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DON ISAAC ABARBANEL.

THE family of Abarbanel, one of the oldest and most illustrious in our history, belongs to those Jewish refugees who, at the establishment of the Inquisition in Spain, fled for their lives to Portugal. Members of the family dwelt in Seville as early as the twelfth century, and Ibn Verga, in his *Shebet Jehudah*, a history of Israel's sufferings that may be likened to Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," mentions an ancestor of Abarbanel as a distinguished scholar living in the time of the good and wise King Alfonso VI. This Abarbanel offered to Thomas, a learned Christian friend of his and a confidant of Alfonso, an explanation of a Hebrew word much misunderstood both then and since, and this explanation averted imminent persecution from his brethren in faith, and obtained for Abarbanel himself the personal friendship of the King. As the matter is not without interest even at the present day, I give the translation of the dialogue between Thomas and the King.

Thomas.—"I have had a dispute about this matter with an eminent member of the family of Abarbanel; (further on he terms him 'that great sage'). He has come from Seville, his native town, and he tells me that he who knows Hebrew, will find no difficulty in it, viz., in the use of the word נכרי in the Talmud. For there is a difference in meaning between the terms נכרי 'a stranger,' נוצרי 'a Christian,' and גוי 'a heathen.' The נכרי is he who has estranged himself from his Creator, and does not acknowledge even the fundamental principles of religion; whilst the Christian, believing as he does in the creation of the world, in miracles and in providence, is not, and cannot be, called נכרי."

The King.—"I am very pleased with you, and even more so with Abarbanel, for this explanation. I shall be delighted if you can induce him to come to our court."

Don Isaac ben Jehudah ben Shemuel ben Jehudah ben Joseph ben Jehudah, as he is in the habit of describing himself, of whose life, and to some extent works, I intend giving a sketch, though originally of Spanish extraction, his ancestors having all resided in the Kingdom of Castile, was

himself born in Lisbon, in the year 1437, more than 450 years ago. He traces the descent of his most noble family, like that of Ibn Daud's, in a direct line to the royal House of David. He speaks of himself, not once or twice, but repeatedly, with a perfectly intelligible and pardonable pride, as "Isaac of the root of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, of the holy seed, of the family of the House of David," or as it is sometimes varied, "of the seed and stem of David, the leader and commander of the peoples."

In his commentary on Zechariah xii. 7, after remarking with approval, that the words "the House of David" occurring there are explained by the Commentators as meaning "the seed of David and his family," he continues thus: "'To Spain also after the destruction of the first Temple,' so writes R. Isaac ben Jehudah ibn Giat, 'there came two families of the House of David, one, the family of the children of Daud, which settled in Andalusia, the other, the family of the children of Abarbanel, which settled in Seville, of which is my humble family.'"

Of his celebrated ancestors, whom, as we have seen, he counts upwards to the sixth generation, whose names, glittering stars as it were, in his family coat of arms, he so often joins to his own, but little worthy of note has come down to us.

His grandfather, Don Samuel Abarbanel, who also lived in Seville, and who was one of the two envoys sent by the Jews of Spain on a mission to Pope Martin V., was a distinguished statesman, as high minded as he was esteemed, in the service of Henry II. (1369), of Castile, the conqueror and successor of his half-brother, Don Pedro (1350).

He was a generous and noted patron of Jewish learning, and it was in his honour that R. Menachem ben Aaron ben Serach, so miraculously saved at the massacre of the Jews in Estella, and who in his flight met with a most welcome reception in Don Samuel's house, wrote his valued work, *Tsadda Laddarech* ("Provisions for the Way"), a compendium of Jewish Law, theoretical and practical. The same too, doubtless, it was who, on his forced conversion to Christianity—ostensible and temporary of course, as usual in such cases—at the persecution in Seville, Ash Wednesday, 1391, had his ancient and venerable name changed into that of Juan di Sevilla.

For reasons not given, but yet not far to seek, Don Samuel's son, Don Judah, the father of Don Isaac, emigrated from Spain to Portugal, and established himself in Lisbon. He was not there long before he attained to honour and

consideration, due in part, no doubt, to his wealth. The influence, powerful as it was, which he thus had over the great of the land, he used in favour of his coreligionists.

