

SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE

A Symposium

Edited by
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PREFACE

The scope of Sir Moses Montefiore's activities was so wide, his life so long, his fame so great that he became virtually a legend in his lifetime. A great deal about him exists in print; but much of it resembles hagiography rather than biography, and even his diaries were drastically shortened and edited before publication.

It was therefore fortunate that the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies took the initiative in arranging at Yarnton Manor on 15 June 1980 a symposium at which the evidence for studying his life could be reviewed and his activities – in Britain, Palestine and on behalf of Jewry elsewhere – surveyed. The symposium brought together scholars from the Centre with others interested in Sir Moses, including members of the family. It did not aim to give definitive answers but to discuss questions needing study and offer suggestions helpful for carrying it out.

The Centre, intending to publish the symposium proceedings, arranged for them to be fully recorded on tape. Unfortunately, in the course of a burglary at the Centre, the tapes were all stolen and not recovered. They were therefore not available when I was asked to edit the symposium proceedings for publication. I happened to have taken some notes of the proceedings, although not with the intention of using them for a record. I have tried to reconstruct the discussions from my notes, and have had to ask those who contributed papers to provide complete texts of them without the help of the tapes. Thanks are due to the contributors for the time and trouble they have taken in doing so, but the consequence has been unforeseen delay in publishing the proceedings. I must apologise to participants whose contributions to the discussion have been omitted or inadequately reported because they were not available in the record.

The Centre wish to express their appreciation to the Jewish Historical Society of England for joining in the publication of the symposium proceedings. The Society's action, together with a generous gift from Mr and Mrs David Franklin, has enabled the cost of printing to be met, thus ensuring the appearance of a volume which should be of great help to all preparing for the Sir Moses Montefiore Celebrations in 1984–5.

V. D. LIPMAN

31 May 1981

I
SOURCES FOR
THE STUDY OF SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE

Dr. Richard Barnett, C.B.E.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Oliver Sebag-Montefiore, T.D.

A COUPLE of years ago thoughts of the approaching centenary of the great centenarian whom we are commemorating began to occur to many of us, and as a part-time archivist and an ex-Museum man, I naturally began to wonder how we, the Anglo-Jewish community, would celebrate it and with what material. At first thought, one would imagine, there must be plenty available for a good presentation of Sir Moses' life and work, extended over so long a period and over so many countries. Second thoughts, however, make the prospect a little less clear, in fact make it a little more clear how much has been destroyed, how little has been preserved, how much lost and dispersed.

When I tried to draft this lecture, I found myself facing a real problem of organisation. There is both too much material and too little. For the record of the life of this eminent and saintly person, who lived through four reigns, from a date early in that of George III into the middle of that of Victoria, to be a hundred years old, was so closely packed or associated with innumerable events vital in the development of Jewish history that it would take far longer than half an hour to explain, if we were to examine the whole range of his activities. On the other hand, there is a dearth of original material in the form of a regular archive, which I *shall* endeavour to explain. The basic text book on which any study of Sir Moses' life has to be based is of course, the two volume edition by Dr. Louis Loewe made up of extracts and summaries of the Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore, published in 1890, and amounting to a biography.¹ True, there are others.² A modern biographer, however, looks for material that will enable us to judge something of the man himself, his psychology, his inner views and feelings, material that will flesh out the rather dry bones of Dr. Louis Loewe's official chronicle valuable though it may be. The modern historian, too, needs to know more of the actual events, and their inner reasons, the external appearance of which Sir Moses was or seems to be engaged in dealing with. In both spheres the need is for impartial history, not hagiography. For this purpose we would expect to use original MSS, autograph letters and documents, records and diaries.

So the first question that the researcher or student has to ask is, where are the papers of Sir Moses? Where are the Montefiore archives on which I may start my research? The answer comes as something of a shock. Nearly all his vast archive of incoming correspondence and vast amounts of other papers were destroyed, and what is left is scattered far and wide. I read you a description of what happened from a letter written to Dr. Leonard Snowman in 1925 by Lucien Wolf, the leading historian of Anglo-Jewry in the last century and this, who knew Sir Moses when he himself was young and wrote the first serious biography of him for his centenary in 1884; this is what he says:

Richard D. Barnett

Many years ago I published Lady Montefiore's Honeymoon Diary which old Haim Guedalla managed to rescue for me from the vandalism of his cousin, Sir Joseph Sebag-Montefiore. In the introduction to that little work³ I gave an account of Sir Moses' Diaries and of their fate. There were several hundreds of them which were deposited in the Library of Judith Lady Montefiore College. After Sir [Moses] Montefiore's death Dr. Loewe published two big volumes which were supposed to contain their gist, but as a matter of fact failed altogether to extract from them the valuable political and social information they contained. Some time in the early nineties I had an opportunity of seeing them but only took a few notes from them and I intended devoting a summer holiday to them. When the summer came I dined one evening with Sir Joseph at East Cliff and to my horror he told me that he had burned all the diaries and all Sir Moses' other papers. I am glad to hear from you that one⁴ at least of these documents had been saved.

I send you back the abstract you were good enough to send me and am much obliged to you for allowing me to see it. Faithfully yours

(signed) Lucien Wolf

(dated June 30 1925)⁵

This tragedy is corroborated by the verbal account which in about 1965 the Rev. S. Lipson gave to me. Lipson's father-in-law was the Rev. Mr. Shandel of Ramsgate synagogue which was described humourously by a Jewish wit⁶ as the 'Shool for Shandel.' It was Shandel's melancholy task to carry out Sir Joseph's orders and make a bonfire of the manuscript books and papers. He took pity on and saved some twenty files which he secured away.⁷ After his death these 'brands saved from the burning' passed into the Rev. S. Lipson's hands, by whom they were mostly broken up, after World War II, sold singly and scattered, but a few,⁸ on my intervention were nobly rescued and bought by the late Mr. John Sebag-Montefiore and placed in the Montefiore Library at Jews' College, which has housed a large part of the Montefiore Library since the start of this century.⁹ Mr. Sebag-Montefiore retained a small MS diary of Judith Lady Montefiore describing their journey to Italy in 1817, now owned by his daughter Mrs. Myrtle Franklin, I believe. Two more are preserved in the collection of Mr. Eric Lipson.

So we have to repair the almost irreparable loss of Sir Moses' archives by making do with the surviving documents, mostly letters, in the Jewish Museum, in Jews' College, the Board of Deputies, in the Mocatta Library in University College London, and in private hands and elsewhere. Only opinions are available and may well differ why this vandalistic holocaust was carried out at Ramsgate. Tradition in the Loewe family and reported to me by Mr. Raphael Loewe says that it was in deference to Sir Moses' wish that he should not be worshipped and made into a plaster saint. If so, this massacre of material has had the exact opposite effect, since we have now too much left of the plaster under layers of Victorian homage, but not enough of the real man. Another tradition hints more darkly that

there were things in the diaries which Sir Joseph and the family wished or thought they ought to hide. I very greatly doubt it. There might of course be matters of which Victorian taste disapproved; thus in his sea voyage of 1827 on his first journey with Mrs. Montefiore to the Holy Land, he recorded in a diary (now lost except for a single page) how on board the *Leonidas* they ran into a great storm between Naples and Alexandria. At noon Mr. Montefiore threw into the raging sea a piece of the *Afikoman*¹⁰ which he had brought with him, saying a prayer to the Almighty, and by seven p.m. the sea was calm. The episode which reminds us (but in a happier tone) of the story of Jonah's experience, is not included by Dr. Loewe in his book who perhaps felt his Victorian audience reacting in mild horror against such a suggestion of degrading superstition. Thus the reasons for Sir Joseph's decision remain obscure and one cannot help feeling that an element of jealousy lay in it. So as far as MS diaries go, all we have left is a few samples. The Spanish and Portuguese Congregation, London, possesses a small diary for June, 1840. Thus that of Sir Moses for the 1855 pilgrimage to Palestine survives,¹¹ and another for 1879 when he was 95¹² and we have three of Lady Montefiore's in addition to the two others already published in print.¹³ Turning to other types of documents, we have an important collection of incoming letters and petitions at Jews' College, including the invaluable Census of Palestinian Jewry (1839 and 1863).¹⁴ All these came originally from Ramsgate. Other letters, account books and letter-books containing copies of summaries of letters from Ramsgate and a few letters from other sources exist at University College in the I. L. Goldsmid and Gaster Papers,¹⁵ and in Anglo-Jewish Archives in the Mocatta Library. Copies of many outgoing letters signed by him are naturally to be found in the recently reorganised Archives of the Board of Deputies.¹⁶ A number of his letters exist in libraries in Jerusalem and elsewhere;¹⁷ other exist in the archives of Rothschild's Bank, but their amount and significance turns out much less than one might have hoped,¹⁸ viewed from the importance and intimacy of Sir Moses's contact with the family. Mr. Robin Sebag-Montefiore (now in Geneva) also has a collection of his papers including many in-coming letters. Mr Eric Lipson also possesses a considerable archive. Mr. A. Schischa of London also possesses a collection. Mr Walter Schwab and I, with the support of the Mrs. John Montefiore Trust Fund and the Cecil Roth Trust, have made a collection of transcripts of all Sir Moses' available outgoing correspondence numbering over 500, which we are hoping to publish, or at least to calendar and make available in due course to scholars. They cover a vast span of time, the earliest being written by him at the age of 10¹⁹; the latest in 1884.²⁰

Like a British Ambassador in an Oriental country, in 1839 he engaged an 'Oriental Secretary'; this was Dr. Louis Loewe, an exceptionally gifted expert in Oriental languages, both ancient and modern, particularly

conversant with Turkish, Arabic and Persian. Dr. Loewe became his life-long aide-de-camp, fellow-traveller, confidant and friend. A precious series of over 160 MS letters from Sir Moses to Dr. Loewe survives in the possession of his great grandson, Professor Raphael Loewe; it begins in 1835, continuing till 1879; mostly they are in holograph until his latest years, when he was forced to employ an amanuensis. To these letters Dr. Loewe's great-grandson Professor Loewe has very generously given me unlimited access. They have the advantage of showing us very unusually a little bit more of the real Montefiore, normally so strictly 'buttoned-up', reserved and reticent. Here he shows himself kindly, humane and generous, the embodiment of contemporary liberal humanitarianism, an unshakeable believer in Victorian tradition of the unstoppable of progress but still always very business like and diplomatic, with an immense capacity for organisation and hard work; nevertheless these letters disappoint us for they lack generally the breadth of view, chatty confidentiality and fascinating informativeness of a great letter-writer of the type of, say, Chaim Weizmann. Yet the cumulative effect and undeniable importance of our collection of Montefiore's letters is very real and impressive.

We shall give some excerpts in the course of a brief survey of his career and the sources of its study. Moses' marriage in 1812 to Judith, daughter of Levi Barent Cohen, was an important event linking two important Anglo-Jewish families, one Sephardi and one Ashkenazi. It was in itself an historic event, for it marked a great step in the increasing rapprochement of the two sections of Anglo-Jewry who had hitherto kept very much to themselves; but it formed one of the axioms of Moses' life that there were – and should be – no real differences between Jews, whose destinies everywhere were inseparable and interdependent. Nevertheless, he showed his first duty to his fellow Sephardim. He started the hard way. By 1808 he was a member of the *Lavadores* (or Washers of the Dead – part of the *Hevra Kadisha* or sacred burial society of the Bevis Marks Synagogue).

By 1815 he was active in the Synagogue's affairs, becoming an Elder and Chairman (*Thesoureiro*) of the *Bet Holim*, their Hospital – (founded in 1748 and still extant, though only now as an Old People's Home). By 1818 he was President of the Elders. These matters and his contributions are, of course, duly recorded in the Archives of the Synagogue. He also became increasingly concerned with philanthropy and social work. To turn to his private life, in 1822 he rented East Cliff Lodge which he later bought in 1831, adding to it a private synagogue, still extant and in partial use. By 1824, by now a very wealthy man with many business interests, he somewhat dramatically even abruptly decided to give up his career in business and retire from it in order to devote himself to higher and better things. In fact his retirement was far from total, since he remained a director of eight companies, in particular of the Alliance Insurance

Company and of Imperial Continental Gas.²¹ What prompted him to take this momentous step of early retirement? Was it due to Judith's persuading and in deference to her genuine religious views? I think that there can be little doubt that the decision was Sir Moses' and his alone. Was it his 'mania for travelling' on which Mrs Montefiore had already remarked in her diary for Xmas Day, 1825^{21a} or some other cause? There exists his copy of the Sephardi Prayer Book (David Levi 1810)²² on the fly leaf of which he wrote a simple, rather banal prayer, which is dated 'Mount Cenis 1824'. Why? May we possibly infer from this scrap of information that the ascent and crossing of this mountain pass on the Franco-Italian frontier (now pierced by a tunnel) which he must have crossed either on his way to or from Rome, where his brother Abraham lay dying, was associated with some deep religious experience?

Did the Almighty speak to him and call upon him to alter the tenor of his life, as to another Moses long ago on another mountain top? The loss of the diaries makes it impossible to know more precisely: we are left guessing by this tantalising scrap. Be that as it may, on May Day 1827 the Montefiores started off on their first journey to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Montefiore's technique, used later in his lifelong career of diplomacy, was already well developed. He clearly believed in always going boldly to the top. He set off with introductions from the Foreign Office to the Governor of Malta, to Admiral Codrington R. N., commanding the Mediterranean Squadron, and to the British Consuls in the Near East.

After the rough passage at sea to which we have referred in discussing the lost diaries, they reached Alexandria at the end of September and were received in audience by Mehemet Ali, the viceroy or pasha (governor) of Egypt, (somewhat theoretically) then part of the Ottoman Empire. It was the start of a very important personal friendship. Only nine days were spent in the Holy Land as war was on the point of breaking out between the allies defending Greece from Turkey; matters culminated in the battle of Navarino, fought on October 20th, when the Turkish-Egyptian fleet was completely destroyed by Admiral Codrington. By October 26th the Montefiores were back in Alexandria. The sea voyage back to Malta took place in weather almost worse than that which attended the Montefiores' coming, and from there he returned home, bearing Codrington's despatches.

But short as his stay in Jerusalem had been, it was enough to start his love-affair with that magic city, which lasted the rest of his life. It would be interesting to know if it was from this period i.e. on his return, that he caused (as can be seen from old photographs) to be hung over his four-poster double bed at East Cliff Lodge in Hebrew the words of the psalmist (Ps. 137):

'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem may my right hand forget its cunning'²³

It was certainly on his return from his first journey in 1827 that he commemorated the event by augmenting his coat of arms by a banner bearing the word 'Jerusalem' in Hebrew characters, a striking advertisement of the marriage of Jewish and mediaeval English traditions. In 1828 he joined the Board of Deputies (founded in 1760) as representative of the Spanish and Portugese Community, whereby he automatically assumed a leading part. The 1830's were Montefiore's formative years in preparation for his new international and later rôle.

In his capacity as President of the Board from 1835 he revitalised it from a long sleep and started it on its course by boldly reconstituting it on a much wider and more democratic basis, and by holding regular, instead of occasional meetings as matters of necessity arose. In his programme of affairs he left the battle for Jewish rights at home to his kinsman, I. L. Goldsmid, while in its new form he reshaped the Board to a wholly new concept of world-wide responsibility. If Montefiore was to be God's instrument in intervening on behalf of oppressed Jews anywhere, the Board was to be Montefiore's. For over thirty-nine years that he presided over it, he was able to utilise his own and the Board's excellent and officially accepted channel of communication with the Foreign Office and the government to organise some degree of assistance to Jewish minorities or individuals on an international plane by working closely through the elaborate and growing network of British ambassadors, ministers and consuls.

This will be found amply documented, apart from the printed sources of the Loewe Diaries, by F.O. papers in the Public Record Office²⁴ or Lord Russell's,²⁵ Sir Henry Layard's,²⁶ or Sir Robert Peel's Papers,²⁷ now in the British Library and, of course, the papers and archives of the Board itself. So close was this contact that Lord Aberdeen gave instructions to the Foreign Office that copies of any despatches about Jews should be sent to Sir Moses.²⁸ I cannot say that my delvings into these papers have added much by way of important new finds: but in a, to us today, rather surprising letter to Sir Robert Peel in 1846 we find him boldly asking to be recommended to the Queen for a baronetcy.²⁹ As we know, the request 'worked' and Her Majesty consented to the proposition.

It seems, however, that travel was the great passion of this extraordinarily energetic man. His wife, in her Honeymoon Diary, already refers with resignation to this 'mania' for travel.

My chance discovery of a MS volume from Ramsgate, now transferred to Jews' College, reveals that as early as 1830 he was thinking of going to St. Petersburg. Why exactly I do not know.³⁰ This volume was compiled by E. Gilbert, an English official of the Imperial Continental Gas Co. living in Ghent, Belgium, who knew St. Petersburg well, and who describes the city in detail for Montefiore at his request, with all necessary information for a visitor. After a serious bout of ill-health and a fresh trip

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to the Continent in 1834 to recuperate, the indefatigable traveller was already planning for the following year his next visit to the Holy Land. I need not recite here the details of the 'Damascus Affair' and the horrible events of 1840, which took Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore on their celebrated mission to Alexandria in that year to visit the Pasha of Egypt, Mehemet Ali, his old friend, for the second time, and to Constantinople to see the Sultan, against whom Mehemet Ali was in virtual rebellion.

The story is perfectly well known, and needless to say, figures extensively in Sir Moses' private correspondence. Some of his letters, formerly in the Cohen Collection, now in the Mocatta Library at University College, have been published by Cecil Roth.³¹

What was behind this sudden outbreak of anti-Semitism and why did it assume this particularly malevolent form? In a recent lecture to The Jewish Historical Society Dr. Tudor Parfitt pointed out that the blood libel known in Europe since the 13th century and mediaeval times and condemned by Popes and Cardinals, had not hitherto been encountered in the Orient.³² Who disseminated it in Damascus? The answer is still not clear – though Dr. Parfitt was recently the first outside person able to peruse the Father Tommaso *dossier* in the archives of the French *Quai d'Orsay* in Paris. Perhaps it was significant that he found that three despatches from Count Ratti-Menton (the French Consul at Damascus who seemed to have started the whole affair) had been removed from the file before he was allowed to see it, which suggests that there was something in the file that even after 140 years the French authorities still wish to hide. Sir Moses himself had little doubts. In an unpublished letter to his relative Louis Cohen written from the island of Syra, but posted in Marseilles, dated 21st July 1840 he writes,³³

'Do not believe that the affairs at Damascus can be settled as speedily as we had hoped, indeed I fear it is only part of a deep plot against the Jews, not only in East but in Europe, Heaven grant I may mistaken . . .'

And again, on 14th August,³⁴

'Should the late horrid conspiracy be hushed up by the liberation of the four important men in Damascus, I have no doubt other or similar charges would be brought against the Jews in a short time both in the East and in Europe.'

By September 27th, 1840, he had adopted a lesser note of alarm; he writes of Mehemet Ali:³⁵

'He is no enemy to the Jews; to the fanaticism of the Catholics of Damascus and the *diabolical hatred of Ratti-Menton* and some of the authorities of that city is the horrid charge to be solely attributed.'

Sir Moses, nevertheless, was firmly convinced that the plot was directly contrived by Monsieur Thiers and the French Government.³⁶ By the Sultan's *firman* this attack on Jewry was warded off: but the *firman* did more, since it firmly laid down that the Jews of the Ottoman Empire were to be treated on the same basis of equality as other subjects. Testimonials, tributes, telegrams and addresses flowed in to the architect of this great diplomatic stroke. To those of us today who lived through the appalling atrocities of Nazism and the Holocaust of European Jewry, the excitement generated over the Damascus affair and its outcome may seem quite disproportionate if not slightly ludicrous. But in 1840/1 it was seen as a favourable portent, a real and significant victory, clearly symbolic of the progress of liberalism and equality. Not least of its merits was the promise read into it of the abolition of torture in trials. To his kinsman and fellow-philanthropist Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, Sir Moses Montefiore wrote an unpublished letter written on the back of a printed translation of the *firman*.³⁷ It is dated '13th November 1840 At Sea.'

'This document [the *firman*] has been hailed with universal joy by our co-religionists here and it is looked upon as the great Charter of their liberties; and I hope it will teach a lesson to other Governments of true liberality and lead to the realisation of your wishes in the repeal of those obnoxious laws which exclude us from office and power at home. I look upon the *Firman* as a great step in advance and one eminently calculated to raise all in the East possessing our religion to a perfect equality with the Turks and thus give a new impetus to that thrust for mental and moral improvement which has distinguished our people at home.'

Sir Moses was in many ways, alas, too simplistic and too optimistic. Even the Blood Libel accusation, though rebutted, was now released and revived itself several times in the Near East before 1900, as Dr. Parfitt showed, and though Sir Moses made it clear that in 1840 the Moslems in Damascus took no part in the conspiracy against the Jews, in the subsequent instances this was no longer true.

