

ben Sakkai, or R. Akiba, as would make us recognise a nineteenth-century altruist in them. Nor would it require much ingenuity to parade, for instance, R. Abuhah as an accomplished geologist, inasmuch as he maintained that before the creation of *our* world God was ever constructing and destroying worlds;¹ or again, to introduce as a perfect Hegelian that anonymous Rabbi who boldly declared that it was Israel's consciousness of God which was "the making of God";² or finally, to arrogate for R. Benaha the merit of having been the forerunner of Astruc, because he declared that the Pentateuch was delivered not as a complete work, but in a series of successive scrolls.³ Indeed, the Rabbinic literature has already been described as a "wonderful mine of religious ideas from which it would be just as easy to draw up a manual for the most orthodox as to extract a vade-mecum for the most sceptical." But I have not the least desire to array the ancient Rabbis in the paraphernalia of modern fashion, and to put before the reader a mere theological masquerade, or to present the Talmud as a rationalistic production which only by some miracle escaped the vigilant eye of the authorities, who failed to recognise it as a heretical work and exclude it from the Synagogue. The "liberty of interpretation," in which so many theologians indulge, and which they even exalt as "Christian freedom," seems to me only another

¹ See *Gen. R.*, 9 2.

² See below, p. 24, note 2.

³ See *Gittin*, 16 a.