

RASHI

[Rabbi Solomon of France*]

By SOLOMON ZEITLIN

The year 1940 will mark the nine hundredth anniversary of the birth of Rashi. Together with Maimonides, whose eight hundredth anniversary was celebrated by Jews throughout the world in 1935, Rashi exerted the greatest influence upon Jewish life and culture since the close of the talmudic age. These two luminaries towered like light-houses amidst the stormy darkness of the tragic Middle Ages; and by the brightness of their light countless generations of the humble and the learned walked, and still walk to this day.

But, their light was cast upon different areas of Jewish scholarship and culture. Maimonides was primarily a philosopher and a codifier; Rashi was the commentator *par excellence*, bringing illumination to the Bible and the Talmud. Maimonides was known best to the learned: Talmudists studied his *Mishne Torah*, philosophers his *Moreh Nebukim* ("Guide to the Perplexed"). Rashi, on the other hand, was a familiar friend to almost every Jew in *Heder* (elementary school), where Jewish boys from the age of seven studied *Humash* (The Pentateuch) with his commentary. Maimonides achieved two names: to the philosophers "Maimonides", to the Talmudists "Rambam" (the letters r,m,b,m, are the initials of Rabbi Moses ben Maimun). But Rashi, to students of the Bible and Talmud, was known only by one, formed by the initial letters of his name, Rabbi Shelomo Izhaki.

So profound and universal has been the influence of Rashi upon Jewish and Christian thought that it is fitting

*Since this essay is intended for popular reading, notes and references have been omitted. The author, however, expects in the near future to substantiate all his theories with proper notes and references.

and proper that this anniversary of his birth be used to re-evaluate his life against the background of his times, and to draw inspiration and insight from it for our own dark, uncertain and tempestuous days.

I.

As early as the period of the Second Commonwealth, when Jews still lived in their own country, *Erez Israel*, there had been a Jewish Diaspora. For more than a century before the destruction of the second Temple, the majority of the Jews lived outside of Palestine. After the collapse of Bar-Kokba's revolt a small minority remained in the land, and their influence upon Jewish life was greatly diminished. A new center had developed in Babylonia which was to dominate Jewish life for many centuries, extending the sway of its authority even to far-off Europe.

Many Jews had migrated to Europe. Jewish settlements came into existence, and Jewish communities were established and began to thrive, especially in Italy, Spain and France.

Jews came into Gaul with the Roman armies and established colonies as early as the first century. A number of communities grew up in Provence, in Southern France, which spread as far as the Seine-Marne and the Rhine. These Jews of France were in constant communication with their co-religionists in Palestine, and were strongly influenced by them. Many of them went to Palestine to study. On the other hand, Palestinian scholars sent teachers to France to give instruction in Judaism as practiced in the Holy Land.

In the eighth century, the Arabs wrested Palestine from the Christians. Communication between Palestinian and French Jewry became more difficult. At the same time the Babylonian Gaonate had assumed the spiritual leadership of entire Jewry, and its influence reached France, where the Babylonian Talmud became the authoritative word in deciding legal questions (*Halakot*).

Tradition has it that Natronai Gaon, who lived in the middle of the ninth century, visited France. This indicates

that the authority of the Gaonate was either already established or was becoming established among the French Jews of that time. Another tradition relates that Rabbi Gershom ben Judah (960-1028), a native of France, studied in the Babylonian academies under Hai Gaon. Despite the growing domination of the Babylonian Gaonate over French Jewry, the old Palestinian traditions of the earlier centuries did not entirely disappear. The study of the Agada and Midrash, which were of Palestinian origin, was more popular among the Jews of France than among the Jews of Babylonia or Spain, the Jews of Spain having come originally from Babylonia. Furthermore, the communal life of the French Jews was still shaped by the older tradition which had originated in Palestine.

In one respect the French Jews differed at first from the Spanish Jews — the matter of leadership. As Jews settled in France and developed their communities, they chose lay leaders to rule the religious as well as the secular life of the community, whereas the religious life of the Spanish Jews was influenced by the Rabbis rather than by secular leaders.

But, in the eleventh century, a change took place in French Jewry. The Rabbinate became more influential than the lay leadership. And this change was due, undoubtedly, to the influence of Rashi and his descendants. How the change was effected, and the part that Rashi played in it is an interesting and important story.

France, at that time, was divided into numerous principalities. One of the most important of these was the principality of Champagne, situated between Ile-de-France and Lorraine. Here grew large Jewish communities that played a very important part in the life of the country.

Jews participated widely in the economic life of the land. Many possessed fields and vineyards, often employing Christians to work in them. Some were engaged in cattle-raising, others in trade. Many even attained great wealth. They lived on good terms with their Christian neighbors. On Jewish festivals they received gifts from their gentile friends. Although, from time to time, bigoted Bishops preached against Jews and Judaism, the prevalent harmony between Jews and Christians was never com-

pletely disturbed. Their only disputes concerned the interpretation of certain biblical verses which the Christians maintained referred to Jesus. This lasted up to the tenth century.

Scholarly activity and literary creativity testify to the enjoyment of economic security and political stability by a people. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Jews of France enjoyed peace. Consequently, they devoted themselves to intellectual pursuits. Scholars of eminence appeared, such as Leontin (Judah ben Meir ha-Kohen), who lived in the second part of the tenth century; his disciple, R. Gershom, born in Metz, who is known in rabbinic literature as the *Meor ha-Golah* (The Light of the Exile); R. Gershom's brother, R. Machir, and disciples, Simon the Elder, Jacob ben Yakar, Isaac ben Judah, Isaac ha-Levi; and Joseph Bon-Fils, who is known by the Hebrew name of Joseph Tob-Elem. The French scholars, however, did not restrict themselves to rabbinical studies, but gave their attention to biblical studies as well. The outstanding biblical scholars were Moses ha-Darshan and Menahem ben Helbo.

Troyes was the main city and capital of Champagne. It was situated on the River Seine. In the medieval period, Troyes was one of the most important centers in the economic life of France. Among its main industries were the tanning of hides and the manufacturing of parchment for export. The latter occupation, no doubt, greatly aided the development of literary pursuits, for parchment at that time was the chief material used in writing.

Commerce played a vital part in the life of Troyes. The city was well known for its great fairs which were held twice annually, in the spring and the winter. These fairs presented opportunities for Jewish leaders to assemble from different parts of France to discuss their religious and spiritual needs.

