The History of The Great Synagogue

By Cecil Roth

INTRODUCTION

The History Of The Great Synagogue

This book is an essential source for the study of Anglo-Jewish history. It is now a very rare volume, and has been out of print for almost half a century.

For the benefit of all those who are researching Anglo-Jewish history and family history, and who are unable to make use of Dr Roth's great scholarship.

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Chapter I

THE FIRST ASHKENAZIM

WHEN, as a result of the favour of Oliver Cromwell and the exertions of Menasseh ben Israel, Jews settled again in London in the seventeenth century after an interval of some four hundred years, what is known as the Sephardi (Spanish and Portuguese) rite was followed in the Synagogue they established. This was natural: for the overwhelming majority of its members were former Marranos who had escaped from the clutches of the Inquisition in the Peninsula, or else their immediate descendants. From the beginning, though, the settlement was leavened by a few representatives of the Germano-Polish group, generally known (after the term applied by the Jews of the Middle Ages to Germany) as Ashkenazim. In essentials, of course, there was little difference between them and their coreligionists, though their immediate antecedents were distinctive, their standard of general culture lower, their economic occupations humbler, and their synagogal tradition (almost identical, in fact, with that followed by the mediaeval Anglo-Jewish community, before the expulsion of 1290) slightly different. It may be noted that the most stalwart of those few Jews who penetrated into England in the 'Middle Period"--the mining-engineer Joachim Gaunse who was expelled for his outspoken religious views, and the Jacob Barnett who fled from Oxford rather than submit to baptism --both happened to be Ashkenazim.

It was out of the question for this element to be excluded on logical grounds, once their Sephardi coreligionists, outwardly more engaging, had obtained a foothold in England. There is indeed evidence that they constituted a recognisable group at a comparatively early date. The late Lucien Wolf used to speak of a contemporary account of the arrival in London in 1648 or 1649 of a whole shipload of Polish Jewish refugees from the recent massacres at the hands of the Cossacks. Early in the reign of Charles II they may have had a private prayer-meeting of their own. In fact, in an informer's list of 1660 we read of a subordinate "sinagoga" in Great St. Helen's, in the House of "Sin. David the Priest", in addition to the official place of worship. If this really existed (probably, it is simply the result of a confusion, or a figment of the informer's muddled imagination) its attendants might have included "Sin. David Mier", of Leadenhall Street: "Sin. Mordihay" of Creechurch Lane: "Sin. Solomon Frankes" (who notwithstanding appearances may not be identical with the Sephardi apostate, Solomon Franco), of Fenchurch Street: and "Severall Jewes" (not "Spaniards"--that word is erased) in Leadenhall Street. This hypothetical synagogue could not have existed for long, if it existed at all, for there is no further mention of it. So far as other sources show, there was in London at this period only one Jewish place of worship--that following the Sephardi ritual, in Creechurch Lane: and only one Jewish burial place--that of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews in Mile End. Yet there is ample evidence that this community was already diluted by an ample sprinkling of what it considered the inferior tribe. A number of unmistakable names (possibly in some cases those of visitors who had died during their stay in England) may be traced in the oldest registers of the "House of Life"--e.g. Isaac Yafe (1660): Rabbi Raphael ben R. Solomon Zalman (a Lithuanian, perhaps from Narol, 1684): Abraham "Ashkenazi" (1678): Joseph "Ashkenazi" and another Ashkenazi (1689): a certain Israel (or perhaps Isaac) Levy: and a few others. We find more than one tudesco craftsman employed by the congregation at the time of the reconstruction of their Synagogue in 1675--Moses ben David, David Fels, Jacob Tudesco and Joseph Tudesco (perhaps identical with Joseph "Ashkenazi "); and some of these had presumably been in London already for a while. More than one of the communal employees was of Ashkenazi origin. The very Beadle, 1667&endash;1701, was Samuel Levy, of Cracow, popularly known as "Ribbi Semuel": and in the last quarter of the century, when he grew old, he was assisted by another tudesco, quaintly known as Isaac Purim. Yet another was Jacob Keyser, who managed the congregational butcher's shop, probably overlapping with the subsequent Shochet, Baruch Benedict. The first recorded Keeper of the Burial Ground was Mordecai Gimpel (Gümpel), who on his death in 1695 was succeeded by his widow Sarah, buried there at his side twenty-six years later.

In the Minutes and Accompts of the congregation, entries may be found relating to other persons with names indicating German or Eastern European provenance, who, however, contributed to its funds instead of drawing upon them. They included Samuel Forst, Hayim Forst, Hayim Brosa and Jochanan Luria (1671): -- bar Levi and -- bar Nathan(1674): Levy Nathan (1675): Simon Levy (1676): Samuel Heilbuth (1676) and Jacob Adolphus (1685: we shall meet these two again). Another tudesco, Isaac ben Abraham, who had since migrated to Hamburg, left the Synagogue a legacy of £30 on his death about 1677. The secular records enable us to expand our list. As early as 1664, a well-to-do merchant named Jacob Levy (Luevy) was resident in the parish of St. Katherine Coleman; in 1665 he had paid the standard fine of £5 to avoid serving as Collector for the Poor and Sidesman when elected to that office1; and in the following year he made the Parish a voluntary gift of £3 for charity. An Aaron Moses died in London in 1675. Among the persons endenizened in 1687 were Isaac Abraham and Jone Mathias, with the latter's wife Judith and son Isaac.2 There was a certain Abraham Lyon living in the parish of St. Katherine Creechurch in 1681, whose rates were reduced owing to his poverty. An Ashkenazi too, probably, was Aaron the Jew, who in the following year had five shillings given him by that Parish "in Charity towards his reliefe"--an unexpected demonstration of tolerance, unless he was a convert to Christianity. London apostates who wrote accounts of their conversion in order to impress the public included several Ashkenazim; and a Jew named Hayman Isaac (Hayim ben Isaac), who was baptised at Nantes many years later, claimed that he had been born in London in 1682. Not all, perhaps, of the persons mentioned above were permanent residents in London; one or two, notwithstanding their names, may in fact have been Sephardim, or were not Jews at all. Yet the list is lengthy enough to make it clear that the background of Jewish life in London, in the generation succeeding the Resettlement, was not (as is generally believed) exclusively that of Marranos escaped from the Peninsula and their offspring.

A number of those whose names have been recorded were obviously very small fry--communal dependants, employees, even mendicants. Yet there were in the group a few persons of different calibre, with one of whom the story of the establishment of the Ashkenazi community in London is associated in an especial degree, and who may in fact be reckoned its founder. The most prominent and most numerous Ashkenazi community of Western Europe at this time (with the possible exception only of Amsterdam) was that of Hamburg, with its aristocracy of wealthy gem-merchants. Among its outstanding members was a certain Moses Levy, a merchant of considerable means, who numbered among his connections some of the best-known Rabbis of the age. His family included a son named Benjamin, who, accompanied by his brother Seligman or Solomon, went over to London about the year 1669 to push his fortunes. About the same time his uncle, Michael or Meir Levy, also settled here--a man apparently of considerable public experience and linguistic ability, who was repeatedly employed by the Sephardi community as their "solicitor" to present their case before the authorities when the necessity arose.

It is clear that Benjamin Levy arrived with a certain amount of capital, which rapidly increased. (When in April 1693 he was chosen Overseer of the Poor in the parish of St. Katherine Coleman, he was "discharged" from the performance of that office on the payment of the maximum fine of £12.) He had not been long in England when he was admitted to the Royal Exchange. When in 1697 this institution was reorganised and the number of brokers restricted to 124 all told, he was one of the twelve Jews licensed to practise, only one other Ashkenazi being included in the list. A Frankfort Jew who had been in London recounted the episode with a little pardonable exaggeration to Johann Jakob Schudt, the Christian chronicler of Ghetto life in Germany, who in his Jüdische Merckwürdigkeiten told how Benjamin Levy was sworn Broker to the British sovereign, and as such always wore the royal arms on his breast--a reference, presumably, to the broker's medal with which the successful candidates had to provide themselves.

Levy (who was endenizened3 in March 1688/9 together with his brother Seligman) had a finger in many commercial pies. He was an original Subscriber to the Bank of England, and the only Jew on the list. It was said that he was responsible for procuring the new Charter for the East India Company in 1698, with the result that his name was the second on its registers. In any case, he was a considerable shareholder in that institution, £1,000-worth of stock being purchased

from him in 1693, at 95 per cent, by the Board of Governors: and in the public subscription list of 1698 we find the names of his kinsfolk Mary, Margaret and Michael Levy. In 1698 the Treasurer of the Navy was instructed to pay him a sum of over £6,000 as discount on a draft for £85,885. He was a member of the Royal African Company from 1688, and a considerable shareholder in the Million Bank, founded in 1695. There are records too of his activity in almost every branch of overseas trade: and his name is met with, as that of a merchant of fist importance, in Home Office Papers, Petitions and Warrants, in the Patent Rolls, in the Treasury and Colonial Papers, and in other official records. In 1703 we find him (unless, as is not impossible, a transatlantic name-sake is here in question) twelfth in order among the thirty-two proprietors who surrendered to the Crown the right of government in the Eastern Division of the Province of New Jersey in the American plantations. Later in the same year, his name was included among the signatories to a petition requesting authority to nominate the first Governor of the Colony.

On his arrival in London Benjamin Levy worshipped as a matter of course at the synagogue of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews in Creechurch Lane, established in 1657, where by coincidence there were at this time two other worthies who bore the same name. One was a scholarly person, Shochet to the congregation from 1664 and its Hazan from 1667, and possibly its secretary as well--a devoted adherent of the pseudo-Messiah Sabbatai Zevi, who received the first reports from abroad regarding the meteoric career of that strange portent. In order to fulfil his communal functions satisfactorily, he must have been a Sephardi--probably Levantine--in origin. Another namesake, Benjamin Levy the elder (el viejo), Asquenazi, was buried in the congregational cemetery in 1695: had he been identical with the Hazan and Shochet, a devoted communal servant over a number of years, the fact could hardly have escaped mention in the official record. It is generally easy to distinguish the tudesco magnate from his homonyms. In view of his financial position, it was natural to admit him a yahid, or full member, of the congregation--an honour conferred on barely any other Ashkenazi at this time. His name first appears in the accounts, for a trifling sum, in 1669. In succeeding years, his contributions rapidly increased. When the new Ascamot, or Regulations, were drawn up in 1677, his name figured fourteenth in the list of signatories. He had contributed, though modestly, to the synagogue reconstruction fund in 1674. In the previous year, he had been chosen by lot to act as Hatan Torah on the Rejoicing of the Law, and he signalised the occasion by presenting the congregation with a silver cup (unless, in this case, the other Benjamin Levy, the Hazan, is in question). When the new Synagogue was projected, in 1700, he made a donation of £35 to the building fund--the largest individual sum recorded in the first list, subsequently supplemented moreover by smaller amounts.

Though a person of this calibre was treated (as he always is) with proper deference, the Spanish and Portuguese community was nervous (for reasons that can be understood readily enough) at the prospect of an influx of poor Jews from overseas, whose number would tax their slender resources, attract public attention, and possibly undermine the grudging toleration that they had won in the country. At intervals, therefore, they took steps, sometimes in conjunction with the City authorities, to check the tide of immigration of persons unable to support themselves: thus, on May 25th 1669, Michael Levy had been empowered to lodge a complaint with the Lord Mayor regarding the number of foreign mendicants besetting the synagogue, and was charged to make a report on them. Apart from these considerations, some nervousness was felt lest the newcomers should change the character of the congregation and swamp the distinctive Spanish and Portuguese tradition. Drastic steps were taken to cope with this eventuality. In the year 5439 (1678/9)~ a resolution was passed to the effect that no tudesco should be allowed to hold office in Synagogue, to vote at meetings, to be called to the Law, to receive any congregational honour, or even pay imposts or make offerings, without special permission. An exception was made to this intolerant rule in favour of only two persons other than the devoted Shamash, Samuel Levy of Cracow--Benjamin Levy and his uncle Michael; for they already enjoyed a position of privilege. It was a harsh restriction, and the fact was soon realised: towards the close of 1682 it was modified, the presiding Parnas being empowered to call Ashkenazim to the reading of the Law at his discretion (with the exception for the next twelve months of Samuel Heilbuth, who had for some reason or other embroiled himself with the authorities), as well as to accept their impostas. One may conjecture that this was due to the visit of Rabbi Raphael ben Solomon

Zalman who (as we have seen) was in England and died there about this time, and may have pointed out that the restriction was against Jewish law. More defensible, though hardly genial, was another regulation passed in the Spring of the same year, that foreign tudescos who came to England to beg charity should not receive more than five shillings apiece and should be shipped back immediately to Amsterdam.The congregational accounts of 5440 (1679/80) reflect the manner in which this was carried into effect, a special section being devoted to "expenses for sending poor tudescos away":--

> For obtaining the despatch of eight tudescos and two women to Rotterdam £5 12s 6d
>
> For expense with two tudesco Rabbis and for lodging and despatch to Rotterdam £1 5s 0d
>
> Given to Izopo (=Joseph) the tudesco to go to Hamburg £0 5s 0d
>
> Given to Mayer Levi for despatching a tudesco doctor to Rotterdam £0 10s 0d
>
> Given to Abraham Siviart (?) for despatching a tudesco to Rotterdam £0 10s 0d
>
> For expense with four tudescos for food and lodging, etc., here £0 15s 0d
>
> Given to embark the said tudescos £1 5s 0d
>
> Given to despatch two tudescos to Rotterdam, and expenses in London £1 4s 0d
>
> To despatch a tudesco Rabbi, with another poor tudesco man, to Rotterdam £1 12s 0d

Not long after, the situation was changed by the process of external policy. The stirring events of English history in 1688/9 proved to be of cardinal importance in the record of the Anglo-Jewish community. The Glorious Revolution brought under one rule England and Holland, with the famous and numerous Jewish community of its chief city, Amsterdam. Relations between the two countries became extremely close; communications improved; and there was a considerable development of reciprocal trade, reflected in a constant coming and going of merchants. Immigration began on a comparatively large scale, and the Jews naturally followed the general tendency. The Sephardi community in London was augmented to such an extent that, before long, arrangements had to be made for the construction of a new Synagogue--the stately edifice in Bevis Marks still in use, to which Benjamin Levy subscribed so handsomely. It is probable that Ashkenazim were represented among the immigrants to an even greater extent: and, in view of the close relations between Amsterdam and Hamburg, that city too began to send its scions to England in increasing number to trade and to seek their fortune. There is extant a list of passes for leaving England in 1689 and the succeeding years, and this includes numerous unmistakably German-Jewish names, whether of visitors or of permanent residents who went abroad on business. It is perhaps significant that the first on the list is a certain Rabbi, Isaac Cohen Zedek, who received a pass on October 14th, 1689, "to go beyond the seas."

Thus, at the beginning of the reign of William III, there was established in London a not inconsiderable Ashkenazi community.4 Doubtless, its members met together for Divine service from time to time in accordance with their own traditions. It is possible indeed that the Rabbi just referred to may have come over in connexion with this, at the season of the greatest solemnity in the Jewish religious calendar: for the New Year had fallen on September 5th, and Tabernacles thus ended a couple of weeks before he received his pass to leave the country.

Numbers were now sufficient to require something more than a sporadic prayer-meeting in a private house. The next stage was the organisation of a proper community.

Notes Chapter One

1This was a usual method employed for the raising of revenue in the City Parishes, and it would indeed have been inequitable had Jewish householders. escaped the burden which fell on their neighbours. Some. however, elected to serve; the lists of Churchwardens on the walls of the Church of All Hallows Barking, include Henry Moses (1768) and Nathan Solomon (1772&endash;3).

2 The name "Meres", often stated to be in this list, should read "Morel"

3 i.e. naturalised, in a slightly modified form.

4 "J. S.", who edited an edition of Josephus ben Gorion's Wonderful History of the Jews, published in London in 1699, refers in his dedication to "the Jews (whereof there are Swarms at present in this City)".

Chapter II
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CONGREGATION, 1690

BEFORE we go further, one observation must be made. The earliest records of the Great Synagogue have been lost. Until the year 1722, all that we have to go upon are stray references in scattered sources in a bewildering variety of languages: a couple of old deeds: the casual statements, sometimes contradictory, of the protagonists in a forgotten quarrel: and (a document now studied for the first time) the oldest account-book of the congregation, with sporadic entries referring to the first decade of the eighteenth century. Often, these allusions are cryptic beyond the verge of unintelligibility. English words and names and places appear strangely transmogrified, and sometimes unrecognisable, in the careless Hebrew transcription. The interpretation of the entries is frequently open to doubt. But all these sources must be used exhaustively in the default of any connected record: and the story that has been pieced together with their aid, though certainly open to amplification and correction in details, is at least consistent. We are thus enabled to reconstruct the record of a third of a century of communal history, hitherto an utter blank.

The precise date of the foundation of the first Ashkenazi Synagogue in London is unrecorded, and the original records relating to it have long since disappeared. In 1827, however (according to the Preface to the Laws of the Congregation of the Great Synagogue issued in that year), there was still to be found among the muniments of the community "the remnant: of an ancient manuscript book of laws and minutes of transactions" which indicated that the congregation was in existence prior to the year 5452 (1691/2). The document here in question was apparently the earliest book of Takkanoth, or Synagogue Laws (preceding the oldest now extant, those of 1722). From the phraseology, which we must analyse with the utmost care, it would appear that the beginning of the volume, giving the date of the redaction of the code and the organisation of the community, was missing, the earliest of the supplementary laws or minutes being dated A.M. 5452. It is unwarrantable to state, as has been done hitherto on the basis of this record that this year is given as that of the foundation of the synagogue.

We now have, in fact, definite evidence to the contrary. In 1689/90, the Reverend Robert Kirk, a Presbyterian divine, of Aberfoyle in Scotland, visited London, and kept a careful record of everything he saw in the great city. As a minister of religion, he was interested in the Jews, and paid a visit to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Creechurch Lane, of which he gives an interesting description. But he made it clear that this was not the only one in London at the time. He enumerates all the places of worship of the various sects: ten Quaker, two Lutheran, six Anabaptist, and "3 Jewish synagogues (but cannot contain them all)".1 The mention of a third Jewish place of worship at this date presents a problem. Possibly, there was in existence some

other Bethel of which we know nothing (perhaps for the Italian immigrants, who had already arrived in some numbers and like the Ashkenazim were none too cordially received by the magnates of the Spanish and Portuguese community). But it is clear that at the time of this visit there was more than one synagogue in London: and, since the regulations of the Creechurch Lane Synagogue forbade the setting up of a rival congregation following the same ritual of prayers, the second synagogue must necessarily have been constituted for the benefit of the Ashkenazi group.

This is, as we have seen, in 1689/90. The lost synagogal record referred to above proves the existence of the Congregation before the year 5452 or 1691/2--i.e. at the latest in the year 5451 or 1690/1. The year 1690--to be exact, the last months of that year--is the common denominator of these two unimpeachable authorities.

Another newly-published source, which saw the light after these lines were written, provides confirmation for the date 1690 for the establishment of the institution. According to Dr. Lionel Barnett (Bevis Marks Records, London 1940, i, 30), the quarrelsome Samuel Heilbuth, jeweller, of Duke's Place (members of whose family were to be closely associated with the Great Synagogue in its early years) had been living in England at least since 1671, and was associated with the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue. From 1690 to 1694 there was, for no apparent reason, a break in his attendance. It is natural to explain this as a consequence of the establishment of the new place of worship, to which he properly belonged, even though later on he once more began to attend the older synagogue sporadically. One may deduce from this too that it was in 1690 that the second metropolitan community was set up.

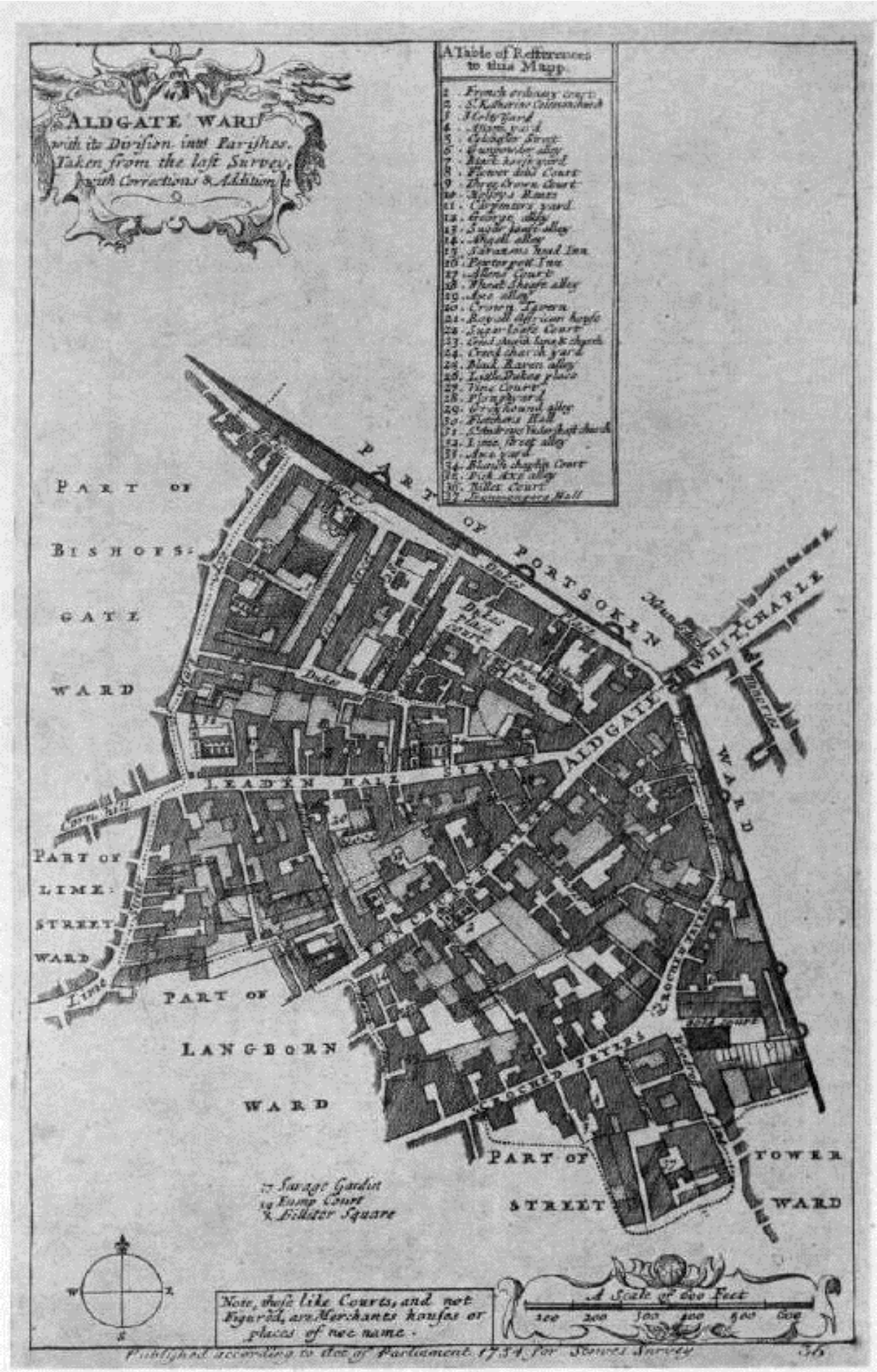
In view of these three independent pieces of evidence, all pointing to the same conclusion, it may now be regarded as an established fact that, while the origins of the Ashkenazi community in London may go back some while earlier, its organised existence began in the year 1690.2

Where was this earliest precursor of the Great Synagogue situated? The current works of reference are explicit on this point. It was, they say, in Broad Court, Mitre Square, being removed later on to the present site. It remains to decide where Broad Court, Mitre Square, was to be found, for it figures on no modern map. But it must be realised how vague and how fluid London place-names were down to the nineteenth century. Before this period, the name "Duke's Place" seems to have been most frequently applied, not as it was for so long, and as will generally be the case in the present volume, to the present Creechurch Place (previously St. James's Place) but to what is now called Mitre Square, at the rear of the Great Synagogue, and the adjacent streets. The historic Duke's Place, now so sadly metamorphosed, was variously called Duke's Place Court or Broad Court--a designation found at irregular intervals from as early as 1646 to as late as 1775. "Broad Court, Mitre Square" where the Synagogue was originally established, was not therefore some obscure cul-de-sac. It was none other than Duke's Place itself, where the first permanent synagogue was built, according to the historians, in 1722, and which for so many years was the heart of the London Ghetto.3

Unfortunately, the rate-books and similar records of the parish of St. James's, Duke's Place, can no longer be traced, and the aid which they might have provided in locating the primitive synagogue more precisely is thus lost. It is worthwhile, however, to attempt the task. Clues are not entirely absent: for in the chronological table at the close of E. H. Lindo's A Jewish Calendar for sixty-four years, published in 1838, the following interesting entry may be read:

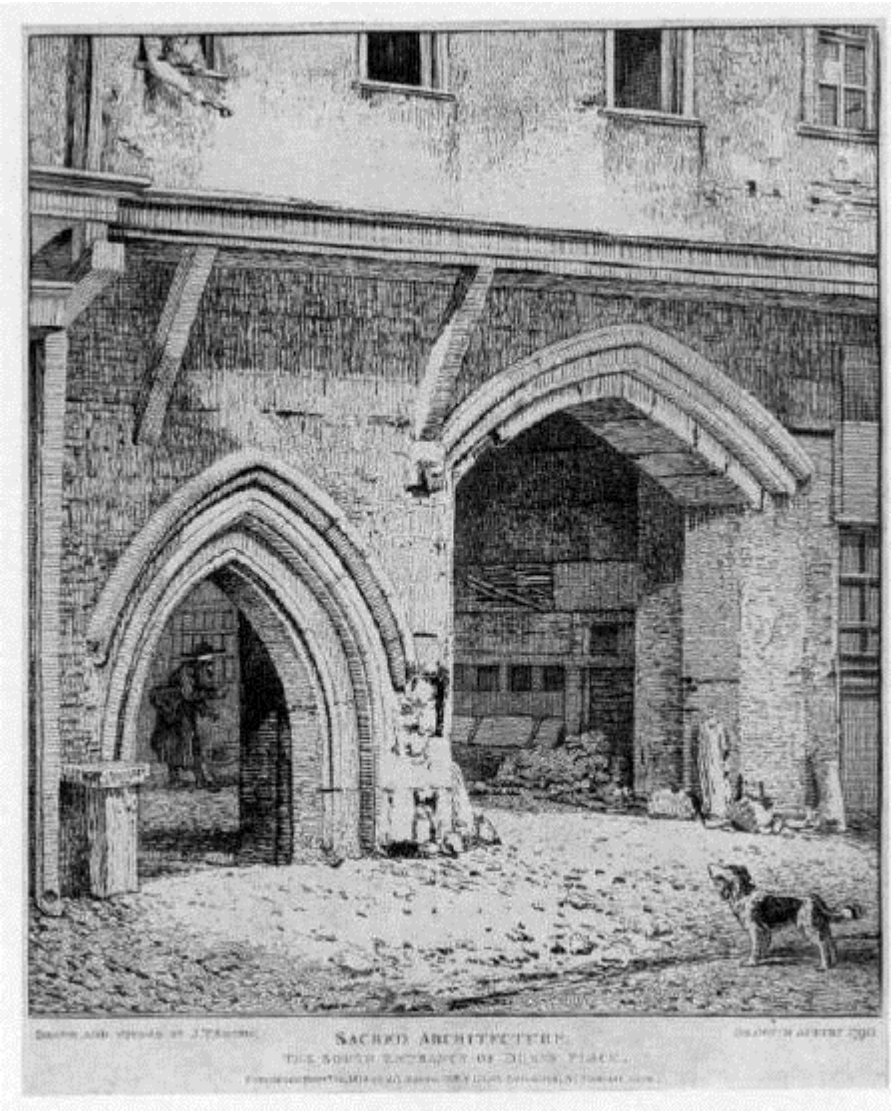
1692. The first German Synagogue erected in London, in Broad Court, Duke's Place, on the site of the present Great Synagogue.

This represents, presumably, the tradition current in the London community upwards of a century ago. If it is correct, and the position remained unchanged from the time of the foundation onwards, we must conclude that the first Ashkenazi Synagogue in London, the precursor of the present



The Synagogue area in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (from Stowe's Survey of London, 1754)

Great Synagogue, was actually founded in the year 1690 on a portion of the site which that stately edifice now occupies. The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue was as yet still situated in its primitive home in Creechurch Lane. The esnoga which was subsequently to be erected in Bevis Marks was as yet not even projected. But the congregation which afterwards adopted the name of the Great Synagogue was already established on the same site that it has continued to occupy down to the present day, sanctified now by an unbroken tradition of Jewish worship extending over two and a half centuries,4 The area was historic. Fifteen centuries before, the Romans had constructed a bastion of their City Wall just here: and masonry belonging to it may be seen below the present Great Synagogue building. In the Middle Ages, the area was occupied by the famous Priory of the Holy Trinity, otherwise known as Christ Church (by a curious coincidence, certain ground in the neighbourhood belonging to the foundation was at one time mortgaged to a Jewish financier, bringing back the connexion perhaps to Angevin times). The former Duke's (now Creechurch) Place is on the site, and to the present day preserves the actual form, of the Great Court of the Priory. Indeed, down to the beginning of the last century access to it was obtained through an ancient Gothic archway, which had formerly been the main entrance to the mediaeval pile. The Great Synagogue occupies part of the site of the Conventual Church (though it is questionable whether the Austin Canons who worshipped there would have appreciated the revolution); while a portion of the synagogal area is described in an old deed as "abutting on the house called the Great Kitchen" On the dissolution of the monasteries, the ground in question was granted by Henry VIII to Thomas Audley, the Lord Chancellor. From him, it went to his daughter, Margaret, who married the Duke of Norfolk. Their heirs allowed it to pass piecemeal into plebeian hands, the main precinct being purchased by the City in 1592, though a certain portion devolved on Trinity College, Cambridge, from which body various extensions to the Great Synagogue site were acquired. The nomenclature of the neighbourhood vividly recalls this past history. Mitre Square (on the site of the former cloisters) and Mitre Court were named after the tavern which used as its sign the distinctive head-dress of the Prior of Holy Trinity; while Duke's Place preserves a reminiscence of His Grace of Norfolk, former proprietor of the entire area.



Entrance to Duke's Place in the eighteenth century (from an engraving)

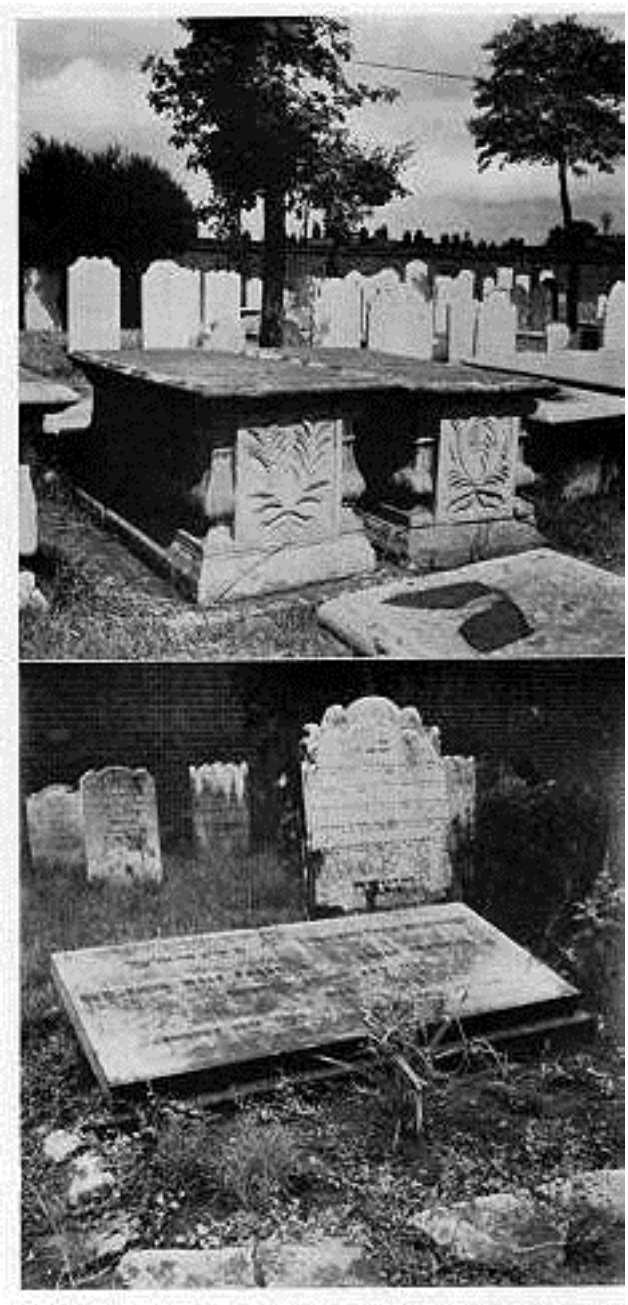
Now that they had their permanent synagogue, one thing only was required by the Ashkenazim to make their newly-established community self-supporting. Hitherto, they had buried their dead in the cemetery of their Spanish and Portuguese

coreligionists in Mile End, acquired with the connivance of Oliver Cromwell himself at the time when Menasseh ben Israel was in London. After their own congregational organisation was formed, it was hardly equitable that this arrangement should continue, especially in view of the constant increase in their numbers. On Sunday, January 11th, 1692/35 David Penso, parnas of the Burial Society of the older community, called the attention of the Mahamad to "the many tudescos who are at present in this city and increase every day", and the problem to which this gave rise. His fellow-dignitaries agreed that their burial-ground was not large enough to serve both sections of the community, and decided to take action. Summoning to the vestry-room the leaders of the other body ("The Mahamad of the tudescos", as they were designated in the record) they presented them with an ultimatum, indicating that they must find their own cemetery within six months, after the lapse of which time no more of their number would be buried in the House of Life except those who had paid their burial-rate (finta de Bethahaim). This is incidentally the first documentary record of the existence of an organised Ashkenazi community that has thus far been traced. The six months passed, but whether from penury or from neglect nothing was done (unless, as is conceivable but not probable, a cemetery of which all trace is now lost was instituted at this period for the poorer members of the community). No doubt pressure continued: and in the year 1695/6 a separate Burial Society (Hebra Kadisha) was instituted in connection with the Ashkenazi community. The names of the original governing-body of this organisation have been preserved, constituting the earliest nominal roll of members of the Synagogue: we shall have to return to this document later on.

Deed for the acquisition of Cemetery, 1696/7

In the end, the pressure from without grew too great to be resisted any longer. Benjamin Levy, the wealthy Ashkenazi magnate, determined to take the responsibility on his own shoulders. It was for him indeed a matter of minor importance, since he was a full member of the Spanish and Portuguese community, paying all synagogal dues according to an ample assessment, and having thus been able to lay his wife to rest in the Mile End burial-ground not long before. It was therefore quite altruistically that he acted. There was a piece of vacant garden-ground

abutting on the Sephardi cemetery on the north side, the property of Captain Nathaniel Owen. It was impossible for Levy to purchase this outright, being not only a Jew but also alien born, though an endenizened British subject. He accordingly acquired it, by a deed of February 12th, 1697 (February 2nd, 1696, according to the "old style" of reckoning) for 999 years, at a peppercorn rent, for a payment of £190, of which amount £105 was left on mortgage. This God's Acre may still be seen, being that part of what is now termed the Alderney Road Cemetery (considerably enlarged since that date) immediately to the left of the entrance from the street, with a low wall dividing it from the historical Beth Haim of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation.



The Cemetery in Alderney Road (Acquired 1696/7)

Thus, with its synagogue, its regulations, its Governing Body, its Burial Society, and its Cemetery, the new community was at length fully equipped with every necessary adjunct.

Notes Chapter Two

1 D. Maclean and N. G. Brett-James in Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, n.s. vi, 324, vii, 151.

2 Both A. M. Hyamson in his History of the Jews in England and E. N. Adler in his History of the Jews in London date the foundation of the Great Synagogue "c. 1690", apparently without printed authority, but possibly following some traditional source which neither at present recalls.

3 The name Duke's Place, as applied to the present Creechurch Place, is found as early as 1666; sometimes, however, it is applied more loosely to the entire area. Mitre Square on the other hand was also designated Little Duke's Place (1799&endash;1831). As indicated, the new nomenclature will generally be neglected in these pages, The name Duke's Place was transferred to the former Shoemaker's Row (later Duke Street) in the nineteen-twenties.

4 This statement, hypothetical when it was written, is finally confirmed by a document of 1795 in the Guildhall Archives, discovered while this volume was passing through the press (see below, p. 116): "The Congregation of German Jews in London have always congregated themselves in their Synagogue in Shoemaker Row, which, is built on lands belonging to this Honble City."

5 This form of date is used for clarity. The "Old Style" Calendar, which began the year in March, still prevailed in England: the year was therefore 1692 according to the "Old Style" and 1693 according to the "New", officially adopted in 1752 but already widely used.

Chapter III
THE FATHERS OF THE COMMUNITY

OF the structure of the synagogue and its history in the first years of its existence nothing whatever has hitherto been known. It is probable at that the outset there was no synagogue building, but only a house or part of a house adapted to conform to the very simple requirements of Jewish worship. Possibly, there is a reference to it in the 1720 edition of Stowe's Survey of London, edited by Strype (volume i, p. 81) where reference is made to "Duke's Place, which is very large. and for the generality taken up by the Jews... and in this part was the Jew's Synagogue, a good large upper room." It is not out of the question, in view of the use of the past tense, that this actually refers to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, not long since reconstructed, which was in the Duke's Place area. If, however, we take this topographical reference literally, we may apply to the Great Synagogue also an uncomplimentary reference in the popular anti-Semitic tract, An Historical and Law Treatise against the Jews and Judaism in England, showing that by the Established Laws of the Land, no Jew has any Right to live in England (first published in 1703). Here we read:

For, with submission, it is but a very slender sign of expelling Immorality and Prophaneness, and a less Sign of Reformation or Religion, to see a Synagogue erecting in Duke's Place within the Heart of the Great City of London, for Jewish Rabies, and such like, to pour out their Blasphemies.

Once again, the reference is very probably to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, round the corner in Bevis Marks. This however had been dedicated in the autumn of 1701, and to refer to it as being still under construction in 1703 shows, to say the least, a certain lack of accuracy. If we apply the two passages literally, to the Ashkenazi synagogue situated in Duke's Place itself, we must conclude that, some twelve or thirteen years after its establishment, it was reconstructed so drastically that public attention was attracted; and that it occupied henceforth a large upper room, apparently on the present site in the corner of the great square.

This paragraph, with what may appear to some its some-what laboured reasoning, was already written when, in the course of a re-examination of the oldest account-book of the Synagogue, documentary confirmation of the hypothesis was found. In 1712, the Treasurer was one Ze'eb ben Jacob, perhaps identical with the Mr. John Jacobs whom we encounter in secular records. When his books were inspected at the end of his term of office, the audit included also his outstanding accounts (apparently for a sum of £49 2s. 101/2d.) in connexion with works at the Synagogue ten years before, in 1702, when he had been in charge of the special building-fund. (The dedication-ceremony seems to have been performed in the week when the first portion of the Book of Leviticus was read--i.e. in the month of March.) It is presumably to this rebuilding that the pamphlet of 1703 refers. It appears that the conventicle in which the congregation worshipped in its early days was a more solid construction than has hitherto been imagined, for the £49 2s. 101/2d.) presumably refers to the surplus only. It is from such casual and indirect allusions that the history of the Great Synagogue in its early years has to be retrieved.

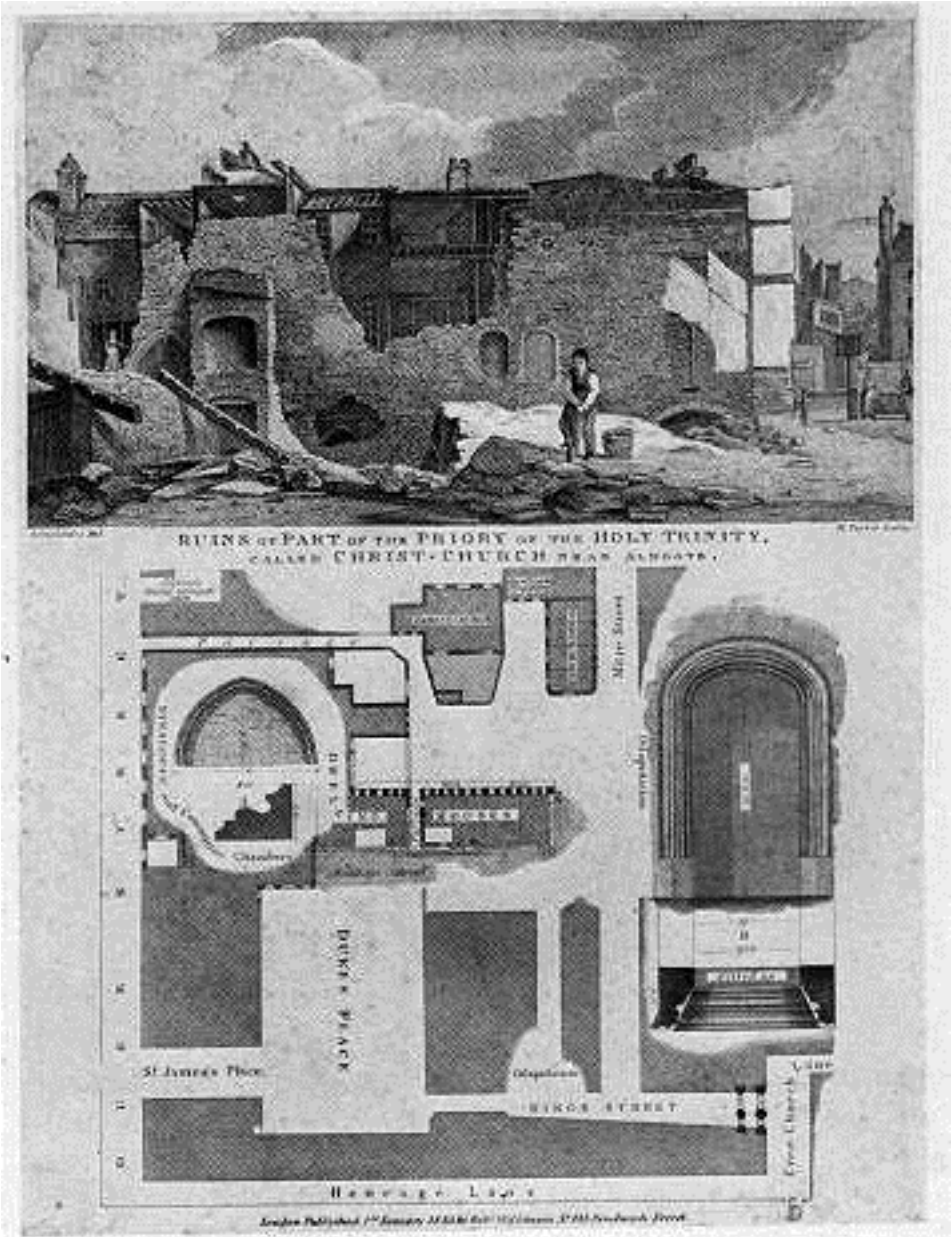
Further scrutiny of the accounts provides some extremely slender additional indications. Reb Aberle, or Abraham London (of whom more below) is recorded to have paid Isaac Nunes the sum of £28 13s. 4d. on behalf of the congregation for the hire of the synagogue for a year and a half from September 1706 to March 1708• One is perhaps justified in deducing that at this period worship was conducted in "a good large upper room" adapted for the purpose in 1702 in a house rented from this member of the Sephardi community. He is perhaps to be identified (if the retransliteration from the Hebrew is correct) with Isaac Israel Nunes, alias Isaac Alvarez, a prominent member of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue, or (more probably) with Isaac Fernandes Nunes, a close friend of Benjamin Levy's. If my conjectures are correct, this house was situated in the southeast corner of the Square.1

The accounts provide a few pieces of additional information regarding this period. It was not long before the newly-established community began to indulge on a not inconsiderable scale in the Jewish privilege of charity, and delegates from abroad seldom appealed to it in vain. It is pleasant to be able to record that, as though by way of expressing gratitude to the senior London community for past favours, one of the earliest donations on record, probably for 1708, is a payment for £5 for the Meshullach or Messenger of the Sephardi community of Smyrna, devastated at about this period by one of its recurrent fires. At about the same time, a levy for the emissaries of Lublin on behalf of Polish Jewry brought in £5 7s. 6d. (the Sephardim had collected £276 9s.). There was a law-suit with one member, and payments were made to release debtors from prison. One sees an echo of a petty annoyance in payment to the parish of £5 on behalf of the Rabbi, as the fine to save him from the indignity of having to perform the functions of scavenger, to which office he had been elected. Other than details of expenditure, frequently for charity, we know nothing. The cemetery gives us no assistance in our enquiry, for the London atmosphere has dealt ruthlessly with the epitaphs of this period. Indeed, the earliest decipherable tombstone in the old burial-ground marks the last resting-place, not of an Ashkenazi, but of a Sephardi. Close to the wall that divides the two cemeteries is an altar-stone, in good preservation, similar to those in the other ground, with a sonorous epitaph in Spanish as well as Hebrew. This remains as a perpetual memento of the stormy days in the history of the Spanish and Portuguese community in London shortly after the construction of the Bevis Marks synagogue, when Haham David Nieto, newly arrived from Leghorn, was suspected of having given utterance to heretical opinions in one of his sermons, and was vigorously assailed by some punctilious members of his congregation. There were petitions and counter-petitions, writings and counterwritings; and the authors of an anonymous "libel" upon Nieto were barred from the synagogue. In 1705, in the middle of all this, one of them, Joseph Elijah Cohen d'Azevedo, died--on the worst terms with his community and having dared, if not incurred, the penalty of Herem (excommunication). Whether his family could not, or would not, inter his body in the House of Life belonging to his own congregation is not quite clear (the most probable hypothesis is that they would not submit to the indignity of having him buried "behind the boards"). In any case, he was in fact laid to rest just beyond the dividing wall, among the Ashkenazim, who did not scruple to extend him this last hospitality.

Let us attempt, from the extremely slender materials at our disposal, to reconstruct the composition of the newly-formed community. The majority of the members probably hailed from the flourishing port of Hamburg, and continued to maintain the closest relations with their kinsmen in that city--to a considerable extent those affluent, pious, quarrelsome gem-merchants, who are depicted for all time in the Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln and Rabbi Jacob Emden. (That this was the parent-community of the London settlement is proved by the fact that the rite followed in the Synagogue, from earliest times, was stipulated to he that of Poland and North Germany, as observed in Ham burg.) There was a smaller contingent from Amsterdam, with a sprinkling from other German cities and even from as far afield as Poland, During the first years of its existence, the outstanding member of the community was of course Benjamin Levy. In 1684 he had married for the second time, the bride on this occasion being Hendele (Hitchele), daughter of Samuel Heilbuth. The ceremony took place, naturally, under the auspices of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue, the officiant being Haham Solomon Ayllon. Later on, in 1699, the marriage contract having been lost, a new one was drawn up and registered. The couple appear to have removed to a new house in Southwark (Fenchurch) Street. Here Hendele presented her husband in the course of the next few years with two children--a daughter, Abigail (called Golly), and a son, Elias. In the spring of 1704, the lady died, and was buried in the cemetery which her husband had acquired. He did not survive this second bereavement long. That same year he retired from the Royal Exchange, being succeeded as one of the twelve "Jew Brokers" by Aaron Alvares: and, probably in the month of June, he himself passed away.2 He had formerly desired to be buried near his children in the Beth Hayim of the Spanish and Portuguese community. But, since his second wife had been laid to rest among her own kinsfolk, he left instructions that he should be interred at her side, in the plot which he had himself purchased. No doubt an impressive monument was raised over the grave: but all trace of it has since

disappeared, and the great community of which he was in a sense the founder is ignorant even of the precise spot in which he was laid to rest. It is to be assumed, however, that it is marked by one of the row of massive altar-stones in the middle of the ground, the inscriptions on which are no longer legible.

In his will, the dead magnate expressed the wish that a silver lamp should be given to the "Dutch" (i.e. "deutsch", that is to say Ashkenazi) synagogue, to be kept burning for a year after his decease with "oyle" fetched out of his own house. After the expiration of twelve months, the lamp was to go to the use of the synagogue; but, if a new place of worship were built and the lamp disposed of, something else should be purchased to perpetuate his memory. The new Synagogue was duly built nearly twenty years later, as we shall see, and the lamp presumably disposed of. But it has not been replaced, and there is now no tangible reminder of any sort to remind the congregants that Benjamin Levy lived, and deserved well of the body to which they belong.



The Synagogue site, showing ruins of the Priory of the Holy Trinity (from an engraving)

The will itself was a curious, involved document, consisting of a formal instrument in English and a supplementary one in Hebrew (or perhaps Yiddish) comprising certain more intimate

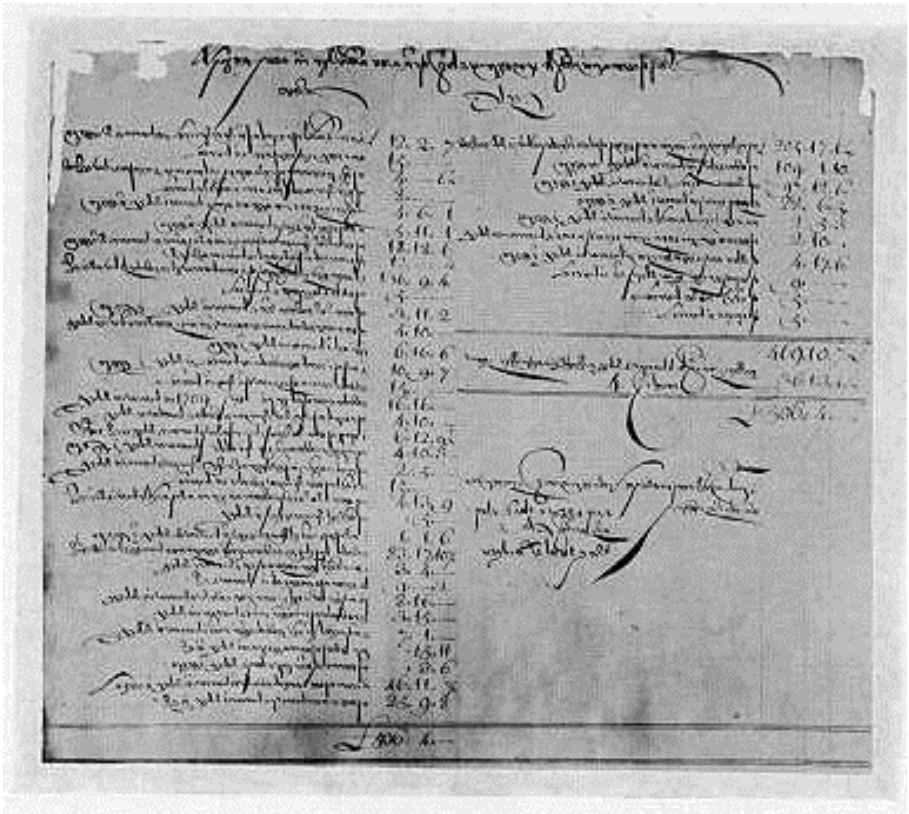
details: this arrangement being rendered necessary by the fact that "we have heere but a small congregation that we cannot have our laws executed so well here as in other places, so I am obliged by the English law to amend it because it is stronger and of more force". Charitable bequests were noteworthy for their range rather than for individual magnitude. The poor of the Sephardi as well as the Ashkenazi congregation of London, the famous Klaus or Talmudical College of Hamburg, the Christian paupers of the parish, the Portuguese Orphan Society, dowerless Jewish brides, and other similar charitable causes all benefited. For twelve years, annual distributions were to be made to poor Jews, Ashkenazi and Sephardi--half on Passover to buy flour and half on the anniversary of the testator's death to buy coals, at the discretion of the "Clerk of the Synagogue", who would know who stood in greatest need. There were bequests to scholars (including Haham David Nieto), relatives and others. There were marriage portions for needy kinswomen, including two of his own unmarried sisters, and a trifle for the daughter of the former Rabbi Judah Loeb Cohen ("Hachachem Hashalom Morenu Rabbi Libe"). His mother-in-law was treated generously. His daughter Abigail was to have a necklace consisting of thirty-two diamond roses, and other jewellery, as well as his fine striking watch. Menahem, his son by his first marriage, received his mother's ear-rings and silver enamelled box, to be given to his bride, as well as various rings and his father's gold watch for himself. The library was divided, the Dutch (i.e. non-Hebrew) books going to Golly, and the Hebrew books, including a Scroll of the Law, to the sons. The balance of the estate was to be divided in equal among the children, who were expressly enjoined to maintain their membership of both the London synagogues with which their father had been associated.3

The admixture in the will of ethical counsel and practical dispositions was characteristic but curious. "I earnestly desire my executors and my mother-in-law to use their utmost endeavour so that my children may be educated in the fear of God and in a strict religious and virtuous life in the Jewish religion. And I strictly charge and require all my said three children on my Blessing and as they value the Blessing of Almighty God and by all that is good that they have a great regard to the advice of my Executors and to their nearest relations especially in their marriages and that they always marry in the race of the Dutch Jews in which they are borne and that they be mutually helpful to each other according to their power and religiously observe and keep the law of God according to the Jewish religion all the days of their lives and have a special regard in all they do to the honour of their family. And forasmuch as I think it for the interest of my family to enlarge their relations as much as may be by their marriage it is my earnest desire that my daughter Golly shall not marry to the first degree of kindred of such persons as my son Menahem shall marry.... The Almighty God has given me sufficient to leave my children pretty good portions and you my children shall at all times consider your poor friends and help them in what you can as well as your Mother has done the same; and I beg of my beloved children that they agree together and everyone be careful and helpful to each other. Then I do not question but that Almighty God will help you and give His blessing and peace."

Second in wealth, though not in activity, to Benjamin Levy was Abraham (Naphtali Hertz) Franks, who had been with him one of the twelve original Jew Brokers admitted in 1697 and the only other Ashkenazi: we will have to revert to him and his family again, for they took a particularly active part in the affairs of the congregation throughout the eighteenth century. Mention has already been made of another prominent family hailing from Hamburg--that headed by Samuel Heilbuth, jeweller, of St. James's, Duke's Place. He had been endenizened in 1675, and was formerly a Yahid of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation, with which he maintained his association even after the Ashkenazi synagogue had been founded: as we have just seen, his daughter Hitchele was Benjamin Levy's second wife. Of Samuel Heilbuth's four sons, the eldest was Philip, who later on, as a "broken merchant", claimed to have first projected the maritime insurance corporation which was the nucleus of Lloyds: while Isaac (whom we find nominated as a Collector for the Poor for the parish of St. Katherine Creechurch in 1715, and engaging in litigation with one Asher Levy in 1724 over a Bill of Exchange endorsed by John Jacobs) was a familiar figure in the City. Samuel Heilbuth's brother, Jacob, enjoyed a scholarly reputation, and was one of the original members of the Burial Society in 1695/6.

Another noteworthy family was that of Mears, probably of Dutch origin. Sampson Mears was an importer and ship-owner, whom we meet later on as a dockyard superintendent. His kinsman, Jacob, was subsequently at the head of a syndicate of English merchants and sea-captains who approached the King of Prussia with an East African colonisation scheme, which, had it been carried out, might have changed the face of history. The ancient community of Frankfort-on-Main sent over Moses and Meir Waage, members of a family which derived its name from the Sign of the Golden Scales, who in England anglicised their name to Wagg; it is said that the latter was able to give Sir Robert Walpole effective assistance at the time of the South Sea Bubble, and was rewarded by a post in the American colonies worth £100 per annum. We see from these details that the group of Ashkenazi Jews who founded the Great Synagogue were not resourceless petty traders of no family. They were in many cases the children of houses which had made their name known in Jewish history, engaging in activities which were of some importance in the world of affairs.

The list of founders of the Burial Society in 1695/6 provides us with some other interesting names. Baruch Benedict ben Solomon Bloch, to be Treasurer of the Congregation in 1708, etc., is obviously to be identified with Mr. Benedict Solomon, of the parish of St. Katherine Coleman, who in 1723/4 submitted to a fine when selected as Churchwarden --as we have seen, a mild annoyance resorted to by the authorities for the express purpose of raising revenue. Other members (besides one or two to whom we shall have occasion to revert later on) were R. Jacob ben Judah of Amsterdam (perhaps to be identified with Mr. Jacob Levy of the parish of St. Katherine Coleman, as that surname was often applied to a person whose father was called Loeb or Leib, i.e. Judah) R. Judah Leib ben Moses of Lublin, Samuel ben Judah Segal (or Levy), Sabbatai ben David, and Isaac Brisker (i.e. of Brest-Litovsk). Another person who emerges from the Hebrew records is the wealthy Hamburg jeweller, Joseph Levy, who advanced £30,000 to Prince Eugène when he came to England to visit Queen Anne in 1712. He was one of the group of Jewish merchants who were asserted to be concerned in the export of silver in 1690, as were also Solomon Levy (Benjamin's brother) and Mordecai Isaac. A scholar and patron of learning, Joseph had a resident tutor in his house to teach his children, the erudite R. Simcha Bunem Levy of Pintschow.



Page from oldest ledger, with accounts for 1708-1710

The Assessment Records of the City parishes in 1695 give us several other names, which indicate something of the numerical importance of the community. In the parish of St. James's, Duke's Place, alone we find Sampson Marks, Michael Boss, Emanuel Isaac, Mordecai Abraham, -- Meers, -- Prague (perhaps identical with the David or Wolff Prager of early records), -- Polander, -- Lyon, -- Jacobs, -- Hollander, and Samuel Levy (obviously the same as Samuel Segal). The heart of the settlement seems to have been in Rose Alley (now known as Mitre Street, Aldgate), where there were living Alexander Marcus, Zachariah Marks, Solomon Marks, Aaron Moses, -- Polander, -- Jacobs, and -- Hollander. Another member of the community was Moses Israel (or Azriel) Levy, ancestor of a notable American clan : a silver ewer presented by him to his bride, Sarah, on the occasion of their marriage in 1695, is one of the earliest Anglo-Jewish specimens of the sort on record. The brothers Henry and Behrend Lehmann of Halberstadt are apocryphally said to have journeyed to London in 1694 in connexion with the establishment of the Bank of England. (On the way, it is told, they had a narrow escape from drowning, and as a thank-offering Behrend subsidised the publication of a new edition of the Talmud, as the London Rabbi advised him.) For the sake of completeness, we may call attention also to Levine Weisweiler, Joseph Symonds, Jacob Michael, Heschell Abrahams, Isaac Barents, Emanuel Simons, Moses Marcus, Elias Isaac Polack, and others who received passes to travel to the Continent between 1689 and 1696.

We have left the most prominent of all to the last. This was the learned, restless, overbearing R. Abraham, who had resided so long in London that he was often called Reb Aberle London, though sometimes from his place of origin Reb Aberle Hamburger. The son of the Hamburg Parnas R. Moses Nathan, or Norden, famous in that community in his day, he had received a thorough Talmudic education and was given the Rabbinical diploma: though his material circumstances were so good that it was unnecessary for him to make use of it except (it must be feared) when he wanted to make himself a nuisance to others. He was a merchant on a large scale, in partnership with Sampson Mears, and their ships went as far afield as the West Indies. But his main interest was in his dealings in precious stones. In Hamburg, he was on friendly terms with the famous Haham Zevi Ashkenazi, the greatest Rabbinical authority of the day (to whom, as "Rabbi Harsh of Hamburg ", Benjamin Levy had left a legacy). Indeed, when in 1705 the Spanish and Portuguese community in London was racked by the problem of the attack on their Rabbi's orthodoxy, to which reference has been made above, it was through Reb Aberle's mediation that: it was submitted to Haham Zevi for his opinion. There will be a good deal to say later on regarding this stormy petrel of London Jewry. It is enough to state at this stage in our narrative that, though he ultimately retired to the Continent, his descendants long continued to play a prominent role in England. David Tevele Schiff, Chief Rabbi from 1765 to 1792, was the son of his daughter Roesche, who had married Solomon Schiff of Frankfort: while his son Kalman was father-in-law of Moses Abrahams, of Poole in Dorset, and thus ancestor of Viscount Samuel, first British High Commissioner for Palestine.

Unlike the majority of the group, the Hazan or Reader of the community in 1695/6 (the earliest of its officials whose name is on record) did not come from Germany, but from Poland. This was the scholarly Rabbi Judah Leib ben Moses of Lissa, formerly of Wesel. He died, apparently, some ten years later (the accounts for 1706-8 register a payment of £5 to the apothecary for the late R. Judah, the Hazan).4 He left a young son, Jacob, at that time only nine years old. The boy, who took the name of Jacob London, became quite a noteworthy figure in Hebrew letters. He lived for some time in Amsterdam, Hamburg and Frankfort, returned to Lissa, and later travelled through Italy, where the numerous unintelligible papers in a strange tongue which were found on him once led to his arrest as a spy. He was the author of a well-known ethical work in Hebrew, The Contending of the King of the South with the King of the North (Amsterdam, 1737) as well as of some other books and various hymns. R. Judah's immediate successor as Reader was probably R. Mendel the Hazan, who was in office in 1708 at a salary of £12 2s. 7d. per annum; the latter's coadjutor as Beadle was a certain Meir ben Mordecai Levi, assisted sometimes by his son Menahem.

The first Rabbi of the community whose name has been preserved is Judah Leib ben Ephraim Anschel Cohen, of Hamburg--an undistinguished scholar, who found himself in constant friction with Abraham Aberle. The relations between the two men became worse and worse. One day, it was noticed in the synagogue that the tallith which the Rabbi was wearing for prayer was mutilated and unfit for use--an unpleasant reflection on a person who was supposed to set an example to the community in matters of ritual observance. Subsequently, the reason was found to be that an unscrupulous hand had deliberately cut off one of the fringes after the daily routine inspection.5 Worst of all, men whispered that the person responsible for the outrage had been Meir Levi, the Beadle, acting under the instructions of Reb Aberle himself. Rabbi Judah was fortunate to find another appointment safe from this relentless persecutor at Rotterdam, where a vacancy happened to occur just at this time.6 By the spring of 1700 he had entered into discharge of his functions in his new home. For reasons which will be gone into later on, no immediate steps were taken to fill the Rabbinate by a person of equal standing. Instead, the community availed itself temporarily of the services of a certain Rabbi Aaron ben Moses the Scribe, formerly of Dublin, where a diminutive Jewish congregation existed at this time. We may identify him with Aaron Moses, who was living in 1695 in Rose Alley (Mitre Street), in the immediate proximity of Duke's Place, with Rose his wife and their daughter Leah. He was a native of Nowogródek, in Poland, and was a skilled scribe, having practised that art under the supervision of no less an authority than Rabbi David haLevi, author of the Ture Zahab; and it was presumably in this capacity that he had first come to England. A collection of his letters that has been preserved enables us to reconstruct something of his personality and activities. He subsequently lived in Shoemaker's Row, Duke's Place: he eked out his income by acting in traditional style as marriage broker: he made some superb copies of Hebrew codices, of little importance in themselves, for Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford (there are specimens both in the British Museum and in the Cambridge University Library). But he was hardly of the calibre to serve as spiritual and intellectual leader of the London community, and in point of fact his office was only nominal and of short duration. He nevertheless fully deserves the few lines that have been devoted to him here: for his name is the first to figure in the distinguished roll of spiritual heads of the Great Synagogue and Chief Rabbis of England, recited by that congregation and by many other Anglo-Jewish communities on the solemn occasions of the Jewish year.7

Notes Chapter Three

1 Comparison with the data given below, pp. 47&endash;8 and 51, makes it apparent either the site was afterwards extended, or else that Nunes asked only a nominal rent.

2 There is evidence that, in his last illness, Hayim (=life) was symbolically prefixed to his name: for his son Elias was called in Hebrew "ben Hayim Benjamin Levi".

3 The executors of the will were Alvaro da Fonseca, Joshua Gomes Serra, Isaac Fernandes Nunes (presumably the Synagogue landlord), Abraham Nathan and Moses Hart (for the last two, see later on in this and the following chapter). Each received a handsome legacy.

4 His widow was still receiving a pension, with her son Isaac, in 17P23/4.

5 To cut off the fringes of a tallith was intended to convey an evil omen, since this is done to the tallith in which a corpse is wrapped.

6 Judah Leib subscribes himself as Rabbi of Rotterdam in an approbation written in 1700, and he was in Amsterdam from 1706 onwards. The events described above are therefore to be dated some years earlier than has generally been the case, unless they took place during a later visit to London. He was not, as so often stated, a relative of Benjamin Levy's, though the latter left his daughter a marriage-portion. He was probably appointed after 1695/6. as otherwise his name

would have figured among the founders of the London Burial Society in that year. His term of office cannot therefore have exceeded four years, c. 1696 to c. 1700.

