

The Religious Teachings
of
Samuel David Luzzatto (Shadal)

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Rabbi at the Hebrew Union College.

by
David Sherman

Cincinnati, Ohio

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I. Luzzatto and the Zeitgeist

1. Biographica

Luzzatto was a child of the Romantic Reaction and at the same time the most thoroughly Jewish in spirit of that group which founded the Science of Judaism. He appears to us as a man of innumerable contradictions and curious paradoxes. A poetical spirit of no mean degree, he delved into the antiquities of ~~Samaritan~~ and Syria. A profound scholar with a broad philosophical perspective, he revelled in the picayune minutiae of the Targum. With a heart of surpassing tenderness and all encompassing sympathy, he spent his life in quarrels and contentions, daring to wage war even with the great - Maimonides and ibn Ezra, Krochmal and Rapaport, Zunz and Geiger and Jost. And withal there shines through his life a singleness of purpose which sets off in sharp contrast the multi-colored facets and the infinite complexities of Jewish life.

The son of Ezekial Luzzatto, a poor though learned wood-turner, ~~Samuel David~~ ^{Samuel David} was born in Trieste, August 22, 1800. His early childhood was spent amid the tempest and the turmoil of the Napoleonic wars. As a bar-mitzvah gift the English warships in the harbor bombarded the city, pouring their shell almost into his home. But the wars do not seem to have disturbed him much. Except for this incident there is scarcely any mention of them in his writings.¹ At the age of three he was sent to the heder to learn Hebrew. At four and a half he entered the modernized Talmud Torah where he studied Hebrew, Latin, Italian, French, German, history, geography, and arithmetic. He

showed such marked proficiency that he was able to enter the highest class at the age of nine.² In 1811 he began to write a Hebrew grammar in Italian, translated the life of Aesop from Italian into Hebrew, and wrote some exegetical notes on the Pentateuch. At this time an unpublished commentary on the Targum fell into his hands, starting him off on the studies which finally culminated in his critical treatise on the Targum of Onkelos (Ohev Gar)³. At the age of thirteen he left school and continued his studies, largely by himself. It was while reading the Ein Yaakov that he came to the conclusion that the vowels and the cantillation marks of the Talmud were post-Talmudic, and that the Zohar which refers to them must necessarily be of later composition.⁴ He debated the matter with his father who was a Kabbalist, and won him over. In his letters to his cousin, Lolli, he announced these discoveries. Lolli turned the letters over to SI. Reggio who attempted to answer the boy, only to admit himself worsted. Reggio visited Luzzatto in 1818, and there was laid the basis for a lasting and fruitful friendship.

The poetic muse came to Luzzatto at an early age. At fifteen he was already the author of a volume of thirty seven Hebrew poems - Kinnor Naim . His first public literary appearance was in August 24, 1817. On that date the crown prince, Ferdinand of Austria visited Trieste. In honor of this visit the Jewish community had commissioned Luzzatto to write a laudatory poem in Italian. The poem was well received and the young poet's name appeared in the newspapers for the first time.⁵ All his life Luzzatto remained a staunch monarchist.

In keeping with the Talmudical injunction that every man should teach his son a trade, Ezekiel began to insist that his son learn a trade. But it was impossible to tear the boy away from his books. unwilling to force him his father did, however, extract from him a written testimonial to the effect that he had vainly urged the trade upon him. And this document he took with him to the grave as evidence of having discharged his duty. The only way the young man could become self-sustaining was through tutoring. But owing to his absorption in study and the lack of contact with children of his own age, he had developed a shyness which made it hard for him to secure pupils.⁶

Despite his other preoccupations, philosophy and logic soon came under his purview. Writing in the Magid⁷ he tells us that he was charmed by the "straight-forward simplicity, clarity, and honesty" of Locke which he contrasts with the "transcendental" systems of Plato and Leibnitz. He liked Condillac too, but soon made the discovery that Condillac erred in applying the analytical method of mathematics to the other sciences. This method he regarded as especially unsuitable for theology. At the age of seventeen he conceived the plan for a theological treatise with the object of strengthening religion. Indeed, he completed twenty-four chapters of this Torah Nidreshet, but gave it up to pursue his grammatical studies in the Hebrew language.⁸

When the Bikkure Haithim began to appear in 1825 Luzzatto was among the first contributors. These writings won for him consider-

able renown among the literati. Hence when the rabbinical college in Padua was opened in 1829, in response to the imperial decree that all Austrian rabbis be philosophically trained, Luzzatto was appointed to the faculty. Besides him there was one other teacher, Hillel de la Torre who taught the oral law - Talmud and Posekim. Luzzatto taught the written law (Biblical exegesis, history, grammar, Jewish literature and theology. The institution was always in poor financial circumstances. The salaries of the teachers were modest, often in arrears and sometimes altogether wanting. And were it not for the generosity of his friend, Gabriel Trieste, Luzzatto and his children would have known the pinch of hunger.

But all in all the year 1829 was a great year for Luzzatto. In addition to his appointment it saw the appearance of his book on the Targum - Ohev Ger, and the birth of his eldest son whom he named Philoxemus after the book. His happiness, however, was short-lived. His wife, the daughter of his former teacher, Raphael Segré, whom he had married in 1826, was stricken with melancholia upon the death of a child in 1833. She died in 1841, and in 1842 he married her younger sister. In 1854 he was prostrated by the death of his son, Philoxemus, who had already attained distinction for his brilliant oriental studies. He survived him only eleven short years and died erev Yom Kippur, September 29, 1865.⁹

2. The Romantic Reaction.

Luzzatto was a man of marked individuality. But even his

individuality can be understood only in terms of the conflicting thought currents of his age. The nineteenth century ushered in a violent reaction against the rationalism of the eighteenth century, which had grown out of the empiricism of Bacon, Locke, and Hume, on the one hand and the intellectualism of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz on the other.¹⁰ The chief literary exponent of this rationalism was Voltaire. Its religious expression was Deism which, while subscribing to belief in God as a sort of first cause, regarded Moses and the prophets as imposters, the miracles as fakes, and the Scriptures as forgeries. Indeed, the notion was quite widespread that religion was born when the first knave - ^{the} priest - met the first fool. Man, too, was taken down from his high eminence and reduced to the level of a mere automaton.¹¹

But the revolt was not slow in coming. Rousseau smashed the Homme Machine of La Mettrie, and sounded the call "back to nature". Life, he showed, was richer and far more complex than a narrow intellectualism would admit; that our emotional nature is possessed of a primacy and an authority which reason dare not transcend. He told the Academy of Dijon that man was born good only to be corrupted by civilization.¹²

Kant followed up the attack by sharply defining the limitations of human reason. With his antinomies he cut the ground from beneath the Deists by showing that it was impossible to prove metaphysically either the existence or the non-existence of the first cause. Theology was thus taken out of the realm of pure reason and grounded upon the moral certainty of practical reason. God, freedom, immortality, now

became matters of intuition and faith, rather than subjects for cogitation and argument.¹³

Just as Rousseau's Nouvelle Heloise paved the way for Goethe's Werther and Chateaubriand's Atala, so Kant opened the sluice-gates for Schleiermacher's rehabilitation of faith and Chateaubriand's Genie du Christianisme. The romantic revival in literature found its counterpart in the religious rebirth which spurned philosophy as a disintegrating force and turned to faith for its organizing power.¹⁴ But Rousseau's exaltation of the feelings and intuitions of the natural man were soon deflected from their original revolutionary course. It was his purpose to break the shackles of tradition and to reconstruct social institutions according to the native needs of man. But if one takes intuition rather than reason as the criterion of truth, it is easy to channel these intuitions into the traditional molds and to feel that what is is right, that the traditional is natural and that changes are unnatural. This was the course pursued by de Maistre, "the great panegyrist of the executioner and auto da fe."¹⁵

But just as western Europe was preparing to give up rationalism for a brief fiesta with faith and scripture, the Jewish scholars of Germany began to take up the cudgels for rationalism, with all its dire consequences of higher criticism and reform. This, Klausner sneeringly remarks, is in keeping with the "tendency of Jews to take up the ideas of others long after they have given them up."¹⁶ Such a statement is as unfair as it is evidence of a basic misunder-

standing. German Jewry was then going through the throes of a heartbreaking struggle for emancipation. The brief tantalizing taste of political equality held out to them during the French occupation was brutally snatched from their hands after the Congress of Vienna. Their brief acquaintance with freedom made their degradation all the more galling.

The liberating ideas of the Revolution derived as much from the eighteenth century rationalistic attack upon authoritarianism as from the romantic flood let loose by Rousseau. And when the Jews of Germany saw the romantic current harnessed to the wheels of reaction, and witnessed the coalescence of romantic piety with the cynical callousness of a reactionary court,¹⁷ they had no choice but to seek their champions in the camp of the rationalists. Rationalism had not died out in Europe; and though in disfavor at the court, it continued as the bulwark of popular liberties. The new pietism struck the Jews much as it did that great rationalistic theologian of the nineteenth century, David F. Straus, as a "sausage of which the meat is orthodoxy, the fat is Schleiermacher, the spice, Hegel."¹⁸ Rationalism with these Jewish scholars was not merely a matter of intellectual conviction - and it was that too - but it was above all a weapon in the fight for emancipation. Their problems and their interests were predominantly political rather than theological.

In Italy we find a Jewry politically less mature than in Germany. Hence the problem of emancipation does not loom up with the same compelling force. After the Congress of Vienna, Italian Jewry

settled down quietly and patiently to bear as best they could the repressive measures of Metternich. The ravages of rationalism had not been especially marked - indeed Italian Jewry had a centuries-long tradition of mysticism and Kabalistic piety. Luzzatto's father was himself a Kabalist, and there had been strong Kabalistic traditions in the family. The brother of his great grandfather was none other than the renowned Kabalist Moses Haim Luzzatto.

The early home life of the boy was distinguished by a spirit of tranquil piety. He depicts for us the touchingly beautiful scene of his mother sitting by the fireside in the evenings reading Psalms, which Ezekiel, her husband, would translate for her into Italian. His parents used to donate at least one tenth of their meager income to charity. And they were very well loved and honored by their poor Christian neighbors.¹⁹

Of the period of his early spiritual wrestlings and religious questionings Luzzatto tells the following naive little anecdote. His father had built a house on top of a hill. Every morning the lad would watch the sun climb up over the hill. When overcome by all sorts of philosophic doubts he used to say to himself "there is no God, there is no God". But no sooner did he see the dawn spread its scarlet flush over sky and trees as the sun came creeping over the hill than his heart would rebel against his scepticism and extort the exclamation "There is a God!".²⁰

Temperament and home influence had conspired to make of

Luzzatto a Rousseauist even before he had heard the name. Hence he can tell us in all sincerity that as soon as he read Rousseau's strictures on the artificial formalism and intellectualism of Voltaire and the encyclopedists he felt welling up within him a profound spiritual agreement. But just as Chateaubriand had taken Rousseau's natural man and enshrouded him with a cloak of Catholic piety in the Atala,²¹ so Luzzatto immediately envisaged the natural man as the equivalent of the pious Jew. He was now able to contrast the artless simplicity and naturalness of the truth loving sages of the Mishna and the Talmud with the artificiality and dissimulation of the Greek and Latin writers. No philosopher or scholar can approach our sages, he declares, in their naturalness, honesty, disinterestedness, and unselfishness. Because their teachings come from the heart and their love of righteousness is no mere manner of speaking as with other writers.²²

His reading of Locke had led him to distrust the notion of innate ideas. But just as Locke had softened to admit the authority of moral conviction alongside of sense impression, Luzzatto, too, raised his *לֵב לֵב*, or soul sense, to a parity with sense impression. Indeed, everybody knows good and evil instinctively when he sees it.²³ This moral certainty has been implanted by nature in the normal human consciousness, that we may be guided by our inner feelings. Consequently such fundamental truths of Jewish teaching, as God, Providence, and Immortality need no other authority than the inner assurance of their validity. Locke regards the testimony

of Scripture as of the highest certainty. Our faith in it leaves no room for hesitation or doubt. But he makes one proviso - we must be sure that it is really a divine revelation. Luzzatto has no doubt on that score.²⁴ He is assured of that because we have learned it from an authentic tradition, handed down by a chain of trustworthy persons. Moreover, he differs from Mendelssohn, who regards these Jewish teachings but as arbitrary injunctions of the divine will. For him the Torah, including its ceremonial aspects, constitutes an ethical Weltanschauung deeply grounded in human nature.²⁵ Indeed, we may say of Luzzatto's attitude to the Torah what Georg Brandes said of Chateaubriand's Genie du Christianisme: "(He) did not endeavor to prove that Christianity is excellent because it comes from God, but that it comes from God because it is excellent."²⁶ The teachings of the Torah are therefore validated by their consonance with human nature.

In the light of these ideas, Luzzatto was now able to interpret Judaism as the product of heart and feeling. Its purpose is not to spread the eternal truths of a divine metaphysic, but rather to teach righteousness and ethical conduct. The chief concern now is with character rather than with philosophy. The highest type of man is no longer the intellectual, the scholar, or the philosopher, but the average pious Jew who believes in the Torah and follows its teachings. For this reason Luzzatto gives preference to the simple scholars of medieval Germany and France - Rashi and Rabbenu Tam and Rabbenu Gershom, rather than to Maimonides and Ibn Ezra and their disciples.²⁷ He overlooks no opportunity therefore to set up his

own father - good and pious man - as the symbol of the simple Jew, against Mendelssohn the intellectual Jew whose decent instincts have been corrupted by reason of his acquaintance with philosophy.²⁸ And when he wishes to discredit the Kabala he does not consider it enough to record the opposition of Saadia, Halevy, Maimonides, and ibn Ezra but must needs drag in the testimony of Benjamin of Tudela - because as a good and pious Jew with no philosophical tendencies, Benjamin alone is competent to voice the authoritative sentiments of the Jewish spirit.²⁹ But it was with Jehudah Halevy that Luzzatto felt the greatest degree of spiritual kinship. For like Luzzatto himself, the poet philosopher, who regarded Israel as the heart of the nations, grounded his philosophy on tradition and the burning faith in his heart.³⁰

II. The Jewish Spirit

In men like Halevy and Rashi Luzzatto finds the highest flowering of the Jewish spirit. Indeed, what pleases him most in their writings is the forthrightness and sincerity of utterance which leaves no room for evasion or misunderstanding. And he goes on to make the claim that this same spirit of high seriousness and honesty has always characterized Jewish literature, since the time of Moses. Hence his quarrel with ibn Ezra is based primarily upon the insincerity and the evasive ambiguity of his writings which, having no Jewish models, he must have learned from the Greeks.³¹ The touchstone of a writer's integrity and worth depends therefore upon the extent to which he

is imbued with the Jewish spirit and the manner in which he aligns himself with the main stream of Jewish tradition. All that flows down the main currents of Jewish thought is good and praiseworthy. They who would introduce foreign notions and extraneous elements bring nothing but dross. Luzzatto dares to attack even maimonides for trying to deflect Jewish thought into the narrow Aristotelian channels. And he assails the Kabalists most bitterly for trying to smuggle Greek contraband into Judaism.