To this day Troyes, with its narrow, crooked streets, and its many little wooden houses, has retained something of its medieval character, and there may still be found in it a little alley which bears the name of *rue de Synagogue*. In this city Rashi was born.

II.

Solomon ben Isaac, known to us as Rashi, but known to his contemporaries as Rabbi Shelomo ha-Zarfati — Rabbi Solomon the Frenchman — was born in 4800, according to the Jewish reckoning, which corresponds to the year 1039–40. He was descended from an illustrious family. His father was a scholar, and his maternal uncle, Simon the Elder, a disciple of R. Gershom (The Light of the Exile), was one of the outstanding scholars in France.

The circumstances connected with the birth of Rashi are hidden in legends. As with Homer, Columbus and other notables, many cities claimed to be his birthplace, among them Worms and Lunel. One of the legends about his birth tells of a precious jewel owned by his father, Isaac. Some Christians sought to take it away from him, either to give it to the Bishop for the adornment of his vestments, or to present it to the Church. Isaac firmly resisted, and refused all offers to purchase it. One day, however, a Christian lured him into a boat and demanded that he give up the jewel. Isaac courageously refused, and in order that the jewel should not fall into the possession of the Christians, he threw it into the water. At that moment a mysterious voice was heard in his school, uttering these words, "A son will be born to thee, O Isaac, who will enlighten the eyes of all Israel" Another legend records that his mother, when pregnant, was walking along a narrow street in the city of Worms when two carriages coming from opposite directions collided. In danger of being crushed, she pressed against a wall, which miraculously leaned backwards in order to save her from injury by the carriages. Afraid of being accused of witchcraft, Isaac and his wife left Worms for Troyes where his son was born, whom he named Shelomo, meaning peace.

The early education of Rashi was most likely supervised by his father, and particularly by his uncle, R. Simon the Elder, who is mentioned by Rashi in his commentaries.

We may safely surmise that Rashi married early, as was the custom among the Jews. He had three daughters. One daughter, Miriam, married the well-known scholar,

R. Judah ben Nathan (Riban). A second daughter, Jochebit, was also married to a great scholar, Meir ben Samuel of Rameru (Ramerupt), a city not far from Troyes.

Of this latter union four sons were born. The eldest, Samuel, known in Rabbinical literature as Rashbam (R. Samuel ben Meir) continued the work of his grandfather by writing a commentary on the Pentateuch and on some chapters of the Talmud. The second son, Jacob, surnamed Tam, which means upright or perfect, was the founder of the great School of the Tosafists, which had the greatest influence upon Jewish spiritual life throughout the ages, not only in France, but in Germany, Poland and Russia, and even in western Europe and the Orient. The third and fourth sons were Isaac, known as Ribam (R. Joseph ben Meir), and Solomon.

With his third daughter Rashi was not so fortunate. Her name was Rachel, but in French she was called *Belle-Assez*, apparently because of her beauty. She was married to a man named Eleazer, but they were later divorced. Tradition records that the daughters of Rashi were quite learned in the rabbinical law and literature, and even helped their father in making rabbinical decisions.

Rashi keenly felt the need for an adequate commentary on the Bible. As long as Hebrew was a living tongue, as in the days of the Second Commonwealth, there was no need for a translation or commentary. The Pentateuch was studied in the schools and was interpreted by the *Soferim*, the scholars. The Prophets were also studied and interpreted, while the Writings (*Ketubim*) had not yet been canonized. In Egypt, where the Jews did not know Hebrew, a translation of the Bible necessarily came into existence. Not only were the five Books of Moses translated into Greek, in the Septuagint, but they were also transliterated, the Hebrew words being written in Greek characters.

After the destruction of the Temple, Hebrew was no longer spoken by the masses, and they could not understand the Pentateuch. A translation was made into Aramaic called *Targum Onkelos* which did not help in giving the Jews a proper understanding of the Bible since

it was merely a literal rendering of the text. Hence a demand arose for a commentary, as well as a translation of the Books of Moses. A new Targum was compiled on the Bible known as *Targum Jonathan* which was a commentary as well as a translation of the Bible. This was the very first attempt at a commentary.

During the Arabic period when the vernacular of the Jews was neither Hebrew nor Aramaic, a need for an Arabic translation arose. The production of an adequate translation was made more difficult by the existence of various factions among the Jews of the Islamic countries. Just as the Moslems were divided into two factions, the *Ashariya* school (or orthodox Mohammedans) and the *Mutazilah* school (dissenting Mohammedans), so the Jews had their groups — the Rabbinites and the Karaites — the former upholding the traditional law and the latter denying it. There were other factions who explained the Bible allegorically.

A few commentaries were compiled during this time, the outstanding ones being those of Saadia Gaon (882-942), and Jephth ben Ali ha-Levi, the Karaite, (end of the tenth century). The commentary of Saadia Gaon especially reflected the Jewish spiritual life of that period, and was written for the purpose of combating the Karaitic and allegorical interpretations of the Bible, as well as defending it against those who criticized it and found contradictions in it, thereby denying its divine revelation.

The commentaries compiled in the Islamic countries, even if known to the Jews of France at this time, would have been of no real value, for they were not confronted with the same religious problems as their brethren in the Islamic countries. There were many men in France in the tenth and eleventh centuries who sought to interpret the Bible. Of these, the outstanding was Moses ha-Darshan, who followed the midrashic method of interpretation. Another important interpreter was R. Menahem ben Helbo, who paid careful attention to the exact meaning of words, but neglected the biblical narratives in his commentary. Since the Jews of France knew little Hebrew, and none of these commentators and interpreters seemed to satisfy their needs, the Bible remained a closed book to them.

Rashi, therefore, began to write his own commentary, starting with the Pentateuch, and using as his basis the *Massorah* text. Rashi thought that a commentary should be written not only for the scholars but for the masses. In this respect, although he lived in a Christian country, he differed from the leaders of the Church who did not encourage the reading of the Bible. Rashi found that he had oftentimes to translate many of the biblical words and phrases from the little-known Hebrew into French. He called the French words *La'az* to differentiate them from the sacred tongue. These *La'azim* (foreign expressions) he transcribed into Hebrew characters.

