

ABRAHAM BENISCH'S PROJECT  
FOR JEWISH COLONIZATION  
IN PALESTINE (1842)

By

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GIFT OF  
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The idea of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine made greater progress in the early 1840's than in any previous period in modern times. The cumulative effect of the sharp rivalries of the European nations in the Eastern question, the decisive struggle between Viceroy Mohammed Ali of Egypt and his Turkish overlord in 1840, the Damascus blood accusation, which had deeply aroused Western public opinion and the missionary efforts of the London Society for the Promoting of Christianity amongst the Jews—all produced an atmosphere conducive to serious consideration of the Eastern Jewish problem. Among other measures it was frequently, though rather hazily, suggested that many of the oppressed and destitute Oriental Jews be transferred to agricultural colonies in the Holy Land. Chiliastic dreams, deeply intermingled with imperialistic *Realpolitik*, prompted many a Christian author, especially in England, to advance a scheme for such restoration of Jewry to its ancestral home. Among the Jews it was primarily Sir Moses Montefiore who, during his trip to Palestine in 1839, became deeply interested in the possibilities of such a solution. He was soon swamped by the local Jews with applications soliciting his aid, political as well as financial, for the purpose of acquiring farmland and the necessary agricultural implements. Montefiore actually started negotiations with Mohammed Ali for a charter guarantying the security of Jewish mass colonization. These negotiations, conducted by the Egyptian government solely for the purpose of obtaining a loan from the Jewish bankers in London, were frustrated by the Egyptian defeat in the Palestinian campaign.

In this fascinating, thrice-told tale<sup>1</sup> one intriguing episode has thus far been missing. It has not been known that, through Montefiore's mediation, a detailed scheme for Jewish colonization, under Great

<sup>1</sup> Cf., especially, *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, ed. by L. Loewe, 2 vols., London 1890; N. Sokolow, *History of Zionism*, 2 vols., London 1919; A. M. Hyamson, *British Projects for the Restoration of the Jews to Palestine*, *PAJHS* XXVI (1918) pp. 127-64; N. M. Gelber, *Zur Vorgeschichte des Zionismus*, Vienna 1927.

Britain's protection was officially submitted to the British government in January 1842 and received serious consideration.<sup>2</sup> It was advanced by a Jewish group headed by Dr. Abraham Benisch, later a distinguished Anglo-Jewish leader and editor of the "Jewish Chronicle." Emanating from a circle of young Jewish intellectuals in Prague and Vienna, moreover, this remarkable document<sup>3</sup> reveals clearer than any of their hitherto known public or private utterances the idealistic resiliency as well as realistic approach of these Austrian forerunners of Herzl.

As far back as 1836 a group of Jewish students in Prague led by Abraham Benisch and Moritz Steinschneider organized a society to propagate the restoration of the Jews to Palestine.<sup>4</sup> Two years later they transferred the scene of their secret deliberations to the capital of the Austrian empire, where they found congenial associates in Albert Löwy and Wilhelm Oesterreicher, fellow-students at the University of Vienna. Half a century later Löwy, then Secretary of the Anglo-Jewish Association in London, reminisced on these early days:

. . . . Fifty-five years have elapsed since Benisch, a student at the University of Vienna, attracted around him a large number of his Jewish fellow-collegiates, to whom he used to propound, at Dr. Steinschneider's and my residence, or during excursions to Vienna's charming outskirts, his scheme for promoting, in

<sup>2</sup> E. g. Dr. Gelber, the latest writer on the subject, to whose researches in the records of the police archives in Vienna we owe most of our information concerning the early history of the movement (cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 202-12, partly repeated from his *Aus zwei Jahrhunderten*, Vienna 1924, pp. 178-84) asserts that Benisch and his associates "have made no practical step whatever for the realization of their idea" (*Vorgeschichte*, p. 207). Unfortunately these records themselves are no longer available, having, in all likelihood, been destroyed by fire during the riots of July 1927 (Communication of the director of the Vienna archive dated Nov. 2, 1934).

