

that Providence sent it to school here on earth, in order to raise it from childhood to manhood. In reality, the human race is—if the metaphor is appropriate—in almost every century, child, adult, and old man at the same time, though in different places and regions of the world. Here in the cradle, it sucks the breast, or lives on cream and milk; there it stands in manly armor, consuming the meat of cattle; and, in another place, it leans on a cane, once again without teeth. Progress is for the individual man, who is destined by Providence to spend part of his eternity here on earth. Everyone goes through life in his own way. One man's path takes him through flowers and meadows, another's across desolate plains, or over steep mountains and past dangerous gorges. Yet they all proceed on their journey, making their way to the felicity for which they are destined. But it does not seem to me to have been the purpose of Providence that mankind as a whole advance steadily here below and perfect itself in the course of time. This, at least, is not so well settled nor by any means so necessary for the vindication of God's providence as one is in the habit of thinking.

That we should again and again resist all theory and hypotheses, and want to speak of facts, to hear nothing but of facts, and yet should have the least regard for facts precisely where they matter most! You want to divine what designs Providence has for mankind? Do not frame hypotheses; only look around you at what actually happens and, if you can survey history as a whole, at what has happened since the beginning of time. This is fact, this must have been part of the design; this must have been decreed or, at least, admitted by Wisdom's plan. Providence never misses its goal. Whatever actually happens must have been its design from the beginning, or part of it. Now, as far as the human race as a whole is concerned, you will find no steady progress in its development that brings it ever closer to perfection. Rather do we see the human race in its totality slightly oscillate; it never took a few steps forward without soon afterwards, and with redoubled speed, sliding back to its previous position. Most nations of the

earth live for many centuries at the same stage of culture, in the same twilight, one which seems much too dim for our pampered eyes. Now and then, a dot blazes up in the midst of the great mass, becomes a glittering star, and traverses an orbit which now after a shorter, now after a longer period, brings it back again to its starting point, or not far from it. Individual man advances, but mankind continually fluctuates within fixed limits, while maintaining, on the whole, about the same degree of morality in all periods—the same amount of religion and irreligion, of virtue and vice, of felicity and misery; the same result, if one compares like with like; of all these goods and evils as much as is required for the passage of the individual man in order that he might be educated here below, and approach as closely as possible the perfection which is apportioned to him and for which he is destined.

I return to my previous remark. Judaism boasts of no *exclusive* revelation of eternal truths that are indispensable to salvation, of no revealed religion in the sense in which that term is usually understood. Revealed *religion* is one thing, revealed *legislation*, another. The voice which let itself be heard on Sinai on that great day did not proclaim, "I am the Eternal, your God, the necessary, independent being, omnipotent and omniscient, that recompenses men in a future life according to their deeds." This is the universal *religion of mankind*, not Judaism; and the universal *religion of mankind*, without which men are neither virtuous nor capable of felicity, was not to be revealed there. In reality, it could not have been revealed there, for who was to be convinced of these eternal doctrines of salvation by the voice of thunder and the sound of trumpets? Surely not the unthinking, brutelike man, whose own reflections had not yet led him to the existence of an invisible being that governs the visible. The miraculous voice would not have instilled any concepts in him and, therefore, would not have convinced him. Still less [would it have convinced] the sophist whose ears are buzzing with so many doubts and ruminations that he can no longer hear the voice of common sense. He

demands *rational proofs*, not miracles. And even if the teacher of religion were to raise from the dust all the dead who ever trod the earth, in order to confirm thereby an *eternal truth*, the skeptic would say: The teacher has awakened many dead, yet I still know no more about eternal truth than I did before. I know now that someone can do, and pronounce, extraordinary things; but there may be several suchlike beings, who do not think it proper to reveal themselves just at this moment. And all this is still far removed from the infinitely sublime idea of a *unique, eternal Deity* that rules the entire universe according to its unlimited will, and discerns men's most secret thoughts in order to reward their deeds according to their merits, if not here, then in the hereafter.

Anyone who did not know this, who was not imbued with these truths indispensable to human felicity, and was not prepared to approach the holy mountain, could have been stunned and overwhelmed by the great and wonderful manifestations, but he could not have been made aware of what he had not known before. No! All this was presupposed; it was, perhaps, taught, explained, and placed beyond all doubt by human reasoning during the days of preparation. And now the divine voice proclaimed: "*I am the Eternal, your God, who brought you out of the land of Mizrajim, who delivered you from bondage, etc.*" A historical truth, on which this people's legislation was to be founded, as well as laws, was to be revealed here—commandments and ordinances, not eternal religious truths. "I am the Eternal, your God, who made a covenant with your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and swore to make of their seed a nation of my own. The time for the fulfillment of this promise has finally come. To this end, I redeemed you from Egyptian slavery with unheard-of miracles and signs. I am your Redeemer, your Sovereign and King; I also make a covenant with you, and give you laws by which you are to live and become a happy nation in the land that I shall give you." All these are historical truths which, by their very nature, rest on historical evidence, *must* be verified by authority, and *can* be confirmed by miracles.

Miracles and extraordinary signs are, according to Judaism, no proofs for or against eternal truths of reason. We are, therefore, instructed in Scripture itself not to listen to a prophet if he teaches or counsels things contrary to established truths, even if he confirms his mission by miracles; indeed, we are to condemn to death the performer of miracles if he tries to lead us astray into idolatry. For miracles can only verify testimonies, support authorities, and confirm the credibility of witnesses and those who transmit tradition. But no testimonies and authorities can upset any established truth of reason, or place a doubtful one beyond doubt and suspicion.