He was made Treasurer to the Infante Don Fernando, brother of the King Duarte, who, with his small income, very often stood in need of Don Judah's riches. Before undertaking, in 1473, his journey to Moorish Tangier, and with a presentiment of his approaching death, he made his will, and ordered that "the Jew Abarbanel, inhabitant of Lisbon" be paid in full the sum of 506,600 reis blancos, which he (the Infante) had received from him as a loan.

Don Judah gave his son Don Isaac a careful education, suitable as well to his means as to the circumstances of the time. We are not told who his master was, but there can be no doubt that the then Rabbi of Lisbon, R. Joseph Chajun, exerted a material influence over the direction of Isaac's mind.

Rabbi Joseph Chajun, like Don Isaac Abarbanel, a native of Lisbon, was a most pious and God-fearing, as well as a learned man. He held the Rabbinate of the congregation of Lisbon for a quarter of a century, irrespective of the short time during which he was compelled by a ravaging plague, to leave the capital and to stay in Evora. He there finished at the end of May, 1466, his commentary on Jeremiah, which we have in MS., and, four years later, that on the Ethics of the Fathers. He also wrote commentaries on many other books of the Bible, such as the Psalms, Proverbs and all the Prophets. This same Rabbi, who was succeeded in the Rabbinate by his son Moses before 1490, Abarbanel, even in his maturer years, regarded as his teacher, and he may have taken him as his model and pattern in his exegetical philosophical commentaries. Later on however, when residing in Toledo, the capital of Castile, and when he must have been 47 years of age, it would appear from an incidental remark of R. Joseph Caro's, that he attended and heard the lectures of his friend Rabbi Isaac Aboab II., the then Rabbi of Toledo. Now this Rabbi, though bearing the same name as the author of the "Menorath Hammaor" cannot, as Zunz has conclusively shown, be identical with the latter, who lived nearly two hundred years before. He was, however, the successor, in the Chief Rabbinate of the Jews of Spain, to his teacher, R. Isaac Campanton in Oporto, and the author of many learned and valuable works. Abarbanel was of precocious nature, of clear and penetrating judgment, animated by a burning love of learning, and ardent enthusiasm for Judaism, its lofty and sublime conception of God, its glorious and ancient history.

In his youth he gave promise of his future greatness, a promise that he fulfilled beyond all expectation. When but twenty years old, he formed the plan of his commentary on the Torah, beginning, however, with that on Deuteronomy. He had evidently already won fame for his statesmanlike qualities. For whilst yet composing his second work, "The Crown of the Elders," of which he invariably says "which I composed in my youth," he could boast that "he had amassed more riches, wisdom and greatness than anyone before him, men and women servants, who ate his bread, and clothed themselves in his woollen and linen, and that he, called into request by various affairs and concerns, was unsettled and fugitive, now here, now there, like a practised man of business."

He read the works of Aristotle, whom, like his predecessors, he speaks of as "the philosopher," as well as those of the Arabian writers on the Stagyrice, Ibn Roschd, Ibn Sinai, Algasali and others, all, naturally, in Hebrew translations, for he knew neither Arabic nor Greek. He was familiar with Maimonides' "Moreh," which served him for a time as a chief guide, with Jehuda Hallevi's "Cusari," and the philosophy of Gersonides. He wrote, with the aid of these and other writers, his first work—more properly, a small pamphlet, consisting of but a few leaflets—on "The Original Form of the Elements." This was soon followed by a second, and, in every way, more important work, under the title of "The Crown of the Elders;" wherein, taking for his basis and starting point, Exodus xxiii. 20, "Behold, I send an angel before thee," &c., he discusses, in twenty-five chapters, and in a pleasing and intelligent way, some of the most momentous questions of religion—God's special providence of Israel, prophecy, and many others.

Alfonso V. was then king of Portugal, and his reign has been truly described as "the last golden age of the Jews of the Pyrenean Peninsula." He was called "The African," from his victories over the Barbary Moors, and succeeded to the throne in 1438. Himself cultivated, gentle, and amiable, he was appreciative of the like qualities in others, and therefore sought to attract to his court the rich, educated, and graciously sociable Abarbanel. To one with such great warlike enterprises on hand, so often exceeding his means, a man like Abarbanel must have been a perfect godsend. He entrusted him with the care of the finances, consulted him on all important questions, and bestowed his confidence on him.

