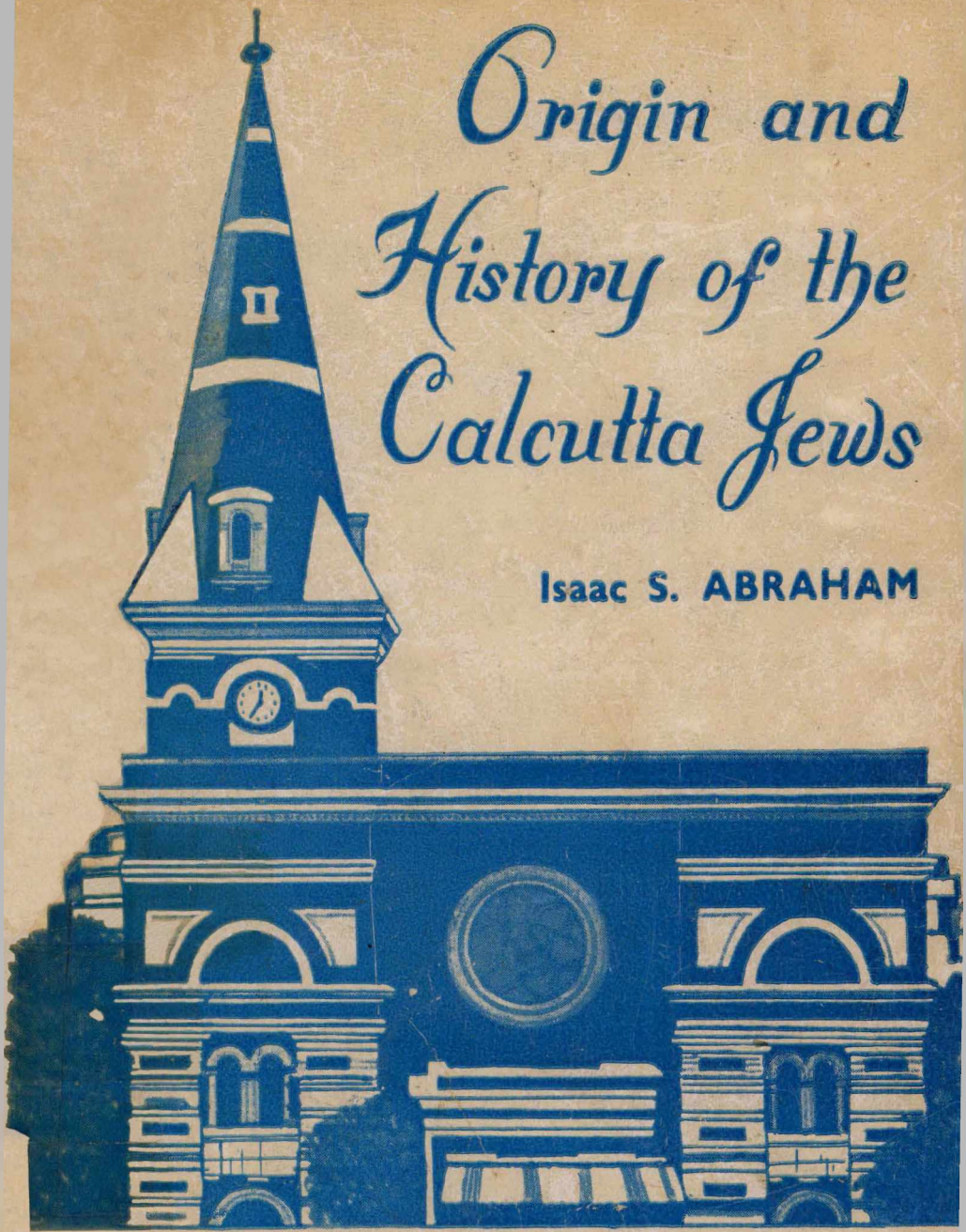
Origin and History of the Calcutta Jews

Isaac S. ABRAHAM



Introduction by

DAVID HOROWITZ

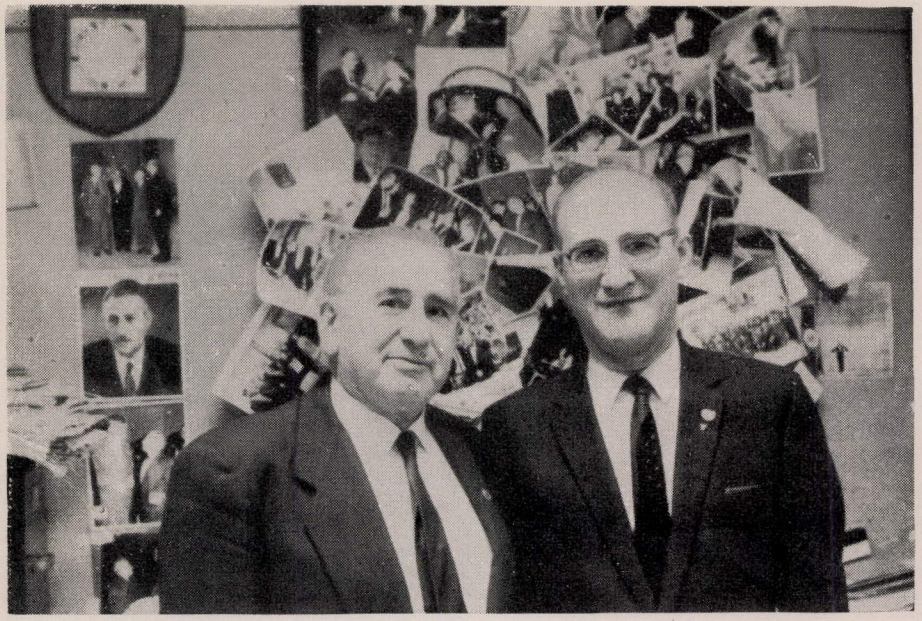
THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE CALCUTTA JEWS

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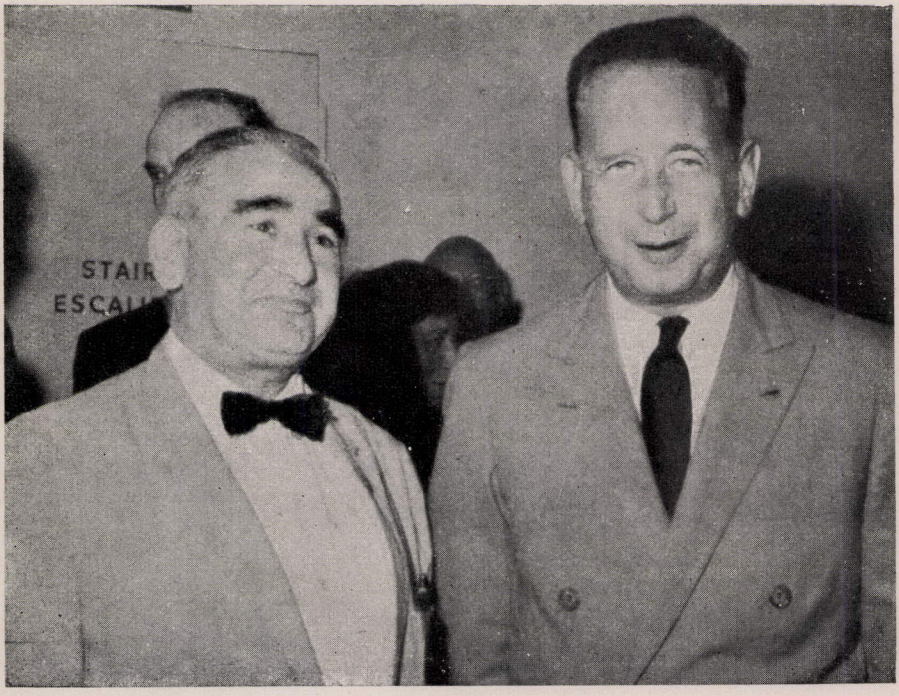
I. S. ABRAHAM

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The author (right) with Mr. D. Horowitz at the U.N. (Press Bureau)



Mr. Horowitz with Mr. Dag Hammarskjold

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Mr. Horowitz, a noted United Nations correspondent who has covered the world organisation since its inception for a chain of newspapers serviced by the World-Union Press, of which he is editor, is also president of United Israel World Union—an Institution advocating Mosaic Law for One World—and editor of its publication, the United Israel Bulletin, with headquarters at 507 Fifth Avenue, New York City. A veteran journalist, he won a citation in 1963 from Sigma Delta Chi's Deadline Clun for "distinguished journalistic achievement as a UN correspondent." In 1966, he was unanimously elected President of the Foreign Press Association in New York after having served as its Secretary-General and Vice-President. Noted as a lecturer he has also written a number of expositions on biblical origins and is the author of "Thirty-Three Candles," termed by the New York Times as "a revealing and informal biography."

Mr. Horowitz hails from Sweden and personally knew Mr. Dag Hammarskjold, the late Secretary-General of the UN. His weekly column "Behind the Scenes at the UN" is published by 35 newspapers around the world. His researches and writings have also won him the Doctorate of Philosophy from a mid-Western College in the U.S.A.

INTRODUCTION

Author Isaac S. Abraham, esteemed member of the Jewish community and the Far Eastern Representative of the World-Union Press which maintains a Bureau at the UN, has rendered an invaluable service to World Jewry with his creation of this long over-due work recounting the fascinating history of the Jewish people in that great Indian city—Calcutta.

Mr. Abraham dedicates much of his spare time to the fostering of the ideals of Judaism. He was inspired to compile this volume by his friend Mr. Shellim Samuel, author of "A Treatise on the Early History of the Bene-Israel of Maharashtra State". Both books show clearly the universal role which the ever-wandering Jews have played in every nook and corner of the globe. The role of India's Jews, as Mr. Abraham discloses, is no less significant than that which Jews have played in other parts of the world.

In reading the pages of this interesting book, I couldn't help sensing a certain *mystique* explaining why the children of Israel were moved by circumstances to pull up roots and migrate to almost every country in the world and only one word flashed through my mind—*Providence !*

Wherever the Jewish people went, or were driven, Torah The Law—of course went with them. How they clung to it with their very lives is a matter of history. In travail, it seems, the Law was disseminated among many people and nations and became the foundation of what may be termed the Judaeo-Christian civilisation embracing most of the Western democratic nations.

Today we are witnessing strange manifestations such as the one in Spain—the very country of the Inquisition. In December 1968, a Synagogue was dedicated in Madrid with Government officials participat-

ing, the first such public event since 1492—the year of expulsion of the Jews from this country. During the self-same period, in mid-December, 1968, the Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, travelled some 1500 miles so as to personally inaugurate the 400th year anniversary of the Paradeshi Synagogue, Cochin, South India.

The emergence of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948 as sanctioned by United Nations resolution of 29 November 1947 and the mass migration of Jews to it from various parts of the world explain, of course, why certain Jewish communities such as those of Calcutta, Bombay and other cities have dwindled. A symbolic remnant will, however, always remain in the countries of their long and happy residence. Cochin is a good example. These remnants will continue to remain faithful citizens of the countries of their adoption just as gratitude will ever remain in the hearts of those who benefited from their long stay in this benevolent land.

Mr. Abraham's "The Origin and History of The Calcutta Jews" brings out beautifully this aspect of the work of an ancient people. It seems to fill a gap in the total history of the Jews in the world and brings into relief the doings of a small industrious section of the community in that part of the ancient-modern world. It, therefore, stands out as a useful testimony to their genius wherever destiny assigned them a role to play.

David Horowitz.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

It was at the special request of my good friend Mr. Shellim Samuel, M.A., LL.B., the author of "A Treatise on the Origin and Early History of the Bene Israel of Maharashtra State", that I undertook to compile this book.

The small Jewish community of Calcutta achieved quite a few credits during its comparatively short stay in this city since the mid-19th century. How they came to be where they are, a short account of some of their achievements, their customs and peculiar modes of life and finally their shutting shop and emigrating to the land of their forefathers on its emergence to statehood form the framework of this book. I have endeavoured to make it as interesting as possible both to Jews in all parts of the world and to others interested in this type of historical perspective. I only hope that I have succeeded even though to a very small measure.

As elaborated in the body of this work, the Jews of Calcutta were mainly of the stock that emigrated to India from Iraq and other countries of the Middle East—not only on account of persecutions but because having sipped the sweetness of the country a good reconnaisance report went back to their brethren —leading to a whole stream of refugees making their home here.

As is well-known, India is one of the few blessed countries where perfect religious freedom prevails and foreign refugees could always live here in perfect safety and freedom from molestation in the practice of their faith. This gift to the Jew was priceless and he was not slow to grasp the opportunity. Besides spiritual freedom he also discovered immense opportunities for his material welfare. In this direction too

his agile mind was quick to grasp what seemed to offer itself freely. Thus spiritually and materially his stay in this country was amply rewarded. The Jews can never forget the debt they owe to the land of which Max Muller wrote: "If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that nature can bestow—in some parts a very paradise on earth—I should point out to India."

The community in Calcutta reached a peak of about 5000 during the second World War. Due to emigration to Israel since its emergence, it has dwindled to less than 500 today. Even so, love for and gratitude to the land of their birth and happy residence are inborn in all who lived here and even the remnants are ever loyal to the democratically-constituted government of the country, work zealously and always pray for its welfare.

My thanks are due to Mr. J. M. David and Mr. Solly Ezekiel for supplying me with interesting materials and to Mr. David Mordecai for his valuable help in the reproduction of the photographs in this work as also to all who helped in its get-up. Being my first attempt at such work, I have to request the indulgence of the reader for any literary deficiencies or factual inaccuracies and shall be most grateful to receive any corrections or suggestions for my future guidance.

I. S. A.

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CHAPTER I

ANCIENT ORIGINS AND BABYLONIAN EXILE

The Jew has been happily described by Lamb as "a piece of stubborn antiquity." It is a common characteristic of human nature when faced with antiquity of any kind—be it physical antiques, archaeological sites or monuments, palaeontological specimens of creatures long since extinct or a living representative of a long line of evolution going back millions of years like the fish Coelacanth—to be curious and interested and have an urge to probe deeper into the mysteries of existence or of history. This is particularly true in the case of ancient specimens of man as the most advanced creature on earth, especially, when his descendants are in our midst today. The Jew being an integral part of the human race is no exception. He has survived long periods of trial and persecution since the liquidation of his land in the first and second centuries of the Christian era, the destruction of his most holy shrine—the Temple at Jerusalem, followed by the dispersal of his race far and wide on the face of the earth.

History and tradition give us an inkling that these people known as The Hebrews in the days of their glory originated from their patriarch Abraham, who dwelt in "Ur of the Chaldees" or Babylonia. Dissatisfaction with the mode of life around him led him with a large body of followers to migrate to the land of Canaan or what is now known as Israel, where he established himself. As fate would have it, his great grandson Joseph in the line of Jacob was sold by his jealous brothers as a slave to some traders, which transaction landed him in Egypt or the land of Goshen. Here the ruling Pharaoh had some disturbing dreams, among others, of seven fat cows being later swallowed by seven lean ones. Joseph, it is held, was the only person who could solve the mystery of the dream as being

seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, thus advising the Pharaoh that by judicious conservation of the stock of the years of plenty, the sufferings attendant on a long and severe famine would be minimised. Joseph was immediately made the governor to manage affairs. When famine came, it enveloped the land of Canaan too thus compelling the inhabitants there including Joseph's family to go to Egypt for help. The Bible beautifully describes the reunion of Joseph with his family.

In later ages the descendants of Jacob became slaves in this very land and it required another stalwart in the person of Moses to deliver them from slavery and lead them out of the country in search of another land. This led to their wandering for forty years in the wilderness of Sinai, the ascent of Moses to a certain mountain and receipt on its heights of the ten commandments which were inscribed on a tablet of stone, the discovery of the land of Israel, its conquest and establishment therein of a Jewish state based on a monarchical pattern of government. This was round about 1200 B.C. The most famous kings were David and his son Solomon, the latter being known as "the Wise". Under him a Temple was constructed in Jerusalem for the worship of God by the whole nation. Again as fate would have it, various vicissitudes created by rival claimants to the throne after the death of Solomon led to the weakening of the kingdom, its subjugation by Babylonia under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. and carrying of about 50,000 of its inhabitants as captives to that distant land. Their exile lasted about 50 years till the conquest of Babylonia by Persia under Cyrus who graciously permitted the Jews to return to their own state and rebuild their Temple in 538 B.C.

This is a very brief sketch of the general history of the Jews till their exile to and release from Babylonia. We may as well note that not all the Jews thus

released chose to leave their settled mode of life in Babylonia to make the arduous trip back to Judaea or Israel. Many of them prospered and were in due course treated well. They were allowed to build houses, have servants and enter into business. They were not denied even the highest posts in the state as the later story of Daniel seems to indicate. Some of the Jews in that land were the wealthiest caravan merchants, the most skilled artisans, the most successful farmers, cattle breeders and land-owners. So it came to pass that many chose to remain behind.

It would be beyond the scope of this little work to trace the history of the portion of Jews who returned to their Holy Land nor would it be quite relevant except to mention that history records the glorious as well as tragic episodes of their national life. If an attempt is made here to describe something of the background of the Babylonian Jews, the reason is simple. Almost all the Calcutta Jews are of Iraqian origin and for a proper appraisal of their liturgy, language, customs and way of life, it is necessary to know the background in which their forefathers lived and prospered. It is from this cross-roads of history, namely, the aftermath of the exile that we intend to take up their story and link it up with the immediate forebears of the Calcutta Jews. The history of the Jews in Babylonia is a wondrous 1500-year-old saga, one of the most fecund in the fateful Jewish adventure. During the captivity, the Jews were allowed as hinted, to have their own priests, prophets and teachers. The shrewd Jews made excellent use of the golden opportunity by giving a new direction and deeper appreciation of their religion. It was during the exile that they established the institution of the synagogue or assembly, primarily for instruction of the multitude in the Torah or the Jewish Law. The religious fervour thus generated was to have a profound and lasting effect on all the Jews in the suc-

ceeding ages. Thus out of apparent evil came ultimate good.

The Exilarchs

The privilege to have their religious heads or leaders enabled the Jews to have a sort of autonomy within the paramountcy of the state. They selected a head—a direct descendant of King David as their exilarch or Rosh Galuyoth (head of the exiles). This institution was respected by the rulers even with all the changes of governments due to conquests etc. For example, when the Persian era ended and that of Muslim domination commenced, the institution of the exilarch was still respected as the head of all Jews not only in Babylonia but also in Armenia, Turkestan, Persia and Yemen.

The office of exilarch was hereditary and confined to one family only which, as stated, traced its lineage to King David. It was a political rather than a religious power and were given almost royal honours by whoever ruled the land. According to one account, all subjects of the Caliphs or Mohamedan satraps were required "to rise in the presence of The Prince of the captivity and to salute him respectfully."

The exilarch was the head of a, so-to-to-speak, high power body of ten men who represented the Jews in Babylonia vis-a-vis the rulers of the country. Whenever vacancy due to death or incapacity occurred the whole body would meet to choose a suitable successor, but the succession question was not always smooth. Quarrels and dissensions often arose leading to plenty of intrigues, plots, counterplots and much litigation, thus ultimately weakening its power and influence from within, leading, as we shall see, to its decline and position of inferiority compared to another body of Jews known as The Gaonim or Gaonate.

The Gaonate

The word Gaon means "Excellency". The Gaonim were the intellectual leaders of the Jews just as the exilarchs were the political heads. It was these groups who established the famous colleges or institutions of higher Jewish learning in various centres of Babylonia Nehardea, Nisibis and Mahoza on the grand canal as well as Pumbeditha and Sura in the interior. These centres became shining names lighting the darkness that shrouded the Jews everywhere else.

In 658 C.E. the Caliph Ali released the academy of Sura from the jurisdiction of the exilarch, whereupon, its head Mar-Isaac, took the title Gaon or Excellency and inaugurated the Gaonate—the epoch of learning and scholarship. Soon the directors of the college of Pumbeditha also assumed the title of Gaon. This state of affairs led to serious quarrels and bickerings between the Gaonim or rabbis and exilarchs, who tried to control the former, resulting however in the downfall of the latter, as could be expected. After 762 the Gaonim elected and dominated the exilarchs and imposed many other conditions and restrictions on them to assert their power.