7 Rabbi Aaron was an old man of at least seventy when he died, some time after 1707. In the Commemoration Book of the Chatham Synagogue, he is designated as "the Holy": in that of the Portsmouth community, as one "who fixed times for study and devoted his soul and spirit to the service of his Creator, and whose soul went forth in purity and holiness."

Chapter IV
THE HAMBRO' SECESSION

THE retirement of Rabbi Judah Leib Cohen had marked the beginning of the ascendancy in the Ashkenazi community of London of a family which was to dominate it, in both the spiritual and the secular spheres, for half a century and more. Benjamin Levy had a relative,1 Hartwig (Naphtali Hertz) Moses, of Hamburg, who had emigrated to Breslau with strong recommendations to the Count of Schaffgotsche. He had prospered in his new home, and was known far and wide as a supporter of Hebrew scholarship. He had two sons, who varied their careers in the traditional Jewish fashion--the elder, Uri or Aaron, born in 1670, devoting himself to study; the younger, Moses, born in 1675, to commerce. The former (known also as Uri Phoebus), after receiving a sound Rabbinic training at home, married a daughter of the illustrious Samuel ben Uri-Schraga of Schidlow, sometime Rabbi of Fürth, whose famous work Beth Shemuel--a commentary on the juristic code Eben haEzer, and the first book issued from Sabbatai Bassista's press at Dyhernfurth--had been produced at Hartwig Moses' cost. In his father-in-law's house, Aaron's Talmudic education was completed, and before returning to Breslau he directed a Rabbinical college in Poland.

In 1697, the Council of Breslau made one of its periodical attempts to expel the Jews. It was natural at this juncture for Hartwig Moses' younger son to go to seek his fortune in London, where his kinsman Benjamin Levy had established himself so handsomely. Here he became known (the father's name serving as the basis of his own surname, as was usual at the time) as Moses Hart. His cousin took him into his business as his confidential assistant: later on, he branched out on his own, and by 1704 had prospered sufficiently to become enrolled as one of the twelve authorised "Jew Brokers", in succession to the Sephardi magnate David de Faro.

His position in the community was reinforced by his family connexions. Simon Lazarus, of Goslar, who had accompanied him from Breslau, was his maternal uncle : the latter's son, Lazarus Simon, and Meir Wagg, of Frankfort, were his brothers-in-law: David Prager had married his cousin. (It was with reason that Johann Schudt reported that the London Jews were "much brother-in-lawed" [sehr geschwägert].) Unlike Benjamin Levy, Moses Hart was associated with the Ashkenazi synagogue from the moment of his arrival, and took the part in its administration which his position warranted. In 1704, the year of the other's death, he was acting as the lay head of the community.

It was natural for him in such circumstances to press the claims to official recognition of his brother, who had followed him from the Continent and was now known to the outside world as Aaron Hart. The latter had not been on the best of terms with the retiring Rabbi, Judah Leib Cohen, and had taken some part in the disputes that preceded the latter's withdrawal. For this reason, it had been considered proper that he ought not profit from it and should accept no official appointment in London for at least three years to come (it was said, indeed, that he had bound himself to this effect by oath). But, with his training, his experience, and his connections, it was not easy to enforce such a restriction. Before long he was performing Rabbinical functions; a little later on, he formally accepted the appointment.2 He was to remain in office for over half a century, until 1756, witnessing the inconsiderable community over which he had at first presided increase in numbers during his incumbency to some thousands, with offshoots in more than one provincial city.

His first years of office were anything but tranquil. Glückel of Hameln (that delightfully garrulous Hamburg Jewess whose Memoirs entitle her to the name of a German-Jewish Pepys, and are an invaluable source of information for the social life of the period) had among her brood of children a daughter named Freudche. To her mother's delight, the child had married Mordecai, son of Moses ben Leib, or Moses Libusch, one of the founders of the Altona-Hamburg community, whose name was a byeword in Germany for his wealth, his learning and his nobility of character. Mordecai (or Marcus) Moses, as the young man was called, followed the example of other members of the Hamburg community and went to London to seek his fortune, in the additional calling of dealer in precious stones.3 Later on, he was joined temporarily by his brother-in-law, Mordecai Hameln, who as a child of five had been so petted by Prince Maurice of Nassau and the future Frederick III of Prussia, when they attended the marriage of his sister Zipporah at Cleves.

One of Marcus Moses' closest business associates was a certain Abraham Nathan, whom he accompanied more than once to the Continent. It would seem that the two and Sampson Mears, R. Aberle's partner, homesick for the scholarly traditions of Hamburg, wished to set up in London a Beth haMidrash for study, with a synagogue attached, on the model of the famous Klaus in their native city. Early in 1704, they went so far as to make preparations for converting Nathan's house in St. Mary Axe for the purpose. It is possible that they had no idea of seceding from the community, and they maintained that the new place of worship would be strictly subordinate to the house of study. Nevertheless, Moses Hart felt not only that the dignity of his brother, the Rabbi, was likely to be prejudiced by the scheme, but also that the new institution would undermine the position of the existing Ashkenazi synagogue, over which he then presided, and would tend to increase anti-Jewish feeling among the general population. He accordingly enlisted the collaboration of the head of the Spanish and Portuguese community, and the two appealed for support to the Court of Aldermen of the City of London:

Tuesday, 20 March, 1704

Mr. Abraham Mendez and Mr. Moses Hart now acquainting this Court that Abraham Nathan an Inhabitant in St. Mary Axe Samson Mears inhabiting in Goodmans Fields and Marcus Moses of Whitechapel Jews of the German Nation and others were erecting a New Synagogue in St. Mary Axe aforesaid without permission of this Court. It is ordered that the said Abraham Nathan Sampson Mears and Marcus Moses be summoned to attend this Court upon Thursday next to shew cause why they presume to take upon them to erect a new Place for Jewish Worship without any authority for the same, and that the said Mr. Mendez and Mr. Hart be present at the same time.

Thursday, 22 March, 1704 Upon examination of the Complaint made unto this Court, upon Tuesday last that Abraham Nathan Sampson Moses [sic] Marques Moses and others, Jews of the German Nation were erecting a Synagogue in St. Mary Axe. After hearing both Parties in the presence of each other and it appearing unto this Court that the said Building was fitted up and designed by the Parties complained of for a Synagogue or place of Jewish worship and for a Colledge or Schoole for the education and instruction of Youth and others according to the Jewish religion. This Court doth declare that they will not permit nor suffer the said place to be converted or turned into a Synagogue for the exercise of the said Jewish religion or for a Schoole or Colledge for ye education and instruction of any Persons in the Jewish Law or Religion and therefore doth order and require that no person or persons do presume to convert the said place into a Synagogue Colledge or Schoole, or to use any Jewish worship therein as they will answere the same at their peril.

This intervention effectively suppressed the secessionist movement. To reinforce it, moreover, a fresh communal regulation was passed forbidding under pain of excommunication any further attempt to establish a separate synagogue. To this, all members were compelled to subscribe, the

ringleaders of the revolt binding themselves to forfeit £500 each--half payable to Her Majesty the Queen, half to the poor--if they contravened this solemn pact.

Shortly afterwards, Moses Hart was succeeded as presiding officer of the synagogue by Reb Aberle, who had himself at one time shown separatist tendencies and had even set up a rival communal butcher (thus seriously imperilling the stability of the communal finances, partly based on a meat-tax); moreover, relations between him and the Hart brothers had been strained owing to business differences. But all this now belonged to the past; indeed, he was now on the best of terms with Rabbi Aaron, who now seemed to be his instrument.4 He was thus able to act as a communal dictator. Marcus Moses remained a stormy petrel of the community. He prospered in his business of gem-dealing to such an extent that Reb Aberle now considered him a dangerous rival: nor could the latter forget that notwithstanding the disparity of years he had formerly been a suitor for the hand of Freudche, the other's wife. A violent quarrel took place between the two men: and it was accentuated not only by their argumentative natures but also by their scholarly propensities--not reinforced, however, in the case of the younger of the two, by conspicuous scholarly attainments.

It happened that on Sunday, August 27th, 1706, Rabbi Aaron Hart, acting in strict privacy, arranged a conditional divorce for a certain Asher (Anschel) Cohen--a notorious ne'er-do-well who, laden with debt, was about to sail for the West Indies and wished to leave his wife free to marry again if he should not be heard of again. Old Rabbi Aaron of Dublin, whose son-in-law had been ruined at cards by Cohen, was naturally not asked to participate, being an interested party. The document (a very complicated one according to rabbinic regulations) was accordingly drawn up by the official scribe of the Sephardi community, Jacob da Silva: and two scholarly witnesses were found, Isaac ben Joel and Menachem ben Isaac Cohen. However, immediately the news was generally known, Marcus Moses began to criticise the entire proceedings, which he stigmatised as being contrary to Jewish law and practice: for(from what he remembered of what was customary in similar cases at Hamburg) such secrecy was irregular, and he considered it quite impossible to fulfil all the formalities so expeditiously without making a blunder. He was even willing to back his opinion: he told his neighbour in Synagogue, when he heard the news that evening, that he would lay five guineas that the document was invalid, and later asserted with even more confidence that he would wager his diamond ring on it.

Jews traditionally allow themselves a considerable degree of latitude in most intellectual exercises. Nevertheless, ever since the days of "Rabbenu Tam" in the twelfth century, to question the validity of a divorce had been regarded as a heinous offence, which automatically rendered the person responsible liable to excommunication; for such criticism ipso facto impugned the validity of any subsequent marriage and the legitimacy of the offspring. Aaron Hart, a peaceful soul, asked some of his congregants to warn the critic, and even proposed to visit him in his own house to advise him of the consequences of his action. But Marcus Moses remained obdurate: and, when the learned Johanan Holleschau, the Moravian talmudist who was acting as tutor to his sons, undertook to speak to him about the matter, the angry magnate all but ordered him out of the house.

As a compromise, Hart suggested that the matter should be laid before a Rabbinical court for adjudication. The other agreed, with the reservation that only the Rabbinate of the Sephardi community, which stood outside the quarrel, was competent for the purpose. It was accordingly constituted, the members being Haham David Nieto, the Dayan David Yerez, and Aaron Hart himself. But the inclusion of the Rabbi in the tribunal determined Moses not to recognise its authority: and, when the examination of witnesses took place on Tuesday, September 3rd, 1706, he failed to put in an appearance. Instead, he took Johanan Holleschau to live with him and with his aid prepared a counter-attack. The latter managed to secure a copy of the depositions, set about obtaining assistance and counsel for his patron, and communicated with the latter's brother in Hamburg, the wealthy and learned Hendele Cohen (an intimate friend of Haham Zevi) in order to canvass local support. Aaron Hart, meanwhile, was doing his best to placate his critic, and

intimated that, if the other consented to withdraw his strictures and submit to the lesser ban for thirty days--little more than a mark of contrition--he would be recompensed by the signal honour of being called up to the reading of the Law on the approaching New Year and Day of Atonement, among the great ones of the community.

All this time, Reb Aberle had been away from England. In Hamburg, probably, he learned how his rival in commercial and matrimonial affairs had affronted the properly-constituted authorities in the congregation, and how they were prepared to compromise with him in a fashion which would leave his dignity enhanced rather than impaired. Towering with rage, he sent home forbidding Aaron Hart to take any further action in the matter, and on his return to England saw to it that the idea of reconciliation was thrown to the winds. Marcus Moses was formally put under the Ban to which his conduct had legally exposed him. This was no slight matter. Men shunned him as they would the plague: contact with him in the street and synagogue was avoided: he was permitted participation in no ceremonial observance, however pressing his need might be: he was even denied the privilege of bestowing charity, as the very paupers would no longer visit his house. Had not the members of the Sephardi congregation remained friendly, the boycott might have resulted in his financial ruin. The affair became the talk of the town. It was discussed on 'Change; and men spoke of it even in the Judengasse of Frankfort, where the chronicler Schudt garnered spiteful details.5

At this season of the year, with the High Holydays approaching, the position of the excommunicated magnate was intolerable. Brought to a sense of realities, he offered a guarantee of £500 that he would submit to the decision of the Rabbinical authorities. On Nieto's advice, Hart consulted Rabbi Leib Charif of Amsterdam, who recommended that the promise of synagogal honours over the festival should be kept, but no more. But there is no indication that even this took place. That year, as it happens, adverse winds held up the supply of citrons (ethrogim) at the beginning of the feast of Tabernacles. The Sephardim, more fortunate, had received theirs from Italy, and generously gave one to the sister-community. It was jealously guarded and passed round from hand to hand for the ritual benediction to be made; but Marcus Moses and his family were not allowed to touch it. But worse still was to come. Just at this period, his wife Freudche gave birth to a daughter, and attended Synagogue shortly afterwards for the ceremony of naming her. Even this privilege was refused, and she returned home in a flood of tears.

A secondary dispute had emerged by now. It seems that the communal pedagogues, themselves Talmudists, had sided with their colleague, Johanan Holleschau, as against the Rabbi and his supporters. As a punishment, the synagogue authorities determined to exclude them from all communal honours, such as being summoned to the Reading of the Law or invited to festivities. Moreover, on the occasion of a dispute which arose between a householder and a teacher regarding payment, Aaron Hart (with Reb Aberle's approval) decided that the latter was to take a solemn oath in synagogue that he had performed his functions adequately; and other employers eagerly seized the opportunity to insist on the same formality. The Rabbi's critics (headed by Holleschau, who again canvassed support abroad) averred that this too was against Rabbinic law. Thus more fuel was piled upon the flames of the dispute, Aaron Hart being stigmatised as an utter ignoramus.

Meanwhile, Marcus Moses' influential friends on the Continent had not been idle. Judah Leib Cohen, still in Rotterdam, saw the opportunity of avenging himself on his former enemy, and released the London magnate from the Ban, to which he considered that Rabbenu Tam's decision did not properly apply--if only because of the culprit's ignorance that it existed. More influential was the voice of Haham Zevi, who had been approached by Hendele Cohen in Hamburg, and who, regardless of his long friendship with Reb Aberle, was indignant at the treatment meted out to a member of so distinguished a family. During the Intermediate Days of Tabernacles, a letter from him (dated Tuesday, September 15th, before the Day of Atonement, but delayed in

transmission by the autumn storms) arrived in London, intimating that in his considered opinion the penalty imposed was quite unwarranted by the circumstances of the case and had no validity.

Reb Aberle, intolerantly confident in his own scholarship even when he was confronted by the greatest Rabbinical authority in Europe, could not be shaken. Without much difficulty, he dragged the weak and accommodating Aaron Hart in his train. (It was whispered by the malicious that this was the result of bribery, to the tune of several thousand Rhenish florins, though in view of the affluent condition of the Rabbi's family this was patent scandal.) The proceedings against Marcus Moses were reopened, being given a new turn by the solemn formalities employed to impress the witnesses and by the presence among the assessors of the saintly Rabbi Abraham Rovigo of Jerusalem, a famous mystic and a father of the Jewish settlement in the Holy Land, who happened to be in London at the time. Instead of being annulled, the excommunication was reaffirmed, a minute now being entered in the congregational registers (in opposition indeed to the views of some of the more reasonable members) to the effect that when the time came proper burial should be refused to the dissident's remains. Marcus Moses was now left with only possible reply. He had the support of eminent Rabbis in Hamburg, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam, who considered that he was being treated unfairly, and that from the point of view of Jewish law his action had not been so reprehensible. He had tried to make his peace with the congregation, but had failed. Doubtless, he hoped for practical sympathy from his friends of the Sephardi community; but, just before the New Year of 1707, that body pointedly passed a new regulation forbidding tudescos so much as to enter their place of worship. Nothing was left to him now but to fend for himself. In defiance of the recent regulation for preserving communal unity, to which he had subscribed with all other members, he opened a synagogue in his own house, within a few hundred yards of Duke's Place. He furnished it with scrolls of the Law and all the necessary appurtenances. On March 25th, 1707/8, he completed the congregational organisation, and at the same time the breach with the parent body, by acquiring a piece of ground in Hoxton on a 150-years' lease, at a rent of 10s. per annum, as the cemetery for use in conjunction with his synagogue. As Rabbi, he installed his family tutor and faithful supporter, Johanan Holleschau.6

We are informed so minutely of this dispute in the community by reason of the spate of publications that it occasioned. Aaron Hart set the ball rolling in a little work, Urim veTumim (a title combining a reference to his name and the Aaronic vestments with a hint of the transparent righteousness of his cause) which appeared in London "under the rule of our great, pious and victorious sovereign, Queen Anne" towards the end of 1706--the first book entirely in Hebrew to be published in England. Holleschau replied verbosely in his Maaseh Rab ("A Great Occurrence", with perhaps a sarcastic alternative meaning, "The Tale of a Rabbi") which was published at Marcus Moses' expense very shortly after, and was reprinted before long under a different title, perhaps to command a wider public.7 Later, on the basis of these works, the not over-creditable episode was brought to the notice of the Gentile world in Germany by the pastor Adam Andreas Cnollen in his New Things and Old, and by Johann Schudt in his Jüdische Merckwürdigkeiten, where it was used to show the quarrelsome and intolerant nature of the English Jews and the manner in which they preserved internal jurisdiction. Jacob Emden, too, Haham Zevi's son, gave an independent outline of the affair in his autobiography, Et Sopher: and a generation ago on the basis of all these accounts, David Kaufmann wrote an inimitable résumé, to which the present abridgement is much indebted.

It is a somewhat ironic consideration that the Hebrew printing-press in England owes its origin to this quarrel. But these two primitive pamphlets have other points of interest, apart from their somewhat crude format and their frequent misprints. In the Maaseh Rab, Johanan Holleschau makes the following observation, particularly significant if one regards it as the first public utterance of Hebrew scholarship in this country:

But I have no fear; for we, our brethren of the House of Israel, live in the kingdom of England, under rulers and princes and lords who deal with us with kindness and mercy. They may indeed

be reckoned as the Pious Ones of the Nations of the world. If a man give them a houseful of gold and silver they would do no injustice or wrongdoing, but act only as is written in their lawbooks.

These publications give us too a few very intimate glimpses into the social life of the founders of the Great Synagogue. There was (as we have seen) a characteristic passion for Jewish education. The community supported at least five Hebrew teachers and two elementary schools (Hedarim). The future mothers of the community were not neglected: Isaac ben Joel, one of the signatories to Anschel Cohen's Bill of Divorce, earned his living by going from house to house to teach young girls. Instruction was, however, imparted through the medium of Judaeo-German, with the result (recognised even then) of a lack of sympathy between the children and their foreign-born tutors, and sometimes a most unsatisfactory outcome. The London Jews were already scattered: we are informed that some lived as much as a mile from the synagogue, so that they were quite likely to remain in ignorance of proclamations made in the traditional fashion from the Reading Desk. The call of the English countryside had already made itself strongly felt: Aaron Hart, when he was trying to arrange a compromise, suggested a meeting with his adversary "on the face of the field, in a place of gardens and orchards": and Holleschau apparently thought that there was a place called "Country", where the wealthy members of the congregation went whenever they could--sometimes even just before the Sabbath--to enjoy the air and drink the waters. This, we learn, made them lax about some ceremonial observances, as for example abstention from milk not produced under Jewish supervision. On this matter, incidentally, Rabbi Hart was very particular, and after he entered into office he saw to it that special arrangements were made for the Jewish milk-supply in the Metropolis. The members of the community clearly indulged in a good deal of card-playing, as well as of quarrelling and (in the case of Marcus Moses at least) a little forthright bad language. They frequented the coffee-houses, where Gentile clients heard all about their differences. Reb Aberle, for example, attracted general attention when on the grounds of ill-health he once partook of refreshment in one of these public resorts on the Fast of Esther, without even troubling to retire into a private box. From the depositions taken in connexion with the case--all in homely Judaeo-German--we even know exactly how the London Ashkenazim of this period spoke.8

The new congregation became known ultimately as the Hambro' Synagogue. This title was long believed to be in commemoration of the founder, generally called among his coreligionists Mordecai Hambro', or Hamburger. This, though, is not correct: for in fact the congregation subsequently acquired other patrons, as we shall see, and was known by their name, that of its founder not even being recorded in its roll of benefactors. It is more probable that it was so entitled since it became the centre of the Hamburg colony in London, who naturally drifted to it, so that it preserved the specifically Hanseatic tradition for a longer period. On the establishment of this secessionist body, the original community became known as the Great Synagogue--a title which is to be found from the middle of the century at the latest.9

We may now return from this stormy digression to the external history of the Great Synagogue.

Notes Chapter Four

1 Clearly not his father's brother, as is invariably stated by previous writers, for in that case Moses and Aaron Hart would have belonged likewise to the tribe of Levy--a fact that could not have escaped mention. But in his will, Benjamin Levy speaks of Moses Hart as his brother-in-law (their wives were sisters) and of Aaron Hart as his cousin.

2 The statement in the works of reference that his rabbinate began in 1722 is completely inaccurate. His enemy, Johanan Holleschau (for whom see below) implies in his Maaseh Rab that Aaron Hart did not arrive in England until 1703/4, and that he had previously been engaged in business activities--not always with fortunate results. There may be some truth in this: he or

a namesake certainly attended the Leipzig Fair in 1713. In 1704, Benjamin Levy had left "my cousin, Rabbi Fivish" [i.e. Phoebus], £12 a year for three years.

3 Under the terms of Benjamin Levy's will, Marcus Moses was to transmit one of his benefactions to Hamburg.

4 The dispute between the two and R. Judah Leib Cohen may possibly belong to this period, during a return visit of the latter's to London.

5 There is some evidence that the matter led to judicial proceedings in the secular courts. In his accounts for 1706-8, Reb Aberle records various payments (one of £5 7s., 6d.) for a law-suit with "Berle"--perhaps Berl Cohen, brother of the Anschel Cohen whose domestic troubles began the dispute.

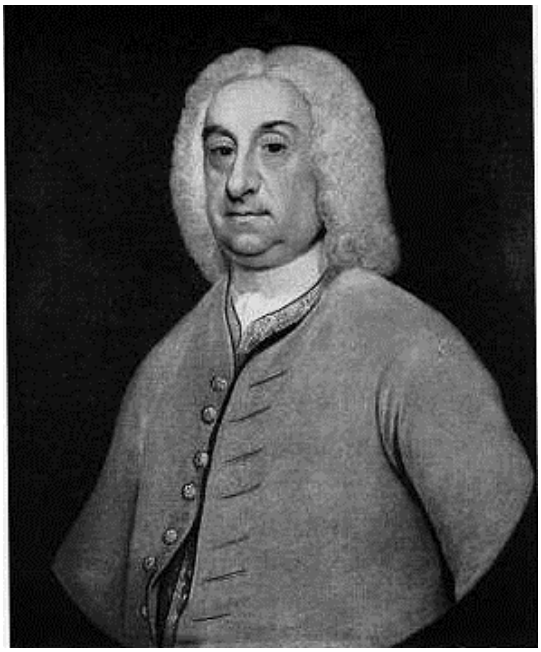
6 It seems that legal opinion was sought in connexion with this dispute. In the Archives of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue there is an opinion given to the Elders in June 1708 by Edward Hertley on the legality of excommunication and of refusal of burial; and something similar seems to be referred to in a cryptic note on the reverse of the title-page of Holleschau's pamphlet, indicating that search had been made in the records for a precedent to these events.

7 A close examination of these two works has enabled me to fix their dates more precisely. The Urim veTumim was produced in Heshvan 5467--i.e. at the end of 1706, not in 1707: and it is mentioned in Holleschau's work, both editions of which are therefore posterior to it. The first of these (produced before Marcus Moses opened his own synagogue) has no place of printing, and may be a London production, but it is more likely to be from Amsterdam: as is certainly the case with the second, dated Rosh Hodesh Ellul 5467 (=August 1707). This bears the title Teshuboth haGeonin, certain Rabbinical opinions on the pronunciation of Hebrew, etc., which the author had appended to the first edition, here figuring ostensibly as the main subject matter.

8 These depositions are eleven in number. They are from Jacob Heilbuth, Aaron the Scribe, the communal Magnate Juzpa Luza (who tried to excuse himself on the ground that he was a grosser shakchan), Benjamin ben Jacob, the scholarly Nathan son of the Parnas Moses Abraham, Mordecai ben Isaac, Bunem Levi the teacher, his employer Joseph Levy, the Beadle (whose name is not given), the teacher Mordecai ben Zadok, and Solomon Zalman ben Raphael. (The last-named, who was Marcus Moses' neighbour in Synagogue, is probably identical with the author and publisher Solomon Zalman ben Moses Raphael London, of Nowogródek, subsequently bookseller at Frankfort-on-Main, whose daughter made herself known in due course as a Judaeo-German poetess: he was perhaps son of the Rabbi Raphael b. Solomon Zalman who had died in London in 1678.)

9 It may be mentioned at this point that the traditional Hebrew equivalent is Beth haKenessseth haGedolah, the feminine adjective agreeing with the nearest word and not (as grammarians would prefer) with the first.

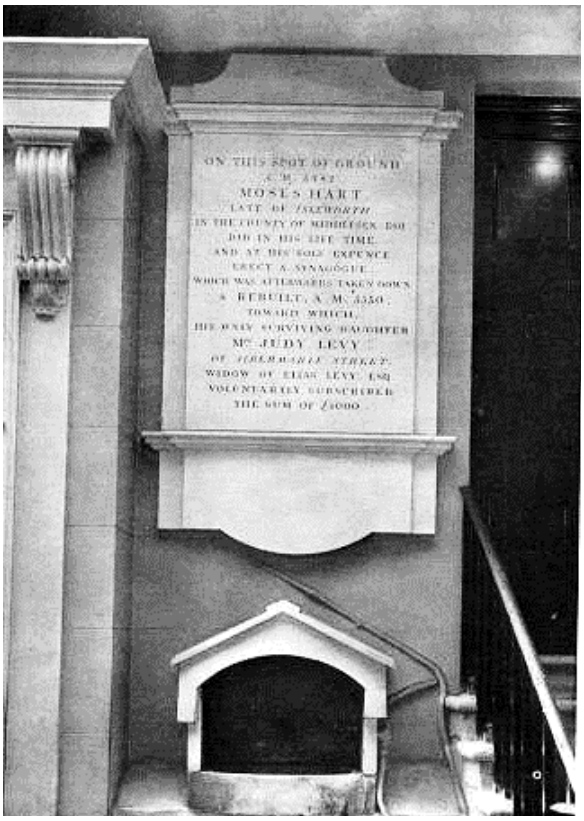
Chapter V
"MOSES HART'S SHOOL", 1722



Moses Hart, 1675-1756 (from a painting in the Board Room of the Great Synagogue)

AFTER this turbulent episode, the curtain again falls for a time on the life of the congregation. The records are sparse and scattered, and it is only now and again that we are afforded a glimpse into its affairs. We know how in 1714 it was honoured by a visit from Haham Zevi, how the prominent London Jews put out in boats to greet him, and how he stayed with the wealthy Hamburg gem-merchant, Joseph Levy (Gabbay of the synagogue from 1708 to 1710), at his house in Ingram's Court, Fenchurch Street. Here, a curious episode took place. More than one member of the London community desired to possess the Rabbi's portrait, but religious scruples prevented him from sitting to an artist for the purpose. Accordingly, a painter was placed in an adjoining room, whence he executed an admirable likeness, several copies of which were subsequently made, without the Rabbi's knowledge.1

In this same year, the Synagogue became a direct tenant of the City of London, This conclusion was drawn by the present writer some time ago, on the somewhat tenuous evidence of a receipted bill to Moses Hart for engrossing a deed in 1716--apparently, from a scribbled calculation, for seven years from 1714, renewed later to bring the term to sixty-one years. This conjecture is now confirmed from the oldest account-book, where we read how in October 1715 Moses Hart was reimbursed for having paid the Chamberlain of London the sum of £255 16s. 6d. for the lease of the Synagogue and the houses belonging to it, for sixty years, with all attendant expenditure. It must have been quite an extensive parcel, since the ground-rent for two years and nine months came to £33 3s. 8d. This was the first mention of the relations between the Congregation and the City, which remained its landlord until the end of the last century, when the leasehold was converted into a freehold. The accommodation by this time must have been fairly considerable, for during the four-year period between 1718 and 1722, when Meir Wagg was Treasurer, the income from seat-rentals and synagogue honours (mitzvoth) totalled £1054 0s. 6d., or over £250 yearly.



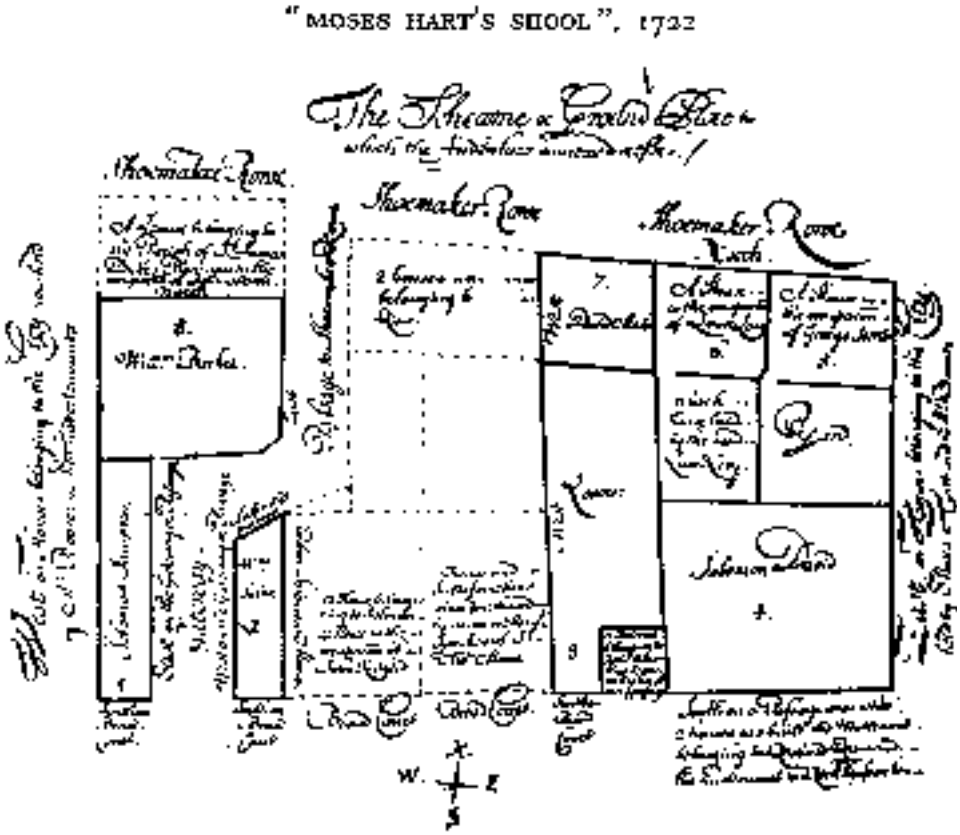
Tablet and Lavabo in the Forecourt of the Synagogue

Reb Aberle was by now in eclipse. He had been reduced to penury as the result of a law-suit with his brother-in-law Ephraim, in which the forgiving Haham Zevi had endeavoured in vain to adjudicate. True, he was still to know another brief period of prosperity: and when in 1718 he heard of the Rabbi's death he vowed to contribute a hundred ducats for the support of his orphans. (It was a debt of honour, the latter's family said, because it was only because of their father's blessing that the wheel of fortune had turned for him so providentially.) Encouraged by this report, Jacob Emden, Zevi's quarrelsome and intolerant but very learned son, came to London. He found Reb Aberle in the depths of despair. He had sent his eldest son, who assisted him in business, with a quantity of precious stones to Paris. But Paris had even then a reputation not unlike its reputation to-day: and the youth dissipated the lot, returning to London with nothing to show for his journey but a shaven French poodle. Beggared, Reb Aberle retired to Hamburg, where he died at a ripe old age in 1745. He retained, however, his membership of the London community, on the roll of which his name figured before any other.

Moses Hart, on the other hand, had been forging ahead in the world. He had married into a wealthy family, his wife being a daughter of Samuel Heilbuth and sister-in-law of Benjamin Levy. When Godolphin was Lord High Treasurer he received according to report a lucrative appointment as Government agent. At one time, he is said to have had in hand dealings in stocks to the value of one and a half million pounds. And, on the principle that "unto everyone that hath shall be given", fortune too smiled on him. In the Original Weekly Journal for 1719, we read under the heading "Engagements ":

The 7th November 1719. We hear a marriage is on Foot between Mr. Isaac Franks, and a Daughter of Mr. Moses Hart, the two Gentlemen who got the twenty Thousand Pound Prize in the present Lottery; so that by Virtue of this agreement Mr. Franks is to have the whole twenty Thousand Pound.

The marriage between Isaac, son of Abraham Franks, of St. James's, Duke's Place, broker, and Simcha (or Frances) Hart took place in the following year, the officiant being the bride's uncle, Rabbi Aaron. Those who desire more details may refer to the pleadings in the law-suit which hinged about this matrimonial adventure some forty years later, in which the relevant documents, which do not quite confirm this highly-coloured account, are printed in full.



Ground Plan of Great Synagogue Site (from a deed of 1721-2)

After his extraordinary stroke of luck in the lottery, Moses Hart began to live on a grand scale. From the very moment of the resettlement, English Jews had succumbed to the charms of the English countryside, and fund-collecting visitors from abroad lamented the fact that the wealthy among them were so seldom in London. Moses Hart was no exception. In the year after this piece of good fortune he built himself a house at Isleworth, on one of the loveliest reaches of the Thames near the capital, not far from Twickenham. It must have been a notable mansion, as an engraving of it was published before long. Several other members of the family followed him to this neighbourhood--above all, some of his Franks cousins, who became established at Mortlake, Teddington and Isleworth. Later on, Moses Hart crossed the river and settled in Richmond. At the time of the "Jew Bill" agitation in the middle of the century, a journalistic wit published "true intelligence" from that place to the effect that all the local butchers would shortly be obliged to stop payment on account of the stagnation of their business occasioned by the number of Jews who had fixed their residence in the neighbourhood. But in general they seemed to have been very well received. In a private letter, another contemporary wrote: "M[ose]s H[ar]t and A[aro]n F[rank]s, at the last Vestry held here, mingled with the rest without opposition, though two clergymen and Justice B. were present. No less than a coach-load of them last Thursday assembled at a clergyman's house to play cards."

Now that he was the unquestioned leader of Ashkenazi Jewry in London, Moses Hart resolved to signalise the fact in munificent fashion. The building lease which he had obtained in 1716 had stipulated that he was to expend £400 on the property. In fact, he exceeded this figure five-fold. At the south-east corner of Duke's Place, abutting on Shoemaker Row (the later Duke Street, and now Duke's Place--at that time there was no carriage-way to join it to the great square) on and around the ground the synagogue had occupied since its earliest days, he acquired various properties--partly from Richard Sparks and partly from the City Corporation. Various tenants were persuaded to move out forthwith in consideration of an outright monetary payment. On the site thus consolidated he constructed, at a cost of £2,000, a new Synagogue--no longer a dwelling-house adapted for the purpose, but a building properly designed and expressly erected to meet the requirements of Jewish worship. During the reconstruction, services were held over a period of six months, from Passover to New Year, in the house of the teacher, Leib Cohen, later Beadle of the community. He was paid £10 10s. to recompense him for the inconvenience, and the accounts mention that the reader for these services was Joseph the Hazan, assisted by Michael the Bass Singer, and that the total income derived was £174 2s. 5d.2

On September 18th, 1722--the eve of the New Year of 5483, according to the Jewish reckoning--the new synagogue was dedicated. It was a red-letter day in the history of the Anglo-Jewish community. Twice since then the building has been radically reconstructed and enlarged: the nucleus of the stately edifice of today, however, the historic Great Synagogue of London Jewry, is that which (in the words of the tablet in the forecourt) "Moses Hart... of Isleworth in the County of Middlesex, Esq., did in his life time and at his sole expense erect".

As is the case with its predecessor, we know very little indeed regarding the appearance and architecture of this place of worship. Apparently it imitated, though on a smaller scale, the neighbouring esnoga of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews in Bevis Marks: "The Synagogue belonging to the German Jews," wrote D'Blossiers Tovey in his Anglia Judaica, in 1738," is in Broad Court, in the Parish of St. James, Duke's Place, not far from the former; but tho' it is built after the same Model, is not half so big."3

For many years afterwards the Synagogue was termed, after the Maecenas who had built it, "Moses Hart's Shool". But, notwithstanding this proprietorship, the magnate did not take an active part in the administration, preferring to exert his influence from behind the scenes as Rosh haKahal or Head of the Community. When the building was opened, he did not figure even among the nominal Presiding Officers. These were Benedict Solomon (Bloch), whom we have encountered elsewhere, and Isaac Levy, son of Joseph Levy (who had died not long since4), the

joint Gabbaim, together with Asher Anschel ben R. Eleazar (perhaps known as Ansell Lazarus) the Gabbai for the Visitation of the Sick5.

The spiritual administration was superintended by the Rabbi Aaron Hart, Moses's brother, who was by now almost an institution in Anglo-Jewish life. The Reader (who received the munificent salary of £60 per annum) was Jehiel Michael ben R. Moses Joseph; the Shamash, whose wages came to only half that amount, was Samuel ben Judah Leib. In addition, the congregation had its "servitor", Samuel, who received a shilling a week for odd jobs, and the Reader continued to enjoy the assistance of Michael the Bass Singer, at a pittance of £24 per annum.

The accounts during the first year of the new Synagogue give some idea of its organisation. The total revenue was £382 6s. 9d. Among the principle sources of income were seat-rentals, to the amount of £134 8s. for the half-year: payment for synagogal honours, £188 7s. 3d.: £31 9s. 6d. from the collecting-box (it was passed round, of course, during the week-day services, then actively attended): £16 16s. for entrance-dues from new members: and £9 2s. for Kippur-lights and citrons for the feast of Tabernacles. Expenditure included some £150 to £200 for salaries: £22 5s. 9d. for the poor: various regular charitable distributions to pensioners and the dependants of former officials: £2 5s. for cemetery upkeep: £26 5s. 6d. for vestments for the Scrolls of the Law, and the like: and apparently a total of over £75 for woodwork and gilding in the new building, including the Ark. The Kippur-lights and citrons cost more than they brought in £5 14s. 8d. being expended on the former and £5 13s. 6d. on the latter (together with the willows for Hosanna Rabba), representing a net loss of over £2. An emissary from Safed received three guineas, the scavenger £1, and ten shillings was given to the vicar of the Parish, probably for distribution among the poor. The window-tax cost 16s., from which, with a little research, it may be possible to ascertain to what extent the fathers of the congregation considered ventilation an adjunct of Sanctity.

To commemorate this new stage in the history of the community, a new set of regulations was drawn up, replacing those of some thirty years earlier, now lost. They were supposed to remain in force until 1730 but, in fact, continued with certain modifications until replaced by a new code at the end of the century. The volume containing them is the oldest substantial record in the muniments, magnificently indited by the scribe of the community, a certain R. Judah, at a cost (as we know from the oldest account-book) of £3 12s. Further regulations were added from time to time, so that this volume contains in fact the epitome of the communal history down to the end of the eighteenth century. The language used throughout is Yiddish, or Judaeo-German written in Hebrew characters, with a particularly large admixture of Hebrew:6 only here and there does English figure to any appreciable extent. The cover proudly blazons forth the importance of the occasion in the history of the community, in a sonorous Hebrew: "The Regulations of the new synagogue that was builded by the foremost among our leaders, R. Moses son of the eminent R. Naphtali Hertz of blessed memory, who vowed it and gave it to our congregation as a gift. May his merit stand for ever!"

The organisation of the congregation closely followed the lines of the traditional Continental scheme. It was considered inequitable that a man should come into a city and enjoy without the slightest effort all the advantages painstakingly and expensively established by those who had preceded him. If a stranger wished to have a voice in local affairs, therefore, he was expected to acquire his "holding" in the congregation (Hezkath haKehillah)--a proceeding the cost of which, only £3 3s. in 1722, was raised in 1736 to a minimum of £5 5s. and in 1740 to £10 10s. Thereby he became a "house-holder" (Baal Bayith) of the congregation--a title misleadingly rendered later on as "privileged member". This entitled him to full membership of the body, with the right of voting for and being elected to office, of introducing his sons or sons-in-law to the congregation at a reduced fee, of benefiting from certain communal charities and of being buried, when the time came, in the higher part of the cemetery. Membership was reckoned in terms of the family rather than of the individual, and for a synagogue to accept a scion of a house traditionally belonging to another was regarded as unethical. as well as uneconomical. A list of the "privileged

members" of the Great Synagogue, almost from the beginning, has been preserved, the first name on the list being that of Reb Aberle London: on an average, about eight new persons were admitted to this restricted number every year. Applicants for membership had to be formally approved, like candidates for membership to a club; and indeed there was something in the nature of a club in the close-knit, semi-hereditary membership of a London synagogue two hundred years ago. The "privileged members" continued to be admitted to the City Synagogues until the eighteen-seventies, when the establishment of the United Synagogue imposed a new system; there were a few survivors of the number until very recent years.

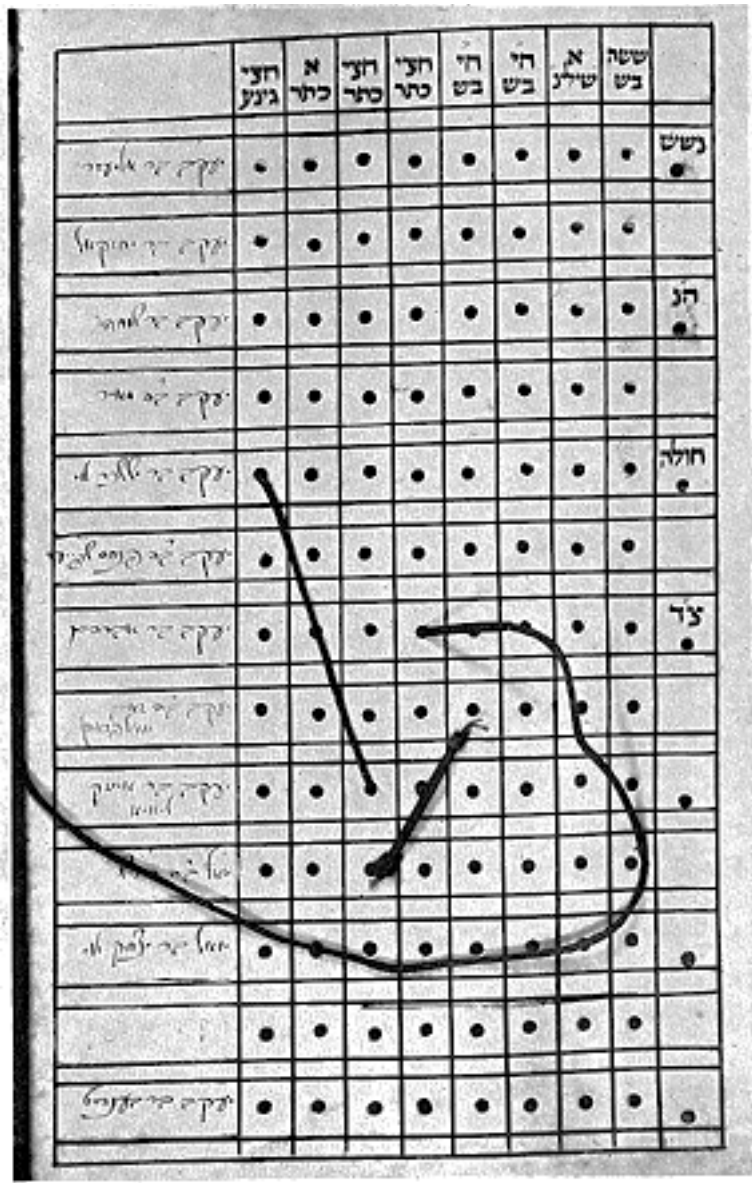
Below the Baale Batim there was a secondary stratum of Toshabim, or Residents: persons who had settled in the city and affiliated themselves to the Synagogue by renting a seat, without assuming the responsibilities and expenses of membership. Their financial burden was lower: but on the other hand they had no voice in the management of the community and no privileges other than the utilisation of the religious facilities provided. (They were to be styled later on "unprivileged members".) Below them came the pauper and semi-pauper proletariat of unattached persons, termed Orahim or wayfarers, since it could not be imagined that any person who wanted to make London his permanent home would fail to identify himself with the community more closely.

At the outset, the affairs of the Community were managed by two Gabbaim, or Treasurers, assisted by the Gabbai Bikkur Holim, or Treasurer for the Visitation of the Sick, whom the former appointed: with the somewhat intimidating figure of the Rosh haKahal, or Head of the Community, looming in the background. At the time of the dispute leading to the establishment of the Hambro' synagogue, routine affairs seem to have been in the hands of a Monthly Warden (Parnas haHodesh), but this arrangement did not continue after the new synagogue was built.

In 1741 a fresh arrangement was introduced. Henceforth the presiding officers were three--two Wardens (Parnassim) and a Treasurer (Gabbai Zedakah--literally, Charity Treasurer). They were assisted by a committee of five, called the Five Men (Hamisha Anashim), the number being frequently raised to seven from about 1780. In 1787 the work of the Gabbai Zedakah was subdivided, the Goveh ("Exactor") acting henceforth as Treasurer and the Gabbai as Overseer of the Poor. In addition, there was from about 1741 a special Treasurer for cemetery upkeep (Gabbai Tikkun Beth Hayim) as we shall see; but in 1774 his duties were merged in those of the Gabbai. The "Five Men" together with the two Wardens were known in the Talmudic phrase as "The Seven Good Citizens", and were dignified in English by the title of "Elders". The officers of the community were chosen from the members whose payments to the Synagogue exceeded a certain minimum. Service in any office to which a person was elected, however onerous he might consider it, was compulsory: and it was possible to secure exemption only on the payment of a solid fine--e.g., for the office of Gabbai, of £10 10s. for the first offence and £25 for the second. (The same applied, of course, in the Spanish and Portuguese congregation, and was to be responsible later on for driving Isaac d'Israeli and his family out of allegiance to the synagogue.) A fine was also exacted from any person who refused any incidental congregational honour to which he had been nominated, or who failed to put in an appearance at synagogue meetings. Those persons who had served as Treasurer or paid the requisite fine, together with certain co-opted members, constituted the Vestry (which arrogated to itself in Hebrew the ambitious title, Kahal or "Congregation"). This was the supreme governing body of the community, meeting each quarter, by which the honorary officers were elected annually. The elections were held on Hosanna Rabba, the antepenultimate day of the Tabernacles festival, the traditional day for such activities ever since classical times.

A good part of the income of the congregation was raised from the offerings which had to be made when a man was "called up" to the public reading of the Law. We learn from a contemporary source that the amount specified was sometimes as little as one penny; but this can only have been the case at minor conventicles, for the financial records of the community do not substantiate the statement. Indeed, the regulations of 1722 specified that even on a week-day not less than

fourpence should be offered, half to the Synagogue and half to the Society for Visiting the Sick (this salutary provision had been adopted from the Sephardi community). Of course some difficulty arose on the Sabbath, when it was impossible to make a note of the amounts. Accordingly, an ingenious system was devised. The names of the members of the congregation were entered in a great parchment register, in alphabetical order, down the side of each page. Along the top, the columns were marked with various amounts, from a few pence to a pound or more, with a row of perforations below them opposite each name. Each page was provided, moreover, with a lace. Thus, when any person made an offering, the lace could be inserted in the right place under the column indicating the specified amount. More than one such register is preserved among the curiosities in the muniments. Synagogue honours were generally sold by auction by the Beadle during the service, as much as twenty guineas being paid sometimes for some coveted privilege: to modern taste a highly undignified procedure, which certainly did not add to the decorum of the proceedings, but helped the finances of the institution and at the same time testified to the simple piety of the worshippers and their eagerness to be associated personally with the ceremonial of divine worship.7



Offertory Book, 18th Century, with laces for registering amounts on Sabbath

The scope of the congregation's activities was constantly increasing in these years, and simultaneously the scale of its commitments. The search for fresh sources of income was constant, and it could hardly have been possible but for the enhanced well-being of those from whom it was derived. In 1734/5, a special levy of £4 was made on all members. Two years later, in 1736, the minimum entrance-fee for a Baal Bayith was fixed at £5 5s. 0d.: shortly after, it was raised to twice this amount. In 1748, an attempt was made to force up the fee to thirty guineas, payable in three annual instalments, but this was found impracticable (as indeed it would be even to-day, notwithstanding the vast difference in the relative value of money) and after two years the experiment was abandoned.

A good part of the financial preoccupation of the community was of course due to the requirements of charity, which received specific attention more than once. In the spring of 1740, a new tax was instituted, to be levied each year on the New Moon of Shevat, for the purpose of providing Unleavened Bread for the poor on Passover: it was generally reckoned at two shillings in the pound on seat rentals. There was another way of raising revenue, by a combination of charity, insurance and business, and this was by arranging for the payment of annuities (a regular activity at this time of some

Continental communities, as for example that of Venice). The system does not seem to have obtained a strong foothold in London, but in 1767 Mr. Benjamin Alexander (known in the Synagogue as Phineas ben Leib Hamburger, but more generally as "Benny")8 gave the congregation £200 down in consideration of an annuity of £25 per annum payable to his wife. Alternatively, money could be accepted on deposit, as happened in 1796, when the "Getz Hebra" deposited £100 with the congregation at five per cent.

Scroll-Mantle of Silk Italian Velvet, 18th century

Round the Synagogue, various institutions sprang up. The Burial Society (Hebra Kadisha) dated back, as we have seen, to 1695/6. In 1732, a Talmud Torah--the precursor of the present Jews' Free School, reorganised on its present basis in 181710--came into existence. 1745, the year of the Young Pretender's incursion into England, saw the beginning of the Hebrath Hakhnassath Berith for assisting the poor to make arrangements for the circumcision of their children--an institution which is still doing admirable work as the Initiation Society. (It is a pity that the earliest records and registers of this body, which would have been invaluable for the reconstruction of Anglo-Jewish family history, are no longer traceable, the oldest extant minutes going back only to 1819. A few entries relating to Ashkenazi Jews in London are, however, included in the register kept in the first half of the eighteenth century by Isaac Carriao de Payba, a pious member of the Sephardi community.) In 1748, an Orphan Aid Society (Hebrath Gidul Yethomim) came into being. A Society for Visiting the Sick existed at least as early as 1722, and an analogous Hebrath Refuath haNephesh ("Society for the Cure of the Soul"), probably something on the lines of a Friendly Society, with its own physician, in 1753. The destitute were assisted too by a Hebrath Malbish Arumim for providing clothing. A Society for Ransoming Captives (Hebrath Pidion Shevuyim), to help those reduced to slavery by the barbarous customs of Mediterranean or Muscovite warfare, is also said to have existed in the Ashkenazi as well in the Sephardi community of London. A society for dowering poor brides, too, was probably established at an early date, as in all other Jewish communities: it was perhaps to this that the Marriage Portion Fund, administered today by the United Synagogue, owes its origin. A private society for study named Mahazike Torah was established in 1748 in Rosemary Lane, the centre of the old-clothes dealers: this ultimately developed into a minor synagogue, which existed until the nineteenth century. The London Chronicle of 1757 reveals the existence of another body--the Jewish Society for Relieving Debtors of Small Sums, which made a donation of £18 in that year to the Poultry Comptor (a prison between the Grocers' Hall and Poultry, which later on made special dietary provision for Jews). The oldest Jewish Friendly Society in England, the Rodphe Shalom, which comprised many Great Synagogue members, is also said to have been established in the first half

of the eighteenth century: and the records mention another Hebra shel Ahabah (a literal translation of the English term) known as the Getz Hebra [probably the first word is an abbreviation of Gemillath Zedakah] in 1769. Another early Ashkenazi institution was a Society for Assisting Widows and Orphans (Sippuke Almanoth veYethomim), revived in 1789 under the auspices of a group headed by the son of a proselyte to Judaism, Abraham bar Israel Ger.11

By comparison with the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, of course, the organisation appeared very imperfect. Maitland, the antiquary, called attention to the fact in 1739 in his monumental work on the History and Antiquities of London, after giving a detailed account of the structure and finances of the older body; but even he was compelled to recognise at least the generosity of the Ashkenazim in their treatment of the poor:

The Management of the German Jews, both in respect to their Synagogues and Poor, is so miserably bad, that none were capable of giving a tolerable account thereof, tho' apply'd to in my Behalf, by one of the most eminent of their Brethren. However, I was told by some of those principally concerned, that their Poor stands them in above a Thousand Pounds per Annum.

So closely is the history of the Great Synagogue in the eighteenth century in its early days bound up with the history of the Franks family that it is desirable to devote a few lines to some account of their history. The first to come to England were two brothers, sons of one Aaron Franks. One was Benjamin (born 1649), who had an adventurous life. After losing a fortune in gem-dealing in the West Indies, he embarked for India on the galley Adventure commanded by Captain William Kidd (who had been commissioned to suppress piracy), belonging to the starboard watch. When Captain Kidd turned pirate, Franks managed to escape, and subsequently gave evidence that assisted in bringing his erstwhile skipper to the gallows. Later on, he settled in New York, his descendants playing an important part in American life. (Among his descendants was Colonel David Salisbury Franks, Benedict Arnold's companion in battle though not in treason, and United States envoy to Spain at the conclusion of the War of American Independence.)

Benjamin's brother, Abraham (confusingly known in Hebrew as Naphtali Hertz) had a more simple career. He prospered in London, was (as we have seen) the only Ashkenazi among the Jew Brokers appointed in 1697 other than Benjamin Levy, and was a respected householder in the Parish of St. James's, Duke's Place, hard by the Synagogue. His wife was Abigail (Sarah Phila), a daughter of Rabbi David Bloch. She died on February 22nd, 1695, at the age of thirty-three and was buried in the Sephardi ground, that of the Ashkenazi community not yet having been purchased. Abraham Franks continued to play his part in congregational affairs until his death, advanced in years, in 1748.

Of this magnate's children, the best-known was Aaron Franks (1685-1777), of Billiter Square, Bishopsgate, who was concerned in all the important affairs in the life of the community in the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century. He was a governor of the Foundling Hospital as early as 1747, and was stated in the public Press at the time of his death to have been in the habit of distributing £5,000 yearly in charity, without distinction of race or of creed. At his house at Isleworth, he entertained members of the aristocracy like Horace Walpole, the letter-writer, son of the great Prime Minister, and celebrities like Kitty Clive, the famous actress. He owed his large fortune to the family profession of jeweller, being among the greatest London gem-merchants of his day: there was one occasion in 1742 when he lent jewellery to the value of £40,000 to the Princess of Wales for a masquerade. He was himself seen sometimes at Society functions, and contemporary gossips were amused at a piece of unrepeatable scurrility with which a young lady once taunted him for his taciturnity. Late in life he married Moses Hart's daughter Bilah, his own sister-in-law, thus adding yet another to the complicated inter-alliances between the two families. The Great Synagogue benefited on his death in 1777, at the age of ninety-two, by a legacy of £1,000.

Abraham Franks had three other sons besides Aaron. One of them, Moses, died unmarried in 1716 and need not concern us further. Another, Jacob, settled in New York like his uncle; the family was prominent in American life later on, his son David becoming the principal commissary to the British forces and the latter's daughter Rebecca, a noted beauty, being the toast of the famous Ball known as the Meschianza given at Philadelphia in 1778 in honour of General Howe. The third son of Abraham Franks, Isaac, was the hero of the double lottery of 1719, by which he won a bride as well as £20,000, and as Moses Hart's son-in-law was soon recognised as one of the lay heads of the Synagogue. Like his brother, he was well known for his liberality. He died at Bath, comparatively young, in 1736, leaving an estate estimated at £300,000. The Synagogue and the poor found that he had not forgotten them, and his name is still recorded among the benefactors of the London community.12 In the second half of the century, some of the children of Jacob Franks of New York returned to England, settling at Mortlake and Isleworth. Not all remained loyal to Judaism, but two at least of their number continued the family tradition of devoted communal service. They were Naphtali Franks (1715-1796), Fellow of the Royal Society, who married Phila, daughter of Isaac Franks; and Moses (1718-1789) who married her cousin and namesake Phila, daughter of Aaron Franks, both being granddaughters of Moses Hart's. (The second was reckoned a great beauty in her day, and her portrait was painted both by Gainsborough and by Reynolds, who also executed in 1761 a portrait of her husband--for a fee of £21!) As late as 1772, these two, Naphtali and Moses, with their uncle Aaron (now over eighty years of age) acted in collaboration in a formal matter on behalf of the congregation, nearly one hundred years after their grandfather had collaborated in its foundation.13

This was by no means the only Great Synagogue family which established branches on both sides of the Atlantic. The oldest synagogue account-book gives details concerning "Isaac Levi, New York", who (as we know from other sources) went thence to London in 1752. In 1762, again, "Abraham ben Moses of New York" is mentioned. The Adolphuses, who intermarried with the family of Benjamin Levy, similarly had an American branch. Aaron Hendricks, of Dutch origin, after having been a member of the Great Synagogue for some years, settled in New York, where his descendants still play a particularly honoured role in Jewish life. The Mears family too had their connexions in the colonies. Abraham Wagg, son of Meir Wagg (who married Moses Hart's sister Zipporah) settled in America, favoured the British cause and suffered for his devotion, optimistically endeavoured to negotiate peace between the mother country and her revolted children, and ultimately retired, broken and ruined, to die at Bristol. Commissary Aaron Hart, the founder of the Jewish community in Canada, who was responsible for the victualling of the British troops and rode into Montreal with General Amhurst in 1763, was similarly a native of London, a namesake though probably no relation of the Rabbi. There were others, whose individuality stands out less clearly. Space can be spared for only one, whose connexion with the Great Synagogue is not definitely demonstrated by any extant record, though he was probably associated with it: Bernard Hart (Behr ben Menahem), who emigrated to the New World and whose grandson was the eminent American man of letters, Bret Harte, was born in London in 1764. Well back in the eighteenth century, Moses Hart's Shool, in Duke's Place, London, had a Transatlantic fame.

FOUNDERS OF THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE

Moses Levy (of Hamburg)

Samuel Heilbuth (of Duke's Place, London)

Hartwig Moses (of Breslau)

BENJAMIN LEVY = Hendele (d. 1704) (d. 1704)

ELIAS LEVY = JUDITH (1702-1750)

Prudence =MOSES HART (1675-1756)

R. AARON HART (1670-1756)

Bilah = AARON FRANKS (1692-1777)

Hymen (1710-1738)

Simha or Frances (b. 1705) = 1720 ISAAC FRANKS

Besides the children shown, Benjamin Levy had by his first wife a son Menahem (d. 1708) and by his second a daughter Abigail, who married Moses Adolphus: while Moses Hart had two further daughters, Isabella and Rachel, who married Jacob and Michael Adolphus respectively. One of Hartwig Moses' daughters was Margoles, who married LAZARUS SIMON, and another Zipporah, who married MElR WAGG. (The capitals denote in each case a person closely associated with the administration of the Congregation.)

Notes Chapter Five

1 A less distinguished Rabbinical visitor at this period was Zalman b. Jacob Abraham of Leipnik. editor of Nahalat Jacob, who was in London for six months in 1720/1 as a member of the Yeshiba maintained by Abraham Mocatta.

2 The fact that services had to be held elsewhere during the reconstruction of the Synagogue in 1722 shows clearly that the old one had been on the same site. This is confirmed too by the description, in one of the leases of that year, of the acquisition by Moses Hart of a piece of ground abutting to the south "partly on the Jews' Synagogue there", and finally by the newly-found petition printed below, p. 116-7.

3 It is possible that the general architectural features are reproduced in an awkward and highly-imaginative engraving, The Jewish Synagogue, in the New Universal Magazine for April 1752, which certainly does not represent Bevis Marks (though it is to this that the description in the following issue refers). On the other hand, it may be copied from a Continental production.

4 See The Weekly Courant or British Gazetteer of October 14th, 1711: "On Friday 7-night (two days after he was cut for the stone) died Mr. Joseph Levy, .a rich Jewish merchant, who supplied Prince Eugene with £30,000 when he was here in the late Queen Anne's time." Joseph Levy had died on October 4th: he made, just before his operation, a nuncupative will attested by Rabbi Aaron Hart, Adolph Cohen and Sampson David.

5 The list of office-holders given by Picciotto in his Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History is completely erroneous: there were no Wardens at this period.

6 I was informed by Dr. Duschinsky that the language of the original regulations may be more precisely defined as a Germanised form of Polish Yiddish .

7 Cf. the jaundiced account in A Peep into the Synagogue (to be referred to below, p. 250 note) pp. 10-11: "In the Synagogue there is a Clerk, called a Shamos, who mounts the pulpit, as an Auctioneer does his Rostrum, and then exclaims aloud, 'One penny for opening the door of the Ark!' Another bids more, a third more still, and sometimes the contention is so strong... that six, seven, or eight guineas is given for the superstitious privilege... Indeed, it has sometimes happened in London, when two or three obstinate rich Jews, stimulated by pride, ignorance or folly to oppose each other; that one of those Mitzvous, or good deeds... has cost the buyer no less than twenty guineas."

8 The sobriquet seems to indicate that Benny Alexander was brought up in England. He was probably the son of the Leib ben Alexander (?Levy Alexander) of the early accounts. It is possible that A. Alexander, the printer (see pages 146-7) belonged to this family.

9 See below, page 60.

10 See pages 227--230.

11 Other charitable confraternities which existed under the Georges included "Path of Peace" (1782), "Path of Righteousness" (1790) and probably "Brotherly Love" (Hebrath Ahabath Ahim), for sick, burial and mourning benefits, the revised regulations of which were printed in 1807. (Like all similar bodies, this Hebra had also a cultural side, the members meeting for the purpose of all-night study on the eves of Pentecost and Hosanna Rabba.) In 1811, there was a Confraternity for assisting mourners (Menahem Abelim, known also as Bene Israel Gemilluth Hasadim uZedakah Tatsil meMaveth). The "Metropolitan Jewish Confined Mourning and Benefit Society" was founded in 1806, and the "Lovers of Justice and Peace" in 1823. The Hebra Maarib beZemanah Oheb Shalom, founded about 1790, had dual functions, providing a Minyan and relieving members during the week of mourning. The Hebrath Malbish Arumim (which was mentioned in the will of "Dr." de Falk in 1784) was apparently amalgamated in 1813 with another charitable society, for training poor boys in useful handicrafts. The Bodleian Library has a printed copy, probably unique, of the statutes of the association formed in 1788 by the union of the "Hamburger Hebra " and the Ahabath Shalom, with headquarters in Duke's Place, for study and mutual benefits; this may be identical with the Oheb Shalom mentioned above.

One reason for the establishment of specifically Jewish Friendly Societies was the intolerant spirit shown by some of the non-Jewish ones. As late as 1791, the Lodge of Tranquillity in London specifically excluded Jewish members. (It was poetic justice when it was resuscitated by Jewish seceders from the Joppa Lodge in 1847.)

12 See below, p. 96.

13 Moses Franks was an attractive character, and seems to have been highly esteemed in Society, to judge from a letter of Lord Camelford in Nichol's History of Literature: "Poor General Cowper regrets extremely the loss of his neighbour Moses Franks, who was one of the few he cultivated." Another Moses Franks, who died in 1810, was Attorney General and then Chief Justice of the Bahamas.

Chapter VI
DAILY LIFE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

ALREADY in 1722, Duke's Place was distinctly and unmistakably Jewish in population, as contemporary guide-books unanimously informed the curious traveller. As early as 1677, in the London Directory--the earliest publication of the sort--"Mr. Samuel" of Duke's Place had figured (presumably to be identified with Samuel Heilbuth), not to mention various Sephardi names. A sketch of the Synagogue site, annexed to a deed of 1721, shows the new place of worship to adjoin the houses of Solomon Sampson, David Marks, Laso Levy and Solomon David. In the London press of July 23rd, 1725, we find Isaac Abraham, of Duke's Place, advertising for a lost pocket-book. In the immediate neighbourhood, of course, Jewish associations were almost equally strong. In 1727, Abraham Benedictus, whose address is given as " The Rising Sun ", tallow-chandler's, in Houndsditch, offers a reward for assistance in tracing a certain Dutchman named Moses Levy. In 1736, a Jewish tea-merchant in the Minories comes into the news: while in 1754 Solomon Isaac, of Duke's Place, advertises for his wife, who had apparently eloped. The Synagogue area was thus the centre of a little world of its own, where every requirement could be satisfied at Jewish hands. Opposite the synagogue Hyman Levy, "a Jew penny-barber ", exercised his trade in 1753. There was more than one Jewish butcher, and even a Jewish milkman. Later on, "Sam's Coffee House" catered for Jewish needs, and provided an accommodation-address for Jewish business-men, and it probably had a precursor filling the same functions many years before.