In his next journey to the Holy Land in 1849 he hastened out to Jerusalem to succour the community, threatened physically by an epidemic of cholera and morally from the activities of Christian missionaries. He met the threat by distributing relief to sufferers of all confessions alike. By 1850, aged 66, back at home he felt overwhelmed and wrote to Dr. Loewe seriously thinking of retirement:

Alliance, 22 May 1850 – 5616:
Sir Moses Montefiore to Dr. Loewe:

'I am almost worn out and find the fatigue too great to continue much longer, with so numerous a correspondence. While you were near me it was done, without anxiety on my part – it is different now. If I could get a Committee to

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relieve me I should be happy, and I shall be very glad to have your advice what I had better do so that the poor in the Holy Land may not suffer by my retirement.'

and in 1855 a fresh crisis arose in Palestine when famine and cholera again afflicted the communities which were already suffering from the interruption of remittances from Poland because of the Crimean War. Sir Moses and Chief Rabbi Adler raised a fund of nearly £20,000. Then he set out for Palestine with his wife Judith, but this time to stimulate more realistic projects. Armed with a new *firman* from the Sultan permitting him to purchase land in Palestine, he laid the foundation stone of a hospital, planned the Touro almshouses outside the walls (*Mishkenot Sha'ananim*), built a windmill – both are still extant – opened a girls' school (in defiance of every rabbinical and conventional obstructionism) and an industrial school for boys, had the *abattoirs* removed from the Jewish quarter, and established small agricultural colonies at Jaffa, Safed and Tiberias. Some documents – mainly letters – survive here³⁷ and in Jerusalem³⁸ about these matters.

At the age of 67 a new, more statesmanlike and socially developed and constructive Moses Montefiore had emerged. It would be interesting to speculate to what influences and whose wise advice this development in his outlook was due.

Sir Moses' energy and 'mania for travelling' did not diminish as he grew older. Indeed he was only restrained with difficulty by Sir Henry Layard and his Foreign Office friends from undertaking a journey to Persia in 1860 to assist the persecuted Iranian Jews.³⁹ Time does not permit us to dwell on his further pilgrimages – such as that to Rome in 1860. Recovering somewhat from the blow of his wife's death in 1862, in 1865 he set out once more for the Holy Land, then suffering from a plague again of cholera and locusts by which, incidentally, his 'model farm' at Jaffa was devastated. He raised a relief fund of £3,000, the balance of which he decided to spend on the housing development outside the walls of Jerusalem. In 1866 he was in Roumania, and in 1872 in Russia for the second time. Lucien Wolf's summary is this:⁴⁰ 'while Sir Moses undertook only one journey in his fifth decade and two in his sixth and seventh respectively, he performed four in this eighth. During his ninth decade, he also undertook four journeys, two to Jerusalem, one to Roumania and one to Russia.' No mean achievement in the pre-jet age! (Mrs. David Franklin possesses, or possessed, some of the original maps of his journeys marked with some of his routes).⁴¹ He corresponded with Heads of State, obtained written assurances and documents with promises of equal treatment of Jewish subjects from the Czar (1846, 1872, 1886), the Sherif of Morocco and the Shah of Persia, thought the last provided only an evasive answer, as did Prince Charles of Roumania in 1872. These

documents still exist. He may not have always succeeded in his interventions; but to the multitudes of suffering East European and Oriental Jewry his star shone like a bright light at the end of a very dark passage and gave them encouragement and hope.

When he reached the age of 90 in 1874, he at last retired from the Board and a public testimonial fund was raised amounting up to £12,000 which he desired should be devoted to improving the condition of the Jews in Palestine.⁴²

His long tenure of office in the Board of Deputies' presidential chair – he resigned in November 1874 – had its negative, even detrimental side. In the first place, in the religious crisis of 1841, the strictly orthodox views which he held led him to veto absolutely the participation of the Reformers of 1841 and contributed to their being driven out into the wilderness. These events can be followed in the press and in the archives of the Board, the West London Synagogue and the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue.

Thanks to his powerful personality, his exclusive domination over three decades of the Board's life led to others rebelling against the limitations that he imposed. Accordingly Sir David Salomons and other prominent members of the community set about the foundation in 1871 of the Anglo-Jewish Association, 'with the aim of the social, moral and intellectual progress among the Jews; and obtaining protection for those who suffer from being Jews:' in other words, an alternative forum for ventilating and pursuing the Jewish cause, which likewise obtained the right of access to the Government. The Minute Books and records of the Anglo-Jewish Association, now housed in Anglo-Jewish Archives at the Mocatta Library, bear witness to these events. Judge Israel Finestein has analysed in an excellent article these criticisms of Sir Moses' policies.⁴³ It was the barely subdued challenge to his rather rosy views on the state of affairs regarding girls' education in Jerusalem in the school which he had set up which led to his last pilgrimage in 1873 at the age of ninety, to report back to the Board in a personal and defensive note.⁴⁴

As we have said it happens that his diary for 1879 is one of the very few that have survived.⁴⁵ It is not very fully entered, and his hand shakes badly. On 17th April, aged 95, he writes almost illegibly:

'May the God of our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, renew my strength to enable me to perform good and worthy deeds for the benefit of my co-religionists and *all God's sons and daughters*. This day I had the happiness to leave the House the first time in some weeks, but I feel extremely weak.' (Read Parasha about the Blessing of the Homer⁴⁶ and Dr. Loewe dined with Jemima⁴⁷ and myself.)

At times he doodled absentmindedly in his Bible the words 'Mt. Ceniz' or 'Smithenbotham.'

We have already pointed out the evident or at least possible significance of the allusion to Mount Ceniz, at the beginning of this paper. 'Smithenbotham' is a different matter. This village was a place which he and Judith used to regard as their favourite place of retreat, where he thought over his religious problems, where he stayed with his wife before her death in 1862, where in 1864 he planned the college that finally bore her name.⁴⁸ That his mind and hand in his old age should have harked back to these places and events associated with his happy married days and found them sufficiently important and of sufficient religious significance for him to scrawl them onto the margin of a page of his Bible is profoundly interesting.

Sir Moses survived another five years to reach his centenary in 1884, five years of scarcely diminished activity on his part on behalf of his fellow Jews and others. The celebrations of his 99th birthday on November 3, 1883 were held at Ramsgate in truly grand style. A large choir of sixty ladies and gentlemen serenaded him early in the morning, followed by a service in the Synagogue; deputations, presents, telegrams, flowed in and a grand procession two miles long file past his house. In the evening the harbour was illuminated, and to add a lighter touch, a monster firework display took place. The printed programme is itself an important archival document.⁴⁹ The centenary celebrations were on a little quieter but still very impressive scale. He died quietly on July 28th, 1885.

Moses Montefiore was indeed the creation of his time, and his extraordinary role could not have been enacted at any other period. But what a time and what a period!

I have touched on the different and various groups of Montefiore sources. Let me summarise some of those best known to me: first, there are private incoming and outgoing letters – scattered through various libraries, Mocatta, University College, Jews' College, British Library, Rothschild's Bank, Jewish Museum, Hebrew University Library (Jerusalem), and other libraries and private hands over half the world; then we have the more official papers and documents of a communal and public character, *in primis* those of the Board of Deputies; these can be supplemented by F.O. papers, and could no doubt be followed up by browsing in Jewish archives abroad, such as the Alliance Israelite in Paris or Yivo in New York. Again there are Foreign Ministries' archives abroad, if one could penetrate them in the countries which he visited, always supposing these documents survive there. Then there is the contemporary press, which in London often reported his speeches or large parts of them *verbatim* certainly in the case of the Jewish Press. I do not speak of the formerly huge collection of printed and MS *testimonials* and tributes from all parts of the Jewish world, mostly formerly at Ramsgate, where they once numbered 2,000.⁵⁰ The surviving portion numbering now only 200 is now in the Mocatta Library at University

College, of which a catalogue is in preparation⁵¹; I also pass over those printed sources of which Dr. P. Kohn prepared a bibliography in *Sinai* in 1945.⁵² Nor do I dwell on the quantity of special printed synagogue services commemorating his activities – which though they are of slight importance historically, attest his religious impact.⁵³ His impact on the City of London is another matter, which I have not explored; but the records of the Mansion House and its Appeals might be investigated in the Guildhall Library, which certainly holds the papers of the Alliance Assurance, of which he was a founder. A few papers and letters survive of his intimate friend and companion of his travels, Dr. Thomas Hodgkin but have been published⁵³. Nor have I closely investigated his activity in support of the anti-slavery campaign, or many other charitable causes; nor his impact in America.⁵⁴

This is, then, in barest outline a sketch of the journey that has to be travelled if anyone wishes to produce a new biography in whole or part of that great Jewish leader and arch-traveller, Sir Moses Montefiore.

NOTES

- 1 L. Loewe (ed.) *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore: comprising their life and work as recorded in their diaries from 1812 to 1813*. 2 vols: (London 1890). The value of this work, fundamental for the study of Sir Moses and his times, was greatly diminished by it having no index, but this is now remedied by the index compiled by Mr. W. M. Schwab.
- 2 Israel Davis, *Sir Moses Montefiore; a biographical sketch* (London 1883); Lucien Wolf, *Sir Moses Montefiore: a centennial biography*. With extracts from letters and journals. (London 1884); Paul Goodman, *Moses Montefiore* (Philadelphia 1925); Umberto Nahon, *Sir Moses Montefiore: a life in the service of Jewry* (Jerusalem 1965).
- 3 'Lady Montefiore's Honeymoon' in *Essays in Jewish History*, ed. C. Roth (London 1934) pp. 233–257 (Honeymoon diary 1812, with additions 1825, 1826).
- 4 see note 5.
- 5 Typed autograph letter in pocket of Sir M. M.'s Diary for 1879. (See below, note 12) Mocatta Library, M.4720.
- 6 The witticism is ascribed to the Rev. A. A. Green.
- 7 These twenty files were offered for sale in the middle of the 1930's by the London bookseller, Edward Goldston, but were withdrawn before the sale took place.
- 8 MSS &c at Jews' College additional to Hirschfeld's catalogue (H. Hirschfeld, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew MSS of the Montefiore Library* (London 1904) include: MS 584. Telegrams of congratulations 1883/1884; MS 585-7, various incoming letters.

Sources for the Study of Sir Moses Montefiore

- 9 The collection of MSS and a large part of the library of printed Hebraica and Judaica from Ramsgate were deposited at Jews' College on loan in 1901 by the Elders of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation as trustees of the Montefiore Endowment. For catalogue of the MSS, see note 8.
- 10 Piece of unleavened bread, put aside during the Eve of Passover Service (Seder), and preserved by some for good luck.
- 11 Now at Jerusalem, Hebrew University Library. Another diary undated, at Jews' College: Hartwig Hirschfeld, *Descriptive Catalogue*, MS no. 578.
- 12 University College, Mocatta Library, M. 4720. (see note 5 above). A single page, apparently from a diary for 1839, survives in the Loewe letters. (see note 15).
- 13 (i) L. Wolf, 'Lady Montefiore's Honeymoon Diary', (see note 3 above).
(ii) Diary for 1838/39—*Notes from a Journal* (1855). Unfortunately the value of this publication is completely negated by all names being reduced to dashes. Unpublished diaries: see above.
- 14 Hirschfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 159, nos 528–557. (Statistical accounts of the Holy Land. 30 vols. See also p. 161, nos 574–577. 'Letters and petitions received. Sir M.M. and Lady M. in the Holy Land in . . . 1839' (four vols.).
- 15 They were transferred to the Mocatta Library from Ramsgate when the Judith Lady Montefiore College was re-organised in 1961. They consist of
- | | | | |
|-----|------------|-----------|--|
| 1. | Montefiore | Mss. 716. | Account book for travels 1827–1829 |
| 2. | „ | 713. | Account book, Holy Land Committee |
| 3. | „ | 717. | Account book 1861 and 1869–72 |
| 4. | „ | | Diary for 1879 (see note 5) |
| 5. | „ | 712, 719 | Letter book, 1862 |
| 6. | „ | 718. | Letter book, 1865–70 |
| 7. | „ | 720. | List of incoming letters 1844–5 |
| 12. | „ | | Letters 1827–68 to Benjamin Gompertz and others. |
- 16 Catalogue by Miss R. Routledge: *Report on the records of the Board of Deputies of British Jews 1839–1966* (Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, 1976).
- 17 As mentioned above, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue archives also possess a small unpublished pocket book of Sir Moses with some diary entries in pencil for the period of June 1840.
- 18 I am very grateful to Lord Rothschild and Mr. Gershon Wright, Archivist to Rothschild's Bank, for allowing me to study these letters.
- 19 Preserved in the Hebrew University Library, Jerusalem.
- 20 Letter of 8 July 1884, addressed to Sir David Salomons; preserved at Broomhill (residence of Sir David Salomons), Southborough, near Tunbridge Wells: now headquarters of the South East Thames Regional Health Authority.
- 21 The archives of the Alliance Assurance Company are now in the Guildhall Library.
- 21a Lady Montefiore's Honeymoon Diary, Sunday 25th Dec. 1825:
'The mania for travelling not having yet ceased, notwithstanding our new and desirable dwelling – we started from home at four o'clock in the

morning in our chariot which conveyed us to the Spread Eagle Bishopsgate Street, where the stage departs for Yarmouth. Thence after new year home via Norwich and Bury.'

- 22 In the possession of Mrs. Myrtle Franklin.
- 23 Photograph reproduced in Franz Hubmann, *The Jewish Family Album* (London 1974) pl. 111.

The Spanish and Portuguese Congregation as a result of founding the Board, normally provided the President of the Board until the latter part of the nineteenth century.
- 24 A. M. Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem (1838–1914)*, 2 vols. 1914 publishes Sir Moses' correspondence and other papers in the F.O. files preserved in the PRO, relating to his pilgrimages to the Holy Land from 1830.
- 25 Russell Papers, Brit. Library.
- 26 Brit. Library, Add. MSS 39114, 39115 (Layard Papers)
- 27 Peel Papers, Brit. Lib. MSS 40594 f. 259 (25.vi.1846) and Peel's Reply: (28.vi) f. 261.
- 28 In 1864 he is sent copies of F.O. despatches from Athens and Corfu about Jews on the orders of Earl Russell (Loewe, *Diaries*, p. 164 ff).
- 29 See note 27.
- 30 Professor Ankori after this lecture suggested that it was due to the sharp deterioration in the position of the Jews of Russia to which his attention may have been drawn.
- 31 Cecil Roth, *Anglo-Jewish Letters* (London 1930).
- 32 Professor Ankori, a distinguished expert in the history of Jewry in the Middle East, who was present at this paper, pointed out that the Blood Libel was in circulation in the East as early as the 15th century in the time of the Sultan Mehmed Fatih between 1460–70 in Tokat and Amasya.
- 33 Mocatta Library, Cohen Collection, no. V.
- 34 from Alexandria. 14.8.1840. Mocatta Library, Cohen Collection no. VI.
- 35 Letter to Louis Cohen. Syra 27.9.1840. Mocatta Library, Cohen Collection no. VIII.
- 36 Letter to Louis Cohen, Alexandria 14.8.1840. Mocatta Library, Cohen Collection no. VI:

'France is exerted in every way against us, it poisons the minds of the people against all Jews, and most persons in this City, be they of whatever country they may, entertain a most unfavourable opinion respecting the murder of Father Toma . . . it is therefore more needful than ever that we should proceed if possible to Damascus and investigate the whole affair ourselves.'
- 37 I. L. Goldsmid Papers, University College London.
- 38 Some letters and papers are preserved and exhibited at Mishkenot Sha'ananim, Jerusalem.
- 39 Layard Papers. Brit. Lib. Add. MSS.
- 40 L. Wolf, *op. cit.*, p. 234.
- 41 These were A. R. Fremin, *France 1849*; Schroëpp, *European Russia 1844*; Lapie, *Ottoman Empire, Russia 1846*.

Sources for the Study of Sir Moses Montefiore

- 42 The Jewish Museum collection of letters (mostly addressed to Louis Emmanuel, Secretary of the Board) shows that the Fund was originally conceived as a presentation to Sir Moses, who was furious at the suggestion and flatly refused to accept any such thing. Instead he insisted it should be devoted to the benefit of the poor of Palestine. See *Diaries* II, pp. 263–4.
- 43 Israel Finestein, 'The Anglo-Jewish Revolt of 1853,' *Jewish Quarterly* (1978) pp. 103–113.
- 44 Mayer Auerbach and Samuel Salant, *An open letter addressed to Sir Moses Montefiore on the date of his arrival in the Holy City of Jerusalem* (London 1875).
- 45 See above p. 5 and note 12.
- 46 The Parasha is the current portion of the Reading from the Pentateuch: the 'Homer' or 'Omer' is the wave-offering at harvest-time between Passover and Pentecost. (Lev. XXIII. 10–11).
- 47 Not identified, possibly a housekeeper or relative [most likely his niece, the daughter of Solomon Sebag and wife of Haim Guedalla. V.D.L.]
- 48 *Diaries* I pp. 120, 164, (Sept. 25 1864).
- 49 Copy in Jewish Museum.
- 50 *Diaries* I p. 158.
- 51 By Mr. P. Salinger and Mrs. Marilyn Lehrer.
- 52 P. J. Kohn, 'Reshimat Sefarim. u-meamerim she-nidfesu Likhbod R "Moshe Montefiore"' [Notes of books and articles printed in honour of Moses Montefiore] Jerusalem, Mosad HaRav Kook, 1952, 1953 in *Sinai*, xvi, no. 1–2 (189–190), pp. 97–112; xvi, no. 10 (198), pp. 254–255.
- 53 cited in P. J. Kohn *op. cit.* See also *Anglo-Jewish Bibliography 1937–1970*.
- 54 See Bertram W. J. Korn, *Montefiore in America*.

DISCUSSION

The *Chairman* raised the question of the reason for Sir Moses' decision to retire formally from business and asked whether it was related to the death of his brother Abraham (1788–1824), his business partner and to whom he felt very close, as shown by his support of Abraham, during the latter's first marriage to a non-Jewess. Mr. Sebag-Montefiore also raised the question of Sir Moses' health and asked whether there was significance in his regularly being accompanied by his physician, Dr. Hodgkin.

Mr. Denzil Sebag-Montefiore supported the suggestion that Abraham Montefiore's death was connected with his brother's decision to retire. The Alliance Assurance Company was a family concern with three brothers-in-law (Moses Montefiore, N. M. Rothschild, Benjamin Gompertz) and founded also because Jews then found it difficult to obtain insurance cover. A contributory reason for Moses' retirement was expressed in his wife's advice: 'Thank God and be content'. The Montefiores' journeys were due not to a passion for travel but the need to see conditions on the spot.

Professor Zvi Ankori made two points. First, Montefiore's wish to visit Russia in 1830 was due to the deterioration in the conditions of the Jews there after the accession of Tsar Nicholas in 1825. Second, there had been cases of the blood libel in the 15c. under the Ottomans, as instanced by Turkish documents of the period of Mehmed II (1451–1481). It recurred in the 1530's in Anatolia, at Tokat and Amasya. In the nineteenth century, there was a blood libel accusation at Meshed in Persia. Reforms in the mid-nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire were aimed at putting minorities on an equal footing (the revival of the office of *Haham Bashi* was part of this process). The Latin Christians, who were now officially on the same level as the Jews and the Greek Orthodox, resented this and attacks on Jews were a result. There was also a recurrence of the blood libel every few years in the Greek Islands and the Peloponnese.

Dr. Alan Crown asked about Australian connections with the Montefiores. The Chairman mentioned Jacob Montefiore, and his brother Joseph Barrow Montefiore, sons of Eliezer Montefiore (Sir Moses' uncle), and referred to Aaron Aaron, *The Sephardim of Australia*.

II
THE ROLE OF SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE
IN THE HISTORY OF ANGLO-JEWRY

Dr. Aubrey Newman

CHAIRMAN
Dr. Helen Rosenau

THE absence of any major study of Sir Moses Montefiore is not only a reflection on the problems of the source material as explained earlier by Dr. Richard Barnett. It is indeed a mark of the problems facing the modern historian; the subject is so vast, so bestrides the whole of nineteenth-century Anglo-Jewry, that the vast majority of historians are still too scared to be able even to contemplate it. He is a figure much larger than life, so that he is a figure of significance in terms of Anglo-Jewry over a period of activity of more than eighty years, of significance to European Jewry of more than fifty years, of significance to the Jewry of Eretz Israel of nearly sixty years; but add to that that he has a significance in terms of British and European non-Jewry as well over much of this period. Add to that too that the years in which he has these significances is a period when these bodies are undergoing tremendous changes, that to use a very over-worked cliché these are years of change and transition, and it is easy to see why the average historian is too scared to try and do more than scratch at the surface.

