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= Bethany Israel =

Moses Safer

His Time, Life and Work

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Books Read and Consulted.

The Reform Movement in Judaism
Dr. David Philipson.

Reform Judaism and Its Pioneers
Dr. Emanuel Schreiber.

Geschichte der Juden (both German and English)
Dr. H. Bractz.

Neueste Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes. (v. II)
Dr. Martin Philippson.

Rabbi Moses Sofer — Josef Katoness

Biographie von Rabbi Moses Sofer — M. Herzfeld

שצטה 1910 — חוט השני שש

(הקדמה שנה רביעית) ס.י. בארדיטשעוויסקי — קורא משנה 1910

(כוכבי יצחק) — M. E. Stern — "ענין קשה" (שיר)

ספר אבני בית היצור — יצחק ווייס — משה סופר

(ממזרח ומערב v. I) א. ה. ווייס — זמירות הקור קשה סופר

Analekten aus den gutachtlichen Werken des R. Moses Sefer
Dr. M. Zipfel (Ben Chananya, 1865, p. 337.)

Chapter I

This Time.

The period falling between the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, approximately, forms one of the most important landmarks in the history of the Jewish people. It is a period in which a most wonderful, though incomplete, transformation of the life and status of the Jew took place. From the fall of the Temple and the final dispersion of the people among the nations up to the above-mentioned period, with the possible exception of the Spanish-Era, the Jewish people, as a whole led, voluntarily or involuntarily, a life of such utter seclusion ^{and isolation} as to justify the malignant designation of their position in the respective countries as "a state within a state", "a people within a people". For, indeed, while transferred to another soil and climate, they did not fail to take their peculiar environment along with them, which for want of development and expansion became after the lapse of centuries unduly intensified and exaggerated into abnormality. The powerful instinct of self-preservation, added to a repellent attitude of a most pronounced type on the part of the nations in whose midst they dwelt, made them draw closely together and rendered them oblivious of the outside world, its life and influence. What with the inveterate hatred and fiery animosity raging ceaselessly round about them, what with the humiliating political and civil disabilities, what with the

terrible persecutions sporadically breaking out on all sides; and what with their own desperate adherence to the religious traditions and customs of their forefathers, they retreated within themselves and built beside the walls of the visible ghetto numerous invisible ones. Bent upon keeping their religion intact, they accepted the state of degradation as a matter of course and devoted the best of their energy to the cultivation and practice of the law, which, while warping for a time their free and natural growth, served, nevertheless, the beneficent end of preserving their distinctive individuality that otherwise would have perhaps slowly faded into nothingness.

But such a state of affairs could not last forever. The life they had been living was unnatural, abnormal. Environmental influences could not forever be shut out from their narrow confinement, the instinct for imitation which is so deeply rooted in the heart of man could ^{not} be stifled eternally, nor could the voice of justice be forever mute. A time had to come when these artificial chains should be rent asunder violently and convulsively. A time had to come when, like a volcano, the burning lava should irresistibly burst forth from the womb of its long and strait confinement and with its cinders and ashes, though spreading at first ruin and desolation round about, richly fertilize the bare and parched ground, thus turning barrenness into fruitfulness. When, about the middle of the eighteenth century, the exclusiveness of the Jew had reached its ~~&~~ culminating point and his degradation had been complete, then it was that the

invisible ghetto began to fade and the walls of the perceptible one to crumble, and the Jew began to consider himself a member of a larger group, worthy to be the recipient of a larger and freer life.

This marvellous ^{change} in the internal and external conditions of the Jew was not effected suddenly and with meteor-like rapidity. It was of a slow and gradual process. There were three interdependent currents of influence slowly but steadily working to remove the slime of centuries and by the process of erosion to widen and deepen the stream of Jewish growth and development. These currents may properly be designated as (1) the cultural, (2) the political, (3) and the religious.

A. Cultural Emancipation.

It is quite obvious that before the Jew could identify himself with the life and interests of the community in which he lived he first had to be brought in closer contact with his outside environment. The social restraints that had obstructed the free intercourse between Jew and Christian had to some extent been broken through — a task which could be accomplished only by the medium of linguistic and cultural equality. The Jew had to adopt the language and cultivate the taste for the literature of his neighbors. And to Moses Mendelssohn (born at Plessen 1728-1786) died at Berlin 1786) be the credit of having done pioneer work in this direction. By dint of his philosophical and aesthetical writings he succeeded to a considerable extent in bridging over the gap that lay yawning between the ghetto and the outer world and thus became

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the mediator between his people and their neighbors. By sheer force of intellect and character this poor, crippled son of a writer of the scrolls of the law ascended the loftiest pinnacle of the culture of his day. While a mere strappingling he went to Berlin where under great difficulties he strove to imbibe deep draughts from the fountain of secular knowledge. His progress must have been of a phenomenal character, for before long we find him linked in inseparable friendship with the great Lessing (1754) who was captivated by his noble character and strong philosophical acumen. It was Lessing who stimulated in him a love for literature and art, and it was he who introduced him into his social circles. His works: "Philosophical Conversations" (1755); "Are Philosophical Truths susceptible of Mathematical Demonstration" (1763) and "Phaedon" gained for him a high place in the estimation and honor of cultured Europe and at the same time elicited a more favorable ^{opinion} of the Jews from the reading public.

Having received the light of modern culture he sought to diffuse its rays among his people within the ghetto walls who were still groping in the dark. He translated the Pentateuch into German, in Hebrew characters, (1783), — a work which resulted in a veritable Jewish Renaissance, both in religion, of which we shall speak later, and in culture. For the translation served the purpose of a text-book of the German language for the great mass of the people who were then unable to read books written in the vernacular. It thus opened to them the portals of the

of the treasure-house of modern thought.

Mendelssohn was not alone in this work of enlightenment. Isaac Abraham Euchel and Mendel Breslau, students of the Königsberg university, continued the quiet activity of Mendelssohn with perhaps greater effect. They established a society for the promotion of the Hebrew language and founded a journal called *Ha-meassef* (1783) which became a medium for the propagation of European culture among the Jews. The "meassefim", as the contributors to this journal were commonly known, in stealing light from the outside world and bringing it to their people, performed the inestimable service of Prometheus, the friend of mankind of the Grecian mythology.

Another vehicle for the spreading of the new culture was to be found in the schools of modern tendency which ^{had been} were established in every important city of Germany and Austria, in which the elements of liberal culture were imparted to the young. These schools were founded by the Mendelssohnians, comprising in a wider sense all those who zealously labored in different parts of Europe for the better education of the Jewish masses, among whom numbered Salomo Rubins (1737-1819); Hartwig Wessely (1725-1805); Herz Homberg (1749-1841); ^{Joseph Johnson (1778-1851)} David Friedländer (1750-1834) and Israel Jacobson (1768-1848). The schools established for the dissemination of secular knowledge among the Jews by the efforts of these disciples of Mendelssohn were: the Free School of Berlin (1778); Wilhelmschule in Breslau (1791); Herzogliche

Franzschule in Bressan (1799); Jacobsschule in Seesen (1801); Philanthropin in Frankfurt (1804); Samsonschule in Wolfenbuttel (1807); and in Cassel (1809).

B. Political Emancipation.

While this cultural tide was gradually oozing through the open chinks and crevices of the impenetrable intellectual ghetto of the Jew, an event occurred which pulled down and forever destroyed the massive walls of the political ghetto in which the Jews had been kept immured for so many dreary centuries. I refer of course to the act of Sep. 27, 1791, of the National Assembly of France, which declared the Jews citizens of the country, granting them full civil and political equality. This act while the inevitable consequence of the revolutionary spirit that had, torrent-like, swept over France was not however without antecedent literary agitation, carried on by some noble spirits, which had sought to lay bare the unjust and cruel treatment of the Jews by those in power, urging the necessity as well as the advisability of removing the numerous disabilities that were impeding the progress of the Jewish people. These fiery advocates exerted a lasting and wide spread influence in that, by predisposing the public mind in favor of these down-trodden people, they actually paved the way for their political emancipation.

The first to raise his voice in protest of the barbarous treatment of the Jews was Montesquieu^u (1689-1755) who in the "Spirit of the Laws" (1748) clearly and forcefully demonstrated the harm the ill-treatment of the Jews had caused the State. "Ye

Christians complain," he eloquently pleads, "that the Emperor of China roasts all Christians in his dominions over a slow fire. You behave much worse towards Jews because they do not believe as you do. If any of our descendants should venture to say that the nations of Europe were cultured, your example will be adduced to prove that they were barbarians! The picture that they will draw of you will certainly stain your age and spread abroad hatred of all your contemporaries" (Quoted in *Biog. v. 5 ch. 8 p. 336*)

Another zealous advocate for equal rights to Jews was Christian William Hohn (1751-1820), a close friend of Moses Mendelssohn. In a pamphlet commonly known as "Hohn's Apology" and entitled "Upon the Civil Amelioration of the condition of the Jews," he promulgated the doctrine of equal rights, debarring the Jews from one privilege only, that of filling public offices or entering the arena of politics. This proposed restriction was evidently a reluctant concession to popular sentiment which was not then so far advanced as to regard favorably a reform so drastic and sweeping.

Contemporaneous with the publication of Hohn's apology were the series of laws relating to the Jews issued by Emperor Joseph of Austria (1781) by which the Jews were permitted to learn handicrafts, arts and sciences. They were to be considered fellow-men, and the Christians were enjoined to behave in a friendly manner towards them. ^{and the} The shameful and degrading *Leibzohl* was to be abolished. Elementary schools for their education were to be established, and the doors of the universities and academies

to be thrown open to them.

