

COMMENTARIES
ON THE LATER PROPHETS

BY

R. ELEAZAR OF BEAUGENCI

I.

ISAIAH

EDITED FROM A UNIQUE BODLEIAN MS.

WITH A NOTICE ON

MEDIÆVAL FRENCH AND SPANISH EXEGESIS

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INTRODUCTION.

IN order that a fair estimate may be formed of the following specimen of early French rabbinical literature, which now for the first time sees the light, it will be necessary to take into account the information which the writer had at his disposal and the circumstances under which it was written. Our author's commentary may, perhaps, be thought to throw but little light on the meaning of the prophecies it endeavours to explain, and to offer no great information in the way of Hebrew lexicography and grammar, and yet, on further consideration, may be of interest in shewing the condition which biblical exegesis had reached in France at the latter part of the twelfth century of our era. To students of early French, moreover, it will be of importance as supplying many archaic forms of words then in use¹. It is hoped, therefore, that the following slight sketch, embodying as it does materials which may not in all cases be easily accessible to the readers of the appended treatise, may not be unacceptable to them.

It will be found on enquiry that, at the time when it made its appearance, the progress of Jewish thought had

¹ The works of Rashi alone have furnished M. Arsène Darmesteter with more than 2000 old French words of the eleventh century: see his article in *Humania* (1872), p. 146, and his reports in *Archives des Missions Scientifiques*, série 2, vol. 7, p. 87; and série 3, vol. 4, p. 383.

varied much in the several countries of Europe. The author belonged to a school which, while it had much similarity to the German, differed greatly from those established in Provence and Spain. To understand his position, therefore, it will be requisite to take a glance at these others also, and to note the circumstances which in their case led to such different results.

For many centuries after the capture of Jerusalem by Titus, Jewish learning appears to have been chiefly confined to the schools of Palestine, Armenia, and Babylonia, and from them teachers and books found their way to western settlements. In no one of all the numerous congregations scattered throughout Asia Minor, Europe, and northern Africa, wherever the arms of Rome had penetrated, has the name of any local teacher of eminence been handed down to us. The information needed for imparting religious instruction and for duly carrying out ceremonial observances was entirely derived from eastern sources; each rabbi made the best use he could of such portions of the Talmuds and Midrashim¹ as reached him, and no one was of sufficient authority to add anything to the stock of knowledge on these subjects. Even had the learning of those times been greater than it was, it would have been exceedingly difficult to have established rabbinical schools in countries where life and property were so precarious for Jews. The mere whim or greed of rulers, or a popular outcry, might at any moment, without warning, bring exile and confiscation, if not death, upon

¹ For an explanation and account of the origin of the Talmuds and Midrashim, see Neubauer, *Géographie du Talmud*, p. xii sq.

an unoffending community, which, at the best, was only tolerated on account of its capacity for business, and for bearing the heavy imposts which were laid upon it: it was not under conditions such as these that learning was likely to flourish.

Thus matters proceeded till the time of the Carlovingian dynasty, when better days dawned for the Jews of France. Pepin had already granted to the Jews of Languedoc the right of acquiring landed property, and his son Charlemagne pursued the same indulgent policy. Lucca was at this time one of the principal seats of Jewish learning, and from this place in 787¹ the emperor transplanted Kalonymos, with his son Moses and a nephew, to Mainz, where they opened schools, which continued to flourish under the care of their successors, and much influenced the Jews of northern France. With the same object of introducing learning into his empire he employed a Jew named Isaac on an embassy to Harun-al-Rashid; and the Khaliph, at his request, sent him R. Machir, who founded an important school at Narbonne, which must have received a still greater impulse when later, about 950, Nathan ben Isaac the Babylonian took charge of it². Under Louis

¹ This seems to be the proper date, and not 917, as given by Zunz and others. Grätz, *Gesch. d. Juden* (1871), v. 193.

² Ant. Lévy, *Die Exegese bei den franz. Israeliten vom 10 bis 14 Jahrh.* p. 47. In Grätz, v. 311 and note, will be found an account of the adventures of Shemariah ben Elhanan, Hushiel, Moses ben Enoch, and (probably) Nathan ben Isaac Kohen, the four emissaries sent to collect alms for the support of the school at Sura. Taken prisoners by a Moorish vessel, they were sold as slaves, but afterwards regained their liberty, and became teachers of eminence at Cairo, Kairuan, Cordova, and (probably) Narbonne

the Pious (814-40) the Jews were highly favoured by the emperor and his wife Judith; a high official, termed the 'magister Judæorum,' protected their interests, and they could trade freely from one part of the empire to the other without payment of toll. Charles the Bald (840-77) shewed them special favour; a Jew, Zedokiah, was his physician, and another, named Judah, his trusted adviser.

Italy, too, felt a similar impulse towards a revival of rabbinical learning: about this time the schools of Bari and Otranto acquired celebrity: and in the following century Shabthai ben Abraham Donnolo, a physician of Modena (913-80), greatly distinguished himself by his works on natural science and medicine, which obtained a wide circulation in other lands¹.

This improvement in the material condition of the Jews of France continued with some interruptions² till nearly the end of the twelfth century, and the great wealth they acquired³ was partly expended in founding a multitude of

respectively. See, however, Steinschneider, *Hamazkir*, iii. 4, who objects to Grätz's theory as to the fourth emissary.

