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BELOW THE PULPIT.

THE HEBREW SYNAGOGUE.

[By our Special Reporter.]

The religion of Judaism more nearly touches Christianity than does any other system, and Christians and Jews have very many interests in common. To the Israelites we are indebted for the preservation during many centuries and in the midst of untold opposition, of that great Law handed to Moses on Sinai. Their nation laid the foundation upon which our faith is built; our finest devotional literature was penned by its kings and priests and prophets; and, greater than all, the Lord whom all Christendom calls the Saviour of the World, was born in the land of the Hebrews, trod its roads and streets, and preached in its synagogues. From the last-named fact the synagogue has a special claim upon the attention of all His followers. In these buildings to-day one may realize the scene presented when, in His native Nazareth, Jesus entered the synagogue and read those sublime words from Esaias:—"The spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

—The Synagogue in Adelaide.—

The Adelaide Hebrew Congregation meets in the synagogue, situated off Rundle street, a little east of Pulteney street, and is ministered to by the Rev. A. T. Boas, who has occupied his position as rabbi for a third of a century. During the last 14 years he has been assisted in the pastorate and oversight by the Rev. M. Rosenthal. From very early days of settlement in South Australia the Jews have conducted their public worship. The first regular services were held in a small room at the rear of the Theatre Royal, and for the larger congregations of special ceremonials a more spacious apartment, on the site of the Tavistock Hotel, was engaged. Among the pioneers of the community occur the names of the late Messrs. Judah Moss Solomon (an M.L.C. and former Mayor of Adelaide), Emanuel Solomon, M.L.C., John Lazar (who was also Mayor of the city), Morris Marks, Bernard Nathan, Ralph Raphael, and Maurice Salom. The first movement for erecting a permanent building was made in 1847, when a large piece of land with 200 ft. frontage to Rundle street was purchased for £200, and vested in Messrs. Nathan, Marks, and Louis Joseph as trustees. In the next twelve months a synagogue was erected, of which Messrs. J. M. Solomon, Israel Simmonds, and Aaron E. Cohen were the first trustees, and the congregation was presided over by Mr. J. M. Solomon, with Mr. L. Joseph as treasurer. For many years prior to the inception of the present Rabbi to the ministry, Mr. A. J. Solomon acted as reader. The building then fronted Rundle street, standing at the rear of an extensive grass plot. During the land boom in the eighties the congregation was offered £200 per foot for the land for building purposes. An attempt was made to obtain an enactment amending the trust deed to allow the sale, but this was opposed by some of the members, and before the Bill was passed the negotiations fell through. About eight years ago a private Bill drafted by Mr. J. Moss Solomon passed the Legislature, allowing the mortgage of the property for the purpose of building shops on the frontage and leasing them. To erect these premises and extend the synagogue building to the side street £4,000 was borrowed. The original synagogue (which had been used as a school-room) was demolished in 1896, and a commodious vestibule and schoolroom erected on its site. The rents from the shops leave an annual profit of £300 after paying interest on the mortgage; but with the strain of successive bad seasons the small Jewish community has been unable to lay aside any of this income as a sinking fund, and the money has had to be applied to defray current expenses. It is hoped that with the improvement in business that appears in prospect something may be done towards repaying the loan.

—A Synagogue Service.—

On Saturday morning I found myself at 10.15 beneath the doorway that bears the inscription in Hebrew characters "Beth-telal" (house of prayer). In the wide vestibule I was welcomed by a member of the congregation, who conducted me to his own pew. The synagogue is said to accommodate 400 persons. The hall is about 50 ft. by 25 ft., and several rows of seats are placed around three sides, while the light gallery is similarly provided. At the northern end is the ark in which the scrolls of the Law are kept. This is an ornamented recess in the wall, curtained off, and reached by a semi-circular lectern platform, with three steps. In the middle of the hall is the accommodation for the readers, behind which the choir occupies a small gallery, and in front chairs are placed for the executive officers of the congregation. In accordance with the ancient usage of the Temple the sexes worship apart, the ladies occupying the upper and choir galleries. The gentlemen are provided with seats in the body of the hall. A feature that strikes the visitor at once is that all the men, as well as the women, wear their hats during the service. The male members who have been confirmed also wear a long scarf or shroud, bordered with blue ribbons and fringe, which is thrown over the shoulders and hangs down in front. This is in fulfilment of the command given in Num. xv. 38. The visitor soon notes the absence of a musical instrument, and enquiry reveals the fact that, though instrumental music filled a large place in the service of the Temple at Jerusalem, the Jews, in token of grief for the destruction of their fair house of God, do not admit instruments into their synagogue services. The Adelaide congregation is fortunate in the possession of a first-rate choir, which has been well trained by Mr. W. E. Daltrey, and whose singing could hardly be excelled by that of any similar body possessing the advantages of instrumental aid.