It is possible to reconstruct a vivid picture of the inner life of London Jewry in these far-off days with the aid of the regulations of 1722 and subsequent additions. Divine worship followed (as has been indicated) the Polish rite according to the usage of Hamburg, as had been the case "from old time, in former years": though even at this early date the practice of ending the service with the antiphonal singing of the hymn Yigdal had been introduced. Decorum was not neglected. The worshippers were enjoined under pain of fine not to chew tobacco in Synagogue, nor to attend service wearing slippers1 or caps. (The first of these regulations was renewed in 1756 when the practice was succinctly described as a miusskeit.) The old-time practice of throwing sweetmeats on a bridegroom when he was called up to the Reading of the Law, on the Sabbath after his marriage, and on the symbolical bridegrooms on Simhath Torah, was prohibited: though this restriction subsequently fell into desuetude. Care was taken not to permit the service to be spun out unnecessarily, thus making it a burden on the congregation: for example, the Reader was forbidden for this reason to indulge in the luxury of chanting the hymn Ehad Yahid on this occasion. Members were prohibited to attend service in any rival congregation that might be set up within a radius of ten miles, or even in the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue. As a matter of course, special attention was paid to religious instruction: it was not permitted to open a Heder (or infants' school) without the express licence of the Synagogal authorities, who thus were able to assert some measure of control; while no one over thirty who had left his wife abroad was to be permitted to retain office as a teacher of youth for more than three years consecutively. (A similar regulation was enforced by the Jewish communities in Lithuania.) Disputes between members should not be aired before the law-courts but were to be submitted to the officers of the community for arbitration: only after the defendant had been solemnly summoned to plead on three occasions by the Beadle, and had failed to put in appearance, was the plaintiff empowered to take legal steps before the civil authorities. Notwithstanding his relationship to the communal Maecenas, the authority of the Rabbi was considerably restricted, and he was not allowed to place anyone in Herem (excommunication), nor to officiate at a marriage or divorce, nor even to intervene in any private quarrel, without the sanction of the Wardens... So the regulations went on, throughout their ninety-seven elegantly phrased clauses, mostly introduced by a crude Hebrew couplet.

It was originally intended that the code should last for only eight years, until 1730. In the event, it remained in vigour for nearly ten times as long, until 1791, constant additions and modifications bringing the total number of clauses in the end up to 211.

The ladies of the congregation of course followed the fashions of their Gentile sisters. In the middle of the eighteenth century, when feminine costume occupied fully three times as much cubic space as the feminine body, this presented the synagogal authorities with a serious problem, in view of the limited accommodation: and in 1755 it was solemnly decided that no lady should be admitted to the Synagogue on the High Holydays wearing a hoop. If they had equal pleasure in attending with their glory thus restricted, human nature has strangely changed.

Communal discipline was rigidly enforced. When in 1747 Jospa ben Jacob Buchtel, of Amsterdam, was so ill-advised as to arrange services in his house in Bethnal Green, drastic action was taken, lest this Minyan should also develop into a secessionist synagogue: and this was not by any means the only case of the sort.2 In 1749, the Rabbi was insulted in the street by Baer ben Pheis Frank: fortunately for the latter, he expressed his contrition in time, for otherwise he would have incurred the most severe penalties. Serious action had to be taken, however, in 1756 against one Simeon Levy, who attacked the Treasurer, Man ben Haim Gokkes (? = Menahem Hendricks3) inside the sacred edifice. Amorous enthusiasms, too, had to be reckoned with: and in 1750 it was decided that any person who married a damsel without her father's consent should be excluded from synagogal rights and privileges. For a man to make his peace with the congregation after a lapse was no simple matter, entailing not only a monetary fine but humiliation as well: he would be compelled to stand up in Synagogue during Service, when the Scroll was being taken out of the Ark, and to repeat after the Beadle a confession of his wrongdoing, a promise not to repeat it, and abject apology to the Kahal, whose pardon was humbly supplicated. This was the fate, in 1768, of Samuel ben R. Anschel, who was guilty of making a disturbance by insulting the Wardens in Synagogue on the seventh day of Passover, the Hillul haShem being enhanced by the fact that there were several Gentiles present on that occasion. In the old days he might have been condemned to thirty-nine stripes: but he was instead mulcted in thirty-nine halfcrowns, this being the punishment also of Gershom ben Isaac (known to the general public at Mr. George Isaacs), who insulted the Parnassim in Synagogue on the first day of Tabernacles, in the autumn of 1774.

It was laid down by the regulations that persons who had frequent occasion to undertake journeys to the Continent were not to be elected to administrative office. This was necessary: for the communal magnates were familiar wherever Jewish merchants foregathered. In the list of those Jews who obtained passes for the famous Leipzig Fairs several Londoners figure--Aaron Hart (possibly identical with the Rabbi: 1713), Moses Adolphus, later Warden of the Great Synagogue, with his son and D. Salomon (1724); Solomon Goldschmidt and Nathan Abraham, with Seckel Bing(1728); Solomon Isaac (1725); Jacob Levy (1735, 40, 47/8, 63); Joseph Meyer (servant to young Mr. Ollen: 1745); and Jacob Bacharach (1755). Several of these persons, or their families, may be traced in the Synagogal records. Cosman Lehmann of Halberstadt, son of the Herz Lehmann mentioned in an earlier chapter of this work, was known as "Engelland", and presumably travelled backwards and forwards on business. In English sources, one finds recurrent allusions to persons such as Aaron Lazarus, the jeweller, who specialised in trinkets and antiques, and enjoyed a distinguished clientele among the aristocracy--almost certainly a member of the Great Synagogue, though he does not seem to have played any part in its administration. He typifies the class of wealthy jewellers who, with a sprinkling of wholesale merchants, brokers and stock-jobbers, constituted the communal aristocracy, upon whose shoulders a good deal of the financial burden of the synagogue rested.

An insight into the composition of the communal proletariat is provided by the first lists of members and the account-books--the only portion of the early records, other than the regulations of 1722, that is now extant. A number of them seem to have been in service with their wealthy coreligionists: thus we encounter Isaac, servant of the Franks, Behr the servant, Abraham "Cook" and Moses ben Hayim "Footman" Some found employment in the houses of Sephardi magnates: we have, for example, Samuel Levi, of Epsom, the servant of Rodrigues, at quite an early date (c. 1718), who was probably a co-employee of "Leizer Epsom, Cook". Besides being perplexed at the problem of whether it was their moral obligation to support these lowly and unattached

coreligionists if they fell sick or on evil days, the community objected to the servile atmosphere they introduced to the Synagogue, excluded them from full membership and liturgical honours, and flatly forbade them to attend service wearing their livery ("livery-malbushim", as the 28th regulation quaintly put it). A few other professions are specified in the records: sugar-baker, cravats-washer, several tailors, a goldsmith, a watch-maker, a diamond-polisher, a barber, and so on; later on, we encounter more than one "lemon-man"--itinerant fruit-vendors, such as are depicted in Wheatley's "Cries of London"--and, in another source, a fishman. The places of provenance mentioned include Hamburg, Halberstadt, Harzfeld, Neumegen, Middleburg, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Prague, Lissa, Posen, Charleville, Berlin, Koenigsberg, Brest-Litovsk, Vienna, and so on (all these places are specified before the middle of the century). But, by the side of these foreigners, there were others whose very names showed that their families were firmly established in Cockaigne: such as our old friend Phineas ben Leib Hamburger, known as Benny Alexander, or Jacob ben Elchanan, called Cocky Jacobs.

The membership of the Synagogue was not confined to London. Its roll of members comprises persons in many parts of England. Not only is it thus an invaluable aid to the reconstruction of the history of the Jewish communities in the provinces, but in more than one case it constitutes the first evidence of the settlement of Jews at the place in question. The earliest membership-list (c. 1750) provides us with the name of Moses Abrahams, of Poole, son-in-law of Reb Aberle and ancestor of Lord Samuel; and Henry Moses, of Dover, ancestor of Colonel Goldsmid and of the present Lord Swaythling. In 1762, Rabbi Hirsch of Kalisch, Hazan of the new community of Bristol, was admitted to membership; he was the forebear of the Collins family, of music-hall and architectural fame, as well as of Felix A. Davis, at one time Treasurer of the United Synagogue. In the following year, the congregation welcomed Manele ben Zalman of Exeter, Jacob ben Samuel of Portsmouth and Moses ben Jacob Ballin of Nottingham. 1766/7 saw the enrolment of Nathan ben Elijah of Lincoln (grandfather of Ney Elias, the explorer), Natte ben Naphtali of Margate, and Ensele ben Samuel Cohen of Brighthelmstone, as well as of "Sam Irishman", who is identical with Samuel Davis of Portsmouth; hence came too, in 1744/5, Jacob Levy, son of Benjamin Levy, the founder of that community, from whom are descended the Waley family and others. Meir Aryeh ben Mordecai of Greenwich is entered in 1783/4. The Synagogue was then even in these early years more than a local place of worship; it was a nation-wide Jewish religious association.

Relations with the Spanish and Portuguese community were generally smooth. Complications were not indeed entirely absent. In 1718, one Jacob Mazahod, a disgruntled member of the older body, made a legacy of £5,000 on condition that the beneficiary had him buried either in the Ashkenazi cemetery or else in Amsterdam. There was something of a secession to join the tudescos in 1730, and in 1737 a special meeting was called to consider the case of a member who had begun to frequent the German synagogue. Notwithstanding occasional clouds of this nature, the Gentlemen of the Mahamad treated the Gentlemen of the "Dutch Jews' Synagogue" in Duke's Place with courtesy, not altogether free from patronage: while on the other hand, every week the latter paid homage to the erudition of the former Sephardi Haham, David Nieto, who had fixed the religious calendar for the meridian of London which obtains in this country to the present day. Each Friday, between the afternoon and evening services, the Shamash of the older congregation would proceed forth from Bevis Marks, with a proper escort, and march to Duke's Place, where his tudesco colleague would solemnly greet him: and, on the threshold of the Synagogue, he would pompously present the compliments of the Gentlemen of the Mahamad and inform the sister community of the hour when the following Sabbath would begin. This custom long survived the publication of printed calendars, which gave full details not for a week but for a year ahead, and died out only in the present century.

The cordial relations between the two bodies did not, however, imply that the Sephardim had ceased to consider themselves a superior caste. Legend reports how some of the hidalgos would have a room sprayed with scent after a tudesco had been in it. This is indubitably a gross exaggeration: but it is certain that the objection to intermarriage between the members of the

two groups (as strong indeed on the Ashkenazi side as on the other, if we may accept the evidence of Benjamin Levy's will) continued unabated. When in I744 Jacob Israel Bernal, a descendant of a family of Inquisitional martyrs and Gabbai of the K. K. Sahar Asamaim, applied to the Mahamad for leave to marry Johebed Baruch, a tudesca, he was compelled to resign, and the most humiliating conditions were imposed before the ceremony was authorised, and then only in a truncated form. (It was because of this episode that the Bernal family, who afterwards furnished English politics and society with some beloved figures, began to become estranged from Judaism.)

A particularly intimate glimpse of the life of the community at this time is afforded by a curious work published in 1738: The Book of Religion, Ceremonies, and Prayers; of the Jews, as Practised in their Synagogues and Families on all Occasions: On their Sabbath and other Holy-Days Throughout the Year. To which is added, A Preface shewing the Intent of the Whole. The Contents, and an Index, with the HEBREW Title of each Prayer made ENGLISH; With many Remarkable Observations and Relations of the Rabbies: All which are what the Modern Jews Religiously observe. Translated immediately from the HEBREW, by GAMALIEL BEN PEDAHZUR. Gent. It subsequently transpired that "Gamaliel ben Pedahzur, Gent.", who was responsible for this egregious production, was a pseudonym of Abraham Mears, an apostate member of one of the oldest families of the Ashkenazi community in England. The volume is saturated with malice, having little object other than to cast ridicule upon the author's former coreligionists.

The translation is unimportant, except for the fact that it is the earliest integral rendering of the Jewish liturgy in English; and it displays on almost every page the author's crass ignorance of what he had the effrontery to criticise. The introductory description of Jewish rites and ceremonies, on the other hand, though similarly marred by malice and lack of knowledge, is of considerable interest, giving as it does a graphic, detailed, and at times not unamusing picture of London Jewish life--in particular, it must be accentuated, the life of the community of the Great Synagogue, in which Mears had been brought up--in the first half of the eighteenth century.

London Jewry, it appears, was meticulous in its observance, not merely of the Shulhan Arukh, but also of innumerable superstitions, of which Gamaliel does not fail to make capital. Belief in the Evil Eye was general. There were, however, certain old women who made it their business to counteract it by a process of fumigation, at a fixed scale of charges: though, being themselves Ashkenazi, they made the Spanish Jews pay more than the Germans. In the synagogue, what was subsequently to be regarded as the characteristic Anglo-Jewish pronunciation of Hebrew already prevailed: Awdown Owlom, Awbeenue Molkeinue, Coddish de Raubonnen, Attah chownen lyodem dawoss, are a few characteristic specimens of Gamaliel's transliteration. It was unusual for unmarried women to attend Synagogue, except on Simhath Torah and Purim. Every Sabbath afternoon, the poorer class religiously went to bed. As for costume: the Jew, like his Gentile neighbour, affected the irksome dignity of a periwig, which the Rabbis' regulations permitted him to comb out even on the Sabbath. The young sparks habitually went about with swords but on the day of rest, when they were enjoined to attach a wooden blade to the hilt, the majority preferred to do without. If Gamaliel is to be believed (but it seems that occasionally he is badly confused when he deals with such matters) it was the custom to use a sedan-chair as a substitute for a coach or horseback on that day. (Not, in any case, for synagogue attendance, as in 1755 it Was laid down that 'chairs' were not to be admitted at any time within the portals of the place of worship.) Weddings and betrothals, the egregious Gamaliel informs us, were conducted in full continental style, with feasting and music spread over several days. We are even told something of the menu on such occasions--wine and drams, with coffee, chocolate and tea for those who liked such new-fangled beverages, and cakes and sweetmeats to eat. Of one wedding ceremony at this period, on August 24th, 1720, almost certainly held under the auspices of the Great Synagogue (just before the construction of Moses Hart's new Shool) we happen to be minutely informed, for public attention was attracted to what was happening and there were accounts in the contemporary news-sheets. Leather sellers' Hall was rented for the festivities,

which lasted for six days. A guard of Grenadiers was hired to escort the bridal procession. Silver favours were distributed bearing effigies of the happy pair, accompanied by the motto: "This is God's Command." Large numbers of the nobility and gentry were invited and came to gratify their curiosity, including the Prince of Wales himself, who bore the apologies of his wife, who hoped that the bride (her name was Cornele) would soon be prevented from attending parties for the same reason that now kept her back.

Later on, some scandal was caused by the practice of including in the wedding-celebrations dances in non-Jewish places of resort, these being held even on the Sabbath. It was accordingly forbidden for the day of rest to be desecrated henceforth by the playing of instrumental music of any sort, and the Beadle was strictly prohibited to announce such gatherings in Synagogue, in the fashion which was customary before the modern fashion of sending out invitations became usual.

Non-Jewish visitors to the Synagogue must have been frequent; indeed, it was largely for their benefit that Gamaliel's work was compiled. It figures in some contemporary guide-books as one of the sights of London (though one still has to be on one's guard against confusion with the neighbouring Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue). Thus, in A New Guide to London, or Directions to Strangers (French and English: second edition, 1726) We read of "Duke's Place, where most of the Jews dwell; you may on a Saturday go and see their Synagogue, which is very fine; but the streets of their resort are very dirty and disagreeable". One foreign visitor whom we know to have taken this advice was the Comte de Saussure, when he was in London in 1729 (who, again, may possibly have mixed up the two Jewish places of worship which he inspected). He records that in what he terms the "Dutch Synagogue" (which he described as small but pretty) "the women do not mix with the men, but stood in a sort of shut-off gallery. The men covered their heads with a piece of silken stuff or veil, the Rabbi's veil being black, as also their cloaks and garments." After the service, a circumcision was held in the Synagogue, and he gives an account of the procedure. It is interesting to note that he was not the only non-Jewish onlooker, a Christian lady being present also. We know of one other curious congregational episode of about this time, when there were such disorders in the synagogue during the service that the parish constable was called in to keep the peace, and two of the ringleaders were haled off before a magistrate. Unfortunately, no further details are given.4

The Rejoicing of the Law was, of course, an occasion for universal merriment. Gamaliel ben Pedahzur records how on this festivity "the women usually fling down sugar-plums to the Children in the Men's Synagogue, and the Children have all Flags and Banners in their Hands to play with, and the whole Congregation are as merry as you please". So merry, indeed, that it was thought advisable to curtail the celebrations to some extent. From 1722 (perhaps earlier still) it was forbidden for a Scroll of the Law to be carried into the women's section of the Synagogue on this occasion (Takkanah XVI) and for sweets to be thrown down on the symbolic bridegrooms (§XVII). Still, decorum left much to be desired, and the fourth of the supplementary regulations made after the redaction of the original code deprived the celebrations of one of its most distinctive features (and one which gave rise to the greatest degree of commotion in the synagogue) by abolishing the traditional circuits with the Scrolls of the Law during the evening service, and restricting the number of Scrolls taken out for the purpose in the morning to three, the barest possible minimum. This restriction must have been short-lived, and in 1759 the circuit with the Scrolls during the evening service was reintroduced. A more durable and less exceptionable reform which was passed in 1735 abolished the practice of selling the honours of acting as Hatan Torah and Hatan Bereshith on this occasion, the offices in question being distributed in future by lot (a fine of £5 was imposed after 1750 on those who refused). But the carnival spirit could not be destroyed by mere regulations. After the evening service, the two Bridegrooms used to be escorted home from the synagogue by a demonstrative procession of congregants, carrying banners and torches, and singing lustily. For Jewish boys, the occasion was an anticipation and compensation for Guy Fawkes Day, which came a little later in the autumn and as yet bore something of a religious tinge, and fireworks, serpents and crackers

would be thrown lavishly and indiscriminately. In 1784, this led to tragedy in Duke's Place, when a certain non-Jew, Joseph Ridout, exasperated beyond his powers of endurance, fired his blunderbuss at the crowd of urchins who were annoying him and killed the thirteen-year-old Moses Lazarus.

But this is an anticipation, and we must return to the first half of the eighteenth century, to Moses Hart's Shool and those who maintained it.

Notes Chapter Six

1 "Unless he has sore feet"! The "fine" was assessed at one shilling: that for tobacco-chewing at 4s. 6d.

2 See below, pp, 120-2 and 165•

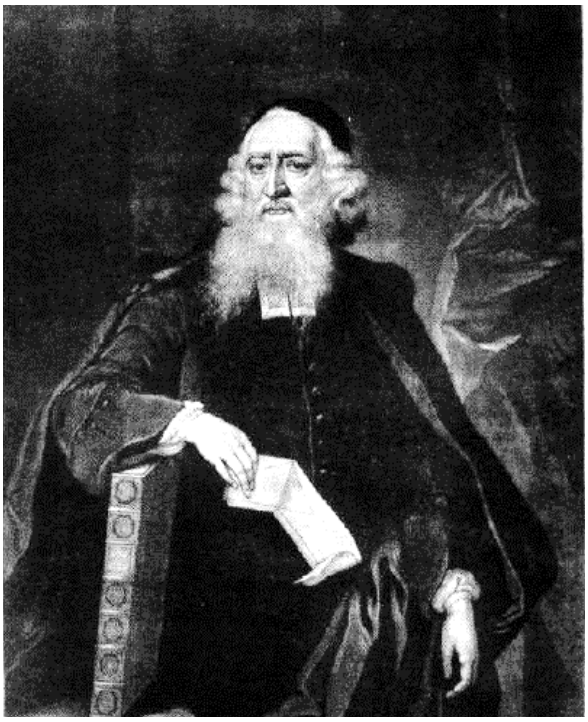
3 Father of Hayim ben Man Hendricks, who was Assistant Scribe to the Synagogue in 1771/2.

4 Cf. the deposition in the Guildhall Archives, C. R. Repertory, vol. cxxix: London

I Thomas Lewis of St. James's Dukes place London Scourer voluntarily makes Oath. That when he was Constable in the year 1723 he this Depont was called to keep the peace (there being a great Disturbance in the Jews Synagogue in the place aforesd) in the time of their Service and was there Charged with two men in his Custody for making the sd. Disturbance who were carried before a Magistrate by the Depont in Order to be Dealt with according to Law. **Tho Lewis**

From the context, it seems as though this disorder had something to do with the Hambro' Synagogue secessionists.

Chapter VII
LIGHT AND LEADING: THE OFFICIALS OF THE COMMUNITY



Aaron Hart, Rabbi of the Great Synagogue, 1706-1756 (from a mezzotint)

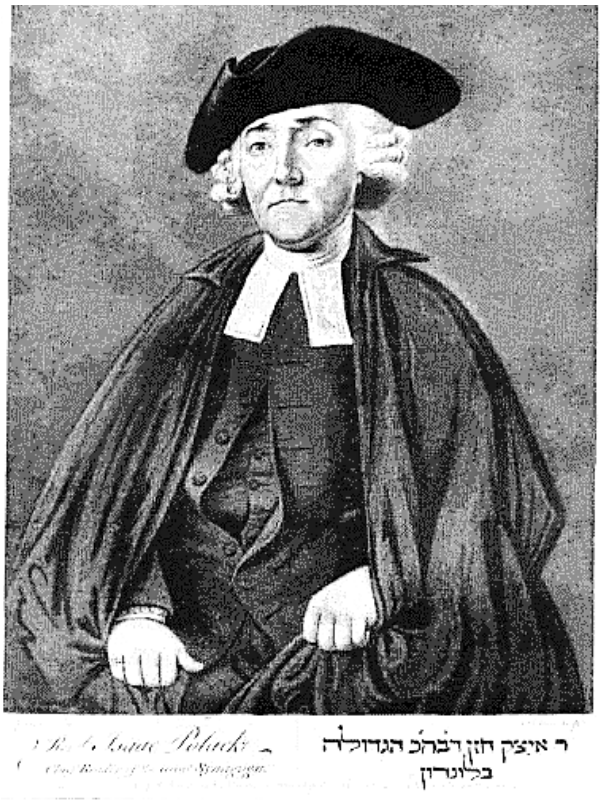
ALL this time, Aaron Hart had remained Rabbi of the congregation. His appearance is familiar from the superb engraving executed in 1751, when he was in his eighty-second year, by James McArdell, after the painting by Dandridge now preserved in the Great Synagogue vestry-room. He is an impressive figure of a man, with his careful dress, his benign face, his flowing white beard, his finely-modelled features. Under his elbow is a leather-bound Hebrew folio, and in his hand a piece of paper apparently marked Get--a reminiscence perhaps of the famous controversy on the Bill of Divorce many years before. Except during this quarrelsome interlude, he was rather a retiring figure, and few records exist whereby his personality may be recovered. He seems however to have been fairly well abreast of current theological writings in English, if we may trust Edward Goldney's conversionist work, A Friendly Epistle to the Jews, published in 1760, which contains a vivid pen-picture. The writer, wishing to know something about contemporary Jewish beliefs, was advised to wait upon "Mr. Aaron Hart (who was then living) an eminent and very aged High Priest, who as they said, his life and conversation was unblemishable". Providing himself with a letter of introduction, accordingly, Goldney waited on the old man (he was upwards of eighty) and tried to engage him in controversy, asking him his grounds for refusing to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. The Rabbi refused to be drawn into an argument which could hardly have any profitable or pleasant outcome. "The English Jews," he observed, "are not fond of gaining proselytes." For his part, his father, grandfather and greatgrandfather had been Jews, and he saw no reason for abandoning their manner of belief. Goldney, who had come prepared for something different, lost his temper. He was surprised, he said, to receive such a poor, low, mean answer From a gentleman of his years and high station in the Synagogue: and he pressed on his conversionist arguments, with more heat than good taste. The Rabbi replied by handing him an English rationalistic work published some time before --Woolston's Discourses on the Miracles--and turning to the middle of it asked him to read a few pages. Nothing more was needed. Goldney left him, adequately answered, but not a little indignant.

Rabbi Hart's functions were carefully laid down in the Takkanoth. He regularly preached twice yearly, on the Sabbaths before the Passover and the Day of Atonement, after the morning service; on these occasions, he had a prescriptive right to be "called up" to the Reading of the Law, but not on other days when he chose to deliver a discourse. He was expected to read the service for Rain on Shemini Atsereth and for Dew on the first day of Passover, as well as the Concluding Service on the Day of Atonement. Besides his salary, the congregation paid the rent of his house, which came, at the outset, to £23 a year. In his later years, it is to be imagined that his wealthy brother relieved him of all financial care.

From the literary point of view, the Rabbi was the reverse of productive. After his polemical publication of 1706, he produced no further books, and in his portrait it is on his father-in-law's magnum opus, Beth Shemuel (which at one time he had intended to edit), that his elbow is resting.

There is extant in fact only one inconsiderable relic of his intellectual activity in his later years. It was at the time an open question whether turbot was permissible for food in accordance with Mosaic law: and when a delegation of Venetian Rabbis came to England in 1741 to conduct certain negotiations with the Spanish and Portuguese community, the opportunity was taken to ask them what was the Italian tradition in this matter. There is preserved a letter of theirs indicating that, on the lagoons, the fish in question was indubitably regarded as permissible for Jewish food, with a covering note to the Rabbi of Amsterdam from "Monsr Aaron Hart, Rabin, London". If there is any other specimen of his handwriting extant (except perhaps as signatory to a marriage contract), it is not known to the present writer.1

After the Rabbi, in order both of importance and of emoluments, came the Reader (Hazan). As we have seen, at the time of the dedication of the Synagogue in 1722, this dignity was filled by Jehiel Michael ben R. Moses Joseph; just before, we find payments recorded to Joseph the Hazan and Michael the Bass-singer." The other assistant at this time, who completed the choral organisation, was Samuel Hirsch of Schwersee, the Meshorrer. The new Takkanoth of 1722 forbade the employment of such assistants by the Hazan, on the ground that it was an abuse of the patience of the community; this prohibition did not, however, last for long. In 1729(?) Michael the Meshorrer was promoted to be Hazan, for an initial period of three years, at a salary of £60 per annum, but this relatively high rate of payment was only temporary. In 1741/2 the Hazan was also Michael (perhaps Michael the Bass-singer already recorded) who was assisted on the High Holydays by a certain Leib; the other remained in office as Assistant Hazan, his salary being raised in 1751 by £6, to £30.



ר איצק חזן רבהכ הגדולה בלונדרן

Isaac Polack, Hazan of the Great Synagogue, 1746-1802 (from a mezzotint)

In 1744, there appears on the scene the first of the Readers of the Great Synagogue who is today more than a mere name--one of the most distinguished indeed of all those who have occupied the office. This was the bahur Isaac Elias [i.e. Isaac, son of Elias: this method of nomenclature, common on the Continent at the period, should not be forgotten] Polack, of Hamburg, who was appointed to office in that year for an initial five years at an annual salary of £30. He is referred to in 1795 as "the venerable", and so was born before 1725, but he must have been a very young man (as well as a bachelor) when he first became associated with the congregation. He overlapped for about a decade with Rabbi Aaron Hart; their combined periods of office covered an unbroken stretch of approximately one hundred years! In 1748, he had an increase in salary of £10 a year, bringing it to £40, and the same again twelve months later. Ultimately, he received £70 a year, together with ten guineas for clothes. More will be said about him later on.3 Among the Reader's duties was the examination of the Scroll of the Law every week to make sure that it was fit for public worship; if he was negligent and an error was discovered during the public reading, he was fined half a crown. It may be mentioned at this point that even in the middle of the eighteenth century the Congregation endeavoured to introduce decorum into the service of the Synagogue by insisting that the officiant should wear canonicals; and in 1755 it was decided that the Hazan should not be allowed to conduct service without his "mantle". Visiting Hazanim diversified the proceedings from time to time, but only if the full governing body approved: should the Gabbaim

make such arrangements on their own authority, each was liable to a fine of five guineas--a figure which shows how heinous the offence was considered.

It was something of a tradition in Jewish communities of the past that when possible appointments were allowed to remain in the same family. This was especially the case in connexion with the office of Secretary, in which a son could be initiated while assisting his father, so that when the latter retired he became the obvious candidate for the succession. In some of the great continental communities, the office of secretary thus remained in a single family for centuries (as was the case with, for instance, the Cases family in Mantua, who provided successive incumbents from the seventeenth century down to our own day). The same tendency manifested itself in England. The first person whom we know to have fulfilled these functions was Meir Lefman Polack, who was appointed Assistant Scribe to the Congregation in 1738 at a salary of £5 per annum, and in 1741 also Collector for another £5. Later he took over full secretarial functions, and in 1752 signed a communication in English to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue which will be spoken of in the next chapter; in 1748, his salary was raised to £15 per annum, and in 1753 to £20. By now his once firm handwriting was that of an ailing old man; and in 1756, he was succeeded by his son Israel, and the latter in turn on his death in 1771 by his brother Eleazar Lipman or Lefman Polack (the two were admitted members of the Congregation in 1769/70) at a yearly salary of £15.4

The communal dignitaries included also the Physician, with his salary of £30 per annum, who sat with the Wardens and had a vote on important occasions, and whose duty it was to look after the poor. The earliest functionary of whom we have knowledge who served in the Great Synagogue in this capacity was Meyer Löw Schomberg, born at Fetzburg in Germany in 1690, who graduated at Giessen in 1710 and afterwards removed to London, where he was admitted a licenciate of the Royal College of Physicians in 1722. At this time, he was so reduced in circumstances that the College accepted his bond for future payment of his admission fees. For some time he was the physician to the Great Synagogue: and, on the basis of the connexions with wealthy business men which he thus acquired, he became one of the best-known medical practitioners in the City, being reputed to earn 4,000 guineas a year. In 1746 he wrote as a sort of personal apologia a semi-ethical work which he entitled Emunath Omen (a title which may perhaps be translated as "The Faith of a Professional Man"). In this, he soundly trounced his coreligionists and former patrons. They broke the Ten Commandments. Their God was Mammon. If they heard on Sabbath that a ship was sunk, they ran to 'Change to learn whether India and South Sea Stock had gone up or down, and they did not scruple to garnish a bankrupt's banking-account on the sacred day. They ate forbidden food, and married Gentiles in Church, despising Jewish girls because their position or family was not good enough for them. As for himself, they called him a bad Jew because he carried a sword and rode in his coach on Saturdays when he went to visit his patients. But this was all pretext: in fact, he could not practise among Jews, he sneered, because Jews would not pay Jewish doctors a living wage, though they would gladly heap gold upon a non-Jewish physician.

The physician's insincerity was demonstrated by the history of his own family, who with one accord abandoned the Jewish faith (in certain cases at least before the criticisms quoted above had been penned) and, their pathway through life thus smoothed, carved out strikingly successful careers. Isaac, who graduated at Cambridge in 1750, after undergoing baptism, became Fellow and Censor of the College of Physicians, and attended Garrick in his last illness. His brother, Ralph, was well known in letters, publishing a number of dramatic and other works (most of them extremely bad). Henry became a soldier, and rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Alexander, the youngest, entered the navy, was in command of the naval detachment which covered General Wolfe's landing at Quebec, and was subsequently knighted: he was father of Admiral Sir Alexander Schomberg (1774-1850) the distinguished naval writer, and ancestor of a notable naval clan.

Of the communal physicians immediately after Schomberg, we know very little; and even their names can be recovered only with difficulty. It is possible that Dr. Bass, "a noted Jew physician", who died in St. Mary Axe in 1731, and the Londoner "Dr. Jeremias", active at Prague in the middle of the century, had been in the employment of the Great Synagogue, but there is no definite evidence to this effect; the same applies to Behr the Physician, a member of the community about this time. In 1758, "Herz Doctor" was formally appointed to attend on the congregational poor at a salary of £10 per annum (increased in 1766 to £20). Possibly he is identical with Hart Wessels, M.D., buried in the Alderney Road cemetery in 17675 : who doubtless collaborated on occasion with Nathan Mitchell, M.D., who was laid to rest there in 1785. Ultimately, the physician drew a salary of £40 per annum--£20 from the Charity Fund and £20 from the Society for Visiting the Sick. From this amount, £15 was deducted to pay the apothecary, who received an additional £5 from the Congregation, making £20 in all. From 1751 onwards, the congregational apothecary was. Yossel ben Hertz "Doctor" (presumably Hart Wessel's son), whose appointment was constantly renewed year after year: he was followed, in 1767, by a member of the Sephardi community named Rodrigues.

Of the subordinate communal officials we know still less. As Scribe, for writing Scrolls of the Law and important documents (his duties and emoluments were carefully stipulated in the regulations of 1722), Rabbi Aaron Hart imported his brother-in-law, Leib Aryeh, a son of the author of the Beth Shemuel, who died in 1751; his tombstone in the Alderney Road ground is still legible. The Gentleman's Magazine informs us in 1776 of the death of one of his successors in office--Levy Marks, aged 96, Principal Scribe to the Jew's Synagogue. (The phraseology suggests that there were several who followed the profession.) Cases of Jewish longevity, indeed, often engaged the attention of the gentlemen of the Press. To cite some instances which must have been familiar to members of the Great Synagogue, we read in 1765 how Rabbi Shamey, a fine old Polander, aged 102, with a nineteen-inch beard, attended the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. More frequently, we are told of such prodigies only after they had passed from earth, as in the case of Solomon Raphael Levy of St. Giles', who died in 1771 aged 108, or Isaac Benjamin, "the oldest Jew in England", who followed suit in 1775 in his 109th year, leaving twelve sons resident in the country. In January 1786, there died in Moorfields David Levi Solomons, "a Jewish Rabbi", aged 100; in 1799, there passed away in his 108th year Nathan Moses "the oldest member of the Dutch Jews' Synagogue", who, like the foregoing, may have recalled the original place of worship in Broad Court. Such longevity was sometimes found, though exceptionally, among the wealthy, as in the case of Maria Anna Moses, "a rich Jewess", of Whitechapel, who on her death in 1785, in her hundredth year, left £10,000 to be divided among the poor of her own persuasion.

Another official who had to be appointed by the Community was the Constable, as was customary in the Aldgate Ward. In 1766, the duties were filled by Lyon Toby, apparently a Sephardi; but later on there were two, one Sephardi and one Ashkenazi--the latter probably nominated by the Great Synagogue.

The following provisional list of communal employees of the first half of the eighteenth century, whose names figure in the accounts and elsewhere, may be set down at this point:

Rabbis:

Judah Loeb ben Anschel Cohen (c. 1691-1700); Aaron the Scribe of Dublin (c. 1700-1704); Aaron Hart (c. 1704-1756)

Readers:

Judah Leib ben Moses of Lissa (?1690-1706); (Menahem) Mendel (?1706-); Joseph (--I722); Jehiel Michael ben Moses Joseph (1722-1750?); Samuel Hirsch of Schwersee, formerly Meshorrer (1730-1741?); Michael (1741-); Isaac Polack (1746-1802). Assistants: Michael Bass

(1722-1743); Samuel Meshorrer (later Hazan); Leib Shamash (1752-); Jossele b. Aberle Melamed (1761--); Abraham Bass (1759); Abraham "Singer" of Prosnitz, father of John Braham (1767-1779).

Beadles:

Meir ben Mordecai (1707: assisted by his son Menahem); Samuel ben Judah Leib (1722); Leib [Cohen] (£17 10s.--£20: 1739-42) with Meir (£7 16s.); Jacob (£2 8s., presumably on pension), and the woman-beadle Golde (£7); Moses Joseph Jossel (1766); Wolf, under-Shamash (1739-1770); Jacob ben Levi(1770--)

Scribes:

R. Aaron of Dublin (c. 1700); R. Abba; R. Judah (1722); R. Jacob; Leib Aryeh ben Samuel (d. 1751); Levi [Leib] Marks (d. 1776).

Notes Chapter Seven

1 It may be mentioned that there were at least four other Aaron Harts who were contemporary with the Rabbi. One, a teacher of dancing and deportment, is mentioned in The Connoisseur of November 6th, 1755; another, a sailor aboard the privateer Caxtor, died at sea on February 28th, 1759; another was Commissary Officer with the British forces at the time of the conquest of Canada (see above, page 65); and a fourth, a merchant with American connexions, died on November 21st, 1762, leaving in his will instructions that "I desire to be buried in Linnen and to have a Horse, and four mourning coaches and six others... And I desire and order that 10 persons may come to read, every morning and evening for one month after my decease, for which my executors shall give them 90 shillings each."

2 For this choral system see below, p. 143.

3 The Rev. M. Rosenbaum suggests that he was a nephew of Reb Aberle, whose wife was Esther, daughter of Isaac Polack (d. Hamburg, 1713), and son of the Elias Isaac Polack who received a pass to go abroad in 1692 and 1693.

4 David Tevele Schiff, the later Chief Rabbi, had an uncle named Lefman Polack: Meir Lefman Polack may therefore have been his cousin.

5 Dr. Herz's successor, appointed this same year, was Abraham van Oven, for whom see below, pp. 200-1.

Chapter VIII
THE WORLD AND THE SYNAGOGUE

THE reputation of the Great Synagogue in London was now becoming better and better known to Jewish committees abroad. This fact was responsible for one of the most remarkable episodes in Anglo-Jewish history of the eighteenth century, which at the same time marks the beginning of the British tradition of assisting the Jew against his oppressor. During the War of Austrian Succession, in revenge for certain fancied offences of the Jews in Alsace, the Empress Maria Theresa, most illogically, banished the Jews from Bohemia--especially from its capital, Prague, which at that time contained one of the oldest and greatest communities in the western world. That hapless Jewry now entreated its co-religionists throughout Europe to use what influence they could to secure at least a reprieve. When in December 1744 this appeal was received at the Great Synagogue in London, through the medium of the Rabbi, it was realised that no time was to be lost. The presiding officer was Aaron Franks, who, with his father-in-law Moses Hart, the Rosh haKahal, immediately petitioned King George II on behalf of their unhappy brothers in faith. The King consented to receive them in audience (doubtless Aaron Franks' elegant clientele now stood him in good stead): and they were accompanied by Joseph Salvador, Warden of the Spanish and Portuguese community, which thus became associated in this meritorious deed. A recently-discovered account describes how the old monarch showed the supplicants every sympathy, tears coming to his eyes as he heard their harrowing account of what was happening to the miserable Bohemian Jews in the middle of a severe Central European winter. "It is not right," he repeated, shaking his head, "It is not right that the innocent should suffer with the guilty." In consequence of his truly royal sympathy, the British Ambassador in Vienna, Sir Thomas Robinson, was instructed to make representations to the Austrian Government. The Empress was deaf to the pleadings of humanity, and the process proved slow. Meanwhile, it was reported abroad that old Moses Hart (he was now in his seventieth year) betook himself to the Continent, in the company of three Members of Parliament whose sympathies he had enlisted, to see whether it was possible to do anything for the relief of the sufferers. In the long run, the diplomatic action set on foot at St. James's and the Hague proved successful, and the edict of banishment was rescinded. It is significant, and memorable, that the first mention of public action on the part of the Great Synagogue was in connexion with this remarkable episode of humanity.1

In addition to this diplomatic action, all the London synagogues raised relief funds (that of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation amounted to £843)1 and a joint committee comprising representatives of all sections of the community was appointed to administer it. This was the earliest instance, by many years, of co-operative action of the sort in the Anglo-Jewish community.

Among the minor problems of the Synagogue at this period was that of proselytisation. One of the objections that had been raised to the resettlement of the Jews in England at the time of Oliver Cromwell was that they would convert Christians to their way of belief; and a report was current among the members of the Spanish and Portuguese community that the toleration extended by Charles II was conditional upon nothing of this sort being attempted. Yet, though Judaism is no proselytising faith, and admits freely that "the righteous of all creeds have a part in life eternal", it was not always possible to rebuff those non-Jews who thought that they found in the religion of the Torah a key to their perplexities, or to damp the zeal of Jewish enthusiasts who desired to assist them. Considering the spirit of the age, there can be no question that this was distinctly dangerous to the position of the community as a whole, and all the London congregations were at one in endeavouring to check it. Every now and again, the Great Synagogue took steps to curb some of its more hot-headed members. Nevertheless, conditions in this respect gave rise to periodical anxiety, and two days after Christmas in 1751 the presiding body received the following letter from Mahamad of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation:

To the President & Gentlemen belonging to the Vestrys of the Duke's Place Synagogue.

Gentlemen:
Being persuaded that you will join with us in all things that tend to preserve the present happy toleration, we take this opportunity to acquaint you as worthy representatives of your congregation, of a growing evil among us, viz., that of permitting proselytes, which end we have heard that two or three Christians have come hither from Norway with that intention, and lest these practises should extend to English proselytes, which is contrary to the express condition annexed to our first establishment here, we have thought proper to forbid in our Synagogue any from aiding and assisting them therein in any manner whatsoever, under the penalties as we send you enclosed. We do not doubt that you will also concur with us to endeavour to prevent the same from taking effect amongst you in the manner that may be judged most expedient. We pray God to preserve you for many years, and believe us to be,

Gentlemen,
Your friends and humble servants,
A. de Castro - For the Congregation

A similar communication was sent to the Hambro' Synagogue in Magpie Alley. The representatives of the two bodies of "Dutch" (i.e. German) Jews met together to consider what should be done---it is the first recorded instance of such consultation. In consequence, the following reply was sent by the hand of Meir Lefman Polack, the Secretary of the Great Synagogue:

London, the second January, 1752 The President and Gentlemen belonging to the Portuguese Vestry

Gentlemen:
We received your letter and have this Evening met in Order to take it in Consideration And Concur with you in Opinion that we ought to do Every thing in our power to prevent the ill Consequences that may arise from making of Proselites, contrary to the known laws of this Kingdom, and here Annexed you have the Resolutions we have taken upon that occasion. And in order to prevent their pleading Ignorance we shall publish the same in our Synagogue.

We shall always joyn with you in our Endeavour to Check such unlawful practices, we pray God to preserve you for many Years and believe us to be,

Gentlemen
Your Friends and Humble Servants,
M. L. Polack
For the Gentlemen Parnassim & Gabbay of the Dutch Jews

The Resolution in question--proclaimed by the Beadles of the two Synagogues in Yiddish, on the Sabbath of vaEra--ran (in the sturdy contemporary translation) as follows:

It having been Represented to us that some Foreign Jews not inhabitants of England make it their practice to convert Christians to the Jewish faith; in order to put a stop to so pernicious and unlawful Practices, we the aforesaid Presidents and Gentlemen of the Vestrys, come to the following Resolution, that in case any Person or persons shall attempt making of Proselites, he or they so offending shall be immediately expeld the Synagogues & also be deprived the Benefit of being burried in the Jewish Barren(l) Grounds and to be deny'd all other Privileges appertaining to the Jewish Religion. These Penalties are not to be understood as merely personable, but even to extend to their Wives & children.

The vocal powers of the Beadles and the disapproval of the authorities proved quite inadequate to solve the problem. In the winter of 1759-1760, it was discovered that there was a proselytising

movement in London, which involved many persons. Two Christian children, it was said, had recently been initiated to Judaism in the house of one Isaac ben Jochanan: while a certain Meir Cohen had performed the marriage ceremony (in the house of the Rabbi himself, the record says) between a Jew and a foreign proselyte whom he had admitted to the faith, and who was given the ritual bath in the Mikvah in the house of Abraham ben Josele. Isaac pleaded ignorance of what had occurred, as he had been away at the time, and was merely fined a symbolic sum of thirty-nine pence, corresponding to the thirty-nine statutory stripes of Biblical days. Abraham ben Josele, on the other hand, had to pay twelve times that amount, and after a special session of the governing bodies of both of the Ashkenazi communities, Meir Cohen was expelled from the congregation, in accordance with the regulation enacted eight years earlier. But there was another episode with which they could not deal unaided: for when not long since Abraham the Bass-Singer at the Synagogue had married a Gentile woman who had embraced Judaism, the ceremony had been performed by a Sephardi scholar, Rabbi Perez. The following letter was thereupon addressed to the senior congregation:

Gentlemen:
We have with the greatest concern discover'd that a Foreign Jew lately come among us has in violation of our Laws to the Contrary made a Proselite, for which daring Crime we have this day unanimously put the said Law in force against him, which is we have expell'd him Both our synagogues and Deprived him Burrial should he Die among us.

We are at the same time Extremely Concern'd to acquaint you that we are inform'd of a certain person in your Congregation who has been guilty of the same Pernicious and unlawfull Offence. We need not point out to you the heniousness of it, but beg leave to refer you the annex't copy of your Letter dated the 2d Jan.y 1752. We make no doubt but that a Proper Example be made of him adequate to his crime.

We are, Gentlemen,
Your most humble servants.

Notwithstanding all such efforts, it proved impossible to stem for long the enthusiasm of those who thought that they found in Judaism greater spiritual comfort than in the religion in which they had been born and bred. Not long after, it is recorded how an entire family, consisting of father, mother, and two daughters, came from Coventry to London and were admitted to the faith, becoming more strict in their observance than ordinary Jews. Whether this episode had any connection with the Great Synagogue it has been impossible to determine, though it is highly probable.

There is a fleeting glimpse of the life and organisation of the congregation at this time in the various publications regarding the cause célèbre of Henry Simons. This was a Polish Jew (presumably Zevi Hirsch ben Simeon) almost entirely ignorant of English, who fell among thieves while travelling about the country in 1751 and alleged that he had been robbed of a belt of money--an episode which led to a series of prosecutions for theft, libel and perjury, at the close of which he was handsomely vindicated in the Courts of Law. For some reason or other, the case seized on the popular imagination, and several pamphlets were issued on the one side or the other in connexion with it. The witnesses on Simon's behalf included Naphtali Franks, "the great rich Jew", who testified how the other had been forced to "pawn his veil" (i.e. tallith) as a result of his losses: Lazarus Simon, the Overseer of the Poor (Gabbai Zedakah) of the Synagogue, who had given him relief and used to see him "publickly, and constantly" at the place of worship: and Meyer Polack, Clerk of the Synagogue, who once gave him half a guinea out of the poor-box, and at another time sixpence out of his own pocket. Naturally, the affair was closely followed in Duke's Place, from which many of the witnesses on Simon's behalf came. In particular, feelings ran high against a certain Jacob Abrahams (a native of Wintzenheim in Alsace, and accordingly known in London as "Wants-money"!) who had given evidence on the other side. To avoid unpleasant consequences, Aaron Franks (Naphtali's cousin) gave him a letter to take to Lazarus

Simons, suggesting that action should be taken by the congregation to anticipate untoward consequences:

Dear Sir,
I find it highly necessary, that since the affair is over, [that] we take care that no insult is offered to the bearer; for which reason I am of opinion it ought to be called out in the synagogue; for if it should be known, that a man is insulted because he appeared to give a Christian a character, it may prove of bad consequences.

Your friend,
Aaron Franks
Please to let it be done next Sabbath.

To Mr, Lazarus Simmons, Thursday morning.

We see from this how vigilantly and how energetically the Congregation watched over the good name of Jewry in those far-off days.

A day-to-day history of the Synagogue at this period would hardly be enthralling, even if the records were in a condition to permit us to make the reconstruction. Only here and there is there anything to record beyond the merest small-talk. On February 28th, 1748, indeed, there was a flutter of excitement when the Synagogue was broken into and property was stolen, including plate and vestments, to the value of £300. Subsequently, the culprit--a certain Jeremiah Levy--was apprehended. Seven years later, in 1755, there was a similar untoward episode, when it was found that a pair of bells left to the Congregation by Moses Heilbuth in 1748 was missing. An enquiry was made, and the two beadles were found guilty of culpable negligence in their custody of the Synagogue property, one of them being fined ten guineas and the other suspended for six months. Yet another episode of the sort took place on the night of May 20th, 1767: a silver cup and caster "used in certain benedictions" being stolen by a baker's boy named Joseph Phineas "who blinks with his eyes", subsequently convicted. (In the course of the evidence it was stated that "upon the wardens being chosen, they have a list of the vestments and they give them from warden to warden.") These occurrences are probably responsible for the fact that hardly any of the appurtenances now in possession of the Congregation are anterior to the middle of the eighteenth century. Minor peculation was presumably more common; in 1756, for example, Mr. Lewis Oppenheim's seat in the Synagogue was broken into, and he advertised a reward in the public press for information which would enable him to recover the lost property. In 1738, the Ashkenazim had doubtless shared in the mourning of their Sephardi co-religionists, when there was a serious conflagration in their Synagogue round the corner, and we read how on Candlemas day "a fast was observed by the Jews on account of their Law being burnt in a late fire in Duke's Place." Notwithstanding the growth of the congregation, it had its periods of financial stress, and in 1734 a special levy of £4 a head had to be made on all members, as has been mentioned before. The year 1746, however, brought an unexpected windfall, when the Wardens received the sum of £50 to be distributed among the poor of the community from the executors of one Timothy Motteux, perhaps a benevolently inclined French Huguenot (the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue had been similarly remembered). 1751 saw an auction for the benefit of the orphans in the room attached to the synagogue (the Kahalstube, as it was called) of the goods of Moses [ben Hayim] Hyams, recently demised, for the benefit of his orphans--an illustration of the paternal if despotic power of the community. In 1752-3, various appurtenances for the Scroll of the Law were purchased from one of the members, Moses Israel, a silversmith, probably to be identified with the Moses ben Israel haCohen of the records. Nine years later, in 1761, the Charity Fund acquired from Joseph Levy, of Frankfort, that magnificent ewer and beaker for laving the hands of the Priests which is still used on festive occasions--a splendid example of English silversmiths' work of the period.

Page from the earliest Commemoration Book (registering bequests of Lazarus Simon, Benjamin Mendes da Costa, etc.)

Those who had supported the Synagogue in their lives did not fail to remember it, in many cases, at their death; and some pious members of the Sephardi community--Benjamin Mendes da Costa, Moses Gomes Serra, and others--similarly showed themselves mindful of its needs. English law, however, regarded any bequest for the support of the Jewish religion, if challenged in the courts, as devoted to a superstitious object, and therefore invalid: and, partly for this reason, partly because to the Jew the support of suffering humanity is more important than the maintenance of the pomp of the public worship, charitable objects were generally uppermost in the mind of the testators. Thus, when Isaac Franks died in 1736, he left his brother and executor, Aaron Franks (among other benefactions) the sum of £2,500 on trust, the income of which was to be devoted to the purchase of coals, clothing, provisions and other necessities of life for distribution half-yearly, at Purim and the New Year, to " poor German Jews and their families, living in England". Besides this, a legacy of £1,250 was to be given to the synagogue, £100 to the poor of the parish, and £150 to the East India Company's hospital at Poplar, while the Rabbis received £100 "for praying for my soul" This was not an unusual formula in wills at the time, notwithstanding the fact that a legacy in such terms was not then enforcible in law. Thus, in 1764, another member of "Moses Hart's Synagogue in Duke's Place", Simon Jacob Moses, of Bury Street, left not only "£50 to the Learned Rabbys if they pray for my soul", but an additional £100 to his nephew, Jacob Nathan Moses, one of his executors, "if he will pray for me at Synagogue for one year"--i.e. recite the Kaddish. His other legacies included £50 to his book-keeper, Lefman Salamon Pollock, and £10 to his clerk, Lefman Meyer Pollock (subsequently Secretary of the Synagogue), £15 to the poor, £50 for the "Parnossims or rulers" of the Great Synagogue, £10 to the Burial Society, and the same amount to the Charitable Society for Educating Children--i.e. the Talmud Torah.2

The Congregation was to receive another great benefaction on the death of one of its oldest members. Simon ben Eleazar, or Simon Lazarus, of Goslar, near Halberstadt, an ancestor of the Franklin family, was Moses Hart's uncle and left Breslau with him in 1697 to settle in London; here he played a prominent part in communal affairs until the time of his death in 1725. His son, named after his grandfather, and known in England as Lazarus Simon, succeeded Moses Hart in his place as Jew Broker and married the latter's sister Margoshes. He remained active in the service of the Great Synagogue for many years, as repeated references in these pages have shown: and he was elected co-warden with Aaron Franks in 1750, 1753, 1756-7 and yet again in 1760. On his death in 1764, he left the congregation the sum of £3,500, Of which £2,500 was to be applied to clothe and give a small gratuity each year to twelve destitute persons, half of them men and half women, and the remaining £1,000 in distributions to the poor twice yearly before the Holydays. It was stipulated that the men's outfit should consist of a coat and waistcoat, a pair of breeches, two shirts, two neckcloths, a pair of shoes, a pair of stockings, and a hat; while the women were to receive a gown, a petticoat, a pair of stays, a pair of shoes, a pair of stockings, two shirts, two handkerchiefs, two caps, and two aprons. In order to prevent one very obvious abuse, any of the recipients who sold or pawned the outfit were debarred from further benefit from the fund. In accordance with a decision reached in 1808, only decayed members of the

congregation were to be eligible for the clothing charity. This proviso is no longer adhered to, and preference to enjoy the benefits is now given to poor widows. With this reservation, however, and with due regard to the changed fashions in clothing, Lazarus Simon's legacy is faithfully administered by the United Synagogue to the present day.

A full list of the major benefactions to the Congregation, in the middle years of the eighteenth century, is subjoined. The list begins with the bequests of Isaac Franks and of Moses Hart. All names are of course given in their Hebrew form: the English forms, when ascertainable, together with the date of death, are appended in brackets:

Simon ben Moses Levi £50 (Simon Jacob Moses, d. 1764)

Haber Aaron Moses ben haber Baruch Levi £100 (Aaron Levy)

Dan Eliezer b. Simon £250 (Lazarus Simon, d. 1764)

Benjamin Mendes da Costa £120 (d. 1764)

Judah b. Zevi £50

Hayim b. Judah Levi £100 etc. (Hyman Levy, d. 1769)

Joseph b. Benjamin £50 Joseph Wolf, d. 1770)

Adam b. Hayim £100

Zevi b. Zeeb £100 (Henry Isaac of the Hambro' Syn., d. 1773: See p. 120).

Abraham b. Hayim Levi £100 (Abraham Hyman Levy, d. 1774)

Simon b. R. Israel Scroll of Law, etc.

Aaron b. Naphtali £1000 (Aaron Franks, d. 1777)

Moses Hayim Gomes Serra £15 (d. 1780)

Jacob b. Hayim £100

Phineas b. Isaiah £100

Yetta b. Judah £25

Aaron Moses b. Reuben £25

Speranz b. Joseph £60

Benjamin b Joseph £150

Naphtali b. Joseph £100 (Naphtali Hart Myers, d. 1788)

Alexander b. Isaac £25 (Alexander Isaac, d. 1789)

Moses b. Jacob £250 (?Moses [Michael] Adolphus, d. 1785)

The list continues with additional entries in a later hand, presumably belonging to the last decade of the century. Among the entries are included Margolis b. Judah, who left the Synagogue £144, and Abraham Samuel, son of a Rabbi Raphael, whose bequest was described an indefinite "proper gift".

Apart from these legacies and others (e.g. the pair of bells and house in Fleet Street bequeathed to it in 1748 by Moses, son of Samuel Heilbuth), the Synagogue benefited from the generosity of living members from time to time. The congregation gratefully recorded year by year such benefactions as that of Judah b. Menahem, who gave a donation of £100 on some special occasion, Judah b. Eliezer Levi (£50), Judah b. Samuel Levi (£20 and a scroll of the law) and many others; the bounty of some of them is mentioned elsewhere in these pages.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the cemetery acquired by Benjamin Levy in 1696/7 was beginning to get full. In accordance with a practice which was not uncommon in Ashkenazi congregations at the time, they at first attempted to cope with this problem by vertical instead of latitudinal expansion--that is, by covering the ground with a stratum of earth of sufficient depth to make fresh graves. It would seem that the south-western section of the ground, and the stretch behind the caretaker's lodge, were artificially raised in accordance with this practice, which some contemporary English observers noted as being alien to the other section of the Jewish community. (When this happened, tombstones were sometimes placed back to back, indicating that two bodies lay, one beneath the other, under the same memorial.) But in the nature of things, this could only be a temporary expedient. In the spring of 1740, a fund had been opened for the maintenance of the Cemetery. It was decided that all persons called to the Law henceforth should make an offering for this object, and a new functionary was henceforth appointed, year by year, to act as Treasurer (Gabbai Tikkun Beth Hayim). In 1748, Moses Hart, Aaron Franks, Elias Levy, Samuel Adolphus and Naphtali Franks--those never-failing benefactors--were appointed a sub-committee for the purpose of buying fresh land for a cemetery. In the course of the following year, the freehold of a site adjoining the original ground (described as "being situated in Three Colt Yard in Mile End and the Hamlet of Mile End Old Town, in the Parish of St. Dunstan, Stepney") was acquired for the sum of £150. A further payment of £21 was made to secure access to the public highway. The new ground lay at right-angles to the old, the whole henceforth being in a rough L-shape. The negotiations had been carried on through the medium of Lazarus Simon, himself to be laid to rest shortly after in the old ground, where his tombstone, recently restored by pious descendants, may still be seen.

There was by now a regular keeper resident in the cemetery, in accordance with the terms of the will of Isaac Franks, who had left the Synagogue among his other bequests an annuity of £10 to be paid to the ground-keeper for the time-being. The conditions are still piously carried out. The gravestone of the earliest beneficiary is still decipherable: it marks the last resting-place of Mordecai, son of Moses Nathan, of the province of Hesse, Shochet in London and keeper of the burial-ground (the date is apparently about 1745). In the newer part of the ground, one may read the epitaph of his daughter, which adds the interesting detail that he had been resident in Ireland before coming to England: it marks the resting-place of Leah, daughter of Mordecai Irelander, the Shochet and keeper of the Cemetery, and wife of Leib ben Joseph of Nassau (in Denmark!); she passed away in 1774, in her seventy-second year. Mordecai ben Moses Nathan's successor was his son, Nathan Nathan who, born in 1710, died in 1795• in his eighty-fifth year, after having occupied the obviously salubrious profession of cemetery-keeper for fifty years. One night in January 1758, shortly after midnight, he ran out with a naked sword to assist in overpowering a burglar who was struggling with a local householder among the tombs, his wife, Eve Nathan, meanwhile summoning the watch.

A mere ground-keeper was found later on to be an insufficient safeguard. It was the age of the "resurrection men", who removed recently-interred corpses and sold them to the medical schools for dissection. The Jew's particularly profound veneration for the bodily shell in which a human spirit had been enclosed rendered this possibility a constant dread in the community, though

hardly more so than it was among the ordinary population. Accordingly, as with other cemeteries, Christian as well as Jewish, a system of watch and ward was devised. A sort of wheeled sentry-box was provided (at Brighton, something more than a century ago, a bathing-machine was adapted for the purpose!) which was moved about the ground and placed near newly-made graves, which were watched from it so long as was necessary. At the Great Synagogue, a law was passed to the effect that all members of the congregation between the ages of eighteen and seventy were to be obliged to lend their services in rotation. Each night, therefore, three of them, armed with blunderbusses, performed this cold and rather gruesome duty, from as early as four o'clock on winter evenings to seven in the morning. At intervals, they had to ring the bell of the watch-tower to show they were alert: in some grounds, they were supposed to walk about every hour and to call "All's well" if they found nothing amiss. Among the Synagogal records there are preserved rosters of the roll of service, "for the guarding of the House of Life". It was possible to obtain exemption only on the payment of a substantial fine, of which too the records are preserved. (It will be recalled how Zangwill's "King of the Schnorrers", with this object in view, obtained alms for a purpose which he euphemistically, and misleadingly, described as "to keep an old man out of the cemetery".) This system continued to obtain until well on in the nineteenth century.3

The Cemetery, like the Synagogue, attracted some attention among non-Jews. One eighteenth-century account speaks of it in the following terms:

In the Cemetery belonging to the Dutch Jews, the rows are not kept so regularly, and the tombs resemble more than in our burial grounds. The inscriptions are entirely Hebrew... The Dutch Jews are equally averse from disturbing the bones of the dead, and if the Cemetery is full, they cover it with a stratum of earth of sufficient depth to make fresh graves, but the Portuguese always purchase new ground. The Cemetery belonging to the Dutch Jews was set apart for that purpose, about the beginning of the present century.

In another respect, Jewish burials caused comment in the early days. In the seventeenth century, in order to foster the textile industry, legislation had been passed compelling all persons to be buried in shrouds of wool, and of no other material, under pain of a fine payable to the parish. This, however, was contrary to the religious practices of the Jews, which prescribed for such purposes the use of the simplest material. Since both of their cemeteries were at the beginning in the same part of Mile End, the resultant payments constituted quite a considerable source of income, which it would have been inequitable to restrict to that part of the parish in which their burials took place, though so few resided there. Accordingly, an order was made for "fines on Jews for not burying in wool in Mile End Hamlet to be divided among all hamlets in Stepney parish".

"Gamaliel ben Pedahzur", whose description of Ashkenazi life in London in the first half of the eighteenth century has been quoted above, gives some interesting details of the organisation of the Kabronim-Chevra, as he calls the Burial Society. The pious duty of digging the graves was performed of course by its members, who cast lots among themselves to determine whose turn it was to take part. A female counterpart of the Society, going by the same name, was responsible for providing the shrouds, and its "clerk", a poor woman, distributed various portions of it to the members, so that all should be able to participate in this meritorious deed. Burials took place at that time within twenty-four hours of the death, the time of the funeral being announced in the synagogue at the time of service by the "Clerk", or Beadle.

Up to a time almost within living memory, all the principal mourners attending a funeral were supplied with black "mourners' cloaks" which continued to be worn throughout the Shiva week and on the following Friday night when they attended Synagogue. Thus, with exquisite Jewish feeling, any deficiency of attire was covered, and the poor were saved from being put to shame. This custom continued until the second half of the last century, when for sanitary reasons it was discontinued. In those early days (it may be added), and long after, Jewish deaths were announced

by the Beadle or some other representative of the synagogue, who went round the Jewish quarter with a great copper money-box ("bix") which he rattled as he went. This intimated that a death had taken place: if anyone wished to know who it was, he had to put a contribution in the box.

In 1786/7, a subscription was raised for performing certain works at the Cemetery (probably including the construction of a solid boundary-wall). At the same time, the Burial Society founded nearly a century before was reorganised, and a new roll was compiled of those willing to perform the pious duty of preparing the bodies for burial and watching by them before the last solemn rites. Two parchment registers used for this purpose, for the men's and women's societies respectively, are preserved in the congregational records. Year by year, on the Thursday before Hanukah, the Burial Society held a fast which was observed by all members (the ritual is preserved in a rare volume Rephuath haNephesh, a handbook for its pious work, printed in London in 1780). On the conclusion of the service, the members proceeded to the Cemetery, where the Rabbi delivered an address, and the pardon of those buried there was formally asked for any neglect in the last duties administered to them.

In the course of time, the new cemetery too became old. The pleasant garden-ground in which it had been situated was now a wilderness of bricks and mortar, in which the House of Life provided the only touch of verdure. What in 1749 had been Three Colt Yard was softened into Colt Yard, and finally metamorphosed to Alderney Road. At length, in the last decade of the century, a new burial-ground was purchased, as we shall see, the old one being henceforth used only for reserved graves or in special circumstances. It was only in 1853 that the last interment was carried out--that of Henrietta, first wife of Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler, who was himself laid to rest upwards of forty years later at Willesden.

His collaboration in acquiring the new ground was the last important service rendered by Moses Hart to the congregation. He was by now advanced in years. In 1756, he asked to be excused from attending further to synagogal affairs, on the score of his failing health. An old account-book of the Synagogue, contemporaneous with this, begins with a record of the offerings made for his recovery from illness, including one of £18 in his own name.4 But this turned out to be his last, as on November 19th, 1756, he died, being then in his eighty-first year. By a codicil to his will, made shortly before his death, he left to the elders or wardens of what he termed "my Synagoga in Duke's Place" a legacy of £30 per annum for repairs and his rights and title to the Burial Ground at Mile End. An earlier codicil, revoked by this one, renounced to the Congregation all his interest in the Synagogue also: this, however, he had already made over at the time of its construction--a fact which seems to have slipped his memory for the moment, unless he had intended to duplicate the transfer in order to avoid any possible legal quibbles in future, or the document antedated 1722.

There was another legacy, of what was then the very large sum of £1,000, to the London Hospital, of which his son-in-law, Elias Levy, had been a Governor. These generous benefactions by Jews are perhaps responsible for one extremely interesting detail in the early organisation of that institution, displaying a broad-mindedness and tolerance hardly to be imagined at so early a date. Even before the Hospital was incorporated in 1759 special arrangements were made for a diet to conform with Jewish religious prescriptions. A minute of 1756, repeated in the Bye-laws of 1769, under the heading "Jew's Diet", prescribed that they were "To be allowed Twopence Half-penny per Day in lieu of Meat or Broth, but to receive Bread and Beer like the other patients, according to the Diet they are on." Later (about 1796) this was slightly modified: Jews were to receive "Fourpence per Day, with Bread and Beer, when on Full or Middle Diet: but when on Low, Milk, or Fever Diet, no Money." (This was embodied in the Bye-laws of 1829, but the amount was raised shortly after to 9d.) There is every reason to believe that this tolerant arrangement was partly due to the munificence in the support of the institution of that family to which the Great Synagogue owes its origin.5

Rabbi Aaron Hart had predeceased his brother by a few months. He had seen the Ashkenazi community in England grow from a handful, who could assemble for prayer in a room in a converted dwelling-house, to a body of some thousands, scattered throughout the country, with nascent communities in the provincial centres who looked to him for guidance. He passed away in the spring of 1756, at the age of eighty-seven, having served as Rabbi of his community for upwards of fifty years. He was buried, like his brother, in the old ground at Alderney Road, probably under one of the tall tombstones which apparently mark the family plot. But no inscription is now legible, and it has been an act of obvious piety to the memory of the first Rabbi of the Great Synagogue that a monument has recently been set up in the ground commemorating the members of this great family of Anglo-Jewish communal workers.6

Notes Chapter Eight

1 Emboldened by the success of the former experience, Simon Wolf Wertheim wrote to Aaron and Moses Hart in December 1747 requesting them to approach the Government once again, in view of the still-precarious condition of Bohemian Jewry. There is no evidence that anything was done on this occasion.

