

GEORGE MANDEL

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IN BOULEVARD
MONTMARTRE?

OXFORD CENTRE PAPERS · 2

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ERRATUM

On page 13, line 5,
now lives should read *lived*.

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I

The name of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda is known to nearly everyone who takes an interest in the history of modern Israel. Ben-Yehuda is one of the State's legendary founding fathers: streets are named after him, children are taught about his life, and a few years ago there was a pop song written about him. The fact that pop songs are written in Hebrew, and even win international song competitions, would probably have delighted Ben-Yehuda, for the great mission of his life was to make Hebrew once again a living, popular language after nearly two thousand years during which it had been used actively by hardly anyone except scholars and writers. Ben-Yehuda's fame rests on his work for this linguistic revival, and he is generally considered as the father of modern Hebrew.

Ben-Yehuda was born in Lithuania in 1858 and his original name was Eliezer Yitzhak Perelman. He received the traditional education of an orthodox Jew in those days: that is, one devoted entirely to Jewish religious and legal texts. By the time he reached his thirteenth birthday he could read Hebrew fluently, and must have known Aramaic — the language of most of the Talmud — nearly as well. His mother tongue, and the language of everyday conversation with family and friends, was Yiddish, and it is unlikely that he or his classmates knew more than a few words of Russian or Lithuanian. The Jews of the Russian Empire were both a religious and a national minority, divided from their neighbours not just by creed but also by language.

Although the great majority of Russian Jews in 1858 still followed the traditional ways, others were impatient for change. A movement for reform had come into existence early in the century, whose adherents, the *maskilim* (devotees of 'enlightenment') wanted Jewish children — girls as well as boys — to receive a general as well as a Jewish education, to learn European languages, and to study science and vocational subjects. The *maskilim* were opposed, often bitterly, by the conservatives, and for many decades East European Jewry was riven by a *Kulturkampf*. It was during this period that Eliezer Perelman was born and grew up.

One of the tendencies of the *Haskalah* — the movement for Jewish enlightenment — in Russia was to emphasise the Hebrew language and look down on Yiddish. The *maskilim* saw Hebrew as the bearer of all that was admirable in Jewish culture; in particular, of all that was considered worthy of admiration by the Gentiles. It was this tendency that gave birth to the Hebrew novel and the Hebrew newspaper in the very decade of Eliezer's birth. Mapu's biblical romance *Ahavat Tziyyon* (The Love of Zion) usually regarded as the first modern Hebrew novel, was published in 1853, and the weekly newspaper *Ha-Maggid* began publication in 1856. Eliezer's first glimpse of a cultural world beyond the borders of the

conventional yeshiva curriculum came when he was thirteen or fourteen years old when one of his teachers, who was a secret maskil, introduced him cautiously to a Hebrew translation of *Robinson Crusoe* and to the study of Hebrew grammar (another hallmark of the Haskalah, and much disapproved of by most of the rabbis at the time). The pupil was captivated. He became a fervent devotee of the neo-Hebraic literature, and it was not long before he sought wider horizons still. After intensive private study, particularly of Russian, he entered the High School in Duenaburg, in about 1874.

Eliezer Perelman stayed at the school until 1877, and while he was there he became increasingly detached from Jewish interests. Under the influence of his fellow-students he became a socialist, believing that his life should be dedicated to the service of the people and that national distinctions were of no importance. Such beliefs, which were spreading gradually among the more advanced young Jews of Russia at the time, meant in practice that the *Russian* people should be the objects of service and that the preservation of a distinct *Jewish* nationality was unimportant. The one thread that continued to connect Eliezer to Jewish life was a residual passion, which he was not strong enough to overcome, for the Hebrew language and for contemporary Hebrew literature, especially the writings of the novelist and essayist Peretz Smolenskin. These he continued to read, even though the question that was central to Smolenskin's essays — how could the Jews continue to survive as a national entity once the social and legal barriers that had once separated them from the Christian majority no longer existed? — was, according to Eliezer's new outlook, an unimportant one.

Then, in 1877, Russia declared war on Turkey with the aim of liberating the Bulgarians from Ottoman rule. The Bulgarians were fellow-Slavs, the 'little brothers' of the Russians. A wave of pan-Slav feeling swept through Russia, and the impressionable Eliezer was caught up in the enthusiasm. He rejoiced in the news of each Russian advance and devoured the newspaper articles about the approaching freedom of the Bulgarians and their country. In the midst of all this, a surprising thought came suddenly into his mind: if the Bulgarians, why not the Jews? If Bulgaria could become an independent country, why should not the Jews return to Palestine, the ancient Land of Israel, and lead a free life there? And if he, Eliezer Perelman, was going to devote his life to a cause, why should it not be that of his own downtrodden people and of their ancient language, whose very survival seemed to many people, including even important Hebrew writers, to be in doubt?