The most remarkable fact about the Gaonate was that from the seventh to the eleventh centuries, questions of Talmudic Law were referred to them from all the Jewish world and their *responsa* created a new legal literature for Judaism. This period was the golden age of the Jews and was unprecedented for peace, freedom and creative achievement. Its climax was reached at the time of Saadia. He was called Al-Fayyumi as he was born in 892 in Faiyum in Egypt. He grew up and married in Egypt. In 915, he migrated to Palestine and thence to Babylonia. A diligent scholar, he was made a Gaon or director of the college at Sura at the age of 36. In his short life of only 50 years he produced such a mass of writing—mostly in

Arabic rivalled only by Maimonides in the record of Medieval Jewish literature.

In 930, serious differences arose between Saadia and the exilarch David ben Zakkai culminating in mutual excommunication of each other. In 940 when David died, Saadia appointed a new exilarch who was assassinated by the Moslems. His son who succeeded him met a similar fate, whereafter the office was kept vacant thus ending the career of the exilarchate. In 942, Saadia died.

The political upheavals of the eleventh century leading to the disintegration of the Baghdad caliphate and the decline of Eastern Islam affected the Babylonian Jews adversely. The college of Sura closed its doors in 1034, that of Pumbeditha four years later and in 1040 the Gaonate came to an end. The crusades and the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258, were other unfavourable factors which caused the Jewish community to reach its nadir and almost disappear from history.

A Note on the Talmud

After the captivity in Babylon, the learned ones among the Jews—the rabbis and scribes were busy for many centuries composing an enormous body of rules, laws and commentaries forming a body of literature known as the Talmud which literally means "teaching". It was believed that when Moses gave the Jews the written law in the form of the Pentateuch or Five Books based on the Ten Commandments, he also left an oral one which was transmitted from age to age from teacher to pupil thus gradually becoming expanded or unfolded in the process. This oral law was accepted by all the orthodox Jews. Together with the Pentateuch it constituted the Torah by which the Jew literally lived and in which he had his being. It took a thousand years to build up, give form and substance and put into writing the oral law. The result was the *Mishna*.

Yet another eight centuries of debate, judgment and elucidation were required to produce the commentaries known as the two *Gemaras*. The union of the Mishna with the shorter of the Gemaras was called the Palestinian, with the larger the Babylonian Talmud, Mishna being the same in both. These pieces of work may be described as one of the most complex and astonishing feats of the Jewish genius. Even the European Jews accepted it.

Of the two Talmuds, the Babylonian is by far the larger running into about 6000 pages of 400 words each. The Mishna is concise and states the law in a few lines, whereas the Gemaras are discussive containing the diverse opinions of various rabbis. The Mishna is halacha—law. The Gemaras are partly law and partly haggada or story. This includes many illustrative anecdotes or examples as also portions of all sorts of sciences like medicine, astronomy, astrology, magic, history, biography as well as ethics and homely advice. It contains very many gems of delightful humour which often comes to relieve the mind after a tiring discourse, for example:

"Rab Ami and Rab Assi were discussing with Rabbi Isaac Napcha, when one of them said to him: "Tell us, Sir, a legend" and the other said: "Pray explain to us a nice point of law." When he began the legend, he displeased the one, and when he began to explain a point of law, he offended the other. Whereupon he took up this parable: "I am like the man with two wives, one young and the other old. The young one plucked out all his gray hairs, that he might look young; the old wife pulled out his black hairs, that he might look old; and so between the two he became bald. So it is with me between you."

More Humour:

The rabbis had a fine sense of humour as exemplified in the story of Reb Kahan. He "was once selling ladies' baskets when he was exposed to temptation.

He pleaded with his tempter to let him off, and promised to return. But instead of returning he went up to the roof of a house and threw himself down. Before he reached the ground Elijah came and caught him and reproached him with having brought him a distance of 400 miles to save him from self-destruction."

Even some of the sayings in the Talmud are mixed with humour, for example:

"A man should walk behind a lion rather than a woman and should avoid any situation that may excite his passions."

"A man who has a bad wife will never see the face of hell. On the other hand, no man is so rich, said R. Akiva, as one who has a wife noted for good deeds."

"All the blessings of a household come through the wife. Therefore, should her husband honour her."

"Let men beware of causing women to weep. God counts their tears."

"Ten measures of speech descended to the world. Women took nine, men one."

Tragedy:

"A midrash is an exposition or address given by rabbis expanding in popular style various statement in the Hebrew scriptures. It forms part of the Talmud. A midrash tells a touching story of death and Rabbi Meir:

"While Rabbi Meir was holding his weekly discourse on a Sabbath afternoon, his two beloved sons died suddenly at home. Their mother covered them with a sheet, and forbore to mourn on the sacred day. When Rabbi Meir returned after evening services he asked for his sons, whom he had not seen in the synagogue. She asked him to recite the "Habdalah" (a ceremony marking the close of the Sabbath), and gave him his evening meal. Then she said: "I have a

question to ask thee. A friend once gave me jewels to keep for him; now he wishes them again; shall I return them?" "Beyond doubt thou must," said Rabbi Meir. His wife took him by the hand, led him to the bed and drew back the sheet. Rabbi Meir burst into bitter weeping, and his wife said: "They were entrusted to us for a time; now their Master has taken back His very own."

Charity:

"Greater is he who practices charity than one who performs all rituals." On Abba Umna's face there was always a holy peace. He was a surgeon, but would never accept with his hands any payment for his service. He had a box placed in a corner of his consulting room, so that those who could not afford to pay would not be ashamed." Rab Huna, 'when he sat down to a meal, would open the doors and exclaim "Let whoever in need enter and eat." Chama ben Ilai gave bread to all who sought it, and kept his purse ready, so that none need hesitate to ask. But the Talmud discouraged conspicuous giving, and advised a modest secrecy: "He who dispenses charity in private is greater than Moses."

Children:

"If thou must strike a child, do it with a shoe string."

"If one refrains from punishing a child, it will end by being utterly depraved."

"The world is saved by the breath of school children—the Shekinah or divine presence shines in their faces."

"The child in turn must honour and protect the parents under all conditions, to the end."

Ethics:

"Pirke Aboth" is a little treatise meaning The sayings of the Fathers. It contains the maxims of the great

rabbis of two centuries before and two centuries after Christ. It forms part of the Talmud. The following is a sampling:

Ben Zoma said: "Who is wise? He who learns from every man .... Who is mighty? He who subdues his (evil) inclination ....He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city. Who is rich? He who rejoices in his lot .... When thou eatest of the labor of thy hands, happy shalt thou be ... Who is honoured? He who honours his fellow men ... Despise not any man, nor anything, for there is no man that has not his hour, and there is nothing that has not its place. All my days I grew up among the sages, and I have found nothing better for a person than silence"..... Rabbi Eleazar used to say: "One whose wisdom exceeds his deeds may be compared to a tree whereof the branches are many and the roots few, so that when the winds come, it is uprooted and turned upon its face. ..... But one whose deeds exceed his wisdom may be compared to a tree whereof the branches are few and the roots many, so that even if all the winds in the world blow upon it, they move it not from its place."

The Talmud as representing the Torah or the Law meant much to the Jew no matter where he found himself, whether in Calcutta, Calabar or California. As Heine said, it was to him a portable Fatherland into which he could transport himself whenever he chose and put his mind and heart *en rapport* with all that it contained. In it he found the Patriarchs and the Prophets becoming living men and re-enacting before his very eyes the intense drama of his race. He loved the book beyond measure and preserved even fragments of it with jealous care. In later centuries he paid enormous sums to have it printed in all its fullness and wept when popes or potentates, or kings chose to ban, burn or confiscate it. He was prepared to defend it with his very life and spared no effort to preserve it. Even

today it is the most precious possession of his home and temple, the repository of his innermost hopes and aspirations, the living torch to be carefully passed on to generations still unborn, the solace, refuge and stronghold of his race.

The Hakhamim or Latter-day Leaders

From the middle of the 13th century up to modern times, the Talmud was the binding force which kept the Jews together. There was also in active existence the institution of the Synagogue which emphasised the dependence of the community on the Torah. It existed throughout these seven centuries as a shining institution in their life. Allied but connected with it in more ways than one was the Yeshiva—a school to read, study and discuss the Law. It is from the latter, as from a fertile soil, that rose on the basis of merit alone those holy and learned individuals known as The Hakhamim—literally the wise ones from the root Hakham or wise. These became each in his turn the rightful leaders of the community. It was not pretended by them to introduce any fresh theories or teachings in the already vast and complex body of literature which came down from their forebears. They only studied and interpreted the various laws as best they could on the basis of the vast learning in their possession. Most Eastern Jews of Iraqian origin even in remote corners of the world such as Bombay, Calcutta Rangoon, Singapore, Shanghai, Hongkong implicitly accepted their decisions on all questions of religious observances and sometimes even personal and private ones. Their influence was always strong and all-pervasive in the lives of the Eastern Jews.

It would be out of place here to give a detailed account of these leaders except to mention at the end of this chapter a few of them who lived mostly during the last century as their memory is still fresh in the minds of many of the previous generation. They

were the very last of the Iraqian leaders as the Jews already started to emigrate from their place of domicile about the middle of the last century towards countries of the East as India, Burma, Singapore, China and Hongkong. After the establishment of the State of Israel, the flood of emigration was unprecedented and broke all barriers leaving Iraq and many other centres of Jewry in Mohamedan countries almost denuded of Jews—except for a few thousand hapless ones.

Sason B. Mordecai Shindookh (1747-1830):

Sason B. Mordecai Shindookh belonged to one of the most prominent families of Baghdad. Although he never officiated as Hakham, he may be mentioned here on account of the work he was entrusted with, viz., the performance of weddings for the whole of the city of Baghdad. He was also the author of numerous works and scribe of many manuscripts some of which have been printed. His "Kol Sason" is a moralistic work interspersed with poems.

Faith and trust, modesty and patience, good manners and study, decency and ethics, love and hatred, jealousy, envy, peace, strife, perjury, repentance and instruction, etc., are the subjects of the author's dissertations. The most attractive are the parables and anecdotes narrated in his work. The work reached two editions; one printed in Livorno (Italy) in 1859, the other in Baghdad in 1891. The second work appeared under the title "Mizmor le-Asaf," comprising the rules connected with the prayer book, arranged accordingly. The third work appeared under the title "Dabar be-Itto" in two parts also printed in Livorno in 1862-64

Sason officiated as Hazzan of the "Great Synagogue." (Baghdad) and in 1810 the right of performing wedding ceremonies was officially entrusted to him and to his representatives. In some contemporary letters, he is mentioned as the Hakham's equal in office and dignity. From the trend of his

writings one can easily gather that he was interested in Kabbalistic lore. His descendants enjoyed, equally with those of Saleh Masliah and others, certain shares due to them according to the local customs of Baghdad for the seven days of wedding festivities.

Finally, it may be mentioned here that Hakham Sason was reputed as an artist who modelled a miniature Tabernacle exactly according to the description given in the Bible, and we are told that after the reading of the Terumah (Exodus 25-27-19), he used to show it to the congregants present. Solomon b. 'Abed Twena, a later prolific author, who hailed from Baghdad but spent many years in Calcutta, refers to this masterpiece, in recording at the time a similar construction by another Baghdadian, Faraj Hayyim b. Solomon b. Ezekiel Judah who was the author of "Wa-Tithpallel Hannah" (Jerusalem, 1889-90).

Hakham Joseph Hayyim (1833-1909):

Hakham Joseph Hayyim was the last of the great Rabbis of modern times in Baghdad. He succeeded his father as the spiritual leader of the Baghdad. Jews and officiated in this position for 50 years. He was also recognised by the Jewish communities in Calcutta and other centres in India and far off China. Being a wealthy man, he could afford to devote all his time to religious exercises and study. People flocked to the synagogue to hear his addresses on the Sabbath where he would expound the Halaka and Haggadah. Whenever he preached, in the Slat el-Kebirah or Great Synagogue the other Rabbis went there to listen. His love for the community was great and his services to his fellow men never failed. Being a scholar and an orator, he was also the author of numerous works.

The reforms of Hakham Joseph Hayyim incurred the anger of the German Jew, Obermayer. Firstly, he said that the Kapparoth for the Day of Atonement should be white fowls and that people should wear



Hakham Joseph Hayim

cloth shoes and not walk bare-footed on the ninth of Ab. He ordered the Jews of Baghdad to fast on the 7th of Adar being the anniversary of the day of the death of Moses and also stipulated that the preceding night be spent in study and reading. He included the 5th of Ab amongst the days of fast when he celebrated the Jahrzeit of R. Isaac Luria Ashkenazi. He prohibited the slaughter of a fowl or other animal in the sight of another animal. Obermayer criticises the Hakham spending all day in his library aloof from the rest of the world while his four wealthy brothers carried on his business. He also finds fault with the religious conditions prevailing in Baghdad and the Hakham's inactivity.

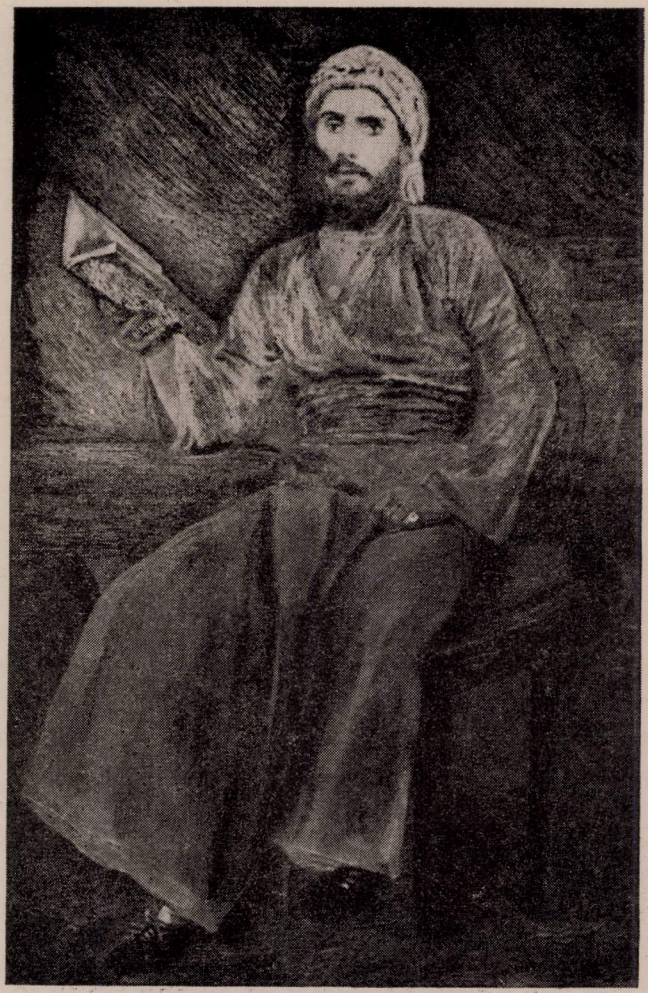
Hakham Joseph Hayyim introduced many innovations and despite the adverse criticism from Obermayer, it is clear that he was acknowledged far and wide as a learned and holy Rabbi.

Moses b. Hayyim b. Moses b. 'Abdallah:

This Hakham was eulogised by the son of his predecessor, Nissim Masliah in the year 1780. He was already a recognised spiritual leader in the Baghdad Community. In those days the authority of the Hakham of Baghdad was extended to the new settlements of Baghdad and to the Jews of India especially of Calcutta and Bombay. We learn that the leading Jews in these places turned to the Rabbinate of Baghdad for guidance and instruction especially in cases of ritual and law, e.g., of "Aghunoth"* and their relations to the Bene Israel in marriage law.

After the death of Hakham Moses Hayyim in 1837, Elijah b. Joshua b. Obadiah was the spiritual leader of the community. He died in 1895. After his death,

*Aghunoth: A woman who lost her husband by drowning at sea (not river) or at war. In fact when there is no proof of death, she cannot remarry.



Hakham Solomon Abed Twena

the congregation was divided by two parties Ka-Sini and 'Abeidi (derived from the name of two rivals). Ultimately, Raphael Kasin was elected head of the community (Hakham Bashi). He was the descendant of a Spanish family who settled in Aleppo (Syria) after its expulsion from Spain. He was a remarkable man, wrote a number of books and manuscripts and worthy of being the Hakham Bashi.

During this period we find several scholars flourishing. One was Abdallah Khdeir b. Silman who wrote an excellent poem to be found in an inscription in the mausoleum of Prophet Ezekiel restored by David Sassoon in 1859. Another was Gabriel Jacob Elisha whose work Shem Ya'akob was frequently mentioned by Solomon 'Abed Twena in his Nofeth Sufim" (Baghdad, 1879).

With all the above as background, we are now ready to shift the scene of our history to the great Metropolis of India—Calcutta.

CHAPTER II

EARLY SETTLERS

Although the majority of the settlers in Calcutta emigrated from Baghdad, it is Aleppo which holds the distinction of providing the first. He was Shalom ben Aaron ben Obadiah Ha-Kohen (Shalom Aaron Cohen). He was born at Aleppo in 1762, a descendant of an exile from Spain at the time of the Inquisition. He died in Calcutta in 1836. For an account of his remarkable life, we are indebted to his personal diary which is now in the possession of Mr. D. S. Sassoon of England.

In 1789, he embarked on the first of his many voyages. This journey took him from Aleppo to Baghdad, then to Hillah and finally to Basra, where one of his sisters was living. The very next year, he began what was to be his voyage of destiny, as it brought him for the first time to his future homeland, India. He arrived at Bombay in September 1790, but soon moved to Surat where he took up his residence. A jeweller by profession, he must already have been a rich man for his diary records show that he loaned a sum of Rs. 1,500, a considerable sum in those days, to his landlord, Stephen el Goorgi (i.e., Georgian). The loan was given without interest but entitled him to live rent-free in the house which he later acquired for Rs. 20,000.

Shalom entered into a business alliance with Jacob ben Semah ben Nissim (Jacob Semah), a wealthy businessman who had emigrated from Baghdad, whose sister he married in 1793. This was Shalom Cohen's second marriage. His first wife had refused to leave Aleppo. However, in 1795, he journeyed to Baghdad via Muscat and Basra, and there met his first wife who agreed to accompany him back to Surat. Two Shoha-

tim, Jacob Sittenhon and Moses ibn Zbeida, also accompanied him to India. During this period Shalom Cohen made frequent voyages to Baghdad, Basra and other places in Mesopotamia.

The next chapter in his life commenced in 1797 when he first came to Calcutta after visiting Cochin and Madras. In Calcutta he and his partner Jacob Semah set up a prosperous business, employing staff from even distant cities such as Cochin. Apart from the jewellery business, they established a thriving export and import trade with Baghdad, dealing in such commodities as silks, muslins and indigo. However, his partnership with Jacob Semah terminated after a business disagreement after which an arbitration court ordered Jacob Semah to pay Rs. 60,000 to Shalom Cohen, the verdict being confirmed by the English Court.

By this time, Shalom Cohen had become a very wealthy man and was able to indulge in the luxury of holidaying at Chinsurah, in the outskirts of Calcutta, with his wives. Even so, he continued to expand his business, and in 1816, made a trip to Lucknow via Benares by boat and carriage. At Lucknow, he was received by the Ruler of Oudh, Vizier Ghazi el Din Haider, who conferred on him the title of Court Jeweller, a position which carried a salary of Rs. 2,000 per month. He lived with his wives at Lucknow till 1819, during which period they stayed in the house of the British Resident. In April of that year, he returned to Calcutta via Cawnpur, Faizabad and Murshidabad.

The extent of his wealth and status can be gauged from the fact that his retinue consisted of 30 Spahis (soldiers), 25 Chokras (oddboys), 7 carriages, 7 palanquins, 60 bearers, 23 changis (sweepers) and 10 personal servants. In 1829, he made another visit to Lucknow, where his former protector had been succeeded by his son, Suleiman Jab Nasir Din Haider bin Padishahi Anwad. During this visit too, he was honoured

by the British Resident who invited him to breakfast and to a Christmas party. It is reported that, in addition to being Court Jeweller at Lucknow, an identical title was conferred on him by Maharajah Ranjeet Singh of Punjab.

In 1830, he had the distinction of being received in audience by the Governor-General of India, Lord William Cavendish Bentinck. His diary reveals him to be a learned man, interested in such diverse subjects as Astronomy, Philosophy and Poetry. He also had a fine sense of humour. When he died, he was buried in the cemetery which he himself offered to the community.