Voltaire's Apology was followed by an important work entitled "Upon Mendelssohn and the Political Reforms of the Jews" (1787) by Count Mirabeau (1749-1791). He was a great admirer of Mendelssohn and a sincere, warm-hearted friend of the Jews. May it not be said, he exclaims in speaking of Mendelssohn, "that his example, especially the outcome of his exertions for the elevation of his brethren, silences those who with ignoble bitterness insist that the Jews are so contemptible that they cannot be transformed into a respectable people?" He admits the present inferiority of the Jew, but ascribes it to the life he is compelled to live, to the disadvantageous conditions that surround his existence. The disabilities hampering his development must be removed. Only then can the world be in a position to judge of the inherent good or evil that is in the Jew without erring in its judgment. "If you wish the Jews to become better men and useful citizens then banish every humiliating distinction, open to them every avenue of gaining a livelihood; instead of forbidding them agriculture, handicrafts and the mechanical arts, encourage them to devote themselves to these occupations."

This propaganda, added to the arduous zeal and energetic activity of Abbé Grégoire and Carl Berr, two indefatigable workers in the cause of the political liberation of the Jews, resulted in the emancipatory act of 1791, adverted to above. This act dealt a death blow to the monstrous friend of human oppression. For wherever the French obtained a firm footing there the Jews

were set free and their inalienable rights recognized. When the Batavian Republic was established, Holland conferred equal rights upon its Jewish subjects (1796). At the conquest of Italy by the French arms the old ghetto walls were demolished and the Jews raised to equal citizenship. The same results were obtained in the Kingdom of Westphalia at the head of which was Jerome Bonaparte. Even Prussia ^{soon} fell under the benign influence of the spirit of the French Revolution, and its coldness and frigidity towards the Jews ~~were~~ began to thaw by the fiery contact, so that on the eleventh of March, 1812, at the initiative of the liberal Prime Minister Hardenberg, an edict was issued by Frederick William III, King of Prussia, by which the Jews were made citizens. Rabbinical jurisdiction was to cease, and special taxes as well as restrictive trade conditions were to be abolished. It was left for a later date, 1848, to confer complete civil and political equality denied them even by this edict. But the foundation for the later structure was laid in this early period.

C. Religious Emancipation.

With the rise of modern culture and political freedom on the Jewish horizon there also arose the necessity for religious reform, which would reconcile Judaism with the newly-changed conditions. The time had come for the breaking down of the religious ghetto which the Jew had built for himself within himself. And here, too, in the religious emancipation

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as in the cultural and political, the progress was slow and the preparations many. Long before any practical reforms in worship and ritual were introduced, there were evidences among the more progressive elements of an inner dissatisfaction with the prevailing strictness of Rabbinic Judaism. First this feeling was in a state of passivity, it then became self-conscious and vehement, until finally it burst forth with great violence and assumed a most drastic form.

The first step towards reform in this direction was taken in Germany by Moses Mendelssohn, though he surely was not aware of its far-reaching results. For in reality Mendelssohn was no religious reformer. On the contrary, he was sternly opposed to all changes in the religion. He himself was a devoted orthodox Jew complying with the most rigid injunctions of the *Schulchan Aruch*. To him Judaism was law, immutable and eternal. "Indeed," he states in "Jerusalem", "I cannot see how those born in the house of Jacob can in any shape or manner emancipate themselves from the law. We are, to be sure, permitted to think about the law, to search occasionally into its spirit and, where the lawgiver has not given a reason for the same, to conjecture a reason. The reason for the law was perhaps determined by time, place and circumstances. Hence the law could possibly be changed in accordance with time place and circumstance, provided it would please the Almighty to make known to us His will

concerning the same just as loud, as publicly and beyond every possibility of doubt as He did when giving the law. As long as this does not come to pass, as long as we cannot show such authentic immunity from the law, our subtle reasoning cannot release us from the rigid obedience which we owe to the law" (quoted by Emanuel Schrieber in "~~Jewish Reform~~ *Reformed Judaism*"). Such words could not issue from the pen of a reformer. And yet by his translation of the Pentateuch he paved the road to reform. For in aiming to give a correct understanding of the doctrine, literature and language of the Bible he indirectly helped to weaken the Talmudic influence, which in many instances simply perverted the exegesis of the Bible and caused the study of it to be comparatively neglected. His commentary to the translation, in which Salomo Rubens Hartwig Wessely and Herz Homberg cooperated with him, seeking to read the Bible with an eye to grammar, taste and sound logic, proved ruinous to the subtle play of dialectics and idle argumentation of the Talmud.

A more conscious and more insistent cry for reform issued from other quarters. In 1786, David Friedländer translated some of the Hebrew prayers in German for the benefit of the female portion of the congregation. As was naturally to be expected, he was attacked by the strict orthodox, whereupon he wrote *An Open Letter to the German*

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Jews" (1788) wherein he bitterly complains that the Jews do not care for the "holiness of the teachings, the enlightenment of the spirit, of the holy scriptures, but for the dead letter only. If I do not understand one word of the prayer which I mutter, as long as it is in Hebrew it will, according to the ideas of these men, produce devotion, knowledge of God's benevolence and resignation to the divine will. If I do not know what the prophets and the teachers of the law have said and thought as long as I repeat mechanically their words it will make me better, wiser and more rational."

Words still more drastic were uttered by another disciple of Mendelssohn, Lazarus Bendavid. When in 1782 Emperor Joseph II made the enlightenment of the Jews a state duty, Bendavid, in a pamphlet entitled: "Something on the Characteristics of the Jews", urged his Austrian brethren ^{not} to relinquish the opportunity of accomplishing their own emancipation. "If the outward change," he pleads, "is to have a salutary effect, the Jews themselves must create the reform from within. They must learn to understand that their ceremonial laws have become inapplicable and senseless for the present time and they must have a purer religion more worthy of the common Father of mankind. Away with the senseless ceremonial law; tell your children that it was once placed as a useful hedge around the garden, but that what has served for the slavish

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sense of past centuries, for the sake of saving and preserving the inner kernel, has to be given up as inappropriate to-day." (E. Schrieber)

The first practical step towards reform was taken in Holland, when in 1796, equal rights having been conferred upon the Jews of the Batavian Republic, the more liberal minded separated themselves from the existing synagogue and formed the congregation 'Adath Jeshurun' wherein some mild reforms were introduced, such as the omission of וְיָשׁוּבָה from the prayers, the abolition of some 'pigulim', and the use of the vernacular in public addresses. (Philips: Reform Movement in Judaism).

But the first to exert a most decisive and lasting influence on religious reform was Israel Jacobson. The whole of Jewry as he saw it was divided into two classes: those who, having imbibed the new culture, despised Judaism for the ugliness of its outer garment, and those, numbering the great majority, who would not yield a jot in their religious observances for fear that if a single support became loose the whole structure might collapse. Jacobson's aim was to unite, if possible, these two faring elements by beautifying and aestheticising the synagogueal worship, and thus render it more attractive and satisfying to those who had already outgrown, and felt disgusted with its old form. His first endeavor was to reform the services held in the synagogue

connected with the newly erected school in Cassel by eliminating its noisy features, such as the sing-song reading then in vogue, and introducing more order and decorum.

He also insisted upon sermons in the vernacular, German as well as Hebrew prayers, German hymns with organ accompaniment and confirmation exercises. As president of the Consistory which was organized upon the formation of the Westphalian Kingdom, he sought but with little success to force these reforms on all the synagogues. In 1810 he consecrated in Seesen a temple based on these innovations.

With the downfall of the Westphalian Kingdom terminated Jacobson's power. He moved to Berlin where he soon gathered around him a small coterie of friends and followers who were in full sympathy with his reforms. Finding no local synagogue willing to tolerate any change in the old mode of worship, he consecrated a room in his private apartment as a place of worship (1815). Those attending these services formed the nucleus of the reform party of Berlin. But at the instigation of the orthodox this private synagogue was closed by the Prussian government, ^{which was} King Frederick III being averse to all innovations (1817). A later decree issued ^{by the government} by the monarch (1823) declared that "divine services of the Jews must be conducted in accordance with the traditional ritual and without the slightest innovation in language, ceremonies, prayers

or song" (A. 3. d. J. VI 393).

The scene of action now moved to Hamburg. Hley, a young preacher of Jacobsohn's school, came to Hamburg for the purpose of conducting a free-school, and before long he set a movement on foot to erect a reform temple after the pattern of Jacobsohn's at Seesen. In this undertaking he was quite successful and on October 8, 1818, the Reform Union Temple of Hamburg was dedicated. Among its leading innovations were: 1. changes in liturgy, notably in the prayers referring to a personal Messiah; 2. prayers in German; 3. the use of the organ; 4. Portuguese pronunciation of the Hebrew; 5. the abolition of the traditional cantillation employed in the reading of Scripture.

Before these changes were instituted, Jacobsohn, being deeply interested in the ultimate success of the Hamburg Temple, had endeavored to obtain in advance the ratification of the temple ritual. Among the German Rabbis he could find no voice of approval. He therefore resorted to the assistance offered by ^{II} Eliezer Lieberman ~~to~~ Austria who thus became for a while the stout defender of Reform.

The first Rabbi to ratify this ritual was Aaron Chorin (1766-1844) Rabbi of Arad, Hungary. He, in conjunction with two Italian Rabbis, Shem-Zob-Sammun of Livorno and Jacob Vital Recanati, spoke favorably of these innovations, their opinions and arguments

were collated by Liebermann in two books under the titles *Hogah Zedek* and *Or Hogah* (1818). Chorin sees no wrong in playing the organ on Sabbath, nor does he consider the uncovering of the head during ~~the~~ divine services as a violation of the Jewish spirit. His views he attempts to justify by Talmudic citations and the utterances of rabbinical authorities. He believes in the ceaseless growth of Judaism, and while Bractz describes him as "an equivocal character and tedious prattler of varnished education and mediocre Talmudic scholarship" who "favored the new movement without having a clear judgment", he evinces however a clear understanding of the true spirit of Reform. In the third part of his pp. 171-177 he gives as reason why the old teachers and scribes did not write down the "oral law", because "in doing so they would have prevented the teachers and Rabbis of later times and coming ages from making new laws or establishing changes and innovations in accordance with the exigencies and wants of new epochs." This reason may or may not be essentially correct, but the view herein expressed is the very corner-stone upon which modern scientific Judaism is built.

