

## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE NEW SYNAGOGUE

On 24 October 1892, I. Simon (though he did not sign himself Rev., he was then minister of the South Manchester Synagogue) wrote to the *Jewish Chronicle* as follows:

Sir. – Knowing how generously you grant space in your valuable columns for every proposition and suggestion made in the interests of Jews and Judaism, I venture to ask the favour of your inserting my appeal – happily not for money – but for parental instructions, which may be the means of creating a closer union between high culture and religious observances.

My son, who entered last week Wadham College, has been accustomed all his life to attend public worship on Sabbaths and Festivals, went last Friday evening with a fellow-student to the Synagogue of Oxford, where they found the Reader and the Treasurer of the Synagogue to be the only occupants of the House of God. Repeating his visit next morning by himself, he had the sad privilege, he says, of forming the entire congregation. No one besides the Reader had put in an appearance. I know for a fact that some of the Jewish residents refrain from coming to the Synagogue because they feel sure that there would be no 'Minyan'. If the five or six young gentlemen of our coreligionists who study at Oxford could be prevailed upon to become regular attendants, their presence would be a great acquisition, and would encourage the residents to meet more frequently for Divine Service. I can think of no better way to insure the co-operation of these gentlemen for such a holy object than by asking their parents, through your widely read organ, to make it a point of reminding their sons by letter weekly, of the duties they owe to the faith and creed of their ancestors, and of impressing upon them the

absolute necessity of devoting some hours of the sacred Sabbath to prayer and meditation.

Even if the prescribed number of ten could not be procured, the students might avail themselves of the Chief Rabbi's recommendation to have service conducted under certain modifications with a less number. They might also introduce English prayers and Bible Readings. Considering that their Christian colleagues are bound to be at Chapel at 7.30 every morning, no enlightened Israelite ought to regard himself as exempt from a duty so cheerfully and so readily performed by the noblest and most cultured members of every university.

There was a tart reply next week from 'M of M' (Laurie Magnus of Magdalen, now in his second year):

Sir – Your correspondent, Mr. I. Simon, whose son's first days in Oxford were attended with such 'sad privileges', will perhaps be surprised to learn that Divine Service has been held here on Sabbaths and Festivals for the last fifty years. How the synagogue fared before Mr. Simon, junior, came up to form 'the entire congregation' is a point in communal history on which the residents in the town and the University students might have enlightened his father, before he attempted to dictate that weekly parental circular, which would soon go the way of all recurring stereotype.

May I further correct Mr. Simon on a point of secular history, and inform him that our 'noblest and most cultured Christian colleagues', who 'cheerfully and readily' throng the chapel at 7.30 every morning exist only in his peroration? The scanty and unwashed few who 'do' their three or four 8 o'clock chapels a week, as an alternative for the yet more perfunctory roll-call, are scarcely models for imitation for the members of a religious body.

Mr. Simon swiftly replied:

Sir – I am at a loss to find in my letter of the 24th ultimo, under the above heading, any part which could have given occasion to your correspondent 'M of M' to take the trouble of informing your readers the well-known fact 'that divine service was held in Oxford for the last fifty years'.

I did not ask the Jewish students in Oxford to *build* a place of worship, or to organise themselves into a *new* congregation, but expressed my wish that they would unite themselves with the existing community, and attend the old established synagogue.

As to the going of the weekly paternal *letter* – not circular – 'the

way of all recurring stereotype', I venture the hope that no educated son would be unmindful of the universally accepted interpretation of the commandment in Leviticus xix 3 'Ye shall fear every man his mother and father'. Parents' words should not be contradicted nor thrown away – Talmud Kedushim Fol.31.

I judge from the minute description given by 'M of M' of the number and appearance of the Christian colleagues 'who do their three or four chapels a week' that he must have been with them in the chapel to have observed their being 'scanty and somewhat unwashed'. If my surmise be not erroneous that 'M of M' is a co-religionist, may I advise him to join in future the colleagues of his own brethren-in-faith, who I trust are well washed both physically and morally: and since he has taken upon himself the task of correcting me, should urge upon his fellow-students in the fiery words of the prophet, 'Come, let us go up to the house of God, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in His paths' (Isaiah ii 3).