—Hebrew and English.—

The main portion of the morning service was in Hebrew, and must have been a great strain upon the Rabbi, who was chanting the liturgy and the readings with hardly any rest, for an hour and a half. The members indeed say that on several special fasts Mr. Boas intones the service all day, with only a rest of three hours, during which he must neither partake of food nor drink water. Great reverence was shown to the Books of the Law (the five books of Moses). At the appointed time the President ascended the ark, drew aside the curtain, and, taking one of the ponderous vellum scrolls, carried it to the rostrum. The people, standing, repeated the fundamental creed of Judaism, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." Then the cloth swathings were taken from the scrolls, which were opened, and wound upon their long spindles (topped with silver bells, symbolical of the glory of the kingdom, the priesthood, and the law) until the place at which the last reading was concluded had been found. The readings are so arranged that the whole of the five books of Moses are gone through once in three years. The portion for the day was then intoned by the minister, and during the process seven men and youths were successively called from the congregation, each of whom in turn pronounced a blessing as a testimony of his belief in the truth of the word of God. At the close of the day's portion the Book of Law was held aloft by the Rabbi towards the four cardinal points, emblematical of the universality of its teaching, and a formula extolling its beneficent application was pronounced. This concluded the regular service, and the additional Sabbath devotions, or Haphtorah, were then begun by the reading of Isaiah liv, in English, in which Mr. Boas displayed fine style and rhetorical strength. Psalm cxlv. was then intoned in Hebrew by the Rabbi, and Psalm xxix. chanted by the choir, which afterwards rendered a fine Hebrew hymn, "There is none like unto our God," and an anthem.

—The Sermon.—

At the conclusion of these devotional exercises Mr. Boas ascended the lectern and read the lesson from Ecclesiasticus xxxviii., having special reference to the honour to be paid to the physician. He then preached a forcible sermon from Deut. xxiv. 8, 9—"Take heed in the plague of leprosy to observe diligently and to do according to all that the priests and the Levites shall teach you; as I commanded them, so shall ye observe to do. Remember what the Lord thy God did unto Miriam by the way, after that ye were come forth out of Egypt." He alluded in well-chosen language to the sanitary regulations prescribed by Moses, and said that there was something unique, and not without divine intention, in the combination of the offices of priest and physician in one person. The physician might still be compared to the minister or priest, the first seeking the health of the body, while the latter aimed at the welfare of the soul. Body and soul were largely interdependent. Medical science had a special interest for the Jews, one of the glories of their history being that almost every epoch had been distinguished by scientific researches, but in no respect more remarkable than in the department of medicine. The prophets wrought many cures, the sages of the Talmud and of the middle ages were acquainted with the treatment of diseases,

and many became famous in history as court physicians to the kings of mighty empires. Among their mighty men in this branch he mentioned Maimonides and Halevi; Abarbanel, who gave public lectures to Christian students at Marseilles; and Emanuel Lopes, attached to Queen Elizabeth's court. The Jews were long considered the only reliable doctors in Europe. He deplored some of the methods adopted at the present time for the advancement of surgical and anatomical science, and completed an eloquent sermon with a comparison between the ravages of leprosy and of sin, and a direction to live well, to let life be guided by the directions of the sages of old, in order to preserve body and mind, that healthfulness conducive to length of days and serenity of spirit, and the blessing promised by God to Abraham—"Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace, and be buried in a good old age."

—The Graves of the Fathers.—

After the sermon, an incident occurred which in touching manner showed the reverence of Jews for their dead. A member of the congregation rose in his place and recited a Hebrew formula, after which a boy stood and similarly uttered several sentences in the Jewish vernacular. On enquiry my friend informed me that the first speaker was a son of the late Mr. J. M. Solomon, who died on that day 23 years ago, and that it was the custom on every anniversary of the death of a member for his descendants to thus honour his memory. The younger boy's mother had died a few months since, and the son would repeat the same prayer of thankfulness for her good life and happy end in the synagogue every Sabbath during the 12 months, and afterwards on the anniversary. So much importance was attached to this duty, I was told, that if the anniversary occurred on any "off day," a special meeting would be called in order that it might not be neglected.