Although the divine book that we received through Moses is, strictly speaking, meant to be a book of laws containing ordinances, rules of life and prescriptions, it also includes, as is well known, an inexhaustible treasure of rational truths and religious doctrines which are so intimately connected with the laws that they form but one entity. All laws refer to, or are based upon, eternal truths of reason, or remind us of them, and rouse us to ponder them. Hence, our rabbis rightly say: the laws and doctrines are related to each other, like body and soul. I shall have occasion to say more about this below, and shall content myself here with presupposing it as a fact, of the truth of which anyone can convince himself if he peruses the laws of Moses for that purpose, even if only in translation. The experience of many centuries also teaches that this divine law book has become, for a large part of the human race, a source of insight from which it draws new ideas, or according to which it corrects old ones. The more you search in it, the more you will be astounded at the depths of insight which lie concealed in it. At first glance, to be sure, the truth presents itself therein in its simplest attire and, as it were, free of any pretensions. Yet the more closely you approach it, and the purer, the more innocent, the more loving and longing is the glance with which you look upon it, the more it will unfold before you its divine beauty, veiled lightly, in order not to be profaned by vulgar and unholy eyes. But all these excel-

lent propositions are presented to the understanding, submitted to us for consideration, without being forced upon our belief. Among all the prescriptions and ordinances of the Mosaic law, there is not a single one which says: *You shall believe or not believe*. They all say: *You shall do or not do*. Faith is not commanded, for it accepts no other commands than those that come to it by way of conviction. All the commandments of the divine law are addressed to man's will, to his power to act. In fact, the word in the original language that is usually translated as *faith* actually means, in most cases, *trust, confidence*, and firm reliance on pledge and promise. *Abraham trusted in the Eternal and it was accounted to him for piety* (Gen. 15:6); *The Israelites saw and trusted in the Eternal and in Moses, his servant* (Ex. 14:31). Whenever it is a question of the eternal truths of reason, it does not say *believe*, but *understand and know*. *In order that you may know that the Eternal is the true God, and there is none beside Him* (Deut. 4:39). *Therefore, know and take it to heart that the Lord alone is God, in heaven above and on the earth below, and there is none else* (ibid.). *Hear, O Israel, the Eternal, our God, is a unique, eternal being!* (Deut. 6:4). Nowhere does it say: *Believe, O Israel, and you will be blessed; do not doubt, O Israel, or this or that punishment will befall you*. Commandment and prohibition, reward and punishment are only for actions, acts of commission and omission which are subject to a man's will and which are guided by ideas of good and evil and, therefore, also by hope and fear. Belief and doubt, assent and opposition, on the other hand, are not determined by our faculty of desire, by our wishes and longings, or by fear and hope, but by our knowledge of truth and untruth.

Hence, ancient Judaism has no symbolic books, no *articles of faith*. No one has to swear to symbols or subscribe, by oath, to certain articles of faith. Indeed, we have no conception at all of what are called *religious oaths*; and according to the spirit of true Judaism, we must hold them to be inadmissible. Maimonides was the first to conceive of the idea of reducing the religion of his fathers to a certain number of principles, in order that, as he ex-

plains, religion, like all other sciences, would have its fundamental conceptions, from which all the others are deduced. This merely accidental idea gave rise to the *thirteen articles* of the Jewish catechism, to which we owe the morning hymn *Yigdal*, as well as some good writings by Chasdai, Albo, and Abrabanel. These are all the results they have had up to now. Thank God, they have not yet been forged into shackles of faith. Chasdai disputes them and proposes changes; Albo limits their number and wants to recognize only three basic principles which correspond rather closely to those which Herbert of Cherbury, at a later date, proposed for the catechism; and still others, especially Luria and his disciples, the latter-day Kabbalists, do not wish to recognize any fixed number of fundamental doctrines, and say: In our teaching, everything is fundamental. Nevertheless, this debate was conducted as all controversies of this kind should be: with earnestness and zeal, but without animosity and bitterness. And although the thirteen articles of Maimonides have been accepted by the greater part of the nation, no one, as far as I know, has ever branded Albo a heretic because he wanted to reduce their number and lead them back to far more universal propositions of reason. In this respect, we have not yet disregarded the important dictum of our sages: *"Although this one loosens and the other binds, both teach the words of the living God."**

In truth, everything depends here also on the distinction between *believing* and *knowing*, between religious doctrines and religious commandments. To be sure, all human knowledge can be reduced to a few, fundamental concepts, which are laid down as the bases. The fewer these are, the more firmly the structure will stand. But laws cannot be abridged. In them everything is fundamental; and in this regard we may rightly say: to us, all words

* I have seen many a pedant quote this saying to prove that the rabbis do not believe in the principle of contradiction. I hope to live to see the day when all the peoples of the earth will admit this exception to the universal principle of contradiction: *"The fast day of the fourth and the fast day of the tenth month shall become days of joy and gladness if you but love peace and truth"* (Zechariah 8:19).

of Scripture, all of God's commandments and prohibitions are fundamental. Should you, nevertheless, want to obtain their quintessence, listen to how that great teacher of the nation, Hillel the Elder, who lived before the destruction of the second Temple, conducted himself in this matter. A heathen said: "Rabbi, teach me the entire law while I am standing on one foot!" Shammai, whom he had previously approached with the same unreasonable request, had dismissed him contemptuously; but Hillel, renowned for his imperturbable composure and gentleness, said: "Son, *love thy neighbor as thyself*. This is the text of the law; all the rest is commentary. Now go and study!"