<sup>3</sup> This document as well as the correspondence, occasioned by it, is to be found in the British PRO F.O. 78-501. I am much indebted to its officers for their kindness in placing at my disposal these and numerous other documents which I have utilized in preparation of a detailed work on the international Jewish question in the first half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> Gelber's assumption that Steinschneider rather than Benisch was the founder of the society (*op. cit.*, pp. 202 f.) is erroneous. Not only was Benisch, then twenty-five, the maturer man (the future great bibliographer was five years his junior), but evidently his was the driving force behind the entire movement. This is also clearly stated in the biographical sketch of Steinschneider in C. Wurzbach, *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich* s. v. which, as is now known, was written by Steinschneider himself. Cf. A. Marx, *Zunz's Letters to Steinschneider*, *PAAJR* V (1933-4) p. 95 note 1.

a cautious and peaceful manner, the liberation of our Jewish fellow-countrymen from the galling yoke of intolerance and oppression. After deliberations, extending over many months, the band of his friends decided to form a secret society (clubs and meetings of any kind being severely interdicted by the law of the land). This society had its ramifications in foreign countries for the purpose of affecting a gradual emigration from what was called our "step-fatherland." The society assumed the name "Unity," and had for its symbol the numeric figure "1." Our eyes were directed towards Turkey where, inclusive of Palestine, our Jewish brethren had long enjoyed an enviable degree of liberty. It was agreed that Dr. Benisch, after the completion of his studies, and under the auspices of well-to-do friends who favoured the "Unity-Society," should act as its emissary, and visit certain foreign lands so as to find a suitable basis for our liberation and emigration scheme. Henceforth our main reliance was placed upon the moral support of the English Jews who had a world-wide renown for their loyalty to their race.<sup>5</sup>

Their great opportunity seemed to have come in the tempestuous days of the Damascus affair. Adolph Crémieux, one of the heroes of this *cause célèbre*, returning from his eastern mission, arrived in Vienna on November 17, 1840. Benisch and Oesterreicher hastened to submit to him a detailed project for the establishment of a Jewish colony in Palestine. Crémieux, although emphasizing the patriotism of French Jewry which desired no fatherland other than France, expressed warm sympathy for "the lofty and useful aim" of the scheme in general, inasmuch as it would help the oppressed coreligionists of other lands. Significantly, he pointed out to the young enthusiasts the timeliness of diplomatic action at the chancelleries of the great European powers in order to secure for the prospective Jewish colonists effective Western protection. Under the circumstances, only France or England could be considered. Even this French patriot seems to have realized, however, that France was handicapped by her protectorate over the Latin Christians and that, through her equivocal policy in the Damascus case, she had largely forfeited the confidence of world-Jewry. He consequently sent Benisch and his colleagues a warm letter of recommendation to Montefiore who would best be in a position to gauge the potentialities of their "great idea."<sup>6</sup>

This suggestion fell on fertile ground. Benisch and his associates had long before realized the necessity of international action. Two months before Crémieux' arrival in Vienna Benisch had conferred with Edward Gibbon Wakefield, a well-known exponent of intensive Brit-

<sup>5</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, Nov. 13, 1891, p. 30. This Jubilee issue contains much pertinent information about Benisch, who had been the outstanding figure in the history of that notable Anglo-Jewish journalistic effort during the preceding half century.

<sup>6</sup> Gelber, *op. cit.*, pp. 203 ff. S. Posener, *Adolphe Crémieux*, 2 vols., Paris 1933-34, makes no mention of this noteworthy incident.

ish colonization in new countries;<sup>7</sup> he had also corresponded with Rev. Grimshave in Bedford, a leading member of the British Bible Society. Löwy, who had in the meantime established his residence in London, constantly reported back to Benisch that he had communicated the aims and objects of the "Unity Society" to several influential British Jews, but that "there was not the remotest chance for an appreciation of our pet-project." Benisch, undeterred, decided to join him in the British capital early in 1841. In addition to Crémieux' recommendation he had a very warm open letter of introduction of Alexander von Humboldt praising him as "a highly talented, aspiring scholar whose humanitarian zeal and energy merited the encouragement."<sup>8</sup> With these letters he undoubtedly approached Montefiore and the other leaders of British Jewry.

We obtain a few glimpses of his efforts from his correspondence with his Vienna associates. Some of the letters have been intercepted by the suspicious Vienna police who sensed in every Austrian youth movement a revolutionary undercurrent. We see that Benisch not only energetically pursued his negotiations with leading British Jews, but established valuable contacts with experts in the field of emigration and colonization and carefully studied the practical aspects of the Palestinian venture. His friends on the Continent and, especially, Steinschneider carried on during his absence. When Steinschneider had moved to Berlin in 1840 he gathered around him a circle of interested scholars and students and maintained some sort of information exchange with the Vienna group. It also appears that, during his stay in Leipzig in 1839, he had succeeded in interesting Dr. Julius Fürst, the editor of the influential *Orient*, in the Palestine idea. It was through Steinschneider that this journal subsequently received most of its enthusiastic communications from London concerning the growth of popular sentiment in favor of Jewish rehabilitation. Indeed, in January 1842, the Berlin police designated the *Orient* as the "mouth-piece" of the secret society.<sup>9</sup> Another member of the group, Dr.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. now A. J. Harrop, *The Amazing Career of Edward Gibbon Wakefield*, London 1928 and I. O'Connor, *Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the Man Himself*, London 1928.