¹ See *Donnolo*, by Dr. Steinschneider, Berlin, 1868. Towards the end of the eleventh century Kalonymos ben Shabtai of Rome went to Worms, and succeeded Jacob ben Yakar as Talmudical teacher. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries southern Italy acquired a knowledge of Arabic literature from Provence; middle and north Italy were especially devoted to Talmudical studies. Berliner, *Pletath Soferim*, p. 7.

² Such as confiscations under Charles the Simple and Philip Augustus: their sufferings also in the first crusades were very severe. Thirty persons perished in an auto-da-fé at Troyes in 1288; see the interesting French poem on this event, transcribed by Neubauer at Rome. *Hist. Litt. de la France*, xxvii. 475.

³ Half Paris is said to have belonged to them in the twelfth century. Grätz, vi. 155.

schools, which produced a long succession of teachers, whose works in some cases still survive, although most frequently their names only can be recovered¹. From an examination of such writings of theirs as still remain to us, it will be seen that a marked difference existed between the studies and habits of minds of the northern French rabbis and of those settled in Provence. Politically they belonged to different countries, and in other respects also they widely diverged². The former gravitated towards the German school, the latter were powerfully influenced by the Spanish, and ended by being merged in it. The difference between the two schools is in fact so marked that it has been proposed to term one the Talmudic, the other the Scientific. This does not imply that the Jews of northern France had no science, or that those of Provence and Spain neglected the Talmud, but rather that the learning of the one school was based upon the Talmud and derived from Jewish sources; that of the others embraced also all the various sciences which were being eagerly studied around them. The influence of the Spanish school made itself so much felt for many

¹ In *Hist. Litt. de la France*, xxvii. 448 sq., is to be found a long list of authors whose works have for the most part perished.

² Provence passed by marriage to Charles of Anjou in 1246, but was not united to France till 1481. The Provençal Jews were separated by an intervening tract of country from the settlements of their northern brethren. Their consciousness of the separation is shewn by the fact that they term the home of the northern Jews 'Zarephath,' the usual term applied to France in the middle ages. Cassel, *Lehrb. d. jüd. Gesch. und Litt.* p. 269. At the end of the thirteenth century, Jacob ben Judah of Beaucaire, writing to Solomon ben Addereth, says—'At Montélimar commences France (Zarefath), a country of which the inhabitants hold themselves aloof from all philosophical study.' *Hist. Litt.* xxvii. 677.

centuries by the Jews of France, that before continuing the history of these last, it will be as well to give some account of their more gifted brethren of the peninsula.

The condition of the Jews of Spain before the Moorish invasion of 711 had been rendered so unbearable by forced conversions to Christianity, that they welcomed the arrival of the invaders, and soon found good reason to rejoice at the change of masters. Hisham I, at the end of the same century, erected schools in Cordova and other towns of his dominions in which Christians (and, no doubt, Jews also) might learn Arabic¹: a permission of which the latter were not slow to avail themselves², and before long acquired such command over the language as to use it and Hebrew with equal facility. Thus they gained an enormous advantage over their brethren of France. Not only were all the results of Arab thought laid open to them, but they had acquired a language which from its intimate relationship to Hebrew threw a great light upon the structure and meaning of it. They found themselves living among a people of eastern origin, whose habits and customs would serve to explain many biblical allusions. They heard subjects of Arab philosophy discussed in the schools around them in which they would naturally take a keen interest, such as the unity, spiritual essence, and incorporeal nature of the Deity. They could take advantage of the intercourse which was carried on between the Arabs of Spain and the East to put themselves in communication with the

¹ Conde, *Hist. de la domination des Arabes et des Maures en Espagne* (1825), i. 267.

² Jost, *Geschichte d. Judenthums*, ii. 394.

rabbinical schools of the Euphrates and the Tigris, and thus gain the solution of legal difficulties of interpretation. The accession of Abdorrahman III in 912 to the throne of Cordova gave a great impetus to the arts of decoration by his embellishment of the capital with splendid buildings, while representatives of every science crowded to the city to enjoy his unbounded liberality. The *Nassi*, or head of the Jews, in his reign was one Isaac ben Hasdai, and, in imitation of his sovereign, he patronised the learned among his countrymen. The celebrated grammarian and poet Menachem ben Seruk enjoyed an especial share of his protection, but some years later he completely lost the favour of his patron's successor, the younger Hasdai, and had to make way for a more successful rival, Dunash ben Labrat; possibly his fall was due to the idea that he was furthering the cause of Karaitism in the explanations given in his lexicon¹. Their efforts were however soon surpassed by the works of R. Judah Hayug of Cordova, to whom is due the credit of pointing out that all Hebrew verbs are formed of three radicals², and of rightly explaining the changes of the weak consonants ו'הא. Still further

¹ For an account of early Jewish grammarians see my edition of *Two Treatises, &c.*, by R. Judah Hayug, translated into Hebrew by Moses Gikatilia, p. vi; also the article by Munk on Abou'l Walid Merwan, in the *Journal Asiatique* for 1850, and by Neubauer on Hebrew Lexicography, in the same periodical for 1861-2.

