

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
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Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
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Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
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Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
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Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
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Rashi

Maurice Liber

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RASHI
BY
MAURICE LIBER

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

ADELE SZOLD

TO THE MEMORY OF
ZADOC-KAHN
GRAND-RABBIN OF FRANCE

PREFACE — — —

Some months ago the Jewish world celebrated the eight hundredth anniversary of the death of Rashi, who died at Troyes in 1105. On that occasion those whose knowledge authorizes them to speak gave eloquent accounts of his life and work. Science and devotion availed themselves of every possible medium—lectures and books, journals and reviews—to set forth all we owe to the illustrious Rabbi. The writer ventures to express the hope that in the present volume he has made at least a slight contribution toward discharging the common debt of the Jewish nation—that it is not utterly unworthy of him whose name it bears.

This volume, however, is not a product of circumstances; it was not written on the occasion of the centenary celebration. It was designed to form one of the series of the biographies of Jewish Worthies planned by the JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY OF AMERICA, the first issue of which was devoted to Maimonides. The biography of Rashi is the second of the series. It is not for the author to endorse the order adopted, but he hazards the opinion that the readers will find the portrait of Rashi no unfitting companion-piece even to that of the author of the *Moreh*.

Jewish history may include minds more brilliant and works more original than Rashi's. But it is incontestable that he is one of those historical personages who afford a double interest; his own personality is striking and at the same time he is the representative of a civilization and of a period. He has this double interest for us to an eminent degree. His physiognomy has well-marked, individual features, and yet he is the best exponent of French Judaism in the middle ages. He is somebody, and he represents something. Through this double claim, he forms an integral part of Jewish history and literature. There are great men who despite their distin-

guished attributes stand apart from the general intellectual movements. They can be estimated without reference to an historical background. Rashi forms, so to say, an organic part of Jewish history. A whole department of Jewish literature would be enigmatical without him. Like a star which leaves a track of light in its passage across the skies, Rashi aroused the enthusiasm of his contemporaries, but no less was he admired and venerated by posterity, and to-day, after the lapse of eight centuries, he is, as the poet says, "still young in glory and immortality."

His name is most prominently connected with Rabbinical literature. Whether large questions are dealt with, or the minutest details are considered, it is always Rashi who is referred to—he has a share in all its destinies, and he seems inseparable from it forever.

It is this circumstance that makes the writing of his biography as awkward a task for the writer as reading it may be for the public. To write it one must be a scholar, to read it a specialist. To know Rashi well is as difficult as it is necessary. Singularly enough, popular as he was, he was essentially a Talmudist, and at no time have connoisseurs of the Talmud formed a majority. This is the reason why historians like Graetz, though they dilate upon the unparalleled qualities of Rashi's genius, can devote only a disproportionately small number of pages to him and his works.

Though the writer has throughout been aware of the difficulties inherent in his task, yet he is also conscious that he has sometimes succeeded in removing them only by eluding them. In parts, when the matter to be treated was unyielding, it became necessary to dwell on side issues, or fill up gaps and replace obscurities by legends and hypotheses. The object in view being a book popular in character and accessible to all, technical discussions had to be eschewed. Many knotty points had to be brushed aside lightly, and the most debatable points passed over in silence. These are the sacrifices to which one must resign himself, though it requires self-restraint to do it consistently. The reader may, therefore, not expect to find new data in these pages, new facts and texts not published before. If the book has any merit, it is that it presents the actual state of knowledge on the subject, and the author anticipates the charge of plagiarism by disclaiming any intention of producing an original

work. Recondite sources have not always been referred to, in order not to overload a text which at best is apt to tax the reader's powers of attention. Such references and special remarks as were deemed necessary have been incorporated either in Notes placed at the end of the book, or in an Appendix containing a bibliography. There the works are mentioned to which the author is chiefly indebted, and which his readers may profitably consult if they desire to pursue the subject further.

The author desires to express his appreciation of the work of the translator, whose collaboration was all the more valuable as the revision of the book had to be made, after an interval of almost two years, under most unfavorable conditions, aggravated by the distance between the writer and the place of publication. The readers will themselves judge of the skill with which the translator has acquitted herself of her task, and the author gladly leaves to her the honor and the responsibility for the translation.