There are some ill-judged aspects to these letters, but the correspondence was not without result. The first move was that the Congregation summoned a Committee meeting on 13 November, and instructed the Secretary to write to students advising them that the charge for seat rental was 30/- per annum. Since their own normal seat rental was 21/-, this is ample testimony to their belief in the superior financial and social status of students and their realization that a new opportunity was opening.

At this point, Oswald Simon reappeared. On Saturday, 19 November, 'a large congregation consisting of nearly every Jew and Jewess in Oxford was present in the synagogue at Worcester Place. Apart from the fact that the remodelling of the services here has of late resulted in arousing very keen enthusiasm amongst undergraduates and others in the affairs of the congregation, the fact that Mr. Oswald Simon, one of the oldest [he was 36] and most respected members, had been announced to preach on Saturday sufficed to increase the interest and swell the attendance of Jews of the town and of the University. In the course of a most edifying discourse, Mr. Simon impressed on all his hearers the importance of appreciating and making use of the religious and spiritualising influence of the ancient University. He remarked that a great religion had been handed down to us, and it was in our power to hand it down in our turn either tarnished or embellished. Our faith must be either a finality or a development. Let us take heed, encouraged by the example of other religions, that the atmosphere and tradition of Oxford make it the latter.

Mr. Simon concluded his address with a most moving prayer. The service was conducted by Mr. Laurie Magnus of Magdalen, and the lesson of the day read by Mr. A.B. Birnbaum of Merton.<sup>1</sup>

That Oswald Simon had not always been on the best of terms with the town Congregation, we saw in the last chapter.<sup>2</sup> What he is reported as saying is well in line with the characterization of him<sup>3</sup> as 'a passionate Reformer with an equally passionate yearning for conciliation with the Orthodox'. But if the University element was prepared to take a hand, the town was prepared to go along with it to the best of its ability.

On 3 December, at a General Meeting (Present: Mr. B.J. Franks in Chair, Mr. Solomon, Mr. G. Davidson, D. Davidson, Mr. S. Mitchell, V. Samuel (Magd.), R.C. Davis (Worc.), L. Magnus (Magd.), A.B. Birnbaum (Mert.), J.W. Cohen (Mert.), Q.Q. Henriques (C.C.C.), P. Eicholz (Magd.), M. Simon (Wadh.)<sup>4</sup>), it was agreed that the new premises of Mr. Gardiner situate 1 Nelson Street be taken on a 5 year lease at £25 p.a. plus rates, that 100 copies of the Ritual be printed and that Mr. Magnus be empowered to obtain as low a price as possible. Various sub-committees were appointed. Not more than £30 was to be expended on decoration and purchase of Rituals.

Subscriptions had already been coming in. The eventual list<sup>5</sup> was: Mr. F.D. Mocatta £10; Mr. C.G. Montefiore £10; Mr. N.L. Cohen £5 5s; Sir J. Goldsmid, Bart., M.P. £5; Mr. E.A. Franklin £5; Mrs. B. Birnbaum £2 2s; Mr. G. Schorstein [Claude Montefiore's brother-in-law] £2 2s; Lady Magnus £1 1s; Mr. Felix Waley £1. Besides this £41 10s, a further sum of £19 1s was collected among the undergraduates, so that the Decoration Committee hoped to be able to hand to the Treasurer a small surplus towards the higher rental. Among other gifts to the synagogue were 'a beautifully carved ark', presented by Mr. Lionel Cohen, and a handsome cover for the reading desk from Mrs. Birnbaum, to which Mr. Lewis Solomon, President of the Congregation, afterwards added a curtain of purple velvet for the ark and seven brass candlesticks. A second scroll of the law was placed at the disposal of the Congregation by Mr. P. Frankenstein, Warden of the Manchester Great Synagogue, Joel Zacharias' father-in-law, and Mr. and Mrs. F.S. Franklin gave a handsome covering for it. The main burden of fitting up the building fell on Joel Zacharias, with undergraduate help from A.B. Birnbaum.