² Previous grammarians had been ignorant of the rules by which the permutation, suppression, and assimilation of the feeble consonants ו'הא are governed. Hence they often confounded different roots, and in some cases made them consist of two or even one letter only, as was done by Saa'dyah and David ben Abraham.

progress was soon after made in the same direction by the celebrated Jonah ben Ganah (Abulwalid Merwan), whose lexicon far surpassed all previous efforts of the kind¹. Judah ben Balaam, the commentator and grammarian, was a younger contemporary of his²; and about the same time lived Moses ben Samuel ben Gikatilia of Cordova, a commentator and grammarian of note, the translator of Hayug into Hebrew. Then also flourished the princely Samuel ben Joseph ben Nagdila of Granada, poet, Talmudist, and grammarian, by whose liberality and care the new acquirements of the Jews of Spain passed to their less advanced countrymen of France.

In religious poetry the Spanish Jews greatly excelled: their most distinguished authors were Solomon Gabirol (1020-75) and Isaak Gayath (1088); Moses Ibn Ezra (1150); Judah-ha-Levi, who died as a pilgrim in the Holy Land (1080-1150); and, lastly, Joseph ben Saddik, a contemporary of the last-named writer. Hymns for the service of the synagogue, moral poetry, the defence of Judaism against Greek philosophy, lamentations over the misfortunes of their countrymen, these formed the fertile subject of their verse.

To biblical exegesis the Spanish school does not appear to have devoted such particular attention as the French,

¹ Edited by Neubauer in 1875, for the Delegates of the University Press.

² He probably commented on all the Old Testament. The Imperial Library of St. Petersburg has two large fragments, almost complete, of his work on the Prophets, and one leaf on the Psalms; the Bodleian, fragments on Numbers and Deuteronomy; the Vatican, a few leaves on Job and Daniel. Neubauer, *Report on Firkovitz MSS. at St. Petersburg*, in the *Oxford Univ. Gazette*, Nov. 21, 1876.

nor does it possess many names of eminence in this branch of study. There was, however, one notable exception, Abraham ibn Ezra (1100-69), who has exercised as wide an influence by his able and devout, even if somewhat obscure commentaries on the various books of the Old Testament as any Jewish writer. He, moreover, like the others mentioned above, excelled in poetry¹.

It has been before noticed that considerable, though not exclusive, attention was paid to Talmudical studies by the rabbis of Spain², and with the mention of one commanding genius in this branch of study, Maimonides (1135-1204), this short notice of their labours will end. The object he had in view in his numerous writings, of which the most important were the 'Explanation of the Mishnah,' the 'Mishneh Thora,' and 'Guide to the Perplexed,' was to heal the divisions which had gradually arisen between the independent and widely-scattered schools of Talmudists. One section of these looked upon Judaism as a religion of practice, as a law of which no single direction, however minute, might be transgressed, the precepts of which must be carefully ascertained and as carefully observed. To them this was the principal point; but as for the reasons why such injunctions should have been given, whether any deeper meaning lay beneath the surface of the

¹ See Friedländer's *Essays on Ibn Ezra*, published by the Soc. of Hebr. Lit., London, 1876.

² The Talmudic element in the teaching of the Spanish school was strengthened by the arrival of R. Moses of Sura towards the end of Abdorrahman's reign, who founded an important seminary, and was succeeded by his son Enoch. Jost, ii. 399. See above, p. vii, note 2.

text, and other questions, of the same sort, these were matters of secondary importance. The other party held Judaism to be a spiritual religion, intended by means of its various ordinances to teach the knowledge of the Deity; and they looked upon philosophical speculations and natural science with no suspicion, but rather as useful helps towards supporting and illustrating these views. They considered the exclusive attention which their rivals paid to the letter of the Law to be cramping to the mind, and calculated to hinder the higher and more complete understanding of it: the scrupulous students of the letter, on the other hand, considered this appeal to science to be highly dangerous, and tending to lower the authority of revelation, by the introduction of other principles as of equal weight with it. The views of Maimonides on this subject appear to have resembled those of the Alexandrian school, of which Philo is the principal representative. In these respects he agrees closely with Ibn Ezra also¹. His writings excited the deepest interest, but were received very differently; welcomed as almost a second revelation by some, burnt as rank heresy by others. The name of Maimonides is the last of importance connected with the Jewish literature of Spain, as the religious fanaticism of the Mohads closed the Jewish schools and forced the teachers to emigrate: Maimonides himself crossed the sea to Fez, and is found later in the Holy

¹ The letter to his son Abraham, ff. 38 sqq. of his *Letters &c.*, ed. by Lichtenberg, Leipzig, 1859, quoted by Jost, ii. 453, as genuine, appears to be spurious. See Kobak's *Jeshurun*, iii. p. 35, and Steinschneider's *Hamazkir*, iv. p. 107.

Land and Egypt, where he founded a school; others crossed the border to southern France, where they were warmly welcomed by the many congregations settled there. From this time the southern French (or Provençal) and Spanish schools, which had for some time been approximating more and more to each other, were united. Before returning to the school of northern France, to which our author belongs, it will be well shortly to notice that of Provence.