As to methods of interpretation, in Rashi's time there were two important schools: the *Peshat*, which emphasized fidelity to the text, and the *Derash*, which employed interpretation and speculation. Undoubtedly, those who emphasized *Peshat* as the only true method of biblical interpretation came as a reaction against those Christian theologians who interpreted many of the passages in the Old Testament as referring to Jesus. They adhered to the actual meaning of the text and contended that the Massoretic text should be closely followed. During these centuries there were many Jews who interpreted the Bible in other ways. They were called *Poterim* (interpreters).

Rashi felt that neither method of interpretation was sufficient alone, but that a synthesis of both was necessary for a satisfactory commentary. When the *Derash* did not violate the text, Rashi adopted its interpretation. When there were different midrashic interpretations, he selected the one most faithful to the text. When the *Derash*, however, could not be brought into harmony with the text, he pointed out its inadequacy and, where necessary, how it was irreconcilable with the laws of grammar. Frequently, in his commentary, one finds such statements as the following: "These words require an explanation according to the Midrash, and cannot be explained in any other way;" or, "There are many midrashic explanations. I, however, am only concerned with the plain sense of Scripture;" or, "There are agadic Midrashim, but I only explain it according to sense;" or, "There are midrashic explanations of these words, but this is the plain sense of the

text.' He followed the same rules with whole verses as he did with individual words, always insisting on fidelity to the text.

Rashi also determined to write a commentary on the Talmud. The Talmud was not known outside of the small circle of scholars who could grasp its legalistic ideas, follow its subtle reasoning, and comprehend its intricate Halakic problems. To the average layman the Talmud was a vast trackless wilderness through which no paths seemed to lead. The few commentaries which had been written by R. Gershom and other scholars were of no practical use to these laymen. Hence, Rashi, ever eager to make learning the possession of the masses, came to feel acutely the need to supply a guiding thread by which the talmudic fastnesses might be more easily traversed.

Before writing a commentary on the Talmud, Rashi realized that he must have an established text. The biblical scholars had the *Massorah*, the definitive text of the Scriptures, but the talmudic scholars had no such standard text or tradition of interpretation. In search of an accurate talmudic text he decided to go to Mayence where R. Gershom had established an academy of learning. The latter had not only written some commentaries on the Talmud but had also tried to ascertain a proper text. Tradition relates that R. Gershom at one time studied under Hai Gaon. If this was so, it is likely that he had received suggestions about the text from him. His method of studying the Talmud, in order to establish a definite text was fully developed by his students, Jacob ben Yakar and Isaac ben Judah. Their commentaries on the Talmud and the different variants of it have come to us under the name, *Kuntres of Mayence*.

After Rashi had spent some time in Mayence he decided to go to Worms where there was another academy under Isaac ha-Levi, another disciple of R. Gershom who probably had additional notes on the Talmud. It was not, as is generally maintained, to learn Talmud, but to establish a text for it, that Rashi went to these academies.

Rashi had made many financial sacrifices to go to Mayence. In Troyes he had been a wealthy man, and had

possessed a vineyard which brought him a comfortable income. While abroad, he could not look after his property and, consequently, suffered a period of financial distress.

At the academies of Mayence and Worms, Rashi wrote the first draft of his commentary on the Talmud. Upon its completion, he returned to Troyes, where he established a *Yeshiva*. From this *Yeshiva* the School of the Tosafists developed.

Rashi had become a recognized authority on the *Halakot* (Legal Judgments). His fame as a commentator of the Talmud spread throughout Champagne. His interpretations were responsible, at this time, for the introduction of a very important reform in the communal life of the Jews. Up to the time of Rashi the power of punishing a person for an offense against the community or against the Jewish law rested with the lay leaders of the community. Rashi now held that the power of punishment and excommunication should be in the hands of a *Beth-Din* (a Court of Law), consisting of scholars and not laymen. He also maintained that the decision of such a court should be final if based on talmudic law, even though other scholars might differ with the interpretation of the court. Henceforth, the Rabbi appointed by the community became the final authority in such cases. This reform, instituted by Rashi, had a crucial influence on rabbinical literature and on the spiritual life of the Jews.

Rashi corresponded with many people about complicated problems of law, including his teachers whom he venerated, although they often differed with him on certain decisions of *Halakot*. Rashi was a modest man, and showed his great humility in his respect for his colleagues and his fellow Jews.

In his last years shadows fell upon Jewish life because of the Crusades. Although the movement started in France under the leadership of Peter the Hermit, and most of the Crusaders came from there, French Jews did not suffer directly. On the other side of the Rhine, however, in Worms, Mayence, and other cities, thousands of Jews were slain. Some of them, in order to escape martyrdom, accepted Christianity, but in most cases in name only.

After the Crusaders left the cities, the converts returned to Judaism, and were received by Rashi with great tolerance and sympathy. He was not only eager to accept them, but also wished to help them forget their past experiences. In a *Responsum* he wrote, "Let us be careful not to take measures for isolating them and thereby hurting them. Their defection was made under the menace of the sword, but they hastened to return from their wanderings."

Although the Jews of Champagne escaped the riots and slaughtering which took place on the other side of the Rhine, the propaganda and agitation during the Crusades and the intolerance of some of the clergy had a far-reaching effect upon Rashi's life, and probably shortened it. He grew weak, and was compelled to spend his last days in bed. His hands trembled. He found it difficult to hold his pen, and he had to dictate his *Responsa* to his disciples and friends.

His death, like his birth, is embroidered with legends. It is said that Godfrey of Bouillon, before he left for the Holy Land, summoned Rashi to him in order to consult him about the success of his undertaking. Rashi refused to come and Godfrey became greatly incensed. Accompanied by his knights, he went to Rashi's school to punish him. When he entered the building he found it empty. But, he heard voices. Godfrey cried, "Where art thou, Solomon?" A voice answered, "Here I am. What does my lord wish?" Godfrey, not seeing anyone in the building repeated his question, but received the same answer. Rashi, records the legend, had rendered himself invisible, although he could see everything himself.

Godfrey became greatly annoyed, and left the school. He came to believe that Rashi must be an extraordinary person. He met a disciple of Rashi and asked him to request his teacher to appear before him (Godfrey), promising that no harm would come to him. Rashi then revealed himself. Godfrey said, "I know that thy wisdom is great. I should like to know whether I shall return from my expedition victorious, or whether I shall perish. Speak without fear."

