

A STUDY OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF JOSEPH NASI

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for a rabbinical degree.

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Dedicated
with loving memory to
My Father

Introduction

We Jews are the world's most incorrigible optimists. From very earliest antiquity we have marched down the ages proclaiming our immutable conviction that this universe is good, that humanity is by nature good and that ultimately good will triumph over evil. In a history that is filled with persecution and pogrom we have been able to discern the workings of a divine plan which made for the survival of the Jewish nation. It has been a fundamental precept of our faith that somehow or other, in ways we cannot quite fathom or comprehend but whose evidences we see in the saga of the Jew, Providence transforms the evil which men and nations devise and do, into good. It would be hard to see how such a bloody page in history as the Spanish Inquisition could have produced any good for the Jew, but even of this it might be said, "Gam zu L'Tovah," regardless of how terrible and tragic it might have seemed, even this was for good. A Golden Age of Civilization in Spain in ruins, centuries of literary and scholastic accomplishments consigned to the flames, auto-da-fe's, even to this there was a bright side. It set Europe in a turmoil that broke down the absolute power of the Holy Roman Church under the papacy; it opened in the East, particularly in Turkey, a haven of refuge where cultured and learned Jews might openly practice their faith and at the same time have full rights in the government

under which they lived; and finally it produced Don Joseph Nasi, Spanish-Jewish statesman of Turkey, who helped guide the destiny of a great part of the world, from Poland to Persia, in the Sixteenth Century.

It is with Don Joseph Nasi that this thesis is concerned. By an examination of contemporary documents such as correspondence of the French and Italian ambassadors, as well as the Hebrew Responsa of that period, the author has attempted to reconstruct the life and character of the man, both as statesman and as Jew. Much new material which gives us a new insight into the man as a politician and statesman has been unearthed by Abraham Galante in the Royal Archives during the past few years. There is a paucity of materials in English on Nasi and the tremendous influence that he wielded in European politics; hence much is incorporated verbatim from the Hebrew, French, and Italian sources.

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Notes.

Chapter I.

THE EARLY LIFE OF JOSEPH NASI

1. The Background of the Inquisition.

The edict of Ferdinand and Isabella of March 30th, 1492, robbed 100,000 cultured Jews of their homeland. Spain saw a few months later, the sorrowful picture of an unwilling exile. The king's cruel edict watched over the roads so that no one swerved from the line of march. To have pity on these unfortunates was a crime and to give them shelter even for a short time incurred the severest penalties, even death. Those among the Jews who remained on Spanish soil from that time on, carried outwardly the symbols of Christianity, but inwardly they kept the belief in the One God.

Later Immanuel, King of Portugal, son-in-law of Ferdinand issued a similar edict for the Jews of his land. The Inquisition was promulgated for the Jews who remained in the Pyrenees, not only to give them a firm belief in Christianity but to prevent their backsliding, and in the course of the sixteenth century and the following century every religious act required many sacrifices. Forced belief, however, produces obstinacy, so that despite all the edicts of the Church against the obstinate Marranos who inwardly preserved Judaism from generation to generation there arose men who sat in the councils of the rulers, men who were priests, teachers of science. They secretly observed Jewish ceremonies, gathered together on festive days in subterranean caverns, taught their children the ancient tongue, acquainted them

with Old Testament, which the fanatics had prohibited. To escape persecution they adopted Spanish names. Thus there arose an unbroken line of old Jewish families, with old Jewish names, while the world only knew them by their new Christian ones.¹

Many Jews were forcibly converted in Portugal but escaped and found an asylum in Ancona. There they received an indemnity from Pope Clement VII, that they were not to be harmed by the Inquisition but were to be allowed to practice Judaism.² "Since they were dragged by force to be baptized they cannot be considered members of the Church and to punish them for heresy would be to violate the principles of justice and equity. With sons and daughters of the first Marranos the case is different, they belong to the Church as voluntary members ...but they must be kept in the bosom of the Church through gentle treatment."³ But Clement's death brought to naught (1534) his good intentions and the Marrano's hopes, and the Inquisition again started up in Portugal. King Joao III paid but slight heed to Clement's successor, Paul III.

S.P. Rabbinoiwitz makes a social distinction as to the manner in which the Inquisition affected the migrations of Jews from Portugal. He states that there were two classes of exiles. The first class had to flee in hunger with pestilence and the sword accompanying them; these were the impoverished Jews who came to the Turkish lands in Europe and Asia, while a few went to Northern Africa and others to Southern Italy. The second class were of the wealthier families whose fathers and grandfathers had entered Christianity in the early days of the Inquisition but who wanted to

escape from their oppressors and to find freedom in other lands. Many of the refugees went to the Netherlands, concentrating there in Antwerp.⁴ Although they still remained under the influence of the Church they felt less uneasy in their new surroundings than they did amid the scenes which they had so recently witnessed; no longer would the tortures and persecutions of their brethren arouse futile anger within them. Granted that they still had to mask themselves as Christians, still it was not so irksome away from the keen eyes of the Portuguese Inquisition.

2. The Mendes-Nassi Family.

As was pointed out by Levy above, many Marranos in order to escape the rigors of the Inquisition, changed their Jewish names to Christian ones. Rosanes tells us that among the Marranos of Lisbon who lived in fear of the Kingdom of Portugal was a rich and honorable family known among the Christians by the name of Mendes and among the Jews under the name, Nassi.⁵ There were three brothers who had fled from the Inquisition in Spain at the end of the Fifteenth century to seek refuge in Portugal.⁶ The eldest brother was Francisco Mendes who had founded an extensive banking business with branches in Flanders and France.⁷ A second brother was the head of the branch at Antwerp; his name was Diego Mendes. The youngest brother was the father of Joao Migueis who in Turkey became known as Joseph Nasi.⁸ Since Levy points out that the name Migueis means in Spanish "Miguel's son" although none of the sources mention Joseph's father by name, we can yet assume from Levy's deduction that he was Miguel Mendes. On the basis of this Levy asserts that

the spelling "Miques" found in "Les Negociations de la France dans le Levant" and in other French sources is a corruption.⁹ According to Carmoly the Nassi family changed its name to "Miques" prior to 1520 in order to escape the Inquisition.¹⁰ The question whether Miques assumed the name of Nasi as a title of rank or a resumption of his family name will be discussed later under the section, "The New Haven in Turkey".

Closely joined to the history of Joseph Nasi, Duke of Naxos, is that of Dona Gracia Nasi, the wife of his uncle, Francisco Mendes. All the modern historians, Graetz, Rabbino-witz, Rosanes, Carmoly, and Galante seem to agree that Dona Gracia was born in Portugal about 1510 of a Marrano family of Benvenisti. Their basis for this view is Joseph Karo's Responsa No. 80 . . . *אברהם בן יוסף* . . . According to Graetz she married Francisco Mendes under the Christian name of Beatrice de Luna in 1528.¹¹ According to Galante¹² and to Carmoly¹³ she received the name of Beatrice de Luna early in childhood. A great deal has been written on the different names of Gracia; a half dozen of them are mentioned by Galante.¹⁴ They have attributed to her the Christian name of Brianda, for we find the following statement in the "Informationi Manuscripti Italiani, folio 16, piece 13" . . . 'a very rich Portuguese Marrano Dona by the name of Brianda who had lived for some time in Ferrara and Venice, later going to Turkey where she married her daughter off, and where she professed Judaism with her family . . .'. Graetz points out that such a person is not known in any of the sources. The portrait, however, fits Gracia Nasi perfectly. Graetz is of the opinion that Brianda is

without a doubt a scribal error for Mendesia; that was Dona Gracia's name as a Christian.¹⁵ The French ambassadors in their correspondence designate her as "la Mende Portugaloise" or simply "Mende" while she was still in Venice and Ferrara.¹⁶

According to many historians, including Graetz, the former Marrano changed her name from Gracia Mendes to that of Gracia Nasi after she arrived in Constantinople. It is hard to know the true status of her name, for Joseph Hacohe¹⁷ calls her "Beatrice" when in 1556 she asked Suleiman the Magnificent, to intervene in favor of the Marranos imprisoned in Ancona by Pope Paul IV.

In an official Turkish document she is called Senora Gracia Nasi, on January 20, 1565, the name which she kept till her death. In a letter written to the Cadi of Belgrade it was written: "The Jewess Senora Gracia Nasi, who recently arrived from Flanders, has sent a messenger to inform us that six men attached to her service have left for Belgrade for business reasons."¹⁸

In citing the other members of this family we find some confusion because of the similarity of names. So far in this paper we have mentioned the following members of the Mendes-Nassi family; first, the three brothers, Francisco, Diego, and Miguel; secondly, Dona Gracia Mendes or Beatrice de Luna, the wife of Francisco; and thirdly, Joao Migue^s or Joseph Nasi, the son of Miguel. Now the confusing element enters in the person of Reyna Benvéniste, younger sister of Dona Gracia, who later married Diego in Flanders.²⁰ Dona Gracia bears Francisco a daughter about 1530 and they name her Reyna, too, so that now we have two Reyna Mendes, aunt and niece ! To add to this comedy of names, Diego and his

wife, Reyna, the elder, bear a daughter in Flanders about 1536, whom they call Gracia, so that now we have two Gracia Mendes, aunt and niece ! Gracia Mendes, the younger, later married the brother of Joseph Nasi, Samuel Nasi, who was her cousin.²¹

Levy ²² cites Almosino, who was elected rabbi of the Neveh Shalom community of Spanish Jews in Constantinople in 1553, author of the Spanish homiletic work, "Regimento de la Vida"²³ that Donna Gracia, the younger, called herself Donna Gracia Benvenisti up to the time of her marriage. Joseph's brother Samuel, according to Carmoly,²⁴ was of great assistance to Joseph in building up business with the Netherlands, Spain, France, and Portugal. According to Joseph Soncin, Samuel was this brother's Christian name, but when he became converted to Judaism, or rather returned to the faith of his fathers, he assumed the name of Moses.²⁵ A final important member of the family is another nephew of Dona Gracia, a member of the Benveniste family whose Christian name was Enriquez Agustin, who called himself Abraham Benveniste on his return to Judaism.²⁶

Levy points out that Don Joao Miguez or Joseph Nasi was the nephew of Donna Gracia by citing I. Aboab's "Nomologia". Joseph ben Leb in the foreword of his Responsa mentions the same relationship.^{26a} David Cassel is absolutely wrong in his statement that Donna Gracia was the mother-in-law and grandmother of Joseph Nasi.^{26b}

Dona Gracia was left a widow at the age of twenty-five with only one small daughter, Reyna, together with the responsibilities of the extensive banking business founded by her late husband, Francisco.¹⁹ In those days the Inquisition was starting in Portugal, and was exercising an extreme severity toward the Portuguese

Marranos. The difficulty which the Papal court of Paul III made by confirming the erection of the Inquisition had to be paid for by large sums taken from the Marranos. The Marrano delegate, Duarte de Paz negotiated concerning this with the Curie in Rome and the influential Marranos in Portugal had secret meetings with Nuntius Marco Della Ruvere, Bishop of Sinigaglia, in Portugal. When the demand of the court of the Pope became insufferable and the Marranos could no longer raise the enormous sums demanded of them, they complained to Duarte de Paz that he had made impossible promises in their name and had grown rich at their expense. This ugly scandal became well-known at the Portuguese court and the Nuntius in Portugal did not receive the stipulated sums. Called away from Portugal, De Paz betook himself to Rome by way of Flanders where he intended to extort money from the Marranos there. Della Revere writes in 1536. "Diego Mendes, the richest and most influential Jew, Portuguese Marrano in Flanders, and his sister-in-law, the widow of his brother, Mendes" and one recognizes them at first glance; they are Dona Gracia Nasi's deceased husband who had made her the sole heiress of a large fortune and her brother-in-law, the shareholder of the extensive banking business, as is evident from the responses of Joseph Karo No.80 and Samuel de Medina II, 3-8, through Levy's work. In 1541 the Marranos again accumulated large sums for the pope and turned it over to the collectors, Diogo Fernando Neto, who received it from Diogo Mendes. It would be strange otherwise that Dona Gracia Nasi who had done so much for her Portuguese Marrano brethren, as Samuel Usque never tires of relating, should not have stood at the head of the secret agitation because of

her wealth and wise counsel. By 1535 she was a widow in Flanders. (The Letter of Nuntias was begun in January, 1536).²⁷ Hence when the widow saw that a heavy yoke would be put upon her and that she was closely watched by the spies of the Inquisition because of her constant efforts in aiding Jews and Marranos^{to} flee, she decided to leave Portugal herself.²⁸ Graetz cites Samuel Usque's "Consolacao" to show that she had given poor Marranos funds to flee the flames of the Inquisition. When she made up her mind to leave the country where her existence and those of her family were in danger, she chose to join her brother-in-law in Antwerp in the Netherlands.²⁹ The clergy, however, always opposed the departure of the Marranos from Portugal. At the Papal Council, Bishop Balthasar Limpo, representative of the King of Portugal, vehemently asked Paul III to sanction the Inquisition against relapsed Marranos irrevocably. He pointed out that "as Christians and under Christian names they leave Portugal by stealth and take with them their children whom they themselves have carried to the baptismal font. Once out of the country they give themselves out for Jews, live according to Jewish ordinances and circumcise their children."^{29a} Gracia's preparations for departure, however, were not interfered with, either because she was not suspected or her prominence as a woman of great wealth compelled the authorities to be more circumspect in their dealings with her.

3. The Flight to Flanders.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, with the expansion of ocean travel and trade, Antwerp became one of the most prosperous ports and centers of world commerce. Traders of all nationalities

made it their headquarters. The Mendes family had established a branch of their bank there under the supervision of Diego Mendes³⁰, and this branch of the Lisbon house became the most important financial center. Since, under the will of Francisco, she inherited this great financial structure, and because the bulk of the business was now in Flanders, it became more urgent for Dona Gracia to go to the Belgian capital.³¹ According to Carmoly the advent of Charles the Fifth of the Netherlands to the throne of Spain offered a favorable opportunity for the Marranos to go to the Netherlands. The fact that they went in large numbers is evident from the decrees restricting them, passed in Holland in August, 1532 and July, 1549, which, however, were not enforced.³²

As to when Joseph Nasi came to Antwerp is uncertain. Levy³³ is of the opinion that he came to Antwerp with Diego after his father died. They came in the guise of Christians because the Flanders province was still under the control of Spain and ruled by Maria, the widowed queen of Hungary, and sister of Charles V. Joseph at this time changed his name to Joao Miques to evade the Inquisition. Then, according to Levy, not much later, however, in 1536, the widow of the elder Nasi who had died in Portugal, namely, Dona Gracia Nasi, came to Antwerp under the name Beatrice de Luna. With her were her daughter, Reyna, and her sister Brianda (Reyna also). According to Rosannes³⁴, Joseph Nasi and his brother Samuel, came with the women from Portugal. Levy, however, cites Almosino .. *Op. cit.* No. 9, p. 75, to prove that Joseph's brother did not live with the family in Holland but met them later in Italy.³⁵ Graetz

is probably correct when he indicates that her retinue included her younger sister and her two nephews, Joao Migue and Agustin Enriques³⁶ but he errs in omitting her daughter, Reyna, who is included in Galante's list of the retinue.³⁷

A document in the archives of the Nasi family "Protestation du Magistrat d'Anvers contre l'Arrestation du Diego Mendes"³⁸ dwells on the great service that the Marranos rendered the city of Antwerp.

"Diego's banking house became more powerful because of the new capital which Gracia brought, capital provided through the will of her husband. They brought precious merchandise of many kinds like spices, sugar, wines, oil, and cotton; many fruits like figs and raisins, etc.; a quantity of precious stones, pearls etc. Most of the boats that come to Antwerp come only because of the Marranos and they bring a great deal of money."

The arrival of such an important family was highly significant to the city of Antwerp, for it meant that other wealthy Spanish families would be attracted to settle there. Antwerp began to vision itself the equal of the southern European courts.

4. Court Life and Social Activities in Flanders.

At Antwerp, Donna Gracia, partly through her spirit and beauty, partly through her wealth, soon became a favorite of Queen Marie of Hungary, Regent of Netherlands, the sister of Charles the Fifth. In Antwerp, city of many Marranos, the family of Donna Gracia held an enviable position. Carmoly points out that this influential position caused the Regent to grant Gracia and Joseph entrance to the Palace.³⁹ Graetz says that the fine-looking nephew, Joao Migue, was intimate with the first men of the capital and was indeed much

loved by Queen Marie. That this was not necessarily a purely platonic relationship is ascertained from the information that we have that Joseph was sought after by many ladies of the court and he became a companion in arms with Maximillian, brother of the Emperor, with whom he joined in the delights and pleasures that Antwerp had to offer.⁴⁰ When we recall that Jews under the Spanish rule were being hunted down and butchered like animals, to be intimate with the sister of the King of Spain, who was a queen in her own right, was no mean achievement! It was at this time that Gracia's younger sister, Reyna, married Gracia's brother-in-law, Diego Mendes, and from this union was born a daughter, Gracia, the younger.

Despite her high position in the social circles of Antwerp, Gracia did not forget her unfortunate brethren who were still suffering from the fire of the Inquisition in Portugal. Galante points out that she did everything possible to ameliorate the horrors of the Inquisition in that country, not only aiding with ample contributions in gold but also exerting her influence in having her co-religionists depart from the benighted land.⁴¹ Graetz says that she did not use her own money for this purpose but the sums which the Marranos paid to the emissaries of the Pope went through her hands and those of her brother-in-law, the Mendes bank in Flanders acting as the financial agent.⁴² It is hard to understand Graetz's insinuation that she intended to make a financial profit from the sufferings of her fellow Jews by taking interest as payment for her services in transferring the money of the Marranos. Especially is this hard to believe in the light of the

glowing language employed by Samuel Usque in his "Consolacao":

"The heart is considered the noblest and most excellent of the human body organs since it is the most susceptible. It is my intention to serve with this small branch of new fruit of our Portuguese nation (the Marranos). Is it not reasonable your Highness to give it you as the heart of this folk since you are more susceptible to their suffering than any other? I am in no wise blind, gracious Senora, to your generosity which has permitted me to write and work. For since you have begun to spread your light this truth has penetrated to the lowliest creatures of this race in whose hearts your name and blessed memory will forever be engraved." 43

The poet Samuel Usque praises her more during the course of his work; he has the consoler in the dialogue give, among other reasons for Israel's suffering, this one: that it has thereby received the unexpected help of this noble woman.

"Who has not seen divine mercy reveal itself in human clothes, even as she has at the time of your greatest need? Who has seen the resurrection of Miriam's inner pity giving her life for her brother? The great wisdom of Deborah in ruling her people? The virtue of Esther in delivering her people from the hands of the persecutors? The attempt of the chaste widow Judith to free the besieged? She has been sent by the Lord in which soul He has implanted all the virtues which now reveal themselves in your behalf in the beautiful person of the blessed Jewess, Nassi. She has given your sons hope and courage during the emigration of Marranos to escape the flames, risking thereby her life and fortune. She helped recent refugees lavishly, those who had been weakened by poverty in Flanders and elsewhere, weakened by the long sea journey, weakened by fear of ever-present danger. She gave them protection in the wild Alps of Germany in their misery and trouble. She did not withhold help even from her enemies. With open hand and divine will she has succeeded in rescuing most of the nation of Marranos from the pit of misery, poverty and sin, led them on new paths and gathered them once more under the banner of their ancient God. Thus she was the strength in thy weakness ".

The two editors of the Ferraro-Spanish Bible, Abraham Usque and Athias dedicated it in part to the gracious Senora Donna Gracia:

"We wish to present the translation to your Grace, the lady to whose services we are so much indebted. May it be acceptable to your Ladyship, guard it and protect it as you have always those who have required your help."^{43a}

Indeed, she aided all three Usques. As he himself confesses, the poetical historian owed much to her. She had the poet Salomon Usque (Duarte Gomez) take part control of a banking firm. She aided Abraham usque in maintaining a Spanish-Hebrew press. Praise from them might seem partisan but everyone, even the most scrupulous rabbis of the time, were enamored of her virtues and spoke inspiringly of her, if not elegantly:

"The Princess, the fame of Israel, the wise lady who has built her house in piety and holiness. With her lavishness she has supported the poor and needy, making them happy in this world and blessed in the next. She saved many from death and and raised them from the depths of their vapid life, those who pined in prison given over to death. She built houses for learning and religion where anyone could receive instruction. She has also aided those who desired to live a larger and ruller life." 44.

Donna Gracia was a true "Ashes Hayyil" in Israel. None who came into contact with her could help but be inspired by her stateliness, her grace, her kindness, and her sympathy. Yet with these fine qualities were combined executive ability, a shrewd sense of finance, and a keen knowledge of banking.

5. The Economic Status in Antwerp.

The high social position enjoyed by the Mendes-Nassi family and their entree into the court life of Antwerp was the result of the good position of the Mendes bank which had been started by Francisco in Lisbon; the Antwerp branch had been established by

Diego Mendes who also managed it. In the "Protestation du Magistrat d'Anvers" mentioned above ⁴⁵ is stated the high business ethics of the Marranos.