At that time there was no particular name given to the cemetery, which was on a plot of land located at 45 Narkeldanga Main Road, Calcutta. Mr. E. M. D. Cohen took a leading role in organising its affairs for many years as also Mr. I. S. Musleah. Many years later, the Jewish burial board was formed with the Honorary Secretaries nominated by election and Messrs. D. J. Cohen and I. S. Musleah worked very hard as Hony. Secretaries of this institution. It was not until 1951 that the "Oseh Haised Board" was formed and registered. This was headed by Lady Rachel Ezra as the President, and Mr. I. S. Musleah as the Hony. Secretary. Messrs. J. R. Jacob, E. J. Samuel, E. F. E. Moses, I. E. Musleah, R. Abraham, J. E. Jacob, A. E. J. Abraham, E. D. Ezra, and W. Starkmann were the office bearers.

The aims and objects of the institution were as follows:—

(a) To undertake the burial of the dead of the Jewish community in or at the discretion of the Board in the State of West Bengal, in accordance with Jewish rites and customs.

(b) To provide charitable and humanitarian relief to indigent and sick members of the Jewish community in West Bengal and to alleviate their suffering and distress in any manner whatsoever.

(c) To maintain the cemetery at 45 Narkeldanga Main Road, Calcutta, and its extension when acquired and all the tombs therein, and also the Jewish cemetery in Darjeeling and such other cemetery or cemeteries as may be acquired or opened.

(d) To improve and extend the burial grounds now existing and acquire other lands for burial purposes as and when necessary.

(e) To employ Secretaries, Managers, Clerks, Superintendents, Medical Men, Nurses, Organisers, Attendants and others for the purposes and objects herein mentioned.

(f) To purchase, take on lease, or in exchange hire or otherwise acquire any property, moveable or immoveable of every description and to sell, mortgage, let out, exchange or otherwise dispose of the same.

(g) To borrow and raise moneys for the purposes of the institution, to issue securities therefor and to open banking and other accounts.

(h) To invest any moneys of the Institution not immediately required for any of its objects, in immoveable properties and|or Government or Trustee Securities.

(i) To draw, make, accept, endorse and otherwise deal with Promissory Notes, Bills of Exchange, Debentures and other securities and documents.

(j) To accept donations, subscriptions, payments and gifts and to subscribe or contribute to the funds or otherwise to assist Synagogues, Hospitals, Charitable, Religious or Scientific Institutions, Societies, Funds or Objects.

(k) To affiliate or amalgamate with any communal society or association having objects wholly or in part similar to those of the Institution.

(l) To appoint trustees, including the Official Trustee Government of West Bengal or of any other State to act as Trustees of the whole or part of the properties and assets of the institution.

(m) To do all other things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects including the power to spend the funds of the institution for all or any of such objects.

So far, approximately 4,000 people are buried in this cemetery and a new plot was purchased adjoining the old plot to ensure its continuity for many more years.

Other Prominent Settlers and Their Descendants:

The main influx of Jewish settlers into Calcutta took place early in the 19th century. The majority of these came from Baghdad where the misrule of Daud Pasha forced many Jews to emigrate. They found a welcome haven in India, a land of tolerance, where they could live in perfect freedom and security and preserve their culture and traditions unmolested. Settlers also arrived from Basra, (Mesopotamia) and Aleppo (Syria) and other Middle Eastern countries. Prominent among the new arrivals were Moses Duek Hakkohen (Moses Duek Cohen) and Eleazar ben Aaron ben Seadyah Iraki who came from Aleppo and Yemen respectively.

Eleazar Iraki was a printer and the author of many books. It was he who activated the community intellectually. Between 1840 and 1857 he produced 27 publications among them the Ein Ya'akob, Sefer ha-Ma'asivoth, the Pizmonim (2 editions), Eldad ha-Dari-Law of Shehitah, Polemics, Josippon and Sefer ha-Yashar and Kabalistic writings like the Book of Raziel the Angel and Interpretation of Dreams.

Moses Duek Cohen was a descendant of ancestors of the stock exiled from Spain and the term "Duek" is actually a corruption of the Spanish title "Duc". He is referred to as the real founder of the Calcutta Jewish community and was elected as the first President of the community. He was an Honorary Rabbi and Minister, Mohel and Mekkadesh (marriage performer) from

1825 till his death in 1861. He was also the author of the "Kaneh Middah" which provides valuable material relating to the history of the Calcutta Jews. As a religious leader, the community looked to him for guidance in all disputes.

In 1810, he married the daughter of Shalom Aaron Cohen. Their son, the Rev. Moses Silas Duek Cohen became a junior minister in the old "Neweh Shalom" Synagogue in which post he served from 1861 to 1873. But it was their grandson, Elias Moses Duek Cohen who was to make the greatest contribution to the community.

He was born on the 21st December, 1852, the eldest of eight brothers and four sisters. At the age of seventeen, he married Gracia, daughter of Yom Tob Isaac Duek Cohen. They had five sons and four daughters on whom they lavished their love and affection. Their love and devotion to each other was exemplary. It is recorded that when he had to undergo an operation, he refused anaesthetic and was content to hold his wife's hand throughout the painful ordeal.

A born leader with a magnetic personality, he was a stickler for principles and no amount of pressure could cause him to deviate from his convictions. Nevertheless, he was essentially a humble man.

Like his grandfather and father before him, he entered the Ministry. He succeeded his father as junior minister of the old "Neweh Shalom" Synagogue on Rosh Hodesh Heshwan 5634 (20th December 1873) on retirement of his father. On the 9th of February 1877, he became senior minister of the old "Neweh Shalom" and was invited to join the Board of the Synagogue Manhigim. This event was to inaugurate a new and prosperous era in the history of the synagogue.

With his dynamic drive and singular zeal, Rev. E. M. D. Cohen set about increasing the revenue and status of the synagogue. Due to various innovations,



Rev. Elias Moses Duek Cohen

the revenue of the synagogue increased six-fold. With a view to elevating the status of the synagogue, he instituted the Yehidim with their Kippur night offerings, accepted seat rents and thereby won representation for the synagogue on the Council and Board of Deputies of British Jews in London.

In the synagogue itself, he introduced a number of changes. In the old "Neweh Shalom", he replaced the old lamps with gas chandeliers and introduced "punkas" (mechanical fans) in the "Maghen David." In 1902, these were in turn replaced by electric lights and fans. By raising contributions, he set up the bracket lights between the arches. He converted the Tebilah rooms in the rear into office rooms so as to earn additional revenue for the synagogue. In 1917, he chose the Biblical verses which decorate the symmetrical arches which also were designed by him. In 1918, he presented the first of the three cut-glass thirty-light electroliers which adorn the centre of the synagogue. He drew up a plan for redesigning the Bimah which was too confined, but due to other preoccupations, this failed to materialise. He personally supervised the planting of trees in the synagogue grounds.

Apart from the synagogue, he had many other interests. It was he who first mooted the setting up of an exclusively Jewish school for Jewish children, who, till then, attended the Christian Hebrew Mission School or other Christian institutions. This was prompted by the missionary activities of one of the heads of these Christian Schools. Thus, in 1881, the first such School the "Jewish Girls' and Boys' School" came into existence. An account of both these institutions is given separately. Throughout his life, Rev. Cohen was associated with this school as Hony. Secretary till 1887 and as Hony. Treasurer till the time of his death

He was the editor and printer of the Jewish weekly gazette "Paerah" published in Arabic which appeared

from 1878 to 1889. This Gazette gives us a valuable insight into the early history of the Calcutta Jewish community. It recorded both local and international events of the day. Its popularity was worldwide and news items from it were reproduced even in the European press.

In spite of his many religious duties and social activities, Rev. Cohen still found time to actively participate in civic affairs. He stood for election as Municipal Councillor from ward 12 of the city and was elected by an overwhelming majority. For twenty one years, he served on the Corporation where he was affectionately called "The Grand Old Man" and where he was highly esteemed for his outstanding qualities. For about 10 years, he served district No. 2 Committee as President. That he lost his seat in 1911 was due solely to the fact that he could not spare time for electioneering.

With the advent of the first world war he at once turned his attention to the welfare of Jewish Troops. His youngest son was serving with the 9th Middlesex Regiment. Beginning with eleven soldiers from this regiment he gradually made arrangements for 70 Jewish soldiers, drawn from all over India, to observe the High Holy Days in the traditional manner. He exchanged correspondence with military commanders who came to seek his advice on Jewish religious matters pertaining to the sick and wounded and to burial of the dead. His efforts on behalf of the Jewish troops serving in the British army in India, were warmly appreciated by Major Michael Adler, Chief Minister of the Jewish force of the British Army. His attempt to persuade the Adjutant-General of India to sanction the post of a Jewish Military Chaplain was not successful due to the relatively few Jewish troops in service.

At the instance of Major Schonfield, Officer in command of the administration of the Jewish War Services

Committee in London, he set about inaugurating similar committees in Calcutta and other large centres in India. In this task, he was assisted by two Jewish soldiers, Gunner Epstane and Private Middlebrook, and one officer, Lt. Herbert Loewe of the Army Clothing Factory. Committee centres were set up at Calcutta, Bombay, Bangalore, Rawalpindi, Ambala and Aranpoora for the benefit of the Jewish troops posted in those areas. Rev. Cohen became the President of the Calcutta Community which looked after the needs of 250 Jewish soldiers and a further 250 Jewish prisoners of war.

His association with the British Administration in India went back to the 1870's when he was introduced to Lord Lytton, Viceroy of India. Again in 1887, he was one of the six Jewish delegates invited to present the address to Queen Victoria on the occasion of her Jubilee. The government sought his opinion in matters of legislation involving Jewish interests. Even court cases involving Jews, were referred to him and so fair were his decisions that both parties usually accepted his judgement.

In 1889, he toured Egypt, Syria, Palestine and England, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy and Germany. As a Zionist he worked for the restoration of Israel.

In December 1923, he celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his service in the Ministry, an occasion of joy for the community, which he had selflessly guided for half a century. On the 14th of January, 1926, he passed away leaving an empty void in the community. After an impressive and solemn funeral procession, his mortal remains were interred in the cemetery at Sura, a suburb of Calcutta. A memorial oil glass is lit perpetually to his memory in the Maghen David Synagogue.

Other notable arrivals were Aaron Kindil and Aaron Solomon Leniyado, ancestors of the subsequent Hazanim and teachers of Bombay and Calcutta respec-

tively, Ezekiel Musleah, an indigo expert who rendered services to the East India Company and Ezekiel Judah (Yehuda) from Baghdad, (a descendant of Silman David Ma'tuk), an indigo merchant who also traded in silks and muslins. It was Ezekiel Musleah and Benjamin Abraham Solomon David, another immigrant from Baghdad, who were instrumental in purchasing the site in 1823 for the synagogue now called Neweh Shalom. About this time, another family from Baghdad, destined to make their mark in the Calcutta community, arrived in Calcutta.

This family consisted of Joseph Ezra and his two sons, David and Nissim. After staying for a short time in Calcutta, during which he established business connections, Joseph Ezra returned to Baghdad with his two sons, who, however, finding the conditions in their homeland intolerable in comparison with the free good and orderly way of life in India under the British, left Baghdad for good and returned to Calcutta. David Joseph Ezra, the founder of the Calcutta Ezra family went into business on a large scale. He set up an import and export trade with Baghdad, Aleppo, Damascus, Muscat and Zanzibar, exporting indigo, silks, rice and other items of food and importing dates and other native produce of those countries. He also exported opium on a large scale to Hongkong.

With typical foresight, he invested his fortune in landed property and buildings, the value of which spiralled, and at the time of his death, he was the biggest owner of landed property in Calcutta.

His eldest son, Elias David Ezra, inherited his vast fortune and built upon it, following in his father's footsteps as an exporter of opium and an investor in real estate. He was the patron of the Calcutta community which owes to him the magnificient synagogue, "Maghen David" built at Canning Street. A full account of this masterpiece is given in the next chapter.

He had five sons from his two marriages. The first marriage was with the daughter of David Aaron Gubbay, the second with Mozelle Ezra, daughter of the late Sir Albert Sassoon (son of the great philanthropist, David Sassoon of Bombay) and sister to the late Sir Edward Sassoon, M.P. This marriage united these two leading families of Calcutta and Bombay. Elias David Ezra died in 1886. Mozelle Ezra eventually settled down in London. So numerous and lavish were her charities that her name became a household word amongst the poor. In 1886 she built the Ezra Hospital to commemorate the name of her late husband.

Joseph Elias Ezra, the eldest son of Elias David Ezra was not only a leading businessman but also took a leading part in the civic affairs of the city. He was Municipal Commissioner from 1886 to 1896, and Sheriff of Calcutta in 1888-89. Like his parents, he is also remembered for his numerous charitable works. He married a grand-daughter of David Sassoon of Bombay.

The third brother, David E. D. Ezra, eldest son of Mozelle Ezra, also married a grand daughter of the late David Sassoon. While he settled down in Calcutta, his other three brothers migrated to London and Paris. David Ezra was to achieve the highest pinnacle of fame culminating in his Knighthood in 1927. An account of his achievements appears in a later chapter.

CHAPTER III

SYNAGOGUES AND INSTITUTIONS

Wherever Jews settled and established communities, they built synagogues.

As mentioned earlier, the first synagogue at Calcutta, the "Neweh Shalom" was established in 1823. Ezekiel Musleah and Benjamin Abraham Solomon David were instrumental in purchasing the plot from an Englishman, John Bowers, for Rs. 16,000. Of this sum Rs. 6,000 was raised from the community itself and Rs. 10,000 was borrowed from Mackintosh & Co. at 8 per cent interest per annum. By 1831, the principal and interest accrued, were paid up in full which speaks very well of the prosperity of the community. On August 29, 1825, the original constitution of the "Neweh Shalom" was drawn up, the text of which was as follows:—

> On Monday 25 Elul 5585 since the creation of the world by our calculation (which corresponds to the English date of 29th August 1825) here in the city of Calcutta situated on the river Ganges which flows into the ocean, we, the undersigned, have taken upon ourselves, our future generations and all those connected with us, a procedure for all times, to appoint an officer and manager of the affairs of the Synagogue existing in the city of Calcutta. He is empowered to deal with the affairs of the Synagogue and pay expenses of the Synagogue as he desires, but he is not permitted to make payments not incurred for the actual needs of the Synagogue such as charity to the poor and emissary collectors from other countries and even to the poor people of Calcutta, he is not allowed to pay a single penny, this being the burden of the community. Such an officer has no power to force anybody to contribute to such causes except when the collections concern the Synagogue only. We also give him full permission and adequate powers to rebuke and fine any one

who behaves disgracefully in the Synagogue, or raises his voice in anger during the time of prayers or reading the Sefer in which case he is empowered to rebuke and turn the offender out of the Synagogue as he thinks proper. We have no power to dismiss him from his office, neither can he, after accepting the appointment resign and cast the burden off his shoulders, even if, God forbid, someone has annoyed and villified him. After the completion of the alloted period the authority of the first officer will remain in force until his successor has been chosen and appointed in his stead by the Community or they may extend the period of the first officer so that the Congregation of God may not be left like sheep without a shepherd.

"After the second officer has been chosen, his predecessor is bound to pass on to him the books, files and accounts and God forbid, if other payments have been made to the poor or foreign emissaries which do not concern the Synagogue, but entered in the accounts of the Synagogue, the second officer is bound to recover the money from his predecessor who is forced to make good the loss out of his own pocket, he having been prohibited from the beginning from making such payments out of the funds of the Synagogue.

"Whoever the officer may be, he is allowed to select any two men he likes to assist him with their advice, and we are bound to accept them as himself. Even the advisers, after having accepted their appointment to advise and assist the officer, cannot resign their office during the period of the existence of the officer ,and should the officer be compelled to leave Calcutta owing to his business, he is permitted and entitled to choose another officer in his stead to complete the allotted period, and we are bound to accept the latter's authority, actions and decisions as emanating from the first officer.

"In the event of the death of the Officer taking place before a successor has been elected, the two advisers are bound to choose another officer over them, in order to complete the allotted period of the deceased, so that the power of authority contained in this document may stand valid for all times from one Officer to another for all generations and neither we nor

our offspring nor those connected with us of the Jewish faith, can at any time, or for any reason, annul the powers conferred by this document, by which, we now fully confirm on a solemn oath with good intention. We have invalidated all versions and arguments made by any person against this document, by which, we, the undersigned, have today severally and jointly agreed to accept, appoint and constitute Mr. Moses Duek Cohen as the first Officer over the Synagogue for a period of six months in accordance with the above mentioned terms.

"To this we have clearly written all the conditions mentioned above, and have subscribed our signatures, of our own free will and with full knowledge without the least doubt whatsoever.

"We have handed over this document to the said Moses to remain in his possession and in the possession of the officers coming after him as a documentary evidence.

"Everything mentioned herein is firm, clear, true, established and enduring.

Abraham Solomon David
Salman Eliahoo Ezekiel Gubbay
Ezekiel Eliahoo Cohen
Jacob Jonah Isaac
David Joseph Ezra Khilaif
Joseph Hakham Zekharia
Reuben Ezra Abraham
Moshe Abi Shimeon Ali Qoseen
Ezekiel Duek Cohen
Shamaiah
Joseph Jacob Jonah
Samuel Duek Cohen
Ezekiel Eliahoo Musleah
Ezekiel Reuben Manasseh
Joseph Ezra Joseph Khilaif
Aaron Duek Cohen
Jonah Jacob Jonah
Hayem Simon Heyem David
Moses Ezekiel Rahamim

Isaac Isaiah
Abraham Benjamin Solomon
Aaron Hayem Eliahoo Abraham
Mitooq Ezra Joseph Zekariah
Solomon Shimeon Duek Cohen
Abraham Jacob
Yahya Joseph Arakie Cohen
Benjamin Eliezer Hakham Nissim Musleah
Mordecai Abraham
Joseph Shimeon Meyer Duek Cohen
Salim Sulaiman
Elazar Aaron Arakie Cohen
Elazar Mordecai Cohen
Moshe Abi Shimeon Ali Qoseen

By 1884, however, the "Neweh Shalom" was in a very bad state of disrepair. The authorities, therefore, urged the Ezra family to build a new synagogue on "Neweh Shalom" land. Thus Elias Ezra, son of David Ezra, built the "Maghen David" giving the Ezra family the privilege of becoming the permanent presidents of the Manhigim. The minister and the congregation moved into the new synagogue and the "Neweh Shalom" was closed down. Later this was converted into a Yeshivah with a library.

This however was not to be the end of the "Neweh Shalom". In 1888, it was re-opened by a clever ruse. Some members of the community, on the plea of intending to use the building as a kind of prayer hall, were allowed to re-open it. Then, in defiance of the authorities and ignoring the conditions laid down, they got a congregation and began to conduct regular services. No amount of legal action could induce them to give up the place. Ultimately it was accepted once again as a synagogue. Thus the "Neweh Shalom" obtained a new lease of life but its affairs were conducted in a very poor manner. This prompted Mr. Ezra Arakie to convene a general meeting of the com-

mittee to elect Manhigim. He was himself elected as Honorary Secretary and thus it came about that the "Neweh Shalom" was the only democratically-run synagogue in the Calcutta community. In 1911-12, the old structure was demolished and rebuilt by the community. The synagogue had over 30 Sefarim but now has only 12.

Beth-El Synagogue

"Beth-El" Synagogue was erected in Pollock Street by David Joseph Ezra and Ezekiel Judah in 1856. It was later renovated and enlarged into a magnificent structure by Elias Shalome Gubbay at a cost of Rs. 100,000 paid personally by him. He raised the centre on massive columns with lofty arches and ornamental windows, paved the floors with marble and provided additional decorations. Being felicitously inspired, in one year he completed the whole work, which included adding two galleries to the Azarth Nasheem, replacing the heavy pillars by elegant iron columns with sufficient light space, and improvement to the central aspect thus fulfilling the injunction. This is my God and with Glory I will prepare this Temple."

"Beth-El" Synagogue had at one time a very crowded gathering and conducted regular daily services (continued to this day) with over 100 Sepharim but today there are only about 30 due to the mass exodus of the community to Israel including the last Hazzan Abraham Abed Twena who served the Synagogue for many years. He died in Jerusalem in February 1968.