The building itself had been built in 1891 by a local builder, John Job Gardiner, who had wide interests, on a triangular plot of about 547 sq. yds., originally part of the Great Bear Meadow, which had the tiniest of frontages between Richmond Road, then Worcester Terrace, and

Nelson Street. The site was an unused block included in the freeholds of 1–6 Nelson Street, which he had recently acquired in splitting his father's estate with his sister. It was certainly not built as 'the Jews Synagogue', as the conveyance of 1897 asserts. The application for building permission,<sup>6</sup> dated 20 March 1891, prepared by its architect, J.C. Gray of Blackhall Road, Oxford, describes it as a 'Proposed Mission Room', and treats it as part of a general project connected with 1 Nelson Street, which had a washhouse attached to its back at the same time. The plans in the application do not include the vestry extension on the east side, which was nevertheless already there at the time the Congregation occupied it. It seems hardly likely that Gardiner built this Mission Room without a tenant in view, but, if he had had something else in mind, it had evidently fallen through by December 1892. No light is shed, at any rate for me, by the name of the occupant of 1 Nelson Street, a Mr. Henry Jones.<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps not altogether impossible that Joel Zacharias had for some time been working to a private plan.

The building, still fresh in the minds of many, was not without its dignity, even when put under strains which could hardly have been envisaged in 1892. The 'beautifully carved ark', which had nothing Jewish about it and appears to be of eastern wood and manufacture, gave a strong focus to the south wall and the central *bima* was well proportioned. The interior woodwork of the roof was not unpleasing, though its details were eventually masked by hanging gasfires, which never really solved the problems; the building was always either too warm or too cold. Various forms of seating were in use over the years, never particularly attractive. The roof gave periodic trouble.

By Sunday, 29 January, 1893, arrangements were far enough advanced for a visit from Hermann Adler, now Chief Rabbi in his own right, which rated a long item in the *Jewish Chronicle* of 3 February, together with an accompanying editorial. 'Until a few months ago the Oxford Synagogue had fallen into an irreverent old age. At the beginning of the academic year last October, the matter was energetically taken up by two or three undergraduates, the co-operation of the few Jewish townspeople was secured, the attendance of their fellows canvassed, and during the term a service was read every Sabbath evening and morning, which appealed to the growing congregation. The languishing flame thus kindled has not been allowed to die, and last Sunday saw the consecration by the Rev. the Chief Rabbi, in the presence of nearly fifty congregants, male and female, of a new and commodious place of worship, originally built as a lecture-room, which has been admirably fitted up for its present sacred use.

At 3 o'clock on Sunday afternoon the Rev. Dr. Adler besought God's blessing on the new building in Worcester Terrace, where it is hoped that for many years to come townsmen and gowmsmen will sing God's praises together with one Jewish heart.

[Sermon]

The Chief Rabbi then offered up a prayer for the dedication of the Synagogue to God, for the Queen, for the University.

After conclusion of the Afternoon Service, Dr. Adler received the members of the congregation in the Vestry-room, and remained for some time discussing the affairs of the synagogue. An informal vote of thanks was then accorded to him for the very kind and careful address he had read, and for the trouble he had taken in coming to Oxford.'

The Ritual was printed by Wertheimer, Lea & Co. in London as *Form of Prayer for the Use of the Oxford Hebrew Congregation* (London, 1893); A.B. Birnbaum's copy, rapidly discarded, is in the Bodleian (951.f.4). Laurie Magnus and whoever else he consulted conceived it on extreme Reform lines. The Friday evening service, though not violently curtailed, only has *barechu*, the first paragraph of the *Shema*, and the *Kaddish* in Hebrew, and there is proportionately even less Hebrew in the Sabbath Morning Service, which reduces the Additional Service to a mere token and appears to envisage the regular reading of the Ten Commandments instead of a reading from the Torah. There clearly had been some innovations in the services in the term before the opening, and the editorial in the *Jewish Chronicle* says 'at present it is not proposed to read the whole ritual in Hebrew'. Laurie Magnus's background, at least, was as much in the Reform Synagogue as Oswald Simon's, and clearly even the Manchester Simons were not rigidly committed to an Orthodox service. But, even though Dr. Adler in 1892, after summoning a Preachers' Conference, had laid down some options about modifications in services which he was prepared to accept,<sup>8</sup> he can hardly have approved of this. His inaugural sermon dwelt strongly on the necessity of continuing the Hebrew language in the performance of the ritual and service, as had been observed in all countries from time immemorial, and it seems that the book did not have a long life. The concern of the local community, not for the last time, was that services should not be unduly protracted, and, on 26 February, it was 'agreed that the *shochet* shall commence his portion of the service at 8.15 and finish at 8.45 at *Nishmas*'. In London, the nineteenth-century demand had tended to be for a later start, but, on Oswald Simon's evidence, it is doubtful that many Oxford shopkeepers shut on Sabbath.

