

Thesis for Graduation:

ELIAS LEVITA

by

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Preface

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Elias Levita is indeed a subject worthy of treatment; not that this has been overlooked or neglected by our historians and the writers of our history of literature, but for the reason that it affords ample opportunity to the young student for study and research.

In presenting the subject, I have tried not so much to give a mere sketch of the life of the great grammarian and an account of his works, as rather to point out the relation of Elias, as the representative of the Jewish humanists, to the Revival of Learning, to trace the antecedent causes which were instrumental in producing a

character like this; — in a word, to show what historical connection, if any, there is between Levita and his age, and the centuries preceding and following him.

As to the subject matter, I lay no claim to originality, though having sometimes consulted the original sources, i. e. Elias' own writings. Besides these and a few encyclopaedical articles, I have mainly availed myself of the following standard works on the subject:

Symonds' "Revival of Learning";
Burckhardt's "Cultur der Renaissance
in Italien";

Michelet's "Renaissance";

Graetz' "Geschichte der Juden";

Jost's "Geschichte des Judenthums und seiner secten";

L. Geiger's "Verhältnisse des hebräischen Sprachstudiums zu der geistigen und religiösen Bewegung der Zeit";
Karpelès' "Geschichte der jüdischen Literatur";

Fürst's "Bibliotheca Hebraica";

Wolf's "Bibliotheca Hebraica";

Hamberger's translation of
Di-Rossi's "Encyclopaedia of Jewish Authors";

With these prefatory remarks, indispensable for the avoidance of misunderstanding, the following essay is submitted to the kind con-

sideration of the patient reader

by the author.

Cincinnati, June, 1893.

Introduction

The Relation of the Jew to the Revival of Learning

is an historical fact, which though overlooked by the superficial student of history, and ignored by the prejudiced historian, must, nevertheless, be admitted by every unbiased and broad-minded historiographer. To say that the Jew was a dull bystander in the great intellectual movement, called the Renaissance, unaffected and inactive, that he received nothing from, and added nothing to the force at work which brought about the discovery of the world and the

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discovery of man, is an incongruity as great as to maintain: that the discovery of America by Columbus, that Copernicus' explanation of the solar system, that the invention of the art of printing, of gunpowder, the compass, the telescope, and many other things, had nothing to do with the inauguration of the New Era.

It is a well-known fact, recognized by every judicious observer of human life, that circumstances and surroundings, in some measure, determine the character, not only of the individual, but also of a people. Should the Jew form an anomaly? Should

The Relation of the Jew to the Revival of Learning ³

he alone not have been affected by environments, that law of nature which reigns supreme not only in humanity but even throughout the whole universe? Time and place have indeed left their impressions upon the pages of Israel's history no less than upon that of any other people. Throughout all the centuries of his wanderings, he has been more or less influenced by environments, both acted upon and prompted to act by the impulses he received from them, and this despite all the attempts of his adversaries to isolate him from the outside world. To what extent this

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is true of the period under consideration, what relation, if any, the Jew bears to the Revival of Learning, may be found out by tracing the historical currents, both Jewish and Christian, of that time to their points of intersection. But in doing so, we cannot conform to the general view and accept the opening of the fourteenth century, i. e. the appearance of Dante and Petrarch, as the beginning of the Revival of Learning. For the dividing lines in this as in any other period of history, are not so sharply marked as not to allow us to look for another starting point. Historical divisions depend entirely upon the point

The Relation of the Jew to the Revival of Learning
 of view from which we consider a cer-
 tain group of facts; and, therefore, what
 may seem epoch-making to one will
 not be so to another. Accordingly, if
 from a literary standpoint the Revival
 of Learning begins with Dante and
 Petrarch, we may from a philosophical
 point of view consider the earlier
 part of the thirteenth century as the
 starting point of this epoch; for as
 early as that, Aristotelian ideas and
 the Greek mode of thinking had been,
 both indirectly and directly, introduced
 into Western Europe. Maimonides'
 מורה הנבוכים, *Guide of the Perplexed*,
 conceived in the spirit of Aristotle, had.