If therefore I stand before you to deliver this paper it is partly in a mood almost of temerity but partly also in the hope of having some of the gaps filled in by others, gaps which I am completely unqualified to try and discuss. What I am going to try and do is to discuss the role of Sir Moses both within his own community and in the wider non-Jewish English body as a whole, and above all to try and raise important issues rather than try to answer all the questions which I intend to raise. The feeling of going into a lions' den is the stronger with the presence here of so many of his family. I am not however going to indulge in a Lytton Strachey approach; on the other hand it does remain essential to examine the Montefiore story very critically.

I begin with a recapitulation of the leading issues of Sir Moses' life. He was born in Italy, at Leghorn-Livorno during a visit by his parents to their Italian relations. He grew up in Kennington, and after what we are told was a short time at school he was apprenticed to a firm of provision merchants before joining a broking firm in the City. His business career would seem to have been more as an associate of the Rothschilds than on his own account. In 1812 he married Judith Cohen, daughter of Levi Barent Cohen, and thus became brother-in-law of Nathan Mayer Rothschild. He moved to New Court, to be nearer the Rothschilds, but kept up his connections with his mother's family, the Mocattas, and it was the Mocatta connection which enabled him to obtain, in 1815, one of the twelve Jews' brokers' medals, for £1200, and thus to trade on the Exchange. His commercial career left him with a foot in both Jewish and non-Jewish camps, but he also had a social life in both camps. In 1809 he

was commissioned as a Captain in the 3rd Surrey Militia, and he performed his duties there until he was stood down at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. In the year of his marriage he became a Freemason – describing himself as a merchant – joining the Moira Lodge in company with a number of his cousins and friends. He resigned from the Lodge in 1819, and although he later became an honorary member of the Lodge which was named after him on his eightieth birthday there is no evidence that he was ever an active mason. In 1821 he retired from active business life on the Exchange, and in 1824 cut links with many of his other activities, though he did not sever his connections with all his companies. Certainly it was in 1824 that he took part in founding the Alliance Insurance Company, he was among the founders of the Imperial Continental Gas Association, and was one of the founding directors of the Provincial Bank of Ireland. In 1825 he moved out of the city, to the West End, ending in Park Lane.

Closely associated with his business career was his connection with the Bevis Marks Synagogue, a connection built up originally, perhaps, through his links with the Mocatta family. By 1808 he had become one of the Lavadores, a member of the Chevra Kadisha of the Congregation, in 1814 he became the Synagogue's Treasurer, and in 1818 he succeeded in due turn as President, serving several times in that office. It was through his connection with that body that he found his way to such other bodies as the Board of Deputies. At this stage it would not, I should imagine, have been his wealth which gave him authority, for he would not have been amongst the richest of that body, but his general character. But his retiral from business was followed by a growing interest in the affairs of the community; his career was quite clearly brought-on by his Mocatta uncles and by the support and inspiration of his wife Judith.

The connections between himself and his uncle Moses Mocatta would certainly deserve further investigation; it was during his uncle's presidency of the Board of Deputies that he first became a member of the Board, and it was to be on his uncle's retirement from that office that he himself became President in his turn. Yet, as will be shown, he was not always on the best of terms with his uncle, and there were to be a number of occasions when they found themselves on opposing sides of very contentious issues.

The Board of Deputies was to be the springboard of his career in Anglo-Jewry, the career which in effect was to make him a virtual shtadlan. His first visit to Palestine might well have kindled in him an enthusiasm for that country which was to remain in him until his death, but at the same time it must have given him also a taste for foreign travelling under official, or quasi-official auspices.

His 'representative' career opened in 1828 when he was put on to a committee of the Board to discuss with Ministers the political disabilities

under which the Jews still suffered. He was still not yet regarded as the most prominent among the Anglo-Jewish community, but his election as President of the Board of Deputies, followed two years later by his election as Sheriff of the City of London, put him into that position so far as the outside world was concerned. Dr. Barnett has already indicated occasions when the Foreign Office directed copies of official despatches to be sent to him, and this in itself indicates a rather unusual status for the time. There are, too, various other aspects of his career which go some way to indicating a rather unusual set of circumstances about him and the offices which he occupied. His Presidency was marked at its outset by a dramatic reconstruction of the constitution of the Board, and indeed it is not unfair to see in him a conscious instrument by which the Board was revitalised and made much more representative of the Anglo-Jewish community as a whole. At the same time the attempt was being made to secure the recognition of the Board as the sole means of communication between Anglo-Jewry and the Government. There had already been a number of changes in the law, such as that on the celebration of marriages and the means whereby they were to be registered, which had already given tremendous power to the Board, and in particular to the President of the Board, such as the right to declare whether any particular congregation was to be recognised as being Jewish. When, after 1840, there was to develop the controversy over the West London Congregation of British Jews a great deal of that was to include arguments over Montefiore himself, over the way in which he was trying to run the Board, and the attempt in ways in which he was trying to arrogate to himself a virtual monopoly of contacts with ministers. Virtually the same arguments were to be rehearsed again in 1853, and in that episode too, as Judge Finstein has shown, much of the controversy in practice represented a degree of discontent with Montefiore himself.¹

The other foundation stone of his career must of course be the unique position he occupied in the non-Jewish world. In this context of course a great deal of attention must be paid to his term of office as Sheriff of London and Middlesex, in 1837–8. He was not, of course, the first Jewish holder of the office, and he had not been as prominent in City politics as David Salomons (the first Jewish holder of that office) had been. The work already done on the circumstances of Montefiore's election shows the extent to which it must be put into the context of City politics, and how comparatively little connection it has with Jewish matters or genuine desires to establish Jewish political emancipation or even Montefiore's own personal prestige. Nonetheless the way in which he exercised his office, and maintained his personal religious position, could not do anything else but reflect favourably upon him, while his being honoured with a knighthood (in Coronation year) was equally significant for the Anglo-Jewish community. He had also a comparatively close connection

with the royal family – the Duchess of Kent was his neighbour at Ramsgate, and her daughter (now Queen Victoria) had played in his gardens.

What probably gave him the unique status which thereafter he occupied was the Damascus affair. It is not for me here to repeat the details concerning it, but what is significant here is the way in which, after his return, he was welcomed by all ranks of society. The Queen allowed him to add to his armorial bearings supporters holding banners with the word *Jerusalem* in Hebrew, the major congregations held services of thanksgiving on his safe return, and a magnificent piece of silver, suitably inscribed, was presented to him. No one after that could fail to regard him as the official spokesman of his people, and it is of course after that that, I think, he too came to regard himself as such. It was surely for that reason that, as Dr. Barnett has reminded us, he asked for a baronetcy, and it was surely for that reason that he was given one. Yet despite this very strong regard there were limitations on it. The grant of heraldic supporters to mark his exertions on behalf of his co-religionists was unique; the bestowing of a baronetcy upon him and the later suggestion that it be given a special remainder so that it could be inherited by his great-nephew equally to some extent testify to the esteem in which he was apparently held by his non-Jewish contemporaries. And yet it must be pointed out that when it was suggested, as it was on several occasions, that he be given a peerage the suggestion was either turned down as it was by Disraeli, or neglected, as it was by Gladstone. It is not at all clear indeed whether the Prime Minister – any Prime Minister – ever strongly recommended a peerage for him, and so it is not clear whether Queen Victoria would have been so opposed to his being honoured as she was, for example, to Lionel de Rothschild. Not altogether irrelevant in this connection is the limited extent to which Sir Moses himself was particularly interested by that stage. He never, for example, seems to have sought election to the House of Commons (unlike David Salomons), and indeed one of the arguments against him in 1853 was that he was not as active in the search for full political emancipation for Jews as some of his contemporaries would have wished. And when it was suggested that he should be given a special remainder for his baronetcy to allow his great-nephew to succeed to it, the matter was allowed to drop after it was discovered that Sir Moses himself was not happy about the idea. But the issue does remain as to whether there was a limit to the extent to which Jews were accepted in non-Jewish society or even whether Sir Moses himself thought that there was such (or ought to be such) a limit. Certainly however by the time of his hundredth birthday he had come to occupy a place which was unique. He was in that year referred to by Victoria and by Gladstone as 'excellent old Centenarian patriarch' and as 'Good old Sir Moses'. The year of his hundredth birthday was marked all

The Role of Sir Moses Montefiore in the History of Anglo-Jewry

over the country by celebrations and receptions, participated in by all ranks and indeed by Jews and non-Jews alike, and his death the following year was equally the occasion of widespread manifestation of sympathy.

I have suggested that Sir Moses was virtually a 'shtadlan', recognising the anachronism which is in a sense inherent in that term, if used at this time. But if the role which I think he was trying to play is examined it can best be understood by reference to that role on the continent, and after all he, with the possible exception of Joseph Salvador, was the first to seek it in Anglo-Jewry. He may have on several occasions have been guided by some form of intuition on when to 'push', and when not to do so, but it is certainly important to realise that when he did want to do so he had the right sort of contacts. What seems interesting too in this connection is the absence of any obvious connection between him and Disraeli.

But equally important in judging Sir Moses' place must be two further factors. One was undoubtedly his own personality. Many contemporaries agree in saying that he had a likeable personality, and this must have gone down very well, not least of all when he was trying to remain on friendly terms with Mehemet Ali and all his rivals at the same time. But equally he must be placed into context, a self-made man with a deep sense of social responsibility. This was very much a Victorian trait, and one can see in a slightly later period the emergence of that feature in men like Joseph Chamberlain or Lionel Louis Cohen; in their way these men too looked round at the world and saw what they thought needed bettering. Moses Montefiore looked around, and saw what amongst his Jewish brethren, however poor or far away they may have been, needed bettering. He did it, and he did it for the best of reasons. And it is for that, recognised as such by his non-Jewish and his Jewish contemporaries alike, that he owes his place in the history of Anglo-Jewry.

NOTE

- 1 *Jewish Quarterly* (1978), pp. 103–113.

DISCUSSION

Professor Henriques said that in 1841 Daniel O'Connell drew attention to the dichotomy between the power which Jews could exercise in finance and their lack of formal political rights. *Dr. Barnett* mentioned the invaluable material, needing further study, in the Board of Deputies Archives. *Dr. Lipman* referred to the discussion of Sir Moses' shrievalty and its relationship to City of London politics in his paper in *Three Centuries of Anglo-Jewish History*. *Mr. Denzil Sebag-Montefiore* stressed:

- (i) Sir Moses' activities on disabilities were guided by a Sephardi's intuition about how and when to 'push' – and when not to do so;
- (ii) his work for the Imperial Continental Gas Company – the first to introduce street gas-lighting – which showed him, as in his other economic activities, as an innovator and which won him the F.R.S.;
- (iii) how much of his devotion to Jewish interests was due to the influence of his wife.

Professor Ankori questioned the use of the term 'shtadlan' as anachronistic in the 19th c.: Sir Moses was merely using the only means of diplomacy available to him. *Dr. Newman* replied that 'shtadlanut' was an alien concept in the British context but the role Sir Moses sought to play could best be understood by reference to the role of the 'shtadlan' and Sir Moses (with the possible exception of Joseph Salvador) was the first to seek it in Anglo-Jewry. *Mrs Myrtle Franklin* asked whether it was not Queen Victoria who refused Montefiore a peerage and *Dr. Newman* questioned whether the issue was ever submitted to her.¹

Dr. Julius Carlebach suggested that Montefiore's achievements pointed to the relationship between being Jewish and being emancipated. In the Damascus Affair, Crémieux enjoyed emancipation but no support from his Government; English Jews at that date lacked full political emancipation but Montefiore could count on the committed support of his Government.

In thanking *Dr. Newman*, the Chairman (*Dr. Rosenau*) mentioned that a key to Sir Moses' tastes and interests was provided by the list of his books

¹ A. M. Hyamson, 'The First Jewish Peer' (*Trans. J.H.S.E.* XVII, 287–90) shows that, while in 1868 Gladstone may not have submitted Montefiore's name to the Queen, in 1869 when the Queen was more than once pressed to agree to Baron Lionel de Rothschild being made a peer, and would not agree to a Jew being made a peer, she was specifically told that Shaftesbury had written to Gladstone to press Sir M. Montefiore's claim to a peerage. [V.D.L.]

Discussion

in the Mocatta Library. Sir Moses' interests in cultural life were varied. While no Medici as a patron, his contribution as both Victorian and religious Jew gave his patronage a special character. The Ramsgate Mausoleum was an example of Victorian historicism, but based on Rachel's tomb and not on the more usual Gothic (which was 'un-Jewish').

III
SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE AND PALESTINE

Dr. Tudor Parfitt

CHAIRMAN
Dr. David Patterson

THE period spanned by Moses Montefiore's seven visits to Palestine' (1827–1874) witnessed the gradual emergence of Palestine from the mediaeval to the modern world. The Jewish Community in Palestine (the *yishuv*) grew at an unprecedented rate during these years and by the middle of the century there were Jewish majorities in a number of towns notably Jerusalem, Tiberias and Safed. The influx of Jews into Palestine during the nineteenth century and the development of the *yishuv* were two factors of some importance in the overall westernization of Palestine. By the 1870s western dress and European cultural and commercial enterprises were commonplace in the Holy Land: banks, hospitals and schools were springing up in all the larger towns. It is clear that through his work for the *yishuv* Montefiore played a considerable role in the development of the country. Over the years Montefiore developed a passionate attachment to the Jews of the Holy Land. A symbol of his devotion to the cause of the community can be seen by the fact that in 1831 he replaced the Hebrew motto on the family crest by the single word 'Jerusalem'.

Historians have rightly attached considerable importance to Montefiore's work in Palestine. Cecil Roth concluded that 'Montefiore also helped pave the way for Herzl, founder of political Zionism in its modern sense. He was, moreover, the father of the agricultural *Yishuv*, which was one of the most important factors in the recreation of a Jewish polity in Palestine in our own day'.² There appears to be little dissent from this view. To judge the extent to which these claims can be justified it will be necessary to examine Montefiore's activities in Palestine.

In 1824, Montefiore retired from business on the London Stock Exchange and decided to make the perilous voyage to Palestine. The Mediterranean was still infested with pirates and the Greek War (1821–1829) made the overland route almost impossible. In Palestine itself the arbitrary exercise of power on the part of local rulers and the deeply imbedded opposition to Western penetration into Palestine on the part of the Muslim population and the Ottoman authorities had effectively kept the country insulated from the outside world. Palestine had become a backward and unsalubrious backwater that had scarcely changed since mediaeval times.

The difficulties of the journey to Palestine were such that this first trip took Montefiore and his wife ten months to complete and for all that they were able to spend only three days in Jerusalem. *En route* for the Holy Land they stopped in Egypt where Montefiore struck up a cordial relationship with Mehemet Ali (1769–1849) the ruler of Egypt.

Montefiore was an observant Jew and in 1827 he went to Palestine as a

pilgrim as many of his Italian Jewish forbears had done before him. In common with tens of thousands of other Jewish pilgrims throughout the nineteenth century, Montefiore undertook the voyage with its attendant dangers in order to be able to pray at the Western Wall and at the tombs of the Patriarchs. But his pilgrimage was to have greater significance, in a number of respects, than he can have foreseen. Although there had been a number of important and wealthy visitors to Palestine before 1827, Montefiore was the first Jew of wealth and distinction to visit the country in modern times. The impact of his visit on the small and oppressed Jewish community was considerable. Rare indeed was the spectacle of a Jew who was wealthy enough to distribute gifts to the poor on his wife's birthday and important enough to be received and fêted by the Pasha and chief notables of the city. Moreover, Montefiore was a man who understood the power of money and the new possibilities open to Jews in the changing world of his time. He thus looked at the impoverished Jews of the Holy City with more than the idle curiosity evinced by the majority of the visitors of the period.

The political instability that characterized Syria and Palestine in the years prior to the Egyptian conquest was prevalent in Jerusalem at the time of Montefiore's first visit. During this period Ottoman authority meant little outside the walls of the cities and even the more important towns revolted from time to time. Such revolts took place in Aleppo in 1814 and 1819 and in Damascus in 1831. In Jerusalem, Muslim reactions to the Greek War had created a difficult situation for the Christians and Jews of the city. This was exemplified by the fact that the governor of the *eyalet* of Damascus (of which Jerusalem was a part at the time) found it necessary to send a message to the Muslims of Jerusalem, which was read out before the Mosque of Omar, forbidding Muslims to kill *ra'âyās* (non-Muslim Ottoman subjects) without express permission.³ The position of the Jews deteriorated in 1824 when the Muslims of Jerusalem revolted against the governor of Jerusalem, Sulaymān Pasha, and the Jewish community was left at the mercy of the rebels.⁴ The plight of the Jerusalem community made a lasting impression upon Montefiore and during his short stay in Palestine he developed the passionate attachment to the *yishuv* which was to stay with him for the rest of his life. His return journey to England was arduous and he concluded that 'travelling is not always divested of disagreeables'.

Shortly after his return to London, the repeal of the Test Act in 1828 and the Catholic Emancipation Act of the following year freed the Catholics and Nonconformists of the majority of their political disabilities. The Jews had thus become the only minority to be excluded from (nearly) full political rights. The battle for emancipation that followed kept Montefiore away from Palestine until 1839. During the intervening years radical changes had overtaken Palestine while Montefiore, who had

been knighted in 1837, had become a figure of international renown, at least among Jews. The well-known Jewish convert to Christianity, Joseph Wolff, the explorer and missionary, reported that by 1834 Montefiore's name was already known to the Jews of Bokhara and Samarkand. One can assume that the same was true elsewhere. In any event, when the Montefiores arrived in Safed and Tiberias during this second trip, there were scenes of wild rejoicing among the Jews, the like of which can rarely have been seen in Palestine in modern times. The arrival of Montefiore was particularly timely as the 1830s had been disastrous years for the Jewish communities of Safed and Tiberias. The revolt of the *fellaheen* of 1834, the earthquake of 1837 (in which more than 2000 Jews in Safed lost their lives) and the Druze attack of 1838 all took their toll on the communities.

Wherever Montefiore went in Palestine, his friendship with Mehemet Ali, now the ruler of Syria and Palestine, ensured that he was received with great respect. The two months of his stay were largely devoted to initiating various projects. He instructed Dr. L. Loewe, whom he had met *en route* for Palestine in Rome and who was to become his private secretary – to compile a register of all the Jews in Palestine. This was intended to serve as the basis for a series of undertakings designed to improve the economic and social situation of the *yishuv*. In the event, the only contemporary function it served was as a means of distributing alms to the Jewish poor of the Holy Land.

During his visit, Montefiore gave considerable sums of money to the indigent Jews of the Holy Land. The Jews of Palestine were noted for their poverty throughout the nineteenth century. The situation was particularly desperate in Jerusalem. Water was scarce in the summer as most of the Jews' houses had no cisterns and water had to be bought from the *fellaheen* at exorbitant cost, food was expensive and employment hard to come by. There were Jews whose poverty occasionally forced them to sell their children to the monasteries rather than see them die for lack of food. Montefiore distributed a Spanish dollar a head to the Jewish poor and half a dollar to children under thirteen. One consequence of this was that in Tiberias and Safed, the price of corn fell from 5 to 2 piastres a measure.⁵

But such acts of charity were no more than a stop-gap and Montefiore certainly had more long-term solutions in mind to the endemic poverty of the community. During his visit of 1839 he appears to have embraced the idea that agriculture was the panacea that would cure the ills of the *yishuv*. It has been suggested that it was the antisemitic taunt of the radical social reformer William Cobbett that gave rise to his interests in agriculture. 'The Israelite' said Cobbett 'is never seen to take a spade in his hand but waits like the voracious slug to devour what has been produced by labour in which he has had no share'. In any event, while he

was in Safed Montefiore met a number of Jews who were already involved in agriculture as tenant farmers using Arab labour. In his diary for May 24, 1839, Montefiore wrote:

‘I am sure if the plan I have in contemplation should succeed, it will be the means of introducing happiness and plenty into the Holy Land. In the first instance, I shall apply to Mohammed Ali for a grant of land for fifty years: some one or two hundred villages: giving him an increased rent of from ten to twenty per cent and paying the whole in money annually at Alexandria, but the land and villages to be free, during the whole term, from every tax or rate either of Pasha or governor of the several districts . . . This grant obtained, I shall, please Heaven, on my return to England, form a company for the cultivation of the land and the encouragement of our brethren in Europe to return to Palestine. Many Jews now emigrate to New South Wales, Canada etc., but in the Holy Land they would find a greater certainty of success . . . by degrees I hope to induce the return of thousands of our brethren to the Land of Israel. I am sure they would be happy in the enjoyment of the observance of our holy religion, in a manner which is impossible in Europe.’⁶

Of course nothing came of these schemes and even on a more limited scale the frequently expressed ambitions of the Jews of Safed and elsewhere to till the soil of their fathers never progressed very far despite Montefiore’s encouragement.