It is quite unnecessary to follow up the later widening and deepening of these three streams of influence.

which were at this period gradually but steadily percolating
 the life of the Jewish people. For our purpose it is sufficient
 to have traced their rise and early development. Their fuller
 and more complete growth is of little interest to us at present.
 Our chief concern now is to study the views and methods of
 those who had set themselves in stern opposition to these trans-
 formative forces and with all the means at command ener-
 getically but unavailingly had sought to stem the influx
 of these powerful tidal waves whose near approach meant,
 in their opinion, the certain destruction of that stupendous
 structure which had been so elaborately built and
 so zealously guarded by former generations. Many
 there were among the faithful guardians of the old forms
 of Judaism who desperately though unwisely and unskill-
 fully resisted with might and main the fierce onslaughts
 of the newly-arisen foe by tightening their grasp on the
 object attacked ^{the} more firmly and tenaciously. But
 we choose for our present study ^{only} the most typical and
 most truly representative ~~of the school~~. (His name
 was Moses Sofer)

Chapter II

His Life.

Moses B. Samuel Schreiber, or Moses Sofer, was born in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, Sep. 14, 1762. His parents were both of good stock. His father, Samuel Sofer, was a grandchild of the learned Rabbi Joseph Samuel of Krakau, author of *דברי יוסף*, a cross-reference index to the Talmud which few Talmudical students can altogether dispense with. His mother, Reisel, was a grandchild of Rabbi Samuel ^{Shotten} ~~Shotten~~, author of *מנחת שמואל* comprising casual notes and comments on difficult passages in the Talmudic treatise *ק'ק'כ*. As was customary in those days, little Moses received a thorough training in Talmudic and Rabbinic lore. At an early age he was sent to *גור* under the tutorship of Zalmon Chasid. Being a precocious child he was transferred at the age of nine to the local school of learning at whose head was the pious Nathan Adler. And such was the rapidity with which he had progressed in his studies that the distinctive privilege of holding a public dissertation on some intricate Talmudic question was conferred upon him by his Teacher Nathan Adler. On one occasion in the course of his argument he chanced to take issue with his great-grandfather, Samuel ^{Shotten} ~~Shotten~~, who in his work *מנחת שמואל* seemed unable to

extricate himself from the meshes of a Talmudic difficulty ~~but~~ which appeared to this young discourses easy of solution. Whereupon his father being present ministered to him a severe rebuke which was accompanied, by way of emphasis, by a parental admonitory chastisement that meant to indicate his strong disapproval of such superciliousness and want of respect for the profound learning of his ancestor. This conduct of the father provoked Nathan Adler so much that he immediately took young Sofer under his wing and care, enjoining him to leave his father's house and even avoid holding converse with him as such would prove deleterious to his mental growth. The boy acting upon the counsel of his teacher came to live under his roof and thus became attached to him with a double cord. (עליון ויהי)

There was then in Frankfurt another school headed by Phinehas Hurwitz, author of 'Sefer Hafleah'. In his desire to strengthen and deepen his Talmudic knowledge, Sofer at the invitation of Hurwitz joined this school too. But he soon found his stay in Frankfurt greatly inconvenient, owing to ^{the} estranged relations existing between him and his parents as the result of his teachers fanatic zeal, and he decided to leave the city. Having barely reached the age of fifteen, he left his native city for Mayence where he entered the Yeshibah of Rabbi Zebele Scheuer. There he was supported, as all poor students of the Law were in those days, by the generosity of those members of the com-

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minity who were able and willing to render the desired assistance. He did not however find Mayence congenial enough, for a year later we find him back in Frankfurt as pupil of Nathan Adler and Phineahas Hurwitz.

His progress during this time must have been phenomenal, for at the age of sixteen he completed, according to report, all the six treatises of the Babylonian Talmud—a feat which, if true, is surely marvellous. No wonder then that his name became a by-word for diligence and precocity.

But an incident soon occurred which bade him leave Frankfurt once more. His Teacher Nathan Adler was called to Boskowitz (Moravia) to serve as Rabbi; and such was Sofer's attachment to his Teacher that he was unwilling to part with him. He was determined to follow his Teacher to the place of his new home. On their way to Boskowitz they passed through Prague (1783) where the celebrated Ezekiel Landau had his post. They called on him and soon entered with him into a heated discussion over some difficult Talmudic passage (N. 25 h 71' 0" n). Landau it seems was well impressed with Sofer's acute understanding and deep knowledge of the Talmud, for he complimented him on the brilliant solution he offered to the difficulty (Ibid.).

In 1785 after a two years' stay in Boskowitz, Sofer in the company of his Teacher visited Vienna (p. 94 71' 0" n) where

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they took up quarters with the wealthy and prominent Nathan Aronstein. Sofer, it is related, was greatly shocked one morning when he discovered his host's daughter-in-law seated before a hair-dresser with her hair ~~discovered~~ and disheveled. Never before had such a sight confronted his view! A married woman in such a shocking position! He instantly seized the opportunity of imparting to her some of his opinions about such unheard-of laxness in matters religious. She in turn resented his impudence, and the following day he was compelled to look for quarters elsewhere, to the no small chagrin of the host.

Owing to the strong opposition of some of the members of his congregation as a direct consequence of his excessive piety and extreme fanaticism, Nathan Adler could not stay in Borsowitz very long; so in 1786 he returned to his former home. His faithful pupil followed him up to Fünth, where they parted company, Adler leaving for Frankfort and Sofer for Posnitz, Moravia. There being then no rabbi there, he succeeded in gathering around him a good number of young men eager to study the Talmud, whose teacher and guide he, the Bochar of Frankfort, was.

While in Posnitz he became engaged to a woman who was almost twice his senior, the daughter of Rabbi Moses Yerwitz. Her brother Hirsch Yerwitz (her father being dead) pledged himself to support them to the best of his means, so that he, Sofer, might carry on his studies in peace and tranquility. Having no

rights of residence in Moravia, he could not marry in ^{non}Posenitz, but had to go to Semnitz, Hungary, to wed. He now found himself in a peculiarly embarrassing situation. He had a wife but no means for her support. He was wholly dependent on the resources of his brother-in-law, but the means of the latter were limited and too meagre to support the couple when away from his table. How was he to secure the right of residence in Moravia? At this juncture the people of ^{non}Posenitz, greatly appreciating the service he had rendered the community by his learning and teaching, came to his rescue. They addressed a petition to the King requesting his majesty to grant Sofer "a native of Frankfurt who is an upright man engaged in teaching others gratis" the right of residing within his kingdom. The petition was granted, and thus Sofer could pursue his studies untroubled and undisturbed.

But the quiet which he was thus to enjoy was but of short duration. His brother-in-law having met with reverses in his business enterprises had become unable to ^{carry} this additional burden of maintaining him and his wife. Of course, Sofer could have easily obtained a rabbinical post but the thought of using the Torah as "a spade to dig with" was abhorrent to him. Even in his later years he deeply regretted the fact that he had to receive a compensation for discharging his rabbinical duties (א"ר א"ר 164). But no matter how much he disliked the position of

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Rabbi in such straitened circumstances he had to resort to it, and so he accepted the call that had been extended to him by the community of Wresnitz. The congregation, however, could not elect him without having secured in advance the approval of the Chief Rabbi of the province. Furthermore as he had not held a similar position before he had to obtain first a rabbinical degree, *haskamot*, from a prominent Rabbi. He therefore applied to Marcus Benedict, or Mordecai Benet, as he is better known, then Rabbi of Nicolasburg and Chief Rabbi of the province, who forthwith complied with his request (1793). The *haskamot* though written in the usual conventional style is not lacking in terms descriptive of his profound learning and genuine piety.

His early responses date back to this period. He remained in Wresnitz for almost five years. In 1797 he received a call from Mattersdorf, Hungary. A similar call was extended to him by the community of ^{Pross}Posenitz, but he had already accepted the former, and no matter how much he would have liked to be in Posenitz, he had to decline the offer. Two years later he was offered the position of ^{Diener} Jewish, Bohemia, but Mattersdorf would not part with him. In 1801 Wresnitz attempted to secure his services once more by offering him a higher salary as inducement to leave Mattersdorf. But he resented the spirit in which the offer was made. "I am ashamed" he wrote in reply, "to show your letter to anyone, in which you speak

of an increase in salary and made no mention of your willingness to maintain the Yeshibah. You emphasize the trivial and insignificant and disregard the essential and important.

In Mattersdorf Sofer founded a Yeshibah to which many of the students who had studied under his guidance in Plesnitz came. During the nine years he was Rabbi in Mattersdorf he drew deep from the fountain of rabbinic learning and his name and fame resounded throughout the Jewish world. Difficult legal questions were submitted to his judgment for decision by the leading Rabbis of Europe and Asia. His growing fame did not, however, tend to diminish his desire of acquiring still deeper knowledge. He led the same quiet, unassuming and studious life as before. Having no children of his own he adopted an orphan of his wife's relations, whom he later married to one of the students of his Yeshibah. He also brought up an orphan boy, the son of the deceased cantor of his congregation, and reared, educated and married his nephew Rabbi Samuel Straus.