"Because of this, financing costs much less than formerly, so that principal and interest do not run as high as it used to. Therefore his Majesty when he required money for the expenses of the army in war, the finances cost him much less than formerly ... They have been of great profit to the country not only to Antwerp but to many other cities. In exchange for the goods which they bring here, they handle and send out of the country a great deal of goods and manufactured articles that are made here and sent to Spain, Portugal, the Indies, and other countries resulting in great gain and profit to the merchants and to the industrial people of this country."

According to Levy⁴⁶, Joao Migue, although very young, managed the business and extended it to the palace at Antwerp, and to other places in the Netherlands and France. It is evident according to Graetz⁴⁷ that while Gracia and the family stayed in Antwerp, Joseph or Joao, was a sort of "good will ambassador" for the banking house. He established an important branch of the bank at Lyons, from which he made a loan to the king of France which was later to change world history.⁴⁸ According to the "Negociations" of the French ambassadors of that time, Nasi was made a member of the colony of foreign bankers of Spaniards who lived at Lyons. Their speculations kept them in touch with the Levant. It was for the supplies of the French expeditions in Turkey that the future favorite of Selim was sent to Turkey with letters of recommendation with which he was presented by the French ambassador ~~to him~~ to the princes of the Ottoman empire.⁴⁹ With the adroit diplomacy he had learned from his contacts with Christian officials, he had himself recommended by the ambassador

of the French court with whom the family Mendes-Nassi lived in a state of quiet warfare, - by Mons. de Lansac in Constantinople.⁵⁰

The "Negociations"^{50a} mentions Jean Miques in regard to the debts of M. de Cottiganai:

"The man (Jean Miques) mentioned here for the first time appears frequently later, and became famous through the influence which he exercised under the reign of Selim II. This Portuguese Jew called himself Joseph Nasi, surnamed don M. guez, from whence arose the name of Miques, which the French commonly call him. M. de Selves in 1553 mentioned him in his correspondence: 'One sees there this Jew mixed in the financial operations required by the expenditures of the French agents, and who became the source of numerous contests and political difficulties between the two governments.'"

The unpublished work of Chesneau describes thus the beginning of his fortune in Turkey where he started under the patronage of France. "At this time a certain Jew, Jehan Micques, a Portuguese, came to Constantinople with letters of favor from Monsigneur de Lansac, ambassador of the King to Rome, in order to get certain favors which he wished to pursue to some extent."

Nasi probably met at this time the most influential Jew in Turkey, Moses Hamon, the physician to the Sultan Suleyman, and revealed to him the great financial power of the Mendes-Nassi family. Graetz⁵¹ also mentions visits which Nasi made to Marseilles, Rome, and Sicily, making important contacts in almost every large European capital. Everywhere his wealth and growing influence effected an entree and one can imagine from his personal popularity that he must have made a fine appearance and must have had an engaging personality. From his financial dealings with most of the European countries he undoubtedly gained much insight into the intrigues and the weaknesses

of European courts. What advantage he took of this information will be discussed in the chapter on the "Jewish Statesman".

6. The Flight From Flanders.

Though business flourished in Flanders, Donna Gracia did not find it comfortable, having to worship under false pretences in Antwerp. The love for her original faith which she had to deny outwardly, and her revulsion for the Catholic religion which was forced upon her and which she had to observe daily by attendance at the chapel, kneeling and confession, surrounded by spies, - all served to make life in Flanders as miserable as it had been in Portugal.⁵²

According to Levy she could not live any longer in Flanders, because the love of Judaism which had been strong enough in her heart to make her go from Portugal to Flanders, put her in fear because of her conviction that an Inquisition just as harsh would arise in the Netherlands as the result of the harsh edict of August 14, 1532.⁵³ She longed for a country where she could follow the dictates of her heart freely. According to Rosanes, she asked her brother-in-law, Diego, to flee with her to Italy.⁵⁴ Graetz is of the opinion that she tried to induce her brother-in-law who in the meantime had married her younger sister, either to go with her to Germany, or to pay her a share of the total business from which she would withdraw.⁵⁵ Galante indicates that Diego was willing to go to any country where she might freely exercise the religion of her ancestors.⁵⁶

Diego had already set the date for this migration but his death in 1547 upset all of Donna Gracia's plans. She had a hard task to fulfill. She had to direct the Mendes banking house which Diego had designated to her as trustee for his wife and daughter.⁵⁷ His will reads:

"Yo porque mi hacienda esta derramada por muchas y diversas partes para la gobernanza de alli, quero hanna testemendara (testamentaria?) con Abraham et Joseph tengan cargo de la mandar cobrar solamente con el capitulo esto testamento autentico cado por que mi contento de todo lo que los dichos hicieron con tanto que Hanna i cunada sia principal y en falta suya lo que el dijo no mandare entara Augustin Enriquez, habiendo por firmo y por vaillfra (?) todo lo que la dicha mi cunada con los otros hicieron etc."

The sense of the will is that she was made chief of the extensive business for he had great respect for her ability and honesty. And she had but two young men at her side, her nephews. She could not dispose of her duties so readily as to permit her burdened heart to reveal its true Judaism in some quiet spot on earth. Besides it happened that Charles V cast a longing eye on the wealth of the house of Mendes since Diego had no male heir.⁵⁸ The royal treasury now accused the deceased Diego Mendes - he had secretly been a Jew; nay, he had even lent himself to the opponents of the Inquisition. As a penalty his whole fortune, as that of a heretic, was forfeit to the royal treasury, for there were severe strictures against the toleration of Marranos in Flanders. The order had already gone out that the property and accounts of the house of Mendes be disposed and

ttled but the widow Beatrice Mendesia succeeded in bribing the officials to hold off. Under such circumstances she could hardly have Antwerp without exciting suspicion and running the risk of losing all her possessions. Thus she had to remain and make a loan to Charles V and undergo mental torture until the loan was repaid.⁵⁹ Osanes cites Joseph Karo's *7317 Haplan* No. 80 that this loan was not repaid for two years, but it served to remove the spies during that period.⁶⁰

When finally this loan was repaid Beatrice had completed her preparations to leave for Venice. The involuntary operation of the bank delayed the realization of her project to quit the country, where she lived under compulsion, once and for all. But after Charles the Fifth repaid the loan she had been forced to make after Diego's death, her hour of deliverance was at hand. Levy says that Beatrice hastened to Venice with her daughter, Reyna, and other relatives including Don Joao Miques.⁶¹ Galante reports that some say that Joseph Nasi fled to Venice with the daughter of Gracia, Reyna, who later became his wife. This flight was to frustrate the ambition of a Christian nobleman who had announced his intention of marrying Reyna. Perhaps the news of this flight was circulated purposely in order to cover up the departure of Gracia for Venice and thus allay the fears of the authorities in Flanders.⁶² Graetz reports the rumor (based on *Strada de Bella Belgico*, p. 135) that Joao Miques had seduced Reyna, for whose hand many Christian noblemen had sued, and had eloped with her to Venice.⁶³ Levy claims that Graetz has

misread Strada and that Joseph did not elope with Reyna to Venice but had to flee there alone for having raped the daughter of a nobleman who sought to avenge his daughter's honor on his person. His relations with his cousin were always honorable; he married her in Constantinople. The Strada reference reads: "This Michesius was a Jew who had fled, when a youth, from Spain etc. and had spent some time at Antwerp ... the daughter of a nobleman having been raped there, he hastened to Venice."⁶⁴

Whatever might have been the pretext for the flight, it failed to bear fruit. The authorities did not believe that her nephew was in love with her daughter and had fled to another city, so that Donna Gracia was forced to pursue after them and to separate them.⁶⁵ After her departure, Charles V, accused the two Mendesia sisters of heresy, saying that they were Jewesses in secret, and ordered their wealth confiscated. In order to avoid this heavy penalty she freely distributed gold among the king's advisors on her arrival in Venice in 1549.⁶⁶ This she did on the advice of her two nephews, Don Joao Migueles and Enrique Augustin.⁶⁷ Since the latter's name is not mentioned in any of the sources as having accompanied the family on their flight from Flanders, it is safe to assume that he was appointed to safeguard the interests of the family in the Netherlands.

That their friends in Antwerp were not in sympathy with the persecution of these Marranos by Charles V is apparent from the letters sent to the Spanish officials as a protest by the magistrate in Antwerp. This letter is in the archives of the Nasi family.

The letter says in substance: "...this is not the way to make good Christians out of these Portuguese. It does not seem at all reasonable that after they have shown themselves sympathetic by having themselves converted in the Church, that they should be diverted from the faith by being cut off from all relationships with Christians. If they can neither negotiate nor visit in Christian countries with Christians, no doubt they will seize the opportunity to take their refuge elsewhere and be transported to Salonica, Turkey, or some other infidel country where they will be willing to receive and admit them. Besides was it certain that they observed the Sabbath and other Jewish superstitions? Since the court recognizes that they practiced these ceremonies^{so} secretly that no one could convict them ... one does not have a single point on which to charge them ... each one deserves to be absolved of guilt since they cannot prove anything against him."⁶⁸

From the above we can see that it is possible that the Nasimendes family maintained in Antwerp some of the traditional ceremonies of their forefathers, despite the rigorous surveillance of the Inquisition. To do so, of course, while they acted as good Christians outwardly, was a tremendous risk, for it would have been a flagrant violation of the rules of the Church. We probably get a hint of the true motives of the persecution of the family a little later in the same letter: "one understands that the motives are mixed, they are piqued with envy and ill-will, because of their interest and their profit particularly. They wish to see those Portuguese at

present, to fall into the hands of others; since these Portuguese are industrious and subtle in doing business at a small expense and with great economy, they easily make a profit, each deal making them rich, and it does not take very much work or labor. This is what stimulates envy and bad feeling."⁶⁹ From this document it is evident that it was not just a matter of religious principles that made Flanders uncomfortable for the Mendes- Nassi family with the result that they had to flee to Italy.

Cecil Roth has a theory, which is untenable, however, that the Regent of the Netherlands, Mary of Hungary herself, did not scruple to solicit the hand of the lovely Reyna for one of her noble favorites. The mother replied that she would sooner see her daughter dead. This incredible refusal turned the animosity of the government against the family. They were already suspected, with good reason, of being true to Judaism at heart. Now scenting another persecution in the air, the whole family fled, first to Lyons, and then to Venice."⁷⁰

Chapter II.

The Sojourn in Italy.

1. The Arrival in Venice.

From the time of the establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal in 1497, Marranos have settled in Venice. They aroused in an exaggerated degree the animosity of the general population. Like all immigrants they tended to crowd together, their way of life being regarded as dirty and unsanitary. They continued to render lip service to Christianity so that they could not be relegated to the Ghetto. On the other hand their orthodoxy and sincerity was very rightly suspected; they were a far greater threat to the orthodoxy of the general population than their more candid brethren. The authorities were uneasy with the arrival of more and more Marranos, so that the coming of such an important group as the Mendes-Nassi family, one of the most powerful banking families on the European continent, was certain to be noticed. When Donna Gracia arrived in Venice she called herself by her Christian name, Beatrice de Luna.¹ She probably felt that by using this name she could mask her real intentions from the court of the Inquisition until she was able to return openly to Judaism without fear of punishment from a Church tribunal.

According to Levy, the clever Donna Gracia, and her sister and their families arrived in Venice under the name of Mendes, as Christians, that they might support themselves for a short time without interference from the authorities. They made the preservation

of their widespread banking interests was their ostensible reason of their visit, although in reality it was a temporary stopping place until she could come to Turkey, the end of her wanderings, where she hoped to be able to profess Judaism openly.² That Joseph, her nephew, was already there can be seen from the correspondence of the French ambassador in Venice, M. de Morvilliers, on July 12 and August 22, 1549³, where he is referred to as "gentilhomme venetien" whom the Turkish state-messenger wanted to see delivered near the "personne estrangere" in the name of the Porte. Carmoly is quite wrong in his theory that Donna Gracia married off her daughter Meyna to Joseph in Antwerp, and then Gracia retired with her nephew, Samuel Nasi, Joseph's brother, in Italy, under the protection of the Duke of Ferrara, in order to publically confess the religion of her fathers.⁴

Graetz quotes Strada de Bella Gallico (p. 135) to show that Joao Miques, soon after his arrival in Venice, beseeched the Republic to let him have one of its islands to people it with Jews. But his plea was rejected either because of Christian niggardliness or because of the fear of competition in business.

"Ventias contendit (Michesius) ubi ausus est cum senatu agere de attribuenda Judaeis sed in aliqua insularum Venetiis adjacentium rejectusque est."⁵

Levy says it can't be determined whether he was treated shabbily on this occasion because of his own plans or because of his alliance with the Mendes (Beatrice de Luna) since they were outwardly Christians.⁶ When his brother, Samuel Nasi, repeated this request in 1558 asking of Venice, in the name of his brother, guaranteed protection

for Spanish and Portuguese Jews, the request was again refused.⁷ After her arrival in Venice, Donna Gracia found new tribulations awaited her; they came neither from the Inquisition nor from Charles Fifth but from Venice. Though Charles V and the Inquisition had harassed her they had never openly laid violent hands upon her or imprisoned her. Donna Gracia was to find Venice not so hospitable.

2. Donna Gracia's Quarrel with her Sister.

In Venice Donna Gracia experienced her saddest days from an unexpected source, her own sister, in fact. Keyna Benveniste was as flighty and giddy as Beatrice de Luna was collected and firm. She did not want to leave in Beatrice's possession the inheritance that belonged to her and her child from her husband, but insisted on managing it herself.⁸ Diego before his death in Antwerp in 1547 had placed his sister-in-law as executrix over his property but his wife did not want an executrix but wanted to rule over her inheritance alone. Levy cites Joseph Karo in *Shu"t* No. 80, that Dona Gracia would not give her consent, in fact she legally could not, because she had been appointed by her brother-in-law as the sole ruler of the business and guardian of her niece, who was a minor. The younger sister resented this dependency and guided by false advice she took a regrettable step. She informed the Venetian Signoria that her older sister was on the point of departing with all her money for Turkey, thereto openly avow her Judaism, whereas she and her daughter intended to remain within the fold of Christianity. The Venetian authorities ought to help her gain her share of^{her} property so that the latter might be put to decent Christian use. The Venetian

officials , eager to garner a pretty penny, lost no time in accusing Gracia and bringing her to court; she was placed under surveillance so as to prevent her possible flight.⁹ Her ill-advised and malicious sister sent an envious and anti-Jewish messenger to France in order to dispose of the goods of the House of Mendes there, using, of course, the same accusation of her sister's Judaizing, as in Venice. The messenger, who thought he had not received recompense commensurate with the importance of his errand, also denounced the younger sister as a secret Jewess and used his influence in having the court dispose of the property of ~~the~~ house of Mendes. King Henry II also considered it unnecessary to pay his debts to this house when the agent informed him that both sisters were in reality Jewesses. He claimed that the heads of the house had appeared as Christians when they had transacted the loan at Lyons, when they were really Jews; thus had they deceived the government.¹⁰ According to the law, loans made by Jews in France were not valid.

Under these insinuations the Venetians arrested the two sisters and all the wealth that the Nassi family had in France was confiscated. The situation of the Nasi family was critical and action was necessary. The French ambassador in Venice, M. de Morvilliers, in his letter to Henry II on August 22, 1549 "speaks of the quarrel of the sisters precipitated by the rash act of the younger one," "There were made many addresses to the dishonor and prejudice of this Mendez. The substance was, that it has now been discovered that which they had always doubted, (i.e. their Christianity) that she and her family had been and were of the Marrano sect and had pretended to be

be Christians only to enrich themselves by negotiating freely with all the merchants ...Her sister, who also has a daughter, was in this city, and they were divided because of differences between them. She wished to dispose in surety of the part belonging to her and her daughter, which the other one refused to do, saying that through the testament of the two husbands, she had the entire administration of all the property and the management was forbidden to the younger ..."¹¹

In the meantime the unfortunate Gracia used all her means to avert the impending blows against herself and her fortune. Her nephews, Joao Miguez and Augustin Enriques were lavish in their efforts to stay the loss and to free this noble kinswoman. Joseph who had traveled extensively throughout Europe, and well knew the hold that the Inquisition had upon the European courts, knew how futile it would be to appeal to any of these courts for assistance. In his travels as noted above he had made a trip to Constantinople and had come into contact with the powerful Porte of the Ottoman Sultan, Suleyman the Magnificent. He knew the most powerful Jew in the Porte was the Sultan's physician, Moses Hamon. The French ambassador, in speaking about Moses Hamon in the "Negociations" said that he had a broad knowledge of languages which made him useful for the diplomatic conferences of the court. It is even recorded in the peace treaty with Venice in 1540 that the 'physician of the Sultan, a Jew, is to be given 1000 ducats, and his nephew 500'.¹² Graetz points out that Moses Hamon accompanied the Sultan on all his war campaigns and was justly considered the protector of his brethren and the promoter of Judaism. ¹³

This zealous physician would have the courage at the time of danger to answer for his coreligionists and to use his influence with the Sultan to defend their rights. The historian, Joseph Hacoen, who was his contemporary, paints him as a staunch Jew who pleads that justice be done to the Jewish subjects who were suffering because of a blood libel in Greece.¹⁴ He stood so well with the Sultan that the French ambassador, de Morivilliers, wrote his master: "...Le G.S. le favorise plus que homme de sa loy ...(the Sultan honors him more than he does a man of his own faith!)" According to this same document Gracia had promised Reyna, her daughter, to Hamon's son.^{14a} Such a thing is not impossible, for as high as the Mendes ranked in Europe, so high did Moses Hamon rank in the Ottoman empire, as the following citation from Levy¹⁵ who bases himself on Salomino Athins⁷² ben Schemtob's introduction to his commentary on the Psalms (Venice, 1549): "In Constantinople, Moses is very great, and placed high in the Ottoman empire of Sultan Suleyman, significant is his service and worthwhile ..." Thus an alliance between the two houses would have joined the two most influential families among the Jews of the East and West. With his influential position and his personal interest in the matter it was not difficult for Moses Hamon to interest Sultan Suleyman in the case of the wealthy Donna Gracia. In another place in the Negotiations, M. de Selve, who was French ambassador prior to de Morivilliers till September 1550, writes to Henry II on January 5, 1552: "The dispatch of the Venetian ambassador (in Constantinople to the Venetian Senate) is chiefly about the matter of the two Portuguese sisters, by name Mendes, who are here; the daughter of one is being courted by the physician of the sultan, the physician being

a Jew, because she is extraordinarily rich."¹⁶

While Joao Migueis was using his influence through Hamon at the Porte, Donna Gracia was not idle in her efforts in her own behalf. She had become reconciled with her sister when they realized the common danger that they both faced. She sent an agent to Lyons to arrange affairs there, and to raise as much money as he could from her funds in Lyons, or elsewhere in France. When they heard that Suleyman was interested in her behalf and intended to intervene, she became quite troubled. Evidently she thought that Joseph's interesting Moses Hamon to arouse Suleyman's intervention would prejudice her plans in France and might endanger the agent she had sent to France just six weeks before. According to the French ambassador: "None the less these things are so befuddled that I am unable to verify them. So much is clear; some mystery is present, since those women were so strangely perplexed when they received the Turkish state-messenger. I am told from reliable sources that they finally sent men to him, and others to Constantinople, to hold up the messenger and to force him to wait until another decree should be issued by the Porte."¹⁷ According to Graetz the messenger was sent to Venice with instructions to have the Marrano woman released from confinement and allowed to continue on to Turkey.¹⁸

This intervention, claims Charriere, editor of the *Negociations*, was the obscure origin of the great war between Venice and the Porte.¹⁹ Venice tried to placate Suleyman as is evident from the following: (In a letter from M. d'Aramon, French ambassador at the Porte, to M. de Selve:) "The rumor is being spread here at the Porte about a

letter (which the special State-messenger who was sent to Venice for the Portuguese women/ wrote): That they had been so badly treated that the Sultan and all his ministers were on this account in great anger. From this it is known that the Venetian ambassador who is in Constantinople, came hither (to Adrianople where the court is occasionally held) two days ago for the purpose of placating them. But as far as one knows, he was not successful, and this matter can lead to complications, since that woman who is favored by the physician of the Sultan, who stands so near the Sultan that there is neither a Bassa nor anyone else who could have such an interest therein."²⁰

According to Galante the arrival of the Turkish emissary embarrassed not only Venice but also France which had sequestered the fortune of the Mendes sisters.²¹ The situation between France and Turkey was precarious enough and France, torn by internal religious strife, could not afford to offend this powerful antagonist. Levy is of the view that to make the Sultan quite zealous for the mistreated Jewess, the demonstration of the great wealth of Gracia Nasi which she intended to bring to Turkey was enough to insure the Sultan's cooperation. The participation of Moses Hamon awaited only his being called; as soon as he would be called he would readily respond. One may also consider it in the realm of possibility that he wanted the rich heiress, daughter of Donna Gracia, as his son's wife. Whatever were the dealings of the Sultan and Hamon it is enough that the former sent an official letter with the command: "Grant the foreigner, together with her companion (apparently Don Joao Migue) a straight passage with her fortune to Turkey."²² The Mendes-Nassi family now were not only a prominent family in Europe but had risen

sufficiently in the esteem of the Sultan to merit an invitation to sojourn in Turkey; this invitation was cordially extended by none other than the Magnificent Sultan Suleyman himself!