On one side of the compound of this synagogue is Mikveh as well as space where matzoth are baked for the passover for the entire local community, on the other side are office premises built by the synagogue.

The "Maghen David" Synagogue:

As mentioned earlier, the "Maghen David" Synagogue was built by Elias David Joseph Ezra to perpetuate the memory of his father, David Joseph Ezra who died in 1882.

A portion of the old "Neweh Shalom" with shops and jute and tobacco presses on two plots of land belonging to it were dismantled to provide the site for the new synagogue. But, since this site was not spacious enough an adjoining building occupied by Mr. Ezra's step-mother's mother, was also acquired and demolished, the lady being provided with another house. The foundation stone was laid on January 23rd, 1883, and the building was completed in 20 months.

The religious articles from the old "Neweh Shalom" were installed in the new synagogue and the formal dedication was performed in the presence of a large congregation on September 11th, 1884. Most of the congregation from the "Neweh Shalom" moved over to the "Maghen David" where seats were allocated to them. Even the Gubbai (warden) of the "Neweh Shalom" transferred his services to the new synagogue.

The largest synagogue in the East, the "Maghen David" cost about Rs. 200,000 to build. A magnificent structure, its architecture has been praised by all visitors including those of the Armed Services during World War II. The outer walls are of mellow red and grey brick. The interior is Italian in design and is a unique work of art. The pillars, adorned at the top with floral designs, were imported from Paris. There are three cut-glass electroliers, the centre one of which was presented in 1918 by the Rev. E. M. D. Cohen and the other two being installed in 1927. The Rev. E. M. D. Cohen also designed the beautiful arches and decorated them with Biblical verses selected by himself.

A magnificent decoration stands before the entrance to the ark. It consists of a collection of religious



A striking Calcutta landmark: the Steeple and Clock Tower of the Maghen David Synagogue

symbols of Judaism. Just below the crown of Torah and the words of Exodus 3 : 15, "This is my name for ever and this is my memorial unto all generations", the name of God is embossed in effulgent splendour. The name appears as part of three verses taken from the Psalms:

"I have set the Lord always before me." (Psalm 16 : 8).

"From the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof praised is the name of the Lord." (Psalm 113:3).

"Lord, I love the habitation of Thy House, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth." (Psalm 26 : 8).

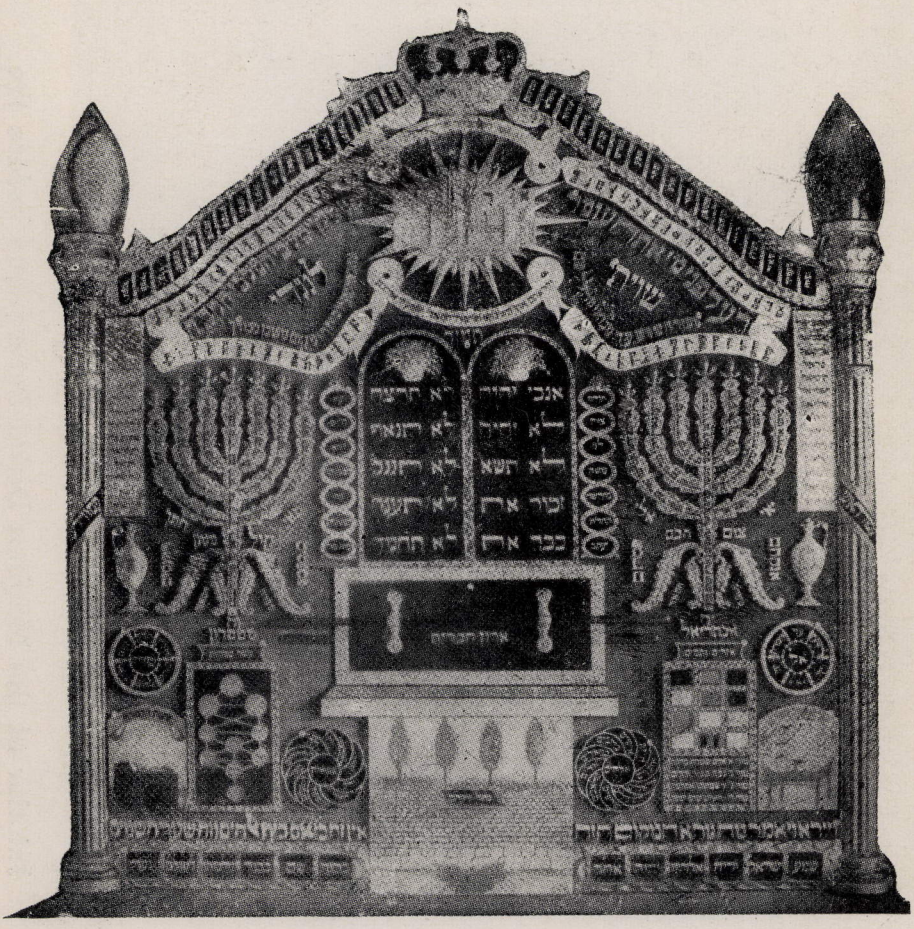
Below this there are two tablets with the Ten Commandments, the first letters standing out boldly. Still further down, the Ark of the Covenant is represented by a rod and a painting of the Wailing Wall is decorated with evergreens. On either side are two columns figuratively adorned at the top with the Pillar of Cloud on the left. On either side of the Tablets of Commandments are two Menorahs. The branches and stems of the left one contains the mystical rhymed prayer of forty-two words (An-Na-Be-Ko-Ah) whose author is Tana Nehunya ben Hakanah (first century) and those of the right contain Psalm 67. There are also diagrams of the Urim and Thummim, the Table of the Shew-bread, the Altar of Incense and several names of the angelic host. Mystical words appear at the upper border and at the bottom the Shema as well as the words "And he (Jacob) was afraid and said, 'How full of awe is this place. This is none other than the House of God and this is the Gate of Heaven'." (Gen. 28:17).

The dome covering the entrance to "Hekhal Hakkodesh" (the Holy Ark) symbolises the sky on a starry night. Set in this dome are windows two of which are inscribed with Judaism's eternal truths, "The Lord is our God, the Lord is One" and "Thou shalt love thy fellow-man as thyself." The middle window con-

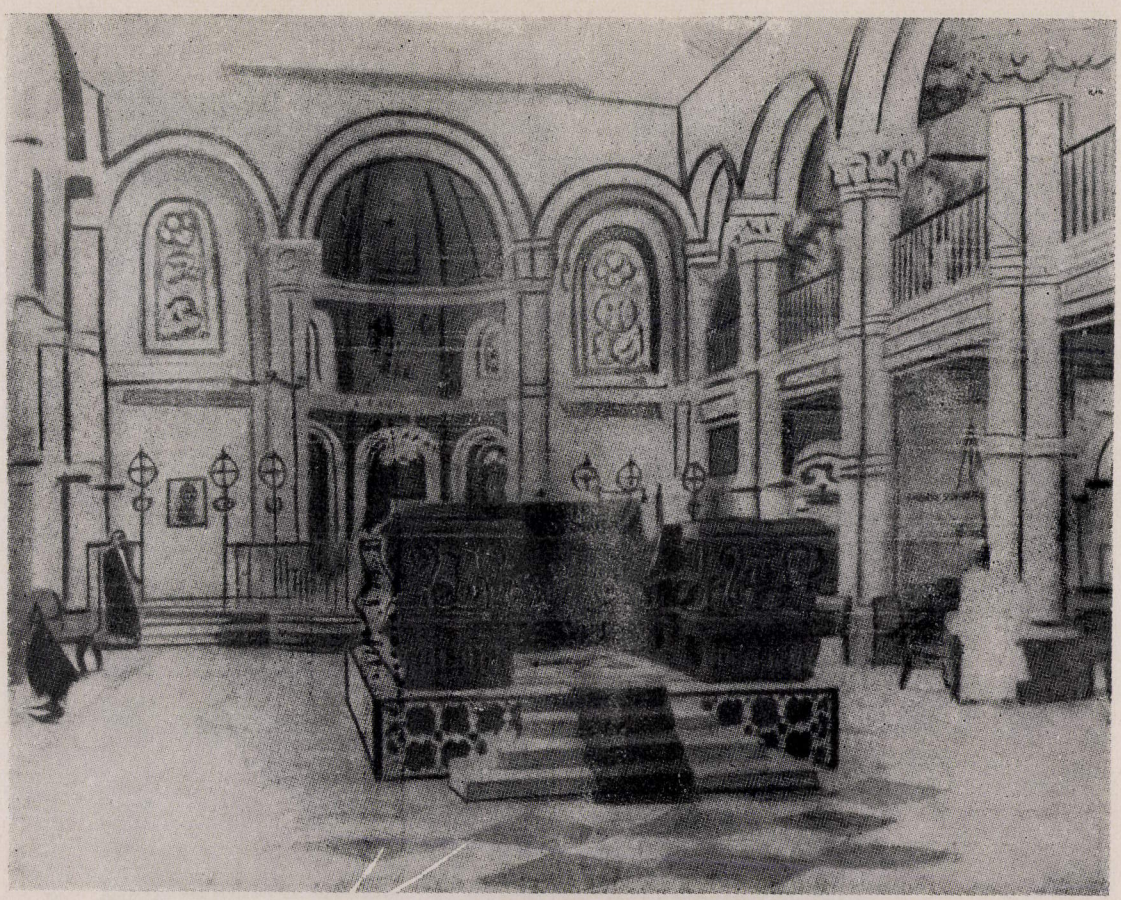
tains an amorphous impression of a cloud radiating rays presumably to represent the Shekhina.

Above the ladies' gallery are multicoloured glass windows. Originally these were made of ordinary glass and did not keep out the morning sun. A screen had to be rolled across to keep out the sun, but this also deprived the interior of much needed light. Eventually the Rev. E. M. D. Cohen introduced frosted glass and did away with the screen. The clock set up in the 142 ft. high tower was imported from London. The gas lamps were electrified in 1921 by the late Jonah R. J. Jacob. Services are held in the mornings and evenings on weekdays, and three times on Saturdays. Although seats here are not sold as in Europe some families have occupied the same seats for generations. The form of worship is strictly orthodox (Sephardic) and is conducted in Hebrew, although this is not very popular with the modern generation who do not understand Hebrew. This synagogue had over 100 Sefarim but is now considerably reduced — mostly dispatched to Israel with the exodus of the congregants.

Besides these three synagogues, two prayer halls were also set up for the benefit of the expanding community. The first was opened by Hakham Solomon Twena, a religious teacher, at his own residence in Blackburn Lane in 1897. It was called "Beth Hakeneseth". The Prayer Hall served the community but by 1942 its affairs were in such a sad state that its very existence was threatened. It was at this stage that the wealthy B. N. Elias family took over the institution. They bought up the property, liquidated all debts and took a pledge to build a proper "Maghen Aboth" and Yesheboth. They instituted a management committee drawn from the community but stipulated that two members of the Elias family should always be represented. The institution was called "Maghen Aboth and Yesheboth Jacob Benjamin Elias." Services here have been discontinued for want of a minian (quorum) and



An imposing decoration over the entrance of the Ark in the Maghen David Synagogue.



Interior of the Maghen David Synagogue before the installation of electricity.



A recent picture of the interior of the Maghen David Synagogue.



The Jewish Girls School.

it is gathered that attempts are being made by the heads of M|s. B. N. Elias & Co. to build a home instead for the aged of the community.

In 1933, another Prayer Hall, the "Sha'areh Rasone" was started by Mr. A. Levroy for the convenience of those members of the community who, for reasons of ill-health, were unable to go to north Calcutta where all the synagogues were situated. It is patronised by the more well-to-do Jews living in South Calcutta. It conducts regular daily services.

Educational Institutions :

Although from its very inception, the community in general prospered, not much thought was given to educating the children, whether in religious or conventional subjects. The children of the poor especially suffered in this respect. In fact, it was the Christian missionaries who initially started the education of Jewish children by setting up a free Christian Hebrew Mission School. Those Jewish children who could attend this or other Christian schools were able to receive some education. Others had none.

The state of affairs might well have continued were it not for an incident which came to the notice of the Rev. E. M. D. Cohen. Hearing that a young Jewish girl was ready to be converted to Christianity he published a series of articles which shook the community and awakened them to a sense of their responsibility. He appealed for the setting up of an exclusive Jewish school for Jewish children. Benefactors such as Moses Jacob Abeasis, Moshe Mayohas and R. M. Cohen readily responded to these appeals which resulted in the setting up in 1881 of the very first Jewish school in Calcu'ta, "The Jewish Girls' and Infants' School." The very next year the Ezra Benevolent Institution was founded to impart education to the poor Jewish children in Hebrew, religious knowledge and general subjects.

The Jewish Girls' School :

The "Jewish Girls' and Infants' School" opened an independent section for boys and came to be known as the "Jewish Boys' and Girls' School." In 1885, this section was merged with the girls' school and the institution was called simply, "The Jewish Girls' School."

Until 1903 the school struggled depending for its budget on individual subscriptions and donations which barely covered half its annual expenditure. However, in 1904, the government, which had recognised the school as a "European School", started giving grants-in-aid.

Under the code "European Schools", education was imparted upto the Middle School and Scholarship Examination. By 1911, this code was revised and the school was recognised as a secondary school upto the Cambridge Junior School Certificate standard.

The school was situated at No. 8 Pollock Street. Due to the efforts of Rev. E. M. D. Cohen, contributions were raised and the corner stone of a new building was laid in 1926 by Sir David Ezra. The Rev. Cohen had since passed away but his daughter, Mrs. Sara Curlender, fittingly performed the stone laying ceremony.

In association with the Jewish Girls' School, Rev. Cohen established the "Jeshurun Free School" for the benefit of poor Jewish children. Also in 1937, a Jewish Girls' Hostel was set up for the girls attending these schools. Although an independent unit, this hostel gradually came to be associated with the board department of the "Jeshurun Free School". Lady Ezra created an endowment fund for this institution amounting to Rs. 100,000. The school building was sold and the school was transferred to 63 Park Street where it still continues to function but in a better locality.

"The Elias Meyer Free School and the Talmud Torah":

This was a school for boys. Its forerunner was the "Ezra Benevolent Institution", founded in 1882 by Mr. Elias David Ezra. The aim of this institution was to inculcate the Hebrew language and religious traditions and to educate the poor Jewish children. Education was free with midday meals supplied to the children. Till his death in 1886, the institution was maintained at Mr. E. D. Ezra's own expense. After his death, however, his sons lost interest in the venture and it was left to a few Jewish philanthropists, headed by the late Mr. Abraham Hayoo Gubbay, to keep the institution alive. The name of the institution was changed to the "Talmud Torah". Till 1907, it was successfully managed by Mr. A. E. Gubbay in the name of the community.

Despite the absence of a benefactor and with little assistance from the community, these devoted men managed to keep the institution going, mainly through their own efforts. It was a bleak period in the history of the school. Very few pupils could be accommodated and the level of education was up to Standard III only.

Two articles from the pen of Mr. I. A. Isaac, which appeared in the "Voice of Sinai" in 1904 and in the "Hebrew" in 1907, glaringly exposed the deplorable conditions which prevailed at that time. The tenor of the articles ran as follows:

> "With a population of more than 2,000 in Calcutta, we have no school for our boys; they are left to the mercy of the Christian missionaries and those who attend Christian schools are black-mailed by being charged over and above the sum paid by the Christian children. Some time ago, when it was rumoured that the missionaries were going to open a boarding school for the indigent Jewish children, we raised a hue and cry at the very idea, but since then have we stirred ourselves even an inch to relieve their want?" ("Voice of Sinai", July 8, 1904).

"An Opportunity for a millionaire."

"You have just to go into the heart of Hurriahutta leaving the Parsee Hotel and here you will find horrors shocking to the civilised world."

"Behind the screen of this "City of Palaces" there abounds untold misery and degradation."

"As soon as the child passes the crawling stage, he is sent by his parents either to a Hebrew Mission School contributed and controlled by Christians where free education is imparted, or to a sort of Jewish School called Talmud Torah where there is the only advantage of geting one free meal with niggardly or no education at all. These young souls are found at almost any time prowling around Jewish houses for a pice. Most of them are half nude and those of them who have clothes are dirty and in tatters. Look at their faces, they look bright and promising with doubtful destiny in store for them. Once this spirit of beggary is stamped into their system they find it very hard, nay impossible, to lift themselves up to lead a life of usefulness. If the men are so very degraded we leave our readers to imagine the condition of the weaker sex, who entirely depend upon their lords for support and protection."
("Hebrew', ,June 14, 1907).

Realising that the institution could not survive, let alone improve, without proper backing from the community, Mr. A. E. Gubbay convened a public meeting in 1907 at the "Maghen David" synagogue with a view to appointing a properly constituted management to run the "Talmud Torah." This resulted in the formation of a committee of nine members with Mr. Ezra Aaron Arakie as Honorary Secretary and Mr. M. A. Sassoon as Honorary Treasurer. Elections to this body were held annually at the General Meeting of the subscribers. From 1907 to 1942, Mr. Ezra Aaron Arakie, an M.A. of Cambridge and a Barrister-at-Law, served the institution with single-minded devotion. A tireless social worker, he gave all his time and energy to the cause of the poor and neglected youth.

With his dynamic personality and high social status, he was able to raise funds for the school in the shape of gifts and legacies which now form the major portion of the school's trust funds. Simultaneously with giving the school financial stability, he set about raising its educational standards. He introduced secular subjects in the curriculum and won recognition of the school from the government. From the lowly status of a primary school, the level of education rose until candidates were being sent up for the Senior Cambridge Overseas Examination and the Board of Apprenticeship Primary Examination.

With the steady progress of the "Talmud Torah" and the "Jewish Girls' School", the rival Hebrew Mission School was forced to close down in 1922 for lack of pupils. The progress of the "Talmud Torah" was not, however, achieved without numerous difficulties, not the least being inter-rivalries and jealousies between the Managing Committee and some members of the community and between personalities. The result was that instead of healthy co-operation in building up the existing institution, rival institutions and organisations were set up thereby dissipating the energies of the community. For instance, in 1907, Mr. I. A. Isaac, himself a great social worker, set up a rival institution, the "Benevolent Home and Orphanage" in Weston Street with the help of foreign Jews living in Calcutta. In 1910, with the departure of the foreign Jews, the institution failed. Similarly, other rival organisations failed for want of funds and lack of co-operation. That the "Talmud Torah" was able to make the progress it did in the face of these difficulties, speaks volumes for the tremendous zeal and unswerving dedication of Mr. Ezra Aaron Arakie.

A great deal of credit, however, must also go to Mr. Elias Meyer, a millionaire of Singapore, who, in 1924, donated the land and half the cost of the present three-storied building comprising the school premises

at No. 50 Bowbazar Street. In token of this contribution, the name of the school was changed to the "Elias Meyer Free School and Talmud Torah." In 1939, Mrs. Flora Meyer, widow of Mr. Elias Meyer, donated the sum of Rs. 375,000 in terms of the trust deed which is now the operative constitution of the school.

The school normally accommodates about 150 students for whom education, books and meals are free. In addition, they receive clothing twice a year before the High Holidays.

With the advent of World War II and the independence of Israel, the exclusively Jewish character of the school underwent a change. Due to the large-scale emigration of the Calcutta Jews to Israel and other countries, the number of pupils in the school diminished considerably. With too few pupils and too many teachers, it was becoming uneconomical to run the institution. Thus it was decided to take in non-Jewish children but only on a paying basis. The benefit of the trust funds were exclusively reserved for the Jewish students. This move brought a welcome source of income to the school and helped to offset the losses incurred in maintaining the hostel which had too few boarders. It also helped to raise the teachers' salaries and improve the school's amenities.

Today the school is run by a Jewish Managing Committee. In addition to education the Committee lays stress on maintaining the Jewish traditions for the Jewish students and on the building up of character and personality in all the students. Although the future of the institution is bright, the continued spate of emigration creates a source of worry.

The present Secretary and Principal is Mr. Moses Elias who held these positions very capably since 1956. Prior to this, he was Secretary in 1951. The committee consists of the following members:

Official Trustee of Bengal Inspector of Schools, and Messrs. E. J. Samuel, Gerald Craig, Nissim Meyer, Aaron Arakie, Aaron Hazari, Mordi Cohen, Cyril Cohen.