I have sketched the basic outlines of ancient, original Judaism, such as I conceive it to be. Doctrines and laws, convictions and actions. The former were not connected to words or written characters which always remain the same, for all men and all times, amid all the revolutions of language, morals, manners, and conditions, words and characters which invariably present the same rigid forms, into which we cannot force our concepts without disfiguring them. They were entrusted to living, spiritual instruction, which can keep pace with all changes of time and circumstances, and can be varied and fashioned according to a pupil's needs, ability, and power of comprehension. One found the occasion for this paternal instruction in the written book of the law and in the ceremonial acts which the adherent of Judaism had to observe incessantly. It was, at first, expressly forbidden to write more about the law than God had caused Moses to record for the nation. "What has been transmitted orally," say the rabbis, "you are not permitted to put in writing." It was with much reluctance that the heads of the synagogue resolved in later periods to give the permission—which had become necessary—to write about the laws. They called this permission a destruction of the law and said, with the Psalmist, "There is a time when, for the sake of the Eternal, the law must be destroyed." According to the original constitution, however, it was not supposed to be like that. The ceremonial law itself is a kind of living script, rousing the mind and heart, full of meaning, never

ceasing to inspire contemplation and to provide the occasion and opportunity for oral instruction. What a student himself did and saw being done from morning till night pointed to religious doctrines and convictions and spurred him on to follow his teacher, to watch him, to observe all his actions, and to obtain the instruction which he was capable of acquiring by means of his talents, and of which he had rendered himself worthy by his conduct. The diffusion of writings and books which, through the invention of the printing press, has been infinitely multiplied in our days, has entirely transformed man. The great upheaval in the whole system of human knowledge and convictions which it has produced has, indeed, had on the one hand advantageous consequences for the improvement of mankind, for which we cannot thank beneficent Providence enough. However, like every good which can come to man here below, it has also had, incidentally, many evil consequences, which are to be attributed partly to its abuse, and partly also to the necessary condition of human nature. We teach and instruct one another only through writings; we learn to know nature and man only from writings. We work and relax, edify and amuse ourselves through overmuch writing. The preacher does not converse with his congregation; he reads or declaims to it a written treatise. The professor reads his written lectures from the chair. Everything is dead letter; the spirit of living conversation has vanished. We express our love and anger in letters, quarrel and become reconciled in letters; all our personal relations are by correspondence; and when we get together, we know of no other entertainment than playing or *reading aloud*.

Hence, it has come to pass that man has almost lost his value for his fellow man. Intercourse with the wise man is not sought, for we find his wisdom in writings. All we do is encourage him to write, in case we should believe he has not yet published enough. Hoary age has lost its venerableness, for the beardless youth knows more from books than the old man knows from experience. Whether he understood correctly or incorrectly does not matter; it is enough that he knows it, bears it upon his lips, and

can talk about it more boldly than the honest old man who, perhaps, has the ideas rather than the words at his command. We no longer understand how the prophet could have considered it so shocking an evil for a *youth to be overbearing toward an old man*, or how a certain Greek could prophesy the downfall of the state because a mischievous youngster had made fun of an old man in a public assembly. We do not need the man of experience; we only need his writings. In a word, we are *litterati, men of letters*. Our whole being depends on letters; and we can scarcely comprehend how a mortal man can educate and perfect himself without a *book*.

This was not the case in the bygone days of ancient times. Even though one cannot say that they were better, they were certainly different. One drew from different sources, one gathered and preserved in different vessels; and one made one's own that which had been preserved by completely different means. Man was more necessary to man; teaching was more closely connected with life, contemplation more intimately bound up with action. The inexperienced man had to follow in the footsteps of the experienced, the student in those of his teacher; he had to seek his company, to observe him and, as it were, sound him out, if he wanted to satisfy his thirst for knowledge. In order to show more clearly what kind of influence this circumstance had upon religion and morals, I must once again permit myself a digression from my path, from which, however, I shall very soon retrace my steps. My subject matter borders on so many others that I cannot always keep to the same road, without deviating into byways.

It seems to me that the change that has occurred in different periods of culture with regard to written characters has had, at all times, a very important part in the revolutions of human knowledge in general, and in the various modifications of men's opinions and ideas about religious matters, in particular; and if it did not produce them completely by itself, it at least cooperated in a remarkable way with other secondary causes. Scarcely does a man cease to be satisfied with the first impressions of the external

senses (and what *man* can long remain content with them?), scarcely does he feel the urge implanted in his soul to form concepts out of these external impressions, when he becomes aware of the necessity to attach them to perceptible signs, not only in order to communicate them to others, but also to hold fast to them himself, and to be able to consider them again as often as necessary. The first steps toward the separation of general characteristics he *can*, and indeed *must*, take without making use of signs, for even now all new abstract concepts must still be formed without the help of signs and are only later designated by a name. The common characteristic must first be separated by the power of attention from the fabric with which it is interwoven and must be rendered prominent. What facilitates this is, on the one hand, the objective power of the impression which this characteristic is capable of making upon us, and, on the other hand, the subjective interest we have in it. But this throwing into relief and consideration of the common characteristic costs the soul some effort. It does not take long for the light which attention concentrated on this point of the object to disappear again, and the object is lost in the shadow of the whole mass with which it is united. The soul is not capable of advancing much farther if this effort must be continued for some time and has to be repeated too often. It has begun to set things apart, but it cannot think. What is one to advise it to do? Wise Providence has placed within its [the soul's] immediate reach a means which it can use at all times. It attaches, either by a natural or an arbitrary association of ideas, the abstract characteristic to a perceptible sign which, as often as its impression is renewed, at once recalls and illuminates this characteristic, pure and unalloyed. In this manner, as is well known, originated the languages of men, which are composed of natural and arbitrary signs, and without which man would be but little distinguished from the irrational animals; for without the aid of signs, man can scarcely remove himself one step from the sensual.

In the same way in which the first steps toward rational knowledge must have been taken, the sciences are still being expanded

and enriched by inventions; this is why the invention of a new scientific term is, at times, an event of great importance. The man who first invented the word *nature* does not seem to have made a very great discovery. Nevertheless, his contemporaries were indebted to him for enabling them to confound the conjurer who showed them an apparition in the air, and to tell him that his trick was nothing supernatural, but an *effect of nature*. Granted, they did not yet have any distinct notion of the properties of refracted light rays and how, by their means, an image can be produced in the air—and how far does our own knowledge of this subject extend today? Scarcely one step farther; for we are still but little instructed about the nature of light itself and about its internal component parts—still, they at least knew how to refer a particular phenomenon back to a universal law of nature, and were not compelled to attribute a special arbitrary cause to every trick. This is also true of the more recent discovery that air has weight. Even though we cannot explain weight itself, we are at least able to relate the observation that fluids will rise in airtight tubes to the universal law of gravity which, at first glance, should rather make them go down. We can render it intelligible how the general sinking, which we cannot explain, must have caused a rising in this case; and this, too, is a step farther in knowledge. Accordingly, one should not be in a hurry to declare every scientific term an empty sound, if it cannot be derived from prior elementary concepts. It should suffice if it only denotes a universal property of things in its true extent. The term *fuga vacui* would not have been objectionable had it not been more universal than the observation. One found that there are cases in which nature does not rush to fill a vacuum immediately. Therefore the term had to be rejected, not because it was empty but because it was incorrect. Thus, the terms *cohesion of bodies* and *general gravitation* still continue to be of great importance in the sciences, even though we still do not know how to derive them from prior fundamental concepts.