This, it would appear, arose under different circumstances from those which, as we shall presently see, were the lot of their northern brethren. First of all the political conditions under which they lived were probably more favourable; for instead of being exposed to the exactions of a turbulent nobility, who were but imperfectly subject to the royal authority, they needed only to come to terms with the practically independent counts and barons under whom they lived, in order to be free from exactions, and at liberty to develop their trade or pursue their studies in leisure and quiet. Then, again, their southern neighbours were of a more easy disposition than the French of the north, more disposed to leave them alone and suffer them to live peaceably among them. Consequently there sprang up many and important communities of Jews in the great towns of the south: we read of large congregations at Narbonne, Béziers, Montpellier, Toulouse, Perpignan, and other places, who being for the most part, from their capacity for trade and business, in easy circumstances, could afford to indulge their inclinations for study. This was not in their case bounded by such narrow limits as that of their northern compatriots. Living many of them

within easy reach of the sea, and having much of the trade of the time in their hands, their communications with other countries were frequent, and they became conversant with the literary activity of other nations. More especially all that was happening in Spain exercised the most important influence upon them. First the grammar and then the philosophy of their Spanish brethren found their way into Provence and took deep root there, till, as before remarked, the two schools were merged in one.

The earliest attempts at biblical exegesis in the south of France were, as those of the north, in accordance with the traditional interpretation of the Midrash. The names of Moses ha-Darshan of Narbonne, who about 1050 composed Midrashic notes on Genesis¹, and of Judah ha-Darshan of Toulouse, probably his son, have descended to us as authors of note in this line, but only fragments of their works remain to us in the writings of Rashi. The same spirit still lingers on in the writings of Moses Kimhi (1170-90), elder brother of the more celebrated David, and son of Joseph, though his commentaries on Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Proverbs were for a long time wrongly attributed to Ibn Ezra, whose method of interpretation was quite different. Soon after, however, another system came into vogue. Just as the controversial exigencies of northern commentators had compelled them to take up a simple mode of interpretation,

¹ As to the identity of the anonymous *Midrash major* on Genesis with that of Moses Darshan, see Neubauer's edition of *Tobit* (Oxford, 1878), p. viii sq.

so the influence of the Karaites¹ probably had much the same effect upon those of the south. This is very noticeable in Menachem ben Simeon of Posquierès, a pupil of Joseph Kimhi, who in 1191 wrote commentaries on Jeremiah and Ezekiel. He was well acquainted with the works of the Spanish grammarians, and is severely accurate in following out the simple and logical meaning of his text, not even mentioning the interpretations of the Midrash².

But the best known writer of this school was David Kimhi (1160–1235). His eminence may be in a great measure traced to the influence of his father, who had set him a good example of diligence. Driven from Spain by the intolerance of the Mohads, he had brought with him to his new home sound principles of grammar and exegesis, and did his best to introduce them to the knowledge of his new neighbours at Narbonne³. The son followed in

¹ The Karaites, who may be termed the Protestants of Judaism, arose about the year 754. Their principles were the rejection of (1) tradition, as (a) a supplement to the Law, or (b) as an interpreter of it; (2) of the authority of the rabbis to add to or diminish from the Law. Jost, ii. 294. As they rejected the Talmud and all traditional methods of interpretation, they could only be met by close attention to the grammar and wording of the Law.

² His commentaries are still in MS.; but some extracts are to be found in Lévy, p. 23. For an account of him see the *Univers Israélite*, 1856–7, p. 398.

³ He is said to have been the first to divide the vowels into five long and five short, and to have bestowed much pains on the correct reading of Synagogue prayers and the Talmud; he also arranged the forms of nouns. Cassel, p. 273. His *Sepher ha-galuy*, hitherto supposed to be lost, has been found by Neubauer in the Vatican Library (No. 402); it consists of observations on the works of Menachem ben Seruk, Dunash ben Labrat, and Jacob Tam. Neubauer's *Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah* (Translation), p. vii.

his father's steps. It may be true that he owed most of his knowledge to the discoveries of abler predecessors, such as Ḥayug, Ibn Ganah, Ibn Ezra, but still for all that the credit cannot be denied him of having popularised the study of Hebrew grammar and lexicography, and having been the first to introduce them, through his countrymen, to the learned of Europe. In exegesis also he did good service. His commentaries may not display the depth and originality of Ibn Ezra, but they are clear and sensible: they shew a wish to arrive at the meaning without forcing views into the text which are not really contained in it. His merits as grammarian and commentator may at one time have been too highly rated, but they deserve more respect than has sometimes been shown to them.

But another influence, that of Arab philosophy, began about this time to be felt by the commentators of southern France. The problem which had presented itself to the Arabs of Spain, viz. the reconciliation of the principles of the Aristotelian philosophy and the Koran, had originated the system of the Kalam¹; and practically the same task had been undertaken by Maimonides in his various philosophical works, and achieved by him through an allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures. A taste for such discussions had been introduced into Provence by the fugitives when they crossed the border in numbers, about 1148, to avoid the persecutions of the Mohads in Spain. What was done

¹ A dogmatic or scholastic philosophy signifying 'word' or 'discourse,' and so called because first occupied with questions regarding the divine word addressed to the prophets, or as being equivalent to 'mantik' or logic Munk, *Mélanges*, p. 311; *Guide des Égarés*, i. 335, note 2.