His schoolfriends dismissed his new plan as mere fantasy, but one of them also told Eliezer that the idea of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine appeared in a favourable light in a recent novel by the famous English writer George Eliot, which was just then appearing in translation

in a Russian literary periodical. Eliezer read the novel, *Daniel Deronda*, and his resolve was strengthened. He made up his mind to qualify in some suitable profession, then emigrate to Palestine.

Although the word 'Zionist' did not yet exist, that is what Eliezer Perelman had become, nearly twenty years before the more famous conversion of Theodor Herzl. The paths of these two men make an interesting contrast. Herzl was born into a German-speaking, westernised family, received only the minimum of Jewish education, and knew hardly any Hebrew. Ben-Yehuda's background, as we have already seen, was very different. Herzl became a Zionist because of the antisemitism he saw around him, which came to be an obsession with him. Antisemitism played little or no part in Ben-Yehuda's case. The immediate cause of his conversion was the example of another national movement, that of the Bulgarians, and the background to it was the tension between his new, Russianised, way of life and his 'advanced' ideas, on the one hand, and his continuing passion for Hebrew literature, on the other. Theodor Herzl, in his pre-Zionist days, believed and hoped that the Jews would become so thoroughly assimilated among the Gentiles that antisemitism would die out, and he even once advocated the mass baptism of Jews as a way of speeding the process up. When he changed his mind and wrote *The Jewish State*, it was because he had regretfully concluded that such thorough assimilation was not likely to take place. In Ben-Yehuda's early writings, by contrast, we find the fear that assimilation is taking place only too quickly, and that in a few decades the Jews will have ceased to be an identifiable national group and will have become, at best, merely a religious community. The only way to prevent this is mass immigration to Palestine, where the Jews will be the majority and will be safe from the threat of assimilation. Thus, the starting-points of Herzl and Ben-Yehuda were very far from each other, but both men reached the same conclusion: that the position of the Jewish people as a universal minority was no longer tenable.

Shortly after Eliezer Perelman completed his high-school studies he went to Paris to study medicine. His choice of Paris was made at least partly because of that city's importance as a European political centre. The three years he spent there were significant for many reasons. It was in Paris that he made his debut in public life when he wrote an article in Hebrew setting out his ideas about a Jewish revival in Palestine, which was published in 1879 in the prestigious monthly *Ha-Shahar* (The Dawn). The editor of *Ha-Shahar* was none other than Peretz Smolenskin, whose writings had so strongly attracted Eliezer in his schooldays. Eliezer signed his article simply 'Ben-Yehuda' — an allusion to his nationalism (the name means 'a son of Judea') and to the fact that his father's name was Yehuda. This was the first occasion on which he used the name which he was subsequently to adopt as his personal

surname, thereby establishing the Zionist and Israeli tradition of exchanging European names for Hebrew ones. At the same time he began to reflect on the problem of language and came, before long, to the conclusion that the proposed new nationalist Jewish settlement in Palestine must make Hebrew its language of everyday speech. This idea was even more radical than that of the restoration itself, and it was to be the central idea of Ben-Yehuda's life; for he soon decided that this was the aspect of the national revival to which he would devote himself personally.

Ill-health forced Ben-Yehuda to abandon his studies and, after a period of convalescence in Algiers, he emigrated to Palestine in the autumn of 1881. His subsequent activities on behalf of the revival of Hebrew are too well-known to need more than a brief summary here. Ben-Yehuda was one of the founders and foremost members of the Hebrew Language Council, the forerunner of the present-day Academy of the Hebrew Language. He edited a newspaper which helped spread a popular style of Hebrew and through which he introduced many neologisms of his own invention into the language, and he also founded the world's first Hebrew newspaper for children. For nearly forty years Ben-Yehuda worked on his great *Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, whose seventeen volumes have been a familiar sight, and a much-used work of reference, in libraries of Hebraica since their publication (most of them appeared only after Ben-Yehuda's death, having been completed by other people). Last, but certainly not least spectacular, he made Hebrew into the language of his own household, in spite of the fact that his wife did not know the language when she married him, and that his children had to be kept out of contact with other children so that they would hear no language but Hebrew during their early years. (Ben-Yehuda is even said to have forbidden his wife to talk to their first child until she could do so in Hebrew). By the time of his death in 1922 Ben-Yehuda had seen the rise of a generation of Hebrew-speaking children in the new Jewish villages of Palestine, and Hebrew had been recognised by the government as one of the official languages of the country.