From Palestine Montefiore went on to Egypt where again he was granted an audience with Mehemet Ali. He is reported to have said:

‘You shall have any portion of land open for sale in Syria and any other land which by application to the Sultan might be procured for you. You may have anyone you would like me to appoint as Governor in any of the rural districts of the Holy Land and I will do anything that lies in my power to support your praiseworthy endeavours.’⁷

It is worth noting Loewe’s reaction to this audience. He observed more soberly: ‘I was convinced from Muhammed Ali’s words that the proposal to found Jewish settlements in the Holy Land and in Syria had caused him to fear that the Jews intended to establish a new state in their ancestral homeland’.⁸

When he returned to England Montefiore submitted formal plans to Mehemet Ali which included the suggestion of forming a bank with a capital of one million pounds sterling to finance the project. Mehemet Ali had promised to give his approval in writing but never did. In any case, within a matter of months the entire situation had changed. The Egyptians had been driven out of Syria and Palestine by Ottoman forces with the approval and support of the great powers. In addition Montefiore’s attention had been diverted by a sequence of tragic events that came to be known as the Damascus Affair.

When Montefiore left Palestine in 1839 he was, in the words of the then British Consul in Jerusalem, William Young, 'fully purposing to do something towards ameliorating the condition of the Jews in Palestine'. But for the time being there was no way of implementing his plans.

One of the ways in which the position of the Jews in Palestine was altered at about this time was the decision of the British Government to further its own interests in the Middle East by taking up the cudgels on behalf of the Jewish communities of the area. In the battle for influence in the Middle East, France and Austro-Hungary were able to exploit the Catholic institutions and population, Russia had a traditional role *vis-à-vis* the Orthodox communities, while Britain with no traditional links in the area had to forge new ones. The Druze and Jewish populations were chosen for this purpose. In a letter to Viscount Ponsonby of 21 April, 1841, Palmerston wrote:

'You will, upon any suitable occasion, make known to the Local Authorities that the British Government feels an interest in the welfare of the Jews in general, and is anxious that they should be protected from oppression, and that the Porte has promised to afford them protection, and will certainly attend to any representation which her Majesty's Ambassador at Constantinople may make to it on these matters.'

It has been suggested that Montefiore was responsible for the initial suggestion that the Jews should come under the British protection and that this was one of the happier consequences of the Damascus Affair. But it could equally be that such a policy had been an integral part of an overall British strategy in the area since the opening of the British Consulate in Jerusalem in 1839. Nonetheless, Montefiore did make representations to Palmerston and his successor Aberdeen to this effect and had discussed the matter with Sir Stratford Canning, the British Ambassador at the Porte. His influence in this respect cannot, therefore, be ignored.

In 1843 reports reached Montefiore in London that encouraged him to further efforts in Palestine. One of the chief dangers to the Jewish communities was the high incidence of fatal diseases that were endemic in Palestine. There were open sewers running through the streets of the towns and throughout the nineteenth century it was commonplace to find dead dogs, cats and camels lying in various stages of decomposition in the streets. The Jewish quarters, particularly in Jerusalem, were often the dirtiest and most cramped quarters of the city. G. Laffon, a French consul to Jerusalem, described the Jewish Quarter of the city as 'un amas de saleté et d'infection'. The diseases that were most rife were malaria, cholera, typhoid, smallpox and dysentery. Until the 1830s such diseases were usually fatal and went unchecked by anything other than the traditional cures such as the use of charms, blood-letting and cauterisation. With the

establishment of missionary hospitals the health situation started to improve. The Rabbis in Jerusalem, however, went to great lengths to ensure that the Jews kept away from the mission hospitals, feeling, correctly, that the hospitals were as anxious to save the souls of their Jewish patients as to administer to their bodily ailments. Thus in 1843 Montefiore decided to send a qualified physician at his own expense to attend the Jewish sick of the city. He maintained him there along with a well-stocked dispensary for a number of years.

In 1849 Montefiore received reports that Tiberias was being ravaged by an outbreak of cholera. He immediately launched an appeal among the English Jewish community: it was not a great success. Partly as a reaction to this enterprise he decided to pay a third visit to the Holy Land. Again Montefiore dispensed considerable sums of money. As the British Consul in Jerusalem, James Finn, wrote 'a great excitement has naturally arisen in various ways among the Jews following Montefiore's generosity'. Finn notes 'Sir Moses has announced everywhere that his principal object was to ameliorate the condition of his people by the establishment of schools and trades and by affording medical relief among themselves and by themselves'. But on this occasion, as previously, many of his proposals fell on deaf ears. The new census he endeavoured to take was opposed. In a report to Palmerston, James Finn noted:

'The majority commenced by opposing his attempt to make a census of the Jews – quoting the precedent of Israel being smitten with the plague in old times for King David's numbering of the people – and as a learned rabbi assured me that when Montefiore was in Palestine last and attempted to count the Jews, the plague actually arrived and lasted three months (in this argument, however, there was an inversion made of the chronology).'

Similarly Montefiore's desire to found a school teaching secular subjects such as mathematics and geography was rejected out of hand by the rabbis as *bittul torah*. By and large Montefiore was always anxious to abide by the wishes of the rabbinic authorities and always recognized their traditional authority among the Jewish community. It is probable that as a result he achieved less than he might have otherwise done.

By now Montefiore enjoyed a certain measure of international recognition for his work for the Jews of Palestine. In 1854 the North American Relief Society for Indigent Jews of Jerusalem⁹ agreed to channel its annual contributions through Sir Moses.

The endemic poverty and distress of the Jewish community in Palestine reached its nadir at the time of the Crimean War (1853–1856). The *halukkah* funds were cut off from Eastern Europe and the war led to a steep rise in the cost of foodstuffs, particularly wheat. The passions of the Muslims against the enemy were vented, as they often were in such

circumstances, against the local *ra'ayās*. In July, 1853, James Finn reported to the Earl of Clarendon:

'The Christians and Jews of Jerusalem were in a state of absolute terror, and especially on the preceding day had been announcing to each other from house to house that the Muslims were to massacre them after prayers at noon.'

The massacres did not take place but the Jews were treated more aggressively than they had before in recent times. Reports of the deterioration in the situation reached Montefiore who reacted with his usual vigour. Along with the Chief Rabbi Dr. N. M. Adler, he issued an appeal which realized £20,000, £8000 of which was sent off as immediate aid. In the meantime, an American Jew, Judah Touro, had died and left \$50,000 for Montefiore to use as he saw fit for the relief of the Jews of the Holy Land. In May, 1855, Montefiore set off for Palestine once again with the intention of putting these sums to the best possible use. *En route* he stopped at Constantinople where he obtained two *firmāns* from the Sultan Abdülmeceid permitting him to purchase land in Palestine (normally forbidden to non-Ottoman subjects).

Having arrived in Palestine, Montefiore was able to put the money he had collected to good use. He laid the foundation of a Jewish hospital (which was eventually built as an almshouse) and which came to be known as *Mishkenot Sha'ananim*. He ordered the erection of the windmill that stands not far away. He persuaded the rabbinical authorities to accept the foundation of a Jewish girls' school in Jerusalem. Believing, correctly, that orthodox Jews have little concern one way or the other for the education of women he put forward plans for a school that would teach a full range of secular subjects. But fearing the encroachment of enlightenment and secularism the authorities were only prepared to accept a school whose curriculum would be devoted exclusively to domestic subjects and properly supervised religious studies. The school only lasted for two years and was always looked down upon by the Jewish community. At the same time he constructed a vocational training school and workshop to teach young Jerusalem Jews the art of weaving. He sent three young men off to Preston to learn the trade and allocated funds for the maintenance of the school. Initially an English gentile was appointed to run the school but he encountered difficulties of all sorts, as might have been expected. Finally after a couple of years the enterprise closed having failed in almost every respect. Of more immediate benefit to the community was Montefiore's success in having the Muslim slaughter-house removed from the Jewish quarter to a site outside the city. The offence to the nostrils and hazard to health represented by the slaughter-house had

occasioned the most frequent complaints on the part of the Jews since the eighteenth century. Of even greater importance to the Ashkenazi Jews of the city was the fact that Montefiore had brought with him another *firmān* from Constantinople which allowed for the reconstruction of the ancient Ashkenazi synagogue, the *Hurvah*, which had been burnt down at the beginning of the eighteenth century. During the same period Montefiore also bought some land in Safed and Jaffa (usually rather grandly termed agricultural settlements) which provided employment for a few poor Jews. The purchase of these orchards (in the case of the Jaffa orchard from a Jewish owner) has led some to conclude that Montefiore was the father of the agricultural *yishuv*. This is, perhaps, to claim too much. During the nineteenth century there were always a few Jews who practised agriculture in Palestine usually in the vicinity of Safed and Tiberias and particularly in Peki'in. But neither these nor the gardens of Montefiore were in any real sense either responsible for, or forerunners of, the agricultural settlements of the 1880s and 1890s whose inspiration lay clearly in the radical social movements of Eastern Europe.

It is of some interest to note that at least one of the motives behind Montefiore's involvement in Palestine was his apparent desire to encourage British interests generally in the area. Shortly before Montefiore's fourth visit to Palestine in 1855, M. Albert Cohen had come to the city to dispense money on behalf of the Paris Rothschilds on various charitable enterprises. James Finn quoted Montefiore as saying:

'He explained to me his vexation at the proceedings of Mr. Albert Cohen . . . who made improper use of Sir Moses' name and went home proclaiming the ascendancy of French influence in this country with the decline of that of England.

Sir Moses declares that no other object than that of contradicting by facts that unfounded assertion, could have brought him here at so advanced an age and in so enfeebled a state of health as he is . . . Sir Moses is unwearied in repeating expressions of attachment to the British crown and nation.'

One event of the 1855 visit has a certain symbolic importance in the framework of Muslim-Jewish relations in the area. Montefiore became the first Jew in modern times to set foot inside the Haram – the area surrounding the Dome of the Rock. A very few years before any Jew daring to approach the area would have met certain death. It is clear that by virtue of his prestige and success in having persuaded the Sultan to publicly exonerate the Jews of the libel of ritual murder after the Damascus Affair, Montefiore had played a significant role in bringing about this new state of affairs.

In 1857, Montefiore visited Palestine for the fifth time. In a memorandum to Clarendon, Finn reported on the visit:

‘Sir Moses Montefiore who was here last summer for the fourth [sic] time exerted himself in promoting education and mechanical employments for the poor of the Jews — as yet the benefit is not very apparent, through their own fault — his institutions however still remain in existence such as a girls’ school and a weaving establishment and I doubt not that they will in time produce beneficial results. Upon the piece of ground purchased near the city, the proposed hospital and almshouses are not yet commenced, neither do I find Jews employed in the cultivation of the soil there: but a cottage is built and an expensive windmill will soon be completed.’

Within a couple of years, work on the Jewish almshouses was allowed to proceed and an English architect, one J. W. Smith, was sent out to direct operations. This first Jewish presence outside the walls of the city was of some importance and can be seen as marking the beginnings of the Jewish parts of the new city of Jerusalem. Nonetheless the expansion outside the city had already started and had been pioneered by Christian organizations. Bishop Gobat’s school had been built on Mount Zion in 1855, the Schneller Orphanage had been constructed in 1860 and between 1857 and 1864 the great Russian Orthodox compound had been built. In the years that followed the Jewish population which was growing at an unprecedented rate started spilling out into the countryside around Jerusalem and occupying new suburbs. Within the walls new synagogues, yeshivot, hospitals and schools were erected and Jews started occupying traditionally Muslim areas of the city. Thus in the early 1870s Charles Tyrwhitt-Drake wrote ‘The number of Jews in Jerusalem is increasing by 1200 to 1500 p. a. — they are spreading all over the towns and outside the walls . . . They have the greatest part of the town and are buying land wherever they can find it’.

Nonetheless, the material position of the Jews in these years was far from satisfactory. The situation in the 1860s was made more grave by a series of cholera epidemics and droughts. In 1865, according to the French consul of the time 60 people a day were dying of cholera in Jerusalem and according to other reports 15% of the total population died in the course of the year. Montefiore mounted another Holy Land Relief Fund and £3000 was sent out to the affected areas. Montefiore followed, by this time an old man of 82. During his visit he concerted measures with the Governor of Jerusalem to improve the water supply of Jerusalem and contributed to the building of a hospital for lepers. Upon his return to England he stressed the importance of new building for the Jews of Palestine. He himself suggested the formation of a building society to fund the operation. For the moment it came to nothing but it was later to be implemented by others.

His final visit to the Holy Land took place in 1874. With remarkable energy and force Montefiore persisted with the projects he had initiated

during his earlier years. In a final attempt to fight against the ravages of cholera the 90 year old Montefiore had refuse removed from the entire quarters of the city, houses whitewashed and streets cleaned. His desire to be of practical service to the community never seems to have deserted him. But even in his last years he demonstrated a sense of realism in his dealings with the community. During his last trip he went to inspect his orchard near Jaffa where the overseer had demanded a steam-engine to make the work easier. Montefiore was aware of the man's failure to run the place properly and refused to help him further. Over the years Montefiore had not infrequently been the only outside source of help for the Jews of Jaffa as they had no share of the *ḥalukkah* funds despite their strenuous attempts to reform the system.

It has been stated more than once that Montefiore was the last of the *shtadlanim* i.e. a Jew whose wealth and power could influence foreign heads of state to the advantage of his people. But towards the end of his life there had been such changes *inter alia* in the organizational structures of Jewry that gradually the area in which an individual could effectively operate became smaller and smaller. A recent study has been made of the power struggles that went on between 1869 and 1882 among the various Jewish organizations to achieve leadership in the provision of relief for the Jews of the Holy Land.¹⁰ The Board of Delegates of American Israelites – once happy to follow Montefiore's lead – sided with the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* in its policies in Palestine. The Anglo-Jewish Association later sided with the *Alliance* while the German *Hilfsverein* took an independent view.

In 1875 the Sir Moses Montefiore Testimonial Fund was established. The subsequent refusal of the Fund to intervene in educational affairs in Palestine and the lack of co-operation between the Fund and the Board of Delegates of American Israelites led to the International Jewish Conference in Paris in 1878. The results of the conference were to limit outside support for the Jewish community in Palestine to education and were to completely exclude support for immigration and settlement in Palestine. General dissatisfaction with this state of affairs and the consolidation and growth of the *Ḥibbat Tziyyon* movement led to the Kattowitz Conference of 1884. Some might see this conference as a continuation of the work done by Montefiore in Palestine. But by now the terms of reference were quite different: the events of 1881 and the rise in Jewish national consciousness had ensured that. David Vital has written:

‘The aged Montefiore died some months after Kattowitz. He left them neither a moral nor a financial legacy, nor did his heirs have his interest in the condition of the community in Erez-Israel. It had availed the *Hovevei Zion* nothing to call their movement after him and the name *Mazkeret Moshe* soon dropped from use.’¹¹

Sokolow, the first historian of Zionism, wrote 'we cannot doubt that Sir Moses was a great Zionist throughout his whole life'.¹² Perhaps, in the rather loose sense intended by Sokolow, he was. He certainly had contacts with people like Churchill and Oliphant who were early Christian Zionists, so to speak, and who were influenced by the evangelical millenarianism of the first half of the nineteenth century which had been largely responsible for a plethora of schemes to restore the Jews to their land.¹³ Cecil Roth wrote: 'This stalwart Jew looked forward to the realization of the Messianic dream and the renewal of Jewish polity on the ancestral soil'.¹⁴ And certainly Montefiore himself wrote: 'I do not expect that all Israelites will quit their abodes in those territories in which they feel happy, even as there are Englishmen in Hungary, Germany, America and Japan . . . but Palestine must belong to the Jews, and Jerusalem is destined to be the seat of the Jewish Empire'. But the fact remains that even at the ripe old age of ninety, an age when a man can be forgiven his dreams, Montefiore was far more interested in the contemporary realities of Palestine and in the day-to-day practical problems of its Jewish inhabitants than in schemes to change the accepted order of things.

Montefiore undoubtedly played an important role in the development of the Jewish community in Palestine. He gave the community generous financial and practical help over half a century. He helped found institutions some of which were of real and lasting benefit to the Jews of the holy cities. It is probable that his well-known generosity to the community was one of many factors that were responsible for the very considerable growth of the community during the period. His role during the Damascus Affair was of great significance and the amelioration of the social and political position of the *yishuv* owed a great deal to his achievements in 1840. What is more, the co-operation of international Jewry in concerting political, financial and moral assistance to a far-flung community was a clear precedent for the political co-operation that was to emerge among Jews half a century later. Claims that Montefiore was 'the one who laid the foundations of the New Yishuv'¹⁵ and was 'the founder of the New City of Jerusalem'¹⁶ are not entirely valid. The new *yishuv* (at the best a vague and unsatisfactory term) came about as a result of the growth of nationalist ideologies among Jews in central and eastern Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century and its subsequent development was aided by the fact that throughout the nineteenth century the old *yishuv* had grown as much as it had. The institutional aspects of the old *yishuv* which were of most importance to the 'new' settlers were only in part Montefiore's responsibility. As far as Jerusalem is concerned, we have already seen that the development of New Jerusalem was largely pioneered by Christian groups.¹⁷ However what can be said is that no other individual played a greater part in the development of the 'old' Jewish community in Palestine than did Montefiore and with such a

conclusion, one imagines, Montefiore himself would have been well pleased.

NOTES

- 1 The term Palestine is used to denote the area which might otherwise be called the Holy Land or in Hebrew *Eretz Yisrael*. In the nineteenth century the term carried no political or administrative connotation.
- 2 C. Roth, 'Moses Montefiore' in S. Noveck (ed.) *Great Jewish Personalities in Modern Times*, (London, 1964) 55. For similar views see I. Ben-Zvi, 'Eretz Yisrael under Ottoman Rule' in L. Finkelstein (ed.) *The Jews: Their History*, (New York, 1971) I, 481.
- 3 See S. N. Spyridon, *Annals of Jerusalem 1821-1841*, (Jerusalem, 1938) p. 19; W. Jowett, *Christian Researches in Syria and the Holy Land in 1823 and 1824*, (London, 1825), p. 323.
- 4 J. Schwartz, *A Descriptive Geography of Palestine*, (Philadelphia, 1850) 375-6.
- 5 L. Loewe (ed.) *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, (London, 1890) i, 167-8.
- 6 *Ibid.* 107.
- 7 L. Wolf, *Sir Moses Montefiore, A Centennial Biography*, (London, 1884) p. 78, *Diaries*, i, 199 ff.
- 8 I. Ben-Zvi, *op. cit.*, 480.
- 9 For this body, see *Diaries*, II, p. 30 [V.D.L.]
- 10 Y. Kellner, *Lema'an Tziyyon*, (Jerusalem, 1976).
- 11 D. Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*, (Oxford, 1975), 169.
- 12 N. Sokolow, *History of Zionism 1600-1918*, (London, 1919), ii, 119.
- 13 See M. Verete, 'The Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought 1790-1840' in *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.8, no. 1, 1972.
- 14 C. Roth, *op. cit.*, 54.
- 15 P. Goodman, *Moses Montefiore*, (Philadelphia, 1925), 180.
- 16 S. U. Nahon, *Sir Moses Montefiore*, (Jerusalem, 1965), 68.
- 17 See also M. Eliav, *Eretz Yisrael ve-Yishuvah ba-Meah ha-19*, (Jerusalem, 1978), 173.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Benjamin Jaffe said that evaluation of Sir Moses' contribution to Jewish development in Palestine had been impeded by lack of material and this had led to controversy in scholarly circles in Israel about his role. Sir Moses has not referred to the Board of Deputies or Charles Churchill's plan for Jewish settlement. Was he afraid of missionary influences and was this also why he did not support the plan for a Jaffa-Jerusalem railway?

Mr. Schischa suggested that Sir Moses' achievement was that he convinced Jews to settle outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Mr. Denzil Sebag-Montefiore thought that Sir Moses was confident about an eventual political restoration of a Jewish state and in 1875 he appealed to all Jews to help; but, while he aimed at this achievement, he did not think it could be rushed.

Dr. Parfitt replied that it was to Sir Moses' credit that he was not influenced by millenarianism to give up practical steps to improve the existing situation.

Dr. Rosenau commented on the contribution to town planning made by the design of Sir Moses' suburbs, which were linear and could be extended, and did not have closed courtyards.

Dr. Jonathan Webber said that before 1882 the power-base of the Yishuv did not extend beyond the rabbinate in the four Holy Cities. Did Sir Moses get on badly with the Rabbis, as instanced by the *Herem* imposed on him for going on the Temple Mount. *Mr. Schischa* said Sir Moses had good relations with the rabbinate and the ban was issued only by a few extremists. *Dr. Parfitt* added that it was caused by Sir Moses' payment for a teacher to give instruction in Arabic.