Abarbanel soon became the favourite of the whole court, and won the regard of the grandees, within and without the

royal circle. He was on friendly terms with the members of the house of Braganza, especially with its head, the powerful, but well-disposed Duke Fernando of Braganza, who, as we shall before long see, died on the scaffold for no fault of his, under king Alfonso's successor, John II. The same ruled over fifty towns, boroughs, castles, and strongholds, and could place in the field, 10,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry. Abarbanel also numbered among his friends Fernando's two brothers, the Marquis of Montemar (Constable of Portugal) and the Earl of Faro. Princes and nobles frequented his palatial residence, the learned of Lisbon were his friends and companions, and the scholarly Doctor João Sezira—a man of high consideration at court, and a warm patron of the Jews (in whose behalf he never failed to interest himself)—was one of his most intimate friends. Rich and honoured, he spent in Lisbon, under king Alfonso, some of the happiest years of his life, as he himself, indeed, in the introduction to his commentary on the Book of Joshua, tells us: "I lived in peace in my inherited house in renowned Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, where God had given me blessing, riches, and honour. I built me great houses with large rooms. My house was the meeting place of the wise and learned. I was beloved in the palace of Alfonso, a just and mighty king, under whom the Jews enjoyed liberty and prosperity. I stood near to him, and he leaned upon my hand, and as long as he lived I went in and out of his palace." When, in the thirty-third year of his reign, the king, in the course of his second campaign into Africa, captured the port town of Arzilla, his soldiers brought with them, amongst several thousand Moorish, also 250 Jewish captives of both sexes and of various ages, in the direst distress and suffering, who were sold as slaves all over the country. Jews and Jewesses condemned to wretched slavery, under such circumstances too, was more than Abarbanel's sympathetic heart could bear to see. Accordingly, as soon as the news of their misery reached him he formed a committee, consisting of twelve of the leading members of the Congregation of Lisbon, who set themselves the task, no light one by any means, of delivering their hapless co-religionists from their captivity. To ensure still more the success of the undertaking, himself and another influential colleague, travelled all over the country, raising funds for this pious object—"the redemption of captives."

In a short time, he was fortunate enough to bring together 10,000 gold doubloons (£16,000), with which the liberty of 220 captives was bought, not unfrequently, as may well be imagined, at a high price.

Now, however, their real difficulties began. The ransomed Jews and Jewesses, adults and children, were sorely in need of clothing, shelter, and support, until they had at least learnt to speak the language of the country, and were able to shift and provide for themselves. Yet, where were the means necessary for the maintenance of so large a number of destitute poor to come from? Abarbanel could not again encroach upon the kind liberality of his own Portuguese countrymen, and he therefore addressed himself to the most illustrious Jew of Italy of the time, who was an intimate friend of his, giving him to understand that contributions in behalf of the distressed Moorish co-religionists, would be thankfully received from his Italian fellow Jews.

This Italian Jew, Jechiel of Pisa by name, was a noted capitalist, who, by virtue of his vast wealth, ruled the money-market of Tuscany, and competed with the richest houses in that province. He was more than this, however. As beneficent as he was rich, noble and generous in heart and mind, he was ever ready to assist the poor with his money, to comfort the sad with word as well as deed. To show that there is no exaggeration in my description of him and his character, I just mention that twenty-one years later, in 1492, on the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, when very many of the exiles took refuge in Italy, he took up his fixed quarters, so to speak, at the port of Pisa, and there received them all, rich and poor alike, cared and provided for them, or if need be, forwarded them on to their several destinations, all, of course, at his own sole expense.

Next year, again, 1472, the king had occasion to send an embassy to Pope Sixtus IV. at Rome, both to congratulate him on his accession to the Papacy, as well as to inform him of his conquest over the Moors in Africa. Dr. João Sezira, the friend of Abarbanel and well-wisher of the Jews, was one of its members, and Abarbanel exacted from him the promise to speak with the Pope in behalf of the Jews, at the same time asking him to deliver the above-named letter, and some of his own and others' works, to his friend Jechiel of Pisa.