<sup>8</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, l. c. According to *Die Neuzeit*, Vienna 1878, p. 251, he also had a recommendation of the Vienna Rothschilds. The exact date of his arrival in London is not known, but the Berlin police reported several months later that during March 1841 he had spent a short time in the capital of Prussia. Cf. Gelber, *op. cit.*, p. 308 n. 172. It is likely that from there he proceeded directly to London.

<sup>9</sup> In the three bibliographies of Steinschneider's works (Steinschneider, *Bodleian Catalogue* No. 7271; A. Berliner, *Die Schriften des Dr. M. Steinschneider*, Berlin 1886 and G. A. Kohut, *Bibliography of the Writings of Professor Dr. Moritz Steinschneider* in *Steinschneider-Festschrift*, Leipzig 1896, pp. V-XXXIX) are listed

Barasch later a well-known leader of Rumanian Jewry, left Berlin for Rumania with the intention of eventually settling in Constantinople and acting there as emissary to the Porte. The Vienna police becoming ever more suspicious thoroughly investigated the affairs of

several letters from London which appeared in the following numbers of the *Orient*: 38, 44, 45, 48-50 [should read: 48, 49, 52] of 1840 and 3, 12, 19, 20, 22 of 1841. These letters are all unsigned, with the exception of one in No. 49 of 1840 which bears the obviously incorrect signature: L[eipziger] A[llgemeine] Z[ei]tung]. Steinschneider and his two intimate friends must have known, however, that he had not been in London at all during the years 1840-41. In his "Berichtigungen und Zusätze" to Berliner's bibliography in *Magazin für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* XIV (1887) pp. 35-7 Steinschneider suggested no correction on this point. Nine years later G. A. Kohut, his young admirer, included these items, while enjoying "the privilege of working under the eye of the master" (*op. cit.*, p. V). This assertion is fortified by the copy of Berliner's bibliography, formerly in Steinschneider's possession (now in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America), which was used by Kohut. Professor A. Marx (to whose kindness I am indebted for reference to this copy and to the letters of Benisch to Steinschneider, quoted later on) and myself were able to identify numerous bibliographical additions and corrections to Berliner's list, made in the handwritings of both Steinschneider and Kohut, but found no remark whatsoever which would indicate rejection or doubt with respect to the articles in the *Orient*. Internal evidence, moreover, seems to substantiate Steinschneider's claim. The style in the other London reports (e. g., in Nos. 17-18 of 1841) radically differs from that in the letters here listed. In fact, the author of No. 19 directly refers to No. 12 as to his last previous dispatch. The following excerpt from the first of these articles may serve as an illustration of both the author's vigorous style and his frank espousal of his personal views, so characteristic of Steinschneider's scholarly writings. After discussing the religious impulses of the British movement for Jewish restoration, he proceeds: ". . . Denjenigen aber, welche, wie wir selbst, mehr Weltliches als Göttliches in ihren Speculationen haben rücksichtlich des künftigen Schicksals Syriens, scheint es nicht zu den unwahrscheinlichsten (most improbable) Suppositionen zu gehören, dass die Restauration und Nationalisation des jüdischen Volkes, obschon gegenwärtig unwahrscheinlich, letztlich das Mittel werden dürfte, den Conflict der Prätionen auszugleichen und einen neuen Fokus der Civilisation in jene interessante Gegend herzustellen. Es gehört aber, wir erkennen es an, zu den unwahrscheinlichsten Suppositionen, dass die Grossmächte von Europa durch irgend eine Vorstellung, wie die erwähnte, sollten bewegt werden, obschon die Juden selbst weiter gehen, und in mancher bestimmter Form nachweisen, was für ihren Vorteil erfüllt zu werden wünschenswerth, wie es zu erreichen ist, und auf welche Weise die Erreichung desselben zur Sicherheit der Nachbarstaaten und Aufrechterhaltung des allgemeinen Friedens führen dürfte" (*Orient*, September 19, 1840). We must assume, therefore, that Steinschneider actually wrote these articles on the basis of whatever information reached the Vienna and Berlin societies from their correspondent in London (probably Löwy) or through the London *Times*, etc. It appears that after Benisch's arrival in London, he forwarded some of the subsequent dispatches, such as that dated July 26, 1841 (*Orient* No. 35) directly to the editor. Incidentally, Dr. Fürst's own attitude is very well expressed in his editorial of June 26, 1841 (*ibid.*, No. 26).