Mrs. Franklin said Sir Moses should be remembered for his educational work, the foundation of the girls' school. He was a creator of gardens, concerned about the problems of security and water, the conservation of Rachel's Tomb and the Western Wall, and anxious to bring Sephardim and Ashkenazim together.

Professor Henriques drew attention to the useful documents appended to Lady Montefiore's *Notes from a Journal*; and that Sir Moses' encouragement of 'spade husbandry' was the contemporary Victorian panacea for poverty and criminality.

Discussion

Dr. Richard Barnett mentioned that Sir Moses had referred to a committee of the Board of Deputies Colonel Gawler's scheme for purchasing the whole of Palestine; Sir Moses' interest in the later scheme proposed for a railway; and his wish to work with the Turkish authorities.

IV

SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE'S ACTIVITIES ON BEHALF OF DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

- 1 Introduction *Dr. V. D. Lipman c.v.o.*
- 2 Who killed Father Thomas?
Professor U. R. Q. Henriques
- 3 Sir Moses Montefiore in Russia *Mr. B. Jaffe*

INTRODUCTION

THE Damascus Affair of 1840 (and the simultaneous blood libel at Rhodes) was Sir Moses', and the Board of Deputies', first recorded intervention for Jews abroad. Sir Moses had met Mehemet Ali, ruler of Egypt, on a previous visit to the Holy Land; and this helped him to see Mehemet Ali again and to obtain action in Damascus, then under Egyptian control. Sir Moses followed his visit to Damascus by going on to Constantinople, where he obtained the celebrated *firman*, to Rome (in an unsuccessful effort to get an offensive tablet removed from the Capuchin convent in Damascus) and to Paris (since the French consul bore responsibility for instigating the accusation). In 1846 came Sir Moses' first visit to St Petersburg, and to the Jewish communities in Lithuania and Poland on the way back. In 1859 he went to Rome – again unsuccessfully – to try to get the Church to return Edgardo Mortara. In 1863–4 he went to Morocco; in 1867 to Rumania; in 1872 again to Russia. This catalogue excludes Sir Moses' seven visits to Jerusalem. But visits abroad were not the sum of his activity for other Jewries. Both personally, and as President of the Board of Deputies almost continuously from 1835–74, he dealt with a mass of correspondence, relating to countries he had visited and to others. For instance, he was twice dissuaded from going to Persia but was actively involved in getting the British authorities to do what they could to help Persian Jews.

His method was always to work through the Foreign Office – to see the minister in charge, obtain introductions to local British representatives and use these as his intermediaries with the local rulers. He believed always in going to the top – to see the monarch not only of the country where Jews had to be helped but also of any state which might influence that country: thus he obtained audience with Louis Philippe to seek to influence French action in Syria, Louis Napoleon to try to influence the Pope, Queen Isabella of Spain as a preliminary to going to Morocco. He lost no opportunity to cultivate contacts at the highest level in each country: for instance, he had both the future ruler of Egypt (Said Pasha) and the latter's son Toussoun as his house-guests for successive visits.

His style was diplomatic, and polite to the point of effusive flattery. 'I am fully convinced,' he wrote in 1881, 'that it is only by mild and judicious representations – relying in advance as it were on their kindness and humanity – that you have a chance of your application reaching the throne of the Emperor.'¹ When he was made a baronet in 1846, a reason was 'the hope that it may aid your truly benevolent efforts to improve the social conditions of the Jews in other countries by temperate appeals to the justice and humanity of their rulers.'²

His close association with British officialdom in an age of expanding British power and prestige suggests the question whether he was merely using Britain to aid his ends or was himself being used as an instrument of British foreign policy. He was, to some extent, successful in getting British representatives to intervene in the Ottoman Empire to protect Jews, as the French protected Latin Catholics and the Russians the Greek Orthodox. This gave a *locus* for intervention to Britain; but equally, even more, it was of some help to the Jews; and one can hardly doubt Sir Moses' fundamental motives. 'When my brethren suffer, I feel it painfully,' he said as he left Vilna. 'When they have reason to weep, my eyes shed tears.'

Another question is the relationship of his personal authority to his position as President of the Board of Deputies. On the one hand, he almost always made the presentation of an address from the Board the focal point of his approach to a foreign head of state; and the fact that he was the spokesman of the representative body of so influential a Jewish community gave him a right to plead for less favoured Jews. On the other hand, in 1844, the Russian Ambassador advised his going to the Czar 'as an English gentleman, his character being so well known, remarking that the cause would not be benefited by his acting as representative of the Board of Deputies'.³

The most important question, viewed from the perspective of a century or more later, is what he actually achieved in the long term, both in effecting changes in the Diaspora communities themselves, and in their treatment by rulers and neighbours. To some extent it may be argued this was not a relevant issue, because Sir Moses' interventions were often in response to an emergency: to secure the release of prisoners wrongly accused – in which he usually succeeded – or to have Edgardo Mortara returned to his parents (in which he failed). But Sir Moses had ideas of what Jewish Diaspora communities should become: more or less as like his ideal of Anglo-Jewry as circumstances allowed. They should, while remaining religiously observant, be acculturated in dress, language and habits; should be industrious, practising agriculture and other 'useful' trades; and be loyal citizens and good neighbours. Equally, he saw the importance of trying to eradicate belief in the blood libel, which occurred with such frequency not only in the Levant but in Europe. Indeed, it has been persuasively argued that Sir Moses had more difficulty with Christians than Moslems; and that in the Ottoman Empire, it was the Christian minorities, and the consuls of powers like France and Russia, who instigated the troubles, not the Turkish or Egyptian central authorities.⁴

In Rumania, Sir Moses' 'temperate appeal to the justice and humanity' of Prince Charles of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen could hardly be expected to counteract the anti-Semitism endemic in Rumanian society. In Rome, he failed, as he did whenever he came up against the Catholic Church. On

Russia, Sir Moses himself at the age of 98 reviewed his work after the events of 1881 and still thought he had achieved something: he mentioned especially that 12,000 Jews had been able to settle in St Petersburg between his two visits to the Czars.⁵ In Morocco, he was sure the Sultan kept his word, even if this could not always be implemented in the actions of local governors.

Was Sir Moses by his very philosophy and methods attacking symptoms rather than causes? He was certainly convinced that the way he was received by the rulers of a country must influence the way in which the local Jews were in future regarded and treated by their neighbours.⁶ And, even if this were not so, must it not at least have had an effect on raising the morale of the local oppressed Jewry? To take one example, in Marrakesh, Jews were compelled to go barefoot in the streets.⁶ Yet Montefiore, a Jew who was determined at every opportunity to identify himself with his brethren, was received with the fullest honours by the Moroccan Sultan, including a guard of honour of 6000 troops. The way in which Montefiore, a committed and religiously observant Jew, was received by their rulers must have given fresh hope to oppressed Jewish communities – even if these hopes were not fully realised and his visits could not change the course of history.

NOTES

- 1 L. Loewe (ed.) *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, (1890), II, p. 300.
- 2 *ibid.*, I, p. 338.
- 3 *ibid.*, I, 334.
- 4 Charlotte L. Klein, 'Jews, Christians and Moslems under Turkish Rule', 1860–1907, *Patterns of Prejudice*, XII, 4, July–August, 1978.
- 5 *Diaries*, II, p. 300
- 6 *ibid.*, I, p. 152.

2 WHO KILLED FATHER THOMAS?

IN the year 1840 Damascus was the capital of a Syria which extended from the Taurus mountains in the north to the Dead Sea in the south, covering much of modern Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. According to a report of the well-known economist Dr. John Bowring, it was the oldest city in the world, and still occupied the place it had held in the days of Abraham.¹ If this was perhaps an exaggeration, still the remains of building estimated to date from the fourth millennium B.C.² were found underneath what was in many respects a medieval town. Its position was beautiful, wrote the enthusiastic Bowring, whether you approached it from Lebanon to the south, or the desert to the east, or the high road to Aleppo to the north. In Oriental parlance it was 'a pearl surrounded by emeralds' being in the midst of green and fertile fields, watered by rivers and by sparkling streams. Not only was it a Moslem holy city with ancient mosques, it was also famous for its Great Khan, a multi-domed warehouse and hotel, surrounded by the houses of the merchants who received there, amid much bustle, the camel and mule trains bearing cotton twist from Manchester, all kinds of European commodities sent over from the port of Aleppo, tobacco from the hinterland, cloth, coffee, dye woods, and other merchandise. The goods were retailed in bazaars divided according to the trade goods or local manufactures sold in them. In exchange the merchants exported tobacco, wool, carpets, and woven cloth in which there was an extensive hand-produced industry, especially in cloth of gold or silver thread; also gums made from sub-tropical plants, used as medicines. But because Syria was stagnating, the roads neglected and unsafe, perhaps also because Aleppo on the coast was taking so much trade, the exports did not pay for the imports. Both prosperity and population were believed to be declining. Meantime, Damascus was said to be the most oriental city in the Turkish empire. Oriental costume was worn universally, even by Europeans living in the town.

On closer acquaintance Damascus proved to be less agreeable than at first sight. It was divided into three quarters, or 'countries', Moslem, Christian and Jewish, the latter with gates which locked at sundown, guarded by gatemmen, although it would seem that some of the richer citizens had keys. The streets were narrow and unpaved. They were also filthy and pitted with holes, some deep and extending almost across the street, into which the inhabitants threw their rubbish. Beneath them was an ancient and extensive system of sewers and water courses, flushed by streams, which, if properly maintained might have mitigated the outbreaks of plague and cholera and other diseases which haunted Damascus as they did the other cities of the Middle East. The population was

variously calculated at 80,000 to 110,000. It was divided by religion and noted for its fanaticism and ferocity. As in all cities of the region the large majority were Moslems, although the exact number could never be obtained, since no-one could enter the harems. Next came the Christians of all denominations. They included Greek Orthodox, Armenians (mostly merchants whose families were in Armenia), Syrian Catholics under a patriarch, Maronites from the surrounding country (a native church affiliated to Rome, also under a patriarch) and a sprinkling of European Roman Catholics. The latter were mostly religious persons from various missions. Lastly there was a sizeable community of Jews, although once again the exact number is difficult to ascertain. The Jewish population of Aleppo was reported by the British consul there as being some 6,000 out of about 80,000, but the size of the Damascus community was not specified in Bowring's report. It was probably bigger than the Aleppo community, and a village of 1000 people nearby was said to be entirely Jewish.

Although there were a number of Moslem merchants in the town, much of the trade and industry was in the hands of the Christians and the Jews. Both these peoples were despised by the Moslems, whether Turkish or Arab, who regarded them as infidels. Governments, both Turkish and Egyptian, made the rayas, as all non-Moslem natives were called, pay a special tax, the Faradj, and the Moslems would have preferred to keep them permanently as an under-privileged and inferior caste. Yet the top merchant and banking houses of the Jews and Christians possessed much of the wealth of the town.³ The Christians, apart from one very wealthy international merchant firm, were traders and stall keepers, and took a leading part in the weaving industry. The Jews were merchants and bankers. Although the majority were poor, an allied and inter-married group of powerful Jewish families possessed businesses which aggregated more wealth than did those of the Christians. The Jews acted as money-lenders, for which, Bowring wrote, they earned much opprobrium, which in turn probably increased a rate of interest already high as a result of the chronic insecurity of all commercial and financial arrangements. Part of the gum trade was in their hands, and they were said to adulterate scammony, a kind of resin drawn from a local convolvulus plant, and much in demand in Europe as a laxative. The despised religious minorities did not cling together in the face of Moslem contempt. Sectarian rivalries were rife, and evidently tinged with the economic jealousy which has so often been a contributory element in anti-semitism.

The chronic insecurity ensured that there was little outward display of riches in Damascus. The houses as well as the streets looked mean and dirty. Only when the visitor penetrated the high walls did he find luxurious marble courtyards decorated with mosaics and fountains, rich

furniture, and women clad in fine silks and jewellery, sometimes attended by domestic slaves. The Jewish women were often loaded with diamonds, which represented much of the family wealth. Since the banks were unsafe there was nowhere else to put them.

The backwardness of Damascus, its failure to expand its traditional trade and industry, was due not only to the neglect of the roads all over Syria, but to the political situation of which this was a symptom. Syria was part of the Turkish empire, but the Sultan at Constantinople, who had done nothing for decades to develop and assist the people of his empire, had largely lost control of it. In the 1820s the various parts of Syria were in the hands of local pashas, who were unable to keep order in them. In 1834 the Druzes of Mount Lebanon attacked the ancient Jewish town of Safed, and murdered most of its inhabitants. Damascus having assassinated its pasha, Selim, fell into the hands of one Sheikh Taffetmi, who continued the tradition of oppressing the Christian and Jewish minorities, and permitted a constant decline in trade and prosperity because of the anarchic conditions. But in 1831 Syria was invaded by the army of the Viceroy of Egypt, Mehemet Ali, under the command of one of Ali's many sons, Ibrahim. As well as being something of a military genius Ibrahim imported the comparatively modern ideas and vigorous administration of his father. But although he set up new commercial courts, subsidised education, especially in the army, checked the violence against non-Moslem minorities, and tried to encourage new agriculture and trade, all his efforts were vitiated by the constant seizure of men, money, provisions, horses and carts for his military machine. Men left their villages and fled into the Turkish provinces to get away from Egyptian forced labour and military conscription, and then fled back to avoid the Sultan's military conscription. The mountain tribesmen refused to give up their arms. Outside the big towns the roads were still unsafe, The Emir Bechir who had established an illegal control over the region of Mount Lebanon continued to exercise it. The Druzes of Lebanon (a tribe with a secret religion) rebelled again, the Moslem majority of Syria resented the equal treatment of the Christians laid down by the new ruler, while the Christians continued to hate the Jews. The embryonic peace and prosperity failed to develop. Ibrahim and his governor-general of Damascus, Sherif Pasha, had constant reason to apprehend an attempt by the Turks to re-take their province. It is probable that they looked to the Christians for support against the claims of the Porte to recover its tenuous control over the conquered region.

Traditionally what justice there was in Syria was administered by the Mekemeh, or courts of the Cadis, who were appointed by the Sheikh ul Islam at Constantinople, and administered Islamic law. These courts were notoriously corrupt. Everything was done by 'presents' or competitive bribery, which, as a cynical judge said, served as fees. There was

even a tavern in Damascus where false witnesses could be hired. Yet Bowring maintained that there was not much serious crime in the cities. However, the administration of justice had been recently improved by the Shora or commercial court set up by Sherif Pasha, with a bench of judges including nine Moslems, two Christians and one Jew. According to Bowring, this was less venal than the Mekemeh, and its verdicts were generally considered equitable. Bowring does not seem to have realised that serious cases were heard in the Diwan or court of the governor himself, which met in his presence at his new palace, the Serail. Sherif Pasha was reputed to be religiously tolerant (he had encouraged the Jews to build a synagogue), unswayed by religious considerations, and fair to the rayas. Again, Bowring seems unaware that in criminal cases, torture was regularly employed to extort confessions. This was better known to the ministers of the European powers, who had already started forcing reforms in criminal procedure on the Turkish authorities.⁴ These, however, were very difficult to ensure in practice in lands where the bastinado was traditional and acceptable; and they had not penetrated the Egyptian-controlled parts of the Turkish empire.

The savagery of Turkish legal procedure was mitigated (although unfairly) by a system of consular protection. In criminal cases Europeans were withdrawn from local jurisdiction to that of the embassy or consular court of their own nation. In civil cases native subjects had to sue them in their embassy or consular court, while they had to sue local subjects in the local courts. Bowring saw this as a great abuse, for the native merchants were denied justice when contracts had been broken by European traders. The consuls of the European powers, who were often resident native merchants acting in an honorary, unpaid capacity, gained the protection of their employer's consular court, and could sell similar protection to their friends. The consular courts were, in fact, a usurpation of the sovereignty of the rulers in whose lands they operated, and would nowadays be considered a spearhead of colonialism. Their function, indeed their necessity, would be shown by the events of 1840. Meantime the Jews, as an English Jew residing in Jerusalem told the British Consul General, Colonel Campbell, 'had every reason to be satisfied with Ibrahim Pasha.' More ominously, Campbell noted that there was 'a personal feeling both of Mahomet Ali and Ibrahim Pasha, as also of the Christians and other sects in Syria against them.'⁵

I

Father Thomas of Sardinia disappeared on the afternoon of Wednesday, February 5th 1840. 'Il Padre Tommaso' as he was called locally, was a Franciscan friar of Italian origin. He had lived in Damascus for thirty-

three years, and being a doctor as well as a friar, had made a good living vaccinating the townspeople against smallpox. He was 'quite like one of the people'⁶ and because of his trade he had an entrée into homes in all quarters of the town. It was said by some that he had rather more wealth than was allowed to most friars. Other accounts of him varied according to the side taken in the controversy. He was reported to be a man of violent temper, or one who was 'inoffensive . . . so good and had done so much good . . .'⁷

Father Thomas had been invited on the Thursday, along with some other religious, to dine at the house of one M. Massari. The others arrived and they all sat waiting for Father Thomas, but he did not appear. Now his friends became anxious, and they reported the matter to the French consul, for Father Thomas was a French-protected person. A party was sent to search the house where he lived, and found his dinner by the stove, all ready and waiting to be cooked. Enquiries revealed that he had already been knocked up twice and had failed to answer. He had disappeared in the Jewish quarter, and so had his servant who had gone to look for him there. Many people had seen him going to the Jewish quarter, and none had seen him come out again. The French consul reported the disappearance to Sherif Pasha, the governor of Damascus, and the governor sent an official with an armed guard to search the Jewish quarter, but still without result.

The next step was to arrest a shopkeeper who sold tobacco from a stall near the synagogue. Father Thomas had been affixing advertisements for vaccination in the Jewish quarter, and one was found on this stall at a height which could not have been reached by the Father. It was assumed, therefore, that the tobacconist had seen him and knew something about his movements. After a little 'inducement', consisting of the bastinado, or flogging on the soles of the feet, the tobacconist referred his questioners to a Jewish barber (presumably a barber-surgeon, for medicine was not very far advanced in Damascus). The barber was arrested, but knew nothing. However, nine days later, after several doses of the bastinado and the promise of a pardon if he would tell all he knew, the barber was ready to give evidence that Father Thomas had been murdered at the house of David Arrari, a cloth importer and one of the circle of wealthy Jewish traders. By that time Arrari's personal servant, Murad el Fathal, had also been arrested and induced to corroborate the barber's evidence. About a week after the disappearance Arrari himself with two of his brothers, Isaac and Joseph, an old man over eighty, Joseph Legnado, and two rabbis, Moses Salonikli and Moses Abu-el-Afia were seized and consigned to a dungeon in the Pasha's palace. The technique of the accusers, which now became clear, was followed faithfully throughout the trials. First one or two people of humble birth, by-standers and personal servants of the suspects were arrested. These were flogged and

tortured until they were prepared to give evidence against the more important quarry. These in turn were imprisoned and tortured until they 'confessed'. The confessions were coordinated so that they were identical or at least fairly consistent with each other. If the witnesses hesitated or tried to withdraw their confessions they were immediately returned to prison and tortured again until they were in a more reasonable frame of mind. One or two of the more vulnerable were induced to turn prosecutor's evidence. Aslan Farkhi, a young member of the second family most deeply involved, and the rabbi Moses Abu-el-Afia who had been flogged 'until it was seen he was ready to expire'⁸ became valuable witnesses. The rabbi turned Moslem and was prepared to say anything against his former co-religionists. Aslan Farkhi was strung along with promises of a pardon which would be withdrawn if he failed to say anything required of him. Perhaps the interrogators discovered and took advantage of any weakness in the social relationships which cemented the cohesion of the isolated and inward-looking Jewish community. Moses Abu-el-Afia said the Arraris were 'too grand for him'. They often had parties which he did not go to. There was a coolness 'froidure' between Aslan Farkhi and Isaac Piciotto, whose alibi he was trying to destroy, on account of their wives.

There were attempts to present some contrary evidence. A Jewish merchant with a shop near the gate had seen Father Thomas and his servant leaving the town at dawn the day before his disappearance. Two Arabs had seen Father Thomas outside the Jewish quarter towards sunset, and one had seen the servant on the road some half hour's march away. A Jewish doctor claimed to have seen Father Thomas on the night of February 6th. Several persons recounted a row three days earlier between Father Thomas and a Moslem Arab. The friar had jeered at the Arab's religion, they had come to blows, and Father Thomas' servant had come to his master's rescue and seized one of the combatants by the throat. The old Arab had departed swearing vengeance. Finally a young Jew had seen him entering a Turkish house whence he had not reappeared. But these statements were ignored, except that the young Jew was seized and beaten to death.⁹

The official show trial held before the Pasha in his Diwan opened some ten days after the disappearance of Father Thomas. By that time the houses of the Arrari family had been searched with the help of the French consul, a squad of the Pasha's soldiers, and a large mob of Syrian Christians, but nothing had been found. However, on February 15th the barber Solomon declared before the Diwan that David Arrari had promised him money to keep silence, although the money had never been delivered, even after Solomon had been arrested and his family left in want. By February 25th he was ready to tell the whole horrifying story.

