CHAPTER THREE

TOWN AND GOWN

1871 was not only the year of the first visit to Oxford by a Chief Rabbi; it saw the passing of the University Tests Act, which swept away the last legal bar to the full membership of Jews in the University. Admission of Jews to the University had been slower at Oxford than at Cambridge for the largely accidental reason that at Oxford religious tests had been imposed at matriculation, so that a professing Jew could not even start the course, whereas at Cambridge they only arose on taking a degree; James Joseph Sylvester, for example, had been second in the Mathematical Tripos at Cambridge in 1837 and Numa Hartog top (Senior Wrangler) in 1859. At Oxford, admission became possible after the Oxford University Reform Act of 1854, and all remaining obstacles were now, in 1871, removed. All Jews entering Oxford up to 1854 had been converts; even after that year some were particularly devious. Sackville Davis of Worcester, the first Jew to take the B.A. degree, on 4 December 1862, had not mentioned that he was Jewish until it occurred to him that the fact might be the way out of divinity examinations; an enormous row with the college followed, in which he did not behave creditably.[1]

Thereafter there was a slow beginning, in terms of numbers, though not in quality. There are a few possible Jewish names in the 1860s after Sackville Davis, but the real start should be dated to 1869, which brought the first of a long line of 'examination successes' in the *Jewish Chronicle*. On 12 March, it reported the election to an Exhibition at New College of a 'co-religionist Mr. F.D. Schloss of Manchester Grammar School'. Next week, in greater excitement, it corrected the order of his initials and reported that he had now obtained a Scholarship at Corpus, noting in a bracket that this was worth £95 p.a. for 5 years, against the £50 p.a. for 3 years of the New College award. 'The fact of his achieving

so much success in the space of a few days speaks as highly for his high attainments as it does for the liberality of the Governing Body to whom the circumstance of his being a Jew was made known. If we are not mistaken, he is the first Jew who has obtained a Scholarship at Oxford.' By May 1871, the House of Lords Committee on the University Tests Act was told that he had already been elected to the Committee of the Union. In later life he was one of the first Jews to take a serious interest in housing conditions in the East End of London.

Schloss's success was followed in December 1871 by the election of Joseph Solomon of Bristol to a Mathematics Scholarship at Balliol. In parallel with these scholarship successes for the newer generation of Anglo-Jewry, older families are also visible, though I am not sure how to classify the brothers Micholls, who came up to New College in 1869 and 1871. They were sons of a Manchester cotton-manufacturer, but their mother was a Montefiore. They were followed by Leonard Montefiore, who came up to Balliol in 1872, and got a Second in History in 1876, observing the Sabbath by abstaining from work and walking to the Oxford workhouse to talk with and entertain the old people there.[2] Between him and his younger brother Claude, who came up in 1878 and got a First in Greats in three years, there was yet another Balliol man, the first to take a recorded interest in congregational affairs. Oswald John Simon came up in 1876, a little old at 21, and only stayed for two years without taking a degree. He was the son of the Jamaican-born Sir John Simon, one of the last of the 'common serjeants', with a wide and well-known interest in Jewish affairs, particularly the Reform Synagogue and the persecution of Russian Jewry. More remarkably, a young man from Australia, named Samuel Alexander, though from a poor family, abandoned his course at the University of Melbourne and sailed to England in the hope of winning an Oxford or Cambridge Scholarship. Elected at Balliol in 1877, he had a glittering undergraduate career, and was elected a Fellow of Lincoln in 1882, the first Jew to be elected a Fellow of an Oxford or Cambridge College. There is no surviving suggestion in the college records that his Jewish origins were thought in any way to be a bar to election, and the Rev. V.H.H. Green expressed the view to me that the Fellows of Lincoln were genuinely progressive. Alexander went on with a distinguished philosophical career, was Professor of Philosophy at Manchester from 1893 to 1924, and made a member of the Order of Merit in 1930. In the next year, 1883, came the first Jewish professor. J.J. Sylvester, now renowned world wide as a mathematician, but somewhat past his best, was elected Savillian

Professor of Geometry; the *Oxford Magazine* congratulated the University on being now allowed to do itself so much honour.

