

the importance of miracles and their meaning as a religious factor in those early times. Our chances of clearing up such obscure but important points would naturally be much greater if some fresh documents could be discovered.

As another instance of the damage wrought by the loss of those older documents, I will allude only here to the well-known controversy between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel regarding the question whether it had not been better for man not to have been created. The controversy is said to have lasted for two years and a half. Its final issue or verdict was that, as we have been created, the best thing for us to do is to be watchful over our conduct.¹ This is all that tradition (or the compiler) chose to give us about this lengthy dispute; but we do not hear a single word as to the causes which led to it, or the reasons advanced by the litigant parties for their various opinions. Were they metaphysical, or empirical, or simply based, as is so often the case, on different conceptions of the passages in the Scripture germane to the dispute?² We feel the more cause for regret when we recollect that the members of these schools were the contemporaries of the Apostles; when Jerusalem, as it seems, was boiling over with theology, and its market-places

¹ *Erubin*, 13 b.

² For other controversies of a theological nature between the same schools, see *Gen. R.*, 12 14, *Rosh Hashanah*, 16 b; *Chagigah*, 12 a; *P. K.* 61 b. Cf. Bacher, *Ag. Tan.*, 1 14.