THE WORLD OUTLOOK OF DON ISAAC ABRAVANEL

and his

Historical, Political and Messianic Works

by

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The times of Don Isaac Abravanel, whose life and thought we shall attempt here to pursue, were pregnant with far-reaching and decisive changes, including perhaps the most fundamental changes that the history of mankind had ever known. Two major events, which respectively occurred in the first and last years of Abravanel's life, may help illustrate the nature of the period. The one was the invention, in 1439, of printing by Gutenberg; the other - the formation, in 1508, of the anti-Venetian League of Cambrai. Both the invention of printing and the decline of Venice as a world power - which the creation and action of the League signified - were among the most portentous signs of the profound cultural and political changes which characterized the end of the Middle Ages. Other momentous developments, bearing similar testimony, were the opening of the epoch of maritime discovery, the extension of absolutism at the expense of feudalism and the establishment of the Platonic Academy in Florence which marked the loosening of Aristotle's old grip over man's mind and the unfolding of new vistas for free thought. Abravanel, then, lived in the great age of transformation from the medieval to the modern era - the age of Ficino, Savonarola, Da Vinci, Erasmus, Machiavelli, Columbus and Copernicus. Each of the names mentioned here spotlights the great revolution which was then afoot in almost every field of human knowledge and endeavor - in philosophy, in religion, in science, in social concepts, in politics, in geographic notions, in the concept of the universe.
What emerged from the medley of theoretical and practical trends, often contradictory rather than harmonious, which each of these men initiated or symbolized, is our complex world of today.

It was an agitated, convulsive and restless age - one of the most restless in human history. Yet the transition from the medieval to the modern period was marked by no outstanding violence, by no world shaking event, like the fall of Rome, or the French Revolution, or a World War. To be sure, the times were not lacking in violence and wars broke out almost every year; but then war was a chronic phenomenon in the Middle Ages and the fifteenth century was hardly more turbulent than the three centuries that preceded it. The wars of the period, moreover, were localized and of no sufficient moment to effect a radical change in the political structure of Europe as a whole. Even the conquest of the Eastern Roman Empire by the Turks and the fall of Constantinople in 1453 - undoubtedly the greatest military event of the time - failed to have forceful dramatic impact. For the Eastern Empire had been for centuries considered a decaying organism and was, on top of this, dissociated in many ways from the countries of the Western European orbit where the transformation from the Middle Ages to the modern era was effected. What is more, the wars in the East and the Turkish conquests, while stimulating new developments in the west - especially by the migration of the Greek scholars to Italy - were themselves in no way an expression of the new forces which were driving toward the transformation of the European civilization. They were, on the contrary, in every respect medieval - another expression of the migration of nations and the struggle between Christianity and Islam.

Judged by the standards of war and peace, especially the standards of medieval warfare, the year 1492 was even an irregularly peaceful year. There
minute entreaties before Isabel; a gale might have sunk Columbus' frail craft. The discovery of America might have indeed been postponed for a century; but it would not have postponed the demise of the Middle Ages even for a single day. For the Middle Ages were already dying; and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain was intimately connected with the new processes, political, economic and cultural, which spelled doom to the medieval system.

To understand the events in Abravanel's lifetime - and particularly and the most significant of them, the expulsion - we must pay attention to these processes. More clearly, we must try to define and analyze the forces that determined the fate of the Jews in the Middle Ages, leading up to that dramatic and disastrous climax of the Jewish tragedy in Spain.

II

For the Jews of Europe, as for the rest of the diverse European population, the Middle Ages were divided into two periods of more or less equal length. The first was the one in which feudalism was built; the second in which it was destroyed.

The Jews had little if anything to do with the building and expansion of the feudal system. But they - as we shall clearly see - contributed materially towards its destruction. In so doing, however, they blindly followed a cruel and ironical destiny. For the fortunes of the Jews in the European countries - at least from a broad point of view - stood and fell with those of feudalism. Thus, in the first period of the Middle Ages, Jewish fortunes, are in the ascendance; in the second, they are on the decline.

The opening of the first period and the beginnings of feudalism are commonly related to the barbaric invasions and the destruction of the western
Roman Empire. It has often been remarked that the break-up of the Roman system and the establishment of the "feudal chaos" in its stead, led to the ultimate revocation from the Jews of their rights as Roman citizens and to the general deterioration of the Jewish position. From a long range historic point of view, however, the barbaric invasions must be considered an act of rescue for the Jewish people. The all important fact which must be born in mind is the growing influence of Christianity upon the Roman imperial institutions and the policy which was already in formation when the barbaric invasions set in. Rome on the eve of the barbaric invasions, say, Rome of Theodosius the Great, no longer displayed that tolerance for religious differences as, for instance, Rome in the times of Augustus. Toward the end of the Fourth century Rome was largely dominated by the Church, and the Church, by its ideology as well as by its policy - a policy encouraged by the enormous state-power which the Church now had at its command - was developing totalitarian tendencies and ambitions. The treatment which, in the fourth and fifth centuries, the Church accorded heretical sects like the Manicheans, the Donatists, the Nestorians, and others - a treatment equal to that of criminals - was clear indication of the growing impatience with holders of other religious views. For the aim of the Church was unity of faith in the entire Roman Empire, and in pursuance of this aim it was bound to become increasingly illiberal, zealotic and aggressive.

It is true that in the western part of the Empire, where Roman tolerance was deep rooted, the Church had to overcome much mental resistance for the establishment of its religious policy. But that it was on the way to winning the battle can hardly be doubted in view of the growing disabilities which were imposed first on pagans, then on heretics, and finally on Jews as well. Two more centuries of Roman rule in the west would probably have sufficed to bring about a situation in which the Jews would have been denied their Roman citizenship and otherwise placed
in an impossible position. In the Eastern Empire, where the Church was given more time to implement its policy through the instrumentality of the state mechanism, the development of the process can be clearly seen, and the decree of forced conversion under the penalty of death issued by Emperor Heraclius in 628 against Jews was merely the inevitable climax of long, unabated and increasing persecutions. It was the Arab conquest of Palestine and a major part of the Eastern Empire which saved the Jews of these realms, just as the Germanic invasions of Rome prevented a similar disaster for western Jewry. These great upheavals which beset the Roman system in the East and the West prevented Christendom from using the organized power of the empire for the elimination of Judaism and the Jewish people.

To appreciate the full meaning of the barbaric invasions - from the standpoint of the struggle between Christianity and Judaism - we must consider the following facts. The totalitarian policies of the Church - a world institution - required the alliance of a world totalitarian state. Without this, their realization - at least their total realization - was unthinkable. The barbaric invasions, however, destroyed the foundation of this essential prerequisite. Instead of the centralized Roman rule there appeared the decentralizing regime of the German conquerors, which was based primarily on tribal priority and lax allegiance to the King. Not only was the empire broken up into a number of states, and conflicting states at that, but each was divided and subdivided into almost fully autonomous realms. To consider these practically autonomous realms as states in the ordinary sense of the word - as states within states - was also impossible for the simple reason that the normal state services stopped functioning, and society was split up into an almost infinite number of independent groups and collectives. The consequences which followed from this
state of affairs for the totalitarian plans of the Church need hardly be stated. Under these conditions of a multi-partite society and of almost endlessly multiplied authority, it was illusory to conceive of a universal acceptance of a Church policy, and even more so of its universal enforcement.

To this fundamental difficulty, there was added another which resulted from the particular form of jurisdiction established by the conquerors. For the dual system of law which the invaders introduced - the Salic for their own group and the Roman for the native population - was a factor which, while holding some advantages for the Church, was bound to hamper its totalitarian policies. The application of Roman law for the native populations meant, in effect, adherence to the status quo as far as the social position and legal rights of the various sections of this population was concerned. Since Roman rule, and Roman legislative bodies, disappeared together with the German conquest, Roman law became practically frozen. To suppress a new heresy among the Roman citizenry, or reduce an undesirable religious group, like the Jews - who were also regarded as Roman citizens - implied, however, the necessity of changing the status quo. And this appeared difficult, if not utterly impossible, within the framework of the legal system with which the Church was now confronted.

The problem of the Church was further enhanced by the fact that the invaders, even when Christians, were Arians - that is heretics - and thus not only did the Church lack the facilities for using the state as an instrument for its policies, but it had to consider the state - or the ruling powers - among the major opponents of its totalitarian plans. That it was impossible to apply measures of suppression against the ruling class was obvious; but it was also impossible to count on its assistance in the suppression of other undesirable groups. This was so not only because the attitude of the Arians toward
other religions was fundamentally a neutral one, but also because it was in their
direct interest not to have a religiously unified population against them. Their
concern was, on the contrary, to develop religious divergence and strengthen as
much as possible - and certainly not to attack - religious minority groups among
the population. Under such circumstances we can understand why the Jews experi-
cenced little or no discrimination under Arian rule, why they received from the
conquerors the same share of land allotted to other Roman citizens, and why they
were readily incorporated in the feudal regime which was then being formed.
Thus, the Middle Ages opened for the Jews with a sign of good hope. With these
three powerful obstacles before the Church - the decentralization, the legal
system and the religious policy of the rulers - their position as a social and
religious group might have even been considered secure.

It was the perseverance and tenacity of the Church and the faithfulness
of the native Roman population to its doctrine that led the Arian conquerors to
adopt Catholicism and thus unite Europe on religious grounds. The deteriorat-
on of the Jewish position as a result is immediately reflected in all these
domains. The process which was already growing in Imperial Rome, but which was
interrupted by the invasions, was again resumed with increased vigor. After
converting the Arians - the major heretic group - the Church now attempts to
liquidate Judaism by open measures of suppression. As the Roman citizenship of
the Jews proved an impediment to the issuance of drastic laws against them, the
Church set herself the aim of achieving the abrogation of that privileged stat-
cus. The successful attainment of this objective completely cleared the way for
anti-Jewish legislation; yet this was not the main implication of the event. Its
far greater consequence was that the Jews came to be considered foreigners. They
now belonged neither to the native population, nor to the invaders; ergo, they
were aliens, without real right in the country. The effect upon the Jews of the deprival of their Roman citizenship is felt throughout the Middle Ages and indeed ever since in Jewish history. In this respect it was the most effective single measure that the Church ever passed against the Jews.\(^5\)

The Church, however, did not stop with this. The declassification or rather the denationalization of the Jews was accompanied and followed by a campaign for their dispossession. On the theory that the Jews, who rejected the Savior, were punished by Him so as to be deprived of all authority, particularly of authority over Christians, the Church insisted upon denying the Jews the right of owning Christian slaves. The measure which was already advocated in Imperial Rome, and accepted as law by Theodosius I, was not however merely an expression of religious principle. Since slavery was in those days the basis of agriculture, the measure, if enforced, would have entailed for the Jews nothing less than economic bankruptcy. It is clear that the measure was not fully enforced, or perhaps it was circumvented by the introduction of pagan slaves. The Church however proceeded to advocate the adoption of a series of even more radical measures, including the most radical of all – the prohibition for Jews to own land. The latter was a logical consequence of the new status in which the Jews were placed. Land was granted by the conquerors to Roman citizens: once the Jews were disqualified as Roman citizens, the rectification of the other 'error' seemed inevitable. But this meant to uproot the Jews completely from both the social and economic life of Europe. In sixth century France or seventh century Spain it was difficult to imagine any other way of living except within and through the feudal system. There was nothing except land to offer a source of income and there was nothing except the feudal system to offer some measure of security.

By the middle of the seventh century the Church could see herself
victorious. The first aim of the Church was achieved: the Jews were now declass­
assed and dispossessed. They were no longer Roman citizens and they were pract­
ically out of the feudal system. When this process was accomplished, it was
generally expected, the Jews would be brought to their knees. There was for
them, it seemed, no possibility of existence except through regaining the fac­
ilities they had lost and these could not be regained now except through con­
version to Christianity. The reasoning implied in all this was sound, and yet
there were flaws in these calculations which, in effect, nullified the entire
scheme.

The success of the Jews in extricating themselves from the clutches of
death which were closing in upon them must be attributed first of all to
the position of the Church itself. From its successful campaign for the conv­
er­
sion of the Arians and the pagans among the German conquerors, the Church
emerged with increased power and authority — not only in the field of religion
alone. It now appeared as a tangible bond of union between the diverse, and
often conflicting forces which comprised the population of Western Europe. It
became the only international factor which carried with it international prest­
ige. It possessed highly disciplined and wide-spread forces, which could sim­
ultaneously press for its interests and policies in a dozen or more political
centers, and it controlled a well-trained and potent campaign machine — the
only one in existence in those days. Like all international bodies, however,
with no state mechanism and no military strength, its influence was limited to
those policies which were in accord with, or at least did not jeopardize, the
interests of the ruling powers. Whenever its policies clashed with these
interests, the Church usually had to withdraw. In consequence, while the Church
could exert great influence, it could not exert decisive influence. Indeed,
gone were the days of Imperial Rome when Church inspired decrees were made binding laws in all the corners of the civilized world. But the Church would not reconcile itself to this fact. Throughout the Middle Ages it fought for the restoration of the power it had enjoyed in the last days of Rome. It dreamt of the rebuilding of an all-European and all-embracing Holy Roman Empire, or at least of raising its international turhority above every local and secular force. This was the essence of its entire struggle in the Middle Ages, and to achieve this it went to great extremes. It lashed its whip of excommunication against barons, kings, and whole countries. It plunged even into the water of power politics, allied itself with some states to suppress others, and manipulated or intrigued between the states as a purely political secular force. All this, however, did not avail her. For it conducted power politics without real power. And thus it remained that it had been: an international factor of considerable influence, but without decisive influence. The failure of the Church to raise its authority above the local political authority is the most important fact which must be borne in mind when considering the puzzling problem of the survival of the Jews - a minority in the midst of a fanatical Christian world - in the long period of the Middle Ages.

The limitations of the Church reflected themselves clearly in the enforcement of its measures against the Jews; and by this we mean primarily its economic measures. For to uproot the Jews from the economic system meant in some cases to upset the economic balance, or injure the interests of some powerful feudal lord and consequently, the latter would protect his Jewish coloni or estate-managers against the Church. In cases where such protection was offered, it took the Church a long time to offset it, and this brings us to a basic circumstance which implied rescue for the Jews in the Middle Ages: the extension of time. Had the measures of the Church come upon the
Jews like one fell blow, their ruin and surrender would probably have been inevitable. This however was not the case. Their enforcement was upset by many delays and was rarely total and universal. These delays had a life-saving effect. They gave the Jews the time they needed for readjustment, for preparing themselves, in thinking and experimentation, to a new condition which their ingenuity and resourcefulness had gradually developed under duress.

The essential facts of the Jewish metamorphosis in western Europe during the seventh century have been reviewed a number of times, and here we shall touch upon them only briefly. Out of the feudal system, the Jew noticed not only the disadvantages of his position, but also the particular advantages it offered him. The servus, the lidus, and the colonus could not move. They were attached to the land performing certain functions by which they fulfilled their obligations to the lord. The lord was similarly tied up to his estate by the constant need of supervision and defence. The Jew, free of such obligations, could move anywhere he pleased. He was, as it was sharply pointed out, the only mobile element in a fundamentally immobile society. The Jew was quick to exploit the advantage involved in his freedom of movement. As a former constituent of the feudal order, he knew its weaknesses as well as its needs. Both its weakness and its needs were in the field of supply and the Jew thought of ways to meet them. He decided to set out to distant lands to seek and obtain the needed commodities. Travelling in those days was a perilous undertaking; but the Jew realized he had to live by danger, if he was to escape moral death. In any case, he was not brought to his knees. All that the policy of the Church had thus far accomplished was to change a people which, from time immemorial, was predominantly agricultural, into a people of merchants.

In this change the Jews were particularly assisted by a lucky historic coincidence. At the very time they were excluded from European feudal system,
the forces of Islam had overrun the countries girdling the southern half of the Mediterranean. The commodities which Europe needed most could be obtained only in the lands of the East which were either controlled by Moslems or whose approaches the latter guarded. Distrust between Moslems and Christians became rife; it appeared as if the world was split into two, and that Europe was ringed by an iron curtain through which only the Jews could pass. The Jews thus became international traders, and as such they enjoy the protection of the feudal lords to whom they sell most of their merchandise, and these include also clerical lords who tend to forget theory for practice.

The Jews have thus outmaneuvered the Church by making themselves indispensable. The campaign of the Church against them did not stop, but it became ineffective and had to subside. It was here indeed that the weakness of the Church - an international body without state authority - was fully revealed. For here the Church policy conflicted with real interests - and the Church was before long bound to recognize the futility of its charge. Nevertheless, while the Church failed to bring the Jew to capitulation, the effects of its earlier successes against the Jews were never erased. The ousting of the Jews from the feudal society only intensified and sealed the results implied in the annulment of their Roman citizenship. The fact that the Jew was neither serf nor freeman in the real sense of the word, determined the attitude toward him in Europe and his fate in the centuries. From now on he was no longer an integral part of Europe's social system; he lived outside of it, attached, and at the same time detached from it. He lived by the society, from it, for it, but not in it. He was considered everywhere an alien whose right of living depended on the measure of the usefulness he could bring. Hence, to secure his right of living, the Jew had constantly to demonstrate his usefulness. In other words, he had to be indispensable.

From the seventh until the eleventh century, under the conditions
of feudalism, as they were, and with the rift between East and West, the Jews were
indispensable. They were the suppliers of the feudal system, and they were
practically its only suppliers. The constant state of enmity between Byzantium
and the neighboring Moslem powers was responsible for the disappearance from the
European markets of the only potential rivals they had - the Byzantine mer-
ants. Facing in effect no competition, the Jews controlled most of the Europe's
commerce. Their trade-system encompassed a vast area and became almost world
wide. Their trade-arteries spread across the length and breadth of Europe,
reaching every center of power and importance where life throbbed with greater
vigor or where the urge for civilization was more strongly felt. Their commer-
cial expeditions ventured across central Asia - through the Slavic lands where
they acquired slaves for both the Moslem and European markets - reaching to the
gates of remote Cathay. Returning to Europe through the Germanic countries or
by crossing the Mediterranean through Italy - they came back laden with prec-
ious commodities which the European nobility badly needed: silk and cotton,
spices and slaves. The slave trade meant a supply of manpower, which the feudal
system needed badly, just as the trade in cloths meant better clothing and the
trade in spices - among other things medicines -. The Jewish trade was far
from being limited - as it has been suggested - to the supply of luxuries only.

So long as the feudal society needed these services, and so long as
these services could be maintained, there was little for the Jews to fear. But
every human system carries with it the germs of its own destruction. And so it
was also with the feudal system and the Jewish trade organization in the Middle
Ages.
III

Up to the middle of the eleventh century, European society represented a pyramid in which every element had its place in the all-embracing structure of feudal hierarchy. Not only did the serf realize clearly his position toward the freeman, but the freemen knew precisely their position toward each other. For the freemen were divided into more and less powerful, poor and wealthy, and thus the weak and poor preferred to lean on the protection of a more powerful neighbor on the condition of service in war and payment of some revenues in peace. The original equality of all freemen which was still in evidence in the middle of the sixth century had soon disappeared, and the freemen were divided into patrons and clients, seniori and vassi. A senior to one, was himself a vassal to another. In fact, there was a system of vassaldom ranging from the king to the lowest rank of society. Every one was in some form a vassal. Only the king was absolute lord.

There was however a weak link in this system. This was city. In the estates, feudalism was in full control. But the situation in the cities was quite different. Here, where most people were originally free, subjection was never as complete as in the villages. Theoretically the city was incorporated in the feudal system. Its citizens were vassals of some powerful baron - a duke, or Marquis, or count - whom the king appointed as Lord over the city's province, but practically they represented an unassimilated element as they never reconciled themselves to feudal authority. Half-ruined after the Barbaric invasions, they gradually grew as centers of population. They absorbed part of the nobility whom the estates could not support, and part of the serfs who fled to them for refuge in times of baronial warfare. With its increased
population and its protective walls, the city began gradually to feel its strength and consequently to assert its freedom.

The Jews did much for the development of the cities. Their change of occupation involved also a change in their place of living. From a rural they became an urban population. They settled in the old centers of commerce, in the localities near the water ways, the sea-coasts and in strategic points along the ancient commercial routes. Their extremely expanded trade lines required numerous outposts and in consequence, Jewish colonies sprang up in almost all the old cities from the Gibraltar to the Baltic and from England to the Caspian Sea. The influx of money as a result of Jewish commerce soon manifested itself in the city's expansion. There grows a considerable class of craftsmen among the local population as well as among the Jews, and as the Jews are engaged primarily in wholesale trade, retail trade develops among the local populace.

The development of the cities soon reacted unfavorably upon Jewish fortunes. The competition which arose between the Jewish and Christian craftsman and between the Jewish and Christian retail merchantman constantly gained in intensity and fervor. Friction increased for political as well as economic reasons. The Jew was protected by the city's lord who shared in the Jew's commercial profits. The burgher would notice the special favor meted out to the Jew by the Lord, and resent it. He resented it particularly because of the fact that he hated the lord's authority and was trying to overthrow it. In the Jew he saw, therefore, not only a competitor, but also an ally of the feudal enemy, an instrument for his policies, and something of what we call to-day a fifth column. Consequently, wherever the cities succeeded in freeing themselves completely from the authority of the feudal lord, as was the case with Amalfi, or Venice, or Genoa, the elimination of the Jews was rapid and
complete. Wherever the struggle for freedom was prolonged, as was the case in Germany or in Spain, the Jew became an object of growing hate and a symbol of feudal oppression.

So long, however, as the Jews held at their disposal the keys to world commerce, so long as they controlled wholesale trade, they commanded sufficient influence within the restless city to prevent any outburst against them. They were still too useful to be disregarded. But the rise of the cities in Italy and the opening of the East in consequence of the Crusades dealt Jewish commerce a crucial blow. For the Italians take over the Eastern trade and close the routes to the Jews. The change is soon felt throughout Europe. As a retail merchantman and craftsman, the Jew is only a competitor. His usefulness seemed to be completely gone. The Jew is now confronted with an open attempt on the part of the hostile city populace to suppress his economic activity, or oust him from the city altogether.

In this struggle between the burghers and the Jews, the Church was bound to come to the fore. For centuries its campaign against the Jews was subdued only because it met with the unsurmountable opposition of powerful economic and political interests. In the campaign of the burgher against the Jews, the Church found — for the first time — such interests supporting, rather than opposing her policy. In the medieval cities the Church found, in other words, the necessary social and political conditions for a successful campaign against the Jews, and the times provided her, on top of this, with a favorable religious atmosphere. For the rise of the cities, it must be remembered, coincided with that of the great religious wave which was stirred by the Crusades.

Thus, from the middle of the twelfth century, the Church aligns it-
self definitely with the burghers in their determined campaign against the Jews. That it intensified the burgher's hostility for the Jew, that it fired that hostility with religious passion and conviction, may indeed be considered a fact of history. That the principal stimulus for that hostility was economic rather than religious, however, is another fact which must be equally recognized. When historic phenomena in the Middle Ages are considered, the strength of the economic factor is often placed under question mark. Yet the effect of economic interests was as forceful in the Middle Ages as at any other time. It was at the same period of the Crusades, which opened the concerted attack against the Jews, that cities like Genoa and Venice fought each other, for mere economic reasons, almost to a state of exhaustion. In the same period, moreover, Italian cities allied themselves - despite papal interdicts - with the Moslem enemy for the purpose of defeating some Christian rival. The practice continued until the end of the Middle Ages, and indeed beyond them. Even when Venice was mortally wounded during her war with the League of Cambrai, Florence did not hesitate to incite the Turkish Sultan to seize the possessions of Venice in the Orient! If economic competition between Christian forces could reach in the Middle Ages such extremes as to employ the assistance of the dangerous infidel in an effort to crush a Christian competitor, the hatred of the Christian burgher for the Jew could certainly assume the same proportions for purely economic reasons.