4. Donna Gracia in Ferrara.

By the time the Turkish emissary arrived, Gracia and her family, by some mysterious means not mentioned in any source, had been able to take refuge in Ferrara under the protection of the tolerant Prince Ercole d'Este.²³ According to Cecil Roth, Ferrara was the greatest center of Marrano immigration during the middle of the sixteenth century. Under the benevolent rule of the house of Este the first of the great Marrano congregations in Europe were established. There the printing of Spanish and Portuguese literature in the vernacular was begun.²⁴ Here (according to Graetz²⁵ and Rosanes²⁶) she resided for many years (1549 - 1553) in peace and freedom, under her Jewish name, Hannah. She now had the opportunity to demonstrate her goodness of heart, her virtue, piety, sympathy, and nobility of character. It was a period of peace in which she could employ her admirable qualities of charity and compassion among the poorer Jews of Ferrara. The rabbis of this period call her "noble and generous princess", "the glory of Israel", the "Esther of her times" etc.²⁷ Among others she helped Samuel Usque, the author of "Consolacao" and the translator of the Ferrara Spanish Bible.²⁸ According to the French ambassador²⁹, Gracia became reconciled with her sister in Ferrara.

here too she married off her nephew, Samuel Nasi, to the daughter of her sister, so that the large fortune would remain in the family.³⁰

Levy is not certain that Gracia was in Ferrara from 1549-1553. That the younger sister and her daughter were there is certain but whether Donna Gracia was there, as the French ambassador stated, is not clearly proved. Nothing in the contemporary responsa of Joseph Kero and Joshua Soncin mention it. The sojourn, if it did occur, was only of short duration. That the famous Bible published by Samuel Usque and Yom Tov Athias at Ferrara and Usque's "Consolacao" were dedicated to Donna Gracia is not sufficient proof that she resided there at that time because the fame of the woman could easily have reached Ferrara without her presence there.³¹ Her prestige undoubtedly had reached many European communities which she never visited. Her wealth, social position, and the fact that she was important enough to merit the aid of the Sultan of Turkey, must have made her a person known to all the harassed Jews of the Church-ridden continent.

5. The Departure from Italy.

After Dona Gracia Nassi had become reconciled with her sister and had married off her nephew, she determined to fulfill her long delayed desire to travel to Turkish soil, there to be free of the shackles of Christian torture. Her talented nephew Joao Miques, who was already engaged to her daughter, Reyna, at this time, had made numerous journeys in her behalf to Lyons, Marseilles, Rome, Sicily, and had used his influence at Constantinople to good effect.³² That

his extensive travels were not purely business and personal is evident from the statement of a contemporary historian, Mezeraz, whom Levy cites to show that Miques left no Christian country unvisited, not to further business, but to spy out these lands, while posing as a Christian, and to carry such information as he could gather back to the Sultan.³³

The family, weary of a life of duplicity which was quite ineffectual to avert the consequences of Christian intolerance anyway, prepared for departure to Turkey. The preparations were extensive and according to Levy covered a period of two years during which time negotiations to settle the business interests of the family were frowned upon by the Venetian Senate which was loath to let such an enormous fortune slip out from their control. These negotiations designed to liquidate Gracia's interests in Italy could not be completed in less time without substantial loss. Hence it was not until the middle of 1552 that Donna Beatrice de Luna, widow of the Portuguese Francisco Mendes, was able to journey to Constantinople. There she and her daughter, Reyna, immediately returned to Judaism under the old family name of Nasi. Her sister, however, changed her name to Ferrara, which she used for a long time.³⁴ Thus after years of vain striving, the gracious Gracia, finally accomplished her life's ambition and was free to worship the God of her fathers before the eyes of the entire world.

Galante is inclined to place the date of Gracia's departure from Italy a little later than Levy. He thinks that Donna Gracia finally realized her desire to leave sometime between 1553 and 1555

and then did she openly profess Judaism.³⁵ From the correspondence of the French ambassador the date 1552 as the arrival of Gracia and 1553 for Joseph's appear to be the most plausible. In 1553 Joseph must have been well known in many high circles in Constantinople.

Charriere remarks :³⁶

"Son nom (jos. Nasi) se recontre deja, eb 1553, dans la correspondance de M. de Selve: l'on y voit ce Juif mele aux operations financieres necescitees par les depenses des agents francais, et qui devienderont la source de nombreuse contestations et de difficultes politiques entre les deux governments. La relation inedite de Chesneau constate ainsi le commencement de sa fortune en Turquie ou il debuta sous le patronage de la France. En ce temp la un nomme Jehan Mignes, Portugaloys vint en Constantinople, avec lettre de faveur de M. de Lansac ambassadeur du roy a Rome, pour le favoriser en quelque affaires qu'il ne voulut poursuivre aucunment. Il y trouva la sire Beatrice de Luna, une Portugaloise et Juifve riche, pres laquelle il se retira esperant d'en sepouser la fille, qu'il fit apres s'estre premierement declare Juif et faict circonciere."

Another means of placing the date of Dona Gracia's arrival in Turkey is from the tragic occurrences in Italy which occurred to the Jews which we know happened in 1556 under Paul IV. At this time, according to Joseph Hacohe³⁷ Beatrice was well established in Constantinople, and was able to get the Sultan to intercede with the ferocious Theatine pope on behalf of the persecuted Jews. Joshua Soncin is therefore correct when he writes: "Four years after the emigration of Dona Gracia the tragic occurrence in Italy took place."³⁸

At this time the change of popes upon the death of the tolerant Julius III meant a reaction which would fare ill with all the Jews in the papacy. The clerical fanatic, Garraffa, succeeded Marcellus on Peter's chair under the name, Paul IV (May, 1555 - August 1559).

As an old man he still retained the energy and passion of his youth. He hated the Protestants, Jews, and even the Spaniards, who were his most useful instruments of fanaticism. He called them and the bigoted king, Phillip II, "decadent seeds of Jews and Moors".³⁹ Soon after his accession he promulgated a bull to the effect that every synagogue should be compelled to pay ten ducats in support of a House of Catechism where Jews were to be brought up in the Christian faith. Even more harsh was his second Anti-Jewish Bull of July 12, 1555, which brought the canonical law against them in all its vigor. They were to remain confined to ghettos and to maintain only one synagogue, the others must be destroyed; they were not permitted to have Christian servants or nurses, nor to have social relations with Christians, either to eat or to play with them. All Jews were compelled to wear green hats and all Jewesses green veils, even outside the city. Christians were not to address them as "Mister". They were forbidden to possess landed estates, within a half year such as had them must dispose of them. Thus landed realty amounting to more than 500,000 gold crowns was sacrificed for a fifth of its value.⁴⁰ That they were compelled to conduct their business in Italian was no particular hardship but of what value was it if there was no business! The worst feature of the Bull was that Jewish doctors were prohibited from ministering to Christians, doctors to whom many a Pope was indebted for his health. A severe penalty was attached for violation of this law.⁴¹

At the time when Gracia was preparing to leave Italy there were in that country three unscrupulous Jews who rebelled against their

1. ?? Show?
 faith; Alenu and Salomon Romano (later changed his name to John the Baptist) and Joseph Morro. To this group was added later, Hananael di Paulino. They brought vile reports concerning the Talmud to the pope (Julius III) saying that it slandered all Christians. The leaders of the Inquisition sided with them and the Pope was forced to issue an edict abolishing the Talmud in Rome. With fanatical zeal the Inquisition burst into the homes of the Jews in Rome and brought out all the Talmudic books and burned them in the streets of Rome on Rosh Hashonoh of the year 1556.⁴² This edict spread to all the cities of the Papal States and a period of violent reaction was instituted against the Jews.

A number of Jews left Rome for more tolerant cities. They were molested on the way by fanatical populaces. Those who remained in Rome were treated by the Pope with chicanery. It was now said that the Jews had sold their realty only apparently and not actually and had produced false Bills of Sale. They were imprisoned on these trumped up charges. Soon the Pope published a list of those Jews who were not "Active for the Commonweal" and had to leave Rome within a short time. When the distressed Jews asked what "active" meant they were told "You will find out in due time". Paul IV compelled them to do forced labor in repairing the wall of Rome which he wished to strengthen against his traditional enemy, the Spaniards. He ordered his nephew, called "Haman" by the Jews, to set fire to all Jewish dwellings one night. Haman was on the way to execute this infamous deed but luckily Cardinal Fernese, gifted with more insight

Fernese

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into the vicious mind of the Pope, advised him to delay the act until the Pope had time to sleep over his order. The next day the Pope hastily revoked his edict of the previous day.⁴³

In an official Turkish document we see that on January 1565, Dona Gracia Nasi was important enough in the business world of Constantinople to have the Sultan Suleyman write to the Cadi of Belgrade the following complaint in her behalf: "The Jewess Senora Gracia Nassi who recently arrived from Flanders has sent a messenger to inform us that six men attached to her service had left for Belgrade for business reasons. At Belgrade they registered their names in the Court of Justice in order to escape ill treatment from the ship captain or their fellow passengers on the boat which they boarded to go to Vidin, a Serbian city on the Danube. Upon the arrival of the ship at Vidin they declared that these six men had died and they proceeded to interrogate the captain and crew who denied knowing anything about them. If the fact is established as is reported and if the names of these Jews are found as has been said, to have been registered in the records of the law court, I order that upon the arrival of my representative armed with my imperial order that the accused be heard and a minute inquest be opened to establish if they are not liberated convicts or if they have not previously been sentenced to 15 years in prison. If it is proved that they have already gone through one penalty, act according to law. In case they state that the murderers of the Jews are rebel soldiers put them in jail and send me an account of their conduct. If the murderers are not soldiers act according to the religious law. Do not forget to settle the difficulty without which the religious law must be

applied so that similar acts do not recur."⁴⁴

Within a year after her arrival, then, Suleiman was issuing special orders in her behalf to protect her fellow Jews. The New Haven in Turkey was a far cry from the oppression the Mendes-Nassi family had suffered in Venice.

Chapter III.

The New Haven in Turkey

1. The Policy of the Ottoman Empire.

Under Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-1565) the Ottoman Empire achieved its greatest brilliance. H.G. Wells in his "Outline of History"¹ points out the genius of the man. While Europe's Christian kingdoms were wearing themselves out with bloody controversies between the Holy Roman Empire and the various Reformation movements, and fanatically spurring on the zealots of the Inquisition to new depths of human brutality, Suleiman was building a powerful state in the East. Shortly after he became sultan he started a victorious march across Europe. He made rapid advances into Hungary, defeated and killed its king in 1526, held Buda-Pesth in 1529, and was within the environs of Vienna, knocking on its walls before the tide of his attacking armies was stemmed. Christendom, split by Martin Luther, was unable to unite against the Moslem foe. Charles V was not a good Machiavellian, and he acquired in Spain a high degree of religious sincerity so that he was led to decide against Luther with the result that he alienated from himself a host of German princes.

Years of stupid and fruitless strife impoverished all Europe thus making it easy prey for Suleyman's hungry hordes. On the other hand the Ottoman Turkish state was strongly organized under the able leadership of Suleyman who ruled as a despot, supported by the Mohammedan Sacred Law. His empire governed a vast territory which

had been gathered together under the Crescent by successive conquerors. Many lands, diverse peoples, conflicting religions were all subject to the Sultan. Of the multitude of peoples some were favored because they held the State religion, others, though in an inferior position, had the right by sacred compacts to practice other religions and obey other laws.²

The principle of the personality of law and religion came most visibly into play. Prevalent in the Orient from the time of Assyria's greatness to the present day, it is not easily understood in a land that has wholly separated religion from law. where these two ideas are united two men who hold different faiths must perforce live under different laws. Islam inherited the idea of the personality of law from the Sassanian Persians and endeavored to apply it with simplicity by drawing a single line between Moslem citizens (Muslim) and non-Moslem subjects (Zimmi).³ Such considerable bodies of non-Moslems, such as Jews and Armenians were left not only to their own laws in religion but also to its own civil law and the administration thereof in all matters not concerning Moslems. Proceeding yet further with the same principle they granted even greater privileges to foreigners who wished to reside within the Empire. Except for a tax upon the land which they might occupy and for customs, duties, etc., and for the responsibility to Ottoman courts of justice in civil cases involving Ottoman subjects, such foreigners were free from Turkish control, even freer than in their own lands.⁴

Small wonder then that the Jews of Inquisition-ridden Spain

and Italy flocked to the free atmosphere of Turkey where they could be free of galling laws, have freedom of conscience, law, and worship. Samuel Usque, the famous author of the "Consolacão as tribulações de Ysrael" has the following to say in praise of the country where most of the refugees from the Pyrenean peninsula found asylum:

"Great Turkey ... there the gates of freedom and equal opportunity for the unhindered practice of the Jewish worship are ever open to Israel; they are never closed to thee. There thou canst renew thy inward life, change thy condition, strip off thy habits, cast away erroneous teachings, recover thy ancient truths, and abandon the practices which, by the violence of the nations in which thou wast a pilgrim, thou wast forced to imitate. In this land thou receivest boundless grace from the Lord, since therein He granteth thee unlimited freedom to begin thy repentance." 4a

2. The Attitude of Sultan Suleiman.

The more the harsh edicts of Europe sought to destroy the Jew the more steadfast did he become in his faith. When King Charles V of Spain became occupied in battling the effects of the Reformation, the Jews of his realm took advantage of the respite to betake themselves to the freedom of Turkey. There they found friendly reception and there they set up their businesses and cultivated their arts. Many different types of Jews went to Turkey but Jewish physicians were especially welcomed, one of them, Moses Hamon, being appointed personal physician to the Sultan Suleiman. The importation of a great intellectual class was considered as necessary by Suleiman as the need to improve the political situation of his land and to strengthen its

government.⁴ Suleiman established, therefore, two ruling bodies in his empire. The first, the political organization, headed by Suleiman, the officers of his household, the executive officers of the government, the generals of the army, etc., all of them, with the exception of the Sultan, born a non-Moslem or the son of a non-Moslem, controlled the entire government in all spheres outside those pertaining to Sacred Law.⁵ The other, the religious organization, was composed of the priests who maintained the structure of Mohammedan learning and law and religion in the Empire. It was patterned closely after the Jewish Beth Din. In contrast to the political organization the personnel of the Moslem religious establishment was composed entirely of men born of Moslem parents.

At the head of his board of advisors in the Ruling Institution Suleiman placed the renegade Christian, Mohammed Sokolli. Though Suleiman was an absolute despot, he seemed willing to entrust much power to his subordinates who thus relieved him of the more burdensome cares of the immense empire.⁶ This political board early realized the value of importing a cultured class of good businessmen and scientists^{mechanics} as the Jews. They sought thereby to actively compete with the Venetian State in commerce and trade. Lybyer quotes a contemporary Turkish document describing Constantinople at the time of Suleiman:

"There are in the city besides Turks, countless Jews or Marrani, expelled from Spain; these are they who have taught and who are teaching every useful art to the Turks; (Lybyer states that this claim and that following are exaggerations), and the greater part of the shops and arts are kept and exercised by these Marrani. There is a place called "Bezestan" where they buy and sell all kinds of cloth and Turkish wares, silks,

stuffs, linens, silver, wrought gold, bows, slaves, and horses; in short all the things that are found in Constantinople are brought there to market which is open every day except Friday."

The above indicates that the Jews did not observe Sabbath in the realm of Suleiman where they were free and allowed to prosper. Levy quotes Alberi's "Relazioni delgi ambasciatori Veneti" that the ambassador Marino Cavalli (c. 1560) laments the impetus that the Jews gave to the commerce of Turkey at the expense of Venice: 8

"In all Turkey and Greece, as far as Constantinople, it is easy to be astonished and almost unbelievable, that there should be such a great number of Jews who are daily multiplying because of business and commerce. They go in all places on land and sea so that one can truly say that they have the greatest mercantile establishments of the Orient in their hands. In Constantinople they have the greatest and best storehouses containing the costliest and the most precious merchandise. Besides this one finds among them many extraordinary artists and mechanics, especially among the Marranos who were at one time expelled from Spain. These Jews from Spain were treated badly by the Christians and have taught the Turks various arts and modern warfare, thick armour, swords, firearms, powder, and weapons. Intellectual Jews have also founded a printing press which is a wonderful thing for the Turks, and print Latin, Greek, Spanish, Turkish, and Hebrew."

Joseph Hacoen points out that the Venetian Senate was not uninformed as to the effects of Suleiman's attitude encouraging immigration. He reports that when the Venetian Senate was debating whether to expel the Jews, the Venetian "bailo" at Constantinople, Prince Soranzo, cried out: "What a terrible deed! You are committing a

in driving out the Jews. It will be a measure which will have evil effects for you. Who brought good fortune to the Turks? Where did they get workers who provided them with cannon, bows, heavy weapons, swords, shields, and lances, if not the Jews who were driven out of Spain? Is it your final decision to drive them out that they will go over to our enemies? Know you that the Jews occupy the highest place in the estimation of the Turks. Therefore your decision is not a good one."⁹

The effect of Suleiman's policy was to attract Jews in large numbers to Turkey. Graetz says that all Jews in Turkey amounted to millions but this does not seem to be an accurate estimate.¹⁰ Levy, citing a contemporary traveler, Schwigger, the author of "Eine neue Reyssbeschreibung nach Consonstantinople" says that in the first half of the sixteenth century their number ran to about 20,000 in Constantinople, while in the other cities of Turkey, such as Adrianople, Salonika, Sephath, Rhodes, Jerusalem, etc. their number outweighed that of the Christians.¹¹ Graetz's explanation of Suleiman's attitude is that Turkey was a comparatively new state. The Turks were good soldiers but bad citizens. The Sultan, frequently on bad terms with Christian countries, could place but indifferent trust in the Greeks, Armenians, and Christians of other national creeds but looked upon them as born spies and traitors. He could depend, however, upon the fidelity and usefulness of the Jews. Here they were on the one hand the business people and on the other the superior citizenry of Turkey. Thus Christianity itself, vile persecutor of its defenseless Jews, furnished their deadliest enemies, the Turks, with the very weapons which were destined to overwhelm

them with humiliating defeat after defeat.¹²

3. Joseph's Introduction to the Porte.

According to the report of the French ambassador¹³, M. de Vigne, in a letter sent to the king of France, Henry II, on June 24, 1557, Nasi had made a trip once before for the purpose of supplying the French expeditions there. M. de Selves had mentioned him in his correspondence as "the Jew who was mixed up in the financial operations required by the expenditures of the French agents, and who later became the source of numerous contests and political difficulties between the two governments."¹⁴ With the letters of introduction from the French government he found easy entry into the most influential circles of Turkey. Thus he was able to persuade the Sultan to come to the aid of his aunt at the time Venice imprisoned her. According to most historians, Donna Gracia and Reyna, preceded Joseph Nasi's second arrival in Turkey by about a year. They arrived there in 1552 and Joseph appeared in 1553. According to Graetz¹⁵ he did not come there himself and unattended but he traveled like a ruling prince with a retinue of 500 persons, Portuguese and Italian Marranos.

The family embarked on this new phase of its existence. Gracia was still acknowledged as head of the family and all remained faithful to her. Rosanes says that not a long time elapsed before the Turkish government was aware that a rich and powerful family was in the land. Because of his intelligence, great wealth, pleasant speech and good manners not to omit his intimate knowledge of European affairs, Joseph became a welcome visitor at the royal court where he soon rose to

a position of high esteem in Suleiman's favor.¹⁶ The Sultan especially welcomed his information on the attitude of Spain to its Mohammedans whose harsh treatment under the hands of the Spaniards inflamed Suleiman to the point of seeking a pretext for waging war upon the brutal Spaniards.¹⁷ This information Joseph was in a position to give by virtue of his extensive travels on the continent and because of the many important contacts he had established in diplomatic circles. Nasi was in a position to authenticate reports that the Catholic Church in its bigoted policy of enforcing the Inquisition had not stopped at torturing its Jewish Marranos but its thirst for blood merely whetted by the sight of Jewish crimson had turned to the Mohammedans as fit subjects of oppression.¹⁷ Thus the expulsion of the Moors from Spain had repercussions in the stronghold of Moslem power, the Porte. Even the Christian renegade, Mohammed Sokolli, who had become Grand Vizier of Sultan Suleiman, was so wrought up over this inhuman treatment that he favored war with Spain.¹⁸ The Sultan probably felt that here was an exceptional opportunity for Turkey to punish Spain. Thus Nasi, well versed in the intrigues of the European courts, in close contact with his business agents who were scattered over all Europe, personally acquainted at the various capitals, was the ideal instrument to use against the skilled politicians and neo-Machiavellis of Christendom who sought to curb the ascent of the Turkish moon.¹⁹

So it was that the Christians ground their teeth in anger when they beheld their most cherished plans of crushing Turkey forestalled by Jewish hands. The worm had turned into a poisonous reptile poised to strike the heel of its former oppressor. Joseph

informed him his policy

Nassi

Nassi, also known as Juan Miques, the respected Marrano of Portugal, gave many a Christian ruler and diplomat uneasy hours, for was he not the representative of the mighty Suleiman who but waited the pretext to annihilate Christendom? Thus they crawled in servility and unctuously flattered him whom they would have crushed like a worm in other circumstances. The Republic of Venice, almighty Spain, and peacock France, even an arrogant Papacy, were now intimidated by the Jew.²⁰ Now that a hated Jew had been able to establish himself as an advisor to the Sultan it was clearly evident that the good favor of the heathen Sultan who ominously glowered over Europe succeeded in staying the heavy hand of the Christian oppressors more readily than did the voice of decency and humanity.