Rashi replied, "Thou wilt take the Holy City and thou

wilt reign over Jerusalem three days, but on the fourth day the Moslems will put thee to flight and when thou returnest only three horses will be left to thee." Godfrey was deeply perturbed and cried to Rashi, "If I shall return with only one more horse than thou sayest, I shall take vengeance upon thee. I shall throw thy body to the dogs, and put to death all the Jews of France."

After many years of fighting, Godfrey returned to France with only three knights, but in all there were four horses, one more than Rashi had predicted. Godfrey recalled Rashi's prophecy and determined to carry out his threat of vengeance. But, when he entered the city of Troyes, a rock from one of the gates fell upon one of his knights, killing him and his horse. Stunned by the miracle of Rashi's prediction, Godfrey decided to visit him and pay him homage. But he learned that Rashi had already died. This grieved him greatly, runs the tale. (As a matter of fact, Godfrey never returned to his native France, but died in Jerusalem in 1100, five years before Rashi's death.)

Rashi died in Troyes on the 29th of Tammuz in 1105, at sixty-five years of age.

III.

Since Rashi's contribution to Judaism came by way of his great commentaries upon the Bible and the Talmud, a more thorough study of his methods and insights will bring us into the holy shrine of his inner spirit. In this section and the next we shall attempt an appreciation of Rashi's methodology and ideas by way of his comments on the Scriptures and the Talmud.

Rashi, in his commentary on the Pentateuch, followed the Babylonian as well as the Palestinian Talmud, but especially the Babylonian, to which he oftentimes referred as "our Gemara." He cited Saadia Gaon, Hai Gaon, and Eleazar ha-Kalir. The *Targum Onkelos* was also one of his guides and he used *Targum Jonathan* when he discussed the writings of the prophets. When he used the method of *Derash*, he turned to the work of R. Moses ha-Darshan which he called, "Foundation." When, however, he used

the method of *Peshat*, he followed Menahem ben Helbo. He availed himself of the books of Menahem ben Saruk and Dunash ben Labrat when he needed philological explanations and grammatical derivations. In fact, Rashi used everything he could lay his hands on: the different interpretations of the Bible which he had read, or significant illuminations which came to him orally by tradition. He felt free at all times to employ or reject them.

Rashi displayed the instinct of the educator in his employment of simile, example and illustration to make clearer the meaning of the biblical text. He rejected all anthropomorphisms, as *Targum Onkelos* had done before him. Those verses in the Bible which presented God functioning like a human being Rashi explained by pointing out that the Torah spoke in the language of men, *locuta est lex lingua hominum*. Thus, men would be enabled to understand its deeper meaning. Sometimes Rashi explained these humanistic expressions as being "figures of speech."

To Rashi the *Massorah* was holy, and in writing his commentary on the Bible, he adhered strictly to it. When an Amora in the Talmud read the word *Ma'abirim* (I Sam. 2, 24) without a *Yod* after the *Raish* (Sab. 55b), Rashi strenuously objected. "I say that a great error had been made here, for the *Massorah* has a *Yod* after the *Raish*." Thus, he rejected a reading of the Talmud by an Amora, because, forsooth, it contradicted the *Massorah*. Rashi also made great use of the "points of accent," and he admitted that if the "points of accent" had not been inserted, he could not have explained the words. In many cases, great man that he was, he humbly confessed that he did not know the meaning of the words.

In Rashi's days much of the polemics between Jews and Christians involved biblical texts and their interpretations. Although there were no public polemics between the Christians and the Jews, we may safely state that Rashi engaged in discussions with the higher clergy of his city, and that he was aware that the Church Fathers interpreted many passages in the Bible as relating to Jesus. Naturally, Rashi interpreted those passages differently. Nor did he miss any opportunity to do so.

The famous fifty-third chapter of Isaiah was a favorite bone of contention. It deals with the "Servant of God." This, of course, to the Christian theologians referred to Jesus. But Rashi explains it as having reference to Israel. Another controversial passage is the second Psalm, in which the Christian theologians likewise saw a reference to Jesus. But Rashi insisted that it referred to David. "Our Rabbis," he wrote, "apply this passage to Messiah; but it is better to apply it to David." It might be interesting to point out that in some manuscripts instead of "our Rabbis apply," the reading is "many apply." I examined a manuscript in the library in Moscow in which the reading of this passage is as follows: "Many of the disciples of Jesus apply this passage to Messiah, but in order to refute the *Minim* this passage should be applied to David." Thus, whenever the occasion arose in the interpretation of the Prophets and Hagiographa, Rashi sought to refute the explanations proffered by the Christian theologians.

In some places in his commentary, Rashi even engaged in firm and deliberate polemic with the theologians of the church. Especially true is this in the matter of the text of Isaiah 9.5-6. The passage reads as follows: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace; that the government may be increased, and of peace there be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it through justice and through righteousness from now on, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts doth perform this."

The Church theologians interpreted these verses as referring to Jesus; the *Targum Jonathan*, however, interpreted them as referring to the Messiah. Rashi combatted the notion that these passages referred to a Messiah. He maintained that they had reference only to King Hezekiah. The Christians contended that the word *Olam* (forever) could refer only to a Messiah; hence, to Jesus. But Rashi retorted that the word *Olam* does not mean "forever," but merely a "lifetime." He supported his contention by the verse from I Sam. 1.22, where the word

Olam refers to the "lifetime" of Samuel. Furthermore, he adduced the expression "from now on," found in the same verse, and asserted that this could not have referred to Jesus, because Jesus was born about five hundred years after the prophecy was delivered, and that the words "from now on" could only apply to King Hezekiah. Thus, the whole prophecy referred to King Hezekiah.