The new expenses were still further increased by the departure to

London in the spring of Lewis Solomon; it was agreed that the three shillings a week he had been contributing to the *shochet's* salary be made up from congregational funds. He resigned the Presidency in June, and in September there were new elections, B.J. Franks as President, G. Davidson as Warden, J. Zacharias as Secretary and Treasurer.

The new beginning was marked by the establishment of an official marriage register and a registered Secretary for Marriages. The first marriage in the synagogue and in the register, that of Leah Goldstone to Louis Feinmesser, was celebrated on 13 June 1893. Only three succeeded it before 1939, and two of those were synagogal confirmations of registry office marriages.

Another project had been much on Joel Zacharias's mind, and it was announced in December<sup>9</sup> that 'he had succeeded in obtaining from the City Corporation a grant in perpetuity of a most eligible portion of land for the purpose of a cemetery for the Jewish inhabitants. Mr. Zacharias has offered personally to bear the expense of the fence around it. This is the second time of there being a Jewish cemetery in this city, the first being some seven centuries ago when Oxford was one of the most considerable residential cities for Jews in the country.' On 1 April 1894, the burial ground was consecrated in accordance with a service specially formulated by the Chief Rabbi.<sup>10</sup> Joel was only just in time. His father, Abraham, died on 12 April at the age of 77, to become the first occupant of the new ground.

There was evidently some friction between Franks the President and Zacharias the Secretary, and in September 1897, Zacharias took over as President, with his 14-year old son George as Assistant Secretary; Franks forthwith reduced his contribution to the *shochet* to 1/6 a week and his seat rent to 21/-. Zacharias now reported that Mr. Gardiner the landlord had written that he was willing to sell the synagogue property for £600 and to let it on a six months tenancy at £30 per annum. Mr. Zacharias was empowered to see Mr. Gardiner and get better terms. The interview was of an unsatisfactory nature, and it was briefly considered whether to move to a vacant plot in Castle Street, belonging to the City Corporation, of which Zacharias would take up half. By now, he was well entrenched in town affairs; in November he was elected to the City Council. The possibility of a move brought Gardiner's price down to £500, and the deal went through; the Levin bequest of 1892 now came in useful, and it was only necessary to take out a mortgage of £350 with a local solicitor.<sup>11</sup>

Thereafter, minutes became briefer and briefer as Zacharias tightened

control. An active new member arrived in 1899, only to resign almost immediately after a row with the *shochet*, who also resigned. There was a move to regularizing the position of the University members; June 1898 sees the first mention of a University sub-committee, but an even more formal-sounding arrangement of February 1900 provided that the Committee should consist of the President, the Treasurer and two members of the Congregation, one City and one University, and there be one General Meeting a year in January.

The minutes then stop again and it is doubtful whether there were ever any more minutes of the town Congregation until 1940. During the interval before minutes of 'the University Section' start, a Mr. Abrahamson, who had been appointed *shochet* in November 1899, left for Rhyl, and was succeeded in May 1901 as minister and *shochet*, at a salary of 26/- a week, by a young man of 23, ten years or so out of Lithuania, Moses H. Segal. He had been on the staff of a Yiddish newspaper and become a Zionist of the cultural school. He had met a girl after reading a poem she had written in a Hebrew journal, courted her with volumes of Dickens, and married her in 1899. He tried business to support her, without much success, and was ready to come to Oxford, where he had already helped with the services in 1900, though he disliked performing *shechita*. The home was already Hebrew-speaking,<sup>12</sup> and he took the opportunities provided by residence in Oxford. In 1903, he formally matriculated in the University as a Non-Collegiate Student to read a degree in Oriental Languages; though only getting a second-class degree, he won many prizes and laid the foundations of a career which would end as a revered Professor of Bible at the Hebrew University. However, at some time before 1908 *shechita* in Oxford had stopped.