That other colleges had their reservations about what they would and would not tolerate in Governing Bodies which were then very small closed societies, sometimes not going into double figures, is suggested by the case of Adolf Neubauer, who, after a preliminary stay in Oxford in 1860–2, arrived from Hungary in 1868 to become the first resident scholar who really opened up the treasures of the Bodleian Hebrew manuscripts. He too was cited to the House of Lords Committee on the University Tests Act in the evidence of C. Appleton of St. John's, who referred to him as a well-known Jewish savant, who was on the best of terms with the Professors of Divinity and Hebrew who were very glad to apply to him for help in their biblical studies.[3] He was given the M.A. degree in 1873, without any college connection at all. In 1884 the University made him Reader in Rabbinical Literature, but Readerships did not until the 1960s create any right to a College Fellowship. Neubauer was then taken in by Exeter College, which, in 1890, gave him, not the status of an ordinary Fellow, which would have admitted him into full participation in the college's affairs, but that of Honorary Fellow, normally reserved for former members of the college distinguished in public life, who were not likely to come to Oxford very often. Neubauer did come; his favourite dish was potato mayonnaise. There is little evidence that Neubauer, despite his wealth of Jewish scholarship, took any interest in the Oxford Synagogue; Raphael Loewe was told that his visits there were rare events; one happens to be recorded.

The first generation of Jewish undergraduates falls broadly into two categories. The families long established in England were mostly those affiliated with the Reform Synagogue, and mostly Sephardim; the old Ashkenazi families were slower, until the Jewish house at Clifton, founded in 1879, started to produce an effect. Alongside these were boys of newer Ashkenazi families, mostly arriving on scholarships from the great day schools, City of London, St. Paul's and Manchester Grammar School. By January 1882 the *Jewish Chronicle* could report that there were 25 Jewish undergraduates at Oxford, of whom 9 were at Balliol.[4] A fairly complete list of these can be reconstructed and repays analysis.[5] This number was fairly near the high before the First World War. A list of the University Section of the Congregation for 1908–9 has 29 names, and 43 were claimed for 1912, but some much smaller figures are recorded in between and it was always clear to contemporaries that there were more Jews at Cambridge.

Two general points may be made here, besides the obvious one that these are numbers in a much smaller undergraduate body than today's, never exceeding 3,000 before the First World War. Even before the great expansion of student grants in the 1950s, there was no absolute bar to Jewish access to Oxford for the poor student of sufficient ability and determination. The great day-schools had a substantial number of free places, and once the boy was in them, there was access to a wide range of leaving scholarships designed to assist access to the universities; private backers could be found to provide grants or a loan;[6] even without detailed investigation, individuals from very poor backgrounds can be identified. Even outside these schools, there are interesting cases. The promise of Reuben Levy, a poor boy in Bangor, was early noted by his teachers, and was amply backed;[7] he ended as Professor of Persian at Cambridge. The progress of Nita Abrahamson in the intermediate schools of Newport, Monmouthshire, was recognized by her local authority, which scraped up a group of small awards to enable her to go to Somerville.[8] This is not to say that there were not cases when students found it impossible to carry on financially.

Another striking point is the high proportion in this poorer class of the children of the Anglo-Jewish ministry and bureaucracy, not a very prosperous body. This tendency seems to start very early, with Alfred Kalisch, son of the Chief Rabbi's Secretary, in 1881. The father of Lionel Abrahams, who came up to Balliol in 1888 and ended as a luminary of the Indian Civil Service and Sir Lionel, was Secretary of the Initiation Society. The first son of a minister I have so far found was Maurice Simon in 1892; we shall see more of him in the next chapter. He was succeeded by several sons of ministers and *shochetim*, and the pre-war sequence even ends with the arrival of the daughter of a Liverpool minister at St. Hilda's in 1914. Evidently, the respect in their families for learning as a method of social advancement outweighed any doubts there might have been about the dangers of a gentile environment.