The war of the cities against economic rivals was a cruel, compromiseless war. So was the war of the burgher against the Jew. To the extent he would tolerate the Jew in the city, the Jew had to be placed under strict city-control. But the burgher would rarely agree to tolerate the presence of the Jew in the city altogether. Regarding the Jew as a dangerous competitor, and of course as a foreigner as well, the burgher would not stop at eliminating the Jew by means of expulsion and, if need be, extermination. The Church gave this hate the sanction of religion and thus morally facilitated attack against
the Jews, while the decline of the power of the Jew's guardian, the baron, made that attack practically possible. Under these circumstances the Jews' physical liquidation, or, at least, their surrender to Christianity, seemed to be an inescapable eventuality. Nevertheless, by making two major moves, one economic and one political, they succeeded, while suffering enormous losses in the process, in defeating the designs of both the burghers and the Church.

The political move consisted in a shift from an alliance with the nobility to an alliance with the King. For together with the rise of the cities, the king's power rose also, both forces benefiting directly from the weakening of the nobility during the crusades. Yet, while the cities often succeeded in freeing themselves from baronic rule, they did not, except for rare occasions, renounce their allegiance to the king. Their citizens still remained the king's vassals. At the crucial moment for the Jews, therefore, when the baronial regime failed to protect them, and the cities regarded them as hated foreigners, the Jews turned to, and received, the protection of the king. From the middle of the twelfth century onward the Jews were generally considered the king's serfs - servi camerae - and the burghers and the Church were thus confronted with the almost insoluble dilemma of abandoning their campaign against the Jews or renouncing their allegiance to the King.

The economic change which the Jew was forced to make was closely linked with the political. The protection of the kings was not given. It was bought. And it had to be constantly repurchased. In order to buy it, however, the Jews had to produce money, quickly, endlessly, and in large quantities. But the production of money seemed to have been denied them by the transfer of international commerce to the Italians and by the growing limitations of commerce in the cities. How then could the Jews produce money? There was but one answer: with money.
Thus was effected the second metamorphosis of the Jews in the Middle Ages: the international trader becomes a money-lender. In the critical situation he now faced, the Jew knew he had but one advantage - the fortunes he amassed during the centuries in which he controlled European trade; and he also realized that the objective conditions were most favorable for making full use of this advantage. For in the later centuries of the Middle Ages there was a universal hunger for money, and that hunger grew from century to century. Money became - as Petrarch put it - the "overlord" who "holds kings and Popes in bond". But money was not sought only by kings and Popes. The Baron, the burgher, the peasant, the priest - all desperately needed money. The general yearning for money was symptomatic to the transition from feudalism to the capitalistic economy. While the feudal society lived primarily on the production of its manpower - the serf and the slave, in the later centuries of the Middle Ages lived more and more on what they could buy. The growth of commerce and the rise of the cities developed better tastes and higher standards of living. And the chief models of emulation were the great centers of wealth, the Italian cities, which absorbed most of the Eastern trade. Here was an example of what money could do. Here plain merchants often lived in greater luxury than kings and lords of the vastest estates. Here was an incentive for the lower classes to rise and join the class of tradesmen; but to do that they again needed money. For money was not only the product of commerce, but also the dynamo which moved its wheels.  

Here again the Jew rendered a vital service to the European society. While in the first half of the Middle Ages he was the supplier of goods, he now became the supplier of finance. The great extent to which his services were needed is evident from the vastness of the credits he supplied and from the fact that he was begged to supply these credits - even in periods of rising agitation against him - in France, Spain, and the Italian cities. Despite the complaints against his high rate of interest, he was always preferred
as creditor to the Lombards whose rate of interest was much more exorbitant. And while the Lombards would lend money under the most difficult securities only, and consequently to the lower classes, the Jews lent money almost to everybody and on much easier terms. They thus placed themselves again in a field where they practically had little or no competition.

That the kings encouraged the Jews to deal in money, in order to produce money for themselves, need hardly be said. Perhaps more than any other element in the Middle Ages, the kings were beset by financial problems. They wanted to make their authority manifest, but they had no ramified administration with which to exercise that authority; and they could have no such administration because of their limited financial resources. For the kings had to maintain a national administration covered mostly by the income of the crown lands. The crown lands of the kings, however, were often no larger than the lands of some of their powerful vassals. What is more, the crown lands were constantly subject to reduction, it was by land gifts that the kings granted the nobles that they could often secure their loyalty and co-operation. In consequence the kings could afford having only a thin administrative service. The poor control that such a service could exercise had, in turn, greatly reduced the value of the King's other economic assets, such as the prerogatives of coinage, the mining of mountain salt and some forms of taxation. To make these assets valuable to the king they had to be sold to a financier or tax-farmer for a high and definite price. But these were risky and complicated undertakings. To make them going concerns, they required people with enough economic despair and sufficient economic skill. Such people could be found only among the Jews. And thus the Jews function in the king's economic scheme was often not limited to the provision of money through revenues and loans, and, if needed, exactions, but also included the tasks of tax farmers, farmers of the coinage, developers of mines,
treasurers, suppliers of armies, and financial administrators. 17

The contribution of the Jews to the European society is therefore now expressed in two forms: They strengthen the process toward capitalism and they promote the power of the monarchy. Both courses were inseparably connected, but the reaction to each was quite different. For his services to the king - the Jew received the king’s support. For his service to the populace, he reaps enmity. Money-lending and tax-farming are, by their nature, factors which contribute to unpopularity. Under the chronic economic crisis, which characterized the later Middle Ages, they could make the Jew but an object of hostility. The Jew could not satisfy the hunger for gold which was the affliction of those centuries. In fact, he only increased that hunger. His economic activity was by far advanced of the economic concepts and economic capacity of the vast majority with whom he dealt. In the primitive attitude of the latter, their attitude toward the Jew was essentially a dual one: as borrowers they welcomed, as debtors they hated him. Poverty made the hatred predominant, and thus the anti-Jewish front was widened: to the Church, that fought the Jew for his religion, and the burgher that still saw in him a dangerous competitor was now added a multifarious mass of people who owe money to the Jews and seek to escape payment. The increase in the scope and intensity of the opposition often raises the pressure against the Jews to the very danger point of explosion, and the problem of maintaining the Jews under such pressure becomes increasingly difficult for the King. Nevertheless even now the burgher and the Church, supported as they were by the lower classes and a considerable part of the nobility, failed to produce decisive results. So long as the Jews commanded a position in the field of the king’s vital interests, their status remained basically unchanged.

The downfall of the Jews in the Middle Ages comes with the withdrawal of the king’s support. For the time comes in each country when
the king feels that the continued protection of the Jews is not on a par with the disadvantages caused by the alienation of the affections of the people. This time is when the kings decide to eliminate the power of the nobles. The accomplishment of this aim cannot take place without an alliance with the cities, and to obtain such an alliance - the Jews must be sacrificed. The downfall of the Jews in the Middle Ages is thus connected with the final defeat of feudalism. It is a product of the increased monarchic powers, to whose growth the Jews contributed, and it is a concession to the burgher middle class for supporting the policy of centralization.

In other words, in the second half of the Middle Ages, with the increasing conflict between the monarchy and the baronage, the Jews can exist only so long as there is a certain balance of power between the nobility and the king. When this balance is upset by the final attack of the monarchy against the baronage, the Jewish position is lost. Thus the Jews are ousted from Britain by Edward I, who planted numerous towns in order to weaken the barons, and who was the first to call the Model Parliament in which the cities were represented. They are ousted from France by Philip the Fair, who summoned the first Assembly which included the third estate, or representatives of the burghers. They are ousted from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabel when they eliminate the power of the feudal baronage and formed a State Council composed mostly of plebians.

The major principles which manifested themselves in the history of the Jews in medieval Europe can therefore be summarized as follows: First, it was not the Church that dealt the Jews the death-blow in the Middle Ages! Not because it did not want to, but because it could not achieve this objective! The Church could not induce the secular powers to act decisively against the Jews so long as the Jews rendered vital services to these secular powers. More dangerous for the Jew than the Church was the burgher who, although his motive
was primarily economic, also possessed some political power. Since the power of the burgher was rarely sufficient to effect a total liquidation of the Jew, more clearly, since his power was usually checked by secular forces stronger than his own, his position can be summed up as follows: The extent of the burgher's attack against the Jew was determined by the extent of his political freedom. The burgher however finally wins indirectly, through the battle of the monarchy against the baronage, what it could not attain directly. By forming a common front with the monarchy against feudalism, the burgher changes from a primarily local into a first-rate national factor. And the third major principle which appears to be embodied in medieval Jewish history is this: the Jew could exist under monarchical protection so long as the king was essentially a feudal lord; when the king however passes from the stage of feudalism to the more developed stage of national representation, his policy toward the Jews becomes also representative of the people's attitude and will.

IV

These three principles manifested themselves nowhere as fully and as clearly as in the Iberian peninsula. For in these realms where the Jews formed the strongest of all Jewish communities of Europe, and consequently where the struggle against them was the most difficult, each of these principles was thrown into high relief. But Spain, in the final phase of her campaign against the Jews, in the closing decades of the medieval period, also brought to the fore a new principle which was an outgrowth of medieval policy as well as a departure from it.

The various stages of social transformation through which the Jews passed in the Europe of the Middle Ages were evident also in their Spanish surroundings. But in no phase of the struggle against them were they fully dislodged from their earlier positions. When anywhere else in medieval Europe
the Jews were forced to exchange agriculture for commerce, Spanish Jewry was
not exempt from this rule; yet a minority among them clung tenaciously to the
land, and Jewish farmers and land owners were present in the peninsula up to
the close of the fifteenth century. When, again, in other countries, commerce
and craftsmanship were replaced by money-lending and other business with
finance, the process is visible in Spain as well; yet the Jewish merchant and
craftsman were never totally uprooted and continued strong to the very end.
Reasons to fight them economically were thus multiplied and hatred for them
increased proportionately. In 1391 - when a temporary but marked weakness of
the Crown afforded the long sought opportunity - popular fury exploded in a
burst of violence that almost annihilated the Jews of Spain.

The main result of this outburst was that the majority of Spain's
Jews, facing the alternative of massacre, converted themselves into Christianity.
By all medieval Church conceptions, the Jewish problem in Spain was thus
successfully solved - at least as far as the majority was concerned. That it
was not solved, however, that it was, on the contrary, accentuated, was proven
conclusively by successive events; and it is here where history furnishes an
opening for inspecting the inside motives of the diverse forces comprising
the anti-Jewish front in medieval Europe.

From the standpoint of the Church there was but one aim to the anti-
Jewish campaign. This was conversion. To grant the Jew relief from all the
disabilities that canonic law decreed for the Jew, the Church would be satis-
fied with nothing less; but it also demanded nothing more. The moment the
Jew embraced Christianity, all discrimination against him was to disappear.
But this was not the fundamental attitude of the mass of the people, and
especially of the burgher. In advocating and enforcing anti-Jewish measures,
the burgher went hand in hand with the Church, but their aims and motives were
essentially different. While the aim of the Church was conversion, that of
the burgher was annihilation or expulsion. Out of respect for the Church, and accepting its leadership in the long and difficult anti-Jewish campaign, he yielded to the Church on this point: wherever the Jews converted to Christianity, their lives were spared. His hopes however were based on the Jews traditional religious stubbornness rather than on his religious surrender. For, consciously or unconsciously, the fight of the burgher was directed primarily not against the Jewish religion, but against the Jew as a social, economic, and political factor.

The mass conversion of the Jews in 1391 certainly held an element of surprise. But, theoretically at least, the burgher, a Christian, could not help but uphold the Church principle. The great religious victory, moreover, accompanied as it was by an orgy of blood and pillage that literally reduced many Juderias to ashes, satisfied popular passion for a time. But very soon a situation developed that confronted both victor and vanquished with a set of realities in which religion obviously played a secondary role. The converts, dumbfounded at first by the change, were quick to discover the advantages of their new status. They no longer needed to live in isolated quarters, or to be subject to ruthless and exhausting taxation. They were no longer limited in the choice of their profession or restricted in assuming administrative positions. All the roads seemed now open to advancement, including those leading up into the hierarchy of the Church. Soon the converts became well accustomed to their new way of life with its inseparable Christian coloring. Many of them - and primarily those who chose for themselves Church careers - became convinced and devout Christians, determined to carry the light of their convictions to their former Jewish brethren who remained in the darkness.

Since the Jews, however, treated them as renegades and traitors, some converts developed a hatred for Jews which was deeper and more venomous than that of any Christian. The growing alienation between Jews and converts, originally fed
by religious dissension, was further strengthened by social differences. For free from the shackles that restrained the Jews, the converts climbed the social and economic ladder rapidly. They became prominent in the Court, in the administration of Justice, as well as in the administration of finance. The second generation must have been pretty far detached from Judaism, and suddenly the old frenzy broke out.

The old Christians came to realize the fateful mistake they had committed when they forced the Jews to embrace Christianity. They thus opened for the Jews with their own hands the way to all the advantages and positions which they had so vehemently fought to deny them. Determined to rectify this error, the burgher seeks ways to subject the Conversos to the same disabilities he demanded for the Jews. But what ways could be used against a group so strongly entrenched in all positions of power and to whom Christianity gave immunity against persecution? A calculated answer to this knotty problem could not be easily found, but in the meantime the burgher expressed his "natural" reaction to the Conversos - or the Marranos as he now derisively called them - in a new vitriolic campaign. From 1449 the marranos are subjected to repeated waves of massacre, while the campaign against them assumes a cynical racial aspect hardly known before in the Middle Ages. The "reprehensible" features of the marranos, their "sinister" character and "polluting blood" now became the favorite themes of the campaign and were stressed as proof that change of religion could not remedy the malady of the Jew. Indeed, between the Spanish anti-Jewish literature of the second half of the fifteenth century and the German anti-Semitic literature of the first half of the twentieth century there is a remarkable similarity.

As far as the burgher was concerned, this fundamental evil, the "criminal nature" of the marranos, was a sufficient reason to persecute and subject them to the disabilities they demanded for the Jews. But this was not a reason
which the state could accept or that the Church could seriously consider. The fact that Spanish Churchmen were often spokesmen of the new racial theories only shows the extent to which popular animosity influenced clerical opinion in Spain. The Church as a whole, however, could in no way recognize the principle of racial discrimination. Devotion to Christian dogma was the only standard by which it could judge individuals and groups. The Spanish clergy thus faced a difficult dilemma - and it solved it in the only way it could. Gradually charges were built up against the New Christians - by a clerics which in sentiment was at one with the populace - about the religious hypocrisy of the marranos, about their secret practices of Judaism, and about the danger they represented to the purity of the Christian faith. The ideological groundwork for the Inquisition - for the destruction of a group within the bosom of the Church - was carefully laid down.

The fiasco of conversion as a solution of the Jewish problem had thus become apparent. Had the bloody riots of 1391 been a mere expression of religious zeal, as some historians are so prone to insist, there should have been no problem of New Christians. But in Spain, as anywhere else in Europe, the struggle against the Jews was motivated not only by religion, but also by different and more complex causes. The Spanish inquisition was the outcome of these causes, and therefore it must be treated as a case apart in the history of the Inquisition in Europe. Its similarity to earlier instances of the institution was limited only to form and procedure; its motives and purposes were radically different.

If we compare the Spanish Inquisition with - for example - the Inquisition in Languedoc, the country where the Inquisition was first instituted, the difference can be clearly brought out. The Inquisition in Languedoc - against the Cathari and the Waldesians - aimed at eradicating
religious sects which not only differed with Catholic theory and practice, but represented a real threat to the authority of the Church. The Inquisition in Languedoc therefore was, for all intents and purposes, an instrument of religious warfare; it moreover grew out of a religious war which ravaged southern France for decades. Thus, while the methods of the Inquisition of the Languedoc may be criticized, its aim cannot be questioned. Its aim was to destroy a religious opponent, and a dangerous and aggressive opponent at that. Nothing of the kind happened in Spain. All attempts to find here an analogy are based on misconception, wishful or not. For the Marranos did not represent a religious sect. They were not conducting a campaign against the Church. They did not carry into Christendom a new aggressive dogma which might present a threat to the Papacy as a system or to Catholicism as a faith. Essentially they were Catholics like the rest of the Catholics; and if some of them, or even many of them, manifested laxity in religious practices, or some disregard for religious principles, they were not different in this from many Old Christians among the intellectual and Renaissance inspired groups. 19

The Inquisition, in any case, was not established to uproot religious laxity; it came to uproot religious orthodoxy, i.e., a Jewish orthodoxy, to which the Marranos had allegedly adhered. But this, save for rare occasions, was contrary to the facts. As the Marranos, on the whole, had no use for Judaism and were detached from it both in spirit and practice,20 the Inquisition in Spain had obviously operated with a religious fiction. Its aim, in reality, was not to investigate, but rather to prove - to prove by all means - the existence of a Jewish heresy as well as to try to identify this heresy with the whole Marrano group. And as truth and reality were completely discarded, the Inquisition did not hesitate to prosecute famous converts who had spent their lives preaching Christian dogma and who in all honesty could not be suspected of even a taint of sympathy for Judaism. This is why the papacy which in Languedoc was carry-
ing high the torch of the Inquisition, was never enthusiastic about, and at
times sternly opposed, both the aims and practices of the Spanish Inquisition.

From this emerged another symptomatic fact: the Inquisition in Spain
was imposed by the Crown, that is by the State and not by the Pope. That the
Popes gave their sanction to the Spanish Inquisition was again a result of
pressure from Spain rather than of purely religious convictions. Indeed, the
whole policy of the Papacy toward the Spanish Inquisition marked the capitula-
tion of the Church to the secular forces. It was no accident that with the
establishment of the Inquisition the Spanish clergy becomes thoroughly
nationalized. It is a clergy which receives its instructions not from Rome,
but from the populace with whom it is identified and from the Crown whose
interests it serves. 21

That the Inquisition increased religious intolerance must of course
be admitted. But so did the war against Granada which was launched simulta-
neously with the Inquisition. Neither however was born of religious intolerance.
The causes which led to the establishment of the Inquisition were already pointed
out. Similarly the war against Granada was motivated by national and political
rather than by religious considerations. Like the Inquisition, it sprang from
the same impulses that drove Spain toward national unity and with this, toward
the ejection of all elements that the majority considered foreign. In the last
analysis, the War, the Inquisition and the Expulsion were different means
applied to different minority groups, in accordance with their respective power
and position for basically the same objective. Religion served both the war
and the Inquisition, but in quite different proportions. It was easier to fight
the Moors under the standard of religion, but it was impossible to fight the
New Christians except under that standard. The Inquisition was the only way
for the suppression and destruction of the Jewish minority in Spain - the Jewish
racial minority - under the prevailing ideologies of the time.
That the persecution of the Jews - both by race and religion - originated in the need of the Crown to placate the populace in order to obtain the latter's support for its absolutist aims, cannot be too strongly emphasized. Yet the persecutions in Spain, and particularly the Inquisition, represented something more than that. For they applied not only a concession to mass hatred - which was the initial consideration of the Crown - but also a deliberate mobilization of mass-hatred as a major instrument for obtaining the state's aims. That it was primarily due to the Inquisition, or rather to the popular anti-Jewish sentiment it expressed, that the Spanish sovereigns succeeded in passing measures which implied despotic rule for the Spanish people themselves, can hardly be denied. The terror-striking procedures of the Inquisition, the espionage, the tortures, were vital for their system of rule by fear. But perhaps the greatest use of the Inquisition was seen by them in its capacity to provide funds. It was no mere accident that the establishment of the Inquisition coincided with the outbreak of the Granadan war. Just as the expropriation of the German Jews in our time helped materially in building the German war-machine, so the expropriation of the conversos was an important element in financing the war enterprises of the Spanish kings. The attempts of Catholic historians to clear the Spanish sovereigns on this score are shattered by the harsh facts of that period's recorded history.²² The fact that the Inquisition was first of all directed against the richest families among the Marranos is in itself proof of its main purpose and character. For if the embers of Judaism still flickered under the ashes of a burnt Jewish past, it was much less among the wealthy than among the poor. For the rich assimilated more thoroughly both culturally and religiously. It was not in vain that all the plots against the Inquisition were organized by the richest among the Conversos, and it was for no unfounded reason that they so persistently demanded the removal of confiscation from the Inquisition's system of punishment. That this demand was never heeded must again be explained by
the fact that the Inquisition was from its very inception an instrument of extortion - this time not by the Church, but by the political leadership of the state.

The Spanish Inquisition was thus a momentous development that brought a new element both to the system of government and to the persecution of Jews. Constituting a state totalitarianism rather than a religious one, it pointed an ominous finger toward future methods of anti-Jewish attack. But above all it highlighted the major forces which defeated the Jews in the Middle Ages. It brought to the fore, as never before, the fundamental weakness displayed by the Church when in conflict with secular forces. It showed that the contribution of the Church to the anti-Jewish campaign was limited primarily to one thing: it provided the populace, and especially the burgher, with an anti-Jewish ideology. The ideology was made full use of by the burgher. But behind the religious ideology was the economic motive, behind the economic the racial, and behind the racial the national.

Toward the end of the fifteenth century Spain rises as a nation. The unification of the States of Castile and Aragon, the annexation of Granada and the reduction of the feudal nobility were all expressive of the same force. And so was what transpired with Spanish Jewry. Fundamentally, it was part of the great process by which the nations of western Europe marched from feudalism to capitalism in the field of economy, and from feudalism to nationalism in the field of politics. For absolutism was the vanguard of nationalism. It created unity of the nation at the expense of the feudal baron and the Jew. Consequently, the Jew was pushed out not only of the state mechanism, but also of the state.

The Spanish expulsion - and this cannot be separated from the ensuing expulsions from Portugal, Navarre and Naples - was not only the last link in the chain of expulsions and persecutions which ties up Jewish history in western Europe. Nor was it merely the largest in scope and the most disastrous in consequences. Its major distinction was that it represented an act of state and Nation
rather than one of city and Church. Never before, as we have seen, did the State power undertake such a thorough and total campaign against the Jews. Never before, we should add, did it make of its policy a point of international importance. And in this, too, it anticipated later times. When the Jews therefore believed that with the expulsion from Spain their world - the Jewish world in Christian Europe - had collapsed, they were considerably mistaken. What collapsed was a much larger structure. It was the world of the Middle Ages.

The medieval Jews failed to recognize the factors that defeated them. For centuries they saw the Church in the lead of the battle which was waged against them. The burgher, the noble, the king, often changed their attitude toward the Jew. The Church, however, was always hostile. Thus they came to see in the Church their arch-enemy, and in their religion the same cause of their troubles. Prevailing medieval opinion, with religion dominant as it was, could only help foster such a view. Political persecution emanating from whatever cause, was also motivated by religion. So was the entire campaign of the Inquisition in Spain and outside of it. The historic outlook of the Jew and his view of life was deeply influenced by this agitation, and thus when the Middle Ages came to a close - in a general rise of Pagan sentiment - the Jew was more religious than ever before. His spiritual life and his social theories were in conflict with the realities which militated against him and which he failed or refused to recognize. And perhaps the best illustration of this fundamental conflict between the realistic condition of the Jews in the Middle Ages and Jewish thinking over these conditions is afforded by the course of life and thought of Don Isaac Abravanel.
CHAPTER TWO

PORTUGAL: A HAPPY HAVEN

I

Don Isaac Abravanel was born in Lisbon in the year 1437 into a family which ranked high among the Jews of Portugal, and indeed of the entire Iberian peninsula. The Abravanel family was distinguished by their financial position as well as by their political attainments. Abravanel's father, Don Judah, was the financier of Prince Fernando, the son of Portugal's Joao I, and in all probability was similarly engaged by other members of the royal family. His grandfather, Don Samuel, was a powerful courtier in the suites of three successive Castilian kings, and in the days of the third of them - Enrique III - reached the top position in Castile's financial administration when he assumed the office of contador major. Another ancestor of Don Isaac, Don Judah - most probably his great-grandfather - was the treasurer of Fernando IV in Seville, and, also, according to some indications, Castile's almoxarif major. From his ancestors then Abravanel acquired the financial acumen, the craft for managing large-scale state finances and the diplomatic ability which goes with it.

