual activity of his countrymen. From his time onward the study of the Talmud assumed another complexion. With what consequences? Novellæ multiplied; casuistry passed all bounds, and gave birth to strange and unheard of decisions. And thus the fond hope in which Maimonides had indulged, that his work, which contained every detail of the Jewish law, would do away with the necessity of consulting other books, was disappointed. His expectations were only in part realised. His *Yad* was, indeed, generally accepted as an authority, but not as an oracle. The French principle prevailed and ousted his method even in Spain. The casuistic method of the *Tosafot* became the beaten road for Talmudists. The multitude of questions, answers, controversies, and discussions produced fresh crops of *dinim*. And these *dinim*, deduced from the argumentation of the French teachers became recognised as laws of Israel. Rabbi Moses ben Nachman was the pioneer who cut the path; and it has been continually widened up to the present day.

That things took this turn and that Maimonides' purpose failed of accomplishment has, by some, been considered a good fortune for Judaism and the Jews. The French method, adopted by Nachmanides and his successors is, they contend, the *sacra via* which has preserved for us the free and unrestricted study of the Talmud. Maimonides wished, they maintain, to impose upon his people those decisions which pleased him, for the Talmud.¹ But how unwarranted and presumptuous is this line of argument! Every intelligent student of Talmudic methodology knows that Maimonides was not the originator of the *מסקנת* (fixed and final practical conclusions). Ever since the close of the Talmud, the Geonim and their successors never swerved from the *מסקנת*. Even if it were true that Maimonides forged these fetters, would it have been such a dreadful calamity to wear them? Was it he who added *dinim*? Does his codex contain a larger number than those in force at present after the French method has triumphed, and the boasted free and unimpeded investigation has done its work? The burdens which Maimonides' final decisions imposed on Judaism and the Jewish people have been multiplied sevenfold by the casuistic method which is termed "Free Investigation of the Talmud." Ever since Maimonides' clear and simple principle was set aside, the Jewish Code has become bulkier; the multitude of *dinim* and *minhagim* has increased inordinately. This is the whole result of the suppression of the principle advocated by Maimonides.

The contention that Maimonides' work was prejudicial to the true interests of Judaism, because of its rigidity, is untenable. "Our sages' words resemble goads, by aid of which the spiritual leaders of every age and country can lead their flocks in the direction which the varying circumstances of time and place render expedient. Maimonides' sentences are fixed nails that cannot be moved from their place. By his decisions he sought to remove all doubts and prevent differences; not in the manner of the Mishnah, which gives conflicting views of rabbis, so that future generations might know both sides, and select either according to the needs of the times."² As if the decisions and compromises of the Talmud were not already fixed in the days of the Geonim and their successors, long before Maimonides' time! Was he the first to say of the Talmud: "One must neither add to nor take from it?" It is absurd to judge Maimonides and his time by the standard of the Mishnah and its age. The standard of the Mishnah was different to that of the *Mishnah Torah*.

¹ S. D. Luzzato, *Kerem Chemed*, Vol. III., p. 66.

² *Ib.*, p. 67.

R. Jehuda the Prince's object was to compile all the Halacha, whether it was universally or only partially accepted, whether it was clear or doubtful. The material was left to the scholars of future generations to elaborate. The Talmudic doctors did their duty and thoroughly threshed out the Mishnah. Their debates again formed the subjects for future discussions. But neither the Mishnah nor the Talmud was intended by the compilers to be binding universally and in every detail. Were their intentions carried out? After the close of the Talmud, every one of its sentences become not a hard "nail," but a living tree with many boughs, each of which drooped under a weight of legal fruit. And now who meant well with Judaism and the Jewish people; Maimonides with his fixed and rigid rules, or those who did not venture to abrogate any one of these, but added another to each rule? The result of this lauded "free" research was not to shift the yoke of the *בטקנה*, but to increase its weight. The wisdom of the "untrammelled investigators" has created a large number of laws of which our ancestors were in happy ignorance.