George Street, 1878–84

In the view of one of the earliest undergraduates, Oswald Simon, the state of the community in the 1870s was deplorable.[9] 'There was no synagogue and no sort of provision whatever for the religious education of the young. On Kippur day the Jews met in an untidy room for divine service, and only some of them appeared even on that day. I took the liberty of calling on every Jew in Oxford and by their kind reception of me I was fortunate in getting them to meet on occasional Sabbaths; and, subsequently, they removed their place of worship to a more suitable

quarter.'[10] Whether he was instrumental or not, there was a move in 1878. That fact has long been known, but Roth was mistaken in thinking that the new premises were already in Worcester Place. It emerges clearly from material of 1883 that they were in George Street. The entrance was 'thoroughly dirty, and, after having entered, there faces us a washhouse and stabling, and other things not pleasant to behold'.[11] The synagogue was over the stables, apparently on the site of the present Old Fire Station.[12]

The new premises were available by the High Festivals of 1878; the services were conducted by Mr. Rosenthal, assisted by Messrs Davidson and Abrahams (presumably Israel Abrahams, now 20 and at the beginning of a distinguished career).[13]

The next week saw two parallel entries;[14] I give the second. 'A new small synagogue has lately been opened in Oxford. Its size and character, though of humble description, is creditable to the few families who have honourably striven to preserve their ancient congregation under great difficulties. On Sunday, Mr. O.J. Simon of Balliol, son of Mr. Sergeant Simon, M.P., who, we believe, intends to join the Jewish ministry, delivered a sermon. He spoke from Deuteronomy 4.39 "Know this day and consider in thine heart that the Lord he is God on heaven and earth; there is none else". Adverting to the historical associations of Oxford with the Jewish people, he pointed out how the principle of his text had sustained former generations in the city, as elsewhere, under severe persecution. The present time was one of freedom and religious equality, and some sacrifice is still incumbent upon the people of the Covenant wherever their lot was cast, to show forth to the world the high moral characteristics of their faith.'

Oswald Simon had presumably sent this in himself. His personal problems are not clear, beyond the fact that he had in fact already left Balliol after two years, without a degree, but he now saw himself with a mission, in which the move to new premises was only a start. The next week he wrote the following letter, perhaps only possible for a young man of twenty-three:[15]

> SIR – Through the medium of your columns I desire to communicate with our people on the subject of this Congregation, in which I am deeply interested, and earnestly to solicit funds to aid me in erecting a Synagogue in this city. The position of the Oxford Jews is a peculiar one, and perhaps unlike that of their brethren in any other provincial place. They live under the immediate observation of a great world of intellect and culture. The notions of cultivated men

regarding Judaism and the Jews are often formed by their Oxford experiences, and it is not the mass of men who think deeply upon Religion or who interest themselves about our race. Therefore, in Oxford the Jews are specially responsible for the honour and credit of the House of Israel. The number of their families is eleven, most of whom have several children. They have a temporary place of worship, and a 'reader and killer', possessing a distinctly musical voice.

The members of the congregation are engaged in pursuits of thorough respectability, and are the social equals of their fellow-citizens. They have received the suggestion to erect a synagogue rejoicingly, and have responded to my appeal for funds to the utmost of their means. Some will give £20 and others £10; I have reason to believe that in the course of this week I shall raise £100 among them for our sacred object. Besides their own numbers. there are isolated families of our faith in the neighbourhood of the county whose co-operation I shall look for. It is said that an iron chapel or unpretentious building can be raised for a few hundred pounds in Oxford, where building is inexpensive. I shall this day put myself in communication with the Town Clerk respecting a site I have marked, and shall at once obtain a builder's estimate. In London last week I told my tale to the venerable and Rev. Chief Rabbi, Dr. Nathan Adler, who kindly gave me his hearty good wishes for the Congregation, and approval to deliver sermons from time to time. Oxford Jews are fully sensible that it is their duty to maintain a minister who shall be an educated person, able to command respect from all quarters. Until I find they are in a position to do this and have secured one, I have solemnly undertaken, with their unanimous accord, to stand by them as their minister and friend. Every interest and sympathy is evinced by my brethren of the *Alma Mater*. Support has been volunteered by one who is not of the Covenant. My friend and fellow Collegean [*sic*], Mr. Claude Montefiore, who is one with me in this work, has kindly consented to receive donations by letter addressed to him at Balliol College, Oxford. The Rev. A.L. Green will be our good medium in London, and I shall be most grateful to receive donations here.

Seeking the help of Almighty God,
I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
Oswald John Simon.