The Jewish Women's League:

The turn of the century saw the Jewish community at Calcutta firmly established. Many of its members had become prominent and wealthy citizens. However, a sizeable section of the community failed to grasp the numerous opportunities offered with the result that they remained steeped in poverty and ignorance. They did not even appear to have any desire to work for their living but were content to depend on alms for their existence. Their numerous children, clad in rags, were allowed to go from door to door soliciting alms. Their living conditions were a nightmare.

With a view to eradicating this evil and in order to try to infuse into these people a sense of purpose in life, a group of ladies led by Miss Kate Judah decided to form a League. Thus, in 1913, was born the "Jewish Women's League" to promote the social, civil, moral, intellectual and spiritual welfare of the poor. A committee was set up consisting of 15 members, five of whom were elected as office-bearers. The first committee consisted of the following:

President: Mrs. E. E. D. Ezra.

Vice-President: Mrs. S. J. Ezekiel.

Joint Honorary Secretaries: Mrs. Zachariah and Mrs. E. S. Mingail.

Honorary Treasurer: Mrs. Simon J. Cohen.

Committee Members: Mrs. E. M. Cohen, Mrs. Hyam Curlender, Mrs. Angelina Duke, Mrs. A. Grossman, Mrs. Rama Leveroy, Mrs. Joe Minney, Mrs. M. A. Sassoon, Miss Regina Guha, Miss Musleah and Miss R. Moses.

They launched a programme aimed at relieving the distress of the poor and making them feel wanted in society. Entertainments and get-togethers were organised, homes and hospitals visited and funds raised for the poor. Fund-raising however proved to be a slow and laborious task despite the zeal shown by the volunteers. Over the first few years only Rs. 2,500 in all, could be collected through raffles, fancy fairs and other forms of entertainment The First World War also drew away a number of subscribers who turned their attention to the war effort when they began sending regular comfort-parcels to the Jewish troops in Mesopotamia. However, under the joint-secretaryship of Miss E. M. D. Cohen (Later Mrs. A. Curlender) and Mrs.J. S. Duke, the organisation continued to grow and collections increased. The League also widened its interests. For instance, tiffin and tea began to be served to poor children who did not have any in their own homes. Also twice a year before Pesah and Rosh Hashanna, gifts of rice, meat and clothes were distributed but this function was later taken over by the Jewish Charitable Fund.

Education for the poor children was a crying need. As already stated, children either did not go to any school whatsoever, or attended the free Christian Hebrew Mission School. The League, therfore, closely associated itself with the "Jewish Girls' and the Jeshurun Free School" where they obtained every co-operation from the Rev. E. M. D. Cohen. The League is to be thanked for the establishment of the Jewish Girls' Hostel for students.

In order to protect Jewish children from christianising influences, the League withdrew 15 girls from the Hebrew Mission School and had them admitted into the Jewish Girls' School. By 1952, the League was paying for the education of 22 girls. Scholarships were also offered to poor girls for training in medicine and the arts. Since, however, there were no applicants,

the funds were eventually utilized for teaching needlework and dress-making to the children at the "Talmud Torah."

Many other plans were formulated with varying degrees of success. A medical panel consisting of Dr. Hannah David Duke Sassoon and Dr. Rachel Cohen assisted by two Indian Doctors, Sen and Maitra, attended to the girls at the Jewish Girls' School. A Bureau was also set up to streamline the collection of gifts and donations the task previously carried out through individual efforts. In 1923, only Rs. 250 was collected which increased to Rs. 5,000 by 1930. This activity however, gradually faded away. As a long-term relief measure, it was intended to set up a home for destitutes and appeals for funds were sent out. Only Mr. Nathan Perry responded to this appeal. He offered to furnish a building to accommodate 30 persons and to pay the rent in advance for 20 years provided the maintenance was paid from other sources. Unfortunately, nobody came forward to guarantee this maintenance and the scheme fell through. Mr. Perry however, made another approach by contributing Rs. 5,000 to the League.

Despite such disappointments, the League continued to carry out its noble work. Due to various fund-raising activities and generous donations from wealthy philanthropists, including Sir Victor Sassoon, Mr. Ronald Sassoon and the Countess of Reading, the financial stability of the League became established. In 1922 its capital was Rs. 34,000 and by 1925 it had risen to about Rs. 50,000.

In 1929, the League was registered as a Society. Some of its aims were as follows:—

(a) To take all measures expedient or necessary to help the Jewish poor and depressed classes.

(b) To act as guardian for unprotected Jewish children or Jewish children needing to have a guardian or guardians

appointed of the persons or property or both of such children and to act as such guardian in case of need and to make all applications to court as necessary or expedient.

(c) To promote the social, civil, moral, intellectual and spiritual welfare of the Jewish poor.

(d) To establish, conduct and carry on houses, clubs and hostels for the Jewish poor and generally to relieve their distress.

(e) To place poor Jewish children in schools and to pay school fees and other charges on their behalf.

(f) To take all steps to rescue Jewish children from surroundings which may be considered dangerous or undesirable to them physically or morally.

(g) To take such steps by oral or written appeals both private and public as may from time to time be expedient or necessary for the purpose of procuring contributions to the funds of the League in the shape of donations or subscriptions or otherwise.

(h) To acquire, by purchase, lease, gift or otherwise, property moveable or immoveable and whether subject to any special trust or not for any one or more of the objects of the League.

In addition to the above, the League published the following aims with its annual report of 1936:—

1. To render relief to persons in distress.

2. To provide for children, especially orphans, by sending them as boarders, paying their fees and supplying them with clothes, books, etc.

3. To pay fees for public examinations in the case of very poor children.

4. To pay motor licence fees etc. in the case of those who cannot afford to pay.

5. To relieve the sick by supplying them with injections and medicines according to the instructions of the doctor in charge and if necessary to supply them with nurses.

6. To pay tuition fees to schools for teaching poor girls and boys typewriting and shorthand.

7. To advance small sums of money to especially deserving cases to help them to start business in a very small way and endeavour to recover the entire amount from the parties as may be possible.

8. To act as guardians of orphans left destitute.

9. To try and save the young from going astray.

Two years later item 7 was substituted by the following (evidently due to the changed circumstances) "To pay passages when absolutely necessary."

The League actively cooperated with the great industrialist, Mr. B. N. Elias in getting employment for many of the Jewish unemployed, thereby inculcating in them a sense of self-respect. Also, in 1940, a scheme was drawn up with the co-operation of the Director of Industries, Bengal, to impart technical training in such small-scale industries as bee-keeping, pottery-making and weaving. This scheme, however, was not very successful and was later abandoned.

Appalled by the conditions under which infants and nursing mothers were compelled to live with no external aid except what could be procured from the St. John's Ambulance Clinic, the League, headed by Lady Rachel Ezra, set up in 1928, the "Jewish Women's League Baby Clinic", which later came to be known as the "Jewish Baby Welfare". Starting off with a budget of Rs. 3,000, ten babies were selected for special medical care and nourishment. Dr. Rachel Cohen was the first medical practitioner in charge of the clinic and Miss Hannah Ephraim the Matron. Expensive medicines were donated and services were rendered by Dr. Ena Mitra. In 1936, the Clinic became a registered body and announced its aims as follows:—

(a) To provide for the babies, free milk and fruit juice daily, and tonic whenever necessary.

(b) To provide free medical advice to mothers and babies once a week, also all kinds of medicines including tonics and other body-building foods.

(c) To impart free instructions about the best modern methods of bringing up babies.

(d) To impart free hygienic instruction with particular reference to proper ventilation, sanitation, consistent cleanliness in body and clothes, scrupulous avoidance of dust, regular baths, plenty of fresh air and the value of vitamins in food.

(e) To take such steps by oral or written appeals both private and public as may from time to time be deemed expedient or necessary for the purpose of procuring contributions to the funds of the Clinic in the shape of donations or subscriptions or otherwise.

(f) To erect or purchase a small building, funds allowing, for the use of the Clinic.

Aided by further gifts and legacies from members of the community, including Miss Ramah Moses, S. J. Solomon, Mrs. Mulca Meyer, Mrs. M. Elias Nahoum David, Aaron Raphael Gubbay and Mrs. Sally Judah and with grants-in-aid from the Corporation (which latter were discontinued in the early 1950's) the League was able to carry out many other good works. By co-operating with "St. James' School" and "Entally Convent", Jewish Boys and Girls were taken in as boarders in these institutions. Orphans were also accommodated in the Kalimpong Homes. Consumptive patients were sent to the Pendra Road Sanatorium for treatment and the S.P.C.I. trained many Jewish boys.

In 1937, the League affiliated itself to the Bengal Presidency Council of Women thus linking its activities with those of the women's organisations in the Council. Miss Ramah Moses was the League's first representative on this Council. One of the joint activities undertaken by the affiliated organisations of the Council was the relief work carried out during World

War II in connection with the Red Cross Society. The efforts of Mrs. Seemah Luddy were outstanding in this regard. Another joint activity was the feeding of the hungry, particularly during the terrible Bengal Famine in 1943. In 1947, the League contributed Rs. 21,000 at two functions held at the Grand Hotel, to the Relief Fund organised by the West Bengal Governor for the victims of the Partition of India.

During the war, the League also extended relief to the Jewish war refugees from Burma and contributed to the rehabilitation of those rendered homeless during the Japanese bombing of the city.

In 1938, the League celebrated its Silver Jubilee. Its many successes were recalled despite the severe handicaps of lack of finance and facilities that it had to face during the 25 years of its history. Nevertheless, it clearly proved that its members were possessed of the determination to strive, to seek, and never to yield.

Every member of the League played her part with commendable zeal and it is difficult to single out any one for special mention. However, in going through its records some names seem to occur frequently or to be emphasised for some special efforts. Mrs. (later Lady) D. E. D. Ezra for instance, appears to have served as President for a number of years. Lady Rachel Ezra, noted for her outstanding charities, was made life-President in 1934. Miss Ramah Moses who looked after the destinies of two generations of students at the "Jewish Girls' School" was a long-standing committee member. On her 70th birthday a purse of Rs. 5,000 collected in her honour, was used by her to create a "Holiday Fund" so that each year, some poor child could have a decent holiday. Drs. Rachel Cohen and Hannah D. D. Sassoon devoted their professional services during the League's struggle against disease and malnutrition. Mrs. Curlender (formerly Miss Sara E. M. D. Cohen) daughter of Rev. E. M. D. Cohen

adorned the League for many years and revitalised it with her personality and drive. Miss Sally Gubbay is associated with the success of the Jewish Baby Welfare. Then there were Mrs. J. Curlender, Miss R. Luddy, Mrs. Tabby Solomon, the Musleah sisters, Mrs. Hannah Meyer, Mrs. J. R. Jacob and a host of others too numerous to relate in a work of this size and scope. Many of these ladies also contributed financially to the League funds.

Of the many donors to the League's funds, special mention must be made of Mr. Aaron Raphail Gubbay and Mr. Raphail Aaron Gubbay who contributed Rs. 134,000 and Rs. 84,000 respectively to the League.

After the war, another Rs 7,000 came from the A. R. Gubbay Trust Fund. Other new sources of income for the League are the "J. E. Joseph Charitable Trust Fund," London, which contributed between £100-£150 per year, the "Stafford Sassoon Memorial Fund," London, which contributed Rs. 1,500 annually. The "Gubbay Jewish Women's League Benefit Trust Fund" of Rs. 30,000 and the "Lady Rachel Ezra Charitable Trust" which brings in Rs. 5,000 per year.

The Ezra Hospital:

Prior to 1886, there was no hospital in Calcutta exclusively meant for the Jews, and Jewish patients had no other recourse but to go to the various public hospitals in the city. Those fortunate enough to afford it, were able to make their own private arrangements for Kosher food, special diets, personal attendants and the religious ceremonies associated with the last rites. With a view to providing these very amenities for the poor, Mrs. Mozelle Ezra founded and built the Ezra hospital in 1886. It was dedicated to the memory of her husband.

Situated in the compound of the Calcutta Medical College Hospital, the building consists of two floors,

each having eight cubicles flanked by two larger rooms. It was able to accommodate 54 patients and had enough space for a dispensary, nurse's room and store room. Till 1926, the Ezras maintained the hospital themselves. In that year, however, it was made over to the government. A trust fund of Rs. 22,000 was deposited with the Accountant General, Bengal, for the purpose of providing a ritual slaughterer (Shohet), special Kosher food, a Jewish kitchen, a cook and sweepers. The administration of the Trust fund was left at the discretion of the government. It was also agreed that, if beds were not occupied by Jewish patients, they could be utilised for non-Jewish patients. The corpus of this trust fund now exceeds Rs. 30,000.

A further sum of Rs. 10,000 was donated for the use of the hospital by Mr. Ezekiel Saleh Moses in 1930. In 1941, Sir David Ezra created the "Ezra Hospital Endowment Fund" with a corpus of Rs. 81,300. The object of this fund was to provide additional day and night nurses as required, more menial staff, special medicines, surgical instruments and apparatus not readily available in the public hospital and surgical appliances for those discharged patients who had need of them.

Sir David died on August 23, 1947. In his will it was stipulated that yet another trust fund, "The Rachel and David Ezra Dietary Trust Fund," be set up with a corpus of Rs. 50,000. As its name implies, this fund was to assure the proper observance of ceremonial and dietary laws for Jewish patients but it also provided for other benefits as considered necessary for the patients.

These trust funds were to be administered by a committee under the Chairmanship of the Superintendent of the Medical College Hospital and three nominees of the Ezra family. The current nominees are

Mr. J. M. David, Mr. N. B. Elias and Mr. J. R. Cohen. This committee has no power over the internal administration of the Ezra Hospital.

Very few Jewish patients have been admitted into the Ezra Hospital with the result that the Trust Funds have hardly ever been utilised. Only Rs. 220 were utilised out of the "Ezra Hospital Endowment Fund" whose corpus is now Rs. 112,000. The fund has an annual surplus of Rs. 3,000. The "Rachel and David Ezra Fund" has never been utilised at all and its corpus now stands at Rs. 65,000.

As the city grew, the demand for beds in its various hospitals increased greatly with the result that the "Ezra Hospital" was invariably full to capacity. Consequently, Jewish patients found it extremely difficult to gain admittance into the hospital. At the instance of the late Mr. I. S. Musleah and with the co-operation of the committee of the "Ezra Hospital Endowment Fund," the matter was taken up with the administration resulting in certain permanent concessions being granted. Thenceforth, two beds on each floor were kept reserved for Jewish patients who were also permitted to employ attendants with the permission of the Medical Officer on duty. Negotiation for further concessions continued and the government later conceded that no Jewish patient meriting hospitalisation would be refused admission. Furthermore, it was agreed that, in the event of the "Ezra Hospital" ceasing to exist, hospital fees paid by any Jewish patient in any government-sponsored hospital under the auspices of the Medical College would be reimbursed by the Trust Fund.

The total capital of the "Ezra Hospital" earmarked for Jewish patients is about Rs. 225,000 and its income is about Rs. 6,500.

The I. S. Musleah Memorial Clinic:

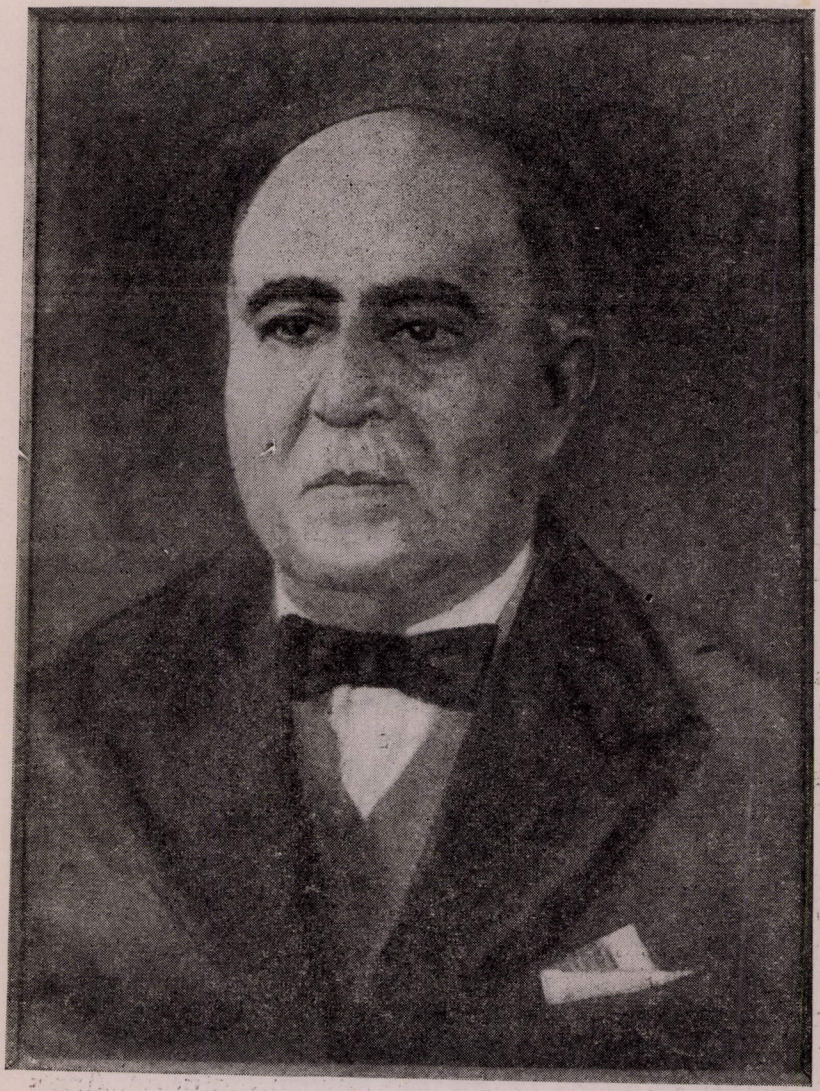
Apart from the "Ezra Hospital," another institution, the I. S. Musleah Memorial Clinic was set up for treatment of Jewish patients.

Outdoor treatment is carried out at 109 Canning Street and, in addition, two rooms loaned from the "Maghen David" synagogue were converted into a dispensary and consulting room. In 1961, this Institution incurred expenditure amounting to Rs. 2,000 for hospitalisation of patients and it is now undergoing a financial crisis. It is a pity that the "Ezra Hospital Trust Funds" cannot be utilised to bolster this institution.

A Prominent Social Worker:

A prominent committee-member of the above clinic worthy of special mention is Miss Marie Mordecai. The daughter of the late Isaac Mordecai, who started the well-known mango-pickle, chutney and condiment factory in Calcutta under the name of Daw Sen & Co., she finds time for innumerable social activities in spite of heavy business responsibilities. She was the first Vice-President of the Jewish Women's League in Calcutta, Honorary Secretary of the Jewish Girls' School and its hostel, Honorary Treasurer of WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organisation). She was member of the committees of several organisations like The Jewish Association, Education and Employment of the Y.W.C.A. and a Founder Member of the Blue Triangle Club for Working Girls of the Y.W.C.A. During the war, she worked on several projects like First Aid, Home Nursing, Air Raid and Diversional Therapy for the School, visiting of hospitals, etc. She also worked as Honorary Secretary for the Jewish Refugee Association in Calcutta throughout the war years and after.

Miss Mordecai seems to be born for this type of work as she took to social work right from her school days.



Ezra Aaron Arakie: Founder, "Elias Meyer Free School & Talmud Torah."

CHAPTER IV

CUSTOMS AND USAGES

The customs and usages, proverbs and superstitions constituting the folklore of the Calcutta Jews (as well as Bombay Jews of Iraqian origin) are distinctly peculiar and derive from their Iraqian forebears who in turn were greatly influenced by the general beliefs of the people amongst whom they sojourned for centuries. Their idioms and manner of speech in Arabic are of a jovial type and exude commonsense. Certain expressions are so graphic in depicting subtle shades of ideas as perhaps to defy exact translation into other languages.

This chapter describes in brief some of their rites and customs relating to childbirth, marriage and death as well as their superstitions and proverbs.

Childbirth :

It is still generally believed that a newborn child and its mother are particularly vulnerable to the influences of demons and evil spirits and there are many rites for their protection. For instance, it is a common belief that the hanging of apotropaic (evil-repelling) articles besides mother and child or of tying them to their heads, protects them from demons.