Despite his love and admiration for the Spanish-Jewish poets and scholars he cannot forgive their lapses into Graeco-Arabic philosophy. His defense of the German paytanim is characteristic. The verse of Kalir, Rabbi Simeon, and Rabbenu Gershom may not roll so neatly on the tongue, they may lack the elegance and polish of the Spaniards, but they exceed them in depth of feeling and imaginative power, and feeling after all is the test of poetry.³²

1. Practical Judaism.

This Jewish spirit is an intensely practical one and its chief concern, as Luzzatto points out with clear historical insight, has always been ethical, never metaphysical. The aim of Jewish teaching therefore is the ethical perfection of man and the world - insofar as these are attainable.³³ The faithful Jew believes action is more important than words, and that the study of Torah without good works is godless. Luzzatto then contrasts the faithful Jew with the philosopher, who regards study as the ultimate of human perfection. "And in time of trouble" - he poses the question naively -

"to which of these two would you turn?"³⁴

Like Mendels^fohn - though he arrived at his ideas independently - Luzzatto sees Judaism as a matter of action rather than belief. It is a supernaturally revealed legislation, not a revelation of any universal intellectual truths.³⁵ And the Torah presents not a theoretical system but a practical means for the attainment of ethical perfection. "God is not concerned with religion because of its truth", he wrote to Jost in 1840, "but because of its value in improving morals. Hence it need not be altogether true."³⁶ Luzzatto knows no absolute nor theoretical truths - only practical truths. What is good for us is true, what is bad is false.³⁷

This pragmatic point of view was more or less forced on him by Kant. The knowledge that reason could never apprehend the "numina" but must confine itself to the ambit marked out by the realm of "phenomena" left him with a profound disrespect for all philosophy. In 1862 he wrote to Senior Sachs:³⁸ "Metaphysical speculation being beyond the powers of the human mind, results in mere nonsense and endless bickerings which are foreign to the spirit of Judaism." And as a mere youth he had written in his Torah Nidreset (Chapter VII):³⁹ "Science though pre-eminent in its own domain of sense impression is bound to lead us astray in matters that are beyond the reach of the senses." Hence, "we must exclude from its purview all such matters as do not come to us through the senses - the doctrine of the soul, angels, one God etc." Nor did he find the geometric method of Spinoza any better suited

to the investigation of religious truth. For the perfect circles, squares and triangles that were used in geometry are but arbitrary constructs of the imagination. Geometry therefore resolves itself into a mere analysis of terms already given without anything new being added. Such a method is inapplicable outside of the self-limited realm of mathematics.⁴⁰

2. Atticism versus Judaism.

Our metaphysical befuddlement he traces back to the Hellenic principle, or as he calls it "Atticism". In a little French essay,⁴¹ Luzzatto contrasts Atticism with Judaism. Western civilization, he asserts, has sprung from two contending principles - the culture of Greece and the culture of Israel. From Greece we learn philosophy, science, and aesthetics, which are basic to our intellectual development. From Israel we learn religion, ethics, and altruism, - the love of goodness and righteousness.

Greek culture may increase, expand, and undergo changes with the increase of knowledge. But Judaism is unalterable; its teachings deeply rooted in human nature cannot change. The feelings of the heart, to be sure, may sometimes become corrupted; for goodness is innate in man and evil must be acquired.

Because of its ever changing aspects, Greek culture appears more attractive to the eye than Judaism whose ethical teachings are always the same. This explains the victory of Greek culture over Judaism. But civilization cannot get along without harking back ever so often to the basic intuitions of goodness and right doing. And in as much as Greek culture produces no such feelings,

human nature must revolt now and then against the intellect.

The Greek and the Jewish principles are engaged in a perpetual warfare which can end only in the complete subjugation of the one to the other. But this is impossible. For the Greek principle will not put a curb to its ever expanding desires, and Judaism being unalterable cannot be expected to change in any respect. Indeed, Judaism cannot change even its apparently external form, such as the notion of supernatural revelation or the amoral commandments (ceremonial law) . Because if it were to do any of these things Judaism would lose its authority and governance over our human feelings - which authority is dependent upon the faith in its divine origin and its changelessness.

In another place⁴² Luzzatto identifies Atticism with the Stoics, whom he calls "the more sincere of the Greek philosophers." He decries their asceticism as putting an unnatural burden upon man. They despised the virtues of the body, its pleasures and desires; they regard^d the sense of touch as shameful, and look^d upon eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse as animal matters. They look^d down upon the masses as incapable of perfection. For them the soul purpose of man was knowledge, and above all knowledge of things spiritual.

The Jewish thinkers on the other hand did not degrade the body and its pleasures. The purpose of man was not so much to know God as to do His will. And the will of God was not the study of science or philosophy, but rather justice and truth and peace. And if they honored study, it was the study of the Torah which

leads to action. As an example of this healthy-minded humanism Saadia even went so far as to rank the Zaddik above the angels. Herein lies the essential difference between Jewish and Greek thought.

So wide is the hiatus between the Jewish mind and the Greek, that the Mishnic authorities whose traditions we follow (not those of Philo and the Essenes) were never influenced by Greek ideas. Not that the rabbis were unfamiliar with this ^{body of} thought, but having tested it they found it unacceptable. The Pardes in rabbinic literature is the Garden of Epicurus. Elisha ben Abuya cut down the fruit, ate of them, and ended up a heretic. Ben Azai and ben Zoma heard their arguments and spent their lives in arduous study so that they might combat these heretical doctrines, with the result that one ruined his health and died while the other lost his mind.⁴³

Luzzatto was insistent that every ^{thing} good came from Judaism, everything bad from Atticism. In 1847 he wrote to Steinschneider:⁴⁴ "If Christianity proclaims the teachings of the Torah and the prophets i t presents them in the filthy garments of Greece and Rome, which are responsible for all the evil in the world." He was no less harsh in his judgment of those Jews who left the mainstream of historical Judaism to coquette with Atticism. On no other basis is it possible to account for his violent hatred of Spinoza, his loathing for ^{Abraham} ibn Ezra, his dogged opposition to Maimonides, his occasional slurs upon Mendelsohn, and his persistent attacks on Judaeo-Arabic philosophy and the Kabala. But on the other hand he felt the warm glow of spiritual kinship with those who found their place in the main

current of Jewish teaching.⁴⁵

3. Judaism as an historical process.

Despite his emphasis upon the immutability of the basic teachings of Judaism, Luzzatto recognizes with Halevy that Judaism is an historical religion. For the growth of its ever expanding tradition is intimately bound up with the evolution of the Jewish people. With a boundless enthusiasm for all that is noble and beautiful in Hebrew poetry and in Judaism seen as the product of an ethical and historical development, he set himself to stir up a national rejuvenescence. It was his aim to restore our medieval treasures and at the same time to purge them of the dross they had accumulated. Moreover, the idea of evolution had begun to seize hold of his mind just as it had done with the other best minds of the nineteenth century before Darwin. He felt justified therefore in ignoring some of the earlier authorities and in honoring only those who manifest the true Jewish spirit which teaches love for humanity and devotion to Israel and Torah. Inasmuch as Judaism from Moses to Rashi puts its emphasis upon purity of heart the writings of the Spanish-Jewish scholars must be purged of the dross of Greek intellectualism.⁴⁶

On the idea of progress, however, Luzzatto's stand is rather ambiguous. As Klausner points out,⁴⁷ he seems to be torn between two loyalties. As a disciple of Halevy he accepts Judaism as the product of an evolutionary process. As a disciple of Rousseau he must condemn progress and yearn for the good old days. Like Rousseau he

must contend that science and civilization have not made man any better or happier. In an Italian letter⁴⁸ he writes: "Does man improve ? Not at all ! Man becomes worse, never better. Man perfects his tools - his instruments for weaving, printing, building, agriculture; he improves everything - his carriages, his ships, his roads, his laws - everything - but never himself. Man will always remain man." In 1858 he wrote to Silverman in a similar vein;⁴⁹ "Progress means only technical advance and the increase of knowledge; but human nature remains as heretofore. If anything it is becoming worse. owing to the spread of egoism as fostered by Spinoza."

Luzzatto thus follows the curve of reaction which transformed romanticism from a revolutionary ferment into an apologia for the established order, and the traditional forms. Hence, when in 1850 he heard that Jost had joined the peace society he wrote him a letter of reproof.⁵⁰ Therein he affirms his belief in the monarchical system, and no less so in the indispensability of war. "It is Utopian to speak of universal peace." In 1820, however, Luzzatto seems to have been more kindly disposed to the possibilities of human progress. In his commentary to Kohelet he attacks the concept of a static universe which is not susceptible to improvement by our human powers. It must have been foisted upon the author he maintains by the Greek philosophers who had a notion of four immutable elements which defied all human efforts to change them.⁵¹

In any event, if the path to moral progress is barred it is

the fault of Greek intellectualism, which weakens our moral fibre despite every effort of Judaism to strengthen it. Judaism as an historical process goes back not to Moses but to Abraham. It should therefore be known as Abrahamism rather than Mosaism. Did not Moses himself speak of "Jahveh, the God of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exodus III, 15).

Just what the exact tenets of this patriarchal religion were we do not know, because they were so well known at the time that Moses felt no need to specify. But we may gather from his account of their history that they believed in one God, creator of heaven and earth, who rewards those who fear him and punishes evil-doers. Moreover, Abraham commands his household to follow the way of the Lord, which is justice and righteousness (Genesis XVIII, 19) . And inasmuch as Abraham was the first to reject idolatry he was chosen to be the father of a priest-people who are to be separated from the other nations of the world, in order that they might bring the light of God's truth to all men. Thus Judaism starts out from its very beginnings with the doctrines of one God, Providence, and Retribution and Israel the chosen people.⁵²

The unique contribution of Moses was to transform the family religion of the patriarchs into the national religion of Israel. In order to meet the needs of this new national group which was about to set up housekeeping in the promised land, Moses found it necessary to supplement the religion of the patriarchs with the

more detailed descriptions of the Torah. The purpose of the Torah was twofold: (1) To make for ethical living; (2) To preserve religion, lest Israel fall into the ways of their neighbors.⁵³

The sacrifices which figure so prominently in the Torah had originally been free-will offerings whose purpose was to obtain divine favor. The Torah, however, uses them as an educational device to impress upon the popular mind the majesty of God, in order that the people might follow more readily in the way of righteousness.⁵⁴

The Torah of Moses was expanded and elaborated in succeeding generations by the teachings of the prophets and Hagiographa. With the completion of the canon ended the early creative period of Hebrew literature which was characterized by spontaneity and divine inspiration. Then ensued the later non-creative and dependent period whose authors based their writings upon the authority of the ancients. All that these later writers did was to comment upon the former and to elucidate their teachings.⁵⁵

With the passage of time, however, the conditions and demands of life changed apace. The Soferim, who came after the canonization of the twenty-four sacred books, found it necessary to enact new regulations in keeping with the needs of the times. They did so by virtue of the powers invested in them by the Torah as the spiritual authorities of their generation and as the guardians of the traditions handed down from Sinai. At first they did not bother to find

supports for their enactments in the letter of the Torah. But when the Sadducees began to question their authorities they found it necessary to invent new methods of exegesis in order to buttress their new laws with Scripture. In order to bring Scripture in line with current notions and with the immediate needs of the day they often had to take the text out of its context and to misinterpret it. Indeed, Onkelos often mistranslates certain passages for the same reason. But among themselves, the Soferim and the rabbis after them understood that the real meaning of the Torah was literal, and that these were only supports or asmaktot.⁵⁶

These new regulations or halakot were not recorded in writing, but were preserved in the form of oral traditions handed down from teacher to student. Conflicting opinions were also preserved orally alongside of the accepted halakot so that later generations might investigate and change the halachah in accordance with the needs of the day.⁵⁷ The multiplication of halakot coupled with the ^{re/}current dispersions gave rise to such confusions that Rabbi Jehudah Hanasi, out of fear that there be a thousand different Toras instead of one "shut the gate that had been opened till his day." Collecting and sifting the various halakot he gave them definitive form and arrangement in his Mishna. But the Mishna, too, records minority opinions alongside those of the majority so that later generations might choose between them the one most suitable for the needs of the day.⁵⁸

Luzzatto takes violent exception to Geiger's theory that Jehudah Hanasi recorded the Mishna in writing, and that other Tanaim

such as Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiba also wrote out their mishnas. It is Luzzatto's contention that not only the Mishna but also the Talmud were not written down but were compiled and transmitted orally until the chaotic conditions of the Saboraim made their recording in writing imperative for their preservation.⁵⁹ Not only do we have the statements of the Talmudic authorities to this effect, but the mnemonic devices scattered through the Talmud are ample evidence of the fact that the Talmud was preserved orally and that these were used as aids to memory.⁶⁰