II

That, in outline, is the story of Ben-Yehuda's life and of his work for the revival of Hebrew. Before I come to the episode in Boulevard Montmartre which gives this talk its title, I must say a word of explanation about the meaning of the phrase 'Revival of Hebrew'. When Ben-Yehuda was at school in Duenaburg Hebrew was not a dead language in the same sense that Hittite, say, is a dead language — i.e., one that survives only in a fixed number of ancient texts and has gone out of use, for

practical purposes, in all forms of communication. We have seen already that there were Hebrew novels and Hebrew newspapers in the last century. As a matter of fact, Hebrew was used actively in many other ways: in private letters, communal minutes and regulations, works of poetry, philosophy, and natural science, and so on. The difference between Hebrew and more 'normal' languages, such as English or Russian, lay in the fact that Hebrew was not, for the most part, a spoken language. Educated Jews in many parts of the world could and did write Hebrew, but when they were talking to their friends or family they spoke Yiddish, Arabic, Ladino, German, Russian, or any one of a score of other languages, depending chiefly on where they lived.

The practice of reading and writing in one language and talking in another seems strange to us today, but it has been very common in human history. The best-known example comes from medieval Europe, in which most writing was done in Latin by people who spoke other languages in everyday life. Among Jews in the middle ages Hebrew was used in the same way and, like Latin, it was also spoken when speaking it seemed convenient or appropriate: to prevent non-Jews from understanding, for instance, or between Jews from different parts of the world who had no other language in common. One still sometimes hears it said that for two thousand years Hebrew was only a language of prayer and study. This is simply not true. Hebrew was in active use in intellectual and literary life, and was as necessary to most educated Jews as Latin was to educated Christians.

This use of different languages for different purposes in life — one 'high', or prestigious, language for literature and intellectual matters, and a 'lower' one for everyday topics — is called *diglossia* by students of sociolinguistics. Among the Jews diglossia survived long after Latin had almost died out among Christians, and it was still widespread in Russia a century ago. What Ben-Yehuda set out to do, therefore, was not to bring a 'dead' language back to life, but to make Hebrew once again an ordinary spoken language, like French or German. He believed that diglossia was bound to die out among the Jews of Europe as it had among the non-Jews (events have proved him right in this belief) and he wanted to make sure that for at least some of those Jews Hebrew would displace their other language, rather than vice versa, and so would become their everyday language in all forms of verbal communication. That, in fact, is the situation today in Israel, where there are perhaps a million people who know no language but Hebrew. In Ben-Yehuda's day many Jews knew Hebrew but it was not their mother-tongue and nobody knew *only* Hebrew. It is this change that we call, in admittedly rather loose wording, the Revival of Hebrew.

It so happens that in one part of the world — Palestine itself — the practice of speaking Hebrew *was* common in the nineteenth century. In

Jerusalem the Jewish community consisted largely of immigrants drawn to the city by its religious associations. These immigrants lived in distinct groups, according to their countries of origin, and spoke various languages, of which Yiddish, Ladino (i.e., Judeo-Spanish), and various dialects of Arabic were the most common. There was obviously a need for a lingua franca, and often this was Hebrew. We know that Hebrew was spoken by the leaders of the different sections when they met to discuss matters of interest to the Jewish community as a whole. What is more remarkable is that Hebrew sometimes served as a lingua franca among less educated Jews. We have reports of its being used in this way in the market place, and of porters, hotel-keepers, and coach-drivers managing to talk to their customers in Hebrew. There is evidence that this was also the case in other parts of Palestine which had a significant Jewish population.

I want to emphasise that this 'market Hebrew' existed before Ben-Yehuda and the beginnings of the modern revival, and that it came into being for practical, not ideological, reasons. It is not easy to say whether its existence did much to further the revival once Ben-Yehuda and his associates had begun their propaganda in Palestine, and this question is, in fact, currently under discussion among scholars. What is certain is that the existence of this market Hebrew was practically unknown outside Palestine. Ben-Yehuda had no idea that spoken Hebrew was in frequent use in Palestine when, in 1877, he decided to settle in that country as soon as he had qualified as a doctor.

