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SUMMARY

THE HISTORICAL PICTURE OF R. YEHUDA HALEVI

by I. HEINEMANN

(pp. 147—177)

The author sets out in chronological order the remarks of R. Yehuda Halevi referring to history from ancient times until the latter days, thus clarifying the method of the philosopher, particularly his independent attitude towards the Aggada, and the character of his approach. It would appear from a number of passages that he seems to restrict the activities of the Shekina to the People of Israel and the patriarchs. In reality the signs of Divine Providence are recognisable throughout the entire field of organisms, and little by little become more clear until in the human sphere they reach the "quintessence" of full manifestation, demonstrating the general providence of God. For the divine power is revealed in all the teleological phenomena. The philosopher gives this the name of Amr. He draws both the intuition of this uniform force and the fulfilment in detail, primarily from the Stoics; but he employs it in independent fashion. The national and popular view of Jewish history obviously differs from that of the disciples of Aristotle, and particularly from that of Maimonides.

THE KABBALISTS RABBI EZRA AND RABBI AZRIEL, AND THEIR PLACE IN THE GERONA SCHOOL.

by I. TISHBY

(pp. 178—185)

The essay deals with the two Kabbalists Rabbi Ezra and Rabbi Azriel, who headed the disciples of Rabbi Issac Sagi Nehor (the Blind) at Gerona in the beginning of the Thirteenth century. It is demonstrated that in contradiction to the assumptions of certain scholars, they were not brothers but that, as far as can be judged, Rabbi Ezra was the father-in-law of Rabbi Azriel. Various proofs are brought of the relations between Rabbi Issac and his disciples. As an example of his influence all the expressions found in an Ms. commentary by Rabbi Azriel on the Aggadot are quoted, together with the words of the master from which they are taken. In connection with the Gerona circle all the relations between the members of the circle are described, together with their influence on the dissemination of the Kabbala. It is found that, in contradiction to the tradition of later times, Rabbi Ezra was not the direct teacher of Kabbala to Nahmaides.

In the final chapter a description is given of the literary character of the two Kabbalists, as it can be apprehended from the investigation of their works. Rabbi Ezra appears as a reproductive personality linking others, while Rabbi Azriel is original and independent. In the development of the Kabbala, however, it was Rabbi Ezra who exerted an influence, while the original ideas of Rabbi Azriel did not spread far.

THE BEGINNINGS OF HASSIDISM AND ITS SOCIAL AND MESSIANIC ELEMENTS.

by B. DINABURG

(pp. 186—197)

In the tenth chapter of his study the author deals with the Hassidic groups and the character of Hassidic life prior to the Baal Shem Tov, From the "Praises of the Besht"

and other works of the period he sets out to demonstrate the existence of prior Hassidic groups, and the association of the Movement with them. The revelation of the Besht was only, according to the Hassidic sources, his recognition by these groups, and particularly by that of Brody which was the most important of all, as their head. It can be seen from the same sources that one of the kinsfolk of the Besht competed with him for that position. The earliest important disciples of the Besht belonged to those groups, which consisted mostly of ascetics of the types to be found in Jewish communities after the spread of Lurianic Kabbala. We possess not only detailed information regarding the existence of these groups, but also the rules and regulations in accordance with which they conducted themselves. On the basis of this information the author reaches the following conclusions:

- 1) The study of Kabbala and the spread of that study compelled the existence of such "Holy Associations". The study of Kabbala gave a fresh turn to the study of certain other subjects, particularly of Aggadot and midrashim.
- 2) This in turn led to the establishment of "Mishna Associations", which constituted one of the organisational forms of the students of the secret learning in the communities.
- 3) The first paragraph of the Shulhan Arukh on the "True" way, which was accepted by the Kabbalists, required whosoever wishes to learn "the true Torah to conduct himself in the way of piety (Hassidut)".
- 4) To this end he had "to keep his distance from the ignorant" and "always to be together with the saintly and pious, to be their companion and to learn from their deeds." Such "hassidim" stood out in the communities as special groups stamped with their own particular way of life, which was "the way of piety (Hassidut)". And many of the books of morality and upright behaviour of the period were actually based on this form of life, which they wished to make the general one. That way of life really included all the "new customs" which the Hassidim introduced in the days of the Besht and which awakened so much opposition. They included the employment of Rabbi Issac Luria's usage in prayer, the wearing of Rabbenu Tam's phylacteries, white garments on the Sabbath, immersion in the ritual bath (mikveh), a "rabbi" or instructor who teaches Torah in the Sabbath, the celebration of the Third Feast on the Sabbath and various other practices.
- 5) The members of these groups were also united in close personal bonds, which was the result of the necessity of fulfilling the commandment "And thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" by "close association of the comrades", as well as by the negative and mocking attitude of extensive masses of the ordinary people to those "Hassidim" and "saints". These considerations led the Hassidim to join all the many religious and social societies to be found in the communities (societies for visiting the sick, studying Torah, providing dowries for poor brides, Redeeming Captives, Clothing the Naked, Reciters of Psalms, etc., etc.). One of the societies founded by them, and which was exceedingly widespread in the communities, was the "Midnight Society" the members of which used to rise at the midnight hour, recite special prayers and bewail the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Shechina (Divine Presence), and study Torah. The author concludes from all these facts that even during the first half of the eighteenth century the term "Hassid" already denominated a certain religious-cum-social type, and a specific theoretical religious approach. The latter can be appreciated only by an examination of the general religious background upon which the Hassidic character crystallised.