the "Unity Society," and even invoked the assistance of the Prussian government in tracing its ramifications in Berlin. Eventually, however, the authorities in both capitals dismissed the case as an innocuous, fantastic play of youthful enthusiasts.<sup>10</sup>

Benisch's great chance came toward the end of 1841. The British Consul in Jerusalem, William T. Young, long an ardent exponent of the idea of Jewish restoration for both missionary and political purposes, came at that time for a short visit to London. In Montefiore's house he met Benisch, who eagerly outlined to him the details of the scheme for Jewish colonization. Montefiore undoubtedly lent his moral support. He had, a short time before, brought the difficulties of Palestine Jewry to the attention of both Lord Aberdeen, the new head of the Foreign Office, and Sir Stratford Canning, the newly appointed British ambassador to the Porte.<sup>11</sup>

At Young's suggestion, Benisch sent him on January 3, 1842 "a Paper containing the views about the Eastern Jews which were the object of our conversation some days back." This document which evidently struck a responsive cord in its recipient reads as follows:

#### SCHEME FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE CIVIL AND MORAL CONDITION OF THE JEWS IN THE EAST.

It may be assumed as a fact, that the firm preservation of the influence lately acquired in Syria,<sup>12</sup> must be of great importance to England. However great this influence now may be, still, if nothing more be done, it must in the course of natural events be entirely lost, independent of the opposition of her two most powerful rivals, France and Russia; to which countries there exists a well-known sympathetic inclination on the part of those portions of the population, who profess the Roman and Greek Catholic Creeds. Now if we consider the power of religious feelings in the East at large, if we consider the potent influence which in a Coun-

<sup>10</sup> Gelber, *l. c.*

<sup>11</sup> Montefiore, *Diaries* I, 303 f. The following entry under Nov. 7, 1841 is especially noteworthy: ". . . They had a long and interesting conversation respecting the Jews and the Holy Land and Sir Moses was exceedingly gratified by Sir Stratford's kindness." Montefiore's intense pro-Palestinian sympathies found expression also in his remarkable reply, dated Nov. 28, 1841, to Rabbi Grunwald of Lehrensteinsfeld in Württemberg, one of the few German-Jewish sympathizers with the idea of Jewish restoration through political and economic action. Cf. *Sulamith* VIII (1842), pp. 29-31.

<sup>12</sup> As a result of her naval and diplomatic success in the Turko-Egyptian war.

try like Syria, religion is likely to exercise, to the exclusion of all other ideas, we shall not then experience much difficulty in accounting for the above mentioned predilection. This demonstrates to England, the path, by the following of which she will be enabled to maintain her power, namely to endeavour to acquire the sympathies of a Creed sufficiently extended and active, to operate everywhere.

England being a protestant state the simplest way would seem the countenancing of Protestantism,<sup>13</sup> and the granting of the same protection and privileges as the already named powers do to their Correligionists.

But the unfitness of this proceeding is obvious from the following considerations:

I. There exists at the present moment in Syria neither Protestantism nor Protestants; those few who travel through and exist in the Country, are from their number, unworthy of Consideration, and before Protestantism shall under existing circumstances have taken root, the influence already obtained will be destroyed.

II. As yet Protestantism as a Creed has no legal foundation in Syria; to obtain this, negotiations with the Porte will be necessary, to the success of which Catholic powers on the one Hand, and on the other the apprehensions of the Porte, lest hostile feeling and European influence be increased, will present no inconsiderable obstacle.

III. If England endeavoured to maintain her influence in Syria, by promoting Protestantism, she would counteract her own efforts of alleviating to the Porte the government of Syria; for by introducing a new faith, the jealousies of the other Christians and fanatical Mahometan population would be aroused, and the settling of the consequent differences would entail on the Porte fresh embarrassments.

If it be evident that England cannot attain her views by the propagation of Protestantism, she must direct her attention to another persuasion, legally on a par with the resident Catholics, and which evinces no sympathy with either of the Catholic Powers. This persuasion is the Jewish one. Scattered on the surface of the whole globe, the Jews still form in their religious sentiments an irrefragable unity, and a benefit conferred on any

<sup>13</sup> The following evidently refers to the Anglo-Prussian endeavors to foster Protestantism in Palestine through the establishment of an Anglican bishopric in Jerusalem.

of them, fills the hearts of even their ocean-separated Brethren, with purely grateful feelings.