Balliol College, Oxford, 21st October 1878.

How far in 1878 the local Congregation was prepared to accept this patronage and this view of their mission is unclear. It appears, from Oswald Simon's later account,[16] that £10 came in from Sir Nathaniel de Rothschild, but he himself fell ill for a long period, and the project was suspended.

The Congregation was evidently not, by its own lights, idle or unattended. Our curtain goes up in 1881 with the first congregational minute book. There has obviously been some friction, perhaps between new arrivals, Emanuel Harris a furniture-dealer and an unplaceable L.H. Goodman, and the survivors from an older generation, Israel Levi and Lewis Solomon. The 'Reader', Solomon Schapero, has some pretensions to culture, and the synagogue has been undergoing some redecoration. It was clearly felt that greater organisation was now necessary.

A first meeting on 28 August was attended by five members and the Reader. It appointed officers, L.H. Goodman as Hon. Secretary, I.M. Levi as Gabbai, L. Solomon as President, M. Harris as Treasurer, and agreed to have the Oxford Synagogue and Congregation placed under the Board of Deputies. All male adults would be invited to a meeting the next Sunday. Only two more attended this meeting, which made arrangements about finances, agreed that the male seat-holders would form the committee, and, with two objectors, that Mr. Davis of St. Clements be invited to join. Seats would be allocated by ballot. There would be 24 male seats, of which only 12 would now be taken, and 17 female seats in three rows. The rentals were to range from 2 guineas p.a. down to 5/–. One member would be asked for 3 guineas. At yet a third meeting, Mr. Solomon presented a new Shofar and Reading Desk, and it was decided to make an inventory of the property and to ask the United Synagogue how to have a constitution.

These meetings were reported in the *Jewish Chronicle* in the form that Solomon and Levi were to be Wardens, Harris Treasurer, Goodman Secretary. It was further stated that the synagogue had been redecorated throughout and that a far better feeling now existed between all parties. A further note added, inaccurately and prematurely, that the Congregation had resolved to request the Council of the United Synagogue to admit it as one of its constituents.[17]

For the moment, all went well. It was reported that the synagogue had been well attended at the recent festivals. Services had been conducted by the Rev. S. Schapero, assisted by Mr. G. Davidson. On the Day of Atonement, Mr. Schapero had even preached, rather exceptionally for

the period, taking his text from Jeremiah iv.1 and illustrating the power of man to work out his own salvation.

The era of 'far better feeling between all parties' lasted just two months. On 19 November, Oswald Simon preached a sermon. By his own account, he had not intended to spend this weekend in Oxford, and had been prevailed on at the last moment to preach impromptu. He took his text from Psalm xxxiv.5, and dwelt on the ennobling and enlightening influences of a devout life on the soul. He went on to allude to 'the peculiar circumstances of the Oxford Congregation', and was at any rate reported, in some detail, as expressing disapproval of a system of religious observance which tended to breed fanaticism and superstition and as recommending the Congregation to affiliate itself to the Reform Synagogue.

This was too much for the Rev. Mr. Schapero, who, with the Committee's support, forthwith wrote a letter, saying that he could not see any desire for a change of ritual or system among the members, and that, while they were indebted to Mr. Simon for his eloquent sermon, they had not the smallest intention of applying to the Berkeley Street authorities for either interest or support; it was their intention to make early application for affiliation to the United Synagogue.

Oswald Simon replied, in a letter long even by his standards. He said, with some justice, that it would have been illogical of him to recommend any particular affiliation, since he was at this time writing constant letters, saying that the Reform secession of 1841 was now forty years past and that what was now needed was a general structure which would cover Ashkenazim, Sephardim and Reform. He did, however, think that Oxford, like any other small congregation, needed institutional support. Unfortunately, he went on to sketch the history of his association with the Congregation more frankly than before. He had done everything he could to get them into better premises, but they had not really responded. All of them except one kept their shops open on the Sabbath, and saw no reason why they should not continue to do so. He hinted darkly at even worse, well known to people he had talked to in London, which he did not wish to divulge.