Rashi was never considered an exegete like Ibn Ezra. The Jews of France believed that the Torah in its entirety came from God, nor did they have a scintilla of doubt about the divine inspiration of the Prophets. They did not feel any urge, therefore, to make a critical examination and explanation of the Bible. Rashi, as a French Jew, was influenced by his environment, but despite this perfect faith, Rashi was conscious of passages that were difficult and complex, passages which some of the later critics tried hard to expound. One of these passages was the very first verse in the Pentateuch which reads, "*Bereshit bara . . .*" Rashi commented on this passage in this manner: "This verse calls aloud for explanation in the manner that our Rabbis explained it . . . If, however, you wish to explain it in its plain sense, explain it thus: At the beginning of the creation of heaven and earth, when the earth was without form and void and there was darkness, God said, 'Let there be light!' The text does not intend to point out the order of the acts of creation." Rashi saw the difficulty in this passage. It could not be taken literally, for it would mean that *Bereshit* created God. This passage was translated in the Septuagint: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

When, at times, Rashi was puzzled by the text, he did not hesitate to express his perplexity. For example, the text in Genesis 28.5 reads: "And Isaac sent away Jacob, and he went to Padan Aram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau." Rashi could not understand why the text had the expression "the mother of Jacob and Esau" which was quite unnecessary, because in the preceding chapters we had been told that Jacob and Esau were the sons of Rebekah. Rashi exclaims his surprise. In other parts of the Bible, as in the Prophets, Rashi freely criticized the

text. In II Kings 15.8, Rashi believed he detected an error in the chronology of the text. He realized that that part of the concluding verse of Deborah's Song (Judges, 5.31) which stated that the land had rest forty years was not part of the Song, but was added by the author of the book. Rashi believed that the prophecy in Ezekiel 17 was earlier than the prophecy in Chapter I. Of Isaiah 48.16, Rashi contended that the verse contains two different sayings.

Rashi made use of some very beautiful agadic stories in his commentaries. He was especially fond of those that conveyed an ethical or moral meaning. These agadic tales left a profound impression on all who read them, children as well as adults, laymen as well as scholars. A beautiful one that comes to mind Rashi takes from *Pesikta Rabbati*, and applies to Genesis 48.7. "And as for me, when I came from Padan Aram, Rachel died unto me in the land of Canaan in the way, when there was still some way to come unto Ephrath; and I buried her there in the way to Ephrath — the same is Bethlehem." Rashi comments thus: "And although I trouble you to take me for burial into the land of Canaan, and I did not do this for your mother, which I might easily have done since she died quite close to Bethlehem do not imagine that it was the rains which prevented me from bringing her to Hebron for burial. It was the dry season, when the ground is riddled and full of holes like a sieve, and yet I buried her there, and did not carry her even the short distance to Bethlehem, to bring her to a city. I know that in your heart you feel some resentment against me. Know, however, that I buried her there by the command of God, that she might help her children when Nebuzaradan will take them into captivity. When they pass along the road, Rachel will come forth from her grave and stand by her tomb weeping and seeking mercy for them, as it is said, 'A voice is heard in Ramah,' 'the sound of weeping . . . Rachel weeping for her children.' And the Holy One Blessed Be He replies to her, 'There is a reward for thy work,' and He continues, 'For thy children will return to their own border.'"

Rashi wrote a commentary on the entire Bible, except

the Book of Chronicles. Although he used both *Derash* and *Peshat*, the *Peshat* method of interpretation was the more popular even in his own lifetime. His grandson, R. Samuel, is authority for Rashi's statement that "If I had enough time I would write other commentaries on the Bible, more in the method of *Peshat*."

Rashi had perfect mastery of the complexities of the Hebrew language. His great genius enabled him to grasp and understand its innermost spirit. His style was natural, simple, concise. The Rabbis of the Middle Ages praised him and said that by his commentary he exalted the Torah and fortified it. Thanks to Rashi the Torah has been renewed. According to many rabbis, God had revealed Himself to Rashi when he wrote his interpretations. His commentary on the Bible has remained, throughout the centuries, the Commentary *par excellence*.

To his grandson, Jacob Tam, founder of the School of the Tosafists, himself considered the greatest intellectual giant in the realm of the Talmud, the following judgment is ascribed by tradition. Rabbenu Tam said: "So far as my grandfather's commentary on the Talmud is concerned, I might do as much; but, it would not be in my power to undertake to write a commentary on the Pentateuch."

IV.

The true measure of Rashi's unique genius can be found mainly in what he has come to mean for the study of the Talmud. The *magnum opus* of Rashi is not his commentary on the Bible — great as that is — but his commentary on the Talmud. Here his enormous powers flowered, and here they brought forth their fruit.

Rashi faced insuperable difficulties because the Talmud had no authoritative text. Scholars from time to time had added variant readings either on the margin or in the text itself. Sometimes they even emended the text; the *Garsanoim* which Rashi mentions in his commentary refer to these variant readings. In many cases the copyists themselves added or omitted words. Even R. Gershom had realized these difficulties, and had already endeavored to establish a correct text of the Talmud.

Rashi realized early that he could not establish the proper text merely on the basis of the different readings he had gathered from his teachers. He believed these should be tested by internal evidence. Hence, he carefully weighed the textual readings he had obtained in Mayence and Worms, and, notwithstanding the fact that he had received them from his teachers, he rejected them when they conflicted with established *Halakot* or with the context of the Talmud. In their place he supplied other readings which in his opinion were more accurate.

Since the Talmud consists of the Mishna and the Gemara, Rashi began his comments on the Mishna. His explanations were clear and concise. He avoided the Amoraic interpretation of the Mishna; nor did he render the decision of the law as it was given in the Gemara. When his explanation seemed too brief or inadequate, he would state that a fuller explanation would be found later. He helped to group the un-punctuated words into proper phrases and sentences. After he had clarified the sentence structure, he explained the subject matter.

Rashi utilized both the inductive and the deductive methods of interpretation. Some texts can be comprehended only after the particulars are first explained; then the general thought emerges from the multitude of examples. This is called the inductive method. In the deductive method, the large, general thought is first expounded; then the particular elements become illuminated. While some emphasized the one or the other method, Rashi, like a good pedagogue, applied both. Where a talmudic subject could not be fully understood until every detail had been analyzed, Rashi explained every particular. In other cases, where the general principle was essential, Rashi would set forth that first, and the particulars became clarified in its light.

Rashi would always first explain the less complicated passages, and would then advance to the more difficult ones. He continually sought to relate the new facts to the old, to those that were already part of the apperception of the student. As in the Bible commentary, so here, he often resorted to the use of metaphors and similes. He obtained his illustrations from the Talmud itself, but, if

he could not find any there, he turned to the Bible or the *Targumim*. When explanations in Hebrew or Aramaic failed him for difficult words, he used French words which, it will be recalled, he called *La'az*. And, in his efforts to expound and interpret, Rashi made full use of the languages he knew to perfection: Hebrew, Aramaic and French.

Rashi faced efficiently the grammatical difficulties that the Talmud presented. The Talmud has no punctuation marks to designate where sentences end or begin, whether words should be separated or united, whether a sentence is declarative or interrogative. Rashi supplied this missing punctuation by means of a word or a brief explanatory statement.