The question now is, how can England acquire their sympathy?

The answer to this is. By supporting the application about to be made by the Porte for the establishment of a Colony in some well situated part of Palestine. The objects of this proposition are the foundation of agriculture and commerce for the benefit of such Jews, subjects of the Porte, who may be desirous of settling there. The Colony to be under Turkish Government and protection, and England to guarantee the maintenance of the conditions under which the Colony shall be founded.

From the following it will become obvious, what wants such a Colony will be enabled to meet, what special advantages (independent of those already Enumerated) will most likely accrue to England from the foundation of the Colony—and in what manner she could forward its advancement without compromise to herself.

It is a fact that the Jewish Subjects of the Porte although legally on a level with the other rayahs throughout the Empire, especially in Palestine, do not enjoy the privileges granted to them by the Hattischerif of Gulhane.<sup>14</sup> This evil may in general be traced to the three following causes:

I. To the absence of an adequate protector whereby they are more exposed to cruel and tyrannical treatment.

II. To the blind hatred and ignorant prejudices of a fanatical populace.

III. To the several peculiarities which alienate them from the other inhabitants.

IV. To the starving state of a numerous Jewish population, resident in Palestine, hitherto subsisting in a great measure upon the Charity of their occidental Brethren.

The weakness of the Porte on the one hand and on the other the dispersion of the Jews throughout too manifold a population prejudiced against them, together with the wants of pecuniary resources and state of despondency occasioned by the existing distress, render the removal of the aforesaid evils impracticable if the above obstacles are allowed to continue. It is therefore necessary to fix upon a place which from its situation would be beyond

<sup>14</sup> This is the well-known decree of 1839 proclaiming all Turkish subjects without distinction of creed to be equal before the Law. Cf. e. g., M. Franco, *Essai sur l'histoire des Israélites de l'Empire Ottoman*, Paris 1897, pp. 143 f.

the reach of fanatical attacks, in contact with European civilisation—easily protected by the Porte—and a spot to which the Jews might feel themselves attracted.

In the Colony, Schools for the propagation of civilisation might also be founded which would serve as the medium of intimation not only to the residents but also to those who living in a distant part of the Country might either send their Children thither, or receive from these establishments competent instructors for their families at home. Tracts of land might also be granted to the settlers which would diffuse an agricultural spirit, which in its turn again would lead to other useful pursuits.—Such a place is unquestionably to be found in some part of the Syrian Coast.

This acceded to, the following questions may arise:

I. Do the Turkish Jews, especially those of Palestine, feel the want of such a Colony, and would a part of them be inclined to settle there?

II. Will the Porte permit the establishment of a Colony?

III. Whence are the necessary funds to come?

IV. How may England countenance the undertaking?

The first of these questions may be answered in the affirmative, as might be proved by Letters from Jews residing there.

The answer to the second question depends upon the Porte; yet if we take into consideration the advantages which Syria would be likely to derive from the Establishment of such a Colony, we are justified in supposing that the answer will be a favourable one.

The answer to the third question presents the greatest difficulties as the funds as well as the direction of the scheme must emanate from Europe. These difficulties are however but seeming, and will disappear if it will be considered,

a. that the commencement on a small scale with an already resident population cannot be attended with great outlay.

b. that the sympathies of a great many of the European Jews are, and have for a long time been directed towards the East, as is shown by the pecuniary support which for Centuries past has been forwarded to their Asiatic Brethren.

c. that these sympathies would now be more called into action, in consequence of the late Damascus events, and pecuniary sacrifices be greater, provided it could be shewn that these would be productive of lasting benefit to their brethren of the East.

d. that in consequence of the lively interests manifested by Christianity, especially Protestants, for the Jews, the Holy Land

and Civilisation at large, it is reasonable to expect pecuniary support from them.

e. that it is proposed to establish the settlement on a system of *shares* which would place the required advances in the light not of a gift, but as a Loan, which in the course of a few years could be repaid and might also prove productive of profit to the lenders.<sup>15</sup>

f. that it is proposed to issue shares of small amount, so as to enable persons of moderate property to become shareholders.

