BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Hasdai (or Chasdai) Crescas, the subject of this study, was born in Barcelona, Spain, in the year 1340. His family was one of the noblest and wealthiest among the Catalonian Jews, and supplied many a leader in communal affairs as well as in scholarship to Spanish Jewry. Hasdai, despite his great Talmudic scholarship, never occupied any official Rabbinical position; his wealth made him completely independent. Yet the fact that he was a layman did not diminish his prestige. His fame spread far and wide throughout the diaspora, and his word was law to many Jewish communities. Even the gentile world thought highly of him, for he stood in some degree of relationship to the court of James I of Aragon, and was often consulted on matters of state.

Crescas's life, however, was not all bright, but had its dark shadows as well. As the result of a conspiracy, Crescas was accused before the court and was thrown into prison, together with some of the notables of Catalonian Jewry, among whom were some of his friends and also his teacher. After a long term of imprisonment he was eventually released on bail. The persecution of 1391, which swept through Spain like a tornado, leaving behind desolation and ruin in most of the Jewish communities, failed not to include Crescas among its victims. In the massacre of Barcelona his only son was killed. Thereupon he removed to Saragossa, where the rest of his life was spent in philosophic study. He died in 1410.
Besides his work *Or Adonai*, which contains his philo-
sophico-theological speculations, Crescas wrote a polemical
treatise against Christianity in which the fundamental
doctrines of the church are analysed. The latter was
written in Spanish and later translated into Hebrew. The
*Or Adonai* was originally written in Hebrew.