On the afternoon of February 5th Solomon had been summoned by

David Arrari's servant, Murad el Fathal. At Arrari's house he found the Arrari brothers, the two rabbis, Legnado, and Father Thomas, bound. He was given a long knife and asked to cut Father Thomas' throat, but he refused; so David Arrari seized the knife and did it. The friar was left lying on a sofa with his head and neck hanging over the edge so that the blood ran into a lead basin. When the blood had all drained away the corpse was carried into another room, and stripped of its clothes which were burned. The barber and the servant were then told to dismember the corpse. The severed head and bones were broken on the stones of the courtyard with a mortar pestle and the remains put in a water-proof sack which was carried away and emptied down one of the openings into a sewer. Meantime the blood had been transferred into a bottle which was taken away by rabbi Moses Abu-el-Afia.

A visit by the Pasha's men to Arrari's house confirmed this story. The floor had been scrubbed, but there were blood stains on the wall. But where was the bottle of blood? Moses Abu-el-Afia had confessed that it was in a cupboard in his house, but when he was carried there on the backs of four men (for he could not stand) nothing was found there but a large sum of money, which the Pasha impounded. The rabbi was flogged again, and it was then he turned Moslem and became, at length, able to tell the truth without fear. He said it was in the house of David Arrari, who, however, said it was in his. One of the Arrari brothers, Isaac, now confessed to complicity in the murder, and said that Father Thomas had been invited into the house to vaccinate a child. The blood had been sent for by the Haham or Grand Rabbi of Damascus, Jacoub el Antabi, in order that it should be mixed with flour for the unleavened bread which would be used for the feast of Passover. An attempt to withdraw this statement was nipped in the bud. On February 28th Isaac 'retracts what he had said for fear of the others,' and affirmed the truth that he had sent the blood to Abu-el-Afia through the hands of Moses Salonikli. Why this was necessary is unclear, since Moses Abu-el-Afia had assisted with the murder, but it seems as though the interrogators wanted to involve as many people as possible.

The whole story was confirmed by the discovery of the dead man's remains, or rather by the unearthing of some bones and pieces of flesh at the entrance to the sewer, together with half a cap of the sort known to be worn by Father Thomas. The bones were carefully examined by a panel of Moslem doctors and pronounced to be human bones. An Austrian doctor who later said they were animal bones was ignored. The wretched prisoners appeared by now to be utterly demoralised. According to the transcript (which, it must be remembered, was translated by the French consul's chancellor, a man exceedingly hostile to the Jews), David and Isaac Arrari were made to accuse Rabbi Salonikli of taking Father Thomas' watch and keys, while Salonikli tried to deny his presence at the

murder. Moses Abu-el-Afia, now re-named Mohamed Effendi was induced, in open court, to give his interpretation of the Talmud. He explained at length how Christian blood was required for their ceremonies by the inner circle of religious Jews; how Jews considered all other people so inferior that they were compelled to lie to them, to take their property, to cheat them whenever possible: how they were compelled to kill any of their own nation who converted to another religion, or disobeyed the ritual commands of the rabbis. These 'interpretations' were all confirmed by the Haham, who had also been imprisoned and flogged. The enquiry had now departed from its original purpose of finding the murderers of Father Thomas and become a platform for discrediting the Jewish religion and people.

But there remained the mystery surrounding the disappearance of Father Thomas' servant, Ibrahim Amara. Evidence was quickly forthcoming that he had gone to look for his master in the Jewish quarter, and late that Wednesday night had been invited into the house of the Farkhis, being told that his master was inside. Once in the door he had been pounced on, bound and gagged, and then murdered in the same way as the friar. The second murder was a faithful copy of the first. The man's throat was cut and the body drained in the same way, but the details were, if anything, even more explicit and horrifying than before. The Farkhis were the richest Jewish family in Damascus. The accused were Mehir, Raphael and Murad Farkhi, Raphael's son, Aslan, and their accomplices Rabbi Jacob Abu-el-Afia (Moses' brother), Aaron Stambouli and Isaac Piciotto. Mehir Farkhi tried to defend himself. He had been in synagogue that evening and knew nothing about any murder. But the witnesses he reluctantly named for his defence (for such naming was likely to result in their imprisonment and torture) hastened to deny that they had seen him in synagogue, or even that they had been there. Bones and a shoe belonging to the servant had inevitably been found in one of the sewers. 'What do you want me to say?' asked Mehir. The tone of despair penetrates the written report.

So far Sherif Pasha had run a very successful trial. He had sentenced ten Jews to death and their sentences had gone for confirmation to Ibrahim Pasha, commander of the army and the real power in the land. 129 Jews were in prison on one pretext or another. Many houses had been searched and rifled, and some pulled down. Sixty-five boys between the ages of ten and sixteen from a religious school had been taken prisoner and were held in a dungeon with a cup of water and a piece of bread a day to live on, as a means of persuading their parents to 'confess'. David Arrari had tried to concert a defence, and according to Moses Abu-el-Afia, when they were in prison had begged the others, kissing their hands, to say nothing, so that the Pasha wouldn't kill them, or at least they would all die together. But this attempted conspiracy of silence had been broken,

by means which were only hinted at in the trial transcript, but were confirmed in various letters later. As well as the floggings, which were apparently a routine method of examination in Turkish criminal cases, other inducements had been offered to the principal accused, such as depriving them of sleep, putting cords round their heads and twisting them, driving thorns under their finger and toe nails, putting cords through their ears and dragging them about, tying string tightly round their genitals and throwing them in tubs of cold water. But these methods apparently raised no doubts in the minds of the accusers or of the local Christians who formed the mobs. These simply followed the example of the Pasha in assuming the accused were guilty. So did most of the consuls of the foreign powers, who might have exercised a restraining influence on the Pasha. In such circumstances any kind of defence was virtually impossible. Early in the crisis the Damascus Jews appealed to Bakhri Bey, Sherif Pasha's finance minister, a powerful official who was so 'sold' to the Jews that he actually went to smoke pipes and drink brandy in their homes.¹⁰ But Bakhri Bey would not hazard his job, or his life, in defending them. A courageous Jew called Chahade Lisbona who tried to persuade the Pasha with a promise of 50,000 piastres to delay the trials for a month while the Jews themselves looked for the culprit (or for Father Thomas) was held up to opprobrium as an example of the Jews' propensity to bribe. The Pasha took any money offered and proceeded as before.

Meantime the crisis was spreading beyond Damascus. On February 21st, on the Island of Rhodes two Jews were accused of the ritual murder of a boy of ten who had disappeared and had last been seen in their company.¹¹ Moreover attacks on the Jews were starting in the villages round Damascus. There were riots in Smyrna on the Turkish mainland. Even the great community in Constantinople felt itself threatened. But in the course of the enquiry into the death of Father Thomas' servant, the Pasha at last received a check.

The French consul in Damascus was Benoît Laurent François de Paul-Ulysse, Comte de Ratti-Menton. He had been born in Puerto Rico forty-one years earlier, and had pursued a consular career for the government of France, working his way slowly up the ranks of the service, apart from a two years' suspension in 1831-2 for going bankrupt. He had been appointed to Damascus in July, 1839, where he had soon become influential with the Pasha.¹² Whether this was on account of personal liking or, more likely, because Mehemet Ali, Ibrahim and Sherif (who was an adopted son of Mehemet Ali) were dependent on French help in maintaining their conquests in the Turkish Empire is impossible to say. One thing they certainly had in common was their dislike of Jews. Ratti-Menton had first reported the disappearance of Father Thomas to the Pasha. Ratti-Menton had accompanied the soldiers and the mob, to

search the houses and the drains in the Jewish quarter. Ratti-Menton had himself arrested and interrogated the suspects under his consular right of conducting cases concerning French-protected persons, and had then, he said, surrendered the conduct of the criminal proceedings to the Pasha who had 'incontestably more numerous and juster "means" of investigation than any foreign agent.'¹³ Ratti-Menton had set spies, persons of admitted bad character, to watch the prisoners and report on their efforts to defeat the path of justice by bribery. He attended daily at the Pasha's Diwan, and his chancellor, Beaudin, translated the transcript of the proceedings into French.

On February 8th, three days after the disappearance of Father Thomas, Ratti-Menton wrote to the Austrian consul, G. G. Merlato, asking for his co-operation in arresting a Jew who claimed Austrian protection, and was said to have taken refuge with him.¹⁴ In reply Merlato offered to send an Austrian consular employé to the man's home when Ratti-Menton visited it!¹⁵ Then, as he assured the Pasha, he called all the Jews under Austrian protection together and questioned them about the disappearance of Father Thomas, 'even with menaces', but without result. He declared himself anxious to help if the least suspicion fell on any Jew, and would be no obstacle to his arrest. Only he desired that those of whom there was only a suspicion should not be imprisoned like someone against whom there was proof.¹⁶ Merlato was remarkable in that milieu in that he lacked anti-semitic prejudice. He employed a local Jew, Nehmed Eliau, in his chancellery. And he had behind him the might of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, currently dominated by that arch-reactionary, Count Metternich. His enquiries quickly convinced him that the 'murders' were a put-up job. Soon he had cause to complain to the Pasha of spies surrounding his house, which was suspected of being a centre for Jewish refugees fleeing from the Pasha's justice.

The real confrontation came with the accusation of Isaac Piciotto of complicity in the murder of Father Thomas' servant. Piciotto was a man of substance and standing. The family centred on Aleppo, where Eliau de Piciotto was consul general to Austria, Moise de Piciotto was consul general to the Swedish and Dutch governments, Daniel de Piciotto was consul for the Dutch, Raphael de Piciotto was Russian and Prussian consul, and Illel de Samuel Piciotto was consul for Naples, all *ad honorem*.¹⁷ Isaac himself had acted as a consul for Austria, and was an Austrian-protected person. He was some relation of the rabbis Moses and Jacob Abu-el-Afia, and a friend of Merlato's official, Nehmed Eliau. Early in March, at Ratti-Menton's urgent request, Merlato arrested him and sent him to the Pasha's Diwan for questioning. He refused however to give up his custody to Ratti-Menton, or to the Pasha, always sent him to the Court accompanied by an Austrian representative, and boarded him in the consulate. His refusal to give him up brought on a bitter quarrel

with the French consul. He had already fallen out with Ratti-Menton, accusing him of sacking the house of another Austrian subject, terrifying his pregnant wife, and when a servant refused to answer his questions, threatening to send him to the Government to be 'more tormented than the Jews had been'. When the man failed to answer as he wanted, he 'flew into a violent rage, seized him by the throat, and tried to strangle him.'¹⁸ Merlato reaffirmed Austrian jurisdiction over Piciotto and all other Austrian-protected persons, being, as he said, at a loss to know who was really conducting the trials. He also told the Pasha that Monsieur le Consul had no right to humiliate Austrian nationals, nor the Pasha to assist him with troops. It is a fair conclusion that Piciotto went to his interrogation before the Pasha's Diwan with a secure promise of protection from the Austrian consul.

Piciotto was accused of having known about the murder of Father Thomas, and of having sent a comforting message to the Arraris that they were not suspected. But the main charge against him was of having actually assisted in the murder of Ibrahim Amara, the servant. It was said he had helped to bind and gag him, and had held one leg while Aslan Farkhi held the other and Mehir Farkhi cut his throat. The accusers were David Arrari's servant, Murad el Fathal, his own servant who was brought to the court from prison, and the demoralised Aslan Farkhi, clutching his pardon. Piciotto's defence was an alibi. He could account for all his movements from noon on Wednesday February 5th until noon on Thursday 6th. In particular, late on Wednesday night when the servant was said to have been killed he was having supper with other guests in the house of Georgios Makhsoud. He was astonished that the Pasha would give ear to such calumnies, and he insisted that he would stand trial only before an Austrian court. As for the false witnesses, Aslan Farkhi calumniated him because he had the Governor's promise to save his life, and knew what had been done to the others. If he was an Egyptian subject under suspicion and saw the tortures before him, and had a pardon he probably would have calumniated also. 'But God preserve him in the interests of his conscience and his honour from doing such a thing.'¹⁹

In the middle of the interrogation Ratti-Menton arrived, and said something in French to Piciotto, who rose in wrath, saying he had been outraged by the French consul and would take no further part in the enquiry, nor have the matter judged anywhere but in Austria. He then left the Diwan; but two days later Merlato sent him back to finish his defence. The trial lumbered on in an attempt to break Piciotto's alibi. Makhsoud and his guests were summoned. Makhsoud was a British-protected person, and although the behaviour of the British Consul, N. M. Werry, was far from immaculate in that he fully shared the common prejudice and belief that the Jews were guilty and used no influence to help or save them, he did exert himself at least to protect British

subjects.²⁰ So Makhsoud confirmed that Piciotto had been his guest that night. The next move was the introduction by two of Ratti-Menton's spies, Seyd Mohamed Telly²¹ and Khalil Sidnaoui, of a couple of Syrians, also of doubtful character, who swore they had seen Piciotto at 2 a.m. on the road leading to the Farkhi house. Piciotto rounded on them as 'malevolent'. Some people's intention of the total destruction of the Jewish nation was known. He thought the Viceroy knew it, as well as the Generalissimo. As for the servant, Murad el Fathal, he had been in prison for forty days, beaten and tortured. His own servant's false evidence was excusable. He had been imprisoned to give it, and 'the gate of fear is large, and life is precious.' Piciotto continued obstinately to deny the validity of all the accusations and appeal to the judgement of the Austrian courts. With Merlato's protection the Pasha could not touch him. He, alone of the accused, could stand erect.

Inevitably Merlato came in for his share of the mud. An elaborate plot was discovered by which Sidnaoui and Telly were offered huge bribes and protection to say that they had planted Father Thomas' bones in the sewer, and if they refused they would be sent to Alexandria and beaten until they retracted their evidence before the Austrian Consul-General. The plot was discovered by Ratti-Menton and probably existed nowhere except in the fictional talents of the spies and his fevered imagination.

In the last days of April the trials came to an end. Several men had died under torture – the number varies with the account, but the firmest account says four.²² Others had been crippled for life. Most of the Jewish population of Damascus had fled the town in terror. The most surprising thing was that the ten men condemned to death had not already been executed. Apparently Ratti-Menton had asked for a stay of execution in the hope of obtaining further information about the death of Father Thomas' servant. The last man to give evidence was Mehir Farkhi. Later on Ratti-Menton was to claim credit for the prisoners' survival.

The secondary case on Rhodes ended in May. In some ways it was more scandalous than the Damascus events, for it was reported that the foreign consuls themselves had taken it over, and despite the protests of the Austrian consul had tortured the accused to obtain confessions. These had included the British consul, F. W. Wilkinson, who was denounced to Palmerston by Joel Davis, a member of the London Jewish Board of Deputies who had business connections on the island, and went to investigate.²³ But he died soon after, and Wilkinson vigorously denied the accusation, saying that the Jews had been imprisoned for their own safety from an enraged population.²⁴ However, Rhodes was still under Turkish administration, and under pressure from the governments of the European powers. The Porte called the case before its court in Constantinople, and found the accused innocent. Yet the Rhodes case, like the Damascus trials, had continuing effects. For some time there were similar

accusations against the Jews whenever somebody disappeared. Most of those 'assassinated' turned up later safe and well. There were also a number of attempts to deposit corpses in Jewish houses in order to bring an accusation of ritual murder. The trials at Damascus and Rhodes were to have lasting repercussions beyond the borders of those places. And the supposed bones of Father Thomas, buried with much pomp in the Franciscan church under a stone inscribed 'Here rest the bones of Father Tommaso, Capuchin missionary . . . murdered by the Hebrews, 5th February 1840' were a potent focus for future anti-semitism.

II

News of the Damascus trials reached Europe about the middle of March 1840. Damascus Jews had written to their friends in Constantinople. The Constantinople elders had written full accounts to the members of the Rothschild fraternity in Vienna, Paris and London, begging their intervention. European Jewry took alarm. The Rothschilds approached the French minister, Thiers, and also Pope Pius IX, both of whom refused to intervene, although Metternich sent a letter of remonstrance to Mehemet Ali. On April 21st a meeting was held in the Park Lane house of Sir Moses Montefiore. Among many distinguished Jews present were Adolphe Crémieux, vice-president of the Paris Consistoire Central des Israelites Français, and a well-known radical lawyer and politician who happened to be in London at the time. The meeting appointed a deputation to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, led by the President of the Board of Deputies of the British Jews, Joseph Guttes Henriques. Palmerston took action. On May 5th he wrote to Colonel Hodges, Consul-General at Alexandria (whom he had recently substituted for Colonel Campbell, too warm an admirer of Mehemet Ali), telling him that Lord Ponsonby, British ambassador in Constantinople, was being instructed to communicate with the Porte about the case in Rhodes. Hodges was to write officially to Mehemet Ali about the events in Damascus:

'You will represent to Mehemet Ali the extreme disgrace which the Barbarous enormities perpetrated at that place, reflect upon his administration – you will observe upon the astonishment which Europe will feel at finding that under the rule of a chief who has prided himself upon promoting civilisation, upon establishing security for persons and property, and upon maintaining public order, atrocities such as these should have been committed, and that these atrocities should have been not the acts of an ignorant rabble setting superior authority at defiance, but the deliberate exercise of power by the Pasha to whom the government of the great city of Damascus had been entrusted.'²⁵

He suggested that Mehemet Ali should compensate the Jews and dismiss the officers concerned.

Mehemet Ali was already under pressure. Early in May Laurin, Austrian Consul-General in Alexandria, prompted by Merlato, had complained to the French Consul-General, Cochelet, about the behaviour of Ratti-Menton. Cochelet replied that he had already written to the Count telling him to watch that 'methods were not used repugnant to our customs and epoch', but that he could not interfere further in an affair between the French Consul at Damascus and the local authority. He was quite impartial (he wrote) about this 'épouvantable assassinat', and could not make himself defender of 'quelques rayas mourriers d'un religieux français' after all the enormous bribes offered to employés of the Damascus consulate to shake M. Ratti-Menton's conviction and get him to withdraw his complaint.²⁶ It was obvious that Cochelet shared Ratti-Menton's prejudice. Most of the residents of Alexandria did so too.²⁷ Shortly after, Hodges received a letter from one G. W. Pieritz, a converted Jew and member of the Protestant mission at Jerusalem which was sponsored by the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. Pieritz had been sent by the mission to enquire into events in Damascus. He complained of the conduct of the British consul, N. M. Werry, who, he said, had encouraged Sherif Pasha to proceed against the Jews, advised Ratti-Menton, and had tried to get the Austrian Consul not to interfere on behalf of Isaac Piciotto.²⁸ Werry told him he was convinced of the reality of ritual murder and believed the Jews had killed Father Thomas. Pieritz threatened to publish his complaints unless Werry could give a satisfactory answer. He had come to Alexandria to seek help for his former co-religionists. Since converted Jews, especially missionaries, were much despised and usually treated as traitors and outcasts by unconverted Jews, his action was one of unusual magnanimity. It was also influential, since the Protestant mission had the ear of the great Lord Ashley (later the Earl of Shaftesbury), who was Palmerston's son-in-law and not without influence on the British Foreign Secretary. Subsequently Werry as well as Wilkinson had to make what denials and apologies they could in reply to very angry letters from Lord Palmerston. It would appear that the accusations against Werry were not published. But Hodges organised a joint petition to Mehemet Ali by all the European consuls in Alexandria urging him to initiate an impartial enquiry into the Damascus affair, allowing the accused to be represented by counsel of their own choice as in Europe. Nine consuls signed it, although those of France, Belgium, Greece and Holland refused.²⁹ Then Cochelet persuaded Mehemet Ali instead to let him send a very junior officer of the French consulate staff who shared his own prejudices, to conduct an enquiry in Damascus.³⁰ His report was quietly suppressed by the French government, and is unavailable to this day.

Mehemet Ali, through Hodges, sent a cynical reply to Palmerston's rebuke. The fault, he said, was not that of Sherif Pasha who had been misled by the advice of others, and whom he had known all his life as a man of sound good sense. As to barbarity – 'the time was not so remote when England too was the scene of many an act as barbarous and cruel as those of Damascus'.³¹ Nonetheless, the pressure was having some effect. At the end of April, although the accused in Damascus were still in prison, the survivors were alive and active ill-treatment had stopped.