To this tradition of wealth and power was added a long-standing reputation for noble lineage - a reputation which, we may assume, contributed to the family's prestige. The Abravanel family were most proud and certain
of the excellence of their origin - so proud and certain indeed that they claimed descent from the Davidic dynasty and settlement in Spain in pre-Roman times. That the claim received credence, at least among some leading Jews, not only in Don Isaac’s times, but four centuries before, is certainly amazing; for it shows that as far back as the eleventh century the family was already notable for owning an old and marked record of distinction. As the family’s genealogical tree is cut off five generations before Don Isaac’s time, there is no way of proving, or indeed of disproving, the veracity of this claim. But the very fact that such a claim could be maintained so long and so persistently is, to our mind, sufficient indication that the family not only projected itself on the scene of history with important deeds and personalities of merit, but that it was also imbued with that sense of historic mission which we find so strongly expressed in Don Isaac’s life and thought.

It is proper to note one more trait which is observable in the Abravanel family. All of Abravanel’s ancestors were prominent in Jewish leadership. In view of their positions in the financial administration - that is, their relations with the court - and their social standing, this was almost inevitable. Yet the Abravanel family were not entirely given over to leadership in Jewish communal affairs, or in the field of state finances. For besides material and political, they had strong moral and intellectual interests. Thus, one available record speaks of an Abravanel in the days of the "mighty and pious King Alfonso" - perhaps Joseph Abravanel, Don Isaac’s great-great grandfather, in the days of Alfonso X (the Learned) - who was admired as a "great sage" even by the most renowned clerics and whose wisdom and learning earned him an invitation to visit the royal court. Again, Don Samuel, whom we have already mentioned, is described by one contemporary as a man who "loves learning, patronizes scholars, cares for their welfare and who - whenever he
is relieved from the turbulence of the times - is possessed with a desire to indulge in the works of the [famous] authors and philosophers." There was no doubt a strong intellectual current running for generations in the Abravanel family. In the lives of his ancestors, this propensity for meditation was suppressed or overshadowed by their public and financial interests. In the life of Don Isaac, as we shall see, the spiritual and material tendencies, although they clashed, came both into full play. In any case, from his ancestors Abravanel inherited not only his financial aptitude and his impulse for leadership, but also his inclination to speculative endeavor which so strongly influenced his life.

The home-town of the Abravanel family was Seville, and it is there where they lived after the conquest, as well as in Moslem and perhaps pre-Moslem times. Seville was the most important city of Andalusia, and - together with Barcelona - one of the two cities of international importance in the peninsula. It was re-conquered by the Christians in 1248, in the general southward sweep of Fernando III, which wrested from the Moors other important centers as Cordova (1236), Murcia (1243), and Jaen (1246) and limited the Moslem hold over Spain to the narrowest confines it ever had. The capture of Seville was the crowning achievement of Spain's crusading effort for generations, but for almost the next two and a half centuries it remained the terminus of Christian expansion. As a great commercial center in which Jews were powerful, and as an advance outpost of Christendom in the historic struggle with the Moors - Seville had more than the usual share of provocatives, economic as well as religious, for a charged social atmosphere. Consequently Seville became the breeding ground of the most virulent and most relentless anti-Jewish agitation. It was Seville that gave the signal, in 1378, for a nation-wide campaign of persecution against the Jews. It was Seville that initiated the anti-Jewish massacres that swept
the peninsula in 1391. And it was in Seville that the Inquisition opened its
tribunals in 1481.

To this fierce and warlike background of Seville must be attributed,
at least partly, not only that zeal for and mastery in combatting Christian
dogma for which the Abravanels became famous - (in Seville, where clerical attack
was most vehement, religious disputations must have been common and acrimon-
ious!) - but also the one great moral and religious failure which is noticeable
in the annals of the Abravanels. For in the last years of the eighties of the
fourteenth century - at a time when hostility for the Jews in Seville was
approaching the most critical and most explosive stage - Don Samuel Abravanel,
the great courtier and patron of letters, converted himself to Christianity.17
The records concerning his conversion are too meager to permit definite
conclusions regarding the factors and motives which led him to this act.
Yet there are sufficient indications for stating that in this, not only an
element of weakness, but also an element of duress was involved. 18 That
his conversion was not entirely a product of free choice is clearly indicated
by subsequent developments. For although a few years after his conversion
the majority of Spain's Jews converted to Christianity - and thus the social
embarrassment which his conspicuousness as a convert might have caused him
was greatly reduced - and although furthermore while a convert, he rose to
the high offices of contador mayor and treasurer of the queen, 19 he was
resolved to sacrifice his career and position for the price of returning to
his ancestral faith. No doubt, Don Samuel, converted for whatever reason,
considered himself secretly a Jew and looked for an opportunity to leave the
country.

But such an escape was not easy in those days. The return of
converts to Judaism was considered in Spain a crime punishable by death,
and any attempt at departure from the country had to be well concealed. It was an especially difficult undertaking for a man in the position of contador mayor. Perhaps he also wanted before leaving Spain, to liquidate his financial affairs and rescue as much as possible of the family's fortune. Such a liquidation, however, could be made only slowly and with the utmost caution to prevent suspicion. Thus, more than six years after the great riots - in November 1397 - we still find him in Castile, in the service of King and Queen. It must have been however shortly after that - probably before the turn of the century - that he cut the strings that tied him to Castile and the royal service, and - as it appears with a great loss of property - left one day with his family for Portugal.

The conversion of Don Samuel, as well as his return, left a deep imprint upon the consciousness of the Abravanels. Not in so much as a word does Don Isaac mention in his copious writings the conversion of his grandfather. The matter must have been regarded by him as a black blot in the bright annals of the family, a blot which he perhaps subconsciously sought to erase by his ardent devotion to his people and their faith. No other Jewish author in the Middle Ages dealt so extensively with the Marrano problem, as he did. But behind his harsh words against the Marranos, behind the bitter chastisement as well as deep compassion which he evinces toward them so repeatedly in his writings, there may lie not only his considered reaction to the grave Marrano problem of his time, but also a reflection of his personal attitude towards the sad and perhaps disreputable experiences of the grandfather which he wanted to, but alas - could not, forget.
II

In the years during which the Abravanel family settled in Portugal, the country was in the process of national rebirth. It was the period following the battle of Aljubarrota at which Portuguese arms won a decisive victory over Castile's invading forces and Portugal's independence, which had long been threatened by the monarchic claims and expansionist ambitions of Castile, was established for all time. The battle of Aljubarrota was indeed a milestone in the history of the Iberian peninsula. For just as it secured Portuguese independence it prevented amalgamation between Portugal and Castile of the kind effected a century later between Castile and Aragon. From a geographic point of view, Portugal is an extension of Castile. From an ethnic point of view it was not less apart from Castile than Aragon. And as far as linguistic differences were concerned, it was closer to Castile than Valencia or Catalonia. Portugal serves as an example of a nation born out of sheer political differences - a nation born out of the particular feudal scramble of the Middle Ages.

Until the battle of Aljubarrota Castile never gave up hope to reunite with, or rather annex, the realm of Portugal which she regarded legitimately hers. As far as Castile was concerned, the independence of Portugal was merely a usurpation, for Portugal was originally a fief granted by the Leonese King, Alfonso VI, to his field-commander and son-in-law, Henry of Gascogne. The vassal, and especially his son, however, soon developed desires of independence. In 1143 the Portuguese monarchy was officially born, and with it the Portuguese nation.

What stimulated more strongly the growth of the national feeling were the wars, both defensive and aggressive, that people of Portugal fought
against the Moslems. The land granted by Alfonso to his son-in-law formed approximately half of modern Portugal. The other half had to be torn in bitter strife from the hands of the Moors. In a series of wars which lasted for another century Portuguese forces, unaided by Castile, carved out a new territory, and extended their land southward along the Atlantic to the southern tip of the peninsula. It was a land born out of conquest, a land truly gained by the sword, and consequently one of the first states in Europe to develop a strong nationalistic feeling.

Both the wars of expansion and the struggle for independence determined, in a large measure, Portugal's attitude toward the Jews. So long as the country faced double danger, that of the Moslem and that of Castile, the Jewish minority was left unmolested. The economic conditions were no less favorable for the Jews than the political. In the newly conquered districts and undeveloped cities, Jews were welcome as colonizers and traders. In the second period of Portuguese history, however, the period which begins with the conquest of Algarve, the last region taken from the Moors (1249), both political and economic conditions as far as Jewish interests were concerned, gradually take a turn for the worse. The fourteenth century sees the rise of a considerable burgher class in Portugal and, together with it, of hostility for the Jews. The outcome of the Castilian-Portuguese conflict further aggravated the Jewish situation. For the decisive victory over Castile (1385) focused general attention on internal issues and greatly intensified the national feeling, both developments contributing materially to a growing friction with the Jews. Thus the third period, which begins with the rule of Joao I, the hero of the battle of Aljubarrota, sees the increasing demands of the Cortes to abrogate the privileges granted the Jews by the Crown and subject them to the limitations imposed upon them in neighboring Castile.
But in Portugal more than in other countries, the Jews belonged to the Crown, and the Crown had other problems to consider besides popular antagonism toward the Jews. As in other countries in the Middle Ages, in Portugal, too, the policy toward the Jews could be clearly read on the political barometer which registered the relations between monarchy and baronage.

João I was most friendly to the nobility. It was the support and cooperation of the great nobles that won him the Crown in 1385 when the old dynasty had been practically extinguished, and it was again the patriotism and valiant fight of the nobility which enabled him to defeat the forces of Castile. Believing that he owed all he owned to the nobility, João I demonstrated his gratitude by a shower of gifts drawn primarily from the Crownlands. In consequence he lost almost the entire income of the Crownlands, and was utterly dependent for the expense of his administration upon the income derived from custom duties and other revenues which were not affected by the alienation of his possessions. That he was most interested under such circumstances to support the Jews - a strong commercial element in Portugal and an element that belonged to the royal patrimony - can be readily understood.

For the same reasons João I was not opposed to the influx of conversos from Castile, even at the expense of their return to Judaism. Clerical opinion was of course dissatisfied with this move - which made Portugal notorious among all Christian countries for giving shelter to escaped heretics - but Portugal was an old trouble spot for the Church and, despite his orthodoxy, João adhered to the traditional policy of Portugal's Kings who repeatedly defeated Church attempts to intervene in the processes of government. Under the impact of popular hostility to the Jews, João was
forced nevertheless, from time to time to yield to the Cortes and pass laws against the Jews, including one which made the wearing of the badge mandatory (1391), and another which prohibited the Jews from occupying positions in the royal service (1404). These laws, however, were not enforced as is seen from the complaints of the clergy against João in 1427. The Abravanel family therefore came to Portugal at a time when the social climate of the country was hostile to the Jews, but when the prevailing policy was still pro-Jewish and when opportunity was available for financial enterprise. It may be readily assumed that Don Isaac's father, Don Judah - the son of Castile's contador mayor - had little difficulty in advancing to positions of material and political prominence.

In the year of Abravanel's birth, however, the policy pursued toward the Jews was such as to give every reason for serious concern regarding the future of the Jews in Portugal. Four years before Abravanel's birth, in 1433, João I died, leaving the throne to his eldest son, Duarte. The latter, having none of the considerations of his father for the barons, embarked upon a different policy toward the nobility. Looking with disfavor upon the alienation of the crown lands, he sought ways and means of redeeming them for the Crown. In his struggle with the nobility, he was in need of enlisting the support of the Cortes in which the cities and the clergy were represented - hence his attention to their complaints against the Jews and his manifestly anti-Jewish policy. The pestilence which struck the country during his reign and the unsuccessful war venture in Africa only helped stimulate intolerance toward the Jews. But these calamities also cut short the king's life. He died in 1438, a victim of the plague, with none of his undertakings truly successful and none of his policies carried to conclusion.

A year before his death, Don Isaac was born, and it is from that
time that we have the first record concerning Don Judah's position in Portugal. In that very year Duarte dispatched his ill-fated expedition to Tangier, whose conquest had been, since 1418, the first objective of Portugal's policy of expansion. Among the leaders of this expedition was the Infante Fernando, master of the order of St. Benedict of Avis and one of Joao's five famed sons. Before he left on his fatal mission - he subsequently died in an enemy prison - Don Fernando prepared a will in which he ordered the payment of a debt of 506,000 reis to Don Judah Abravanel. Whether Don Judah was a treasurer of the Infante, as some biographers of Abravanel have asserted, or otherwise acting in his financial service, cannot be stated with authority. In any case, in the year of Abravanel's birth, Don Judah, his father, was in possession of great wealth and had direct relations with the royal house of Portugal. As Don Isaac stated in one of his writings, he was brought up from childhood within wealth and honor.

Yet the childhood of Don Isaac was not entirely free from the oppressive spirit of an anti-Jewish atmosphere. During the minority of Alfonso V, the regency devolved upon Don Pedro, Duarte's brother. The latter, a vigorous and astute ruler, shared the view of the late king on the need of curtailing the power of the nobles, and consequently was no supporter of the Jews. As regent, Don Pedro was not strong enough to carry his policy toward the nobility to its extreme, and therefore there was no reason for him to extend Duarte's measures against the Jews. Yet the tendency of Don Pedro is clearly seen in the Ordinances of Alfonso V, a codex compiled under the former's guidance, which incorporated most of the anti-Jewish laws issued in Portugal in the previous reigns. That many of these laws were not enforced can be taken as a safe assumption, but it is also certain that anti-Jewish laws passed by the Cortes during the reigns of both his father and brother
were carried into effect. Don Isaac's childhood therefore passed under a regime that respected Duarte's decrees against the Jews, the decrees which emphasized and deepened the gulf between the Jewish and outside worlds. It is clear, above all, that under Pedro's rule there was no relief from the severe restrictions concerning the right of Jews to stay outside the Judarias. And thus, every evening, as the bells of the churches would toll for prayer, the child would know that the Judarias must close, that stern punishments threatened Jews who happened to be outside them after sunset, and that no one, except some privileged people, of whom his father might have been one - were permitted to leave through the guarded gates.

And yet the populace was not satisfied with Pedro's rigorous, but restrained policy, and the constantly rising hostility for the Jews sought an outlet in violence. It was in the year 1449, when Don Isaac was twelve years old, that the first major outbreak against the Jews of Portugal occurred. A rioting mob, bent on pillage and murder, surged towards the Jewish quarters of Lisbon, wildly shouting "death to the Jews!". The attackers however, found it difficult to force their way into the Judarias - there were three of them in Lisbon in those days - which like other Judarias in the peninsula, were well fortified and prepared for defence. Throughout the Middle Ages, we notice, the Jews were unable to resist the understandable temptation of settling, whenever permitted, outside the Judaria walls - the walls which symbolized their social isolation; yet those walls saved them quite often from spoilation and massacre. In 1449 they saved the Jews of Lisbon by enabling them to hold out against overwhelming odds until the arrival of the armed forces of the Crown. The attackers were then forced into retreat, but only to organize for resumed aggression. Alfonso V, at that time in Évora, was urged by the state secretary to return to the capital.
He returned, but the tension, instead of decreasing, now assumed the form of an uprising against the king. The stern measures which Alfonso employed to suppress the rebellious movement in the city and the severe punishment he inflicted upon the offenders, finally convinced the burghers of Lisbon that the King was determined to defend the Jews with all the might at his disposal. 

The attempt to wipe out the Jewish community of Lisbon took place at a time of political upheaval. That was the year which saw the climax of the conflict between Alfonso V and his uncle, Don Pedro. The instigator of that conflict was the Count of Barcellos, João I's illegitimate son, who strove to replace his half-brother, Don Pedro, in political influence in the Court.

To this personal ambition there was added, however, a political motive which, from a historic point of view, was of far greater import. While Don Pedro was an advocate of Duarte's policy which aimed at limiting the power of nobility, the Count of Barcellos, upholding the feudal principle, was strongly opposed to such limitation. To appease his half-brother, Don Pedro bestowed upon him, in 1442, the title of Duke, together with the Lordship over Barganza.

But Alfonso remained unappeased. Like other nobles he looked with anxious eyes to the King's approaching maturity. When in 1447 Alfonso V married Pedro's daughter Elizabeth, his worries could obviously only increase. It now became his aim to destroy the regent before the latter succeeded in employing the king as an instrument for his anti-baronial policy. And his purpose was fully accomplished when, after ruining the king's confidence in Don Pedro - who was declared a traitor to the kingdom - the latter was killed in an encounter with the forces of the Crown.

It was in the year 1449 - the year of the anti-Jewish riots of Lisbon - that Don Pedro met his death on the battlefield. It was an event which cast a long shadow on the future history of Portugal and consequently had
a decisive effect on the fate of the Jews in that country. From 1449, for more than three decades, the house of Braganza was the most influential in the realm. When the conflict resolved as it did, young Abravanel could hardly imagine that his own rise and fall in Portugal were to be inextricably connected with the rise and fall of the powerful Braganzas.

III

The reign of Alfonso is generally considered a period of prosperity for the Jews of Portugal. This is undoubtedly true to a large extent; yet it would be erroneous to maintain that a radical change in the Jewish position occurred as soon as Alfonso assumed power. The laxity of the Crown in enforcing anti-Jewish measures was, it seems, noticeable from the very beginning; but this laxity was, before long, effectively protested by the Cortes. In 1451, in the Cortes of Santarem, laws were re-enacted to the effect that the Jews must wear the badge as decreed and must not live outside the Judarias. Similar laws were issued from time to time within, at least, the next decade, and it was only in later years that Alfonso came to feel himself sufficiently strong, or sufficiently inclined to ignore the Cortes on the Jewish question. Thus, as far as the Jews were concerned, Alfonso's long reign may be roughly divided into approximately two equal periods: the first - lasting until the middle of the sixties - in which Pedro's policy was still considerably in force (although its effectiveness was gradually waning); the second, lasting until Alfonso's death, in which the king openly pursued a determined and full-fledged pro-Jewish policy.

Despite the official support Alfonso offered in the first period, to legislation which was repellent to the Jews and which served to maintain
an oppressive atmosphere, the king's basic attitude could not remain for long unnoticed by the elite of the Jewish community of Portugal who for both political and economic reasons strove to develop friendly relations with the Court. In this elite, the most prominent in those days was Don Isaac's father, Don Judah Abravanel. It is true we have no records about his activity, but even from the scanty material available, it is clear that he was, at least in the sixties, the head of the Jewish community of Portugal and a man of great influence and fame. As Don Judah was not professionally devoted to a scholarly or a rabbinical career, his leadership in the community must have been acquired through his social and political position, or more clearly, through his relations with the Court. But connections with the Court could not have been of lasting value without the support of the Duke of Braganza, who commanded decisive influence with the king and was the chief power in the administration. It is therefore safe to assume that the exceptional friendliness which marked, as we shall see, Don Isaac's relations with the princes of the House of Braganza was a continuation of a family relationship initiated in the days of the first Duke by his father, Don Judah.

As the son of a powerful Jewish courtier, Abravanel was accustomed from childhood to visit the "palaces of kings" and princes, and his education was accordingly directed to suit the social strata in which the family lived, as well as to prepare him for assuming in the future his father's duties and responsibilities. Those were days in which Renaissance culture was pouring strongly into Portugal, and among the staunchest protagonists of the new movement were members of the royal family. Don Pedro was a confirmed Renaissance man and so was the king, Alfonso V. The study of Latin and the Roman classics was thus part of Abravanel's education. His great
familiarity with the works of the Roman historians, and Roman political
thinkers and moralists, a familiarity which is noticeable in his writings,
was therefore a heritage of those days, and the effect which these,
particularly Seneca and Cicero, left upon his intellectual development was
deep and indelible. His knowledge of Latin however, enabled Abravanel not
only to be at home in the Roman classics, but also to delve — in later days,
when his trend of thinking digressed from the Renaissance — into the writings
of the Christian Medieval scholastics and the works of the Church fathers.

The first half of the fifteenth century, however, witnessed not
only an increased interest in the classics but also an important advance in
Portugal's national literature. The intensified Portuguese national spirit
sought expression in the national language and gave rise to refined forms of
literature which became the subject of general admiration. Not only did the
lyric poetry of Portugal come to be considered as superb throughout the
peninsula, but also in the art of historical writing Portugal achieved unique
distinction. This was the age of Fernan Lopez, known as "the father of
Portuguese history," whose historical works are commonly rated among the
most artistic and inspiring chronicles of the Middle Ages. It is perhaps
from the writings of Lopez, who must have been also personally acquainted with
the Abravanes - Lopez was the secretary of the Infante Fernando with whom
Don Judah had close relations - that Abravanel acquired much of the interest
which he evinced for history in his works. Like the rest of Portugal's
upper class, Abravanel sought and attained perfection in Portuguese and
he must similarly have mastered Castilian. This we may conclude from the
fact that he was a member of a family which migrated from Castile, and also
that Castilian was a familiar tongue among Portuguese intellectual and baron-
ial circles. As the Castilian literature of the time was represented
primarily by chroniclers and historians, it undoubtedly contributed to his historical knowledge and had a share in the development of his historic views. It is undoubtedly also to his mastering of Castilian that we should partly attribute his ability to establish in later days close relations with the monarchs of both Spain and Naples.

Latin, Portuguese and Castilian were thus the three European languages in which Abravanel was versed. It is doubtful however that he excelled in any of these more than he did in Hebrew. For, early in his life he manifests a command of Hebrew which not only surprises in its vivacity and beauty, but also indicates a thorough knowledge of all the phases of Hebrew literature. It was in Hebrew that Abravanel must have received his basic education in all the numerous subjects which formed his complex curriculum. In full accordance with the prevailing tradition among the medieval Jewish intelligentsia, this curriculum comprised not only the study of the masters of Jewish philosophy in the Middle Ages, but also of their Greek and Arab forerunners - particularly Aristotle, Averroes and Avicenna and it also included the "natural sciences", i.e., medicine and astrology. In his writings, Abravanel shows a knowledge of medical theories which were prevalent in his time, as well as a familiarity with the fundamentals of astrology, a study which was connected with medicine and regarded in Portugal in those days as undisputed science. Abravanel, however, was destined to be neither a physician nor an astrologer. By nature he was a theoretician and a writer, and both his intellectual capacity and writing ability revealed themselves fully in his first philosophical work, which he must have written while in his early twenties.

The essay was called The Forms of the Elements, and its contents fully agreed with its name. In it Abravanel sought to determine
the forms, or rather, the essential qualities of the elements - fire, water, air and earth - of which, according to Aristotle, the sub-lunary world is composed. There is nothing in this work which would indicate a religious outlook or even an interest in a religious view. Here we read stated, as axiom, Aristotle's dictum: "Nature does nothing for no purpose!" There is no mention of the name of God. There is no citation from the Bible, or indeed from any Jewish religious source. Here was philosophy in its best pagan form, based on cold logic, deduction and observation.

In his youth Abravanel must have cherished an ambition to delve into the study of philosophy, and produce answers to at least some of the puzzles which the great philosophers left unsolved. Contemplation of these problems fascinated him, and for a considerable time the study of philosophy was his greatest passion. But finally a reaction set in. The more Abravanel became absorbed in philosophy, the more he realized that the task was beyond him, nay, that it was beyond human capacity. He observed the contradictions, the uncertainties and limitations which mark every philosophical theory, and came to the conclusion that philosophy is largely a useless exercise in dialectics. He was however by his nature thirsty for truth, a thirst which philosophy only intensified, and thus like other disappointed rationalists, he turned to religion and to mysticism.