The Congregation met, and it was proposed by B.J. Franks, seconded by Joel Zacharias, that a vote of censure be passed on Mr. Oswald John Simon for his unkind and uncalled for remarks published in the *Jewish Chronicle* upon this Congregation and synagogue and that Mr. Oswald John Simon be not again invited to lecture in the synagogue. This was carried, only Israel Levi dissenting, and it was agreed that no one should

officiate or lecture without consent of the majority of the Committee. In the account of the meeting in the *Jewish Chronicle*,[18] the motion was falsely reported in the form that 'in future none other than Orthodox ministers and gentlemen be invited to officiate or assist in any service in this synagogue'; it would appear likely that Mr. Schapero was doing some manipulation of the record. Simon's observations on the report[19] were uncharacteristically short; they ended 'Whoever was the inspiring source of the unusual proceeding has strangely misled a well-meaning, though small, congregation, whom I know too well to suppose that they would have desired to hold such a meeting.'

Greater matters were claiming his attention and that of many others, among whom his father was taking a lead. The pogroms in Russia now commanded public attention. At its annual meeting the Oxford Conservative Association unanimously agreed a resolution which, after regretting the absence of liberty in Russia as shown by the terrible persecution of the Jews, expressed the hope that steps would be taken to impress on the Russian authorities the duty that is imposed on them, a presumably civilized government, to protect the interests of all classes of their subjects.[20] The Congregation, meeting at the Synagogue Chambers on 12 February, appointed a Committee and Treasurer for a Russo-Jewish Fund. They collected £10/4/6 among ten subscribers and resolved to wait upon the Mayor to propose a meeting on behalf of the persecuted Jews of Russia. This was pushing at an open door. The same number of the *Jewish Chronicle* which chronicled their efforts[21] reported a letter to the Chief Rabbi from the Vice-Chancellor and 246 heads of colleges, professors and resident graduates, an extraordinarily high proportion of the University, asking him to convey to their fellow-countrymen of the Jewish faith their sympathy with their people in Russia under the grievous sufferings and wrongs which had recently befallen them. They had heard with surprise and indignation of the outbreaks which seemed to recall the unreasoning antipathies and savage cruelties of the Middle Ages. They earnestly hoped that the day might not be long distant when in every country all loyal subjects would be equal before the law, and public opinion would secure justice to all alike without distinction of race or creed. A parallel undergraduate petition organized by Samuel Alexander and J.W. Mackail of Balliol (both, curiously enough, later to become members of the Order of Merit) went to the Lord Mayor of London, with the staggering total of 1,589 signatures.[22] Oxford's Town Hall meeting was on 2 March; it was well attended and very fully reported.[23]

Throughout these weeks the Congregation had been distracted by internal troubles. They were ready to discuss various methods of making Mr. Schapero's salary up to £1 a week, but he had been insulting the Secretary, Mr. Goodman. It was agreed that he would be dismissed if he did not apologize. In fact, he resigned to 'take up a more important post in Liverpool' and was presented with a handsome silver kiddush cup on 11 April as a token of the high esteem of the members. I have not traced this post in Liverpool and cannot find any further trace of him; if he went to Liverpool, it may have been to catch a boat.

Mr. B.J. Solomon of London was appointed to replace him.[24] However, Mr. Goodman also resigned as Secretary, and was replaced by Joel Zacharias. Not for the last time in the history of the Congregation, the advent of a powerful Secretary was marked by a suspension of minute-taking, and for the next three years we are denied the entertaining counterpoint between what the minutes actually say and what the *Jewish Chronicle* was told.

Much happened in the interim betwen the minute-books, an exceptionally crowded and eventful period for Oxford, though its events have up till now been totally lost in all accounts, published and unpublished, partly because of the gap in the minutes. It is apparent that, if Joel Zacharias was too busy to write minutes, he was active in other ways.

He was now thirty, and this year he married Rebecca, daughter of Philip Frankenstein, one of the large group of Manchester india-rubber and waterproof manufacturers. This was the foundation of a new career. In 1883 directories, the china and glass business which he had taken over from his father in the 1870s is replaced by a waterproof clothing business, which would be famous in Oxford as 'Zacks for Macs' for the next hundred years. He was determined to get on, inside and outside the Jewish community, and the *Jewish Chronicle* was kept regularly informed of a selection of his benefactions and progress in civic and masonic life.[25] Before he died in 1905, shortly before he was due to become Mayor of Oxford, he had bridged yet another social gap; his eldest son was a member of the University and a medical student.