by the family of the Kimhis in spreading a knowledge of Hebrew grammar by the use of Arabic works bearing on the subject, was carried out in the subject of philosophy by the three generations of Tibbons, Judah, Samuel, and Moses, who appear to have possessed a special gift for translating. The commentaries of this Samuel (1160-1230) on Ecclesiastes, and the homilies of Jacob ben Abba Mari Antoli on the Pentateuch, give instances of the employment of the allegorical method of interpretation; and the same will be found in Menachem Meiri of Perpignan (1249-1306), the famous Levi ben Abraham (1315), and R. Levi ben Gershom (Ralbag), known also as Leon of Bagnoles, who was born about 1288. The explanations of Ralbag are often clear and simple, and his practical applications to subjects of daily life useful; but his determination to find the whole of the Aristotelian philosophy imbedded in the pages of the Bible often compels him to take the most violent liberties with the plain meaning of the text. With this author the present portion of the subject will cease, as no exegetical writer of any importance in connection with this school arose after him.

It is time to return to the northern school of French rabbis to which our author belonged. This was subject to influences very different from those which had shaped the growth of the Jews of Provence. Like the schools of Germany, it had little direct communication with those of the east, its members also had no acquaintance with the Arabic language or literature, and could take no advantage of the immense progress which had been made by the Arabs of Spain in grammar, poetry, rhetoric, medicine, and physical

science. The subjects upon which they chiefly worked were the Bible, the Talmud, and Midrashim; and they knew no cognate language, whose structure and etymology could throw a light upon the grammar and signification of Hebrew. They were surrounded by an ignorant population; all the learning of their day was in the hands of the clergy; and it would have been useless for them to have attended Christian schools, even could they have obtained permission to do so, as the discussions in them were carried on in Latin, a language unknown to them, and on subjects, such as the mysteries of Christianity, in which they could take no part¹. Thrown back, therefore, to a great extent, on their own resources, and restricted in their studies, they could not be expected to exhibit the same intelligence and progress that distinguished their brethren of the south. Owing to the comparative isolation in which they lived, they devoted much attention to the Talmud and Midrashim, and we should therefore expect to find their biblical commentaries not free from the influence of these writings. This, on enquiry, will be found to be the case to some extent; but for all that they are for the most part simple and natural in their expositions. One or two different circumstances may have contributed to this result. If the Jews of northern France were not so highly educated as their southern brethren, and could take no part in the scholastic philosophy of their time, this very fact would serve to keep them free from the dialectic subtleties to which they might otherwise have been prone. Again, the eleventh century

¹ Lévy, p. 57.

was a period of great religious excitement among European Christians. The end of the world had been expected to occur at its commencement: before its close the first crusade had been successfully carried out, and the banner of the cross planted on the walls of Jerusalem. Discussions between Jews and Christians, with a view to the conversion of the former, were of frequent occurrence; and as appeals to the Talmud would have been unintelligible to their antagonists, the Jews were compelled to cultivate a simple and natural method of reply to Christian interpreters of their scriptures¹. Again, as the twelfth century advances and the relations between the north and Provençal schools become more intimate, we shall find the influence of the latter continually increasing. The commentators of the north more and more give up their leaning towards a talmudic and homiletic method of exposition, and adopt a more simple one; their criticism becomes sounder, their knowledge of the language more exact, and a philosophical spirit becomes noticeable in them. These tendencies reached their height in the person of Joseph Bekhor Shor, towards

¹ A discussion, which lasted a month, took place at Limoges at the beginning of the century. A MS. of the Paris National Library (Catal. No. 712), called *יְוֹסִיף הַסֵּקֵנָה*, contains a number of religious disputes belonging to the twelfth century, in which R. Joseph and his father R. Nathan of Joigny, otherwise termed Nathan Official, the Tosaphist, took place. Lévy, p. 58. The same work is, in part, to be found in a MS. at Hamburg, see Steinschneider's *Catal.* p. 176, and Grätz, vi. 403. See also the account of the disputations of the same R. Joseph and R. Yehiel of Paris, *Hist. Litt.* xxi. 506 sq.; of the controversial work of R. Meir ben Simeon, termed *Milhamath Mitzvah*, and of the disputes which took place before the governor of Narbonne, and between Paul Christiani and R. Moses ben Nahman, *ibid.* xxvii. 558 sq.

the close of the twelfth century. But soon after his time, as we shall see, the school hopelessly degenerated, and in fact, so far as the production of commentaries was concerned, ceased to exist. For about 200 years however, commencing from the middle of the eleventh century, it produced several men of eminence. To Simeon ben Helbo Kara (i. e. the synagogue-reader) is due (1050) the *Yalkut*, or collection of agadic explanations by previous rabbis on various portions of the Bible. About the same time Gershom ben Judah of Metz, surnamed for his services to Judaism the 'Light of the Captivity,' wrote a complete commentary on the Talmud, of which, however, only parts remain; he contributed also several prayers to the synagogue-ritual; and many of his decisions on points of law are still extant: he is chiefly, however, remarkable for having assembled a council at Worms, and there passed, among other important regulations, a prohibition of polygamy. His brother Machir composed the *Alpha Betha*, a Hebrew and Chaldee lexicon of considerable merit. A contemporary at Limoges (1030-40) was Joseph ben Samuel Tob Elem (Bon-fils), a prolific though not highly gifted writer of ritual hymns, and a collector of previous rabbinical decisions. The first, however, of this school who really deserved the name of commentator was Menachem ben Helbo Kara (1050-90), brother of the Simeon mentioned above. His grammatical knowledge was not great, for he, like his contemporaries, was only acquainted with the crude attempts of Menachem ben Seruk and Dunash ben Labrat. But still he did his best to interpret after a simple and natural manner, instead of giving homiletical reflections

upon the text, as his predecessors had done. He appears to have written comments on the whole Bible, though only fragments of them remain in the writings of Rashi and his nephew Joseph Kara¹.