The answer to the fourth question will become manifest from the consideration of the following: It is obvious from what has already been said, that the proposed colony should be established under European direction and with European funds. But it may be advanced, that no European will invest his money in an undertaking which has no firmer guarantee than that which may be offered by the now tottering and weak Turkish Government. Solely the manifestation of a warm interest for the Scheme in view by a European Power, will serve as a guarantee for the durability of the undertaking.—And as it is assured that Englishmen will form the chief portion of the Enterprise, it is natural to suppose that these will look up to their government for sympathy and support, because of the advantages they may derive from the establishment of such a Colony. Thus England would not compromise herself, in following the above course, as the whole proceedings would bear the private character of a commercial speculation, in which the English Government, requested by both parties, does that, which as a government it is her duty to do, as, for example, in the case of aggression she would be bound to advocate the cause of her subjects.

Assuming that what has been stated is sufficiently explicit, it may not appear superfluous to adduce more grounds which may influence England to take a warm part in the proceedings.

I. England would find in this Colony a new, sure, and stable market for her goods, where the known activity of the Jews and their connection throughout Asia would open to them new paths of exportation.

<sup>15</sup> The idea of a commercial company to finance Jewish colonization had often been suggested before. Benisch must have known, for example, of a similar proposal made by Rev. William Filson Marsh in his appeal to Chief-Rabbi Hirschel in London, which appeared in German translation (by Steinschneider?) in the *Orient* No. 48 of 1840.

II. It would assist the endeavours of England to strengthen the Porte by converting a now useless portion of her subjects into an active community, an example which would not be lost on the other subjects, and at the same time increase both the revenue of Turkey, and the welfare of Syria.

III. Civilisation which so deeply interests England, would thus be promoted in this country; and the Jews by their tractability and dispersion are eminently adapted to its propagation.

IV. It behooves the Government of a country where Protestantism has taken the deepest roots, where a large and respectable portion of their Citizens manifest their Benevolence towards the Jews, It behooves, I repeat, the Government of this Country, to extend its benevolence towards a nation through which Christianity has received its highest gifts, a nation which according to the sacred Book, the standard of faith for both religions, will once again act a high part.—

Young, ten days later, officially transmitted Benisch's memorial to Canning "for the information of the Earl of Aberdeen." He also added a private note to the Ambassador, which throws a characteristic light on the progress of these negotiations:

My Lord, In obedience to Your Lordship's verbal instructions, I requested Dr. Benisch (the Austrian Jew whom I told Your Lordship that I had met at the house of Sir Moses Montefiore) to put on paper whatever observations he wished to lay before Her Majesty's Government respecting his plans for improving the Civil and Moral conditions of the Jews in the East.

Lord Aberdeen seems to have taken no action in the matter. Unlike his predecessor, Palmerston, he was reticent and legalistic in his relations with the Turkish government and much less ambitious with respect to the expansion of British influence in the Near East. After the stormy events of 1840 there followed a period of comparative quiet in the Eastern conflict, little conducive to setting the British diplomatic machinery in motion for such a venturesome scheme. At any rate, on June 28, 1842 Benisch writes to Steinschneider:

Lieber Freund! Es ist nun geraume Zeit, dass wir einander nicht geschrieben haben.<sup>16</sup> Dies Stillschweigen ist vielleicht nicht weniger meine Schuld als Ihre.

<sup>16</sup> According to Professor A. Marx, the voluminous Steinschneider correspondence (now, through the good offices of Dr. G. A. Kohut, located in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America) contains no previous letter of Benisch. However, in a message from Berlin to Steinschneider, then in Prossnitz, which was