(115 II י"ג א"ר ע"ה)

With the increased number of students in his Yeshibah, the city of Mattersdorf was confronted by the vexed question: how to obtain sufficient means for their support? — a problem which this small community found hard to solve. When therefore in 1802 Sofer received a call from Peststadt, Hungary, with the promise that ^{they} the students would be provided with

45.
the necessary means of subsistence, he gladly and joyously accepted it. But meanwhile an accident ^{had} occurred which prevented his departure. When he had already delivered his farewell sermon and was about to leave for Kustod, a devastating fire originating in a brewery ^{spread} over the city of Kattersdorf and a large portion was utterly destroyed by this conflagration. To leave the people in this sad plight would have been cruel indeed. He therefore abandoned the idea of leaving their midst, and immediately set to work to alleviate with all the means and powers at command the sufferings of the poor victims who were unable without outside assistance to rebuild their homes (239, 711 07). In time of distress and calamity he proved himself most faithful, enduring and effective.

In 1806, after declining a call to Yarmuth, Hungary, he was chosen by a peculiar method as Rabbi of Pressburg. When in 1797 he had left Pressnitz for Kattersdorf he passed through Pressburg where he made the acquaintance of its Rabbi, Sholem Ezra Fuszumity (11. II 17 78 07) whose admiration and praise he won — a fact that was soon communicated to ~~the~~ ^{leading} members of the Pressburg community. When therefore after the death of their Rabbi they were to choose a successor Sofer's name suggested itself to them. But he was not the only one in the field. Arisba Eger of Friedland, Baruch Frankel of Leipzig, Sholem Ullman of Fraunkirchen, were the other possible candidates. As all of them were Rabbis of great repute and profound

26.
erudition the choice was not easy to make. The primitive method of casting lots was resorted to. The lots were cast, and chance favored Moses Sofer.

As soon as he came to Pressburg then he began to organize a Yeshibah on a larger scale. This Yeshibah became in time one of the leading schools of Talmudic learning in Europe — a place which it occupies even at the present day. His ^{whole} life was wrapped up in the welfare of this institution. Students from all parts of Hungary and the neighboring countries flocked to it. Such was the magnetic power of the man.

Pressburg appreciated the true worth of the man and his work. Great care was taken to provide him with all the necessary comforts, and to pay him the deserved respect and reverence. All efforts were made to make his life one of undisturbed peace. But in 1809 during the Franco-Austrian war Sofer became involved in some serious trouble. Two Pressburg Jews bought implements of war from the neighboring peasants who had picked them up on the battlefield. Unable to settle their differences, they submitted the case to Moses Sofer for decision. (156. דין דין) His decision proved unsatisfactory to one of the litigants, and the case was carried to the civil courts. There Sofer's verdict was produced, and he was charged with being accessory to the crime, as it was incumbent upon him to inform the government of this unlawful dealing. The community

47.
spent 10,000 gulden in the effort of clearing him of this serious charge, in which they finally succeeded.

About this time another accusation was ^{made} ~~brought~~ against him. Owing to the unsettled conditions of the country during this period of protracted warfare, the state notes had greatly depreciated in value, so that their market value was reduced to almost one fifth of their former value. Cases involving the settlement of debts that had been contracted previous to the time at which depreciation set in were ^{frequently} brought before him for decision and adjustment, and his usual summary judgment was that "the law of the land is law", and that all such cases therefore must be settled in accordance with the jurisdiction of the civil courts. On one occasion, however, the case being somewhat different from all others that had been laid before him, he decided that inasmuch as the contract made specific mention of the kind of money to be paid back, this very kind should be returned no matter what changes in its current value had taken place, as long as that form of species was extant. (58, 011 011). He was denounced for this decision before the government, but he somehow managed to disentangle himself from this complication, and even escape ~~an~~ open trial.

In 1812 his wife died (53, 711 011). About this time Sorel the daughter of Adibah Eger, was bereft of her husband.

28.
and her father wrote to Sofer asking him, after some expatiations upon her numerous virtues, if he could suggest a suitable husband for her. Instead of answering this letter himself he handed it over to Haniel Prosnitz, Chief Wagon of Pressburg and the Rabbi's confidant. The latter divined his meaning, and in the capacity of marriage-broker he replied Eger's letter by suggesting Sofer himself as the most desirable son-in-law. Whereupon Eger registered his full consent, expressing however the apprehension that Sofer might reject the offer as he may perhaps aspire to the hand of the daughter of אברהם אבינו. Sofer, on his side, expressed perfect satisfaction at this arrangement but was beset by the fear lest he, Eger, withdraws his consent as he may not wish to marry his daughter to an אברהם אבינו. The fears of both were soon dispersed when Sofer aged fifty and Sofer aged twenty-five were happily united in wedlock.

This union brought into the world eleven souls, four males and seven females, all of whom, but one boy and two girls who died in childhood, proved worthy of such descent. His son Samuel Benjamin succeeded him as Rabbi of Pressburg. Simon Schreiber first occupied a rabbinical position in Mattersdorf and then in Krakow in which latter city he was in 1879 elected member of the Austrian Parliament. Jospe Sofer, his third son, was

29.
a much respected (and highly honored) layman engaged in the mercantile business.

The remaining years of his life were spent in hard study and in the faithful performance of the sundry duties connected with the rabbinical profession. During this period he also wrote a good many responses, chiefly directed against the spirit of iconoclasm in religion. His energies seldom flagged. His last years were dimmed by certain mishaps. His heart ached to see the spirit of reform making conquests on all sides and even seeking to effect an entrance into his own fortress. In 1832 his wife died. In 1835 he married for the third time, the widow of Rabbi Hirsch Heller author of *פ'ד'ג' ב'ד'ג'*. On the third of October, 1839, he breathed his last, and thus a very fruitful career came to an end.

Chapter III

His Works.

That his contemporaries looked upon Moses Sofer as a mighty genius, a "light of the exile", is as certain as that posterity has almost ^{but} ~~entirely~~ forgotten his name as well as his greatness. Fortunately, however, we have to depend for a true and unprejudiced estimate of the man and his work neither upon the judgment of his contemporaries nor upon the verdict of posterity. He lives in his writings which form his monument, precious or worthless. He did not write anything which is of intrinsic worth or of essential benefit to our modern civilization, but he did write much which for a proper understanding of the character and views of the man and his age is of supreme historical value. His chief work: תורת אשה 1791 or simply 7910, comprising one thousand, three hundred and seventy seven responses addressed to men such as Arisa Eger, Ephraim Salmon Margolin, Solomon Kluger, Joseph Saul Nathanson, Zebi Hirsch, ~~Chasch~~ Mordecai Benet and many others of less renown, contains a full statement of his religious views and opinions as well as a true picture of the nature and character of the man. And our purpose in this essay will be to reconstruct by means of these

31.
responses a mental picture of the character, ideas and beliefs of this apostle of strict and uncompromising orthodoxy and bitter opponent of reform and its accessories.

Moses Sofer was a great Talmudic scholar whose breadth and depth of rabbinic knowledge have not been surpassed nor even equalled by Rabbi pinca. The wide field of rabbinic learning which he traversed and the complete mastery of the numerous sources he refers to or animadvert upon are in themselves sufficient to fill one with astonishment and genuine admiration. It is to be regretted perhaps that such richness of intellect and such wealth of knowledge should not have produced results of a more far-reaching nature. But he could not foresee the revolutionary changes that would take place in the taste of future generations, nor would he have done otherwise if he had. For he was the product of his time and environment. To the youth of his day ~~the~~ Talmud was the all-absorbing source of study, in which field he attained supremacy. His responses are characterized by sound scholarship, (as the term was then understood) and searching penetration. After carefully weighing all the arguments that could be adduced on either side of a question he reaches the final decision he would render, if, however, other eminent authorities would concur with his judgment, as he should not venture to decide a question of such great difficulty and importance (T^{sh} 114^h. II י"ד א' ד')

36.
Nor was he lacking in practical wisdom and insight, but looking at life through ^{the} ~~bedimmed~~ ~~and~~ ~~beclouded~~ window-panes of the Beth Hamidrash his view was blurred and oftentimes distorted.

His responses were not published during his life-time. In a letter to a friend written in 1879 he states the following: "Regarding the rumor that has reached you that I have published a book, a copy of which you desire to have, I wish to state that I have never contemplated such a step. For, the majority of those who are superior to me or are at least my equals do not need my instructions, and the small minority who are inferior to me I do not care to trouble myself about. But even if the world stood in great need of my instruction I would not feel obliged to publish my views broadcast. As long as God gives me life and strength I am ready to teach all those who come to learn. --- answering questions to the best of my knowledge, gratis. I am writing down ^{my} halachic decisions and agadic thoughts and he who wishes to copy them from the manuscript, as was the custom in older days, is welcome to do so. --- To publish my writings with a view to acquire fame, I fear the curse of the Rabbis; with a view to rescue my name from oblivion, which has been the fate of so many authors, or with a view to material benefits --- such thoughts have never occurred to me." (תורת משה 777). But while he refused to publish his writings he was more than willing to communicate his opinions.

22.
upon request in epistolary form to anyone interested in the practical application of the same (294 71'). Not even illness could prevent him from imparting legal information on some question of immediate importance (121 71'). And if the question was such as required but a brief answer, he added some homiletical interpretation of a Biblical passage so as to satisfy the receiver of the epistle of his willingness and gladness to render necessary assistance (182 111').