Before Baron von Haller discovered the law of *irritability*, many

an observer will have noticed the phenomenon itself in the organic nature of living creatures. But it vanished in an instant, and did not sufficiently delineate itself from secondary phenomena to hold the observer's attention. Whenever he noticed it again, it was to him a single effect of nature, one which could not remind him of the multitude of cases in which he had noticed the same thing before. It was, therefore, lost again very soon, like those which had preceded it, and it left behind no distinct memory in the soul. Von Haller alone succeeded in detaching this circumstance from its context, in perceiving its universality and denoting it with a word; and now it has awakened our attention, and we know how to relate each particular case in which we notice something similar to a universal law of nature.

The designation of concepts is, therefore, doubly necessary; first, for ourselves, as a vessel, so to speak, in which to preserve them, and keep them near at hand for use; and, next, to enable us to communicate our thoughts to others. Now, in the latter respect, sounds or audible signs have a certain advantage; for, if we wish to communicate our thoughts to others, the concepts are already present in the soul, and we may, whenever necessary, produce the sounds by which they are denoted and made perceptible to our fellow men. But this is not the case with regard to ourselves. If, at another time, we wish to reawaken abstract concepts in our soul and to recall them to our mind by means of signs, these signs must present themselves of their own accord, and not wait until our will summons them, since they already presuppose the ideas we wish to recall. Visible signs provide this advantage because they are permanent, and need not always be reproduced in order to make an impression.

The first visible signs which men used to designate their abstract concepts were presumably the things themselves. Since everything in nature has a character of its own which distinguishes it from all other things, the sense impression which this thing makes upon us will draw our attention chiefly to this distinctive feature, will excite the idea of it, and can therefore serve

very well to designate it. Thus, the lion may have become a sign of courage, the dog, of faithfulness, the peacock of proud beauty, and thus did the first physicians carry live snakes with them as a sign that they knew how to render the harmful harmless.

In the course of time, one may have found it more convenient to take images of the things, either in bodies or on surfaces, instead of the things themselves; later, for the sake of brevity, to make use of outlines, and next, to let a part of the outline stand for the whole, and at last, to compose out of heterogeneous parts a shapeless but *meaningful whole*; and this mode of designation is called *hieroglyphics*.

All this could have developed, as one sees, quite naturally; but the transition from hieroglyphics to our alphabetical script seems to have required a leap, and the leap seems to have required more than ordinary human powers.

The opinion of some that our alphabetical script consists merely of signs of sounds, and can be applied to things and concepts only by means of sounds, is, to be sure, completely without foundation. Admittedly, script reminds us, who have a more lively conception of audible signs, first of all of perceptible words. For us, therefore, the road from script to things leads across and through speech; but there is no reason why it should be necessarily so. To one born deaf, script is the immediate designation of things; and if he were to regain his hearing, written signs would, initially, no doubt, bring first to his mind the things immediately connected with them, and only then, by means of those very things, the sounds which correspond to them. The real difficulty presented, I imagine, by the transition to our script consisted in the fact that, without preparation and cause, one had to conceive a deliberate plan of designating, by means of a small number of elementary signs and their possible transpositions, a multitude of concepts which would seem neither to admit of being surveyed nor, at first glance, of being arranged in classes, and thereby encompassed.

Nevertheless, even here, the path of the understanding was not entirely without guidance. Since one very often had occasion to

transform script into speech and speech into script, and thus to compare audible and visible signs, one must soon have noticed that the same sounds often recur in the spoken language, as do the same parts in different hieroglyphic images, though always in different combinations, by means of which they multiply their meaning. In the end, one must have realized that the sounds which man can produce and render perceptible are not as infinite in number as the things denoted by them, and that one could easily encompass the entire range of all perceptible sounds and divide it into classes. And thus, in the course of time, one could extend and continuously improve this division, which was at first incompletely attempted, and one could assign to each class a corresponding hieroglyphic character. Even under this assumption it still remains one of the most glorious discoveries of the human spirit; one sees at any rate how men may have been led, step by step, without any flight of inventiveness, to think of the immeasurable as measurable, and to divide, so to speak, the starry firmament into figures, and thus to assign to every star its place, without knowing their number. I believe that in the case of the audible signs it was easier to discover the trace which one only had to follow in order to perceive the figures under which the immeasurable host of human concepts can be accommodated; and from then on, it was no longer so difficult to apply the same rule to written characters, and to arrange them, too, and divide them into classes. I think, therefore, that a people born deaf would have needed greater inventive powers to pass from hieroglyphics to alphabetical writing; because in the case of written characters it is not so readily apparent that they have a comprehensible range and can be divided into classes.

I employ the word *classes* whenever it is a question of the elements of audible languages; for even today, in our living, developed languages, writing is far from being as variegated as speech, and the same written sign is read and pronounced differently in different combinations and positions. Yet it is evident that by the frequent use of writing we have made our spoken languages more

monotonous and, following the rules and requirements of written characters, more elementary. For this reason, the nations which are unacquainted with writing have a far greater diversity in their spoken language, and many of the sounds in these languages are so indeterminate that we are able to indicate them by our written characters only very imperfectly. In the beginning, therefore, one had to take things in their totality, and to designate a multitude of similar sounds by one and the same written character. As time went on, however, finer distinctions were perceived, and more characters were adopted to designate them. But that our alphabet was borrowed from some kind of hieroglyphic writing can still be discerned today in most of the shapes and names of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet,* from which, as history clearly shows, all other known ways of writing originated. It was a Phoenician who instructed the Greeks in the art of writing.