The British Board of Deputies decided to follow up its representations to Palmerson by sending a deputation of its own to Damascus to enquire into exactly what had happened. The obvious choice of leader was Sir Moses Montefiore, who had been travelling in Syria only a few months before, on his second visit to Jerusalem. He was on good personal terms with Mehemet Ali, and while he could use the money for such a mission which had been contributed by Jewish congregations all over Europe, he could obtain credit facilities on his journey from the Rothschilds.

Montefiore set out on July 7th, 1840. He was accompanied by his wife, Judith, who went with him on all his journeys, by his learned German secretary and interpreter, Louis Loewe, his friend Alderman Wire of the City of London, and his physician, Dr. Madden. He also had the warmest recommendations from Palmerston to Lord Ponsonby, British ambassador at Constantinople, and all the consuls in the area, and these were specially extended to protect Loewe and Crémieux who were not British subjects. Picking up Crémieux, his wife and his secretary, the savant Solomon Munk in Paris, the party arrived in Alexandria on August 4th.

Moses Montefiore at fifty-five was an imposing figure.³² He had retired in 1824 from his broking business (though not from certain other business interests) to devote himself to travelling and philanthropy. He was six foot three inches tall, had fine manners, and carried in his ample luggage his uniform as a member of the Lieutenancy of the City of London, which he would don when visiting foreign heads of state. This was his first diplomatic visit to save persecuted Jews, and he set the pattern for his later missions by going straight to the political top and trying to exercise his personal influence on the prince, king or emperor who seemed to be in command. It was not an easy mission. The heat in Alexandria was stifling; Judith Montefiore and Louis Loewe were unwell, there was much cause for anxiety about the safety of the prisoners in Damascus, and the partnership with Crémieux which began well enough ended in disaster. Perhaps this was to be expected as the two men were so different. Crémieux was in the unfortunate position of having no support from the government of Thiers, who was dependent on the votes of the French anti-semitic clerical Right, and had, prejudice apart, no option but to support Cochelet and Ratti-Menton. He was therefore dependent on Montefiore for his diplomatic status and probably felt his inferiority.³³

Beyond that, Crémieux, a member of an old Jewish family from the South of France, had been educated at the Paris Lycée Imperial and the Aix Law School, while Montefiore had left school at fourteen. Crémieux was already a well-known Radical French politician while Montefiore took little interest in British politics and was instinctively conservative in his attitudes. In any case, Montefiore never could brook a rival. Incipient friction can have done nothing to mitigate the anxieties and difficulties of trying to get action from Mehemet Ali in the midst of a political crisis and in a particularly slippery mood.

By August the foreign pressures on Mehemet Ali had increased. His conquest of Syria had upset the great powers Britain, Prussia and Austria, whose overwhelming fear was that his progressive weakening of the decaying Turkish Empire would result in Russia intervening in Turkey and expanding her power into the Mediterranean. The danger was contained, or at least glossed over by the inclusion of Russian ministers in the moves to limit Mehemet Ali's expansion. The Four Powers were trying to find a settlement which would prevent Mehemet Ali from consolidating his hold over Syria. The only country defying them was France, on which the Egyptian Viceroy was wholly dependent. Therefore, as Montefiore wrote to his wife's nephew, he would listen only to Cochelet and not to Palmerston nor to Montefiore when the question arose of resolving the Damascus crisis.³³

Throughout August Montefiore and his party sweated it out in Alexandria, canvassing the consuls of the other powers (the Russian consul, however, 'happened to be asleep') and seeking personal interviews with Mehemet Ali. The Viceroy was besieged with visits, letters and petitions demanding that he give Montefiore permission to go to Damascus to conduct an enquiry into the Father Thomas affair, that he release the prisoners and compensate the persecuted Jews. The Viceroy was too busy to attend. In defiance of the Four Powers he was trying to suppress a revolt which had broken out in Northern Syria. A British fleet under Commodore Napier was intercepting his warships and blockading Alexandria harbour. Meantime nine Jews remained in prison, although news was brought by Lieutenant Shadwell and the chaplain, the Rev. Joseph Marshall, both of H.M.S. *Castor*, who had visited Damascus, that they were now in airy rooms, allowed to chat with their guards, and recovering from their injuries. This was confirmed by a chastened N. W. Werry who was looking after them as well as he could. They were in good health, he wrote, and cheerful except for the Farkhis, especially Aslan who was calling for a visit from his mother, which the Pasha would not allow.³⁴

By the end of August Mehemet Ali was beginning to give way. He told a British merchant, Mr. Briggs, that he felt inclined to release all the prisoners if nothing more was said. Cochelet had made a final attempt to save Egyptian and French faces by proposing that the Viceroy should

declare that the Jews who had died had murdered Father Thomas, not for religious purposes but for revenge. The remaining prisoners were innocent and could be liberated. This Montefiore would not countenance. 'I would rather die than consent to any compromise which would cast a stain on the memory of the unhappy men who so nobly endured their dreadful sufferings. One of them died with the words of the Shemang on his lips and the whole relying on the God of Israel to remove from their memories the imputation of murder.'³⁵ Such a compromise would sacrifice the Jews to screen Sherif Pasha and the French consul. To hush up the conspiracy would result in similar charges soon being brought against the Jews in the East and in Europe. If Montefiore was inclined to romanticise the behaviour of the victims he had a firm grasp of the probable dangers arising from the Damascus affair. Yet by August 25th he was hinting that he might forego the full enquiry in Damascus if Mehemet Ali would release all the prisoners, recite in a Firman his entire conviction of their innocence, his disbelief that the Israelites committed murder for the sake of blood in their ceremonies, his permission for those who had been obliged to flee from their homes to return, and his desire that henceforth the Jews in his dominions might dwell in peace.³⁶

This request was presented to Mehemet Ali with supporting documents, including an account of the acquittal of the accused from Rhodes, by Briggs. On August 25th a firman of acquittal arrived from the Porte, and as a result a further petition sponsored by the Austrian Consul Laurin was circulated and signed by the consuls, but as Cochelet would not sign, it was apparently not presented.³⁷ There was need for haste. The Damascus Jews were still in prison. If they were there when the impending hostilities erupted, and lost the protection of the Four Powers, they would probably die.

On August 28th Mehemet Ali gave in. He probably realised by now that the French were a broken reed. They were distracted by their involvement in the conquest of Algeria, and in any case their naval strength could not compare with that of Britain. Cochelet could not persuade him to go on defying Palmerston in this matter. According to Montefiore Crémieux with his wife went off on August 27th for an eight day visit to Cairo and the Pyramids; but he wrote *en route* that he had heard Mehemet Ali would grant their request, and asked Montefiore to do nothing about it until he returned. Whereupon Montefiore immediately went to the Palace and pressed Mehemet Ali for a reply to his demands. The Pasha promised he would release the prisoners, grant Montefiore a firman or permission to go to Damascus, allow the Jews who had fled to return to their homes, direct Sherif Pasha to protect the Jews as well as he did Christians and Moslems, and give Montefiore a copy of his Order to Sherif. While Montefiore was awaiting the return of Loewe from the Palace, where he had gone to despatch a letter from Montefiore to Moses

Abu-el-Afia (whose defection had apparently not resulted in his liberation) and to bring back a copy of the liberation Order, Crémieux came in. He had returned unexpectedly and was in a towering rage because Montefiore had not waited for him. Loewe got no joy that evening because the Pasha was closeted with the Consuls of the Four Powers, and then with Cochelet. But next morning about ten o'clock Loewe went to the palace again with Munk to collect the Order. When they saw it, it proved to be a pardon as for a crime committed, not a vindication of the accused Jews. Loewe asked Munk to take the Order to Montefiore, but Munk instead took it straight to Crémieux. Crémieux, without telling Montefiore at once went to the Palace and without difficulty got the offending words removed. He told Montefiore afterwards that he hadn't asked him to come too because he didn't think Montefiore would go on the Sabbath.³⁸ So Crémieux snatched the glory of obtaining the official exoneration of the Jews from the blood accusation. Montefiore was deeply chagrined. There was nothing much he could do about it but he later wrote to the acting President of the Board of Deputies telling him to take care that the French 'didn't run away with the honour due to our country'.³⁹

On September 5th the prisoners at Damascus were released and returned to what was left of their homes and to their families. The leading Moslems of the city, who had taken no part in the persecution, called on them with congratulations, while Ratti-Menton protested and the Christian mob maintained a sullen silence. The Montefiore mission still hung on in Alexandria awaiting news of the release, while the political situation deteriorated, and all sorts of rumours circulated, including one that the prisoners had been executed. They were ready to leave in haste if the consuls decided to go. On the 17th the news arrived, to their infinite relief. With it came news that Napier's fleet had bombarded Beirut, putting four cannon balls through the French consul's house, and had landed 2,000 British and 4,000 Turkish troops in North Syria. Montefiore called on Mehemet Ali, with whom he was still on good terms to say farewell, for he was convinced that the real responsibility for the Damascus persecution lay primarily with Ratti-Menton and the Syrian mob, and after that with Thiers. And then they 'sang the song of Moses and with joy and thanks left the land of Egypt.' Crémieux went home while Montefiore headed for Constantinople. He still hoped to go and conduct his enquiry at Damascus, but circumstances dictated a temporary change of plan. Mehemet Ali himself, while granting him a firman of authorisation, had warned him urgently not to go there. The news was that it was totally unsafe. Feeling was still inflamed against the Jews. A party of Christian Arab and Jewish merchants travelling to Damascus had been waylaid in the mountains by the rebels and all the Jews had been picked out and murdered. There was fear that a Jewish mission would

provoke another outbreak of fanaticism from the Damascus Christians. Montefiore was no coward, but it seemed wiser to go first to Constantinople to thank the Sultan for his firman, and procure another categorically denying the blood libel. It was now obvious that force was going to be used to get Mehemet Ali out of Syria, and reassurance had to be sought from the Turkish government which would once more rule Damascus. On October 15th while the party was resting in Smyrna on the Turkish coast Napier defeated Ibrahim Pasha and then proceeded to drive him out of Syria. By the end of the month Mehemet Ali had signed a convention with Napier giving up Syria to the Sultan in return for confirmation of his rule over Egypt.

In Constantinople Montefiore was dined and wined by Lord Ponsonby, who wanted to consult him about starting a bank there. He also visited Rashid Pasha, Grand Vizier of the young Sultan Abdul Medjid, and had little difficulty in obtaining a firman declaring the Sultan's disbelief in the accusations of ritual murder and promising equal treatment of the Jews with all other subjects of the Turkish Empire. What he could not get was a promise of action to remove Father Thomas' memorial stone. But reasonably satisfied with what he had accomplished he had copies of the Sultan's firman made to present to the crowned heads of Europe (especially Louis-Philippe) and made for home. In Salonika he had a visit from Isaac Piciotto, and at Malta he encountered Colonel Charles Churchill who was going to Beirut.

III

Both Montefiore and Crémieux were welcomed as heroes by the Jewish communities of Europe on their respective ways home. But while Crémieux received some support from French liberal opinion he soon found himself deep in controversy with the French clerical Right. Montefiore was enthusiastically supported by public opinion in Britain. He was fêted and lauded, and Queen Victoria granted him supporters for his coat of arms, an honour which had to be specially granted to knights who were not knights of orders of chivalry. From the moment news of the Damascus events had reached Britain the English political classes had demonstrated their sympathy with the maligned and oppressed Jews. The Evangelicals represented by the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, whose attitude was partly conversionist but also largely humanitarian, sent a deputation to Palmerston, and were responsible for sending Pieritz to Damascus.⁴⁰ A meeting in London had sent a petition to Mehemet Ali signed by, among others, Dr. Bowring. In June the Damascus crisis was discussed in the House of Commons, when Sir Robert Peel, Leader of the Opposition, told the whole story of the trials.

'Tortures had been inflicted upon that unfortunate people, he feared with the connivance of some Christian authorities, which reflected disgrace and dishonour on the age in which we lived.'⁴¹ He asked for unofficial interference by the British government, which Palmerston readily promised and which, as we have seen, he carried out. Government and Opposition spoke in harmony, supported by back bench speakers as diverse as Lord Ashley and Daniel O'Connell. *The Times*, too, published accounts from Damascus. Montefiore was suspicious of *The Times*, and it did give publicity to the Blood Libel, printing long extracts from a pamphlet which it claimed had been written in Moldavia in 1803 by a rabbi turned monk, much on the lines of the 'interpretations' extorted from the unhappy Moses Abu-el-Afia, but even more disgusting and extreme. But it denounced the pamphlet as 'an abominable perversion of holy writ' and an account of the murder of Father Thomas as equally bigoted.⁴² Montefiore knew well enough the weakness in his claim to have succeeded completely in his mission. On October 12th *The Times* carried a letter from him to the Lord Mayor of London describing Mehemet Ali's firman permitting the Damascus Jews who had fled to return home and declaring that Jews should have the same protection as his other subjects. He added that the disturbed state of Syria and the opposition of the French had 'hitherto prevented our proceeding to Damascus or obtaining a new trial and thus daring our accusers to bring proof that my co-religionists were in any way implicated in the murder.'⁴³ He had already observed in the Smyrna papers suggestions which he feared might get into the European press that he had accepted the release of the Damascus prisoners as pardoned rather than as innocent men.⁴⁴ Sure enough, on October 20th *The Times* printed a long letter signed T. J. C., Oxford. T. J. C. started by regretting that Sir Moses and his coadjutor had renounced an investigation so urgently called for by public opinion throughout the civilised world, and still more 'that they should boast of the innocence of their co-religionists while all recent letters from Syria concur in considering the guilt of the Jews fully proved.'⁴⁵ He asked whether, in accepting the Pasha's pardon and renouncing their journey to Damascus they were influenced by the consideration that an immediate investigation with M. de Ratti-Menton present to vindicate his behaviour might lead to results fatal to their cause? He declared the dangers at Damascus were purely imaginary. The Egyptians were still in firm control there, and judging by the reception of the released Jews, respectable Mahometans were favourable to the Jews. Even if Mehemet Ali was deposed, with the Sultan's firman Sir Moses would be perfectly safe. The letter went on to repeat the blood libel, connecting it with the ceremony of circumcision, and claiming that the Jews 'hate Goyim and curse them in their prayers', while the need for blood at Passover time was sufficient motive for the minor offence of murdering a Goy. Who T. J. C. was is not

clear; Montefiore certainly did not know. Internal evidence from this polished but violent and venomous letter suggests that he may have been an Oxford don attached in some way to the Tractarian Movement. But this is speculation. More seriously *The Times* accompanied this 'able letter' with an editorial praising it and agreeing that the evasion of the whole matter by the deputation from England and the acceptance of a free pardon instead of an order from the Pasha of Egypt for a searching yet impartial enquiry was anything but satisfactory to the world at large.

Montefiore received a copy of this letter with other communications from the Board of Deputies at Malta, and immediately wrote back quoting the naval officers who had so emphatically warned him of the dangers of going to Damascus.⁴⁶ Meantime the Jewish publicists sprang to the defence of their mission, and of their religion. Dr. Barnard van Oven, a well-known pamphleteer in the cause of Jewish Emancipation contributed a long and powerful defence of Jewish practices to *The Times* the very next day.⁴⁷ But perhaps the most effective because the most earthy and practical arguments against the blood libel had already been supplied by a correspondent signing himself E. C. L. on June 29th. He enclosed with his letter a piece of unleavened bread for examination by an analyst. He pointed out that there were eight synagogues in London. If the Jews were killing Christians for their blood at Purim and Passover the police would know something about it by now.⁴⁸ As for the murder of Father Thomas; it was much too early for Passover. The blood would have gone bad.

The controversy continued, but all it showed was that under the surface even of fair and tolerant Victorian Britain there lurked in some quarters, an irrational and vicious anti-semitism. This was the more obvious in that Montefiore was being denounced for failing to set up an enquiry in Damascus. But no enquiry set up in Damascus by Montefiore would ever have been recognised as impartial by his opponents there or by anti-semites anywhere.

The effects of the Damascus crisis were long lasting. Once more in control of Damascus the Porte issued a firman guaranteeing the status of Jews in public administration. Raphael Farkhi was restored to his position as banker of the provincial treasury. But in 1847 on the disappearance of a ten-year-old boy, the Jews were once again accused of murder. Even when the child turned up in Baalbeck it proved difficult to get those arrested out of prison.⁴⁹ Although Ratti-Menton had been moved to Canton in 1841, his successor who was none other than his former chancellor, Beaudin, tried to emulate him. Montefiore went to Paris to make representations to Thiers' successor, Guizot, who put a rapid end to this attempt at blood libel.⁵⁰ Not until the 1850s, with the protection of the British government, could the Jewish community of Damascus begin to feel safe. When further disturbances broke out in the city in 1860, they

were directed against the Christians, not the Jews. Even then the Christian victims of Moslem hostility claimed that the Jews had joined in the attack on them, in an attempt to get them punished by the Turkish authorities.⁵¹ But at least these disturbances brought about the destruction of the Franciscan church and of Father Thomas' memorial stone, which all Montefiore's efforts had been unable to accomplish.

The continuing danger had caused a rush among the Damascus Jews for British protection, headed by the Araris. Aberdeen who succeeded Palmerston as Foreign Secretary was less complacent than he, and refused it to the remoter branches of the family in 1842.⁵² It was felt to be a safeguard amidst the endemic hostility which the blood accusation at once fed on and augmented. The accusation itself was as old as Christianity, for the early Christians had been accused of using blood for their ceremonies before they had turned the accusation against the Jews. There was even an English example in the thirteenth century story of Little St Hugh of Lincoln. The libel was endemic in Central Europe, but the Damascus affair spread it about Western Europe and the Arab world. In this context it is perhaps significant that Mehemet Ali, Ibrahim Pasha and Sherif Pasha all came from Albania, part of the Balkans where the libel was already current.

The Damascus crisis confirmed Palmerston in his distrust of Mehemet Ali. It also engaged his sympathy with the plight of the Jews of Mediterranean lands in a way which helps to explain his championing of Don Pacifico twelve years later. Indirectly it gave a boost to the long-standing belief of evangelical Protestants that the Second Coming of Christ would be heralded by the return of the Jews to the Holy Land where they would all embrace Christianity, so that the prophecies of the Bible could be fulfilled.⁵³ Colonel Charles Churchill on his way to Beirut encountered Montefiore on his way home, and was persuaded to an enthusiastic belief that the Jews would return to Palestine. Palmerston was already welcoming the idea for other purposes. He envisaged a Syria populated by rich Jews from Europe under British protection. They would add to the stability and prosperity of the area, and act as a barrier against further conquests by Mehemet Ali.⁵⁴ He was encouraged by his son in law, Lord Ashley, who wrote him a long letter on September 27th 1840 in the middle of Napier's campaign.⁵⁵ Ashley was motivated by his evangelical beliefs, but he was diplomatic enough to use practical and economic arguments to Palmerston. He pointed out how suitable the Jews would be for restoring the empty wastes of Palestine to cultivation and civilisation, and proposed a four-power treaty with whoever should govern Syria, guaranteeing equal laws and equal protection to Jew and Gentile, operated by the Consuls under the guarantee of the Four Powers. The Jews would peaceably buy or rent their land, and being long used to autocratic rule and trained to habits of endurance and self denial, 'they would joyfully exhibit them in

the settlement and service of their ancient country.' For the time being nothing came of all this. But it has its place in history, along with Montefiore's first attempts to create Jewish settlements, among the very early fumbblings towards Zionism.

The Damascus crisis was certainly promoted by the political uncertainties of Mehemet Ali's rule in Syria. But the motives of the principal actors are not easy to ascertain, some of them probably lying below the threshold of consciousness. Lord Ashley believed that 'the sole object of these abominable cruelties was the extortion of money.'⁵⁶ This verdict fits the case of Sherif Pasha rather than that of Ratti-Menton, who loudly congratulated himself on resisting Jewish bribes. The French consul was not even interested in converting his victims to Christianity, allowing them to turn Muslim under the Pasha's direction. His sort of anti-semitism has always presented a psychological mystery. It can only be suggested that he was, perhaps, a sort of Himmler without the large-scale technology of destruction. His behaviour apparently did no damage to his career, for in 1841 he was made a Chevalier of the Order of St Maurice and St Lazare, and in 1842 he retired as an officer of the Légion d'Honneur. Judging by the behaviour of his superiors, nobody could be surprised by the events of the Dreyfus case at the end of the century.

But who killed Father Thomas? It is unlikely that the mystery will ever be solved. It was too much in the interests of those who spread the Blood Libel in Damascus that neither Father Thomas nor his servant should ever be seen or heard of again.

SOURCES

I should like to acknowledge the kindness of Dr. Tudor Parfitt of the London School of Oriental and African Studies who allowed me to use his extensive French Foreign Office documents on the Damascus trials, copies of which he had brought home from Paris. I should also like to thank Dr. Richard Barnett for allowing me to see the transcripts of many of Montefiore's letters which he has made. The article is largely based on these two sources.