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by this time, already been given, not only to the Jew, but to the world at large, and created a new epoch in the philosophy of the Middle Ages. Not only did the Mohammedans write commentaries on it, but Christian schoolmen learned from it how to harmonize the conflict between religion and philosophy. And Jacob Antoli, an ardent follower of Maimonides, had, about the same time, (invited to Naples by Frederic II, the last of the Hohenstaufen, and paid by the Emperor an annuity from his private purse to perform the arduous task of translating Aristotle) prepared, in conjunction with Michael Scotus,

The Relation of the Jew to the Revival of Learning
 a Latin translation of the Greek philosopher, together with the commentary by the Arabian philosopher Averroes (Ibn Rosht).

Thus the dawn of reason had begun; but the Church dwelling in darkness hated light, and the Synagogue, in proportion as it was influenced by surroundings, did the same. The philosophy of Aristotle and that of Maimonides met with the same fate; both were declared to contain heterodox views, and were condemned to the flames, the one by the Church, the other by the Synagogue of Montpellier and her adherents. How much circumstances and surroundings

influenced the Jewish mind we can see from the fact that in one and the same country the Jews were divided into two camps; in Southern France, the Provence, amidst the Albigenses, where the first rays of light had fallen, the Rabbis were devout worshippers of the 'Moreh', while in Northern France, where thick darkness still prevailed, Maimonides' philosophy was fiercely opposed to by the Rabbinical authorities. Excommunications, anathemas and bans, the Christian mode of procedure against heretics and heterodox writings, had now become very frequent in the Synagogue, which certainly was copied from the Church.

To what extent this is true, we may learn when we read the ban (Jost. Gesch. d. Juden, III p 20) issued (Thammuz 5046, i. e. 1286 after Christ) by Isai ben Hizkiah b. Isai, the Nasi at Damascus, against the antagonists of the Moreh. Like Thomas Aquinas who silenced all opponents to Aristotelian philosophy by its reception into the orthodox system of the Church, this Nasi Isai ben Hizkiah stopped this antagonistic movement against the Guide.

All these events may, from our point of view, be considered as precursors of the Revival of Learning. They all betray one and the same tendency, viz. the fight of dark ignorance against

dawning season.

The fall of Constantinople is usually considered a landmark in history, with special reference to the Revival of Learning, for the reason that the ruins of classical antiquity were by this disaster transferred from the East to the West, i. e., from Byzantium to Rome. But the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, about forty years later, in 1492, deserves to be considered in connection with this period, no less than the downfall of the Eastern Roman Empire. "Spain in which the Jew had found an early home, was the country in which 'the golden

age of the Jews shone with the brightest and most enduring splendor'..... To the shame of Christianity be it said, the Jew enjoyed his greatest privileges in the Iberian peninsula under Musselman rule, and from the conquest by the Moors till towards the end of the tenth century, when whole Christian Europe lay in darkness, Mohammedan Cordova might be considered the centre of civilization, of arts and letters....
....., and the Jews, under the enjoyment of equal rights and privileges, rivalled their masters, or, rather, their compatriots, in their advancement to wealth, splendor, and cultivation. In Spain alone and only under Musselman reign; the Jews in

the Middle Ages enjoyed religious liberty and the privileges of their own jurisdiction, and it was in Spain alone that the Jews, since their Babylonian exile, developed a nobility which to this day is considered the aristocracy of the dispersed people of Israel. Need we wonder that under such very favorable conditions, which became endangered only now and then, the Spanish Jews developed a very active spiritual life, and a desire for culture and science which produced noteworthy fruits? 'The Jews in the Arabic provinces' says Da Costa, in speaking of the Saracen rule in Spain, 'were rarely bankers but merchants, trading on a larger scale to different points of the East. They acted as

treasurers to the Califs, but more frequently as physicians, philosophers, poets, theologians—in a word, as savants and men of letters.

..... While the Jews, who at that time lived under less favorable circumstances in France and Germany were disinclined to all scientific endeavors, and all their spiritual activity became absorbed in the study of the Talmud, the Spanish Jews vied in all sciences—in philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and in poetry with the flower of the Arabian genius..... The schools of the Spanish Rabbanim (at Cordova, Toledo, Barcelona and Granada) not only became the center of Jewish civilization and learning, but

the auxiliaries of the Arabian philosophers in their endeavor to keep alive the flame of learning during the deep darkness of the Middle Ages, and the Jews became the communicators of Arab and Greek philosophy to the Christian world, the interpreters between the Saracens and the Western nations."