Moreover, neither the Mishna nor the Talmud were originally intended by their compilers to be written down as codes of law fixed for all generations. Otherwise the rabbis would never have included items of mere contemporaneous interest which have no bearing on law or ethic or even on faith. The homiletic whimsicalities, the vagaries of opinion, the snatches of conversation that we find there could have been included only by later generations who were sufficiently far removed from the original, to treasure and cherish every word of the masters.⁶¹ Surely the Mishnic and Talmudic authorities never dreamed that their table talk was destined to be written down. On the contrary, "since they were not philosophers but true scholars they did not record their opinions in writing, in order that later authorities might make improvements and changes in accordance with the needs of time and place." Nevertheless, Luzzatto insists that there are certain basic principles in the Mishna and in the Talmud, indeed, in all rabbinic literature, which are not subject to

revocation or change. "That is what I call Judaism."⁶²

Geiger, however, was not the first to advance the opinion that Jehudah Hanasi wrote the Mishna and Rav Ashi wrote the Talmud. Maimonides had preceded Geiger in this, and Geiger makes use of his authority. Luzzatto links this view of Maimonides with his desire to make of Judaism a fixed system of thought. It is for this reason that Maimonides wishes us to believe that Jehudah Hanasi and Rav Ashi had settled all disputes fixed the halakot irrevocably.⁶³ This static conception of halachah is abhorrent to Luzzatto. But Maimonides has gone even further in his violation of the dynamic spirit of the oral law. In the Mishnah Torah he records the various halakot of the Talmud as obiter dicta. And, as if there were no room for argument or change, he records none of the conflicting opinions as was done in the Mishna itself. It is against this attempt of Maimonides to suppress differences of opinion and to produce a false sense of uniformity, that Rabed justly protests. And had it not been for Rabed, both Mishna and Talmud might have been forgotten, and all of us subjected to the authority of Maimonides and Aristotle with no appeal beyond them.⁶⁴

After the redaction of the Talmud, the Sinaitic traditions, upon the authority of which the halakot were based, were forgotten in the confusion of the times, because they were not written down. Hence the asmaktot which had hitherto been used merely as supports now became all important. The disciples of Anan, lacking in all

historical insight and true understanding of the oral law revolted against it. They took the name of Karaites out of devotion to the Bible. But the Karaites themselves found it necessary to interpret the Bible, but lacking an oral tradition they fell into all sorts of pitfalls and extravagances. The Sadducees before them had also rejected the oral tradition; but with them it was not so much out of love for Torah as for their espousal of Atticism in opposition to Judaism. With the destruction of the Temple, however, the Sadducees disappeared from the Jewish scene.⁶⁵

III. Contra Philosophia, Spinoza and Kabala.

1. Contra Philosophia.

More dangerous to Judaism than the anti-traditionalism of the Karaites was the influx of Atticism into Jewish thought through the vehicle of Graeco-Arabic philosophy. In working out his dichotomy between Judaism and Atticism, Luzzatto finds philosophy unalterably opposed to Judaism. Whereas philosophy attempts to adjust man's inner self with his outer environment, Judaism is primarily concerned with the relationship between God and man, Judaism is concerned with overt ethical action, philosophy with eternal truths arrived at speculatively. These two can have nothing in common. Hence it is absurd to attempt a reconciliation between them. Luzzatto sets up a dualism of ethic and intellect, of heart and mind, which cannot

be transcended. Indeed he is convinced that every attempt to harmonize these two conflicting principles must lead to religious heterodoxy and ethical perversion.⁶⁶

Maimonides as the great reconciler of these irreconcilables must therefore bear the full brunt of Luzzatto's frontal attack. The attempt to bring the Torah into agreement with Aristotle is evidence of his inability to see Judaism in its true historical perspective; and the result is a modification of Judaism by means of his fixed halakot and articles of faith.⁶⁷ Maimonides is guilty of fostering two great doctrinal heresies both of which are corollaries of his notion of the soul. First is his denial of the orthodox belief in Resurrection. He substituted for the resurrection of the body the immortality of the soul - and even that is reserved for the philosopher alone. Whereas Judaism looks forward to a bodily resurrection and individual reward and punishment he holds out only a sort of union of the soul with God in which our individuality is lost, moreover since the type of perfection which entitles one to immortality is not ethical but merely intellectual, it remains possible for the philosopher to be an immoral person and to attain immortality notwithstanding. The lame defense that Maimonides puts up in his *מאמרי הלכה* ^{שם} ~~שם~~ indicates merely that the idea of bodily resurrection means no more to him than a device to make children and common people behave themselves.⁶⁸

His second doctrinal heresy is to be found in his articles of faith. When did the prophets or sages define the articles of faith ?

Judaism, on the contrary, judges man by his actions, not his beliefs, and gives us considerable latitude in matters of faith. It excludes no one from grace no matter what his beliefs, as long as his deeds are pure. And yet Maimonides dares to tell us what we must believe and what not. But this is a necessary corollary of his doctrine of the soul and immortality which is not Jewish at all but derived from Graeco-Arabic philosophy. He regards the soul as a mere preparation for the separate intellect, which alone, after its separation from the body, may attain to immortality - and then only if it be well versed in metaphysics. Our fortunes become tied up with this intellectual acquisition. Hence those who fail in this respect are no better than animals. And since everyone cannot acquire these principles by himself Maimonides offers a short cut to true belief in his articles of faith.⁶⁹

If in a moment of exasperation the Talmud invokes divine punishment upon the Gentiles, it is for their immoral deeds, never because of their faith or lack of faith. But Maimonides in his commentary to Perek Helek would remove from grace all who reject his principles of faith, as heretics and unbelievers unworthy of our sympathy - *רחוקי מן הברית*. ~~החטאים~~ This intolerance of heterodoxy and foreign faiths/^{is} contrary to all rabbinic teaching. Rashi the typical rabbinic Jew shows a more tolerant spirit than Maimonides the philosopher when he refuses to concur with those who stigmatize Christianity as idolatry. It is the philosopher therefore and not the traditional Jew who evokes the resentment of the Gentiles and prejudices the relation^s of the Jew and his neighbor

to the great hurt of the former.⁷⁰

By introducing the confused notions of Greek Arabic philosophy Maimonides has done us more harm than we have suffered by all the naive beliefs of our ancestors. Granting the intellectual cogency of his protests against anthropomorphism, the banquet of the Leviathan, the attributes, the use of charms and the like - but practically what harm is there in these ? The Jew who believes in all these metaphysically untenable notions believes also in Providence and Retribution; and in the fear of God he does justice and mercy. But the philosopher in his arrogance regards himself as the special object of God's providence whose benefits no one else could enjoy.⁷¹

Although the philosophy of the time of Maimonides is gone and forgotten, "modern philosophy issues from the same poisonous Greek roots, " and is similarly bound to work evil. For the Greek philosophers were dominated by two unworthy motives - the pursuit of pleasure and the desire for vainglory. That is why they "say much and do little."⁷²

Luzzatto's strictures against philosophy are not born of ignorance. No indeed ! He claims to have spent twenty-four years in the study of the different systems of philosophy and to have found them barren of all profit. The philosophers contradict one another and mislead their students. Not only do their students learn nothing from them but what is worse, whatever good qualities of morals or intellect they may have originally possessed are corrupted.

The simple man on the other hand who has not studied philosophy or logic will be saved by his common sense from the pitfalls and confusions into which the philosophers inevitably fall. Moreover, he knows that he does not know; whereas the philosopher thinks that he knows what he really does not know, because he is able to confuse himself no less than his hearers with words. Luzzatto evidently disagrees with Socrates who thinks it is the business of philosophy to teach men to realize that they know nothing.⁷³

2. Contra Spinoza.

To Luzzatto's way of thinking the greatest cause of confusion today is Spinoza whose books, hitherto banned, are now being republished and translated even into Hebrew and are being read with great avidity by Jews, to the great hurt of the younger generation.⁷⁴ The Jewish philosophers before Spinoza: were in no sense original thinkers; They merely followed the dominant thought currents of their day and have since been forgotten. But Spinoza, the only original thinker of them all, "strayed from light into darkness - adopting atheism for his metaphysic and egoism for his ethic;" whereas true philosophy grounds its metaphysic in God and its ethic on pity.⁷⁵ Luzzatto hated Spinoza because he regarded him as symbolical of all those who cut themselves off from the mainstream of historical Judaism.⁷⁶ And much as Cato is reputed to have concluded his every utterance with "Carthago delenda est", so Luzzatto winds up every other of his writings with an attack on Spinoza. Indeed, he hated Spinoza so much that he wrote to Delitzsch in 1863: "If you are a good

Christian you are a thousand times dearer to me than those Jews who follow Spinoza."⁷⁷ And in a footnote to his commentary on Kohelet he assures us that he is publishing this commentary after thirty-eight years, largely because the exhortation to a life of service for others, found in the conclusion will afford a timely antidote to the egoism taught by Spinoza.⁷⁸

When Solomon Munk in his inaugural address at the College of France denounced pantheism as atheism, Luzzatto acclaimed him as an ally. He sought support, too, from Mendelsohn's opposition to Spinozism as subversive of every principle of faith.⁷⁹

It was his habit of looking at all things rationally, and seeing everything as governed by an ironbound necessity which brought Spinoza to deny the existence of God.⁸⁰ To be sure Spinoza never denies the existence of God in so many words. On the contrary. Wrapping himself in the mantle of piety he speaks of God with great reverence; but what he means by God is the universe. For every thing came into existence by reason of an eternal necessity which leaves no room for a purposeful creation. And this uncreated, eternal existent he calls God. Taking their cue from Spinoza some Jews have committed the blasphemous folly of interpreting *Q/A* as meaning the whole of existence or the universe. Such a view of the universe devoid of all final purpose is nothing more or less than atheism.⁸¹

Spinoza's metaphysic, however, causes Luzzatto less perturbation than the baneful effects of his perverse doctrines upon ethics. If you deny Providence, and people no longer fear Retribution, the consequences are a letdown in morality.⁸² But Spinoza went even

beyond this to cast ridicule upon that other great mainstay of ethics, pity. He dismissed pity as the mark of the simpleton and "the weakness of women". It is the wise man who follows reason and suppresses his feelings of compassion. Spinoza thus enthrones reason at the expense of man's passional nature, considering it "the whole of man", when in reality it tells only half the story. For it is man's "feelings which lead him to sympathize with his fellows, to sorrow in their sorrows, to rejoice in their rejoicings... and to love justice and righteousness because he cannot bear to see one man afflict the other."⁸³ Spinoza on the other hand would have man disregard all feeling in the interests of reason, and would exclude from the realm of human motivations even the elements of praise and blame. It would seem that "he wishes to stamp out all our human qualities and to convert man into flint."⁸⁴

The individual consequently seeks to preserve only himself and to secure his own interests. He will have nothing to do with charity because that is a communal concern, to ^{be} worked out in accordance with a well-considered social policy, rather than a matter of individual concern. Although Luzzatto does not altogether disapprove of social legislation and government support of philanthropic institutions, he nevertheless, regards their very existence as evidence of the decay of the moral instincts in man. For if the individuals had pity on the poor and the unfortunate there would be no need for these institutions and regulations.⁸⁵

Spinoza has tried to ground his ethic on reason, but the net

result of this intellectualism has been a decided weakening of the moral fibre. For if reason dictates self-development through social living, Luzzatto argues, how can we gainsay him who wishes to develop himself through theft and fraud ? Spinoza may well answer that the only true development of the self is intellectual; But who will listen to him ? Will not most people use this doctrine of self-development as an excuse for every manner of self-aggrandizement and evil-doing ? And if we do get people to agree upon the intellectual ideal and to realize that they need society to attain this goal, even then they will act socially only insofar as it will advance them intellectually. But how will you get them to love their wives and children, the poor and the infirm, which love will be only a hindrance to their intellectual quest ?⁸⁶

Luzzatto attributes to Spinoza's teachings the decline of marriage in certain countries and the consequent increase of illegitimate children. Whereas the natural instincts of man would lead him to marry and to beget children, to love and support them, the cold reasoned calculations of the Spinozists dry up the well-springs of love, which they consider as folly and weakness. Hence they resort to prostitution and adultery in order to avoid the burden of supporting a family.⁸⁷ But this is a perversion of nature. For if that love which nature implants in a human breast to make man forget the irksome responsibilities of parenthood is an illusion, it is an illusion necessary for the preservation of the species.⁸⁸

Luzzatto describes, in almost Schopenhaurian terms⁸⁹, how nature deceives man through the instrumentalities of instinct and desire.