Although his grammatical views were based upon those of Menahem ben Saruk and Dunash ben Labrat, Rashi was a grammarian in his own right. He held views contrary to those authorities, such as that the quiescent verbs were trilateral and not biliteral. He traced the etymology of many words in the Talmud to Arabic and Greek sources. Although he did not know these languages, his fine language sense helped him. For example, in one instance he noticed that a particular word was Arabic, since it had the prefix *al*, a characteristic Arabic prefix. His guesses concerning word origins are usually correct. Where an error is found in Rashi's text, it may be put down to a careless copyist.

He often made drawings to illustrate talmudic passages which he feared the reader would not fully comprehend. His explanations are often based upon personal observations from the life about him. Before he discussed matters pertaining to shoes, he visited a shoemaker to learn how shoes were made. Similarly with the art of the smith, or the building of ships. He used the experimental method to obtain his information. When he had to depend on the information of others, he first made a thorough study of his subject. When he had to explain the different diseases mentioned in the Talmud, he read medical books. He was so proficient in medical knowledge that some scholars even suggest that Rashi was himself a physician.

Rashi did not preface his commentary with an introduction expounding abstractly the general rules of the

Talmud, nor did he give the geneological tables of *tanaim* and *amoraim*. He brought in such information in the course of his comments, when the occasion called for it. When he thought the reader needed such information for a better understanding of the *Halakot* or of the Talmud, then he would explain general principles, and expound the rules of hermeneutics. Similarly with chronology and other historical data. Rashi was not a historian, as we use the word today. His interest lay mostly in events and chronology, of which he had a critical understanding.

Unfortunately, Rashi died before he completed his commentary on the Talmud. He left unfinished his commentary on the Tractate *Baba Batra* and on the Tractate *Pesahim*. There are other tractates whose commentaries did not come from Rashi's pen. Rashi was a careful writer and usually made three revisions of his work. Most of his commentaries have undergone these three revisions; of some only two were made. Naturally here and there occasional contradictions will be found.

The spirit in which Rashi approached his Talmudic commentary may be seen from the fact that earlier commentators, such as R. Gershom and the older Geonim, were concerned only with the Halakic portions. Moreover, their works were fragmentary in nature. They completely omitted agadic passages which rabbinical scholars never studied. Their commentaries were intended only for the learned in Israel. But Rashi was anxious that the Talmud be studied not only by the Rabbis but by every Jew who was able to read the Bible with his commentary. That he wrote his commentary for the people and not only for the scholarly élite may be deduced from the fact that he interpreted the Agadic portions as well as the Halakic passages of the Talmud.

Herein lies the essential difference between Rashi and Maimonides. When Ibn Aknin, a pupil of Maimonides, established a *Yeshiva* in Bagdad, Maimonides counselled him not to waste his time in discussing the Gemara but to use the *Mishne Torah* and the *Halakot* of Alfasi as textbooks, and to refer to the Gemara only when contradictions

appeared between these two works. Rashi, on the other hand, held strongly to the opinion that the Talmud should be pre-eminent, that it should be made accessible to every Jew, and that the *Halakot* should be decided according to the rules given in the Gemara. For him, the Gemara was the authoritative word. As he once stated in his commentary: A man who is well versed in the Bible and Mishna, is still dependent on the Gemara, where the decisions of the law are given.

In his commentary on the Talmud, Rashi sometimes indicated how the law, in his opinion, ought be decided. In this, Rashi often had to take a radical step in changing the talmudic text. For example, according to the Talmud, where an anonymous opinion is stated, followed by differences of opinion, the decision never followed the anonymous opinion. Rashi, however, sometimes found himself in agreement with the anonymous opinion. In such cases, he changed the reading of the Talmud in order to have the differences of opinion first, followed by the anonymous opinion. In accordance with talmudic rules, the law could then be decided according to the anonymous opinion.

Like his commentary on the Bible, Rashi's commentary on the Talmud was written in a style remarkable for its simplicity, clarity and conciseness. He omitted involved details that would only clutter up the argument and confuse the reader. His commentary on the Talmud has become the supreme commentary, *Konteros* (Commentarius). On them, other commentaries and even books have been written; and rules on how to study them have been laid down by rabbinical scholars.

It is no exaggeration to say that without his commentary the Talmud would remain a closed book, or, using an earlier metaphor, would still be, for most men, a vast, trackless wilderness. Menahem ben Zerah, a Spanish Rabbi, has aptly stated the truth in these words, "There is no one so illuminating and so concise as Rashi in his commentary. He wrote as if by divine inspiration. Without him the Babylonian Talmud would have been forgotten in Israel."

V.

While it is true that Rashi was not a codifier of laws like Maimonides, he was not only a commentator but also a *Halakist* (Legalist). He decided *Halakot*, in his commentaries, on the basis of the Gemara, for the Gemara was for him the definitive authority. He also wrote *Responsa*, not many to be sure, because he believed that the decisions of the local court, based on the Gemara, were binding, as there was no greater authority in Jewish law which could reverse them. Even a Gaon, Rashi held, had no authority over the decisions of the local court elected by the community.

Rashi showed great lenience and tolerance towards his Christian neighbors. Although he was very zealous for Jewish law, he was most liberal towards Christianity. He did not consider Christianity an idolatrous religion. We have already learned that he welcomed the Jews who were compelled to accept Christianity, when they returned to the Jewish faith.

He showed his attitude towards his gentile neighbors in his decision that Christians could be employed by Jews in the making of wine. According to talmudic law, Jews were forbidden not only to drink, but even to derive any benefit from wine handled by Gentiles. In Champagne, in the times of Rashi, the Jews were engaged for the most part in the making of wine. They employed Gentiles in their vineyards. The talmudic law would have worked great loss upon the Jews since they could not sell the wine lest they derive some benefit from such sale. Rashi maintained that the law set forth by the Talmud did not apply to Christians, but to idolaters. Hence the Jews might employ Christians to work for them in their vineyards, and could sell their wine.

The liberal attitude of Rashi may be observed in his legal decisions concerning the granting of loans. According to talmudic law, a Jew had no right to charge a co-religionist interest on a loan. When business activities among the Jews increased, this law tended to work great hardship for it was necessary to obtain credit. Rashi, therefore,

permitted the creditor to charge interest for his money if it was loaned through a third party. That is, a Jew could turn over his money to a non-Jew who would charge interest; this interest would revert, of course, to the original creditor.