With the expulsion of the Jews from Spain "a galaxy of great and learned men of which any nation might well be proud," sought refuge, among other countries, also in Italy, and there the Greek and Hebrew spirit met again, for the second time after the lapse of about fifteen centuries, if we count from Philo Judaeus,

or after a period of nearly a thousand years, if we count from Emperor Justinian, who, by inaugurating a hostile policy against the Jews of his realm, made life intolerable for them, so that many of their number quitted the Byzantine Empire to seek a refuge in Persia and Babelon, where the Israelite was treated with more leniency. The Jew who had moved westward with his Shemite brother and settled there with the establishment of the Saracen rule in Spain, when driven from this country, after the subjugation of the Moors, by Ferdinand and Isabella, had, after an association with the Arabs and their culture for seven centuries, fully trained his faculties, and his mind

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could easily vie with that of the humanist in all literary pursuits of that age. An exchange of thoughts soon takes place between the Graeco-Arabic and the Italian humanistic minds. Men like Abraham de Balnes, Elia del Medigo and Elias Levita, on the one side, and Pico de Mirandola, Cardinal Domenico Grimani, and Cardinal Egidio de Viterbo, on the other, all filled with a desire for study and learning exchange their mental treasures, and thus not only benefit each other but also the world at large by furthering the spread of culture and enlightenment. How this communion was brought about is not difficult to explain. Classically inclined minds while searching for ancient manuscripts stumbled upon different versions

of the Bible.*) Comparing these manuscripts and finding them to vary more or less in contents from each other, what was more natural than a desire for a thorough acquaintance with the original text. But a knowledge of the Hebrew language and Biblical literature certainly none but the Jew possessed at that time. Therefore the Jew becomes the teacher of the Bible in the original, and Christian scholars like Reuchlin descend from their temple of fame to the ghettos in order to receive there the first instruction in the holy language and its literature. Another reason for this interchange of learning may be found in the fact that while the unearthing of the ancient classical world was going on, many forged manuscripts were set afloat, which after having been exposed as

forgeries by the keen-eyed critic²¹ could not but cause the learned world to look with suspicion upon everything that claimed antiquity. The reign of mediæval credulity being now over, and reason having been enthroned instead, thorough research and investigation became necessary in every field of thought, Christian theology not excepted.

The theological tendency which this intellectual movement assumed in Germany, the Reformation which soon supplanted Humanism in that country, may be considered as another cause for this general desire to know the Holy Book in the original. Says Geiger: "Besides the awakening desire for learning a main cause for the study of the Hebrew language was the theological tendency of the time. They returned

to the Bible; from this alone they desired to draw instruction; from this alone a refutation of the antagonistic views could be given. What wonder that they longed after the original language, that they made it the basis for translations into the vernacular."

This intellectual transformation, passing on as it was from the social and political into the religious world, was now, as in former centuries, looked at with suspicion and fear by the votaries of ignorance and fanaticism; for the thick darkness of the Middle Ages was still lingering. Need we wonder that the same historical undercurrents, after the course of three centuries, come again to our view; that now, at the outset of the Reformation, as then, during the earlier part of the thir-

teenth century, anything not conforming to the "credo quia impossibile est" is doomed to perdition; that authors daring to differ from the doctrines and beliefs of the Church, are declared heretics and their writings condemned to the flames: that these heterodox books, the Talmud included, now meet with the same fate as did the works of Aristotle and Maimonides and the whole Talmudic literature. And this spirit of antagonism against culture and enlightenment makes itself felt not only in the Church but also in the Synagogue. Pico de Mirandola and Reuchlin are accused of heresy by ignorant and fanatic monks because of their cultivation of Jewish thought and learning; and Elias del Medigo and Elias Levita are charged with apostasy by bigoted Jews because of their association with the humanists of that time.