The town Congregation was already going into decline, through deaths and removals from Oxford;<sup>13</sup> it may be that resentment of the powerful President was also a factor. The 26 seat holders declared to the Board of Deputies in 1893 must, I think, have included undergraduates; in 1900 the figure was 15. In 1901, the *Jewish Yearbook* reported 12 seat holders, 30 resident Jews and 14 University students. In 1908, a note in the University Section's minute-book reports only two old members (D. Davidson and Baron Franks) plus Joel Zacharias' widow, and five new ones, only two of whom lasted long in Oxford. It was hoped that they would bring in a total of £15 in subscriptions, without Mrs. Zacharias (now Jessel). But there was some continuity, even in this depressed state. High Festival services out of term are attested at least for 1913.

Our information now shifts almost entirely to the undergraduate point



of view, and the next minute-book starts in May 1903, with what was described as the third meeting of the University Section. This was given little information about the true financial position; in October it was noted that the accounts were incomplete, since there was no record of cash payments. It was resolved unanimously 'that this meeting of the University Section of the Oxford Hebrew Congregation expresses to Mr. Zacharias its grateful acknowledgement of the liberality with which he has provided for the upkeep of the synagogue during the past year chiefly by his private generosity and respectfully decides to place on record its opinion that it is desirable that a perfectly full, complete, accurate and detailed balance-sheet of expenditure and receipts be presented to the next meeting; that payments where possible be paid by cheque, and that the minister's full salary appear in the balance-sheet and that this meeting hopes that it will not be inconvenient to Mr. Zacharias to the amount of whose generous contributions it has already testified with gratitude to agree to this arrangement'. It was inconvenient to him, and the February 1904 meeting was told that 'Mr. Zacharias was convinced that owing to the peculiar position of the Oxford Congregation, it would be impossible to produce a complete balance-sheet – showing all the income and expenditure – without injuriously affecting the interests of the Congregation'. However, one current undergraduate, Robert Sebag-Montefiore, was this month allowed to share the cost of transferring the mortgage into Jewish hands,<sup>14</sup> and Nathaniel Lucas was encouraged in 1905 to raise a fund to put a handsome gate on the synagogue.<sup>15</sup>

The University Section had already occasionally been using its meetings for other than strictly congregational matters, and in May 1904, it was agreed that it was desirable to imitate the Schechter Society, which had been founded in Cambridge in 1902 to act as a forum to discuss religious, literary, and other Jewish matters. There was, however, no minuted meeting of what it was agreed to call the Adler Society until 10 November 1905, when 9 were present to hear Moses Segal read a paper entitled 'Jewish Ethics'.

In the meantime, Joel Zacharias, who had recently changed his name to Joel Zacharias Jessel and had suffered from heart-trouble for some time, died on 2 August 1905, and was buried in torrential rain near his parents, with an enormous attendance of city dignitaries and relations.<sup>16</sup> 'It was the ruling passion of his life to make the name Jew honoured and respected among his neighbours and he devoted all the energies of his richly-endowed personality to that end'.<sup>17</sup> I find it a little surprising that

he only left £15,000, say, £700,000 in 1991 money, but he had evidently always spent well up to his income. A joint meeting of the whole Oxford Hebrew Congregation on 30 October appointed Baron Franks and A.M. Green co-Treasurers and Secretaries, one to have control in vacation, the other in term. G.J. Zacharias Jessel, still a medical student, would pay 3/6 a week to Mr. Segal, with two town members, Mr. Franks and Mr. Davidson, paying 2/6 and 1/6 respectively. Together with subscription of University members at 10/- per term and the £14 per annum from the Chief Rabbi, this was considered sufficient to carry on the working of the synagogue. Baron Franks took over Joel Zacharias' share of the mortgage.