Then there is the ceremony called "Dusan el 'Atbah" i.e. "Stepping over the Threshold". No one may visit two houses where babies have been newly-born without breaking journey at a half-way house, i.e., stepping over its threshold between such visits. The night of the 6th day and the evening of the 7th day are called respectively, "Leilt el-sitti" and "Leilt 'Akd el Yas." On these nights, the newborn must be carried in the lap and not placed in its cradle. The

night of the 6th day is also associated with the custom called "Shashaa". On this night little boys carrying melon peels or potsherd in their hands, approach the house where the child has been born. A mixture of saffron and water is poured over these articles which are then thrown away as the boys repeatedly chant "Shashaa". The boys then depart after being given sweets or roasted gram and water-melon seeds. It is on this 6th night too that the girl babies are named by the midwife.

Circumcision:

The myrtle plant, as associated with birth, wedding and burial ceremonies, goes back to Talmudic times. It is also used in the ceremonies connected with the circumcision of children. The Iraqian Jews explained the use of myrtle at these ceremonies by deriving its Arabic name Akd el-Yas from the name of the prophet Khidr Elyas and the Arabic name for myrtle el-Yas. In fact, myrtle has been used as a protection against demons since Talmudic times. The child's father, on the evening preceding the eighth day after birth, lays out a feast at which Hebrew and Arabic songs are sung. The next morning, the father goes to the synagogue and the child is taken there for circumcision by its mother accompanied by another lady. During the ceremony a special service peculiar to Baghdadis is performed. The rules of this service may be found in the booklet "Sorkhe Huppah Wu-Millah" (Baghdad, 1892).

Pidyon:

The Iraqian Jews preserve the custom of redeeming the first-born male by a Cohen (high priest) with a bag of silver coins (quarter-rupee pieces) which are then distributed to the guests. The ceremony is celebrated 40 days after the first male child is born with great festivities. The father arranges a big banquet for the relatives and friends. Such invitations are an-

nounced in the synagogue and in more recent times, they have also been issued in print.

Marriage:

As in olden times, the Baghdadi Jews today preserve the custom of betrothal (Erusin) before the actual marriage (Nissuin) with an interval long or short between the two. Although betrothal is not actually a marriage, it is considered as binding as marriage, for should it be dissolved, ritual divorce becomes necessary. The burden of expenses for wedding festivities falls on the father of the bridegroom, although it is not uncommon for the bride's father to bear part of the expenses.

The ceremony of the "Leilt el-Hinni" or "Leilt el-Khadbah" is performed on the eve of the marriage. The nail of the bridal couple and of the Shusbin are painted to protect them from demons. This custom is also shared by the North-African Jews. The bridegroom sends henna, sweets, gloves, shoes and wax-candles to the bride's house. As a further protection against demons, leaves from the rue plant are placed in a tray containing sugar candy and sent from the bridegroom's house to the bride's. It is after this that the Kiddushe Erusin, or the first marriage is performed in the house of the bride to the accompaniment of music and Hebrew and Arabic songs. The absence of songs and music on this occasion is considered to be a bad omen. For the wedding ceremony the bridegroom sends out invitations through the beadle of the synagogue. Guests arrive clad in their usual attire but sometimes uninvited persons attend. They, however, do not wear traditional dress but attend in a guise known as "tabdil."

There is also the custom known as "Hleehil" whereby the bridegroom is called upon to read the lesson in the synagogue on the two Saturdays preceding and succeeding his wedding day while the ladies

in the upper galleries intermittently let out a peculiar, shrill and prolonged call of joy "Kill-lili-lili....". On this occasion also, tiny sweets with cloves and cardamoms are thrown at the bridegroom.

For those who can afford it, a second wedding ceremony is performed in the bride's house. On this occasion, the nuptial canopy (Huppah), is not used; instead a cloth is held before the bride by two men.

On leaving her parents' house for her future home, the bride is accompanied by her female friends and relatives. They take along with them a loaf of bread and a pair of fowls. Her husband then arrives with a stately procession of friends, relatives, pipers and drummers, to be greeted by the bride and her friends. Next a loaf of bread is broken over the head of the groom and his best man. Lastly, there is a banquet at which all but the bride's people attend.

The Calcutta Jews still preserve the festival of seven days with the usual benedictions as laid down by the Talmud (Sheba-Berakhot). During this festival Hebrew and Arabic songs are sung by professional singers. Women singers called "Dakkakat" sing to the accompaniment of music called "Jalwah". Throughout this period the bride and bridegroom may not leave their homes except to attend the synagogue, nor are they permitted to remain without companions. On the first afternoon, while the bridegroom is still in the house, the cook who is employed for this week, sticks three cooking spikes into the earth in the courtyard of the house. When he leaves at the end of the week, he draws up these spikes and throws them behind him. The ceremony is meant to counteract the influence of evil spirits.

The Shabbath after the wedding or the "Sabt el Niswan", i.e. the Sabbath of Women, is so named because on this day some veiled women, invited or uninvited, crowd to the newly-married couple's house to

look at the bride. On this occasion broadsheets are displayed on which are shown the community leaders' rules and regulations and various changes in the wedding customs over the centuries. There is also a ceremony known as "Fatah el Wooch" i.e. uncovering the face which is held about 20 to 30 days after the wedding ceremony.

Funerals and burials:

The funeral and burial customs of the Calcutta Jews also closely follow the Baghdadian customs. When a death occurs the women of the household loosen their hair. The proclamation of death is announced in the synagogue and a bier is placed before the house of the deceased. The "Taharah" or ritual washing is performed in the house while the wailing women called "Mekoneoth" in Hebrew and "Ma'addedat" in Arabic, chant elegies in Arabic. Before the bier leaves the house the mourners rend their garments while the Sidduk ha-Din is read. The bier is then carried out of the house borne on the shoulders. At this stage, Psalm 78 Verse 38 is recited and the mourners say the short Kaddish. While the funeral procession proceeds along the street, the poem "Shokhene Bate Homer" by Solomon ibn Gabriel is recited. In Baghdad this is traditionally done by a member of Hakham Sason Mordecai's family. Yemenite Jews also recite this poem in their burial services. The Baghdadi rite of seven circuits is also adhered to, the Kaddish being said after each circuit.

On reaching the burial ground, the body is removed from the bier which is then overturned. After the body is laid to rest the grave is covered over with a cloth and the mourners throw coins onto the cloth. No special Kaddish is said after the burial. As is done in Baghdad, a son mourning the death of his parents ties a handkerchief around his neck. Women are not permitted to attend funerals except those of recognised and qualified Rabbis. Funeral orations and services

* A motor hearse was introduced by the Jewish Burial Board in 1929 with much opposition by the orthodox community, but it was gradually accepted by all.

in the synagogue are also permitted on these occasions. The liturgy for the burial services is taken from the booklets "Hanhaghat HM"K", Baghdad, 1893 and Eilooi Hannishmoth" Baghdad 1888-89.

After death there is a period of mourning for seven days. Thereafter, during the first year, services are held in the house of mourning on Thursday and Saturday afternoons. Services are also held on the twenty-second day after death, called Shahr el-Nakis (i.e., the incomplete month), on the afternoon before the completion of the eleventh month called Sant el-Nakis (the incomplete year) and finally on the first anniversary, called Yom el-Sanah (the day of the year). After these services it is traditional to serve fruits, coffee and home-prepared biscuits made out of flour and oil in the form of thin doughnuts called "Kaakas" as mentioned in the Talmud. During the seven-day mourning period and the day of the death anniversary, it is customary for food to be distributed. Also, during the seven days of mourning the "Ashwiyyit el-Mayyit" (dinner of the dead) is sent to the Hazzan of the synagogue to which the deceased had belonged as also throughout the year on Thursday and Saturday afternoons. "Kaleicha", consisting of flour mixed with butter and sugar, baked into flat cakes and flavoured with saffron, are distributed amongst the relatives and friends and those with whom the deceased had any business dealings during his lifetime. This is done in the days of Ab preceding the fast. The idea behind it is to absolve the deceased from any obligations which he might have contracted during his lifetime. Lastly, there is a sweetmeat called "Timghiyee" or "I have forgiven X the son of Y". This is meant to serve the same purpose as the Kaleicha".

During the year of mourning, roasted water-melon seeds are never eaten by the mourners. This has an interesting origin. The cracking of water-melon seeds between the teeth used to be considered as a form of amusement, so much so, that a figure of speech was

coined from this custom by the Baghdadi ancestors of the Calcutta Jews. When the Baghdadian Jews used to say "Ke id Tiksir Hab 'Alayyi" (Art thou sitting and cracking seeds over me"), what they actually meant, was, "Do you want to amuse yourself at my expense."? During the week of mourning and on Fridays of the year of mourning, the grave of the deceased is visited and the "Hashkabah" recited. When visiting the synagogue on Sabbaths and festivals, the mourner takes along a bottle of rose water (Kimkim) which is passed around the congregation who recite the proper benediction. The custom of visiting graves during the week of mourning was mentioned in one of the elegies by Samuel haNaghid. In order to commemorate the memory of the deceased, it is customary for sacred articles of worship to be dedicated. Thus scrolls of the law encased in beautiful wooden caskets overlaid with gold or silver called Sepharim are dedicated to the memory of the departed, taken in solemn procession along the streets of the city and presented to the synagogue on certain holy days to the accompaniment of the hymn "Simhoo Na, Simhoo Na, be—Simhath ha-Torah" and dancing and singing with great religious fervour.

Language and Allegiance:

Although the language of the early settlers was Arabic and differed from the Malabari (Malayalam) of the Cochin Jews and the Marathi of the Bene Israel, they gradually adopted European customs and modes of dress. Even English eventually replaced Arabic as their mother-tongue during the British regime in India.

Eleazar Iraki, the chronicler of Calcutta, has recorded the patriotic celebrations arranged in the two synagogues on the occasions of Queen Victoria's birthday. Also special liturgical pamphlets with orders of service for prayer were used on such occasions as the 60th Anniversary of the accession of Queen Victoria, the Coronation of King Edward VII and of King George V.

An intercession service was also held for the success of His Majesty's troops during the First World War. Today this allegiance is transferred to the lawful Government of the day.

Superstitions:

The Calcutta Jewish community have inherited many interesting superstitions from their Baghdadi ancestors. Some of these are worth mentioning here.

Merchants with ink-horns must never enter the house of a person suffering from measles. On the third day of the illness the patient is taken for a visit to the synagogue, but no two persons suffering from measles may be taken to the synagogue simultaneously.

If parents have lost a child, they must not incur any expenses at the time of birth of their next child but must beg the wherewithal from strangers, who are induced to place money in the hand of the new-born child. On Purim, the mother must carry the baby to the synagogue, where strangers put money into a box held by the infant. The mother also must go from house to house for this purpose. If the infant is a boy it is given a earring and, if a girl, a nose-ring. This custom is traceable to se'adyah Hussein of Baghdad, father of Hakham Sadkah, whose child was thus protected after the earlier children died in infancy. Thus the name "Sadkah" means charity. The child is referred to as "Ibn el-Darb", i.e., child of the street.

The practice of carrying patients round the "Tebah" in the synagogues is also inherited from the Baghdadian Jews. This practice is called "'Dwarat el Kbiri wo-Dwarat el-Zghayri" or the Big and Small Circuits.

The practice of Msahbah or appeasement of demons is carried out before entering a new house or lodging. On the evening before entering the house, a basket containing a looking-glass, rue, a new jug with water and sweets are sent to befriend the demons and

spirits in the house. This practice is called "el-Mandel" in Arabic.

It is believed that illnesses are caused by harmful demons who, when hurt, avenge themselves by passing on their hurt to people. Thus, when a person has been suffering for a long time, a professional woman is called in to appease the demons by magic spells and by offerings of food.

Dogs and cats are never kept. Black cats with shining eyes are considered to be possessed by demons hence they are never beaten but have to be driven away by banging on the floor.

Before pouring hot water onto the ground the demons living in the earth are warned so that they can cover their heads and not be scalded.

The throwing of salt and water into a river is also calculated to appease demons which cause illnesses. Charms are also made from garlic and turquoise as a protection against demons.

A strange snake is considered to be the angel of death in disguise, therefore, it is never hurt.

Tarkah is a charm against fright. A horseshoe is heated red hot and water is poured over it. The water is then drunk. Thsi is calculated to prevent fright.

These and many other superstitions inherited from Baghdad still persist in the Calcutta community. From Babylonian times these Jews have clung strongly to these practices, despite numerous attempts by Rabbis to eradicate them.

Proverbs:

A number of Baghdadian sayings and proverbs are in common usage in the Calcutta community. A few of these are as follows:—

1. "Il indu jeejee Yidainonu beidi". To him who has a hen, an egg is lent, i.e. a loan is willingly given to a man of means.

2. "Khidh liesel wulo'alihseer". Take a man of good family even if he be on matting. This is an advice to a father with a marriageable daughter to choose a man of good descent, even though he be very poor.

3. "Shaher il ma'indak beenu hseeb lat 'idd iyyamu". A month in which you have no account to settle, do not count its days, i.e., do not meddle in people's affairs which do not concern you.

4. "Hijara il ma tirdaha, tifshikh". The stone which you despise can cause a fracture, i.e., the smallest thing can be of great consequence.

5. "Beidi min beidi tifsad." An egg can be spoilt by another egg, i.e., bad society spoils good manners or one scabbed sheep infects the whole flock.

6. "Il admi min ramza wul ihmar rafsa". The man with a wink, the donkey with a kick, i.e., a hint is sufficient for a wise man, a fool must be pushed to do a thing.

7. "Il yisawwi ruhu nikhala tilkitu ijjeejee." He who reduces himself to grain will be pecked by the hen. A man without self-respect will not be respected by others.

8. "Kirsh il abyad yimfa' yom il aswad." A white kirsh (i.e., a Turkish coin worth about two pence) will come useful on a black day. Even the smallest thing may be useful in time of need.

9. "Herem innakli wula brakha biddain ." Anything in cash (a bird in hand) and not a blessing on credit, i.e., better the worse thing at present than the good thing delayed.

10. "Rizk libzazeen 'and niswan lim ithrat". Cats thrive near untidy women. Untidiness in women is the blessing of cats.

11. 'Jibnanuil akkaa yiwinnisna, kashaf rasu wukhirr'anna." We brought the bald-headed to amuse us but he uncovered his head and frightened us. Expectations often lead to disappointments.

CHAPTER V

COMMUNAL AFFAIRS

Right up to the eighteen-eighties all power relating to the religious, communal and social affairs of the community were vested in the synagogue Manhigim representing the "Neweh Shalom" and "Beth El" synagogues.

This system of control found favour with the members of the community who implicitly obeyed the authority of the Manhigim in all matters relating to marriages, divorces, registration of births, burials and other customs such as the slaughter and sale of Kosher meat. The Manhigim also acted as a liaison between the community and the Government of India in such matters as majority rights and privileges of the community members.

The system of government by the Manhigim functioned smoothly and harmoniously till the 1880's when internal rivalry and jealousy set in and the system began to disintegrate. This state of affairs appears to have been brought about by the rise of the Ezra family to a position of eminence in the community. Due to their immense success in business they were able to spend vast sums for the building of most of the institutions for the community and to take a major interest in communal affairs. It appeared that they were projecting business matters even into social affairs and this led to differences among the leaders of the community. The change of management of the Ezra Benevolent Home and the death of Elias David Ezra in 1886 seemed to mark the final disintegration of the old order.

With the dissolution of the old system a number of new bodies and associations sprang up each vying for position of authority in the community. However, these

various bodies gradually aligned themselves into two opposing factions which may be appropriately described as the conservatives and the liberals"

The conservative group was strictly traditional and built up its organisation on feudal lines. There were no elections for the synagogue committees, appointments being solely by co-option or nomination by the retiring committee members. These committees, however, hardly ever met and it was left to the personal interest of the Honorary Secretary and to tradition to carry on the business of the synagogue.

The liberal group was led by the late Ezra Arakie. He was a firm believer in democracy, strongly opposed to the centralised form of administration as practised by the synagogue Manhigim. In his campaign against this centralised authority, he was ably supported by other liberal-minded people, particularly Mr. I. A. Isaac. It was Ezra Arakie who was instrumental in democratising the organisation of the "Neweh Shalom" Synagogue. Under his liberal influence, a number of democratic organisations sprang into being for purposes of burials, Mussa arrangements and charitable works. These organisations were great successes in contrast to the failures of the Manhigim. Their success was due in large measure to the outstanding calibre of leaders such as Ezra Ezekiel. The common man, however, had little ability in running these organisations and, in the absence of constructive leadership, was apt to become confused. Nor could he analyse the maladies which beset the community and seek appropriate remedies. Thus the ground was laid for the setting up of the Jewish Association whose purpose was to co-ordinate the various activities of the existing organisations to derive the maximum benefit from them. The following notice taken from the pamphlet "Memorandum of Association and Rules and Regulations" gives a clear picture of the aim and functions of the Jewish Association of Calcutta.

"There has been a community of Jewish inhabitants in Calcutta since approximately the past 100 years, and various institutions have from time to time been set up within the community for the welfare of its members, and generally for social and/or charitable work. Some of these institutions thus coordinated were:

1. **Maghen David Synagogue;**
2. **Beth-El Synagogue;**
3. **Share Rasone Synagogue;**
4. **Maghen Aboth Synagogue;**
5. **Elias Meyer School;**
6. **Jewish Girls' School and Jeshurum Free School.**
7. **Jewish Burial Board;**
8. **Jewish Women's League;**
9. **Mussa Board;**
10. **Judean Club.**

"In recent times the members of the community generally and in particular the representative committees of management of the above named institutions have deeply felt that in the interests of the community as a whole and in the interests of the above institutions themselves, there should be mutual help and collaboration. It is further felt that social welfare and uplift work within the community should be based under a co-ordinated scheme whereby all members of the community would be entitled to participate in a democratic manner with responsibility should be equally shared by all members. It is further felt that this co-ordinated plan for the benefit of the community should be influenced, as far as possible, culturally and spiritually, in a Jewsih direction. It is therefore with these objects in view that a Central Organisation known as "The Jewish Association of Calcutta" duly registered and with properly formulated objects and rules has been set up."

Literary Life:

From the earliest times, the community has been

מגיד מישרים

דובר אמת ומגיד מישרים מפני משובת אחבוב
עיר שלם תהיה כ"ט
ויוכפכם יום ם כמים
CALCUTTA THURSDAY 2 JULY 1896
ניוב ם כמם כל יום 48 6 ניוב כוכבם 48 6 מעום בוכבם 20

יום הנז' הנ' האחים הנעימים הב' דוד אייא דהר יוסף עזרה הי"ו והנ' אהרן מאפרו להטרול אא מיננלור והנ' הב' עזורי הי"ו מאפר לחטו"ל אא לנדן יום ג' מע' הח' הש' והכו' יעקב סידים הי"ו וצל לחבו"ל מן סנגפור

זבד הבת

well served in the intellectual sphere. The names of Eleazar Arakie (whose works have been enumerated elsewhere), Ezekiel b. Solomon, Moses b. Mordecai Meyohas, Elizah b. Solomon and E. M. D. Cohen are prominent in the intellectual history of the community. But the most famous was Solomon b. 'Abed Twena (Hakham S. Twena) who had built the Prayer Hall at Blackburn Lane.

Hakham S. Twena had been sent by Hakham Beski from Baghdad for the Bombay Jewry. But it was at Calcutta that he taught and laboured. He is acknowledged as one of the greatest Hebrew scholars. quoted in the "Origin of Early Settlers." Hakham Elijah b. Joshua Obadiah observed that by 1889, he was the author of 67 works and before his death in 1913, his output must have swelled considerably.

Some of his principal works are the translations from Hebrew into Arabic of some of Dr. Markus Lehman's historical novels, like Suss Oppenheim (Calcutta, 1897), Bustanai, Hathan ha-Melekh, a history based on events which occurred during the Chmielniscki persecutions in the Ukraine in 1648-49 and the story of the Sar of Coucy (Calcutta 1898).

Calcutta provided weekly newspapers for the Jews of India such as "Mebasser: The Jewish Gazette" (1873-77) edited by Ezekiel Solomon; "Paerah: The Jewish Gazette" (1878-89) edited at first by Moses Meyohas and Elijah Solomon and after 1888 by E. M. D. Cohen; "Maggid Mesharim" (1889-1900) and "Shoshannah; The Jewish Gazette" (1901) both edited by Solomon Abed Twena.