As far as the Congregation was concerned, the first sign of coming change comes with the report of the services at the festivals of 1883[26] (conducted by the Rev. M. Schulman). 'It is in contemplation to erect a new synagogue, for which purpose a subscription list will shortly be opened.' In the same number, Samuel Montagu, the most active Jewish organizer of the day, in the course of a long article on the need for Jewish ministers, dropped the remark that 'Oxford has need of a minister who

will safeguard our young men from the danger of defection'; it is not clear whether he had any particular case in mind.

On 2 December 1883,[27] Dr. Hermann Adler, already essentially performing his ageing father's duties as Chief Rabbi, visited Oxford for the purpose of making arrangements to enable the Jewish students to join in public worship. He attended a meeting at the rooms of Samuel Alexander, now Fellow of Lincoln; Claude Montefiore and the majority of Jewish undergraduates were present. He 'afterwards met the members of the congregation at the synagogue in George Street. The room in which divine service is at present held is entirely unsuited to its purpose. As a result of these meetings resolutions were passed that strenuous efforts be made by the Jews resident at Oxford and by others to establish a proper place of worship in that city. A committee consisting of four members of the University, Mr. Samuel Alexander, Mr. Hermann Cohen, Mr. Schorstein and Mr. Moses, together with two citizens, Mr. Zacharias and Mr. Franks, was formed to take the necessary steps for repairing the present synagogue, and, if necessary, securing other premises. It was also arranged that divine service should be regularly held on Friday evenings and that a gentleman who is a graduate of the London University should be asked to preach a discourse on Sabbaths during term. We are informed that Mr. F.D. Mocatta, Mr. Samuel Montagu and Mr. Claude Montefiore, who take a deep interest in the movement, have signified their intention to contribute towards the payment of the expenses.' The needs were further expounded in the same issue by a letter from 'An Orthodox Jew', who introduced two further points: 'To do this effectually it would be as well to ignore Oxford as a mere provincial congregation, and to establish it as a constituent of the United Synagogue, have a properly appointed place of worship, so that men need not be ashamed if by any chance any of their Christian friends were to visit it. As most of the parents and friends of the Jewish undergraduates are liberal supporters of the United Synagogue, I think they have a good claim to consideration. If this were done, and suitable arrangements made so that men were able to obtain kosher dinners, well cooked and neatly served, as they are accustomed to at home, we should have the happiness of seeing in the future clever and learned men not only Jews in name but also in observance.'

It so happened that the same week saw the announcement of the election of Sylvester to his Professorship. In the next number of the *Jewish Chronicle* the editorial matter passed naturally from acclaiming his election to hopes that Dr. Adler's visit would produce practical results

and covered all the ground again. It was always desirable for the sake of congregations and of their gentile neighbours that both synagogues and the modes of conducting worship should be, as far as possible, beyond reproach. But this was particularly the case in Oxford; the students should be attracted to the synagogue and induced to form the habit of regular attendance at the services. 'The nature of their surroundings, and the circumstance that they are passing through the most critical period of life when a man's character and opinions are largely determined, render it essential that Jewish influence should be constantly brought to bear on them. No habits are more easily thrown off, or resumed with greater difficulty, than religious habits. And the truth applies with peculiar force to the Jewish students of a University, seeing that they are subjected to influences which tend rapidly to exhaust the reserve of religious feeling and habit which has been stored up within them by home training.' After recapitulating the proposals, it found them 'well calculated to keep the students attached to their ancestral religion. If the project is successfully and wisely carried out, the sharp contrast between the neglect with which the spiritual needs of the Jewish students have been treated and the efforts made to bring their Christian companions within the reach of the most effective religious influences, will be very considerably diminished.'