2 It may be mentioned that a bequest, left by Nathan Simson as early as 1725 (partly from the proceeds of South Sea Stock), is still administered by the Board of Guardians, who until recently used to advertise year by year in the Jewish press for the founder's kinsfolk, who according to his will were to have a prior claim.

3 As late as 1826, watch-houses were built to overlook churchyards in London in order to prevent body-snatching. The last to remain, at the Church of St. John the Baptist in Waterloo Road. was recently demolished. According to The Times of February 10th, 1800, the "Jew Broker" A. de Mattos Mocatta left 200 guineas to have his grave in the burial-ground of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews watched for twelve months.

4 Eighteen has the numerical value of the Hebrew word "Hai", or life: hence its significance.

5 The association between the London Hospital and the Jewish community under the Georges was so close that in 1828 a recommendation was made that Jewish governors should leave blank forms for admission to the Hospital with the Secretary of the Great Synagogue, to be distributed to the poor when needful. As early as 1814, a collection for the institution was made in the Westminster Synagogue. In 1745, one of the five houses of which the London Infirmary (as it was then called) consisted was known as "The Jews' House", but a separate Jewish ward was first considered only in 1816: see below, p. 274

6 The exact date of Aaron Hart's death is not on record. He was alive when Moses Hart made his will on April 2nd, 1756, but on August 13th of the same year administration of his estate was granted to his grand-daughter, Billah Moses, whose sister (mother?) Susanna Heilbuth, the Rabbi's only surviving child, had renounced her title. (The Rabbi had been predeceased by a son, Abraham, mentioned in the early accounts.) Moses and Aaron Hart had in addition to their two sisters (Margoles, who married Lazarus Simon, and Zipporah, who married Meir Wagg) a half-brother named Solomon Hart (d. 1768: a scroll of Esther written by him was in the Solomons Collection) who was father of another Moses Hart (d. 1790) and of the book-collector Naphtali Hart (d. 1849?).

Chapter IX

Chapter IX
THE RABBINATE OF HART LYON, 1758-1764

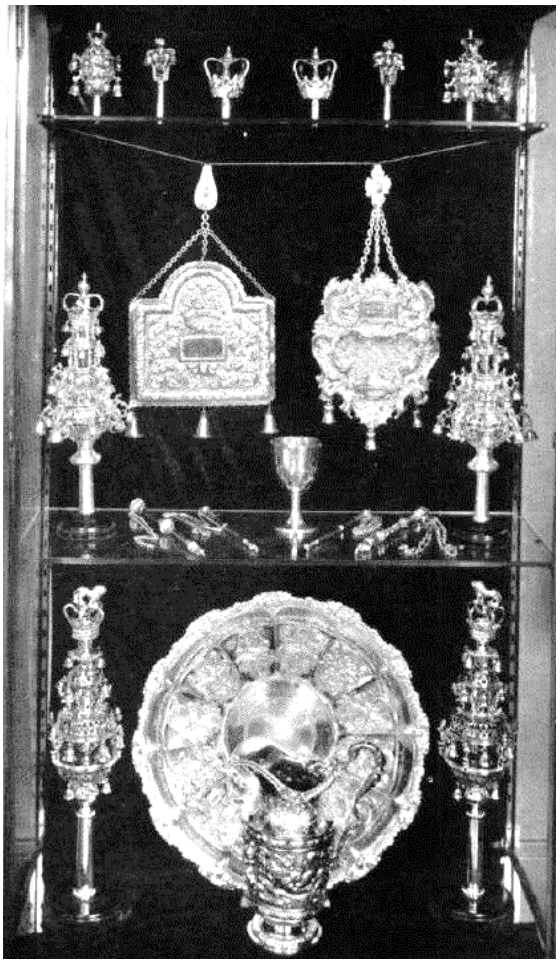
Hart Lyon, Rabbi of the Great Synagogue, 1758-1764 (from a mezzotint)

FOR the first time within living memory, it was now necessary to find a new Rabbi. The choice of the community fell upon Zevi Hirsch, son of Aryeh Leib, the recently-deceased Rabbi of Amsterdam. Here, presumably, members of the London community had been favourably impressed by his son's ability, and when the vacancy was declared early in 1758 negotiations with him were at once begun. Though he was now in his thirty-seventh year (he had been born at Rzeszów in Poland in 1721 and for the last few years had studied at Glogau, of which community his father-in-law was a leading member) this was his first incumbency. In London his name was anglicised to Hart Lyon, though on the Continent he was known as Hirsch Loebel or Hirschel Lewin--the same appellation in a slightly different form. His salary was £250 per annum, £80 more than his predecessor had received--an income which for those days, when a village parson "was passing rich on forty pounds a year", was quite considerable. (Of this amount £100 was contributed by the Hambro' Synagogue, with which a reconciliation had been effected in 1750, as will be seen later on.) Moreover, whereas his predecessor had the right to be summoned to the reading of the Law only on those special occasions when he preached, Hart Lyon was to be "called up" every Sabbath. Of the early Rabbis of the Great Synagogue, Hart Lyon was probably the most learned in Talmudic lore and played the most significant part in the affairs of the Jewish world generally: a fact which was responsible for the eager competition for his services, the comparatively short duration of his pastorate, and the fact that he is the only Rabbi of the Great Synagogue, from Aaron Hart onwards, who did not die in office. From 1772 he was Chief Rabbi of Berlin, where he was on terms of great intimacy with Moses Mendelssohn (itself testimony to his character and erudition), collaborated with him in preparing a German résumé of Jewish civil law, and played an important part in the disputes which marked the beginning of the Haskalah movement. Evidence of the high regard that he enjoyed in literary circles even during the period of his Rabbinate in England is given by the fact that he contributed an approbation to the work Shoneh Halakhoth by Haham Solomon Salom, published at Amsterdam in 1762. But it was perhaps his learned ancestry as much as his attainments that determined the London community to give him the appointment. As we have seen, his father, Aryeh Leib, was Rabbi of Amsterdam, where he died in 1755. (Out of compliment to the son, his name was included in the commemoration list of the Great Synagogue, where it is still recited, somewhat confusingly, among the roll of the Chief Rabbis of London.) His mother, moreover, was a daughter of Haham Zevi, that great scholar who had been consulted during the disputes in the infancy of the congregation, and whose family continued to play its part in the affairs of the London community for almost a century and a half.

Until he acquired the dignity of age, Hart Lyon does not seem to have had a very impressive appearance. Not long after his arrival in England, his portrait was painted in oils by I. Turner, a poor but fashionable artist of the time (the original now hangs in the vestry-room of the Great Synagogue), being subsequently engraved by Edward Fisher, with the lettering: "The most learned High Priest HART LYON, Rabbi. London Printed for Robt. Withy at the Dunciad in

Cornhill. Price 2s. 6d." But it is impossible for even the most enthusiastic admirer to maintain that the face is either handsome or venerable, or that the new Rabbi could compete even remotely in looks--whatever might be the case with his mental capacity--with his immediate predecessor.

A number of sermons delivered by Rabbi Hart Lyon during his period of office are extant--somewhat heavy fare, generally beginning with a Talmudical discourse that must have lasted for about an hour and a half, which formed the prelude to a homily of approximately equal length.1 Several were preached on the occasion of the services of intercession that were held from time to time at the royal command during the Seven Years War. They throw some light on social and religious conditions in the London community, of which the Rabbi, as in duty bound, heartily disapproved. There was, to his great regret, no proper scholastic institution for the study of the Talmud, and men criticised him when he attended service in the Beth haMidrash he had set up in his own house instead of going to Synagogue. England was abundantly supplied with travelling preachers (Maggidim) from the Continent (the regulations of the community minutely prescribed the conditions under which they might occupy the pulpit, and in the accounts there are periodically noted gratuities to foreign scholars). Notwithstanding their efforts, the standard of religious observance was not conspicuously high. Jews congregated outside the post office on Sabbath mornings to receive their mail, and asked Gentiles to open it for them; they carried burdens on the day of rest outside the City boundaries, had tea and coffee prepared by their non-Jewish servants, dressed on public holidays better than they did on the Jewish festivals and dutifully ate Christmas pudding when their Christian neighbours indulged in that fare. Socially, they were assimilated to their environment, playing cards at the coffee-houses when the Rabbi would have preferred them to be studying, and frequenting the theatres with more zest than they did the institutions of Jewish learning; while the women dressed their hair like their neighbours and wore gowns with what he considered a shocking décolletage. Even mixed marriages were by no means unknown. Synagogue attendance was lax, and decorum far from perfect (everything, in fact, that is deplored today). But all the Rabbi's attempts to remedy matters were useless. "Heaven knows how weary I am of my life here," he cried in a pulpit address in the summer of 1762. "I cannot bear witnessing any longer all you do in public and in private." (There was obviously one mental reservation to this sweeping statement: in November 1760, he had been granted £25 on the occasion of his daughter's betrothal.)



Antique Ritual Silver

The internal history of the community during this period was of considerable importance. It seems that Rabbi Hart Lyon attempted to make good one of the communal shortcomings which he had criticised by setting up a Yeshiba, in the continental style, where young men might immerse themselves under his direction in Talmudical study: but the institution only lasted for a very short time, and the experiment ended in failure. Shechita provided another perennial problem. There was at that time in London a pious Levantine Jew named Jacob Kimchi, who spent his time, in the intervals of selling slippers near the Royal Exchange, in writing Hebrew books and criticising the constituted authorities. One of his preoccupations was the question of the ritual slaughter of animals for food, which he alleged to be carried on under the auspices of the Spanish and Portuguese community in a manner at variance with Rabbinic prescriptions.

When Hart Lyon arrived to assume the Rabbinate of the Ashkenazi community, Kimchi waited upon him and expounded his point of view. The Rabbi promised to consider the matter and to set down his views in writing. But he reckoned without his Parnassim, who, not wishing to cause any ill-blood between the two communities, forbade him enter into the controversy: a fact of which Kimchi did not fail to make as much capital as possible in the pamphlets which he published to air his opinions.

Hart Lyon's Rabbinate was marked by one development of the utmost importance in Anglo-Jewry, in which the Great Synagogue was very intimately concerned. In the autumn of 1760 old George II, who had shown himself so sympathetic when the Jewish representatives had told him about the sufferings of their brethren in Prague, passed peacefully away. He was succeeded by his young grandson, George III. It had been the practice of the Spanish and Portuguese community to elect from time to time a small committee of "Deputies", to represent it in political matters which might affect its interests and to wait upon the officers of state on its behalf when necessary. This was done as a matter course on the death of the old King, when a sub-committee of the Deputados went to see the Prime Minister, requesting him to assure the new ruler of their loyalty and to convey him their humble congratulations.

The Wardens of the Duke's Place Synagogue that year were Aaron Franks and Lazarus Simon: the "Five Men" who constituted the Board of Management were Simon Jacobus Moses, Aaron Levy, Jacob Nathan Moses, David Salamons (Bloch) and Aaron Goldsmid. When the news of what had happened reached these worthies they were furious. It was upwards of thirty years since a new ruler had come to the throne in England. Since that time, their community had grown in numbers and wealth, and it was preposterous at this stage for the magnates of Bevis Marks to pretend to speak in the name of the entire body of Anglo-Jewry, leaving them in the cold. On Sunday, December 7th, accordingly, Aaron Franks went to Bevis Marks to register a formal complaint in the name of his colleagues. A special meeting of the Deputados was thereupon called, and not only Mr. Franks, but also Mr. Levy Salomons of the Hambro' Synagogue (great-grandfather of Sir David Salomons, first Jewish Lord Mayor of London) was asked to attend. It was pointed out to them that what had been done was according to precedent, but that, as the deputation had spoken in the name of the Portuguese Jewish "nation" only, it was open to the other section of the community to take similar action if they desired. If, on the other hand, they desired to join in presenting a loyal address to the new King's mother and the royal family, their collaboration would be welcomed. While agreeing to this, the visitors suggested that in future, in order to avoid similar confusion, "each Nation should communicate to the other what they were doing in public affairs". This proposal presented an obvious difficulty, which the Portuguese representatives were quick to point out: the Ashkenazi communities had no specific organisation with which to communicate when necessary. The difficulty was easily met, the latter deciding to nominate a Committee similar to that of the senior body. The agreement was sealed, and on December 11th Mr. Franks accompanied Mr. Salvador to the Palace and kissed hands with the Princess, the Duke of York, and the Princess Augusta on tendering the humble devotion of his own community.

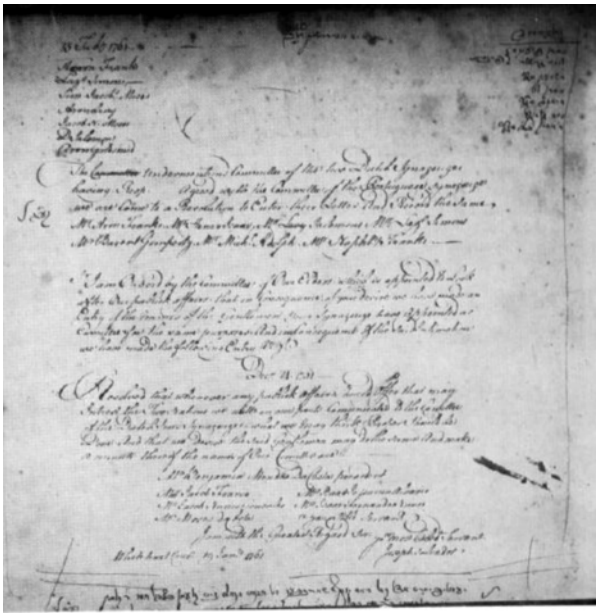
The following week (December 14th), the two Ashkenazi communities nominated their representatives. Those of the Great Synagogue consisted of three members of the inevitable Franks family--Aaron, Naphtali and Moses--together with their relative Michael Adolphus. (This same group, with Lazarus Simon in the place of Moses Franks, had previously acted as the Committee to carry on negotiations.) On the receipt of these names, the Portuguese Deputies passed the following resolution:

Decr 14th, 1760.

Resolved that whenever any publick affair should offer that may Interest the Two Nations we will on our parts Communicate to the Committee of the Dutch Jews Synagogues what we may

think proper should be done, and that we desire the said Gentlemen may do the same and make a minute thereof.

This was the origin of the London Committee of Deputies of British Jews, generally known as the Board of Deputies, which was to become in the course of the nineteenth century a representative body embracing the entire country, and in certain aspects even the entire Empire, and to be a powerful force for good in Jewish life generally throughout the world.

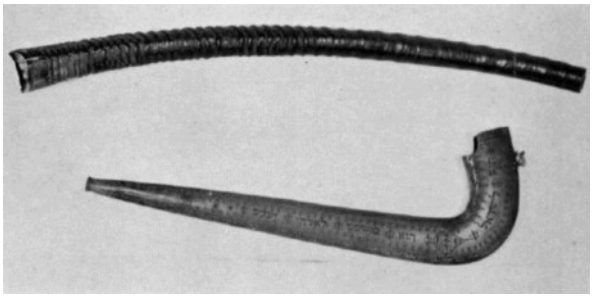


Minute relating to Foundation of the Board of Deputies, 1761 (from the earliest Takkanah Book)

In the first generation or so of its existence, indeed, its activity was only sporadic. It started off with the best of intentions, and within a very short time of the original arrangement two representatives of the "Dutch" Jews were summoned to confer with those of the Portuguese regarding the action to be taken in connexion with a proposed revision in the form of the Oath of Allegiance. Very wisely, it was decided to do nothing. Thereafter, the Committee lapsed into inactivity, the Portuguese refraining from troubling their colleagues on those few occasions when they took action on behalf of their Sephardi coreligionists elsewhere in the Empire. It was not until 1789, when the King recovered from his first illness, that Deputies from the Ashkenazi communities were again invited to co-operate in the presentation of a loyal address.

Meanwhile, the congregation in Duke's Place had continued to grow. All the communities in Germany were sending their youth to the land of toleration and of opportunity, where so many of their kinsmen had prospered. At the beginning of the century it is doubtful whether the total number of Jews in England approached 1000: by the time of Hart Lyon's rabbinate they had touched six times that number, and the majority were now Ashkenazim. The synagogal accommodation, on the other, had increased but slowly. Only one important development is to be recorded. In 1731 Marcus Moses, founder of the Hambro' Synagogue, had returned from India after a ten-year absence, in which he had recuperated his fortunes handsomely: among his trophies being a superb diamond whose equal had never before been seen in Europe.2 The returned nabob's associates profited from his good-fortune--all the more, perhaps, since he had disinherited his disreputable apostate son, Moses Marcus, who had brought disgrace upon the entire family not only by his actions but also by his publications. During the magnate's absence, services had continued to be held in the synagogue which he had set up in his house; indeed, reunion with the parent community was impossible, since the Ban pronounced in 1706 still stood upon its records. But the seceding body had by now grown, another plutocrat connected by marriage with the founder, Benjamin Isaac (alternatively known as Wolf Prager and Zeeb Wolf ben Isaac), a native of Jungbunzlau, in Bohemia, having begun to take an interest in it. It was now determined to follow the example of the older body and replace the extemporised place of worship by a proper synagogue. This was accordingly constructed in 1725, in the garden of the house in Magpie Alley, Fenchurch Street, to which Moses now removed, the foundation stone being laid by Benjamin Isaac three days before Pentecost, and the Synagogue opened some time in the New Year. (It is said to have been modelled architecturally on the "Hamburger Schul" on the Neuer Steinweg in Hamburg.) It must have been a small, but wealthy body, as indeed it remained to the end in relation to the other London communities. The synagogal paraphernalia--the silver,

the brocades, the candelabra--were all of the finest, and did credit to the good taste of the little group of gem-merchants who controlled its destinies. Down the end of the nineteenth century the synagogue remained on its original site, where Fenchurch Street Buildings now stand. (In 1893-9, it was removed to Adler Street, Commercial Road, where it stayed until in 1936 the congregation re-amalgamated, after 230 years, with the Great Synagogue.)



Shofar, eighteenth century

As on a previous occasion, twenty-one years before, the jealous parent-community, backed by the parishioners of the neighbouring church of St. Katherine Coleman, made vigorous representations to the City authorities--not ineffectually, as the following extremely informative documents from the Guildhall archives, hitherto unpublished, vividly shows:

To the Right Honble the Lord Mayor and the Worshipful the Court of Aldermen

The Humble Petition of Moses Hart on behalf of himself and the rest of the Members of the Synagogue of German Jews in London.

HUMBLY SHEWETH

That the Congregation of German Jews in London have always congregated themselves together in their Synagogue in Shoemaker Row which is built on Lands belonging to this Honble City and is the only Synagogue for their Worship in London.

That in the Year 1704 Mr. Abraham Nathan and Mr. Marcus Moses separated themselves from the said Synagogue with an intent to Erect another Synagogue in St. Mary Ax which they were actually doing when upon complaint made to this Honble Court and after hearing all Partyes this Court did Order A Stop to be put to the Erecting the Same and the said Mr. Nathan and Mr. Moses in obedience thereto again joined themselves and became Members of the said Synagogue and for preventing any Separation for the future by writing by them duely Signed reciting the said Order they did promise and agree that they would not at any time then after erect any other Synagogue or assemble in any other place or Synagogue under Forfeiture of 500£ one half to her Majesty and the other half to the Poor and to keep this Agreement they bound themselves by a most Solemn Oath.

That the Said Synagogue in Shoemaker Row being very old and out of Repair your Petitioner in 1716 on paying a Fine of about 300£ obtained a building lease thereof and of some Tenements thereto adjoyning from this Honble City in order to rebuild and enlarge the same and thereby agreed to lay out 400£ in rebuilding the said Synagogue But your petitioner relying on the former Order of this Honble Court that the same should be the only Synagogue of the German Jews in London Your Petitioner lnstead of 400£ expended the Sume of 2000 in rebuilding thereof and to prevent all Disputes and as much as in Your Petitioner Lay to preserve Unanimity and Harmony among the Members of the said Synagogue made a free and voluntary Gift and present thereof to the said Congregation.

That the said Abraham Nathan and Marcus Moses as also Mr. Benjamin Isaacks with an Intent to divide and weaken the said Synagogue have withdrawn themselves from the same and in Contempt of the said Order of this Honble Court and in breach of the abovementioned Solemn Agreement and Oath by them made and taken are now actually erecting and building a Synagogue in Magpye Alley London which should it go on would in a short time Manifestly tend to the Impoverishing of the said Congregation which for some years past hath found it very difficult

to maintain its Poor and render it unable to Support them for the future and thereby bring a great and inevitable charge on the Parishes where they live.

That Your Petitioner and the Members of the said Synagogue are very sensible of the Happiness and many Blessings they Enjoy under the Protection of the Laws and your Lordships and Worships mild Administration of Justice and therefore in regard the said Building is built so near the Parish Church that the same gives great Cause of Offence and Will greatly incommode the Inhabitants of the said Parish in the Exercise of Religion--they therefore think it their Duty to aqquaint this Honble Court with their abhorrence and Dislike of an attempt of this Nature and their Desire that the same may be Discountenanced.

Your Petitioner therefore humbly prays this Honble Court to take the premisses into your Consideration and to make Such Order therein as to your Lordship and Worships in your great Wisdom shall seem just and reasonable.

And your Petitioner as in Duty bound Shall Ever pray &c

Moses Hart

The Humble Petition of Mr. Moses Hart.

To the Right Honble the Lord Mayor and the Worshipfull the Court of Aldermen--

The Humble Petition of the Minister and Church Wardens and other Inhabitants of the Parish of St. Katherine Coleman, London--

SHEWETH

That there is now a building by Marcus Moses a New Jews Synagogue in Magpye Alley in Fenchurch Street London which Your Petitioners apprehend to be contrary to Law, and to Sundry Orders of this Honble Court, and particularly referr to One of the 22d March 1704.

That the said Synagogue being of a Large Extent adjoyning to the Church Yard, very near the said Parish Church, will, if Continued to be a great nuisance to the Parishioners who Inhabit near the said Synagogue by bringing Numbers of Jews into the Alley wch is a Thorowfare not Exceeding three foot in width, will in a great measure block up that passage

Your Petitioners therefore humbly Prays this Honble Court would please to take our said Complaint into your Consideration & grant such releife as your Lordship and Worships shall think Fitt.

And your Petit. shall ever Pray &c;--

James Furnese

John Burton and 45 other sig.

Jews not to proceed on a Synagogue.

Upon reading the humble petition of the Minister and Churchwardens and other inhabitants of the parish of St. Katherine Coleman London and also a petition of Moses Hart on behalf of himself and the rest of the members of the Synagogue of German Jews Complaining that one Marcus Moses is now Building a New Synagogue for the Jews in Magpie Ally in Fanchurch Street which the said petitioners the Minister and Churchwardens Complain will (if continued) be a Great Nusance and Disturbance to the parishoners in going to Divine Service and being Informed that the said Marcus Moses was at the Door he was Ordered to be Called in and this Court proceeded to Examin the Matter of the said Complaint in the presence of all the said parties

and after a full hearing of all the said parties in the presence of Each other This Court Doth Declare That they will not permit nor Suffer the said Building Complained of to be Converted or turned into a Synagogue for the Exercise of the said Jewish Religion and doth therefore Order and Require that no person or persons whatsoever do presume to convert the said Building into a Synagogue for the Exercise of the said Jewish Religion as they will Answer the same at their peril.

Notwithstanding this categorical prohibition, the work of construction was not interrupted,4 and the building was dedicated in due course, as we have seen.

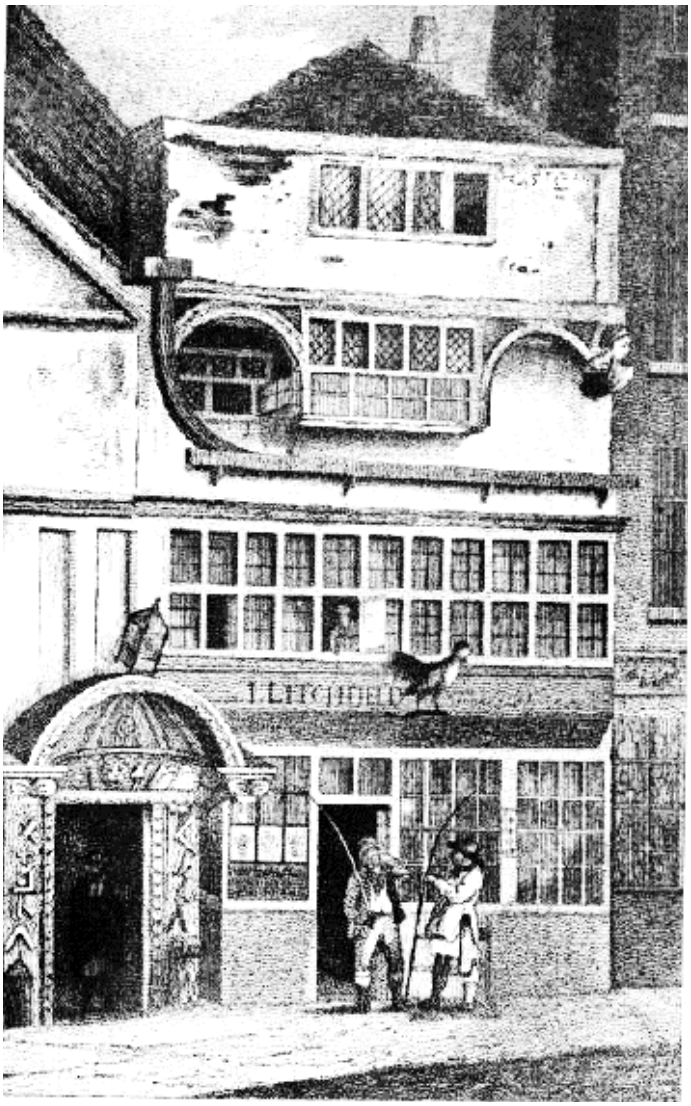
In 1731, Marcus Moses again returned to India, where he died four years later. Henceforth the synagogue he had founded was regarded as the private property of Benjamin Isaac, who referred to it as "my synagogue", in the same way as the Great Synagogue was called "Moses Hart's Shool": it was only later on that it became generally known as the Hambro' Synagogue. Even after it had built itself this new and beautifully-equipped place of worship, the congregation continued to be considered by the parent body to be under the ban of excommunication. On the construction of its new Synagogue in Duke's Place in 1722, the latter had made a last attempt to heal the breach, offering to readmit members who had joined the secessionists if they made their peace within three months. At the same time (as we have seen) the regulations forbade attendance at any rival conventicle within a radius of ten miles, debarred these "strangers" from such religious honours as those of godfather or "unterführer" at celebrations under the auspices of the congregation, and even forbade the acceptance of Purim gifts from them. (A proclamation to this effect was made every year on the Fast of Esther.) Yet this attitude could not be maintained indefinitely; and at last in 1750, by an additional regulation or takkanah of the Congregation, the solemn Herem pronounced in 1706 against "the Synagogue of the late Mordecai Hamburger" was formally abrogated. Six years later Moses Hart sealed the reconciliation, when it was found that he had left a small legacy to the synagogue set up in opposition to his own; and on Hart Lyon's appointment to the Rabbinate that community not only recognised his authority, but even contributed to his salary. (Moses Hart's compliment was cordially reciprocated, and Henry Isaac, the "proprietor" of the rival establishment, left £100 on his death in 1773 to the poor of the parish of St. Katherine Coleman "at the discretion of the Gabas of the Synagogue in Shoemaker's Row", and £100 to the Synagogue itself.) Henceforth the two communities collaborated in matter's of common interest, such as the control of Shechita and the disciplinary regulation of London Jewry, and in 1759 it was agreed that the Hambro' Synagogue should henceforth contribute one-third to the cost of the maintenance of the Ashkenazi poor in London.

The Hambro' Synagogue, Fenchurch Street, 1725-1893

Yet the Great Synagogue had not yet learned its lesson: that it was impossible to maintain a monopoly in matters spiritual, especially in a period of rapidly increasing population. In 1761, the Press announced that "a company of Jews, natives of Germany, are subscribing a sum of money for erecting and enclosing a new synagogue near Bricklayers' Hall". The name of the moving spirit is given elsewhere as Moses Jacobs, of Little Duke's Place, silversmith, with whom were associated his brother (?) Lazarus Jacobs, of the same place and trade; Abraham Judah, of Chiswell Street, colourmaker; Lazarus Levy, of Woolpack Alley, Houndsditch, jeweller; and Levy Bartharha (i.e. Bacharach, probably identical with Judah [Loeb] Bacharach, a former Great Synagogue member), Houndsditch, linendraper. The place was not in fact near Bricklayers' Hall, but was

Bricklayers' Hall itself, in Leadenhall Street, subsequently Sussex Hall, which the Worshipful Company of Tylers and Bricklayers had been forced to vacate owing to straitened circumstances. All told, the original list of members, drawn up just a fortnight after Pentecost 1761, comprises sixty-five names. The secessionists had no desire to effect a schism, and the earliest regulation of the new community, dated in the midsummer of the same year, specifically recognised Hart Lyon as their Ab-Beth-Din, and insisted on having his approval for the nomination of R. Lipman Speyer, of Halberstadt, as their own spiritual leader. Nevertheless, the authorities of the Great Synagogue were furious when they heard the news. Moses Jacobs (Moses ben Jacob), the ringleader, was summarily expelled in February 1761 from membership of the community and all the privileges attached thereto, because of the great "profanation of the Divine Name" (Hillul haShem) that he had caused. Not content with this, on August 16th, after consultation with their colleagues of the Hambro' Shool, the wardens and elders (presumably with their Rabbi's concurrence) passed the following resolution:

Whereas certain persons unworthy of our countenance and protection have formed themselves into a society calling themselves a congregation at Bucklers' Hall; we do hereby strictly charge our Priest, now and hereafter, that he does not directly or indirectly, or other in his name or with his knowledge or permission, officiate either publicly or privately in the service of marriages, burials, circumcisions, or other acts of priesthood, for any persons whatever belonging to the said society. And to prevent any persons from unwarily joining with that Society, we order that this resolution be read publicly two Sabbaths successively in our synagogues, that none may plead ignorance thereof. And we further order that a copy of this resolution be forthwith delivered to the Mahamad of the Portuguese Synagogue, desiring their concurrence in supporting and maintaining with us the good order of our respective communities.



Entrance to the New Synagogue, Leadenhall Street (from the European Magazine)

This pronunciamento was meaningless to the founders of the new congregation, who already two months earlier, on June 4th, had gone so far as to acquire for use as their cemetery a piece of ground in what was then called Ducking Pond Lane (afterwards known as Brady Street). Accordingly, they went ahead with their arrangements, and in June 1762 the first stone of their new synagogue was duly laid, large sums of money being collected from those who participated. In due course the edifice was completed, and was dedicated with great pomp. This fresh congregation, at first naïvely called "The Society of Bricklayers' Hall", ultimately became known as the New Synagogue--the name which it still retained when in 1837 it removed from Leadenhall Street to Great St. Helen's, and in 1915 from Great St. Helen's to Stamford Hill.

Before long, the Great Synagogue managed to establish a modus vivendi with the new congregation, and the relations between the two bodies became not merely smooth, but friendly. With the institution of this third place of worship, the synagogal organisation of the metropolis, as it was to exist until the nineteenth century, was completed. The Great Synagogue and its two formerly dissident daughters, the Hambro' and the New, represented to London Jewry of a former age the fulcrum of its spiritual life, and in fact a good deal of the religious organisation of the community of the metropolis today is based upon the synagogal trilogy established during Hart Lyon's period of office.5 As might have been expected from the tone and frequency of his complaints, which are not likely to have been diminished by disputes such as this, Hart Lyon's rabbinate was not of long duration. On the expiry of the initial period of three years, his appointment was indeed renewed. But this precedent was not repeated--in part, according to tradition, because of the Rabbi's objection to the restrictions that were placed upon his authority. At the beginning of 1763, the Halberstadt community opened up negotiations with him; they had heard, they said, how neglected the study of the Torah was in London, and they were happy to be able to offer him a post which would accord better with his temperament. Early in 1764 he left London for his new home, where he likewise remained for six years, afterwards becoming Rabbi at Mannheim and ultimately at Berlin, where he died in 1800. A number of stories are told about his departure from London. It is said that one pious member of the community asked him why he was leaving. "Because this is the first 'question' (Sheëlah) I have been asked since I arrived," the Rabbi wittily replied. He is reported to have stated later on in his career that in London he had money but no Torah, in Mannheim Torah but no money, and in Berlin neither the one nor the other. Forty years after he left, however, as will be seen later on, the connexion of his family with London was to be renewed.

Notes Chapter Nine

1 They were, of course. delivered on Sabbath afternoons, not during the morning service.

2 So the Hebrew sources: but the writers may have been thinking of the famous Pitt diamond, subsequently owned by the Duc d'Orléans and subject of many legends, which Moses had offered for sale in Paris on behalf of Governor Pitt ten yeas before.

3 The impression here given is that the Hambro' Synagogue began its independent existence in 1725, but as we have seen this is not the case: it had been functioning since 1706/7 (the date of the earliest extant record) but in a private house, so that the City could not be asked to intervene.

4 Possibly Marcus had appealed to the King, whose permission is recorded in somewhat emphatic language on the foundation-stone (now in the Jewish Museum, London).

5 It is to be noticed that the foundation stone of the original New Synagogue, with the punning Hebrew inscription (with its obvious reference to the Bricklayers' Company), "The stone which the builders rejected has become the headstone of the corner" (Psalm cxviii, 22), apparently gives the chronogram 5417 (or 1756/7) as the year of foundation. This (which was taken over in the foundation stone of 1837: see the correspondence in Jewish Chronicle, September 24th, 1837) may possibly have been the date of the establishment of the congregation here, the reconstruction having been taken in hand, simultaneously with the acquisition of the burial-ground, four or five years later, when the attention of the Great Synagogue authorities was drawn to the new institution. But there may have been an error in computation, and the Laws of the New Synagogue, published in 1824, give the year of foundation as 5522 (1761/2). The basement of the Bricklayers Hall, below the Synagogue, was used as a wine-cellar. Hence a once-famous couplet:

"The spirits above are spirits divine:

The spirits below are spirits of wine."

Chapter X
TEVELE SCHIFF AND THE CHIEF RABBINATE OF ENGLAND

David Tevele Schiff, Rabbi of the Great Synagogue, 1765-1791 (from an oil painting formerly in the possession of Dr J. H. Hertz)

HART LYON'S retirement set in motion in the Anglo-Jewish community new currents, with consequences perceptible even at the present day. We have seen that the Hambro' Synagogue, not long since readmitted to favour, had accepted his authority as Rabbi and even contributed to his salary. This arrangement was expected to continue in the case of his successor, and on October 16th, 1764, the Great Synagogue passed a resolution to the effect that the new Rabbi should be engaged by the congregations in common at a salary of £250, £150 from "our" synagogue and £100 as before from "the other" Even before this date, on September 29th, a certain measure of agreement had been reached regarding the appointment, the gentlemen of Magpie Alley being apparently allowed to take the initiative this time as those of the senior body had done on the previous occasion. There was indeed no difference of opinion, for it was understood that the new Rabbi was to be chosen from a list, the most promising candidate on which was a first cousin of the last--Israel Meshullam Zalman, son of Rabbi Jacob Emden and grandson of Haham Zevi, who was bound to London by manifold family ties. (The other three were R. Jozpa, grandson of the eminent R. Samuel Schotten; R. Israel Lipschütz, recently appointed Rabbi in Cleves; and the Rabbi of Düsseldorf.) The Great Synagogue approved of these candidates, provided that the enquiries to be made about them elsewhere proved satisfactory. But in the event they did not (Meshullam Zalman was not only young, but apparently inherited in addition his share of the quarrelsome disposition of his family). While Jacob Emden was thrown almost into ecstasies of joy at the signal distinction his son seemed about to achieve, the gentlemen of Duke's Place decided that they could not confirm the appointment. It was in vain that Mr. Henry Isaac, son of Benjamin Isaac, and now the proprietary Parnas of the Hambro' Synagogue in his father's place, expostulated against their decision. The other body remained obdurate: and on February 3rd the following minute was entered on the Synagogue records:1

Feb.y 3rd, 1765

Present Naph.ty Franks, Mr. Aaron Goldsmid, Mr. Aaron Levy, Mr. Jacob Nathan Moses, Mr. Naph.ty Myers, Mr. Joel Levy, Mr. Sam.l Ans.l2 Levy, Mr. Moses Franks, Mr. Alex.r Isaacs.

A proposal from Mr. Henry Isaacs on the part of his Synagogue having been communicated by Mr. Naph.ty Franks to set aside an order of the 29 Sep.t Relative to the nomination of [rabbanim], the same was taken in Consideration and debated. But it Appearing that the particulars Directed in the said order of the 29th which was then agreed to by Both Synagogues [having] been Complied with and the answers to the Letter Respecting the Characters of the parties in Nomination proving unacceptionable, it was unanimously resolved that the Proposal aforesaid could not be admitted and that the order of the 29th should continue in force.

The upshot was that the short-lived concordat between the two communities ended, each now electing its own Rabbi. The Hambro' Synagogue formally appointed Israel Meshullam Zalman

(who became known in England by the surname Solomon) managing to bring up his salary to £150 as well as to grant him £50 for travelling expenses and £120 to set up house in London.3 The choice of the Great Synagogue, on the other hand, fell (largely through the efforts of Aaron Goldsmid, founder of that distinguished Anglo-Jewish family) upon Rabbi David Tevele Schiff, son of Solomon Schiff, member of a famous and learned family from Frankfort-on-Main. His mother as it happens was Roesche, daughter of the quarrelsome Reb Aberle London, who had played so commanding a role in the congregation in its earliest days, and the new Rabbi was happy to think that fortune brought him back to her home-town. He had already had considerable experience, having served as Preacher (Maggid) in Vienna, head of the Beth haMidrash in Worms, and finally Dayyan in Frankfort. He was elected to his post in London on February 24th, 1765, with a salary of £200 per annum: in the course of the summer, his rival arrived to take up his appointment in the other community.

It was natural for the New Synagogue, which had so recently been established in the teeth of the fiercest opposition from Duke's Place, to recognise the authority of the Rabbi of Magpie Alley; and perhaps it even contributed to his salary. What, however, of the little congregations which were to be found by now here and there throughout England? Many of their members had at one time lived in London, or had affiliated themselves to one of the London synagogues by acquiring membership rights. During the last ten or twenty years of the life of Aaron Hart, several such bodies had established themselves, looking naturally to him for spiritual guidance--at Portsmouth, Plymouth, Canterbury, Bristol, King's Lynn, and elsewhere. Hart Lyon had, of course, received universal allegiance. But, now that there was a split in the London Rabbinate, which of the two pastors were the Jews of the provinces to follow? Israel Meshullam Solomon, on his side, had no doubt as to the matter. He had received the call in the first instance, and two synagogues obeyed his sway in London, as against only one (albeit the larger and the wealthier) which accepted his rival. He accordingly considered the latter the interloper, and had no hesitation in subscribing himself " Rabbi of London and the provinces".

It was in Portsmouth, the largest of the provincial communities, that the battle was fought out. Here the adherents of Tevele Schiff claimed that precedent was on their side. In the days of Aaron Hart, they maintained, the authority of the Rabbi of the Great Synagogue had been unquestioned in Portsmouth. It was to him that all questions of law were submitted, he who gave certificates to Shochetim, he who issued licences for marriages: and they considered that the association should continue. But they were overborn by weight of numbers: for, on taking a vote, it was found that only eight voices were in favour of Tevele Schiff and the Great Synagogue, whereas sixteen were for Israel Meshullam Solomon and affiliation to the two London communities under his guidance. On the other hand, the minority included an overwhelming proportion of what were termed "old" members, who had been morally and financially responsible for the foundation of the community and still claimed proprietary rights. These insisted on standing their ground. The result was a split in the community. One Saturday night, in February 1766 the supporters of the Rabbinate of Meshullam Solomon came to the Synagogue, removed their prayer-books and ritual appurtenances, and carried them off to a new place of worship which they now established. The two bodies immediately put themselves in touch with the rival London Rabbis. Before the winter was over, the Wardens of the Portsmouth community travelled specially to London to make the necessary arrangements. They interviewed the presiding officers of the Great Synagogue (Naphtali Franks, Naphtali Hart Myers, Joel Levi and Aaron Goldsmid) in the Vestry Room at Duke's Place; they waited on Rabbi Schiff in his house; and details were settled to mutual satisfaction. They returned home with mellifluous letters of commendation and amity: and later on, the Great Synagogue authorities sent down the basis of a code of laws to regulate reciprocal obligations. Any disputes between members of the congregation which could not be settled locally were to be referred to the London Rabbi for decision; he was to issue marriage licences, and to be entitled to a fee of one guinea on each occasion when he did so; every person called to the Reading of the Law was to make an offering in his honour; and year by year five pounds of wax were to be despatched to London, to be used for illuminating the Great Synagogue during the Day of Atonement, as a token of homage.

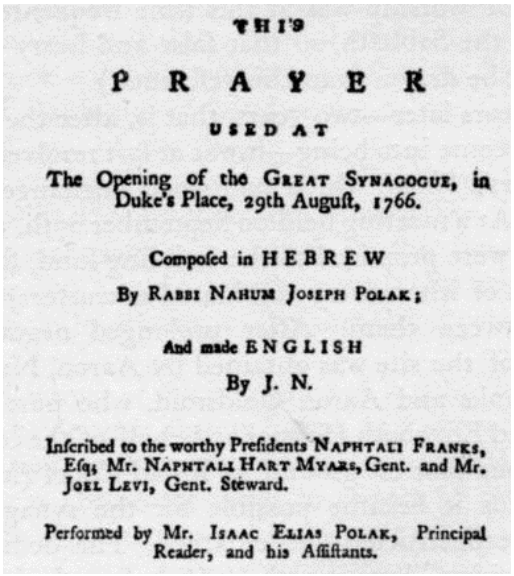
Thus fortified, the older Portsmouth community was able to maintain its position of superiority. The secessionist body, notwithstanding some sort of reconciliation in 1771, remained in existence until 1789. But by this time its raison d'être had disappeared. Meshullam Solomon had thrown himself heart and soul into his work in London, optimistically proclaiming himself as Rabbi of the Ashkenazi communities of the entire kingdom. He had published in 1777 the translation of a sermon he preached in the previous December at the General Fast for the success of the British arms in America--the earliest address delivered in an Ashkenazi synagogue in England to be made available in print to the general public. But otherwise he was less successful. In 1774, his action in invalidating a get brought from Amsterdam six years previously resulted in a torrent of uncomplimentary criticism from a Sephardi scholar, Shalom Buzaglo. Four years later, his matrimonial troubles attracted attention in the public press, where it was described how the "Jew Priest" of the Hambro' Synagogue had been divorced from his "Priestess". Finally, his relations with his congregation seem to have become embittered, while their income decreased to such a degree that they were unable to continue to afford the salary for a Rabbi of their own. Whatever the reason, early in 1780 Israel Meshullam Solomon, heartbroken, had to leave London, his disappointment mollified by an annuity of £50 per annum which his congregation agreed to pay him.4

With his departure from England, the dispute which had begun in 1765 was ended. The Rabbinate of the Great Synagogue was henceforth recognised without question by all the growing communities of the provincial towns. Tevele Schiff's successors hence enjoyed, without question or dispute, the title of Chief Rabbi not of London alone, but of the entire kingdom and later of the British Empire as a whole. The office was no artificially-created Crown Rabbinate instituted by the civil authorities for their convenience, like the similar institutions which formerly existed on the Continent of Europe, but a slow historic growth, as typically British in its spontaneity as in its efficiency. To this fact it perhaps owes its strength.

The establishment of the new place of worship in London in 1761, just before this dispute began, had opened the eyes of the Great Synagogue authorities to the extremely obvious fact that it was absurd for them to expect to retain their primacy unless they made provision for the religious requirements of the rapidly-increasing population by adding to the accommodation which they could provide. Not long since, in 1760, the site of the existing synagogue had been consolidated. Through the efforts of Aaron Franks and Lazarus Simon, and in consideration of the payment of a fine of £90, a "perpetual" lease for forty years was now granted by the Court of Common Council, renewable every fourteen years on payment of a fee of £30. At the same time, according to a contemporary news-sheet, a plan was set on foot for making a passage from Houndsditch to Duke's Place--perhaps on the line of the present thoroughfare--"for the conveniency of coaches going to Synagogue". (It may be mentioned that the place of worship was at this time frequented on other days than the Sabbath, so that false and hasty conclusions should not be drawn from this reference.) Three years later--two years, that is, after the New Synagogue had come into being--it was at last resolved to enlarge Moses Hart's School, which had stood unchanged for forty-one years. At a meeting held on September 27th, 1763, liberal donations were promised to the building-fund, fifteen members (seven of whom were nominated as trustees) subscribing £2000 between them. After prolonged negotiations, an extension of the site was obtained by Aaron, Naphtali, and Moses Franks and Aaron Goldsmid, who purchased from Edward and Elizabeth Holmes on behalf of the congregation a contiguous plot of ground in Broad Court (March 23rd, 1765). Thus it became possible for the synagogue to be radically reconstructed and enlarged. The dedication took place on Friday, August 29th, 1766, before the inauguration of the Sabbath. There was a special order of service, drawn up by Rabbi Nahum Joseph Polack; and, through the enterprise of Nahum Reischer (i.e. of Rzeszòw, possibly identical with the last-named) and the erudition of a gentleman who preferred to veil his identity under the initials J.N., those who were present were provided with the order of service, printed both in Hebrew and in English--the earliest publication extant made for the benefit of the Congregation, now designated in print for the first time as "The Great Synagogue". Rarer still at present (the only copies now traceable are in the collection of the present writer) are two folio broadsheets printed

at Amsterdam, which contained poems composed for the occasion by the newly-appointed Rabbi and by Moses Joseph Jossel, the scholarly Beadle. The former moreover signalised the occasion by delivering an address (of course in Yiddish) which won golden opinions and on which his correspondents abroad congratulated him warmly. There was a very large attendance, including many non-Jews, who professed to be much edified by the proceedings, while the musical portion of the service, rendered by the Hazan and his assistants, attracted much favourable comment. To quote The Annual Register:

August 13th(!) 1766. This afternoon, the ceremony of the dedication of the new-built synagogue in Duke's Place was performed with the greatest pomp and solemnity, in which the Chief and other eminent Rabbis belonging to the Portuguese Jewish nation assisted; when the prayer for their Majesties and the Royal family, which was always read in their liturgy in Hebrew, was at this time pronounced in English by the Chief Rabbi, and was followed by Handel's "Coronation Anthem" performed by a numerous band of the most eminent musicians. The procession and other ceremonies on that occasion in the synagogue were accompanied with several Anthems, choruses &c. by the same performers."



THE

PRAYER

USED AT

The Opening of the GREAT SYNAGOGUE, in Duke's Place, 29th August, 1766.

Compoſed in HEBREW

By RABBI NAHUM JOSEPH POLAK;

And made ENGLISH

By J. N.

Inſcribed to the worthy Preſidents NAPHTALI FRANKS, Eſq; Mr. NAPHTALI HART MYARS, Gent. and Mr. JOEL LEVI, Gent. Steward.

Performed by Mr. ISAAC ELIAS POLAK, Principal Reader, and his Aſſiſtants.

Service at Rededication of the Great Synagogue, 1766 (Title Page)

As was customary on such occasions, all the scrolls of the Law were taken out of the Ark and carried in procession round the Synagogue seven times. The Hebrew hymn chanted meanwhile was highly patriotic, and lost nothing of its flavour in J.N.'s version:

Most merciful God… Crown with flourishing leaves of Olive His Majesty King George III. thy Beloved, As also Her Majesty Queen Charlotte, with the young Rose Buds their Offspring… Long live George Prince of Wales our Sovereign's successor All the Royal Family and Princes, As also the Generals and Officers, Each worthy according to his banner.

Chorus: May George the Third our Sovereign, and all the royal family, live for ever.

Nor were the civic functionaries forgotten:

Let us lift up our hands to the Lord which is in Heaven. That he may strengthen and support the Right Hand, and Gird the Loins, for the Honourable the Lord Mayor at this time in his Mayoralty, with his Brethren the Worshipful Aldermen, each presiding over his Ward of this City.

The list of donors referred to above, to whose liberality the construction of the Synagogue was due, is worth reading. The names in the original are all in the Hebrew form, but I append the English equivalents (so far as I have been able to establish them) as a guidance to students, and for the sake of the light they throw on Anglo-Jewish nomenclature:

Aaron Franks £500

Naphtali Franks £250

Moses Franks £250

Leizer Goslar (Lazarus Simon) £250

R. Simeon Segal (Simon Jacobus Moses) £100

R. Aaron b[en] B[aruch] (Aaron Goldsmid) £100

R. Joel Levy6 £100

Züsskind Wiener (Alexander Isaacs) £100

R. Jacob Segal (Jacob Nathan Moses)£50

Aaron Levy £50

Samuel ben R. Anschel (Samuel Ansell Levy) £50

Meir Kampe (Michael Salamons) £50

R. Samuel Bira (Samuel Adolphus) £50

Abraham b. Hayim Levy (Abraham Hyman Levy) £50

Solomon b. Zevi (?) Solomon Henry) £50

It is convenient to give at this point the names of the officers of the congregation at the time of the dedication of the new building:

Wardens:

Naphtali Franks, Naphtali Hart Myers (Naphtali b. Joseph).

Treasurer ("Steward"):

Joel Levy.

Treasurer of Society for Visiting the Sick:

Alexander Isaacs (Züsskind b. Isaac).

Treasurer for Cemetery:

Zalman ben Isaac (? Solomon Isaacs).

Committee ("Five Men"):

Aaron Franks, Aaron Goldsmid, Aaron (ben Naphtali) Levy, Jacob Nathan Moses, Michael Adolphus.

Broadside Poem on Rededication of the Great Synagogue, 1766

Unfortunately, we know very little about the interior appearance of this synagogue, which served the community for twenty-four years.7 In the year that it was opened, indeed, the Rev. John Entick, M.A., in his New and Historical Survey of London, iii, 357-8, devoted a few lines to it:

On the West side [of Shoemaker Row] is the Synagogue of the Dutch Jews, as they are commonly called, with whom the Jews from all the Northern regions communicate, who are a distinct sect from the Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, &c., Jews. This Synagogue is just now enlarged with an

addition of building in brick, that makes it as large again as it was before; and has approached so near to the Church of St. James, Duke's Place, that the congregations may be heard from each other.

A good deal more significant than this, however, is a single sentence from the pen of Charles Wesley, the co-founder of Methodism, who visited the Synagogue a year or so later: "The place itself is so solemn, that it might strike an awe upon those who have any thought of God."

Broadside Poem on Rededication of the Great Synagogue, 1766

Notes Chapter Ten

1 My account of this episode is new. Unfortunately the "order of the 29th Sep.t" which is referred to in the minute cannot be traced, and the use of the fatal hybrid "unacceptionable" makes it difficult to understand whether the credentials of the person nominated were " unexceptionable" or "inacceptable". The latter, however, is more probable: yet it is clear from Jacob Emden's memoirs that he considered his son to have been regularly appointed and the Great Synagogue to have defaulted on its obligations. On the other hand, a minute in the oldest extant register of the Hambro' Synagogue: dated Adar 10th, 1765, specified the names of four candidates who were nominated. The account given in the text is the only one by which the conflicting sources can be reconciled.

2 Samuel ben Anschel Hamburger in the corresponding Hebrew. I26

3 On the other hand, it was decided that the Rabbi should not be allowed to hold a Minyan in his own house (as Hart Lyon had done) but should always attend Synagogue.

4 He died in Hamburg in 1794, his name being included in the Memorial List of departed Rabbis of the Hambro' Synagogue.

A kinsman of his who spent some time in London at about the same period was Rabbi Aaron ben Meshullam Zalman Mirels, whose sister Sarah married Haham Zevi. No record of his activity here is however traceable, but it is not impossible that he was Rabbi of the Hambro' Synagogue in the first half of the century. His son, born in England (later Rabbi in Schwerin 1777-90), in Wreschen 1792-1814. and author of Mispar Zebaam) was thus known as Hirsch Aaron London. There was also a Rabbi Elhanan b. Löb London, who died in Lissa in 1807. Ms. Mich. 325 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, contains novellae composed by Lazarus b. Gumpel of London while studying at Fürth, 1775.

5 An episode during the rebuilding is recorded in a contemporary newspaper cutting: "Yesterday three men were carried before the Right Hon. the Lord Mayor on suspicion of breaking into a

house near the Jews' Synagogue, belonging to the High Priest, with an intent, as is supposed. to steal the plate belonging to the Synagogue deposited there while that building is repairing. They were sent to Wood-street Compter."

6 Joel Levy signs himself in Hebrew "Joel, son of the martyred R. Joel, the Levite".

7 There is indeed a contemporary print depicting "The Jewish manner of HOLDING UP the LAW in the sight of the People, at DUKE'S PLACE, LONDON". This is, however, simply a copy of one of Picart's engravings produced at Amsterdam at the beginning of the century, showing a Dutch synagogue interior.

Chapter XI
THE SYNAGOGUE OF 1766-1790

DAVID TEVELE SCHIFF began his Rabbinate in the Synagogue erected by Moses Hart in 1722; he continued in office throughout the duration of the enlarged building which he consecrated in 1766: he lived to see the inauguration of the majestic place of worship used by the congregation to-day. Yet, save in the architectural sense, his Rabbinate was not eventful. Its main features were the constant expansion of London Jewry, numerically and economically; the growing anglicisation of its dominant section; and the consolidation of the newly-established congregations in the provinces, which by the close of his life were still further increased in number and importance, all looking to him for spiritual direction.

A number of his letters have been preserved--mostly written to his brother, Meir Schiff, Rabbi of Copenhagen--from which it is possible to obtain a glimpse of his personality and private life. Owing to the unfortunate quarrel with the Hambro' Synagogue, the Rabbi did not have as large an income as his predecessor. His salary was indeed raised to £250 in 1768, but it was brought down to the former level three years later, and during the period of economic distress that accompanied the War of American Independence, proposals were made at every synagogue meeting to reduce it even further. The worst was that, after Rabbi Meshullam Solomon left London, Rabbi Schiff was expected to do the work of the Hambro' Synagogue as well; and though there was some tall< of asking them to contribute £50 a year towards his salary, that would have brought him no personal benefit. He even failed to receive from the junior congregation the marriage fees which every Rabbi regarded as his perquisite, for on such occasions members preferred to have recourse to their own Hazan.1 "You imagine that London is a Kehilla!" the Rabbi sighed. "Far from it!" Twice, indeed, he attempted to change his position. In 1781, he had hopes of being appointed Rabbi at Rotterdam, but was thwarted by a member of the ubiquitous Emden family; in the following year, he applied for the vacant Rabbinate at Würzburg, his letter being lost at sea by enemy action. Thus he was fated to remain in London--a town where, as he complained, he had no colleagues or pupils with whom he could discuss congenial points of Jewish law or literature. There seems to have been, on the other hand, plenty to occupy his time, what with hopeful young members of the community who espoused the damsels of their choice with a religious ceremony of doubtful validity, applications from abroad (and even from America) for assistance in every manner of personal and business difficulty,2 scapegraces who got themselves into trouble and required superhuman efforts to save them, and the serious business of buying tickets in the lottery.

His wife, Breinle Sinzheim, died not long after his appointment to London, leaving him an only son, Moses. Afterwards, her niece, Mindel, daughter of Solomon Sinzheim, acted as his housekeeper, subsequently perpetuating her position by becoming his daughter-in-law, But he had to look after many domestic details himself, such as ordering from Frankfort half-a-dozen plain white nightcaps and as many coloured handkerchiefs--coloured, not white, on account of the snuff which he was in the habit of taking.3

There was one point of Tevele Schiff's life at which he became a principal actor in a dramatic episode of Anglo-Jewish history. When in June 1780 the No Popery Riots had terrified London, it is said that the good Jews of Duke's Place, so as to avoid any possibility of molestation, chalked on their doors the prophylactic phrase: "This house is true Protestant". Later on, the erstwhile Protestant leader, Lord George Gordon, began to feel the attractions of the Jewish faith and, after prolonged study, determined to embrace it formally. It was natural for him to approach in the first instance the Rabbi of the Great Synagogue (this must have been some time in the summer of 1786). The latter, an eminently sensible person, who was well aware of the nervousness which prevailed in the community as regards the making of proselytes and the serious preoccupation that had been caused in the past by cases of individuals less illustrious than the son of an English duke, and less in the public eye than the founder of the Protestant Association, refused outright. (The correspondence relative to the application, extant within living memory and read by the late Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler, Tevele Schiff's great-nephew, has since disappeared, so that the exact details will never be known.) In consequence, it was under the auspices of the Hambro' Synagogue that the eccentric nobleman entered Judaism. But he never seems to have forgiven Rabbi Schiff for his action, and his curious Letter to Angel Lyon on the wearing of Beards virtually accused him of accepting bribes from the wealthier members of his flock.

The general picture of the time is confirmed by a Yiddish pamphlet published in London in 1791 (cf. Jewish Chronicle for April 5th, 1907), which deplored contemporary laxity in unmeasured terms. Parents allowed their children to go bareheaded; men and women came together in dancing academies, where they embraced one another without shame; they dressed like lords and ladies, and could not be distinguished from Gentiles. Such complaints were of course part of the moralist's stock-in-trade.

The lay heads of the community during Tevele Schiff's Rabbinate belonged to the same families that had played the principal part hitherto--in particular that of Franks. Moses Hart had of course been recognised until his death, whether he held office or no, as the principal member of "his" synagogue. Thereafter this unquestioned primacy lapsed. From 1769 onwards, however, we find Aaron Franks, his son-in-law, formally recognised and referred to as Head of the Congregation (Rosh haKahal)--its presiding and proprietary genius, as it were--as Moses Marcus and, after him, the Isaac family were of the Hambro' Synagogue. He died in 1777, aged ninety-three; and in the autumn of that year his kinsman Naphtali was elected Rosh haKahal for life in his place. After 1786 the latter's name is omitted. The Great Synagogue now had no place for a dictator. It must be observed, however, that the successive Heads of the Community amply paid for the honour bestowed upon them, in hard cash and devoted labour.

Opening page of Isaac Polack's Prayer Book, 1776

Rabbi Schiff's principal coadjutor in the Synagogue throughout the period of his Rabbinate was Isaac Elias Polack, who, appointed Hazan in 1746, had officiated at the dedication of the new structure twenty years later and continued to conduct the services throughout its duration and for more than a decade after. A fine mezzotint portrait of him is extant, engraved in 1779 by Bolton after a painting by Burgess. He is clean-shaven and white-wigged; his mobile lips seem to be suppressing an anecdote or a sarcasm; and he is wearing his three-cornered hat and clerical bands. It is a fine, handsome face, very much that of the lady's man. (The legend describes him as "Rev.d Isaac Polack, Chief Reader of the Great Synagogue", while another portrait of twenty years later gives him the unearned title "D.D.") The Synagogue still possesses a splendid folio prayer-book, magnificently indited on vellum, which he wrote with his own

hand and presented to the Congregation in 1776--an act of piety fittingly commemorated in the Memorbuch together with the monetary donations of the wealthy. There seems to have been a temporary interruption in his services in 1781 when (apparently in consequence of giving a guarantee to an unworthy coreligionist) he was imprisoned for debt, to the Rabbi's profound distress: but his release was secured in time for him to officiate at the High Festivals that autumn. He died in 1802, when he was not less than seventy-five years of age and had been in the service of the Synagogue for fifty-six years.4

The names of one or two others who assisted on the Reading Desk of the Great Synagogue at this period are preserved. Thus, for example, in 1778 Joseph (ben Leizer) Lazarus appears as Reader, and two years later Isaac (ben Joseph) Levy was appointed assistant Hazan for two months at a fee of £7 10s. He seems to have given satisfaction, for he was still in office in 1795, having composed the music on the dedication of the new building in 1790.

The Hazan was assisted by a choir only on special occasions. Normally, as we have seen, the traditional arrangement of the Continental synagogue applied in England also. On the reading desk, by the side of the cantor, stood two persons who assisted him in the choral portions of the service: on the right the Meshorrer, or [tenor] singer; and on the left the Bassista, or bass. They were something between musical accompaniment and choir. It was their duty to extemporise choral pendants to the Hazan's improvisations; and on occasions such as the Day of Atonement they were expected to provide vocal diversions from time to time in order to permit him to rest his voice when he seemed tired. Mention has already been made of one or two of these versatile performers. There was one, at this period, who outshone all the rest. In the outside world, even Hazan Polack's reputation was trivial as compared with that of one of his assistants. Meir ben Judah or Meir Lyon, better known by the Italianate name of Myer or Michael Leoni, who had already appeared on the stage of Drury Lane, entered the service of the Synagogue as chorister in 1767, at a salary of £40 per annum, on the understanding that he was to behave as a Yehudi Kasher. (His emolument was reduced in 1772, when the congregation was in serious financial straits, to £32, but after two years was again raised to the former figure, on the understanding that no public offerings should henceforth be made on behalf of the Meshorrerim.) The sweetness of his voice created a veritable furore. Non-Jews as well as Jews came to hear him. In 1770, Charles Wesley was among the audience one Friday night, and recorded the fact in his Journal. "I was desirous to hear Mr. Leoni sing at the Jewish synagogue," he writes. "I never before saw a Jewish congregation behave so decently." With him, Wesley took the Methodist minister, Thomas Olivers, who was so deeply impressed at the singing of Yigdal that he adapted the melody for his hymn, The God of Abraham Praise. The adaptation had an enormous success, thirty editions being published within the next twenty years.5

Antique Ritual Silver

Leoni did not remain much longer the exclusive property of the congregation. He drifted again to the stage under the auspices of David Garrick, though always stipulating that he should never appear on Friday evenings, when his melody enriched the Synagogue service. He was taken up by the wealthy members of the community, who found some pride in exhibiting this synagogal prodigy to their Gentile acquaintances. Aaron Franks, for example, had him down one day in November 1774 to his house at Isleworth to sing at a concert, to which he invited several members of the

aristocracy. Horace Walpole, who was there, was enthusiastic in his praise of the Jewish singer. "There is a full melancholy in his voice, though a falsetta," he wrote. "that nothing but a natural voice can ever compass."

But it was not easy to serve two masters simultaneously. The day came when a report reached the ears of the Synagogue authorities that their much-esteemed officiant had sung in a performance of Handel's Messiah. This proved the last straw. For some time to come he had to choose the operatic side of his career; and when ultimately he abandoned the footlights for the Almemor (finally, in this case) it was not in the long-suffering London synagogue, but in that of Jamaica.6

Famous Singers of the Great Synagogue: Myer Leoni as Carlos in The Duenna, and John Braham as Orlando.

But the most famous and most melodious of the Meshorrerim of the Great Synagogue was without doubt a boy--son of Abraham "Singer" of Prosnitz, formerly also in the service of the congregation, who had died in 1779--whom Leoni once found selling pencils in the street, adopted as his nephew, and introduced to the service of the Synagogue as his assistant. The child's name was John Abraham, better known as Braham, the phenomenal tenor--sweetest of English singers of his day and author of The Death of Nelson, long the most popular of English patriotic songs. (His first appearance on the stage as "Master Abrahams" was at Goodman's Fields theatre early in 1787, shortly after which he made his bow at Covent Garden in the benefit performance of The Duenna on behalf of Leoni.) The story goes how, one Friday night, when he appeared on the stage holding a lantern, the performance was interrupted by the voice of a coreligionist from the gallery: "Put down the candle, you Meshummad !"

There is evidence that the congregation had overstrained its strength in constructing the new Synagogue in 1766, for in the succeeding period it was faced with protracted financial difficulties. It became necessary to make a drastic reduction in expenditure. At a meeting held in the winter of 1771 in the house of Aaron Franks, the Rosh haKahal, it was determined to make cuts in all salaries.7 But this proved insufficient. In the following year, when the time came for paying Edward Holmes the balance due to him for the site in Duke's Place on which the Synagogue extension had been constructed, there was no alternative but to mortgage the place of worship to him. The sum thus raised was £1700--£1300 being the amount due to him, and the balance of £400 representing a loan in cash at 5 per cent. (The respective roles of Jew and non-Jew in this monetary transaction is noteworthy, and perhaps nearer to type than the general picture.) Next year (Passover 1773) another expedient was tried to meet the financial difficulties: the minimum amount that had to be offered by persons summoned to the Reading of the Law on a week-day was raised to sixpence, to be distributed among various charitable objects, payment in cash being made obligatory. The responsibility for seeing that this regulation was punctually obeyed obviously devolved in great Part on the long-suffering Hazan, who was made subject to a fine of 2s. 6d. if he recited the form of benediction (Mi sheBirach) without mention of a monetary offering. By way of compensation, it was at the same time decided, so as to minimise the burden on the congregation's patience, that no more than five formulas of the sort should be recited for the same person--a usual method of ostentation at that time. (This, incidentally, was the first communal minute to be signed in English.) It was only some ten years later that the period of emergency seems to have ended.

