

LAUDS LIFE OF RABBI ISAACI

Dr. Mendel Silber Discourses Entertainingly On the Great Teacher.

Rev. Dr. Mendel Silber, rabbi of Temple Emanuel, spoke to his congregation last night on the life of Rabbi Solomon Isaaci. The occasion of the sermon was the eighth centennial memorial of the death of the great teacher and commentator on the bible and talmud. He paid a feeling tribute to a man of deep sympathy and broad learning, saying in part:

"The glory of Judaham lies in its great rabbis, teachers and masters of learning. In our hall of fame there are inscribed the names of hundreds of men whose lives were given unselfishly to the study of God's word and the interpretation of God's message. There is an unbroken line of sages extending over the centuries. The scholarly rabbi represents the ideal in Judaism. And a scholarly rabbi Rashi was indeed.

"Born as he was in the year 1040 at Troyes, France, into a community of scholars, he was a student almost from his cradle. As a lad his progress was remarkable. He mastered the most intricate studies without difficulty, obtaining in addition to his great proficiency in philology, philosophy, medicine, astronomy and civil law, a complete mastery over the wide range of Scriptural and Talmudic lore. As he grew his scholarship grew with him.

Rabbi Was Poor.

"Not only the scholarly attainments, but also the scholarly accompaniments, simplicity and poverty. For the price to be paid for the privilege of belonging to the scholarly guild of Israel is a high one, it is continuous and conscious, self-sacrifice. And so we see poverty clinging to Rashi all his days. Yet his penurious circumstances served only to impress him with the stamp of magnanimity.

"His robust nature conquered all obstacles, overcame all difficulties, and placed him before the world as one of the most celebrated scholars and teachers. Rashi was happy, in spite of his poverty. He was poor but extremely contented. His means were small, but his wants were also few. Passionately devoted to the attainments of knowledge, he forgot all else in pursuit thereof.

"Another source of blessing for the great rabbi was his early marriage. True to the Talmudic maxim which sets the time for wedlock at eighteen, Isaaci married, and married happily, at that age.

Great Love of Knowledge.

"But his love of knowledge was even stronger than that of home. So eager was he to learn all he could possibly be taught, and so earnest was his desire to gain instruction at the best possible sources, that he did not hesitate to leave his wife and children in pursuit of study. For seven years he traveled through France, Italy, Germany, Greece, Egypt, Palestine and Persia, all the time storing up for the benefit of coming generations, all that an observant eye, a gifted mind, and a diligent student could gather. By visiting the academies and conversing with the learned of every city he passed through, he continually added to his already wonderful store of knowledge. But though to learn was the object of his travels, he also had to teach, for he was often prevailed upon to give lectures in the various schools and synagogues he visited.

"Upon his return he settled in the city of Worms, where he established a school, and where his lectures were attended by hosts of pupils, who ardently received his instructions. This Rabbi Solomon Isaaci worked unceasingly and unselfishly for the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge up to the year 1105, when at the age of sixty-five he departed from this world greatly lamented, and still more greatly celebrated in all lands.

Eminence Becomes Traditional.

"His eminence has become traditional with succeeding generations, and his great piety and learning, his remarkable purity and religious fervor have become an object of emulation for thousands during the eight centuries that separate us and as the years and centuries roll on the life and work of that great scholar cannot but gain in splendor and admiration, for Rashi was not only the benefactor of his immediate pupils and his own generation, but through his masterly works he has become the teacher and guide for all ages to come.

His Great Works.

"A book on medicine, a poem on the 'Unity of God,' a work on rites and ceremonies and eight penitential hymns are among the gifts the world has received from that illustrious man. His commentary on the Talmud, his most stupendous production, a work without which the Talmud itself would almost be a sealed book, explains in a lucid manner the difficulties found in the text. The many technical terms employed throw a ray of light on the subtle arguments of the rabbis.

"His commentary on the Bible, a part of which has been translated into Latin and German, is of the greatest value to the student, and largely aid him to understand the sacred text. 'The Ethics of the Fathers,' 'the Mishnah' and a hundred chapters of 'the Midrash' have each received a commentary from the prolific pen of Rashi, and as in the progress of learning many of his unpublished works will make their immortalizing appearance into the world, and win our indebtedness to Rabbi Solomon Isaaci, they will spread through every clime the name of one who, not only as an author, but also as a truly pious and great man, will be the means of showering honor upon the race to which he belongs."