As we have already explained, the introduction of the French principle of Talmudic study into Spain was due to the influence of Nachmanides. In another department of literature, also, a new order of things arose, in which Nachmanides took a leading part. I refer to the Cabbala, which began to flourish in his days. The Cabbala made a most powerful impression on the minds of Spanish scholars, and modified not only their beliefs, but also their practice of Scriptural and traditional Judaism. It is quite true that in earlier times esoteric studies already existed. Combinations of the letters of the Divine names, amulets, charms, and the belief in their efficacy, had obtained wide currency among learned and simple. References to the employment of sacred names, to Ezekiel's vision, the cosmogony, spiritual sanctuaries, angelology, etc., will be found in the Talmud and Midrashim. These subjects engaged the minds of men in very early times indeed.¹ The same tendency continued, without interruption, during the period of the early Geonim. There were many in Babylon who made use of the sacred names of the Deity, practised exorcisms, put faith in Cabbalistic thaumaturgy, and were fully convinced that Elijah would appear to those individuals who had penetrated into the mystery of the Deity and the "secrets of the Law." According to Hai Gaon, these beliefs were particularly luxuriant in Sura, near Babylon, where the Jews learnt them from the Chaldeans.² In Spain,

¹ דור דור ודורשיו part I., chap. 23.

² *Ibid* IV., *passim*.

however, as one result of diffused scientific culture, such creeds and practices were the exception rather than the rule. Eminent scientists looked with disfavour on this pseudoscience, and discredited its pretensions. Before the time of Nachmanides and his teachers, we do not find in the Peninsula proficient Cabbalists or students brooding on the mysteries of the universe in the fashion of the Cabbalists of the twelfth century. In the whole of ancient Jewish literature there is no book that has given so much occasion for Cabbalistic interpretation as the *Sepher Yetzirah*, but it is only later commentators who have explained it in this spirit. Earlier Spanish writers followed their usual scientific methods in its exposition. Nachmanides was the first Spaniard who was at the same time a Cabbalistic hermeneutist of the book. Dr. Jellinek, it is true, maintains that R. Azriel, the teacher of Nachmanides, was the author of the commentary on the *Sepher Yetzirah*, usually ascribed to the latter.¹ Dr. Jellinek, however, expresses a different opinion in other parts of his work, and, therefore, appears to be uncertain on the subject. After a careful examination of the commentary, I fail to find the least reason for doubting that Nachmanides was the author. Its brief and enigmatic style suggests comparison with Nachmanides' Cabbalistic comments in his exposition of the Pentateuch. As early as the second generation after his death the work was attributed to Nachmanides, and it is hardly likely that scholars were even then mistaken as to the authorship.² Maimonides explicitly discredited the Cabbalists and condemned the folly of those who write amulets. "Such things," he says, "no sane person will listen to, far less believe."³ He warns his readers against their use, terms those mad "who turn the ineffable name into folly."⁴ "Their combinations are nothing but falsehood, the invention of fools."⁵ How is it that these beliefs became rampant since Nachmanides' time? We are irresistibly driven to the conclusion that, as he reintroduced the old methods of Talmudic studies, so he re-established the science of Cabbala. Nachmanides, the most prominent figure in his age and country, learned in science,

¹ *Cabbala* II., p. 34, but contrast p. 40, note 5 and I., p. 10.

² The introduction to the *מערכת אלהים*, assigned to R. Perez Ha-cohen, teacher of רנב"ר (not R. Perez the Tosafist), quotes Nachmanides on the *Sepher Yetzirah* for a definition of יסור. The quotation is to be found word for word in the commentary on the *Yetzirah*, ch. i., p. 4. Another quotation in the fifth chapter of the *מערכת אלהים* I have been unable to find in our incomplete editions of the commentary.

³ *Guide*, c. 61

⁴ *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Sotah, ch. ii.

⁵ *Guide*, Part I., c. 62.

almost unrivalled in his knowledge of Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, philosophy, mathematics, medicine, and other branches of knowledge, esteemed Cabbala, studied it deeply, and styled it the way of truth. How could contemporary scholars help being influenced by so illustrious an example? And, indeed, during his life, and still more in the next generation, Cabbala grew in favour among the Spaniards. This was no chance coincidence. Soon after Nachmanides had set the example, the composition and publication of works on Cabbala began, and continued till the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Nachmanides himself, it seems, disapproved of this publicity. In the introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch, he warns the reader not to attempt to guess at the meaning of the allusions to the "Secrets of the Law," scattered here and there in that work. And in all his Cabbalistic expositions, he conceals far more than he reveals. Again and again he remarks that it is not well to dilate on such topics in books. But what weight could such a recommendation carry when he himself failed to act up to it? The comparative length or brevity of his mystical comments is immaterial. If anything, their brevity only served to stimulate curiosity as to their meaning. The wish for reticence that he professed was not respected. R. Isaac of Acco, said to have been one of his disciples, elucidated the mystical passages of his commentaries in a book called *Meirot Enayim*. R. Shem Tob ben R. Abraham Gaon wrote a work entitled *Keter Shem Tob*, with the same intent.¹ The second generation after Nachmanides witnessed the apogee of Cabbala in Spain. Authors devoted special attention to the subject. Then appeared the *Zohar*, ascribed to Simeon ben Yochai, the Tanaite. Critics are agreed that this authorship is spurious. The real writer was a Spanish Cabbalist, who lived after Nachmanides. Many more works of the same class were then produced in Spain.² The desire