Rashi showed a similar liberality in ritual law. He permitted Jews, on the second day of the holidays, to use the fish and fruit given them by their Christian friends on the first day of the holidays. His decision ran counter to that of all his teachers. He also allowed Jews to play ball on the holidays. In general, Rashi maintained that there was more validity in the argument for permitting a thing than for prohibiting it. Rigidity in the law was easy in regard to matters which were allowed, but courage, fortified by learning, was essential where permission to declare such a law permissible was sought.

Before the Talmud had become known to the Jews of France, many non-Jewish customs crept into Jewish life. Rashi believed that the Jews should continue to observe these customs, since they had become part of their religious life. When, however, the customs appeared contrary to the spirit of Judaism, he fearlessly abrogated them. He was never an extremist, even in matters of piety. Rashi believed in being forthright. He objected to the opinion that practices which, according to the *Halakot*, were permitted, but which some people believed were prohibited, should not be permitted in their presence. On the contrary, Rashi held that if a practice was permitted according to the law, it should be declared permissible even in the presence of those who believed it prohibited; they had no legal basis for their erroneous opinions.

Rashi strove to secure communal self-rule as a means of assuring Jewish survival in the Diaspora. After the Temple was destroyed, the Jews ceased to exist as a political nation. Scattered all over the world, they were united in religion only. In order to survive in the Diaspora, the leaders of the Jews felt that it was necessary to have harmony and solidarity among the members of the community. They threatened to excommunicate those who failed to respect the institutions and decrees of the community. The Jewish

communities in France lacked a central authority like that of Babylonian Jewry, where there was a Gaon (the spiritual leader) and an Exilarch (the civil authority).

The Jewish communities in France were independent of each other. Rashi was anxious to preserve this independence. Once when a man took an oath not to conform to the community's decrees, Rashi maintained that the oath was void, that all must conform to such decrees. Such a man was guilty of two offences: for taking an oath falsely, and for not obeying the decrees of the community. He could be excommunicated.

On being requested to intervene in regard to a decree of another community, Rashi refused, saying that he believed that the authority of the local court was the highest tribunal in the Jewish law.

He was very solicitous about the rights of Jewish women. It happened that a man promised to marry a young woman and had deposited a sum of money as surety. Later he retracted his promise, and demanded that the money be returned to him. But Rashi held that the man had humiliated the woman, and should be severely punished by the loss of the money. Another case involved a man who ordered his wife from their home. He later sought a divorce without paying her the accustomed sum stated in the *Ketubah*. He charged that she had been afflicted with an offensive disease before her marriage to him. When the charge was found to be untrue, Rashi said that the man was unworthy of belonging to the race of Abraham whose descendants were always full of pity for humanity, and especially for their wives. Rashi affirmed that even men who did not believe in God would not eject their wives without cause. Since this man had conducted himself in such an unworthy manner towards a daughter of our Heavenly Father, he could not divorce her without paying her what was stipulated in the *Ketubah*.

His sympathetic attitude towards forced converts to Christianity urged him to declare that they must never be reproached when they returned to their people. They were to be treated on a basis of absolute equality. Even a *Kohen* who had been forced into Christianity but had returned to Judaism, was to have the same privileges he had enjoyed

before. He could resume his old position, and still be called first to the Torah.

Rashi had a profound love for his people, and never suspected that a Jew would knowingly transgress the law. Therefore, he trusted everyone. It is said that he accepted presents of wine from his fellow Jews, even though the wine may have been handled by Gentiles, and therefore should not have been drunk by a Jew. In addition to declaring that the law applied to idolaters, and not to Christians, Rashi assumed that, since the wine came from Jews, the law had been complied with, especially if the donors had never before been suspected of transgressing the law.

Besides the *Responsa* and the commentaries, there are other works which have come to us from the pen of Rashi. Such are: *Sefer ha-Pardes*, *Sefer ha-Orah*, *Mahzor Vitry*, *Siddur Rashi*, and the *Issur we-Heter*. These works are commonly attributed to Rashi. However, not all the material contained in them was written by him, but was compiled by his disciples who made many additions of their own. Rashi, like many other Rabbis, wrote poems which were incorporated in the Liturgy.

Rashi's works, especially his commentary on the Talmud, contain a mine of information on the history of the Jews of France. Much of this information, which is of great value to the history of French culture, historians have not yet utilized.

Rashi has much of the French spirit in him. The clarity and brevity of his style are undoubtedly due to the influence of the French language upon him. He sometimes called French his language. To the French people he is known as Solomon ha-Zarfati, Solomon the Frenchman. In many places in his commentary are reflected glimpses of the life of the people of France.

The women of Troyes, Rashi informs us, covered their faces, while the prostitutes uncovered their flesh near the elbow. He calls an ordinary cloak a *Mantelle*, and trousers he calls *Genouillere*. He mentions the games that were played then, and describes how they were played. In Troyes people enjoyed chess (*Echecs*), ball (*Peloton*), and bowling, in which the young people tested their strength.

The balls were made of leather and were filled with wool. He also describes musical instruments, and some of the utensils used in Troyes. He observes how glass was made, and how copper and zinc vessels were produced. He relates that storekeepers placed samples of their merchandise in front of their stores to advertise what they had for sale, much in the manner of today. Even French chivalry is reflected in the way people kissed their parents on their hands or on their knees as they came out of the synagogues after services.

The most important sources for the cultural history of France lie in the *La'azim* of Rashi. These *La'azim* are French words that Rashi used to interpret or translate a Hebrew or Aramaic word. He used over three thousand *La'azim* in his works. Since these *La'azim* are French words used in the tenth and eleventh centuries in Champagne they are culture-carriers of great importance. Studies of these *La'azim* have been made by two scholars, A. Darmesteter, and particularly by D. Blondheim who, until his death, was a professor at Johns Hopkins University. However, research in this subject is not yet exhausted. We trust that the *Académie Française* will yet undertake the tremendous work of scientifically editing the *La'azim* of Rashi which bear so significantly upon the history of the French language.

VI.

Rashi's influence on Judaism and Christianity has been profound.