III

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda spent about three years in Paris: roughly, from the end of 1877 to the end of 1880. It was during this period of his life that he came to the conclusion that Hebrew must be made the spoken language of the Jewish settlement in Palestine that he was advocating, and it was in Paris that he made his own first serious attempts to use Hebrew in ordinary conversation. Ben-Yehuda left an account of these attempts in his autobiography *Ha-Halom ve-Shivro* (The Dream and its Realisation), which was written while he was in New York during the First World War. I want to devote the rest of this lecture to one episode described in that book.

Early in 1879 Ben-Yehuda made his first venture into journalism, which I have already mentioned briefly. He set out his ideas on the need for large-scale Jewish settlement in Palestine in a three-thousand word Hebrew article and sent it to Peretz Smolenskin, the editor of the most prestigious Hebrew periodical of those days, *Ha-Shahar*, which was

published in Vienna. When he received Smolenskin's reply, a postcard saying that he would publish the article in *Ha-Shahar* and that its author was a gifted writer, Ben-Yehuda was as excited as one would expect an unknown, poverty-stricken, twenty-one-year-old tyro to be. Longing to show the postcard to someone, he ran to the house of Baer Goldberg, a veteran Hebrew writer from Russia who had settled in Paris and whose house was a meeting place for devotees of Hebrew and of Jewish scholarship. Goldberg had ridiculed what he regarded as Ben-Yehuda's fantastic project, and Ben-Yehuda wanted him to see that no less a person than Smolenskin took the idea seriously. Here is the story as Ben-Yehuda tells it:

The reply from the Editor of *Ha-Shahar* made me doubly happy. In the first place I was happy that the idea was going to be put before the Jewish public, and that the Editor himself agreed with it, since otherwise he would surely not be printing my article. In the second place I was happy — why should I deny it? — at this evidence that I possessed some literary talent. I felt the need to talk to someone Jewish, who could understand my feelings. An unkind impulse made me run over to Baer Goldberg's house. I wanted to enjoy my triumph, to see the old maskil's face and hear what he would have to say now. Goldberg was not at home, but I ran into Mr M. Zundelmann. 'All to the good,' I thought, and without many preliminaries I showed him the postcard in my hand.

'That's one of Smolenskin's merits', he said. 'He knows how to discover new literary talents, and if he sees a spark of talent in a young man he'll do his best to encourage him.'

Now that I know Mr Zundelmann well, and know how he likes to provoke people, I can see that his words weren't meant to please me. Mr Zundelmann was hinting that Smolenskin's acceptance of my article was no proof that he agreed with its contents, and that his praise for my ability to write was not necessarily intended as praise for the article itself, but meant only that he had detected a spark of talent in me; and how often do such sparks grow faint and die out, sometimes to the benefit both of the reading public and of the owners of the sparks? And in two respects Mr Zundelmann was right. My article was indeed immature, and as regards the idea of the revival of Israel and its language in the land of its forefathers, Smolenskin's writings quickly made it clear to me that his opinion was still very far from mine. But at the time I was still feeling slightly inebriated by a feeling of victory and saw only the good in everything, so even these words of Zundelmann's gave me pleasure. I invited him to have a cup of coffee with me, and in one of the big cafés on Boulevard Montmartre we sat and talked for two hours about my plans for the future and my work in Jerusalem, and also about all the political questions of the day.

And that long, ardent, and serious conversation was entirely in Hebrew! That was the first time I spoke Hebrew at such length and about such serious topics, and it was all done not for the sake of speaking Hebrew but for the sake of the subject matter, so that sometimes I almost forgot that I was talking Hebrew.

And that conversation itself, when for the first time I had the definite feeling that from now on Hebrew would be my language — not just temporarily, artificially, at set times, in order to get used to speaking Hebrew, but really my language, my natural language always — that conversation showed me straight away how hard it was to talk Hebrew, how far Hebrew still was from being an adequate instrument of expression for the needs of daily life. I saw that I would need to make a list of the Hebrew words most needed in conversation, and I began to search in learned works of all periods, ancient as well as modern. That list was the beginning of the Dictionary. When it had grown somewhat I wanted a short name for it, and since I didn't like the usual combination, *Sefer Millim* [A Book of Words] I suddenly had the idea of giving it a new name, and after a few days' thought a new word flashed into my mind: *Millon*.

That was the first new word that I created in the Hebrew language.