In this most interesting letter, dated Nissan, 5232—1472, Abarbanel, besides his already-mentioned request to him for assistance for the poor Jewish captives, begs him very strongly to show every attention in his power to the Doctor, and to assure him, as well as his noble companion, who was at the head of this special mission—Don Lopo de Almeida—that king Alfonso's fame had penetrated the Apennines, and that he (Jechiel of Pisa) was greatly delighted to hear how very kind and humane his (the king's) con-

duct was towards the Jews of his country. At the same time, and not forgetting the amenities of life, Abarbanel sent as a present for Jechiel of Pisa, and all by the hands of the Doctor, his "Crown of the Elders," of which mention has already been made, and his then unfinished commentary on Deuteronomy, and from his own wife, for the wife of Jechiel, a trusty Moorish female slave, who had already lived some time in the house of the Doctor. The letter concludes with the following postscript, which speaks for itself: "Have the goodness to let me know whether this Pope is well-disposed towards us, whether there are with him or in the country of Rome, Jewish doctors, and whether the Cardinals have doctors"—Jewish, presumably. As long as Abarbanel enjoyed the Royal favour "he was shield and buckler to his people, delivered the sufferers from their enemies, repaired the breaches, and saved the Jews from the lions"—as his poetical son, Juda Leon, describes him. He "had a warm heart for all sufferers, was a friend to the friendless, and a father to the fatherless." He never forgot his own people, and ever did his utmost to further their welfare, however great and distinguished he became. Happy and prosperous, in the company of an excellent wife and three promising sons, he might have continued undisturbed in the enjoyment of all that makes life worth living, and might have devoted himself with undiminished vigour and energy to his heart's desire, the pursuit of his studies, had not events, which he could neither foresee nor control, interfered with all his plans and arrangements, foiled and crushed all his hopes and expectations. Indeed, so fortunate had his career till then been, that though at the date we have now arrived at, he was already middle-aged (44 years old), the misfortune I am now going to relate is, as far as is known to us, the first but not the last, for it was but the beginning of a whole series of reverses, that befell him.

His patron, the good and wise King Alfonso V., died at the end of August, 1481, after a reign of forty-two years, and was succeeded in the kingdom by his son John II., 1481-1495, a new king who knew not Isaac nor remembered what he had done. This John was the reverse of his father in almost everything, sullen, heartless, and selâsh. He strove to put aside the powerful grandees, and to establish an absolute monarchy. He desired to rid himself first of all of the Duke of Braganza, the richest and most popular man in the country, his near kinsman, and like him of royal blood, or as Abarbanel puts it, "flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone." Accordingly, and whilst actually feigning friendship

for him, he charged him and his two brothers with maintaining a treasonable correspondence with the joint Spanish sovereigns (Ferdinand and Isabella), and had them impeached of high treason. The duke, arrested on this, the gravest of charges, was beheaded, and his vast estates and those of the entire house of Braganza were confiscated by John to the crown (1483). His brothers, whom a similar fate awaited, fled abroad. Abarbanel, who, as we have seen, was on friendly terms with these three brothers, all fallen into disgrace, likewise incurred the king's suspicion of complicity in the alleged conspiracy. Commanded to attend at court, and, in his innocence apprehending no harm, he was actually on the point of obeying the royal summons, when on the way he was stopped by an unknown friend, who told him that his life was aimed at and in danger, and advised him to make his immediate escape. Warned by the fate of the Duke of Braganza, Abarbanel followed the friendly and timely advice, fleeing for his life until midnight of the second day, when he reached the city of Segura, on the frontiers of the kingdom of Castile. That he did not escape at all too soon is evident from the fact that, when he failed to appear in obedience to his command, the king at once despatched couriers in all directions, with instructions to take him dead or alive. But these measures, happily for our hero, failed of their object. Foiled in his attempt to get hold of his person, the king revenged himself by confiscating, not only all of Abarbanel's valuable property, including, as we shall see later on, his commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy, but also that of his eldest son Juda Leon, who was then already, though but in his fourteenth year, practising as a physician on his own account. In a respectful but manly letter addressed to the king from his place of refuge, Abarbanel protested his innocence of the crime laid to his charge, and likewise acquitted his friend the Duke of Braganza of all guilt. "From the depths of my sorrow I cried to him, from the place I had then hidden myself in. In a letter I wrote him I cried, 'Save, O king: is it well for you to oppress? Shall the judge of a whole country not do right? Why have you done evil to your servant? Why have you thrust me out? Let me know what you charge me with, why you contend against me? Prove and try me, my lord, and all efforts to the contrary will not succeed in bringing guilt home to me.'" All in vain, however, as might have been expected; the tyrant was too suspicious to attach credence to any assurances, however solemn. As Abarbanel himself puts it, "The king, like the deaf adder that stops her ear, would not withdraw

his hand from destroying. I looked for judgment, but behold oppression, for righteousness, but behold a cry." This was the *first* of the three banishments that he suffered during his career.