But by far the greatest writer of this school, whose works are still read with admiration by Jews and Christians, was Solomon ben Isaac (Rashi) of Troyes² (1030-1105). To his own almost unassisted genius must be ascribed the success he attained, as Saadyah³ and Menachem ben Helbo in exegesis, and Menachem ben Seruk and Dunash ben Labrat in grammar, are the only writers of importance that seem to have been known to him, and they were but beginners in their subjects. No particulars of his life are recorded, except his birthplace and the names of his parents. His father was one Isaac, a writer of no great eminence; his mother, a sister of the elder Simeon, who was a pupil of Gershom ben Judah. It is probable that he studied at Mainz, married early, and taught at Troyes; all other details of his life appear to be fabulous⁴. His diligence was unwearied, and continued till his death; the results of it are to be seen in legal decisions, synagogue-prayers, and a commentary on almost the whole Bible and

¹ See the extracts in Lévy, p. 9, and in *Ha-Schachar*, Bd. ii, Heft. 7, p. 289 sq.

² Not of Lunel, which has been assigned as his place of birth in consequence of the elder Buxtorf having interpreted the abbreviation 'וַר as Salomo ben Yarchi. Zunz, *Zeitschrift*, p. 279.

³ Geiger, *Parschandatha*, p. 17.

⁴ Such as his extensive travels, acquaintance with foreign languages, &c. Probably he knew no Greek, Latin, Persian, little German, astronomy or medicine. Zunz, pp. 281-6, 378.

Babylonian Talmud¹. The last-named work is of priceless value; without its aid the original would be practically unintelligible. For Jewish students it is still indispensable; many Christians also, such as the Buxtorfs, Lightfoot, and Carpzov, and in later times Rabe and Tychsen, have been beholden to it for such knowledge of the Talmud as they have acquired².

But Rashi's greatest title to fame is based upon his biblical commentaries, and for them he deserves all the praise which since their first appearance has been freely bestowed on them by Christians and Jews alike. In his system of interpretation he endeavoured to unite the divergent methods of his predecessors. Moses ha-Darshan and his school had directed their attention to the *Derush* or traditional (generally figurative) meaning alone; Menachem ben Helbo, on the other hand, influenced by Menachem ben Seruk and Dunash ben Labrat, had thought only of the *Peshat* or simple sense. Rashi takes a middle course between these two extremes, endeavouring to unite the merits of both. He does not neglect the homiletical expositions of the Rabbis, but is careful to choose only such as come nearest to the simple sense; the traditional legends also he treats with freedom, transforming, abridging, uniting, and extending them at his will for the purpose he has in view, the illustration of the meaning of his text. For the same end he employs all the resources of lexicography and grammar

¹ His commentary on two Talmudical tracts (*Pesahim* and *Baba Bathra*) was left unfinished: that on the *Chronicles* ascribed to Rashi is not by him. Cassel, 355, 6.

² Zuef, p. 371.

which he has at his disposal, and often explains the sense of the Hebrew by French equivalents¹. His work at once attained the highest honour among his countrymen. Preachers quoted him in their sermons, and often made his words the subject of their public teaching. Masters introduced him into their schools, and taught him to children. Even the least instructed studied him; the great rabbi Joseph Caro declared that he might be read instead of the Chaldee translation of Onkelos². His commentary spread rapidly, thanks to his disciples, copyists, and commentators, who quoted and praised him. More than seventy works have been written with a view of explaining his writings³.

If his value as a commentator has been thus recognised by his own countrymen, Christians have not been less ready to recognise his merits, and to express their obligations to him. Luther drew largely upon Nicolas de Lyra in his translation of the Bible, and this great scholar was formed in the school of Rashi and his successors the Tosaphists⁴. For the two hundred years, dating from the

¹ M. A. Darmesteter, to whose kindness, as well as to that of Prof. P. Meyer, I am indebted for the transcription of the French words occurring in Eleazar's treatise on Isaiah, is preparing a complete edition of all the French words employed by Rashi in his commentaries.

² Alluding to an ancient rabbinical precept to read the appointed section (*sidrâ*) of the Pentateuch thrice each week, twice in the original and once in Onkelos.

³ Berliner's ed. of Rashi on the Pentateuch, pref. p. ix.

⁴ So called from their *Tosaphoth* or 'additions,' the name given to the exegetical and Talmudical works of the French school of the eleventh and two succeeding centuries, which took the form of glosses or postils on Rashi's commentaries. *Hist. Litt. de la France*, xxvii. 433; Grätz, vi. 157.

beginning of the sixteenth century, during which Rabbinical learning was pursued, Rashi was constantly studied and cited, and many employed themselves in translating and explaining his writings¹. His singular clearness and originality must always make his commentaries popular.