¹ *Mazref la-chochmah*, 34 a.

² The *Zohar* is attributed by some, e.g. Yuchasin, ed. Amsterdam, and Yuchasin ha-shalem, to Moses de Leon. Dr. Jellinek takes the same view, in support of which he collates from the *Zohar* and De Leon's acknowledged writings many passages similar in style and sentiment. *Landauer*, quoted by Jellinek, Part I., attributes it to Abraham Abulafia, on whom Solomon ben Aderet makes some remarks in his *Responses* No. 548, which are quoted by Judah Chayat at the end of the preface to his commentary on *סערכת אלהות*, and requoted in *לכסף*, 31 b. The Spanish birth of the author, however, is undisputed. I will only call attention to Chayat's statement that he compiled from the scattered fragments the larger portion of the work, whence it would appear that as late as the end of the fifteenth century the *Zohar* was not yet extant in complete form. See *Jellinek*, Part I., sections iii. and vi. It is strange, by the way, that this critic does not notice this passage. These two scholars, De Leon and Abulafia, composed numerous

to make a mystery of the science no longer existed in its original strength. On the contrary, writers flung the doors of the Cabbala wide open to all who desired to penetrate into its secrets. A pupil of one of Nachmanides' disciples, the celebrated Cabbalist R. Judah ben Abraham ibn Gikitalia, wrote the *Gates of Light* as an introduction for beginners. He further laid down general rules and principles to facilitate the study of this science. R. Bachya ben Asher of Saragossa wrote a commentary on the Pentateuch almost entirely Cabbalistic, but in a style so simple as to make it easily understood. In course of time, Cabbala became very popular, and the reluctance to discuss it in public completely vanished. Some wrote books expressly for the class of scholars, students, and the perplexed in faith, "to teach them the secrets of religion, and open the eyes of the blind." By revealing these inner mysteries, they hoped "to bring back those who had strayed from the fold."¹ The whole purpose with which the *Zohar* was written was to unfold to all students of Jewish literature those mysteries which were formerly the exclusive possession of a few individuals. The blame meted out in several passages of the book to those who neglected this science, and the praise bestowed on those who cultivated it sedulously were not without their effect. Gradually the custom of introducing Cabbala into public discourses spread in Spain. These *Darshanim* are severely handled in the *Mazref-la-chochmah*, 12a. "Who gave them the liberty," asks the author, "to discuss and invent mysteries? These men have done a good deal of harm to Cabbala." Even if *Darshanim* here does not exactly refer to the preachers, still there is ample evidence in their published writings to show that they introduced mysteries and arithmetical combinations into their popular discourses. This is not the place to enter into a detailed exposition of this branch of knowledge. We only wish to call attention to the fact that its popular diffusion brought about a transformation in religion. Foreign conceptions were taken up into Judaism. Not only its dogmas but also its practice became largely modified through Cabbalistic influences. A multitude of new rules and customs came into existence, for the origin of which

works on Cabbala. Worthy of mention also is R. Menachem Recanate, author of a Cabbalistic Commentary on the Pentateuch, and *ס' טעמי המצוות*, most of which is Cabbalistic; the *מערכת אלהות*, ascribed to R. Perez Ha-cohen; R. Joseph Ibn Gikitalia, who, according to *Jellinek*, Part II., No. 8, lived a generation after Nachmanides, and composed many Cabbalistic works, already quoted in the essay, and to be quoted in it hereafter, which helped to disseminate the knowledge of this esoteric science. Yuchasin wrongly gives a late date to Joseph Ibn Gikitalia.