4. The Return to Judaism.

The Jews, persecuted in Spain and in the rest of Europe, keenly felt the loss of their faith. Wherever they settled in Europe they chafed under the restrictions of the Inquisition. Surreptitiously they attempted to maintain a few of the rituals of their forefathers that they might not lose sight of their inheritance altogether. Whenever an opportunity presented itself for them to move to a freer spot, such as Ancona and Ferrara in Southern Italy, where they were exempted by papal decrees from persecution, they flocked to these sanctuaries in large numbers. But nowhere in Europe was complete freedom granted to them, even the subterfuge of a change in name and outward change of religion proved unavailing. The lot of the Marrano was equally hard. Small wonder then that Suleiman's policy of tolerance to the Jews induced many Marranos to emigrate to Turkey for the sole purpose of once again embracing the faith which was wrested from them by force.

Dona Gracia, in her early days in Antwerp, had been one who chafed under the constant surveillance of the Church. Her plans to escape from that country were motivated by the high ideal of a return to open Judaism. It has already been noted that while Antwerp gave her greater measure of freedom than Portugal, nevertheless, she did not forget her persecuted brethren there and she aided many an unfortunate Jew who had been left behind in Portugal.²¹ But even this did not satisfy her passionate desire to be affiliated once more with the Jewish people so that during her stay in Venice, the French ambassador rightly suspected her of being a Jewess who with her entire family had merely pretended to be Christians in order to enrich themselves.²²

Hence as soon as she was assured of safety in the confines of the Turkish empire she openly returned to Judaism. The following year, 1553, Joao Miques also openly returned to the faith of his people. His reasons for doing so have been variously interpreted by the historians, none of whom doubt the sincerity of Dona Gracia's return to her faith. The French ambassador, la Vigne, mentions the event in a letter of November, 1557: "There is one named Jehan Micques who was a Christian who made himself a Jew in order to marry the rich Jewish heiress (Reyna) who formerly left Flanders passing through France to come to this country."²³ De Hammer Purgstall comments on the marriage by saying that Don Miguez Christianity had been only superficial so that he easily returned to Judaism because of his love for a young Jewess, as rich as she was beautiful.²⁴

Levy corroborates the fact that Joseph did not return to Judaism at the same time as Gracia. He cites Isaac Aboab's "Nomologia" in

praise of Gracia for not allowing Reyna to marry a Christian noble but a Jew. Many wooers had sought Reyna's hand but Levy thinks that the two had fallen in love during their common misfortunes of their earlier years in Antwerp. However, it may not have been so much a matter of romance with Gracia as of business because with her usual business sagacity she saw the desirability of confining the fortune to her immediate family and thus following her example of marrying her niece to ^{Sonnet!} Moses Nasi, Joseph's brother, in Ferrara. The young daughter probably was glad to acquiesce to the wishes of her mother that she marry this handsome cousin whose personality had secured him entrance into the boudoir of the queen of the Netherlands. She was fully aware of his familiarity with the highest social circles, with his pleasant address, his fine manners, not to mention his genuine business and diplomatic ability. The tie was naturally made on the condition that Joseph acknowledge Judaism and the marriage was performed immediately upon his return to the beliefs of his fathers. Through this double tie, the one with Israel, the other with the wife of his choice, he was freed from the fetters of hypocrisy and assured of an independent position through the wealth she brought him. Joseph reached the goal of a long nurtured hope, an ambition long burning within his breast, full of strength, bound for a career which he followed with powerful steps and which he made brilliant by his remarkable talents and unusual luck.²⁵

The Jewish inhabitants of Constantinople soon learned to value the beneficence of Dona Gracia and her son-in-law. She supported the

poor, erected synagogues and schools and provided salaries for instructors in Talmud. The Spanish Rabbi Joseph ibn Lab who had come from Salonica to Constantinople because of persecution and disease received his entire income from Dona Gracia and Joseph Nasi. But their benefactions extended not only to Spanish and Portuguese but also to Germans and other Jews beyond the borders of Constantinople.²⁶

It is to be noted that the return of Joseph Nasi to Judaism was probably dictated by Dona Gracia, his mother-in-law. Joseph Nasi had not evinced in his youth the same ardor towards the religion of his fathers that his aunt had. From an examination of the sources one might almost suspect that it made little difference to Joseph what religion he professed so long as he could fulfill his business ambitions and persuade many a high born lady to his amours. It was only while Dona Gracia was alive that he actively participated in Jewish affairs. Even then we notice that all those in which he was interested were those founded or financed by Dona Gracia! Thus in a later section we shall discuss the Tiberias experiment financed by Gracia, the Ancona boycott initiated by her, the subsidies to Jewish studies which she donated and many another philanthropic enterprise in behalf of her Jewish brethren. In all these Joseph Nasi played an important role because of his influence but it is to be doubted whether he would have done so had not his aunt inspired him. She it was who directed the business in the Turkish capital. All transactions with the Ottoman government were performed in her name which occurs

frequently in the official documents of the Porte.²⁷ Graetz shows that the Jewish population considered Gracia an "Aashes Hayyil", a business woman.²⁸ Thus, as director of a large fortune she never lost the opportunity to avail herself and her fortune for the benefit of her brethren, whether Spanish, Portuguese, German, French, or otherwise.²⁹ We shall see that Joseph was not molded in her pattern and as soon as he gained full control of the fortune after her death he was not so interested in the welfare of his brethren as he was in his own aggrandizement.

5. Nasi's Friendship with Prince Selim.

Trained by his years in the courts of the European sovereigns, Joseph determined to strengthen his position at the Porte by insinuating himself into the good graces of one of the members of the royal family. Suleiman had three sons of whom the eldest was Mustafa whom his father idolized and whom the Janissaries of the army loved but whom the harem hated;³⁰ another son, Selim, was peaceful, gentle, pleasure-loving, the ~~only~~ son of the only wife a sultan ever had, the Russian woman, Roxalana; and a third son, Bajazid, warlike, bold, rebellious, and the favorite of the warriors. It was with Selim that Joseph thought his best interests could be furthered. Hatred and jealousy prevailed among these three sons of Suleiman. The courtiers kept themselves aloof from Selim, the disregarded Prince, and did not intercede on his behalf with the Sultan.³¹ Perhaps the attitude of the courtiers was the result of their disgust for his debauchery. Professor E.J.W. Gibbs³² describes Selim as the unworthy son of a magnificent father.

pointing out that Selim was the first Ottoman monarch to shrink from leading his armies in person it is apparent that he was a man of mean and ignoble character whose sole pleasure seems to have been in indulgence of his degraded tastes and vicious/ appetites. According to a contemporary traveler, Ogier Guiselin de Busbecq, who served as Dutch counsel at the court of Suleiman from 1554-1562, Selim was totally unlike the Sultan but inherited the face and manner of his unpopular mother. In gait he was pompous, in person corpulent, his cheeks were unnaturally red and bloated, and among the soldiers he was nicknamed "the stalled ox". "He led a lazy life, that of a sluggard and sot. In the small courtesies of life he was singularly ungracious; he never did a kindness, he never gained a friend. The only man who loved him was his father, everyone else hated him." 33

Lybyer cites contemporary Turkish documents that refer to Selim as a sot and debauchee. Because of the attitude of the court toward him, Selim did not stay in Constantinople but resided in Kutaje, the capital of Magnesia, a journey of about five or six days from the capitol, where his unpopularity as a prince was not so conspicuous.³⁴

Knowing that Selim was bereft of close friends and advisors, Joseph Nasi carefully laid his plans to become the confidant and close friend of the unpopular prince. He defended Selim to his father when the other courtiers spoke ill of the prince. Galante discusses the question as to why Nasi should have defended Selim and quotes a contemporary Turkish historian, Mehmed Mourad, in *Tarikh-i-Abov-El-Faronk* (III, 306) to the effect that Joseph met Selim in Magnesia.³⁵ All historians agree that when Suleiman decided to send to Selim a

gift of 50,000 ducats in cash and 30,000 ducats in jewels, he gave the mission to his Jewish favorite, Joseph Nasi. Nasi seized the opportunity to titillate Selim's thirst by presenting him on his own account with bottles of Cyprus wine in jeweled cases as well as other delicacies sure to tickle the palate of the gourmand. This he did in 1558.³⁶

With gifts of pearls and stones, silver, and precious wines, did Joseph insinuate himself into the confidence of Selim so that he became his favorite as well as his father's.³⁷ The prince was delighted with the gift but what flattered him more probably was that he, who was so despised at court should be sought out by a prime favorite of his father. Nasi knew how to entertain the lascivious prince in the manner of the lavish courts of Europe. The close friendship that was begun between the Ottoman prince and the former Marrano gave rise to the strange idea among the people that Selim was not actually the son of Suleiman but that in reality he had been born of a Jewess and had been changed in the cradle and smuggled into the harem.³⁸ This notion is correctly branded as an idle fancy.³⁹

Another rumor is that in satisfying the passion of Selim for Venetian ducats and Cyprus wine Miquez had convinced the prince how easy it would be to conquer the isle of Cyprus when he should become Sultan and then he would have such goods in profusion! One day while he was befuddled by the fumes of the powerful wine, Selim embraced his friend and said: "Courage! If my wishes are fulfilled you will be the king of Cyprus!" According to De Hammer purgstall this drunken promise

was the cause for Joseph's changing his name from Miquez to that of Nasi, in anticipation of his becoming king⁴⁰ but it has already been shown that this was a family name in existence long before Joseph came to Turkey, and was not assumed as a title of rank.

The ambassadors of the Christian court looked with envy upon this Jewish favorite who knew how to disclose all their tricks of diplomacy to the Sultan and therefore they spread vile lies about him. They reported that Joseph Nasi was leading the prince astray through orgies and otherwise undermining his character and health. Especially inimical to Nasi were the ambassadors of France and Venice because he had seen through their plans and frustrated them before when he had had private business transactions with them and they, not wishing to pay him his due, conspired against him, incarcerated his mother-in-law and confiscated her wealth; the French court owed the house of Mendes a significant sum, 150,000 ducats, which it had no intention of paying.⁴¹

Yet, in spite of the jealousies and intrigues of his enemies, Nasi continued to rise in the favor of Prince Selim until Selim relied upon him implicitly for guidance and direction in all of his affairs and transactions. Joseph Nasi felt it was a gamble he must undertake to pick the prince who would eventually succeed Suleiman as head of the Ottoman empire. He was certain that if he made himself indispensable to Selim and if he could have Selim made sultan in place of either of the other princes, he would become one of the most powerful men of the world because of Selim's innate weakness. Would his gamble succeed? Was he shrewd enough to become the power

behind the throne?

*a lot of construction
maybe you are right!*

o. The Election of the New Sultan.

Joseph Nasi rose to the height of power in the Ottoman Empire when the new sultan was elected. A favorite of Suleiman and the recipient of many honors from him, he was anxious that his exalted station at least be continued under the new sultan or if possible bettered. The succession to the sultanate was not fixed⁴² since there was no "Kanun" or law which provided for it but the custom was that a prince of the house of Osman should rule and almost invariably it was a son of the sultan who succeeded him. Not until 1617 was it established that the oldest male of the royal house was the heir apparent. Before that when a sultan had several sons, as did Suleiman, the eldest had no inherent right to succeed to the throne. The Turkish father naturally chose his successor and in view of this aim he would usually place the favorite as governor of the province nearest the capital. After Mohammed II issued his famous "Kanun" which legally authorized the son who reached the throne to execute his brothers, a situation of disequilibrium arose as soon as the sons of the sultan attained their majority. Each knew that he must either obtain the throne or die soon after, so that revolt was the only course open to the sons who had been sent to the provinces in the hinterland.⁴³ In the case of Mustapha, who had the sympathy of the Janissaries, Suleiman was forced to execute his oldest son in order to assure his own safety.⁴⁴ In this execution can be seen the hand of Selim's mother, Roxelana, who exercised great influence over Suleiman. Contemporary documents indicate that as late as 1553 Suleiman seems to have intended that Mustapha should occupy the throne.

Had primogeniture been the established order Mustapha need

only have been on his guard against poison, he would have lacked motive fore rebellion, and his father would not have feared his usurping the throne. Had not Mohammed II established the terrible "Kanun", Roxelana need never have feared for the safety of her sons. Had not the Janissaries helped Selim to the throne ahead of time and against the wishes of his father their favor toward Mustapha would not have forced a crisis. If Suleiman really desired Mustapha to succeed him he made a great mistake in sending him so far away to the governor ship of Amasia.⁴⁵ Bayezid, the ablest living son of Roxelana, was in Karamania; and Selim, the least promising of her children, but apparently the favorite of Roxelana, was assigned to the governorship of Magnesia only a short six days journey from the capital whereas the others, Bayezid and Mustapha, had long journeys of 26 days to reach the capital. Suleiman may have meant by these appointments only to promote his sons to more distant governments as they grew in experience and could be entrusted with greater responsibilities; they, on the other hand, could hardly fail to suspect that he had entirely different intentions.

Mustapha, the child of the Sultan's first favorite, was^a thorn in the flesh of the second son, the favorite of the harem. He was the heir not only to the throne but to his father's good qualities without any of his bad ones. He was tremendously popular with the people. To insure the safety of her sons and herself, Roxelana conspired with the Grand Vizier, Rustem, her son-in-law, to make Suleiman believe that Mustapha was a conspirator in league with the Janissaries to oust his father from the throne. Rustem exerted his

powers of intrigue and Roxelana brought her own charms into play; Suleiman fell into the net and Mustapha's fate was sealed.⁴⁶ In obedience to his father's summons he appeared at the camp of Eregli and on entering his father's tent without suspicion that anything untoward was occurring he was seized and strangled before the eyes of the Sultan (October 6, 1553).⁴⁷ The Dutch counsul, Ogier Busbecq, indicates in his diary:⁴⁸

"Suleiman must have passed many hours of torturing indecision before he determined upon the execution of his eldest son, Mustapha; he consulted the guardian of the Sacred Law. Suleiman journeyed to Amasia to join the army and with him went the decree which spelled his son's death. Appealing to the Mufti, Chief Priest of the Turks, corresponding to the Pope, he placed before him a hypothetical case: 'In Constantinople there was a merchant of good position, who, when about to leave home for some time placed over his property and household a slave to whom he had shown the greatest favor and entrusted his wife and children to his loyalty. No sooner was the master gone than this slave began to embezzle his master's property and plot against the lives of his wife and children, nay more, he had attempted to compass his master's destructions. What sentence could lawfully be pronounced against this slave?' The Mufti replied that in his opinion he deserved to be tortured to death. Now whether this was the Mufti's own opinion or whether it was inspired by Roxelana's previous consultation with the Mufti, there is no doubt that it greatly influenced the sultan, who was already in mind to order the execution of his son, for he considered the latter's offense against himself as great as that of the slave against his master in the story he had related to the Mufti."

Thus fate played into the hands of Joseph Nasi and removed one of the obstacles to his plan of placing the weak Selim on the throne. There yet remained another obstacle before Selim would have a clear title to the succession, his brother Bayezid.

After Suleiman had killed Mustapha there was an intense rivalry and jealousy between the two remaining brothers as to who would succeed to the throne. This rivalry, smoldering while Mustapha was yet alive, broke into open antagonism after his death. On the side of Selim stood his father and the influential advisor, Joseph; but Bayezid also had a following and was able to raise an army strong enough to maintain a hot fight with Selim at Konia in Asia Minor on May 1559.⁴⁹ Bayezid fled to Persia where he was delivered up by the Shah Tamasp to Selim's executioners. The unfortunate prince, and his four sons, were ruthlessly strangled. As blood money the Shah received 300,000 ducats from Suleiman and 100,000 from Selim.⁵⁰

After Bayezid's death Nasi was thrown together with Selim more than ever. His death had made a deep impression upon Suleiman who now became melancholy and taciturn. A pall fell upon the palace in Constantinople. Playing of the lute and drinking of wine were prohibited in the palace.⁵¹ Selim, however, sure of his right to the throne, made merry in his capital in the province of Magnesia. Joseph saw to it that the prince was adequately entertained, that he had plenty of his beloved Cyprus wine, and that the insatiable lust of the prince was lulled by the beauty and voluptuousness of the province. His debauches became notorious.⁵² The court at Kutajeh was far from moral but was typical of the more degenerate courts of oriental rulers, where intemperance, sensualism, and perverse practices constituted the best in life.

Married to his lovely Reyna it is unlikely that the shrewd Nasi indulged in the debauches of his royal friend; he was content to seek out for him new and unusual delights. Selim's palace was

a far cry from the gloom of Suleiman's court. Naturally it was difficult to remain in the favor of the capricious Selim and it took all of Joseph's most brilliant strategy and extraordinary control to keep the favor of the prince but Joseph succeeded in growing more entrenched in the confidence of the prince. By constantly being of service to him he firmly established himself, so that whatever the prince could do he would if only Joseph asked him.

Chapter IV.

The Jewish Statesman

1. The Titles and Honors Given to Nasi:

At this point it would be well to spend a moment in retrospect to see how Joseph Nasi advanced himself step by step into the high position of honor that was finally awarded him. While in the Netherlands he was intimate with the court of Queen Marie, Regent of the land and sister of the emperor, Charles V. There he learned to appreciate the niceties of court life and manners, mingling with those bearing high titles by reason of his own right to the title of "Don" as a member of an old Spanish family, but more by virtue of his personal charms and blandishments. It is not too much to believe that the queen was infatuated with him as were others who were taken by this young Marrano whose easy graces swept conqueringly through the court. The adulation of the royalty in Antwerp produced a lasting effect upon Nasi; it gave him a lust for power and an insatiable ambition to be a man of influence, one who could mold destiny to his own ends as he manipulated world events and made world history. Knowing that his position and that of his family was in jeopardy so long as he remained in Christian countries and within the aegis of the Inquisition and that whatever financial ramifications he might construct would be liable to swift destruction, he turned to the East. Since the Christian policy towards the Marranos was too unstable one's royal friends today might be one's royal executioners on the morrow, he knew that the realization of his ambitions lay in the awakening East, in Turkey, mortal enemy of Christendom.

Nasi was a keen observer of the psychology of human nature; he well understood those things that would appeal to the tastes of the Oriental. He was shrewd enough not to follow his aunt and bride to be to Turkey as any other plain citizen, surreptitiously and shrinking from notice. He came blatantly, like a powerful prince, followed by a retinue of five hundred Marranos so that "from the beginning Don Joseph Nasi revealed himself as a Prince in Israel."¹ His followers were Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian Jews. Soon after his arrival he so impressed Suleiman with his importance and wealth and his vast information about European courts and diplomats that Suleiman favored him. Carmoly says that he was made director of the States's treasure.² However no other historian corroborates this view and in fact the existence of such an office has ~~not~~ been recorded so that Carmoly has apparently allowed his enthusiasm to conquer his better judgment. What is more likely true is the statement that soon after his arrival Joseph disavowed his apparent conversion ^{born in X} to Christianity and used his influence at court to attract great numbers of Jewish families of Portugal and Spain to Turkey.