But Jew and Christian both alike are amply rewarded for the services they rendered each other and the world at large by their mutual assistance. Reuchlin who had been initiated by Jewish teachers into both the Biblical and Rabbinical literatures, and had learned from them to appreciate not only the teachings of Moses but also those of the ancient Rabbis, rescues the Talmud from the flames, and thus gives back to the Jew his oral law, while Elias Levita who had become imbued with the humanistic spirit through Christian aid, opens to his Christian brother the book that had been sealed to him for ages — the Hebrew Bible. True, there were among the Jewish humanists of that day, besides Elias Levita men who instructed Christians in the Holy language and its literature; but none

exerted so great ~~an~~ influence, both as Hebrew teacher and author, upon the Christian world as the great grammarian. He may indeed say with Geiger: "Levita was the teacher of Christendom" and, with Karpfles, that Elias Levita's whole character as well as his literary activity make him the true representative of the Jewish humanists of his age. In him are united all the characteristics of the typical humanist.

To point out the causes that cooperated in producing a man like this in the midst of oppressed and persecuted Israel, has been the object of this introduction. I shall now proceed to the subject proper, i. e. to give an account of Levita's life and works.

I

His Life.

as that of many a great man is, in its entirety, not so well-known as to enable us to state with certainty when and where he was born. Both the year and the place of his birth have been the subject of literary controversy. The former point seems to have been settled by the learned Rossi. Says he: "No Jewish historian speaks of the year of his birth; Bartolucci and Wolf are also silent about it. Only in modern times, when the study of

biblical criticism and the memory of our Elias revived with much dignity, two Germans Herz and Nagel, made more thorough and careful researches into this matter, and fixed the year of his birth, the former at 1469^{*)}, the latter at 1477, both relying upon a journey which Elias made to Rome, in 1509 according to the former, in 1517 according to the latter. Nagel adds a still stronger proof that according to the observations of Gans and the undoubted passage in the preface to the third Venetian edition of his "Bachur", he was seventy years old in 1547 when this edition was printed. Both writers are mistaken.

The dates, based upon his journey to Rome, are both false, and the seventy years are **not** to be referred to the third but to the second edition of his book in Italy, 1542, which, however rare it is, had nevertheless appeared in Germany, and, therefore, it is surprising that it has escaped the careful research of Nagel. We fortunately possess it, and report here, from the latter preface of our author, the following significant passage concerning his life. 'I was,' says he, 'forty years old when, forced by circumstances of time, I left Venice for Rome. There I was repeatedly asked to write this book, and I answered the

general demand as well as my own wish.
From then till now thirty years have passed,
and the Lord has granted me such a vital
power that I am now, in my seventieth
year, still as active as then, and able to
dispute about the Grammar, the holy
text and the Masorah, nay, I have
since that time gathered new knowledge
and new conjectures which I hitherto
did not possess; therefore I have resolved
to have this book printed a second time.
This passage fixes with certainty the two
principal epochs of his life. If in 1542,
when writing this, he was seventy years
old, he must have been born in 1472, and if
then thirty years had passed since his jour-

ney to Rome, the latter must have taken place in 1512, in the fortieth year of his life." Thus Elias Levita's birth falls in the year 1472.

The second point is still a point of dispute, both Italians and Germans being desirous to claim this great writer for their country. The chief argument of the former is that Elias, in his concluding words to the "Meturgeman", while in Italy, Germany, speaks of Italy as "my country," and Venice as "my city". To quote the author's own words: "I shall return to my country, the city of Venice, which I have left, and die in my city."

The chief arguments of the Germans

are that Elias on the title pages of several of his books calls himself "Ashkenazi"

(אַשכּנזי) or the "German", and that, according to the expressed testimony of his friend and pupil, Sebastian Münster," he was born at Neustadt, on the Aich, not far from Nuremberg. Whether we accept the one view or the other, so much is sure that he was of German descent, and spent the greatest part of his life in Italy.