This passage from Ben-Yehuda's autobiography confirms what I said earlier about the importance of his Paris period: we see that he began to compile his great *Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew* in Paris, and also took his first steps in word-coining, which was to be another of his characteristic activities in later life. (*Millon* is the normal word for 'dictionary' in Hebrew today.) Moreover, he obviously looked back on the conversation in the café as an important event. He mentions it (albeit briefly, and with few details) in another place, the introductory volume of his *Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, in which he describes how the Dictionary came to be written. Ben-Yehuda says there that the conversation resolved a doubt that had been worrying him — was Hebrew capable of being used in everyday speech in modern times and on contemporary topics? — and led him to make a habit of speaking Hebrew whenever possible. He also indicates, as in his autobiography, that it was the conversation in the café that set him on the road to compiling the Dictionary. It is therefore plausible to regard it as a significant event not just in Ben-Yehuda's life, but in the history of the Hebrew language itself.

That being so, one would like to know something about the other participant in the conversation, M. Zundelmann. Who was he, and how is it that he was able to speak Hebrew (as he apparently did even if *Ha-Halom ve-Shivro* gives the impression that Ben-Yehuda did most of the talking in the café)? It has been argued that Zundelmann must have been a Palestinian, or at least have lived in Palestine at some time, since that was the only place in the world where he was likely to have got used to speaking Hebrew. This hypothesis is appealing, especially since we know that another person with whom Ben-Yehuda spoke Hebrew in Paris was indeed from Palestine. This was the writer and publisher A. M. Luncz, who met Ben-Yehuda when both were patients in the Rothschild Hospital in Paris early in 1880. Ben-Yehuda had contracted tuberculosis and Luncz had come from Jerusalem in search of a cure for his failed

eyesight. It was from Luncz that Ben-Yehuda first learned of the use of Hebrew as a spoken lingua franca in Jerusalem. Another person with whom Ben-Yehuda used to speak Hebrew in Paris was Getzel Selikovitch, a young man who had left his home in Lithuania and traveled in North Africa before coming to Paris. Selikovitch had got into the habit of speaking Hebrew with the Jews of Tunis and Morocco, since he and they had no other language in common. His facility in speaking Hebrew therefore had the same origin as did that of the Jerusalemites: the usefulness of Hebrew as a lingua franca between Ashkenazi and non-Ashkenazi Jews. Thus, although Selikovitch was not a Palestinian himself, his case — which was clearly rather exceptional — tends to confirm the general impression that the people who were able to talk Hebrew to Ben-Yehuda were likely to have been from Palestine. Since Zundelmann was Ben-Yehuda's chief Hebrew conversationalist until the meeting with Luncz, it is tempting to believe that he, too, was from Palestine.

Unfortunately we know nothing about Zundelmann apart from what Ben-Yehuda tells us in that short passage in his autobiography. Zundelmann's name is not in any of the reference books where one might hope to find it, nor is he mentioned in any other memoir of the period. There have been two editions of *Ha-Halom ve-Shivro* in book form since the work first appeared, in instalments, in a Hebrew weekly in 1917–18. One came out in 1941, the other in 1978. In neither of them does the editor offer any information about Zundelmann although both editions contain explanatory footnotes, by their respective editors, about other matters. As for Ben-Yehuda, all the information he gives us about Zundelmann is contained in the passage from his autobiography quoted above (pp. 7–8). When Ben-Yehuda, having related how he ran to Baer Goldberg's house and found that Goldberg was not at home, goes on to say 'but I ran into Mr M. Zundelmann', it is the first mention of that person in the book.

Now this is rather odd, because Zundelmann has not been 'introduced' to the reader in any way. On the other hand, Ben-Yehuda seems to assume that his readers know something about Zundelmann. This shows in the reference to Zundelmann's provocative nature, which Ben-Yehuda seems to regard as common knowledge, and in the phrase 'All to the good', which is what Ben-Yehuda says to himself when he meets Zundelmann. The Hebrew original of the phrase, *gam zu le-tovah*, is a well-known quotation from the Midrashic literature, used when some event which at first sight looked bad turns out to have been good. Ben-Yehuda had a particular reason for wanting Baer Goldberg to know that Smolenskin had accepted his article for publication, and the phrase *gam zu le-tovah* implies that Zundelmann, too, was a specially appropriate person to be the recipient of the news. Yet the reader is given no idea why this should be so.