¹ Gikitalia's *Ginath Egoz*, end of Part II.

we must look to Cabbalistic writings like the *Zohar*. Thence they found their way into Halachic literature, and became accepted as part of Judaism. Particularly was this the case with the rules relating to Divine Service and the Ritual. Many prayers, that are almost destitute of meaning, have been adopted into the liturgy, because they were composed by Cabbalists, and are now regarded with as much reverence as if they had been instituted by the men of the Great Synagogue. The sum of the foregoing is that from the time of Nachmanides Cabbala attained a large measure of popularity, and, in time, universal acceptance, which was, in many respects, prejudicial to the purity of the Jewish Law, and fathered upon it many laws that have no real authority.

Codists have derived innumerable new rules from the Talmudic writings of Nachmanides. His *Novellae* were a favourite study of all succeeding teachers. His reasoning is, indeed, most profound, and his idiom very exact. Some who composed treatises on Talmudic methodology supply rules for the interpretation of the writings of Nachmanides.¹ His decisions, if the testimony of these compilers is trustworthy, were implicitly relied on throughout Catalonia, as if they had come from Moses on Sinai.² Of these, only a portion is extant. In completion of Alfasi's work, he wrote Digests of Nedarim and Berachot, which his disciples named *Pirké Halachot*.³ His *Torat ha-adam* on the laws of mourning and *Niddah* has also kept its place. The first part is full of casuistic discussion; the second, however, gives, in Maimonides' style, clear and precise rules, as also excerpts from older authorities. His *Novellae* on Gittin also contain conclusions on דיני דגרמי. These are not practical decisions, but only the final results of preceding arguments. One of his disciples, R. Solomon ben Adereth, frequently uses the phrase, "and thus my master wrote in the *Halachot*."⁴ Hence the inference might be drawn that Nachmanides wrote other Halachic works besides those just noted. It is more probable, however, that the allusion here is not to Nachmanides, but to his chief teacher, R. Jonah, whom he, indeed, mentions by name in another passage.⁵ The numerous Halachoth that we have from Nachmanides' pen sufficiently show that he adopted the French system in this department of study. His remarks on Cabbala are nothing else than mysterious hints. He expressly warns readers not to indulge in guesses as to their meaning,

¹ Shem Hagedolim on Nachmanides.

² Questions and Responses of ריב"ש, 415.

³ *Novellae* of א"ב"ב on Nedarim, 20b.

⁵ *Ib.* 8a.

⁴ *Novellae Sabbath*, 21b.

for they could only be correctly interpreted by a Cabbalist to a Cabbalist. (Introduction to the commentary on the Pentateuch.) His exposition of the *Sepher Yetzirah* (the Book of Creation) is also full of subtle allusions. Because he was careful not to reveal the "secrets of the Law," it must not, therefore, be hastily concluded that he wrote none of the Cabbalistic literature attributed to him. With all his scruples, he could not keep Cabbalistic mysteries out of his commentary on the Pentateuch. And if he wrote these Cabbalistic notes, why not Cabbalistic works? The commentary on the *Sefer Yetzirah* already passed under his name two generations after his death. A close and careful scrutiny is, however, necessary to determine whether any work, of which Nachmanides is said to be the author, has been rightly attributed to him. His style in this subject is not as crabbed as that of his successors became under the influence of the *Zohar*. And before we pronounce the commentary on the *Ten Sefirot*,¹ or the exposition of the *Tetragrammaton*² to be really by him, as they are said to be, we must compare their style with that of our author's certain Cabbalistic writings. The authenticity of the treatise on *Faith and Trust*, hitherto uniformly attributed to him, has recently been questioned.³ These details

¹ MS. Munich.

² Catalogue *Ozar Ha Sefarim* s.v. פירוש.

³ On the authorship of *Faith and Trust*, Dr. Jellinek quotes Landauer's opinion, expressed in the *Orient*, that it is erroneously ascribed to Nachmanides. Jellinek agrees with Landauer, and gives the following reasons: (1) Nachmanides carefully avoided writing on Cabbala. (2) The exposition of the Decalogue in the *Faith and Trust* is different from that given in the Commentary on the Pentateuch. (3) Recanate, who quotes the whole book in his exposition of the Torah, nowhere names Nachmanides as the author. These arguments are, in my opinion, inconclusive. In Recanate's טעמי המצות, Precept 45, the remark occurs, "The mystery of the staves" (Gen. xxx.) has been explained by "the great teacher." This term always refers in the literature of that time to Nachmanides, who is so quoted by Rashba, Bachya, and Ribba. The explanation of the "secret of the rods" is found in *Faith and Trust* (c. xv.), which, we thus see, Recanate ascribed to Nachmanides.