In the footnotes the French Foreign Office documents are styled Q.d'O. (Quai d'Orsay) and Dr. Barnett's collection is called Montefiore Papers. Some of the latter have also been published in Cecil Roth's *Anglo-Jewish Letters (1158-1917)*, Soncino Press, 1938.

NOTES

- 1 Many details of Damascus are taken from Dr. John Bowring, *Report on the Commercial State of Syria*, P.P. 1840, XXI, 237.
- 2 For a history of Damascus see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1965, II, 277 ff.
- 3 Bowring (see note 1 above) reports 66 Moslem commercial establishments in Damascus trading with Europe, which an average capital of about £4,000; 29 Christian merchants, including one very rich house, but mostly with capital of between £250 and £1,000; and 24 Jewish houses with an average capital of £6–7,000.
- 4 The first of these reforms was embodied in the Hatti Sherif of Gulhona, November 1839. See Moshe Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, 1840–1861*, (Oxford), 1968.
- 5 Report of Col. Campbell, appendix D, p. 137. Campbell was the British Consul-General at Alexandria.
- 6 Translation of a 'Journal concerning the disappearance of Father Thomas and his servant Ibrahim Amarga, lost in the quarter of the Jews at Damascus, Wednesday evening, 5 February 1840' in the Quai d'Orsay archives, 129. This account of the trial with supporting documents was made by Count Ratti-Menton's head of Chancery, M. Beaudin, with notes by Ratti-Menton himself. Most of the account of the trial in this paper is derived from this source.
- 7 Notes on the translation of the Journal, by Ratti-Menton, 175.
- 8 *Times*, 25 June 1840. An account translated from an Arabic journal.
- 9 S. Posener, *Adolphe Crémieux (1796–1880)* (Paris, 1933), I, 200, 201.
- 10 Ratti-Menton's note on the Trial journal, 134.
- 11 For the Rhodes case, see correspondence between Palmerston and Wilkinson, P.R.O. F.O. 78/413.
- 12 I am indebted to Dr. Tudor Parfitt for information on Ratti-Menton.
- 13 French to Austrian Consul, Damascus, 10 March 1840. Quai d'Orsay documents, 122.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 8 February 1840, 090.
- 15 *Ibid.*, undated. Austrian to French Consul.
- 16 Merlato to Sherif Pasha, 12 February 1840, *ibid.*, 117.
- 17 Bowring, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
- 18 Merlato to Sherif Pasha, 8 May 1840. Quai d'Orsay, 092.
- 19 Interrogation relative to the assassination of the domestic of Father Thomas, Ibrahim Amarga, assassinated 5 February 1840. Quai d'Orsay, 208.
- 20 Werry also claimed to have protected the Haham who was born in Gibraltar, but – as has been shown above – he had not done so.
- 21 It was noted (? by Beaudin) that Telly, a Moslem, was in prison for debt at the time of the assassination. Was not an 'homme rangé' but had no crime record against him. He was given to drink. The Consul employed him because he had lived in Jewish families 'and knows all the bad subjects of the quarter'.

- 22 The accounts differed widely. One said that David Azzari had died, but he was certainly alive when officers from British ships visited the Pasha's prison in July.
- 23 Wilkinson to Palmerston, 23 October 1840. P.R.O. F.O. 78/413.
- 24 Wilkinson to Palmerston, 4 July 1840. P.R.O. F.O. 78/413.
- 25 Draft. Palmerston to Col. Hodges, 5 May 1840. P.R.O. F.O. 78/403.
- 26 Cochelet to Lavrin, 7 May 1840. P.R.O. F.O. 78/405.
- 27 Montefiore to Louis Cohen, Alexandria, 14 August 1840. *Montefiore Letters*.
- 28 Pieritz to Col. Hodges, 11 May 1840. P.R.O. F.O. 78/405.
- 29 Note addressed to the Pasha of Egypt. *ibid*.
- 30 Montefiore thought Cochelet was not particularly biased himself but was compelled to act as he did by Thiers – on what evidence is unclear.
- 31 Hodges to Palmerston, 11 June 1840. P.R.O. F.O. 78/405.
- 32 Loewe, *Diaries*, (1890) i, L. Wolf, *Sir Moses Montefiore. A Centennial Biography* (London, 1884); S. U. Nahon, *Sir Moses Montefiore* (Jerusalem, 1965).
- 33 Montefiore to Louis Cohen, 16 August 1840. *Montefiore Letters*, published in Cecil Roth (ed.), *Anglo-Jewish Letters* (London, 1939), 267–271.
- 34 N. W. Werry to Sir Moses Montefiore, Damascus, 25 August 1840, *Montefiore Letters*.
- 35 Montefiore to Louis Cohen, 14 August 1840. Printed in Albert M. Hyamson, 'The Damascus Affair – 1840', *Trans. J.H.S.E.* XV, 65. [Montefiore, as a Sephardi, translated the Hebrew word, *Shema*, as pronounced with the Sephardi 'Ayin'. V.D.L.]
- 36 Montefiore to the Committee of Correspondence of the Board of Deputies, Alexandria, 25 August 1840. *Montefiore Letters*.
- 37 Hyamson (see note 35) p. 66.
- 38 Montefiore to Louis Cohen, 27 September 1840. The whole letter is printed by Roth (note 33 above) and most of it by Hyamson (see note 35).
- 39 Montefiore to Hananel de Castro, Constantinople, 15 October 1840. *Montefiore Letters*.
- 40 Hyamson, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
- 41 *Hansard*, Vol. 54 (May–June 1840) 19 June, c. 1306.
- 42 *Times*, 25 June 1840.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 12 October 1840.
- 44 Montefiore to Hananel de Castro, Constantinople, 15 October 1840.
- 45 *Times*, 20 October 1840.
- 46 Montefiore to Hananel de Castro, on board the *Dante*, 7 December 1840; Montefiore to Committee of Correspondence, Naples, 11 December 1840. *Montefiore Letters*.
- 47 *Times*, 21 October 1840.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 29 June 1840.
- 49 Lucien Wolf *op. cit.*, p. 165.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- 51 Loewe, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 117–18.

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- 52 Col. Churchill to Sir M. Montefiore enclosing a petition from the brothers Harari for British protection, in L. Wolf, *Notes on the Diplomatic History of the Jewish Question*. Jewish Historical Society of England, 1919, pp. 119–20. H. M. Addington to Sir Moses Montefiore. 22 July 1842. *Montefiore Letters*.
- 53 Mayir Verete, 'The Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought'. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 8, no. 1, 1972. pp. 3–50.
- 54 Palmerston to Ponsonby, 11 August 1840. P.R.O. F.O. 78/390 (no. 134).
- 55 Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury* (London, 1887). Vol. I, pp. 313–4.
- 56 *Hansard*, Vol. 54 (May–June 1840), c. 1386.

3 SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE IN RUSSIA

THE Emancipation of West European Jews in the beginning of the 19th century resulted in many changes in the life of the Jews: integration in the European way of life, change of dress and appearance; assimilation in various forms; conversion in large numbers. On the other hand, there were alternative developments: new self-awareness of Jewishness, seeking a new 'self-identity' and self-expression, 'a Jew at home and a modern man outside' in the words of the Hebrew poet J. L. Gordon. These developments varied from country to country, and in Britain we find all of them.

Sir Moses Montefiore was a new Jewish 'product' of the Emancipation era. He was an Orthodox Jew who kept the traditions of his fathers and forefathers to the letter but at the same time he was socially part of the British upper class with its values and way of life, as was the case with the London Rothschilds (one of whom, Nathan Mayer was Montefiore's brother-in-law), the Goldsmids, Salomons, Cohens, etc. Members of these families were active in the struggle for Jewish emancipation and full political rights for British Jews and in efforts on behalf of their brethren in foreign countries. Sir Moses became the leader of these later activities throughout the 19th century. At the same time Montefiore's methods and tactics in relation to the civil disabilities and political struggle in Britain were more cautious and gradual than those of the other leaders of the Jewish Community, an interesting subject, which is outside the scope of our subject.

Since the Damascus Affair in 1840, which was a turning point in international Jewish involvement, the Board of Deputies of British Jews became one of the main instruments of Jewish organized pressure groups. The Board was later followed in the sixties and seventies by the Anglo-Jewish Association and the French *Alliance Israelite*. During the seventies of the 19th century more Jewish bodies and personalities in additional Jewish communities culminated in these efforts in the struggle for the rights of the Jews of Serbia and Rumania.¹

The methods in all these activities from 1840 throughout the century were uniform: contacts with foreign ministries and diplomatic envoys, 'lobbies' in Parliament, articles and 'letters to editors' in the press, organizing public meetings and demonstrations which were also attended by non-Jewish dignitaries. Montefiore's tendency and approach was more 'political' and 'diplomatic'. He believed in quiet contacts with heads of state, direct communications with governments and their functionaries and travels to the countries involved.

Sir Moses felt that persuasion, 'good will' negotiations, were the only

way to change the policies of governments. 'Pressure', according to his approach, should be used only in rare cases. Montefiore appeared before royal and political figures as the 'spokesman' of the Jewish 'organized community', or even what is now termed 'World Jewry', at a time when these elements were not yet known or recognized. Under his leadership the Board became the focus of this representation.²

The period between 1825–1855 under Czar Nicholas I was a cruel, reactionary era in the life of the Jews in Russia, who then numbered about three million. In 1827 the forcible recruitment of young Jews between the ages of 12 and 25 through abduction and 'snatching' ('Cantonists') resulted in deaths, ordeals and conversion to Christianity.³ The Czar believed that the army service of Jews would expedite their conversion and reduce the numbers of devout loyal Jews. Nicholas did not begin this process which his predecessors introduced but he aggravated the cruel methods used. On the 20th April 1843 a decree was issued by the Russian Government to expel more than 100,000 Jews from 50 versts (35 miles) from the borders with Austria, Prussia and Poland in order to prevent 'smuggling' by Jews who lived in those places.

This decree was never officially abolished though not implemented due to various difficulties and outside pressures, but resulted in instability, hardships and great suffering for the Jews. Furthermore, the Czar initiated resettlement of Jews as farmers in uninhabited regions in South Russia, but again due to various reasons, not necessarily Jewish reluctance or opposition, this venture was only partially carried out and many of those who moved there suffered untold hardships. The Russian Government took steps to 're-educate' Jews in a new kind of 'Russian Jewish' school with the intention to integrate Jews with the general population, a venture which was suspected by the Jews as steps intended to convert them to Christianity. Chedarim and Yeshivot had many irksome restrictions put upon them, Government censorship was imposed on Jewish books including religious books, steps were taken to prohibit the 'Kahal' – Jewish congregational autonomous bodies – and 'Jewish dress', which was worn by religious Jews, was forbidden. In the economic field most professions were closed to the Jews and efforts were made to limit the contacts between Jews and the 'ignorant Russian population'. The Jews were classified as 'useful' and 'not useful', with special treatment for those considered as 'not useful'. Jews were prevented from living in Moscow and St. Petersburg, except a few privileged merchants.⁴

These conditions of Russian Jewry were the background to Montefiore's visit to Russia in the beginning of 1846, though he had received requests to visit Russia and plead on behalf of the Jews since 1842. Sir Moses's success in Damascus raised him to be the leader of 'World Jewry'. Jews from Russia, Poland and from western Europe insisted that such a visit might mitigate the plight of the Russian Jews.

At a meeting of the Board of Deputies, held on 12th September, 1842, Montefiore announced that he had received a communication from the Russian Government, inviting him to St. Petersburg to confer with Count Ouvarov, Minister of Education, on the condition of Russian Jews and the desire of the Czar to introduce among them an advanced system of education, but the Government had found that the 'bigotry and ignorance' of the Jews was an invincible obstacle to the realization of their benevolent plan. They therefore appealed to Sir Moses for his cooperation, 'as you, Sir, enjoy the fullest confidence of the Russian Jews; your name is uttered with the most profound veneration by them'.⁵

According to Wolf, Montefiore could not accept the invitation and doubted the Russians' sincerity. Nearer to 1846 Montefiore decided to go to Russia. It is not clear how much he already knew about that country and its Jews, but it is interesting to note that as early as 1830 G. Gilbert, an English representative in Ghent, Belgium, of the Gaslight Station, which was part of the Imperial Continental Gas Association, of which Montefiore was the head, sent Sir Moses a long report on a visit to St. Petersburg in 1826-27, describing the City, its population and life, though it does not mention the Jews since they were then generally excluded from the city.

Loewe, Montefiore's secretary, writes in the diaries that Montefiore 'thought it is necessary now to make himself fully acquainted with all recent publications referring to Russia and its inhabitants and obtained information from German and English travellers who had visited Russia'.

The Russian Ambassador in London, Baron Brunnow, was prepared to facilitate the journey but was not in favour of Montefiore's visiting Russia as the representative of the Board of Deputies.⁷ It became evident that the Russians were mainly interested in the funds they could obtain from rich Jews in the West for the educational and economic ventures of the Jews. The Russian presumably looked upon the development of Russian Jewry as the responsibility of their rich brethren in the West and not their own. It is doubtful if the Czar and his ministers expected that Montefiore would raise in St. Petersburg the other pressing issues which faced the Jews of Russia. They were not used to 'Jewish diplomacy' or any kind of direct interference on behalf of the Jews by their leaders in the West. It is not unlikely that the fact that Sir Moses was a brother-in-law of the late Nathan Mayer Rothschild who had emerged as a leading European banker, did not escape the attention of the Russian leaders who decided to extend to him a 'royal welcome'.

Montefiore took with him letters from the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, and Lord Aberdeen, the Foreign Secretary, and arrived in St. Petersburg in the midst of winter on 31st March 1846. He was received by the Czar and his ministers, Count Kisselev and Count Ouvaroff and set before them all the complaints and misgivings concerning the plight of the

Jews of Russia. In return the Czar and his Ministers poured on Montefiore accusations on the character, behaviour and appearance of Jews; 'fanaticism, smuggling, laziness, negative influence on the rural populace, strange customs and dress which divide them from the Russian public'. According to Montefiore the interviews were not solely negative: the Czar 'tried to assure him that the welfare of the Jews was one of their concerns and that the measures taken with regard to them were intended for the furtherance of that welfare'. . . . 'His Majesty said I should have the satisfaction of taking with me his assurance and the assurance of his Ministers, that he was most desirous for the improvement of my co-religionists in his empire.' In another letter Montefiore writes: 'I feel confident that there is a great desire for their improvement, but I fear there is the greatest poverty among them. The most likely remedy for this evil would be their employment in the cultivation of land, and the establishment of manufactories; these pursuits require capital, which I apprehend it will be difficult to raise in this country'.⁸

It is not clear to what degree Montefiore was ready during the interviews to reply to all the arguments and accusations levelled against the Jews by the Czar and his advisers. He prepared on his return to England several memoranda which covered all the points raised in his interviews which were an effective presentation of the matters at issue.⁹ When Sir Moses visited several towns, among them Wilna, Riga and Warsaw, he was received with great enthusiasm by the Jewish leaders and masses and a large number of memoranda were presented to him by the Jewish leaders and rabbis.¹⁰

These encounters with Jews were unprecedented and his portrait started to appear in Jewish homes all over Russia and Poland. He raised the morale of the Jews of his time. Only Theodor Herzl's welcome in 1903 equalled this reaction by the Jewish masses in Russia.

A very moving encounter was experienced by Montefiore when he visited Jewish soldiers and attended their service in the synagogue. The Jewish schools he visited wherever he travelled, impressed him for their quality and educational achievements.

In his letter to Louis Cohen (13th April 1846) Montefiore expressed his 'happiness from the results' and he believed that the condition of the Jews would improve as a result of his visit. Montefiore did not and could not understand the Russian mentality and their motives, he overestimated his capability to change the conditions and underestimated Russian inbred anti-semitism in the Czar's circle and Government in general.

Alexander II, the son of Nicholas I, who came to power in 1855, changed his father's policies for the better in a number of areas but the fundamental problems of Russian Jewry remained.¹¹ In 1872 Montefiore returned to St. Petersburg at the age of 88 to present the Czar with the Board of Deputies' congratulatory message on the occasion of the

bicentenary of the birth of Peter the Great. This message expressed the recognition of the Czar's measures in alleviating the situation of the Jews.

Montefiore's visit to Russia in 1846 was not a success although it is likely that his intervention compelled the Russians to be more cautious as far as the treatment of the Jews was concerned. On the other hand Montefiore's visit to Russia enhanced his position and prestige everywhere. He received a baronetcy from Queen Victoria and was welcomed enthusiastically on his return.

Montefiore believed in his ability to convince heads of State which was not always justified. His self-confidence grew with the years, but to judge by his 'diaries' he was over-impressed by the welcome granted to him by kings and ministers and was too often flattered by acts of courtesy and good manners, which had very little to do with the actual issues. Contacts with Governments are ongoing processes. Montefiore did not have the tools and the political acumen which were necessary for such diplomatic contacts. He had no consistent 'policy', and was more of a 'fireman' who comes to the rescue when necessary in response to specific emergencies.

Research on Montefiore has not yet reached the point where the whole story is clear or known to us. Only opening of Russian archives, research in the British Government archives and Board of Deputies' papers will reveal the full picture of this extraordinary chapter of Montefiore's efforts on behalf of the Jews of Russia. In any case, his dedication and concern for his people was a phenomenon which opened the way for modern Jewish diplomacy.

NOTES

- 1 See on this struggle: Correspondence respecting the condition and treatment of the Jews in Serbia and Rumania 1867-76, pp. 1877; F. Stern, *Gold and Iron - Bismarck and Bleichröder*, (London 1977), pp. 352-57; 369-93; Berlin Congress', *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. II, pp. 655-657.
- 2 See L. Loewe (ed.), *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, (London 1890); Lucien Wolf, *Sir M. Montefiore, a Centennial Biography*, (London 1884); B.O.D. archives in Woburn House, London.
- 3 On the 'Cantonists' see *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. V, pp. 130-34.
- 4 On the condition of the Jews in Russia under Nicholas I, see *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. x, pp. 523-526; *Encyclopedia Judaica* vol. xiv, pp. 436-439; Prince Demidow San-Donato, *The Jewish Question in Russia*, (translated by J. Michael, H.M. Consul in St. Petersburg), published by H. Guedalla, (London 1884).
- 5 Wolf, p. 139.

- 6 This report was deposited by Dr. R. D. Barnett in the library of Jews' College, London. I would like to thank Dr. Barnett and the librarian of the college, Mr. E. Kahn for bringing this document to my attention.
- 7 *Diaries*, I, p. 324.
- 8 See: 'Some account of the two journeys to Russia undertaken by Sir Moses Montefiore, Bart., in 1846 and 1872 to further the interest of the Russian Jews', published by J. Guedalla, London, 1882; on the journey and its results see also: *Jewish Chronicle*, January–April, 1846; S. Ginzburg, *Historisheverk Yiddish* 2nd vol., New York 1937, pp. 163–202; 310–303.
- 9 *Diaries*, pp. 360 ff.
- 10 One of these memoranda on the economic condition of the Jews in Russia was published in the book 'Writings of Rabbi Mordechai Gimpel Jaffe' (1820–1891) – (ed. B. Jaffe), (Jerusalem 1979), pp. 36–48; L. Loewe papers, Hebrew Univ. Library, Jerusalem, contain a number of these memoranda.
- 11 See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. xiv, 442–443; Demidow San Donato (see note no. 4 above).

DISCUSSION

There was a brief discussion after the preceding papers, in which *Dr. Parfitt* stressed the importance of the Damascus Affair as a *cause célèbre*; *Dr. Carlebach* contrasted the roles of Montefiore who, though a committed and observant Jew, had the backing of his Government, and Crémieux, who, an assimilated Jew married to a non-Jewess, had no support from his own country; and *Mrs. Lipman* asked whether Montefiore used the Foreign Office or was used by it. The consensus on this last point was that support could be found for both interpretations and this was an important question meriting further research.

CONCLUSION

In concluding the Symposium, *Dr. David Patterson*, President of the Oxford Centre, thanked speakers, chairmen and participants; and expressed the satisfaction of the Centre that it had been able to provide an opportunity both to review the existing state of knowledge about Sir Moses Montefiore and to consider the further research needed to commemorate the bicentenary of his birth and centenary of his death in a manner appropriate to this great Jewish personality.

LIST OF SPEAKERS, CHAIRMEN AND PARTICIPANTS

(in alphabetical order)

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Professor M. Beit-Arie
Mr. R. Booth
Dr. and Mrs. Julius Carlebach
Miss J. Crewdson
Dr. Alan Crown
Mrs. R. Eshel
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Fraenkel
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Mr. M. Goodman
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Mr. A. L. Shane
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