Accordingly, Elias Levita (properly Elijah the Levite, son of Asher) was born in 1472 (and if we are to accept the view of Jost, Graetz, Geiger and Karpeles) at Neustadt on the Aich not far from Nuremberg, in Germany. Here,

according to Geiger, he received his early education and, probably ^{then} went to Italy for the further cultivation of his mental faculties. There is however a report that the margrave of Neustadt expelled Elias together with several other Jews from that town, and that he then went to Italy. Here he lived in several places as teacher of the Hebrew language, especially in Padua, where he lectured on the Hebrew grammar of Moses Kimchi, and wrote a commentary on it. When Padua, in 1509, was captured and plundered, Elias lost all his property and went to Venice, which city, in 1512 he again left for Rome. There he met with

a friendly reception from Cardinal Egidio of Viterbo, who even received him and his family into his own home*) For many years Elias instructed the Cardinal in the Hebrew language, who, in turn, made him better acquainted with the classical languages.**) Through Egidio Elias entered into intimate relations with a number of other cardinals and bishops, who so warmly recommended him that he received an honorable call from King Francois I of France, which he however declined. When Rome, in 1547 was plundered by the troops of Karl V, Elias again lost his whole property. He again went to Venice, where he remained till 1548, when he accepted a call from Paul Fagius

to assist him in the establishment of a new Hebrew printing office, and in the publication of several Hebrew books, at Lany in Suabia. He remained in Lany until 1547, when he returned to Venice, where he died in 1549.

II

His Character

His character stands forth prominently upon the pages of our history; not only does it command the respect of both Jew and Christian but even inspires all who know the name Elias with admiration for the man who could be so upright and sincere so friendly, gentle, kind and affectionate towards all, both Jew and Christian alike, so active and yet so unselfish, liberal and broad-minded at a time when prejudices to a great extent still swayed the human mind and thus severed man from man; where

passions and desires still maintained their supremacy over mankind, and self-gratification was deemed by men the sole purpose of his life. Only when we consider the age in which our author lived — an age full of turbulence and violence, from which the few had to suffer most — when we consider the vicissitudes of Elias' life, only then, and then only, we can form a correct estimate of his character. More than once disturbed in his peaceful vocation by circumstances of time, again and again deprived of his property, expelled from his home, and thus driven from place to place, yet he despairs not; nor does he lose his confidence in mankind. Despite all

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the miseries inflicted upon him by Christian hands, he is still liberal and broad-minded enough to become the teacher of Christendom, and thus at the cost of his good name among his own people. Says Geiger: "Levita was the teacher of Christendom; this was imputed to him for reproach; that he lived with Cardinal Egidio was given out as a crime. He acknowledged it with pride and gloried therein. He tells us (in one of the prefaces to his *כסדרת הקסדרת*) that he can still say: Praise unto the Lord, I am a Hebrew. I fear God who created heaven and earth. That our sages have forbidden teaching the Christians the mysteries of creation and of the divine chariot only, that of the seven command-

ments however, given to Noah and his descendants, they have expressly permitted; but how is it possible to give instruction in these, if the pupils are not previously taught the Hebrew language, in which these commandments are written. That he has taught the Hebrew language not to one only but has had a large number of pupils and that all those who, in turn, learned from them he will acknowledge as his pupils.—This communication Fagius supplements (in his Latin preface to Elias' 1207) when reporting that Levita has had numerous disciples, ^{among them} has numbered, not merely insignificant persons but the most prominent men,—cardinals bishops and scholars everywhere.

That all would wish that his years were ever renewed; that this would be a great benefit to all, both Jews and Christians alike, who busy themselves with the holy language.

To sum up: Elias Levita was a man of sincerity and uprightness, of a kind and friendly nature, of a meek and amiable disposition, despite his frailties and slight inclination to superstition; he was a man of activity and unselfishness, devoting his whole life to study and learning in the service of humanity;—in a word, he was a true humanist.

Withal, his character lacked not modesty.

"Elias Levita was in his life as in his literary vocation of the greatest modesty"

He considers it not below his dignity to learn from his Christian brother whose teacher he is. He seems to follow the maxim of our Rabbis: "מכל מלכודי השכלתי"

This modesty is especially noticed in all his literary pursuits. Though a profound thinker and a man of thorough research and learning he deems it not too lowly to go along the pathway marked out by the Kinnichis.