Doch wir wollen uns hier einander keine Vorwürfe machen und will ich sogleich dazu schreiten Ihnen meine Verhältnisse seit meinem letzten Schreiben zu schildern. Wie es mit unserem Vorhaben bis vor 6 Wochen hier gestanden, werden Sie wohl aus meinen Mittheilungen nach Wien ersehen haben. Seit der Zeit habe ich manche Gelegenheit gehabt, mich noch inniger zu überzeugen, wie wenig von hier zu erwarten ist, wenn nicht kräftige Impulse von Deutschland kommen. Ich will nicht klagen über diese Lauheit in Deutschland. Auch nicht einen einzigen Namen von Bedeutung habe ich unter den am Amfange dieses Jahres im Orient erschienenen Artikeln gezeichnet gefunden, und an namenlosen Zeitungsartikeln ist man in dem unumschränkte Pressefreiheit geniessenden England so gewöhnt, dass es lächerlich wäre, sich in wichtigen Angelegenheiten auf solche zu beziehen. Montefiore sehe ich noch immer ziemlich oft. Seine Vorliebe für den Osten dauert fort und bei kräftigen Impulsen wäre es noch immer möglich den Thatunkräftigen anzuregen. Syrien soll sich jetzt eines viel besseren Zustandes als je erfreuen. (Soeben bekomme ich von Montefiore den in spanischer Sprache mit jüdischen Lettern gedruckten Prospect einer in Smyrna zu erscheinenden jüdischen Zeitschrift zugeschickt. Ich melde es Ihnen aus Kuriosität). Der phlegmatische Engländer braucht nach den Anstrengungen, die er in der Damaskus-Angelegenheit entwickelte, viele Zeit zur Erholung, um wieder einer Spannung fähig zu sein. Übrigens ist der Hass, welchen die unglückseligen Religionsstreitigkeiten<sup>17</sup> hier unter den einflussreichsten Gemeindegliedern erweckt haben, jedem Unternehmen, das Gemeinschaftlichkeit fordert, hinderlich. Kurz alles ist hier Zerrüttung—kurz Wehen ohne Gebähren . . .

The expected stimuli from Germany did not come. Even more engrossed than their English coreligionists in the battle between conservatives and reformers, as well as in the struggle for legal emancipation, German Jewry was little disposed to rally behind an idea which might reflect upon their undivided allegiance to their native lands. The leading reformers combated with ever increasing vigor the age-old messianic hope of a miraculous return to Palestine and more and more peremptorily eliminated all pertinent passages in their prayer books. Even Zunz wrote mockingly to Steinschneider in Prague on November 27, 1843 that he must have gone off with Benisch to Beirut.<sup>18</sup> Benisch plunged himself fully into the cultural and religious

intercepted by the Austrian police in September 1841, the writer mentions Benisch's communication stating that he had shortly before transmitted important news to Steinschneider. Cf. Gelber, *op. cit.*, p. 209. It is probably to evade the surveillance of the Austrian police that Benisch in writing this as well as most of his subsequent letters to Steinschneider used Hebrew characters. The language, however, being German rather than Yiddish it was deemed preferable here to render the letter in Latin script.

<sup>17</sup> The well-known controversy over the West London Synagogue of British Jews. Cf. e. g., D. Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 2. ed., N. Y. 1931, pp. 95 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 112.



problems of English Jewry, postponing all further agitation for his Palestinian idea to a future more opportune moment.<sup>19</sup> That he never relinquished it entirely, however, may be seen in the leading article

<sup>19</sup> The continuation of his June 1842 letter to Steinschneider gives a fair idea of his activities in the British capital: "Ich habe mir inzwischen vorgenommen England nicht zu verlassen. Ich erwerbe mir den Lebensunterhalt durch Unterricht in meiner Muttersprache. Dies ist meine Melkkuh. Ich habe aber noch andere und wahrlich nicht wenig mühselige Beschäftigungen, denen ich mich einzig und allein in der Hoffnung unterziehe, etwas zur Erweckung der hiesigen jüdischen Masse von ihrer geistigen Apathie beizutragen und sie soviel als möglich für höhere Interessen empfänglich zu machen. Diese Beschäftigungen sind: immer mehr besucht werdende religiöse Vorträge, die ich alle 14 Tage in der Halle der neuen Synagoge in St. Helen's Platz halte, dann die vor einem Monate übernommene Redaction des durch eigene Schuld in Miskredit gerathenen Blattes *The Voice of Jacob*. Es hebt sich jetzt und von א"ר an, wo es von einem, von mir entworfenen umfassenderen Plan geleitet werden wird, hoffe ich, dass es Platz greifen und ein tüchtiges Organ unseren Ansichten abgeben wird. Sobald wir einen Agenten in Leipzig haben, so lasse ich Ihnen ein Exemplar zukommen." Benisch's bi-weekly lectures were frequently reported in the *Voice of Jacob*. We find there also his, so to say, programmatic announcement that he "desired it to be understood, that he did not appear before the public as a lecturer, but to give expositions, or in other words, that he was not a preacher giving a discourse on a known truth, but an investigator anxious, on scientific principles, to discover one" (p. 141). The allusion to the "Voice of Jacob" will appear clearer in the light of several editorial statements in that journal. On April 29, 1842 the editor announced: "We hear that the Rev. Mr. Meldola has ceased to be connected with the 'Jewish Chronicle' and that Dr. Benisch is about to edit a Jewish Monthly Magazine. We cannot doubt that such a publication could be rendered a desirable acquisition to the literary inquirer among us, and that it will be received with favour by the religious world generally." After mentioning that the original objectives of the proprietor as far back as the Winter of 1840 had been to form a literary association for the purpose of publishing both a popular periodical and a regular magazine he concludes: "We scarcely hope, at present, to affect such an association for the conduct of the Jewish press, and must therefore be content to bide out time" (p. 125). Several weeks later, however, he could announce that the former editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* and several of its principal contributors had joined the staff of the *Voice of Jacob*. "The other Editor of this periodical," he added, "henceforward, will be the learned gentleman who announced his intention to publish a 'Jewish Monthly Magazine'; he also has deferred to the general opinion in favour of a *consolidated Jewish Press*. The *Voice of Jacob* will be the only issue from that press until, probably, the close of the first year (in September next), but the original and more comprehensive design will be eventually acted upon, by the publication of a Monthly Magazine, calculated for general circulation, and a more popular periodical, at shorter intervals (probably weekly) adapted specially to Jewish readers" (*ibid.* May 27, 1842, p. 137). As late as August 5, 1842 the proprietor, in an elaborate appeal to the public, proposed that after September 4, there should appear both a Monthly Magazine and a popular periodical, and thus defined the aims of the magazine: it "should have for its temporal objects, to teach the world, what the Jews are, and what they are not;—to favour the honorable aspirations of those who would exercise their talents in any and every vocation