To be sure, progress was uninterrupted even during this time of stress. One day in 1770 there was excitement in the Synagogue. A member of the congregation had produced what was found by the English-born element at least to be a positive godsend. Everyone connected with the Synagogue knew Alexander Alexander, son of Judah Leib (Levi) Alexander, who had been associated with the congregation since about 1740• A faithful Jew, he realised the need of a Hebrew printing-press in London; a native-born Londoner, he felt the lack of an English translation of the prayer-book. He set himself to fill both lacunae: and in 1770 he produced, in collaboration with Benedict Just of Halberstadt (known as B[aruch] Meyers), the first Hebrew prayer-book printed in England, accompanied by an English version. Alexander was not a great scholar: both his text and his translation leave much to be desired: but he has a permanent title to the gratitude of English Jewry for the work which he attempted, which soon found many imitators. At the end of the volume there is published an extremely interesting list of subscribers, among whom one notes many Great Synagogue worthies--Aaron, Naphtali and Moses Franks, Aaron and Asher Goldsmid, Mrs. Wolf Liepman, Mr. Isaac Polack, D.D. (the Hazan), and many others, together with Mr. Aaron Hart and Mrs. Dorothy Hart, both described as being of "Canady".

Alexander Alexander, "the printer", was admitted to membership of the Great Synagogue in 1776/7. He remained active for several years, producing a number of liturgical and other works. In due course, he set up his own printing-house, with the collaboration of his son, Levy Alexander. The works he published included a series of Yiddish pocket calendars (the first appeared in 1772) which contained full particulars of coaching-services and market-days, as well as of Jewish and public holidays. The younger Alexander remained active, publishing both in Hebrew and the vernacular (including an English grammar in rhyme) until well on in the following century: we will have occasion to return to him at a later stage.

While Alexander was at work on his prayer-book, another group of London Jews had begun a similar activity, printing, however, in Hebrew only. At their head was Moses ben Gershom (Hyams), who lived at the back of the Synagogue, in Little Duke's Place: and among the employees was a certain Jacob ben Gedaliah, whose family had embraced Judaism as proselytes. Thanks to the efforts of this group, a portly liturgy, accompanied by a Yiddish translation, appeared in 1770/1, in three quarto volumes. A Yiddish history of England, too, was announced, but was never published. The first book produced by this press is said to have been the Toledoth Jacob, by an immigrant Polish scholar named Jacob Eisenstadt (grandson of the illustrious Meir Eisenstadt) who probably preached sometimes at the Great Synagogue--a small volume comprising homiletical expositions of certain Biblical and Talmudical passages, and inculcating peculiar deference to the communal magnates, who (we are informed) were not without influence even at the English court.

Alexander found an imitator in David Levi, the erudite Whitechapel cobbler, who was one of the most remarkable characters ever produced by the Great Synagogue, and perhaps by English Jewry. He was the son of a certain Mordecai Levi, and was born in London in 1740. After failing to make a living as shoemaker, he went to the other extreme and became a hatter, meanwhile continuing his studies. In 1783 he produced, for the enlightenment of the Gentile world, A succinct account of the Rites and Ceremonies of the Jews, in which their religious principles and tenets are explained. From that date onwards, he was constantly engaged in literary work, in the intervals of trying to earn his livelihood. He produced grammars, dictionaries, apologetics, pamphlets, polemics. For years on end he was a one-man Anti-Defamation Committee, always prepared to fight with his quill whenever the good name of Jews or Judaism was impugned. His work, in making the Gentile world realise that Jews were in a position to speak to them in their own language and on their own footing, was inestimable. In addition, he produced a series of liturgical and other translations, immeasurably superior to Alexander's, which are the lineal ancestors of those used among English Jews in our own day. Yet his was a constant life of struggle for livelihood. He considered himself fortunate when towards the end of his life a group of admirers headed by the Goldsmids raised among themselves 18s. a week to defray his most urgent requirements: and it does not seem that he was ever able to afford the expense of

membership of the Great Synagogue, to which his family belonged and under the auspices of which he was buried in 1801.

The Baal-Shem of London, 1708-1782 (from a painting by J. S. Copley)

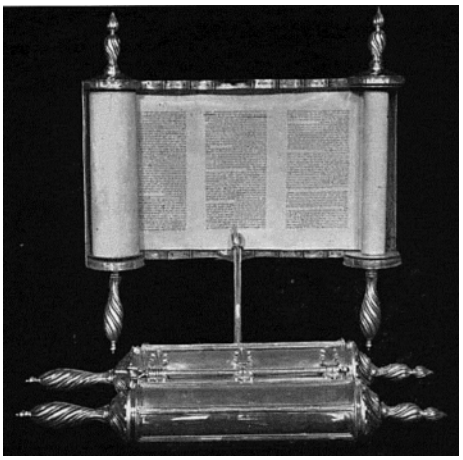
Of the other notables of the Synagogue during Tevele Schiff's Rabbinate the most remarkable, though hardly the most admirable, was that curious figure, "Dr." Hayim Samuel Jacob de Falk, known as the Baal Shem of London. There is no space here to give more than the briefest outline of his career. He was born, somewhere in Eastern Europe, of a Sephardi family, was condemned to be burned as a sorcerer in Westphalia, somehow made his way to England, and from about 1742 lived in London. Here he became known as a dabbler in magic and an expert in the practical Kabbalah, who achieved remarkable results owing to his knowledge of the mystery of the Divine Name (hence his title of Baal Shem). Many stories were current concerning his extraordinary powers. He could cause a small taper to remain alight for weeks, an incantation would fill his cellar with coal,. plate left with a pawnbroker would glide back to his house. Occasionally, he paid mysterious moonlight visits to Epping Forest, where he was reported to have buried quantities of treasure. Although he arrived in London without ostensible means, he was before long in the possession of great wealth and took up his residence at a house in Wellclose Square formerly occupied by Mrs. Judith Levy, Moses Hart's affluent and eccentric daughter. Here he was waited on by nobles, aristocrats, and princes, such as the fair Marquise de la Croix, who had been instrumental in saving many Jews from the clutches of the Inquisition, and the Duc d'Orléans, who received from him the magical ring which was said to have secured his son the succession to the throne of France. Among the Jewish community it was reported how, on a certain occasion when a fire threatened to destroy the Great Synagogue, he averted the disaster by writing four Hebrew letters (no doubt constituting the Ineffable Name of God) on the doorposts.

On his first arrival he was at loggerheads with the community, which endeavoured to suppress the luxurious private synagogue that he maintained in his house, with two Readers and elaborate fittings.8 Afterwards, the ill-feeling was dispelled, for he was on terms of friendship with Rabbi Schiff, and the Goldsmid brothers themselves considered themselves honoured by his company at their table. Nevertheless, he never became a full member of the congregation; it is said that when the Wardens desired to make him a Baal Bayith (householder) of the community he refused the honour, saying that he was a householder of the entire world. His portrait, which was discovered some time since in the possession of a long-assimilated member of the Goldsmid family, is often reproduced in error for that of the more famous "Baal Shem", Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, the founder of Hassidism.

"Dr." de Falk continued to enjoy a great reputation until his death, in April 1782, when he was buried in the Alderney Road cemetery, near the Rabbis of the community. His tomb, with its florid Hebrew inscription, was a place of pilgrimage for Jews of the old type until within living memory, but is no longer to be traced. He remembered the Synagogue handsomely in his will. To the Rabbi for the time-being, he left an annuity of ten guineas: to the Beth haMidrash, the

same amount; and to the Synagogue itself, £100 a year. The place of worship received, too, two exquisite miniature scrolls of the law, in silver cases of the finest contemporary London workmanship, which are kept among its treasures and serve to remind the congregation on feasts and holydays of the enigmatic, bizarre character of its eighteenth-century benefactor, the reputed Baal Shem of London.9

It is not perhaps entirely unfair to mention immediately after "Dr. de Falk" his contemporaries, Philip Jonas and Philip Breslaw (it is conceivable that the two were identical), the conjurers. The former worked specially in London, being first found in the "Angel and Crown" in Whitechapel and afterwards in the Bank Coffee-House. The latter gave performances in 1774 in the ballroom of the King's Arms, near the Royal Exchange, and after in the Marylebone Gardens: a handbill of the period boasts how "he will exhibit a variety of new magical card deceptions; particularly, he will communicate the thoughts from one person to another, after which he will perform many new deceptions with letters, numbers, dice, rings, pocket-pieces, etc." His Last Legacy, or Magical Companion (London, 1784) was long a classic of the conjuring art. It is one or the other of these two whom we find in the records of the Great Synagogue in 1772-3 under the name "Pheis Taschenspieler" (i.e. "Conjurer"), when he claimed membership-rights through his father-in-law, Mendele Levi. However, he did not succeed, as the vestry stipulated that the application could not be entertained until he had paid his debt to Isaac Polack, the Hazan, which he failed to do within the stipulated period of six months.10



Miniature Scrolls of Law, in silver cylinders (London, 1766-7), bequeathed by the 'Baal Shem', 1782

At this period, too, the Synagogue numbered among its members the most distinguished of the physicians associated with it. This was Mordecai Gumpel ben Judah Leib, known in ordinary life as George or Gumperz Leviso(h)n [Schnaper], who, born on the Continent, was considered an infant genius and obtained the Rabbinical diploma when he was only fourteen years old. Afterwards, he was implicated in a domestic tragedy at Breslau, though subsequently cleared of suspicion. He embraced a medical career, came to England and, after studying under John Hunter, was appointed physician at the hospital maintained by the Duke of Portland. While here, he published several medical works in English ("An Essay on the Blood", 1776; "Epidemical Sore Throat", 1778) and in Hebrew a philosophical treatise, Maamar haTora vehaHokhma (1771--one of the first works issued from the newly-established London press) which attracted a good deal of attention and caused its author to be regarded as a dangerous religious innovator. This seems to have embroiled him with the congregational authorities; his youthful escapades were resuscitated and repeated from mouth to mouth: and the mild Aaron Franks himself had him removed from the Synagogue. He counter-attacked in an extremely rare little polemical work in Hebrew, Tokhaha Gedola ("The Great Reproof", 1775)1 in which he insinuated that, in view of recent scandals, the congregation might profitably turn its attention to something more important. A certain Judah took up the cudgels on behalf of the Synagogue in another work, Teshubat hePerushim. Almost immediately after, Levisohn accepted a call to Sweden, where he was court physician and Professor of Medicine at the University of Upsala. Later on, he settled at Hamburg, where he published many other works, and is said to have made a comfortable fortune by popularising the use of chocolate. (The statement that he was ultimately baptised is quite incorrect: he is buried in the old Jewish cemetery at Hamburg.) The congregation's relations with its physicians were indeed not always smooth: in 1799 for example we find Dr. Alexander (David b. Naphtali) formally admitted to penance after having caused general scandal by a public breach of Jewish law.

The time was now passing when the community was confined to a comparatively restricted area in the immediate neighbourhood of Duke's Place--"the Four Streets" as they were then called. The expansion was mainly in an easterly direction. The reason for this lay to a large extent in the intolerant attitude of the City authorities, who allowed no person who was not a Freeman to open a shop for retail trade and admitted no Jew to the Freedom. This, however, did not apply outside the City boundaries, beyond which, towards Whitechapel and Mile End, a considerable Jewish settlement clustered. The disreputable thoroughfare appropriately named Petticoat Lane became largely Jewish at the close of the eighteenth century and completely changed its character: and all the courts leading out of it were teeming with Jewish families. Rosemary Lane (swept away when the approaches were made to Tower Bridge) was the centre of the rag-picking confraternity, and had a minor synagogue of its own. The profession must have been more lucrative than is popularly imagined, for in 1765 there is recorded the death of a Mr. Lyons, of Rosemary Lane, worth £20,000. Topographical snobbery was as yet hardly existent. The most affluent merchants continued to live above their counting-houses in St. Mary Axe, Bishopsgate, or Broad Street, or else in the immediate neighbourhood, in the elegant new dwelling-houses (hardly inferior to those in Westminster and Mayfair) in Devonshire Square, Billiter Square, and Wellclose Square. The most fashionable neighbourhood was Goodman's Fields, which had been described by the antiquarian Strype as early as 1720 as being chiefly inhabited by prosperous Jews. Surrounding this open space were four streets of elegant private mansions--Prescott Street, Mansell Street, Lemon (Leman) Street and Ayliffe (now becoming known as Alie) Street, where the élite of the Ghetto held court. Even today, as one wanders round these thoroughfares, now dingy and neglected, the eye is caught by noble Georgian frontages, beautiful lights over the entrances, exquisite pieces of moulding, handsome bow- windows, and (through an occasional open doorway) dignified oak staircases, which make it possible to revive in the imagination those more spacious and more simple days when this was the heart of London Jewry. Nathaniel Fowler, Churchwarden of St. Mary's, Whitechapel, observed in 1795 that two out of every three empty houses in the neighbourhood were taken by Jews, because it was convenient for them to be near each other. But he did not resent it. "There are many wealthy Jews in this parish whose liberality on charitable occasions is very exemplary ", he added. They even supported Christian sectarian charities: up t0 1812, there are some half-dozen Jewish names among the subscribers to the Davenant Foundation School, founded expressly to teach the principles of the Church of England. There was a fairly considerable settlement a little further afield, in Bethnal Green, where, as we have seen, an attempt was made to set up a domestic synagogue in 1747, and where "Jews' Walk" existed in 1779. (There had been one in Chelsea in 1756.) Here, it was possible to live under almost rural conditions: in 1765, Mr. Israel Levi Solomon, of Bethnal Green, had advertised in the public press for information leading to the apprehension of those who had robbed his garden of fourteen melons.

Not far off the Great Synagogue, in the Minories, there was a traditional street market, largely frequented by Jews-especially old-clothes dealers. When public taste became more delicate, they were considered to constitute a public nuisance, and much distress was caused in the London community in January 1782, when an order was made by the Vestry of the Parish of the Holy Trinity for their stands to be removed.11 On what was called the Tenter Ground, near the Cross Keys in Goulston Street, the annual London Purim fair was held, with swings, roundabouts, Punch-and Judy shows, and stalls laden with the traditional Ghetto delicacies, "Haman's Ears" occupying the place of honour: and the Purim masqueraders would add to the hilarity in the intervals of their visits to the hospitable Ghetto aristocracy in their mansions not far away. Similar convivial scenes were witnessed on the Rejoicing of the Law, when the symbolical "bridegrooms" were escorted back to their houses with a torch-light procession. Life was hard, and for the majority it was far from luxurious: but it was at the same time colourful and intense.

As a result of the constant influx from abroad, the charitable work which the community had to undertake was on a relatively vast scale. As early as 1739, as has been mentioned, it was computed that the two small Ashkenazi synagogues in London disbursed between them no less than £1,000 per annum in beneficence. So great did the burden become that in this year it was determined

that not more than 20 per cent of the total income of the congregation should be devoted to charitable purposes, as otherwise the strain on its resources would become intolerable. In 1759, it was agreed that the Hambro' Synagogue was henceforth to pay one-third of the cost of the charity distributions. It is unlikely that this arrangement survived the dispute over the Rabbinate after Hart Lyon's retirement; but later, a definite scale was laid down by the three congregations which now existed. Every destitute Jewish pauper in London could count on receiving one shilling weekly--6d. from the Great Synagogue and the remainder from the Hambro' and New Synagogues in equal proportions. Besides this the more fortunate could hope to benefit from the charitable bequests of Isaac Franks or Lazarus Simon, and every year before Passover there was a free distribution of Matzoth to all who applied.12 The influx of the needy, not always of a high moral character, for the express purpose of living on their coreligionists, and the consequent increase in delinquency, led the Great Synagogue in 1768 to decide that henceforth they would withhold the weekly allowance from those who had left their own country without good cause. On the other hand, emigration was assisted. This gave an opening for a further abuse, and in 1758 it was decided that the charitable allowance was to be withheld from persons who had received a grant on the pretext of leaving England.

In accordance with the traditional Jewish ideal of self-supporting charity, it was preferred to put the poor in a position in which they might be able to look after themselves. Hence they would be equipped with a tiny capital or small stock-in-trade and sent to earn their living in the only callings which the intolerance of the times left fully open to them--hawking, peddling and old-clothes dealing. Those who were thus engaged formed the bulk of the communal proletariat, painfully gaining their livelihood, consolidating their positions, and ultimately becoming self-supporting, respectable, and charitable members of society. It was easy to jeer at them, and the satirists and caricaturists of the period lost no opportunity of doing so. Yet these uncouth peddlars had ideals and standards which, if different from those of their neighbours, were in some respects immeasurably superior to them. Their home lives were pure and ennobling. Every week the Sabbath came to convert their hovels into palaces illumined with a mystic light, and their hard-working wives into priestesses presiding over a religious feast. No sacrifice was too great for them as an alternative to the desecration or non-observance of Jewish laws and religious customs. They were some of them scholars, all of them lovers of scholarship, and the associations for study which they formed among themselves were even more characteristic than the charitable societies which sprang up so spontaneously and plentifully in their midst. One of these despised old-clothes men--a dependent of the Great Synagogue--has left his memoirs behind him, A Short Account of the Life and Transactions of Levi Nathan (London, 1776). It is amazing to see how this penurious, despised, misunderstood immigrant, prowling raucously round the courts of London and Westminster with his sack on his shoulder, was at the same time the founder, inspiration and leader of a society for Talmudic study.

Not all, however, were of this type. Some of the immigrants, encouraged to come to England by the fatal simplicity of obtaining passage, and finding themselves unable to earn a living when they arrived owing to the galling restrictions which prevailed, turned in desperation to dishonest practises. The problem of delinquency among the Ashkenazi Jews became serious, threatening the good name of the entire community. Instead of blinking at the facts, the authorities of the Duke's Place Synagogue faced them manfully, attempting on the one hand to cope with the problem and on the other to dissociate the Jewish community as such from the malefactors. In 1766 certain criminals who were bringing discredit on the Jewish name were formally excommunicated in the Great Synagogue, and the Wardens gave every assistance to the authorities to bring them to justice. The latter were duly appreciative, as the following interchange of correspondence shows:

Bow Street, May 25th 1766.

Sir John Fielding presents his respectful Compliments to Mr. Naphtaly Franks and Mr. Naphtaly Myers; thinks himself much obliged to them, as is the Public for the assistance they have already

given to the civil power, to detect the Receivers of stolen goods, in Duke's Place and Houndsditch: and also for their laudable Declarations to continue their assistance, till the evil itself is suppressed; And Sir John Fielding is persuaded that as this practise has been carried on by a few persons only, that the countenance and protection of the respectable part of their Body to the Magistrates, in their endeavours to cause such offenders to be apprehended, will discourage this atrocious practise, benefit the public, and reflect honour on themselves.

To this, the Synagogue sent the following reply:
From the Vestry Chamber of the Great Synagogue.

May 26th 1766.

Sir:--
We are honoured with your letter of yesterday, and are very happy in receiving your approbation of our endeavours to detect those few infamous receivers of stolen goods, about Duke's Place and Houndsditch: wretches who are a pest to every Community.

We return you our sincere thanks for your laudable and spirited assistance on this occasion of doing public justice, and flatter ourselves, that with the assistance of the Civil Power, our perseverance will be attended with the same desirable success.

We are firmly convinced that in pursuance of this our fixed resolution, we shall receive the applause of every Jew, who is not totally ignorant of the Laws of God, the Duty of his own religion, the true regard for Public Justice, and the obedience due to the laws of this Kingdom.

We are, with the highest respect,

Sir,
Your most obedient humble servants,

N. Franks
N. H. Myers
Presidents of the Great Synagogue.

Under the same vigorous direction, this policy was continued unremittingly, notwithstanding the criticisms which were offered by some purblind members of the community, who considered it unwise to recognise the existence of the abuse. The Press of the period records, for example, how a person who defrauded a certain Mr. Gibson was expelled from the Great Synagogue at this time; and this was probably not the only case. But remedial action was not enough. In 1771 there was recrudescence of crime, of particularly brutal character. On this occasion, the Duke s Place authorities were not content with excommunicating those responsible, inserting an advertisement to that effect in the newspapers, and offering a reward of £20 for assistance in apprehending them, but did their best to get to the root of the problem. It was pointed out that the free passage from abroad for all, regardless of character, was largely responsible for the regrettable state of affairs, and the Earl of Suffolk, Secretary of State, was persuaded to instruct the Postmaster General to suspend this practice. (There is extant the letter of thanks to the noble Earl, dated December 17th, 1771, written by Naphtali Hart Myers on behalf of the General Vestry of the Great Synagogue.) At the same time, the Wardens waited on the Lord Mayor, who offered a free pass to any Jew who wished to leave the country and return home. Thus, the problem of delinquency was coped with: it was swept away when economic opportunity became more ample. The courageous action of the Great Synagogue in the eighteenth century, in grappling with the problem instead of ignoring it, can be a model to later generations.13

Notes Chapter Eleven

1 There is, however, a glimpse of "Dr. Shift" at a wedding in The London Chronicle of September 2nd, 1786, in a description of a ceremony at which he officiated in the yard of the Black Bear Inn, Piccadilly. The bridegroom's name was Levy; the bride (who was escorted to the ceremony by Grimaldi, the famous clown!) was a Miss Defries.

2 Tevele Schiff and R. Meshullam Zalman figure among the authorities mentioned in connexion with the notorious case of the Cleves Bill of Divorce, the hero or villain of which, Isaac ben Eleazar Mannheim, had emigrated to London .

3 These details and others regarding the private and public activities of the London rabbis of this period are largely derived from the documents published by Dr. Charles Duschinsky in his work, The Rabbinate of the Great Synagogue (Oxford 1921).4 His wife Telza predeceased him in 1799, and is buried, like him, in the Brady Street cemetery.

5 Some synagogal music by Leoni ("Leon Singer") and by his colleague, Abraham of Prosnitz, figures in the Hazanuth collections of Aaron Beer of Berlin: cf. Idelsohn, Jewish Music, pp. 220, 226. A gramophone recording of a superb Kaddish of his for the Ninth of Ab, from this collection, has recently been published.

6 His tombstone, in the ancient Kingston cemetery (still legible) shows that "Mr. Michael Leoni, Principal Reader of our Congregation and one of the first singers of the age" died on Sunday, November 6th, 1796.

7 The new rates were: Rabbi, £200 and coals; Hazan, £62; Shamash, £32; Wolff, Assistant Shamash, £12; Secretary, £15 (as before); Lyon the Meshorrer (Myer Leoni), £32; Abraham the Bass-singer, £12; "Morum" the door-keeper (a Jew), £21, contributed as before by individuals.

8 See below, p. 164-5.

9 Falk was not the only Cabbalist of this type in London at the time. He had a homonym, Samuel the Baal Shem, who survived him by thirteen years and may have been confused with him by some contemporaries. (The latter was buried in the "Strangers'" plot of the congregational cemetery on his death in December 1794; Jacob and Mendele, the attendants of the late Baal Shem, were also buried there, two and ten months later respectively.) Another mystic, Moses ben Nathan, designated the Baal Shem of Fürth, died here in 1775 and is buried in the Brady Street cemetery. He must have been attached to the New Synagogue, as the Great Synagogue had not yet acquired its share in this ground.

Falk was possibly the model for the sketch of a Cabbalist which appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine not long after his arrival in England. His fellow townsman and fellow-mystic, the Sabbataean R. Moses David of Podhace, came over to London in 1759 after he found life in Alcona impossible, stayed with him for some while and collaborated with him in his magical experiments. It is said that he was expelled from England with contumely.

10 It may be mentioned that Philip Breslaw added to his other feats of legerdemain that of dying twice. In the Gentleman's Magazine for 1783, p. 978, there is recorded the death at Brussels of "Mr. Breslau, the noted conjurer"; in the same periodical for 1803, p. 486, that of "Breslaw, the celebrated conjurer, at the Bull and Punch Bowl in Liverpool, aged 77. He was a native of Berlin."

11 So Jewish did the population of this parish become that before religious restrictions were removed there was a little difficulty sometimes in filling the public offices. (By 1836, however, the process had advanced so far that the Vestry appointed a Jewess as Parish Overseer, though her brother was empowered to represent her at meetings.) Reciprocal relations were good on the

whole, nevertheless, and in the autumn of 1818 proxies were admitted in order to permit Jews to record their votes on one of their religious holidays.

12 In the eighteenth century, it was customary to give a dinner, at the public expense, to the Honorary Officers of the community, past and present, on the occasion of this distribution: but in 1794 it was decided to restrict this henceforth to those actually serving.

13 Naphtali Hart Myers, son of Joseph Myers, who was mainly responsible for this policy, belonged to a New York family and was descended from the Adolphuses on the female side. He died at his residence in John Street, America Square, in 1788. He married Hester, daughter of Simon Jacob Moses, of Bury Street, a pillar of the Synagogue, who died in 1764 (see above, p. 99): their son, Joseph Hart Myers, graduated in medicine at Edinburgh, being probably the first professing Jew to obtain an ordinary degree at a British university, and published a dissertation on diabetes. He was appointed physician to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in 1785 and died in 1823. For the episode of 1771, See the account in R. Leslie-Melville: Life and Work of Sir John Fielding (London, 1935), p. 259 ff.

A more pleasing episode of external relations during Tevele Schiff's Rabbinate was collaboration with the Oxford scholar, Dr. Kennicott, while he was engaged in his great work on the text of the Hebrew Bible. There are extant the letters of recommendation to Jewish scholars abroad which he received in 1770 from the two senior London communities, the Great Synagogue's being signed by the Rosh haKahal Aaron Franks and the Warden Aaron Goldsmid, as well as by the Rabbi himself.

Chapter XII
THE NEW GREAT SYNAGOGUE, 1790

THAT munificent family which had been so closely associated with the origins of the Great Synagogue was still playing an important role in its history, though standing somewhat aloof from the ordinary round of communal life. Benjamin Levy, who may be reckoned the father of the congregation, left behind him three children: Menahem, Abigail, and Elias. The first-named, the son of his former marriage, was eighteen years of age at the time of his father's death, and inherited a comfortable fortune. As he was still a minor he could not take over his father's place and medal as one of the twelve licensed Jew Brokers, which passed to one Aaron Alvares. When Menahem came of age in 1707, he tried in vain to persuade his father's kinsman and associate Moses Hart (who had been admitted to Change in 1704, in succession to David de Faro) to retire in his favour, and went so far as to assert that he had paid him £1,000 on this understanding. The case gave rise to prolonged litigation and an enquiry by the Court of Aldermen, with the result that Moses was exonerated. In the following year Menahem Levy died, unmarried (October 14th, 1708).

His half-sister Abigail, or Golly, daughter of Benjamin Levy's second marriage with Hitchele Heilbuth (whose jewellery, including a superb diamond necklace, she inherited under her father's will) was destined to a more useful career. She had been betrothed to a certain Moses ben Samuel, presumably Samuel Heilbuth's son, but the two proved incompatible and in 1704, at the time of her father's death, the arrangement was cancelled by a formal Bill of Divorce (the record of this domestic misadventure has been preserved in a manuscript which somehow found its way to the Orient, and then back to England). Later on, she married Moses Adolphus, £10 being deducted from her wedding-portion to dower two poor maidens belonging to the Synagogue, in accordance with the terms of her father's will. (The bridegroom was a member of a distinguished Anglo-American Jewish family which is always referred to in the synagogal records by its mysterious alternative name "Bira"). They had six sons, all of whom (except one, who was feeble-minded) became prosperous. The most active in communal life was Michael or Meir (d. 1785), one of the original Deputies appointed by the Great Synagogue in 1760, who married

Rachel, daughter of Moses Hart. But more prominent in the eyes of the outside world was his brother Joy, who studied medicine at Leyden (English universities, like most others, not being open to Jews) and graduated in 1739 after presenting a thesis on the nature of pain. Subsequently, he was in practice at Cleves, and was for a time body-physician to Frederick the Great. After a time he returned to London, where his affluent brother Michael could afford to relieve him of material anxiety. Here he published in 1763 his clever but unedifying work, Histoire des Diables Modernes, which was very popular at the time and ran through several editions: and he wrote some other books as well. To compensate for his brother's sterile marriage, he himself had no fewer than twenty-three children. All were daughters, except one, Jacob, who was rewarded by being adopted by his wealthy but childless uncle. The age of assimilation had already begun, and Jacob Adolphus displeased his benefactor by marrying a non-Jewess, Mary Hughes. Later on, the old man became reconciled and adopted his nephew's son, John Adolphus (afterwards Sir John), who became a distinguished lawyer and is famous for his defence of the Cato Street conspirators in 1820. But he could not escape his origin; and when in the following year he defended the Life Guard officers who were tried for the murder of two men killed in a riot during the funeral procession of Queen Caroline, a caricaturist pungently depicted him with a brief bearing the words: "Jew v. Jury". He was the father of an equally illustrious son--John Leycester Adolphus, the famous critic, who was the first person to demonstrate the authorship of the Waverley Novels. To another branch of the family, which remained inside the community, belonged Major-General Sir Jacob Adolphus (c. 1770--1842) Inspector General of Hospitals--one of the first English Jews to attain high rank in the Army.

More important however from our point of view was Golly Levy's brother Elias, a mere child when he was left an orphan in 1704.1 In his will, his father expressed the desire that this boy should be brought up "in some profession in the Jewish learning, whether as a Rabby or a Physitian" (the equation of the two is interesting). He was to live with his great-uncle, Jacob Heilbuth, with his own servant to attend on him, and a certain Rabbi Moses was to be paid £25 annually for four years for teaching him; subsequently he was to be sent abroad to complete his education. Matters did not work out quite as Benjamin Levy had planned: but Elias had a thorough Jewish education, ultimately under the direction of one Adolph Cohen, whom he afterwards refers to as "my old schoolmaster".2 Nevertheless, he does not seem to have been of a scholarly turn of mind. A practical man, he was attracted by the bright eyes and brighter prospects of his cousin, Judith Hart, Moses's second daughter. It was a brilliant match; for her father, himself very wealthy, is said to have invested Elias's property in South Sea Stock, and to have sold out before the crash at a profit of 600 per cent. From both sides, therefore, the match was a desirable one, and it was carried into effect in 1727.

After their marriage, Elias and "Judy" Levy went into housekeeping, first in Bishopgate Street and then in a mansion in Wellclose Square which was afterwards occupied by the Baal Shem of London, "Dr." Hayim de Falk. Elias Levy never became a broker on the Exchange, as his father had been, but is described as "merchant". It is reported that his wife, who had an acute business-sense, aided him materially in his business in the Lisbon diamond trade, and managed to increase her already handsome fortune substantially by investing in privateering shares during the Spanish and French wars. On the death of her brother Hyman in 1738, she and her surviving sister were left the principal heirs of their father's great fortune.

As in duty bound, Elias Levy took an active part in the affairs of the Great Synagogue. He was the earliest Warden appointed when that office was established in 1748/9: he was one of the Trustees for the extension of the burial-ground acquired at the same period; and there is still in use in the Synagogue a pair of silver finials ("bells") for the Scroll of the Law, made in London and presented by him in 1732.3 In the charitable world of the metropolis, too, he was active, being a Governor of the Foundling Hospital and of the London Infirmary. He died comparatively young, on January 14th, 1750, and was buried in the ground which his father had acquired.

About his death a curious tale was told. We have seen above how sedulously the Great Synagogue attempted to suppress anything that might lead to a further secession, and it would have been strange if the private synagogue maintained by the Baal Shem of London should have escaped interference. In point of fact it did not. The mystic's personal attendant, Zevi Hirsch of Kalisch, formerly Hazan of Bristol (ancestor of the Collins family, of architectural and music-hall fame), left behind him an interesting diary, in which he recounts with a wealth of detail numerous episodes concerning London Jewry of the time. One of these relates to the year 1749, and to the conventicle in question. "On the festival of Shabuoth," he writes, "Elias Levy [then Warden, with Simon Levin] sent a spy to discover who attended the Sage's private services. [The diarist appends an uncomplimentary ejaculation to Levy's name: " may his name be blotted out!"] On the following Thursday, the Kahal [the phrase is repeated] met and summoned these men and forbade them to infringe the regulations further by going there again. On Sabbath, Sivan 14th, one of these, Moses Fishman, was compelled to stand up in the Synagogue at the afternoon service, when the Scroll was taken from the Ark, to repeat after the Shammash that he had sinned by attending the Synagogue of the Hidden Master [Baal Zaphun], and to beseech the Kahal's pardon. The Sage was greatly angered, and declared that Elias Levy would not live out the year." The prophecy was, of course, punctually fulfilled, as we have seen.

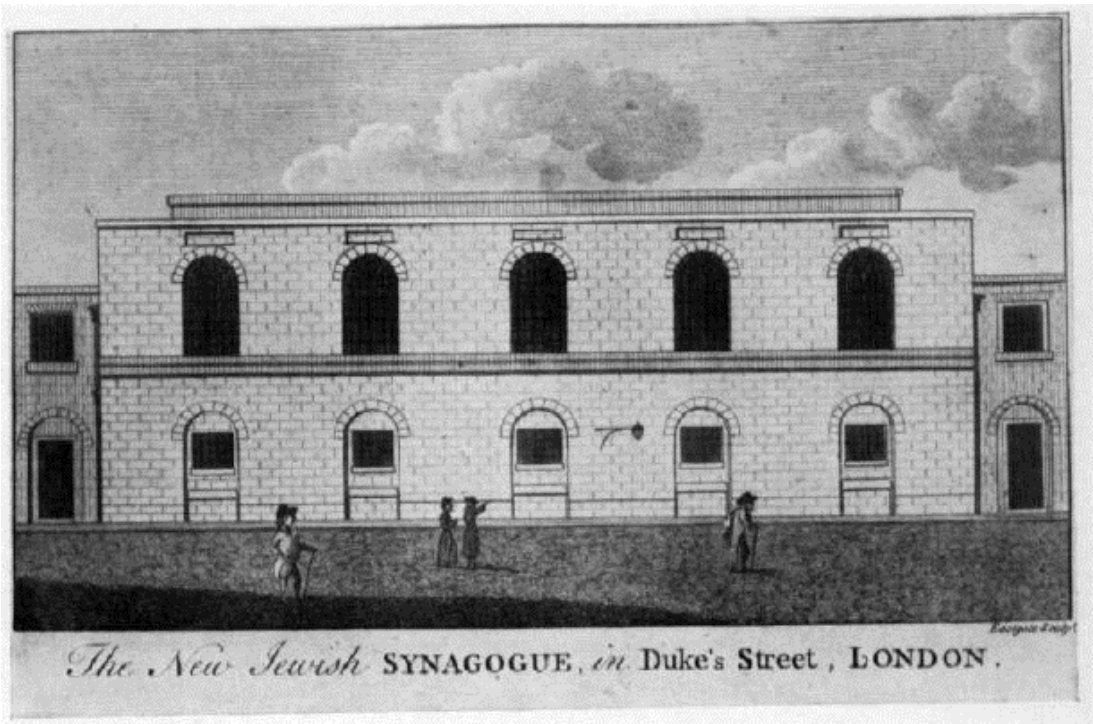
Elias's wife, Judith Hart, bore him several children, of whom only two survived infancy. One, named Benjamin after his grandfather, had died a year after attaining his majority. His sister, Isabella, thus became heiress to great wealth. It is a little consoling for those who deplore the religious decadence of the present day to note how faithfully it was anticipated many generations ago, in what seems to us a period of rigid Jewish observance: and this daughter of a pious house exemplified the fact. Through the medium of the Duchess of Northumberland, with whom her mother was on friendly terms, a match was arranged for her with the Hon. Lockhart Gordon, a member of one of the noblest Scottish families (according to another account, however, it was a clandestine plot). Less than a year after the wedding (not, as legend subsequently asserted, on the day fixed for it) the bride died (March 1754). This proved a terrible blow for her mother. She never returned to her mansion, which was shut up and left exactly as it had been on that tragic day. Henceforth her Town residence was in Albemarle Street, Piccadilly. The majority of her time, however, was spent at Richmond, where her husband had been fond of going and near which her father had built his mansion. Here she bought a house on Richmond Green, known as 4, Maids-of-Honour Row, where Heidegger, Master of the Revels to George II and the ugliest man of his day, had formerly lived. She remained identified with this spot for the remainder of her half-century of widowhood, becoming known in the end as "the Queen of Richmond Green". Though abstemious to a degree, she kept a lucullan table and entertained lavishly. Men noted almost as an eccentricity her kindness to her servants and the manner in which she allowed them the luxuries (as they were then) of coffee and tea. She regularly frequented all the watering-places. She was a notable figure in Society, attending masquerades and balls, and playing at half-guinea quadrille with members of the nobility such as the Countess of Yarmouth, Lady Holderness, and Lord Stormont. But, towards the end of her days, she became more and more eccentric. At her last public appearance at Bath her curious appearance and behaviour were a topic of daily conversation in the pump room. At Richmond, her manner of life became so secluded that her nearest neighbours did not know her: yet her establishment was still maintained as in the days of her greatest splendour, and every morning her equipage punctually appeared before the door, though it was very seldom used. Only her benevolence was undiminished, for she distributed (it was said) upwards of £1,000 a year in charity.

This was the extraordinary personality who suddenly re-emerged into the history of the Great Synagogue a hundred years after her father-in-law had played so outstanding a part in its foundation.

The enlargement of the Great Synagogue in 1766 satisfied requirements for only a short period. The community was perpetually increasing, both by natural growth and by the unending influx from abroad, and before long the demand for accommodation exceeded the number of seats.

Mrs Judith Levy, 1706-1803; Benefactress of the Synagogue, 1790

Accordingly, within less than a generation, it was necessary to enlarge the Synagogue once again. In 1788, two contiguous pieces of ground were acquired on behalf of the Congregation, one from John Western and one from the City authorities, by Levy Samuel, Samuel Joseph, Eleazar Isaac Keyser, Asher Goldsmid, Alexander Isaac and Solomon Henry, and all preliminary preparations were made.4 It was not easy to find the money; the congregation was not in a good financial position, and in 1772 (as we have seen) had been compelled to obtain a mortgage on the Synagogue. At this stage an elderly Fairy Godmother stepped in--the Queen of Richmond Green. She was indeed living in a Gentile circle, and apparently a not entirely orthodox life. But it was her family affair that was in question--the congregation whose founder was Benjamin Levy, her father-in-law, and whose first permanent home had been built by Moses Hart, her father. His original beneficence cost him £2,000. Her generosity was twice as great as his, for in 1787 she contributed no less than £4,000 to the building-fund. With the assistance of this munificent donation, the sacred edifice was radically reconstructed. In November 1788 the ground acquired for the extension was solemnly consecrated, with an exotic ceremonial which the public Press reported with a wealth of inaccurate detail. The new Synagogue contained accommodation for some 750 persons--a little more than 500 in the body of the building, and not quite half that number in the gallery. The structural work was carried out, with admirable effect, according to the designs of James Spiller, the fashionable architect.



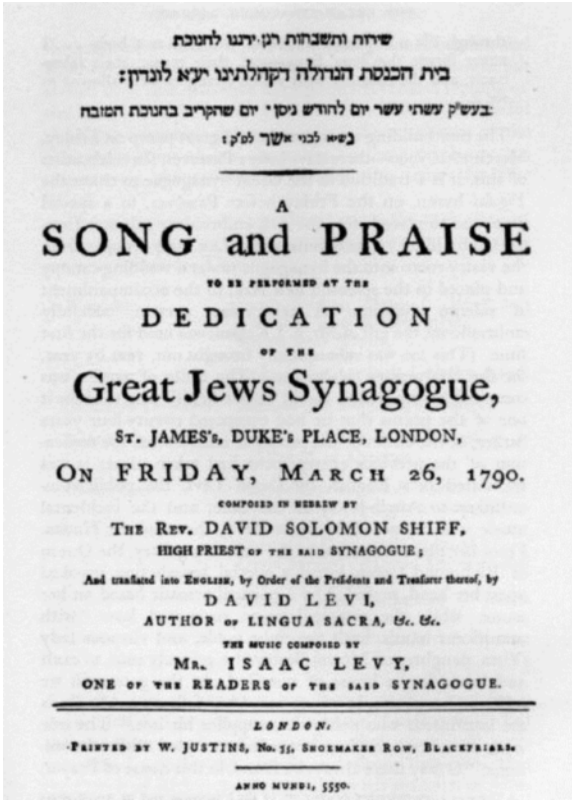
Exterior of the Great Synagogue, 1790 (from an engraving)

The presiding officers determined to leave nothing undone on this occasion. It was decided to provide a new ark, impressively placed in a semi-circular apse, a new reading-desk, and new seating, at a cost of an additional £2,000, and a subscription for that amount was opened. It is

said that the generous benefactress was furious when she heard the news that notwithstanding her munificence the Synagogue had run into debt, and sending for Wardens rated them soundly; had they applied to her in the first instance, she said, she would have been willing to advance sufficient to complete the good work. Her association with the reconstruction is amply recorded in the inscription on a marble tablet in the forecourt of the Synagogue:

ON THIS SPOT OF GROUND
A.M. 5482
MOSES HART
Late of Isleworth
IN THE COUNTY OF MIDDLESEX, ESQ.
DID IN HIS LIFE TIME
AND AT HIS SOLE EXPENCE:
ERECT A SYNAGOGUE:
WHICH WAS AFTERWARDS TAKEN DOWN
& REBUILT, A.M. 5550
TOWARD WHICH HIS ONLY SURVIVING DAUGHTER
MRS. JUDY LEVY
OF ALBERMARLE STREET
WIDOW OF ELIAS LEVY, ESQ.
VOLUNTARILY SUBSCRIBED
THE SUM OF £4000.

In panels around the walls, beneath the ladies' gallery, there were later on inscribed in gold letters the names of those who had contributed to the erection of the new building, prefaced by an elegant poem from the pen (presumably) of the Rabbi himself. At their head was, of course, Mrs. Judith Levy, the most generous of the subscribers. The list continued to be kept up to date, all benefactors of the Synagogue above a certain amount being rewarded by having their names added to the roll.5 It was only at the time of the last redecoration of the Synagogue that this historic record, a little too pragmatic for modern taste, was removed. The only really significant alteration in the building since 1790 has been the lowering, at the close of the last century, of the high brass grill which cut off the women's gallery from the body of the Synagogue. One other feature of the old days, which has happily disappeared, may also be mentioned here. Near the entrance there was a sort of pew, behind the rails of which the poor were herded, so as to prevent them from mingling with the "Privileged" and other members who paid for the upkeep of the building: here, too, belated worshippers adjusted their tephillin before proceeding to their seats. For persons improperly garbed (this description included, later on, those who did not wear top-hats) were not allowed to pass "beyond the bar" of the Synagogue; and even the Courts of Law had their attention engaged periodically by the strict enforcement of this regulation and the disputes (sometimes muscular) which resulted.



שירות והשבחות רנן יחנו לחטכת
בית הכנסת הגדולה והקהלתינו יגא לנורח:
בעש"ק עשרי עשר יום לחודש ניסן יום שהקריב בחנוכת המובח
נשיא לכני אשרך לפ"ק:

A
SONG and PRAISE
TO BE PERFORMED AT THE
DEDICATION
OF THE
Great Jews Synagogue,
St. JAMES's, DUKE's PLACE, LONDON,
On FRIDAY, March 26, 1790.
COMPOSED IN HEBREW BY
The Rev. DAVID SOLOMON SHIFF,
HIGH PRIEST OF THE SAID SYNAGOGUE;
And translated into English, by Order of the Presidents and Treasurer thereof, by
DAVID LEVI,
AUTHOR of LINGUA SACRA, &c. &c.
THE MUSIC COMPOSED BY
Mr. ISAAC LEVY,
ONE OF THE READERS OF THE SAID SYNAGOGUE.
LONDON:
Printed by W. JUSTINS, No. 33, Shoemaker Row, Blackfriars.
ANNO MUNDI, 5550.

Service at the Rededication of the Great Synagogue, 1790 (Title Page)

The new Synagogue was one of the sights of London, and was described in many contemporary works. Thus for example, in Remnant's London, of 1793, we read:

In Duke's Place, the Jews' Synagogue has been lately rebuilt, in a beautiful style of the simplest Grecian architecture, by Mr. Spiller, architect.

More precise architectural details are added in C. F. Partington's Views of London, of 1834 :

The building is of brick, with a roof supported by massy stone pillars... The utmost magnificence is exhibited. From the ceiling are suspended seven modern highly-finished brass branches of peculiarly excellent workmanship; indeed, the whole building is well worthy of inspection; and the beholder is always treated by the congregation with courtesy and respect; so that on a Friday evening, at the commencement of the Sabbath, it is a considerable gratification to hear the solemn chants and service, which added to the tout ensemble, render a visit to this temple of worship very interesting. In front of the building, over the porch, is a large hall, purposely appointed for the celebration of the weddings of poor Jews. This contract is held of such high importance among these people, that its celebration is accompanied by the most extravagant feastings; and that, in such a solemnity, the poor classes may not appear uncomfortable, the whole society, by subscription, ordain the festival in this hall.

James Pelham Malcolm, the American topographer, in his Londinium Redivivium of 1807 (vol. iv, p. 2) also devotes some space to a description of the building, being especially impressed by the Sanctum Sanctorum (i.e. the Ark) which, he says, was very magnificent. But he spoke only from hearsay, as when he wished to inspect the interior he was prevented (as he states) by a number of stout women, who apparently objected to his demeanour. His visit seems to have taken place on a Friday night (perhaps this is why he was not admitted), for he remarks how in Duke's Place "at six o'clock every evening each house exhibits a bright brazen branch, filled with burning tapers".

Another visitor to the Synagogue, who came with more reverent objects and experienced therefore a different reception, was Leigh Hunt, who frequently attended the services when he was a schoolboy. His recollections are worth quoting in full:

I used to go with some of my companions to the Synagogue in Duke's Place, where I took pleasure in witnessing the semi-Catholic pomp of their service and in hearing their fine singing; not without something of a constant astonishment at their wearing their hats... These visits to the Synagogue did me, I conceive, a great deal of good... I have retained through life a respectful notion of the Jews as a body ...I never forgot the Jews' Synagogue, their music, their tabernacle, and the courtesy with which strangers were allowed to see it.6

The new building was opened amid great pomp on Friday, March 26th, 1790--three days before Passover. (In celebration of this, it is a tradition in the Great Synagogue to chant the Yigdal hymn, on the Friday before Passover, to a special tune, and to place before the Ark embroidery columns from the old building.) The Scrolls of the Law were brought from the vestry-room into the Synagogue under a wedding-canopy and placed in the splendid new Ark, to the accompaniment of solemn chanting. A new velvet curtain, tastefully embroidered, the gift of Mr. E. I. Keyser, was used for the first time. (This too was subsequently brought out, year by year, for the anniversary celebration.) The order of service was compiled by the Rabbi, David Tevele Schiff, who used for it one of the poems that he had composed twenty-four years earlier, at the outset of his period of office, when the dedication of the previous enlargement had taken place; it was translated into English by David Levi, the publicist-in-ordinary to Anglo-Jewry at the time; and the incidental music was composed by Isaac Levy, the assistant Hazan. From her place of honour in the women's gallery, the Queen of Richmond Green heard a special benediction invoked upon her head, preceded by a poetical acrostic based on her name; while the principal poem recounted how "with munificent hands, hath the right noble, and virtuous lady (Yitta, daughter of Moses) Bestow'd a princely sum, to exalt and beautify the house of our God. In the gates will we rehearse her praise, in whose mind her father's noble deeds are imprinted; who nobly thus supplies his loss." The ode went on to express pious hopes intermingled with

admonitions. "O may there always be found, in this house of Prayer, the number of ten, to repeat the blessing, Sanctification and Kadeesh, with true piety and fervour. May we restrain our mouth from idle discourse during the Prayer and reading of the Law. Of this, let the Presidents and Elders be careful strictly to admonish the community." Seven circuits of the Synagogue followed, and the prayer for the royal family was impressively chanted by the Reader, the venerable Isaac Polack.

The officers of the congregation when the new place of worship was inaugurated deserve special mention, as on previous occasions. They were:

Wardens:

Jacob Nathan Moses (=Jacob ben Nathan Levy of Rotterdam).
Eliezer Isaac Keyser.

Treasurer:

Lyon de Symons (= R. Leib Pressburg).

Cemetery Treasurer:

Michael ben Benjamin of Fürth.

Charity Overseer:

Abraham Mitchell (=Abraham b. Michael of Ostrow).

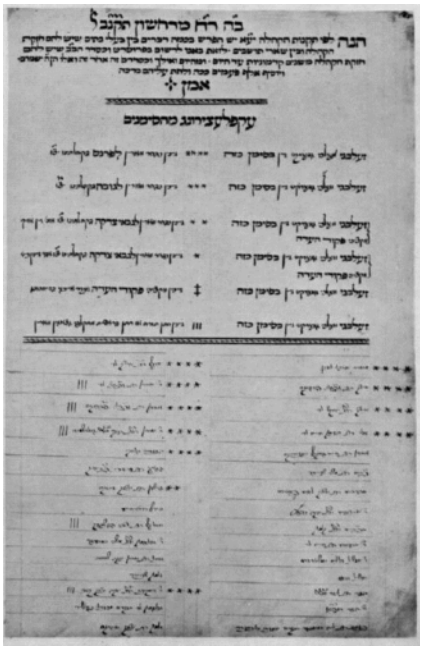
Committee:

Michael ben Samson of Fürth.
Lyon Samuel (=Leib b. Zanvil).
Simon Levin.
George (= Gershom) Goldsmid.
David Samuel(=David Pulvermacher of Krotoschin).
Samuel Joseph (=Samuel b. Jossele Hollander).
Levi Barent Cohen (= Levi b. Berman Cohen).

At the time of her great benefaction to the Great Synagogue, Judith Levy was an old woman of eighty-four. But she lived on, more and more shrivelled, more and more eccentric, long after this. It was on January 18th, 1803, that the Queen of Richmond Green died at her mansion in Albemarle Street, Piccadilly. She was buried two days after in the ground which her father-in-law had acquired in 1697 and which her father had enlarged in 1748, between the husband and the son whom she had survived by upwards of half a century. Her death was a bitter blow to many of her relatives and dependants--such as David Wagg, who had distinguished himself as commissary with the British forces in Germany during the recent wars, and his brother Abraham, who had been ruined as a result of his devotion to the loyalist cause at the time of the American War of Independence: for she made no provision for any of them, dying intestate. The whole of her fortune, estimated at upwards of £125,000, passed into the hands of her kinsman, John Franks, in spite of the fact that her husband had bequeathed the reversion to his estate to the children of his sister, Golly Adolphus, whose descendants long endeavoured to assert their claim.7

It seems that Judith Levy acquired immortality at bargain rates. The new synagogue cost in fact far more than her £4,000. The total expenditure was no less than £12,402 10s. 5d.: moreover, hardly was it built than dry rot set in, involving a fresh outlay of £422. To complete the payments it was necessary not only to utilise temporarily the capital of the various annual bequests left to

the Synagogue by " Dr." de Falk, Moses Hart and others, but also to borrow a sum of £3,500 to liquidate the outstanding debts. An ingenious method was devised to facilitate this operation. Members' notes-of-hand, at twelve months' date, were accepted for the amount of their subscriptions, renewable on payment of interest for the term of three years, when the loan itself was to be repaid. Hence some members contributed to the good work merely by lending their signatures. However, in most cases the amount was forthcoming in cash, nearly £3,000 out of the £3,500 required being collected in this manner. Among the subscribers were three of the Goldsmid brothers, Abraham, Asher, and George, who subscribed £200 each.



Opening Page of Synagogue Membership Roll, 1791

Even now, some nervousness prevailed as to the future of the institution: for the overhead charges had increased to such an extent that a secession would have entailed the most serious results. In 1794, accordingly, a number of the more prominent members signed an undertaking not to withdraw from the congregation under penalty of a forfeit of £100: but it does not seem that it was ever necessary to enforce this.

The history of the Synagogue site was not quite complete. In 1808, an adjoining piece of ground was acquired for the sum of £1,200 to round off the property, the amount being raised by means of a special loan repayable in six instalments. In 1760, as has been seen, the Court of Common Council had granted a lease at a moderate annual rental of the portion of the site belonging to the City, the agreement being renewable every fourteen years for the next forty years on payment of a fine of £30. In 1800 it was discovered that the period had inadvertently been allowed to expire. The Presiding Warden entered forthwith into negotiations with the City Lands Committee, who treated him in an extremely generous fashion, waiving the technical advantage. The lease was renewed on payment of a fine of £45, together with arrears of interest and costs, and they agreed that after 1815 it should be renewed every fourteen years at an annual rental of £32 on payment of the same fine. Finally, in 1874, the freehold of this portion was purchased from the Corporation by the Council of the newly-established United Synagogue, and from that time the Great Synagogue in its entirety stood on property belonging to the Jewish community.

There was a curious anomaly affecting the Synagogue. The Spanish and Portuguese congregation had never paid Church Rates to the Parish in which it was situated, and an attempt made in 1777 to levy them had been abandoned. (They however paid a poor rate at the scale of £30 per annum.) The Great Synagogue, only a couple of hundred yards away but in a different parish, had on the other hand never been exempt and never claimed exemption. What had originally been due to accident or compulsion became in the end (it seems) a point of pride; and when in 1842 the Board of Deputies took steps to get Jewish places of worship exempted from Poor and Church Rates, the Great Synagogue, though heavily assessed, specifically requested that no action should be taken on its behalf.

Although the architectural history of the Great Synagogue reached its culmination in 1790, it was not quite complete. In 1823 the building was redecorated and repaired, a reconsecration service being held on August 29th of that year. The heating apparatus installed in the building was defective and dangerous, this leading to three outbreaks of fire in 1834, and in the following year a further rededicatory service was performed, as was the case also in 18528 and periodically after. In the summer of 1889, when a further renovation took place, the work included the remarbling of the columns supporting the gallery and the regilding of the capitals. On this

occasion too the choir gallery was enlarged and the entrances were improved: and, the level of Duke Street having recently been altered by the City authorities, the access to the Synagogue on that side was lowered to correspond with it. In 1900, the central entrance on the ground floor, with narrow gangways on each side, was replaced by a new doorway at the west end; fifty new free seats were provided; and stone staircases were constructed to the women's gallery. The latest thorough-going restoration took place early in 1930, when the entire scheme of decoration was changed and (as has been mentioned) the lists of donations to the Synagogue were removed from the walls.

Subsequent work on the Synagogue did not entail any fresh financial strain like that of 1790. Among the pillars of the community at the time was Daniel Eliason (known in the Synagogue as Tanhum ben Elijah Neumegen), a connection and partner of the Goldsmids and with them a patron of Braham's. (A scroll of the law presented by him in 1818 with full appurtenances, including a pointer set with diamonds, is still in the possession of the Congregation.) When he died in 1824, he left some thousands of pounds to be funded in order to keep the fabric in a good state of decoration and repair in perpetuity.

Eliason Scroll Mantle, 1819

At the time of the construction of the new Synagogue building, the cemetery in Mile End, opened in 1697 and enlarged in 1749, was becoming full. No adjacent land being now available, it was impossible to extend it further. Not far distant lay the burial-ground which had been acquired by the New Synagogue on its establishment in 1761. A piece of ground contiguous to this, on the west side of what was then called Ducking Pond Lane, was vacant: and in 1795 the freehold was acquired by the Great Synagogue at a cost of £600, largely contributed by Abraham and Asher Goldsmid. Since all the land was not required immediately, a portion was sub-let to a Christian, with the proviso that part should be used for growing willows for Synagogal use during the Feast of Tabernacles.9 Henceforth the two congregations, the Great and the New, shared the same House of Life (though using different sections of it) and the ill-feeling which had originally prevailed between them was rapidly dispelled. Ducking Pond Lane later became known as North Street, and ultimately as Brady Street. The cemetery remained in use regularly until 1858, when the two congregations initiated their new joint cemetery at West Ham. In Brady Street are buried therefore the communal worthies of the late Hanoverian period and the beginning of the reign of Queen Victoria, including (besides successive Rabbis and officials of the congregation) the brothers Goldsmid, the great philanthropists and financiers; David Levi, the scholarly defender of Judaism; and Nathan Mayer Rothschild, founder of his house in England, and other members of his family.

The building of the new Synagogue coincided approximately with yet another development that made the last decade of the eighteenth century mark a turning-point in the history of the Congregation. Hitherto, the records (other than the financial ones, which from about 1750 are very full and in splendid preservation) had been extremely sketchy and sporadic--hence the historian's difficulty in his attempt to reconstruct the history of the institution in the first century of its existence. In 1794, a more comprehensive system began, and from that year the minutes of the governing body are preserved in full and regular sequence. At the beginning, in accordance with the earlier tradition, the language generally used is Yiddish. Within a few years, however, English began to make its appearance with increasing frequency (in the account-books it had first figured in 1771). On May 14th, 1807, it was unanimously resolved that all proceedings should henceforth be recorded both in English and in "Jewish" (Yehudith): in case of any subsequent dispute, the English version was to be followed. After 1815, English alone was used,

except for names, which for a long time continued to figure in both languages (as had been the practice ever since 1773), the Surname being included generally only in the vernacular list.

Systematic registration of births, marriages and deaths similarly begins in 1791 being introduced by the revised statutes of the congregation (of which more details will be given later on) which came into force at the time of the dedication of the new Synagogue. In accordance with a resolution of October 6th, 1765, a sporadic record had indeed been kept in certain instances, and by special request, before this (though only a few of the entries relating to births have been preserved), and even now, not all took the trouble to have family events entered. When in 1816 an application was made to the congregation for a certificate of the marriage of Moses Franks and of the birth of some of his children, it could not be furnished. It was now realised how unsatisfactory this optional system was, and a committee was appointed, consisting of Hyman Cohen, Nathaniel Nathan and Solomon Cohen, to arrange the details of a scheme of compulsory registration. Thus, somewhat tardily, the Great Synagogue family records became as comprehensive and complete as ordinary parish registers, and provide full information for the enquirer. After 1837, when compulsory civil registration came into force, the Synagogal registration of births was made superfluous, and henceforth there is a gradual decline; so that now, as in the early days, only one or two householders, for sentimental reasons, have entries made in the Synagogue register, which is still kept open. For certain purposes, an entry in a circumcision register might serve a similar purpose (as even the Courts of Law recognised), but none of those dating back to the eighteenth century which have survived concerns the Great Synagogue specifically. (In most cases, indeed, the registration of the Hebrew names only, without any English details, robs these records of a good deal of their historical value.) The primitive method of making a birth known to members of the congregation, in the days before the establishment of Jewish newspapers, was by having it announced by the Beadle in Synagogue after service. This, once the invariable London practice, was continued in the Great Synagogue by some staunch conservatives until the Victorian era was well advanced; and it was thus that the advent to the world of many of the stalwarts of Anglo-Jewry was heralded.

Notes Chapter Twelve

1 Lucien Wolf stated that he was only two years old at the time, but this, and his account of Levy's two marriages, may be an unjustified deduction from the issue of a fresh Ketubah in 1699 (see p. 23).

2 See above, page 25.

3 See plate 27: this is the oldest dated silver in the possession of the congregation.

4 The absence of any member of the Franks family in Synagogal activity of this sort, for the first time for half a century, is noteworthy. Solomon Henry (Shelomo ben Hirsch Bloch, of Langendorf in Silesia) was a former employee of Moses Hart's who set up in business on his own account, and one of whose sons became Patentee of St. Kitt's; a good deal of his correspondence from London is preserved.

The property acquired from John Western is described as "on the south side of a passage from Shoemaker Row to Duke's Place": that acquired from the City as "Tenements and Buildings near Mitre Court, Duke's Place".

5 The Legacy Board was installed in consequence of a resolution of April 17th, 1823.

6 There is a less flattering description of the Synagogue and its worshippers in Real Life in London (1841) pp, 479-480.

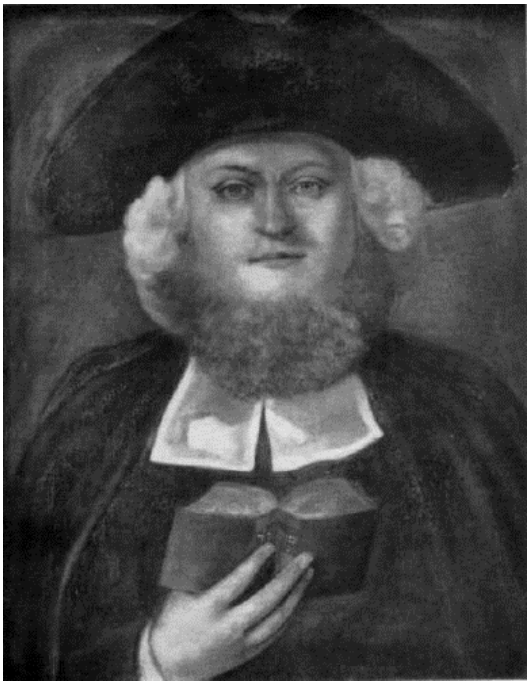
7 Advertisements regarding this claim periodically appeared in Press until quite recently: e.g. in October 1907, when an enquiry was made for information about the children of Alexander Levy, who was believed to be somehow connected with Benjamin Levy.

8 On this occasion there were some ill-natured observations in The Times, ably replied to in the Jewish Chronicle by M. H. Bresslau. (His reply was also published separately, under the title: "The Re-opening of the Great Synagogue", being a few "Observations in reply to The Times report of Friday, September 3rd, 1852".)

9 The scrupulousness in this matter was characteristic of Jewish delicacy of feeling: it was desired to ensure that for religious purposes even so commonplace a thing as a willow-branch should be formally and honestly acquired. It may be mentioned that the Great Synagogue Shamash used to supply the branches for Hosanna Rabba to the Synagogue in Westminster also.

Chapter XIII
RABBI SOLOMON HIRSCHELL AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

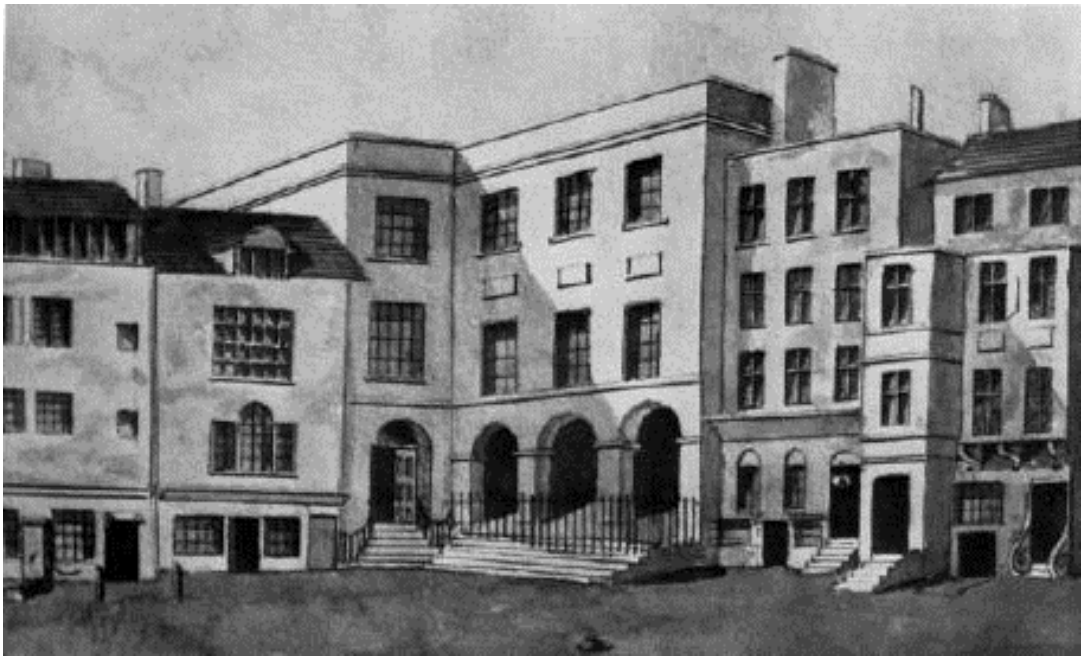
ON December 17th, 1791, Rabbi David Tevele Schiff was gathered to his people, after having occupied the Rabbinate for twenty-seven years. He was buried on the following day in the old burial-ground in Mile End, in immediate proximity to R. Aaron Hart and the founders of the congregation. His funeral was imposing. The Bevis Marks Synagogue was represented by its acting Haham, the three Dayanim, .and five members of the Mahamad, while all the Ashkenazi congregations sent their representatives. The Rabbi's pious son, Moses Schiff, perpetuated his memory by arranging for the publication of his responsa, sermons, and expositions, under the title Leshon Zahab, but by the time the book at last appeared (Offenbach, 1822) he had himself been dead for six years. The Great Synagogue still has in use another memorial to its former Rabbi: a heavily-decorated silver Laver and Basin for the use of the Cohanim, presented by Moses Schiff in 1806, to the acquisition of which (according to legend) the Frankfort community had contributed. On Moses Schiff's own death, childless, in 1816, he bequeathed £458 to the Synagogue, the income to be distributed every Passover to "ten worthy men having wives and children, among whom there ought to be some learned men, to purchase therewith meat and wine fit for the service of the two nights of Passover." Thus, the memory of the family of Rabbi David Tevele Schiff is kept alive in London to the present day.