Here, in Toledo, the capital of Castile, and his ancestral home, he took up his abode at the beginning of the year 1484, and was received with honour by his brethren in faith, and particularly by the educated amongst them. His fame soon spread, and a circle of scholars and followers gathered round him. Impoverished, Abarbanel reproached himself with having, through affairs of state and worship of mammon, neglected the study of the Law, and in his piety viewed his misfortune in the light of a heavenly judgment. Free from service to the State, and thankful to God that he was once more in the company of his wife and two of his sons, whom the king had allowed to follow him to Castile, the third, however, remaining behind in Portugal, he again devoted himself to the service of God. He began by carrying out a resolve, formed when yet in Portugal, to write a full and detailed commentary on the four historical Prophets, which, by reason of their apparent ease, had been somewhat overlooked by his predecessors. He had first delivered his explanations orally to an appreciative audience, and then, at the instance of his new friends and disciples, wrote them down, and in a surprisingly short time, too. In sixteen days he finished his commentary on Joshua, in twenty-five days that on Judges, and in three months and a half that on the two Books of Samuel.

It was not for long, however—not more than six months—that he was permitted to devote himself to his favourite studies and literary pursuits. The author was soon again to be replaced by and merged in the statesman. When about to take up the pen to begin his commentary on the books of the Kings of Judah and Israel, he was summoned to the Court of the mighty Ferdinand and Isabella, the joint sovereigns of Spain, and entrusted with the office of farmer of the royal revenues, an office which he held for eight years, until the expulsion, 1484-1492. In this capacity he made the acquaintance of Don Abraham Senior, a wealthy Jew of Segovia, who like him, but a long time before him, acted as chief farmer of taxes, and who, a generous patron of Jewish learning, took him immediately, it would seem, into partnership with him.

This Don Abraham, a most intimate friend of Andreas de Cabrera of Valencia, is the same who, on the taking of Malaga, August 18th, 1487, by the armies of Ferdinand and

Isabella, ransomed some 450 Moorish Jewish captives, mostly women, for 20,000 doblas of gold = £15,000, and they were taken away in two armed galleys.

That Abarbanel by his sincere devotion to their service, gained their goodwill and rendered himself almost indispensable to them is evident from the fact that they, the high catholic Sovereigns, under the eyes, too, of the venomous Torquemada, and notwithstanding the canonical laws, and the repeated resolves of the Cortes forbidding the admission of a Jew to any public office whatever, did entrust him, Isaac the Jew, with the sinews of the very life of the State.

For eight years he enjoyed his new fortune till that terrible persecution, the most memorable in history, broke out, a persecution by which no one has lost and suffered more than the country itself that was the chief seat and origin of it, and from the evil effects of which morally, intellectually, and materially, even Christian historians admit it has, to this day, not yet recovered. How many services Abarbanel rendered his co-religionists during his eight years' administration, has not been preserved in their grateful recollection, owing doubtless to the calamity, the Inquisition, that fell upon them before long. There can be no doubt, however, that in Castile, as elsewhere, he was their protecting angel.

Their bitter enemies the Dominicans, or Black Friars, to whose hands was committed the duty of detecting and punishing heresy, took care that there should be no lack of the most atrocious, if utterly groundless, accusations against them. Now it was said that the Jews had reviled a cross; now that they had at La Guardia, a village about nine leagues from Toledo, kidnapped a Christian boy three or four years old, and crucified him; that they had attempted the same atrocity in Valencia, but were prevented from carrying it out, 1488—1490. Again that the Jews of Castile did not succumb to the fury of the Inquisitors, for the aid they rendered to the hapless Marranos—Jewish-Christians—was undoubtedly due to the work of Abarbanel. He himself relates that whilst in the service of Ferdinand and Isabella, he acquired wealth; marked honour and consideration were shewn him on the part of the court as well as of the leading grandees. As far as his occupations would allow him, he applied himself to study, and, forgetful of past misfortune, would, during the eight years that he spent in their service, have passed a contented and happy life, had not the future filled him with anxious apprehensions. Indeed, the horizon of his co-religionists in Spain, as well as in Portugal, was overcast with dark thunder-clouds.