No unworthy follower of Rashi in the work of commenting upon the Bible was his contemporary Joseph Kara, son of the Simeon Kara mentioned above. Not being so distinguished as a Talmudical scholar himself, he was still less inclined than his master to follow the views of the Midrash, and was still more anxious to interpret in a simple and straightforward manner. He did not leave much that was original behind him: his writings consist of glosses on Rashi's commentary on the Pentateuch, and of a commentary on the Prophets and Hagiographa, which is to a great extent an enlargement of Rashi's views, but still he made a decided advance beyond his master towards a true principle of interpretation².

Rashi left no sons to take up his labours, but three grandchildren, Isaac, Samuel, and Jacob, followed in his steps, and were no discredit to their descent. The second, Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam), born about 1080, completed his grandfather's commentary on Job and his unfinished Talmudical treatises; he also wrote a commentary of his own on the Pentateuch and five Megilloth: his works shew him to have still more emancipated himself from the interpretations of

¹ A list of them may be found in Zunz, p. 347.

² *Hist. Litt. de la France*, xxvii. 435. The commentary on Deuteronomy ascribed by Geiger to Rashbam was probably written by Kara. Berliner, *Pletath Soferim*, p. 16.

the Midrash, and to have been still more bent on following out the simple sense. His grandfather is said to have been so much influenced by his views as to have expressed himself willing, had his strength permitted it, to rewrite his own commentaries in accordance with them. The youngest, Jacob, or, as he is also termed, Rabbenu Tam, of Ramerupt, was famed far and wide as a Talmudical scholar; some echo also of Spanish learning reached him, for he wrote verses in the Arabic style with such elegance as to excite the astonishment of Ibn Ezra when he made a journey into Franco. He also took up the old question of the respective merits of Dunash ben Labrat and Menachem ben Seruk, warmly defending the cause of the latter against Dunash, whose custom of illustrating Hebrew with Arabic comparisons he especially disliked, as bordering on the profane. He seems, however, to have been unacquainted with the later results of Spanish thought, and to have done really but little in the cause of exegesis. He had, however, one great merit, that he was the teacher of Joseph Bekhor Shor, a most sober and careful commentator. Even if the explanations of this last-named writer in his commentary on the Pentateuch are not always thoroughly satisfactory, yet he recognises and does his best to explain difficulties of the text. He quotes his three immediate predecessors of the north French school; also another teacher of his, Obadiah ben Samuel ha-Sephardi; but beyond the lexicon of Solomon Parhon¹ he seems to have been acquainted with none of the writings of the Spanish school, not even with those of Ibn Ezra, though

¹ Written by him in Salerno in 1161.

this author wrote most of his works in Hebrew, and, as before mentioned, had travelled in France.

With one more author; Eleazar, or Eliezer, of Beau-genci, to whom the treatise which is now published is due¹, the description of this school of writers will end. He appears to have been a voluminous commentator. In the present work he quotes a commentary of his own on Genesis, Leviticus, and Malachi, and the same MS.² contains one on Ezekiel and another on the Minor Prophets,

¹ It should, however, be stated that Moses of London, in his *Sepher ha-Shoham* (see page xxx, note 1), quotes some passages from 'בלגנצי,' who may be the same as our author, which do not exactly correspond with the present treatise. They are as follows:—

Fol. 30. Rad. סאך. (Is. x. 15). הַחֲמַעַל אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ אַחְמָאָר. הִתְמַאָר הַגְּרוֹן (Is. x. 15). לֹא עָץ. שְׁבַט קָרְחוֹ וְכַח פֶּת' הַמַּס' הִתְמַאָר הַגְּרוֹן עַל הַחֻצָּב בּוֹ . . . לֹא עָץ. שְׁבַט קָרְחוֹ הַמְּחֻבֵּר לְאֵילָן וְנִכְסֵף וְנוֹקֵף מֵאִלְיוֹ. וְמִסָּה קְרוֹא הַמַּסָּח שְׂאִינוֹ נּוֹקֵף מֵאִלְיוֹ לְעוֹלָם וְאֹמֵר שֶׁהַמַּחְמָאָר עַל מְנִיסוֹ דּוֹמֵה לְשֶׁבֶט הַמְּחֻבֵּר לְאֵילָן וְנוֹקֵף מֵאִלְיוֹ. וְלִמְרִים' שְׂמִרְיָמוֹ אֵינֶם עוֹשִׂין כְּלוֹם. וְאֵינֶם כְּמִרְיָמִי מַסָּח לֹא עָץ כְּלוֹ' מַסָּח שְׂאִינוֹ עִם הָאֵילָן. בְּלִגְנָצִי.

Fol. 48. Rad. לון. (Job xvii. 2). וּבְלִגְנָצִי סִי' לֹן. וְנִהְיֶה מִתְּרַחֵם תֵּלֶךְ עֵינַי לֹלֵי הַחֹהְלִים וְהַלְצָנִים שְׂעַמְרֵי שֶׁמְחַלְצִים עָלַי וְהַמְרוֹתֵם שֶׁהֵם מְמַרְיִם אֹתִי לֹלֵי הֵן תֵּלוּ עֵינַי בְּשִׁינָה וְאֲנוּחַ כְּמַעַס.