All these different modifications of writing and modes of designation must also have had different effects on the progress and improvement of concepts, opinions, and knowledge. In one respect, to their advantage. The observations, experiments, and reflections in astronomical, economic, moral, and religious matters were multiplied, propagated, facilitated, and preserved for posterity. These are the cells in which the bees collect their honey, and save it for their own enjoyment and that of others. However, as always happens in things human, what wisdom builds up in one place, folly readily seeks to tear down in another, usually employing the very same means and tools. Misunderstanding, on the one hand, and misuse, on the other, transformed what should have been an improvement of man's condition into corruption and deterioration. What had been simplicity and ignorance now became seduction and error. On the one hand, misunderstanding; the great multitude was either not at all or only half instructed in the notions which were to be associated with these perceptible

* ♂ ox ☐ house † camel † door † hook † sword ☐ fist,
 spoon † stimulus † fish ☐ support, base † eye ☐ mouth † ape
 † teeth

signs. They saw the signs not as mere signs, but believed them to be the things themselves. As long as one still used the things themselves or their images and outlines, instead of signs, this error was easily made. For besides their signification, the things also had a reality of their own. The coin was, at the same time, a piece of merchandise which had its own use and utility; therefore, the ignorant person could easily misjudge and wrongly specify its value as a coin. Hieroglyphic script could, to be sure, partly correct this error, or at least did not foster it as much as the outlines did, for its images were composed of heterogeneous and ill-matched parts, misshapen and preposterous figures which had no existence of their own in nature and could, therefore, as one should think, not be taken for writing. But this enigmatic and strange character of the composition itself afforded superstitious the material for all sorts of inventions and fables. On the other hand, hypocrisy and willful abuse were busy, and furnished it with tales which it was not clever enough to invent. Whoever had once acquired consequence and authority wished, if not to increase, at least to preserve them. Whoever had once given a satisfactory answer to a question never wanted to be remiss in his responses. There is no nonsense so absurd, no farce so farcical, that one will not resort to it, no fable so foolish that one will not seek to make a credulous person believe it, merely to be ready with a *because* for every *why*? The phrase *I do not know* becomes inexpressibly bitter once one has proclaimed oneself to be a pun-dit, if not a polymath, especially when station, office, and dignity seem to demand that we should know. Oh, how many a man's heart must palpitate when he is at the point of either losing consequence and authority or of becoming a traitor to truth; and how few there are who possess the sagacity of Socrates, always to answer, at first, *I know nothing*, even in case one knows a little more than his neighbor, in order to spare himself embarrassment, and to render humiliation easier beforehand, should such a confession become necessary.

At all events, one sees how this could have given rise to the

worship of animals and images, the worship of idols and human beings, as well as fables and fairy tales, and though I do not claim that this is the only source of mythology, I believe that it may have contributed very much to the origin and propagation of all these inanities. It will, in particular, help to explain a remark which Professor Meiners has made somewhere in his writings. He claims to have observed that among the original nations, that is, among those that formed themselves and do not owe their culture to any other nation, the worship of animals was, without exception, more in vogue than the worship of men and that, indeed, inanimate objects were deified and worshiped more readily than were human beings. I assume the correctness of this remark, and leave it to the philosophic historian to vouch for it. I shall try to find an explanation!

If men designate the things themselves or their images and outlines as signs of ideas, they can find nothing more convenient and significant to indicate moral qualities than the animals. The reasons for this are the same as those which my friend Lessing, in his treatise on fables, ascribes to Aesop for choosing animals to be the actors in his apologues. Every animal has its definite, distinctive character, and presents itself in this light at first glance, since its features as a whole largely point to this peculiar mark of distinction. One animal is agile, the other sharp-sighted; this one is strong, that one, calm; this one is faithful and obedient to man, that one is treacherous or loves liberty, etc. Indeed, even inanimate objects have something more defined in their exterior than man has for man. At first glance, man reveals nothing, or rather, everything. He possesses all these qualities; at least, he is not completely lacking in any of them, and the greater or lesser degree he does not indicate at once on the surface. His distinctive character, therefore, does not strike the eye, and he is the thing in nature least suited to designate moral ideas and qualities.

Even today, the characters of the gods and heroes cannot be better indicated in the plastic arts than by means of the animal or inanimate images which are associated with them. If a Mi-

nerva and a Juno already differ in their features, they are far better distinguished by the animal characteristics that are given to them. The poet, too, if he wishes to speak of moral qualities in metaphors and allegories, usually has recourse to animals. Lion, tiger, eagle, ox, fox, dog, bear, worm, dove—they all speak and the meaning leaps to the eye. Therefore, at first one sought to indicate and render perceptible through suchlike signs the attributes of what was deemed most worthy of adoration. Since it was necessary to attach those most abstract concepts to perceptible things, and to such perceptible things as are the least ambiguous, one presumably must have chosen animal images, or have composed certain figures out of several of them. And we have seen how such an innocent thing, a mere mode of writing, can very soon degenerate in the hands of man, and turn into idolatry. Naturally, therefore, all primitive idolatry will be more animal worship than worship of man. Men could not be used at all to designate divine attributes; and their deification must have proceeded from an entirely different quarter. Heroes and conquerors, or sages, lawgivers, and prophets, must have come over from a happier region of the world, one that had been educated earlier, and [they must have] distinguished themselves so greatly through extraordinary talents, and shown themselves to be so exalted, that one revered them as messengers of the Deity or as the Deity itself. That this was far more likely to happen among nations that owed their culture not to themselves but to others is easy to conceive; for, as the common saying goes, a prophet seldom acquires extraordinary authority in his own country. Mr. Meiners's remark would accordingly be a sort of confirmation of my hypothesis that the need for written characters was the first cause of idolatry.