Moses Myers, 1759-1804. Rabbi of New Synagogue. Acting Chief Rabbi 1792-1802 (from a crayon portrait in the New Synagogue)

The condition of foreign affairs made it difficult for the community to send abroad for a new Rabbi at this time. In 1794 indeed they made their requirements known, and various applications for the post were received. But they were financially exhausted by the expense of the new building, so recently constructed. Accordingly, they seem to have seized avidly on the opportunity of economy. Instead of appointing a new incumbent to the post, it decided to utilise when necessary the services of the Rabbi of the New Synagogue, with which body relations were now on

a cordial footing. Moses Myers (Moses ben Meir Pollack, in Hebrew) is little more than a name to us, though a crayon-portrait in the Vestry Room of the New Synagogue gives us an idea of his appearance. He was born in Holland about 1759, and must have been quite young when he took up his position in England: there are extant a couple of orders of service which he composed: and he died on April 25th, 1804--it is said as the result of a seizure brought on through the excitement of having to give evidence in a Court of Law about the validity of a marriage. In the internal affairs of the Great Synagogue he does not seem to have played much part, though he presumably officiated on those occasions when his presence was necessary, and sometimes gave discourses. In the Great Synagogue itself, precedence was given to R. Zalman Ansell (father of Moses Ansell, later Secretary of the Congregation) who served as head of its Beth Din.



The Synagogue from Duke's Place in the early nineteenth century (from a wash drawing in the Jewish Museum, London)

Two or three years before Moses Myers' death, the Great Synagogue had again begun to look about for a new Rabbi. Certain members of the community who were in touch with their co-religionists in Berlin heard golden opinions regarding the youngest son of the Rabbi of that place, Hirschel Lewin, whom England remembered as Hart Lyon, and who had died in the summer of 1800. The person indicated was Solomon (known as Solomon Hirschell), Rabbi of Prenzlau in Prussia, who had presented himself as a candidate in 1794. He had been born, as it happened, in London, in 1761, during his father's brief but eventful pastorate, and was not quite three years old when the family left for Halberstadt in the spring of 1764. This geographical accident of birth is said to have proved decisive. It was on Sunday, June 3rd, 1802, that the election took place, R. Solomon receiving 62 votes against 18 cast for R. Aryeh Loeb of Rotterdam, and only 3 for R. Zevi Hirsch of Krotoschin. The patent of appointment in the traditional style (Mikhtab Rabbanuth) was drawn up immediately after. The London press recorded the transaction in characteristic fashion. "The Congregation of German Jews in London," observed The Gentleman's Magazine, " have elected, after a vacancy of ten years, a High Priest of their nation... The choice has fallen on the Rev. Dr. Solomon Hart."1 It was true that at this stage Rabbi Solomon did not know a word of English, and that his acquaintance with the language was regrettably defective to his last day. He nevertheless enjoys the distinction of having been the only English-born Chief Rabbi to the present time.2 The connection with London of the family of the new incumbent had not been entirely broken off since Hart Lyon's retirement, upwards of thirty years before. Solomon Hirschell had a brother, Saul, perhaps more learned and certainly more creative than he, who became Rabbi of Frankfort-on-Oder. He found himself in sympathy with those followers of Moses Mendelssohn who desired to bring about a readjustment

of Judaism to the conditions of the day. Whatever might be thought about his ideals, his methods were certainly open to question. He expounded his opinions in a work, Mitzpeh Jekuthiel, written under the pseudonym of Obadiah bar Barukh of Poland, in which he violently assaulted Rabbi Raphael Cohen of Hamburg, a universally respected figure. This he followed up with a collection of ingeniously-forged responsa, Besamim Rosh, mainly attributed to Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel, in which the authority of that great scholar of the thirteenth century was fraudulently enlisted on behalf of the Mendelssohnian school. The two works created a furore in Rabbinical circles in Germany. Saul Berlin (as he was called) was compelled to give up his position, and to escape the storm made his way to London. Here he died contrite and penitent (as his will shows) on November 16th, 1794, and was buried with great solemnity in the old cemetery of the Great Synagogue, which out of compliment to his father and his brother embodied his name in the list of its departed Rabbis.

It was eight years after this that Solomon Hirschell, having received a grant of £70 to cover the expense of his journey, arrived in England to begin his duties. Though he is said to have had a rooted objection to sitting for his portrait, several are extant, executed at various points in his career. He was a particularly fine-looking man--over six feet in height, with handsome features and an impressive manner: and, as he went through the streets of London, imposingly dressed in the Eastern European fashion, he attracted a great deal of attention. He was a man of ready wit, and stories are still told illustrating this. It is said that he was once walking in the East End, when he passed a couple of non-Jewish women, who turned round to look after him. Hearing some remark pass between them, he asked the meshores or attendant, who always accompanied him, what they were saying. "They are remarking what a fine figure of a man your Reverence is," he was told. "What experts!" retorted the Rabbi, in homely Yiddish. "I can reduce a wealthy man to poverty very quickly," he used to say. "It is enough for me to ask him for £20 for a needy family--he can never afford it." Another anecdote related to an occasion when, on his way to synagogue wearing his long silk Sabbatical robe, he was jostled by some hooligans. A Jewish prize-fighter who was passing rescued him from them, and the Rabbi took his arm and walked with him to service. Critics sneered at this lowering of his dignity; but from that day on the prize-fighter became a regular synagogue attendant. Long after Hirschell's death, London Jews of the old school would speak of the impressive manner in which he used to conduct the Neilah service in the Great Synagogue on the conclusion of the Day of Atonement, notwithstanding a voice that no flattery could describe as melodious. He was proud of his English birth. The story goes that on one occasion during a Parliamentary election he went in a sedan-chair to record his vote, triumphantly informing the incredulous returning officer that he had been born in Cock and Hoop Yard, Houndsditch.

Solomon Hirschell, Rabbi of the Great Synagogue and Chief Rabbi, 1802-1842 (from an engraving)

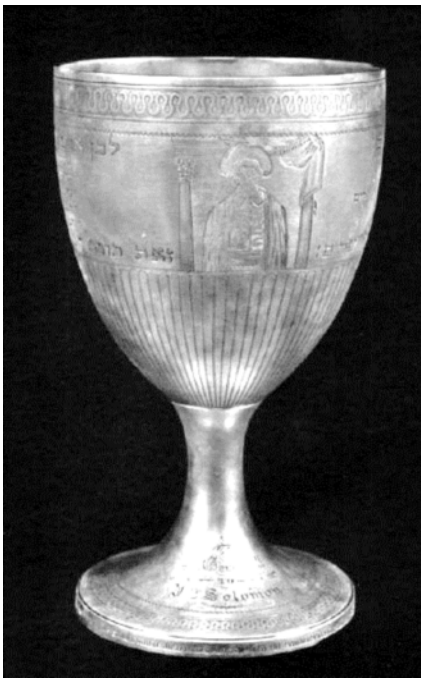
The pastor who was to preside over the great period of transition in the Anglo-Jewish community belonged essentially to the old school, yet his intellectual grasp was such as to enable him to understand the point of view of the new. To the end of his days he was a student, immersing himself perpetually in the traditional lore, but at the same time is said to have had a profound grasp of mathematics. His community, and many outside the community, considered that his attainments warranted an academic degree which, in the circumstances of the

time, he could never have attained: and he was known almost universally, with no real title to that distinction, as "Dr." Hirschell. The high esteem that he enjoyed in the eyes of contemporaries is shown by the manner in which his personality bridged over the gaps that still divided the various sections of the London community. Though he was appointed by the Great Synagogue alone, as their own spiritual head, his authority was recognised (at least after Rabbi Moses Myers' death, so soon after his arrival) by the two other Ashkenazi congregations in London, as well as by those in the provinces; and, though that position had as yet no juridical existence, he was universally recognised as the Chief Rabbi, being the first unquestioned incumbent of the office.

The Great Synagogue, however, remained his official seat and the place of his public utterances. It knew him as a learned and eloquent preacher. Few specimens of his pulpit oratory have survived, but a Gentile writer, William Hamilton Reid, is our authority for knowing that his sermons frequently dwelt on the duties of universal toleration. He generally spoke in Yiddish, but not always; it is on record, for example, that on the occasion of the funeral of Nathan Mayer Rothschild in the Great Synagogue's burial-ground in Mile End, in the presence of the representatives of many foreign powers and the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs of London, his address was in English. But though driven by circumstances to make use of other tongues, the Rabbi's predilection must have been Hebrew, for his official communications to the Wardens of the London Synagogues were always in that language. Then, as now, one of the great religious problems of the community was that of Sabbath observance. Very shortly after his appointment, at the end of 1802, Hirschell was associated with the new Haham of the Spanish and Portuguese community, Raphael Meldola, in a declaration regarding the maintenance of the sanctity of the Seventh Day.

The devoted Rabbi had to put up with some spirited opposition from certain members of his flock, who laid claim to greater scholarship than his. The most vociferous was without doubt Levy Alexander, the son of the earliest Anglo-Jewish typographer, who carried on his father's professions of printer, publisher and translator of the Jewish liturgy. It happened that the Rabbi favoured the rival production of a certain E. Justin, who showed his gratitude by adorning his publication by way of frontispiece with a portrait of his patron--a curious and (as would seem to the present day) highly unorthodox embellishment of a liturgical work. This action of Rabbi Hirschell's gave rise to a prolonged polemic. Alexander assailed him in season and out, moderately and immoderately, through every channel available to him. He asserted that what he termed "The Opposition Mahzor" was replete with errors, which reflected the ignorance of the Reverend Gentleman who had authorised it. He discovered, to his joy, an error in the published calendar, the responsibility for which he ascribed to the same source. When the Rabbi went to see a balloon-ascent one Saturday, he accused him of public desecration of the Sabbath. Horticultural operations in the old Beth Hayim inspired a separate pamphlet: The Axe Laid to the Root; or lgnorance and Superstition evident in the character of the Rev. S. Hirschell, High Priest of the Jews in England, in several letters to him on occasion of his having ordered the trees to be felled in the old burial-ground at Mile End Road--an egregious production which was enlarged, though certainly not adorned, by a scurrilous portrait of his subject. To be sure, Alexander did not confine his attention to the Ashkenazi element--especially when there was the opportunity of having an incidental tilt at his principal enemy: in 1814 for example he advertised: A Critique of the Hebrew Thanksgiving Prayers which were said... on Thursday the 7th of July... for the happy Restoration of Peace, in which the stupidity of the Rev. Raphael Meldola will be clearly shown... with an anecdote on the humorous sermon delivered by the Rev. Solomon Hirschell... High Priest for the Occasion. He reached the climax of audacity with a stroke of polemic genius. He was at this time engaged in producing a new translation of the prayer-book, which was issued in parts. He had the curious inspiration of continuing his attacks on the wrappers of the fascicules as they appeared, sometimes in doggerel verse. The worshippers were thus given the opportunity of conning these amusing scurrilities in the Synagogue itself, under the Rabbi's very nose.

A more significant controversy than that with Levy Alexander had as its protagonist a scholarly artist and engraver named Solomon (Yom-tob) Bennett, a native of Eastern Europe, who had learned his craft in Germany and came to England in 1799. In 1815 a certain Polish Hebraist of considerable attainments, Solomon Jacob (Shalom) Cohen, who was trying to establish a model Hebrew school in England, produced a much-needed educational work, Elements of Faith for the use of Jewish youth, of both sexes, which was translated into English by Joshua van Oven, and for some time had a considerable vogue. The volume appeared under Hirschell's patronage. It happened that a little time before Bennett had published a somewhat crude portrait of the Rabbi, which had proved a drug on the market and involved him in a loss of £100, in consequence of which the unhappy artist apparently had to go to prison for debt. He held Hirschell responsible for this, alleging that the latter nursed a grudge against him because of a quarrel with his father in Berlin years before. With the publication of The Elements of Faith, Bennett saw his opportunity. In a Hebrew work, Tene Bikkurim ("A Collection of Rabbinical Discussions and Opinions", London, 1816?) he accused the Rabbi of having given his approbation to a work which, far from containing the elements of belief, inculcated the principles of disbelief. A certain Meir (Moses) Rintel, one of the Shochetim, took up the cause of the Rabbi in his Minchath Kenauth (London, 1817), and before long the controversy spread to the Continent. Bennett now appealed to the less learned in an English pamphlet, which rivalled Alexander's publications in scurrility: The Present Reign of the Synagogue of Duke's Place Displayed in a Series of Critical, Theological and Rabbinical Discussions on a Hebrew Pamphlet (London, 1818). From this work, we obtain a highly unflattering picture of the "Proud Pontiff" and his circle, as seen through the eyes of a disappointed foreigner: how he "formed prosecutions and plans with those who cringe under his government to obstruct all intercourse among our nation": how "one wretched hireling Mr. Muday was employed to ruminate the library of the Medrash", the counter-attack on Bennett being based on the results of these researches and "the extensive closets of a Rabbinical library, which is only in the possession of R. Solomon Hirschell (if not in his head)": and how he depended at every turn on the Christian philo-Semite, Thomas Witherby, with Dr. van Oven, Michael Joseph "the poet of Duke's Place", and Meir Rintel "the poultry-man", whom he alleged to be "Solomon Hirschell's Hebrew and English writers" and "the active part of his government". But these opinions were those of jaundiced individuals: the veneration that the Rabbi enjoyed in his community, the memory of which is not dead even now, presents a very different picture.



Kiddush Cup, with portrait of Chief Rabbi Solomon Hirschell (presented by him to J. Solomon, 1802)

London Jewry was meanwhile expanding. Among the well-to-do immigrants who arrived in England in the middle of the eighteenth century had been a certain Wolf Liepman, who had been settled for some time in St. Petersburg and had been appointed a Councillor of State by the Czar. He attached himself to the Great Synagogue, but his personal affairs made it necessary for him to live in Westminster, in Great Pulteney Street. Here he formed a minyan in his house, probably in the year 1768. On his death in 1773, those had formerly attended service here joined forces with a charitable society (Hebra Kadisha shel Gemilluth Hassadim) which had been formed by the poorer Jews of the Westminster district--mainly tailors and embroiderers--at least twelve years before, and a room was taken in Bedford Row, Strand, for use as a synagogue; in 1781, this was removed to Denmark Court, where a more adequate place of worship was opened in 1797. This was the beginning of the Westminster, or Western Synagogue--the first and for many years the only metropolitan congregation outside the City. It was, however, dependent upon the existing communities. According to the regulations, no person was to be permitted to give an

address in the Synagogue without authorisation from the Rabbi of the Duke's Place Shool, who himself came down sometimes to attend service. On one occasion, the accounts record an offering of 12s. 6d. made by "the Ab-Beth-Din of our community"; on another, the expenses for a coach when he and his attendant and the Shochetim went to Westminster to inspect the local arrangements. The Rabbi's writ (unlike that of the Lord Mayor) ran also outside the City area. He could send a messenger, when he desired it, to make a proclamation in the synagogue, and the congregation felt obliged to reward the great man's representative with a gratuity of half a crown.

The dependence of the Westminster congregation on the City was not confined to the spiritual sphere. The old objection to the establishment of a secessionist body, which would weaken the existing congregation both materially and morally, still prevailed. The new community was moreover kept in subordination by the fact that it was too poor to afford a cemetery of its own, and had to come to some arrangement regarding the burial of those affiliated to it. Accordingly, when the Synagogue in Denmark Court was dedicated in 17971 a formal "Treaty" was drawn up between its representatives and those of the City congregations, stipulating that their members resident West of Temple Bar could retain membership and burial rights without being under an obligation to hire a seat. Eleven years later, after prolonged negotiations in the vestry-room of the Great Synagogue, the arrangement was revised and renewed, it being stipulated that all members of the Westminster Synagogue should attach themselves forthwith to one or the other of the older bodies, and that no person should be admitted to the congregation unless he resided beyond Temple Bar or Holborn Bar "or within six miles westward thereof". Detailed regulations were laid down as to the distribution between the respective synagogues of sums "offered at the altar". The greater number of the Westminster members were of course attached to the senior London congregation. The archives comprise a folio volume, "Articles of Agreement entered into between the Wardens and Elders of the Great Synagogue and such members for the time being of the said congregation west of Temple Bar", signed by all those concerned. The "Treaty" did not last, however, for many years. One clause in it had prohibited the establishment of any rival congregation in Westminster or the immediate neighbourhood. When notwithstanding this a secessionist Bethel (afterwards known as the Maiden Lane Synagogue) was set up in Brewer Street in 1810, it became obvious that the protection of the older bodies was useless. The Westminster congregation accordingly acquired its own cemetery in Brompton Road, in 1815, thus becoming independent. It was a pointed warning which, however, took something like half a century to sink in.

Another small conventicle associated with the Great Synagogue had meanwhile come into existence. This was the Polish Synagogue, founded about 1790 and dependent on the Great Synagogue for burial rights. In 1804, it dedicated its new Synagogue in Cutler Street, Houndsditch, in the immediate neighbourhood of the site which it continued to occupy until our own day.3 (It had its counterpart in a Polish Minyan founded in 1792 in Gun Yard, Houndsditch, afterwards dependent on the New Synagogue.) There was also, in what was then the far East End, the place of worship in the street regarded as the heart of the old clothes industry, Rosemary Lane, graphically depicted by Rowlandson in a contemporary caricature (as yet unpublished). This congregation continued its independent existence from 1748 to 1874 (latterly in Prescott Street), but its precise relation to the City synagogues is obscure.

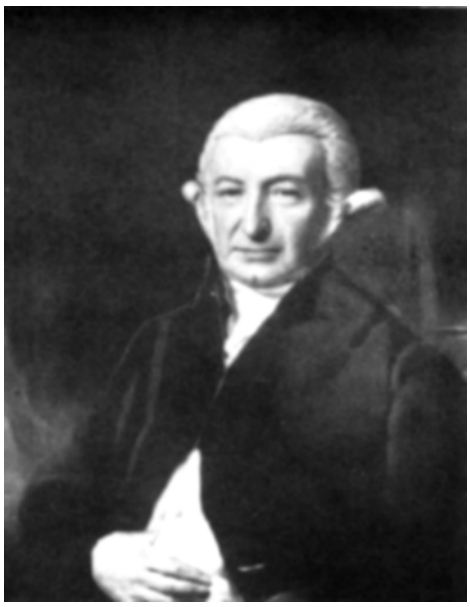
Even before Solomon Hirschell's day, we are able to recover the names of some of the assessors in the Rabbinate, who presumably assisted the Rabbi in giving instruction, occasionally delivered discourses under the auspices of the Synagogue, and sat with him on the Beth Din. Eleazar Liebman Speyer, the first Rabbi of the New Synagogue, was one of the earliest of these of whom we have knowledge; he originated at Halberstadt, in Germany, had been active in London from the time of Hart Lyon, and remained in correspondence with him after he left London. A little later came Abraham ben Solomon Hamburger of Nancy, known in London (where he was attached to the Hambro' Synagogue) as Abraham Nanzig, who wrote a little work, Aleh Terufah (London, 1785), in which he championed the lawfulness of vaccination (or rather variolation)

against smallpox: this is, incidentally, the first Hebrew work to contain a mention of aeronautics. He was a member of the Ashkenazi Beth haMidrash, and a friend of "Dr." de Falk, who left him fifty guineas in his will. Simon ben Israel Meshullam, of Prague, and Jacob ben Eliezer were other scholars who flourished at the time of Tevele Schiff, though they may have been laymen; nor is it quite clear whether the David Levi Solomons, a Jewish Rabbi, who died at the age of 100 at the beginning of 1786,4 filled any official functions or no. An itinerant Rabbi who was active in London under the auspices of the Great Synagogue about the same time was Phineas ben Samuel, who taught at a Hebra specially established for his benefit. In his book Midrash Phineas (London 1795) he speaks of the consideration with which the congregation treated him and how the Beadle was instructed to place him in a seat of honour. A list of his patrons is appended to the work, divided up according to their Synagogal affiliation. The vast majority belonged to the Great Synagogue--it is a very interesting roll--among them being Samuel, son of Rabbi Aaron Baer Waley, "the Dayan", of Prague (ancestor through a daughter of the Waley family of today) whose grave in the Brady Street cemetery may still be seen. A contemporary was "David Solomon, a Jewish Priest", a painting of whom, on ivory, by Stephen Poyntz Dunning, dated 1816, is in the Jewish Museum, London: but nothing further is known about him. We now arrive at Solomon Hirschell's own coadjutors--the Dayan Samuel of Lissa, whose wife died in r834; Rabbi Solomon Aarons, Preacher to the Burial Society, who passed away in 1839: and Dayan Aaron Levy (Aaron b. Judah Leib: generally known as "Reb Aron"), of Lissa, a remarkable scribe (several calligraphic portraits by him are extant, including one of the Rabbi), the first person to exercise Rabbinical functions in Australia, whither he was sent to arrange a get (divorce) in 1830.5

The important functions of Clerk of the Great Synagogue were performed in Rabbi Hirschell's time by a succession of earnest workers who left their mark on communal history. When he came to England, the office was filled by Isaac Bing, successor to Lefman Polack (who had died in 1791). He was the son of the scholarly Leib ben Isaac Bing, of Frankfort, known as Levy Isaacs, an active member of the community, who became Treasurer in 1767. It was under his auspices that there was initiated in that year the new series of Treasurer's Accounts (Pinkas haGoveh), Isaac being responsible for the clerical work. The latter was admitted a member of the community in 1785/6, and in the autumn of 1788 was elected to fill the functions of Secretary (with which he had to combine those of assistant reader and congregational factotum) at the yearly salary of £20 and perquisites. He remained in office until the new century was well advanced, and though he was dismissed in 1801 in consequence of a most curious accusation that he had married a Gentile in lreland was afterwards re-elected (not reinstated). In 1816, however, he was again dismissed, this time for peculation to the tune of £370. His successor was Moses (Moss) Ansell. On the latter's death in 1840, his functions were temporarily taken over by Lewis Eleazar Pyke (1789-1851), who for some years past had served in the capacity of Beadle (Shomer). He was one of the last of the old school, and before he opened the Synagogue for service in the morning would knock thrice on the door with the great key, to warn the spirits who visited the house of prayer by night that it was time for them to depart. The new Secretary was to be a man of a different type.7

The lay leaders of the community with whom Solomon Hirschell worked and who were associated with him in his main activities belonged to families which had been unknown in the community during his father's Rabbinate. There were no descendants in the male line of Moses Hart and Benjamin Levy. The Adolphuses were attaining distinction, but in the non-Jewish world. Few survived of the once numerous Franks clan, and those few had little interest in Judaism. But (as the Rabbis remarked in commenting on the verse of Ecclesiastes, "The sun also riseth and the sun goeth down"), Israel is not left without a shepherd, and before the sun of one leader sets that of another appears above the horizon. There was a fresh group now directing the affairs of the Great Synagogue--men whose names figure with impressive regularity in the records of the time and whose descendants have continued to play a commanding role in the Anglo-Jewish community from that day to this.

It will be noted that (so far as is known) none started life here as the traditional penniless immigrant, all belonging to families of established position and solid background. There was for example Moses, son of Samuel Pulvermacher, of Krotoschin, who boasted descent not only from the Rabbis of the Pulvermacher family but also from Saul Wahl, the legendary One-Day King of Poland. Born on the Continent in 1743, he settled in London in early manhood, becoming known as Moses Samuel. Here, after beginning in a small way of business in Rag Fair, he ultimately prospered exceedingly; was a leading member of the Great Synagogue, its Warden from 1794 onwards, and its representative on the Board of Deputies; was partly instrumental in the acquisition of the new cemetery in Brady Street, where he lies buried; and built a synagogue for the diminutive congregation in Bath, where he went to take the waters. When he died in 1839, at the ripe old age of 97, his legacies included one of £1,500 to the Great Synagogue for distributing among the poor, each year before Passover, clothing of brown material and (in the case of the men) with "covered buttons". (This sartorial regulation, incidentally, is no longer obeyed.) His brother David, who preceded him to England, was also a stalwart worker for the congregation, a Warden in 1784-6, and one of the Vestry when the present Great Synagogue was constructed.



Moses Samuel, 1741-1839 (from an oil painting by H. Paton)

Moses Samuel married a member of another interesting Great Synagogue family--Rachel, sister of Phineas ben Uri, or Phineas Phillips, Hofjud to the Prince of Thurn and Taxis, for whom he used to bring back a variety of commodities (including on one occasion a magnificent consignment of Dutch bulbs) from the Leipzig fairs. In 1775 he paid his first visit to England, where he traded in indigo and gum. He was doubly connected with the Samuel family, his wife being a sister of Moses Samuel's. At the time of his death in 1822 his sons were already settled in England, one of them having been admitted a member of the Great Synagogue in 1804. Phineas Phillips was the grandfather of Sir Benjamin Samuel Phillips, Lord Mayor of London in 1865/6, and great-grandfather of Sir George Faudel-Phillips, Lord Mayor in 1896/7. From the marriage between Moses Samuel and Rachel Phillips a brood of children were born, who played a very important part in the affairs of the Synagogue and the community in general, married into the élite of Anglo-Jewish society, and are the ancestors of many outstanding titled families of the present day.

Another family, intimately concerned with the Great Synagogue, calls for mention if only because of the long duration of its association. Samuel Joseph (Meshullam Zamel b. Joseph Hollander), admitted a member in 1773/4 and Treasurer in 1780, was elected a warden of the congregation in 1786/7 and remained in office for nearly twenty years. His entire existence was bound up in its welfare and that of the charitable institutions of London Jewry. His son, Joseph Joseph, followed in his steps, and was Parnas in 1822/3; later, his grandson Simon Joseph in turn filled the same dignity. The family was also associated, generation after generation, with the Meshebat Naphesh, or Bread, Meat and Coal Charity, founded in 1779, of which one of its remoter descendants, Gerald B. Joseph, is Secretary at the present time, more than one hundred and sixty years after his ancestor collaborated in its foundation. The Congregation still has in use a Scroll of the Law, with all appurtenances, presented to it by Samuel Joseph in 1814, on the occasion of the Barmitzvah of his oldest grandson, Simeon Oppenheim, its later Secretary. (A poem especially written for the occasion by the Rabbi was chanted at the dedication.)8

Yet another family that came into prominence at the same time, and is still prominent in Anglo-Jewry, is that of Keyser, the first representative of which, Zusskind (i.e. Alexander) ben

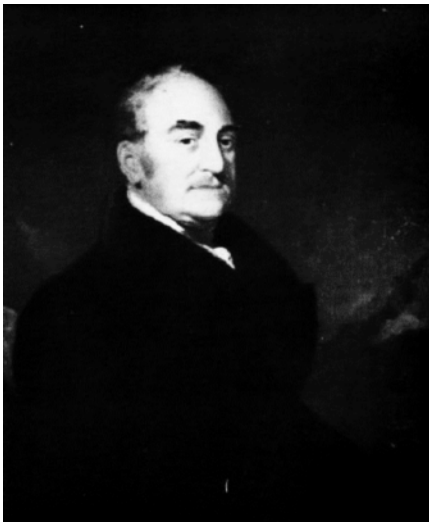
Jacob Isaac Keyser was member of the Great Synagogue towards the middle of the eighteenth century. A kinsman of his, Eliezer Isaac Keyser, born in 1746, came over from Amsterdam early in life, was admitted a member in 1778/9, and was Warden at the time of the rebuilding, when he represented the Congregation on the Board of Deputies. In his old age, he retired to the quasi-rural calm of Hampstead, where he died in 1820. A number of letters which he wrote hence to his kinsfolk in Leyton, the family of his late cousin Assur Keyser, have been preserved. They present a curious picture of this first Jew in Hampstead, well-liked by his Gentile neighbours but forced to go to the City for Jewish contacts and observances, until advancing years forced him to remain behind even on Passover and Day of Atonement: " the poor Jew alone and only regretted my not being amongst the Congregation at Synagogue. But, thank God, I did not omit one word all day from my prayers." Before this, he had regarded it his special prerogative to chant the Aramaic hymn Yatzib Pitgam and the Haphtarah in the Great Synagogue on the second day of Pentecost, and on his visits to Town had always made a point of calling upon "Dr." Hirschell.

Ark Curtain (presented by Eliezer Keyser on the reopening of the Synagogue, 1790)

From the genealogical point of view, the outstanding figure in the Congregation at this time was Levi son of Baruch (Behrend) Cohen, a member of a very distinguished family of Amersfoort, in Holland, one of whom saved the life of the Stadtholder William V. It was in the third quarter of the century that Levi Barent Cohen, as he was called, came to London. He is first mentioned in the Great Synagogue records in 1773, and before long was established as a linen merchant in a large way in Castle Street, Bevis Marks. He was tremendously pious, as well as wealthy, and there is still preserved his correspondence with the erudite Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, of Prague, whom he asked whether it was permissible to open an umbrella on the Sabbath. He filled in succession all the administrative offices of the Synagogue, being a member of the Vestry when the new building was constructed and Presiding Warden for the first time in 1794. He was twice married, to two sisters--Fanny and Lydia, daughters of Joseph Diamantschleifer of Amsterdam. While his own career had been commonplace though solid, that of his descendants was brilliant: with the result that many of the families most active in Anglo-Jewish life since that time trace their descent to him. It is enough to mention that one of his daughters married Sir Moses Montefiore (it was this match that broke down the traditional opposition to intermarriage between Sephardim and Ashkenazim) and another Nathan Mayer Rothschild (it was considered a great triumph for that enterprising young business-man, not long since arrived from Germany): that one of his great-grandchildren was the first Lady Swaythling: that for seventy years or more the English bar has seldom lacked a distinguished lawyer bearing his name: and that the history of the Cohen family during the nineteenth century and after has been the history of the basic institutions of the Anglo-Jewish community, and particularly the London community, as a whole.9

The most prominent family of all--that of Goldsmid--has been left to the last. According to the current works of reference, blindly following an unscientific biographer of more than a century ago, its founder, Aaron Goldsmid emigrated to London from Amsterdam in 1763. In that case, his rise would have been extraordinarily rapid, and his children, who were to cut such a figure in London life, all of foreign birth. But in point of fact this is not the case, and the arrival of the family in England is to be antedated by some twenty years. Aaron, son of Baruch Segal (i.e. Levy) of Amsterdam, known as Aaron Goldsmit (Goldsmid), regularly figures in the congregational records from 1747 at the latest; in 1751 he was elected Warden, in conjunction

with Moses Hart: and on his death in 1782 he left the Synagogue a legacy of £144 to maintain a perpetual light. For the best part of a century, the history of the family and that of the Great Synagogue are inseparable: and all his four sons played an important role in its affairs. George or Gershom, the eldest, who entered into partnership with his father in the firm of Goldsmid and Eliason, was admitted a member in 1766/7. Abraham, the friend of Lord Nelson, whose financial genius was of inestimable benefit to the English treasury in the Napoleonic Wars, and who at one time was instrumental in settling a long-standing dispute between The Times and the Post Office, followed in 1782/3. Asher, of Mansell Street, Goodman's Fields (who became one of the twelve Jew Brokers in 1772) qualified in 1769/7; he was the father of Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, the first Anglo-Jewish baronet and a doughty fighter for Jewish emancipation, himself Parnas in 1821. Baruch or Benjamin, the youngest of the family, Abraham's partner and (among his many charitable activities, famous among Gentiles as among Jews) a founder of the Naval Asylum, joined the others in 1789/90. Though he was better known than any of his brothers in English society, his Jewish sympathies were no less warm than theirs. In his mansion at Roehampton, an apartment was fitted up for use as a synagogue; and on his estate he appropriated a piece of ground for the Chief Rabbi, so that he might grow his own wheat and make his own flour for the Unleavened Bread for Passover. All the brothers in turn served the Great Synagogue in executive offices. George Goldsmid led the way, being Gabbai Zedakah from 1782 to 1784, when he was elected Parnas in conjunction with David Samuel. The London Chronicle of October 4th, 1785, reports how there had recently taken place a meeting of the "principal Rulers, Elders, and Governors" of the Congregation for the purpose of making the elections for the following year, and that the "conduct and management" of the two during the past twelve months had elicited such approval that they were unanimously reappointed.



Levi Barent Cohen, 1740-1808 (from an oil painting by G. Harlow)

In the wake of Wolf Liepman, founder of the Westminster Synagogue, there had come over from Vienna to London his two nephews, the sons of Samuel Pressburg, the affluent Austrian banker and Government agent. One of this couple was to play a very important part in London life in his day. This was R. Leib Pressburg, to give him the Synagogue name, known in the outside world as Baron Lyon de Symons, of Great Prescott Street, Goodman's Fields, and Lower Tooting. A wealthy diamond-merchant, he was active at quite an early date in the affairs of the Great Synagogue, and his exertions in 1785 in conjunction with Rabbi Tevele Schiff, on behalf of a Jewish boy who had got into trouble, show clearly that he enjoyed valuable society connexions and influence. Indeed, "Mr. de Simon", with his uncle Wolf Liepman, Mr. (Aaron?) Franks and Mr. Moses Zunz, "at Mr. Salter's the grocer corner, in Pulteny Street", together with Mr. d'Almeida in Took's Court, Chancery Lane, and an Italian Jewish 'cellist named Graziani, were among the persons whose names Mozart's father noted down as useful connexions when he brought his son to London in 1764. Lyon de Symons married a daughter of Aaron Goldsmid's, served in all the executive offices of the Great Synagogue, and for some years before his death in 1814 was one of the outstanding characters of London Jewry. With his Continental experience and his passion for organisation, he took a leading part in many of the reforms which were to take place in these years.

The Van Oven family, if of lower social status than some of these, was little less prominent, and probably more useful, in the affairs of the community. Dr. Abraham (ben Joshua) van Oven,10 who had graduated at Leyden in 1759, emigrated not long after to London and was admitted a member of the Great Synagogue in 1764/5. Before long, he enjoyed a considerable practice and played an important part in the life of the community, being appointed its physician (as we have seen) in 1767.11 "Reb Avrom", as he was called, with his gold-headed cane and scarlet cloak

(the regular physician's garb in those days) was a familiar and beloved figure in the London Ghetto. He was a good Hebrew scholar, translating into the sacred tongue not only a moralising work like Robert Dodsley's Oeconomy of Human Life, but also Congreve's Mourning Bride--the latter, fortunately, remaining unpublished. One of his sons, Dr. Joshua van Oven (1766-1838) surgeon to the Great Synagogue, was the leading spirit in most of the reforms and many of the fresh departures in the Anglo-Jewish community during Hirschell's rabbinate. His son in turn, Dr. Barnard van Oven (1796-1860), appointed physician to the Great Synagogue in 1827, worked hard for the emancipation of the Jews in England, published more than one pamphlet in connexion with this, and was principally responsible for the establishment of the Jews' Infant Schools. His son again, Lionel van Oven, was active in the community down to the time of his death in 1905. It is a fine record of family service extending over nearly a century and a half: memorable, but in the history of the Great Synagogue by no means unique.

Ark Curtain (Presented by Aaron Joseph, 1798)

Notes Chapter Thirteen

1 The detail is added that the new incumbent was son of a former High Priest, and that his salary was to be £4,000 a year--a gross exaggeration. The name Hart=Hirsch=Hirschell: the degree is imaginary.

2 [This was written in 1940.]

3 In return for the right to have their own conventicle, the Polish Synagogue made an annual contribution of £25 to the Great Synagogue, though in 1797 they found themselves unable to pay owing to the influx of poor from abroad. The former agreement was renewed on October 26th, 1813.

4 Above, p. 86.

5 Reb Arons' colleagues on the Beth Din at the close of Solomon Hirschell's life were R. Azriel ben David (Levy), Aryeh Judah ben Issachar of Krotoschin (A. L. Barnett, 1797-1878), Ze'eb Wolf Gollin of Lissa and Enoch Zundel of Jerusalem.

6 The official designation was Shamash: he combined the functions of Secretary with some of those of Beadle and Assistant Reader, the former however becoming more important with the years.

7 See below, p. 275. As Beadles of the Great Synagogue, three successive generations of the Davis family later served, one after the other: a breast-plate for the Scroll of the Law was presented to the Synagogue in 1874 in memory of the last of them, Abraham Davis.

8 Other donations of this period included a silver Kiddush goblet from Baruch Friedeberg, 1806, and a copper poor-box from Jacob Friedeberg, 1807.

9 It may be noted as a point of interest that Levi Barent Cohen's seat in the Great Synagogue remained in the occupation of his descendants until the present generation. On his death it was taken over by his son, Joseph Cohen, then in turn by his son, Louis Cohen, then by his son, Lionel Louis Cohen (see pp. 172-3, 285, 287), then by his brother, Alfred Louis Cohen, and finally by his son, George Alfred Cohen, who died in 1942.

10 i.e. "Of Ofen" in Hungary, part of the modern Budapest. The family was Sephardi, or rather Italian, in origin, Joshua van Oven's father being a certain Samuel Basan.

11 Another physician who belonged to the congregation at this time was Jacob Canstatt, of Mannheim, who subscribed to the Midrash Phineas in 1735 (as also did Naphtali ben Moses, of the New Synagogue, known as "Dr. Cerf"). The former was probably father or grandfather of the communal physician of 70 years later: see p. 275.

Chapter XIV
THE SYNAGOGUE AND THE NATION 1792-1815

THE French Revolution and the long war with France inevitably led to an anti-alien agitation in England. As always in times of disturbance the Jews were foremost among the sufferers. In the winter of 1792/31 an Aliens Act was passed through Parliament, giving the government strict control over the movement of foreigners in the country. While it was under discussion, the Wardens of the Portuguese Synagogue ordered their acting Rabbi to preach a sermon insisting upon the duty of Jews to show their devotion to the King and Constitution: and the Wardens of the Great Synagogue were informed of this in the hope that the example would be followed, as doubtless it was. But the anti-foreign agitation did not slacken. Five and a half years later, in July 1798, the Wardens of the City Synagogues were summoned before the Lord Mayor, who informed them that he had been ordered to procure a return of all aliens in the City within three weeks, and Jews not conforming to these instructions would be liable to imprisonment and transportation.

In consequence of this, a meeting of the Honorary Officers of the Ashkenazi synagogues was held at the Anti-Gallican Coffee House shortly after, under the chairmanship of Abraham Goldsmid, and it was resolved to draw up a register of all members, seat-holders, past seat-holders and their servants. It is a pity that these lists, which must have contained much useful historical and especially genealogical information, are no longer to be traced. This ill wind nevertheless blew some persons good: for the Secretary of the Great Synagogue received £10 for his work, his assistant £6, and the door-keeper £5 5s.

When after a brief truce war again broke out with Napoleon in 1802, and volunteers were enrolled throughout the country to meet the threatened invasion, Jews in large numbers offered their services as a matter of course. It is said that on one occasion, when a general review of the newly-enrolled force was held in Hyde Park, George III was very much struck at the number of animal names (Bear, Wolf, Lion, and so on) in one of the East End regiments, largely Jewish in composition. At the time of their enrolment, however, there had been a certain difficulty. On October 19th, a solemn fast had been observed, large numbers of volunteers paraded the City, and ten regiments went to Church for Divine service. The corps who had not already taken the oath did so now, and three hundred Jews, of good family, were among their number. A contemporary news-sheet gives an account of their difficulty:

By an order from their High Priest they were prohibited from attending in our churches during the time of Divine Service. The High Priest, however, expressed his highest concurrence to their taking the oaths of fidelity and allegiance to our king and country. These gentlemen accordingly took the oaths, either upon the drilling-grounds of their respective corps, or in the vestry-room of the churches, as circumstances required. They were sworn upon the Book of Leviticus instead of the New Testament.

The call for service continued: and on August 15th, 1803, Rabbi Hirschell--not long since arrived in England--preached in the Great Synagogue on the duty of taking up arms in defence of the

country, though insisting at the same time that the ritual precepts of Judaism (such as the observance of the Sabbath) should not be neglected save in emergency.

The services of Jews were not confined to the home front. There is ample evidence that they figured to a far greater extent than has hitherto been imagined in the armed forces of the crown overseas. Thus, a member of the Goldsmid family, later a Major-General, fought as a cornet at Waterloo and had two horses shot under him; while another, Lieutenant in the 58th regiment, died when his ship went down with all hands on the way to Canada in 1814. In order to obtain the King's commission, they had to abandon or conceal their faith. In the rank and file, however, this did not apply--not, at least, as a legal necessity--and a number of Ashkenazi Jews are known to have served both in the army and navy. Of this, a curious record is preserved among the muniments of the Great Synagogue. For the purposes of the ceremony of Halitzah, it was customary to record the name of the eldest brother of the bridegroom at the time of his marriage, which was generally entered at the back of the Ketubah. The details given are sometimes very illuminating. "His brothers are at sea, in the King's ships", runs one entry; and another (dated 1809, and referring in all probability to the Peninsular War), "His brother is on the Expedition".

But the War period was not, in the days before the instruments of destruction had attained their present diabolical perfection, one of unrelieved anxiety, and during these years there took place some of the most picturesque episodes in the Great Synagogue's history. On Friday, April 10th, 1801, the sacred place was visited by the Duke of Gloucester, the King's brother (whose Duchess is said to have been a niece of Hannah Norsa, the famous Jewish actress). This was the first time that a member of the Royal family is recorded to have been present in a London synagogue since the seventeenth century, when the future Queen Anne was entertained by the Spanish and Portuguese community. The memory of this episode was, however, overwhelmed by another eight years later. The Goldsmid brothers were on very intimate terms with the Royal Dukes, the sons of George III, who enjoyed their company and their hospitality. (There was one classical occasion when the Duke of Sussex drove back from Abraham's house at Morden in the same carriage with Hymon the famous pastry-cook, disguised for the journey as a distinguished foreigner.) One day, in the spring of 1809, the Wardens of the Great Synagogue were surprised and flattered to receive the following letter, from one of the most respected members:

Abraham Goldsmid, 1756-1810

No: 27, Finsbury Square,
March 30 1809.
To the Gentlemen Parnassim of the Great Synagogue, Messrs. Samuel Joseph, Asher Goldsmid and Joseph Cohen.

Gentlemen:
Their Royal Highnesses the Dukes of Cambridge and Cumberland having signified to me their intention of visiting the Synagogue on Friday evening, the 14th of April next, pray give me leave to ask if it will be agreeable to you, gentlemen, to receive them on that day, which will oblige him who has the honour to subscribe himself,

Your most obedient and humble servant,
Abraham Goldsmid.

Great preparations were now made in Duke's Place. A special order of service was compiled, with verses composed for the occasion by Michael Joseph, the communal poetaster, otherwise known as Meir Königsberg (some copies were printed on silk for distribution among the guests of honour). The Rabbi and Wardens went out to greet the visitors, who were accompanied by

their brother, the Duke of Sussex, later to make himself known as a student of Hebrew and champion of Jewish rights. Their path, as they alighted from their carriages, was strewn with flowers by a bevy of beautiful children (one of them was Simeon Oppenheim, subsequently Secretary to the congregation). As they entered, at the close of the afternoon service, their advent was greeted by the chanting by a specially-augmented choir of a florid introductory stanza, which had been rendered into English verse:

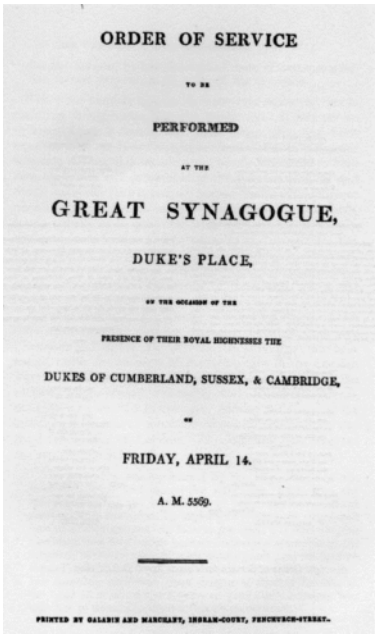
Open wide the gates for the princely train
The Heav'n-blessed offspring of our King
Whilst our voices raise the emphatic strain
And God's service devout we sing.

Within the sacred precincts, new hangings of crimson velvet attracted attention. They had been presented for the occasion by one Nathan Mayer Rothschild, the rising young financier not long since arrived in London from Frankfort via Manchester, and already well known in financial circles. Between the hymns for the inauguration of the Sabbath and the evening service there was interposed a choral rendering of the Prayer for the Royal family--"He Who giveth salvation unto Kings"--followed by Michael Joseph's ode, which concluded in a highly patriotic strain:

Raise, raise the voice; let congregations sing
With elevated shout, long live the King.

For many years after, down almost to the close of the century, London Jews used to tell of this occasion, and old men who were then members of the choir would hum the tunes which they had sung on that historic night. It is better to allow a contemporary journalist to describe the scene as it appeared to the outside world:

Yesterday, at half past six o'clock, the Dukes of Cumberland, Sussex and Cambridge attended the Great Synagogue in Duke's Place to witness the Hebrew form of worship. The preparation made to receive the princes evidenced the loyalty of the Jewish people, and the spectacle was magnificent and most solemn. The Synagogue was most suitably decorated on the occasion. The seats on each side were raised and the pulpit in the centre was adorned by crimson and gold. A space between the pulpit and the ark was appropriated to the Royal Dukes and the Nobility, who stood on a rich platform with four beautiful Egyptian chairs and stands for their books, flowers, etc. The Synagogue was brilliantly illuminated by chandeliers. The High Priest, Rabbi Hirschell, in his sacerdotal habit displayed unusual magnificence: he was dressed in a robe of white satin of considerable value and ordered expressly for him by Abraham Goldsmid, Esq. The Royal Dukes arrived in the carriage of Mr. Goldsmid, and their own carriages followed with several ladies of distinction. The singing was excellent and the Royal Dukes appeared much gratified by the Choruses. When the Ark was opened to take out the Five Books of Moses the Princes were conducted by Mr. Goldsmid to view the interior, at which they expressed great satisfaction, the structure being grand and beautiful. The galleries were crowded with beautiful Jewesses who attracted much the attention of the Royal Party. After the service, the Royal Dukes drove to the mansion of Mr. A. Goldsmid, where a sumptuous entertainment was provided, which was followed by a grand concert.


ORDER OF SERVICE

TO BE

PERFORMED

AT THE

GREAT SYNAGOGUE,

DUKE'S PLACE,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

PRESENCE OF THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES THE

DUKES OF CUMBERLAND, SUSSEX, & CAMBRIDGE,

ON

FRIDAY, APRIL 14.

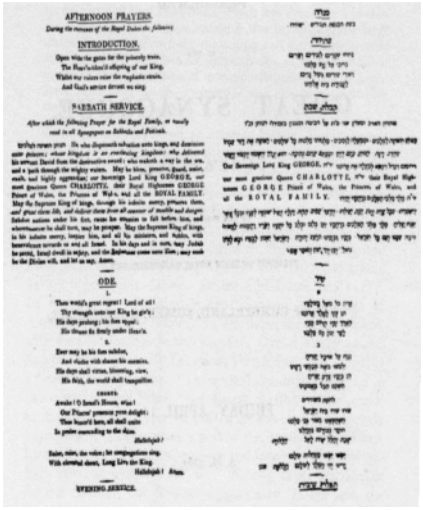
A. M. 5569.

PRINTED BY GALABIN AND MARCHANT, INGRAM-COURT, FENCHURCH-STREET.

Order of Service on Visit of Royal Dukes, 1809

There is an interesting pictorial souvenir of this flamboyant episode. Rowlandson published a satirical caricature on the event. The three princes are shown with dummy heads inscribed " Cumberland Lead", "Cambridge Buttur" [sic] and " Suffolk [sic]

Cheese ", and are being received by five individuals intended to represent Jewish ministers of religion, bearing books and a lighted candelabrum, who greet them with the words: "'Welcome, thrice Welcome Bretheren to the Synagogue".2



AFTERNOON PRAYERS

INTRODUCTION.

SABBATH SERVICE.

ODE.

EVENING SERVICE.

Caricature on Visit of the Royal Dukes, 1809

The visit of the Royal Dukes was not the only excitement in the Great Synagogue in 1809. A short while after that event a mishap occurred which would have been more than unfortunate had it coincided with the other episode. In the Radical Sunday newspaper, The News (published at 8d. per copy, of which 31/2d. was paid as newspaper tax!), we read in the issue of July 30th, 1809:

The inhabitants of Duke's Place were some evenings since much alarmed by a loud crash, which was distinctly heard in the Synagogue. On examination it was found that the large chandelier had fallen from the ceiling and done considerable damage to the benches &c. beneath it. Had this accident occurred during the time of worship, the consequences might have been fatal, as the chandelier was one of considerable weight, having 400 burners.

This was, in every sense, an internal matter. But there was much external excitement at the time as well, owing to what was termed the "O.P. Riots". The new Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, had recently been rebuilt at enormous expense, and the price of seats had been increased. In consequence, for some weeks on end, disorders took place at every performance; there were free fights in the auditorium, and little could be heard by those who had the courage to attend except a persistent clamour for the Old Prices, or "O.P.". In desperation, the management engaged a number of bruisers to tackle the ringleaders. Of these, the most redoubtable were the famous Jewish pugilists, Daniel Mendoza and Samuel Elias, generally known as Dutch Sam and probably a Great Synagogue boy. "On several evenings," we read in the contemporary Press, "the disapprobation of the people at the presence of these sons of Israel has been humorously expressed by cries from every part of the house of old clothes, hare skins or rabbit skins, oranges and lemons, rollers for the hair, any bad shillings &c. &c." Among those responsible for the disorder, too, Jews were prominent. In the end, the Synagogue itself had to take action and in October, The News published the following notice:

The Rev. Solomon Hirschell, High Priest of the Jewish Synagogue, has caused 100 itinerant Jews to be struck off the charity list, for six months, for making a noise at the Covent Garden Theatre; he has also warned them of excommunication, in case they should be guilty of the like again.

There was another time in the same year when the much-enduring Rabbi came into the public eye. It was on an occasion when a certain Mr. John Isaacs, who had been expelled from the New Synagogue for misconduct, forced his way past the bar and assaulted the beadle who tried to

keep him back. He was prosecuted at the London sessions and found guilty: for (as was pointed out) no matter what religious persuasion was in question, or what doctrine was held forth, it was equally to be protected with the established church, while tolerated by the mild government of the country. The Court, we are told in the newspaper reports, was crowded with Jewish people: and "the Jewish High Priest, dressed in his robes, attended by several of the Elders, sat on the Bench."

Another event associated with the Great Synagogue at this time illustrated the growing cordiality between Jews and Christians in London. On October 7th, 1812, there was celebrated under the auspices of the Synagogue in the London Tavern the marriage of Joseph Abrahams, one of the earliest Anglo-Jewish attorneys, and Elizabeth Myers, daughter of a wealthy fishmonger. Among the guests, to the spiteful amusement of some contemporary caricaturists, was the Lord Mayor of London. The Morning Post reported the proceedings at length:

The ceremony was performed by the High Priest of the Jews with great and interesting solemnity. Soon after the marriage, dinner was announced, at which the Lord Mayor presided with that affability and dignity which distinguished him upon all occasions. As soon as the cloth was removed, his Lordship, in a very happy manner, called the attention of the company to the occasion of their meeting and gave for the first toast--"Health and Happiness to the Bride and Bridegroom". His Lordship expressed great delight at finding himself at the head of so numerous a party of Jews and Christians met together in friendship upon so happy an occasion.

These were rare interludes of colour in a protracted period of stress, which affected the Jews no less than their neighbours. Special services in the Synagogue (the rituals for which were usually printed) faithfully reflect every phase of national anxiety and national glory in those crowded years. Hart Lyon had preached at special services of intercession in London as long back as 1759/60. But the earliest held at the Great Synagogue of which there is definite indication is that of February 11th, 1757, "in Pursuance of His Majesty's proclamation for a general fast and humiliation". The order of service on this occasion was published for use "in the Jews' Synagogues in London"; it was not, therefore, like earlier examples, for the Sephardim only, and was presumably recited in the Great Synagogue too. In George III's eventful reign, such services were held at frequent intervals. Thus a newspaper-cutting records how on November 15th, 1788

...at the great Jews' Synagogue, St. James's, Duke's Place, after ordinary service on Saturday evening, prayers were offered up by a most respectable audience for the health of our most gracious sovereign. The service was as follows: The reader of the Synagogue said the blessing for the offering for his Majesty's speedy recovery, when every one present offered according to their abilities; after which the Psalms were chanted by the High Priest and the congregation in alternate verses. The first letters of the verses from the word Melech, King. The Ark being opened, the Priest delivered, in a most solemn manner, the ... prayer composed by him for the occasion.

Six months later (March 1789) the congregation could meet in a happier atmosphere:

At the great Jews' Synagogue, St. James's, Duke's Place, on Saturday last, after reading the law, a public Thanksgiving was read by a numerous and respectable congregation, for the happy restoration of his Majesty's health. The service was as follows: First, the reader and Congregation, with the children of the charity schools, chaunted the 107th Psalm. After which a form of Thanksgiving, composed by the High Priest, Rabbi. David Shiff, was solemnly read; of which the following is an exact translation;--"Altho' our mouths were filled with song as the sea, it is not in our power sufficiently to thank and praise the Lord our God, and the God of our Fathers, for all the miracles and wonders which he has wrought for us from the time that he was pleased to make choice of us from among all nations; he brought us into a desirable and goodly land; and after that he caused us to be removed from thence, carried [us] into captivity, and scattered us to the uttermost corners of the earth, and the isles of the sea, for our manifold sins and transgressions; yet he was pleased to inspire the hearts of the Kings and Princes in whose

dominions we dwelt, with benevolence, by extending their mercy, grace and favour unto us, so that we dwell safely under the shadow of their wings; for all which favours we are not ungrateful, but in return, do continually offer up our prayers and supplications to the Supreme Being for their peace and welfare. And, on this present day, will we give great thanks and praise unto God, for that he hath been graciously pleased to bring us forth from darkness unto light, in that he was entreated of us by our prayers, and hath sent a perfect cure from the highest Heaven unto our Sovereign Lord, and pious King George the Third, (whose glory he shall exalt) and hath enabled him to resume the reins of government, so as to be able to govern his people with mercy, kindness, and paternal tenderness, as in time past; for which we thus thankfully acknowledge the Lord's goodness. And now, with our hands spread forth unto our Father, who is in heaven, we pray, that our Lord the King may thus continue in health, may he never know sickness or pain any more, but [to] spend his days in peace and happiness, and enjoy a good old age. In his days and in ours may Judah and Israel be saved, and dwell in peace and safety. Amen.

A
FORM OF PRAYER AND
THANKSGIVING TO THE ALMIGHTY GOD,
FOR HIS
PROVIDENTIAL CARE IN THE PRESERVATION
OF THE KING'S MAJESTY
FROM THE LATE OUTRAGIOUS AND DESPERATE ATTEMPT
AGAINST HIS PERSON,
AS HE PASSED TO THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE,
On Thursday, the Twenty-Ninth Day of October,
A.M. The Seventeenth Day of the Jewish Month Cheswon.
TO BE USED AT
MORNING AND EVENING SERVICE,
IN THE GERMAN JEWS SYNAGOGUES,
In LONDON
COMPOSED IN HEBREW, BY THE
Rev. MOSES MYERS,
AND TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH, By D. LEVI.
AUTHOR of LINGUA SACRA, &c.
Printed by D. LEVI, Great Street, Mile End New Town.
Anno Mundi 5556.

סדר תפלה
בלונדון

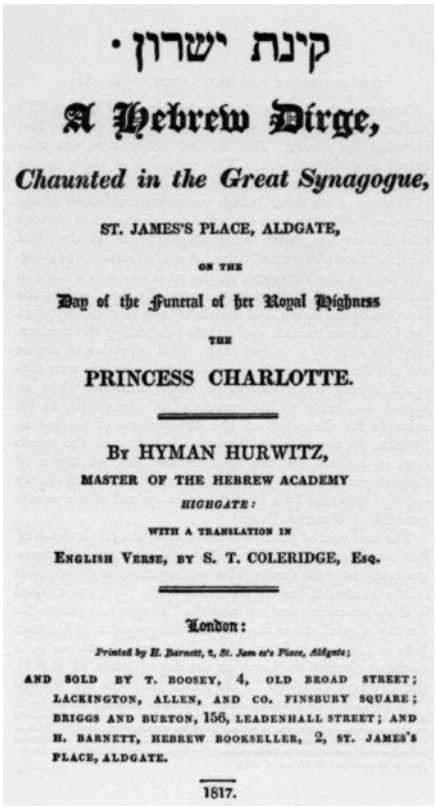
Thanksgiving Service on Royal Escape, 1795

In the following April, David Levi, the erudite hat-maker of Mile End and scholar-in-ordinary to the community, composed the "Form of prayer and thanksgiving for the happy restoration of His Majesty's health, to be read in the Great Synagogue" (though on this occasion, it seems that this title was arrogated by the rival place of worship in Magpie Alley), and on April 13th, 1793, a special service was held on the occasion of the public fast ordered by the King in view of the parlous state of public affairs. A dramatic, and nearly tragic event of 1795 evoked the " Form of prayer and Thanksgiving to Almighty God for His Providential Care in the preservation of the King's Majesty from the late outrageous and desperate attempt against his person, as he passed to the Parliament House, on Thursday, the twenty-ninth day of October." The triumphant news of the Battle of the Nile has its echo in the "Form of Prayer, Praise, Thanksgiving and Laud; to be chanted in the German Jews' Synagogues in London... on Thursday the 29th day of November 1798, being... the day that His Majesty our gracious Sovereign... commanded to give thanks and praise to Almighty God who is tremendous in works... for the great success of Admiral Nelson; his officers, pilots and seamen on board the ships of our Sovereign Lord the King." The restoration of peace by the Treaty of Amiens, and the subsequent reopening of hostilities, are reflected in a "Command Thanksgiving", and "Psalms read at a public fast", and "Form of Prayer for the success of the British arms". The great victory of Trafalgar was celebrated by an identical service at all the London synagogues, and we have, in English, Rabbi Solomon Hirschell's sermon preached in celebration of the "success of His Majesty's Fleet under Lord Nelson, off Trafalgar"--the first address delivered in the Great Synagogue to be published. It breathed, according to the Gentleman's Magazine, "a strain of true piety, a great loyalty and universal benevolence": and it ended with an appeal on behalf of the Patriotic Fund, which had recently been inaugurated. On this occasion, too, another member of the community, Nathan Isaac Vallentine, of Breslau (father of the publisher) produced in Hebrew and English an original composition, Mishbere Yam, "the discourse of the three sisters, respecting the fall and murder of Admiral Nelson".

"Chair of Elijah", 1809 (cushions, 1844)

October 29th, 1809, marked the beginning of George III's jubilee year, for it was on that date in 1760 that he had ascended the throne. This Biblical celebration was celebrated in a Biblical spirit. The remission of debts in the fiftieth year was not overlooked, and the Great Synagogue,

in common with other Jewish congregations, raised a subscription for the fund for the relief and discharge of persons who in accordance with the harsh practice at the time had been imprisoned for small debts. A special service was moreover held in the Synagogue on the great day, at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. A Hebrew prayer, specially composed for the occasion by the Rabbi, and translated into English by Joshua van Oven, was recited: and an ode celebrating the anniversary was sung by a trained choir. This collection of course was not the only one of these years. Subscriptions were also raised among the members on other occasions when an appeal was made to the generosity of the public, as for example for the relief of the devastations of famine in Sweden, for the sufferers through the failure of the potato crop in Ireland, for the maintenance and assistance of English prisoners of war in France, and after the final victory--duly celebrated by a special service--in aid of the newly-established Waterloo Fund.3 The first year of peace was clouded by the tragic death of Princess Charlotte, the Prince Regent's daughter and heiress-presumptive to the throne. The congregation, on the occasion of the Memorial Service on Kislev 10th, 1817, was clothed in deep mourning and we have the "Prayer and psalms for the day of grief, consecrated by the Congregation of German Jews in London and throughout England, to pour out their complaint before the Lord, on the day of burial of H.R.H. the Princess Charlotte": on which occasion the learned Hyman Hurwitz (master of the fashionable Jewish school at Highgate) produced "Mourn the Bright Rose': A Hebrew Dirge... chaunted in the Great Synagogue, St. James's Place, on the day of the funeral of our Beloved Princess," which was sung to the tune of a famous Ninth of Ab elegy and translated into English verse by no less a person than Samuel Taylor Coleridge.4 And the end of the long reign of George III, with all its triumphs and its disappointments, was marked by "Prayer and Psalms for the day of assembly devoted to mourning by the Congregation of German Jews... The day of burial of King George III." A fresh era was now to open.



קינת ישרון.

A Hebrew Dirge,

Chaunted in the Great Synagogue,

ST. JAMES'S PLACE, ALDGATE,

ON THE

Day of the Funeral of her Royal Highness

THE

PRINCESS CHARLOTTE.

By HYMAN HURWITZ,

MASTER OF THE HEBREW ACADEMY

HIGHGATE:

WITH A TRANSLATION IN

ENGLISH VERSE, BY S. T. COLERIDGE, Esq.

London:

Printed by H. Barnett, 2, St. James's Place, Aldgate;

AND SOLD BY T. BOOSEY, 4, OLD BROAD STREET; LACKINGTON, ALLEN, AND CO. FINSBURY SQUARE; BRIGGS AND BURTON, 156, LEADENHALL STREET; AND H. BARNETT, HEBREW BOOKSELLER, 2, ST. JAMES'S PLACE, ALDGATE.

1817.

Poem on funeral of Princess Charlotte, 1817

Notes Chapter Fourteen

1 The control of foreigners was renewed with the hostilities. The London Chronicle of December 28th, 1803, contains an order from Mr. Secretary Yorke to the effect that all aliens desiring certificates were to be referred to the Aliens Office in Crown Court, with the exception of Jews, who were to apply at their synagogues.

2 This is not the only caricature in which Abraham Goldsmid and the Synagogue are associated. In association with the House of Baring, he contracted in the following year for the Government Loan of £14,000,000 (it was his last great operation, as he died, by his own hand, not long after). Cruickshank commemorated this in a drawing of the interior of the Great Synagogue, with a figure (intended for Goldsmid) reading from a book in front of the congregation. This rather spiteful effort, published anonymously, is entitled "Devotion in Duke's Place--or Contractors returning Thanks for a Loan".

3 At the time of the proclamation of peace Rabbi Hirschell was staying in Brighton, at a house in King's Road. The illumination which he displayed on this occasion--a large tree with four branches representing Austria, Prussia, Russia and France, united together at the root by England, and surrounded by Scriptural quotations in Hebrew and English--was exhibited at the Anglo-Jewish Historical exhibition of 1887.

4 This is the wording of the title-page of the edition with the musical accompaniment: the plate facing this page reproduces that of the ordinary edition.

Chapter XV
ADAPTATION AND REORGANISATION

THE Napoleonic Wars gave a stimulus to the evolution of an Anglo-Jewish community which was in the fuller sense of the word English. During the course of the long period of strain it increased in numbers, was consolidated through the cessation of immigration from abroad, became more anglicised; and some of its members began to play a part of real significance in the life of the country. These years, accordingly, witnessed the beginning of a process of adaptation, led by the Great Synagogue, by which the Jewish tradition received expression in a medium more acceptable to native-born English Jews and citizens of the modern world.

Signatures to new Takkanoth, 1791

The problems that exercised the community during Solomon Hirschell's Rabbinate were much the same as those of today--education, poor relief, Sabbath observance, synagogal decorum, the arrangements for the Kosher meat supply, and so on. Charitable organisation and the condition of the Jewish poor were the first matters to demand attention. From the close of the eighteenth century, a number of fresh institutions, conceived and regulated on English lines, began to make their appearance among the Ashkenazi community; and in their creation members of the Great Synagogue played an outstanding part. In 1778, there was established the Meshebat Naphesh, or Bread, Meat and Coal Charity--the first Ashkenazi institution of the sort, which is still doing admirable work after more than a century and a half of continuous activity. The roll of founders and list of early presidents comprise most of the leading congregational worthies of the time--the Cohens, Goldsmids, Van Ovens, Keysers, Josephs, and so on. Later, further institutions of this type were established in rapid succession--a Society for assisting the poor for their Sabbath Necessities (later known from the amount of the largess made available as the Five Shilling Sabbath Charity: 1798-1803), a Holy Land Relief Fund (1805), a Ladies' Benevolent Institution (1812), a Society for Clothing Poor Jewish Boys (1813), the Institution for the Relief of the Indigent Blind of the Jewish Persuasion (1819) and so on. In the winter of 1799/1800, Benjamin Goldsmid, supported by members of both sections of the community, took the chair at a meeting held to establish a Soup Kitchen (not the ancestor of the present institution of that name, which is a good deal more modern). The sum of £360 was speedily raised, several non-Jews being among the contributors; indeed, according to Levy Alexander it "would not have survived but for the support from Christian benevolence at Lloyds." By the year of Waterloo, thirty benevolent societies existed in the London Jewish community to look after the requirements of the poor.