But unlike Schopenhauer he regards this deception as beneficial in its effects. If it drives Schopenhauer into a misanthropic pessimism it leaves Luzzatto's optimism unaffected.⁹⁰ Indeed he writes to Jost in 1840: "Man must have his illusions ... for he can neither comprehend nor bear the truth."⁹¹ This type of illusion is basic to religion and poetry, and is more beneficial in its effects than the much overrated reason. "Philosophy seeks truth. Religion seeks the good and the right; nor is man altogether intellect; he is also poetry. Indeed poetry is the greater part of man ... but if philosophy dominates religion, then poetry and religion fade away together and die."⁹²

3. Contra Kabala.

For all his love of illusion and poetry Luzzatto remains strangely unsympathetic to mysticism. It seems that he was too deeply imbued with the halachic spirit of Jewish tradition to manifest any love for either aggadah or Kabala or Hasidism. He had so little use for the aggadah as to maintain that if Rav Ashi had really written the Talmud he "would never have permitted the homiletic vagaries of the aggadah to stand as they are."⁹³ In 1835 he wrote to Goldberg that he did not know whether to laugh or cry at the reports of the Zaddikim in Russia - both as regards the "ridiculous miracles of the Besht" as well as "the humbuggery of his followers who performed miracles for profit."⁹⁴ Later in 1841 upon ~~the~~ receipt of a satire against the hassidim from Isaac Erter he wrote to tell him how "delighted" he was to read it.⁹⁵

His Dialogue on the Kabala completed in 1820 is so devastating an analysis of that mystic movement that he refrained from publishing it lest it weaken the faith of the pious. And when he finally did publish it after twenty-five years, it was only upon the urging of one of his Polish students who thought it a necessary corrective to the wicked shams of the Hassidim (*חסידים*) in his country who make mock of piety.⁹⁶

Luzzatto's doubts as to the authenticity of the Zohar grew out of his researches into the origins of the vowel sounds and the cantillation marks, which he discovered to be post-Talmudic. Elijah Levita had expressed the same idea in the sixteenth century. But so keen a critic as Assariah de Rossi dared not espouse it. And Mendelsohn, too, had accepted the traditional view. Luzzatto tells us, however, that he arrived at this conclusion independently, as a result of his reading⁵ in the Eyn Yaakov.⁹⁷ He points out that by disregarding the vowel signs and the cantillation marks he has at times been able to arrive at a better interpretation of the Bible text. And he quotes both the authority and the practice of many exegetes who did likewise, notably Rashi, Moses Hacoen, Maimonides, Albo, Obadiah S'forna and Nahmanides. Nor did Onkelos in his Targum always translate the text in accordance with vocalization. Moreover, he finds the recency of the vowel signs attested by ibn Ezra who writes in his Sefer Tzachot that the scholars of Tiberias gave us the vowel signs. Both David Kimchi and Hayyuj speak of the *קריאת התורה*. And Hayyuj also refers to the *קריאת התורה*. While Nahmanides forbids the use of a vocalized scroll because it is not like the one given

at Sinai. Finally Elijah (Bachur) Levita in his Massoret Hamassoret proves conclusively from the Talmud that the vocalized text was unknown before the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud.⁹⁸

Jerome, a contemporary of Rav Ashi, who translated the Bible into latin, says that inasmuch as the Jews rarely used vowel signs they have many readings for the same text. The reference here is obviously not to our present system of vocalization but to the use of the letters va to help indicate the vocalization. The vowel signs proper are never mentioned in any of his writings. What is more he does say that he was afraid to translate Chronicles lest he misread the numerous names mentioned there. There would have been no room for these fears had the text been pointed as we have it now, Luzzatto concludes in triumph.⁹⁹

Since our vocalization is at variance with that of both the Babylonian and the Palestinian Talmuds, it must have been fixed shortly after the completion of the Babylonian Talmud, or these variations would never have been tolerated. We have no record of the invention of the vocalization because we have no books from this period of the Saboraim. Since the vocalization was accepted by the Karaites, it must have been fixed some time before their schism or they would never have accepted it. Hence Luzzatto suggests 500 C.E. as the approximate date of our vocalization.¹⁰⁰

Indeed the only authority that we have for an earlier dating of the vowels is the Zohar, which takes them for granted and builds many

of its interpretations upon the geometric designs of the cantillation marks.¹⁰¹ But even if Rabbi Simeon b. Johai could have foreseen the use of vowel signs and the birth of Mohammed (who also appears in the Zohar), by means of the prophetic spirit, he would surely never have ventured to advocate doctrines utterly foreign to the spirit of the Mishna and the Talmud. Nowhere in rabbinic literature, Luzzatto points out, do we find God conceived of as anything resembling the Ein Sof of the Kabbalists. This is clearly an innovation of the philosophers who wish to deprive God of all His attributes. The Kabbalists of the school of Isaac Luria speak of a basic soul which is by nature destructible. And only through the fulfillment of the six hundred thirteen mitzvot in the case of the Jew and the seven mitzvot in the case of the Noachite does this soul achieve immortality. This is a notion not even remotely suggested in rabbinic literature but obviously derived from Arabic philosophy.¹⁰²

So important a Kabbalistic doctrine as the transmigration of souls is utterly opposed by the Talmudic dictum — *אין עולמות נשמות* *אין עולמות נשמות*. Saadia categorically rejects this doctrine of transmigration as utter nonsense (Emunot ve Deot, Chapter VI end). Rashi too pretends to know Kabbalistic lore. He explains the Kabbalistic notion of Neshomo Yesera naturalistically, as a feeling of expansiveness and peace and joy. He even denies all knowledge of the divine name of forty-two letters, which every school boy can now discover, if the Kabala be true. Halevy and ibn Ezra, too, have no use for the Kabala. Halevy has interpreted the Sefer Yetzira in such a manner as to leave no room for the far-fetched flights of the

Kabalistic imagination.¹⁰³

When the Sefer Yetzira speaks of the ten Sefirot there is nothing to indicate that it refers to divine beings or angels. The term Sefirot is used in the literal sense of numbers - עשרות - and obviously refers to the ten digits. The ten Sefirot of the Kabbalists unlike those of the Sefer Yetzira, are the ten causes or intellects of the Greek-Arab philosophers. How else, Luzzatto argues, could they have learned to describe the ten concentric spheres as leaves of an onion, one within the other, had they not derived them from the philosophers.¹⁰⁴

The language, too, is late; Hebrew and Aramaic intermixed in great confusion. It is full of gross errors and pagan notions of an idolatrous character.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, the Kabbalists themselves admit that the direct line of continuity between them and the Amoraim was broken. For their secrets were not those revealed by the sages to their chosen disciples, and passed on from teacher to pupil. The line of transmission was interrupted, and Elijah is supposed to have revealed these secrets to Rabbi David, the father of Rabad, from whom Nahmanides and the other Kabbalists got them. The authors of the Kabbala, Luzzatto concludes therefore, were neither Amoraim nor even Gaonim but men who lived in a later generation marked by terrible persecution and declining scholarship. That explains how extraneous ideas from Greek and Arabic philosophy crept in to befoul the stream of Jewish tradition.¹⁰⁶

It is the opinion of Luzzatto, however, that the Kabbala was not

so much a fraud as a device conceived by certain pious souls to divert the philosophic interests of their day into more pietistic channels. In the generation after Ibn Ezra they saw the confusion introduced into Judaism by the pot-pourri of Arabic-Aristotelian philosophy. But Jewish interest in the corrupt philosophy of the day kept mounting. The writings of Saadia were unable to stem the tide of irreligion. Ibn Ezra himself sold out completely to philosophy, and even poked fun at Saadia. And by means of a dialectical acuteness and the wide information pervading his many writings he was able to influence his contemporaries and to disseminate his ideas in the many lands which he visited in the course of his wanderings.¹⁰⁷

The Kabala was a necessary reaction against the heretical philosophy of the day. The Kabbalists felt constrained to take these philosophical notions and to change them in such a manner as to remove the elements dangerous to faith, so that they might be pressed into the service of religion. In order to gain credence for their ideas they found it necessary to disguise their source and to attribute them to tradition.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps the most noxious of the teachings of the philosophers was the doctrine of the soul. Whereas the rabbis regarded the soul as an independent pre-existent substance, the philosophers and notably Maimonides taught that the soul was an acquisition of the philosopher. In this respect the Kabbalists also strayed from the traditional teachings. They followed the philosophers, with a slight emendation, that the soul is an acquisition not of the philosopher

but of the observant Jew. They also took over the active intellect - Sechel Hapoel - of the philosophers and made of it the Shechina or the tenth sphere. And the whole system of Kabalistic spheres was manifestly borrowed from the separate intellects - Secholim Nivdolim of the philosophers.¹⁰⁹

In their efforts to exalt God the Kabbalists created a host of intermediary beings; the result being not far removed from idolatry. On the other hand they went almost as far as Spinoza in identifying God with the universe. Except that Spinoza did not believe in God, and used the term merely to denote the universe. Whereas the Kabbalists while believing in God pictured the universe as emanating from the Godhead of which everything was part and parcel.¹¹⁰

Luzzatto sums up the Kabala as little more than an amateurish sort of philosophy, indulged in by people who had no training in it. It is not necessary to believe their mystic vision to have been deliberate fraud perpetrated in order to secure glory for themselves. Because the mind steeped in Kabala and mystical speculation will, after a long period of fasting and self-affliction, have dreams concerning these speculations, and will imagine that it hears voices and sees visions. But these half-baked attempts to fathom the divine mysteries without any proper preparation or understanding must inevitably breed a vulgar sense of familiarity with the supernatural, and concomitant thereto a disrespect for God.¹¹¹

But worst of all in their attempts to divine the mysteries of creation the Kabbalists led people away from the literal meaning of

the biblical text, and substituted for it their own far-fetched and fantastic interpretations. Hence after the Zohar we no longer have any great exegetes like Rashi, Rashbam, ibn Ezra, Nahmanides, and David Kimchi. Not until recent times when Mendelsohn and Wessely break away from the Zohar are we able to go back to a literal understanding of scripture. The result has been five hundred years of darkness and wrong interpretation of Scripture. Whatever good the Kabala may have done in counteracting the vain speculations of the philosophers, it was more than over-balanced by the harm done through its condemnation of the literal meaning of Scripture.¹¹²

As to the actual composition of the Zohar, Luzzatto quotes the testimony of Isaac of Acco, one of the first to question its authenticity. Isaac claimed to have visited the widow of Moses de Leon and to have learned from her that the book was the child of her husband's brain; and that he had attributed it to Simeon b. Johai only to get a good price for the copies which he wrote out from his own head. Luzzatto compares the Zohar to a christological book that was similarly supposed to have been found at the same time in Spain. And just as the Zohar states in its preface that it was not to be found for one thousand years, so this book declared that it was not to be revealed until the reign of Ferdinand of Castile. Surely Moses de Leon knew of this book and wanted to do for his faith what the other forger had done for Christianity.¹¹³ But twenty-five years later upon reconsidering the whole matter Luzzatto came to the conclusion that de Leon was not a forger, but that he had actually

gotten hold of a book which he believed to be the product of the Talmudic period.¹¹⁴

IV. Torah

1. Exegetica.

As instructor of Bible at Padua Luzzatto must of necessity have busied himself with Bible exegesis. But what might have been an onerous duty with another was a passion with him. Writing to Steinschneider in 1856 concerning his commentary to the Pentateuch, Hamishtadel, Luzzatto says that he considers it his most important work.¹¹⁵ And yet for all his passionate devotion to research he never considered it an end in itself, but always looked upon it as a means toward that greater goal, the preservation of Israel. "It is now twenty years," he writes, "that I have applied myself to theological dogmatics and apologetics ... My concern with faith and its elucidation has brought me of necessity to exegetics. And since that is dependent upon grammar I must deal with that too..."¹¹⁶ Klausner, too, points out that he was interested in the minutiae of exegesis and grammar not so much for their own sake as for their importance in building the superstructure of Judaism.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that anyone could be so slavishly particular about the infinitesimal detail of grammatical and literary research as was Luzzatto, without the compensation of an intrinsic

love for minutiae.

Luzzatto was a queer sort of Bible critic. He was able to combine a species of free criticism with a rock-ribbed fundamentalism. First he admits that scribal errors and errors of vocalization crept into the Bible texts (except the Pentateuch), that Solomon did not write Kohelet. But when ibn Ezra, Rapaport and Krochmal suggest that Isaiah XL and beyond were not written by Isaiah, he proceeds to villify them most mercilessly. "He is the type of critic," Kayserling says, "who will go so far, and then fanatically oppose all those who would go beyond."¹¹⁸

In his preface to the Mishtadel Luzzatto defines his own position as follows: "I belong neither to the old nor to the new, I am neither orthodox nor rationalist, neither rabbanite nor Karaite. I strive for truth, and take it from whomsoever it may be, even the meanest of the mean; and I will reject falsehood though it come from the greatest of the great."¹¹⁹

As an exegete Luzzatto tried to model himself after Rashi whom he admires for his attempt to give us a literal interpretation of the Bible, and for giving impetus to the peshat exegetes after him - Rashbam, Nahmanides, and David Kimchi. "The proper understanding of the Torah," he maintains, "comes from a study of the Peshat - witness the helpful study of the great Pashtanim."¹²⁰ Their work unfortunately was undone by Maimonides and ibn Ezra and their disciples who befogged Scripture with their philosophical allegories. This brought on the Kabalists who made confusion worst confounded by means of their mystical interpretations. More honor

then to Rashi who in an atmosphere of aggadic superstition pursued his studies in the spirit of free inquiry. Refusing to be shackled by tradition he dared insist upon the literal interpretation of Scripture.¹²¹

As has already been pointed out (p.) Rashi sometimes disregards the vocalization in his interpretations. But Luzzatto went beyond this, in that he was the first Jewish scholar to begin emending the actual text of the Bible.¹²² In his first letter to Rapaport (1829) he ventured to suggest a correction in the text of Isaiah X,25 , to read *עץ יקום* instead of *עץ יקום*.¹²³ But no sooner did others begin to follow in this direction than he became alarmed and fought them at every step. "The emendation of an ancient text requires great care," he said, "because our manner of thinking is much different, and what appears strange to us did not appear so to the ancients."¹²⁴ He was himself very careful to make emendations only when they appeared self-evident and necessary to an intelligent understanding of the text.¹²⁵ Hence when he saw a host of illiterate Galician youngsters beginning to tamper with the text and to disfigure it with all sorts of uncalled for emendations, it is only natural that he should have had his fears for the integrity of the text.¹²⁶

It is interesting to note here that his youthful torah Nidreshet - an Inquiry Concerning the Truth of the Mosaic Law - is prefaced by a philosophical disquisition on the science of logic. Here he tries to elucidate the uses and, what is more important, the limitations of reason as applied to biblical criticism. He starts off grandiloquently: "Reason is God's greatest gift to man!"