Nevertheless, to assume that his change was entirely a result of intellectual disillusionment, would be an over-simplification. For mysticism is rarely a pure result of speculative processes alone. The flight from rationalism usually represents a search for a solution to some very pressing personal or collective problem which the so-called normal, available means are unable to offer. This is why mysticism is the product of the monastery,
or of oppressed and afflicted societies, rather than of favorable, auspicious circumstances. The social element involved in Abravanel's diversion to mysticism can be easily pointed out. With all the "wealth and honors" into which he was born, he was the son of a fugitive family from Castile, whose childhood was passed in the days of Duarte and Don Pedro, and who grew to maturity in the first period of Alfonso during which the former's policy was still in operation. Bitter family memories of the past and the unfriendly conditions of the present must have left a deep imprint upon his sensitive mind which sought to understand the "why" and "how" of the mystery of his people's great sufferings and existence. As in the theories of other Jewish mystics, the mystical thinking of Abravanel revolves about a search for a solution to the Jewish national problem. Abravanel is the initial similarity in the trend of his thinking with that of other Jewish mystics, was strengthened by the latter's direct influence upon him, just as his attack against philosophy must have been encouraged by the Jewish antiphilosophical, though not mystical, literature which, since the catastrophe of 1391, was increasing in volume and aggressiveness. It is indeed in the representatives of this literature - in writers like Alami and Ibn Mussa and Arama - that we must look for the sources of inspiration for Abravanel's radical change of view.

This change is clearly seen in Abravanel's second work - Crown of the Elders. When he wrote this book, he had already developed the fundamentals of his world outlook. All the major themes in Abravanel's later writings are to be found in this brief dissertation on the concept of God and the meaning of prophecy. It is in this work that Abravanel first expresses his admiration for the Kabbalists, the "sages of truth" and his criticism of the philosophers who "walk in the darkness." His attack
against philosophy is primarily aimed at the leaders in the field, Aristotle and Averroes, as well as at the other standard-bearers of philosophy in and outside of jury. The only exception Abravanel made is represented by his attitude toward Maimonides from whose influence Abravanel could not free himself. Toward Maimonides Abravanel had indeed a mixed attitude of deep admiration and harsh criticism, and it was through his abiding interest in Maimonides that Abravanel remained attached in some measure to philosophy to the end of his life. His main interest however lay in the Prophets, the perfection of whose teachings he contrasted in the Crown with the obvious failings of the philosophers. To interpret the prophets, to reveal the grandeur of their wisdom, had become indeed his undefeatable ambition. In fact, already prior to writing the Crown he had been working on a plan for a commentary on the Pentateuch.

In the middle of the sixties, when Abravanel wrote his "Crown," Don Judah was still alive, but Abravanel must have gradually taken over the business responsibilities of his aging father. Speculative life was giving way to life of action. The great plan for a commentary on the Pentateuch had to be abandoned. And Abravanel now limited himself to the writing of a commentary on Deuteronomy, which is, in many ways, an abridgement of the greater part of the Pentateuch. Even this work, however, remained for long unfinished, and in a letter he writes in 1472, we find him pledging himself that as soon as he will have some peace of mind and a chance to return to literary work he will "not rest or sleep" until the work is completed and the assignment is fulfilled. But the pledge remained for a long time wishful thinking. Peace of mind was far off, for at the very time Abravanel made that pledge he was drawn deeper and deeper into the tangled web of finance and politics.
IV

The second half of Alfonso's reign was a period of prosperity for the Jews of Portugal, and first and foremost for Don Isaac. The family gift for finance and commerce was now manifested in him in full force, exhibiting, for the first time, the strange dualism which marked Abravanel's life. The philosophical writer showed great business ability and amassed large fortunes in the process. His financial enterprise must soon have led him to associations with his father's Christian friends, the Courtiers of Alfonso V, and together with the expansion of his financial activity, and the extension of his contacts with the nobility, his prestige rose in the Jewish community. In 1472, the very year we saw him striving for a respite to complete his commentary on Deuteronomy, we find him already occupying a position of leadership and acting as the political representative of the Jews of Portugal at the Court.

By virtue of both personality and inclination, and under the inspiring example of his father, Abravanel must have developed, early in life, a feeling of guardianship for his brethren. The problems which beset the Jewish community of Portugal offered schooling for the task of leadership. In Abravanel's letter of 1472 to Jehiel of Pisa, the head of a large Jewish-Italian banking house - the principal document providing an insight into both his activities and mental frame-work in those days - we see already the contours of Abravanel the leader as he appears to us in later days.

The problem which then presented itself for a solution resulted from Alfonso's expedition to North Africa in 1471. During the capture of Arzilla, a fortress on the Atlantic, the town's Jewish community, two hundred
and fifty strong, fell into the hands of the Portuguese conquerors and was distributed as slaves among the Portuguese grandees. The appropriation of captives for the purposes of slavery was in accordance with the war customs of the time; but it was also a time honored custom among Jews to redeem their brethren from the debasement of slavery. The Jewish community of Portugal organized for action, and Don Isaac and another leader were appointed the heads of a twelve-man committee that was charged with the responsibility of freeing the enslaved.

The very phenomenon of "so many" Jews subjected to the misery and degradation of slavery, their women facing the threat of molestation and their children given prey to hunger and depravity, shocked him deeply. The thought of members of his own people - the "people of God" - in a state of bondage was for him both distressing and intolerable, and he summoned his entire energy for their rescue. For six full months, as he tells us, he travelled throughout the country, visiting the places where the enslaved Jews were encamped and dealing with their lords who sometimes were harsh and exorbitant in their demands. When the act of delivery was finally accomplished at the great expense of more than 10,000 gold doublons, Abravanel sought to care for the rescued and provide for their rehabilitation in the new land.

In the manner of his treatment of these North African Jews, with whom he could not even converse, we see a tangible example of Abravanel's devotion to people, as well as a manifestation of his strong will, his thoroughness of approach, and his attitude of deed, almost personal responsibility for the welfare of those entrusted to his care. All these are virtuous qualities with which a true leader must be endowed. But at the same time another problem arose which not only appealed to these qualities, but also taxed and revealed his diplomatic skill.
The nature of this problem is not known to us, but it must have been connected with serious developments which endangered the rights of the Jews of Portugal. The attacks against the Jews must have come from the clergy, as it seemed most important for the Jews of Portugal to obtain the favorable intervention of the Pope. To this end Abravanel employed his great friendship with João Sezira, scholar and courtier of Alfonso V, who was then being sent to Rome to congratulate in the king's behalf Pope Sixtus IV on his assumption to the Papacy. To this man whom Abravanel describes as "a great and pure-hearted friend of the Jews" who "always uses his strong influence to protect and better their position", the Jews of Portugal submitted a memorandum in which they stated their case and enumerated their requests. João Sezira pledged himself to Abravanel to plead the Jewish cause before Sixtus IV, but apparently on condition of absolute secrecy, so that the matter was not to become known even to the other envoy of Alfonso, the head of the delegation, Don Lope de Almeida.

On this occasion Abravanel writes to his friend, Jehiel, the magnate of Pisa, asking him not only to show Sezira special courtesy and honor, but also to extend any help and guidance that he might require while in Italy. "You will greatly oblige me", he adds "if while speaking to these men, João Sezira and Lope de Almeida, you state, in your tactful and convincing manner, that our lord the king (Alfonso V) is universally praised for the justice he manifests towards all the inhabitants of the country, and for his friendly attitude toward the Jews. Also add that such a government promotes the country's welfare, enables its expansion and increases its prestige abroad. It is important that you say all that in order to impress these two envoys with the fact that we Jews have everywhere people of great influence who are well informed on all developments affecting their people's welfare".

In 1472, when Abravanel wrote this letter, which indicates his
excellent connections with Alfonso's favorites, he himself, it seems, was not yet established in the position of a courtier. In describing Alfonso V to Jehiel, he in no way mentions direct relations with the king, which would hardly be conceivable if such relations had existed. The question as to the time at which Abravanel assumed a definite position in the court, cannot be answered with absolute certainty. There are good reasons to believe, however, that his rise to such a position took place between 1472 and 1475. It was perhaps shortly after he had written his letter to Jehiel that he entered Alfonso's circle of favorites, and from then on both his friendship with the King and his influence in the court only grew with the passage of time.

Alfonso was a man of strong will, of high moral fiber, of intellectual tendencies, and of a friendly disposition. Despite the criticisms levelled against him as King by modern historians, he was also endowed with great capacities as a ruler. According to Don Isaac, he was: "Just, and righteous, vigorous and heroic, ardently seeking his people's welfare, learned and wise in the councils of leadership".

The pattern that Alfonso V followed in matters of domestic policy was the same as that of his grandfather, Joao X. He completely abandoned, as unworkable or undesirable, the policies of his uncle and his father against the nobility, and, like Joao, had no scruples about securing the loyalty of the barons by enriching them at the expense of the royal patrimony. And, when confronted with the financial problems which were the direct consequence of this policy, he solved them quite successfully, again like his grandfather, by developing the commercial resources of the country and by giving greater freedom to the Jews.

To his friendly policy toward the nobility, and his particular interest
in developing trade, must be added, as an especial feature of his reign, his expansionist policy beyond the seas. Inspired like his predecessors - Joao, Duarte, and Pedro - by the theories of his uncle, Henry the Navigator, he strongly supported his exploratory effort which was directed toward the discovery of a new way to India and which had already netted Portugal important assets. In 1445 the Portuguese sailors, pushing southward along the African coast, discovered Guina from which Portugal drew not only considerable quantities of gold, but also - what was extremely important for both Portugal's agriculture and commerce - a large number of Negro slaves. The growing maritime enterprises of Portugal as well as the protection of her expanding slave-trade, made it necessary for her to possess bases on the strategic northwestern African seaboard, and in consequence Alfonso became determined to resume the attempts, made before with little success by his ancestors, to conquer Tangier and its surrounding outposts. In 1471, after dispatching to North Africa three large military expeditions, he finally accomplished his purpose accomplished, but it was accomplished at enormous cost. The expense of these expeditions - as well as of the ensuing war with Castile - were primarily shouldered by the Crown. Hence another need for money and another reason for a tolerant policy toward the Jews.

It would be wrong, however, to state that Alfonso's friendliness towards the Jews was merely a result of his domestic and foreign policies. The interests of the crown formed, it may be assumed, the primary consideration in determining his attitude. But behind it, and this should not be ignored, was Alfonso's exceptionally liberal attitude and tolerance in matters of religion.

Like other medieval kings in the Peninsula, he was intrigued by the problem the Jews presented, and sought to understand their stubborn adherence
to their faith in the face of deadly opposition. He listened with interest to disputations on religion between Jews and Christians, and sometimes - after pondering over principles of the Jewish faith - addressed to the Jews pointed questions concerning the validity of their principles. By posing these questions, however, he did not seek to lead the Jews to conversion, but rather to satisfy his intellectual curiosity. Rarely pleased with the answers he received, he nevertheless understood that matters of faith cannot be compressed in logical formulae. Once during a disputation between a Christian and a Jew he is reported to have expressed his opinion that neither side can logically prove the veracity of its position. He is further reported to have stated on that occasion that the "Jews are destined to receive divine reward since their religious motives are pure." And when this remark irked the Christian disputant who asserted that the Jews do not speak thus of Christians, the king answered that the Christians are even less tolerant toward Jews, adding that the attitude of both camps did not surprise him, since "religion is rooted in man's fantasy". In other words, it is the imagination and emotions, rather than sober logic, which determines one's attitude toward other religions.

In the Middle Ages such broad-mindedness and tolerance were certainly rare. And Alfonso was indeed in this, as in other respects, an unusual man. Particularly distinguished for his truthfulness, he offered the exceptional example of a king, who ordered his official chronicler not to write the history of his reign while he was in power.

To such a king, whose basic policy was pro-Jewish and whose attitude toward his Jewish courtiers was, by virtue of his convictions, free of any religious bias - Don Isaac was not the only Jew in the Court; influential also were the two Yachia brothers, Gedaliah, who was Alfonso's physician, and
Joseph, who was a counsellor of high rank - Abravanel must have appealed not only by his abilities but also by his intellectual honesty. And he must have appealed to him also by his vast knowledge. For Alfonso was, besides, a patron of letters, a collector of books, and a man of learning and keen intellect. All these elements were undoubtedly conducive to the development of that intimacy between Alfonso and Abravanel that led the latter to feel for the king not only admiration, but also affection. Yet there was still another factor which helped secure Abravanel's position and contributed to the rise of his influence in the Court. This was his relations with the princes of Braganza.

In 1461 the Duke of Braganza died, bequeathing his title and position to his son Fernando. The character of this prince is reflected by the fact that he refused to have a share in, and even openly opposed, the intrigue of his father against Don Pedro. As Alfonso himself had come, in 1454, to recognize his error in judging the late regent, this fact was not held against Fernando, but on the contrary spoke in his favor. The influence which the duke exercised in the Court surpassed even that of his father, and it is with the sons of this man - and undoubtedly also with him - that Abravanel struck up a deep friendship.

We have the first indication of this friendship in a letter of Abravanel written to the Count of Faro, one of the Duke's four sons, on the occasion of the death of the latter's father-in-law, the Count of Odemira. Between the deceased and the surviving counts there existed a deep and mutual love, and it is interesting to note that the count, in his grief, proceeded to write to Abravanel and express to him his feelings, even before he received Abravanel's letter of condolence. This can happen only when relations are most intimate
and cordial. From Abravanel's answer it is also clear that he was aware of details regarding the relationships between the princes with which only a very close friend could be acquainted. Although the letter was written in the middle of the seventies, it is obvious that Abravanel's friendly ties with the Braganzas began years earlier, that is, before Abravanel became established as a courtier, and it would not be far-fetched to assume that it was to the princes of the House of Braganza that Abravanel owed his position in the court.

The princes of Braganza were the wealthiest in the Peninsula and their land possessions were enormous. We do not know what services Abravanel rendered in the management of these tremendous fiefs, but he must have fulfilled some vital tasks for we know he was compensated in abundant measure. He himself became the owner of vast estates, some of which came to him, in all likelihood, as gifts from his grateful and magnanimous friends. It appears that even while in the king's service, Abravanel continued to be, in some form, a functionary of the princes of Braganza.

Of all the princes of this House, however, it was Ferdinard II, the eldest son of the Duke, with whom Abravanel developed the strongest friendship. So intimate indeed were the relations between them that it was universally considered inconceivable that Ferdinard would embark on any important activity without consulting Abravanel. The assumption by Ferdinand II of the dukery in April 1478 - with the death of his father, Ferdinand I - must have marked a rise in Abravanel's position, for never were the Braganzas so influential in the court as during the reign of this prince. It was indeed in those years (1478-1481) - the last years of Alfonso V - that Abravanel reached his highest stage of prestige and power in Portugal. His exact position in the court is unknown to us, although it appears that he acted as treasurer
or at least as top financial adviser. The king's confidence in and respect for Abravanel, however, grew to such proportions that the latter became one of his most trusted counsellors in political as well as financial matters. Abravanel, impressed with his far-reaching influence, had the feeling as if, like Daniel of old, he was "walking within the palace of the kings of Babylon." 

But for Abravanel, these were not only years of political prominence. After fighting a long and losing war with Castile, the country now again enjoyed peace, and while Abravanel must have been largely occupied with the serious financial and economic problems which beset Portugal in those days, he was able to concentrate, at least to some extent, on literary and scholarly work. It was in those days that he furthered his inquiry into the Bible and laid the basis for his commentaries on the early prophets which he was to write a few years later. It was also then that he must have written his _Vision of God_ — a work dealing with various aspects of prophecy in which he took a position opposed to Maimonides' view. Most likely, it was also in those days that he delivered a series of lectures on Maimonides, and also wrote parts of his commentary on the _Guide_. It was furthermore then that Abravanel rose to the position of undisputed leader of the Jewish community in Portugal, and his home became the center of intellectual discussion and the source of all major decisions concerning the community's affairs.

These were the happiest years in Abravanel's life, and in time to come he was to remember them with longing and affection. But his happiness was short-lived. On August 18, 1482, Alfonso V, the protector of the Jews and Abravanel's great friend and benefactor, died suddenly at the age of forty-nine, a victim of the plague which so often visited the fair land of Portugal. The shattering effect of his death on Abravanel is reflected years later in the latter's writings. But his sincere grief must have been
accompanied by grave worries, if not for his own position, at least for the future of the Jews in Portugal. In any event, Alfonso's death marked the end of an era for Portuguese Jewry, and presaged a change in Abravanel's position, for troublesome days lay ahead.

V

João II, Alfonso's successor, was upon coming to power only twenty-nine years old, but he had a fully developed personality and definite views on government. The chroniclers of his time praise him highly as a ruler, and already during his lifetime he was surnamed the "perfect prince," a title in which not only his courtiers concurred, but also, it seems, the mass of the people. The view of later, more detached historians also agrees with this conception. Abravanel's opinion, however, is quite different. According to him, João was not only far from perfection, but was one of the worst tyrants who ever ascended a throne. As Abravanel saw him, he was nothing but "greedy", "deceitful" and "tyrannic."  

João II was, in any case, a man of quite a different nature than his father. Lacking the liberalism and good nature of Alfonso, he was severe, self-centered, cold and aloof toward friend and foe alike. He was a man of resolute will and exemplary courage, and from early youth he distinguished himself in war. Yet no other monarch in Portugal pursued more diligently a policy of peace. For his major qualification was his ability to calculate, without being distracted by love of glory, what would secure with a minimum of danger a maximum of benefit for the Crown.

"The Crown," writes an authority on the period, "was the point to which he related everything, his appearance, dress, bearing, and speech, as well as his thoughts, inclinations, plans and designs." When he ascended the
thronet he was determined to achieve what was in his opinion the prerogative of royalty, and what the monarchy in his country, he believed, was sadly lacking: strength and independence.

Thus, carefully observing the policies and actions of the absolutist monarchs in the neighboring countries - of Henry VII in England, Louis XI in France, and of Ferdinand and Isabella in Aragon and Castile - he resolved to follow their pattern and methods. His first and foremost aim, he realized, was to break the power of the feudal lords. Joao II thus aspired to the same goal which Duarte and Don Pedro had sought to attain, but which had been completely nullified by his father. In fact he now faced a more difficult situation than Duarte did after the death of Joao I. For never was the nobility in Portugal so entrenched and never was the royal patrimony so impoverished as at the end of Alfonso's reign. So lavish was Alfonso in granting gifts to the nobility that Joao, in criticism of his father's generosity, is reported to have said: "All my father left me are the highways of Portugal."110

Among those who benefited particularly from the friendliness and generosity of Alfonso V were the princes of the house of Braganza. When Alfonso V died, the Duke of Braganza was said to have possessed fifty towns and castles and about a third of the land of Portugal, and the great political and military power which he could master by virtue of this wealth was enhanced by the position of his three brothers. One of them, Joao, the Marquis of Montemor, was Constable of the kingdom, and as such in control of the royal army; another, Alvaro, the Count of Olivenca, was Chancellor of the kingdom; the third, Alfonso, the Count of Faro, was also active and influential as a courtier. These princes were regarded by Joao as usurpers of both royal wealth and power and as the greatest obstacle of absolutist rule. Their
destruction became his first objective.

To the reasons stemming from his general policy, there was added a strong personal element which made João particularly anxious to reduce the power of the Braganzas. His attitude toward them was imbued with hatred and an unquenchable desire for revenge. He was the grandson of Don Pedro, the regent, who fell a victim to the intrigues of the first Duke of Braganza. Again, his mother, Pedro's daughter, according to popular opinion, died from poison administered at the order of the same Duke. From childhood João harbored hostility for the Braganzas. He was only waiting for an opportunity.

The conditions of the country after Alfonso's death were conducive to his effecting the change he contemplated. The country smarted from the wounds of defeat, and the people were impoverished by the heavy taxes which the repeated wars of Alfonso had necessitated. There was a general clamor for reforms and João II, appearing as the people's champion, was thus able to embark upon measures aimed at destroying the judicial and economic power of the nobles. He subjected the entire administration of Justice to the immediate authority of the Crown, and compelled all the governors of cities and towns to swear allegiance directly to him. In addition, on December 15, 1481, he issued in Évora a decree to the effect that all holders of lands, formerly belonging to the Crown, must produce for examination the documents on which they rest their right to their possessions.

These measures, which implied a revolution in the entire feudal system, enraged and alarmed the nobility. The Duke of Braganza clearly informed the king of the grievances of his order, only to be sternly rebuked for his audacity in criticizing a king's action. The Duke of Braganza had never before been spoken to in such language, and his brother, the Marquis of Montemor, was
even more deeply offended when he was ordered by the king, for some insignificant offence, into temporary exile. Thus, tension mounted between the king and the princes of Braganza and both sides prepared cautiously for the final showdown.

The conflict between the king and the nobility soon reflected itself in a disastrous manner in the life of Abravanel. It could already be gathered from his general policy and from his need to cater to the sentiments of the populace, that Joao II would take no pro-Jewish attitude, that, on the contrary, he would restrict the rights of the Jews and reduce their influence in the country. A member of the powerful Yachia family, probably sensing the new political trend, left the country in those days. But Abravanel stayed on and was to suffer not only because of his Jewishness, but also - and primarily - for his close association with the House of Braganza.

In the atmosphere of the conflict which was then developing, Joao's attitude toward him could not have been friendly, but he apparently continued in the king's service, either at the request of the still influential Duke, or because his services could not yet be dispensed with. Abravanel, however, must have experienced in those days constant anxiety and aggravation. For the attitude of the king soon reflected itself in that of some of the new courtiers whom Joao II made his confidants and advisers, and it was one of open hostility.

Events moved swiftly to a climax since the discovery by Joao, at the Duke's home at Villa Vicosa, of secret correspondence between the Duke and Ferdinand, King of Aragon. From then on the Duke was spied upon as a potential or actual traitor. That a conspiracy was brewing, can hardly be doubted. At least one of the Duke's brothers, the Marquis of Montemor, advocated armed rebellion against the king. It is not known, however,
whether plans emerged from the state of contemplation to that of resolution. In any case these developments provided Joao II with an excuse for embarking on a drastic course of action. He decided on a purge which was to include all of the discontented elements of the nobility, and first and foremost the princes of Braganza.

Although not a Portuguese noble, Abravanel was among the marked men. The king, it appears, came to suspect Abravanel as acting in the Court in the capacity of the Duke's agent. If the Duke was indeed planning treason, as Joao II might have persuaded himself to believe, it seemed obvious to him that Abravanel was involved, and even if he was not active in the conspiracy, his silence represented criminal complicity. Besides, Abravanel was a Jew and he was rich. His liquidation would meet with the approval of the Jew-haters, and his wealth could add not insignificant assets to the possessions of the Crown.

That Abravanel was aware of the deterioration of relations between the king and the duke need hardly be stated. But it is most unlikely that at any time he believed in the seriousness of the intentions of any of the Braganzas to rebel against the king. In any case he never thought that his own loyalty would ever be suspected. And, although he might have considered the attitude of Joao toward the Braganzas unduly harsh and iniquitous, he nevertheless did his best to serve the king in the capacity in which he was requested and in the way he saw fit.

Thus, when on May 30th, 1483, a royal messenger appeared at his home and presented him with a summons to appear before the king, he unsuspectingly set out for the Court. It was only the day before, on May 29th, that the Duke of Braganza had suddenly been arrested while conversing with
the king at the royal cabinet, but the arrest took place in the fortress of Moura, and the sensational news had not yet reached the capital. Abravanel must have left for Moura the following day in the morning (May 30th) and proceeding eastward he arrived in the evening at Arrayolos, where he and his companion stopped for the night. In this town, within half a day's ride from Moura, the news of the arrest had already spread. Arrayolos furthermore belonged to the Duke, and Abravanel must have had acquaintances there. Thus, while at the inn, one of these approached him and imparted to him the shattering news. From this man, probably a member of the duke's household, who might have known in advance of Abravanel's arrival and was instructed to give him a timely warning, Abravanel learned not only of the duke's arrest, but also of the flight of his sons to Castile, and the king's plan for a purge in which he, Abravanel, was also included. The man urged him to flee the country if he wanted to save his life.

Abravanel was now faced with the need to make a difficult decision. Escape was an advice he could hardly relish. It meant not only to abandon his family and his possessions, but also to strengthen the suspicions of Joao concerning his alleged guilt. Would it not be more advisable to face the king and put up a strong defence in behalf of his life, as well as his honor and his freedom? But he soon came to realize that such a defence would be hopeless. The king, he was convinced, was bent upon robbery, and to justify his planned large-scale confiscations, he would go to any length, including the issuance of death sentences for treason. Should Abravanel then offer him his property? But Joao, he knew, was not the type to take alms. Abravanel thought of his friend the duke. He was humiliated, imprisoned, facing a trial for his life. If this could happen to the powerful Braganza, what chance would Abravanel stand?