Carmoly is to be viewed with suspicion because of his frequent extravagances but Graetz and Galante are more reliable. Graetz is of the opinion that Joseph Nasi, because of his wealth and connections with fellow religionists in Christian countries, was in a position to keep the Sultan well informed of his enemies political and military status.³ Don Joseph's advice was welcomed and soon we find him bearing the title of "Frank Bey", European prince.⁴ The royal family heaped honors upon him. Suleiman wrote in Nasi's behalf, to the

ruler of France in reference to the debt of 150,000 ecus owed Nasi, and frequently referred to Nasi as a "Frank Bey Oglen", "Mutaferik" (noble), and "Nedim" (favorite).⁵ His title of "Mutaferik" was won because of his shrewdness in the following manner: Knowing that Selim was unpopular at the court of the Sultan and that he would have little to gain in supporting the popular two older princes whereas he had everything to gain by befriending Selim, who after all had as much right to the throne as the other two, he brought all his energy to bear in Selim's favor. Thus he brought the gift of 50,000 ducats in coin and 30,000 ducats in jewels from Suleiman, in fact may have been instrumental in influencing the Sultan to bestow this largesse upon his son, Selim. So well did he handle this mission that he was made a Mutaferik, a nobleman of the bodyguard, a distinguished court position to which there was attached an annual emolument of imposing proportions. Thus he held an honor which even Christian princes coveted since it was an office of lifetime duration.⁷

Selim recommended to his father that Joseph be appointed Duke of Naxos and various other islands in the Aegean sea but this idea failed for the time being because of the opposition of the vizier, Sokolli, the Christian renegade who was jealous of the growing power of this attractive Jewish favorite. Sokolli was the head of the Sultan's board of advisors and the sole spokesman for the Divan so that his power was supreme.⁸ Sokolli, although captured in his youth and made a Janissary to be trained in Turkish politics, adopting Mohammedanism for this purpose, still he could not forget his earlier Christian prejudices against the Jews and so he was Joseph's constant opponent. Even so he was constantly forced to entrust Joseph with

affairs of state. In the Divan, the Turkish Senate, there were two parties: one a secret Christian party under Sokolli, the other a secret Jewish party under Joseph, which constantly checked one another.⁹ It is interesting to note that the rabbi of the Neveh Shalom community of Spanish Jews in Constantinople, Moses b. Baruch Almosino, who often visited Joseph's palace at Belvidere near Constantinople, writes of a dream he had about Joseph's rise to power. F. de Sola Mendes, in his article on Almosnino, says that Joseph asked the rabbi to incorporate this dream in his Spanish homiletical work, "Regimento de la Vida".¹⁰

The fact that Selim, while under the influence of the heady Cyprus wine, promised Joseph the island of Cyprus as soon as it would be conquered¹¹ caused Sokolli's renewed efforts to stay Joseph's rapidly increasing influence; so that when the island was captured Nasi was not made king as promised on the ground that this would offend the European powers! Nevertheless the revenues of the island were given to Joseph as partial consolation.¹² Since Nasi was a business man first and a title-seeker only incidentally, he was well satisfied.

Nasi was able to receive from Selim a number of monopolies which greatly increased his fortunes. It is not improbable that his entire relationship with Selim was directed to the end of making himself a colossus in the realm of world finance and commerce. When Selim granted Nasi the monopoly on the important wax trade of Poland and the Polish government thereafter failed to respect the contract, Nasi had Selim II interfere in his behalf. The Sultan wrote a

sharp letter of reproof to Sigismonde II (Auguste), King of Poland, warning him that the interests of his favorite must be safeguarded. The letter, to be found in the archives of the Sublime Porte, dated 17 Ramazan 975 (March 17, 1568), reads as follows: ¹³

"The Jew Gianmore, possessing a contract and part of the retinue of Joseph, Duke of Naxos, model of princes of the Jewish nation, has brought to our attention that you have leased the commerce of wax produced in your country to other persons than himself and his associates; inasmuch as Gianmore and his partners were sent the permission of doing business which you yourself delivered to them according to your laws, and basing themselves upon this permission, they have engaged themselves in buying and selling of wax and have made important outlays of expenses. They have therefore addressed to us a petition begging us to do what is necessary to assure the continuation of the permit and for the unwarranted interference in their affairs they beg redress. As we have always covered with favors those who have distinguished themselves by their faithfulness and their devotion to the throne, we await from you the news which will reassure us that you still hold your former sincerity and friendship for Constantinople, the home of justice, so that you will act according to the permit which they have and restore to them what is rightfully theirs. Moreover, we hope that the permit in regard to taxes etc., will not be contested and its execution will not be hindered."

This monopoly on wax was quite lucrative so that Nasi was loath to have it slip from his control. Besides this, Selim granted him various monopolies on wine. He had the privilege of collecting duties paid in the Black Sea on imported wines.¹⁴ He also had the monopoly on the wine traffic of Crete and Moldavia.¹⁵

Jealous as the Christian princes were regarding this Jewish favorite they were forced to recognize him not only as a statesman but to flatter him with presents and bribes since he was the man to placate if they wished to gain anything at court; they well

knew what influence he had with the Divan. Even Sigismund August, King of Poland, had to be circumspect in his dealings with Nasi. That Nasi was a figure in international finance is evident from the fact that the king of Poland was compelled to borrow from Nasi the sum of money for which he granted Nasi extensive commercial privileges (against the wishes of the Council of Lemberg which violently opposed the action).¹⁶ This was in 1570 after the wax monopoly dispute had been settled to Nasi's advantage. In order to insure speedy consideration at the Porte, Sigismund was forced to address this Jew, whom he probably despised with all the devoutness of a faithful Christian subject of the sixteenth century, as "Your Serene Highness" and what was more important, was compelled to promise favorable treatment of his Jewish subjects. Only by such obsequiousness could this king secure the approval of the Jew, Joseph Nasi.¹⁷

Nasi also played a prominent role in the relations between Austria and Turkey after the capture of Zigeeth in Hungary. When Maximilian II ascended the throne in 1563 he found Hungary at war with Turkey. Suleiman's armies had been able to advance almost at will through the Danube valley. Maximilian thought it wise to declare peace on whatever terms the sultan might dictate. Suleiman was conciliated by the cession of all territories that he had conquered in Hungary and an indemnity of 300,000 florins.¹⁸ On May 1, 1567, wishing to extend this peace for an additional eight years with Selim, who now ruled on the throne of his father, Max-

Maximilian found it advisable to oil the stormy seas of intrigue with a slight token of esteem of Joseph's Nasi's influence, a token amounting to 2000 ducats presented by the Austrian ambassadors. One report has it that Nasi distributed this bribe among the victims of the great Constantinople fire which devastated a great part of the city in 1567.¹⁹ Another report has it that Maximilian sent the German ambassador, Vernatius, to give presents to Nasi and other high officials of the court but Verantius seized the opportunity to borrow money from Nasi instead.²⁰ Whether he received or loaned money from Maximilian the fact yet remains that Nasi was the object of the emperor's serious attention. This appeal of the emperor for Nasi's co-operation so incensed Sokolli that he rushed to Verantius and demanded: "How does it happen that a great emperor deigns to address himself personally to a rustic Jew?"²¹ Although Graetz names King Ferdinand I of Austria as the king who so addressed Nasi, he is completely refuted by all the other historians who agree that it was Maximilian.²² According to Carmoly another ambassador, Minkwiz, presented himself in Constantinople a second time in 1572 for the purpose of insuring peace but this time the representative of Maximilian diplomatically sent identical messages to both Nasi and Sokolli, who was thus mollified.²³

The extent to which Nasi's wine business extended is revealed in Graetz's account.²⁴ Galante also indicates that Nasi succeeded in revoking the laws relating to the wine traffic. These laws placed a heavy tariff on the product but Nasi diverted for himself the annual revenue which the state had formerly received, to the amount

of 13,000 crowns annually. Joseph also owned the most famous vineyards of Chio, Cyprus, and Sicily.²⁵ A letter in the Archives of the Porte gives us an indication of Nasi's extensive transactions. In a royal order sent to the admiral of the Turkish fleet, Pialo Pasha, the Judge of Constantinople and the commandant of the fortress of Yeni-Hissar on the European side of the Bosphorous, dated 20 Ramazan 975 (March 20, 1568), the sultan wrote:²⁶

"Joseph has obtained an imperial order to let pass through the banks of the Bosphorus one thousand casks of wine which he has bought and which he is to buy annually, from the Isle of Crete to Moldavia, along with other goods. He asks by petition that he be given a monopoly on this business. I have ordered that which he desires to do, to be done, namely, to ship one thousand casks of Crete wine through the Bosphorus annually. No one is to object. If any claim that they too have wine, spurn them and do not listen but take away their permits, put them in a sack and send them to me. Tell them that if they try to send wine in spite of this order it shall be confiscated. Consequently you are charged to let me know all the details relative to this.

With the complete backing of the sultan, reinforced by all the facilities of the Turkish naval, judicial and administrative branches, his monopoly was enforced. The Jew who had fled for his life from the Inquisition had now become an imposing influence in Turkish affairs.

Because of his wide business interests in Moldavia (Roumania), Joseph was concerned as to who occupied the throne of that nation. He cared not if the king were the choice of the people, nor if he governed wisely, but his main concern was as to his position

regarding Joseph's interests. Would he be friendly or inimical? He knew that Selim would support him in any plan, even as to whom to crown in Moldavia. Thus we find him involved in a dispute over the Moldavian succession. The French ambassador writes from Constantinople on November 19, 1563:²⁷

"The G.S. has given the rule of Moldavia to Alexander Lapushneanu (1552-61) whom the Moldavians had refused. The despot, in trying to make himself King, is in danger of coming to the same end as Dimitrasco. Seven troops have been sent to Moldavia. Alexander left here with one of the executioners of the G.S. to get possession and to pacify the people. The affair cost more than 200,000 ducats, of which the Sultan Selim gave more than 50,000. Miques, through his wife, gave 10,000 ducats, besides the other smaller official's sums."

Alexander Lapushneanu had cruelly treated the Jews until he was dethroned by Jacob Heraclides, a Greek who was lenient to his Jewish subjects. After Nasi intervened with the Porte in favor of Alexander and succeeded in restoring to him his throne, Lapushneanu did not renew his persecutions.²⁸ Since Heraclides, famous for his leniency to the Jews, was replaced by the man who was notorious for his tyranny, it can only be assumed that Nasi's intervention was motivated more by purely selfish, business reasons than by his love for his oppressed brethren. Even when the opportunity to go down in the annals of human history as the savior of his people by providing them with a homeland, was placed in his hands, his over-weening ambition to be a world figure in commerce made him lose sight of the golden opportunity which existed in Palestine to restore the Jewish homeland.

2. The Gift of Tiberias.

Emboldened by their freedom, the Jews, formerly accustomed to subservience, now began to dream of the establishment of an independent Jewish nation in Palestine. Turkish Jews avidly listened to reports of the adventures of David Reubeni with the warlike Jewish tribes and crowned Jewish heads in Arabia and Nubia. They sought confirmation of his tales. Mingled with these strivings was the renewal of messianic speculation. If there are independent Jewish tribes then the words of the Prophets are not altogether vain and hopes of Israel's renewed glory possible of realization. Samuel Usque, the poetic historian, who now appears in Constantinople after leaving Italy where persecutions against the Marranos had flamed up, carried reports of this nature which spread rapidly to all Jews and once again were enkindled hopes for a speedy return to Palestine. Even Isaak Akrisch who was very suspicious of such reports and calumniated Samuel Usque and his friends as fantastic liars, believed a similar report of an independent Jewish state in Africa and printed it as credible in his "קול המצור".

Joseph of Naxos long cherished the thought of founding a Jewish state. Both the Jew and statesman in him favored the plan and he wished to use the great wealth which he had received from his mother-in-law to this end.²⁹ Graetz attributes to Joseph the most altruistic motives for this ambition which he sought to accomplish by asking from Suleiman and Selim the ruins of Tiberias and seven towns nearby for the purpose of converting them into a

Jewish colony. Even when he was in Venice he had beseeched the Republic of Venice to let him have one of its islands as a Jewish refuge but to no avail. However, the fact remains that he was granted his request by Suleiman; Tiberias and its environs were his to establish there a purely Jewish settlement.

Levy, contradicts Graetz view of Joseph's motives saying that he was not interested in founding a Jewish city per se as he was of colonizing incoming Jews in the hope of inciting a war with Venice.³⁰ Galante may be a little nearer the correct version when he states that Joseph intended to make of Tiberias an industrial center, to set up factories in it that would compete with Venice, and if possible divorce Venice from its lucrative over-seas trade.³¹

Joseph Hachohen, the historian, is our source for the account of how Joseph was given these cities. The decree giving Tiberias and seven small neighboring villages to Nasi on September 3, 1563, was signed by Suleiman the Sultan, Selim the Prince, and by Murad III, the son of Selim.³² According to Levy this was at Joseph's request and aided by Selim's intervention, Joseph was thus favored by Suleiman's acquiescence.³³ Joseph Hachohen writes:

"Don Joseph sent his servant, Joseph Adret, to Tiberias to rebuild the walls of the city. Adret had the favor of Saliman's son and from him he received 60 "asperm" a day, eight men for his own service and an official document with the royal seal to the effect that the Pasha of Damascus and Saphet should give him assistance whenever he would ask for it. It was further ordered that all masons and porters in the city should come to the building. There was no lack of stones in Tiberias since it was once an extensive city, nor of clay and sand, for the sea was close by. But the Arabs became jealous and an old sherif stirred up the multitude to oppose the building of the city by quoting a statement from an old book that "When Tiberias arises from the ruins Mohammedanism will decline." No one came to help build and the project was effectively hindered from further

progress. Joseph Adret now turned to the Pasha of Damascus for aid. The Pasha had two ringleaders executed for refusing to work and the others quickly went back to work. During the digging a large stone was found and by it a ladder that led down deep to a church full of marble statues and altars as is usually evident in a Christian church. Don Joseph's servant destroyed the church and filled it with dirt. They found also three bells which had been buried there in the time of Guido at the advance of the Turks. From these cannon were cast. The city of Tiberias was rebuilt and extended for 1500 ells. It was completed to Don Joseph's satisfaction in 1565. He had a great number of mulberry trees planted as food for silkworms and he permitted wool to be brought from Spain to make clothes after the Venetian fashion. Thus his reputation spread widely through the land." 34

Here was a glorious opportunity for Nasi to establish the beginnings of a Jewish state in Palestine. He had a capable representative in Joseph Purnar Kohen of B'nai Adret who was assisted by eight royal commissioners from Selim's household. The land was there as was the necessary Arab labor whom he was empowered to conscript. The financing was shared by Selim who gave 60 aspers a day and by Nasi who used Dona Gracia's money for the project.³⁵

It was one thing, however, to spend money and provide plans for the organization of a colony and quite another to procure the colonists. Tiberias had been a famous city during Bible days but now it was a mass of ruins. According to Joseph Brasl^{aw}uvsky³⁶ there had been an earlier settlement of Tiberias before Nasi stepped in. If it is true that these earlier settlers were natives of Palestine, from Safed and other places, then it would appear that they would have cleared the debris before Adret

began his work. This view is borne out by Rabbi Moses de Trani a contemporary. He paints a picture of the regrowth of Tiberias as being haphazard and aimless. Settlers built where they wished on the land which they evidently obtained free. So few were the settlers that they needed but one road to connect the scattered houses. The fact that Rabbi Elizar b. Yohai had to come from Safed to Tiberias to settle a law case shows that the latter was an unorganized settlement.³⁷ In this legal case no mention is made of Joseph's representative; if he were there surely he would have insisted on a planned construction. We must conclude therefore that the building of Tiberias began before the official activity of Don Joseph in Palestine.

As to the element that settled there is not clear to the historians. Rabbⁱnowitz is of the opinion that the Palestinian element was too spiritual to heed the call of business enterprise.³⁸ Schechter points out that the majority of the refugees from the Inquisition escaped to Turkey in the sixteenth century but a considerable minority, composed of legists and mystics, directed their steps toward the Holy Land.³⁹ Under the influence of Joseph Caro and Moses ben Joseph Trani it is unlikely that many Palestinian settlers flocked to the colony. However, it might be noted here that Br^eslavsky states that it is a mistake to judge Tiberias only as the settlement of a few mystics. The responsa of the Palestinian rabbis, as yet but slightly examined, reveals active settlements both in the city and villages, agricultural to some extent and yet seeking to expand. He is of the opinion that the offers of free land made by Joseph Nasi were proposed to persuade the inhabitants

of other parts of Palestine to settle in Tiberias.⁴⁰ If Joseph Nasi did not get an enthusiastic response from the mystical groups already to be found in Palestine, he was not disappointed when he invited the Jews of Cori, Ancona, and Pesaro, all cities in Italy, to migrate to his Palestinian colony. While suffering all the birth pangs of the Messianic Age without the advent of a Messiah to console them, the report reached the Jews of Italy that their former fellow citizen had risen to unprecedented distinction at the court of Sultan Suleiman and that he had been presented with Tiberias and seven adjoining villages.

The natural tendency of the Italian Jews to seek a return to the land of their ancestors was intensified by the turn in the political and religious situation of the Jews in Italy. The rise of the new Pope made the condition of the Jews in Italy unbearable. When the new pope, Michael Ghislieu, Cardinal of Alessandria, assumed the title of Pius V after the death of Pius IV, the devotees of the Church acclaimed him saying: "God has restored to us Paul IV". Impatient, fanatical, passionate, formerly a Dominican monk and Inquisitor, he abused the power, which his position as head of the Church gave him, in an attempt to surpass even Paul IV's severity to the Jews. The punishments he decreed proved him entirely devoid of pity or the finer sensibilities of a normal human being. The tortures inflicted on the Jews from the outset of his reign did not satisfy his hatred of the Jews. On February 26, 1569, he issued a Bull ordering all Jews except those of Rome and Ancona to leave Italy in three months. There could be no extension of this period, much less

a withdrawal of the edict. All that remained for the victims of his animosity was to abandon their wealth and possessions and escape to Italian states which still help open their doors to unfortunate exiles.⁴¹ Pesaro took the initiative in organizing the work of aiding the refugees. It could not maintain them permanently because of the poor condition of the Jews there, so ships were chartered to transport them to the great commercial cities of the Levant and the Holy Land. The exiles embarked for these ports at Venice. Mazliach b. Elias Finzi of Recanate was the leading spirit in arousing the sympathies of the Italian communities⁴² which responded nobly but since their resources were limited they turned perforce to Joseph Nasi for further aid.

Nasi maintained a correspondence with the Jews of Italy so that he was familiar with their sufferings. He sent word of the restoration of Tiberias to Italy. Money and ships were provided to transport emigrants. Jewish artisans who could no longer make a living in the Peninsula were especially invited to settle in Tiberias.⁴³ A new Jewish industry was to be reared in that colony. Silk and cloth factories were to be built to manufacture the product of the worms nourished on numerous mulberry trees to be planted.⁴⁴

At this stage of affairs the message reached the Jews of Cori who did not hesitate an instant to obey the welcome call. The entire community gathered into its synagogue and under the presidency of Malachi Galliko of Nepi, their rabbi, resolved with one voice to migrate en masse to Tiberias. Four heads of families were appointed to manage the emigration. Two of these were furnished with a copy of the resolution, sealed with the congregation

al seal and an official subscription book for recording donations. This latter book further contained a minute statistical account of the financial condition of the Cori congregation, a glorification of Tiberias, and an exposition of its significance. To smooth the way for these messengers and to inspire the public with confidence in their representative character, their Rabbi, Galliko, was deputed to accompany them.⁴⁵

It was this group that comprised the bulk of Jews who answered Nasi's call for colonists. Some of Nasi's own boats which he employed in his business with Italian ports, were used to transport the immigrants. But the persecuted Jews of Italy did not reach their goal without a great deal of difficulty. Joseph Hacoen tells us that pirates, the Knights of Malta, ruled the seas. These knights continued on the high seas what the Pope sought to do on land. They captured many Jewish fugitives and sold them as slaves.⁴⁶ Don Joseph Nasi was appealed to and the Turkish fleet was sent to fight the Knights of Malta. The Porte intended not only to seize Malta, under the pretext of seeking to stop these pirates, but to inflict heavy losses on the Spaniards. The island, once in the hands of the Ottomans, would serve as a safe harbor from which the entire length of the coasts of Spain and Italy might be attacked from any point. Accordingly a fleet of 150 ships, carrying more than 20,000 troops aboard and abundantly equipped with all the necessaries for a long siege, was sent from Constantinople to seize Malta. Nasi took no chances that his plans would be interfered with and he sought to insure success by having the greatest sea-captains of the Levant, Piale, Dorgut, and Orchiali, co-operate in destroying the lair of the pirates.

Unfortunately the enterprise was doomed to constant ill-luck so that it failed at a cost of thousands of lives.⁴⁷

Nasi's efforts to colonize quickly raised the cry among the western powers that he was seeking to re-establish the Jewish state and to make himself King of the Jews. The French ambassador M. Boistalle, wrote Charles IX of France, September 15, 1563: ⁴⁸

"...Miques has received permission from the G.S. and confirmed by the Sultan Selim and his son, Murat, to build a city on the bank of the Lake of Tiberias, south of Safed, in which only Jews are to reside, and proposes by this renewal to begin his greatest work there, hoping as much as one can judge, to make himself King of the Jews; that is why he is so insistent in his demands for money from France."

On the basis of this letter Graetz proposes the theory that Nasi was from the first politically minded and brought in his colonists only for the purpose of building up a new Jewish state.⁴⁹ Levy ridicules this notion that Nasi had become so arrogant that he planned to re-establish the Jewish empire with himself as its head. Sultan Selim was too clever a ruler to countenance such "swindling" and Joseph was too judicious to request such foolishness, since the report given by Joseph Hachon shows sufficiently with what intent Tiberias was rebuilt.⁵⁰

Kaufmann is of the opinion that there is nothing in Joseph's career which warrants branding him a dreamer who was carried away by his visionary ideas and ambitions. From the beginning to the end of his days, he always showed himself to be sober in his aims, a prudent calculator of consequences, always keeping his goal in view. The considerations which influenced him in this enterprise

were modest and practical. He evinced no desire to leave Constantinople to visit his new Tiberias, which he certainly would have done had he cherished a secret design to reinstitute a Jewish kingdom. Kaufman attributes to Joseph a religious motivation for desiring Tiberias rebuilt, based on his relation with the Kabbalists and Talmudists of his Divan who regaled him with legends which connected the renovation of the ruined city by the waters of Lake Tiberias with the restoration of all Palestine. This view would seem to explain the opposition of the Arab population who feared that "the rise of Tiberias means the fall of Islam" since they realized the significance of Tiberias to the Jews.