The same number contained two letters from Oxford, continuing the themes of 'An Orthodox Jew'. Joel Zacharias reported that arrangements had now been made to provide the students with kosher meals, but there still remained the difficulty of providing a proper place of worship. for which no funds were yet forthcoming. The present synagogue and *shochet* had been entirely supported, until quite recently,[28] by the resident citizens, only about half a dozen families; they were unable to provide the new accommodation now rendered necessary by the accession of the members of the University. These also expressed their inability to provide the three or four hundred pounds necessary to build a convenient synagogue, so he could see no way out of the difficulty but to ally themselves to the United Synagogue and to appeal to the whole Jewish community for the assistance which was so necessary for a permanent benefit to the future generations of Oxford students. Baron Franks the dentist wrote on similar lines about the smallness of the Oxford community, adding a harsh description of the present premises and a complaint that the account given of the names on the Committee had been incomplete.

A search for a more suitable building ended in Worcester Place, round

the corner from the present site,[29] and a three-year lease was taken on a 'commodious *local*'. On 7 March 1884, Hermann Adler came down to give an inaugural sermon to a crowded congregation of students and residents, including Neubauer (for once) and Alexander; Lionel L. Cohen and Claude Montefiore came down specially. After he had read the afternoon and Friday evening service, he took his text from Psalm xcii.2–3 and devoted his sermon to the importance of prayer, introducing a quotation from Plotinus in deference to the learning of his audience. It was more important to have public prayer in Oxford than anywhere else, in view of its Jewish past and its other religious importance. The students were told not to despise and set at nought these gatherings, even though the structure might be mean and different from the stately cathedral, the room small and the instruction lacking in eloquence. After expressing a hope that the gatherings might also do something for the Oxford Hebrew manuscripts, he closed with a general invocation, including a prayer that God would 'nerve the arms of our brave soldiers who fight in the cause of order and justice and peace in distant Sudan'; Gordon's position in Khartoum was becoming ever more difficult as he spoke.

The *Jewish Chronicle* gave the event ample coverage,[30] and laid heavy emphasis on the need for suitable services. 'It was clear that if the Jewish students were to be attracted to the synagogue, the existing style of worship would have to be altered for the better. The service that suited the congregation proper was quite unadapted for the requirements of a number of young men of culture, who moreover have always before their eyes the best examples of Church worship and preaching. It is essential therefore that a minister be engaged who is able to deliver discourses composed in sound English, and calculated in respect of manner and tone to satisfy the exacting needs of a university audience.'

As the report of December 1883 had hinted, the candidate in mind was Israel Abrahams, and it was on him that the burden of implementing the programme chiefly rested. In the next two terms, he gave about eight sermons on varying themes, reinforced twice each by the Rev. J. Polack of Liverpool and the Rev. G.J. Emanuel of Birmingham; the Rev. Simeon Singer came once, ingeniously using the life of King Solomon to illustrate 'the dangers which beset then as now the possessors of special talents'. That the undergraduates were not without their own resources was demonstrated when Oxford joined the celebrations of the hundredth birthday of Sir Moses Montefiore: the service was impressively read by S. Moses of Trinity and an address given by G.I. Schorstein of Christ Church.[31]

This first attempt to provide national support for the Jewish undergraduates did not last long. There was clearly difficulty in finding a suitable time for the services in the face of university engagements, and no figures for attendances were ever given to the public. After the first term the *Jewish Chronicle* felt[32] that 'some success had been attained, and the fact that we have by no means to chronicle an absolute failure is very encouraging'; that Samuel Alexander had consistently manifested interest was a very pleasing feature. After the second term, it reported[33] that the success had not been inconsiderable and more than some had anticipated, but it was not proposed to arrange for sermons on every Sabbath during ensuing terms. There was difficulty in obtaining the services of competent preachers, all of whom were occupied in their own pulpits, and Mr. Abrahams could scarcely be expected to make such frequent journeys to Oxford. He did continue to come, but at rarer and rarer intervals; there were other visitors in the first two terms of 1885, after which the operation seems to have stopped.[34] It is not clear how much demand there was for the kosher dinners to be provided daily during term by the Rev. M. Schulman at a moderate fixed tariff.[35] The whole enterprise fizzled out. By 1888, it was the Congregation which sent Joel Zacharias and Baron Franks to wait on Hermann Adler to draw attention to the numerous Jewish students at the University and the laxity of their attention to their religious duties and to suggest, not for the first time, that more money might make it possible to maintain a building worthy of the University City and to attract them to the synagogue.[36]