Sofer entertained a deep aversion to the ^{dialectic} ~~philosophical~~ method then so much in vogue among his contemporaries. By "philosophical" of course he meant that extreme and exaggerated form of it that occupied itself with the invention of imaginary situations and queer conditions without regard to their possibility and with the formation of fantastic laws and far-fetched arguments without regard to their practical use. Such mere ingenuity he abhorred. He was interested ^{primarily} in laws of practical application ~~only~~. His time was too precious to waste it in answering intangible and chimerical questions (180 111'). To understand and apply the law constituted his sole aim and object (268 71'). To manufacture useless laws and seek to apply them to imaginary and impossible cases can at best but serve the purpose of sharpening and quickening the mind of the young student (173, 71'). "We can feel nothing but shame when we contemplate the wide difference between former times and modern times. Scholars of former

34.
days though they themselves were endowed with vast intellects and possessed great creative powers deemed nevertheless that which they had learned from their teachers the sole crown of their glory, so that Rabbi Elizer of Babylonia ventured the assertion on one occasion that he had never said anything which he had not received from his teachers. But we of the present age who are obtuse of mind and deaf of ear, knowing almost nothing, are constantly surrounded by these keen intellects who build altars for themselves at will, who endeavor to say something new every morning — something that they had never seen and heard, or received from an authoritative source; who jump around on the hills and romp about on the mountains like goats and bucks. — When one interprets a law according to its simple meaning and answers a question in the way which our early students of the law used to follow, they say that there is nothing new in such an answer, so that with the stones of their pulp they have turned a smooth and level plain into a rugged one. — They do not care whether one case is like or unlike the other as long as the comparison is clever" (אין חן אין חן).

Law, the careful study of it and the immaculate exactitude in its observance, was the dominant passion of his life. Law, Jewish law of course is to him not the creation of man but the divine instrument of God. Hence there can be no line of demarcation

drawn between the written and the oral law. They both come from God and must be equally observed; and though the Rabbi should declare right left and left right we must believe and obey them (אמת ויציב). Abraham in showing his readiness to offer his only son as a sacrifice because of God's will evinced his faithful obedience of the written law, while Isaac in showing his willingness to be sacrificed because of his father's will as transmitted to him by his father proved the binding power of the oral law (Ibid.). No law, practice and handed down by preceding generations, no matter how meaningless and unimportant it may seem to us at present, can be violated with impunity. When, therefore, in a point of law the least doubt as to the ultimate decision arises we cannot be too rigid in its application (151 ע"א). When criticized for following too closely in the steps of the ר"י, fearing to deviate the breadth of a hair from his legal decisions, he replied: "Yes it is true; but this is my chief praise and glory" (Ibid.). Nothing provoked him more than a careless, off-hand answer to a question of law (346 ז"ל). He maintained a very friendly and sympathetic attitude towards the members of his own profession, and in differences arising between them and their congregations he seldom failed to place himself on the side of the former (410 ז"ל; נ"ל, 5, ז"ל). But he has no sympathy for a Rabbi who is either careless in his legal decisions or by his conduct displays a disregard for strict observance. With such he is relentless. He must be removed from his place without any

delay (162, 017). He deplores the fact that some of the smaller communities pay so little attention to the proper selection of a Rabbi, accepting as their spiritual leaders, without consulting a prominent Rabbi, itinerant ^{not} preachers who are ignorant of the law and are only after the filthy lucre (227, 711).

When in 1813 the Austrian ^{Emperor} King returned to Vienna, ~~from~~ ^{for} the Jewish community with Openheimer at its head wished to display their enthusiastic love of country and their patriotic loyalty to the King by celebrating this event in the synagogue where prayers of thanksgiving would mingle with the sound of musical instruments and the melodious female voices singing the national anthem from the ladies' gallery. Sofer was called upon to state whether such a procedure would not involve the violation of some law, and, if so, whether the exigency of the occasion would not justify its temporary suspension. ~~This~~ ^{His} answer was in the negative. It is true that we must on all occasions prove our hearty loyalty to the King who rules over us by the will of God, but we dare not suspend the minutest law in doing so. We dare not honor the King by dishonoring God. The voice of a woman is 'tabooed' and could not be heard in the synagogue while the Almighty is being extolled and glorified, even though the purpose be to please the King (190, 017).

His zeal for law knew no bounds. All practical questions and issues when brought in conflict with the mandates of the

law must yield unconditionally. Law was not made for man
 but man for law. This seems to be his general stand. A pious
 father detecting artistic abilities in his son may wish to send him
 to an academy to learn the art of sculpture. But he is confronted
 by the prohibitory scriptural law as it is traditionally interpreted.
 For how is one to make an image without at the same time
 violating the second commandment? Under no circumstances
 should his sculptured figure be complete and perfect.
 An imperfection or blemish in one of the most prominent
 features, such as an underdeveloped eye or incomplete
 nose, must mar his work (Deut 28:11). Not even human
 suffering may be relieved by wresting the victim from the
 iron grip of law. A young Finnish girl is afflicted with
 epilepsy. The parents can find no other way of allaying her
 pain and alleviating their own suffering but by consigning
 her to the care and treatment of a ^{Mahomedan} ~~hospital~~ hospital
 where such diseases are treated and often cured. But
 there she will be virtually compelled to live on prohibited
 food? She may even learn their customs and manners,
 adopt them, and finally perhaps give up Judaism? Then it
 is far better for her to remain home and die in the faith
 of her fathers. But the parents are poor, and unable to
 take proper care of her? Then let her be sent away from home,
 out in the open world; there will always be found among her

people, some kind-hearted persons who will look after her needs (76, 71'). A similar case is that of an idiot whose parents, made miserable by his presence, wished to send him to a Christian asylum for idiots. But here too the food question is the chief obstacle. Of course, being under thirteen he may remain there until he reaches that age without violating the law. But the eating of prohibited food during the period of childhood would according to the testimony of some rabbis have a deleterious effect on his later moral character. Then it is better that he remain an idiot all his life (83, 171x).

But this strict legalist who would excommunicate one for transacting business on the Sabbath (195 □ 11) and force him into obedience by the aid of the secular government, could at times be reduced to quiet submission. When unwonted circumstances arose, when the conditions of life made the yoke of the law too heavy for ordinary human strength to bear, or when the futility of protest, moral persuasion and even compulsion became only too evident, then his usual rigor relaxed. When, for instance, in 1809 during the Franco-Austrian ^{war}, many of the Jewish homes were destroyed in the city of Presburg, Sofer did not insist upon having the work of rebuilding interrupted on Saturday. The distress of the homeless victims and the financial loss that such an interruption would have

39.
involved considerably mollified his natural severity (1717
60). Again, seeing that the law prohibiting persons of comfort-
able means from performing any work or engaging in any
business on 71107 3111 was commonly disregarded even
by members of his own congregation and that no disciplinary
methods would be of any avail, he reluctantly refrained from
making public denunciations against such sinful con-
duct. He felt that such protests would merely tend to
increase the enormity of the sin as the law would then be trans-
gressed knowingly and intentionally, and 3111 11110 1111 1111 1111
111110 1111 (1 1111). On one occasion he even went so far
as to permit the baking of 111 31 of sweet corn — a notable
concession from a man who had an abhorrent fear of innova-
tion. (1111 1111).

But rigorous as he usually was in matters of law because
of the growing indifference on the part of his generation to its
strict observance (11, II 1111), he was still more so in the
effort of preserving the innumerable customs and traditions which
had become so intimate and vital a part of the religious
life of the Jew. His infatuated love for old traditional 1111110 bears
the stamp of medieval fanaticism. Customs bore the same
binding force as the law divine, and no matter what their
origin may have been we have no right to question or
question their authoritative power (327 1111). While it

40.
is not necessary nor advisable that we should increase
their number by additions of our own making (56. 1118) nor
that we should introduce new customs by borrowing such
from localities where their practice is established, it is
most imperative however that those practised and bequeathed
by former generations should be carefully treasured and
watched with a vigilant eye, for the startling indifference
and woeiful laxness of the age demand a strictness the
severity of which alone could hope to counteract this prevailing
spirit of lawlessness (124. 1118). We may not always be
able to assign plausible reasons for the existence of some
customs, but we may rest assured that though their true
meaning be hidden from us their foundation is firm, and
he who sneers and scoffs at such practices or even seems
to belittle their value manifests a lack of faith that
warrants a careful examination into his religious life and
conduct (51. 1118). He loves peace and hates disruption. In order
that peace ^{might} be maintained he would allow one who cat's bread
that was baked with the milk of a non-Jew to be included
among the three required by law to constitute a quorum for
after-meal grace (107. 111), yea, to preserve peace he would even
disregard the Biblical injunction against 71090 (16. 1118), but
under no circumstances even if it were to prevent dissension and
secure peace would he allow the discontinuance in practice

of even the most insignificant traditional custom, for "let thousands be destroyed and not a jot or iota of Jewish tradition or A.M. be changed" (85. 'V'V p 37).