The literal fulfillment of prophecy as a belief led many to hail the event as an omen of the immediate advent of the Messiah. However, Don Joseph's intentions were more practical. He wished to found a colony at one of the key-points of Palestine - a place hallowed by tradition and which would well serve as an ever-ready asylum for fugitives. He may well have had in mind the condition of the oppressed Jews of Italy.⁵¹ He was very sympathetic with the Marranos of Ancona as shown by his fruitless efforts to gain revenge on Ancona for the Auto-da-Fes there by means of a boycott, as we shall discuss later.

Kaufman's view that Nasi's motives were largely religious is untenable as being that of a scholarly romanticist and not that of a pragmatic economist. Nasi's reasons for desiring Tiberias were purely economic. He would not prejudice his position at the

Porte by starting a Jewish State with himself as king. Every decree and concession he obtained from the Porte was for the advancement of his business interests; he sought Tiberias, therefore, as a source of income for himself ! It was to be no more than another monopoly. He offered free land to entice settlers from other Palestinian colonies as well as from the Diaspora, only for the purpose of later exacting taxes from them. Braslavsky rightly scrutinizes the passage in Joseph Hachohen's ~~אורח חיים~~ in which Don Joseph is given the title "Officer and ruler over Tiberias and seven unwallled cities in her vicinity". The meaning of the title was simply permission to extract taxes.⁵² Lybyer points out that after the time of Mohammed I the system of tax-farming was introduced into the Ottoman Empire. By this means the government assured itself of its revenue without going to the expense of collecting.⁵³ That was probably the reason why Don Joseph saw to it that his colonists got there even if he had to call out the entire Turkish fleet to do it! When he found that his plan to rival the industries of Venice by importing silkworms, mulberry trees, and fine wool was unprofitable⁵⁴, Don Joseph lost all interest and what might have been the fore-runner of the Jewish National Homeland relapsed into a forgotten ambition.

3. The Gift of Naxos.

When the ambassador of Venice came to make terms of peace with the Ottoman Empire on October 2, 1540 he found among the

demands of Suleiman the cession of the important provinces along the coast of Dalmatia which the Sultan had captured along with the islands in the Aegean Sea which Barbarossa had taken.⁵⁵ These included the islands of Naxos, Andros, Paros, Antiparos, Milo, Syra, Santorin, Stampalia, Skyros, Patinos, Aegina, and Nios - twelve in all. The Venetian governor, Duke Giacomina Orispo, was permitted to stay till 1566. A short time before that date, Selim wished to appoint Joseph Nasi as Duke of Naxos, about the same time he granted him Tiberias, but, as we have already noted, Sokolli had interfered to prevent the appointment.⁵⁶ In 1566, at the age of 76, Suleiman, still leading his army in person, had entered Hungary to aid his vassal, young Sigismund Zapolya who had summoned him. The object of his attack was Szigeth, an unimportant town, but its governor, Count Zrinyi, was determined to resist. During the attack, in the solitude of his tent, Suleiman died. Although his death occurred on September 4th, the Grand Vizier did not announce the death of the Sultan until forty days later, when Selim could be informed and rushed to Belgrade to be declared the new Sultan.⁵⁷

With Selim II on the throne, the power of Nasi now knew no limit. When Selim returned from Belgrade, one of his first acts was to name Joseph the Duke of Naxos and the Cyclades, the group of twelve islands in the Aegean Sea. The Greek inhabitants of these islands had appealed to the Porte, which since 1540 had been under the governorship of Duke Giacomo Orispo, complaining that he oppressed them sorely. Hearing that his subjects had brought charges

against his oppression the Duke hastened to Constantinople to defend himself and went so far as to attempt to bribe the officials with 12,000 escudi, but it was a vain attempt. He was found guilty and imprisoned.⁵⁸ This left the lucrative title of Duke of Naxos vacant and who was more deserving of the honor than Joseph Nasi ? This time Sokolli's objections were over-ridden and in November 1566, at the end of the official ceremony held on the occasion of "Kissing the Hand of the Emperor" at which all officials of the Empire assisted, Selim named Joseph as Duke of Naxos and Cyclades. Galante cites the contemporary Alberi's "Relazioni" (Series III, vol. I, p. 150) to prove that Joseph promised to pay Selim an annual tribute of 6000 ducats.⁵⁹ De Hammer says that Selim was able to ignore Sokolli's objections by attributing the appointment to Suleiman's death-bed request; besides Joseph had promised 14,000 ducats annual tribute, including 12,000 ducats for the wine monopoly which yielded Nasi 15,000 ducats a year.⁶⁰ Carmoly fails to mention the payment of the tribute in return for the dukedom but assigns as the reason for the title Joseph's services to the State in advising its policies regarding Venice.⁶¹

Joseph did not live in his principality but preferred to reside near Constantinople, in his palace at Belvedere where there was a gay court life and greater volume of trade. While he lived in his sumptuous palace his dukedom was administered by a Christian nobleman in his employ, Francesco Coronello. According to Galante Francesco's father was a former governor of Segovia and was a descendant of the Jewish royal treasurer of Ferdinand and Isabella,

Abraham Senior, who had been converted to Christianity in 1492.⁶² Graetz does not seem to be aware of Francesco's Jewish ancestry and points out the irony of a Spanish Hisdalgo being the first servant of a Jew whose parents had been driven from Spain.⁶³ It might be inferred that Nasi purposely appointed a Christian to whom he could issue commands in order to raise himself in his own eyes; since his treatment at the hand of the Christians had always been humiliating, this might have been an opportunity to inflate his ego and salve his wounded vanity.

The Duke of Naxos assumed princely airs and made himself a figure of respect among the Christian countries. In his relations with Coronello, his lieutenant at Naxos, he used the air of a king conferring with his minister. His decrees were in form similar to those of a crowned head. Graetz gives the title of a document addressed from Nasi to Coronello in 1577 which is written half in Latin and half in Italian. It was found among the papers of the heirs of Coronello and reads as follows:⁶⁴

"Josephus Naci, Dei Gratia Dux Aegei Pelagi, Dominus Andri, ect. Universis et singulis, Ministris et officialibus nostris has partes inspecturus notum sitQualmente havendo resgarda alla buona, diligente e fidel servitu di Francesco Coronello I.U.D. e luogotenante nostro nell administratione di tutte le isole nostre sia nelle cose di Gisuticia como nelle altre di servitio nostro volendo in parte gratificarloe havendo il piedetto nostro luogotenante humilmente supplicato a volerli conceder li infrascritti terreni e pascoli della signoria esistente alle isoledi Naxiapagando il tutto annuational mese di Settembre PP alla signoria. Datum in Palatio Ducali Belvedere propre peram Constantinoplâs 1557 XV Julii.
Joseph Naci."

In this quite pompous document we see Joseph's absolute power as Duke of Naxos, in the manner in which he praises his vice-regent, Coronello for his faithful service. Levy cites a French historian who was a contemporary of Joseph to show that Coronello served him well. Coronello gained many friends by his loyalty and rectitude and was famed as an honest man. "For, never," writes Sanger, "was a duke more loved and respected than was Coronello during the time of his service which he carried on until his death."⁶⁵

To protect his interests Nasi made use of every means in his possession. These means were not always legal. We saw alone that which he did to obtain the monopoly of the wine traffic of Crete and Moldavia. Not less unscrupulous was the measure he adopted toward the former inhabitants of Naxos, Christians who had established themselves at Galata, a district of Constantinople. At Joseph's command these were obliged by imperial order to return to their former homes. The Duke of Naxos used this device to compel those who formerly lived in the group of islands to return and swell the number of those who had to pay taxes to the Duke of Naxos. Nasi even went so far as to threaten these former residents of Naxos with legal action if they should go to some other foreign land rather than return to Naxos.⁶⁶

This action seemed to have little effect for soon we find Joseph appealing to Selim for aid in restoring his revenues

which had fallen off appreciably. The Sultan acted with quick dispatch. His imperial order to the Judge of Galata, dated November 24, 1567 from Adrianople, which is to be found in the archives of the Sublime Porte, reads: ⁶⁷

"The Duke of Naxos, Joseph, has brought to our attention that the rayas (Christian inhabitants) of Naxos, which he owns, have established themselves in the interior and exterior of Galata, and because of this have caused a deficit in the revenue of the islands. If the situation is such as he describes, I command that you order those islanders who have come from the islands possessed by the above named and who are now living in the zone of your jurisdiction, to return to their old home. If after this order they do not return or if they go to another country, they shall be followed. I have given the present order so that they may be informed."

Several days after the promulgation of this edict, by means of which Joseph succeeded in forcing his former subjects to return, he sent as a delegate to Naxos the Judge of Chio with the mission of taking a census of the isles in his duchy, to draw up a list of its inhabitants, both married and single, so as to levy his taxes on the basis of the census. The imperial order to the Cadi of Chio, dated November 29, 1567, reads: ⁶⁸

"I order that you personally go to the islands of the unbelievers which are in the possession of the Duke of Naxos and impose upon them the tax by proceeding to take a census of all households, without making any distinction between married and single persons. Once the census is made and the tax imposed, you shall draw up a list, which you shall seal and send by footman to my imperial throne. Be just and have integrity in the census."

Nasi did not look with favor on the settlement of Mohammedans in the Cyclades for they might place him in an embarrassing position if they refused to pay the tax which the other Christian inhabitants were forced to pay. He feared lest the Grand Vizier, his sworn enemy, Mohammed Sokolli, might represent him as in the wrong in attempting to tax Turkish subjects in his duchy. Hence he used all his influence to have the Sultan issue an edict forbidding the settlement of Turks in the Cyclades where there were neither mosques or large Moslem communities. In the archives of the Porte there is an order to Piale Pacha dated 23 Ramazan 975 (March 23, 1568) which reads: ⁶⁹

"I have learned that soldiers and other people continue to live among the unbelievers of Naxos and have not stopped molesting the inhabitants and causing trouble. This is contrary to the imperial order which I have issued prohibiting Mohammedans from living among unbelievers in cities where there are no mosques or large Moslem communities. Having heard said that in spite of this prohibition certain individuals persist in living there and in molesting my inhabitants, I order that those who do so will be deported to Turkey and by virtue of my previous command you will be put off the islands where there is neither a mosque or large Moslem community. As to those who persist in acting in this manner, you will draw up a list and send it to me."

As any other businessman very carefully watches over his interests so did Nasi carefully guard his investment in the Duchy. Though he never visited the islands, he was kept informed constantly by his vice-regent Coronello of all that occurred on

the islands, especially in relation to the revenue Joseph was deriving from them. Whenever Nasi saw an imperial decree was necessary, he would bring pressure to bear on Selim and his slightest demand would immediately become a Turkish law. Thus when Joseph had to battle the scourge of piracy which infested the islands and hindered their economic development and lessened the revenue from the islands as a result, he quickly obtained a decree authorizing the admiral of the fleet, Piale Pascha, to rid the islands of the descendants of the Corsairs. The edict which he had Selim issue is found in the archives of the Porte. Dated 23 Ramazan 975, (March 23, 1568) it reads:⁷⁰

"Joseph, Duke of Naxos and model of princes of the Jewish nation, has sent me a messenger to inform me that the Corsair Chaaban Reis has made raids on Naxos capturing non-Moslems and stealing their goods. Other corsairs have followed his example and are stirring up disorder. In view of what has happened I command that you send letters to commanders of boats located in these seas, recommending they use every means to overpower Chaaban Reis, so that, if the crimes imputed to him are verified a corrective punishment will be inflicted so that it will serve as an example to those who stir up disorder and commit abominable excesses. Also use all your commendable efforts to rid my shores from the raids of the Corsairs so that peace can reign and that my subjects will be sure of repose and tranquility."

Nasi jealously guarded the peace of his duchy. A certain Ducna, former governor of Naxos, started relations with Venice and with the Pope in Rome, and tried to stir up trouble among the inhabitants. Informed of what was transpiring in his realm,

Joseph obtained an imperial order directing the judges of Roumelie and of Anatolia to put this trouble-maker under arrest. The imperial order to the Cadis of Roumelie and Anatolia, dated June 13, 1568, reads:⁷¹

"Joseph, Duke of Naxos, has sent a letter to my imperial throne, bringing to my attention that the traitor Ducna former governor of Naxos for a long time has been in correspondence with Venice and with the Pope in Rome; that during his trip to Rome the Pope granted him a pension of 1,400 florins and that he has been in the company of several of his followers round about Naxos where ha has plotted with some of my subjects for the purpose of starting a revolt in the city. I command that each of you attempt to seize him and imprison him if he comes into the sphere of your jurisdiction. Be careful that you do not provoke his flight or you will be punished. Therefore exercise strict guard."

With such whole-hearted co-operation from his royal master it might have been expected that Joseph would have used his duchy as a haven for his oppressed fellow Jews. But nowhere is there any evidence that he was so disposed. Graetz⁷² points out that when he got the islands he had no intention of putting Jews on them, perhaps because it was not feasible, since trouble might ensue with the Christian population. Perhaps because he felt that he could not so fully control Jews as subjects, especially if their rabbis proved strong-willed. Might it have been, as Graetz would have us believe, that he had higher aspirations of waiting till Selim fulfilled his promise of making him King of Cyprus when he would be free to become the King of the Jews whom he would

settle there? De Hammer points out that at his palace in Belvidere Nasi adopted the heraldry, "Joseph, King of Cyprus" and hung it in his house.⁷³ The truth probably is that Joseph was not interested enough in Judaism or in his fellow Jews to want them in his duchy where they might interfere with his administration as well as with his revenues. He was ~~was~~ willing to avenge the indignities inflicted upon the Jews in European countries, when he had been personally affected, or when his mother-in-law, Donna Gracia Mendes, whose heart abounded with Jewish sympathies and compassion, impelled him to avenge the ~~indignities~~ ~~indignities~~ she had been subjected to by Venice. We shall see in the next chapter just what sort of champion of Jewish rights Joseph Nasi really was.

Chapter V

The Avenger of Indignities to the Jews

I. The Martyrs of Ancona and the Boycott.

The title of this chapter might more properly be "The Avenger of Indignities Toward Nasi". In his role of chief statesman of the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century Nasi was in a position to crack the whip over the countries of Europe where Jews were persecuted. As has been previously seen, whenever his business interests were at stake, as in Tiberias, or in Naxos, he did not hesitate to call upon the Sultan, Selim, to have him issue an edict that would call out the entire Turkish fleet if necessary. When the issue at stake affected him personally Nasi was willing to intervene with all his influence to have the offenders punished. If Jews benefitted thereby so much the better, but pure altruism for the sake of suffering Israel was unknown in Joseph's lexicon. Yet he has one achievement to his credit wherein he acted unselfishly apparently but where, it is more likely, he was induced to action by his gracious and generous mother-in-law, Donna Gracia Mendes.

We leave Joseph for a moment and turn to the Jews in Italy. We have seen, at the conclusion of Chapter II, that the clerical fanatic Carraffa became Paul IV in May 1555 and that he instituted a series of Bulls directed against the Jews in the Papal States. This was a cruelty to the many Jews who had fled from the Portuguese Inquisition fifty years previously and settled in

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introduced c. 1536

Ancona where at first they had been unmolested and even received an indemnity from Pope Clement VII. They were not harmed by the Inquisition but were allowed to practice Judaism. The two succeeding Popes, Paul III, and Julius III, equally tolerant, confirmed the privileges of the fugitive Marranos and proved that baptism by force had no religious validity. The more the Inquisition raged in Portugal the more refugees fled to Italy, where they settled in Ferrara and Ancona, secure in the rights given them by the heads of the Church. This comparatively ideal state of affairs was rudely destroyed by Paul IV whose hatred of the Jews led him to disregard their guarantees of protection. He would not permit those already baptized, even superficially, to become Jews again under his eyes. He ordered that all the Marranos of Ancona, several hundred of them, be thrown into prison, a court be instituted to investigate their orthodoxy and their property seized. The blow fell on Elul 1555, after fifty years of comparative security and peace. Among these prisoners were a number of Marranos who were Turkish subjects; they too were accused of being secret Jews and their goods confiscated. ¹ More than a hundred Marranos who could not flee from the edict languished in prison till the General Inquisition passed sentence on them. Those who took a penitent Catholic oath of confession were freed but sent to Malta, stripped of position and dignity. Sixty Marranos submitted to this sham.²

When the news that Pope Paul IV had imprisoned the Marranos in Ancona with the intention of having them burned later reached Dona Gracia, her heart was torn as though the victims were of her own flesh. She knew them all and regarded them as sons and brothers. She did not waste time by idle anguish but went to Joseph Nasi and with him began her activity to alleviate the situation of the oppressed Jews. She appealed to Sultan Suleiman to beseech the Pope to return at least those Marranos who were Turkish subjects. This desire was granted and the Sultan wrote a letter (March 9, 1556) written in the arrogant manner he usually assumed in dealing with the rulers of disrupted Christianity. He charged that the unjust imprisonment of his loyal subjects had incurred a loss of 4,000 ducats to him in addition to a loss of revenue from these Jews whose business was so arbitrarily destroyed. The Sultan insisted that the Pope free the Turkish Marranos imprisoned in Ancona with the veiled threat that if such action were not immediate reprisals would be taken against Christians living in Moslem lands. Paul IV grudgingly released these Jews and permitted them to return to Turkey unharmed.³

Joseph Ha Kohen praises Dona Gracia for her timely interference;

"In Constantinople there was a great woman of the Marranos, by name Beatrice. She went to Suleiman and pleaded with him. He sent a letter to Paul, the Evil One, saying, "Send out my people!" and he listened to him. But this evil tyrant poured out

his wrath upon the Marranos that lived in Ancona and there were burned twenty-four men and one old woman in the month of Sivan in Ancona. As their souls departed they exclaimed: 'Hear, O Israel' and their souls went up pure as flame of fire to heaven. And those who were left were driven out before the Lord and all their property was seized. Never in Italy's history had such an evil act been done." 4.

David Kaufmann cites Joseph ibn Leb's "Consultations" to show that the blood-thirsty Theatine, Paul IV, had renewed for the martyrs all the sufferings of the bloody Tribunal and it was only after the most atrocious tortures that the twenty-four of them, in two equal groups, at intervals of five days, were consigned to the flames.⁵

That which has seemed impossible to happen in Italy had actually come to pass. Ancona had twice been an accomplice to a most horrible crime; the entire city was guilty of this barbarism and the blood of the slain cried out for vengeance. The best the Jews could invent was a feeble attempt at reprisal. At the suggestion of Guido Ubalde, Prince of Pesaro, the Marranos sought to institute a boycott against the city of Ancona. They sought the aid of the Jews in the Levant. No ship, no merchandise of the Levant was ever again to enter the port of Ancona but all commerce was to be directed to Pesaro where Ubaldo promised to improve the harbor.⁶ Of course Ubaldo's motives are obvious. He had invited the refugees to his domain, says R. Moses di Trani, and then ordered them to spread the idea of the boycott so that Ancona would be

bankrupted to the advantage of his city, Pesaro.⁷

It was thus necessary to secure the support of the Levant Jews but it was risky putting anything in writing so an ambassador, Judah Farradj (he is so mentioned by Jehhua Soncin), was delegated and in spite of poor health he undertook the hazardous voyage. He was charged to impart the message concerning the boycott. In addition he carried a letter, written in enigmatic Hebrew, which related the course of events and told of the indomitable faith and heroism of the martyrs who had steadfastly maintained their faith in the God of Israel despite the tempting promises and the cruel tortures of the inquisitors. They gladly faced death for the glory of God. An appeal was made for the powerful Jews of Turkey to avenge themselves on Ancona and show that Jewish solidarity was not an idle phrase. They were to send no ships or goods to Ancona.⁸

The sparks from the faggots of the martyrs at Ancona struck Jewish hearts and inflamed the anger of Jews in the Levant; those exiled Spanish and Portuguese Jews were incensed at the torture and burning of their co-religionists and they cast about for means of vengeance. They immediately instituted a boycott against the city of Ancona and instead traded with Pesaro where Guido Ubaldo had offered the Jews asylum as being good business. Thus the Levantine Jews could decide the fortunes of a flourishing seaport in far off Italy.⁹

The proposal for the boycott was met by various reactions. Some merchants who had been using the port of Ancona exclusively did not know what to do because they were afraid of the shallow harbor of Pesaro. It was agreed among them that a temporary boycott against the Port of Ancona be instituted from Elul 1556 to Pesach 1557, a period of eight months, to see how it would work.¹⁰ The Jews of Pesaro urged that the boycott be unanimous since Duke Ubaldo had incurred the wrath of the Pope by his aiding the Jews and they feared if the boycott failed he would turn them over to the Papal authorities. On the other hand those Jews still remaining in Ancona feared that reprisals for the boycott would be inflicted on them. They feared that the Pope would punish not only Marranos but all the Jews in his domain. According to Joshua Soncin the people of Ancona were notorious among the other Jews for their excessive pride, haughtiness, and self-esteem.¹¹ The merchants were in a dilemma and naturally turned for counsel to the Nasi family. The Jews of Ancona sent a special messenger, R. Moses Bassula, to them to protest against the boycott as injurious to the interests of the Jews in Ancona.¹²

All eyes were upon the Jews in Constantinople. Would they decide for the boycott regardless or would they abandon the idea? Representatives of the other trade cities in the Levant, Salonica, Adrianople, Brussa, Aulona, Morea, had sent inquiries to determine the situation and to obtain counsel how to act.