He came to the conclusion that he had but one course: escape -
and he pondered over the route he should take. A distance of forty miles separated him from the Castilian border at its nearest point to the east, and a straight road was leading from Arrayolos to that point, and from there to the town of Badajoz on the Guadiana. But this road passed through Villa Viçosa, the residence of the Duke of Braganza. The place, he undoubtedly feared, was swarming with the king's agents, and it was also the route which they would expect him to take when the pursuit after him in the morning would begin. Instead of going eastward, he turned, therefore, to the north, and travelled throughout the day on Portuguese territory, suspecting that all the roads leading to Castile between the Guiadana and the Tagus might be guarded by the king's agents. When darkness fell he must have finally reached the Tagus, and after crossing it in the neighborhood of Villa Velha and proceeding northward for another thirty miles, he finally took a turn to the east. It was only in the middle of the second night\textsuperscript{123} - the night of May 31st - that he crossed the Portuguese border to Castile.
CHAPTER THREE

SPAIN: LAND OF PERSECUTION

I

On crossing the Castilian border Abravanel arrived at the small town of Segura de la Orden. Segura belonged to the district of Plasencia, and from there to the city of Palsencia there remained a short distance. The city of Plasencia had a sizeable Jewish community — the only considerable community in that region — and it would appear to have been the logical place for Abravanel to proceed to at that time. Some available data lead us to believe that he did take the road to Plasencia and remained there for some time, although a few months after his escape we again find him in Segura. What attraction could the small frontier townlet hold for him in those days? There were only very few Jewish families there — perhaps no more than ten or fifteen — and the fact that the town was so close to the border would not seem to have made it a chosen spot for the fugitive from an outraged monarch. João, Abravanel knew, was not at all anxious to trespass the rights of his powerful neighbor with whom he was resolved to live in peace. Still there was no telling what João might do to an allegedly escaped rebel who was right at his threshold. Abravanel, it seems, was in hiding in the first months after his escape, and Segura was too small a place to enable him to keep his identity secret. From the one remark left us by Abravanel on this point, it indeed appears that it was not Segura where he hid; yet he must have returned
to Segura from time to time, and for a reason which can be readily understood.

The proximity of the town to the Portuguese border offered him obvious advantages. He still had many things to settle in Portugal. From Segura, it may be safely assumed, he soon dispatched warnings to his family and advices to hasten and leave Portugal, and take with them whatever property they could save. He must have succeeded in establishing - and maintaining - contact with his family, and perhaps also with some of his friends, for he soon received word that Joao II had confiscated all his possessions.

Abravanel decided to write to the king. He dispatched to him a letter in which he tried to prove his innocence, and strongly protested the injustice done him. The letter had no effect upon the king as far as retrieving his property was concerned. It seems, nevertheless, that it was not altogether futile. Joao appears to have been weakened in his determination to bring Abravanel to account. Perhaps he came to doubt Abravanel's guilt. In any case it is a fact that he permitted Abravanel's family - his wife and three sons - to leave the country. Had the king been fully convinced of Abravanel's complicity in the Duke's acts of treason, he would not have hesitated to wreak vengeance on him by inflicting severe punishment upon his family. For a king to avenge himself upon relatives of traitors was viewed as a normal act, and Joao, who was about to order summary executions of the nobles who opposed him, was especially capable of such a practice. Eight years later, as we shall see, he did not hesitate to take punitive measures against Abravanel's one-year-old grandson. But that was after his mind had been made up against Abravanel, and after the latter had been made the subject of a death sentence for treason.

The cause for this aggravation in the king's attitude can be traced both from Abravanel's writings, and the available royal documents relating to the affair. Abravanel, as we have stated, had enemies who sought his downfall,
and at least at one time he came to attribute to them the king's drastic action. According to him, they coveted his great fortune, and hoped to receive from the king, as gifts, part of his confiscated possessions. Such occurrences were not unusual. Since it was not uncommon for a king to pay debts of gratitude with the property of condemned men, those of the king's favorites who plotted a man's ruin often became the heirs of his fortune. Whether any or all of Abravanel's property was actually thus disposed of, we do not know. João II was certainly not anxious to part with any property which fell into his hands. But he, too, was under obligations. The destruction of the old nobility brought to the fore a new group of friends and advisers, and they were hungry for gain.

The escape of Abravanel from Portugal was, of course, conducive to strengthening suspicion of his guilt, and it may be safely assumed that his enemies were not slow to make the most of this fact. Yet, while his foes were active in denouncing him, there was nobody in the Court to support his pleas. His Christian friends belonged to the old nobility which was now in mortal conflict with the king. In the reign of terror, moreover, which João instituted in the months following Abravanel's escape, hardly anyone would dare say a word in defence of a man who was stigmatized as traitor. Nor was intercession made on his behalf by any of his friends among the Jews. Seized by the general panic, or perhaps persuaded to believe in his guilt, some of them, it appears, even helped João's agents in effecting the confiscation of his fortune.

His foes were thus given a free hand to fasten the nails of their accusations upon him. Gradually a whole case was built up incriminating him as an arch conspirator. Trumped up evidence was submitted to the effect that he participated in a secret meeting of the nobles, together with the Duke of Braganza and the Marquis of Montemor, in which he offered expert opinion on
the poor financial state of the realm, and assured the conspirators that the king would be unable to raise, in the event of rebellion, more than six million reys. It was further charged that Abravanel at that meeting urged the rebels to start the uprising and also undertook to pay the mercenaries whom they planned to bring from Castile. Months later, charges against him were expanded to include him in a second conspiracy against the king which was then being organized by the nobles. According to these, Don Isaac conferred, while on Castilian soil, with Alvaro the deposed Chancellor, who was the rebels' spokesman in Castile, and collaborated with him in furthering the conspiracy. As proof of Abravanel's association with the rebels, assertions were made that when the leaders of the revolt, the Duke of Viseu and the Bishop of Avora, lacked funds to carry out the uprising, they ordered Abravanel to return secretly to Portugal, and there to arrange to have his nephew and son-in-law, Don Joseph Abravanel, grant the rebels funds from the assets which Don Isaac still possessed in Portugal. We know that Joseph Abravanel was the manager of the estates of the Duke of Viseu, and that he fled Portugal on the very day - August 23rd, 1484 - that his master was killed by the king in Setubal. Whether some activity of the nephew played into the hands of Abravanel's enemies and led to the intensification of the king's suspicion against him, we do not know. In any case, on May 30th, 1485 and August 31st, 1485 - two years after Abravanel's escape, and one year after the flight of Joseph - official death sentences were issued respectively against Don Isaac and his nephew.

Within the first months after his escape Abravanel learned about the nature of the plot which was being engineered against him. He knew he was being framed and he also knew that he was powerless to thwart the framing. The unscrupulous tactics of his enemies aroused his indignation, but his complete
helplessness to interfere with their doings, and his evidently futile calls for justice, soon led him to resign any effort to re-establish his position in Portugal. That position, he realized, was lost, and he tried to accept the loss stoically. He could not help pondering, however, about his strange fate and the great irony it held for him. He expected to reap honors from his political services, greater gain - from his financial endeavors. Now his honor lay besmirched and his fortune was gone. Wherever there is punishment, there must be some crime; and searching for his sin, Abravanel came to the conclusion that while he dealt fairly with others, he dealt dishonestly with himself. It was his heated pursuit after temporal values, his neglect of the better side of his being, which brought upon him divine wrath.21 One should not betray one's mission in life!

His mind now turned more and more to the "spiritual and eternal", and as Abravanel tells us, he conducted during that period a series of lectures on the Early Prophets.22 His presence became known in the border area, and before long it produced a group of admirers who, impressed with Abravanel's presentation, urged him to put his comments in writing.23 The lectures covered at least Joshua and Judges and must have extended over a period of two or three months, probably from August to October. Then, Abravanel, seized by a creative urge of a strength and intensity he had never felt before, set about putting his ideas on paper. He worked at a terrific pace and, apparently, with few interruptions. In half a month (October 11 - October 26) he completed his Commentary on Joshua;24 in less than a month (October 31 - November 25) that on Judges;25 and then, in one hundred days (November 30, 1483 - March 8, 1484) his commentary on both books of Samuel.26 Altogether, within four and a half months - from October 11, 1483 to March 8, 1484 - he produced four gigantic volumes comprising words.

The quality of the work is no less surprising than the quantity. While
these commentaries set forth the conclusions of his long and comprehensive studies of the Bible, they embody much more than the product of researches. They represent also the conclusions he arrived at from his own observations in political life. There was indeed a reason for Abravanel's neglect to complete at that time his commentary on Deuteronomy, or other parts of his commentaries on the Pentateuch, and for turning instead to the Early Prophets. For in the framework of a commentary on these books, which present a gallery of human leaders with their faults and weaknesses, their failures and successes, their crimes and virtues and acts of heroism, Abravanel found the most suitable opportunity for incorporating his own observations and experiences in the fields of leadership and government. He was trying to fortify himself, as we have indicated, with a stoical attitude toward the misfortunes which befell him, but his mind remained agitated and sought expression for the thoughts which were aroused and crowded into it, both in connection with his own fate, and the political events in Portugal. This is why these commentaries are so filled or saturated with what we may call "living thoughts". It was perhaps the first time that the most important political part of the Bible was interpreted by a statesman.

But these were not casual, disconnected thoughts referring to specific phenomena or developments which Abravanel presented in these works. There is a human aspect to all these writings, but there is also an all-embracing idea. There was an elaborate theory on history and politics which Abravanel sought to express in these commentaries. And this historical-political concept merges with his religious-philosophical outlook, which as we have seen, found expression in the "Crown", but which here often assumed the character of an aggressive, crusading message. The attacks against the rationalists became sharpened, and also broader in scope. The assault is now directed primarily against the followers and commentators of Maimonides in
Jewry - men like Narboni, Ibn Caspi and Albalag, whom Abravanel places on the same level as Abner, the notorious convert of the 14th century, or in other words, accuses them of religious hypocrisy, intellectual perversion, and deliberate intention to undermine and destroy the moral framework of their people's faith.

This obviously illiberal attitude toward the nationalistic Jewish philosophers is however, redeemed by a display of liberalism in a different way. To substantiate his broad combination of views - in religion, philosophy, history and politics - Abravanel in no way limited his sources to Jewish authorities of the anti-rationalist school. He did not even limit them to Jewish authorities exclusively. Seneca and Cicero and Thomas of Aquinas, Augustine and Jerome and Nicholas of Lyra, and even the convert, Paul of Burgos, as well as a host of other scholars, Christian and Pagan alike, were quoted or otherwise employed by him as contributors to the understanding of the Bible. With unprecedented broadmindedness and tolerance in the history of Biblical exegesis, he extracted the truth - or what appeared to him as truth - from wherever he found it. Hence the particular appeal which his commentaries held - despite the oneness and firmness of their central conception - for Christian as well as for Jewish minds.

The writing of these huge commentaries in such a comparatively short time must have required Abravanel's total concentration. Segura, the small border town, was a suitable place for such work. He was on the point of beginning there his commentary on the first book of Kings, when an event occurred the antecedents of which cannot be clearly traced now. Abravanel entered the services of Ferdinand and Isabella.
The years of Abravanel's stay in Spain formed the last phase in the long era of Jewish history in that country. This was the time in which the anti-Jewish forces which a century before had led his grandfather to conversion, and in consequence, later to flee from Castile, were on the eve of total victory. For in that period the entire state system - ruled with all the efficiency of Ferdinand and Isabella - was bent upon achieving their long sought aim: the destruction and elimination of Spanish Jewry.

In 1483, when Abravanel arrived in Spain, the Inquisition in Castile had reaped a vast harvest and was continuing with full force. The policy against the Marranos had reached the height of its development. The policy against the Jews had similarly been laid down, but for reasons which we shall discuss later, its final implementation was delayed for a few years. In 1483, however, its general aims could be clearly detected.

During the eighties this policy unfolded itself fully, and every passing year was marked by some development that implied a foreboding omen for the Jews. In 1480, at the Cortes in Toledo, it was decreed that Jews must live in separate localities; Christians in Jewish boroughs were to be evacuated, while Jews in Christian neighbourhoods were given two years to find accommodation within their Juderias. Although laws aiming at the segregation of the Jews had been enacted in Spain time and again, they were usually disregarded. This time the law was enforced. In 1482, and from then on annually, the Jews were ordered to pay an exorbitant sum into the treasury of the Moorish war. In 1483, a more drastic step was taken when the Jews of the bishoprics of Seville and Cordova - practically all the Jews of Andalusia - were made the subjects of an expulsion order which was relentlessly carried out. In 1486,
an order of expulsion was issued against the Jews of the Archbishopric of Saragossa as well as of the Bishopric of Albarrazin which comprised the majority of the Jews of Aragon. \(^{34}\) In 1489, the Inquisition commenced proceedings against the Jews of the community of Huesca for alleged conversions of Christians to Judaism. \(^{35}\) The accused, who were the leaders of the community, were convicted and burned at the stake. \(^{36}\) In 1490, the Inquisition began action on the monstrous blood-libel of Laguardia \(^{37}\) which again culminated in convictions and executions. The sum total of that brief period was that the Jews were expelled from the most important districts, forced into the "Ghettos", subjected to exceptionally severe taxation, and attacked by dreadful libels. Nevertheless, to the very end, the Jews of Spain, taken as a whole, had no premonition of impending doom. On the contrary, they came to believe that in Ferdinand they had a guardian, and that despite the limitations imposed upon them, they could look to him for protection and justice. \(^{38}\)

The reason for this delusion must be attributed to a number of misleading factors, and first of all to the shrewdness of the Spanish kings and particularly of Ferdinand of Aragon. The plans of Ferdinand were usually hatched in secrecy, deeply laid, and revealed at the most unexpected moment with as little advance evidence as possible. \(^{39}\) That he had planned the total elimination of the Jews from his dominion in 1483 - when he decreed the expulsion of the Jews from Andalusia - may well be assumed. That he attributed this step at the time to the Inquisition is in full accord with his tactics. In 1483 it was not in his interest to stamp himself, in the eyes of the Jews, as radically anti-Jewish. In 1483 he was still badly in need of Jewish experience and ability in the field of taxation. And - what is more - the expulsion of the Jews from the country in those days would only have increased the power of Granada by the influx of an element which could contribute in many ways to the strengthening of that country's resistance. Ferdinand therefore temporarily
employed a half-measure. By forcing the Jews out of Adalusia and thus compelling them to concentrate in the northern sectors, he gained the enthusiastic support of the Southern cities, which were the main bastions in the war against the Moors and in which the feeling against the Jews ran the highest. But seeking to diminish Jewish embitterment against the Crown, since Jewish co-operation was still essential, he attributed the move to the Inquisition.

That the Jews were inclined to accept his explanations was part of their medieval historic outlook and their general conception of their problem. For centuries, as we have stated, they saw the Church as their persecutor, the king as their defender. That Ferdinand was under the pressure of the Inquisition, that he would follow the clergy to a certain limit, seemed reasonable for them to believe. That he would sell them down the river, and thus depart entirely from the traditional policy of Spain's kings towards the Jews, seemed to them most unlikely. Had Ferdinand shown personal hostility to the Jews in the Court or in his service, they would undoubtedly have been alarmed. But hatred and sadism played little or no role in determining Ferdinand's attitude toward the Jews. What motivated his policy against the Jews - and equally, against the Marranos - was a cold, careful calculation of all the factors involved.

Ferdinand's extreme political shrewdness was matched, moreover, by his mastery in diplomacy. As he fully controlled his words and his countenance, it was difficult even for his closest associates to determine exactly where he stood. But what must be particularly stressed is this: few in his time understood as he did the value of public opinion and few knew as he did how to develop and exploit it as an instrument for attaining political aims. The suggestion that his policy against the Jews and Marranos was inspired by his religious convictions, only shows the extent to which he was successful in
his efforts. Religion was certainly Ferdinand's stock and trade, but religion was hardly anywhere his motive. It was one of his favorite tactics to emphasize that he was merely following the orders of the Pope in all matters relating to the Holy Office. But while he consistently sought to appear as an obedient son of the Church, he cynically ignored or forced the revocation of every protest against the enormities of the Inquisition that the Popes were moved to issue. For protests against the Inquisition were in reality protests against Ferdinand. One word from him could have put an end to all the mass arrests, the inhuman tortures, the lawless executions, the systematic confiscations - in brief, to the whole ghastly performance of the Spanish Inquisition. But this word never came. It is rather preposterous to accuse Torquemada, Deza, or any of their evil functionaries, of major responsibility for the atrocities of the Holy Office. Essentially they were tools of Ferdinand. And Ferdinand liked his tools. If anyone doubts this he should read with what zeal and persistence he defended even the most revolting monsters who were in the service of the Inquisition. That he sometimes scolded though never punished them, must be explained not by his "consideration for Justice", but rather by his practical wisdom, by his desire not to stir up on certain occasions too much opposition and a revulsion of public opinion. If he sometimes saved a man from the clutches of the Inquisition, as was the case with Alfonso de la Caballeria or Luis de Santangel, it was simply because the services of that man were by far more useful for his purposes than the property which his destruction would bring to his treasury. If sometimes crumbs of the condemned's possessions were thrown by Ferdinand or Isabella to the heirs, it was because it was in the interest of the Spanish kings to appear merciful and just. It was part of the shrewd strategem of Ferdinand to retain a certain distance between himself and the Inquisition - for he wanted to reap from it
the maximum benefit without being affected - in so far as possible - by the
odium which it necessarily created. Indeed of all the unscrupulous princes of
the fifteenth century he undoubtedly ranked first, but his main distinction
lay in his ability to mask his ruthlessness with virtue. Not in vain does
Machiavelli present him as the shrewdest of all rulers and the ideal of his
Prince. The fact that the Inquisition turned most of its activity against
the Marranos, was another reason why the Jews failed to realize the precarious­
ness of their position. Caught in the storm center of the persecution, the
Marranos seemed to have diverted enmity from the Jews towards themselves. That
such a conception was erroneous and groundless needs hardly be stated. The
Marranos, as we have seen, were not hated as Jewish Christians, but rather
as Christian Jews; and the difference in the intensity and form of the perse­
cutions, directed against the Marranos and the Jews, were merely differences
in method and timing, and not in the final objectives. Common sense, it would
seem, should have indicated to the Jews that with such a fierce campaign being
conducted against the Marranos in the name of their Jewishness, the Jews could
not possibly escape involvement. But the Jews appear not to have sensed this.
Their natural optimism was bolstered in this case by a religious-psychological
motive which was based on their own attitude toward the Marranos. In addition
to what we have pointed out regarding the growing alienation between the two
groups, it must be remembered that the Marranos produced some of the arch
enemies of the Jews in Spain. It was the Santa Marias who were primarily re­
ponsible for the drastic legislation enacted against Spanish Jewry. It was
the Santa Fes who fought them in public disputations and heaped calumny and
slander upon their religion. It was the De Avilas who openly supported - as
late as 1471! - the hideous blood-libel against them and even burned the leaders
of a Jewish community at the stake. Now the Jews saw the sons of these families
so severely punished by the Inquisition, dragged to the Quemaderas for execution or publicly led across the streets in the humiliating processions of the penitants. Was it not God who decreed this punishment for these betrayers of His Law and His people? Was it not actually bordering on a miracle that while this destructive blaze was sweeping the New Christians, the Jews lived comparatively unharmed? Thus, under the influence of Medieval reasoning, the fate of the New Christians, instead of serving as a warning, rather encouraged the natural— but in this case the false—optimism of the Jews.

The fact that in their financial services and administration Jews occupied top positions, and that Marranos held some of the highest posts in the other governmental departments and in the Court, was another factor which tended to diminish the apprehension of the Jews concerning their future in Spain. The employment of Jews and Marranos in their service was part of the strictly utilitarian policy which both Ferdinand and Isabella followed. It enabled them to exploit needed talent, and at the same time to establish the necessary fiction of their unfailing justice and impartiality. But it is precisely this impression which deceived many Jews. It was considered, with apparently good logic, that the kings would not have placed Jews in their administration if they had contemplated their elimination. To draw another conclusion from this phenomenon would ordinarily not have made sense. In the crafty political game of Ferdinand, with its complicated double-dealings and long-range considerations, it made, however, perfect sense.

Finally, what impressed the Jews more than anything else, and what lulled them most into a feeling of security, was the insistence of the Spanish kings on law and order. Law and order were indeed their passion. They were unconditionally opposed to mob rule and mass violence of every form. They could not tolerate in fact any action except if officially authorized by them.
Any act of persecution therefore which they did not sanction, that is, which did not become law - was sternly opposed by the Spanish kings. If they had a policy against a group, it had to be enforced in the form of the degree, and at the time that they considered appropriate. And this strong insistence on law which the Spanish kings had consistently manifested, coupled with the other deceptive elements in their policy and the successful concealment of the expulsion plan, contributed to the development of that strange feeling of security which we find in those days among the Jews of Spain.

It was at such times and under such rulers that Abravanel came to live in Spain. Like many other men in Spain, he stood before the paradox presented by the conflicting actions and professions of the Spanish kings. Like others, he seems to have been inclined to give them credit or at least the benefit of the doubt. But the times were tense, and despite the optimism which encouraged the Jews to hope for the best, it was impossible not to sense some impending danger. A Jewish or a Marrano courtier in the Court of Ferdinand could not escape the feeling that he was playing with a tiger.

III

In March 1484, when Abravanel was summoned to the Court, Ferdinand and Isabella were in Tarrazona participating in the Aragonese Cortes at which they saw to the adoption of their well-laid plan for extending the Inquisition to Aragon. In Tarrazona they stayed until the middle of May when the king left for the front in the south, and in June Ferdinand was already fighting with his enemies in the heart of Granada. Abravanel's audience with the king, therefore, must have taken place in Tarrazona - a symbolic, ill-auguring beginning for his career as courtier in Spain.
As far as the Spanish Monarchs were concerned, both the extension of the Inquisition and the audience with Abravanel — as much as they differed in significance and implication — were essentially two moves in the same direction. Both were motivated, at least to some extent, by their relentless search for financial means adequate to cope with their war plans at that time. Since September 1483, when the peace-treaty with Granada — concluded only the previous month — was violated by a Moorish foray into Castile, it was clear that the war with the neighboring kingdom would have to be continued to the bitter end. The difficulty involved in the conquest of Granada, however, was highlighted by the heavy losses — and the crushing defeat — the Christians suffered in Axarquia in the spring of 1483. With the hopes for a speedy victory dashed and with an outlook for a grim, long war, the problem of increased resources, as well as that of supplying the armies of invasion, became pressing and acute. The experiences of Abravanel — the former treasurer of a king who was often embroiled in war — might have been considered valuable for these ends.

There can be little doubt Abravanel, who most probably initiated the audience, intended to present to the sovereigns a plan which might help solve their financial difficulties. We have no indication, however, of what transpired at that first and all-important meeting between Abravanel and the Spanish kings. All we can conclude from Abravanel’s remarks is that he made a favorable impression on both the king and queen — and that as a result of that meeting he entered their service.

It would be proper to assume, however, that the sympathetic attitude which the Spanish kings showed Abravanel did not result merely from the impression they gained of him on that occasion. They knew, of course, of the position he occupied in Portugal. They knew he had fled the country for alleged participation in a conspiracy which Ferdinand either backed or
encouraged. They also heard, in all likelihood, from the Princes of Braganza, who were greatly respected in the Court of Ferdinand, high praise for Abravanel's personality and for his craftiness in the field of finance. All this provided sufficient inducement for the sovereigns to meet Abravanel and enlist him in their service. To seek out men of ability and use them was, as is known, one of their distinctions.