This attitude of his may seem altogether unreasonable and somewhat inconsistent, but it is only apparently so. There is a profound psychological reason or explanation ~~underlying~~ ^{for} this seemingly contradictory frame of mind. He will adopt a more lenient course when the conduct of some overpious individuals threatens by its rash imprudence to create a breach between them and those less pious or less fanatic than they, but he cannot afford to make ^{the least} concessions to the loud and insistent clamors of ^{the newly-appeared spirit} of gross unbelief. When confronted by such cries his stand must be definite, firm and immovable. To waver would result in ultimate defeat. For the whole structure of orthodoxy would be undermined and would eventually crumble into pieces, if the least breach be effected or the frailties exposed and removed. The first attack once successfully begun and persistently carried on would spell ruin and disaster to the orthodox cause. Traditional Judaism, as he understood it, would be irretrievably lost. For what barriers are absolutely insurmountable to the aggressor? What power is there to repulse the enemy from making further attacks? To day the fragile outside fence is shattered and removed; what is there to prevent the actual bombardment of the castle walls tomorrow? First permission

46.
to share on יו"ב 317 is asked of the guardians of the law, and if
this be granted, as was done by Ezeiel Landau (13 ת"ר I"31)
the cry for the abolition of another law will be raised until
finally even the Sabbath will be publicly desecrated (154 ת"ר)
To forestall such ruinous consequences the only wise and
reasonable method to pursue is to remain obdurate and
unyielding, to resist with might and main the least en-
croachment on the law by stoutly defending its outward
ramparts so that no entrance within into the interior fortress
could be effected. If traditional Judaism is to survive the
repeated onslaughts of its aggressors it must utilize all
available material for its own fortification. The least customs may
prove a powerful instrument in the cause of self-defence.
Tradition must preserve its integrity; only then can it hope of coming
out victorious and triumphant. No changes or innovations
that tend to transform its character should be countenanced
(130, I י"78). The תפ"א must remain in the centre of the synagogue
for tradition has placed it there (28, ת"ר) and no matter how sometimes
unreasonable and defective tradition may appear to us we have
no right to improve upon it by changing any of its features. The
congregational chanting of the Haftara maybe, as it indisputably
is, bad for it defeats the very purpose of this part of the service,
as the congregation, instead of carefully listening to the prophetic
lesson and seeking to derive benefit therefrom, is busy with its own

hubbub of voices thrown into such a state of hopeless confu-
 sion as to be quite unable to grasp its meaning and message.
 But such has been the general custom for centuries and cannot
 at this late stage be changed (68 nix). Custom may sometimes
 exceed the bounds of the law, prohibiting that which is by law
 permitted. The Talmudic law, for instance, may allow some
 parts of a woman's hair to be seen in public view but custom
 based on a statement in the 117 favored a more strict observance.
 In all such cases the slightest deviation from custom tantamounts
 to an outright violation of law, for once established custom
 is as cogent and binding as formulated legal statutes (117
 36). Furthermore tradition may have undeniably erred
 on points of minor importance. The town Raiz may have
 been written in old bills of divorce Raiz by mistake, and
 yet it would be unlawful to rectify this mistake in similar
 documents in the future. The mistake is evident, but whether
 mistake or not, the old spelling should be retained. (117 nix
 31). In short,

It is a matter of exceeding difficulty to separate with
 scientific exactness the composition of human character
 into its various elements and to determine with fate-
 like certainty the extent to which certain influences direct the
 course and conduct of an individual and mould his
 views. How much, for instance, of the desperate tenacity of this

44.
man who would not relinquish the most trivial laws and customs for the simple and all-sufficient reason that they have been bequeathed to posterity by preceding generations, is to be ascribed to his early training and environmental conditions, and how much of it is to be attributed to the growing indifference to, and careless disregard of, those old, time-honored beliefs and practices on the part of a large class of the Jews of his time who having surreptitiously imbibed some outside culture had become restless and rebellious under the yoke of traditional discipline, can hardly be ascertained. There can be no doubt however, that to both of these determining factors are to be traced his excessive zeal for the old and utter contempt for the new. Born and bred in Frankfurt under the roof of pious parents and educated under the rigorous discipline of the fanatic Nathan Adler and the more rational but not less exacting Phineas Hurwitz, Moses Sofer received all the elements that enter into the making of a strict legalist. It is not clear that Sofer ever busied himself with any other studies besides those of the Talmud and rabbinic literature in general, and the sweeping statement that "in spite of his great devotion to Bible and Talmud Sofer succeeded in acquiring a knowledge of secular sciences, also becoming proficient in astronomy, astrology, geometry and general history" (Bernhard Friedberg: Jewish

46.
Encyclopedia) is ~~altogether~~ ^{altogether} groundless. It is not true, to judge from his writings, that he possessed proficient knowledge of the sciences, history and the like. Outside of the sphere of rabbinics in which he was more than proficient, a truly great master, he had no learning worthy of the name. Even his knowledge of the Bible was not profound. He studied its legal and homiletical aspects only, paying little or no attention to its philological and scientific side. For in the latter field he displays positive ignorance. The substantive 771, he argues, is a feminine noun because its plural form has the feminine ending (39 II י"ד). He forgets however that the nouns 771, 772 and the like are masculine although their plural ending is feminine. The name 773 should in his opinion be written 774 as it is probably derived from 775, the 7 and 3 being interchangeable (29 II י"ד). There can hardly be any doubt, however, that 773 is the ~~Hebrew~~ equivalent of ~~the~~ ^{Hebrew} 776, signifying a young girl as its masculine form is 777, a young man. The word 778 he thinks derives its meaning from its component parts 779 and 780 denoting deprivation of food, as the wife is the food-preparer of the home (170 II י"ד). But 778 is doubtlessly derived from 781. The calling of a person by two names as 782 783 is he believes a recent innovation, as in the whole range of Hebrew literature there cannot be found one example of such a case (18 II י"ד). Unfortunately 784

is one. The reason why לִי וְלָךְ and not לְךָ וְלִי should be written in a bill of divorce is, he says, because the prefix 'ו' may also, as it often does, express comparison while 'ל' never in the entire Bible denotes comparison (לְךָ וְלִי). The fact is that there is any number of Biblical verses in which 'ל' is used to express comparison (Amos 6th; Ruth 3rd; Haggai 1st; Ecclesiastes 4th, 9th, etc.). It is therefore hardly likely that, possessing such a superficial knowledge of the linguistic side of the Bible, he would have sought to master the secular sciences. Moreover, he sternly opposed such studies, and unequivocally condemned those who devoted their time to the acquisition of ^{secular} knowledge.

He expressly forbids a Jewish leader, who wishes to escape the cruel anathema, to delve in secular studies, and urges a congregation not to receive religious instruction from one who instead of devoting his undivided time to the study of the law busies himself with the reading of ^{secular} books ($\text{לֹא יִלְמַד מִי שֶׁלֹא יִלְמַד תּוֹרָה}$). And we have no reason to accuse him of practicing that which he had condemned in others. As most of us may have read the works of Jewish philosophers, such as Saadia's Emunoth and Meaminim, and others of the same nature, but he surely did not go any further. For of what avail would all such knowledge have been to him? Even philosophy he deems a mere pastime, which may and may not

be indulged in but which should never be put on the same level with the Law or be allowed to interfere with it or modify the conception of it in any manner or form. They must be kept distinct and separate (הקשר שבין דברי תורה ועבודת
 לעצמם שור וחטור יחדיו ואים הוא סנהדיג ישראל ל כוהני
 ככמים. ה"ח. 51.)

The truth of the matter is that great as he was as a Talmudic scholar he was quite insignificant in the sphere of secular learning. He was a specialist in the strictest sense of the term. It is safe to assert that he knew nothing worth knowing outside of his special and limited field. And when on the other hand he attempted to leave his territory to take up cudgels in another field he met with decided failure. Constantinople in his opinion means the Great Constantin as the suffix 'nople' signifies 'great' in the language of that country—a good example of folk etymology (14, II ע"ה). It is unnecessary however to cite illustrations of his ignorance in secular branches, for he was a typical Rabbi of his age and as such he is of interest to us. Being a disciple of Nathan Adler and living in an age in which new ideas had begun to permeate the life of the Jew threatening to revolutionize traditional Judaism by changing its form so as to adapt it to the new conditions which had arisen, Sofer stood forth as a mighty champion of the old and leading opponent of

the new. Had he lived at a time when there was peace in Zion, when the power of authority was recognized by all and questioned by none, he probably would not have been what he was. But living when and where he did he almost had to be what he was, the faithful protector and zealous defender of tradition against the ravaging onslaughts of the spirit of the time. His was the task of upholding a system of conduct which was in perpetual discord with the general taste of a great number of Jews who by virtue of their more modern education had come in closer contact with the outside world. What did he care whether the 'open-air' wedding shocked and filled with disgust those of keener sensibilities? Does not the *Sh"t* insist upon the canopy being stretched under the free, open sky? We must not set aside the *Sh"t* whose legal decisions are unalterably binding on us all (*Sh"t T"t O'Y"t' 3870" 33*) for the purpose of following the customs of our gentile neighbors. (*98 I Y"t' 78*). He was clear sighted enough to see that the cry for change in religious practices did not emanate from any positive form of disbelief or unbelief but from the deep-seated instinct for imitation, the desire to make the Jewish identity less discernible and striking. People will change their original names not because the names as such are in any way objectionable but because

49.
they denote Jewish origin (38 II י"ד). A faithful Jew
proud of his origin will not change his name (II, II י"ד).
For the same reason they will have stained-glass windows
in the synagogue, whereon an image of the sun having the word
י"ד at its centre is painted ~~which~~ picture or emblem which
is not only ugly but is also a gross materialization of the
deity (129, י"ד). What if not the desire for imitation would
induce religious people to have human figures carved on monu-
ments for the dead, the presence of which renders the cemetery
unhallowed for prayer? (4, י"ד ו"ד). It is this base motive
as well as the supercilious disregard of authority that he so much
deplores and despises. Judaism which is essentially a religion
~~the~~ based on tradition cannot maintain a permanent
existence if it be subject to the whims and caprices that
time and place may engender in the minds of the people. To
change a custom or law because of the demands of neces-
sity or mere convenience means to destroy the same together
with a good many others the abolition of which new condi-
tions may demand at a future date (191, י"ד). To prevent such
disastrous consequences, Judaism must rise above the
exigencies of life and submit to no change or alteration of
any kind. Our predecessors who made Judaism what it is
~~were~~ ^{were} superior to us in intellect and in the knowledge of God. Our
duty therefore is to know ourselves, realize our limitations

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and live in the consciousness of our utter insignificance when compared to those of former generations (אמת ויחס). The questioning of authority is arrogant self-conceit and the introduction of opportunism in religion is vile hypocrisy. These destructive forces must not find entrance into the domain of religion. And it is the duty of every individual to enlist himself in the armies battling for the Lord. For man's purpose in life is not only to develop and perfect his own powers and virtues but ^{also} to seek the perfection of the spiritual life of his neighbor, to weed out the godless and multiply the pious and faithful (Ibid).