and two other editorial comments which appeared in 1856 in a single issue of the *Jewish Chronicle*.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, Benisch's efforts were not altogether futile. "From the humble beginnings of the 'Unity Society' originated much later the 'Anglo-Jewish Association'," asserted Albert Löwy who, so long intimately associated with both enterprises, was undoubtedly in a position to know.<sup>21</sup> They also constituted a remarkable link in the long chain of evolution of the Jewish and British restoration movements, which eventually culminated in the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate over Palestine.

consistent with our religious obligations;—and, to bring usefully to bear upon foreign states a due sense of that crime and folly which would crush Jewish enterprise, and oppress God's people. The other, and no less important objects of the Magazine, would be, by means of an earnest application of our powers to the objects of our hallowed mission ('that we should be a kingdom of priests') to work out the exalted destiny which the Gentile world accords to us—and thus lead the religious activity of our age,—not sink its abject victims" (pp. 177 f.; there follows a somewhat colorless announcement of the "Editors"). Two weeks later, however, the proprietor made the significant reservation that "the Monthly Magazine will be superadded, in case only of adequate support" (p. 185). Indeed, such support seems not to have come and the *Voice of Jacob* began its second year first as a weekly and then again biweekly journal without the magazine. To what extent Benisch thereafter participated in the editing of the journal we do not know. In any case, his real journalistic contribution was made after 1855, when he became proprietor, publisher and editor of the *Jewish Chronicle and Hebrew Observer*. A later writer (A. I. Myers, *A Sketch of the Early History of the "Jewish Chronicle" in its Jubilee issue of 1891 pp. 35-7*) can only say that "... on November 22, 1844 we find the first appearance of the name of Dr. Benisch, who had previously written anonymously, ... as 'Secretary for Foreign Correspondence to the Committee for conducting the Election of Chief-Rabbi'".

<sup>20</sup> March 21, 1856. Even more noteworthy than his somewhat guarded editorial on "The Palestine Appeal Fund" (pp. 524 f.) and his exhortation in favor of increased productivity of the Palestinian settlement as against the Halukkah (p. 525) is the concluding sentence of his review of a pro-Palestinian pamphlet. "The pamphlet will," he writes, "no doubt, be perused with great interest by all those who watch the signs of the time and who believe that the period is drawing nigh which will witness the realization of the events predicted thousands of years ago" (p. 523).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. also L. Wolf, *Essays in Jewish History*, London 1934, pp. 351 f.

#### Postscript

Miss A. Goldberg has recently communicated to Prof. Marx the following excerpt of Steinschneider's letter to Dr. H. Löwe, dated Berlin, Nov. 24, 1898: "Ich war schon im Jahre 1840 von der Unausführbarkeit unserer aus österreichischen Zuständen hervorgegangenen Ideen überzeugt, so dass der Zionismus mir seitdem als Gegenstand der Volkspsychiatrie erscheint, welche durch regelmässige Bildung nur allmählich zu curiren ist. Für den משיח braucht die Menschheit vielleicht die ganze Zeit unseres Erdballs. ... Ich weiss nichts mehr davon, Dokumente existieren nicht."