But how can I express all I owe to M. Israel Levi, my honored master? Without him this work would never have been begun, without him I should never have dared carry it to completion. I have contracted a debt toward him 'which grows from day to day, and I discharge but the smallest portion of it by dedicating this volume to the memory of his never-to-be-forgotten father-in-law, the Grand-Rabbin Zadoc-Kahn. M. Zadoc-Kahn made a name for himself in Jewish letters by his *Etudes sur le livre de Joseph le Zélateur*, dealing with one of the most curious domains of that literature in which Rashi was the foremost representative. One of his last public acts was the appeal which he issued on the occasion of the Rashi centenary. It is not a slight satisfaction to me to know that these pages passed under his eyes in manuscript.

M. LIBER

CHALONS-SUR-MARNE, March, 1906

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INTRODUCTION

A people honors itself in honoring the great men who have interpreted its thought, who are the guardians of its genius. It thus renders merited homage and pays just tribute to those who have increased the treasures of its civilization and added a new feature to its moral physiognomy; it establishes the union of ideas that assures the conservation of the national genius, and maintains and perpetuates the consciousness of the nation. Finally, it manifests consciousness of its future in taking cognizance of its past, and in turning over the leaves of its archives, it defines its part and mission in history. The study of men and facts in the past permits of a sounder appreciation of recent efforts, of present tendencies; for "humanity is always composed of more dead than living," and usually "the past is what is most vital in the present."

No people has greater need than the Jews to steep itself again in the sources of its existence, and no period more than the present imposes upon it the duty of bringing its past back to life. Scattered over the face of the globe, no longer constituting a body politic, the Jewish people by cultivating its intellectual patrimony creates for itself an ideal fatherland; and mingled, as it is, with its neighbors, threatened by absorption into surrounding nations, it recovers a sort of individuality by the reverence it pays to men that have given best expression to its peculiar genius.

But the Jewish people, its national life crushed out of it, though deprived of all political ambitions, has yet regained a certain national solidarity through community of faith and ideals; and it has maintained the cohesion of its framework by the wholly spiritual bonds of teaching and charity. This is the picture it presents throughout the middle ages, during the period which, for Christianity, marked an eclipse of the intellect and, as it were, an enfeeblement of the reason to such a degree that the term middle ages becomes synonymous with intellectual decadence. "But," said the historian Graetz, "while the sword was ravaging the outer world, and the people devoted themselves to murderous strife, the house of Jacob cared only that the light of the mind burn on steadily and

that the shadows of darkness be dissipated. If a religion may be judged by its principal representatives, the palm must be awarded to Judaism in the tenth to the thirteenth century." Its scholars, therefore, its philosophers, and its poets render Judaism illustrious, and by their works and their renown shed a radiant light upon its history.

Maimonides is one of those eminent spirits in whom was reflected the genius of the Jewish people and who have in turn contributed to the development of its genius.[1] Maimonides, however, was also more than this; perhaps he presents as much of interest from the point of view of Arabic as of Jewish culture; and expressing more than the Jewish ideal, he does not belong to the Jews entirely. Of Rashi, on the contrary, one may say that he is a Jew to the exclusion of everything else. He is no more than a Jew, no other than a Jew.

BOOK I RASHI THE MAN

CHAPTER I

THE JEWS OF FRANCE IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

Great men - and Rashi, as we shall see, may be counted among their number - arrive at opportune times. Sometimes we congratulate them for having disappeared from history in good season; it would be just as reasonable, or, rather, just as unreasonable, to be grateful to them for having come at exactly the right juncture of affairs. The great man, in fact, is the man of the moment; he comes neither too soon, which spares him from fumbling over beginnings and so clogging his own footsteps, nor too late, which prevents him from imitating a model and so impeding the development of his personality. He is neither a precursor nor an epigone, neither a fore-runner nor a late-comer. He neither breaks the ground nor gleans the harvest: he is the sower who casts the seed upon a field ready to receive it and make it grow.