Fol. 64^b. Rad. נכה. (Is. i. 5). אִם' בְּלִגְנָצִי. נִכְה. וְכֵן עַל מַה חָנוּ עוֹד חוֹסִיפוֹ סָרְחָה (Is. i. 5). אִם' בְּלִגְנָצִי. נִכְה. עַל אִיּוֹחַ אֲבָר אֹכֵל לְהַכּוֹתְכֶם עוֹד שְׁלֹא לְקִיתֶם בּוֹ כִּי מִכָּף רֵגְלִי וְעַד רֵאשׁ כּוֹף.

Fol. 79^b. Rad. חמר. (Jer. x. 5). לְשׁוֹ' הַמְּרוֹת, חֲמֵר. וְכוֹרִים וְדַסָּה הַעֲזוֹ לְאִישׁוֹנְמִיִל שְׂעוֹשִׂין אֲצֵל סִקְשָׁאוֹת לְהַבְרִיחַ הַעוֹסוֹת.

Fol. 123 (chapter on the numbers). אַחַד עָשָׂר יוֹם. מַחֲרָב (Deut. i. 2) לֹא יוֹם אֶלָּא יוֹם אֶלָּא יוֹם מִמַּשׁ כְּמוֹ שֶׁנִּי וַיִּסְעוּ סָהַר ה' דְּרַךְ שְׁלֹשָׁת יָמִים וְהִמְתִּינוּ עַד הָאֶמְקָף מְרִים וּבָיּוֹם יוֹם נִסְעוּ מִחֲצֵרוֹת וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבַר סַאָרְן וּשְׁלַחוּ מְרַנְלִים. בְּלִגְנָצִי.

² Opp. MS. 625. Neubauer's Catal. No. 1465. It is on vellum, well written in German rabbinic character about the end of the thirteenth century. I have reproduced the original exactly, even to the sun-dial of Ahaz at p. 98, (in which some blunders will be observed,) only filling up some abbreviations for the sake of clearness.

which were in all probability also his¹. If this supposition be correct, it would appear, from the quotations which occur in these last-named works, that he wrote besides on Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Daniel. He is also known to have commented on Job², and in another Bodleian MS.³ are some agadic notes attributed to a R. Eleazar מלוצי (מלוצי), probably the same person. He was a pupil of Rashbam⁴, and explained the remarks addressed by his master to the editor of his (Rashbam's) commentary on the Pentateuch. No further particulars of his life are recorded. It is hoped that the publication of the present work from a unique Bodleian MS. will shew that he was no unworthy pupil of his distinguished master. He lived in all probability late in the twelfth century, and with him the school of north French commentators, which had been honoured by the great names of Rashi and of his descendants, may be said to have ceased. Some writings of later authors are still extant, but they are not original, being only for the most part compilations of earlier works, and of little value⁵. Still, for a while, some remains of grammar-

¹ The colophon of Ezekiel, like that of Isaiah, bears his name, and in style it resembles the commentary on Isaiah and the Minor Prophets. The explanation of מנחם in Is. lii. 15 corresponds with that of the same word in Mal. i. 14, to which special reference is made in the passage of Isaiah, thus shewing the identity of authorship of the two commentaries.

² Zunz, *Zur Gesch.* p. 79. This commentary is repeatedly quoted by his pupil (P) R. Berekhyah, in his own commentary on Job, which is preserved in the University Library, Cambridge. See Dr. Schiller Szeinessy's Catalogue, No. 28.

³ Opp. MS. 563, fol. 284^b. Neubauer's *Catal.* 1606. 12.

⁴ See his commentary on Isaiah xxxiii. 24.

⁵ Neubauer, in Geiger's *Zeitschr.* (1871), p. 214, describes several Bodleian MSS. containing such works.

tical knowledge lingered on among the professional scribes, termed *Nakdanim* or punctuators, such as Nathanael ben Meshullam of Mainz, Moses of London, &c.¹ Soon, however, the influence of Rashi faded away, all ideas of a sound and sober method of commenting were lost, and the wits of succeeding generations were wasted upon reproductions of the Midrash, plays on numbers and such-like follies². Their energies were spent in elucidating the mysteries of the Talmud, or dreaming over the sublime puerilities of the Kabbala³, while the field of biblical exegesis was left deserted and uncared for. The school sank into merited oblivion; and after a while was, with the sole exception of Rashi, entirely forgotten.

¹ The former composed a book on accentuation; the latter, who may have been of French origin, from the number of French glosses contained in his works, wrote a grammar and lexicon termed the *Sepher ha-Shoham*, of which there is a unique MS. in the Bodleian (Opp. MS. 152, Neubauer's *Catal.* 1484), and fragments at St. Petersburg. *Hist. Litt.* xxvii. 484 sq.

² Geiger, *Parschändatha*, p. 33.

³ The Kabbala, an esoteric 'tradition' relating to such subjects as the creation and order of the world, the names and attributes of God, the mathematical conditions of space, the properties of the body, the Hebrew letters, &c., underwent a revival early in the thirteenth century, through the influence of Judah the Pious of Ratisbon, his pupil Eleazar of Worms, and Moses ben Nahman of Gerona. The Spanish and Provençal schools degenerated into Averroism. Jost, ii. 289, iii. 71. *Hist. Litt.* xxvii. 464.