The first time I read this part of Ben-Yehuda's autobiography, I

straight away looked back through the book to see whether Zundelmann had indeed not appeared before. I found no reference to him. However, only a couple of pages before the story of Ben-Yehuda's meeting with Zundelmann there is a paragraph which is of interest for a number of reasons. Ben-Yehuda is describing his visits to Goldberg's house, and the people he met there:

One of the regular visitors was Michel Erlanger, who was at the time in charge of distributing charity for the Rothschilds . . . and who afterwards played a large part in establishing settlements in Palestine with Baron Edmond's support. Michel Erlanger loved learning and had a great respect for scholars, and thanks to him Goldberg received an allowance from the Rothschilds. Every Sabbath Erlanger would come to Goldberg's house to sit in the dust before him (literally so, for the man's house was not at all clean) and to learn from him. I also met M. Adelman, who had previously been the assistant to the Editor of *Ha-Shahar* and had also been one of the editors of the first socialist newspaper in Hebrew, *Ha-Emet*. And I met there too a youth from Russia, G. Selikovitch, whom circumstances had taken from the town of his birth, in Russian Lithuania, to Africa. He had spent some months among the Jews of Tunis and Morocco before coming to Paris, where he was staying for a while with Goldberg. His name became well-known in the world of politics when there was friction between France and England over the Fashoda incident. Later on he became a well-known contributor to the Jewish press in America. From the lips of this youth I heard, for the first time in my life, Hebrew words in the Sephardi accent, which he had learned in his travels among the Jews of Africa.

Among other things this passage shows is how meticulous Ben-Yehuda usually is in introducing new characters and explaining who they are, and how unlike him it is to thrust someone on to the stage as abruptly as he apparently does with Zundelmann a little later. All in all, the story of Zundelmann has a slightly odd feel to it, and I began to wonder whether there might not be something wrong with the printed text of the autobiography.

One possibility is that Ben-Yehuda simply didn't realise, when he wrote about his journey to Goldberg's house with the postcard from Smolenskin, that he had not introduced Zundelmann to his readers yet. Another is that he did realise, and intended to go back and insert an introduction into an earlier part of the book, but forgot to do so. If either of these explanations is correct there is almost no chance of finding out today who Zundelmann was. A third possibility is that a passage introducing Zundelmann did exist but was deleted for some reason before the text was printed, either by Ben-Yehuda himself, or by the editor of *Ha-Toren*, the Hebrew weekly in which the autobiography first appeared, in instalments. This could have happened without anyone realising that the deletion would cause difficulties for the readers later on. This explanation, like the earlier ones, would be hard if not impossible to check.

There is, however, a fourth possibility, and that is, quite simply, that there is a misprint in the text and that Ben-Yehuda never wrote the word 'Zundelmann' at all but some other name, that of a person who had already made an appearance in the autobiography, and which the printer set, wrongly, as 'Zundelmann'.

What makes this seem unlikely at first sight is the fact that the name Zundelmann occurs no fewer than five times in the passage I have quoted. (This may be why the possibility of a misprint has not, apparently, been considered before.) On the other hand, proper nouns are particularly liable to be misread, and one can understand a typesetter who was having difficulty with Ben-Yehuda's handwriting misreading the same name in the same way a number of times, especially as he would have realised that the same person was being referred to each time. That leaves the question of how the error could have escaped detection five times in the proofs. *Ha-Toren* was published in New York, where Ben-Yehuda was living at the time (he left New York to return to Palestine in February 1919, well after the last instalment of his autobiography had appeared in print) so it would have been possible for the Editor to give him proofs to read. However, we don't know whether that was in fact customary, or whether it happened on this occasion. Even if it did, it is quite likely that the job of reading the proofs was delegated to Ben-Yehuda's wife, Hemdah. We know that she assisted her husband in his work a great deal, and she would have had no reason for suspecting that anything was wrong with the name Zundelmann.

If we allow ourselves to pursue the hypothesis of a misprint, the next step is to re-read the preceding pages of the autobiography and see which character, if any, has a name similar to M. Zundelmann. It turns out to be quite easy to find one: M. Adelman, one of the people whom Ben-Yehuda met in Goldberg's house. The only difference between his name and Zundelmann's is in the first syllable of the surname. Now the letter *alef*— which begins the word 'Adelman' in Hebrew — can easily resemble, in carelessly written script, the letters *zayin*, *vav*, which are the first two letters of 'Zundelmann.' Specimens of Ben-Yehuda's handwriting show that he did indeed write his *alefs* in that way, starting not with the neatly-rounded figure which appears in children's textbooks of Hebrew, but with something more pointed, not unlike a hastily-written *zayin*. Ben-Yehuda's handwriting was not very easy to read and it seems to me quite plausible that the typesetter should have printed 'Zundelmann' instead of 'Adelman'.