In judging the religious ideas of a nation that is otherwise still unknown, one must, for the same reason, take care not to regard everything from one's own *parochial* point of view, lest one should call idolatry what, in reality, is perhaps only *script*. Imagine a second Omhya [Omai] who, knowing nothing of the secret art of writing, and without being gradually accustomed to our ideas,

would be suddenly removed from his own part of the world to one of the most image-free temples of Europe—and to make the example more striking—to the *Temple of Providence*. He would find everything empty of images and ornaments; only there, on the white wall, [he would see] some black lines,* traced, perhaps, by chance. But no! All the members of the congregation look at these lines with reverence, fold their hands and direct their adoration to them. Now take him just as rapidly and just as suddenly back to Othaiti, and let him report to his curious fellow countrymen on the religious ideas of the Dessau *Philanthropin*. Will they not deride as well as pity the insipid superstition of their fellow men who have sunk so low as to show divine adoration to black lines on a white surface? Our own travelers may very often make similar mistakes when they report to us on the religion of distant peoples. They must acquaint themselves very intimately with the thoughts and opinions of a nation before they can say with certainty whether its images still have the character of script, or whether they have already degenerated into idolatry. In plundering the Temple, the conquerors of Jerusalem found the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant, and took them for idols of the Jews. They saw everything with the eyes of barbarians, and from their point of view. In accordance with their own customs, they took an image of divine providence and prevailing grace for an image of the Deity, for the Deity itself, and delighted in their discovery. In the same way, at the present day, readers still laugh at the Indian philosophers who say that this universe is borne by elephants, and place the elephants upon a large turtle, and maintain that the latter is upheld by an enormous bear, and that the bear rests on an immense serpent. The good people have, perhaps, not thought of the question: What, then, does the immense serpent rest upon?

Now read for yourselves in the *Shasta* of the *Gentoo*s the passage describing a symbol of this kind which probably gave rise to this legend. I take it from the second part of the *Reports from*

* The words: "God, all wise, all-powerful, all-good, rewarding the good."

Bengal and the Empire of Hindustan, by J. Z. Hollwell, who had received instruction in the holy books of the *Gentoo*s and was able to see with the eyes of a native Brahmin. These are the words in the eighth section:

Modu and *Kiytu* (two monsters, *discord* and *rebellion*) had been overcome, and now the Eternal, having been invisible before, manifested himself and glory surrounded him on all sides.

The Eternal spoke: Thou *Birma* (power of creation)! create and form all things of the new creation with the spirit which I shall breathe into thee.—And thou, *Bistnu* (power of preservation)! protect and preserve, according to my ordinance, the things and forms created.—And thou, *Sieb* (destruction, transformation)! change the things of the new creation and transform them with the power wherewith I shall invest thee. *Birma*, *Bistnu* and *Sieb* heard the words of the Eternal, bowed and expressed their obedience.

At once *Birma* swam into the surface of *Johala* (abyss of the sea), and the children *Modu* and *Kiytu* fled and vanished as he appeared.

When through the spirit of *Birma* the motions of the abyss calmed down, *Bistnu* transformed himself into a mighty bear [read: boar] (symbol of strength, according to the *Gentoo*s, because, relative to his size, he is the strongest animal), descended into the abyss of *Johala*, and on his tusks brought up *Murto* (the earth).—Then spontaneously there issued from him a mighty tortoise (symbol of stability, according to the *Gentoo*s) and a mighty snake (their symbol of wisdom). And *Bistnu* put the earth [read: the snake] erect upon the back of the tortoise, and placed *Murto* upon the head of the snake, etc.

All this one finds among them also depicted in images; and one sees how easily such symbols and hieroglyphics could mislead one into error.

As is well known, the history of mankind actually went through a period of many centuries, during which real idolatry became the dominant religion in nearly every part of the globe. The images lost their value as signs. The spirit of truth, which was to have been preserved in them, evaporated, and the empty vehicle that remained behind turned into a pernicious poison. The concepts of deity which still survived in the ethnic religions were so de-

formed by superstition, so corrupted by hypocrisy and priestcraft, that one had reason to wonder whether atheism might not be less detrimental to human felicity, whether godlessness itself, as it were, might not be less ungodly than such a religion. Men, animals, plants, the most hideous and despicable things in nature were worshiped and revered as deities, or rather feared as deities. For the official ethnic religions of those times had no idea of the Deity other than that of a dreadful being, superior in power to us dwellers on earth, easily provoked to anger and hard to appease. To the shame of the human intellect and heart, superstition knew how to combine the most incompatible ideas, permitting human sacrifice and animal worship to exist side by side. In the most magnificent temples, constructed and decorated according to all the rules of art, one looked, to the shame of reason, as Plutarch put it, for the deity worshipped there, and one found on the altar a hideous, long-tailed monkey; and to this monster blooming youths and maidens were slaughtered. So deeply had idolatry debased human nature! *One slaughtered men, as the prophet put it in an emphatic antithesis, one slaughtered men in order to offer them to the cattle that were worshiped.*

Here and there philosophers sometimes dared to oppose the universal depravity and to purify and enlighten concepts, openly or by secret devices. They sought to restore to the images their old meaning or to impart to them a new one, and thereby to refuse, as it were, the soul into the dead body. But in vain! Their rational explanations had no influence on the religion of the people. Eager as the uneducated man seems to be for explanations, he is equally dissatisfied when they are given to him in their true simplicity. What is comprehensible to him is soon looked upon as tedious and contemptible, and he constantly searches for new, mysterious, inexplicable things, which he takes to heart with redoubled pleasure. His avidity for knowledge always wants to be acute, but never satisfied. Hence, public instruction found no hearing among the populace; it rather met with the most obstinate resistance on the part of superstition and hypocrisy, and received

its customary reward: contempt or hatred and persecution. The secret devices and measures by which the rights of truth should have been upheld, to some degree, took themselves, in part, the road of corruption, and became nurseries for all kinds of superstition, all kinds of vice, and all kinds of abominations.