In the following year, 1492, the joint sovereigns succeeded in taking the kingdom of Granada, after a war of eleven years duration, from the Moors, and made their solemn entry into the capital on January 2nd. "Elated with the conquest, and instigated by the Inquisition first introduced into Spain in 1480, they resolved," as a kind of thankoffering for their success, "that Spain should no longer afford an asylum to, or its soil be polluted by the tread of, anyone not professing the Roman Catholic religion." Thus, determined either to convert the Jews to Christianity, or else to expel them from the country, they issued their terrible edict, dated Granada, 30th March, 1492, that within four months, all Jews of their kingdom, without distinction of age, rank, or sex, should, on pain of death, depart from their country. Abarbanel, who from his position at court was one of the first to hear of the approaching publication of the cruel and tyrannous decree, plunging thousands, aye, and tens of thousands, into wanton and indescribable misery, did his utmost, exerted all his influence, to obtain its revocation, but all in vain. He even went as far as tendering (I quote now advisedly Prescott in preference to Lindo the Jew) "a donative of 30,000 ducats [600,000 crowns, Lindo] towards defraying the expenses of the then just concluded Moorish war. The tempting offer caused the cold-hearted calculating Ferdinand to hesitate about revoking it, when Torquemada, the Inquisitor-general, rushed into the royal presence, and drawing forth a crucifix from beneath his mantle, held it up, exclaiming, 'Judas Iscariot sold his master for thirty pieces of silver; Your Highnesses would sell him anew for 30,000. Here he is, take him, and barter him away.' So saying the frantic priest threw the crucifix on the table, and left the apartment. The sovereigns, instead of chastising his presumption, or despising it as a mere freak of insanity, were overawed by it."

The Jews, astounded though they were by the bolt which had fallen so unexpectedly upon them, had yet as a body no hesitation as to the course they were to adopt. They resolved that, sooner than give up what was dearer to them than life itself, their religion, they would quit the country, however strong and dear the ties that bound them to it. Accordingly on the 9th of Ab, 160,000 families, as Lindo puts it, or as it is usually stated, 300,000 souls, half as many as left Egypt with Moses, left, never again to return to, the home of their fathers, and the happy scenes of their youth. Some of them went to the kingdoms of Portugal, Navarre and the Provence, all so near to them. Others fled to Africa and Asia, and others again to Turkey, Greece and Italy. To this last-named

country, when all hope of the repeal of the decree was gone, Abarbanel and his family also repaired, and he, 55 years old, was one of those who quitted Spain before the expiration of the appointed time. He arrived on board ship at the beginning of the year 1493 with his wife and children and the wreck of his fortune at Naples. Naples was then under the dominion of King Ferdinand I., at whose hands he met with a welcome reception, and to whom he rendered important service.

Most of them, notwithstanding their seeming hopelessness, remained true to Judaism, while a few, actuated by a love of gain and worldly honour, went over to Christianity. Amongst these latter was the farmer of the revenues, Don Abraham Senior, the friend and partner of Abarbanel, and who on the taking of Malaga exhibited such extraordinary zeal for the ransom of Jews condemned to slavery. How great does Abarbanel appear in comparison with such men!

The news of Abarbanel's presence in his dominions, came to the King from the Catholic Sovereigns themselves. After informing him that rich Spanish Jews had fled to his country, they had the insolence to request him to condemn them to death and to surrender to the representatives of Spain, in behalf of the Spanish Exchequer, the residue of the fortune thus obtained. Regardless of their Spanish Majesties' threats, Ferdinand I., humane and high-minded, sent for Abarbanel, received him well, and kindly entrusted him with an office in court, probably with that of the finances, in the management of which we know he was particularly skilled. During his lifetime Abarbanel enjoyed happy days, gained fame and fortune, lived at rest and peace, and had joy and plenty of all things. Not for long, however, was he permitted to be undisturbed in this, his renewed prosperity. At the beginning of the following year, the King died, and was succeeded by his son Alfonso II., who, like his father, befriended him and retained him in his service.