Here of course Dona Gracia and Joseph Nasi were the judges of what should be done and they cast their vote for the boycott as a means of punishing the Pope where it would hurt him most, in the purse. They informed all their agents to ship all their wares through Pesaro. The local Portuguese and Spanish firms agreed to discriminate against any Jewish firms using the port of Ancona. As a matter of fact there were a number of merchants who ventured to ignore the boycott because of fear that their trade would suffer if dependent on Pesaro as a port of entry. Finally the decision was placed up to the rabbis of Constantinople. If they should decide in favor of the boycott all would willingly abide by it. Other communities, such as Salonica, would also follow the decision of their leaders. Hence Gracia and Joseph influenced the rabbis of the various congregations in Constantinople to vote for the boycott.¹³ Their rabbi, Joseph ibn Lab, ordered his colleagues to favor the boycott against the Pope and a rabbinical decree was issued bearing the names of Salomom ibn Billa and Samuel Sabs, Spaniards, and a Romanioter, the respected old Abraham Jeruschalmi, who signed on his death-bed. Thus the rabbinical decree forbade trade with Ancona.¹⁴

Only two rabbis, Joshua Soncin, an Italian rabbi who was minister of one of the Spanish communities in Constantinople, and a rabbi of a German congregation, opposed the resolution.

Soncin declared he would not sign until he was assured that the action would be successful without any bad effects on those Jews who yet remained in Ancona. He considered the letter of Rabbi Moses Basula, who said great danger would befall the Jews in Ancona if the resolution were adopted, as authentic and authoritative. He was incensed that some of Dona Gracia's "flunkeys" should assert that the testimony of Basula were false and not to be relied upon or that he was probably bribed by the Anconian merchants. Indignation was keen. Should the rabbis, teachers of the Torah, be like the Catholic clergy who do business on a basis of personal profit? Soncin therefore proposed to send a personal messenger to Italy, to Padua where the great and respected Rabbi Meir Katzenellenbogen, ~~wh~~ whose integrity there was no doubt, and who being in the midst of the affair would be acquainted with the situation, and up to whom would be left the final decision as to what course should be taken. Soncin undertook the expense of the journey himself. Although he was an intimate and great admirer of Gracia and Nasi he could not be false to his conscience and accept the resolution without further investigation.¹⁵

His open opposition together with that of the German rabbi who refused to have the resolution with its punishment of the greatest degree of excommunication for infraction of it announced in the synagogue, led to the suspension of his annual salary

which Nasi granted him. For Nasi, although liberal and lenient, could brook no opposition to his forcefulness; Nasi may well have been justified since he knew Guido Ubaldo would withdraw his protection of the Jews if the trade advantages to be derived from use of his port of Pesora exclusively were not forthcoming. Since no unanimous resolution could be agreed upon the Jewish merchants outside Constantinople were happy to see that their trade with Ancona suffered no diminution.

In vain did Dona Gracia, in her anxiety for the Jews in Pesaro, urge the rabbinate of the community of ^{Safed} Saphet which included the two most distinguished rabbis of the Orient, Joseph Caro and Moses di Trani, to issue an opinion on the matter. The ban on the Pope was not put into effect. While the debate was at its height, Duke Guido, exasperated by the lengthy indecision of the Jews, and angered because his ambitions of making Pesaro a center of Jewish trade from the Levant were frustrated, yielded to the Pope's importunings to drive out the Jews, and once again the Marranos had to flee (March 1558). To his credit it is mentioned that he did not hand them over to the Inquisition.

A number of reasons have been cited why the Boycott of Ancona, in which Nasi, at the instigation of his mother-in-law, Dona Gracia, took a deep interest, failed. Galante is of the opinion that Soncin's attitude weakened the possibility of

the boycott's succeeding. For when Joseph Nasi tried to overcome Soncin's opposition by getting the signatures of Joseph Caro and Moses di Trani of the Safed Yeshivah, they delayed so long in discussing the matter pro and con that the boycott failed.¹⁶ Graetz believes the boycott failed because the traders of the Levant feared for the safety of their ships in the harbor of Pesaro since it had not been used a great deal for shipping nor was it as advantageously located as Ancona; they feared it would be unsafe.¹⁷

David Kaufmann places the blame for the failure of the boycott directly on Dona Gracia. He thinks that the passionate zeal which this noble woman and her friends employed for the Marrano cause irritated many persons who up to then had remained undecided. She had come out so unequivocally in favor of the Pesaro arguments and Joseph Nasi had used such measures in dealing with the rabbis who favored the Ancona Jews, that many now pronounced themselves in favor of the Ancona community and against the boycott. Divisions were thus produced in the Levantine communities where formerly harmony had reigned so that no one paid serious attention to the "Cherem" pronounced by Joseph's Rabbi, Joseph ibn Leb.¹⁸

Levy seems to have a clearer insight into the psychology of the Oriental Jews when he asserts that the pecuniary interests of the Turkish Jews triumphed over their spirit of generous sacrifice.¹⁹

So ended Joseph Nasi's initial attempt to be of service to the Jews of Turkey by attempting to lead them in a movement to chastise those who had oppressed his fellow Jews in the lands in the shadow of the Cross. He must have been disillusioned and

disappointed at the failure to obtain unanimous action and especially by the selfishness exhibited by his fellow merchants. After enlisting the aid of the Sultan of the Turkish Empire, and after having the greatest rabbis of the day issue a "Cherem", he found that his efforts on behalf of his brethren were unrecognized and fruitless. The result of the failure of the Ancona Boycott may have crystallized in Nasi's mind the decision to further his own ends in the future and not be too concerned with the troubles that constantly beset K'lal Yisroel.

2. The French Debt and the Confiscation of the French Boats.

If Joseph Nasi did not concern himself with the sufferings of his fellow Jews he certainly was very much concerned over any indignities he himself was subjected to by the Christian powers. He was an extremely proud man, one who was a member of an ancient family, a person who had been on familiar terms with the royalty of Europe, and who was now on equally intimate terms as friend and advisor of the ruler of the vast Ottoman empire. As a Jew he was persona non grata as far as countries under the spiritual rule of the Pope were concerned. His early history involved him in difficulties with Spain and from there he had been forced to flee to Flanders; Venice had imprisoned his mother-in-law and had spurned his request for a refuge island for Jews; France now further humiliated him after having become indebted to him through a large loan by refusing to repay the debt. These affronts continued to rankle in the mind

of Nasi and now that he was well-established as a figure of influence in the Ottoman empire he determined to seek redress of the many wrongs he had been subjected to by his enemies in Christendom. The size and power of his enemies did not at all frighten Nasi and we must laud his courage and temerity in daring to single-handed attack those countries that had insulted him; his aim was to bring each before his mercy, offering humble apologies for wrongs inflicted. That a Jew should humble one nation is significant of his power but that a Jew should bring three great European powers on their knees before him is almost a miracle, but that he should have accomplished this while the fires of the Inquisition raged all around him and threatened to consume him at every step is almost beyond the realm of belief, natural or miraculous! It affords one a thrill to read of his exploits, as well as a sense of inner satisfaction, that despite persecution a Jew could shape world history and win compensation for himself as partial redress of the injuries which had been inflicted upon him.

While Joseph had been manager of the branch at Lyons, according to Carmoly, he negotiated a loan to the French government of 500,000 ecus sometime close to 1550. The government of Henry II contracted the debt under authentic title.²⁰ According to the "Negociations de la France" the debt was acknowledged by the government and recorded in Lyons.²¹ Charriere includes in this record the statement of the Venetian Bailo Barbaro: "Giovanni Miches, creditor del christianissimo re, per il deposito del gran partito

de Lione (Lyons) de circa 150,000 escudi..."²²

This account as well as other documents in the "Negociations" indicate that the actual sum involved was 150,000 ecus, instead of the half million that Carmoly indicates. But whether the sum involved was the larger figure or the smaller, France kept postponing payment of the debt. For fifteen years Joseph held his peace, trying to collect the debt himself by means of letters sent to the French court through the various ambassadors of the court, and we find that the subject of the debt to Nasi occupies a great deal of the correspondence of the French ambassadors in the "Negociations de la France dans le Levant", especially from 1563 to 1570.

The French ambassador de la Vigne was zealous in his efforts to ruin Don Joseph. He wrote Henry II that he might report to Suleiman that Joseph Nasi was making it his business to inform the enemies of France of everything that occurred at the Turkish court, that he was doing so in the interests of Spain since he was a Spaniard. The king might write to the Pasha that Joseph was treating French subjects in Turkey arrogantly. He might insist that they both punish him accordingly. As a means to this end the French ambassador proposed that the king might present the letters which Joseph had presumed to write to him in regard to the payment of the debt; this would be sufficient to bend his pride and punish him for daring as a Turkish subject to write to the French king; this would be lese majeste.²³ But far from punishing him

Selim and also the ruling Sultan Suleiman took Joseph's affairs in hand and demanded urgently that the French court cease their complaint against their Jewish subject and favorite. Henry II and his followers had an objection against Joseph's claims which was characteristic of the Christian morality and psychology of the time. Law and religion it was claimed, forbade the king to repay his debt to a Jew since no Jew could legally do business in France and what is more, all Jewish goods were subject to confiscation. Naturally the Sultan and his son understood no such morality and urged the payment be made immediately or dire consequences would result.

When France did not seem anxious to answer his first letter he sent a second and when Nasi's debt was still unpaid, Suleiman sent a third letter which reads as follows: ²⁴

"You were sent sometime ago two royal messages in re the 150,000 gold ecus owed to Frank Bey Oglow Joseph Nasi, the model of the nobles of the Mosaic nation and one of the Muteferik of my son Selim, may God prolong his life, he informs us that the said sum has not yet been paid under the pretext of certain inconveniences. This time when our letter reaches you we beg of you, as a sign of justice, and the loyalty, and in witness of your friendship toward us, for your cooperation in settling without delay this debt, and to give the sum to the bearer of our message,"

He sent as his agent the Jewish poet and merchant Duarte Gomez also known as Salmom Usque, protogee of Dona Gracia, with full power and letters of recommendation to travel to France to collect the debt. On August 11, 1564 the French ambassador in Venice wrote

to Charles IX explaining Duarte Gomez's mission and advocated the payment of the debt through the assignment of French goods to Turkey in lieu of cash. However, M. Petremolle was aware of the financial straits of his emperor so he did not hesitate to advise him to make use of the usual excuse that Nasi was a Jew so that the debt was invalid. He writes: 25

"Since Prince Sultan Selim has sent me his agent who lives at this Porte, he requests of me and begs of you, on the part of this Prince, to ask the favor that in payment of the debts Your Majesty must make, that Joseph Nasi be not among the last paid, but he be given priority over all the other creditors. He assures me that his master, the Prince, has received great pleasure on the many occasions when you have done him a favor. As to the response that your Majesty never refuses a reasonable thing, especially to such princes, and that Nasi up to now has not been paid his debt; the troubles that have beset the France have partly been the cause, and partly also that the debt claimed has still not been verified by the controller of your finances. A command was given to Nasi to send you a man expressly for the purpose of verifying the debt. For this purpose Nasi sent to your court one of his principle agents living in Venice, Odourant de Gomez, with all the provisos and documents necessary for such verification hoping that your Majesty will not find it difficult to reimburse him and to prefer him over other creditors because of your love of Sultan Selim who begs this of you.

While you deliberate to continue to be friendly with this Prince this debt is not so large that your Majesty cannot gratify it, it can not be done without one ecu leaving France, by giving to Nasi (his debt being previously certified by your secretary of finance) an assignment of so much cloth, Brazil wood, canvas, or other goods which are ordinarily in your kingdom and needed here. If not, Your Majesty might use the same excuses which have been used up to now when either my predecessors or myself needed something for your Majesty, that of their faith and religion. Because of the laws of your kingdom which do not permit Jews like Nasi either to negotiate or to traffic there, but all they own is to be confiscated."

Charles IX did not receive Duarte de Gomez but sent a special messenger, Lord Vincent Justiani, to Selim to excuse the delay in making the payment to Nasi. Nasi, however, pointed out to the Porte that unless France made good its debt to him he would be unable to make payment to the Ottoman treasury for the various leases that he had contracted. Lord Justiani was forced to write back to his royal master that the Sultan was firm in his desire that Nasi be reimbursed either in commodities described above or in cash.²⁶ Again Charles IX refused to have anything to do with this Jew "whom he thought the ambassador ought to hold in check and give him punishment that he deserves."²⁷ He remained obstinate despite the protestations of his own ambassadors, as well as Nasi's agent and the Sultan himself.

Finally Nasi's patience came to an end. It was obvious that Charles IX had no intention of paying this legal debt unless drastic action was taken. An inspiration came to Joseph Nasi which sets him down in the history of the world as a genius in the art of international relations. If France would not give him what belonged to him he would take it! On December 25, 1568, he had Selim issue a firman to the Beyler Bey of Egypt to seize all boats flying the French flag in all Turkish waters. In Alexandria several boats were captured after Nasi sent privateers as far as Algiers to take possession of French ships and seize their cargoes.²⁸ According to the edict of Selim²⁹

"One third of the goods of boats flying the French flag having the value of 1,000 florins was to be retained for the

satisfaction of this debt and if they refuse to do this then confiscate all the goods. As for those that say that this might cause loss to the revenue of the harbor they speak against the conditions stipulated to this effect. My order applies only to French boats and not to Venetian, Ragusan, or other boats, therefore apply this law with justice! "

The French ambassador suffered great humiliation because of this triumph of a Jew over his country. He graphically describes the seizure of the French boats in his letter to Charles IX, dated March 14, 1569: ³⁰

"Finally, Sire, as to our sailors, they have given everything which comes under the banner of your majesty, their vessels, their ships, their men, and their goods to a foreign nation and they have not kept that which belongs to your subjects ...Two or three days ago the Bassa took his share of the booty for they carried away 60,000 ducats of merchandise of our poor merchants." (Then he complains of ill treatment at the hands of the creditors)...."I have received from the First Bassa more bad treatment than any of your ambassadors have received here. No one deals honestly with me, they all incite my creditors against me seeing that I have neither the means nor the commodity to satisfy them at this hour, since all my guarantors are in hiding or are fugitives through fear of becoming prisoners awaiting the reply of your Majesty from hour to hour."

France was offended by this manner of action and protested in vain but the Sultan protected his favorite. He sent a letter on October 18, 1569 to Charles IX to explain to him the legality of the measures taken against the French boats. As a result of this incident there was a severe strain on the diplomatic relations between Turkey and France, which was more galling to the latter than to the former.³¹ However, neither Grandchamps, the ambassador

at the Porte, nor the haughty French government intended to allow this fugitive from the Inquisition to flaunt his power in the faces of the Medici and the Navarres. We shall soon see what means of redress they attempted.

3. The French Plot and Nasi's Contravention.

M. de Grandchamp, the French ambassador, felt that something ought to be done to ruin this Jew who had so insulted the French power. He looked upon Nasi as a dangerous enemy, inimical to the interests of France, and therefore to be removed by fair means or foul. Nasi's position next to Selim was so well fixed as to be well nigh impregnable. Finally the ambassador hit upon the plan to bring false charges against Nasi through one of his trusted servants, David Daoud. After his brother Samuel (Moses Nasi, the husband of Gracia, the younger) had died, Joseph appointed as his secretary David Daoud. Levy is of the opinion that he is in reality the unlucky rival of Joseph Nasi for the hand of Reyna: he is the doctor David Hamon, son of Moses Hamon, mentioned in the French correspondence above as the fiance of Reyna.³² Graetz however, states that Levy has no proof that Daud belonged to the Hamon family.³³ Galante also states that there are no worthy facts to prove this theory.³⁴ In speaking of the relationship of Daud to Nasi, the contemporary historian, Elijah b. Chaim in *...אליהו בן חיים* says: "....That several years ago the lofty prince, Joseph Nasi,

received the N.N. and brought him into all his affairs. He raised him from the dust and helped him to reach much honors and wealth; nevertheless he did refrain from truth and candor toward his sire. The activities of N.N. were known to Joseph and Nasi became exceedingly angry and declared through writing as well as by word of mouth that N.N. had brought danger not only to him but to all his co-religionists. God was with Joseph."³⁵

Whatever the reason, Daud and his master had quarreled. As soon as the French ambassador received wind of this he added fuel to the flames by giving Daud a position as interpreter at the French embassy; this position carried with it a good salary which was promised him if he would reveal Joseph's secrets. In his resentment at Joseph, Daud poured forth this information without reflecting on the consequences. He promised to deliver to the French ambassador, de Grandchamp, valid testimony to the effect that Joseph had falsified the amount the French court owed him, that he had lied to the Sultan about his former position, and what is worse that he had indulged in traitorous correspondence against the court of Turkey. He hastened to affirm that Joseph was daily betraying the activities of the Turkish court to the Pope, the King of Spain, the Duke of Florence, the Genoese Republic, and in short to all the enemies of the Sultan. Happy at this opportunity to overthrow Joseph, De Grandchamp reported to the King of France and to the cunning mother of the king, Catharina Medici, that he would soon be in a position to humble this enemy of the French court.

The ambassador of Grandchamp writes from Constantinople
to Charles IX on October 3, 1569:³⁷

I inform your majesty and will inform you daily about how I have found means to cause this Miguez to become an enemy of the Sultan, and it was through the steps and dodges of a certain Daout, whom I have obtained and use for my purposes. As soon as I arrived I started a quarrel among those friends, since Daout sees that his great service for his king is unrecognized. For it is he who strengthened him in this government and brought Nasi into favor when Selim had brought him into prominence when he was still prince and he was already his doctor. Through his skill and good reputation he had broadcast about him he was brought to favor. I have given him 10,000 ecus and I have promised to make him interpreter in your court. He will put the means in my hands which will be demonstrated that your majesty will owe nothing to Miguez and that he will have to give up with interest all the goods confiscated at Alexandria. This will cost him more than 200,000 ecus and ultimately his head, for the many evils which he has wanted to inflict on you. The bearer of this dispatch, Jacques le Mercier, will give you a full account."

To this may be added the cryptic letter to Catharine Medici from the ambassador:³⁸

"I have myself mentioned the doctor who can do many services for you. What my promises to him amount to, will be up to your discretion after we have made use of him in our negotiations.

On October 10, the ambassador repeated the news and mentioned the disclosures that the doctor had made to him:

"In the first place Miguez used other instruments - a promissory note - especially certain checks, which he embezzled and changed. He was the clerk of the bank at Lyon which he had taken and stolen from Spanish merchants, who are still owed a sum which remains unpaid ... But the mentioned Miguez has changed his name since their death, falsified the promissory note, and placed the responsibility for payment on your predecessors. Since Miguez has lived in

this country he has found means to move the late Sultan to write about these conditions in which he deceived him: that he was a prince and had great power when he lived in France, that he had different castles, villages, and places which he sold to your ancestors and the amount of which he obtained part for part in the trade ...the letters which the Sultan wrote at that time were forged by Brossimi (Ibrahim), the interpreter, to whom Miguez gave 300 ecus. 39.

Levy explains the motives of Daud's treachery on the basis of jealousy because of Reyna, the disappointed hope for her, the enthusiastic expression of thanks on the part of the French ambassador for the services rendered, and finally the promised reward of 10,000 ducats, and a position at the French court.⁴⁰

If Daud could go through with his plan openly with the aid of French money, and if the Grand Vizier Sokolli, the deadly enemy of Joseph should take the matter in hand, Nasi was lost. The French ambassador considered it more appropriate, however, to keep the matter secret for a while until, it appears, Daud could muster conclusive proof. He therefore told the King of France not to disclose the matter to the Turkish ambassador who was on his way to the French court. "For as soon as this Mohammed should know it he would immediately tell Joseph and the latter through the Sultan and his ministers would frustrate his plans." He did not find it difficult to maintain secrecy but by some means Joseph learned of the plans. He quickly proved to Selim that the plan was to cast him into disfavor on trumped up charges whereas he had always been true to the Sultan and to his father before him.⁴¹ According to

Elijah b. Chaim, either at Nasi's instigation or of their own accord, all the rabbis of the communities of Constantinople pronounced the severest form of excommunication upon Daud and two of his accomplices.⁴² The rabbinical colleges of the largest Turkish communities, Salonika, Alexandria, Safed, under the leadership of Joseph Caro, followed this lead blindly without attempting to determine Daud's innocence or guilt.⁴³ According to Levy⁴⁴ and Graetz⁴⁵ Nasi got a decree from the Sultan Selim banishing Daud to Rhodes, the criminal colony of the Turkish Empire, but Carmoly⁴⁶ insists Joseph did not punish Daud by Turkish law but only according to Jewish law.