Under the political system of Spain, however, Jews could enter the royal service only in the financial field, and that meant primarily in the field of tax farming. The chief tax farmer at the time was Abraham Senior who was simultaneously Rab de le Corte and official head of the Jewish community in Spain. Senior's position in the Court was strong. Besides the ability he revealed in tax-farming, he was a favorite of the queen, who well remembered the signal services he rendered her in critical times. Obviously, Abravanel could accept a position only secondary to that of Senior.

A shrewd man, Senior must have realized that he had no reason to fear from the intrusion of Abravanel. A "faithful observer of the laws of friendship" he could have felt that Abravanel was of the same kind. And Senior must have welcomed Abravanel's cooperation also for other reasons. He was then 72 years old and beset with difficult problems. It was not easy to meet, under the strain of war, the increasing demands of Ferdinand and Isabella. He soon must have recognized Abravanel's great knowledge in matters of taxation and tax-farming, and he was undoubtedly strongly impressed with the personality of the famous courtier.

Abravanel thus assumed tax farming responsibilities in Senior's elaborate system. That he was in a position to assume such responsibilities is another proof that he succeeded in transferring at least a small share of his fortune from Portugal. In August, 1484, when his son-in-law, Joseph, arrived in Castile, while fleeing Joao's wrath, he might have reinforced
Abravanel's finances by loans or partnership. As the former treasurer of the Duke of Viseu, and as both Abravanel's son-in-law and nephew - the son of Don Isaac's brother, Samuel - Joseph must have been a man of great wealth.

The man of finance and the man of action were now fully reawakened in Abravanel. Tax farming was an exacting business and Abravanel was undoubtedly driving hard to rebuild his family's fortune. His financial ability again proved itself, and his undertakings, which must have been modest in the beginning, greatly expanded before long. He farmed the alcabalas of Requena as well as the salings of Atienza. He farmed the alcabalas of the Marquisate of Villena, and the servicios and montazgos of numerous localities in the central and southern economically important regions. By 1488 his tax-farming activity must have brought him a large fortune. For from that year on we have repeated evidence of huge loans - comprising millions of maravedis - which he made to the Queen and to the treasury of the war.

Abravanel, beginning in Spain from mediocre level, was thus again becoming a financial power. And just as he rose in the sphere of finance, he also increased his influence in the Court. He became befriended with the chief courtiers and the most powerful man in the kingdom, and he knew how to maintain and develop that friendship. What is more, he earned the growing respect of both Ferdinand and Isabella. He even became Isabella's private financial and commercial representative.

The limit of his rise in Spain, however, must be clearly recognized. Politically as well as financially, Abravanel's position in Spain never equalled his position under the Portuguese kings. In Portugal Abravanel was a power. He had direct responsibility for the management of state-affairs either through his influence on the king or on the great nobles who were the powers behind the king. Under Ferdinand and Isabella, Abravanel - and this applies to any other Jew - had no say in any decision which concerned Spanish politics as a whole. Not only
officially, but also unofficially, his activity and advice were strictly confined to certain problems in the financial field. The only point where Abravanel could touch upon the general policies of the state was the latter's position on the Jewish question, or in other words, by representing Jewish interests in the Court.

That Abravanel, during his services to the Spanish Kings, was involved in the representations the Jews made in the Court, hardly needs proof. His experience in dealing with kings and magnates, his direct relations with the Spanish sovereigns, the general prestige which his name evoked, and his great, overpowering personality, combined, together with other qualities, to make him the logical spokesman of the Jews. The loyalty and tactfulness of manner, moreover, he consistently displayed toward Senior, induced the latter to seek his co-operation. In addition Senior, a man of no great stature, was disliked by the leading Jews of Spain, particularly because of his religious laxity and low scholastic level. Abravanel possessed what Senior lacked, and he came to be considered - at least shortly before the expulsion - the unofficial head of Spanish Jewry and its chief representative at the Court.

Politics and finances thus again exhausted most of Abravanel's time and strength. His extended tax-farming, the services he performed for the Queen, his representations in the Court, which in those war years often moved required extensive travelling. He changed his place of residence from the border-district of Valencia to a more central locality - first perhaps to Segovia, then to Alcala de Henares, and finally to Guadalajara, the home of Spain's greatest Jewish scholar, Aboab. It seems, however, that he could spend little time at home. Within one year we find him in places as remote from each other as Valladolid in the North, Saragossa in the East, Valencia and Murcia in the South. Consequently there were only rare occasions when his mind was free from the great pressure of the manifold responsibilities he
assumed. And in order to be able to do some work on problems of a spiritual nature, he had, as he tells us, to "steal time during the day, or steal time during the night".

On such "stolen time" he thus writes in Molina, at the home of a friend, Abraham Carfati, his introduction to the third part of the Guide in which he combats Maimonides' conception of angels on the basis of his own interpretation of the symbols of Ezikiel's "chariot". This is the only work we know for certain that Abravanel composed in Spain, and from it we see that, under Spanish conditions, his mystical trend of thinking only strengthened.

In Spain, the cradle of Jewish mysticism in the Middle Ages, Abravanel no doubt found in some of the intellectuals a spiritual kinship and understanding for his views. He must have been impressed also with the learning of those who were not mystical at all. Spanish Jewry, although reduced numerically, was still rich in great minds and brilliant scholars, and it was because of these that Abravanel maintained that high admiration for the Jews of Spain which we find expressed in his writings.

His standing in the Court, his material success, his leadership in the community, and, above all, the moral atmosphere of the Jewish scholarly circles made his life in Spain - difficult as it may be for us to comprehend - a happy and memorable period. But the period was just drawing to a close. From 1488 the shadow of the Inquisition loomed larger and larger upon the Jew of Spain. In November 1491 the blood libel of Laguardia ended with a formal verdict against the Jews as practicers of ritual murder. But on January 2, 1492 Granada capitulated, and the Jewish leaders might have hoped that the end of the war would lead to a decrease in religious agitation. The following few months were indeed uneventful. A strange peace prevailed; but it was the calm before the storm. When the edict of expulsion was announced,
it came like a thunderbolt out of the clear sky, shattering, at last, the cobweb of illusions in which the Jews of Spain had lived.

IV

The edict of expulsion was signed in Granada on March 31, 1492, evidently without giving the Jewish Courtiers, who, in all likelihood, were at that time at the court, any advance notice. As soon as the edict was signed, however, the Jewish courtiers learned about it. They immediately requested an audience with the king, and the audience was granted.

The secrecy with which the edict was prepared, the totality of its scope, and the fact that it was this time related to the sovereign and not, as previously, to the Inquisition, were of course discouraging symptoms. The Jews at the Court could not be too hopeful; and yet they were not alarmed. They still believed they could avert disaster.

Abravanel was the chief spokesman of the Jews - at least unofficially. The other representatives were the aged Senior - now 80 years old - and his son-in-law, Melamed, who, since 1487, was the chief farmer of taxes in Castile. In 1491 he was instrumental in reorganizing Castile's system of taxation. He must have been a man of great ability and considerable influence in the Court.

The moment in which Abravanel and his colleagues struggled with the Spanish Kings for the life of their people was one of the most dramatic events in Jewish history. Yet we have only little information as to what transpired in the Royal cabinet at the time they addressed Ferdinand with their requests to cancel the deadly order. The arguments employed on that occasion were not transmitted to us; but we do know that Abravanel's presentation was of especial eloquence and force. Even years later, despite the
expulsion which that presentation failed to avert, the echo of its effect was reverberating in the stories of the exiles from Spain.

Under the impact of this strong intervention, the first aim of the Jews was achieved: the matter was made subject to reconsideration, and the publication of the edict was temporarily suspended. Ferdinand was obviously impressed with what he heard. He wanted perhaps to think matters over, and that was undoubtedly all he said, in his cautious and non-committal manner, to the representatives of the Jews. Abravanel and his friends however must have felt encouraged. The attitude of the King gave room for hope. And what is more, the suspension of the publication of the edict provided them with valuable time in which they could organize and bring to bear greater pressure upon the King.

Abravanel then appealed to his friends in the court, who were the "first men in the Kingdom" and determined representations were made by the latter in support of the Jewish plea. Among the chief courtiers were some of the great nobles - men like the Cardinal of Mendoza, The Marquis of Cadiz and Alphonso de Aguilar who were not imbued with fanaticism against the Jews. In view of the record of these men in the early history of the Inquisition, each of them might have been considered a potential advocate - and might have acted - on behalf of the Jews.

It was perhaps from his reaction to their Christian friends that the Jews learned more clearly where Ferdinand stood. To the courtiers who interceded on behalf of the Jews Ferdinand undoubtedly communicated his decision to go ahead with the expulsion order. The situation clearly called for a second meeting with the king, and it was probably then that Senior and Abravanel decided to fortify his urgent pleas with a gold offer.

According to Abravanel the Jews offered to the Crown the maximum sum
they could possibly muster. It seems that Ferdinand again evinced interest, and yet it must be assumed that he was again most careful not to commit himself in any manner. Perhaps he said that he appreciated the Jews' attitude, and perhaps he even asked what they meant by a "maximum" when the Jewish representatives, prepared for the question, threw on the scales a huge sum, perhaps that of 300,000 ducats. The effect of such a figure must have been somewhat reflected in the attitude of the greedy King. The hopes of the Jews were again revived.

Nevertheless it soon all proved illusory, for when Abravanel and Senior saw the King the third time, perhaps to receive his final answer, it was clear that the offer had fallen flat. Ferdinand must have indicated that he found it impossible to revoke the edict, and in order to end the unpleasant pressure which was concentrated against him, he perhaps indicated that the expulsion was not merely a decision of the king of Aragon but also of the queen of Castile. In their despair, the Jews might have taken such a remark not as an excuse, but as an explanation, and as a hint for action in a new direction.

Abravanel and Senior by now must have realized that they were bucking their heads against an iron wall. They had one more chance, they thought, to bring about the revocation of the order - and that was by changing the position of the Queen. Abravanel, it seems, decided to take a different stand. Entreaties, arguments, bribes, were of no avail. There should be threats.

He now spoke to the Queen - the haughty, fanatic, and often ferocious Isabella - not like her financial agent, not even like a cautious diplomatic courtier. He spoke to her now like the scion of the House of David and as a representative of an unconquered - and unconquerable - people. He spoke to her, moreover, like a statesman and a prophet, whose voice carries the truth of history. If Isabella thought that by measures like the expulsion, the Jews
could be brought to surrender or to extinction, she was greatly mistaken. He pointed out to her the eternity of the Jewish people, that they had outlived all powers that attempted to destroy them, that it was beyond human capacity to destroy the Jewish people and that those who tried to do so only invited upon themselves divine punishment and disaster. Isabella, who had a mystic core in her soul, could understand such an argument, but her reactions must have been along the same lines. She too invoked the name of God, but of course to prove the propriety of the move. And she left no room for illusions. When the discussion was over both Abravanel and Senior knew that the verdict against the Jews of Spain was sealed.

Only a few remarks were preserved of what Isabella said on that occasion, but these not only help us to understand the course of the discussion, but also offer decisive proof that Abravanel and Senior were utterly mistaken when they attributed chief responsibility for the expulsion to the Queen rather than the King. "The king's heart," she said, "is in the hands of the Lord, as the rivers of water. He turns it withersoever He will." There is no need for further confession of the weakness of the Queen's influence in that issue. It was the "king's heart" that insisted upon the plan, and it was God, and not the Queen, who could influence him in this matter. Isabel was undoubtedly in favour of the expulsion, and yet she was not the moving spirit behind it. Another statement of hers made on that occasion brings this out even more clearly: "Do you believe," she said to the Jewish representatives, "that this comes upon you from us? The Lord hath put this thing into the heart of the King." It was Ferdinand then who decided upon the expulsion and it was Ferdinand who was most determined to implement it.

In all this there was a typical example of Ferdinand's diplomatic tactics and his ability to deceive and outwit the party with whom he negot-
iated. For this heartless and ruthless man had a passion for appearing considerate and a talent for shifting to others the responsibility for his cruelties. Abravanel placed major responsibility upon the Queen, because Isabel was more open minded and impulsive. But the idea of the expulsion must have been for a long time fixed in the king's mind.

No amount of pleading and no weight of moral argument would have swayed Ferdinand from his decision. For, from the expulsion of the Jews, Ferdinand expected to reap a considerable financial profit. The argument which was advanced, that no economic calculation could have moved Ferdinand to decree the expulsion, as he could easily see the loss which Spain would suffer by the departure of an industrious element, does not hold water. In the same way it may be argued that Ferdinand could foresee the destructive economic results which were implied in his political measures against the Marranos. But Ferdinand had a different economic policy toward the Jews - whether Jews by race only or also by religion - and a different calculation.

Once, as we have indicated, he came to the conclusion that Spain would not absorb these groups, he wanted to be the one to effect their liquidation, and with maximum immediate advantage.

The immediate profits of the expulsion of the Jews were incomparably greater than any possible increase in the revenues which the Jews might bring in in decades. Their taxes in the years prior to the expulsion did not constitute an especially large income. By the expulsion of the Jews, however, Ferdinand was to receive numerous possessions which he could use in many ways for the settlement of many of the accounts and obligations which resulted from the Granadan war. To revoke the expulsion without obtaining from the Jews a large financial profit would indeed be, to his way of thinking, absurd. Yet, to get their money and revoke the order would be even less
wise. For it would lay bare the tactics of the Spanish kings, and bring open conviction upon them that they were selling religion for money. They had on their hands the constant problem of defeating the charge that the entire blood letting of the Inquisition was merely for financial gain. They had a hard time to deny that charge, but still it was possible to counteract it. What was done in individual cases in the darkness which surrounded the Inquisition's procedures was a matter of conjecture. But here was a matter which had to be handled in daylight. To cancel the edict for financial compensation would thus be impossible. The matter would not remain secret even one day. It would compromise the Inquisition beyond recovery. It would ruin the prestige of the sovereigns at home and abroad. It is obvious that the balance of argument weighed heavily against such a move. Abravanel's persuasions, coupled as they were by a large financial offer, could not therefore succeed.

When the edict was finally made public (April 29 - May 31), it was clear that nothing could be done to revoke it. Until the day of the expulsion but three months remained. This was a frightfully short time not only for making financial arrangements, but also for the basic question of emigration. The Jews of Spain knew they had to leave the country. They did not know, however, where they could go. Abravanel, too, was confronted with the problem of finding a refuge for his family. He could not return to Portugal - where most of Castile's Jews turned - and Navarre was too ridden with hatred for Jews and much under Ferdinand's influence to offer a secure haven. Since, as it appears, he would settle in a Moslem country, only as a last resort, there remained only one reasonable possibility: Italy.

The family hastily prepared for departure. Large debts were collected, funds were mobilized; but their major problem was how to get these funds out
of Spain. As it was impossible to take out gold and jewelry, most of Abravanel's newly acquired fortune must have again been lost. But some of it, it seems, he managed to save, probably by the medium of bills of exchange, and he also succeeded in getting from Ferdinand a special permit for both himself and his son-in-law to take out of the country two thousand ducats in gold and other valuables. Ferdinand, of course, would not do such a favor without substantial profit. In return, the Crown received from Abravanel, the right to collect for itself debts totalling more than one million maravedis — a sum ten times larger than what Abravanel was permitted to take with him out of his own money.

Yet it was a friendly gesture on the part of Ferdinand. It was an outstanding privilege which he granted to Abravanel—apparently in recognition of his services to the court. Ferdinand was indeed most reluctant to lose these services. Both he and Isabel made strenuous efforts to obtain the conversion of the three Jews at the Court — Senior, Melamed and Abravanel—who were leading forces in their financial administration. Their conversion would have saved their services for the court and would be regarded, in addition, as a great victory for the religious efforts of the Spanish Kings.

Under the pressure of Ferdinand and Isabella, Senior and Melamed yielded. On June 15th, both were baptized in the old church of Santa Maria de Guadalupe in Valladolid. The sponsors of Senior were the King, the Queen and the Cardinal of Mendoza, the "third king of Spain." It was perhaps hoped that Senior's conversion would induce Abravanel to follow suit. But when it became clear that Abravanel was adamant, it appears that a scheme developed in the court, to steal his grandson, the son of Judah Abravanel, who was at that time only one year old, and convert him to Christianity. It was probably hoped that the conversion of the grandson would detain his parents in Spain, and, in view of the great affection between Don Judah and Don Isaac, would lead the
latter to conversion. The Abravanelas however learned of the scheme in time, and, as they apparently were not yet prepared for departure, they sent the child, accompanied by his nurse, across the border to Portugal, from where they evidently planned to bring him later to Italy.

Toward the end of July, \textsuperscript{116} Don Isaac and his family finally boarded in Valencia \textsuperscript{117} the vessel bound for Italy. It was the second time that his life was shattered, that he was uprooted from his home, that he saw his labor and his fortune once more disappearing like a column of smoke. Again he had the feeling as if he had sold his soul to the devil, and had gotten nothing in return. But the personal loss was now minimized in the welter of the national tragedy. Here he was in the midst of the exiled, leaving a land where his forefathers had lived for centuries upon centuries. Was the exile another episode in the long tragedy of Jewish wandering, or perhaps it represented a move in a different scheme? There were many among the exiles who believed that the expulsion was actually the beginning of the return, that the exodus from Spain might be comparable to that from Egypt.\textsuperscript{118} Could it possibly be true?

While watching the shores of Spain disappearing in the distance, Abravanel must have pondered over the unknown objectives to which the hand of God was leading His people.
The land to which Don Isaac and his family, as well as many other exiles were heading, could hardly be considered, when taken as a whole, as a haven for the Jewish exiles from Spain. Of the ten states of Italy in the north, neither the five republics (Venice, Genoa, Florence, Lucca and Siena), nor the four Duchies (Savoy, Milan, Modena and Ferrara) nor again the little Marquisate of Mantua was prepared to admit these exiles. The Italian cities were the first in Europe to drive the Jews out of their limits, and throughout the centuries of the later Middle Ages, they persistently opposed the settlement of Jews. The Jewish communities in the Italian cities were in consequence extremely small. They consisted mostly of especially privileged Jews who were admitted for particular functions. They were traders with the East who, while crossing Italy were tolerated to the extent they brought profit to the city. They were physicians whose services were needed by Christians. They were bankers who offered cheap credit to the poorer elements and who were often invited to the cities - notably to Venice and Florence - for the specific purpose of providing such credits. In cities where republican rule was entrenched, like Venice and Genoa, restrictions upon entry of Jews were severe. In others where a strong patrician family was in power - as was the case with the Medici, in Florence or the Dukes of Este in Ferrara - in other words, where the democratic elements were weakened -
restrictions on Jewish settlement were somewhat eased and the Jews settled in somewhat larger numbers. But no state in northern Italy, whether Republican or oligarchic, would permit the influx of a large number of Jews, and least of all would they be inclined to allow the entry of an element like the exiles from Spain. Since the latter had left Spain without money, they could not be considered even as money lenders. They could be regarded only as potential craftsmen and traders who would offer competition to the poor middle class. This, in brief, was the attitude of the cities towards the admission of the Jews of Spain.

The attitude of the Papal states, comprising the center of Italy, was not much different. Instead of the opposition of the burgher class, there was here the opposition of the church. In the second half of the fifteenth century the Roman Popes were utilitarian rather than doctrinaire, but even so the admission of a large number of Jews would be little to their advantage. Immediate large gifts of money would do much to influence the decisions of the Papacy in those days, but the exiles from Spain could offer little to attract the interest of the Papal Court.

But in Naples conditions were different. In this kingdom - which consisted of the southern half of Italy - the general circumstances were similar to those in the monarchies in other parts of Europe before the development of absolutism. Here neither the burghers, nor the church, but the king - and the king alone - was the factor which determined the policy toward the Jews. It is true that the Neapolitan princes at the time - Ferrante, the king and his son Alfonso - manifested a strong desire for centralization, and in the course of their struggle against the nobility, they used the same drastic measures employed by Joao in Portugal, i.e., summary executions of the great barons. But unlike Joao, or indeed other absolutists, they failed to find a way, or
understand the need for obtaining the support of the people for their plans. And thus, while they were opposed by the nobility they were simultaneously hated by the people. Having developed the habit of ruling with an iron hand and of giving little heed to the wishes of the populace, the Neapolitan princes had no objection whatever to increase the Jewish element. On the contrary, they welcomed the idea. It meant the increase of an element loyal to the crown, and it meant a potential rise in the commercial development of the Neapolitan kingdom which was, from a commercial point of view, lagging behind the northern states.

On August 24, 1492, nine caravels arrived in the port of Naples carrying with them Jewish exiles from Spain. The journey from Spain proved to be a disaster. The ship masters were ruthless, cruel and avaricious. The vessels were overcrowded and ill provided. Sanitary conditions were such as to invite disease, and the ships indeed became plague-ridden. All these calamities combined to bring the exiles - after weeks of suffering - to the end of their resources. A Genoese historian who witnessed some of them, as their boat passed through his city's harbour, writes that "one might have taken them for spectres, so emaciated were they, so cadaverous in their aspect, and with eyes so sunken; they differed in nothing from the dead, except in the power or motion, which indeed they scarcely retained."5

The description is reminiscent of the Jews who survived in the German concentration camps of the last war. And the condition of many of the exiles was indeed similar. The plague was already strong when they arrived in Genoa. There they were not permitted entry into the city. They were allowed to stay on the mole which was completely surrounded by sea and "was the only quarter vouchsafed to the wretched animals."7 This was the attitude of every other
city into which they sought entry. It was with trembling hearts that this hapless human cargo surveyed the majestic Bay of Naples and the city on the rising slopes behind it. Would the Neapolitan government give them asylum, or would they be further subjected to these wanderings which only implied for them agony and doom? When Ferrante granted their request to land, one can imagine the feelings of gratitude which filled the hearts of the exiles.º

Don Isaac and his family were not among those who landed in Naples on August 24th. They arrived there not before another month had passed.º As we have stated, Don Isaac was with the main group of exiles which left Spain on the last day of July, and either because of the larger number of vessels, or because for other reasons, that group travelled much slower. The Abravanelis must have made the same journey of the various western Italian ports with the same disappointing and distressing results.¹º The length of the voyage must have only increased the suffering of the exiles,¹¹ but the welcome they received in Naples by the king obliterated much of the sorrow they had experienced.¹² Ferrante continued to be friendly, and to the leader of the exiles, Abravanel, he showed particular consideration. For he offered him an invitation to the Court and even a position in his service.¹³ What could Abravanel think of the king and his son Alfonso, with whom he shared government? Princes of mercy and righteousness," he called them.¹⁴ In view of their attitude toward the Spanish exiles, this description is understandable.

The impression which we gain of these princes from other contemporaries is quite different. Thus speaking of Alfonso, Ferrante's son, the French Ambassador, Philippe de Comines, says that "never was any prince more bloody, wicked, inhuman, lascivious, or gluttonous than he. Yet his father was more dangerous, because no man knew when he was angry or pleased; for he would betray men in the midst of his entertainments and caresses."¹⁵ Actually
Ferrante and his son Alfonso were no worse than the other despotic princes of the time. They were ruthless and unscrupulous in their dealings with opponents. But they were also capable of repaying generously for loyal services. They were in any case no more ferocious than Joao II or Ferdinand the Catholic.

Abravanel must have occupied a position of importance in Ferrante’s court. Also, this position seems to have been connected with some great financial enterprise. Describing his conditions in Naples in later years, Abravanel writes that his “wealth grew immensely” and that he became “as famous as the country’s greatest magnates.” Indeed two years after his arrival, we find Abravanel as the most trusted courtier in the suite of the Neapolitan kings. He seems to have had little or no difficulty in adjusting himself to the new court. Ferrante I was the illegitimate son of Alfonso V, who was member of the Aragonese royal house and uncle of Ferdinand of Spain. The system of government, the manners, the language were all the same as in Aragon. It was like serving in a Spanish Court, but it was a court as in the good old days, when the monarchic policy was still essentially pro-jewish.