A certain school of philosophers conceived the bold idea of removing men's abstract concepts from everything figurative and imagelike, and of attaching them to such written signs as could, by their nature, be taken for nothing else, to *numbers*. Since numbers in themselves represent nothing, and are not in natural relation with any sense impressions, one should suppose that they would not be liable to any misinterpretation; one must take them for arbitrary *written signs* of concepts, or else consider them unintelligible. Here, one should think, the rudest intellect could not confound signs with things, and every abuse would be prevented by this subtle device. To anyone who does not understand numbers they are empty figures. Those they do not enlighten they will, at least, not lead astray.

So the great founder of this school could have made himself believe. However, soon enough folly took its wonted course even in this school. Dissatisfied with what one found so intelligible, so comprehensible, one looked for a secret power in the numbers themselves; for an inexplicable reality, again, in the signs, by which their value as signs was again lost. One believed, or at least made others believe, that all the mysteries of nature and of the Deity were concealed in these numbers; one ascribed miraculous power to them, and wished to satisfy through them and by means of them not only men's curiosity and avidity for knowledge, but also all their vanity, their striving for high and unattainable things, their forwardness and greed, their avarice, and their madness. In a word, folly had once more frustrated wisdom's plans and, again, annihilated or even employed for its own use what wisdom had provided for a better purpose.

And now I am able to explain more clearly my surmise about the purpose of the ceremonial law in Judaism. The forefathers of

our nation, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, remained faithful to the Eternal, and sought to preserve among their families and descendants pure concepts of religion, far removed from all idolatry. And now their descendants were chosen by Providence to be a *priestly* nation; that is, a nation which, through its establishment and constitution, through its laws, actions, vicissitudes, and changes was continually to call attention to sound and unadulterated ideas of God and his attributes. It was incessantly to teach, to proclaim, and to endeavor to preserve these ideas among the nations, by means of its mere existence, as it were. They lived under extreme pressure among barbarians and idolaters; and misery had made them nearly as insensitive to the truth as arrogance had made their oppressors. God liberated them from this state of slavery by extraordinary miracles; He became the Redeemer, Leader, King, Lawgiver, and Judge of this nation that He himself had fashioned, and He designed its entire constitution in a manner that accorded with the wise purposes of his providence. Weak and shortsighted is the eye of man! Who can say: I have entered into God's sanctuary, looked over the whole of his plan, and am able to determine the measure, goal, and limits of his purposes? But the modest searcher is permitted to form conjectures and to draw conclusions from the results, so long as he always remembers that he *can* but surmise.

We have seen how difficult it is to preserve the abstract ideas of religion among men by means of permanent signs. Images and hieroglyphics lead to superstition and idolatry, and our alphabetical script makes man too speculative. It displays the symbolic knowledge of things and their relations too openly on the surface; it spares us the effort of penetrating and searching, and creates too wide a division between doctrine and life. In order to remedy these defects the lawgiver of this nation gave the *ceremonial law*. Religious and moral teachings were to be connected with men's everyday activities. The law, to be sure, did not impel them to engage in reflection; it prescribed only actions, only doing and not doing. The great maxim of this constitution seems to have been:

Men must be impelled to perform actions and only induced to engage in reflection. Therefore, each of these prescribed actions, each practice, each ceremony had its meaning, its valid significance; each was closely related to the speculative knowledge of religion and the teachings of morality, and was an occasion for a man in search of truth to reflect on these sacred matters or to seek instruction from wise men. The truths useful for the felicity of the nation as well as of each of its individual members were to be utterly removed from all imagery; for this was the main purpose and the fundamental law of the constitution. They were to be connected with actions and practices, and these were to serve them in place of signs, without which they cannot be preserved. Man's actions are transitory; there is nothing lasting, nothing enduring about them that, like hieroglyphic script, could lead to idolatry through abuse or misunderstanding. But they also have the advantage over alphabetical signs of not isolating man, of not making him to be a solitary creature, poring over writings and books. They impel him rather to social intercourse, to imitation, and to oral, living instruction. For this reason, there were but a few written laws, and even these were not entirely comprehensible without oral instruction and tradition; and it was forbidden to write more about them. But the unwritten laws, the oral tradition, the living instruction from man to man, from mouth to heart, were to explain, enlarge, limit, and define more precisely what, for wise intentions and with wise moderation, remained undetermined in the written law. In everything a youth saw being done, in all public as well as private dealings, on all gates and on all doorposts, in whatever he turned his eyes or ears to, he found occasion for inquiring and reflecting, occasion to follow an older and wiser man at his every step, to observe his minutest actions and doings with childlike attentiveness and to imitate them with childlike docility, to inquire after the spirit and the purpose of those doings and to seek the instruction which his master considered him capable of absorbing and prepared to receive. Thus teaching and life, wisdom and activity, speculation and sociabil-

ity were most intimately connected; or rather, thus should it be, according to the initial plan and purpose of the lawgiver. But the ways of God are inscrutable! Here, too, within a short period, things took the road of corruption. It was not long before this brilliant circle, too, had been completed, and matters again returned to a point not far from the low level from which they had emerged as, alas! has been evident for many centuries.

Already in the first days after the lawgiving that had been so miraculous, the nation relapsed into the sinful delusion of the Egyptians, and clamored for an *image in the shape of an animal*. According to their own assertion, as it seems, not really to worship it as a deity; for with this the high priest and brother of the lawgiver would not have complied, even if his own life had been ever so much in danger. They spoke merely of a divine being which should lead them and take the place of Moses who, they believed, had deserted his post. Aaron could no longer resist the people's pressure; he molded them a calf, and in order to hold them fast to their resolution to revere as divine not that image, but the Eternal alone, he exclaimed: *Tomorrow shall be a feast in honor of the Eternal*. But on the feast-day, while dancing and banqueting, the mob uttered quite different words: *These are your gods, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt*. Now the fundamental law was transgressed; the bond of the nation was dissolved. Reasonable remonstrances rarely produce results with an excited mob, once disorder prevails; and one knows what hard measures the divine lawgiver had to decide upon in order to restore the rebellious rabble to obedience. It deserves, however, to be noticed and admired, that divine Providence knew how to turn to advantage this in itself unfortunate incident and how to use it for sublime purposes entirely worthy of Divinity.