A passage in this work (c. ix.) beginning כבר אמרו רז"ל אין מקרא אומר שיש לתורה ע' פנים אין אחד פשוטו, and ending ויצא מדי פשוטו, is to be found, word for word, in Nachmanides' criticism of מהם מכחיש הפשט, the מצות, c. v. Against these considerations must be set the discrepancies between the views expressed in this book and those contained in the Commentary on the Pentateuch. One of these I quote. On Exodus xxiii. 20, "Behold I send an angel before thee, etc.," *Faith and Trust* comments, "The angel here promised is the one appointed for the blotting out of sin, the seraph of Isaiah's vision." In the Pentateuch *ad locum* it is explained as, "The מלאך הנואל, in whom is the Divine name."

do not affect the main point, of which there can be no doubt, viz., that Nachmanides' example exercised a considerable influence on the general development of Cabbala. His example found eager imitators among his disciples. And, without exaggeration, we may say that it was he who gave the impulse to the mighty revolution which Cabbala wrought in the theory and practice of Judaism.

Nachmanides' innovations were carried far and wide by his disciples, and the majority of his Spanish successors. He was a shining light to his followers, who revered him almost as an angel. In the devoted attachment of his disciples, he had his reward during his lifetime. A bitter drop in his cup was the conversion to Christianity of one of his most promising pupils, Abner, who became a relentless foe to his former coreligionists. Abner wrote many works on Jews and Judaism. Of these the *Wars of the Lord* and an *Offering of Zeal* may be named. According to Leo Modena, who read the latter book, its author must have been a profound philosopher, logician, and Talmudist. The Italian scholar was strongly inclined to burn the book, for fear that it might fall into the hands of one who might find its arguments unanswerable, and be misled by them. We shall not be wrong, perhaps, in asserting that philosophy and Cabbala shattered at that time the faith of many Talmudists. Philosophy led to atheism, Cabbala to Christianity. From the ten *Sefiroth* to the Trinity the transition was easy. There is a legend that this apostate disciple became a violent persecutor of his master, and embittered his life.¹ That period was a troubled one to all Jews in Spain. The Christian priests harassed them with their arguments, and forced them into controversies on the respective merits of their creeds. Nachmanides took part in a debate of this character before Alfonso, of which he published a record, still extant, under the title of *מלחמת חובה*. Episodes of this kind, and the circumstances of the Jews in Spain were, perhaps, one reason why the Spanish rabbis regarded the manners and ways of their countrymen with disfavour, and envied the simple piety of

¹ The *שלשלת הקבלה* (*Chain of Tradition*) gives an ample account of Abner, and legends about him, some of which may, possibly, be true. The introduction of Reggio to Leo de Modena's *Bechinat ha-Cabbalah* (the *Examination of Tradition*) dilates (p. 12) on Abner's story, and states that he wrote a polemical work called *Milchamot Hashem* against R. Joseph Kimchi's book with the same title, and another called *Minchat Kenaot*, to which Leo de Modena makes some allusion in his preface, quoted by Reggio in his *Prolegomena*. In the *קול סכל*, "The Fool's Voice," a section of the *Bechinat ha-Kabalah*, p. 400, excerpts from Abner's book are ridiculed.

the Jews of France and Germany, who neither knew nor cared for philosophy and its methods, but devoted themselves instead with heart and soul to the exclusive study of the Torah. Hence the adoption of their method of study by Nachmanides and the pious Jews of that time. Nachmanides openly and honestly declared that his ardent desire was to induce the younger generation entirely to renounce all scientific pursuits, and give themselves up to the study of the written and oral laws, which are the core of our being, and the instruments of our elevation.¹ His object was not achieved all at once. There were still many scholars and students who regarded Pilpul in the French fashion, as only a waste of time. Even after Nachmanides' death, some questioned the use of Talmudic casuistry, and thought it would be better to learn the legal decisions, so as to have time to become proficient in other sciences. Yet the new casuistic method in Halachic studies which Nachmanides introduced into Spain, gradually became paramount. His disciples extended and amplified it, and it has been the accepted method ever since.

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¹ *Iggeroth Kena'oth*, p. 10, ed. Leipsic.