When, therefore, in 1818 the Hamburg Temple, which was the practical embodiment of the spirit of innovation, was opened, Sofer raised his voice in its condemnation and together with some of his contemporaries entered the arena to wage war against such arch heresy and ruthless iconoclasm. Being ^{untrained} ~~unskilled~~ in the art of ^{practical} warfare and lacking the necessary weapons as well as the proper strength to wield them, he failed, as could easily be foreseen, in carrying the combat to a successful issue. He was moreover hopelessly battling against the impetuous tide which with the gathered strength of centuries was powerfully sweeping over the life of the Jewish people. But bravery and courage and not victory and triumph mark the hero on the battle-field; and, whatever the

51.
issue, in the struggle, so far proved the indomitable strength
of his convictions. He believed ^{strongly} and fought bravely. His
tactics and stratagems may not have been of the best, for he
was a poor general. He spurned concerted action and declining
an open engagement (85, 117). He preferred guerilla warfare
to a decisive battle (Ibid). When asked to contribute to a
volume hoping for its object to disprove the proofs and
arguments given in favor of reform in the book p 24 1113,
he refused to comply with this demand on the ground that
such a step would inevitably involve them in an endless
controversy which would bring small results and
would only tend to procure a delightful pastime for those
self-constituted judges and critics of the fashionable
cafés (Ibid). He deemed it best to shoot deadly arrows
from concealment, to fight singly and obscurely. For he
believed that reform was a momentary outbreak, and
sporadic appearance that were soon to vanish from
the horizon of the Jewish life, and therefore did not think
it necessary nor advisable to transmit to future genera-
tions the least knowledge of this modern form of backsliding (Ibid).

The heat of the contest centred around the Temple
service. The Temple was closed during the week days
and opened only on Saturday. The traditional prayers
were abridged by the omission of some unedifying parts

and the striking out of those passages which contained any reference to the belief in a personal Messiah or expressed a yearning for the restoration of Jerusalem and its Temple. Most of the prayers were translated into German, and a sermon preached in the vernacular took the place of the Haphtara. Also the singing of hymns and the playing of the organ formed a part of the service. To us such innovations may seem innocent and harmless but to a man of the type of Soper these deviations from the trodden path sounded the death knell of traditional Judaism which was his dearest possession on earth. While he himself does not think that the belief in Israel's redemption through the advent of a personal Messiah is one of the fundamental principles of Judaism, he nevertheless insists that he who rejects this belief repudiates the authority and absolute truth of the Bible and is therefore to be considered an infidel (386, 71st). It is not true that Hillel denied the Messianic belief (99a 717710). What Hillel meant was that the Messiah will not appear in the person of an earthly king, but that God himself will redeem Israel (ibid 101). But even were Hillel to be taken literally the ground for disbelief does not thereby gain any strength. For the majority of the Rabbis did not concur with him in this opinion and in questions of belief as in all other questions of moment

153.
the ruling of the majority is final (386. 71¹). Besides, Hillel's
reflection of a personal Messiah does not include the restoration
of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple (192. 17¹) and
the omission of the prayers for their restoration undermines
the entire system of Jewish belief. He grants, too, that any
language is a fit medium for the expression of the soul in
prayer, but the Great Assembly by writing the prayers in
Hebrew once for all decided that Hebrew was the most fit
language for that purpose, and to whom shall we appeal
from their decision? (192. 17¹). It is true that Hebrew is no
longer understood by the masses, but the identical condition
prevailed in those days when Aramaic was the language of
the people and not Hebrew, and still the Assembly did not hesi-
tate to make Hebrew the only language ^{in which} man's spirit could
commune with the divine (84. 17¹). If Hebrew is not suffi-
ciently understood then the better solution to the difficulty is
not to follow the path of least resistance and discard its use
from the synagogue but rather to make the people know
it in the same way as they are taught to understand the
vernacular (86. 17¹). Besides, Hebrew is God's language.
His messages to the prophets were transmitted in this tongue.
It is therefore most becoming that we address Him
in His own language (84. 17¹). Furthermore we cannot
be always sure of getting the precise meaning of some

84.
portions of our liturgy and if we were to render them in another language we would be apt to give them a wrong interpretation, whereas now by retaining the Hebrew we obviate all such possible aberrations as God surely knows the exact meaning those prayers seek to convey (Ibid).

The same holds true with regard to the readings from the Pentateuch and the Prophets. Many of the Public passages have become obscure to us, so that an exact translation of the text is next to impossible; and, while for ordinary reading purposes the loss occasioned by an imperfect rendering may seem inappreciably small for ritual purposes, however, where absolute exactness of meaning is required such a loss assumes a grave aspect (86, 111). Again, history tells us that owing to the people's ignorance of the Hebrew language Ezra created the office of interpreter whose function it was to render the passage read into the vernacular. Why then, the question may well arise, was the Hebrew read at all, if the reading of a translation were sufficient? (Ibid).

Besides, why should we by changing our sacred language close up one of the avenues to redemption which is now open to us? (193, 111). But aside from all such arguments, what are we going to do with the traditional Cantillation which is undoubtedly full of meaning and significance if the Hebrew be superseded by a foreign

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tongue? Missard it, say some (p. 20, 711, 712) for
who, they ask, heard Moses use this particular intonation
or cantillation in reciting the law? There is but one
answer to all such questions: we put our trust in
tradition. We have not inherited falsehood from our
fathers. We have faith, and believe, and no sooner do
we cease to believe than we are beset by endless questions
and doubts. Who, for instance, saw Moses laying this
particular kind of phylacteries, who saw him dwell during
the Feast of Tabernacles in such and such a booth, or who
heard him produce such and such sounds with the
Shofar? But to the believing soul all such doubts are
dispersed and made to evaporate by the strong light of
faith, like a misty fog at the rising of the sun (86, 11).

That which presents difficulty to some is the fact that
the arrangement of the prayers in the traditional services
lacks absolute uniformity, the 17790 77013 being substantially
different from the 1753017 77013 — a fact which seems to support
the contention that Tradition is not always infallible and
that it is often in doubt as to the real truth. But the difference
in arrangement does by no means imply the uncertainty of
Tradition. There is but one law for all, but man is not a
parrot. It is but natural that he should impart to the action
performed and the word expressed a personal tinge.

For after all prayer is nothing but the expression of our love for the divine spirit. This feeling is not predominant in all men equally. The expression of it will therefore vary with the degree of its intensity. All forms of expression however have the one object as basis to exalt and worship the Master of all. There is therefore no essential difference between the two $\pi\iota\lambda\lambda\omega\tau\iota\varsigma$. The $\iota\gamma\gamma\omega\tau\iota\varsigma$ is neither superior nor inferior to the $\iota\gamma\lambda\omega\tau\iota\varsigma$. It was a mere stroke of good fortune that the former found in the person of the $\iota\gamma\lambda$ an able vindicator of its truth and expounder of its meaning. We too, the followers of the latter, could be made to see the true meaning of our $\pi\omega\tau\iota\varsigma$ if chance would favor us with as great an interpreter as was the $\iota\gamma\lambda$. The difference of form alone signifies nothing. All the prophets heard God's message alike and yet each used a different style in expressing it (15. 16. 197. $\pi\iota\lambda$). On the contrary, variety of form saves prayer from becoming too stereotyped. It defeats its purpose however, when the particular mode of worship of one man becomes the peculiar possession of a large group of people to whom such prayers are simply words learned by rote (15. $\pi\iota\lambda$).

(One cannot help discerning in this careful and elaborate discussion of the relative values of the two $\pi\iota\lambda\lambda\omega\tau\iota\varsigma$ a touch of diplomacy, and even a slight vein of sarcasm. Sofer

attached very little importance to the mystical explanations of the "ר"י. His was not a mind susceptible to mysticism. He was a sound, clear-thinking legalist. The very style of the above-mentioned responses sounds to one acquainted with his writings somewhat artificial. In his forced reserve there lurks a fear of being too frank and outspoken. He did not care or, what is more likely, he could not afford at a time when avowed unbelief as it expressed itself in reform became rampant to attack openly the practices of a large sect, which though unsavoury to his palate did no perceptible harm. But that he was not in sympathy with the mystic views and nebulous theories of such men as the "ר"י is quite evident. The mysteries of Kabbalah elicit from him very little praise. He is more true to himself when he writes:
 ויפה כ' פרמ' ע"ל
 שכללנו שהביא סכתבי הקד"ו וכ' ע"ל פרמ' עם עוזאים לא עבדו
 יפה דיבר וכן קני' אומר כל המעריך דברי קבלה עם ההזכות
 הקוסקים ח"ב משום אורע כנאים" (ע"ל, 57).

He praises his teachers Nathan Adler and Phinehas Hurwitz for having never quoted the "ר"י in their sermons (197, א"ל). To him vague statements and obscure explanations, mystifying instead of clarifying things, are sheer nonsense (15, א"ל). He believes with the "ר"י that we are bound to believe only in that which has its foundation in the Talmud and the later interpretations of it. He however who believes in things not based

on or undervived from those authoritative sources, let him believe undisturbed (16, 117). Customs having a Rabbinistic origin and meaning he regards as mere superstitions; as the custom enjoined ^{upon} in the ante-mortem instructions of 710117 that of killing a chicken and roasting in a new house that is built on a previously vacant lot, before one takes up his residence therein, and others of like origin (138, 111). The individual, ^{however} wishing to practice those superstitious customs may do so at his heart's content.)