I have already mentioned above that paganism had a more tolerable conception of the power of the Deity than of its goodness. The common man looks upon goodness and proneness to reconciliation as weakness. He envies everyone the least pre-eminence in power, wealth, beauty, honor, etc., but not pre-eminence in

goodness. And how could he do this, since for the most part it depends only on himself to arrive at the degree of gentleness which he finds enviable? It requires some reflection if we are to comprehend that hatred and vindictiveness, envy and cruelty are, at bottom, nothing but *weakness* and merely the effects of fear. Fear, combined with accidental, uncertain superiority, is the mother of all these barbaric sentiments. Fear alone renders us cruel and implacable. He who is conscious with certainty of his superiority finds far greater felicity in indulgence and pardon.

Once this insight has been achieved, one can no longer hesitate to regard love as being at least as sublime a pre-eminence as power, to credit the Supreme Being, to whom all-power is ascribed, also with all-goodness, and to recognize the God of might also as the God of love. But how far removed was paganism from this refinement! You cannot find in all its theology, in all the poems and other testimonies of earlier times, any trace of its having attributed love and mercy toward the children of man to any of its deities. "Both the people," says Mr. Meiners,* speaking of the wisest Greek state, "both the people and most of their bravest generals and wisest statesmen surely considered the gods whom they worshiped as beings more powerful than men, but [also as beings] who had in common with them the same needs, passions, weaknesses, and even vices. To the Athenians as well as to the rest of the Greeks, all gods appeared to be so malicious that they imagined an extraordinary or long-lasting good fortune would draw upon itself the anger and disfavor of the gods and would be upset by their devices. Moreover, they considered these very same gods to be so irritable that they regarded all cases of misfortune as divine punishments inflicted upon them not because of a general depravity of morals, nor on account of individual great crimes, but because of trivial and, for the most part, involuntary cases of negligence in the performance of certain rites and ceremonies." In Homer himself, in that gentle and loving soul, the thought had not yet been kindled that the gods forgive out of

* *History of the Sciences in Greece and Rome*, vol. II, p. 27.

love, and that without benevolence they would not be happy in their heavenly abode.

And now it may be seen how wisely the lawgiver of the Israelites made use of their horrible offense against the majesty [of God] in order to acquaint the human race with so important a doctrine, and to open up to it a source of consolation from which we still draw refreshment of soul. What sublime and terrifying preparation! The revolt had been subdued, the sinners had been made to recognize their culpable offense, the nation was in dismay, and God's messenger, Moses himself, had almost lost heart: "O Lord, as long as Thy displeasure is not allayed, let us not depart from here. For how shall it be known that I and Thy nation have found favor in Thine eyes? Is it not when Thou goest with us? Only then shall we, I and Thy nation, be distinguished from all others on the face of the earth."

God: "In this, too, I shall comply with thy request; for thou hast found grace in my eyes, and I have singled thee out by name as the one favored by Me."

Moses: "Cheered as I am by these comforting words, I dare to make a still bolder request! O Lord, let me behold Thy Glory!"

God: "I will let *all My goodness* pass before thee,* and through the name of the Eternal, I shall let thee know in what manner I am gracious to whom I am gracious and am merciful to whom I am merciful. My Presence thou shalt see from behind; for My face cannot be seen." Thereupon the Presence passed before Moses, and a voice was heard: "*The Lord (who is, was and will be) eternal being, all-powerful, all-merciful and all-gracious; long-suffering, of great lovingkindness and truthfulness, who preserveth His lovingkindness even to the thousandth generation; who forgiveth transgression, sin and rebellion, yet alloweth nothing to go unpunished.*"** What man's feelings are so hardened that

* What a great thought! You want to behold all my Glory; I will let my goodness pass before you. You will see it from behind. From the front it is not visible to mortal eyes.

** Ex., ch.33, v.15ff. according to my translation, printed in Hebrew characters.

he can read this with dry eyes? Whose heart is so inhuman that he can still hate his brother and remain unforgiving toward him?

It is true, the Eternal says that *He will allow nothing to go unpunished*, and it is well known that these words have given rise to all sorts of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. But if they are not to cancel completely what was said before, they lead directly to the great thought which our rabbis discovered in them—that *this, too, is a quality of divine love that for man nothing is allowed to go entirely unpunished.*

A venerable friend, with whom I once conversed upon religious matters, put the question to me *whether I would not wish to be assured by a direct revelation that I would not be miserable in the future.* We both agreed that I did not have to fear eternal punishment in hell, for God cannot let any of his creatures suffer unceasing misery. Nor can any creature, by his actions, deserve the punishment of being eternally miserable. That the punishment for sin must be proportionate to the offended majesty of God and, therefore, infinite—this hypothesis my friend had given up long ago, as many great men of his church had likewise done; and concerning this matter there was no more occasion for dispute. The concept of *duties toward God*—a mere half truth—has given rise to the equally unstable concept of an *offense against the majesty of God*; and this one, taken in its literal sense, has brought forth that inadmissible idea of the eternity of punishment in hell—an idea the abuse of which has made not many fewer men truly miserable in this life than it renders, in theory, unhappy in the next. My philosophic friend agreed with me that God created man for his, that is, man's felicity, and that He gave him laws for his, that is, man's felicity. If the slightest transgression of these laws were to be punished in proportion to the majesty of the lawgiver and, therefore, were to result in eternal misery, God would have given these laws to man for his perdition. Without these laws of so infinitely exalted a being, man would not have to become eternally miserable. Oh, if men could be less miserable without divine laws, who can doubt that God would have spared them the fire of his laws, since it must consume them so irretrievably? This being