On Judaism and the Jewish people his influence was greater than that of any other Jew since the close of the Talmudic period. In *Halakot* he is comparable only to Maimonides. His Halakic interpretations in the Talmud have been accepted for the most part by all the rabbis of the Middle Ages not only in France, Germany and Poland, but also in Spain. He was responsible for the establishment of the School of the Tosafists which strongly shaped the *Halakot*. He democratized the Talmud, and his commentary on it opened its gates to the Jews in general. In this respect he differed from Maimonides who was an aristocrat, not by virtue of wealth or birth, but by virtue of

his learning and intellect. Maimonides regarded scholarship as the acme of human attainment and believed that the scholars should rule the people. Rashi, on the other hand, was a democrat who sought to bring Jewish learning to the people, holding that there was no difference between the scholarly man and the ordinary Jew.

Rashi's commentary on the Pentateuch became an integral part of it, and was among the first books to be printed when printing was invented. So highly was it esteemed, that the rabbis decreed that it might be substituted for the *Targum* which, according to the talmudic law, every Jew had to recite together with the scriptural portion of the week. Even on the writing of the rabbis did Rashi's influence fall. The grammatical forms which the rabbis later mastered came not from the well-known Jewish grammarians but from the commentaries of Rashi. Even the script which was and still is used by the Jews of France, Germany, Poland and Russia is called by some Rabbis Rashi-script, and differs somewhat from the square-script writing.

The Christian religion also felt the impress of Rashi's spirit and mind. This was first manifested by Nicholas de Lyra (1292-1340) who, in his book *Postillae*, followed Rashi's commentary on the Bible. He so slavishly followed Rashi that he was nicknamed *Simia Salomonis* (Rashi's Ape). He said: "I usually follow Rabbi Solomon whose teachings are considered authoritative for Jews." De Lyra was, in truth, the channel through which Rashi's commentary entered the Christian world. Reuchlin, who was the father of the Reformation, was strongly influenced by Rashi through the work of Nicholas de Lyra. There is a couplet that runs

"Si Lyra non Lyrasset
Lutherius non saltasset."
(If Lyra had not sung his song,
Luther wouldn't have danced along.)

But, Lyra's singing was based on Rashi's notes. Therefore, if Rashi had not written his notes, Lyra would not have sung, and Luther would not have danced.

Rashi's commentary was partly translated into Latin between 1556 and 1710. J. Breithaupt made a complete

translation of it, using various manuscripts. (Today there is a good translation of Rashi's commentary on the Pentateuch.) John Buxtorf the Elder made use of Rashi's commentary in his Hebrew and Chaldaic lexicon. He called Rashi *consummatissimus ille theologiae judaicae doctor*. Rashi's commentary on the Talmud was considered by the Christians to be the official commentary, and hence, when the Talmud was burned in the streets of Paris, Rashi's commentary shared its fate, for it was considered as important as the Talmud itself. Even as the Talmud was censored by the vigilant Church, so was Rashi subject to the same censorship.

Rashi also influenced translations of the Bible, Luther's and the English translations. Tyndale felt his mind. It is well known that the King James' translation is greatly indebted to Rashi's commentary. It might be interesting to adduce a case or two that show Rashi's influence in the English translations.

Exodus 28.41 reads, in the Septuagint, "and thou shalt anoint them (Aaron and his sons) and *fill their hands*, and thou shalt sanctify them that they may minister to me in the priest's office." The Vulgate translates this passage, "and thou shalt *consecrate the hands* of them all, and shalt sanctify them, that they may do the office of priesthood unto me." Tyndale's translation reads, "and ye shalt anoynte them and *fyll theyr handes* and consecrate them." The King James' translation, however, reads, "and thou shalt anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office." In all the translations, except the King James', the word "hands" is found as it is given in the Hebrew text; only in the King James' translation is the word "hands" omitted. It simply states "consecrate them." This is not a literal translation of the Hebrew text. The King James on this verse is based on Rashi's comment, namely, "Wherever the term '*filling the hand*' is used it denotes consecration. The installation ceremony was performed when one entered for the first time into an office as a sign that he is entitled to it from that day henceforth. In France, when a person is appointed in charge of a matter, the Prince puts into his hand a leather glove which

they call 'gant' (in *La'az*). Thus the Prince gives him a right in the matter. They term that, giving of the glove and the office 'revestir' (in *La'az*). That is the meaning of *filling the hand*." Thus, according to Rashi, the expression *filling the hand* in this verse under consideration was meant to be a metaphorical symbol of consecration.

Another example. The King James' translation of I Kings 19.21 reads as follows: "and he (Elisha) took the yoke of oxen and slew them and *boiled their flesh* (the Hebrew text has *bishlom ha-basar*) with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people . . ." Now, the Septuagint translates: "and took a yoke of oxen and slew them and *boiled them* with the instruments of the oxen, and gave to the people, and they ate." The Vulgate reads, "he took a yoke of oxen and killed them, and *boiled the flesh* with the plough of the oxen and gave it to the people." The Septuagint does not mention the word "flesh" as it is in the Massoretic text. The Vulgate says, "boiled the flesh," not defining whose flesh, apparently leaving out the suffix *om* from the word, *bishlom*. According to the *Targum Jonathan*, Elisha *boiled the flesh for the people*; similarly, the commentator Kimhi, interprets this passage, taking the words *bishlom ha-basar* to mean, "he boiled for them." Only the King James' translation reads, "he boiled their flesh" which is undoubtedly based on Rashi's commentary where he writes as follows: "The word *bishlom* means that he boiled the flesh of the two oxen, and it is not as the *Targum Jonathan* translates it 'he boiled for them'."

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The Rabbis of the Middle Ages conferred distinction upon Rashi when they called him *Parshandata* — Interpreter of the Law. In the course of time the man became identified with the Book; and the *Humash* — Pentateuch — became synonymous with Rashi.

The genius of the Jewish people lies in its power to adjust law to life, and tradition to the spiritual needs of the people. *Interpretation* has become a potent weapon in the struggle of Jewish survival. And the interpreter of law and tradition has become more than an illuminator of a

text, he has become a creative savior of Israel. A great interpreter transforms his very text, making it a living part of an ever-continuing spiritual heritage.

Insofar as Rashi was a Halakist, he helped to make Jewish law a living force applicable to the needs of his time. But as a great interpreter, Rashi helped make the whole of Jewish tradition — Bible and Talmud — a living reality, adjusting it, through interpretation, to the ethical, religious and social needs of the Jewish people. Thus, Rashi indicated the way by which the Judaism he loved might remain vital and significant for his generation and for generations yet unborn.

To the Jewish people, R. Solomon ben Isaac will always remain — RASHI, PARSHANDATA.