But to return from this short digression to the Hamburg controversy, what incensed Moses Sofer most in this Temple ritual was its inconsistency that defied all logic. The Temple was closed during the week days and opened only on the Sabbath. The reason for this arrangement was of course purely opportunistic, a matter of convenience. Sofer, however, ~~was~~ ^{seemed} ~~inclined~~ to think that the reason for it was based on some principle, the nature of which greatly puzzled him. The tacit abolition of the daily prayers implied either that communal worship in the opinion of the leaders of the Temple was not an absolute necessity, private worship being as efficacious, an opinion which is contrary to law; or that prayer in their opinion was not the substitute for the daily sacrificial offerings — an opinion which is contrary to the traditional view held hitherto. But whatever

the reason, the Sabbath services retain both parts or sections of the old ritual, the שְׁמִינִי and the קִדְּשׁ , to which an explanatory notice is affixed that the former is in place of the שְׁמִינִי קִדְּשׁ and the latter of the קִדְּשׁ קִדְּשׁ . If, argues Sofer with invincible logic, the daily prayers are done away with, what sense is there in retaining the קִדְּשׁ prayer as substitute for the קִדְּשׁ קִדְּשׁ which by its very name denotes an additional sacrifice to the daily שְׁמִינִי — if there is nothing to add to, how can additions be made? (84, 117).

The playing of the organ in the Temple was another bone of contention. His arguments or reasons for opposing the introduction of it in a Jewish house of worship are interesting. In the first place, since the destruction of Jerusalem all instrumental music is forbidden to us, for "how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (192, 117). In the second place it is not in our power to add religious practices of our own creation to those enjoined by law and tradition. (84, 117). In the third place, it is hardly conceivable, he argues with great vehemence, that a non-Jew who is comparatively speaking the ruling power of the country would condescend to say the least, to hire himself to a Jewish congregation whose beliefs he does not share to play the organ in their place of worship? And granting that he would, what would be the

inevitable consequence? The Christians would soon find sufficient cause for accusing the Jew of seeing thereby to mock Christianity and degrade its adherents (84, 17).

The reforms introduced in the Hamburg Temple were sanctioned and advocated by contemporary rabbis chief of whom was Aaron ^{Chorin} of Arad whose views with the proofs adduced from rabbinic authorities in their support were collated by Eleazer Lieberman in the works *HA'AL* 718 and *715 HA'AL* (85 17). Lieberman could provoke very little anger as he could do very little harm. He was an irresponsible and unprincipled person. Only a short time after the publication of these books he ~~became an apostate~~ ^{turned} apostate. But Aaron Chorin (י"א) occupied the post of Rabbi and it was therefore most necessary that he be brought to submission by being won over, nominally at least, to the orthodox side. But how could this be accomplished? By persecution, pure and simple, said the great Sofer (85 17). What arguments could not do, intimidation and actual persecution finally accomplished. Chorin was a poor man and father of a large family, and in a letter from Moses ^{te}pinetz of Altafen he was informed that unless he recanted he would be made to feel the stings of persecution to the end of his life (93 17). Under the stress of such circumstances, fearing that by a reassertion of his convictions he would

bring down misery upon ~~upon~~ his family, Cholim formally recanted (1820) assigning as reason the fact that the reformers abandoned the belief in a personal Messiah, which is one of the fundamental principles of Judaism (94, 17). The document was signed by Sofer and Mintz. Sofer was not fully satisfied with the reason given, as it clearly implied that the writer assented to all the other innovations (95, 17) but he could not help accepting the triumph, such as it was, with considerable rejoicing.

But while an individual could be thus partially subdued, a whole community could not. No such victory could be gained over the Hamburg Reform Temple. The leading opponents such as Mordecai Benet, Arisba Eger and Moses Sofer, were at the disadvantage of being at too great a distance from the scene of action. When the Temple was dedicated, the college of assistants or Haganim, Hamburg having at this time no Chief Rabbi, ordered a written proclamation to be put up in the synagogues forbidding pious Jews to use the new prayer-book because contrary to all usage important passages had been omitted. The lay heads of the community, however, removed this declaration and rebuked the authors for their presumption. Meeting with such rebuffs on the field of battle, they had to resort to the aid of outside influence. Consequently, the Chief Hagan

Baruch, by name addressed circular letters to the leading Rabbis of Europe denouncing the Temple innovations and appealing for concerted action in the effort of removing this dangerous snare and pitfall from the midst of the community (84. 111). Baruch's plan was to have as many Rabbis as possible sign a petition to the local government of the city of Hamburg requesting it to close the Temple in view of the fact that many heterodoxical innovations had been introduced in its service (Ibid). Sofer, zealous as he was, counseled coolness and far-sighted moderation. Concerted action of this nature is bound, he says to create public sensation which is by all means to be avoided. (הכנסת החכם ענין ברעשו ושב ואל תעשה עדיף) (Ibid) חזק הרברים אשר דבר אשה מאשר עצותו וצויו כנפשו, (Ibid) There should be no open war between the two factions. ולא יראה החובה שום התגרות אדם באדם כה האסת צווחם עם השקר His words are fiery and scathing his actions are cool and deliberate. If he were to execute judgment against them (reformers) he would excommunicate them and interdict marriage between their children and those of the orthodox (89. 111). But such judgment he never passed, although he prohibited his own children from associating with the reformers (Anti-Mortem Instructions). It would perhaps not be wrong to suppose that conditions in

his own community warned him against pursuing the vigorous line of action that had been proposed by some of his contemporaries ^{and} that he perhaps would have liked to see carried out.

Whether governmental interference was sought and proved unsuccessful can hardly be ascertained. But formal judgment against the Temple was finally pronounced, but having been delayed too long, more than seven months having elapsed before sentence of heresy was promulgated, the impression hoped for did not follow. The testimonial was translated in part into German but the German version was not calculated to create a good impression. The warriors proved weaponless.

But successful or unsuccessful, Sofer maintained unflinchingly his constant opposition to ^{the new} ~~the old~~, and to the end of his days he remained a fervent upholder of the old. Thinking that because the cry for reform emanated from the educated classes education as such was the root of all evil, he condemned secular studies as an unholy occupation. He prohibited his pupils from studying the German language, and forbade his children to read books whose contents are not derived from Jewish sources, laying special emphasis on the work of Moses Mendelssohn. (Anti-Mortem Instructions. 7' 17357 37 7' 17) 179071)

He also opposed very strenuously the political or civil emancipation of the Jews on the ground that civil equality would eventually lead to still greater laxity in religion. When in 1833 the Jewish question came up before the Reichstag which then met in Pressburg and the conferring of equal rights upon the Jews was contemplated, Sofer saw in such a measure a great menace to Judaism and warned the Jewish community of the coming danger. The leaders of the movement for equality seemed however not to have heeded to his gloomy prognostications and evil forebodings.

Despite his various efforts the tide of religious indifference swept on ragingly over the life of the Jew and submerged even his own congregation. Finding it impossible to stem its onflow, he appealed as a last resort to the government for direct interference. Two petitions of his written in 1832 and 1833 to Weiland Kaiser Franz are extant in which he desires the government to issue a proclamation by which a strict observance of the Mosaic law might be enforced. (Wiehenzeit, 1870, p. 599). The Sabbath, he complains bitterly, is openly desecrated, for, contrary to the Mosaic injunctions, some keep their stores open on that day. A good many others perform their weekly labors on the Sabbath. In one instance a Jew

married an aunt of his. All such violations of the law, he argues, cannot but be injurious to the welfare of the state. For, in the first place, Judaism like all other religions, teaches the obligations and duties we owe to God, to our King and to our fellowmen. These duties are enjoined upon us in the Bible, and if its authority be defied and its laws violated, the state and society in general are bound to suffer serious consequences. In the second place, this open revolt against tradition which for centuries had been held as absolutely binding by the whole mass of Jews, may have an injurious influence on their Christian neighbors inducing them by example to break away from their religion and violate its fundamental principles.

These arguments sound as they may appear failed to convince the ^{government} ~~King~~ for the reply was long in coming. Seeing that no reply was forthcoming, Sofer addressed a second petition urging the same request. He finally received an answer from his majesty which proved extremely unsatisfactory. The King unconvinced by the invincible logic of the arguments, refused to act on the petitions, as he did not deem it necessary for the government to meddle with the religious beliefs and practices of the people. Such interference he did not think to lie within the province

of the duties of the State. Thus ended his last attempt
— in failure and disappointment.

It is extremely hard for us, children of the modern age, to sympathize with this man in his views and opinions and struggles, and far more to appreciate his work. Our age is so far removed from his, and our conception of the world in general and Judaism in particular is so different from his. But we are studying history and we must ^{employ} ~~use~~ the historical point of view. The life and work of an individual can be properly understood only if studied objectively in relation to the time in which he lived and ~~the~~ conditions in which he moved. Viewed as in the light of this age, and judged by the ~~stastes~~ ^{standards} and standards of our present day life, Moses Sofer appears small and insignificant indeed; but examined by the light of his own time and estimated according to the views and standards of his own day, Sofer stands out as a most prominent and influential personality, a great factor in the history of the Jew and Judaism of his day. In him more perhaps than in any of his contemporaries we witness the everlasting struggle between the old and the new which at this very moment is still disturbing the tranquility of our religious life. As such the life and career of this man as well as ^{his} ~~the~~ beliefs and opinions may still be of importance to the

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student of our history.

End.

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Moses Sofer.

(Compiled by the College Library) ^{Adolph Sigmund} ~~Adolph~~ ^{Adolph}

* This is merely an attempt; no claim is made to absolute completeness.
Librarian

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