The next question is whether the identification fits. We can pick up a few scraps of biographical information about 'Zundelmann' from the little that Ben-Yehuda says about him, and compare them with what we know about Mordecai Adelman; for the latter, unlike the probably non-existent Zundelmann, does appear in various reference books. The sentence

'Now that I know Mr Zundelmann well' tells us two things. The first is that 'Zundelmann' was still alive when Ben-Yehuda wrote his autobiography during the First World War. Mordecai Adelman died in March 1922, only a few months before Ben-Yehuda himself, so he fits the bill in this respect. The other thing the sentence tells us is, obviously, that Ben-Yehuda and 'Zundelmann' got to know each other well in later years. This, too, fits the facts of Adelman's life. He settled in Jerusalem in 1881 (again, the same year as Ben-Yehuda) and as fellow-members of the small and beleaguered circle of maskilim there, the two men would almost certainly have got to know each other even if they had not already become acquainted in Paris. (As it happens, we have direct evidence that they knew each other in Jerusalem.) But the most significant thing in Ben-Yehuda's story, from our present point of view, is what 'Zundelmann' said when Ben-Yehuda showed him the postcard from Peretz Smolenskin. He reacted by telling Ben-Yehuda something about the character of Smolenskin, and Ben-Yehuda does not question his right to speak with authority on that subject. Now Moritz Adelman, as you may remember from Ben-Yehuda's remarks about him, had been the assistant to the Editor of *Ha-Shahar*, so it is no wonder that he felt entitled to speak as he did. Moreover, it also explains the phrase *gam zu le-tovah*, 'all to the good': naturally it would have pleased Ben-Yehuda to show the postcard to a man who had been Smolenskin's chief assistant (Adelman had, in fact, acted as Editor of *Ha-Shahar* while Smolenskin was away from Vienna for several months) and who was himself something of a literary big-shot in the circle around Baer Goldberg, a circle in which Ben-Yehuda himself must have belonged to the small fry.

The hypothesis that 'Zundelmann' is really Adelman is supported by two works about Ben-Yehuda that do not mention the conversation in Boulevard Montmartre at all. One of them is a short biographical article which appeared in *Sefer Zikkaron le-Sofrei Yisrael*, a well-known collection of contemporary Jewish literary biographies published in 1889. This article is important because it is the earliest biography of Ben-Yehuda that exists, written only seven or eight years after his arrival in Jerusalem. The articles in the collection are anonymous, but Mr Kressel has shown recently that the biographies of all the writers who were living in Jerusalem were written by a resident of that city named Jacob Goldman. Goldman presumably got his information from the writers themselves. Certainly this is the most likely presumption in the case of Ben-Yehuda, since the biography includes information about his childhood in Russia and his student days in Paris which Goldman could hardly have got from any other source.

The other work is a full-scale biography of Ben-Yehuda written after his death by his widow Hemdah. As I said, neither of these two biographies tells the story of the conversation in the Boulevard

Montmartre. They do, however, relate how Ben-Yehuda heard from Smolenskin that his article had been accepted, and both of them say that one of the first people to whom he told the news was — M. Adelman. What is more, Hemdah Ben-Yehuda specifies that 'he is the same Adelman who now lives in Jerusalem', and she adds:

Adelman, who knew Smolenskin personally, remarked that it was the habit of the Editor of *Ha-Shahar* to encourage every new writer in whom he saw a spark of talent.

This is exactly what Ben-Yehuda says about 'Zundelmann' in *Ha-Halom ve-Shivro*.