Occupation:

The majority of the early Jewish settlers were traders by profession. In India, they found a land richly endowed with natural wealth and resources. Moreover, India had long established herself as a mercantile country. Her sailing boats laden with fabulous cargoes

of delicate silks and muslins, spices and pottery had been calling at Middle-Eastern ports from ancient times. Even King Solomon had heard of her wealth and from the time of writing of the Book of Kings, she had carried on an uninterrupted trade with Palestine. Moreover, India had a fine system of administration under the British and discrimination of any kind was unknown.

Jacob Saphir, a traveller who visited Calcutta in 1860 testified as follows:—

"From the time when Great Britain fixed the peg of her rule in this town, it has become an emporium for nations and a city of freedom and security to all those who enter its gates without bribe or discrimination between people and people".

The early Jewish traders, with their proverbial talent for business, capitalised on these conditions. Some of them were able to reach the highest pinnacle of success and to amass great wealth besides attaining the highest social position.

India at that time had a virtual monopoly in the production of indigo (before synthetic substitutes were known) and in opium. She was already world-famous for her muslins from Dacca and her Murshidabad silk, which was literally worth its weight in gold. Her spices had attracted ships from all the maritime countries of the world. She had surplus in rice and sugar and edible oils. By exporting these commodities to the Middle East and Hongkong and by importing such commodities as dates, preserved fruits, wines and horses, traders of the calibre of Shalom Aaron Cohen, Jacob Semah, Ezekiel Musleah, Ezekiel Judah and the Ezras acquired fortune and fame.

We have already described how Shalom Aaron Cohen, the first settler, amassed a fortune through his jewellery business which was largely patronised by the many native rulers and their courtiers. We have also described how the Ezras were shrewd enough to buy

up land and buildings realising that their values would soar as time passed and the city developed.

But it was another Indian product, jute, which was to start the growth of a huge export business in more modern times. India was the world's largest producer of jute and the advent of World War I created a great demand for this fibre on the world market.

Amongst the Jews of Calcutta who seized the opportunities offered by this magic fibre, was Benjamin Nissim Elias of whom we will read in the following chapter, who founded the mighty organisation of B. N. Elias & Co.

Apart from the giants of industry and trade, there were many other successful businessmen and traders whose concerns continue to flourish to this day. Their interests extended to furniture, confectionery and a host of other commodities. Today many Jews are also employed in highly responsible positions in various large mercantile firms in the city.



Sir David Ezra

CHAPTER VI

PROMINENT PERSONALITIES

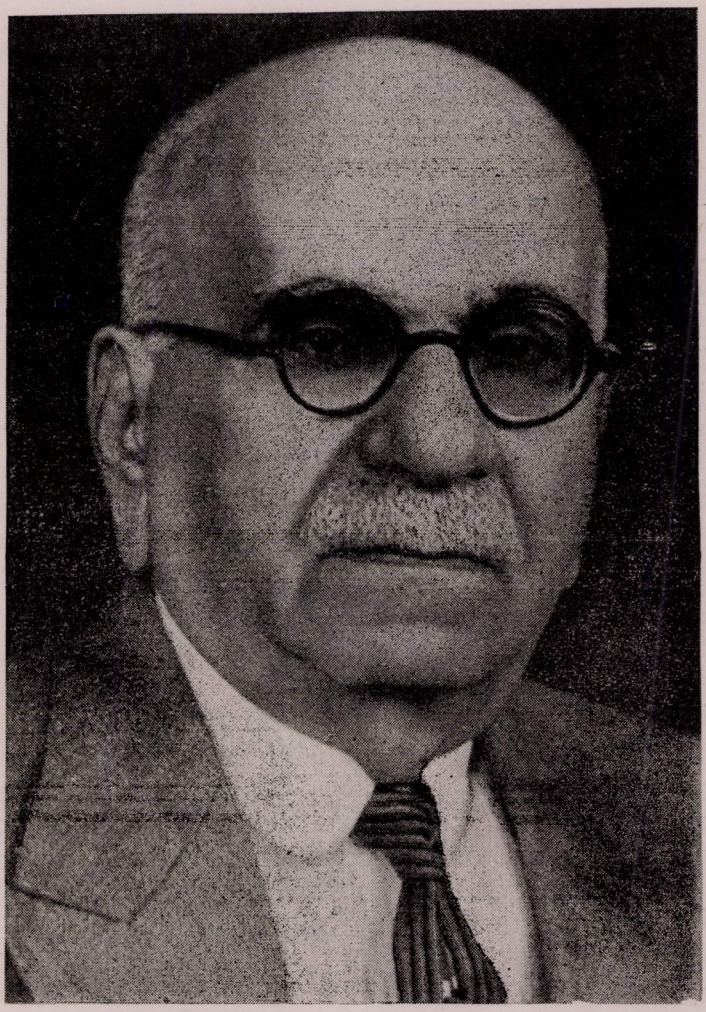
I have already endeavoured to give an account of some of the outstanding early pioneers, religious and community leaders, teachers and businessmen in the preceding chapters. This chapter deals with the achievements of some other notable personalities of the community.

Sir David Ezra:

Sir David Ezra was one of the most respected Jewish personalities in India. The only other person who could be compared with him was the late David Solomon Sassoon the head of the Sassoon family in India. was respected throughout the length and breadth of the country. People in all walks of life knew and loved him. He was born in a rich family and considered his wealth as accidental and was quite unconcerned about it.

Sir David Ezra was knighted in June 1927 and received the accolade from His Majesty King George V. He was a Director of the Reserve Bank of India, several jute mills, coal companies, firebrick and pottery companies, flour mills, Steel Corporation, Aerated Gas Company, Bengal Assam Steamship Co. Ltd., Port Shipping Co. Ltd., Howrah Oil Mills and vast Ezra estates. He was the Sheriff of Calcutta in 1925-26, a member of management of Zoological Gardens and Bengal Veterinary College, Vice President, Jewish Girls' School, President of the Maghen David Synagogue and member of the Royal Calcutta Turf Club, etc.

Sir David was a great respector of traditions and he maintained a Jewish mode of life throughout. Not



Mr. B. N. Elias

only did he maintain these traditions in his palatial home, which was open to one and all, but in his social life he did not overlook his duty to his faith. He was a strict Sabbatarian. An interesting episode in this connection is worthy of record. When he and Lady Ezra failed to attend a dance at Government House on a Friday night, the Governor made a particular note of absentees and inquiring of Sir David was startled by his explanation—"Sabbath." The Governor said, "But Sabbath would only start after midnight and you could have gone by then"! (Note: Among Jews, a day is reckoned to begin at sunset of the previous day).

Birds and elephants were Sir David's hobby, for he was an ardent and noted naturalist. He maintained a veritable zoo, he had prize zebras, birds of paradise, golden turkeys, swans from the King's swannery, tortoises and many rare birds whose plumage lent a galaxy of colour and beauty to his home. At one time baby-bears used to gambol on his lawn. He was a Fellow of the Zoological Society and a member of the managing committee of the Calcutta Zoo.

At the age of 76, while on his usual morning constitutional walk, he sustained a fall which resulted in his death. His passing was a blow to the community.

B. N. Elias:

Benjamin Nissim Elias began his life as an obscure businessman. Before his death, he was to become one of India's greatest and wealthiest businessmen, rivalling such giants as the Sassoons, Tatas and Birlas. From the beginning he did not have any wealth or power to back him up and his success was due solely to his own financial genius and sound business sense. His phenomenal rise started with the jute export business. In the gunny market, he wisely adhered to the market trend, never engaging in unnecessary risky speculations.

Apart from jute and gunny, his business interests



Mr. D. J. Cohen

included many other things. He was the Founder and Managing Director of Messrs. B. N. Elias & Co. Ltd., National Tobacco of India Ltd., Empire Bone Mills Ltd., Mayfair Estates Ltd., and Proprietor of Midnapore Electric Supply, Krishnagone Electric Supply, Oriental Electric and Engineering Co., Alpine Dairy and the Nabadwip Electric Supply. He was also for several years the Senior Director of the Agarpara (Jute) Co. Ltd. Through these firms B. N. Elias was able to give employment to hundreds of his faith.

Although one of the richest businessmen in India, "Benu", as he was popularly known, was a modest, humble man, disliking pomp and show. He took a great interest in Jewish communal affairs. It was he who built the Maghen Aboth Synagogue (of which he was the Vice President and Honorary Treasurer) especially for the poor. He was Honorary Treasurer of the Jewish Girls' School and Jeshurun Free School and established a hostel for poor and orphaned Jewish girls. His charities were too numerous to be elaborated. Suffice it to say that nobody who asked him for help was ever refused. It is little wonder that, when he died at the age of 78, a huge gathering turned out for his funeral. It was a spontaneous tribute to the memory of a great but humble man.

B. N. Elias & Co., the largest surviving Jewish concern was further expanded under the capable guidance of his sons Nissim and Jack Elias and his sons-in-law, Mr. R. Jacob and Mr. Ralph Arakie. After the death of his two sons Jack and Nissim and the retirement of his sons-in-law from India, the firm is still being efficiently run under the leadership of his grandson, Mr. Ben Elias.

D. J. Cohen, O B E:

Mr. D. J. Cohen was born in Calcutta on August 5, 1883. He was a leading personality in the civic life of this great metropolis. A talented leader, there was

no sphere of life in which he took part wherein he was not a brilliant success. He was a dedicated man with love of justice and law and a stern taskmaster.

From 1921 to 1947, he was a Member of the Bengal Legislative Council. He was an Honorary Presidency Magistrate from 1917 to 1948 and a Councillor of the Corporation of Calcutta from 1906 to 1948.

In the realm of education, he was a Vice President of the Calcutta Technical School, the Calcutta Blind School and Member of the Anglo-Indian Educational Board.

A Vice Chairman and Trustee of the Bengal Tuberculosis Association and the Government Mayo Hospital, he was also President of the District Charitable Association. He evinced a keen interest in the affairs of the Jewish community. He was the Secretary of the Beth-El Synagogue, the Jewish Girls' School and Jeshurun Free School and the President of the Jewish Refugees' Relief Association.

When the Government promulgated a rule making Tuesdays and Fridays meatless days (inclusive of poultry), the general public did not raise an outcry. For the Jewish community, however, it virtually meant that Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays were meatless days since cooking was forbidden on the Sabbath. No protest meeting was held by the Jewish commmunity and it, therefore, came as a surprise when the Government altered the meatless days to Tuesdays and Thursdays. However, the leading daily of Calcutta the "Statesman" revealed the cause of the change. Mr. D. J. Cohen had unobtrusively written a letter to Mr. N. C. Sen, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Department of Agriculture, pointing out the difficulties involved for the community and suggested a change. The Minister of Agriculture graciously consented to alter the meatless days to Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Mr. I. J. Cohen, brother of D. J. Cohen, worked side by side with his brother and shared his interests and successes. He served as a Magistrate for thirty years and was a Municipal Councillor for twenty-one years—a notable feat.

Aaron Curlender:

Born in 1880, Mr. Aaron Curlender rose to become a highly successful businessman. He was the senior partner of Messrs. Curlender and Co., the Bengal Bone Mills and the Ganges Valley Bone Mills in which concerns he ably assisted his father.

He was of a stately demeanour and was noted for his chivalrous courtesy. A Rotarian, he had a genuine love for horses and gardening. His beautiful lawn and garden full of blooms was a landmark in Theatre Road. He took a very keen interest in the Jewish community identifying himself with several Jewish institutions. At the time of his death, he was a Patron of the Jewish Association and also President of Maghen David Synagogue in succession to Lady Ezra. He took a special interest in the Jewish Girls' Hostel which could always count on his generous assistance.

He died at Bangalore on the 17th June, 1952, aged 72. With his death, yet another prominent and well-loved personality had passed away.

SOCIAL LIFE AND SPORTS

The vast metropolis of Calcutta offers a variety of forms of entertainment and relaxation. It has a number of first-rate clubs and is a highly developed centre for indoor and outdoor sports.

All members of society are free to join these clubs and take part in various types of sports and cultural activities. However, every community desires to have a club of its own and thus the Jewish community formed the Judean Club and the Maccabi Club.

The Judean Club:

In January 1929, Miss Luddy started two Study Circle groups with a view to conducting research into Post-biblical History and Jewish Literature. In May of the same year, these groups were amalgamated and the Judean Club was formed. A constitution was drawn up and a committee elected. Lady Exra was the first President of the Club.

The aim of the club was to provide a social and cultural centre for young Jewish people. Every week prominent people were invited to deliver lectures. On the entertainment side, dances, parties and picnics were also organised.

In its early stages, the Club was extremely popular but gradually interest waned and the membership dwindled. Moreover, very few persons were actively dedicated to serving the interests of the Club.

In 1939, however, enthusiasm was revived with the introduction of Club rooms. During the war, the Club served as a centre of entertainment for the Jewish troops who were also permitted to observe the Holy festivals in the building. After the war, the Club once again began to lose its popularity, especially because of the emigration of many members of the community to other countries.

Although initially the Club was meant exclusively for Jews, it now has many non-Jewish members. Its tone, however, has diminished considerably and the only popular interests now appear to be the Card and Billiard Rooms.

The Maccabi Club:

The Maccabi Club Association was formed in April 1951, with a view to promote sports interests in the community. Originally, this association did not have any premises or bill collector and members were few.

Later the Association affiliated itself to the Calcutta Zionist Association which had taken over the Judean Club building for use three times a week. Thus, on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, the Judean Club was open to the members of the Maccabi Association with the Zionist Association performing the secretarial work.

Badminton, table-tennis, tennis, physical instruction, boxing, hockey, disc hockey and basket ball were the most popular sports in this club.

In 1955, the President was Mr. B. V. Jacob, Treasurer, Mr. Alec Manaseh, and Honorary Secretary, Mr. A. F. Meyer.

B'nai B'rith Lodge:

The B'nai B'rith is a Jewish fraternal organisation with headquarters in the U.S.A. It endeavours to unite in common brotherhood Jews of all schools of religious and political thought. It seeks to supplement and to promote the work of other organisations where necessary, without overlapping, as well as to render specific services, philanthropic, social or educational. Its motto is "Benevolence, Brotherly Love and Harmony" its outward badge the Menorah and its aim to preach and practise the ideals of Brotherhood.

The B'nai B'rith Lodge of India No. 2626 was inaugurated in Bombay on 27 September 1966. Two eminent members, viz., Mr. Hilary H. Princeton, Charter President of B'nai B'rith District Grand Lodge No. 21 of Australia and New Zealand and Mr. Hans Spitz, its President came to India for this historic occasion when Dr. A. Schmetterling was elected its President with several other office bearers.

In November 1966, the Council decided to have executive representatives in Calcutta, New Delhi, Madras and Kerala. It was the privilege and pleasure

of the author to accept the office in Calcutta as requested by the Committee and President.

Porat Yosef Yeshiva in Old Jerusalem:

From the foregoing account one would be inclined to suppose that the philanthropic efforts of the Calcutta Jews were confined to that city only. This assumption, however, can be proved to be mistaken. The Porat Yosef Yeshiva in old Jerusalem may be mentioned as an instance. This famous institution is situated on Plot No. 30 in the Southeast corner of the Jewish quarter of the old city and consists of a stately domed building dominating the Western Wall (Wailing Wall) compound. This Yeshiva and the little residential quarter in which it stood were built between 1914 and 1923 with the large funds donated from the estate of Joseph Abraham Shalome of Calcutta after whom the Yeshiva is named. It is one of Israel's central Sephardi Yeshivoth and has since been rebuilt in the Geula quarter of Jerusalem according to the original plans.

CHAPTER VII

PROMINENT VISITORS

Mr. Celler Visits Calcutta:

Mr. Emmanuel Celler, together with his wife, was on a tour of the Middle East countries and India to study refugee problems, and arrived in Calcutta by air from Delhi on Monday, December 8, 1953. On the same evening Mr. and Mrs. Celler were the guests of Honour at a tea party given by Mr. and Mrs. Jacob (daughter of Mr. B. N. Elias) at their residence.

Mr. J. R. Jacob, in an opening speech, introduced Mr. Celler to the gathering and gave them an idea of Mr. Celler's political background. Mr. Celler is a Democrat Member of the U.S. Representatives Judiciary Committee and has been a Member of the Legislature for over 40 years and of the Congress since 1923. He is a true friend of India and has served this country more than once in the past. He sponsored Indian independence and in 1951 played an important role in the legislation which provided a two-million-ton American grain shipment to India. He was responsible for the passing of the bill whereby the quota of Indian immigration to the U.S.A. was increased and for the bill which was in favour of the erection of the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial in America.

Mr. Celler won the hearts of his audience by his keen sense of humour. His speech was at the same time informative. He assured us that he was proud of his Jewish origin and of belonging to the people of the Book and that without wearing his Jewishness on his sleeve, he always made it a point wherever and whenever possible, to make known the fact that he was a Jew.

He told us how during one of his speeches he removed his wrist watch and placed it on the table. At the conclusion of his address, a man from the crowd exclaimed that it was strange that the speaker had not once referred to his watch. Mr. Celler was quite prompt in his reply, and assured the gentleman that this was done, merely for the comfort of those concerned.

Mr. Celler believed in driving home his arguments by means of parables. He spoke of the time in the U.S.A. when he was fighting for controls in trade and how the various business magnates were all in favour of governmental control as a whole, but not for their particular industry. To win his case, he told the delegates a little story of a poor family who approached the Chazan for financial assistance. The Chazan knowing that the task was not an easy one, appealed to the flock to at least help by pouring half a glass of their Sabbath wine into a barrel, so that when full the barrel of wine could be sold and the proceeds given to the family. The proposal was agreed to but when the barrel was opened, it was found to be full of water instead of wine. The Chazan reprimanded them suitably but received the same reply from each of them to the effect that they did not think that half a glass of water would make much difference to a barrel of wine. In the same way, each magnate considered that exemption to his particular industry from controls would make no difference at all.

Mr. Celler then spoke on the subject nearest his heart—Israel and her problems. He had visited Israel three times and on each occasion he observed that Israel was advancing from strength to strength. The country was faced with almost insurmountable difficulties however and needed every possible assistance from within and without. Ben Gurion had just resigned to retire in the Negev as a shepherd. as Mr. Celler put it. He compared Ben Gurion to King David, the only difference being that where one started as a shepherd and

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became a king, the other from a king became a shepherd. ...

Mr. Celler concluded his address with some very fine anecdotes, which are worth recording. He related the story of a young lad who when asked what he saw on looking through a pane of glass remarked that he could view the entire landscape. A mirror was then placed before him, but this time he could only see himself. That difference, needless to say, was created merely by a little silver. In the same way, money is sometimes apt to blind us and allows us only to see ourselves and live for ourselves. We should always endeavour to guard against this danger.

His second story was about a learned man who had come to give a sermon to the people in the synagogue, but who at the last moment demanded of the Chazan, 1000 roubles before he would do so. The Chazan was rather surprised at this strange behaviour from one so learned, but the man was adamant. Thereupon, since everything had already been arranged, the Chazan went round and managed to collect the sum. The lecturer placed the money in his pocket and began his address. At the conclusion of his talk, he handed the money back to the Chazan to be returned to the congregation. More amazed than ever, the Chazan asked him the reason for this. The learned man then explained that money had a powerful force and effect behind it and that with a little money in one's pocket, one could speak with greater confidence and success. At the same time, the story brings home to us the point that we should not misuse this force, but divert the power of money into worthy channels, as those of us who are rich are merely the agents through whom God had chosen to perform his blessed deeds.

Mr. Celler then said he was prepared to answer questions but since none was forthcoming, he took it that he had won his case.

Rabbis Seligson and de Sola Pool:

The Jewish community of Calcutta will always remember with deep affection Rabbi David Seligson who served as a Chaplain in the American Army in the China-Burma-India Theatre. Rabbi Seligson did not only devote himself to servicemen but also to local Jewish communities. It will surely be a point of great interest for our people to know that Rabbi Seligson was deputed to serve in this district by the famous Dr. Pool himself, as it was part of his work on the Jewish Welfare Board to provide chaplains to look after the welfare of Jewish servicemen during World War II.

When the War was over there was a great deal of work to be done in the spiritual field and in 1948 the American Government sent Dr. Pool to Europe. The focus of his attention was Germany, where he made personal contacts with chaplains and submitted useful recommendations for the moral and religious guidance of our war-ravaged people.