In many cases, these institutions had their headquarters, as well as their inspiration, in the Great Synagogue. They were administered in the conventional fashion of the time, with occasional meetings of subscribers at the City taverns, anniversary dinners for the purpose of raising funds, and gargantuan libations of wine and spirits (from which the Readers and Beadles of the synagogues were, "from particular reasons", carefully excluded). Moreover, when the benefits

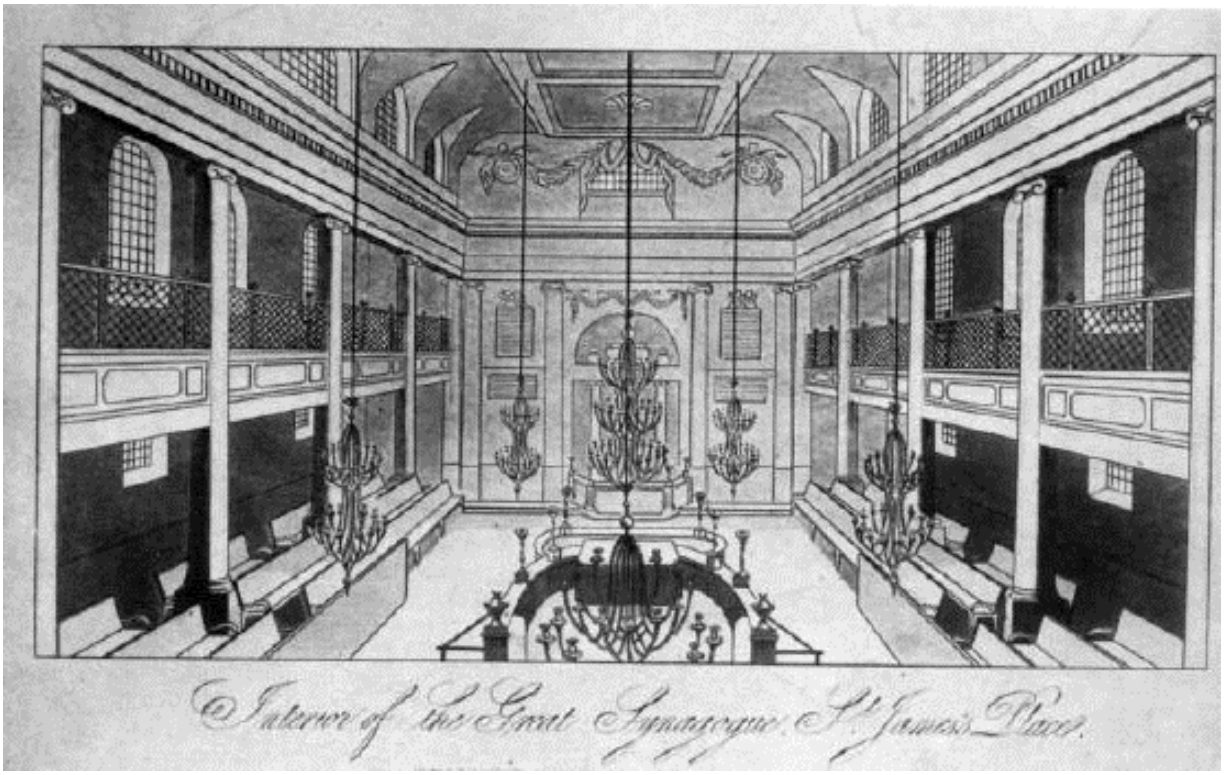
available were not sufficient for all the applicants, lots were drawn, specially made lottery-wheels being used for the purpose.1

In 1795, Abraham Goldsmid and his brother Benjamin launched an appeal for funds to establish a Hospital for the Ashkenazi community (the Sephardim were already amply provided for in this respect) for the purpose of housing the helpless poor and teaching honest trades to the children of the lower classes. Such was the esteem these two brothers enjoyed in the City that non-Jews contributed as eagerly as Jews. Within a few weeks, upwards of £11,000 had been raised from 87 well-wishers, no fewer than 41 of whom were Christians (a further £9,000 was added to this amount before long).

Joshua Van Oven, 1766-1838, Surgeon to the Synagogue (from an engraving)

While this collection was being made, there happened to be in the press a work on the Police of the Metropolis, written by Patrick Colquhoun, one of the metropolitan magistrates, which contained some extremely severe strictures on the Jews. Dr. Joshua van Oven, the Physician to the Great Synagogue, took up arms in defence of his co-religionists in an extraordinarily interesting pamphlet, in which he drew attention to the enormous difficulties which lay in the path of the Jews of the lower order who desired to earn an honest living. He pointed out, too, the almost unbearable burden of charity that the Community had to shoulder--especially his own body, the number of paupers dependent on which was practically unlimited, as "all strangers are customarily considered as attached to this congregation". As a constructive suggestion towards the solution of the problem, he put forward a daring scheme for the establishment by Act of Parliament of an institution for the relief and improvement of the condition of the Jewish poor. This was to be administered by a committee appointed by the Synagogues, and supported partly by congregational levies and a tax on incomes, and partly (the crux of the scheme lay in this audacious innovation) by appropriating the poor-rate paid by Jews in the parishes in which they lived, but not enjoyed by their own co-religionists owing to the proud tradition of the Anglo-Jewish community that their poor never became a burden on the public purse.

Van Oven's plan was approved by Colquhoun on the one hand and by Abraham Goldsmid on the other; and the Great Synagogue appointed a committee to discuss details with the other City congregations. It came to grief, however, owing to the opposition from two different quarters. In the first place, in deference to the views of the local parishes, it was decided that the provision to appropriate the poor-rate paid by Jews was unwise. Accordingly, that clause was omitted in the application to Parliament, though the Synagogues were still to have the power to tax their members for the upkeep of the proposed institution. A modified Bill on these lines was drawn up and placed in the hands of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. At this stage, opposition developed from the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, which claimed that under the scheme they would have to bear a disproportionate degree of the expense while enjoying only exiguous benefits, the pauper problem in its acute form affecting the "German" communities alone. The measure was accordingly redrafted so as to apply only to the latter: but the scheme was now so emasculated that it was hardly worth while to carry on with it any further and it was allowed to lapse. Abraham Goldsmid now fell back on his original project, and in 1805 there came into existence at last the "Jews' Hospital" (Neve Zedek), with a more limited scope, which was opened in Mile End as an Asylum and School with twenty-eight inmates (five old men, five old women, ten boys and eight girls).



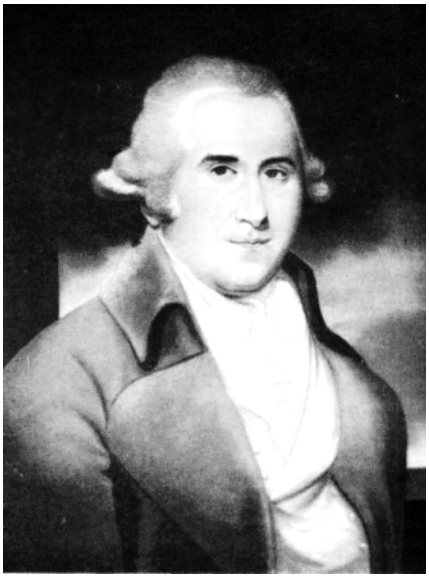
Interior of the Synagogue, early nineteenth century (frontispiece to Isaac Levi's edition of the Haggadah, 1831)

The Neve Zedek subsequently amalgamated with another institution, of romantically humble origin. In 1818, some of the less exalted members of the Great Synagogue established a body called Honen liYetomim "for educating and relieving the distressed fatherless". It seems to have been restricted in its application, and perhaps in its duration as well. In 1830, however, the great cholera epidemic brought home in a peculiarly poignant fashion the need for some such institution. A poor couple named Assenheim, husband and wife, died within a short time of one another, leaving three helpless children. There was at the time no provision for such cases. A poor cucumber-seller, Abraham Green, whose sense of pity was aroused, left his stall and went round the streets and private houses and shops in the Jewish quarter to find help. Carrying two of the children in his arms and leading the third by the hand, he appealed to his warm-hearted coreligionists until he had collected in his cucumber-bowl the nucleus of a maintenance fund. This was the origin of the Jews' Orphan Asylum, which attained permanent form largely through the enthusiasm of Green's brother-in-law, Isaac Vallentine (founder of the Jewish Chronicle and of the Calendars which still [1940] appear under his name every year, and son of the synagogue functionary who had published the "Discourse of the Three Sisters" on the occasion of the death of Nelson). This institution, at first situated in St. Mark's Street, Goodman's Fields, was subsequently merged with the Jews' Hospital, and as the Norwood Jewish Orphanage, with nearly a century and a half of magnificent activity behind it, is today regarded as a model Anglo-Jewish charity. Its association with the Great Synagogue, as long as it was still situated in its original home, was very close: and, in the right-hand corner near the entrance, there was a special pew reserved for the boys, into which they were marshalled unerringly at every service by their master.2

A perennial problem that calls for attention in the Jewish community is that of Shechita. In the first part of the eighteenth century this was completely uncontrolled in London. The Shochetim generally received authorisation from the Rabbis before they were allowed to practise, and ever since the time of Aaron Hart those of the provincial communities too had looked to Duke's Place for their authority. In 1764, during the interregnum that followed the retirement of Hart Lyon, an episode took place which accentuated the supremacy of the London Rabbinate. It was discovered that R. Leib the Scribe3 and R. Moses ben Uri Hamburger, the Shochet, had taken

advantage of the situation to license on their own authority certain youths to act as Shochetim. R. Moses moreover had given a similar licence to a certain Hirsch Mannheim, a resident of Plymouth and apparently the employee of the local community. The elected officers of the Great and Hambro' Synagogues, when they heard what had happened, took vigorous action. The culprits were punished by temporary suspension from office or restriction of activity: the lads were forbidden to practise until the new Rabbi had decided on the case: and Hirsch Mannheim, whose problem was more urgent, was to have his position regularised forthwith by the three official Shochetim of the London Ashkenazi community. The decision was made public by a proclamation in both Synagogues.

Of the early Shochetim attached to the Great Synagogue we know of a few in addition to the Moses mentioned above (who was in office between about 1750 and 1765): Mordecai Nathan (d. 1745?), Baruch Benedict, Meir, and Isaac (1759), and R. Treitel; while the earliest Kosher butchers whose names are recorded are Josele Butcher and Seligman Levy, called Mendel Butcher. Once they had received their licence to practise, however, there was no control over their activities except their own consciences, and as usual among Jewish communities there were recurrent quarrels. Even among the Sephardim conditions were far from ideal. Rabbi Hart Lyon, as we have seen, had been involved in one of their internal disputes on this question, and in 1788 a butcher deprived of his licence because he sold trefa meat unsuccessfully brought an action in the Court of Common Pleas. Among the Ashkenazim there was obviously less opportunity of maintaining discipline in such matters, though as early as 1754 an attempt was made by the two existing congregations to establish a joint system of control. In pursuance of this, in February 1759, a certain R. Aaron was chosen by the two congregations as Shochet in the place of the R. Treitel mentioned above, at a salary of 12s. weekly, with a certain R. Isaac to assist him at a salary of 5s.



Baron Lyon de Symons, 1743-1814 (from a portrait in the possession of Mrs H. B. Lewis-Barned)

Later on, with the vast increase in the London Jewish population, the growth in the number of synagogues, and the collapse of the communal unity which had existed under Hart Lyon, anarchy again prevailed, and conditions at the close of the eighteenth century were so serious that the need for reform was urgent. A meeting of the representatives of the Ashkenazi synagogues in the City was accordingly convened on April 18th, 1792, at which Baron Lyon de Symons brought forward an entirely new and comprehensive scheme for the organisation of the Kosher meat supply. His plan envisaged the establishment of a supervisory committee on which all the London congregations (including the Spanish and Portuguese) should be represented. Under its auspices, there was to be erected a Central Hall with twenty shops for the sale of meat: while the Christian butchers who received the surplus were also to pay a small amount for each head of cattle slaughtered. The co-operation of the Sephardi community was essential for the success of the scheme: and, in forwarding them the plans and estimates, Isaac Bing, the Secretary of the Great Synagogue, pointed out that the congregation would actually save money by adopting the proposals.

The Gentlemen of the Mahamad approved in principle of the idea of the establishment of a joint Shechita board, but they considered the proposed Meat Hall to be positively inadvisable. Letters were exchanged; the representatives of the Great Synagogue insisted that the two parts of the plan were complementary and could not be separated; and an impasse was reached. Meanwhile, under the stimulus of the Great Synagogue, the Ashkenazi communities pushed on with the

scheme, and an appeal was issued (with little success) for subscriptions for the construction of the Hall. In the following year another attempt was made to carry out the plans, though with no better result than before.

The idea was nevertheless kept alive, the Sephardim doggedly upholding the more limited application. At length, thirteen years later, they triumphed, and the conjoint Board for the Affairs of the Shechita ("Shechita Board") was established on April 12th, 1804, with the co-operation of the four London synagogues--their first joint organisation other than the Board of Deputies. It proved a triumphant success. The meat supply was at last decently regulated, from the point of view of religious as well as material requirements. It was moreover justified economically as well. At the end of the first year a surplus of £397 7s. 9d. had accrued, which was divided among the four parent bodies; and since that time its liberality has benefited many deserving Jewish causes in the metropolis.

An allied problem was that of Passover flour, for which similarly all the London congregations originally made their own arrangements. This proved ruinously wasteful, in view of the great quantities of Matzoth that had to be distributed to the poor--one of the great burdens on the congregation, notwithstanding the various legacies (notably that of Lazarus Simon) left with this object. In December 1794, when the war with France had sent up prices to an unprecedented level, the four communities decided that henceforth they would have all the wheat ground at the same mill under joint supervision, thus considerably reducing overhead costs. (That year, in view of the high prices, two-thirds only of the customary free allowance was distributed, the remainder being replaced by potatoes.) In the end, the Great Synagogue assumed the duty of supplying all the flour for Matzoth for the Ashkenazim, purchasing the wheat and defraying the cost of the milling and the religious supervision. The flour was sold to the bakers at cost price, together with a tax to cover expenses (at one time this stood as high as 25s. a sack, but it was subsequently reduced to 13s.). Later on, as will be seen, the problem of joint distribution to those who could not afford to pay was also taken in hand.

It is curious, but unfortunately characteristic, that an outside impetus was necessary before the greatest problem of all --that of education--was systematically coped with. At the end of the eighteenth century, the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews had been founded. Its success at the outset was only slight. Sarcastic Jews would attend the conversionist sermons in full force; and it is told how when William Cooper, one of its most earnest workers, delivered a harangue in Duke's Place he was mobbed by the irate population. A little later, mainly under the inspiration of Lewis Way, it began to tackle the problem of conversionism in a more insidious fashion. The Jews should be approached first in a spirit of charity; thus they might be tempted to succumb in the end to propaganda. The new approach could boast some successes. In 1806, a complaint was made concerning a woman and her five children, who had been "trepanned" by the London Society. The Wardens of the Great Synagogue were asked to take action and to convene a meeting to consider what action should be taken. The Secretary communicated to the Board of Deputies on the matter, as one of general interest. The Portuguese representatives, however, questioned whether the case came within their cognizance, and though their attorney was consulted it was left for the Great Synagogue to act alone. With commendable courage, they sent a deputation to wait upon the conversionist body to protest against the methods that were being employed to wean away souls from Judaism. But there was little or no result.

In 1807 the London Society established a Free School for Jewish boys and girls. The methods employed in cajoling indigent parents to send their children to attend created great indignation in the Jewish community. On January 10th, Rabbi Hirschell delivered a sermon at the Great Synagogue forbidding the members of his flock to enrol their children in this pernicious institution; an abstract being subsequently published in Yiddish and English. The new school only had a very qualified success, but sufficient for the example to be followed. Another Free School was opened in the Jewish quarter in 1811, though very few of the three or four hundred pupils were Jewish, and those of the lowest section of the population. Two years after, the Duke

of Kent (Queen Victoria's father) was persuaded to lay the foundation-stone of the Episcopal Jews' Chapel and a school for boys and girls in Palestine Place, Bethnal Green. (Some time after, His. Royal Highness discovered the real nature of the methods followed and withdrew his patronage.) Though none of these institutions had any important results, their cumulative effect was too great to be opposed merely with exhortations and deputations. Hitherto the only provision for education in London Jewry (other than a host of private teachers) had been the Talmud Torah established in connexion with the Great Synagogue in 1732--a rudimentary Day School, presided over by a melamed of the old type, frequently ignorant and uncouth, who confined his teaching to Hebrew and the mechanical translation of the Bible into Yiddish.4

In 1788, under the auspices of Dr. Joseph Hart Myers, the institution was reorganised on a broader basis. The regulations breathed, of course, in the fullest measure, the spirit of the eighteenth century. It was to be confined to boys, no provision being made for girls. No child was to be admitted ~ below the age of six or above the age of nine, and by way of entrance examination they had to show their ability to read the prayer-book in Hebrew. They were to attend the Great Synagogue regularly, under the supervision of their " Rabbi", on the special seats allotted to them. They had to be present, dressed in their best apparel, at the funerals of members of the Charity, and in certain circumstances one of them would be chosen to recite the Kaddish in his memory in the year following his death. The curriculum was hardly ambitious:

§xvi. ... The boys shall be instructed in the accustom'd manner (under the control and direction of the Committee) : Hebrew-Reading, and Writing; also Gemara5 to such whose capacity will admit; and English-Reading, Writing, and Cyphering.

It was, however, more than merely an educational body:

§xxvi. The boys shall be new cloath'd every Rosh haShanah5 in the following manner; a suit of cloaths in the present mode, of a mulberry colour, lin'd with blue shallon; brass buttons, and a brass plate on the left side, with the words Holy Confraternity of Talmud Torah: established A.M. 54925 on the said plate; a shirt, a hat, a pair of shoes and stockings... The best cloaths shall be brought to school every Sunday, in a proper bag, and left there till Friday.

An indication that one sad abuse which we lament today is not purely modern is given in another brief but pregnant -regulation:

§xxx. No boy to remain in this school more than six months, after his Bar-Mitzvah.5

Thus reorganised, the Talmud Torah school continued its activities in a couple of rooms in Ebenezer (or, as the East-End Jews called it, Aven Ezra) Square, Houndsditch, between Stoney Lane and Gravel Lane, where it remained for a little more than a quarter of a century. At length, in 1815 (largely through the enthusiasm of Dr. Joshua van Oven) a movement was set on foot to develop it into a scholastic institution on modern lines, which should be the Jewish answer to the conversionist foundations referred to above and remove the temptation of succumbing to their blandishments. Thus, in 1817, the Jews' Free School was opened.

At the beginning, the management and methods were somewhat primitive. There was only one master, who was assisted (in accordance with the Lancastrian plan) by selected senior boys who acted as monitors. Old-timers used to tell long after how, owing to the paucity of elementary schoolbooks, they learned the shape of the letters from a rotating disc, while they practised writing by tracing the letters with their forefingers in a trough of silver sand, which could be smoothed over ready for the next attempt. But (largely through the munificent interest of the Rothschild family) the institution rapidly developed and its methods were brought up to date, so that it became one of the finest as well as one of the greatest institutions of its sort in the world. This is only one of the long series of by-products of the Great Synagogue, conterminous by now with a good part of the organisation of London Jewry. The relations between the Free School

and the Congregation continued to be very close. The boys were regularly shepherded to worship in the Synagogue, a pew or large box in the left-hand corner near the door (corresponding to that of the Jews' Orphan Asylum on the other side) being reserved for their use. The twenty-odd selected pupils enrolled in what still bore the name of the Talmud Torah Section had to attend service not on the Sabbath only, but every day. In compensation for this matutinal discipline they enjoyed certain privileges. Four or five of them assisted the Reader from the Almemor in chanting psalms, to a characteristic sing-song, before the service began. The candle-ends left over in the Synagogue were regarded as their perquisite, and they were given the wine-goblet to drain on the occasion of a circumcision. They had new suits of clothing twice each year6, and were apprenticed to a useful calling when their school-days were over. And, on the Rejoicing of the Law, in place of a generic invitation to children to ascend the Almemor to hear the Reading of the Law, "the pupils of the Talmud Torah" were specifically mentioned and went up in a band to chant the prescribed blessing and to hear the benediction invoked on their tousled heads.

Entrance to the Synagogue (from an early nineteenth century engraving)

Poor relief, however, was the greatest communal burden. Contemporaries pointed out how very differently the three Ashkenazi synagogues in London were circumstanced with regard to this. The Hambro' Synagogue was the most happily situated, counting a small number of opulent persons with a very few poor; the New Synagogue had few wealthy members, most being middle-class or poor; the Great Synagogue, largest of all, had the most wealthy, but at the same time the most paupers. Moreover, all poor newcomers to London (Orahim, or wayfarers) were considered to be attached to it, so that its financial burden was unlimited. A modus vivendi was however arrived at with the sister communities, as has been seen, the unattached paupers receiving each week sixpence a head from Duke's Place, and threepence from Magpie Alley and Leadenhall Street. Later on, the former body amortised its obligations by an outright payment to the Great Synagogue of £60 a year.


תקנות

מחברא קדישא נמילות חסדים

דבה"כ הגדולה

בלונדון

שנתחדשו

בהסכמת הנבאים ושבעה אנשים ·

ובצירוף אנשים המכבדים · מרוב אנשי החברה

בשנת תקע לפ"ק

בבית וברפוס

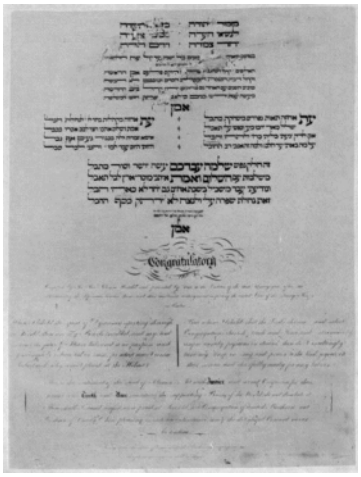
GALABIN AND MARCHANT,
INGRAM-COURT,
LONDON.

Regulations of Burial Society of Great Synagogue, 1810

A problem still remained as regards the dead, for interment even in the most economical fashion entailed considerable expense. A rough-and-ready rotation was generally followed: the Great Synagogue made itself responsible for the burial of two paupers, then the New and the Hambro' for one each, and then the Great began again. This system proved less easy in execution than might have been expected: partly because native-born paupers, or those who had been in England for a considerable time, were considered to have a prescriptive claim on some specific body, which was sometimes hotly contested. Accordingly, there were unseemly wrangles from time to time between the three congregations about responsibility for the burial of some penniless stranger. The matter came to a head one night in September 1790 when, since the Great Synagogue and the New could not agree whose turn it was, a coffin was left lying in Duke's Place, to the scandal of the entire neighbourhood. The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue intervened, and persuaded the New Synagogue to accept the responsibility.

That same year, difficulties arose with the Hambro' Synagogue. The Great Synagogue decided that the £60 yearly which this congregation had hitherto given it for the relief of Orahim was inadequate, and demanded that the amount should be increased to £200. A long-drawn and extremely stilted correspondence ensued, and more than once negotiations seemed about to break down. In the end, a compromise was reached, the contribution being increased to £120. But in June 1794 the dispute broke out again, the two congregations being unable to come to an agreement regarding the burial of a child. Alexander Phillips, the presiding warden of the smaller body, appealed to the Portuguese Mahamad to negotiate an agreement between the two warring communities. Accordingly, a joint conference was held, at which two representatives of the Great Synagogue threshed out the problem with an equal number of gentlemen from the Hambro' and five Sephardim. The conference recommended a compromise on the same lines as that which had already been reached in the matter of poor-relief: for a six-months period, from Nisan to Tishri, the Hambro' Synagogue was to pay the Great an additional £50, in return for which it was to be relieved of all responsibility for the burial of the poor. (In future years, the Gentlemen of the Mahamad were to decide on the amount payable.) There was some difficulty before this agreement was ratified, the Hambro' Synagogue endeavouring to repudiate the action of its representatives; but in the end the plan was accepted. In the winter of 1800, a similar agreement was arrived at with the New Synagogue, which had been sumptuously reconstructed just before. Two years later, the last relic of the original bitterness against this body disappeared, when Nathan Solomons, its leading member, married a daughter of Asher Goldsmid and was admitted to the membership of the Great Synagogue, eternal amity between the two places of worship being declared.

Friction between the Ashkenazi synagogues in the City was thus reduced: but it was not by any means eliminated. The obvious course was to reconstitute the three bodies into a single congregational organisation--which was in fact accomplished long afterwards. The protagonist of the idea was Baron Lyon de Symons, whose passion for symmetry made the discord which he found in London supremely unwelcome in his eyes. Owing to his efforts, a conference of delegates took place in 1804 with the object of accomplishing a union, or at the least a fusion of receipts and expenditure. Clearly, this would have entailed a greater sacrifice on the part of the two smaller congregations than on that of the larger. The representatives of the Hambro' and New Synagogues accordingly rejected the proposals, though the former suggested the appointment of a joint committee to consider the state of the poor. The conference was on the point of breaking down when Rabbi Hirschell, newly appointed and full of zeal, proposed that each congregation should elect plenipotentiaries empowered to adjust all differences without further reference. His suggestion was carried out, and the next meeting was held under the Rabbi's own presidency. It was agreed to continue with an arrangement similar in essentials to that which formerly obtained. The Great Synagogue was to take upon itself the burden of relieving all the unattached paupers, towards the expense of which it was to receive a fixed annual subsidy from the other two bodies. Similarly, it was to provide the burial for two paupers out of every four, as heretofore, the other bodies assuming the responsibility jointly for the rest. So as to avoid ill-feeling on another matter which gave rise to constant friction, it was agreed that no Synagogue should henceforth accept as a member any person attached to one of the others.7 The conclusion of this "treaty" on March 9th, 1805, was hailed with jubilation; and the Rabbi commemorated the occasion by sending each of the three bodies an elegant poem in Hebrew, beautifully indited, congratulating them on the happy event.



Congratulatory Poem by Solomon Hirschell on 'Treaty' between the City Synagogues, 1805

It was generally stipulated on such occasions that the arrangement entered into was to last for six years. On September 12th, 1811, accordingly, the Hambro' Synagogue, which conceived that its interests had been adversely affected, gave six months' notice that

it did not propose to renew the "treaty". Early in the following year yet another joint committee was set up to see whether a basis of agreement could be found. Detailed reports of the proceedings on this occasion, with summaries of all the speeches, have been preserved. The orthography is weak, and the grammar poor; but this constitutes nevertheless an historical document of real importance, throwing much light on the social life, the communal organisation, and the every-day speech of London Jewry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The negotiations broke down, and for the next three years the two synagogues pursued independent paths. But, in March 1815, while the diplomats of the Great Powers were assembled at Vienna to refashion the face of Europe, the representatives of the two synagogues came together in Duke's Place to consider the revision of their own "treaty". The new arrangement was concluded on March 15th. The Hambro' Synagogue now agreed to increase their annual donation to £125 and to look after the last rites for six adult paupers each year, in return for being absolved from all further responsibilities. Hardly was this approved, than diplomatic relations with the New Synagogue entered upon a critical stage. In 1818, the plenipotentiaries of the two bodies met in conference, but both sides proved unaccommodating and the result was a total impasse. It does not seem to have been the fault of the Great Synagogue, which fulfilled its obligations to the letter even in the case of persons who were on the pay-roll of other congregations: a memorandum in the New Synagogue registers notes how "On Thursday, 10th December 1828, Judah Stettenheim, otherwise Jenkins, singer, who assisted the Hazan as Meshorrer, in a state of Insanity hanged himself, and was sent as an Oreah to the Great Synagogue, who accepted him, it being their turn."

A new name was now appearing, with increasing frequency, in the Synagogue registers. In the year of Trafalgar, there had arrived in London a guttural young Frankfort Jew who for the last few years had been in business in Manchester in cotton goods. He had prospered rapidly and amazingly; yet it was considered a stroke of great good fortune when in the following year Levi Barent Cohen bestowed on him the hand of his daughter Hannah. Young Nathan Mayer Rothschild (for that was his name) had already been admitted a "House-holder" of the Great Synagogue, and it was under its auspices that he entered beneath the marriage canopy. He took a dutiful rather than an enthusiastic part in its affairs: subscribed to its various activities, served conscientiously in the various offices; and in 1818--when he was at the height of his reputation in the City--became Warden, in conjunction with his brother-in-law, Solomon Cohen.8 From this period onwards, down to our own day, the names of persons belonging to the family have never been absent from the membership roll, and over a majority of the time they have been included among the executive officers.

Nathan Mayer Rothschild, 1777-1836, Warden in 1818

Nathan Mayer Rothschild's term of office was not adventurous, and the most important innovation with which he was associated (in conjunction with his nephew, Louis Cohen) was the establishment of the services for the poor at the Jews' Free School on the solemn occasions of the Jewish year--an institution that continued to the present time, and in which his family continued to take special interest. (It may be mentioned, for the comfort of those who consider that our own generation has a monopoly of religious degeneration, that overflow services on the High Festivals, to accommodate those who needed no accommodation on ordinary Sabbaths, had been arranged under the auspices of the Great Synagogue at least since 1800.) Another problem which concerned him deeply was the administration of poor-relief. The earliest number of the first Anglo-

Jewish periodical, The Hebrew lntelligencer of January 1st, 1823 ("price Six-Pence"), published details regarding a "Proposal of Mr. Rothschild to the Committee of the Great Synagogue". His suggestions embodied a scheme of practical philanthropy for advancing sums of money to necessitous members, to be repaid in small instalments; and he offered to subscribe £500 to start a fund for the purpose.9 (The details had been drawn up, it is said, by the distinguished mathematician, Benjamin Gompertz, the first Actuary of the Alliance Assurance Company, which Rothschild had established on hearing that his kinsman had been excluded from employment elsewhere because of his faith.) This suggestion failed to have any practical outcome: it was only half a century later that the Jewish Board of Guardians put something of the sort into practice.

But above all, Rothschild's fastidious sense of organisation was offended by the wasteful and (from the point of view of the general public) disgraceful lack of union between the three City Synagogues, and it was to this problem above all that he devoted his attention. Thanks to his mediation, friendly discussions were reopened between the Great and the New Synagogues in September 1824; and in the following May representatives of all three bodies came together at his residence in New Court, St. Swithin's Lane, above the counting-house which was by now one of the financial centres of Europe. No final arrangement was then concluded, but a more friendly spirit was shown than had usually been the case hitherto. But as yet the attempt was premature. In 1828, once more, Rothschild placed his residence and his services at the disposal of the representatives of the three congregations. Again, though an understanding on general principles was reached, no agreement was signed. At the time of the great cholera epidemic of 1830 the three congregations worked harmoniously together in order to protect their poor from its ravages, under the leadership of the Great Synagogue which had been appealed to by the authorities. In 1834, a further crisis arose over the inevitable question of burials, and yet another conference was summoned. On June 19th, 1835 after prolonged negotiations, an agreement was at last reached, and published forthwith. (Articles of a New Treaty agreed on by the sub-committee of the Great, Hambro' and New Synagogues, A.M. 5594 and 5595.) This provided in effect that in all matters relating to the relief and burial of the unattached foreign poor, one-half of the authority and one-half of the expenditure (together with one-half of any incidental income from the burial of more affluent strangers) should fall to the lot of the Great Synagogue, the remainder being divided in equal proportions between the other two bodies. It was agreed at the same time that all flour for Passover should be purchased conjointly: that monthly statements should be exchanged between the Synagogues: and that the Overseers of the Poor in each should be appointed at a common charge. These were to act in rotation--those of the Great Synagogue for six months, of the Hambro' for three, and of the New for three. A standing Committee of Arbitration was set up, consisting of three members of the Great Synagogue and two each from the others, to carry the "treaty" into effect. The arrangement--in a modified aspect, the precursor of the United Synagogue--was on this occasion durable, remaining in force, without serious friction, until the establishment of the Board of Guardians in 1859 rendered much of it superfluous.10

This arrangement was confined to the London Synagogues following the Ashkenazi rite, there being collaboration with the Sephardim only as regards the questions of Shechita and the preparation of Passover flour. But in the political sphere there had been an increasing tendency to co-operation. During the first half-century of its existence, the Board of Deputies had met only occasionally, and the Ashkenazi communities (who seem however to have maintained some sort of parallel activity between themselves) were represented on it only in a sporadic fashion. Thus, on March 27th, 1789, when after a long hiatus the Deputies resolved to present a congratulatory address to the King on his recovery from illness, Baron Lyon de Symons represented the Great Synagogue in the deputation that waited on Lord Sydenham with this object. There was another joint meeting in 1800, when an address was presented to the King on his escape from assassination. (The Deputies doubtless recalled, with a thrill of pride, that their co-religionist David Moses Dyte had been responsible for saving His Majesty's life.) Five years later, the Portuguese Deputados wrote to the Ashkenazi congregations requesting the attendance

of their representatives at meetings when occasion demanded, and this seems to have taken place afterwards at slightly more frequent intervals.

Thus, when the movement for the emancipation of English Jewry started in 1829, there was in existence the nucleus of the machinery by which the efforts were governed. Since, as it happens, the leaders in the agitation were Ashkenazim (above all Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, at that time a pillar of the Great Synagogue) the Sephardi element automatically lost the unquestioned predominance that it had previously enjoyed. Henceforth it ranked with the Great Synagogue on equal terms, the other two London congregations (the only ones represented thus far) lagging far behind. Thus the heavy expenses in connexion with the petitions to Parliament in 1829 were divided among the four bodies, the Great and Bevis Marks Synagogues each paying one-third and the Hambro' and New Synagogues each one-sixth. The same happened in 1831, in connexion with Robert Grant's abortive Emancipation Bill. In 1835, the proportions were crystallised in the new constitution which was adopted for the Board. There were to be twenty-two members--seven of them from the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, seven from the Great, and four each from the other two City congregations; expenses were however to be divided as before, one-third each being assigned to the two larger, and one sixth each to the two smaller bodies, on the understanding, however, that the total was not to exceed £300 per annum. (It was only in 1836 that the Westminster Synagogue secured representation, while the first provincial participation dates to 1838).

Marriage Contract ('Ketubah') of Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, 1804

Even then, with its membership only a tiny fraction of what it is today, some persons considered the Board too unwieldy to deal with matters of urgency. On September 6th, 1838, Isaac Lyon Goldsmid wrote to the Vestry of the Great Synagogue complaining at this, at the illogicality of restricting representation to full members of the Congregation, and at the attempt to make it the sole medium of communication with the Government. (After all, he pointed out, the amelioration in the position of the Jews in England in recent years had been due not only to its activity, but to the zeal of private persons like himself.) The writer took the matter very seriously, threatening to withdraw from the Synagogue unless he received satisfaction. The Vestry communicated his letter to the Deputies, who invited him and his son Francis (the first Jewish barrister) to attend a meeting to discuss the matter with them. To meet his criticism, a resolution was carried to the effect that the existence of the Board did not preclude individuals from exerting their influence for the promotion of their civic rights and privileges. This, however, only half-satisfied the critics, and, though for a time Goldsmid remained a member of the Great Synagogue, he declined to act as one of its Deputies when elected to that office in the following year.

While its external relations were being readjusted, the domestic organisation of the Great Synagogue was being overhauled. The year 1808 witnessed a very important innovation in the inauguration of the Legacy Fund, which was to become a fundamental part of its financial system later on. On the death of Levy Barent Cohen, so long one of its most zealous supporters, it was found that he had left the congregation £500 in Government securities, to accumulate for fifteen years, when the total was to become available for general congregational purposes. By a new communal byelaw passed that spring, this principle was extended to other legacies. The amount of the founder's benefaction was far exceeded by some subsequent bequests--e.g. one of nearly £5,000 from Judah Phillips of Jamaica: £3,900 for the benefit of the poor from Asher Goldsmid

in 1823; and the legacies, mention of which has been made elsewhere, of Moses Schiff in 1816, Daniel Eliason in 1824, and Moses Samuel in 1839.11

By 1828, thanks to wise administration, the invested property of the Congregation, exclusive of special funds, amounted to upwards of £28,000--a remarkable contrast to its state of semi-insolvency at the time when the new Synagogue was opened, and striking testimony both to the increased well-being of its members and to their devotion to its interests.

In another financial reform the Great Synagogue led the entire Anglo-Jewish community. The comparatively modest amounts which figure in the accounts did not comprise the total income of the various officials, which was swollen from a number of incidental sources--specific offerings made at the Reading of the Law, fees for officiating on special occasions, and so on. In 1808, this degrading system was brought to an end and the salaries of all officials were consolidated (offerings on behalf of the Meshorrerim only being henceforth allowed). The Great Synagogue was the first in the country to make this salutary innovation, which even the Spanish and Portuguese congregation did not imitate until many years later. Another new regulation made in the same year reduced the number of the Parnassim (in whose hands the management of the synagogue was vested) from three to two. More important was a new rule whereby the congregation renounced the right to adjudicate in monetary disputes where more than £5 was involved--a matter in which it clearly yielded to circumstances. The same period witnessed a reorganisation of the financial records of the congregation, a new series of account-books on a more modern system being opened in 1826. The year 1828 saw the congregational organisation enriched by the establishment of a Decayed Members' Fund (Misheneth Zekenim), which continued active until the time of the organisation of the United Synagogue.


תקנות

חקהילה דקהל קודש אשכנזים

דב׳הכ הגדולה

בלונדן

תקנא

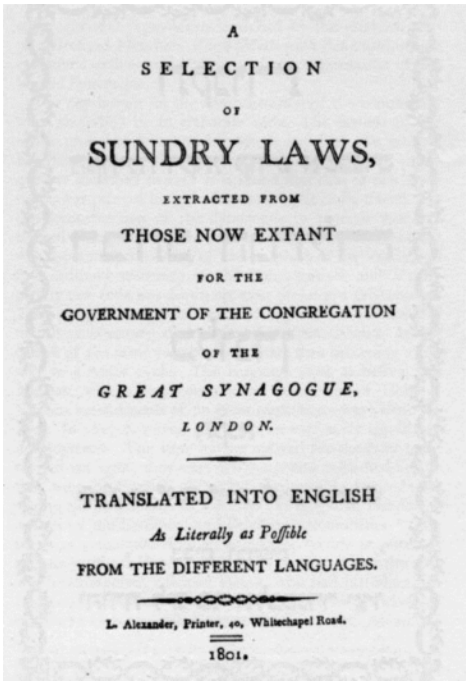
בבית ובדפוס

יהודה ליב בר אלכסנדר יצו

Regulations of the Great Synagogue, 1791

The regulations for the administration of the community were embodied in an elaborate code. The earliest of the series, probably drawn up in 1690, is now lost. An account has been given of that of 1722, with its 97 clauses, subsequently increased to 211. It is stated that this, or one based on it, was printed in 1761, but no copy is to be traced. On the reconstruction of the Synagogue in 1790, it was considered fitting to revise the statutes. A special sub-committee was appointed, consisting of five members of the Vestry and five ordinary members of the Congregation, and a completely new code was drawn up, after prolonged deliberation. This, magnificently indited and signed by all the full members, is among the congregational muniments. In the course of the same year it was printed, thus becoming available to a wider circle. The language used, as before, was Yiddish, with a very considerable admixture of Hebrew. Various amendments of no great importance were issued in 1808. In 1827, however, there was an extremely significant development. The time having arrived for the laws to be revised yet again, they were drawn up, and published for the first time in English, following the sensible example set during the past decade by the New Synagogue in London as well as by the Liverpool and Brighton communities.12 The text was accompanied by an admirable version in pure but slightly artificial Hebrew, due to the learned pen of the poet and lexicographer, Michael Joseph, who had introduced to England something of the spirit of the Meassefim who had initiated a Hebrew renaissance on the Continent. About this time, too, English was substituted for Yiddish for the proclamations made by the Beadle in Synagogue--the invariable mode of communication in the traditional Jewish community. (This reform dates in the New Synagogue from 1824, but that body lagged a little behind the other two in the process of anglicisation.) In another respect, an improvement was made at this period in the organisation of the Great Synagogue, something on the model of a parish church--for, indeed, its functions in the Jewish community were not dissimilar. The problem of the clandestine marriage was all the more serious in the Jewish community in view of the simplicity of the ritual, and this means was occasionally used by the

unscrupulous not only to marry wealthy wives but also to blackmail wealthy fathers. A notorious case of the sort, in which a noteworthy member of the Great Synagogue had been concerned, was brought before the Law Courts in 1798, when a clerk of George Goldsmid's, named David Bromer, enticed his employer's sixteen-year-old daughter Maria to the Shakespeare Tavern in Covent Garden and there, placing a ring on her finger, had pronounced the traditional formula of espousal. Unfortunately for him, the witnesses in whose presence he had performed the ceremony were technically invalid, and the Court, after hearing the views of the Beth-Din, decided that it had no force in law. In 1825, however, Solomon Bennett, the engraver, who fancied his scholarship and had assailed the Chief Rabbi for want of it, presided at a more regular but unofficial marriage ceremony, and it was considered necessary to take steps to stop the abuse. It was accordingly decided that in future the names of parties attached to the Great Synagogue who proposed to marry should be displayed in a conspicuous position on the walls for seven or eight days before the ceremony was to take place.13


A
SELECTION
OF
SUNDRY LAWS,
EXTRACTED FROM
THOSE NOW EXTANT
FOR THE
GOVERNMENT OF THE CONGREGATION
OF THE
GREAT SYNAGOGUE,
LONDON.
TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH
As Literally as Possible
FROM THE DIFFERENT LANGUAGES.
L. Alexander, Printer, 40, Whitechapel Road.
1801.

'Selection of Sundry Laws', 1801

The Great Synagogue, London, was perhaps at this period, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the most important of all Jewish congregations in the entire world from certain points of view. It was famous everywhere for its wealth, its liberality, its public spirit. It numbered among its members some persons, such as the Rothschilds and the Goldsmids, who played a significant role in the public life of more countries than one. It was regarded as a sort of Fairy Godmother for the Jewish world generally, and was continually receiving from overseas requests for support, assistance, advice, intervention. When in 1840 Sir Moses Montefiore left on his memorable mission to Damascus, it was the scene of a great public meeting, and it liberally supported the pious errand from its funds. All the communities that had by now come into existence in England and the British Isles generally--both the old centres in remote country towns and seaports and the new in the growing industrial cities of the Midlands--regarded it as their parent body. The structure of the Great Synagogue, with its characteristic apse containing the Ark, was imitated in them, and from them by some of the colonial places of worship. Their regulations and liturgy were modelled carefully upon its own. Its Rabbi was looked up to as their spiritual head, turned to for advice, consulted in times of difficulty, applied to when there was any question of appointing or dismissing a minister. It was, for example, with a recommendation from the "High Priest", Solomon Hirschell, that Barnett Simmons was sent down from London in 1811 to act as officiant at Penzance, with a covering letter from their former supporter, Lemon Hart (Warden of the Great Synagogue in 1817), venturing to hope that the community would "behave to him properly, for you may rest assured those articles are very scarce in this Market". At Plymouth, the congregational byelaws specified that, if a dispute between two Jews was too complicated to be solved locally, it should be referred to the Rabbi and Beth Din of the Great Synagogue in London. When in 1817 the handful of Jews settled in Bedford found themselves excluded because of their faith from the educational advantages enjoyed by all other inhabitants of the town by virtue of "Harper's Charity" and determined to carry the matter before the Law Courts, it was to the Great Synagogue that they applied in the first instance for encouragement and support. That body, warmly sympathetic, appointed a subcommittee to take charge of the matter, under the chairmanship of Samuel Samuel (one of Moses Samuel's public-spirited sons), enlisted the support of the New Synagogue, took the opinion of counsel, and supported the application in all its laborious stages, though for the moment without success. Elsewhere in the country--at Canterbury, at King's Lynn, at Norwich--the diminutive local communities, a little uncertain of their position, thought it safest to deposit their title-deeds and records for safety with the Great Synagogue in London, as the parent

community of all the congregations in the British Isles, This influence was by no means confined to England. It spread, too, to the new England that was springing up beyond the seas, and even farther afield. In Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the first congregations, established at this time largely by London emigrants, did their best to set up a miniature Great Synagogue on those distant strands. Every stage in their progress and every religious difficulty in their way was faithfully reported to Duke's Place, whence advice and assistance were always forthcoming; and its Rabbi found his mail-bag so swollen by the applications which came to him now from overseas that he had to request relief from the post office. When in 1842 Abraham Hart, a son of an old London family, left for New Zealand in the hope of being able to organise Jewish emigration thither, the Great Synagogue conferred upon him in an honorary capacity the membership privileges usually forfeited on removal: and the congregation which he set up in Auckland was almost a branch of that in London. The regulations of the earliest South African community at Cape Town, drawn up in 1849, were not only based on those of the parent body, but even laid down that the forms of prayer and customs were to follow those of the Great Synagogue, London. Even outside the British Empire, this influence was felt. When in 1825 New York's earliest Ashkenazi synagogue, Bnai Jeshurun, was established--the parent body of a community now numbering some two millions--the preponderance of Englishmen among its earliest members led to the fact that the services and the constitution of the Great Synagogue were taken as its model from the very outset. Ritual difficulties were submitted to Solomon Hirschell, a good amount of whose correspondence with this new-born community is extant; and on Purim, the contributions of the "half-shekel" collected in the synagogue were sent to him to distribute in London.

But the Great Synagogue gave more frequently than it received. If there were a fire in Constantinople, a famine in Poland, an earthquake in the West Indies, the cry for help was certain to be heard in Duke's Place, as the sufferers were well aware. On a single Sabbath in 1841 for example, no less than £300 was offered in the Synagogue on behalf of those left homeless by the recent fire at Smyrna, to be supplemented on the Day of Atonement by a further £100 (this was in addition to some £300 on this occasion for the metropolitan charities). An episode is on record of 1832, when Nathan Mayer Rothschild forwarded the Synagogue an application that had been addressed through him by the Jews of the island of St. Thomas asking for assistance in the construction of a place of worship. The sum of £20 was voted, and forwarded for despatch by the same channel. The great financier refused, however, to accept the cheque, and gave instructions that the West Indian community might draw upon him for the amount, together with an additional ten guineas in his own name.

The Rabbi of the Synagogue had negotiations with the New World of a more delicate nature than those mentioned above. When in 1825 the swashbuckler American journalist, Major Mordecai Manuel Noah, attempted to solve the Jewish problem by founding the refuge-city of Ararat, near Niagara Falls (he got as far as laying the foundation-stone), he nominated various "commissioners", including the most distinguished Jewish leaders in Europe, to co-operate in the scheme. Among these was "Dr." Solomon Hirschell, of the Great Synagogue in London. The Rabbi showed indeed his solid good sense by declining the nomination, and even associated himself with the Grand Rabbi of France in a protest against the scheme, which was published in the Journal des Débats. It was to Zion, rather than to Niagara, that his gaze was turned.14

Notes Chapter Fifteen

1 When in 1908 the report of the Joint Select Committee on Lotteries was published, it was felt that even charity lotteries might be illegal, and the Drum used by the Five Shilling Sabbath Charity (which still carried on its activities in the Vestry of the Great Synagogue) was deposited in the London Museum. Another, which was presented to the same body by Meir ben Manus Leib and his wife in 1800, is in the Jewish Museum: it is the work of a Jewish craftsman, S. L. Lazarus. There was another example in the Mocatta Museum, which was destroyed when University College was bombed in the autumn of 1940.

2 The Cholera Epidemic of 1830 left Anglo-Jewry another legacy. It was at this time that there was introduced the practice of reciting the pathetic hymn of supplication, Shomer Yisrael, daily: it was formerly read only on fasts. It must be added that according to another account a certain Nathan Barnett had anticipated Abraham Green's action some years before the cholera epidemic, and that Vallentine's part was incidental.

3 =Levy Marks: see above, p. 86.

4 It is worth while to quote a little-known picture of Jewish education in England at the close of the Hanoverian era which appeared in the Liverpool periodical, Kos Yeshuoth, in March 1846:

For fifty years, the Poles, who came to this country for an asylum, after a struggling life of unsuccessful commerce in their own country, put in their claim for encouragement in scholastic pursuits; translated the Hebrew words into low German... Hundreds of words given in this pseudo-translation were quite unintelligible to the pupils, who were learning an unknown language by means of another unknown language. Thus the task was repeated day by day, without improvement either in the teacher or the scholar There was no inducement to persevere in such a course of Hebraic study after the age of thirteen. What was hammered in was soon forgotten...

The best-known pedagogues of Hanoverian London were R. Zimra, in Crown Court, in the West End; R. Gedaliah in Back Alley, Drury Lane; R. Leb: of "Norwich" (Solomon Graditz), founder of the Westminster Jews' Free School; and above all R. Moshe Eleazar, of Gravel Lane (formerly of Lea). father of N. H. Solomon, whose school at Hammersmith and then at Edmonton was subsequently famous. There was a school in Mansell Street kept by John Levy, who was assisted by Jacob Myers, grandfather of Myer Davis, the historian. The schools of S. Lyon of Cambridge, H. Hurwitz of Highgate and -- Garcia of Peckham were of a more select type.

5 The words are given in Hebrew.

6 A resolution of 1864 prescribed that a greatcoat was to be given to each of the Tehillim-boys (as they were called).

7 Such was the indignation aroused by any breach of this old-established convention that on one occasion, when the nineteenth century was well advanced, a member of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue who on his marriage to a daughter of a Great Synagogue member allowed the ceremony to be performed by Rabbi Hirschell was expelled from his congregation, a sharp letter of remonstrance being sent to the officiant.

8 Already in October 1813 he had been elected Gabbai Zedakah by a majority; on that occasion he declined to serve, but professed his willingness to pay the statutory fine instead.

9 The Hebrew Intelligencer was a little behind with the news: the minutes inform us that his plan for this institution (which he proposed to call Davar Tov, or "A Good Thing") had been communicated to the committee on the financier's behalf by Mr. Samuel Samuel on November 11th of the previous year. Already in 1818, he had taken steps to establish a "Savings Bank for the Jewish Nation" in London while he was Warden.

10 By this time (since 1830) Wardens and Treasurers of the City Synagogues collaborated also in the administration of a legacy of £2,000, the interest on which was to be applied to monetary gifts for the poor under the title: "Ellis Wolfe's Mite for the Relief of his Jewish Brethren". (The testator had made provision in his will also for the Christian poor of his native place, Dover.)

11 Among the benefactors of the Great Synagogue other than those mentioned in the text were Hendele Solomons (1837), Abraham Michel (1821), Hannah Benjamin of Chatham (18--), Abraham Lyon Moses (1854), Benjamin Elias (1827), Mrs. Catherine Joseph (18--), and Maurice

Benedict Worms (1866). In 1846 Isaac Cohen (Levi Barent Cohen's son) left the congregation £2,000 for the poor and £1,000 for general purposes. S. Simons, of Savannah (Georgia) made a bequest (through Abraham Goldsmid) in 1810, and S. Nathan of Charleston, N.C., one of $2,000 in 1821.

The Synagogue was responsible for the administration, not only of the almshouses established by A. L. Moses in Devonshire Street (Cambridge Road), but also for the Joel Emanuel Almshouses opened in 1854 in Wellclose Square.

12 Levy Alexander had published in 1801 A Selection of Sundry Laws...for the Government of the Congregation of the Great Synagogue, London, Translated into English: but this was an unofficial production.

The 1791 Code was indited and artistically decorated by the communal scribe, Isaiah ben Jehiel of Leeuwarden.

13 At this period, and for some time to come, a disproportionate number of London Jewish marriages were celebrated within the walls and under the auspices of the Great Synagogue. (As has been seen above, there was a hall over the entrance porch for the celebrations among the poor.) It is recounted that, when a number of weddings took place on the same day, the waiting brides were accommodated on a bench by the side of the Ark, screened off from the rest of the building by a temporary curtain. Here they would remain in waiting until their turn came and they were summoned forth by the Beadle's stentorian call: "Kallah for Mr. ---!"

14 This was not the only enterprise of the sort in connexion with which Hirschell's assistance was asked. In A Private Journal kept during the Niger Expedition, by William Simpson, Civilian (London, 1843), we learn how "at the suggestion of some Christian friends he was provided by the two Chief Rabbis [Sephardi and Ashkenazi] in London with letters commendatory to their brethren, in case it should be found that in the providence of God towards that memorable people, any portion of them were located in the interior of Africa". The Hebrew text of Solomon Hirschell's letter, written for him by the Dayyan Aaron of Lissa and dated 23rd Nisan 1841, is given in extenso.

Chapter XVI
THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE AND THE REFORM MOVEMENT

DURING the course of the past generation, there had been heard from the Continent, at first only dimly but ever more loudly as the years passed, the rumbling of a movement for reform in Judaism.1 In its most moderate form, this was only a question of improving the decorum of the service of the synagogue and making its execution more consonant with the standards of the age. With this idea, the Great Synagogue was in general agreement, and even in the eighteenth century certain practices which seemed to create disorder and confusion had been suspended--for example, the circuits with the scrolls of the law on the eve of Simhath Torah, as has been mentioned above. From time to time, attempts were made to introduce other minor reforms of a similar nature.

However, even those which were unexceptionable in theory turned out sometimes to present difficulties in execution. One of the recurrent complaints, for example, concerned the interposition of monetary offerings during the service. Every person summoned to the Reading of the Law was not only expected, but at that time also compelled, to make an offering or offerings on behalf of the Synagogal funds and charities, "for the well-being" of those of his relatives and acquaintances whom he desired to honour.2 In order to prevent persons from scattering compliments broadcast at bargain rates, it was stipulated that only five names might be mentioned in each benediction (Mi sheBirach: literally, "he who blessed", the initial phrase), at the minimum scale, a further amount having to be offered for additions to this number. The presiding officers of the Synagogue had to receive special mention, either individually or collectively, as was also the case with the Chief Rabbi, the offering made on whose account could not be less than sixpence. Optional "donations" might also be made for the material advantage of the Readers, choristers and Shamash, while persons not summoned to the reading of the law could, if they desired, have benedictions recited in their name at a later stage in the proceedings. Accordingly, what should have been one of the most impressive parts of the service was punctuated by an interminable series of formulas, of purely personal interest, enlivened only by speculations as to the amounts involved.

In May 1820, a number of members of the Synagogue signed a petition to the Presiding Officers in which they called attention to the evils of the "prolonged Meshabirach", [sic] which they desired to have curtailed. "It is pitiful", they maintained, "to behold how indecently our solemn prayers are hurried on, particularly during the sacred holidays, in order to allow time for a system of finance which, however beneficial in its operation, is certainly inconsistent with decorum and public order." This document was formally presented to the Committee at its meeting of May 4th by Mr. Judah Cohen (not one of Levi Barent Cohen's numerous and devoted brood) in the name of twenty-one signatories.

Their arguments were incontestable. But those on the other side were also strong. The synagogue partly depended for its financial stability at that time on this system, which, if it played to some extent on personal vanity and desire for publicity, was at least effective. Moreover, it was a question of the upkeep not only of the synagogue itself, the interests of which could perhaps be safeguarded by some other means, but also of various subsidiary charities for which this was a principal source of income. This consideration proved to be of overwhelming force; and, after prolonged discussions and several adjournments, it was decided that "from the manifold distresses of the poor and the consequent claims, it is inexpedient to hazard any experiment by which the revenue is likely to be diminished." Seven years later, the revised Laws of the congregation crystallised the system as it stood; and though later on it was modified, it was in fact never abolished.

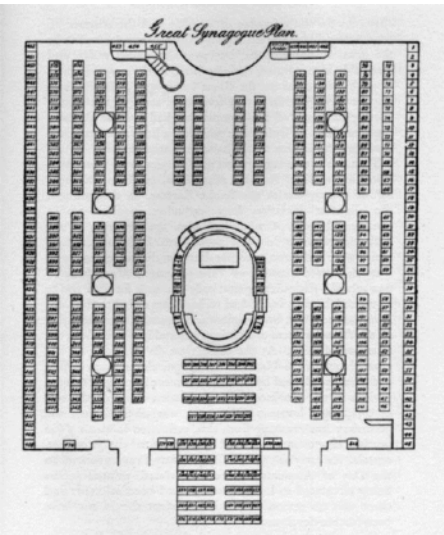
A serious obstacle in the way of the anglicisation of the outward forms of the service was that the officiants were without exception foreign-born and foreign-trained, and introduced to the Synagogue a style of rendering which was exotic without being necessarily Jewish. At a general meeting held on October 20th, 1822, a resolution was passed to the effect that "it would be the means of promoting true piety, and most essential to the interest of the rising generation of the Jews, if a certain number of young men were to be trained and educated so as to render them capable of filling the situation of Hazan." A sub-committee of seven was appointed under the chairmanship of Isaac Lyon Goldsmid (the other members were Hyman Cohen, Lyon Samuel, Peter Salomons, Michael Joseph, Abraham Hart, and Dr. Joshua van Oven) to see how the resolution could best be carried into effect. Their conclusions were a little nebulous. They considered that the small attendance at Synagogue (a recurrent complaint then as now) was in some measure to be ascribed to the manner of rendering the service. They recommended that the Hazan should restrict himself as far as possible to simple chanting and not embark on elaborate musical renderings. They considered that it would be desirable to educate two suitable youths as Reader, though this would prove a wasted effort unless it were possible to determine on some fixed and regular mode of officiating. The crux of the whole question, they sagely concluded, lay not so much in the manner of rendering the service as in the problem of education, for "the Reader... would have considerably less difficulty to encounter in exciting a proper devotion, if his audience were well acquainted with the Hebrew language, in which prayers are delivered." Another cause for complaint was the fact that the City Synagogues, fearful of opposition which would lose them their more affluent members while leaving them with the burden of the poorer, did everything possible to obstruct the organisation of any place of worship outside the City area, though the tide of fashion and of wealth was rapidly flowing towards the West End. Hence the old communal regulations, which had prohibited the establishment of rival congregations in order to secure unity, were now employed to enforce a highly inconvenient spiritual monopoly.

These premonitory rumblings reached their climax only some years later. In 1836, a number of members of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation petitioned the Mahamad for the introduction into the service of "such alterations and modifications as were in the line of the changes introduced in the reform synagogue in Hamburg and other places." Prolonged and unfruitful discussions followed. At length, in 1839, a further address was presented, laying particular stress on the need for the abbreviation of the liturgy, a more convenient hour of service, sermons in the English language, the introduction of a choir, and the abolition of the observance of the second days of the holydays. This, too, meeting with no success, the reformers requested permission to erect a branch synagogue in the West End, near their homes, in which the desired changes might be introduced. Finally, the breach came, at a meeting held on April 15th, 1840, at which the new "Reform" congregation was definitely organised. One of the points which had attracted attention at that time (it seems petty and indeed ridiculous today) was the time-honoured distinction in the liturgy between the Sephardi and Ashkenazi elements, reflecting their distinct background and history. Accordingly, the leaders of the new community determined to abandon this differentiation: and with the eighteen members of the Spanish and Portuguese community who led the secession there were associated a handful of gentlemen belonging to the Ashkenazi bodies, most, if not all, being members of the Great Synagogue. Three of them belonged to the Goldsmid family--Aaron Asher Goldsmid, Francis H. Goldsmid, and Frederick D. Goldsmid: the others were Albert Cohen, Montague Levyssohn, and Solomon Lazarus. (A little later on, they were followed by Benjamin Elkin, who played a prominent part in the literary defence of the movement; when he died in 1848, the Synagogue imposed such stringent conditions before consenting to bury him at his wife's side that the ex-warden, Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, by now a baronet, also resigned and transferred to the new congregation the legacy of £3,000 that he had intended for his ancestral place of worship.)

Previous to this the controversy had been an internal affair of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue; now, the Ashkenazi synagogues were inevitably drawn into it. It happened, moreover, that there was at this time an interregnum in the office of Haham of the older community. Raphael Meldola, who had occupied the office since 1805. died in 1828, and his son David filled the

functions of Ab-Beth-Din only. Hence Rabbi Hirschell was the unquestioned head of the English Rabbinate, and it became his duty to face the emergency. He was by now an old man, nearing eighty years of age, his once-powerful frame wasted by continuous fasting, his mentality hardly attuned to the requirements of the English-born generation that had grown up during his period of office. Had the crisis occurred a few years earlier, he might have been able to master it and to prevent the schism. As it was, he found himself driven, somewhat reluctantly, to an extreme policy of which he is thought not to have entirely approved. The first official reaction in the Ashkenazi community was in April 1841 when the vestries of the Great and other City synagogues resolved that no person who did not conform in religious matters as hitherto and did not recognise the established ecclesiastical authorities might henceforth be elected a member of the Board of Deputies. In this, Hirschell took no ostensible share. However, on September 9th, 1841, a meeting was held at his residence under the chairmanship of Sir Moses Montefiore, which was attended by the wardens and honorary officers of the Metropolitan synagogues and members of the Board of Deputies, and a declaration was drawn up to the effect that persons who rejected the authority of the oral law could not be permitted to associate with observant Jews in any religious rite or ceremony. With some difficulty, the Chief Rabbi was induced to affix his signature to this "caution ", though he rightly feared that it might make the breach irreparable. He succeeded indeed in having its publication withheld for a time. But he was unable to bridge the rift. Preparations for opening the West London Synagogue of British Jews (as the reformers called their place of worship, in order to abandon the distinction between Ashkenazi and Sephardi) were being pressed forward; an old Dissenting Chapel in Burton Street, off Euston Road, having been adapted for the purpose. On January 27th, 1842, it was consecrated. Five days previous, on January 22nd, the "caution" was read publicly by the respective Secretaries in the Great Synagogue and other Jewish places of worship in London (except the Western Synagogue) together with proclamations to the same effect from their own governing bodies.

The breach was now final. The episode was not indeed of such vital importance in the history of the Great Synagogue as it was in that of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation. The terms of the "caution" were not so extreme as those of the Herem which had been automatically incurred by Yehidim of the latter organisation by daring to open a rival place of worship in London. Its loss in membership was moreover trivial, both absolutely and in relation to the total body. On the other hand, the ferment within the community continued for some time. On April 5th, 1842, for example, a meeting of seatholders of the various Ashkenazi synagogues was held at the London Tavern under the chairmanship of Levy Hyman Cohen, at which a memorial was drawn up for presentation to the respective vestries, respectfully drawing attention to various matters connected with rendering of public worship. The existing method of the recital of prayers was described as being "as unaccountable as it is unseemly", and various suggestions for the amelioration of the system were suggested, particular stress being laid on the necessity of a more impressive rendering, English sermons, and the abbreviation of the liturgy by the omission of interpolated passages.



Seating Plan of Great Synagogue, 19th century

As one looks back on the schism, after this long interval of years, it seems in some ways rather insubstantial. The Reformers, though they did not reject the oral law as drastically as their critics alleged, were impatient of the Rabbinic development of Judaism and tended to omit much that was poetic in Jewish worship and beautiful in Jewish ceremonial, simply because it had no Biblical authority. They could not realise that the intellectual world was entering upon a phase when, precisely in their own advanced religious circles, the attitude towards the Bible would change, and they would be driven back to a conception of

an ever-developing evolutionary Judaism, interpreted in each era by its religious leaders--"every generation and its seekers, every generation and its teachers"--a conception nearer by far to that of the Rabbis of the Talmudic age than that of the Reformers of 1840. As for the minutiae of worship and the manner of conducting divine service, which a century ago seemed to be the crux of the dispute, improvements were easily and insensibly incorporated, little by little, in the usage of most English congregations, the Great Synagogue generally leading the way. Within a very few years, some of the revolutionary proposals of the Secessionists had become almost a commonplace. A little more patience, a little more imagination, and the schism would have been unnecessary. That this is no exaggeration may be seen from a brochure issued by the Chief Rabbi in 1847: Laws and Regulations for all the Synagogues in the British Empire. In this, without the slightest deviation from orthodox requirements, a considerable part of what had been the demands of the Reformers was met, in fact if not in form. Elaborate arrangements were laid down to secure decorum during service: and even the vexed question of "the prolonged Meshabirach" was solved by stipulating that only one such formula was to be recited for each individual on his being called to the Law. As far as the Great Synagogue was concerned, a modification of the former system of offerings entered into force from the Passover of 1843. At the same time (in imitation of the example set by the Hambro' Synagogue eleven years earlier, and already adopted by most of the more important congregations in the provinces) the companion abuse of the sale of Synagogal honours (Mitzvoth) was discontinued; the pecuniary loss resulting from this, estimated at about £600 yearly, being counterbalanced by a graduated charge on seat rentals. As early as 1841 the Propitiatory Prayers recited on the Day of Atonement were abbreviated, printed papers being circulated to indicate which had been selected; and there was no reason why this precedent should not have been further developed.