IV

Mordecai, or Moritz, Adelman, whose entitlement to a niche in the history of the Hebrew language I have been trying to establish, was born in 1847, a decade earlier than Ben-Yehuda, in East Central Europe. He had a remarkably varied career. After an orthodox upbringing in Lithuania he was 'seduced' by the Haskalah and his subsequent search for a secular education took him to Vienna (among other places), where he met Smolenskin and became a contributor to *Ha-Shahar*. He also became friendly with A. S. Liebermann, who brought out the first Hebrew socialist newspaper, *Ha-Emet*, in Vienna in 1877, and he is credited with having saved Liebermann from the police on more than one occasion. Adelman devoted much time and energy to searching out forgotten Jewish manuscripts in the great libraries of Europe, and published articles in various learned journals, including a short-lived monthly which he and Baer Goldberg brought out in Paris. The contacts he made while working in the Vatican Library brought Adelman a commission to travel to Persia and Iraq in search of source material for the history of religions. A number of hair-raising adventures befell him on the expedition. Once he entered a Shiite holy place — the tomb of Hosain ibn Ali at Kerbela — in disguise, and had to flee for his life when the news reached him, in Baghdad, that the fact had become known. He embarked on a boat going down the Tigris to Basra, only to find himself in new danger when the boat was attacked by brigands who robbed the passengers, including Adelman. Surviving these perils, he reached Bombay. At the end of 1881 he settled in Jerusalem.

For a time Adelman was a teacher in Jerusalem, first at the German-Jewish orphanage and then at the Laemel School, an Austrian-Jewish foundation which offered its pupils a secular — and German — education, as well as a religious one. After a while he opened a toy-shop near the Jaffa Gate. He continued to write for the Jewish press, in German

and Hebrew, and in 1883 he briefly published a Hebrew newspaper of his own, the weekly *Ha-Tzvi*, which was to be revived a year or so later, and made famous, by none other than Eliezer Ben-Yehuda.

Adelmann was active in strengthening the Jewish settlement (the *yishuv*) in Palestine. To this end he visited Germany towards the end of the 'eighties and helped set up a society, *Lema'an Tziyyon* (For Zion), whose aim was to support the *yishuv*. His attempts to get Jews to settle in towns that had no Jewish population led to the founding of communities of artisans and workmen in Nablus, Ramleh and Gaza. (The one in Nablus soon died out but the other two communities lasted until the First World War.) Adelmann saw to it that each community was provided with the religious necessities: a synagogue, a ritual bath, a *Talmud Torah* and a kosher slaughterer.

A second area of his concern was health. He helped found pharmacies and hospitals, and brought an eye specialist from Switzerland because trachoma was widespread in Palestine. Adelmann's motives included the wish to prevent the Jews from having to depend on Christian missionaries for medical services. A third area was the encouragement of economic self-sufficiency among the Jews, to which end Adelmann imported simple industrial equipment such as knitting and sewing machines into Palestine, for sale on easy terms to members of the *yishuv*, and helped set up printing and book-binding concerns. He was involved, together with Baron Hirsch's Jewish Colonisation Association, in helping Yemenite Jews to settle in Jerusalem, and especially in making mortgages available to them for building houses. In fact, Baron Hirsch once asked him to become the director of the Jewish agricultural colonisation enterprise in Argentina, but Adelmann refused to work for the Association anywhere but in Palestine.

After the First World War Adelmann's religious views led him towards the strictly orthodox Agudat Israel group around Rabbi Joseph Hayyim Sonnenfeld. Although Sonnenfeld and his followers were strongly opposed to secular education, and in favour of total separation from the secular Zionists, Adelmann managed to maintain his relations with the latter, including Ben-Yehuda. He died in 1922 in Berlin, where he had gone for medical treatment.

That, in outline, is the unusual story of the man with whom Eliezer Ben-Yehuda had the first serious Hebrew conversation of his life. Whether, in his Agudist old age, Adelmann was happy about the part he had played forty years earlier in encouraging the use of spoken Hebrew for secular purposes, I do not know. It is, however, a historical fact, and a significant aspect of it is that, in 1879, Adelmann had never been to Palestine. In spite of this he appears to have held his own in Hebrew conversations with Ben-Yehuda, not just on the occasion I have been talking about but on many others as well. Contrary to what has sometimes been

widely supposed, one did not need to be a Palestinian — or a Ben-Yehuda — to be able to talk Hebrew for everyday, secular purposes, even in Western Europe in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The late Cecil Roth once summed up the significance of Ben-Yehuda's career in these words: '*Before Ben-Yehuda Jews could talk Hebrew; after him they did.*' No one who has visited Israel during the last forty years is likely to doubt the truth of the second part of Roth's dictum, at least as far as one section of the Jewish people is concerned. The conversations between Mordecai Adelman and Eliezer Ben-Yehuda in Paris, in 1879, constitute one piece of evidence among many that the first part of Roth's statement is true as well.

The Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies is a research institute for advanced studies enjoying the academic recognition of Oxford University. Its aims are to foster and deepen an understanding and appreciation of Hebrew and Jewish studies at Oxford University and in society at large.

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