"He who certainly had opened to his Christian pupils the gates of the Cabala, modestly declares that he understands nothing of its mysteries. Though a thorough Talmudic scholar he confesses to be a stranger in this field, and as to Philosophy, he maintains that she kept aloof from him.

And yet do his grammatical works breathe
a philosophical spirit and are filled with
Talmudic lore

Thus he has not unjustly been compared
to one of the philologists of the eighteenth
century, possibly to Reiske, the friend of Less-
ing, who, to a question of the poet, answered:
that he is a grammarian and no critic.

In like manner, Levita conducted him-
self when one spoke to him about Cabala
Talmud or Philosophy. "But he was never-
theless, as the former, an excellent gram-
marian (for this reason called *alio' p'k'p'k'*) who
edited significant works of others, produced
important works of his own, and became
an active promoter of Hebrew philology."
(Karpis)

III*His Literary Activity*

is indeed astonishing for its productivity, if we consider the circumstances in which he lived. Driven from place to place, again and again disturbed in his peaceful vocation, he, nevertheless, works onward in the field chosen by him, producing book after book, and enriching thus not only the Hebrew literature but cultivating at the same time the science of Hebrew philology. But Elias was not merely an excellent grammarian, writing books on Hebrew Grammar, but he was also

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a commentator, lexicographer, critic and brilliant poet, and all his works were received by the learned of his age with much appreciation. Says Geiger: "In what light the German scholars regard him — and this view is now for us of essential importance — is shown best by the detailed description which Paul Fagius has given us about him: 'Levita is an excellent grammarian, a rare accomplishment with the Jew in general, especially with the German. He has devoted all his life-time to the acquisition of this branch of learning. He has read all the authentic works and has given complete evidence of his proficiency therein. From these

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writings all have drawn who have busied themselves with the Hebrew language, and the present widespread knowledge of the same is due to him, which fact his pupils publicly acknowledge without hesitation. He knows the Hebrew as well as the Chaldaic language. He has read the Chaldaic translators with diligence and care, and a result of these his studies, is his Chaldaic Dictionary

(ספר דברי חיים). He is well versed in the Bible, with which the rest of the Jews scarcely busy themselves, but spend the greatest part of their time in Talmudic quibbles and trifles.

He remembers not only the beginning of every biblical book but also single verses, phrases, signs, accents and many other things,

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which appears very phenomenal in such an aged man. It is the very age that gives this man no insignificant authority, it commends his learning as tested by long years, shows that whatever he brings forth from his armory, is not a new production, but something more than once considered and discussed, something firmly and solidly established. Of such a man one must learn, of him who, though a Jew, is not antagonized to ^{the} Christian belief, who speaks not, as the rest of his coreligionists, about Christ in a scoffing manner, who besides his positive knowledge, possesses a rich treasure of experience, and understands how to impart all this with readiness

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and wonderful skill. It is only to be feared that his advanced age will unexpectedly one day remove him from our midst; till then however, we must thank God who has preserved him so long and has not yet allowed the grim reaper to cut short his life-thread. Above all I am indebted for this kindness, for to me it was granted not only to read the writings of this man but to have him near me in person, to receive him as my guest, to chat with him "mouth to mouth" as the Hebrew says, to be in close contact with him. Through the advice and assistance so readily offered me by this man Elias who, though a Jew, is none the less worthy of every possible praise for his

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distinguished learning and his admirable goodness and friendliness, I have been enabled to open a Hebrew printing-office. It is therefore especially my duty to exhort those engaged in the pursuit of Hebrew studies to laud and praise this man, who has come to Germany and shows himself thankful to his country by there publishing his writings, and who though stricken in years, seeks not even yet ^{the} deserved rest, but incessantly, day and night, applies himself to the Hebrew studies.

IV.

His Works and Their
Literary Value

Will now be considered in accordance with logical order. In chronological succession Eliás' Works are the following:

1. "באור על מהלך שבי-לי הדעת"

a commentary on the grammar of Moses Kimchi, written for his pupils before the year 1500, in the 27th year of his life. This work was edited at the request of his pupils, after it had been completed at Padua in

His Works and their Literary Value

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1504, and was first published at Pesaro in 1508 by a certain Benjamin who had stolen the manuscript which Elias had given him to copy. This is a different work from his.