There was however need to be on guard. The clamor against the Jews in Naples was rising. The influx of the new-comers was considered by the populace as an onslaught upon their rights and interests for which they held the rulers responsible. Ferrante was under great pressure. And it was especially difficult to resist this pressure because of the ravages made by the plague which the exiles brought with them. “The disorder was so malignant and spread with such frightful celerity as to sweep off more than twenty thousand inhabitants of the city in the course of the year, whence it extended its devastation over the whole Italian peninsula.”

Ferrante however remained firm. The Crown helped to combat the disease. Special camps were established for the afflicted, doctors were mobilized, and
food was allotted by the Crown to the destitute whose number among the exiles was increasing. That Abravanel had a certain share in fortifying the king's pro-Jewish attitude, it is reasonable to assume. In any case, he came to be recognized, not only by the colony of exiles but by the Jews of Naples as well, as their leader and representative in the Court.

His services in the court, however, seemed not to have been as exhausting as in Portugal and Spain. For barely half a year after his arrival, Abravanel even found it possible to return to his writings, and towards the end of his first year in Naples he completed his commentary on the two books of Kings. The period of the Kings was one which culminated in national disaster and exile. In the framework of this commentary, he could and indeed did incorporate his thoughts and feelings about the Spanish exile - the latest and most calamitous disaster the Jews had experienced in the Diaspora. The problem of the exile and the fate of his people indeed occupied him greatly in those days. The cruelties which he and others had witnessed were bound to have a shattering effect upon the mind of many a believer. Is this world ruled by any moral principle? Is there reward for virtue, punishment for evil? Is there indeed a God in this world? And if God does govern the world, why does He not manifest His powers? These were the questions which disturbed the minds of many, led faithful souls to despair and engendered a scepticism which threatened to breed cynicism and apostasy. To answer these questions, Abravanel wrote in Naples - soon after completing his commentary on Kings, a work entitled "Eternal Justice," in which he sought to indicate the ways in which God demonstrates his Justice in this world. Another work he planned to write at that time was to be entitled "The Days of the World." In it Abravanel sought to present a survey of the course of Jewish history, analyze the impact of the history of the world upon that of the Jewish people, and
demonstrate the indestructibility of the Jews by their ability to weather any storm and survive any persecution. In other words, in *The Days of the World* Abravanel sought to offer historic support to the moral thesis he expounded in *Eternal Justice*.

Naples was a great center of Humanism. It was the seat of the *Pontanian Academy* whose fame was great throughout Italy. The academic head Giovanni Pontano, was also Chancellor of the Kingdom and there is little doubt that Abravanel had personal relations with him. The views of Pontano and Abravanel, however, were far apart. Pontano was a confirmed Aristotelian, while Abravanel, as we have seen, was opposed to Aristotle. Aristotelianism was also the prevailing theory among the chief Jewish intellectuals of Italy like Judah Messer Leon, a native of Naples and the more famous Eliah de Medigo who was fighting the new Platonic movement.27 Yet the neo-Platonic trend which was strong in the north, especially in Florence, had its representatives in Naples, too. Pro-Platonic especially was the famous preacher Fra Egidio da Viterbo, who, like Pico de la Mirandola, was also interested in Kabbalistic studies.28 The extent to which Abravanel was influenced - if indeed he was influenced at all - by any of the Neapolitan spiritual leaders, it is perhaps impossible to determine. But it would not be too far-fetched to assume that his anti-Aristotelian position was encouraged in Italy where a Neo-Platonic movement existed and where Aristotelianism was sharply attacked not so much from a religious as from a philosophical point of view. The fact, furthermore, that his son, Judah, became a confirmed Neo-Platonist within the first years of their stay in Italy,29 must have had a considerable effect on Abravanel, and it was perhaps in those days that we should attribute the beginning of Abravanel's own positive attitude toward Plato. A few years later this attitude found expression in his philosophical thesis, *The Deeds of God*.30
His position in the Court, the intellectual atmosphere, as well as his renewed literary activity, was a source of gratification for the exile from Spain. It was the third time he had built up his home after it had been repeatedly destroyed by political persecution. This time, he hoped, his home would stand. But, as if to prove the ephemeral nature of human happiness, a heavy storm was gathering around Naples which threatened to bring ruin and disaster upon the Neapolitan kingdom.

II

During the last decade of the fifteenth century, Italy, at the zenith of its Renaissance culture, was also at the height of political unrest. Divided into a dozen political entities, the Italian states were not based on like principle; they were monarchic, papal, feudal, and republican. And to the bitter strife for power which raged within these states there was added an endless inter-state conflict. Politically Italy was a house of cards. The whole structure was so delicate that any serious trouble — from within or without — could easily upset it. And such trouble was brewing at the very time that the exiles from Spain settled in Naples.

Ferrante I had claims to Milan. According to Ferrante, control over Milan belonged to his grandson, who had already passed his minority, but who was held in subjection by Ludovico Sforza, the real power in Milan and officially the regent. To offset these claims, Sforza once incited France, to whose royal family Naples had belonged, to annex Naples to the French Crown. 32

The problem then which upset the Neapolitan kingdom since the middle of 1493 was the danger of a French invasion. Charles VIII, the French monarch, was reported eager to conquer the kingdom. He knew that Naples could not muster against him military forces which would be a match for his army. The only factor which held him back was Ferdinand of Aragon. Naples was ruled by a branch of the Aragonese House and the official relations between Ferdinand
and his kinsmen were marked by apparent friendliness and cordiality. Yet it
was no secret that Ferdinand, too, had aspirations to Naples. It was clear that
France would not dare to attack Naples if it received a clear intimation from
Ferdinand that he would resist such aggression. The efforts of both France and
Naples were now bent upon securing Ferdinand’s cooperation. A tense diplomatic
wrestling ensued in which Ferdinand of Spain, while holding the best cards,
played his game with utmost care, and without revealing to either side his exact
position and intentions. It may be assumed that at this juncture Don Isaac’s
opinions and advice, based as they were on his own acquaintance with Ferdinand,
were considered by Neapolitan rulers as worthy of especial attention.

On January 25, 1494, Ferrante died, and in August Charles invaded Italy.
When a few months later, he reached Rome - and the last buffer state separating
him from Naples had proved to be no shield for the kingdom - it was clear that
the days of Naples were numbered. The hatred of both the nobility and the people
toward the ruling Neapolitan monarch, Alfonso, now manifested itself openly.

Fearing insurrection and realizing his inability to mobilize, under these cir-
cumstances, resistance to the French, Alfonso, seized with panic, resolved to
abdicate the throne and retire to Sicily. He was, however, so fearful that at
the last minute he would be prevented from implementing his plan by the rising
populace that, according to Guicciardini "he communicated his intention only to
his mother-in-law, keeping it even from his brother and his son."33 The fact
is, nevertheless, that he revealed his secret also to Don Isaac Abravanel who
accompanied him to Sicily.34

It is difficult to see any purpose in Abravanel’s consent to accompany
the king and leave his family, in confused times and in a land facing the
invasion of the French who were known for their hostility to the Jews, except
that of sheer loyalty and friendship to the king. Alfonso was in a state of
mind which could arouse the compassion of a faithful courtier. Seeing Alfonso overwhelmed with fear, his kingdom facing ruin, his people betraying him, and with hardly a friend in whom to confide, Abravanel undoubtedly well remembered how this monarch and his father treated him and his brethren since the time they reached the shores of Naples. Despite all considerations to the contrary, he felt he could not abandon the king even though he had abdicated, at his hour of greatest distress.

Thus, on January 21, 1494, Abravanel accompanying Alfonso left Naples for Mazzara, a coastal town in southern Sicily which Alfonso received the previous year as a gift from Ferdinand of Spain. One month after their departure — on February 22 — Charles VIII entered Naples. The news of the occupation of the city was accompanied by information regarding the pogrom which the Neapolitan population, assisted by the French, made against the Jews. The pogrom, it seems, almost destroyed the Neapolitan Jewish community. Although bloodshed appears to have been limited, many Jews were sold into slavery while others were forced to embrace Christianity in order to escape this fate. The Jewish quarters, in addition, were thoroughly sacked and among the homes plundered was also that of Abravanel. "My entire enormous wealth was robbed," he writes, and much of his precious library as well as the manuscript of *Eternal Justice* were lost. The outrages of the French soldiery and the populace led thousands of Jews to flee the city, and although order was restored, upon the insistence of Charles, this migration seems to have continued. Among those who left Naples after the pogrom was Abravanel's son, Judah, who settled in Genoa as physician. Don Isaac, too, seems to have then decided to move the remainder of his family to Turkey. In Saloniki lived his youngest son, Samuel, and Abravanel sent instructions to his family in Naples to prepare for departure to Saloniki.
But in the meantime the political scene changed. On March 31, a Holy League was formed, comprising the Pope, the Emperor, Spain, Venice and Milan, with the aim of ousting the French from Italy. Such a powerful combination, Abravanel might have realized, could restore the Neapolitans to their former position. Abravanel was undoubtedly informed of the move which led to that alliance even prior to the official formation of the League. It is most likely that he then instructed his family to stay on in Naples for some additional time.

According to some contemporaries, Alfonso's intention at the time of his abdication was to abandon forever any interest in politics and devote himself to a life of social seclusion and religious meditation. The man who, as Comines said, "Never kept Lent in his life, nor so much as pretended to do it," now lived, according to the same source, "a most strict and austere life, serving God at all hours both of day and night, as the monks did in their convent, spending his time in prayers, fasting and alms." This is another sign that Comines was too extreme in his denunciation of the king's character. A man who was capable of such a transformation was not a corrupt criminal. But it would be wrong to assume that Alfonso spent his entire time only in fasting and prayer. Despite his abdication he was considered by the allies, and especially by Venice, as a king in exile, and hardly a move was taken without consulting him. Abravanel therefore was not cut off from political life, but, as we may readily assume, was fully informed of developments and was offering the king counsel on current problems. Perhaps he also succeeded in reviving Alfonso's interest in the throne.
On April 20, the King, accompanied by Abravanel, left Mazzara for Palermo. A Spanish fleet headed by Admiral Requesens was expected any day in Sicily, and plans for the invasion of Naples from the South were already under way. It is clear that Alfonso as well as his Jewish counsellor desired to be nearer to the scene of events. In Palermo, where Alfonso was accepted with royal honors, they stayed, therefore, only a short time, and proceeded to Messina which was the major base of the Spanish and Neapolitan invasion forces. In the second half of May, Ferrante was already fighting in Calabria, and on May 24 a Spanish expeditionary force arrived which was headed by Gonsalvo de Cordova who, in the course of the Italian wars, was destined to become famous as the Great Captain. Gonsalvo, the brother of Alfonso de Aquilar was a familiar figure in the court of the Spanish Kings. His attitude toward Jews was marked by that liberality which was typical of most of the great nobles in Spain and was particularly characteristic of his famous brother. Abravanel undoubtedly knew him from Spain, and although Gonsalvo stayed in Messina only two days, it can be safely assumed that he met Abravanel, Alfonso's closest friend and companion. It was perhaps this renewed acquaintance with the Spanish general that laid the foundation for the friendly relations which later developed between Gonsalvo and Abravanel's son, Judah.

The arrival of the Spanish expeditionary force, together with the events that preceded it — the landing of the naval forces of Requesens, the first victories of Ferrante in Calabria, and the departure of Charles VIII from Naples (on May 20), were hopeful signs for future developments. Most important of all, under French oppressive rule the attitude of the Neapolitans toward their former monarch changed in the extreme, and "now" as we are told, "became agreeable to them the name hateful of Alfonso, calling just severity that which they had wont to note in him for cruelty, and interpreting
to true sincerity of mind that which wrongfully they had wont to consider pride and fierceness." Of this change of heart, the abdicated king must have soon learned in Messina, and there is little doubt that his earlier vague desire to re-ascend the throne of Naples— a desire which, as we have indicated, must have been nurtured by Abravanel— now became a concrete wish. Nevertheless, it was in those days that Alfonso, "despaired and discontented", left Messina and returned to Palermo where he entered the monastery of Monreale. The reason for Alfonso's "despair" must be sought in the strained relations between himself and his son. "These were times," writes Guicciadini, while discussing the morals of political circles, "in which the love of children was rare for their parents," and there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the attitude of Ferrante II toward his father did not represent one of those rare cases. The meeting between the abdicated and ruling kings must have been a cause of great disappointment and deep grief for Alfonso, and we may assume also for Abravanel. If Abravanel had any hopes to become a power in Naples under a renewed Alfonsoine rule, these hopes must have now been shattered, and when Alfonso resolved on escaping the world by assuming the habit of monastic life, there was clearly no sense, as there was no possibility, for Abravanel, the Jew, to follow him. Abravanel then remained in Messina, but, as is obvious for merely a brief time. Messina, it must be remembered, was Spanish soil, and the presence of a Jew there was tolerated only so long as he was part of the King's suite. To stay there after the departure of the King was undoubtedly difficult or at least most unpleasant. Abravanel might nevertheless have lingered on for a few more days, perhaps considering passage to Raggio, in Calabria, which was then occupied by the Neapolitans, until he heard the news of the crushing defeat that the combined forces of Ferrante and Gonsalvo suffered at the hands of the French in Seminara. It seems that it was at
that moment - with the end of the war appearing far off, its outcome uncertain, and his continued stay in Messina viewed with dislike by the authorities - that Abravanel decided to exclude his plan - the plan he had harbored for a number of months - of leaving Italy and settling in Turkey. It was, therefore, we believe, in the second half of June that Abravanel left Messina.

III

The isle of Corfu was in those days an important travelling station on the way to Turkey. One needed only to cross the narrow straits separating Corfu from the mainland of Greece in order to be on Turkish territory. But Corfu was also a stop-off station for those who proceeded by sea to Constantinople or to the Eastern parts of Greece. Corfu was under Venetian rule and, as in all Venetian possessions, the Jews of the island were free from the disabilities imposed on Jews in Venice proper, and their prosperous community could even absorb a considerable number of the Spanish exiles passing through the island on their way to Turkey. It was to Corfu that Abravanel went after leaving Messina, apparently with the intention of awaiting there the arrival of members of his family from Naples, before proceeding with them to Saloniki.

In Corfu Abravanel found a large group of exiles, including a number of Jewish scholars who came directly from Spain or escaped from Naples and other Italian cities which were occupied by the French. Among them was the Lisbon preacher, David Ibn Yachia, nephew of the courtiers of Alfonso V, who was in Naples during the French pogrom and now was on his way to Turkey. There he met also Eliezer Tanusi, the physician, and there were others. To Abravanel, who for months was cut off from Jewish society, the intellectual company of some of these men was undoubtedly a stimulus. But at the same time he was
dismayed to notice the great change that the misfortunes of the exile had wrought in many an admired figure of the past. As Abravanel put it, he had the feeling that the "spirit of God" had departed from these people, and thus some he had considered "intellectual giants" appeared to him now "broken pots of clay." In Corfu, furthermore, Abravanel noticed that sinister moral development which is the special feature of uprooted people everywhere, that total engrossment in material values, that abandonment of all interest in intellectual pursuits, that open or concealed contempt for everything spiritual that hunt after enjoyment and games and pleasures, which is the product of belief in the passing moment as well as of a desire to forget the past - he saw all this and he was deeply distressed. A year later, when writing his *Inheritance of the Fathers*, he gave expression to the grief he felt in Corfu over the spiritual deterioration of Spanish Jewry. It implied in his mind a greater misfortune than all the physical sufferings they had endured.

Once more relieved from service to kings, Abravanel resumed his literary activity. Having completed his commentaries on the early prophets, he turned to Isaiah, the first of the later prophets, according to the traditional order of the Bible. The work, however, was suspended after a short time because Abravanel's interest seems to have then turned to the problem of the principles of the Jewish faith, a problem which in the state of moral let-down and religious looseness he found in Corfu, appeared to him as of a pressing nature. The old controversy over the fundamentals of Judaism now served as excuse for ignoring all of them, and to combat this tendency Abravanel wrote his *Principles of Faith*. Yet even after he had completed this work, Abravanel did not return to his commentary on Isaiah, the reason this time being an event which was both joyful and unexpected. Abravanel found in Corfu a copy of the manuscript of his unfinished commentary on Deuteronomy which he began writing decades before
and which was lost in consequence of his flight from Portugal.\textsuperscript{71} Out of his great joy over the finding,\textsuperscript{72} he concentrated on the completion of that work first. The task, however, was not accomplished in Corfu; for in the meantime developments took place that must have changed Abravanel's plans and called for his return to Italy.

It seems that neither Abravanel nor any of his sons had a real desire to migrate to a Moslem country. They were all steeped in European culture and accustomed to European ways of life. For them to settle in Turkey meant to uproot themselves from a civilization in which they saw not only faults, but also much beauty and genius. If an opening had presented itself, therefore, for their continued stay in Italy the plan of settling in the land of the Turks, which was considered only as a last resort, would have been readily dropped. And such an opening, it seems, appeared shortly after Abravanel's departure for Corfu.

When Abravanel left Messina, we have noticed, the French still held Naples in their grip. Toward the end of June, however, Ferrante, despite the great defeat at Seminara, hastily recruited a new force and succeeded in landing before the gates of Naples. Assisted by the populace, who rose against the French, he soon established himself in the city. The French still maintained a position in Naples by their command of the city's fortress,\textsuperscript{73} but in October the French garrison surrendered\textsuperscript{74} and Ferrante could safely leave the city to prosecute the war in other zones. Under these circumstances, Abravanel's family in Naples, consisting of his wife, his son-in-law, Joseph, the latter's family, and perhaps also of Abravanel's son, Joseph,\textsuperscript{75} the physician decided to continue to stay in Naples and there await the end of hostilities which now seemed not too remote.

For Abravanel, however, to return to Naples in those days, when French
ships were cruising the seas along the shores of the Neapolitan Kingdom, was obviously a risky undertaking. He was anxious nevertheless to leave Corfu, now that the Turkish plan was abandoned, and settle somewhere in the Neapolitan area where he could maintain easier communication with his family and be nearer to them with the war's end. But where could Abravanel go? Calabria was still a theater of war. Most of Apulia was still occupied by the French. There was, it seemed to him, only one suitable place.

The town of Monopoli, a sea-port on the Adriatic, half-way between Brindisi and Bari, belonged to the kingdom of Naples. Yet it was held neither by the Neapolitans nor by the French. For on June 29 - a short time after Abravanel had left Messina for Corfu - the Venetian navy, under Antonio Grimani, captured Monopoli from the hands of the French. The investment of this town by Venice - a member of the anti-French League - was a move in the direction of the allied war aims. Yet those who knew Venetian policies could not help thinking that Venice also sought, under the cover of these war aims, to capture for herself positions on the strategically important south-western Adriatic, and that she was likely to defend these positions with all the might at her disposal. In any case, the fact that Abravanel left peaceful Corfu, and went to Monopoli which was in the French-allied war-zone and which might become an objective for re-conquest by the French, indicates his great faith in the power of the Republic as well as his admiration for her efficient rule with which he had become acquainted in Corfu. And indeed, when Abravanel left Corfu for Monopoli, the town was strongly held under Venetian administration and became an important Venetian naval fortress as well as a base of operations against the French.

His departure to Monopoli took place, in all likelihood, in November or December 1495, shortly after he had received the news of the capitulation of the French in Naples. We have definite information of his presence in Monopoli,
however, only from the 6th of February, 1496, the day on which he completed his commentary on Deuteronomy. It seems that soon after his arrival in that town Abravanel indulged in feverish literary activity; but his commentary on Deuteronomy is not typical of Abravanel's creation in Monopoli. The completion of this commentary must indeed be considered a continuation of his previous literary effort. Soon thereafter, however, there began a new period of creation in Abravanel's life—a period inspired by new feelings, new motives and a new set of ideas.

In Monopoli Abravanel was relieved for the first time of the pressure of political and social duties; he was finally free from the various distractions which until now had interfered with his literary plans. Was this not the ideal condition for speculation—for which he had longed so ardently and so long? In these externally peaceful surroundings, however, he lacked peace of mind. A painful feeling of loneliness gripped him. He was now alone indeed—without family, friends, or intellectual companionship. He was a stranger in a foreign land, where nobody knew him and where he knew no one. The tragedy of homelessness, of exile, of poverty—his financial resources being almost at their end—now dawned upon him with all its gruesomeness.

He was then 58 years of age. He felt himself old, weak and abandoned. After a lifetime of enormous effort he saw himself emerging with nothing. All he seemed to have now was his waning physical strength, deteriorating eyesight, and a heart confused, embittered and depressed with disappointment and failure.

These pessimistic thoughts, however, were soon encompassed by broader considerations. For his personal troubles, he clearly came to recognize, were but an insignificant part of the great tragedy which befell his people. He had deep reverence for their great power of endurance, he thought again of writing his
Days of the World in which that power would be forcefully demonstrated, and it seems he actually began the writing. But his mind centered on the future rather than on the past, and he wondered about the outcome of the unprecedented calamities which were a lot of the Jews of his generations. How long could they take such punishment, he asked himself, if the outlook for the future remained as bleak as the present? The problem of redemption now forcefully occupied his mind, and it was in his commentary on the Passover Tales - Passover sacrifice he called it - a work which deals with the first redemption of the Jews - that we first find him dealing in elaborate manner with the redemption problem.

In April he completed his Passover Sacrifice and began writing his Inheritance of the Fathers. The work was composed at the request of Samuel, his youngest son, who was still studying in Saloniki. It is in this work that Abravanel expressed his great concern about the moral state of his people and about the rising materialistic tendency which he noticed among the survivors of the exile. It appeared to him that the only value the Jews still possessed, the only asset which imparted sense and meaning to their suffering, was their moral heritage which they so faithfully guarded throughout the ages and which now was placed in jeopardy. Was it worthwhile to endure so many hardships, so many trials and tribulations for this moral heritage? His book came to provide an answer. Here are the great moral teachings of Israel's Sages. Here is the Inheritance of the Fathers. And how lofty, how inspiring it is! Here is the essence of all truth, the meaning of all beauty, the sum-total of all virtue! For here is the word of God as transmitted and interpreted by Divine men. What can be more worthy than the guardianship of such a heritage? What can be baser than betraying it? And yet the spread of that betrayal was a fact he could not deny, and the frightful thought passed his mind that the day was approaching
when interest in the divine teachings would completely disappear from Israel. "And what shall I do for you, my son?" Sorrowfully he cries out the sacred oath; "If you forget the Law of God, let my right hand forget its cunning!"

The Inheritance of the Fathers was Abravanel's testimony to the worthwilness of the suffering which the Jews endured, but it left unanswered the basic question which traversed his mind. What was the reason for the suffering? And was there an end to it? Repeatedly he had heard these questions since that journey of sorrow from Spain. Before his eyes passed all the tragedies he witnessed, or which were brought to his knowledge. He saw the old who fell dying on the roads, the young who expired of famine and plague, the mothers who fainted with their children in their arms, the people who took their own lives. And then his mind encompassed the horrors felt by those who remained in Spain and who apparently left the fold. There must be a reason for all this suffering, and there must be an end.

His personal problems were now pushed far into the background. His mind was occupied more and more with that endless gallery of vivid, horrifying visions; his heart was filled with the agony of the martyrs; and he found himself sinking deeper and deeper into nightmarish condition. The experience was overpowering. He had the feeling as if he were "drinking poisonous wine or venom of snakes." He felt that his "essence was poured out" and his strength leaving him", and he heard his "soul sighing" from the depth of grief. Weaker spirits might have cracked under the pressure of such emotions. But Abravanel shook off the visions of horror, and his mind began to look for constructive outlet.

He reflected over the events of his lifetime, the ascension of Turkey, the rise of Ferdinand, the development of the present Italian war. Was not the tragedy of his people part of the great earthquake which was now shaking the lives of all nations? Here, in this town of Monopoli, in whose harbor was
lying the great armada of Venice, and through which Venetian forces were passing to the battlefields, he was constantly reminded of the great war which was being shaped in Apulia and in Central Italy - a war in which not only the whole of Italy was plunged but also France and Spain and Germany. Was the Spanish-Granadan war a mere episode? Was the French invasion an accident? Or perhaps all these wars were merely a prelude to a wider and all embracing world revolution which held both the certainty of the greatest disaster and the promise of the brightest hope? - Is not the hand of providence behind these events and behind the harsh punishment they entailed for God's people?