Blind faith is no way to approach religion. To forbid reasoning will only evoke scepticism. For if it is true why cannot we reason about it ? And if you forbid reasoning it is obviously untrue. Indeed, faith without reason tends to degrade man to the intellectual level of the beast.¹²⁷

Nor can we afford to distrust reason. For if you cannot trust reason how can you trust the Torah ? Belief then becomes a matter of mere whim and fancy. The argument that we must accept religion because our fathers would not lie to us is no more cogent than blind faith. It would make all religions true, because "their fathers would not lie to them either." But since the various religions do contradict each other such an attitude leads to absurdity. Hence, unless we are able to submit religion to the test of reason, we can have no criterion for true religion. But reason is a dangerous plaything. It is a knife which in the hands of the amateur may cut too deeply. In practical matters too much speculation leads to no useful results. In matters of Torah it may lead to befuddled wits and heretical opinions. And inasmuch as every man is not fit to examine the Torah with the scalpel of reason, it should be left to the expert.¹²⁸

As already indicated (p.13) Luzzatto then goes on to point out that the province of scientific investigation is limited to the realm of sense impression. In a study of the Torah therefore we may not inquire into the truth of those things which are beyond the reach of the senses. Moreover there is in all science a residue of

uncertainty, since the order of Nature may possibly change. We can know the world only as it is now. But to say that no other order is possible is an indication of "philosophical provincialism". As regards the "unnatural" things recorded in the Torah, the God who made this world-order can change it to suit himself. The world as we know it is not necessary but only accidental. Hence science can offer no judgment concerning events recorded in the Bible.¹²⁹

Our only approach to a prophetic book is to ask - is it in truth a prophetic book? Once we have established that it is divinely inspired we have no more cause for inquiry, - because it must be true however strange or miraculous.¹³⁰

In the tenth chapter of the Torah Nidreshet he throws out the following challenge: "Is there anything in the Torah at variance with the testimony of the sense? If so we may reject the Torah!" But he hastens to assure us that he can find no such contradictions in the Torah. He then spends the next forty years of his life attempting to reconcile the apparent contradictions in the Bible. But he must have found the task too exhausting. For he reverses himself at the end of that time to declare that even if we do find such contradiction, we may understand them as God explaining his purpose to men in such terms as they can grasp at that stage of their development. Hence no real conflict with science or philosophy is at all possible.¹³¹

It is to be expected, therefore, that for all his liberal protestations, Luzzatto would have nothing to do with higher criticism. He felt so keenly on this point that when Senior Sachs edited the eighth and ninth volumes of the Merem (Hemed) he refused to cooperate

with him because Sachs had once referred to the German school of higher criticism as having "brought light out of darkness". Luzzatto had once sent his own commentary on Isaiah to Sachs in rebuttal, and was unable to understand how it was that he could not see the obvious superiority of his method to that of the higher critics, who are nothing but blasphemers and "charlatans".¹³² "There are two types of Bible exegetes", Luzzatto wrote, "uncritical believers and unbelieving critics. But Shadal joining criticism with faith is the only one to satisfy the needs of the day."¹³³ He objects to the use of the term bikores for Bible criticism. It occurs only once in Scriptures (Leviticus XIX,20), and means there, according to Nachmanides hefker, -irresponsibility. Luzzatto concurs in this interpretation, and believes that the type of criticism which goes under the name of bikores justifies this connotation by reason of its irresponsibility.¹³⁴

Because of Geiger's well-known sympathies with higher criticism, Luzzatto received his overtures for friendship in 1849 very cordly. But he soon overcame his initial prejudice, and a very fruitful correspondence ensued. But this relationship could not last, and was cut short in 1857 with the appearance of Geiger's Uhrschrift.¹³⁵ Although Luzzatto, in his own somewhat radical commentary to Kohélet, had dated it as post-exilic, he found the thesis of the Uhrschrift far too radical for him to stomach. He was ready to admit of certain self-evident emendations in the non-Pentateuchal portions of the Bible, but the Pentateuch itself was sacrosanct, and not to be touched by profane hands. Hence he rose in fury

against Geiger who would tamper with letters and words in the Pentateuch as well as in the prophets.¹³⁶ In view of the extreme care used in handling the text it is hardly credible that later authorities would have dared to touch it. Indeed even the errors were preserved as sacred though the correct Keri was known and indicated. Moreover, the Sadducees and the Samaritans would have been quick to seize upon any tampering with the text by the Pharisees and to point them out.¹³⁷

Luzzatto is especially fanatical on one point - that Isaiah XL and beyond is of one piece with the rest of the book, and was written by Isaiah himself, in Palestine and before the exile. He tells us that he was very much hurt when one of the great scholars (presumably Krochmal) refused to agree with him on this score, and penned vigorous attacks on him. All his life he was engaged in bitter controversies over the authorship of these chapters. One of the chief causes of Luzzatto's lifelong opposition to Ibn Ezra was his suggestion that this portion of Isaiah was written in Babylon. It was the cause of his repeated quarrels with Krochmal and Rapaport and Jost.¹³⁸

In his own commentary to Isaiah (LVI,9 - LVII,13) Luzzatto points out that these seventeen verses are not by Isaiah but the lament of a contemporary on the death of the prophet. But to attribute Isaiah XL and beyond to another author is far more serious than to extrude seventeen verses. In the second case these verses crept in by mistake and were not intended to fool anybody. In the first case, however, it would be a deliberate fraud; because the contents would then appear to have been written as if uttered by an

earlier prophet (see XLV: 21, XLVIII;3,5). And he cannot bring himself to believe that for two thousand years Israel has been comforting itself with forged documents.¹³⁹

To be sure, the first and second half of the book describe different political conditions. In the first Babylon is politically insignificant, in the second, all-powerful. But this offers no difficulty to the true believer. Why cannot the prophet foresee the shift in the political complexion of the later days of which he writes? Luzzatto was firmly convinced that Isaiah was able by means of the prophetic vision, to foresee all the changes that were to take place and to write of them as a contemporary.

Luzzatto was not to be shaken on this point because it involves the entire concept of prophecy. He is himself a confirmed believer in the orthodox notion of prophecy. In a letter of July 26, 1839 he assails Jost for denying that the prophet foretold the future. He takes strong exception to Jost's view that the prophets partook of the holy spirit only in such a manner as did Homer and Virgil. And as for the prophetic writings, Luzzatto was convinced that whatever the prophets spoke concerning the immediate future or wrote down for the very remote future has come down to us in its entirety. If not in its original order and chronological sequence the text at least has not been tampered with or changed as Geiger would have it.¹⁴⁰

Krochmal who does not deny prophecy altogether, would limit it to broad general statements about the remote future without any

specification of names, places, or events. But Luzzatto was in no mood for compromise. He pointed out to Krochmal definite prophecies of a specific nature. The prophet from Judah (I K.XIII:1) specifies *אֶת־בְּרִית־יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־כָּשַׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל*. The blessing of Jacob (Genesis XLIX) specifies places. Joshua's curse (Joshua VI: 26) specifies events etc.¹⁴¹

In his letter to Brecher (1851) he is pleased to agree with Brecher that "there is nothing in prophecy that is opposed to Nature". For men even today have evinced powers approaching prophecy, "although true prophecy is of a higher rank than mere natural clairvoyance."¹⁴²

But in the case of Kohelet no such issue as prophecy is involved. Hence Luzzatto is able to permit himself free range in his criticism. Here is a book attributed to Solomon which casts doubt upon the notion of immortality, and tends to Epicureanism. "How could the wisest of men ever have written such nonsense which contradicts everything he wrote in Proverbs?" The style too is different. The classic simplicity and the short pithy sentences of Proverbs form a strange contrast to the involved contradictory statements of Kohelet. Kohelet also abounds in Aramaisms which would definitely preclude its having been written Before the time of Ezra. Its post-exilic authorship is further attested by definite marks of Greek influence. Luzzatto concludes therefore that the book was written by a post-exilic author named Kohelet who attributed it to Solomon, the son of David. When his contemporaries discovered the fraud, they crossed out the name Solomon and substituted Kohelet; but they

kept "ben David" in order to make fun of the author. In later generations the reason for retaining "ben David" was forgotten - hence the confusion.¹⁴³

His first reaction to the book was to dismiss it as a bit of superficial sophistry abounding in contradictions and inconsistencies which no real thinker would tolerate. The essential theme of Kohelet that all is vanity - havel havalim - is utterly foreign to the optimistic spirit of Judaism. And as for the concluding verses where he speaks of the "fear of God" as being "the whole of man", they merely expressed a conventional sentiment which is altogether at variance with the real intent of the book - havel havalim.¹⁴⁴

This judgment of Kohelet was penned at the age of twenty, when in the heat of youth he rebelled against the futility implied in

וְהָיָה כְּחֵלֶם מַלְאָכָה וְכִדְמוּת עֵינָיִם, וְכִדְמוּת לֵב. It seemed at the time to negate every ~~activistic~~ impulse of his being. But thirty-eight years later he changed his mind completely. Looking back on his life he discovered that it was this very dictum that has meant more to him than all he ever learned from other books. A maturer interpretation of havel havalim has become the actuating principle of his later life. Properly understood it teaches us that a life of selfish indulgence is vanity; and the only life which is not vanity is one of service to others. And the exhortation to social service found in the conclusion of the book he regards as a timely antidote to the egoistic ethic of Spinoza.¹⁴⁵

He has come now to regret his derogatory comment on the last verses of Kohelet which he had stigmatized as expressing merely

conventional sentiments. They now appeared to him as a brief summary of the author's religious philosophy. To wit: "If in reading this book you have failed to understand it, or doubts have arisen in your mind, know then that the fear of God is the end of wisdom, etc." He now believes that the book was written in the latter days of the first Temple. The idea that Kohelet was influenced by Greek philosophy is preposterous, because the book is saturated with the belief in Providence. It begins and ends with the fear of God. The apparent denials of Providence are merely expressions of doubt that arise from time to time as a result of the prosperity of the wicked. But in the main the book is grounded in the belief in Providence. He loves this book now and regards it as the first attempt at a Jewish philosophy of religion.¹⁴⁶

Why Zunz, or anybody else, should want to date some of the Psalms as late as Maccabean times, Luzzatto could not understand. In the first place the creative period of Hebrew literature had definitely been closed with the canon. That anyone would dare to add new writings to the canon is hardly credible. If these Psalms were truly Maccabean why should the author fear to mention Antiochus, Mattathias and the rest, especially since it was the Jews who had triumphed? Why all the secrecy and the mystification on the part of the Psalmist, since the contemporary records in Greek do not hesitate to write of these events in great detail? The latest of the Psalms Luzzatto believes are still pre-exilic. The very language of the Psalms in question proves their antiquity. The idiom

is difficult and involved, unlike the simple style of ben Sirach and the liturgists.¹⁴⁷

In a letter to Berish Blumenfeld (1831) he takes him severely to task for post-dating the Book of Job. Luzzatto's attitude here is characteristic. He would not be so much concerned for the antiquity of Job were it not for the fact that those who post-date Job do the same with the Pentateuch. That Job is similar in style to the Psalms and Proverbs does not necessarily prove that Job was modelled after them, but may mean conversely that they imitated the style of Job. And even if Job were contemporaneous with Proverbs and Psalms it would still have been written four hundred years before the exile. He believes that most of the Psalms are Davidic, and that Proverbs was written by Solomon. The Aramaicisms prove nothing. ^{in poetry} Because it is a common trick of poets to use foreign and unusual words in order to heighten the style.¹⁴⁸

The appearance of Satan proves not lateness, but that the author was not a Jew. Because the God of Job was not the merciful father of Israel but a stern tyrant whose only answer to the agonized cry for justice is to overwhelm poor Job with His might. Fifteen years later, however, Luzzatto changed his mind again. He had misinterpreted Job. The conclusion of the book proves its Jewish authorship. If Job and his friends were not Jews, at least the author was because he wrote to justify God's ways with man, and to teach us that if God afflicts the righteous His gracious Providence requites their suffering in the end.¹⁴⁹

Luzzatto bent all his efforts to prove the authenticity of the Torah. He regards the divine origin of the Torah as the central principle of Judaism. For upon it hinges the existence and unity of God, His Providence, and the Messianic hope. Hence any one who denies the divine origin of the Torah is a Kofer B'Ikar.¹⁵⁰

In 1819 Luzzatto sent Reggio six proofs for the authenticity of the Torah; -¹⁵¹

1. We have no documents which contradict Moses.
2. He tells his story in great detail, with amazing accuracy and without any inconsistencies.
3. He reveals everything frankly and impartially, and makes no attempt to conceal unsavory incidents, such as Rachel's theft, the selling of Joseph, the adultery of Reuben, etc.
4. Ptolemy, King of Egypt had it translated into Greek because he and the other ancient people believed it true.
5. Consentium Gentium - Jews, Christians, and Moslems believed it true and suffered martyrdom for it.
6. Josephus in his Contra Apion mentions some early books which confirm the Bible account. These books are now lost, but he would never have dared to mention them if they had not been extant and authentic.

Once we have validated the authenticity of the Torah we have three proofs that Moses was a true prophet of God: -

1. He says so himself.
2. He performed miracles of a public character, which cannot be explained away as mere sleight of hand.
3. His prophecies came to pass either in his own lifetime or after.¹⁵¹

When Geiger began to heap ridicule upon these proofs for the antiquity of the Torah, Luzzatto wrote to him in exasperation: "How can I continue to cooperate with the man who is trying to tear down everything that I am trying to build up? Because everyone who strengthens the hands of the rationalists I must regard as seek-

ing to destroy all the Jews. Indeed, our very existence depends upon our faith ... For if we permit our faith to waver ... who will protect our children from the missionaries?"¹⁵²

Although the brunt of the rationalist attack was directed against the belief in prophecy, Messiah, and miracles, Luzzatto refused to be budged. We have already seen his attitude towards prophecy (p. 46ff). The belief in the Messiah he regards as one of the corner-stones of our faith.¹⁵³ In his letter to Abba Isak (1847) concerning the Abyssinian Jews he asks with great concern whether they too believed in the coming of the Messiah to redeem Israel.¹⁵⁴ And as for miracles, not only does he accept the Biblical miracles but also the miracles recorded of the rabbinic wonder-workers. He believed that "God fulfilled their wishes because of their piety and righteousness. Hence whatever entered their minds was automatically carried into effect... because of God's great love for them."¹⁵⁵ Although he questions the authenticity of the contemporary Hassidic miracles he has no doubts concerning the holy men and wonder workers of ancient days. They were not like these hypocrites, (פ'זאנאן). They did not amass treasure by praying for their brethren, but were all poor men who earned their livelihood through patient toil.¹⁵⁶

The argument that the Torah could not have been written three thousand years ago because the art of writing was then unknown, proved a formidable one for Reggio. But Luzzatto disposed of it by referring him to Clemente of Alexandria who speaks of a phonetic

alphabet that was used by the common folk in Egypt, and was introduced by Tot a contemporary of Abraham. And in his second book, Herodotus describes a pillar bearing phonetic inscriptions which was erected by Sesostri, a contemporary of Moses. Surely the art of writing was already known before the time of Moses.¹⁵⁷

The antiquity of the Torah is further proven by the fact that we know it to have been written originally in Hebrew script, and to have been later displaced by the Assyrian script. We can prove this change of script from internal evidence. Because certain scribal errors in the Bible can be traced back to similarities between the letters of the ancient script where there are no such similarities in the new script. For example, Tzadi and Yod, while dissimilar in the new script are very close in the old script. In Isaiah XI: 15 we have יוד פיצא. Obviously the yod has been put there in place of the tzadi, for it should be יוד פיצא. This correction has been accepted by Gesenius and others. The reason for changing the script Luzzatto suggests was to differentiate the authentic scriptures from the spurious Samaritan versions which have retained the old script. In this manner Luzzatto hoped to prove the Mosaic authorship of the Torah.