One point that had been insisted upon by the Reformers was the necessity for regular sermons in English. In the eighteenth century, the pulpit addresses had been on the whole instructional rather than hortatory, and (so far as the Great Synagogue was concerned) always in Yiddish. Solomon Hirschell had naturally continued this tradition, his most important appearances in the pulpit--though not, as has sometimes been stated, the only ones--being on the conventional Sabbaths before the Day of Atonement and the Passover, when he expounded the regulations of those solemn occasions on the basis of Talmudic teaching. Sometimes, on special occasions, he spoke in English. English sermons from other qualified persons--mainly laymen--were not unknown. It is stated that an address delivered by Tobias Goodman at the Denmark Court Synagogue on the occasion of the death of Princess Charlotte, on November 19th, 1817, was the earliest delivered in English in any synagogue in the country, though the same claim is made for a series begun at Liverpool as early as 1806. The exact date when English preaching began at the Great Synagogue is not recorded, but about the year 1830, Dr. Joshua van Oven and Arthur Lumley Davids (the precocious Orientalist) and in 1832-4 Henry Naphtali Solomon (who kept a once-famous school at Edmonton) were among those who gave occasional vernacular sermons in London. In 1841, when the Reform controversy was entering upon its most embittered phase, it was resolved to meet one of the criticisms of the Reformers by making arrangements for pulpit instruction in English at the Great Synagogue, and advertisements were published inviting applications from competent persons. The most likely candidate was David Myer Isaacs, who had already given proof of his ability at Liverpool and elsewhere and who, on March 13th, 1841, delivered the sermon at the special service on the triumphant return of Sir Moses Montefiore from his Damascus Mission.3 He was, however, foreign-born, and perhaps because of this no election was made. Not long after, a new Chief Rabbi belonging to the younger generation took it as a matter of course that an important part of his duties was the delivery of regular sermons (in the vernacular, as soon as he could master it), and this old-standing complaint was satisfied.

Another demand of those who sought synagogal reform was the introduction of a choir to replace the traditional Meshorrer and Bassista who had hitherto assisted the cantor on the reading-desk--a system which was not only foreign, but, to English eyes and ears, almost unseemly. After Isaac Polack's death, the congregation had no Hazan of outstanding reputation, it being a period of short tenures and general decline. Moreover, the disturbed condition of the Continent made it

impossible to secure the best talent from abroad, as would have been the normal course. For a long time, accordingly, the congregation had to reduce the scale of its requirements and make shift with local talent and the existing functionaries. At the beginning of 1807, it was formally decided to appoint a Hazan, at a salary of £105 yearly, together with living accommodation and taxes, but there seems to have been only one likely candidate in the country --a Mr. Isaac Alexander, who intimated in the following September that he had decided not to apply. At the end of November, it was decided to prolong the time-limit for applications, owing to the interruption of regular correspondence with the Continent, but in spite of this nothing resulted.

Towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars a further attempt was made, and two likely candidates presented themselves: Myer Metz, of Offenbach, and Nathan Solomon, of Gröningen. Each had a considerable following, and as a compromise it was decided to appoint them both: Myer Metz entered into office in 1814 as Reader and Nathan Solomon joined him on the Almemor as Hazan Sheni in the following year. (It was thus that the custom of having two Hazanim at the Great Synagogue began.) They did not give complete satisfaction--on 19th December, 1815, the two were solemnly reprimanded for negligence in the performance of their duties. Thereafter, relations were smoother. In 1815, a portrait of the Rev. Nathan Solomon, "Reader in the Great Synagogue" was exhibited at the Royal Academy by the Jewish artist, Solomon Polack.4 But his tenure did not last for long. His health proved unequal to the London atmosphere, and after only two years he relinquished his post and left the country, the congregation assuming the responsibility for the care of his children. Metz, on the other hand (who on his appointment had a house found for him by the congregation, and furnished at a cost of £200) remained in office for thirteen years. He was assisted on the Almemor, as chorister, by his son Morris Metz, who, however, was subject to the normal chorister's troubles. In June 1821 he submitted a petition to the Vestry informing them that, his voice being on decline, he wished to go to Jamaica; he was granted £10 for the journey and his father was authorised to appoint another assistant. The latter had now become a popular figure. When he passed away in 1827 it was resolved by the Committee "that the funeral be conducted in the most respectful manner", and that "twelve mourning and six Hackney coaches be provided". He was succeeded by Binom Heinich (Enoch) Eliasson, or Elias, of Darmstadt, formerly assistant reader (in succession to Nathan Solomon) who was elected by a majority of one vote over A. M. Voorsanger, of Arnhem. Elias was of a very parsimonious nature, and it is said that for the sake of economy when he first came to England he crossed Europe with his family by barge, taking a fantastically long time over the journey. One of the conditions of his engagement was that he was to bring a boy singer with him; and his choice fell on Julius Lazarus (Israel) Mombach, who was later to play so important a role in the history of English synagogal music. After only two years, in 1829, Elias had to retire, a neglected chill having affected his voice. (He subsequently became Director of Concerts at the Lyceum Theatre.) His place remained vacant for three years, notwithstanding the applications which were received from various parts of the Continent and a constant procession to the Almemor of aspirants to office. It was thus not until 1832 that the congregation decided to appoint Simon Ascher, of Gröningen, a fine, clear tenor, whose florid style of recitative with frequent roulades long remained a beloved memory with London Jews.5 He was assisted by young Mombach, who stood on his right hand as Meshorrer; the Bassista on his left being Jehiel Hanau, who in 1817 had made a brief appearance as Hebrew publisher.

In 1841, thanks to the efforts above all of Henry Hyman Cohen, this traditional method was at last abandoned, and an organised choir on English lines was introduced. Ascher selected for training a number of youths with good voices, and they were reinforced by Samuel Lewis, the last Bassista under the old system, who sang in the new choir for half a century. The Meshorrer on the other hand became choirmaster. It proved to be a particularly happy appointment. As a composer of synagogue music Mombach was equalled only by Solomon Sulzer, of Vienna, and a large proportion of the now-famous Anglo-Jewish choral melodies were first familiarised by him and his collaborators. Previously, the Hazan had drawn upon miscellaneous secular sources to embellish his recital. The story is told how Solomon Hirschell was once informed that the reader had introduced "Don Juan" into the service on the previous Friday night. He had never

heard of "Don Juan" before, but when the point was elucidated jumped to conclusions, and was more than shocked. "That man be brought to Synagogue!" he exclaimed. "I will not have him or anything connected with him in the place!" At the same time, Hirschell had strong objections to use on the Almemor of what he termed the "Book of Strokes" [i.e. musical notation] and the tuning-fork, and would not permit the repetition by the new choir of the word Hallelujah unless the last syllable, embodying the Divine name, were omitted until the close.

Julius Lazarus Mombach, Choirmaster at the Great Synagogue, 1841-1880

Mombach became an institution. The New Synagogue, too, summoned him to direct its choir, and he divided his time on Sabbath mornings between the two places of worship. He would make his appearance in Duke's Place during the reading of the Haphtarah, and the congregation would rise in his honour as he entered. He was to remain in office until his death in 1880--fifty-two years after he had first entered the service of the congregation. To him is due in large measure that dignified, simple tradition of sacred music which, spreading from the Great Synagogue, has become characteristic of the Anglo-Jewish synagogal tradition everywhere to our own day.

As regards the other great point of argument in 1840-42--the concentration of the Synagogues in the City, out of walking distance for those well-to-do members of the community who lived in the West End--a solution was similarly not long delayed, becoming inevitable with the growing numbers of the Jewish population and the constant expansion of the Metropolis. But by the time this step was taken the surviving links with eighteenth-century Anglo-Jewry had been broken, and the face of the community had changed.

Notes Chapter Sixteen

1 A parallel, but less balanced agitation had indeed developed independently in England. One of the earliest pieces of propaganda in any language for radical reform in Judaism is to be found in an anonymous pamphlet: "A Peep into the Synagogue, or a Letter to the Jews" (London, c. 1790). In this, the author--obviously a member of the Ashkenazi section of the community--after criticising the conduct of the Synagogue and its services in the most virulent terms, suggested the rendering of the prayers in English instead of Hebrew, and even the abrogation of the rite of circumcision.

2 See page 57.

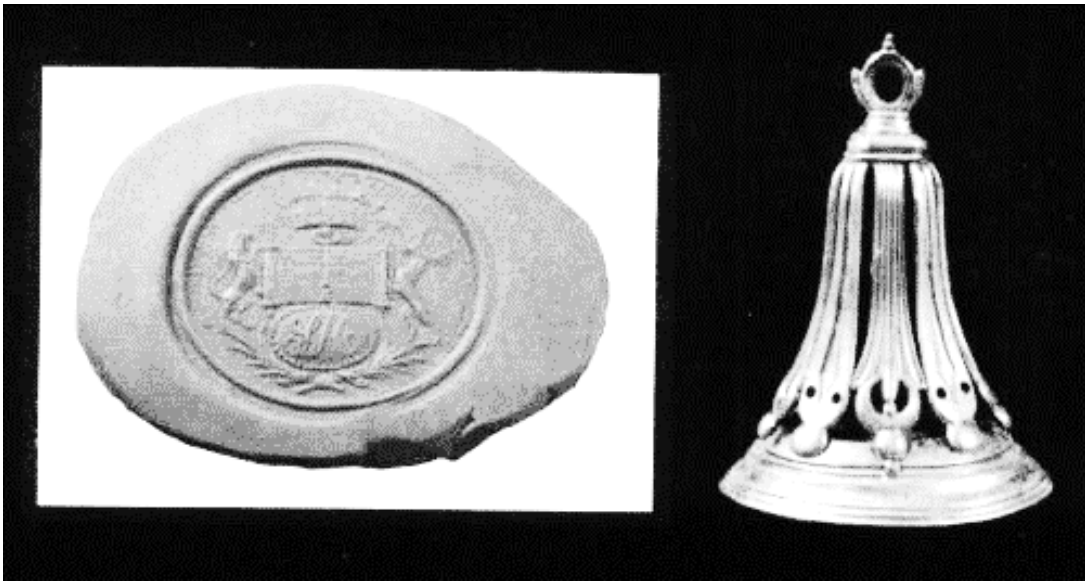
3 Somewhat later (1842/3) occasional sermons were delivered in the Great Synagogue or the Synagogue Hall also by Louis Loewe, B. H. Ascher, D. Asher, I. Issachar (subsequently minister in Jamaica) and Israel Levy (son of "Reb Aron" and subsequently minister in Hull). Weekly lectures of the old-fashioned type were also delivered in Yiddish every Saturday, between the afternoon and evening services, by the Rabbi of the Burial Society.

4 This was presumably the original of the engraving which was to have been distributed to subscribers to Alexander's Mahzor in 1815, no copy of which is however recorded.

5 Ascher's son, Joseph Asher, was private pianist and conductor to the Empress Eugénie, and is remembered as composer of Alice, where art thou? One of his daughters, Flora, a magnificent soprano, was mother of Theodor Fink, the Australian newspaper proprietor, and thus grandmother of the Ranee of Pudakota.

Chapter XVII
THE CLOSE OF AN ERA

ON Monday, October 31st, 1842, Solomon Hirschell passed away, advanced in age. A little more than two years earlier he had fractured his thigh as the result of a fall, and from that time onwards had been confined almost perpetually to his house. (His last appearance in the Synagogue had been on the Hosanna Rabba of 1841, when he insisted on completing the full seven circuits prescribed by tradition, though with frequent halts.) He had made an effort to leave his bedroom in order to celebrate the last New Year of his life, but the exertion was too much for him, and a mishap which would have been trivial in a younger man proved fatal. Had he lived two months longer, he would have completed his eighty-first year.



Seal of Solomon Hirschell

The problem of appointing a successor to the departed Rav was particularly difficult. No longer was the community preponderantly foreign, with requirements which could be satisfied by a Yiddish-speaking Rabbi of the old type. It was by now highly anglicised, with members who had attained not only a considerable degree of well-being but also a noteworthy standard of secular culture and were playing a part of some importance in the affairs of the outside world. However great their devotion to tradition, they required as their spiritual leader a person who combined something of the qualities of an English pastor with those of a Jewish teacher. Since the beginning of the century, moreover, the communities throughout the country--some of which were by now of considerable size and great influence--had become consolidated, and to these were to be added a number of others of more recent date in the British dominions overseas. All these, as well as the smaller London congregations, looked to the incumbent of the Rabbinate of the Great Synagogue as their Chief Rabbi, and were vitally interested in the appointment.

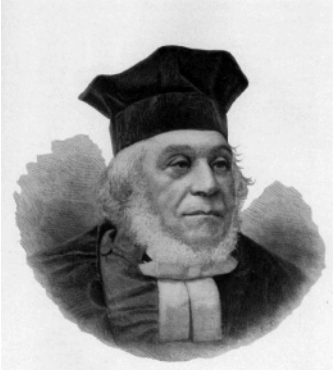
The Great Synagogue was quick to recognise its responsibilities. At a meeting held immediately after Solomon Hirschell's death, the Committee passed resolutions recommending that the office of Chief Rabbi should be filled as soon as possible, and that it was desirable that he should be duly authorised as the spiritual guide and director of all the Jews of the British Empire. The resolutions, implying that the Chief Rabbinate was no longer to be the preserve of the senior Ashkenazi congregation in London, was communicated to the various congregations throughout the country, and were universally approved, notwithstanding the obvious corollary that all should contribute henceforth to the expenses of the institution as well as benefit from its advantage.

A committee of representatives, including eight from the Great Synagogue, met under the chairmanship of Isaac Cohen in the Vestry room in Duke's Place on February 19th and 21st, 1843. The Great Synagogue delegates intimated the intention of the congregation to subscribe £500 yearly to the Chief Rabbi's salary, being a little less than one-half of the anticipated total, and it was decided that the Honorary Officers and three of the committee of that body, together with the Honorary Officers of the other London synagogues which collaborated, were to constitute a standing committee with which the person elected could communicate regarding the duties of his office. In addition it was determined that every congregation was to be entitled to a vote in the election for every £5 which it contributed yearly to what was termed the Chief Rabbi's Sustentation Fund, no single body being, however, permitted more than fifty votes--a noble piece of self-denial on the part of the Great Synagogue, the only body in the country which was affected by this limitation. It is interesting to note that, among the resolutions regarding the duties of the office which were endorsed at the meeting, one repeated in substance a Great Synagogue regulation of 1722, that the Rabbi should on no account pronounce a Herem against any person or deprive him of his rights in the synagogue without the consent of the governing body of the congregation in question.

A meeting of the Vestry of the Great Synagogue in February 1844 unanimously approved the alteration in the laws of the Congregation necessitated by the surrender of the Rabbinate to the community at large.

The selection of the new Chief Rabbi was accordingly made by a Committee of Delegates representing not only the Metropolitan communities, but also those of nineteen provincial cities. It is interesting to glance at the list, for it shows how the geographical balance of Anglo-Jewish life has changed in the course of the past century. The synagogues represented outside London were those of Liverpool (2), Glasgow (2), Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol, Dublin, Edinburgh, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Brighton, Chatham, Cheltenham, Falmouth, Ipswich, Jersey, Newcastle, Southampton, Swansea, and Penzance. (There were a few more, such as those of Canterbury, Sheerness, King's Lynn, Norwich, Sunderland, and Bath which do not figure in the list.) In London, besides the Great, New and Hambro' Synagogues, there were represented the Western Synagogue in St. Alban's Place and the Maiden Lane Synagogue. (At one time it had been hoped that the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, then without a Haham, would also join in the proceedings; but this could not be effected.) Notwithstanding this country-wide representation, the decision actually lay in the hands of the three City Synagogues, as was natural in view of the concentration of the great majority of English Jewry in the Metropolis; out of a total of 143 votes, the Great Synagogue had fifty, and the New and Hambro' forty-five between them, leaving fewer than fifty for the rest of the country.

Fifteen candidates presented themselves, but the names of three only were placed before the electors. There was Dr. Nathan Marcus Adler, Chief Rabbi of Hanover; Dr. Hirsch Hirschfeld, Chief Rabbi of Wollstein; and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Provincial Rabbi of the Province of East Friesland, later to be known as the great pillar of German orthodoxy. (Another promising candidate, Rabbi Benjamin Auerbach of Darmstadt, had withdrawn.) It had been hoped that the selection would be unanimous: and the story of Anglo-Jewry might have been significantly altered if, as was at one time proposed, Rabbi Hirsch had been agreed upon by the champions of his two rivals as a compromise candidate. But when the ballot at the three City synagogues on December 1st, 1844, proved to be in favour of Dr. Adler, the question was decided: and on the scrutiny of the returns on the following Wednesday, it was found that he had been almost unanimously elected, with 121 votes out of a total of 143. On July 9th, 1845, he was inaugurated as Chief Rabbi in the Great Synagogue, crowded with all the talent and ability that English Jewry could boast. It is said that the bells of some of the City churches were rung in honour of the event--resounding testimony to the excellent relations between the Jewish community and its neighbours.



Dr N. M. Adler, Chief Rabbi 1845-1890

Nathan Marcus Adler had been born on December 11th, 1803 (this was the date given in his testimonials, though in the Jewish Encyclopaedia it is indicated as January 15th, 1803), and was now just over forty years of age. His father, Marcus Baer Adler, member of a Frankfort family long distinguished for its learning, was Rabbi of Hanover at the time of his birth, and he had therefore come into the world as a subject of King George III of England--a fact that carried some weight at the time of his appointment. He had, moreover, other English connexions, for his grandmother had been a sister of the penultimate Chief Rabbi, David Tevele Schiff. Born at the dawn of a more liberal age, he had studied at the universities of Göttingen, Erlangen, Würzburg and Heidelberg; had qualified almost simultaneously in 1828 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Erlangen and the Rabbinical diploma from Rabbi Abraham Bing of the same city; had been given his first appointment as Rabbi of Oldenburg in 1829; and within a year received a call to his native city of Hanover in the same capacity. The recommendations which he had presented were of the most cordial nature: it was said that they were backed by private communications from Queen Victoria's uncle, the Duke of Cambridge, who had come into contact with him as Viceroy of Hanover. Because of his German origin and upbringing, the Prince Consort found him congenial company; and family legend tells how he, expert in the problems of nationality, warned the Queen on an historic occasion of the legal complications that might ensue were any of her children born in Germany.

Dr. N. M. Adler's period of office, which lasted for nearly half a century (1844/5-1890) belongs like that of his son and successor, Hermann Adler (1890-1911), to Anglo-Jewish history at large. His activity was, however, centred in the Great Synagogue, and that congregation took the outstanding part in almost all the innovations and reforms with which this period was associated, converting the Anglo-Jewry of 1844, not very different from that of half a century before, into a community which in essentials was identical with that of today.

Hermann Adler, Chief Rabbi 1891-1911 (Caricature by 'Spy')

Not that the change was immediately apparent, save in the modern education and graces of the new Rabbi. At the outset of his career in London, he even had his own personal attendant, or Meshores, who accompanied him wherever he went in the old style--Joseph van Gelder, a familiar figure among London Jews in the middle of the last century; but he was the last person to hold this picturesque office. The Synagogue continued to be conducted according to the traditional method. There was still in force an elaborate system of fines--for refusing to be called to the Reading of the Law, for not attending at service when due to have this honour, for not being present at meetings of the congregation or of any committee, or for leaving before the discussions were over. At the beginning of the proceedings, indeed, the roll was called, almost as at school, to see who was absent. Elections to office were made, as in the old days, on Hosanna Rabba, the results being made known to the congregation by means of a special Mi sheBirach on the next day, Shemini Atsereth. On the eve of the second Sabbath after the conclusion of the holyday, those elected were inducted into office immediately before the evening service, with a special festive ceremonial A procession was formed, headed by the Rabbi and the new dignitaries. As they

entered the Synagogue a special prayer, Blessed are ye in your coming in, was intoned; and the remainder of the service had a character of its own, with music specially composed for the occasion by Mombach. Still and for long after, the Beadle delivered a feather and candle to all members, shortly before Passover, for use in the ceremony of Searching out the Leaven.

The Ark (from a photograph)

Yet, by the side of these eighteenth-century relics, there was a constant sequence of expansion and reorganisation, bringing the old bodies into harmony with the new conditions. One institution after the other in London Jewry derives its existence in its present shape to this period; and in the evolution of them the Great Synagogue, the Chief Rabbi's official seat, played a dominant role.

Typical was the case of the Beth Hamedrash, a traditional foundation which now assumed its modern form. A "House of Study" had almost certainly existed in connexion with the congregation from its earliest days; notwithstanding Hart Lyon's failure to organise such an institution on the Continental model during his Rabbinate, a "Beth Hamedrash of the Holy Congregation of the German Jews in London" was in being in 1782, when it received a legacy of £10 a year "for ever" under the will of Samuel de Falk, the "Baal Shem".1 Though attached to no individual congregation, it was from the Great Synagogue that it received its greatest support, as was only to be expected. In 1841 the new institution (now under the management of a Board of Trustees headed by Solomon Cohen, son of Levi Barent Cohen), was removed from Booker's Gardens to 1 Smith's Buildings, Leadenhall Street. At a meeting held in the Great Synagogue chambers on January 2nd, 1842, a Provisional Committee was appointed to consider how it could be made more effective, as for a variety of reasons it had lapsed into inactivity. The Trustees proposed that it should be extended and used to "train up youth for the various offices connected with the ministration of our religion". The scheme was approved by Rabbi Hirschell, and subscriptions collected, but the scheme proposed--anticipatory of the later Jews' College--was never carried into effect. Hirschell's library was, however, acquired for it with money bequeathed by Solomon Arnold, of the New Synagogue, and in 1849 Abraham Lyon Moses, at Dr. Adler's request, provided the funds for engaging a Librarian (the first was Rabbi Aaron Levy, who served until 1872). When the Chief Rabbi established a society for Talmudical study in connexion with the institution and began a regular course of lectures, the Beth Hamedrash in its modern form had come into shape.

When the time came for overhauling the somewhat antiquated charitable system of the London Jewish community, it was once more the Great Synagogue that took the lead, with remarkably successful results. The "treaty" between the three City Synagogues, renewed in 1835, remained in force without any modification for many years, and it was by it that most of the poor relief was regulated. In 1844, indeed, Henry Faudel had published a pamphlet in which he advocated a radical revision of the entire system and the amalgamation of all existing Jewish charities into a single organisation, something on the lines of the method which has since become common in some centres of the United States. Nothing, however, was done. Meanwhile, the problem of the poor acquired a different aspect, both because of the increase in their number (at least in proportion to the total growth of the community) and of the growing wellbeing and anglicisation of the upper classes, who no longer considered the unscientific traditional method to be really satisfactory, notwithstanding its warm humanity. Accordingly, on January 12th, 1858, the Committee of the Great Synagogue passed a resolution:

That it is deemed advisable that a conjoint Board of Guardians be appointed to relieve the strange and foreign poor.

That a copy of the foregoing resolution be transmitted to the Presidents of the Hambro' and New Synagogues requesting that their honorary officers will meet the honorary officers of this Synagogue as early as possible to confer on the matter.

The Conference was duly held on February 25th, in the Chambers of the Great Synagogue, which was represented by Sir Anthony de Rothschild, Louis Nathan and Ephraim Alex. (One of the two New Synagogue delegates was Marcus Samuel, father of the first Lord Bearsted.) They unanimously recommended "that it is desirable that a Board of Guardians be appointed to attend to the relief of the strange and foreign poor", and that the three City Synagogues should place at its disposal a sum equal to the average amount expended by each of them for this purpose during the last three years. Nothwithstanding this, and the sympathetic reception of a pamphlet by Ephraim Alex explaining the scheme, nothing resulted. Alex, however, was determined to carry it through, and in his capacity of Overseer of the Great Synagogue, he succeeded a year later (February 22nd, 1859) in securing approval for the following resolutions:

(1) That it is highly expedient that the relief of the strange poor be managed by a Board of Guardians constituted of delegates from the three City Uniting Congregations.

(2) That the following gentlemen be appointed the delegates of this Board with power to meet the delegates appointed by the other two congregations and make such arrangements with them for one year as shall seem most desirable to effect the desired object, viz., Messrs. E. Alex, Samuel Moses, Lewis Jacobs, S. A. Jonas, Joseph Lazarus, Jacob Waley, M.A., and Lionel L. Cohen.

(3) That £220 be placed at the disposal of such Board of Guardians for one year to be paid in monthly instalments.

(4) That the Secretary of the Synagogue do attend the meetings of the Board of Guardians when requested and finish all information, books or documents bearing on the relief of the strange poor.

Three days afterwards the initial meeting of the new Board was held at 31 New Bridge Street. The attendance was heartbreakingly small. Only the Great Synagogue was represented, and out of its seven delegates only three--Alex, Waley, and Cohen--put in an appearance. Their enthusiasm was, however, proof against minor disappointments. The first-named was requested to act as Chairman of the new body, and the last-named took upon himself the arduous duties of Secretary; the New and Hambro' Synagogues were again approached and asked to collaborate; and on Monday, May 16th, 1859, the first meeting of the Board of Guardians for the Relief of the Jewish Poor was held at the Great Synagogue Chambers. It was thus that there came into existence that superb charitable organisation, now regarded as a model in every country and among followers of every creed, which, after its small beginnings as a Conjoint Board of the three historic City Communities, now commands the support of every section of the London community without distinction. Its overwhelming share in the creation of "the Board" is not the least of the services of the Great Synagogue to London Jewry.

The establishment of the Board of Guardians relieved the existing synagogues of only part of their charity obligations. It was in the first instance supposed to deal only with those termed the "Strange Poor", or Orahim, who had no specific claim on any congregation and who formed the subject of the "Treaties" of 1805 and 1835 between the City synagogues. In addition to these, there were those--mostly natives--who for some reason or the other were attached to one of the synagogues, claimed support from it as a right rather than a favour, and were supposed to be the beneficiaries of the various charitable bequests left to the individual congregations in the past.

Its appetite for charitable reform whetted, the Great Synagogue attempted to take this question in hand as well, and on July 14th, 1859, a sub-committee was appointed to report their opinion (among other things) "in reference to any improved system for the poor generally". It was Lionel Louis Cohen who now took the lead, and in January 1860 he submitted an elaborate "scheme for the Better Management of all the Jewish Poor" which he subsequently published, with some acute observations at the close. He advocated in effect: the appointment of another, more ambitious Board of Guardians representing the three City Synagogues, to deal with the problem of the "stipendiary" poor, and suggested a new system for combined medical relief and the supply of unleavened bread on Passover. His scheme was rather too complicated: the setting up of another Board so soon after the first seemed curious: and the proposals were not adopted. Ultimately, with the extension in the scope of the Board of Guardians for the Relief of the Jewish Poor to all classes, native as well as foreign, and with the establishment of a closer union between the three City Synagogues, the problem of organisation was automatically solved.

In the general setting of East End charity and philanthropy, the part taken by the London Hospital was of course outstanding. Established in a Jewish area, it had as we have seen received solid Jewish support and made special provision for Jewish patients from its earliest years; and separate accommodation for them had been discussed even in the reign of George III.2 The idea was not abandoned. In 1837 an influential deputation representing "the Committee for the more effectual relief of the sick poor of the Jewish Community requiring medical aid in and about London" (including several outstanding members of the Great Synagogue) presented a memorandum to the Hospital asking for the establishment of a Jewish ward. The implementation of this was delayed for a short while owing to lack of room, but the rebuilding scheme completed in 1842 made it possible for arrangements to be made; the Society referred to above was accordingly wound up, its funds being applied to the Hospital. In 1853, however, for technical reasons, non-Jewish patients were admitted to the ward, which thus lost its specifically Jewish character. The Vestry of the Great Synagogue registered a warm but respectful protest, pointing out that the new scheme was "contrary to the spirit of the agreement between the Committee of the London Hospital and the Jewish Community." Much correspondence and negotiation ensued, but at last in 1860 the Great Synagogue Committee triumphed, the Jewish ward being reopened--this time for good.

The office of the Secretary of the Great Synagogue--the medium of communication between the City Synagogues, and the place of origin of so many ameliorations in the communal organisation--was at this period the hub of the Anglo-Jewish community. It was presided over in succession by two men who left a profound mark on the development of modern Anglo-Jewry. In 1843, there was elected to the office Simeon Oppenheim (1798-1874) a grandson of the mainstay of the congregation at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, Samuel Joseph. In 1809, at the age of eleven. he had been one of the bevy of children who had strewn flowers in the path of the Royal Dukes when they visited the Synagogue. Later, he followed the family tradition of communal service, becoming Treasurer and Charity Overseer, until at last he entered the service of the congregation in a professional capacity. He continued to serve as Secretary for nearly a quarter of a century, in the course of this period witnessing and taking a prominent share in the various developments in the Anglo-Jewish community that emanated from Duke's Place. When he retired through old age in 1866, there was a contested election and a degree of public interest, not to say excitement, which in our days would seem incredible. The successful candidate was Dr. Asher Asher, who had come to London from Glasgow in 1862 and entered into partnership with Dr. Canstatt, the first medical attendant to the poor under the newly-established Board of Guardians. Asher's letter of application, it may be observed, was submitted both in Hebrew and in English--a tribute to the scholarly interests of the recipients as well as of the applicant. The position that he occupied in the Anglo-Jewish community, down to his death in 1889, was unique. With him ended the days when the Secretariat of the Great Synagogue was equivalent to the Civil Service of the London community as a whole.3

Interior of Synagogue, nineteenth century (from Illustrated London News, January, 1890)

Dr. Adler's Rabbinate witnessed the last revision of the Laws of the Great Synagogue. In November 1854 it was determined that the code of 1827 needed overhauling, and a sub-committee was elected, presided over by Dr. Barnard van Oven, to carry this into effect. Their report was presented in March 1858 to the Vestry, which for the next three years subjected the proposals to a minute but leisurely examination. The proposed new code was then laid before a joint committee comprised of the Vestry and forty-two members of the Congregation, and once more submitted to careful scrutiny; the parts relating to religious matters being finally presented to the Chief Rabbi for his approval. Like the previous codes, it was printed and circulated to members. But herein was a token of decadence. No longer was the English accompanied by a Hebrew version, as had been the case on the last occasion (when the English had indeed been a concession to ignorance): any language besides the vernacular was now, alas, superfluous. Thus, some seven years after the revision had first been proposed, the new code was finally approved and came into effect. It continued in operation for less than a decade, as before that period had elapsed the Great Synagogue itself became merged in a wider body. Yet the governing code of that wider body as it exists today is to a large extent based upon this body of regulations of 1861; itself a revision of those of 1827, of 1790, of 1722, and so ultimately of those drawn up when the Ashkenazi Jews of London first formed themselves into an organisation in or about 1690.

Notes Chapter Seventeen

1 Abraham Nanzig (above, p. 192), as a member of the Beth Hamedrash "of the three Ashkenazi communities in London", officiated in 1783 at the celebration of the completion of the study of the entire Talmud, his address on this occasion being printed as an appendix to his Aleh Terufah. This would imply that the institution had already been in existence probably for at least seven years. "Beth Hamedrash" is the official and traditional transcription used in London: this erratic tradition has made complete consistency in the present volume impossible.

2 See the details regarding the London Hospital in the eighteenth century given above, pp. 105-6.

3 On the establishment of the United Synagogue, Asher's place was filled by the Assistant Hazan Moses Keizer, formerly his clerk. Subsequent secretaries of the Great Synagogue included Alfred Henry; Samuel Gordon the novelist, son of the Hazan A. E. Gordon (appointed in 1894); and Isaac Dainow. who now fills the office.

Chapter XVIII
THE DAUGHTER CONGREGATIONS

IT has already been seen, in the first chapters of this work, how hard the Great Synagogue had struggled from its earliest days in order to prevent the establishment in London of any other place of worship following the same rite. The Takkanoth of 1722, possibly following in this the earlier set of regulations of 1690, had banned any rival synagogue within a radius of ten miles: a bye-law subscribed to by each member in 1704 had been directed to the same end: and the Hambro' Synagogue was instituted in 1706, and the New Synagogue in 1761, in the teeth of the most determined opposition. But, once they had become established, the new bodies themselves adopted much the same attitude. It was not mere prejudice or obscurantism, but arose from the fear that secession would weaken them and make them less able to support their burdens.

From the beginning of the reign of Queen Victoria, a fresh element was introduced into the problem. The distribution of London Jewry had changed. The days were passing when the City merchant or broker lived above his shop or counting-house. There was a continual stream of migration to the more desirable areas of residence newly built all round the City: and the wealthier members of the community above all were tending to remove to the fashionable new thoroughfares in the neighbourhood of Westminster and Hyde Park. In view of the fact that the observant Jew would not ride to service on Sabbaths and Holydays, a serious difficulty was thus constituted. The only provision that existed for them within easier (though in most cases not easy) reach were the two small synagogues in the Haymarket (The Western Synagogue) and Maiden Lane. Yet, for all this, the City congregations--Sephardi and Ashkenazi alike--refused to countenance the formation of any fresh place of worship outside the traditional area. The reason was plain. It was not only a question of dignity and jealousy, but also of economics. The older bodies were situated in the centre of the neighbourhood of close Jewish settlement. They had on their shoulders the support of the poor and of multifarious charitable organisations. Were the wealthier members living further west to secede and form their own religious organisation, the burden on those who remained would have been overwhelming.

The question entered a new phase with the beginning of the Reform Movement. One of the reasons for this had been (as we have seen) the absence of religious provision and synagogal accommodation outside the City. When in 1842 the West London Synagogue of British Jews was opened in Burton Street, it became obvious that action would have to be taken soon, for otherwise the élite of the older congregations would become attached, notwithstanding their own inclination, to the solitary place of worship within easy reach of their own homes. Alternatively, they might break away from their present allegiance and establish their own congregation, with results which might prove fatal to the economy of the parent body. Clearly, there was only one solution--the establishment under the auspices of the Great Synagogue itself of a chapel-of-ease more conveniently situated, which would satisfy the religious requirements of those who lived in the vicinity without modifying their relations to the original community. Accordingly, at a meeting on November 7th, 1848, the Committee of the Great Synagogue adopted a resolution to the effect

That it being considered of the utmost importance that a place of worship in connection with this Synagogue be established at the West End of the Metropolis, this Committee do take the subject into consideration at the next meeting.

Matters moved slowly in those days. In the following January a sub-committee was appointed to report on the subject, but ten months passed before their report was submitted, and only in January 1850 was it approved at a special meeting of the Vestry. On February 24th, 1850, the Committee decided that the proposed new Synagogue should be within quarter of a mile west of what was then known as Regent Circus, and the sum of £6,000 was voted for the construction of the building. Since the matter did not concern the Great Synagogue only, all other City

congregations, regardless of rite, were asked to collaborate. The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue duly appointed delegates to attend a conjoint meeting to consider the question, but the difference of Minhag proved an insuperable difficulty, and in the end they set up in 1853 their own Branch Synagogue in Wigmore Street--the forerunner of that at present situated in Lauderdale Road. The Hambro' and New Synagogue on the other hand fully approved the proposals, on condition that the new place of worship should be a branch of all three Ashkenazi synagogues in the City, and not the Great Synagogue alone. The authorities of this body were perfectly prepared to concur, on the not unnatural understanding that the expenses should be shared in what was the usual proportion for other purposes--one half, that is, being contributed by the two smaller bodies between them. But, though convinced that the establishment of a West End branch in connexion with one only of the City synagogues would endanger the others both from a pecuniary and from a spiritual point of view, the latter were not prepared to shoulder any part of the burden involved, and the Great Synagogue had to go forward in the enterprise alone.

Further delays now resulted by reason of certain mild reforms in the service, nowadays regarded almost as commonplace (such as the division of the Sabbath morning service into two portions, and the curtailment of the Mi sheBirach) which were discussed in a series of negotiations with the Chief Rabbi, occupying more than twelve months. The Western Synagogue then interposed, pointing out that, as they had upwards of 120 vacant seats, there was clearly no lack of synagogal accommodation in the West End, and that the opening of a new place of worship would prove extremely prejudicial to their interests. The Great Synagogue authorities, perhaps mindful of the independent action of this congregation at the time of the Reform controversy a few years before, refused to discuss the matter. The Maiden Lane Synagogue, nervous now that it might be entirely swamped, proposed amalgamation, but the discussions on the subject led to no result.

There was now no further excuse for delay, and the Vestry was showing signs of restiveness at the continual procrastinations. At last, in the summer of 1853, the lease of a warehouse in Portland Street was taken for the purpose of a temporary synagogue, and shortly afterwards building operations were started to adapt it for its new purpose. On March 29th, 1855 (six and a half years from the date when the proposals had first been formally approved, and on the sixty-fifth Hebrew anniversary of the consecration of the Great Synagogue itself) the new place of worship was inaugurated in the presence of a large and distinguished congregation. Simon Ascher, Reader of the Great Synagogue, conducted the service, and the sermon was delivered by the Chief Rabbi. In 1870 this was superseded by the beautiful building in which the congregation now worships: the Central Synagogue, Great Portland Street, the foundation stone of which had been laid by Baron Lionel de Rothschild a year before. Before the consecration service of the original building began, a proclamation was made from the Reading-desk to the following effect:

Notice is hereby given that this building now about to be consecrated is a Branch of the Great Synagogue, situate in Duke's Place, in the parish of St. James's Aldgate, in the City of London.

This was by no means a merely formal declaration. What had been established was not a new congregation, but only a new synagogue, at which services were to be held for the convenience of those who lived in the vicinity. No weddings were solemnised within its walls. It was not allowed to have separate officers or committee. Its affairs were controlled by a subcommittee appointed in Duke's Place: and though those who worshipped there were allowed a voice in electing the officers who were to manage the interests of the two synagogues, the ballot-boxes were carried to the City for counting. But before long the Branch Synagogue of the Great Synagogue in Portland Street was no longer sufficient to meet all requirements. The westward drift from the City continued: and quite a large Jewish settlement, comprising members of all three City synagogues, was growing up also in what was then the new suburb of Bayswater. Here local enthusiasm took the lead. On July 11th, 1860, a meeting of residents in the district was held, and an agreement reached as to the desirability of establishing a new congregation in the neighbourhood. There was general reluctance to setting up an independent body, and negotiations were accordingly opened with the Great and New Synagogues with a view to making

the new place of worship a branch of both those communities, in the same manner as the Great Portland Street Synagogue was of the former alone. After several meetings and conferences, it was resolved that "a Synagogue be established, and that it be a branch of the Great and New Synagogues under the religious direction of the Chief Rabbi." £7,000 towards the cost was raised locally (£4,000 more than had been promised), and each of the two parent-bodies contributed in addition £1,500 towards the cost. On July 10th, 1862, the foundation stone was laid: the building (still in use) was consecrated on July 30th, 1863. In view of the fact that there were in this case two sponsoring bodies instead of one, it proved impossible to adopt the same system of administration as at the Portland Street Synagogue, and local honorary officers and committee, with limited powers, were elected. Similarly, it was impracticable to keep weddings under equally strict control, and, after consulting the Attorney General on the subject, the City synagogues were finally compelled to permit the daughter body to appoint its own Marriage Secretary and conduct ceremonies under its own auspices.1 Thus in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the status of the Great Synagogue was profoundly altered. It ceased to be a localised place of worship, with activities restricted to the historic Duke's Place and the East End. It was now a community, spread throughout the Metropolis, and maintaining (in one instance, in conjunction with a sister-body) three widely-separated houses of prayer. It was a complicated arrangement, and one which could in no circumstances have continued indefinitely. In the event, it lasted for only a few years.

Notes Chapter Eighteen

1 In addition to these established Synagogues outside the City area, mention should be made of the North London Synagogue, the construction of which in 1864-8 was materially assisted by advances of money from the Great Synagogue, though its members only paid a poll-tax to retain their affiliation to one or the other of the City shools. In addition, the members of the Borough New Synagogue (which had developed out of a minyan established "over the water", on the other side of the London Bridge, in the middle of the eighteenth century, and had been helped by the Great Synagogue by the loan of four Scrolls of the Law in 1823) retained burial rights in the older congregations.

Chapter XIX
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE

THE foregoing chapters have illustrated the growing cordiality which had begun to prevail since the beginning of the nineteenth century between the three historic City Synagogues. It had received expression by now in a joint Shechita Board, in a close co-operation for the relief of the unattached poor, in the emergence of a Chief Rabbinate commanding common allegiance and receiving universal support, in the foundation of joint institutions, in one case in collaboration in establishing a subsidiary conventicle, and in a number of minor details. Everything was pointing, in fact, to the formation of a closer union: and the tokens of this became more and more pronounced.

This tendency received a striking illustration about this time. The old cemetery at Brady Street was becoming full--especially the portion used by the Great Synagogue, burials in which had to be discontinued by a compulsory order of the Home Office. It happened that the New Synagogue, which in 1761 had acquired the nucleus of this ground for its own purposes, had already taken steps to purchase a fresh plot in West Ham. The Great Synagogue had been either tardy or negligent, and had made no similar provision on its own account. It was thus found necessary to approach the junior body with a view to collaboration. A joint sub-committee representing the two congregations was accordingly appointed to deal with the question. At a meeting on

March 30th, 1857, it was agreed that the New Synagogue should convey to the senior body three-fifths of the total area acquired at a proportionate cost. At the same time it was decided to reduce expenditure and avoid overlapping by setting up a Conjoint Burial Board, composed of five members of each Synagogue, to superintend all the arrangements at the new "House of Life", and to buy a new ground when it should prove necessary. This agreement was embodied in an indenture signed on November 26th, 1857. The agreement for a Joint Burial Board carried a step further the union between the two larger City synagogues which had been foreshadowed in the pact of 1835: but the provision for continuing it after the West Ham ground was full proved superfluous, for by that time the two bodies had been knit together in a closer union. Thus, over the period of one hundred and eighty years of its independent existence, the congregation of the Great Synagogue made use of only three cemeteries.

The least active of the three City congregations was the Hambro' Synagogue, which since Georgian days had ceased to play a prominent part in the affairs of the London community. Its appurtenances were particularly fine, it had considerable vested property, but its membership was inconsiderable and its administration in the hands of a very few well-to-do families, who were tiring of their responsibility. It is tragicomic to note how tamely the body whose birth had been accompanied by such fierce quarrelling a century and a half before now prepared to surrender its identity, for no apparent reason other than inanition. In April 1863 the Governing Body passed a formal resolution:

That, considering the present condition and future prospects of this Congregation, an amalgamation of its members, funds and property with those of the Great Synagogue is eminently desirable.

Thirteen conditions were, however, stipulated, safeguarding the rights, dignity and obligations of the smaller congregation if the amalgamation should take place: from the ranking of its Past Wardens in the congregational hierarchy as though they had held office in the Great Synagogue, to a suggestion that the historic site of their place of worship should if possible continue in use for religious purposes or as a house of study.

The Great Synagogue authorities, instead of being overwhelmed with pleasure at the opportunity thus afforded them, requested to be allowed to see the balance-sheet of the Hambro' Synagogue for the past three years, together with a full statement of its properties, liabilities, and obligations: and a sub-committee under the chairmanship of the everwilling Lionel Louis Cohen was appointed to investigate the matter. Their report concentrated on the financial side. They pointed out that the proposed amalgamation would result in a great increase in the burden of the Great Synagogue, which would have to shoulder all those obligations towards the poor which the Hambro' Synagogue now bore: that the increase in membership would entail the loss of the amount formerly obtained by letting vacant seats for the High Holydays: and that in the long run instead of profiting from the amalgamation, they would lose over £200 a year. Against this they would obtain only the building and site of the Hambro' Synagogue (subject to a rent charge of £40 per annum), its furniture, property and ritual appurtenances, and an annual sum from investments of a little more than £150. The moral advantage was unquestioned, but the material gain was highly doubtful: and the proposals were accordingly allowed to lapse.

The Synagogal organisation of the Metropolis remained therefore as complicated as ever. Leaving out of account the Spanish and Portuguese and the Reform communities, and certain minor places of worship, there were in London three independent synagogues, which maintained various collaborative institutions, with two dependent chapels-of-ease. Those in whose hands lay the greatest responsibilities and financial burden lived in the suburbs and West End; the religious institutions and the centre of administration were retained by the City: and the system was rendered practicable only by a jealous preservation of proprietary rights by each synagogue over its members and its members' families, regardless of personal predilections. The difficulties of the method were made apparent at this time in a dispute between the Great and New Synagogues

which became for some while a cause célèbre in the Anglo-Jewish community. The one congregation had inadvertently accepted as a member, in contravention of its undertakings under the standing "Treaty", a person who belonged by prescriptive right to the other. The solution of the problem was obvious if authoritarian. But the person concerned refused to comply with it, insisting on retaining his membership in the congregation to which he wished to belong and not that to which he was told he should be affiliated. A conference was arranged between the two executive bodies, and there was a general feeling that the time had come for relations between the various London congregations to be reconsidered with a view to an entirely new arrangement.

On the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, in the autumn of 1866, the Chief Rabbi as usual invited the Wardens of the Great Synagogue to take breakfast with him after the morning service in his Succah at his house in Finsbury Square. In the course of conversation, he impressed upon them how important he considered it that the London congregations to which he ministered should be united in a single organisation, in order to prevent in future such disputes as had punctuated the past. They were deeply impressed, and promised to do what was possible. The machinery for the preliminary discussions was already there, as the conference between the executives of the Great and New Synagogues had not yet been concluded. They invited the co-operation of the honorary officers of the Hambro' Synagogue, who had so recently expressed their desire for absorption by the Great Synagogue. In the following month (November 1866) the question of amalgamation was submitted to the Boards of the three congregations. All passed resolutions approving the principle, and appointed delegates to confer on the subject and to prepare a definite scheme. Later on, the Bayswater Synagogue was invited to send its delegates also, though not the wholly dependent body in Portland Street, which did not have a separate legal existence. The moving spirit throughout the deliberations was Lionel Louis Cohen, who had been present at the historic breakfast in Dr. Adler's Succah, threw himself heart and soul into the work, and was mainly responsible (with Dr. Asher, Secretary of the Great and subsequently of the United Synagogue) for the successful outcome.

The discussions, like all discussions at this period, were long and involved. Nevertheless, the main features of the scheme were adopted by the constituted authorities of the synagogues concerned, and on April 19th, 1868, general meetings were held at which the proposals were approved and ratified and the Boards of Management were authorised to take all necessary action. The next step was approval by the Charity Commissioners, this being requisite owing to the fact that various trusts and endowments were involved. The latter in turn presented the scheme to Parliament, and on July 14th, 1870, an Act "confirming a scheme of the Charity Commissioners for the Jewish United Synagogues" (33 and 34 Victoria, chapter cxvi) received royal assent. Thus the United Synagogue came into being.

The scheme (to use the words of a former writer) aimed "to unite the members of the Synagogues generally into one great Congregation, having one common interest, governed by one fundamental code of laws, and capable of embracing every kindred Metropolitan Congregation in one bond of membership." It did away with the old proprietary rights of those whose families had previously belonged to one synagogue or the other: and the "Branch Synagogue" in Great Portland Street was to be admitted into the Union on the same footing as all the others.

It was in fact rather more than a Union. It could have been more truly described as a Reunion. The congregations involved other than the Great Synagogue had their histories intimately associated with it. There was the Hambro' Synagogue, which had branched off from it after bitter words as a result of the great dispute in the community in 1706, and had remained in a state of excommunication until 1750. There was the New Synagogue, fruit of another hard-contested secession about the beginning of the reign of George III. There was the Branch Synagogue in Great Portland Street, opened in 1855, and dependent on the parent congregation for all things until the Union came into effect. There was the Bayswater Synagogue, in which proprietary rights were shared by it with the junior City community. The foundation of the United Synagogue was therefore in fact the reconstitution of the "Holy Community of Ashkenazi Jews in London",

established in or about 1690, but divided from the time of the ill-starred dispute sixteen years later. The Great Synagogue and its errant daughters were now one again, in a greater institution which reverted (though hardly aware of the fact) to the traditions of London Jewry at the time of the Glorious Revolution.

Chapter XX
THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE

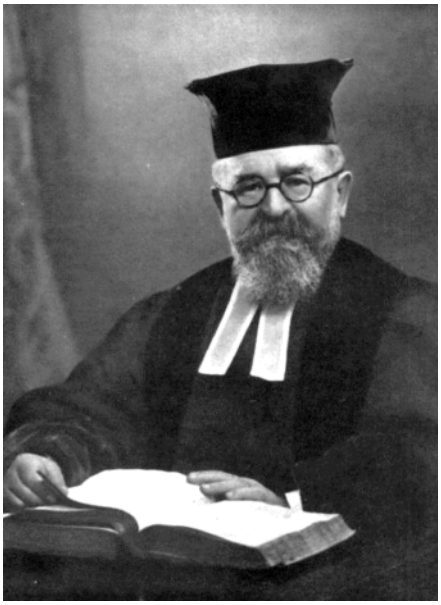
WITH the passing of the United Synagogue Act, the position of the Great Synagogue was fundamentally altered. For the good of the community as a whole, it had given up, gladly and deliberately, the position of dominance that it had enjoyed for nearly two centuries. Gone for ever were the days when it was synonymous with the community of the Metropolis. Gone were the days when its membership comprised the best part of the wealth and the genius of English Jewry. No more would some of the most eminent names in the Jewish world figure on its roll of members, and men in far corners of the earth speak of "The Great Shool" as the embodiment of their ideal in Judaism. Henceforth, all this belonged to the past. The primacy passed to other bodies, though none of them ever combined or ever could combine all those attributes which had given the congregation its distinctive quality in the past.

As years passed by, and Anglo-Jewry increased in well-being, and the tide of fashion receded more and more from the City area, the change became ever more inexorable, ever more pronounced. Yet, though the Great Synagogue changed in character, it continued to fill a distinct function in the life of Anglo-Jewry which could be supplied by no other place of worship.

Tablet affixed to Colours of The Jewish Battalion

Many of the old families associated with it for so many years, or even generations, were bound to the dignified old House of Prayer within whose walls they had been brought up, by manifold sentimental ties, and could not bring themselves to sever their connexion. Distance might indeed make it impossible for them to attend, except on the rarest occasions: but in many cases they retained not only their membership but also their interest. Thus, for example, several members of the Rothschild family continued to be seat-holders, and indeed one of them has always acted as presiding Warden from the time of the Union to the present day. (They are, too, one of the few families which long continued to make use, for purely sentimental reasons, of the synagogal register of births.) Partly as a result of this interest, the Great Synagogue was made to serve as a centre for a great deal of the beneficial work which was done by these devoted Jews in the City and East End area. The first Lord Rothschild above all, who succeeded his uncle Sir Anthony de Rothschild as Senior Warden in 1876, and retained the office until his death in 1915, was particularly sedulous in his devotion to the Synagogue's interests and, together with the members of his family, a regular attendant at the services on all the more important occasions of the Jewish year.1 Moreover, Duke's Place remained the great historic and sentimental centre for Anglo-Jewry as a whole. Synagogues as large and as stately could be built (though in point of fact few actually were). None, however, had the same quiet dignity: and none could appeal to the historic sense so much as this, the parent Synagogue of Ashkenazi Jewry in England, where the fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers of the leaders of the community had worshipped, where the voice of prayer had been heard, night and morning, at least since the beginning of the eighteenth century. (This historic appeal was enhanced when the

original Hambro' Synagogue was closed in 1893, and the New Synagogue left the City area in 1905.) Accordingly, it was thither that the thoughts of the greater section of London Jewry turned on occasions of moment, and there that its representatives gathered for their religious manifestations on all great occasions in the life of the community or of the nation. Here, for example, the Chief Rabbis were inaugurated--Dr. Hermann Adler on June 23rd, 1891, Dr. J. H. Hertz on April 14th, 1913. Here princes in Israel of all lands were commemorated at their passing--men like Frederic David Mocatta, the first Lord Rothschild, Baron Edmond de Rothschild, Chief Rabbi Chajes of Vienna, or, in a recurrent service, Theodore Herzl, founder of Zionism. Here was held in 1930 the combined service which celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Jews' College, the seventieth of the Jewish Religious Education Board, and the sixtieth of the United Synagogue. Here, on March 9th, 1937, a representative communal service took place on the occasion of the coronation of King George VI. These are a few out of a long series which have linked the Great Synagogue up with all the most memorable events in the history of the Jewish people and of Great Britain during the last half-century. And it was natural that after the war of 1914-18, when the Jewish Battalions which had fought under the British flag for the deliverance of Palestine were demobilised, their colours were laid up here, in the historic religious centre of British Jewry. In due course, a tradition grew up, that, during his year of office, the Lord Mayor of London officially attended the service at the Great Synagogue in Duke's Place one Friday night.



Dr J. H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi, 1913-1946

Again: notwithstanding the movement of population, the Great Synagogue remained the centre of the activity of the Chief Rabbi, and to that extent (though not quite in the sense in which the phrase has sometimes been used) the "Cathedral Synagogue" of Anglo-Jewry. Dr. Nathan Adler lived for many years in the immediate neighbourhood, in Finsbury Square: his son retained an address in the City though resident in the West End: and the Chief Rabbi's office to the present day is within the historic synagogal precincts. Even when distance rendered it impossible for him to remain a regular attendant, it was at the Great Synagogue that he worshipped and preached on the most solemn occasions of the Jewish year: and he or his deputy delivered there, in the presence of the scholarly representatives of East End Jewry, the traditional Rabbinical discourse on the Sabbaths before the Passover and the Day of Atonement. Though on ordinary occasions he might worship elsewhere, the Great Synagogue remained his official seat and the scene of his regular public utterances.

This had one curious, and perhaps slightly unfortunate, result. If the Great Synagogue was the official seat of the Chief Rabbi, then the Chief Rabbi was its Minister, and another one would be superfluous. Hence the congregation has never had its own preacher since the time when its Rabbi became the property of the community at large. The Chief Rabbi himself would address the congregation on the most solemn occasions of the Jewish year, as has been mentioned. Visiting preachers would occupy the pulpit from time to time, and considered it an especial privilege. Of recent years, it has become customary to invite ministers of the various Metropolitan synagogues to deliver a sermon at the Friday evening services, when the Princess Sabbath is melodiously welcomed in the presence of a very large congregation. But all this is not entirely satisfactory as a substitute: and the fact remains that the parent synagogue of Anglo-Jewry, where sermons in English first became a regular institution, is the only one belonging to the United Synagogue that has no Minister attached to it and where the sermon is not regularly delivered by its own preacher.2

Six Readers of the Great Synagogue

On the other hand, the Great Synagogue has prided itself on its long sequence of sweet-voiced Hazanim, who have continued to set the standard for Anglo-Jewish liturgical melody. Simon Ascher, whose four decades of devoted service bridged over the period of transition between the old and new stages in the Synagogue's history, was assisted from 1851 to 1854 by A. L. Green, subsequently Minister of the Central Synagogue (who had been permitted to conduct a service in Duke's Place in 1835 as an infant prodigy of fourteen!) and from 1857 onwards by Moses Keizer of The Hague (1831-1893), a dignified Hazan and Baal Kore of the old school. The election that succeeded Ascher's retirement in 1870 (two years before his death) was a remarkable one, the Dutch Jewish colony in London vociferously supporting a compatriot from Gröningen, a traditional home of sweet singers in Israel. But they did not command many votes, and the choice of the congregation fell on Marcus Hast, already well known on the Continent as teacher and composer, who continued that great tradition for nearly forty years, from 1872 to 1911. Apart from his great vocal qualities and deep piety, he deserved well of his community by reason of his monumental work, Avodath haKodesh, in which the musical traditions of the Great Synagogue were set down for all time. In 1888 Abraham Elijah Gordon (father of Samuel Gordon the novelist, who was at one time Secretary of the Congregation) joined him on the Almemor as Second Reader--an office which he continued to occupy with success until his retirement in 1919. His associate in later years was Abraham Katz, of the Great Synagogue of Amsterdam, who was chosen in 1913 out of over one hundred candidates, after a particularly spirited election which led to a democratic revolution in the government of the Synagogue. The latter continued in office until his death in 1930, his successor being the short-lived Jacob Rivilis (1932-7). Simcha Kusevitsky (appointed 1937) and Hermann Mayerowitsch (appointed 1921), were the incumbents in 1940, worthy heirs to a noble heritage. The beauty of the Great Synagogue services owed a great deal, too, to the skill and devotion of the choirmasters, such as Samuel Alman, who brought the choir up to a remarkably high standard and achieved a degree of collaboration between Reader and Choir not often found in English synagogues. Not, of course, that physical always

accompanied the musical harmony. Indeed, at the end of the century there was a prolonged strike of the Great Synagogue choir, which burst upon the community on the eve of the High Festivals; and not even the bottle of eau-de-Cologne which Lord Rothschild sent as usual to the Hazan to help him to sustain his exertions on the Day of Atonement sufficed to restore sweetness to the atmosphere. Those who managed the affairs of the Synagogue were not content for it to become a mere historical monument, but saw to it that the convenience of those who attended and the requirements of the age were not neglected. Abraham Rosenfeld, whose election as Warden in 1879 as the result of internal differences had marked the end of the absolute sway of the old quasi-aristocratic families, and who remained in office for twenty-nine years, was responsible for a number of alterations, not all of which passed unopposed or uncriticised. Thus, for example, during his regime the high brass grill round the women s gallery, which was supposed to preserve the decorum and propriety of their men-folk's devotions, was removed. In 1895, electric light was introduced, much to the distress of some of the conservative element; though previously the heat of hundreds of candles in the great Dutch brass candelabra was oppressive, particularly on such occasions as the Day of Atonement, and the top hat even of a Peer of the realm was not immune from the devastation caused by trickling wax. Some time before this--a change less open to criticism--the Bar across the Synagogue, which separated the paupers from "privileged" and other members, had been removed.

Apart from the sentimental and historic importance associated with it, the Great Synagogue retained its significance from a more practical point of view. The immediate neighbourhood of Duke's Place was no longer residential, shops and warehouses having invaded those streets where the élite of the Anglo-Jewish community used to reside. The area of Jewish residence--the "Ghetto", as the novelists and journalists termed it--moved eastwards, as had been the tendency from the beginning. But even so the Synagogue remained within easy walking distance of the great reservoir of Jewish population in the East End, and was the natural place of worship to which many attached themselves. Hence, however much the West End might regard it as an historical monument, to many in the East End it remained their "neighbourhood synagogue"--the place of worship at which they attended Divine service week by week or day by day, the focal point of their spiritual life, the centre of their Jewish activity. They appreciated its historic importance, and valued its traditions: but they were most concerned with its religious functioning, and wished it to be above all an efficient, well-organised and inspiring centre of Judaism. Others might attend on state occasions. They (reinforced sometimes, on celebrations such as Purim, by business men who worked in the neighbourhood) were its backbone at ordinary times. And, when a famous Hazan was to render the service, or a well-known preacher was to give a discourse, or some notable event in Jewish life was to be commemorated, the East End would pour forth in its hundreds and the Synagogue regained all the éclat of its palmiest days.3

The Lord Mayor at Service at the Great Synagogue, 1928

Front row, left to right: Alfred Myers, CC, Ernst Schiff, Sir Charles Batho (Lord Mayor), Lionel de Rothschild, Dr I. Feldman, I. H. W. Abrahams, CC

By virtue of the enthusiasm of these regular attendants, and to meet their requirements, the Synagogue continued to develop its organisation, thus proving its vitality and enlarging the scope of its work. During the nineteen-twenties, for example, the Guild for Social Service was established, with its regular programme of lectures and functions. In 1932, a hall was provided in the basement to serve as the centre of its activities, named the Ernst Schiff Hall,

in commemoration of a member of the family of the eighteenth-century Chief Rabbi who had been Warden from 1924 to 1931. Much more might be added in connexion with the domestic chronicle of the Synagogue in these past years; but what has been said is sufficient to show that it is not a mere fossil, dependent on tradition and with nothing else on which to rely.

In the two hundred and fifty years that have passed since its foundation, the Great Synagogue had known many vicissitudes. It began its existence as a little conventicle of Jews following the Ashkenazi rite, subordinate to the Spanish and Portuguese congregation established some thirty years before. It did not acquire stability together with independence, and a series of disputes led it to give birth to offshoots, which constituted in conjunction with it the historic framework of the London Jewish community until comparatively recent times. Meanwhile it expanded. One architectural reconstruction after the other was necessary in order to keep pace with the constant demand for more accommodation: until at last, one hundred years after the establishment of the community, the present stately place of worship was consecrated. The congregation had the faculty of inspiring the deepest devotion of its members; generation after generation, the same names figured upon its roll of membership and its board of management, names which include some of the greatest in the annals of Anglo-Jewry. Jews settled in the provincial cities, and subsequently those of the overseas empire, sought affiliation to it, and its spiritual leader became recognised as Chief Rabbi of British Jewry generally. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Synagogue led in every movement for the amelioration of the condition of the community at large, and was partly responsible for the establishment of most of the great institutions--political as well as charitable--which gave English Jewry its strength. When the tide of fashion left the Synagogue area and was followed by so many of its members, it was responsible for the construction of new places of worship in the other districts of the Metropolis to satisfy their needs; and, when these were at last solidly established, it presided over their merging into a greater organisation, gracefully giving up the primacy that it had enjoyed for nearly two hundred years. Thereafter, it has retained its importance, not only as the sentimental centre of the great mass of Anglo-Jewry, but also as a centre of spiritual life for the Jews of the immediate neighbourhood. Its functions have altered from generation to generation, but not its spirit: and it can afford to look to the future with equanimity just as it can look back on its past with pride. The record of two and a half centuries assuredly justifies the title applied to it long since in a different sense and thereafter always maintained--"the Great Synagogue".

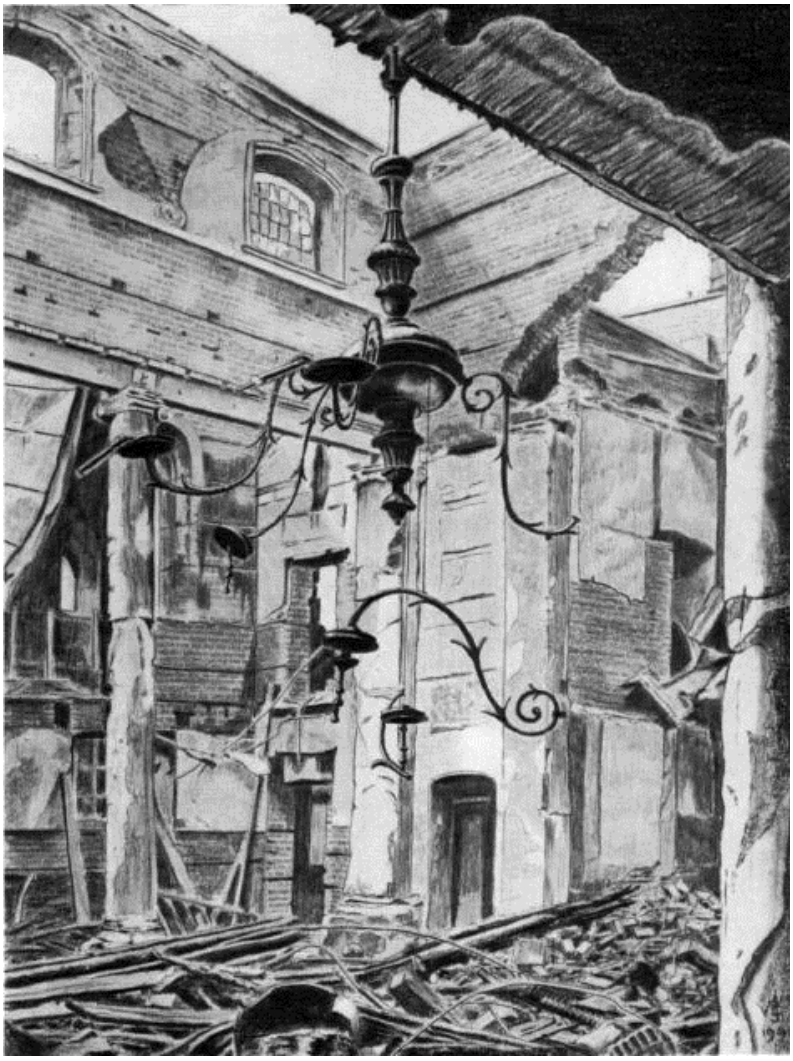
Notes Chapter Twenty

1 Lord Rothschild's interest was commemorated in 1888 by the establishment of the Rothschild Great Synagogue Fund, consisting of that part of the £100 annually offered by his family at the Synagogue which was not required for current expenditure; it ultimately reached a substantial amount. On the occasion of his Barmitzvah in January 1853, his father had celebrated the completion of his thirteenth year by offering £130 to charity; and his mother by apprenticing thirteen poor children.

2 [This was written in 1940.]

3 Services in the Great Synagogue were often described in the Press: there is a chapter devoted to it, too, in Charles Morley's London at Prayer (London, 1909). There was a memorable occasion in 1884 when there were five Barmitzvahs on a single Sabbath, of Masters Ezekiel Richard Levy, Louis S. Green, Louis Harris, Dick lsaac Solomons and James Abraham Samuel. They all survived to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the day when, on May 26th, 1934, they all attended the Synagogue and were "called up" to read the same portions of the Law as they had chanted half a century before: the father of one of them, then aged ninety, distributing the Mitzvoth.

Service for Civil Defence Workers, 1940



Ruins of the Synagogue, May 1941 (drawing by V. Bulkley Johnson)

Ruins of the Synagogue, May 1941

On May 11th, 1941, corresponding to Iyyar 14th, 5701, the Great Synagogue was totally destroyed by fire as a result of a German bombing attack on Central London

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