On the invasion of Naples, however, in 1495, by Charles VIII. of France, then scarcely twenty-two years old, Alfonso II. had to leave the town, make his escape and abdicate in favour of his son Ferdinand II. He sought refuge in Messina, in Sicily, and hither Abarbanel, who alone of all his ministers had remained true to him in his misfortune, accompanied him as his friend and adviser, staying with him until his death, which occurred soon after in June, 1495. Abarbanel was at this time fifty-seven years of age, and this was the third and last of the three banishments that he suffered. He now felt quite forlorn, because of the loss not only of his royal patrons, Ferdinand I. and Alfonso II. of Naples,

and of his property, but also and perhaps still more, of his valuable library, dearer to him than all other worldly goods. During his stay with the King in Messina the French had plundered his house in Naples, and all his property, including even, as we have just seen, his books, in short, all the wealth that he had acquired whilst in the service of the Portuguese and Spanish monarchs, was gone. With want instead of plenty, and sorrow instead of joy, he thanked God that, after a fatiguing journey, he was enabled to settle in Corfu.

No one who can put himself in Abarbanel's sorrowful place, can fail to be moved by a deep sense of pity for him, sorely-tried and thrice banished, sexagenarian as he was. In his highly poetical preface to his *Zebach Pesach*, written in 1496, he speaks thus of himself: "My wife and my sons are away from me, and in another country, and I am left by myself, alone, an alien in a strange land." Forsaken, as he thought, by all, he sought comfort and recreation in study, and found his rest in the quickening and consoling prophecies of the Prophet Isaiah, which he began expounding on July 1st, 1495. A special circumstance nevertheless was the cause of his laying this work aside, for a time, unfinished; he, namely, recovered in Corfu, to his indescribable joy, his commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy, which, begun in his youth when twenty years old, and taken from his study on his flight from Portugal, he had long ago given up as lost. He now determined to continue it with renewed zeal, and on an enlarged scale. In his own words on the subject, in his preface to the commentary: "Ten years after my flight from Lisbon, whilst Israel was dwelling in safety, and in prosperity, in all parts of Spain, God determined to drive them all into exile, cast them into another land, and amongst a nation whose language they did not understand. I amongst the exiles came to Naples, where however we had likewise no rest, for the King, Charles VIII. of France, ruined us. His soldiers plundered all my property, and leaving the country I embarked on board a ship, and by God's mercy came to the island of Corfu, and whilst there got hold of what I had before written on this book (Deuteronomy) and joyfully resolved to enlarge it." After a short stay in Corfu—he remained only till the departure of the French from Neapolitan territory—he settled in his sixtieth year at Monopoli, in Apulia, in the kingdom of Naples. There he spent eight years, 1496-1503 in his theological studies, and displayed a most remarkable literary activity, for many of his works were either written or re-written there.

In January, 1496, he finished his commentary on Deutero-

nomy; about two months later, that on the Haggadah of Passover. In July of the same year, and at the request of his youngest son, Don Samuel, he completed his work on the Ethics of the Fathers, and in December, 1496, that on the Book of Daniel—a work of which he himself had a very high opinion. Then followed in rapid succession, his treatises on single chapters of, as well as his commentary on, the *Moreh*, on Prophecy, the Messiah, and Redemption, on the Articles of the Creed, the Resurrection, Reward and Punishment, and his commentary on Isaiah, which was also finished in Monopoli.

At the end of that time, in 1503, he went at the instance of his second son, Don Joseph (whom Graetz, for some inexplicable reason, persists in calling promiscuously both Isaac and Isaac II.) from Monopoli to Venice, where he passed the last years of his life, happy and serene. Here in the rich city of the Doges, he was once more drawn into the whirlpool of politics. The Senate, considering his able and clever statesmanship, took him into its counsel, and was guided by his advice, and even went as far as employing him, foreigner and Jew though he was, to negotiate a treaty between the Republic and Portugal, his native country, respecting the spice trade. Here too he had the fortune to be joined for a time by his eldest son, Don Judah.