2. Ethica.

The problem of the divine origin of the Torah was no mere academic matter for Luzzatto, but a living burning issue fraught with immediate ethical consequences. He regards the Torah as the

guarantor of our ethic and religion. To be sure, he grounds his ethic psychologically, making it flow from the instinctive feeling of pity which is innate in all men. But unless nurtured by the teachings of the Torah, the feeling of pity tends to weaken and to fade away under the bludgeonings of man's rational nature.

Pity is the first great principle of the Torah. It is the source of love - hesed - and rightdoing. Altruism can have no other incentive either natural or supernatural. The quality of mercy contains its own reward. For the merciful person suffers at the sight of his fellow's pain and he cannot rest until he has done something to help him. Even the proud of heart and the unrighteous try to avoid the sight of suffering and pain, because it makes them feel bad. Pity is also the cause for our love of justice and our hatred of injustice. For the sight of injustice hurts us no less than the sight of suffering.¹⁵⁹

The feeling of pity alone would be enough to make man choose good and reject evil¹⁶⁰ were it not for the rational faculties which are at war with our human feelings. Man is by nature a creature of thought and feeling (אדם מחשבה ורגש). In the early stages of human or national life the feelings are all-powerful and the faculty of thought is weak. In the course of time as thought grows stronger ~~and~~ the feelings tend to diminish, because the dominance of the rational faculties tends to weaken the feelings.¹⁶¹ This is nothing more than a restatement of Rousseau's dictum, that man is by nature good and was corrupted by civilization.

Luzzatto believes that every attempt to establish right conduct upon any motive other than the great social instincts of pity is bound to fail. Witness the failure of the various schools of philosophy. This failure is attributable to the following eight fallacies: -

1. The fallacy of Stoicism - the knowledge that the pursuit of pleasure does not lead to lasting happiness is not enough to enable man to subdue his passions. Human temperaments are so varied that it is impossible for all men to choose the quiet life of the philosopher.¹⁶³
2. The fallacy of "enlightened self-interest"- The individual may very well admit that it would be better if all men were righteous. But in a community governed by selfishness, he might still argue that it is suicidal to be the only righteous man. Furthermore, in a community where all are righteous, certain individuals may find it very profitable to act selfishly, if they can "get away with it." Morality therefore must proceed from feeling, not from any people to self-interest.
3. the fallacy of ^{the} "categorical imperative" - The notion that all men are of equal worth and that you should not do to them what you would not have them do to you, is a fine sentiment for those individuals who can feel this stern sense of pflicht. But unfortunately most people do not feel this sense of pflicht. Moreover, there is nothing to prevent anyone from reasoning that he is stronger and wiser than his fellows, and what he does no-

body else can do to him.¹⁶³

4. The fallacy of the "social motive" - to avoid disgrace and court praise. Such an ethic can apply only to externals and does not involve any internal improvement. Here again what appeal can it have for the person who thinks he can "get away with it".

5. The fallacy of "rationality" - That man as a rational being ought to do good and shun evil. Evidently most people do not feel the urgency of this argument. Else why is there so much evil in the world?

6. The fallacy of the "inner light" - The argument that good and evil are both irrelevant, and that the wise man and the saint alone can attain happiness. It is an argument whose cogency is lost on most men.¹⁶⁴

7. The fallacy of the "naturalistic argument" - That man is by nature a social creature and as such ought to seek the welfare of his community. But the evil man may say - I am by nature bad and ought to do what my nature commands.

8. The fallacy of the "mystics" - The only good is communion with and knowledge of God. This too has a very limited appeal. And those who follow this path usually become insufferable prigs who despise all men.

None of these Luzzatto concludes can motivate right conduct. They may be all right for some few individuals - philosophers, ascetics, and the like - but they have no appeal for the common man; because they are not based upon any natural or instinctive foundation in man.¹⁶⁵

the ethical education of the young involves the development and the strengthening of the innate feeling of pity by means of word and deed. Just as showing the child deeds of cruelty and praising them tends to make him cruel, so by accustoming him to deeds of mercy and charity and by singing their praises we strengthen the feeling of pity.¹⁶⁶

But the most effective agency for strengthening the feeling of pity is the Torah. The Torah teaches pity by means of the laws of *אֶקָרִי, אֶחָדֶךָ, (7)*, the prohibition of usury, the injunction to return the pledged garment at sundown, etc. The philosophers would surely say that the creditor was within his rights in not returning the pledge, but the Torah enjoins pity.¹⁶⁷ The way of the Lord, as found in the Torah, is not the middle path of calculated reason, as taught by Aristotle and the philosopher but the path of love and kindness whose purpose is the welfare of others and the pleasure of God. Herein lies the difference between the selfish ethic of the Greeks and the altruistic ethic of Judaism.¹⁶⁸

The Torah excels in its humane provisions for the treatment of slaves. It gives us the Jubilee Year which equalizes rich and poor by providing for the resoration of patrimony - this is pity for the poor. It gives us the Sabbath rest out of pity for man and beast.¹⁶⁹ It also enjoins kindness towards animals, forbidding us to muzzle the ox during threshing. And the purpose of *לֹא יִהְיֶה* is not to penalize the mother for having shown pity for its young,

and thus giving man the idea that pity does not pay. He quotes Maupertius (Letter no. 6) to the effect that aside from the wrongness of causing pain to the animal the person who accustoms himself to be cruel to animals, will soon find himself able to kill and to torture human beings without overmuch concern. The effectiveness of the Torah in teaching pity is proven by the fact that the kings of Israel were known as Malche Hesed (I K. XX:31)¹⁷⁰

So important is pity that it is used for the thirteen attributes of God, in order to describe His essence. Hence he who fulfills the teachings of the Torah with regard to pity may be said to walk with God. That is, he may actually imitate God through deeds of altruism. Plato, too, Luzzatto points out, based his ethic upon the principle of Imitatio Dei. But to imitate God is meaningless unless we know Him truly - unless we know what kind of God we are imitating. The ancients tried to imitate their gods through adultery, theft, and murder. But ours is a different kind of God.¹⁷¹

Jeremiah sums up the Jewish concept of Imitatio Dei in one verse (Jeremiah IX: 23):

כי אלהים יחלל האמת, ויפסד חסדו, ויפסד צדקו, ויפסד חסדו, ויפסד צדקו, ויפסד חסדו, ויפסד צדקו.

These are the three principles of Jewish ethics, hesed, mishpat and zedakah. Love - hesed - is absolute perfection. But in an imperfect world it requires a certain amount of qualification. Because to love all men whether good or bad would tend to encourage evil-doers. Hence the need for justice - mishpat. Because there

are times when pity for the wicked may result in cruelty to the righteous and injury to the innocent. But strict justice on the other hand may provide no reason for inconveniencing oneself for the sake of others. Hence the need for charity - zedakah. This means sacrificing one's own interests for the sake of others. This is the principle of altruism.¹⁷²

3. Theologica.

The Torah presents God not only as a model for imitation but as the very source and authority for the ethical life. He watches over all His creatures to mete out reward and punishment in accordance with their deserts. The doctrine of Providence with its corollary of Retribution reinforces pity, as a powerful motive and sanction for right-doing. Because the man who has no pity for his neighbor will, if he is sure of a speedy retribution, be very circumspect in his actions, out of pity for himself.¹⁷³

To be sure, the Torah does not expressly enjoin belief in Providence. But that is because it had already become an established belief since the time of Abraham. Moses nevertheless does illustrate God's providential guidance by recounting the experiences of Israel in Egypt. We can now understand that the spoiling of the Egyptians was not an immoral act but an instance of divine retribution upon the wicked oppressors. Nor was the

extermination of the Canaanites anything less than a divinely ordained punishment for sin. The command to destroy Amalek is another instance of just punishment for perfidy. Divine retribution is of two sorts - communal and individual. Communal for sins committed in public, individual for secret sins.¹⁷⁴

Not the Torah and the Prophets alone, but the whole vast range of Jewish literature comprised by Mishna, Talmud, and Midrash, are literally saturated with the principles of pity and retribution - *פנין שוה פנין*. These form the only true basis for social living and religious faith,¹⁷⁵

Firmly convinced of God's providential care and his just retribution, Luzzatto felt it incumbent upon him to work out some justification for freedom and the existence of evil in the world. If God is just in rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, man must have free-will. This problem is recognized by the Torah. For God pardons those who err unintentionally, e.g. the girl who is criminally raped, and the man who commits murder unwittingly. Hence man's actions are not determined, Luzzatto wrote in his Torah Nidreshet.¹⁷⁶

Inasmuch as Kohelet presents the arguments for determinism, Luzzatto wrote a commentary to that book in order to combat these pernicious views.¹⁷⁷ This commentary resulted from a series of discussions with his cousin, Lolli, on freedom and determinism. Lolli presented his own, as well as the arguments of Crescas against freedom. Luzzatto tried to refute these arguments. After Lolli

left Trieste in 1819, Luzzatto wrote three poems (גית נבחינה) on freedom. A lengthy correspondence ensued between the two cousins and Luzzatto was finally forced to admit defeat. He conceded that everything is determined by previous causes, either external or internal, which all go back to one first cause. But that would make God the cause of evil. Hence he scouted the suggestion of the Kuzari (Ch. V, sec. 20) that although all things go back to one first cause - siba rishona - they are not all derived from the Original Purpose - kavana rishona. Although events may be determined they are not fatalistically pre-determined. But finding this explanation unsatisfactory, he turned to Plato and Gersonides who posit a primal matter - homer kadmon- which is the source of all evil, because it could not be purified of all its defects. He found it hard to swallow the doctrine of a primal uncreated matter. But he was reassured upon the authority of Halevi, Maimonides, ibn Ezra, and Gersonides that it was neither inimical to Judaism nor contrary to the teachings of the Prophets. By means of this primal matter, the bearer of imperfection, he hoped to absolve God, the first Cause, from all responsibility for evil.¹⁷⁸

Forty years later (1860) after reading an English writer, Clarke, he decided that it was no longer necessary to posit a primal matter to explain the existence of evil. For every created thing must have a purpose, and purpose implies deficiency which is the root of all evil. Here is a concept highly suggestive of Schopenhauer.¹⁷⁹

In this voluntarism he sought a solution for the dilemma. For whenever we act in accordance with our desires we are free, and subject to praise or blame. And if our desires can be related back to previous causes - what of it ! Indeed, if there were no cause for our actions we would be crazy. But inasmuch as everything can be related back to a First Cause, Who in His infinite wisdom has foreknowledge of all that is to ensue, determinism is also true. Hence evil is not accidental but actually purposed by God. For without evil there can be no good.¹⁸⁰

In the fevered heat of youth, Luzzatto tells us, he could not be so philosophical about this matter. But after forty years of patient investigation and suffering he has come to accept both freedom and determinism and to see the justice of evil in the world. Unlike the Stoics he cannot consider physical evil as a mirage but as a living reality. Evil is meted out to man in a measure, not haphazardly but according to the wisdom^{of} a beneficent providence.

But Providence notwithstanding we must not fall down in our striving for goodness. Because the good that is decreed comes only through such means and such intermediary causes as are dependent upon our efforts for their perfection. Nor may we on any account desist from offering up prayers and supplications, as if there were no appeal from the verdict. For the Divine Providence has ordained that only the humble and the suppliant will be saved.¹⁸¹

Luzzatto was especially perturbed by the problem of evil. His own faith having remained unshaken despite a life bordering almost on martyrdom - with its poverty and illness and the premature death of dear ones - he considered himself particularly well-qualified to justify God's ways with man. In the Torah Nidreshet he tried to justify the punishment of the sons for the sins of the fathers, and scouted its possibilities as a solution for the suffering of the righteous. It is inevitable, he argued, that the fathers should leave their sons, the bad as well as the good. Moreover the knowledge that his sons will be punished for his sins should deter the father from sin. And if it does not deter him, the punishment of his sons will at least be an object lesson to others.¹⁸²

Just about this time Luzzatto began to develop the idea of compensation which exercised a peculiar sort of fascination over him throughout his life. It is interesting to note that Emerson, too, was interested in this idea; but there is no indication in any of Luzzatto's writings¹⁸³ how he came upon this notion. Before he was eighteen he elaborated this solution for the problem of evil in his poem -

182: חַיִּים בְּחַלְקָם יִשְׁכְּלוּ
 אֶקִּים יוֹמָד לְכָל כֹּהֵן עַל הָאָרֶץ
 אֵין יִתְרוֹן לְאָדָם עַל מַצְחָהוּ
 כֹּל חַי יִשְׁאֵל טוֹבָה, גַּם יִרְאֵה כָּרָף
 כֹּל הַגִּבּוֹר אֶחָד יִהְיֶה אֶקְרִיבוּ

In 1850 he wrote to Joseph Lebensohn affirming his faith in Providence and dismissing the problem of "why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper", as an illusion, more apparent

than real. In 1857 he wrote to Egress that it is a mistake to speak of the unequal distribution of good and evil in this world. For, if we were to examine men's lives carefully we would always find the joys balanced by the sorrows; the greater the joy the greater the sorrow. And he offers his own hard life as evidence of the equal balance between the happy and the sad. Luzzatto was so pleased with his solution for this problem that he even tried to derive the very name of God *Yah* from *ya*, a shout of joy, and *ah* a cry of anguish. And the name of God thus compounded he takes to indicate that God is the source of all things, both good and bad.¹⁸⁵