2. "פרוש על פתח דברי"

brief grammatical introduction or scholia to Kimchi's grammar, "פתח דברי", the text of which appeared at Naples in 1542 and Levita's scholia on it at Pesaro in 1507, and later editions.

3. * "ספר הבחור"

a Hebrew grammar, especially for etymology, divided into 4 parts.

This book was written by Elias at Rome in 1517 and, inscribed to Cardinal Egidio, published in 1518.

4. "הַהֲרַחֲקֵי הַכֹּכָבִים"

a book on "Composition", in which he treats of the irregular words of the Bible. The first and rarest edition of this book is the one that appeared at Rome in 1518, and the date of which is erroneously given by some bibliographers as 1519, a year later.

5. "פֶּרֶק־אֲלִיָּהוּ"

"Elias' Sections", a grammatical treatise in 4 parts, which appeared at Soncino in 1520 and at Pesaro

in 1527.

6.

"מסב מעם"

on the "Accents," published at Venice in 1538.

7.

"מסורת המסורת"

a critical book on the Biblical text and its authors, "the most celebrated of all his works," which appeared at Venice in 1538 and a year later in Basel with a Latin summary and a complete translation of the third preface of this his work by Sebastian Münster. This work of Levita created a great sensation in the learned world and largely

contributed to the author's fame, because of the view expressed therein that the punctuation of the Biblical text is a modern invention and not, as had been hitherto firmly believed, given by Moses or Ezra, nay, not even by the Talmudists. That this view met with the fiercest opposition of fanatics both Jewish and Christian, that Levita was for this reason declared an infidel, can easily be imagined; for never before had the authenticity of the Biblical text been questioned in any manner or

form.

8.

"מקור מן"

the 'Interpreter', a Chaldaic-Talmudic dictionary, at Isny in 1541, and at Venice in 1560.

9.

"תשבי"

a dictionary in which are explained 712 Rabbinical words. (their numerical value equals תשבי; hence the title). This book appeared with Fagius' Latin translation at Isny in 1541, (the first printed in Fagius' printing-office). The method pursued by him in this his work may be learned from the following illustrations:

עולם הבא

"Among the moderns there is a controversy about the future world. Some maintain that it signifies the life of the soul which begins immediately after death; others say that it is the time of the Messiah; still others that it is the resurrection of the dead. Each adduces proofs in order to support his own view. But I am not worthy of mingling with the wise; whosoever desires to investigate this question, let him read Isaac Abarbanel's explanation on the subject."

יֵשׁוּעַ

"The Christians say that their Messiah was named Jesus because he was to bring salvation to the whole world, (יֵשׁוּעַ, he will help, redeem); others think that this happened to be his name as that of many others at that time."—

דְּרַגּוֹם

"The opinion of the ancients that the Paradise had 4 entrances, I am not inclined to discuss."—

10. תַּרְגּוֹם מִתְּלֵי דְשֵׁלֻמָּה,

"The Targum to the Proverbs of Solomon", with glosses, published

at Isny in 1541.

11. "שמות קטנים"

"Nomenclature of Hebrew words,"
in 4 columns; (1) Hebrew-German
(Juedisch-Deutsch); (2) Hebrew;
(3) Latin by Paul Fagius; (4) German,
in German letters alphabetically
arranged, published at Isny in
1542.

12. "ספר איוב בחרוזים"

"The book of Job in verse", at Venice
in 1544.

13. "ספר תהלים בלשון אשכנזית"

A literal translation of the Psalms,
Venice 1545.

14. "נמוקי חסידים"

Annotations to the grammar
"מכתב ספר" of R. David Kimchi (רמב"ם),
printed together with the latter
at Venice in 1546.

15. "ספר סדרת ספרות"

A voluminous Concordance.
The author makes mention of
it in the Third preface to his
מסורת המסורת, stating that he
sent it to Paris for publication.
The manuscript is preserved in
the public library of Paris.