From 1905 to 1911 the pattern was to hold one terminal meeting of the University Section of the Synagogue; business was generally pretty formal and attendance very small. The Adler Society was supposed to meet twice a term and generally did. 23 meetings during the period show an average attendance of 17. Although 1908 was a black year, with only one meeting in its first two terms owing to insufficient attendance, the next term showed the highest attendances of the period with 21 to hear Dr. M. Epstein, Leon Simon and J.M. Myres on the work of Lewis House in the East End and 24 plus visitors to hear the Rev. A.A. Green on 'Some of our future problems'. The meetings of the period ranged fairly widely from social work, a major preoccupation of the day among Jewish and non-Jewish undergraduates, through Jewish history, ancient and modern, to aspects of Jewish philosophy and religion. There was only one paper on Zionism, Claude Montefiore in 1909 on its Pros and Cons, mostly, one may guess, its Cons. M.H. Segal attended the meetings regularly, but he was almost leaving when it was arranged that he would conduct a circle for the study of Jewish history; he had, however, long been running a 'Hebrew society'. Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler maintained his long-standing interest in Oxford; in the three years 1906-8 he came every year.

The size of attendance at these meetings can be put in context by the list of the members of the University Section for 1908-9, 29 in all plus M.H. Segal. These included the first known Jewish woman undergraduate, C. Kirschberger of Somerville (it would appear that she attended at least one meeting with a chaperone); among those prominent in later life in various fields were L.L. Cohen (New College), P. Guedalla, E. Lobel, L.N.G. Montefiore, L.J. Stein, S.N. Ziman (Balliol), and H. Dagut(ski) (Merton). A firm line has been drawn through T. Sassoon (Christ Church).

Outside the Adler Society, there ran a University Zionist Society, apparently the first such in Britain.<sup>18</sup> This held its inaugural meeting on 1 December 1906, when the Haham, Dr. Gaster, gave an inaugural address at a meeting presided over by Israel Rubinowitz. Its first generation, Moses Segal, Harry Sacher, Leon Simon, Leonard Stein, and Harry Dagut, got it off to a glittering start in terms of quality, if not of quantity, and it had three or four years of considerable activity, with two visits by Chaim Weizmann among others and a good deal of sponsorship of other University groups and joint activity with them.

In June 1909, Segal resigned to take up a post in Newcastle. 'I have failed to respond adequately to the great demands of my office, partly due to circumstances, partly to my inadequacy.' A meeting, under Franks' Presidency, appointed a Special Committee, which recommended the appointment of a visiting minister during term. The name in mind was Ephraim Levine. But in the event the gap left by Segal was not filled, though the undergraduates were prepared in March 1910 to pay the town section £26 towards expenses of a Reader and some help was given by B. Lieberman, a Jews' College graduate, who was up at Worcester reading Oriental Languages from 1910 to 1912.

In Michaelmas 1909 there was only one meeting of the Adler Society, in the whole of 1910 one and in the whole of 1911 two; all these seem to have been to hear visiting ministers. 1912 started with better intentions, though only 8 came to hear Dr. Gaster, the Haham, on Jewish history, and 7 (plus guests) for Redcliffe Salaman on 'Heredity and the Jew' with lantern slides, a lecture which was repeated under various titles well into the 1930s. Synagogue attendance was obviously at an all-time low. On 10 May, the *Jewish Chronicle* published a letter from N.J. Laski (CCC), B. Lieberman (Worc.), W. Cramer (Trin.), B.L.Q. Henriques and C.H. Goldsmid (Univ.), H. Alexander (Qu.). It was not without considerable reluctance that they ventured to address the community, but although undergraduate attitudes varied, they were all agreed on the tragedy of men passing through the University at a critical age. subject to impressions of every kind, being deprived of strong and continuous Jewish influence. A satisfactory end could only be attained by a recognition on the part of the whole community of its obligation to deal with the problem. The only suggestion that they were able to offer was that either a chair in some branch of Jewish learning be endowed, to be filled by a scholar of distinction, or provision be made for the residence of a Jewish minister. Either of these courses would, in their opinion, lead to the creation of an inspiring and unifying Jewish influence. The

suggestion was approved editorially the next week: 'The Haham was recently deploring the loss to the community of the young men from the Universities. What, asked Dr. Gaster, had become of those who had gone to the Universities during the last quarter century? Whither had they drifted?'