The service books handed to me contained the Hebrew on the righthand page and a translation in superb English on the left, so that I was enabled to closely follow the service from start to finish. The book was somewhat perplexing to me at first, from the fact that as Hebrew is read from right to left, the book "begins at the end," and to follow the translation, the leaves had to be turned from left to right. The service throughout was most interesting in character, and I think it only needs to become thoroughly known that visitors receive such hearty reception and kindly treatment for many others to attend and enjoy the experience that fell to my lot. In conversation with members of the synagogue I learned that many Jews frequently attend the services of the Christian churches, and speak in high terms of the pulpit eloquence and ability of our prominent ministers.

I hurriedly glance down the list of questions, but the lower I look the deeper sinks my heart. It occurs to me that the best thing for me to do would be to stand on my dignity, and refuse to answer such interrogations. The idea of expecting one to draw a map of England showing how the country was divided between the English and the Danes! As if each took half and carried it off home with them! Oh, well; I suppose I'd better try some of the other questions. What do I know about Sir Thomas Moore? Why, wasn't he the man that wrote Irish songs about the last rose of summer? Certainly; and then he was beheaded—No; that was the other Moore. This man became famous by running away from the French at Corunna, and writing a poem describing his burial at the dead of night with some bayonets and no funeral notes. He was the only Englishman who ever won a battle by running away. And, of course, he wrote a book called "Utopia." Then, I can oblige the examiner with a "short" account of Sir Simon de Montfort, the fellow who called one of the men who came to murder him what the book terms "a foul name," and over whose tomb the king wept, and asked the monks to "biff" him.

"When and why were the following battles fought?" Hum! I suppose they were fought because some one quarrelled with some one else, and the "when" was a little after the quarrel took place.

Let me see, now. . . . Wasn't it at the battle of the Standard that the Archbishop of New York ran off waving a desecrated banner in the eyes of the Scotch, and so frightened them that they were all killed? And Evesham was fought because Simon de Montfort didn't like Henry II. And at the battle of Sluys the sun got in the eyes of the Frenchmen, and aggravated them to such an extent that they went mad, and 230,000 of their ships were sunk by the English. Ah! here is something that I do know. The battle of Shrewsbury was fought because the King of France sent a cartload of new tennis balls as a present to the young English King Henry, and so angered him that Henry crossed the Channel at once to kill him. If some one sent me a few hundred tennis balls I should show him more courtesy. In fact, I'd take it as a compliment. . . . My word! This is not so bad after all. Here is the very question—"Write notes on Alfred's government of England." I know he was a good king, and made a lot of laws, besides inventing a candle clock and burning some pancakes for which a woman boxed his ears. Why, I'll pass yet, if I can only worry out something about Henry II's foreign kingdoms.

Hang it! That's the second pen I've chewed up. The officials ought to provide a patent chewer for candidates. Well, time is flying. Every one around me seems hard at work, and here I am helplessly stuck. . . . Why should I bother, anyhow? It's only a paltry exam, and no one will know I sat for it. . . . But I don't like failing. It seems too much like being beaten by the examiner. Wait a bit! I think I remember something about some king's foreign dominions on the left hand page of the history book just after the picture of the soldiers murdering Becket. And that reminds me that it must have been Becket that swore at his murderers, and not Simon de Montfort. Oh, dear! I wonder if people's brains ever burst with trying to think. If I only had that book here I'd find it all out in half a minute. . . . I don't care who it was who used bad language at his murderers, and I don't blame him either. I do wish that "bulldog" would stop reading my paper over my back. I know he's only laughing at what I've written. Hum! It's a girl. Well, I know how to fix her. I'll employ the official closure. Just look her squarely in the face, and slowly close one eye. It's a good tip to know when a "bulldog" is worrying you. . . . Ah! It soon makes her move on. Now I wonder if the examiner would give me any marks for the information that if you close one eye slowly at a "bulldog" who is worrying you, he's sure to move on. I wish he had tried it before he set this paper. . . . Good heavens! There's the head supervisor announcing "only five minutes more." I'll add a little note on to the bottom of my paper to say that I know a lot besides what I've put down, but time would not permit me to write it all. . . . I wonder —. But, then —. Well, it can't be helped, anyhow!