The other event of 1884 was the attempt, first mooted in 1881, to solve the Congregation's problems by joining the United Synagogue.[37] A formal application was made, and the Congregation also enquired, if actual membership was impractical, on what terms the United Synagogue would give its members burial rights. The *Jewish Chronicle* was consistently sympathetic, since it was in favour of extending the sphere of activity of the United Synagogue. The Executive Committee found that it had no legal power to admit a synagogue outside London, but it would be possible to make arrangements for burial; it recommended that this should be done. Lionel Cohen, the Chairman, argued that Oxford was placed in a peculiar position, in that it was as much carried on for the benefit of the students at the University belonging to London as for the local residents; in fact the synagogue was only kept open during termtime, since there were not sufficient Jews to form a *minyan* in the vacations. But even the modified recommendation was rejected by the Council; individuals could apply for burial rights themselves. The *Jewish*

Chronicle described this as a 'selfish, narrow view', but, even after a final plea from Baron Franks, looking forward to a prosperous Congregation which would provide a full *minyan* and warmly thanking Hermann Adler for providing kind support at considerable inconvenience to himself, the matter was not raised again.

Congregational minutes start again in July 1885, but most of the business for the next few years was routine. Appropriate letters were sent on major communal occasions like the peerage of Lord Rothschild and the death of Sir Moses Montefiore, for whom there was a memorial service. There were negotiations with the landlord, who agreed to take a rent of £18 p.a. if they guaranteed a further three years' occupation. It was clearly felt that there was a special relationship with Dr. Hermann Adler, and various letters passed to and fro. The Congregation needed assistance about a defective Sefer Torah; it is not clear that they received it, and, surprisingly in view of past events, they also asked Oswald Simon to find them one. Dr. Adler wrote concerning a *mikveh*; it was agreed to write back explaining the expense and their lack of funds.

What dominated the minutes and the correspondence with Dr. Adler was the provision of kosher meat: the hours at which the *shochet* was required to attend 'on meat days', the unsatisfactory service received from successive butchers, the tendency of successive *shochetim* to disappear without notice. Since the normal pay in this period seems to have been 18/- a week, the last is not surprising.[38]

The system of working *shechita* in collaboration with a local butcher, which the minutes take for granted, is mysterious to us. As it happens, we get some enlightenment from the situation at Aldershot, with which we have already seen a link.[39] There, in 1864, they ratified agreements with a local butcher to provide arrangements for the Congregation's *shochet* to attend as slaughterer. The butcher was required to send his messenger every evening to customers who were members of the Congregation to collect orders and to dispatch them between 9.30 and 10.30 the next morning when the *shochet* would be in attendance to perform his duties. This seems a bit surprising in relation to large animals; presumably the butcher simply took the unrequired portions into stock. It is clear that, at Oxford, only certain days were 'meat days'.[40] No doubt, at Oxford as at Aldershot, the *shochet* also attended at houses of members of the Congregation to kill poultry whenever required.

It was a difficult and expensive system to work, and in January 1891 Baron Franks the dentist wrote to the *Jewish Chronicle*, calling attention to the heavy financial burden which small provincial congregations had to

bear in order to obtain kosher meat. Taking Oxford, with its eight Jewish families, as a typical instance, he pointed out that it cost each individual member of the little Congregation £8 or 10 over and above his synagogue bill to have kosher meat, i.e. by maintaining a *shochet*. He suggested as a remedy the appointment of travelling *shochetim*, who would have their headquarters either in London or in important congregations, and who on application from smaller towns within a given radius should visit them once or twice a week for the purpose of killing animals. A certain sum should be paid per annum to the Congregation in whose direct employ the *shochet* may be. He held that the system he shadowed forth would not put the Shechita Board to any expense as it would be self-supporting and that congregations relieved from the expense of supporting a *shochet* would be in a better position to maintain a minister who would elevate the status of Jews in small towns. There was no response.

This period ended with a windfall. In July 1892, at the age of 105, Maria Levin, a total stranger, died, thus extinguishing her life interest in £20,000, which was now distributed, under the will of her brother Ephraim Levin, for Jewish communal purposes.[41] Oxford's share was £100, and this sum, far larger than any that the Congregation had ever commanded, might yet come in useful.