A lively correspondence followed. One writer pointed out that the Haham's complaint applied to both universities, although Cambridge had had the support now requested by Oxford. It was a pertinent point, blunted by the correspondent's apparent belief that the undergraduates were 23 or 24. A Glasgow student thought the Oxford suggestions were ineffectual. All students were anti-nationalistic. It was impossible to stimulate religion and would be needless if there were national consciousness. If Jews were more interested in their students, students would be more interested in being Jews. Nothing very visible was happening and, at the meeting of the University Section on 16 June, there was an attendance of three, Laski, Goldsmid and Henriques. 'Extreme regret was expressed as to the lack of interest in communal affairs shown by the undergraduates. Nothing was decided but it was felt to be of the greatest importance to make the synagogue services more attractive and Judaism as a whole a greater reality in Oxford.'

Although the *Jewish Chronicle* on 26 July tried to keep the pot boiling by hanging a long article on the Jews of Oxford, medieval and modern, on the thousandth anniversary of the University, then being fictitiously celebrated, 'conversations' with some of the more prominent members in metropolitan Jewry were evidently not finding financial support.<sup>19</sup>

Irrespective of money, opinion was, as usual, divided as to whether improvement in the surroundings or improvement in personnel would be more beneficial. It had already been resolved in October 1911 'that the Synagogue neither satisfies the needs or the dignity of a university town, that it requires complete renovation and that for this purpose an appeal be addressed to past and present Jewish Oxford men asking for their financial support'. A Committee had been appointed, with no obvious result.

Basil Henriques wrote on 20 September that there was evidently no money for a chair or a minister and, unless the right person was found, it would in any case be useless. The duty now fell on Oxford Jews themselves to go to common worship (and also engage in social work). The editorial the next week now also took the line that it was the undergraduates' own responsibility. 'If they will realise their responsibilities, they may make their influence felt in the Jewry of tomorrow and for

many a long day after. If they do not, they will add one more to the many sad and tragic pages in Jewish history.' A similar line was taken the same week by E[phraim] L[ipson], who had recently moved from Cambridge to Oxford: the situation in Oxford was in a critical phase; Cambridge Jews were better organized. On the other hand, B. Lieberman in an interview the next week on 'The Needs of Oxford' stood by the solution that a person was needed. He had never been in favour of a minister, who would not have any standing, not be an integral part of the University; there would in any case be no agreement about what form of Judaism he should profess. The real remedy was the appointment of a Lecturer or Reader in Rabbinics, who would have academic status; it was in any case desirable that the teaching of Rabbinics should be in Jewish hands.

Meanwhile, Henriques and his co-Secretary Alexander had at least got the synagogue redecorated and arranged a programme for the next term. It is doubtful whether they had given great thought to the practicalities, and the coda to the operation was a furious letter of Franks, the town President, to Alexander in March 1913, on receiving a solicitor's letter for £7 for unpaid building work. They had given their orders and then gone off without supervising the work. As for Liberal Judaism, the town members, Davidson and Freedson, would have different ideas.

However, with this stimulus and the remarkable glamour of Henriques' personality, there was a spectacular revival. 'Never has the Congregation flourished so splendidly as during this period' thought Henriques himself.<sup>20</sup> It was reported in January 1913 that 'at the end of the summer term there were only 12 undergraduates; the numbers have now increased to 43. Of these, four only did not take some part in the Jewish life during term, either by attendance at the Adler Society or at the Synagogue.' There was an agreement to concentrate activity by suspending services on Saturday morning. The Friday evening service was 'entirely remodelled, so as to meet the spiritual needs of Jews who are at the same time twentieth century Englishmen. Hebrew has been retained for the first part of the service, while the second part consists of Psalms in English, English prayers from Mr. Singer's prayer book together with many of the beautiful prayers used at Hill Street' (i.e. the Liberal Synagogue).<sup>21</sup> It was claimed that this was on the lines of a service specially sanctioned for the Congregation by Hermann Adler, now dead. In Michaelmas term, there was something happening every week, with the high spots an attendance of 22 to hear a powerful address by Leonard Stein on the Oxford movement in Judaism, calling on the

Society to cultivate Jewish sympathy and encourage Jewish study, and a visit by Claude Montefiore, when there was not seating room to hear him preach, and 23 on the same day at a paper by Mr. Levy of Hertford on 'The Mission of Judaism', at which Montefiore expressed his disapproval of the agnostic Jew, though some defended such a position. The momentum was kept up next term with a well-attended visit by Rabbi Mattuck, and the attendance at the meeting of the University Section rose to 18. Liberal Judaism, it appears, was capable of stimulating attendance, and it is interesting to notice the frequent attendance of Victor Gollancz and Harold Laski.<sup>22</sup> One preoccupation is revealed by the casual remark that a paper on 'Aspects of Judaism' as usual brought the discussion to the question of race.