16. "פרש המסורות"

"Explanation of Massoretic abbrevi-
ations," supplemented by the author
of 'ספר סדרת ספרות', published at Prague in

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1610.

17. "אגרת על מונסטר" or "מכתב מאליה"
a missive to Sebastian Münster
concerning some scientific ques-
tions.

18.

"ספר חבבא"

a German novel, ascribed to him
by Sabbatai, which first ap-
peared at Amsterdam in 1661.

There is also ascribed to him by
the same man a German trans-
lation of the Pentateuch with the
הפטרות and מגילות, which appeared
at Costnitz in 1544. But this
translation is a production of
Michael Adam, a converted Jew,

according to Sesner, his contemporary and fellow-citizen. He also wrote a pamphlet against Balmes'

"מקנה אברהם." Besides, Elias composed many poems. These are for the most part either introductory or concluding remarks to his works. He also copied and translated Cabalistic books for his friend, Cardinal Egidio, as: "פרוש ספר כיצירה", "ספר חכמה נפש", and "סודי גיור".

The literary value of his works cannot be overestimated for the profound erudition they evince and the simplicity of style in which they are written. It was just this

simple and lucid style of Levita that commended his works to the learned of his age & enabled Christian divines to acquaint themselves with the Hebrew language and its literature.

Elias' writings will ever be highly valued by the student of Hebrew literature; for, says Richard Simon, (in his "Cérimonien des Juifs" P. 131) "whosoever desires to learn the Hebrew language thoroughly, must read all the works of Elias which are full of valuable information and are very necessary for a good knowledge of the Holy Text." —

V.

*Their immediate and Subsequent Influence
upon Biblical Studies and Biblical Criticism.*

has not been called in question
by any of our historians. It is generally
admitted that Levi's not only established
the science of Hebrew philology but also
laid the cornerstone to that of Biblical
criticism. Even Jost says: "To him (Eliash)
the Hebrew grammar owes the strong
impetus it received," though thinking
that "he has thrown no light upon the
higher science of this language". He
also admits that "for his century his

Their immediate and subsequent influence 59

literary contributions were most valuable" and while thinking that the מסורה המסורה has been "overestimated", he nevertheless remarks (though in a foot-note; Gesch. d. Juden u. s. Secten, Vol III p. 121) that "Elias view that the vowels and accents are of modern date, is of significance.".....

The immediate influence of Levita's work upon the learned world was largely due to the fact that no sooner had his works been written than they were rendered accessible even to those who knew no Hebrew or very little of it. His Christian pupils Munster and Fagius vied with each other in translating his works. Most of his works were trans-

lated into Latin by his friend and pupil Münster and thus became the common property of the learned world. Living at a time when the human mind had become desirous of learning and the Hebrew language a "fashionable study", Levita was fortunate enough to see his works studied and appreciated by his learned contemporaries, the more so, since their simple style, their thoroughness and the high esteem in which the author was held for his profound erudition and noble character, commended them to all the lovers of knowledge.

Their consequent influence

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upon Biblical studies and Biblical criticism was but natural. Levi had laid the foundation for the science of Hebrew philology and Biblical criticism, and others built upon it.

Hebrew was soon considered an accomplishment as high, if not higher, than Greek and Latin, and was taught along with the classical languages at every university. Of course there were many other causes at work which furthered the spread of the Hebrew language and its literature, but one of the main causes was surely the influence of Eliás' writings upon the learned world.

As to the influence of his works upon the science of Biblical criticism, it cannot be denied that the *מקדמות* anticipated the judgment of the highest modern criticism on the questions of which it treats, and that it was, in fact, the father of the great Buxtorf and Cappel controversy which raged round the Hebrew Scriptures for more than a hundred years after Levita's death. May we not therefore perhaps consider Levita rather than Spinoza the father of Biblical criticism? For has not the view expressed in the *מקדמות*, had for its consequence the denial of the authenticity of the Holy Text itself? —

Their immediate and subsequent Influence ⁶³
upon Biblical Studies and Biblical Criticism

Be this as it may, so much is sure that whosoever will write the history of Biblical criticism, will not forget to rank among the first and foremost of critics the great grammarian Elias Levitas.

FINIS