On July 21, the war in Italy came to an end with a total allied victory. Ferrante II was reinstated as King of Naples, but Abravanel would not leave Monopoli. It was at that very time that he was engaged in writing the first part of his Messianic trilogy, The Wells of Salvation, in which he prophesied the political course which the world, in his opinion, was to take, and suggested the year 1504 as the most likely date of the redemption. When the work was completed in the beginning of January, Abravanel proceeded to make a survey of the mystical parts of the post-biblical literature, as well as all the passages of the Bible in which he found allusions to redemption. The results of these studies which came to substantiate his views regarding both the inevitability and proximity of redemption, were comprised in two separate works - The Salvations of His Anointed, and The Announcer of Salvation. With the completion of the last thesis, on the 26th of February 1498, Messianic trilogy was an accomplished fact. It was undoubtedly the most original and the most significant of Abravanel's works, and the greatest work that was ever composed on the Messianic problem until his time.

His literary urge, however, was still far from exhausted. He now felt the need to strengthen and expand the theoretical foundations of the great miracle of Redemption. Soon, after completing his Trilogy, therefore,
he wrote his *New Heavens* in which he sought to demonstrate the order of the heavens the theory of Creation (ex nihilo), and to coordinate that theory with Maimonides' view. Then he returned to his commentary on Isaiah which he had begun to write in Corfu, but which now under the influence of his Messianic views, particularly of the views he propounded in the *Announcer*, must have assumed an entirely new character. On August 19, 1498, the commentary on Isaiah was finally completed, and the end of this work seemed to mark an end to that tempestuous writing in which he was engaged for almost three years.

In his commentary on Isaiah, as well as in each of the three parts of his Messianic trilogy, Abravanel predicted a world conflict between Christendom and Turkey. And as if to substantiate these prophecies, war clouds again appeared on the horizon, not long after he had completed his commentary on Isaiah, and finally in June 1499, The Turkish-Venetian War broke out. On July 28, the Turks emerged victorious in the great naval battle at Sapienza, which was soon followed by their seizure of Lepanto and the capture of most of the Morea. The following year, however, the tide of battle turned against the Turks when the Venetians, assisted by Spanish forces, defeated the Turks at Cephalonia. In Monopoli, the Venetian naval base, the impact of the war must assumeably have been felt, and although we have no direct indication of Abravanel's reaction to the ebb and flow of battle, the period of the Turkish-Venetian conflict must have been for him one of tenseness and expectation, for we know that he intensely awaited the fulfillment of his prophecies.

It is difficult to believe that all these years Abravanel remained completely detached from all the members of his family. In any case it is not before the end of the hostilities between Turkey and Venice that we find some of them in the vicinity of Monopoli. On February 6th, 1501, we find Joseph, Abravanel's nephew, visiting in Messina, Gonsalvo de Cordova, who had returned
only the previous month from his campaign against the Turks, and it is most likely that this visit was connected with a visit to Abravanel. In the same year we find Joseph's brother, Jacob, staying in Bari, and even doing some business there. In the same year again, we find Judah Abravanel visiting his father in Barletta, also an Apulian sea-port on the Adriatic, and not far from Monopoli. It is clear that the whole family, attracted by Abravanel's presence in Monopoli, moved to the eastern part of the kingdom, but it was a movement for a temporary stay only. For in Naples conditions were restored to normalcy and the ruling king, Federigo, the successor of Ferrante II, was friendly to the Jews and particularly to the Abravanels. The friendly disposition of Federigo towards the family served undoubtedly as an inducement for Don Isaac too, to return to the city of Naples. Thus, on May 10, 1501, the King issued an order to the leaders of the town of Barletta to assist "the esteemed" Don Isaac Abravanel "whom we hold dear", as well as his son Judah and their families, in connection with their planned journey to the capital. Such an order of course implied a royal invitation. But when this invitation reached Barletta, and while the Abravanels must have been preparing for departure, another political storm was gathering which was soon again to bring ruin upon the unfortunate Neapolitan kingdom. The second French invasion was about to begin.

On June 1, 1501, the forces of Louis XI, successor of Charles VIII, crossed the Alps on their way to Naples in accordance with a secret French-Spanish treaty which stipulated the partition of Naples between these powers. On July 8, the French crossed the Neapolitan border, and three days earlier, on July 5th, the Spanish forces, again headed by Gonsalvo, began their invasion from the south. Judah, it seems, ventured to go to Naples. But Don Isaac convinced of the coming of war and of the hopelessness of the Neapolitan
situation, obviously refrained from making the trip. It is not likely, however, that he remained in Barletta which, according to the partition treaty, was to fall into Spanish hands. In all probability he returned to Monopoli which was still under Venetian rule, and indeed was to remain in Venetian hands until 1509.

In about a month after the beginning of the invasion the Neapolitan kingdom collapsed. Peace was re-established. But Abravanel continued to stay in Monopoli. It was at that time that he wrote his Deeds of God, his most important and most artistic philosophical work. In the Deeds of God, we find for the first time, expressions of great admiration for Plato, a development which we may at least partly attribute to the influence of Judah Abravanel. When visiting his father in Barletta, seems to have already composed the first part of his Neo-Platonic Dialoghi D'Amore. The Dialoghi D'Amore and the Deeds of God have a number of fundamental ideas in common, but they differ in the main thesis. While the aim of Dialoghi is to explain the workings of the divine principle of love in the cosmos, the aim of the Deeds of God is to expound and demonstrate the principle of divine power. As in New Heavens so in the Deeds Abravanel sought to support his theory of the possibility of a divine, miraculous redemption.

In July war broke out again - this time between Spain and France - for the possession of the entire territory of Naples. Barletta, where we found Don Isaac and his son shortly before the invasion, now served as the retreat for the hard pressed forces of Gonsalvo who were placed there in stage of siege. On April 28, 1503, however, the Great Captain won his decisive victory in Cerignola, and on May 14, he entered Naples. In Naples lived Abravanel's son Judah and also his nephews, Joseph and Jacob. We have seen that Joseph had dealings with
Gonsalvo already in 1501 and Judah became soon after the conquest, Gonsalvo’s private physician. Don Isaac, however, seemed to have resolved not to return to Spanish territory. When his son, Joseph, therefore, visited him in Monopoli shortly after the restoration of peace, and invited him to proceed with him to Venice, where Joseph was engaged in the practice of medicine, Abravanel must have welcomed the invitation.

The period of his stay in Monopoli had thus ended after seven and one half years. In Monopoli, Abravanel passed one of the stormiest epochs in Italian and European politics — an epoch of repeated wars and upheavals: the first French Invasion, the French-Allied conflict, the French-Spanish Invasion, and the French-Spanish war. In Monopoli he was ever in the theater of the war, but yet, on an island of peace. Thus he had the possibility of viewing the events at a close range, of getting a direct feeling of the developments, and also to analyze them peacefully. In consequence, he could write, while on that island, most of the works which secured his place in posterity. Monopoli which was for Abravanel at the beginning merely a sorrowful station in his wonderings, almost became his second home. And when he said farewell to the little fortress-town on the Adriatic, Abravanel did not experience the bitter taste of disappointment he had at the conclusion of other phases of his life. In Monopoli, he knew, he had not wasted his time. For what he created there, he felt, was bound to live and to have a lasting effect.
IV

The capital of the then greatest republic and the metropolis of world commerce was long an object of admiration for Abravanel. In 1503, by all external signs, Venice seemed to be at the zenith of her power. Barely half a year before Abravanel's arrival, on December 24, 1502, it concluded a peace treaty with Turkey by which it regained almost all the possessions she lost during the war of 1499-1500. Still controlling most of the strategic islands in the Mediterranean, including Cyprus, despite the rise of Turkey, which it acquired in 1488 - it was considered a major Mediterranean power. Her territorial expansion in Italy, moreover, was never as great as at the close of the French-Neapolitan wars, described it as the "most triumphant city I have ever seen." 113

The splendor of Venice was great; yet the leaders of Venice knew full well that the Republic had been dealt a number of fatal blows. They knew that the territorial expansion could not compensate for the losses Venice suffered in her wars with the Turks, that her treasury was exhausted, and that her chances for replenishing her wealth had now dwindled as a result of a new, menacing development. That was the discovery by Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese navigator, of the ocean route to India. 114

The wealth of Venice originated in the monopoly she held over the eastern trade. So long as she controlled this monopoly, she possessed an endless source of income, and she could stand any financial loss. The Turkish expansion in the East hit trade colonies in Greece, but her lifeline to the East remained unsevered. Venice strengthened her ties with Egypt which
commanded the sea route to India, and from which she had now to buy the spices at a much greater cost.

The discovery of Vasco da Gama, however, threatened to stop this source of income. For now spices could be brought to Europe by a direct ocean route and at a much cheaper price. The course of world commerce was about to take a turn which would bypass Venice altogether, and the Venetians, fully aware of the consequences, were frantically trying to avert disaster. First they pointed out to the Egyptian Soldan that if the Portuguese were permitted to carry on direct trade relations with India, Egypt, like Venice, would suffer considerably and they tried to prevail upon Egypt to blockade the Indian coast against the Portuguese. But Egypt was militarily unprepared for such action. Plans for sending, through the Gibraltar, a Venetian fleet to the Indian Ocean or of building a Suez Canal, similarly were abandoned after much consideration, as impractical. There was little left but to recognize the bitter fact: the sea route to India was open to Portugal. It seemed that all that Venice could now attempt to do was to receive from Portugal the kind of monopoly she previously received from Egypt. But the chances for obtaining such a monopoly were slim. Venice did not control the routes from Portugal to Europe as she controlled those leading from the East.

116 It was at this critical stage for the Republic that Abravanel came to live in Venice. And shortly after his arrival he submitted to the Consiglio dei Dieci, the all powerful Venetian Council of Ten - a plan for the regulation of the trade of spices which he believed could be accepted both by Venice and Portugal. Abravanel appeared in person before the Dieci, and here again his personality and presentation made a powerful impression. From an official summary of a meeting of the Council at which Abravanel's proposal was discussed, it is clear that the prudent leaders of the Republic were quick to
notice the "good qualities and virtue of his person". They furthermore felt his genuine admiration for the Republic and his friendly intentions toward its leadership, and they were under the effect of his "serious and appropriate words" with which he had "ingratiated himself" to the Signoria. As for Abravanel's plan, they obviously considered it most advantageous for Venice, as the Council undertook not to "depart from these terms which seem reasonable and proper" and wanted to assure Abravanel that if "the matter will truly come out well", i.e., if an agreement between Portugal and Venice is reached, "there will be nothing to stain the customary gratitude of our state".

The gratitude which the Council promised to show, however, was not only for the plan itself, but also for its implementation. For Abravanel offered his services as mediator and proposed to send to Portugal his "nephew" for carrying on the negotiations and reaching an agreement between the two states. The Council, having obviously considered Abravanel - a former minister of Portugal and now resident of Venice - a most suitable negotiator in this matter, approved of the proposal, and consequently there can be little doubt that Abravanel's nephew was sent to Portugal to obtain an agreement from the king.

That Abravanel, against whom a death sentence for treason was issued in Portugal in 1485, could now propose his services for a purpose whose achievement depended greatly on the good will of his native state, must be attributed to the fact that the ruling king, Manuel, the successor of Joao, was the brother of the same Duke of Viseu whom Joao killed at his palace in Setubal. The attitude of Manuel to the former conspirators is indicated by the invitation he issued to the princes of Braganza to return to Portugal. Even if he knew that the accusations of conspiracy against the Abravanelas were unfounded, he might have still considered them, in view of the persecutions to which they were subjected, victims of the same cause for which his brother paid with his life. Thus, far from harboring hostility
for the Abravanels, he might even have had a latent sympathy for them. Joseph Abravanel, as we have noticed, was financial manager of the Duke of Viseu, and there can be little doubt that Joseph was the "nephew" whom Abravanel suggested to be sent to Portugal.

The embarkation of Abravanel on a scheme which aimed at the solution of the Venetian-Portuguese economic conflict - a scheme which involved not only the two greatest maritime powers of the time but also the entire course of world commerce - shows the vastness of enterprise, breadth of conception, and originality of planning which characterized Abravanel as a financier. In becoming a mediator between Venice and Portugal, Abravanel became an international factor of first rate importance. On Abravanel's mediation were now focused the attention not only of Portugal and Venice, which tensely watched the development of the negotiations, but also all the states and economic factors that had a direct interest in their outcome. Although the aim of the negotiations was not achieved on account of Portugal's negative response, Abravanel's efforts were viewed by the Venetian chiefs of state of Venice, with the highest appreciation. Evidently they recognized the force of the opposition and realized that the negotiations failed not because of Abravanel's intervention, but rather in spite of it. Thus for the Venetian rulers, Abravanel remained an admirable figure to the end of his days.

The mediation between Venice and Portugal seems to be the only - and last - financial-diplomatic action in which Abravanel was engaged. Yet not only after the negotiations had ended (1505) but also while they were in progress, Abravanel devoted his entire free time to literary work. He was sixty-six years old when he arrived in Venice, and he knew that his life-plan was still far from fulfilled. Of the later prophets, he had expounded only Isaiah, and of the Pentateuch only the book of Deuteronomy. Other literary projects he began
in various periods were also awaiting their completion. He wanted to rewrite
his lost - and unfinished - "The Vision of God" which he hoped would serve
like a "divine candle" for explaining the mysterious phenomena of prophecy. 128
He wanted to finish his *Eternal Justice* which he began to write in Naples, 129
and his *Days of the World* he started writing in Monopoli. 130 And on top of all
this, there was the still unfinished commentary on the Guide. He realized that
the fulfillment of these projects required years of work, and time was running
out.

With his arrival in Venice, there began Abravanel's third period of
literary activity, and it is proper to note the difference between this period
and the earlier one in Monopoli. The difference is in the intensity of feelings
and originality of ideas. The Monopoli period was marked by the "storm and
stress of revolutionary thinking. In it, Abravanel drew from his mystical world
outlook the most radical and extreme conclusions. In his literary creations in
Venice, we see Abravanel standing on the platform he had ascended in Monopoli.
In other words, instead of innovation, we see now primarily elaboration. On
the other hand, his works in Venice are characterized by that calmness and self
confidence which often symptomize an accomplished system. In Monopoli, Abravanel
was still searching for answers. In Venice, he followed a trodden path.

In 1505, three of Abravanel's works - *The Inheritance*, *Passover
Sacrifice*, and the *Principles* - were published in Constantinople. 131
These were
the first works of Abravanel which were given to the press, and Judah Abravanel,
who in that year visited his father in Venice, 132 wrote for each of them poetical
dedications from which shine forth not only his great love but also his undiminished
admiration for his father. 133 The fact that Judah whose philosophical
system was in those days fully elaborated, still considered Abravanel his spiritual
master, 134 shows how deep was his father's influence on the development of his
views. Indeed mutual admiration between father and son continued to the end of their days. In 1507, on the occasion of a second visit of Judah to Venice, Abravanel speaks of Judah as of the "choice of all the philosophers in Italy in this generation". 135

In 1505, Abravanel completed his commentaries on the later prophets, in which he followed the principles laid down in his Announcer but in which he also clarified or supplemented many points in his Messianic scheme. 136 Soon thereafter, he began work on the first four books of the Pentateuch in which he incorporated his final conclusions regarding the major historical, philosophical and political problems with which he dealt in earlier works. 137 The commentary on the Pentateuch may be considered, therefore, Abravanel's most conclusive presentation of his views, and it was not without good reason that he considered it the first and foremost of his work. As Abravanel put it, "I invested in it all my thoughts and all my knowledge." 138

With the completion of this work, in 1506 or 1507, the whole of the Bible with the exception of the Hagiographa, in which he dealt only with Daniel, was interpreted by Abravanel. He seems to have had no desire to write a commentary on the Hagiographa, and perhaps he felt that he had said all that he should in the framework of a biblical commentary. He now hoped for the completion of his other cherished plans, and undoubtedly resumed work on them. 139

In March-April 1507, however, a diversion seems to have taken place when a student of philosophy, Saul ha-Cohen Ashkenazi, confronted him with 12 philosophical questions, with a particular view of ascertaining the position of Maimonides. Abravanel's answers to these questions constitute an important philosophical study. Above all, we find here Abravanel standing solidly on his own ground, relieved at last from the long internal struggle he had conducted with Maimonides. Abravanel's independence is especially noticeable in his clear analysis of the points of difference and points of agreement between him and
Maimonides. And it is not unlikely that after completing this book, Abravanel returned to systematic work on his great commentary on the Guide.

When he wrote his Answers to Saul, however, Abravanel was already 70 years old. He was at the prime of his thinking capacity, but his physical strength was fast waning. Disregarding his health, Abravanel continued to work on his books, drawing heavily on his last resources. The end of course could not be far off. Exhausted, after a relentless literary effort which followed a turbulent political career, Abravanel died at the age of seventy-one in December 1509. His death was a cause of national mourning for Jews everywhere, and when his coffin was taken for burial to Padua, he was given the last honors not only by the leaders of his own people, but also by the leaders of the Venetian state. It was a symbolic end to the dual course - the spiritual and political, the national and international - which Abravanel followed throughout his eventful life.

The life of Don Isaac Abravanel as presented here is based on the conclusions we felt could be derived with a more or less substantial measure of certainty from the material available. The material, however, is comparatively scanty; and the biographer who does not want his imagination to replace facts, must remain within the limits of recorded history. But the life of a man who served six kings, was associated with the most powerful personalities in Portugal and Spain, in Naples and Venice must have been necessarily far richer, more complex and more stimulating than this biography might suggest. Additional material which the archives of the states in which Abravanel lived may yield, may fill certain gaps in his biographical picture. It is doubtful, however, whether the picture will change materially. The life of a diplomat
or a King's counselor - usually concealed from public scrutiny - is often half-lost to posterity. The life of such a man in the Middle Ages and a Jew at that, is particularly apt to be obscured. Yet so great was the imprint of Abravanel's character and works upon his time that his image stands out clearly. And from the material available we may draw certain general conclusions, which may help to sharpen its basic outlines.

Abravanel, as we have seen, engaged in three fields of endeavor: the general diplomatic and financial field, the field of Jewish political representation, and the scholarly-spiritual field. In each Abravanel reached great heights, but in each he manifested not only different propensities, but also a different measure of ability and achievement.

It is clear that as a diplomat and financier, Abravanel was endowed with great brilliance and ingenuity as well as with a magnetic, captivating personality. Otherwise, he would not have succeeded in rising so quickly, almost overnight, after every fall, and this while in the humiliating status of a fugitive or an exile in foreign lands. It was due to these outstanding powers of Abravanel that he became not only the constant associate of kings, courtiers, magnates and state councillors, but also what was unique in Jewish statesmanship in the Middle Ages - a figure of international stature. This fact must be borne in mind. That broad, international view which we find, as we shall see, in some of Abravanel's fundamental theories is made largely accountable by this fact.

For his people, Abravanel became the first man - the chief leader, guide, and spokesman. His many sided distinctions, his position in world politics, his vast knowledge in various fields of learning, his mastery of all subjects, particularly Jewish, his devotion to his people's cause, and the great encouragement he offered them in his wonderful books on redemption - all these combined to create widespread and unlimited admiration for him. The Jews considered him the "great eagle" (in learning) "as wise as Daniel" (in politics).
and a "man of God" (in morals and personality). The very fact that he was held in such admiration was in itself a factor of historic importance. In times of tragedy and disaster as those in which Abravanel's Jewish contemporaries lived, nothing can fortify a people's morale like a great leader to whom they can look up.

Considered from a historic standpoint, however, Abravanel's actions in the field of Jewish leadership cannot merit such unreserved praise. There were probably few Jewish spokesmen in the Middle Ages, who were as tactful, inspiring and eloquent as Abravanel. There were probably few who faced more difficult tasks and could register more achievements. What Abravanel did for the Jews of Portugal, Spain or Naples, can be only guessed from the general information and the few details that were preserved; but there is no doubt that his presence and activity in the leading circles of these states was a powerful factor in favor of the Jews. That he was, indeed, as it was said about him, "a fortress and a shield for his people" a "savior of the oppressed from the hands of their enemies" and that he virtually "rescued Jews from the lions" cannot be doubted. Yet despite all these achievements which undoubtedly contributed to the great love and admiration his people felt for him, there was a serious fault in Abravanel's leadership which cannot be overlooked.

It is doubtful whether Abravanel or any one else, even if a different policy had been pursued, would have succeeded in changing anything of substance in the situation which confronted the Jews of Europe of his time. The historic current in which Jewry was swept was too strong to be resisted, and Abravanel therefore cannot be criticized for inability to arrest the rising tide. His responsibility however lay in the failure to sense the strength and direction of that tide and issue a timely warning when means of rescue were still available. In other words, his fault lay with his policy. It was a policy which tried to resist the current, to save here and there those engulfed in
course, and stop the gaps through which it broke. Significantly he was described as one who "stands and mends the breaches." But the breaches could not be mended. And it is here indeed where Abravanel's great error lay.

We have seen that this error of judgement was not peculiar to Abravanel, that it was shared at least by the majority of Spain's Jews, and we have tried to point out the causes which contributed to the development of that falsely optimistic view. But besides the general reasons which were common to his contemporaries, there was a personal reason which made Abravanel particularly apt to make such an error. And it is here where we come to the third feature which was dominant in Abravanel's life - his efforts in the realms of abstract speculation.

As a financier and diplomat in the general field of politics Abravanel must have been a down to earth realist. Otherwise, he could not have gone very far with the shrewd and hard-boiled realistic rulers whose concrete interests he must have served with distinction. As a thinker, however, Abravanel is a mystic. Between these two opposite fields of activity there was a common area of contact - that was his activity in Jewish leadership. As a Jewish leader, Abravanel was simultaneously realistic and mystical alike. Not only his general position on the Jewish question but also his dealings with current problems were deeply influenced by his mystical views. And the influence of these views must have been especially great when he was detached from the management of state affairs. Such was the case in his last years in Venice, such was the case in Monopoli, and such was also the case in Spain. A man whose mind was concentrated on the problem of how to decipher the symbols of Ezekiel's chariot or of proving that Maimonides' concept of the angels was wrong and that of the anti-rationalistic school was right, a
man who was looking for an opportunity to steal time in order to concentrate on his heavenly visions - such a man could not see the developments of his time with a cold and piercing realistic view. With all his experience in politics, his analytical mind, and his vast knowledge of human affairs - he saw the world through a veil.

That the veil was removed from time to time, and that then the genius of Abravanel as financier and diplomat appeared in its full magnitude and effectiveness, must necessarily be assumed. Throughout this work we have attempted to point out the dualism manifested in Abravanel's life. And indeed without this dualism it is impossible to explain the achievements of the man in such varied and conflicting fields of action. The veil however, was never completely removed when it came to the Jewish question. For the processes of his thinking on abstract questions were inseparably bound with the Jewish problem, and when, in turn, he dealt with this problem, he must have consciously or unconsciously been affected by a mystical mood of faith and fatalism. The influence of the world behind the veil, the world of visions and ideas, was always felt here, to a larger or smaller extent, dividing his attention and blurring his view of the realistic conditions of the Jews in the world.

And yet, what Abravanel created behind that veil was his greatest achievement, the greatest even from the national point of view. For one wonders where a greater contribution would lie, in issuing a warning to the Jews of Spain which might have rescued some of them from the calamities of the expulsion, or in offering a great hope for the survivors of the disaster which was in any case bound to come. Abravanel lost the political battle for his people, and his struggle on this behalf in the courts of Kings and magnates was, as he said, a "wasted effort." But Abravanel also fought for his people's soul, and in this struggle he won a considerable victory. For when
the world in which the Jews lived was destroyed and everything crumbled around in the tumult and shock of disaster, there emerged upon the ruins a subsidiary world, a ghostly and fantastic world to be sure, but luminous and angelic and pregnant with hope – the world of inspiring visions and ideas that Abravanel carved out from his great heart.