By the time that a formal article by Ephraim Lipson on 'Jewish Life at the Universities' was published on 27 December, his criticisms were to some extent out of date. They were expressed powerfully enough. After a general eulogy of Cambridge (though he had found the Schechter Society a bit frivolous), he continued: 'At Oxford on the other hand, there is unfortunately practically no Jewish life, and the condition of things is almost the exact reverse of that at Cambridge. The attendance at the synagogue is a fiasco; about three or four men attend, with occasionally one or two more. The quorum for a Minyan is never attained, save on the infrequent occasions when a preacher comes to Oxford, and then only with the greatest difficulty. When a General Meeting of the Congregation is called, the audience consists of two. Oxford Jewry has a profound faith in the virtue of small numbers. There is a Zionist Society which suffers from the depression incidental to any body, the membership of which can perhaps be counted on the fingers of one hand. The picture of Jewish life at Oxford must indeed be drawn in very dark colours if it is to correspond to the facts.' He quite unfairly saw no hope in the present generation of undergraduates. His solution too lay in finding a personality. 'Until the deficiency is made good, Cambridge will be in a position to boast that she alone enables the Jewish undergraduate to enjoy university life and at the same time makes it possible for him to retain his Jewish sentiment in all its fullness and strength.'

It is not in fact likely that Lipson had much sympathy with Liberal Judaism, but three blasts in the letter-columns of the *Jewish Chronicle* of 3 January produced explanations from him and the Editor that the letter had been written in September and hopes from both that the revival would prove lasting. In fact, the new momentum inevitably dropped off,

and attendances in 1913–14 were patchy, except for an informal meeting, attended by more than 40 undergraduates, on the East End work of the St. George's Club, ultimately to absorb the whole of Basil Henriques' energies. 1914 saw the first debate on Zionism, unfortunately not recorded in detail, and the first visit of Chief Rabbi Hertz; only 14 members and 2 guests were curious about Hammurabi. Hertz was however taking stock of the situation. It had emerged by April 1914 that a mysterious London Committee was looking for a minister without reference to Oxford. Some religious tension was in the air. F.W. Haldinsein of Christ Church, who would be killed in 1917, produced a prayer-book *Oxford Prayers* and conducted Sunday afternoon religion classes for the children of the town section. The former members Leon Simon and Harry Sacher descended on 7 June to protest to an audience of 15 that Liberal Jews were losing Judaism and the prayer-book was un-Jewish; their later career suggests that their standpoint was Zionist rather than Orthodox. Haldinsein's line was that all thought must progress and that interchange of thought between one race and another was no harm but a good. The condemnation of the prayer-book,<sup>23</sup> published by the Oxford University Press and financed by Frederic Franklin and Charles Singer, seems to me exaggerated. Confessedly a compromise, it was a great deal more conventional than the Magnus prayer-book of 1893, and follows the reported practice of 1912 fairly closely in having a fairly straight Orthodox Friday evening service, ending with prayers taken from the practice of the Liberal Synagogue. There is, on the other hand, no appearance of the Kaddish, and the inclusion in a Friday night service of elements of the service for the conclusion of the Sabbath might be thought distinctly unusual.

The Chief Rabbi had by now found his solution, with which others helped, notably A.H. Jessel, formerly of Balliol, Vice-President of the United Synagogue.<sup>24</sup> By means which are not at all clear,<sup>25</sup> Herbert Loewe, from Queens' College, Cambridge, steeped in the traditions which Solomon Schechter and Israel Abrahams had established there and with varied experience in travel, archaeology, Semitics, and Rabbinics, was found a post as Lecturer in Hebrew at Exeter, Neubauer's old college. Though he did come into residence, the War intervened, and the merits of the solution would not be manifested for another six years.