

its authority rests, but that he is himself a feeble reflex of the law, improved occasionally by some prophetic notions, but jealously watched by the Rabbis lest he should come into too close contact with humanity.

This is very different from the impression which the Jewish student receives from a direct study of the sources. Quite the reverse! The student is overwhelmed by the conviction that the manifestation of God in Israel's history was still as vivid to the mind of the Rabbis and still as present as it was to the writer of Deuteronomy or the author of Psalm 78. "All souls," say the Rabbis, "even those which had still to be created, were present at the Revelation on Mount Sinai."¹ The freshness with which the Biblical stories are retold in the Agadic literature, the vivid way in which they are applied to the oppressed condition of Israel, the future hopes which are based on them, create the impression that to the Rabbis and their followers the Revelation at Sinai and all that it implies was to them not a mere reminiscence or tradition, but that, through their intense faith, they re-witnessed it in their own souls, so that it became to them a personal experience. Indeed, it is this witnessing, or rather re-witnessing, to revelation by which God is God; without it he could not be God.² People who

¹ *Exod. R.*, 28 6.

² See *P. K.*, 102 b, and *Sifre*, 144 a, with allusion to Is. 43 12. Cf. also Hoffmann's *Midrasch Tannaim*, I 72, for more striking instances. The expression כְּבִיבִיל (as if it were possible to say so) is used in *Sifre*.