Rabbi de Sola Pool once said that he has made many mistakes in his life, but in the choice of a wife and the choice of his congregation. Mrs. de Sola Pool is indeed a dynamic personality—her style is simple and direct and she addresses herself to the very heart of her listeners. Of her numerous activities, the one that is most important to her is her role as Rabbi David de Sola Pool's wife, and in this sphere she has reached exemplary heights.

Recently Rabbi and Mrs. de Sola Pool left New York for California, from where they visited Hawaii, Fiji Isles, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Bangkok and Singapore, before coming to Calcutta. They also visited Agra, Delhi and Bombay and hope to pay a flying visit to Cochin.

"Shanna Habba Yerushalayim" will be realised by Dr. de Sola Pool and his wife this year, God willing, as they hope to spend Pesah in the Holy Land.

A Visit to Delhi .... by Ian Makardo M.P.

One of the incidental pleasures of globe-trotting is the occasional discovery of an unexpected Jewish community—unexpected either because it is an out-of-the-way place or because it is unusual in type. Recently in New Delhi, I came across a community quite different, in many characteristics, from any I had encountered before.

Delhi is not one of India's Jewish centres. Most of the Jews in India are concentrated in Cochin, Bombay and Calcutta. They derive from three distinct immigration groups, which have preserved their separate identity with almost all the rigidity of the Hindu caste system. The Cochin Jews, many of whom are black, are descendants of a group who settled on the Malabar coast nearly 2,000 years ago; the Bene Israel, who account for nearly two-thirds of the total, came in the seventh century; and the Bagdhadis are a nineteenth century influx.

Few Conversions:

Indian Jewry is a stable community. Over the last century its losses by conversion to other faiths have averaged fewer than two persons per annum. and it is negatively protected against losses through intermarriage by the strict ban on mixed marriage imposed by both Hindus and Muslims.

India is probably the only country in the world which has not a large part of its Jewish population settled in the capital city. There are only a hundred Jews, men, women and children, in and around Delhi and New Delhi. They have no synagogue, and their communal instrument is the Jewish Welfare Association of Delhi and Northern India—a high sounding title for a body with only 36 members.

Those members are a remarkably varied group. They include the Judge Advocate of the Fleet, a num-

ber of .... "three nursing sisters, an official of the German Embassy, the wife of a Hindu, and a British Overseas Airways Officer who is a sort of "country member", because he is posted 1,000 miles away, at Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf."

A Bene Israel Ritual:

And what a busy, enthusiastic little crowd they are. They hold services in one of the member's homes though they have to borrow a Sefer Torah from Bombay for the Holy days. They are particularly proud of the distinctive tunes of the Bene-Israel ritual. Last April they held a ceremony of which I confess I had not heard before: it is called the Blessing of the Sun, and is held in the open air at dawn once every 28 years. For a brith milah they have to send for the nearest mohel, at Ahmedabad, a mere 539 miles away.

The Association's members busy themselves with the Hebrew education of their children. One of their proudest records is of a recitation which they gave to Menuhin, the violinist, when he came to India for a series of charity concerts.

They maintain a cemetery which, though tiny, is as well kept and as garden-like as you will find anywhere. Among its graves is that of a British Jewish soldier and when the Imperial War Graves Commission recently decided to remove his remains to one of its own cemeteries, the Association successfully demanded the right to retain the grave on Jewish consecrated ground.

Even a non-observant Jew could not fail to be impressed by the tenacity with which this little group clings to its religion and its traditions. I have the feeling that long after the disappearance of much bigger and more important Jewish communities, the tiny community will still be there.

AUTOGRAPH HUNTER MEETS CELEBRITIES :

An urge to collect autographs has brought Mr. J. Josephs of Calcutta into contact with many of the greatest figures of this century and has landed him in a number of adventures.

Besides talking to President Roosevelt at his private address, he chatted with Gandhi, joked with Bernard Shaw, stumbled on H. G. Wells in the dark, has been nearly shot as a gunman in America and has narrowly escaped arrest by an army of French detectives guarding General Eisenhower. On each occasion, he got his man.

Born in India, Mr. Josephs began collecting autographs in Calcutta in 1923. In that year, he waited three days to get Mahatma Gandhi, and finally ran him to earth at an important public function, surrounded by important public dignitaries and pressmen, with the Lord Mayor of Calcutta. Like many other prominent men asked to sign Mr. Joseph's voluminous album, Gandhi asked who else had signed it. Seeing the names of a number of English lords, he smilingly remarked, "'You don't want to include the name of a scavenger among these." But there the name stands in elegant Hindi script.

Among the famous Indians whose autographs Mr. Josephs collected were Pandit Nehru, Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan, one of the founders of Pakistan, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, the writer and one of the greatest poets of all time, Rabindranath Tagore, Mrs. Annie Beasant, the European mystic and friend of Indian independence. And he has a long list of signatures of Indian Rajahs and Maharajas, starting with the Maharajah of Nawanagar.

"No" from Mussolini:

Sometime before these wartime experiences Mr. Josephs had a strenuous time trying to obtain Musso-

lini's autographs during a ten-day visit to Rome. "It was no good," he said. "I got as far as his secretary but no farther. They said he was too busy." He had better luck with some of the other dictators. Peron Vargas of Brazil, Machado of Cuba and the austere inaccessible Dr. Malan.

Altogether Mr. Josephs has a total of some twenty presidents, including four Americans and a number of Latin Americans. Other political figures include four French Premiers as well as President Vincent Auriol, Mr. de Valera, Mr. Cosgrave, Count Michael Karolyi, the Hungarian aristocrat and diplomat, Field-Marshal Smuts, Mr. Jan Hofmeyer, ex-King Carol of Rumania, ex-King Peter of Yugoslavia, Signor de Gasperi, Count Sforza, Dr. Adenauer, Dr. Figl, the Austrian Chancellor, Mr. Fuat Koprulu, the Turkish leader and the Ranee of Sarawak.

He button-holed Mr. Stauning, the Danish Prime Minister, in a Copenhagen garden in 1939, just before the outbreak of war. Stauning was not sure about signing until he saw Roosevelt's signature, when he agreed.

The Bait:

Looking, however, at the other signatures does not always produce the required results. M. Bidault when Premier of France was on the point of signing the book while the idle flicking of a page revealed the name of Serge Lifar, the French ballet dancer; Bidault refused to sign because Lifar was said to have collaborated with the Germans during the occupation!

The signature that Mr. Josephs displays with glee is that of a former Prime Minister of Tibet.

He has every British Premier since and including Mr. Baldwin, as well as Lloyd George.

The autograph album is now a valuable document, if only historically; Mr. Josephs keeps it in a bank.

The album, of course, contains only a fraction of the total autographs, for many of them have been sent by post. He has often had to reassure suspicious "subjects" who feared he was an unscrupulous business agent in disguise, trying to get them to sign some document that they did not wish to sign. . .

In 1924, Mr. Josephs left India for the United States, where he lived for 15 years. It was a very profitable 15 years from the name-hunting point of view. As well as "getting" some of the greatest American figures, Mr. Josephs claimed some of his most prominent English "victims" during his spell in America.

H. G. Wells:

When Mr. Josephs was living in New York he heard that H. G. Wells, on a visit to the United States, was lecturing in Philadelphia. So he went to Philadelphia in pursuit. On the evening of the lecture he played bridge with friends, intending to go to the lecture hall before Wells left. But the game became interesting, time passed, and when with a start he remembered the purpose of his visit, the lecture was over and he found the hall in darkness.

There were still a few people about; with a friend, he looked hopefully around, but Wells was not in the hall. Mr. Joseph was walking out of a side entrance planning to make a wild dash for the station and catch his man—on the way back to New York—when the friend pointed to a figure in the shadows and said, "There you are. It's Wells." "No, no—that's not Wells," said Mr. Josephs impatiently. "Yes, I am Wells," said the figure. It was, and he signed.

Thomas Lipton, the grocery king, signed Mr. Josephs' book when he was in New York. Many great Americans, from President Roosevelt downwards, have signed. The collector's "score" of Presidents includes Hoover and Coolidge, but not Truman. "I haven't been

to America since he became President, and writing was not good," sighed Mr. Josephs.

One of the most exciting moments was when, after a long struggle, he was able to speak to Dr. Einstein at a dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York.

Legendary American:

Clarence Darrow, the legendary lawyer, is one of the gems of the collection. So are Cordell Hull and Mayor La Guardia of New York. In 1939 Mr. and Mrs. Josephs came to England and he served through the war in the Merchant Navy. About that part of his career Mr. Josephs is modest, though he served in a number of actions and on one occasion was recommended for a decoration.

"It was all in the routine work of the convoy," he says. "Anyone else who had the chance would do the same thing."

He was mainly in the Atlantic convoys. Sometimes, however, it was just a lone merchant ship creeping across the grey waste. Once in 1941, Mr. Josephs was on duty and saw the skipper looking white. "He looks a bit timid," he commented to another ship's officer. "Yes, so will you when you look round" was the reply. He looked round—and there were two warships covering the vessel with their guns! Mr. Josephs went and had his dinner. "I thought if I was going to be taken prisoner I might as well have one good meal in freedom first", he explained. After that, he learnt that the warships were signalling his ship and trying to persuade her to answer in the British code she used, instead of the ordinary international code. The skipper refused. It turned out that the warships were not German but American. It was several months before America entered the war, but they had the code.

When he was in Copenhagen he set out to get the autograph of one of the most famous Danish writers.

Seeing that he was in difficulties with the cafe telephone book, a waitress and a barman came to his assistance. For hours they tried to find the name but all to no avail. "He must live out in the country somewhere," they said. Enquiries elsewhere were fruitless. Next day he visited the Parliament House and was shown portraits of kings and premiers. Then came the portrait of the eminent writer. "I've been trying to find him all over Copenhagen," he said. "Too bad," was the reply, "Hans Andersen died over 100 years ago."

Musicians:

Of all the fields of human activity covered by Mr. Josephs' autograph album, none is so widely represented as musicians for the Josephs loved music. These include Toscanini, Heifetz, Sir Thomas Beecham, Fritz Kreisler, Amelia Galli-Curci, the Italian singer, Joseph Szigeti, Percy Grainger , Ravel, Gigli, Walter Gieseking, Respighi, Honegger, Oscar Strauss, Chalipin, Stravinsky, Rachmaninoff and Bela Bartok, the Brilliant Hungarian composer, who added a note, "feeling better now the concert is over in Hungarian."

"Kings", says Mr. Josephs philosophically, "are hard to get, but it all depends on the contact you can make." At any rate, he has "got" the late King Feisal of Iraq and King Talal of Jordan, as well as Prince and Princess Arthur of Connaught and the Ranee of Sarawak.

Among the other names in Mr. Josephs's amazing album are Thomas Edison, Capablanca, the chess champion, le Brix and Coste, first French aviators to fly the Atlantic, Adler, the psychological pioneer, Sir Alan Cobham, Bertrand Russell, Eddington, Lord Dawson of Penn and Lord Horder, but not Sigmund Freud. —"I went to his house but they said he wasnt's well."

At point of gun:

His greatest "misses" include Mackenzie King, late

Prime Minister of Canada, Sir James Frazer, author of "The Golden Bough", J. P. Morgan, and Henry Ford. American millionaires, said Mr. Josephs, were the most difficult of all; their signatures were apt to be worth so much in terms of hard cash. Once he was waiting in an ante-room for an American magnate's autograph, and happened to reach for his handkerchief which he usually keeps in his hip-pocket.

"Stay as you are," said a menacing voice. He froze. A man with a gun was lurking near a curtain. "What are you getting from your pocket?"—"A handkerchief." Bring your hand out slowly." He brought it out. In the end he managed to convince the men-at-arms that he was not a gangster or a representative of a rival concern.

Literary Celebrities:

The world of literature is very well-represented—

Alfred Noyes (1927) George Russel (A.E.) W.B. Yeats, Emil Ludwig, Hugh Walpole, J. B. Priestley, Aldous Huxley, Philip Guedela, and others too numerous to mention. One of his most pleasant memories is chatting with Bernard Shaw in his London home.

After the war the Josephs decided to try another home and in 1946 they went to live in Argentina and stayed there three years. It was in Argentina that Mr. Josephs nearly lost his album. He went to President Peron for his autograph and had the utmost difficulty in getting it back.

That incident and the general atmosphere of Peron's rule wearied the Josephs. The family came back to England. For a time they lived at Westmoreland Road, Bromley, at the home of Mr. George Fry, the creator of televisions "Prudence Kitten". Or shall we say, the interpretor of Prudence, for there is a real Prudence Kitten. Indeed, Mrs. Josephs beautiful and lively cat, Minouche, is Prudence's daughter.

Mr. Josephs has a French wife, the cousin of Andre Mourois, and has now settled in Beckenham, England, with his wife and two sons, Francis and Bernard.

PARTING HUMOUR

The Drunkard:

In the course of Hakham Solomon Twena's darush (sermon in synagogue) he said that the Almighty did not accept supplications of a person who is addicted to liquor. He actually meant it for one of the congregants who was habituated to liquor. After a couple of days when he met this person, he enquired if he stopped having his usual drinks. The man replied that he stopped praying since the Almighty would not hear his prayers.

The following week Hakham Solomon gave another address and informed the congregants that there was a drought in Baghdad many years ago. The people prayed hard for rain. The Hakham was told in a dream that there would be rain only if a certain person asked for it. The leaders of the community proceeded to visit this man and to their surprise they found him to be an absolute drunkard who perpetually held a bottle. They were utterly surprised as to how a man of his disposition could have such powers from the Almighty. In order to make him utter the desired sentence, they pulled out the bottle from his hand and only gave it back to him when he repeated after them, "Let there be rain in Baghdad." At the exact time he uttered the sentence, there was torrential rain in Baghdad. This man happened to be one of the most charitable persons in the world during his time. He spent

every cent on worthy charities and, therefore, he was blessed with such powers.

Ingenious Adjudication:

The Hakham narrated another story to illustrate the ingenuity of our leaders. A miser lost a purse containing 400 rupees and promised a handsome reward to the one who returned it to him. A poor man found it and when he took it to the miser, he was accused of robbing a hundred rupees. The case was taken to the Rabbi for adjudication.

"How much money did you have in the purse that was lost?" asked the Rabbi.

"Rs. 500", answered the miser promptly.

"How much money was there in the purse that was found?" he asked the finder.

"Rs. 400", answered the poor man.

"Then", said the Rabbi to the miser, "this purse is surely a different one. It is not yours. Please return it to the finder."

CONCLUSION

I have endeavoured in this little book to trace the origins and beginnings of a small community of Jews who made their home in Calcutta, the largest and most interesting city in India, with side references, where necessary, to other similar communities settled in Bombay, The Malabar or West Coast of India and Cochin in South India. History is apt to be a dull affair to most people but I have tried to make it as interesting as possible. How far I have succeeded is for the reader to judge.

The Jews are part of ancient as well as modern history and as we all know a good deal of it was sad and tragic. The hard times they passed through, endowed them—one would say out of sheer necessity —with certain qualities which became ingrained in them down the centuries. Historians and statesmen have borne testimony to their natural talents such as intelligence, industry, business acumen, wider and deeper unity of belief inspite of differences of opinion which divided their ranks from time to time, philanthropy, grim determination in the face of heavy odds, an inborn dislike of injustice and discrimination and a great love of culture which always urged them to build institutions for its inculcation.

The Calcutta Jews have inherited many of these qualities from their forebears, and as a small community numbering only about five thousand at its peak of growth compared with the teeming millions of India, have achieved results well above the average in the country of their adoption. Some served as members of the Legislative Assembly of Bengal, some as Sheriffs of The City, many became Municipal Councillors (one served for forty-two years continuously as narrated in this work) and yet another was knighted by His Majesty King George V.

In the religious field, it cannot be denied that they were somewhat exclusive, but they respected freedom of conscience and desired to be left alone to worship as their hearts dictated (e.g. they frowned upon any proselytising attempts of missionaries on young minds and conceded the rights of others to worship as they chose even if that worship was of idols. Their religious zeal impelled them to build splendid edifices like the Maghen David Synagogue, in Canning Street which though smaller in size could be compared architecturally with the magnificent cathedrals of Europe.

An urgent problem facing them today is "What of the future of the remnants who are gradually dwindling by emigration to other countries as is the nature of these wanderers"? One thing, however, is absolutely certain. There has never been nor is there today any discrimination whatsoever against them in this country. As for anti-semitism, there is not the slightest trace or even hint of it. Furthermore, the Constitution of India declares it to be a secular state and guarantees absolute equality before the law to all irrespective of race, colour or creed. For all this, the Jew is humbly grateful to The Almighty and pledges in his mind and heart his full allegiance to the country of his adoption. As long as the remnants desire to stay here, and the choice is fully theirs, they cannot but be loyal to this country. Though some might choose to leave the shores of this blessed land for other reasons, the warmth of gratitude and pleasant memories of their long and happy residence here will always remain.

As circumstances would have it, these remnants of a tiny community are scattered over several places in India, the main centres being: Bombay and its hinterland (Konkan) where a large Bene Israel community exists side by side with a smaller one of Iraqi origin, Calcutta with its predominantly Iraqi elements and Cochin with its centuries-old local community. There are smaller groups in New Delhi and Poona (near Bombay) too.

What is the link between all these scattered communities? Do they speak with one voice when it comes to presenting a united front vis-a-vis the government and other public authorities or when faced with common danger? We are aware there have been efforts in the past to work out such a common basis of action. Such an attempt was made 20 years ago by the World Jewish Congress of New York of which the Jewish Association of Calcutta is an affiliate. Unfortunately it fizzled out. Should there be another attempt at forging such a unity inspite of past failures and the dwindling numbers of Jews in this country? Many among us who have thought carefully over the matter believe it to be worthwhile. The reasons are many and may be listed as follows:—

(1) The past history of the Jews, not only of Calcutta but in other parts of the world, indicates the beneficial influence which even a small community can exert over the policies of the government and other public authorities and institutions.

In the case of Calcutta and Bombay we know that the smallness of the community has not deterred its enterprising members from helping large sections of humanity with their commercial enterprises, trusts, charities, institutions such as hospitals and schools, scholarships, leadership etc.

(2) Today it seems even more important and urgent to have a common platform and basis for action. Whereas in the past a large community could be viable and have its own leaders, in the present unity of all the Jewish communities situated in various places is imperative.

(3) The various trusts, funds and institutions like synagogues, schools, cemeteries and welfare organisations left by the philanthropists of a generation or two ago, still exist. They do not, however, seem to be unified and utilised for the maximum possible benefit of the Jewish communities in India and elsewhere. Common-sense demands centralisation of efforts.

(4) There are amongst us today some worthy individuals who have very many years of experience in social and charitable work in the main centres of Jewish communal life in India and their self-sacrificing work should be taken full advantage of and not allowed to go to waste.

A central organisation or association will naturally speak with one voice on behalf of the whole community in India and if need be protect its rights according to law along the same lines as other minority communities in India. If such an association representing all Indian Jews is formed even at this late stage, we can rest assured that much can still be achieved not only in the larger interests of the Jews in Calcutta, but of the Jews all over the world.

SHALOME !

AN APPRECIATION

On the occasion of the quatercentenary of the Cochin Synagogue, Smt. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India said "Mazal Tov" (Good Luck) to the Jews of India and also alluded to their notable services in many fields such as business and industry, the civil services and armed forces as well as the world of scholarship.

Aware of the great contributions which the Jews of Calcutta have made to the economic and social progress of the country the record of which may get lost in course of time, I approached my dear friend Bro. Isaac S. Abraham, who I felt was most competent to write the history and facts of Calcutta Jewry with special reference to their contribution to the economic, social and political life of the country.

I am very happy to learn that Bro. Abraham took my suggestion seriously with the result that, within a short time, we have before us his interesting and monumental work for which he deserves to be congratulated. Without doubt he has rendered a great service to Jews everywhere. Although a confessedly brief account of that community, it will stand among other histories of Jewish communities throughout the world and enable us to understand the intricate pattern of their dispersion and the contributions they made in various lands down the centuries.

Needless to add, the subject-matter of the book is fully authentic and informative and written in an excellent manner. However there seems to be scope for further elaboration, which suggestion Bro. Abraham is requested to consider in future editions of his work.

Shellim Samuel
President,
B'Nai B'Rith Lodge of India No. 2626.