It makes no difference whether the world was created ex-nihilo or from some primal stuff, because we have abundant evidence, Luzzatto believes, for a World-Artificer. If the nature of the Creator and the creation are above human comprehension, why worry? It is enough for man to know that he and all the other creatures were shaped by God's wisdom and handiwork. Because the intelligence and purpose revealed in nature are apparent to all. Like Kant Luzzatto was very much impressed by the teleological complexity of the universe.* Hence if God cannot be metaphysically proven with apodictic certainty Luzzatto was willing to rest his faith on the evidence for teleology, or what Kant calls, the physico-theological argument.¹⁸⁶

Luzzatto is willing to compromise on the nature of God and

* Kant though fully conscious of the dignity of this, the oldest argument for God, nevertheless, cannot approve of its claims to apodictic certainty. Moreover, even at best, it can only posit a World-Artificer, who is not necessarily the World-Creator. (Philly: A History of Philosophy, p.416).

creation, but he draws the line at purpose, which he regards as the irreducible minimum of religious faith.¹⁸⁷ In 1862 he wrote to Senior Sachs,¹⁸⁸ an admirer of Spinoza: "What is essential to Judaism and common sense is purpose. This Spinoza denies, thereby denying both Judaism and common sense." He therefore resents the attempt of Sachs to link the ideas of Gabirol with those of Spinoza. "It is the belief in final purpose," Luzzatto maintained, "which marks the difference between the theist and atheist. Belief in final purpose involves belief in Providence and Retribution. Gabirol believed in these, Spinoza did not." Hence Gabirol could in all sincerity compose the Keter Malkut and other poetry full of deep religious feeling; whereas Spinoza's writings are full of blasphemy and contempt for religion and morality. Thus by their fruits do we know them.¹⁸⁹ And in his letter to M. Keller (1865), Luzzatto points out that Maimonides and Mendelsohn also believed in final purpose.¹⁹⁰

The place of man in this scheme of things is no mean one. The Torah tells us that man was created in the image of God - tzelem Elohim. The plural use of the word elohim Luzzatto takes to indicate an all-inclusive unity in which are combined all the powers that be. Hence man who is made in the image of God is also possessed of a plenitude of powers.¹⁹¹ Whereas the animals are limited to certain instinctive functions, man shows greater plasticity, in that he can attain to a vaster range of capacities. Like God man is possessed of the whole gamut of power - that he may have dominion over fish and birds and beast. But most important of all is man's God-given freedom to choose whether he will rise up

on high or descend to the depths. No animal has any such choice.¹⁹²

In 1842, however, Luzzatto found it necessary to qualify this high estimate of our human capacities. As a result of his many sufferings he has come to the realization that our human powers are of no avail before the superior might of God. He laughs to scorn the rationalist who put their trust in human understanding. The sorrows laid upon him by God have taught him that it is not within the province of learning or wisdom or counsel to bring success or to save us from misfortune. That rests with God's providence alone. Happiness can come only through good deeds of mercy and love. For nothing can rob us of the pleasure of doing good for others.¹⁹³

In his later reconsideration of Kohelet, Luzzatto comes to the conclusion that the purpose of the book is to teach that a life of pleasure and excess is vanity. But Luzzatto is no ascetic, for real happiness comes from taking care of one's normal needs - such as eating and drinking - and satisfaction with one's lot. One's lot here refers to one's wife. Luzzatto thus interprets Kohelet as preaching the joys of the simple life.¹⁹⁴

As for those who live only for the pursuit of pleasure, their life is altogether vanity; and it would have been better had they never been born. Not so those who live to do good. They have a worthwhile purpose in life. Neither health nor wealth should be regarded as goods in themselves, but merely as the instruments which enable us to be of service to others - "For this is the purpose of man - Torat Haadam."¹⁹⁵

Concerning the meaning of life, Luzzatto wrote to a friend (January 12, 1841) advising him to accept the world and to accommodate himself to it. To avoid introspection and excessive speculations of the mind. To accept responsibility and to lead an active life. If he follows this prescription he will find both joy and sorrow - and these two in equal measure; hence he will find the sum total of life to be good. He should not hesitate to assume the responsibilities dictated by nature - love and friendship. Let him not despise men as fools; let him rather consider that he cannot live without their love. But to gain love one must give himself of love.¹⁹⁶

This true ethic of service and love, of activism and hope is to be found only in Jewish literature - Torah, Talmud, and Midrash. Neither Spinoza or any of the other philosophers can give it to us.¹⁹⁷ Not only does philosophy, especially of the modern type, fail to make its students any wiser or better, but it also fails to make them happier. On the contrary it converts their natural good spirits into pessimism. It overwhelms many fine young men with melancholy, and fires them with an insane hatred of mankind and self, leading some even to the brink of suicide.¹⁹⁸

Luzzatto tells the story of one such young man who later became a student of his. He found the young fellow plunged in deep melancholy as a result of his philosophic studies, and actually contemplating suicide. Luzzatto took him on long walks through the markets and the fields, and by restoring his faith in Judaism was able to make him see the world in happier perspective.¹⁹⁹

We have nothing to be ashamed of in our Jewish tradition Luzzatto concludes. For with all its lack of system it prepares us to face life with a sense of hope and optimism. Hence if we give our Jewish youth a solid grounding in Jewish tradition before exposing them to modern scientific ideas, then the latter can do them no harm.²⁰⁰

V. Israel

There are certain aspects of Biblical legislation which do not seem to have any obvious ethical implications, nor do they appear at first glance to grow out-of any flowering of the religious spirit. But unlike Mendelsöhn, Luzzatto was not willing to leave them as the incomprehensible injunction of a divine fiat. He set out, therefore, to provide a rationale for the ceremonial law in terms of its preservation-value for Israel as a distinct national and religious group.

1. The Mission of Israel.

That Israel is the people chosen by God to carry His teaching to the nations, Luzzatto regards as the third great principle of the Torah, worthy of being ranked with the principles of pity and Providence. This is not to be confused with the idea of the ancients that each people is under the special protection of its own particular deity. Because the God of Israel is no tribal deity, but the Father of all nations and the Lord of all flesh. Indeed,

the Jew showed no such chauvinism as did the Greeks in calling all others barbarians. And despite the privileged position of Israel, the Torah teaches one law for the stranger and the home-born and makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile in matters of strict justice and equity.*²⁰¹

If Israel was singled out by God it was not for their own benefit, but in order to bring light to the gentiles.²⁰² Nor does it mean that we were given certain metaphysical truths indispensable for salvation. On the contrary, everybody is born with the power to do good, and to thereby attain salvation. Israel was chosen only to assume certain duties and obligations which will make them an example for other peoples.²⁰³ God chose Abraham in order that he and his children after him might preserve those good teachings which are known as the derech Adonoy - that is, justice and righteousness. Hence if our nation stands after the fall of mightier nations it is in order to preserve these teachings for the sake of humanity. "Though all men turn to atheism, Israel must remain a priest-people," Luzzatto wrote in 1865, "because they have been preserved in order to testify to God's wonderful purpose and power."²⁰⁴ But "when Israel apes the ways of its neighbors in order to find favor in their eyes, they tumble down from the rank of a chosen people, and being of no further use to the world are no longer fit to exist."²⁰⁵

* Luzzatto does note four instances in which a distinction was made between Jew and gentile; but he justifies them as pertaining only to matters which are לכבוד השם (for the sake of the name). a) a Jew may not take interest from a Jew - he may from a gentile; b) he may not collect debts after the seventh year from a Jew - he may from a gentile; c) only the Jewish slave is freed after six years - not the gentile; d) one may not take revenge from a Jew, i.e. refuse to lend to him as he refused you - this does not apply to the gentile. (Machkerei Hayahadut, p.32)

When Ludwig Philippson's book on Judaism appeared, Luzzatto wrote a scathing review (1858). He declared the author's attempt to make of the mission of Israel our sole *raison d'être* utterly abhorrent to him. For the Jew who believes in divine revelation the answer is simple - Judaism exists because it is the will of God. Only a non-believer could make the preservation of Judaism contingent upon the missionary idea. To reduce Judaism to the single abstract principle of monotheism, and then to say that Judaism must continue, only to teach this belief, which will bring about the reign of universal peace and the moral perfection of man, is ridiculous. The Bible has been translated into all languages and is now available to all who care to learn about monotheism. And what is more the very people who are to preach this truth do not believe in it themselves.²⁰⁶

Even the faithful Jew who believes in the millennial prophecies of Isaiah is not so arrogant as to imagine that human beings will become angels through any action of his. If the millenium does come, it will come only as an act of God, never through the efforts of those who preach this new "mission of Israel". Because the moral perfection of man involves more than can be achieved through human progress. It predicates a complete change of human nature, greater even than that contemplated by the Prophets "in the end of days". The mission idea of Philippson is but a futile dream which will only cause the Gentiles to hate the Jews for their arrogance, and will only confirm the heretics in their disbeliefs.²⁰⁷

2. The ceremonial law.

The Judaism of the Reformers shorn of its mitzvot and grounded upon abstract principles is little better than Spinozism.²⁰⁸ The ceremonial law is important not merely because of its divine origin but because of its national and social significance. It beautifies human conduct and brings Jews together in spirit in order to insure the everlasting existence of the nation.²⁰⁹ In addition to this it has a twofold ethical function: 1. It acts as a constant reminder of God who in His providence ordained these mitzvot thus deterring man from sin; 2. It disciplines man in abstemiousness, than which there is no better training in self-control.²¹⁰

By separating Israel from the gentiles the mitzvot foster national unity and preserve us as a priest-people. The purpose of the dietary prohibitions is not so much to promote hygiene as holiness. The Sabbath was given to Israel not merely for rest, but in order that national feeling might be intensified when all Jews come together for rest and prayer for one specified day. And the holidays even more than the Sabbath makes for national feeling. Circumcision, too, was divinely ordained to prevent the Jews from mixing with their idolatrous neighbors. Luzzatto points out that the Egyptian priests practiced circumcision as a symbol of separation from the common herd. We may suppose therefore that the Israelites took over this rite to indicate that they were a priest-people. But if we regard these mitzvot as symbols of national unity we must not forget their divine origin.²¹¹

When in 1843 the Reformverein of Frankfort drew up their program and declared that they did not consider the rite of circumcision binding, the Rabbi of Frankfort, Solomon Abraham Triers, addressed a circular letter to a number of scholars asking for an expression of opinion. In his answer to Rabbi Triers, Luzzatto expressed his horror and indignation. The divine origin and obligatory character of circumcision is indisputable (Leviticus XII,3 ; Exodus XII,48). Hence how can anyone be a Jew without this distinguishing mark on his flesh?²¹²

What shall be our attitude towards the man who refuses to have his son circumcised? Such a man Luzzatto believes is to be regarded as denying the whole Torah, and should be expelled from the life of the Jewish community. As an Apikoros we must guard our children from contact with him.. He may hold no office of authority in the community. We may accept no money from him for communal or charitable purposes, although we may accept it from a gentile. But if he is poor we may give him charity. If he comes to the synagogue he should be admitted honorably, even as a gentile. But he may not be counted for the minyan, nor called up to the Torah, ~~except~~ on the death of his father or mother. If he repents on his deathbed he is forgiven, and may be buried in the Jewish cemetery. If he does not repent he must be buried in a separate plot all by himself.²¹³

The members of the Reformverein are to be treated in a similar manner, because they reject the Torah and do not conform to Jewish practice. Rabbis should refuse to serve in communities where these

Reformers are in control of communal affairs.²¹⁴ "Although other nations may exist without religion," Luzzatto wrote to Rapaport in 1860, "Israel dispersed to the four corners of the earth, can live only by its faith. If we cease to believe in divine revelation we will cease to exist as a nation and will be fused with the gentiles."²¹⁵ In order to preserve Judaism we must revive belief in the Torah, and dismiss all heretical preachers and teachers. Children should be taught Hebrew so that they can know the Bible in the original. And we must be tighten up on Sabbath violation and dietary laxity. Under such conditions it is inevitable that the heretical Reformers will have to separate themselves from the Jewish community. For inasmuch as they do not believe in the Torah why should they court the martyrdom and the loss of privilege associated with the name Jew.²¹⁶

3. Wissenschaft, Emancipation, and Reform.

For all his love of learning Luzzatto loved his people more. He never considered his wide learning as anything more than a means for the preservation of the Jewish people. He insists again and again that he has but one aim - to raise the dignity of Judaism among the Jews themselves, to defend the faith, and to revive our "national pride."²¹⁷ He was convinced that the more Jews knew of Jewish literature and of the principles of Judaism the more they would respect themselves; and if Jews would only learn to respect themselves the preservation of the nation would be assured.²¹⁸

When in 1829 Reggio praised the Lehrgebaude of Gesenius very highly, Luzzatto tells us that he felt his national pride touched to the quick. He thereupon swore a solemn oath to redeem our national honor by writing a better book on Hebrew ^{grammar} honor.²²⁰

He was especially concerned with the preservation of Hebrew, as the bond of unity between the scattered members of Israel. Of the entire Science of Judaism group he was the only one who wrote most of his works in Hebrew.²²¹ "Hebrew is a passion with me," he wrote to Geiger, "and the revival of its literature the most beautiful dream of my life."²²² During the course of the Spinoza controversy Senior Sachs wrote a pamphlet lampooning Luzzatto. His only answer was to admire the beauty of his opponent's Hebrew style, and to express the hope that more books would be written in such excellent Hebrew.²²³

Hebrew is much more than a mere language for Luzzatto; he looks upon it as a means of ethical inspiration. The only redeeming feature in Spinoza's life, as far as Luzzatto was concerned, was his love for Hebrew. This love for Hebrew may be inferred from the fact that Spinoza wrote a little book on Hebrew grammar. Hence Luzzatto concludes, that Spinoza was able to live a moral life despite his anti-moral teachings because he had studied Hebrew in his youth. For the Hebrew language is pervaded with a high ethical coloring in which the concepts of mercy and justice predominate.²²⁴

Luzzatto stinted himself and his household of food in order to buy rare books and costly manuscripts. But no sooner had he gotten hold of them than he proclaimed their merits broadcast. Not only

was he ready to lend these manuscripts, but would even copy hundreds of pages with patient care for anyone who would promise to publish these lost records. In this way he furnished such scholars as Zunz, Rapaport, Geiger, Jost, Brecher, and Michael Sachs with the basic materials for their research. Zunz could never have published his work on synagogue poetry without this help. Luzzatto's influence extended even to Heine whose Jewish poems were inspired by Michael Sachs translation of the poems of Jehudah Halevi which Luzzatto had uncovered. And the crowning glory of Luzzatto's own life was the publication in 1864 of a portion of the Divan of Halevi, to which he had given the last two decades of his life.²²⁵