Three years later, in 1507, when sixty-eight years old, and whilst his eldest son Don Judah was still staying with him, he received from a learned Cretan or Candiot of German origin, R. Saul Haccohen Ashkenazi, a disciple of Elia del Medigo, twelve questions on matters philosophical in the *Moreh Nebuchim* of Maimonides. These he answered at the beginning of the next year, with the graceful elegance peculiar to him. To the very last he worked hard at his studies, and was unremitting in his painstaking endeavours to elaborate the truths he had acquired, and to make them common property. His commentaries on the Books of the Prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and on the twelve Minor Prophets, as well as those on the first four books of Moses were all written and re-written in Venice, shortly before his death. In the summer of the year 1509, he died in Venice at the age of seventy-one, beloved, esteemed and mourned by Christians as well as Jews. In the presence of a large following of principal and representative men of Venice, his body was taken to Padua, and there interred in the ancient burial ground, outside the town. Five days later died Rabbi Juda Menz, the Rabbi of Padua and was buried beside him. The last resting place however of the one as of the other was, unintentionally let us hope, disturbed and destroyed. A fierce battle took place

outside the walls, between the army of the Venetian Republic, to which Padua belonged, on the one hand, and that of the Emperor Maximilian I. of Germany, acting under the League of Cambray, on the other. The latter laid siege to the town of Padua, and its surroundings suffered severely, the tombstones set up on the graves of both were demolished, and they have to this day not been identified. Thus was he pursued by adverse fate, even beyond the limits of his earthly existence.

It is most noteworthy that, in the midst of so many and engrossing occupations, in the service of different sovereigns and States, he should yet have found time to write so many works, all of them proofs of high intellectual power and profound scholarship, above all, however, of a high and genuine enthusiasm for Judaism. One can but marvel at the extraordinary fertility, and at the seemingly inexhaustible richness of his mind, particularly in the decline of life, when signs of physical decay were already perceptible, and in circumstances which would have tried and paralysed the capacity of the strongest and most robust. During the greater part of his literary activity, he was actually without books and other means of assistance, and almost wholly dependent on his memory. Most of his works, as we have seen, he wrote after exiles and troubles had come upon him, and after he had been thrust from his high and lofty station. In his above-named letter to R. Saul Haccohen Ashkenazi, containing answers to the other's questions, Abarbanel confesses that it was only in the vicissitudes of fortune that he recognised his true destiny as a theologian and exegetist, and not as a statesman and politician, after he had spent the best part of his life in vain endeavours after earthly perishable goods, riches and honour, all so cruelly and suddenly snatched from him. "Now all these commentaries and works I wrote after I had left my country. Before then, all the time that I was in the courts and palaces of the kings, engaged in their service, I had no leisure to study, and knew no book, but spent my days in vanity, and my years in trouble, in getting riches and honour; and now those very riches have perished, by evil adventure, and the glory is departed from Israel. It was only after I had been a fugitive, and a wanderer in the earth, from one kingdom to another people, and without money, that I sought out of the book of the Lord, according to (and parodying) the words of him who says in the Talmud, *חסורי מחסרה והכי קתני*, 'He is sadly in want, and so he studies.'"

As an expositor of the Bible and of its purely historical books, the first Prophets in particular, he simply stands alone

and without equal. Besides his knowledge of the language, as complete as it is accurate, of the Talmud and Midrash, and of Kabbala and its symbolism, in which he is quite at home, he is remarkably well read in general literature, especially theological and exegetical, and in philosophy, Arabian and other. This is not all, however, for, in addition, he possesses the truly inestimable and essential qualification of the successful expounder of Scripture, knowledge of the world, and a correct insight into political situations and crises. His commentaries, especially those on these Biblical books, throw light upon points otherwise difficult beyond comprehension, and he succeeds in clearing up obscurities, and in supplying deficiencies in matters which the older commentators regarded as of too subordinate and secondary importance. Add to this his perfect scientific treatment of his subject, copied, no doubt, from Christian exegetists, but yet first introduced by him into Jewish commentaries, namely, the habit of prefacing to each book a special and luminous introduction, as well as a table of contents, and to each section or chapter a string or series of questions, occasionally, it would seem, somewhat superfluous and redundant, and started only to be answered; his pure and elegant language, his easy and clear style, so persuasive that Popes forbade Jews even to read his commentary on Isaiah; his fondness, in his exegetical writings, for symbolical and numerical allusions, his thoughtful and happy explanation of many of the so-called ceremonial observances in the Torah, as well as Scriptural passages in general; his frequent references to events and incidents in the past life of Israel; his introduction, by way of illustration, of many a new, striking, and piquant remark, taken from other fields of knowledge—and we know how it is that Don Isaac Abarbanel has become one of the most popular and attractive commentators on the greater part of the Bible, quoted by Jew and Christian alike, and why his commentaries have won a place in the affection of his co-religionists, from which none of those of his predecessors or successors has been able to dislodge them.

ISAAC S. MEISELS.