When Zunz ventured to suggest to him that he might be giving of his light to the worthy and the unworthy indiscriminately, Luzzatto answered: "If Satan himself were to come to me today and ask for a manuscript to publish in hell, I would kiss his hands and give it to him. Do I work then for my own profit or ambition?" Indeed no! For he often received but scant acknowledgment for the help so graciously given.²²⁶

Although one of the fathers of the new Science of Judaism, Luzzatto had little in common with the other co-workers. Krochmal and Rapaport, not to speak of the rationalists, Geiger and Jost, were separated from him by an impassable ideological gulf. Krochmal was a disciple of Hegel, Luzzatto an anti-philosopher. Krochmal and Rapaport admired Maimonides and ibn Ezra. Luzzatto bitterly attacked the last two as expressions of the "Attic" spirit in opposition to the Jewish spirit. What Krochmal and Rapaport admired

in these men Luzzatto condemned as inimical to Judaism. Nor did he hesitate to express his resentment when Rapaport began to associate with Geiger and Jost whose radical views he regarded as dangerous to religion. And in an access of pique he once wrote to Rapaport very bitterly, "What can one expect of a man who defends ibn Ezra!"²²⁷

In 1840 he told Jost pointblank that the German-Jewish scholars who write their works in German cause Hebrew to be forgotten, weaken Jewish national feeling, and cause Atticism to prevail.²²⁸ In 1860 he wrote to Rapaport that the Jewish Science of the German scholars cannot endure, because these men are not interested in Judaism for its own sake. Jewish antiquity means no more to them than Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, or Persian antiquity. And they plow this field not out of love but for the sake of science or honor.²²⁹

Moreover, they regard these studies as a means whereby to raise the esteem of the Jew among his neighbors and to bring about the much desired emancipation. They are ^{so} deluded as to permit their brethren to imagine that their salvation depends upon their being considered the equals of their neighbors. They lack the religious faith and the national pride to discern that the welfare of our people depends not upon emancipation, but upon the love they bear for each other. Such studies can have no permanence, for once the deliverance comes they will no longer have any *raison-d'être*. And with the death of the present generation of scholars who studied Torah in their youth, when they still believed in God and Moses, there will be no one to carry on the work.²³⁰

The Jewish science which will endure is that grounded in faith - which interprets the Torah and the Prophets as the word of God. It must understand the special significance of our history: the perpetual conflict between the divine spirit which is our legacy and the foreign secular spirit. In all generations the divine spirit must predominate; for if at any time the secular spirit were to prevail Israel would cease to be.²³¹

The abandonment of everything Jewish, the divorce from the Jewish past, and the denial of Israel's future is too great a price to pay for emancipation. Long before Gabriel Riesser, Luzzatto was the first to declare that we must not make the slightest compromise in our Judaism for the sake of civic or political liberties. Indeed we must refuse them if they will lead to the destruction of the integrity of the Jewish people.²³²

In an Italian letter to Reggio he warned of the dangers to Judaism from rationalism. It gives rise to a contempt for our people and everything Jewish. It belittles those of our great men who have shown the truest expression of the Jewish spirit. It refuses to see in Judaism anything original or characteristic: it is all outlandish and imitated. Everything - ideas, customs, laws - all were borrowed from others. The one desire of these rationalists is to see the Jews become like their "civilized" neighbors. To model Jewish studies after Christian theology. To convert their synagogues into Protestant "Temples". And to imitate the Christians in walk and in speech, in life and in death.²³³

These Reformers are as school boys compared with our ancient sages. The latter derived their tradition from Sinai and from Judaism and established it on a firm enough basis to withstand the howling gales of persecution. Whereas these Reformers, under the influence of Greek thought, caused the defection of many souls from Judaism. "Our sages prepared people to be ~~be~~ confident in bad times. These men overwhelm our people with melancholy in good times."²³⁴

The universalism of the assimilationist writers and scholars who follow the lead of Philippson he finds utterly repugnant. How ridiculous and naive their prediction that the Gentiles will give up their false beliefs, and the Jews their separate customs, and all will live together as one people. If they hope to gain their emancipation thus they are mistaken. For they lack the perspicacity to understand that the wrath of the gentiles is directed not against the faithful Jews, but against the hypocrites who, neither Jews nor Christians, spread heretical doctrines in religion and politics.²³⁵

It is a mistake for the gentiles to wean the Jews away from the Talmud, which teaches us to deal righteously and justly with all men, and to believe in Providence and Retribution. For the Jew who departs from the ways of the Talmud invariably falls into the net of Spinoza, who teaches that man's only duty is to seek his own welfare. Indeed who makes the better citizen? - The Talmudic Jew who believes in God and Judgment and Mercy, or the Spinozist who says there is no Judgment and no God, who despises pity and love, and believes that might is right?²³⁶

The unbelieving Jew who excises all national references from the prayer-book is thereby stamped as an opportunist who can be true to neither king, nor country, nor people. But the faithful Jew who waits upon the Lord is a good citizen who seeks the good of his city as bidden by Jeremiah (XXIX:7) and the Talmud (Ketubot 111). Nor does he slander the religion of his neighbors, nor attempt to weaken their faith - for he has no mission to spread his religion among them.²³⁷ Thus Luzzatto believes that he has cut the ground from under the Reformers by showing that the believing Jew has a better argument for emancipation than the Jew who is lax in faith and observance.

VI. Postscript

Unless we can see him in the light of the romantic ideals of an "Emile" or better still of an "Atala", Luzzatto must remain to us an enigmatic mass of inner contradictions. The ideal man thus visualized, expresses himself in terms of the laws of his own nature. He excels in a goodness of heart and in an inner piety which is born of naivete and innocence. And he manifests an overweening concern for his originality and unique worth as an individual.²³⁸ Hence Luzzatto tells us that he liked certain books not because they revealed new truths to him but because they were in agreement with the ideas latent in his own heart.²³⁹ It was characteristic of the Romantics to assume that nothing they learned was really new to

them. For if they found any idea appealing, that was ample evidence of its having been lying dormant within their own inner consciousness.

Luzzatto often exceeds the bounds of good taste in speaking of his love of truth, his disinterestedness, his singular character, his originality and genius. Yet there is nothing of the poseur about him. He repeatedly calls Jost and Zunz to task for their false modesty. Truth, he scolded them, despises this type of modesty no less than it frowns on arrogance. And in typical romantic fashion he proclaims to these rationalists: "Nature requires that we express what we feel!"²⁴⁰ Such was his self-assurance that he wrote to Schorr, December 6, 1838; "I will write down my thoughts and if they won't please my contemporaries, I will leave them for a later generation to bear fruit."

Profound as was his admiration for Mendels^sohn, he did not hesitate to damn him as wanting ⁱⁿ that great Romantic desideratum - originality. "He (Mendels^sohn) found his century in alignment with himself. I, on the contrary oppose the century, the world, the universe. I have few colleagues in my lifetime, but that is not my fault ... who knows what will happen after my death. If Judaism is to continue - and it will continue - where will it find anchorage if not in my writings? Surely not in Mendelsohn's".²⁴¹

This Romantic impulsiveness was also translated into his personal relations. Shocked by the rationalism of Jost's history he wrote to Rapaport (1831): "I hate Jost and will always hate him." And when Rapaport refused to break off his friendship with Jost on

that account Luzzatto became very indignant. Rapaport thought it a bit of calculated arrogance on the part of Luzzatto. The breach between the two widened over the question of Deutero-Isaiah as well as the Maimonides and ibn Ezra controversy, which continued over a period of years. April 15, 1839, Luzzatto sent Rapaport a declaration of eternal divorce, which lasted only two years. For all his violent language he could not hate very long. No sooner did he become associated with Jost as a contributor to the Israelitische Annalen than he buried his antipathy towards the free-thinking rationalist and a close friendship resulted.²⁴²

Of his character and influence on his students we have the remarkable testimony of Samson Gentilommo, a student who left the college in Padua because of his disinclination for the rabbinate: "Without preaching morals he taught morality, His students clung to him with love and devotion. They considered themselves his children, and he their father. They asked his counsel in all problems of life and confided in him all their troubles ... Ask all over town and you will hear that he is called by everybody - the father of the poor, the friend of truth, righteous and unselfish man."²⁴³

Taking for his motto: "Judaeus sum, Judaici nihil a me alienum puto", he set himself to sifting the diversified ores of Jewish learning, to refine them of their dross, and to present them in their brightest lustre. Under the stimulus of Rapaport he began to cultivate the fallow field of Jewish history. It was through his

efforts that the literature of the glorious Spanish period, hidden from the eyes of the Inquisition in Italy, was uncovered and published. That is why Graetz says of him: "If Krochmal and Rapaport are the fathers of Jewish history, then Luzzatto was its mother."²⁴⁵

Under the influence of the Romantic Reaction he tried to provide a rationale for Judaism in terms of the irrational of instinct and faith. These are the realities of which reflection are but the faint shadows; and their justification is pragmatic rather than metaphysical.²⁴⁶ But if he took his cue for the interpretation of Jewish history and religion from Romanticism, he knew how to justify it from and how to subordinate it to the demands of Jewish tradition. That is why he went to such pains to purify the Jewish spirit of those foreign and extraneous elements which he called "Atticism". He spent his life exposing and combatting the "Attic" spirit whenever it crops up in the varying forms of medieval Jewish philosophy, Kabala, Spinozism, rationalism, and higher criticism. He had the historical insight to realize that the Jewish genius has ever been strongest on the practical or ethical side. For in metaphysical acumen the Prophets cannot compare with the philosophers of Greece and India.²⁴⁷

Luzzatto is right, therefore, in condemning as a lapse from tradition Maimonides' subordination of ethic and his ignoring of ritual in the attempt to establish Judaism as an intellectualistic system. Nor could he logically approve of the Kabalistic reaction which tries to establish Judaism as a mystical intellectualism grounded on ritual.

As Bloch puts it, ²⁴³ Luzzatto regards Judaism as a "moralism based upon feeling supported by faith and tradition". therein he is even more one-sided than Maimonides, who for all his intellectualism gives morality a high place in his system, making it a perquisite to the attainment of intellectual perfection. Luzzatto on the other hand throws out of his theory all intellectual values. Looking upon religion only as an avenue to moral action, he takes no cognizance of its other and no less significant aspects, such as the intellectual striving after God. Pity and Love, combined with the fear of God, subsume all that is of value in his religion.

Although we are becoming more and more inclined to develop our ethic today upon the substratum of instinct, we must seek a broader base for it than the single emotion of pity*. If he showed rare discernment in pointing out the important role of instinct, he failed to recognize the ^{broader} the/complex of social instincts which we must take into consideration in any ethical discussion. The time has passed when we can speak of any single principle of ethical motivation. Because of the very variety of human temperament and the complexity of human circumstance which Luzzatto himself refers to the basis for ethical motivation must be eclectic. Each one of the ethical principles which Luzzatto rejects as fallacious has its peculiar appeal to certain types of people and all of them together must be woven into the motivation pattern of our ethic.

* Schopenhauer also reduces all morality to a derivative of pity. (see Whittaker : Schopenhauer, p.73 ; Tilly : A History of Philosophy, p.489).

With all his keen insight and brilliant observations Luzzatto was wanting in speculative and systematic power. Strong in the attack, he lacked the energy to carry his point through to its logical consequences. If a deep inner faith gave him the impetus to vault over every chasm of contradiction, he could not always take others with him. He did, however, prepare the way, for a proper understanding of the ethical emphasis in Judaism, its moral weltanschauung, and above all the fundamental meaning of pity in Scripture. If for Halevi the Jewish people were as the heart among the nations, for Luzzatto Judaism was the conscience of humanity.²⁴⁹

Though many are content to preach better than they practice, Luzzatto was not the man to permit action to lag behind principle. That Luzzatto lived the type of Judaism which he taught is evident from Rabbi Simcha Pinsker's fine tribute:²⁵⁰ "He is one of the very few survivors ...who humble themselves for the sake of learning and become themselves its servants rather than make learning serve them. He is ever-ready to aid assist all who may ask him, without weariness or complaint, with a willing heart and a cheerful spirit; because he is eager to do the will of his Maker and to cleave to his ways ..."

Notes

1. Hamagid, vol. III, no. 13
2. ibid. vol. II, no. 17
3. J.E., vol. VIII, p. 224
4. Hamagid vol. II, no. 19
5. Kampfende Geister im Judentum by Simon Bernfeld, p. 126
6. ibid. p. 124-125
7. Hamagid vol. III, no. 21
8. Hashiloah vol. III, p. 66
9. Kampfende Geister, p. 131, 132, 140, 144
Dor Chacham by Simon Bernfeld, p. 53- and 55.
10. Klausner, Joseph, Yahadut Vaanoshiut, p. 45
11. Brandes, Georg : Main Currents in 19th Century Literature,
Vol. III, p. 90
Iggerot Shadal, p. 1392
12. Klausner, p. 47, 48
13. Thilly, Frank : A History of Philosophy, p. 411, 421
14. Klausner, p. 49
Brandes, vol. I, p. 18
" vol. III, p. 90
15. Brandes, vol. III, chapter V.
Randall, John Herman Jr., The Making of the Modern Mind, p. 398-9
16. Klausner, p. 50
17. Graetz, History of the Jews, Vol. V, p. 517-518
18. Quoted by Randall, p. 411
19. Hamagid, vol. II, no. 17
20. ibid. vol. II, no. 18
21. Brandes, vol. I, p. 19
22. Hamagid, vol. II, no. 30
23. Mechkere Hayahadut, by S.D. Luzzatto, vol. I, p. 61-and 66, 73, 144
24. Thilly, p. 317-318
Ein Gedenkbuch zum hundertsten Geburtstag - Samuel David Luzzatto
p. 58, 59
25. ibid. p. 53
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