The quarrel between Joseph and Daud must have occurred before October 3, 1569, since the French ambassador speaks in the first report of information "which had been given him previously." According to Graetz we cannot determine the date of the pronouncement of the "Cherem". He finds that there are two such pronouncements incorrectly dated so as to appear that the quarrel lasted from 1569 to 1573 and thus he arbitrarily sets the date as 1570. From the responsa he gathers that the intrigue was betrayed and he thinks it is possible because of a quarrel between the ambassador and his agent, that the agent, Claude de Bourge, betrayed the plot to Joseph. He sought to frustrate his superior's plans and he was therefore mistreated by Grandechamp at the French court. The ambassador considered it necessary at the time of De Bourge's

return to France to beg him to say nothing to the king of what had occurred.⁴⁷

Thus the unusual efforts of the French ambassador and the court to overthrow the Jewish favorite and get their revenge for the humiliation inflicted on the French flag, failed completely. Instead it left in its train a feeling of bitterness against France. Single-handed Joseph had collected the debt due him from the French king and then had effectively outwitted the French masters of intrigue at their own game.

4. The attempts to incite a Turko-Spanish War and the aid given to the Revolt of the Netherlands.

The country that Joseph had most cause to hate was Spain, mother of the Inquisition. The thought that his family had been exiled from there burned within him like a consuming fire that would not be quenched. To the Inquisition could be traced all the unhappiness that beclouded his early youth. He must have brooded for a long time how could he avenge himself on this infamous country, persecutor of his kin? After he left Flanders the thought that he must have kept ever foremost in his mind was that of humiliating Spain!

When Phillip II succeeded Charles V to the throne of Spain he ordered his ruthless general, Alba, to proceed to institute the bloody tribunal in the Netherlands against the non-Catholics. Through his agents in Flanders Nasi was kept continually informed as to what

occurred there.⁴⁸ The bloody Alba sought to suppress any uprising by forcing conversions with an iron hand. Graetz writes that he sought to make the gallows support a wavering cross in Holland.⁴⁹ Nasi must have had the deepest sympathy for those who were oppressed and it must have rekindled his early rancor against Spain. According to the *Strada* *de Bello Belgica* (I:284) Joseph wrote to the Protestant Church Council in Antwerp that Selim contemplated war against Spain so that Spain would thus be unable to fight against the Netherlands should they revolt.⁵⁰ This then was the form which Nasi's plans for revenge on Spain assumed: he would help the Netherlands secure their independence. If he could interest his royal master, Selim, and succeed in causing him to declare war on Spain, then the small country in the north could successfully resist the Inquisition. It would be an excellent way to embarrass Spain, and Nasi would have his revenge. Right in the beginning Nasi's letters instilled hope in the Consistorial council in Antwerp, the Calvinists depending on Selim's help found new strength and persisted. The Duke, William of Orange, the soul of the revolution in Holland sent a personal messenger to Joseph that he persuade the Sultan to declare war on Spain so that Spanish troops might be decoyed from Flanders.⁵¹ Nasi therefore made every effort to have Selim declare war on the hated Phillip. But the palace did not come to a full break with Spain since the Grand Vizier, Sokolli, was opposed to it. His early Christian training and his enmity to Joseph made him favor Spain.

under Charles V, now a psychopathic monarch afflicted with the gout, came a recommendation of how to deal with the Netherlands in revolt: "Where all who remained obstinate in their errors were burned alive, let all those admitted to penitence be beheaded". Charles son surpassed even his father's cruelty. Alba, his general, murdered, sacked, massacred - but all in vain.⁵² Nasi's reassuring words to William of Orange gave him courage and inspiration to fight the inhuman Inquisition and to lead the United Provinces to the republican form of government which is now Holland. Joseph Nasi was not able to overcome Sokolli's sympathy to Spain but he had at least played his part in the defeat of Spain by the Netherlands.

5. The War with Venice and the Capture of Cyprus.

Once he had settled accounts with France and Spain Nasi now turned his attention to Venice. There was a quiet enmity between the Jewish Duke and the Republic of Venice which both concealed under a patina of outward politeness and diplomatic flattery. But the thought that the Doges dared to lay hands on the person of his mother-in-law and aunt and had attempted to confiscate his property, besides refusing his request for a refuge island for Jews, goaded Joseph on into an attempt to embarrass the Republic. He seized the opportunity of helping himself and at the same time of rendering his adopted country ^{a service} by suggesting to Selim that it would be a good idea to annex the island of Cyprus to Turkey. We have already mentioned how Selim, under the influence of the strong Cyprus wine, had promised

to make Joseph King of Cyprus if war ever gave Turkey the opportunity of conquering these islands. Joseph adopted in anticipation of that event the heraldry of Cyprus with the legend, "Joseph, King of Cyprus" and hung it in his palace at Belvedere.⁵³ Another writer mentions that Joseph often recalled that promise to Selim and made it more vivid by continuing to serve him with Cyprus wine.⁵⁴

Selim was greatly interested in Nasi's suggestion since he did not have a high regard for Venice either. The Grand Vizier Sokolli because of his enmity for Nasi and his friendship with Venice raised numerous suggestions to oppose a war with Venice. He cited the treaty made in 1540 between Suleiman and Venice and also attempted to magnify the fear that complications would arise with other European nations because of an acquisition of Cyprus. But Sokolli's objections went for naught in the face of the declaration by the Mufti Embusuud that the funds necessary for the completion of the grand mosque, then under construction, could not be furnished by the Moslems. The money had to be raised by a victory over the infidels. One wonders if Nasi had anything to do with this. The Mufti issued a decree which made any violation of the treaty with Venice an act of piety. This remarkable decree is found in the "History of the Maritime Wars of the Ottomans", printed at Constantinople, folio 40. It reads:

"If in a country formerly under the power of Islam but later snatched away from that authority the infidels change the mosques into churches, oppress Islam, and spread everywhere the scandal; if the Prince of Islam empowered by a saintly zeal for the true faith wishes to raise anew this land from the hands of the evil-doers, and reunite it under the power of the followers of the Prophet; if they are now at complete peace with the other possessions of these infidels, if in the acts and pacific treaties they recognize that this country has been included; does the simple text of that law offer an obstacle which hindered the breaking of that treaty?

"Such an obstacle cannot be so presumed. The Prince of Islam can legitimately make a peace with the infidels only when it results to the advantage of the majority of Moslems. If this general advantage is not obtained then the peace is not valid. As soon as an advantage appears it is absolutely necessary to take the occasion to break the peace. Thus the Prophet (May Allah preserve his salvation) concluded with the infidels in the 6th year of the Hegira a peace that lasted until the 10th year and Ali (may he be honored) wrote this treaty. Nevertheless he found a good opportunity to break the treaty and to attack the evil-doers in the eighth year of the Hegira and to conquer Mecca. Your Majesty, Chalife of Allah on earth, has the imperial wish to always worthily imitate the noble sunna of the Prophet." 55

The pretended right of Selim to Cyprus by virtue of his Fetwa depended upon the former control which had been exercised over this island by the Arüls under Omar; then the sultans of Egypt. It was further fortified by the circumstance that the income of Cyprus had formerly been applied by the Sultans of Egypt to the upkeep of the two holy temples of Islam, Mecca and Medina. It therefore became a religious duty to render its revenue to this former destination.

At first they sent an interpreter, Mahmed, to carry the demands to Venice. Then the Tschausch, Kubad, went there to claim the ceding of Cyprus from the Republic of Venice as the price of maintaining peace. It required such a sacrifice from Venice to guarantee the safety of pilgrims who went by sea to Medina and Mecca, the destruction of pirate ships which took refuge in Cyprus and finally the honor of the Sultan. The Venetian senate refused. The populace was so enraged that the Tschausch had to escape through a back door to save his life. The Grand Vizier's attempts to divert the war fervor by pleading for aid to the Moors who had been driven from Spain were of no avail.

The religious duty to help the expelled Moslems faded away before the avarice for Venetian ducats and Cyprus wine; the conquest of the island was to begin at once.⁵⁶

Joseph was not content merely to get the clergy behind him but he used all his influence to get the military party to support him since there was a difference of opinion in the Divan. The deciding factor was when Joseph learned from his agents that a great fire had broken out in Venice in September, 1569 and had destroyed the arsenal in Venice. In this building a great portion of the Venetian war supplies were stored. Its destruction left Venice helpless. Many of the Italian historians blame Nasi for the burning of the arsenal. They base their claim on the ground that since Nasi was the first person in Turkey to hear of it and so report to the Sultan he must have had a hand in its firing. Levy cites Cantareni's "de bello turcico contra Venet" that Nasi is to be considered the chief instigator; Sereno also suspects Nasi of causing the fire and for having given the Sultan the political excuse to demand the return of Cyprus.⁵⁷ However, neither of these contemporary historians can bring clear evidence to prove that Nasi was responsible for the fire. Whether he was guilty or not did not enter Selim's mind for he regarded it as a sign from heaven and immediately he ordered the fleet to Cyprus. The Turks quickly took possession of the island's principal cities, Nicosia and Famagusta.⁵⁸

E.J.W. Gibbs describes the war which caused heavy losses to both sides. It lasted from 1570 to 1571. The Christian powers, as Sokolli had warned, were roused by this act of treachery and by

such flagrant violation of the treaty of 1540. Through the efforts of Pope Pius V a maritime league was formed with Spain, Venice, and Malta.⁵⁹ In Venice reprisals were made against the Jews by seizure of their goods, a common proceeding in the wars of those days. But the Senate under Doge Luis Mocenigo resolved to expel all Jews from Venice in December 1571, on the ground they were fellow conspirators of Nasi.⁶⁰ Nasi must have heard of the decree and urged the Turkish fleet to redouble their efforts, for Famagusta soon fell and the Venetians were compelled to sue for peace through another Jew, Solomon Nathan Askenazi.⁶¹

The war lasted for two years and brought Turkey the inestimable profit of the island. The Senate of Venice took revenge on the Jewish instigator of the war and refused to give him the customary gift at the concluding peace in 1571. The efforts of Nasi to be made king of the island failed. Sokolli made the Sultan understand that the elevation of Nasi to the rank of royalty would be opposed by all Moslems as well as all Europe. Instead Nasi was given the revenues of Cyprus.⁶² According to Hammer the revenues of Cyprus which were to be applied by the Turkish sultans and which had served as a pretext for the war and which the Jew Miquez had hoped to seize for himself were given over to the grand vizier, later the greater part of the revenue was given over to the sultan's mother.⁶³ The contradiction would seem to indicate that Nasi although getting some part of the revenue did not have all.

Thus ended Nasi's attempts to humiliate the nations which had injured him because of their malice towards the Jews. Though he did not always profit personally he was nevertheless able to employ

the vast resources of Selim and thus cause a distinct loss to each of those nations against which he bore a particular grudge. Thus he influenced the course of world history. The sphere of his influence extended, it seemed, to the farthestmost corners of the known world. In the Sixteenth Century the curious anomaly was presented that when the Jews were most reviled one Jew should so affect the Christian world.

Chapter VI

Joseph Nasi and Judaism

1. Nasi as a Macaenas.

After the death of Selim II in 1574 Don Joseph remained in the court of Murad III. According to the diary of the famous traveler, Gerlach, both Levy¹ and Carmoly² are of the opinion that his wisdom and his political knowledge made him indispensable to the Porte and Murad like his father, Selim II, and his grandfather, often made use of his advice. He kept his titles bestowed by the former emperors as well as the direction of the public treasury. Levy says that through the Sultan's death Joseph might have taken the opportunity to increase his political influence over the court but with the passing of his patron he gradually began to withdraw from political life.³ He himself was well along in years and a little weary of the continual intrigue and shams of court life. Although his power did not decrease under the new sultan, his nominal position was the same, his influence began to wane and Murad merely maintained him in office in accordance with his father's last wishes. He was now definitely superseded by his arch-rival Sokolli and his Jewish rival, Salomo Ashkenazi who had concluded the peace with Venice.⁴

Now that he was removed from the center of the political stage Nasi spent his declining years trying to be of service to Judaism. Now that his ambition for great riches was satisfied and his goal of

punishing Spain, France, and Venice, achieved, he turned to a new field of activity, the furtherance of Hebrew literature. He had a large library of Hebrew manuscripts and he encouraged writers to produce their works by generous subsidies. Among the works produced at his palace in Belvidere were the Karaite work *מלך המלכות* by Eliah Beschizi; the polemical writings of his teacher, the lame Isaac Akriah, who wrote the history *קול המגן*. Voice of a Free Ambassador, giving the historical parallels of the Exilarch Bostinaï and Chafsdai ibn Shaprut's correspondence with the kingdom of the Chazars; and also the work *קצת חכמה* of the Gaon Nachshon, edited by Onkeneiro, concerning the rules of slaughter.⁵ We learn of a famous biblical manuscript from the following letter which the French ambassador Petromol describes to de Boistaille as follows:⁶

"I would like to inform you of a Bible in Hebrew, consisting of the Five Books of Moses and some of the Prophets, which has been printed in this city. This printing was introduced by Don Joseph Nasi, otherwise known as Jean Miquès, but it has been a long time since it was turned out because of the little profit which it made, and he has not printed other books except those which you have seen."

Levy points out that this letter could not be concerned about the installation proper of the book publishing house in Constantinople through Don Joseph since in 1503 a Hebrew press was in existence and another flourished since 1530 under Gerson Soncino and his son Elieser.⁷

Nasi liked the company of the scholars after he retired from the activity of politics. They would gather at his palace in Belvidere and discuss a variety of subjects but in the main

philosophy was the leading topic. According to Carmoly⁸ among the scholars who were housed permanently at Belvedere were Isaac Turqueman and Isaac Onghianere. Nasi at one time held a discussion with a Christian theologian on the subject of the truth of Christianity and he had written a small book in Spanish on his findings. Onghianera translated it into Hebrew under the title of⁹ כפר בן פרס יוכי חברו שר ינדול הדוכס הנשא הנשיא

האדון דין יוכי הנשיא.

In describing the book Levy says that the tendency of the writing was in no way anti-Christian.¹⁰ Graetz describes his opponent as an unbelieving and astrologically fanatic Christian.¹¹ In the course of the book the unnamed Christian opponent and Nasi argue on the depth and truth of Greek philosophy. Joseph can find no peace in it; he says that he can only find peace in carrying out the commands of the Holy Writings. Nasi tells the Christian that it is God's revelation which teaches to man the secrets of Nature and His Spirit which philosophy is unable to do. He argues against astrology and the influence that the heavenly bodies supposedly have over human destiny. Further on the questions of the happy outcome of man in attaining God's righteousness and the Freedom of the Will are discussed. Graetz does not give Nasi credit as the author of the work but indicates it is uncertain to the reader as to how much of it is Nasi's and how much is Isaac Onghianere's, the editor. Even if it were all written by

Nasi, says this historian, it would indicate that he was satisfied with a mere look into the Talmud in order to avoid more pressing and philosophical questions.¹²

It was difficult for Nasi, who had been interested in the more practical subjects of politics and statesmanship, to throw himself into scholarship and Jewish learning with the correct spirit of humility. His being accustomed to issuing peremptory orders and having them obeyed instantly and without questioning made him treat his friends, scholars and rabbis, like mere servants who were to run about and do his bidding. In addition his business instincts ruled over his literary appreciation because his venture into the publishing of Jewish books was more for profit than love of books and when he saw that profit was not forthcoming he dropped the enterprise. We are fortunate that his wife, Reyna, inherited the love of Judaism which her mother, Dona Gracia, had held before her, for she saw to it that Hebrew literature did not languish. We find in the inscriptions of books published after Joseph's death that in his estates at Belevedere and Koregismi, near Constantinople, she set up a Hebrew printing press where many works of contemporary scholars were printed at her expense. The director of this work was a scholar named Joseph ben Isaac Askaloni who carried out his task well. Some of the books published were: 1. ל' ענין ד' תלמוד; "The Pile of Nuts", a discussion of Genesis by Menachem ben Moses Egosi, "Printed at the estate of the celebrated Madame Reyna Nasi, widow

of Lord Joseph Nasi at Belvedere near Constantinople under the reign of Sultan Amurat and under the direction of Joseph ben Isaac Askaloni."

2. "The Law of Moses" תורת משה commentary on Genesis by R. Moses Alschech.
3. "The Arch of Brass" קשת נחושת, an allegorical drama in verse and rhymed prose in Arabic style by Meir Angel.
4. תורת חכר "Law of Charity" by Isaac Jabez.
5. יפק רנן "Who Draws Favor" by the same author. 1593.
6. ספר רביעי מי שבוט "Fourth Book of Legal Decisions of R. Joseph ben Leb. 1595.
7. אגרת שמואל "Letter of Samuel, commentary of R. Samuel Osieda on Ruth. Koregimi, 1597.
8. מושיח אל "Deliverance of God" by Joseph ben Abraham Cohen.
9. מבוא זהב "The Golden Apple", commentary on psalms by Moses Alschach.¹³

This golden era in the life of the Jews was compensated by the fact that their intellectual and spiritual progress was small. None of the community leaders were extraordinary. The rabbis and preachers were learned but in a conventional way and never strayed from the beaten path of tradition or accomplished anything worthy of note or particularly original. Just one rabbi has left an epochal work which is still in use. Joseph Karo, Rabbi of the

city of Safed in Paletine completed after many years of labor a new religious law book, the Schulchan Aruch. But Karo is the outstanding exception; he was external to the aura of Cabbalistic nonsense which was the nimbus of most of the rabbis. This may be the reason for Karo's attitude toward the rabbis in the Daud affair.

2. Nasi's Attitude Toward the Rabbis as Shown in the Daud Affair.

We can see in Nasi the traits usually associated with blunt self-made men who impress world history with the force of their personality. Drunk with his own power, he viewed traditions and rules as things only to be knocked down by brute force and display of strength. Joseph was indeed not fitted to further the spiritual life of the Jews. In his attachment to the Turkish court he had developed the traits of pride and arrogance which could brook no opposition. He treated the rabbis who were dependent upon him as slaves who rationalized and justified his whims with their learning if they were to escape his wrath. When he took the whim to become reconciled again to the unfaithful servant David whom he had banned he compelled the rabbis to rescind their decree of excommunication against him. The matter was not so easy, however. Such a ban, promulgated by so many famous Rabbis and communities could not, according to rabbinic law, be abrogated, especially now that so many of the participants were dead. Nevertheless Joseph of Naxos demanded of the rabbis in Constantinople that the ban be

rescinded, threatening that if they did not do so he would withdraw his support. But the rabbis had enough independence not to be cowed into submission so easily. The old Rabbi, Joseph ibn Lab, who was dependent upon Joseph, refused to vote for the removal of the ban and his college supported him in the view as did the rabbinate of Egypt, Alexandria, and Salonica. Only two rabbis in Constantinople spoke for Joseph of Naxos: Elia b. Chajim and Jehuda Algasi.¹⁴ The rabbis who refused to lift the edict were:¹⁵

Constantinople:	Joseph b. Lab Samuel Saba Yom Tob ben Farag Elia Galimidi Adriel ben Nahmias Hananiah b. Yakan Menachem Eskenazi Sabatai b. Elia
Salonica:	Samuel de Medina Isaac Adarabi Mordoliai Matalon Jacong Taitacak Daniel Cohen Solomon Levy Solomon Cohen Moses Ouadia Samuel Calai
Cairo:	Ismael Cohen Moses Damohi Yom Tob Sid Simeon Castalan Jacob ben Tebonon Moses ben Abondorom Samuel Alhalo
Alexandria:	Salomon Narboni Azia Nahmani Moses Cohen Moses Tivoli Abraham bon Diaz

Safed: Joseph Caro
 Israel Meir
 Moses Mitrani
 Isaac Arha
 Samuel ben Vargn
 Abraham Arueti
 Solomon Abon Saban
 Jacob Bereb
 Moses de Couriel
 Elisha Galico
 David Navaro

all the above refused to follow the demand of Nasi in view of the fact that the excommunication had been issued under very grave conditions.

3. An Evaluation of Nasi's Character.

Before criticising or praising Joseph Nasi, it would be well to examine his background and then determine whether he was a representative of his period or not. The power he exercised throws a halo of romance about him but Graetz points out that this glamor then, which fell from the Jewish Duke of Naxos and other influential Jews of the Turkish court on their oriental brethren was, when carefully analyzed similar to a delusive light whose shimmering radiance illumines a dark bog. For indeed the religious swamp at this time was dark enough, it was a decisive backsliding into heathenism and what was much worse there was no one to warn them or to realize the danger and brand this backsliding for what it was. Perhaps this indifference was due to the feeling of security which the Jews of Turkey enjoyed under the mighty protectors of their race ?¹⁶

Joseph was not deeply grounded in Judaism and this because of the scanty knowledge he had of Jewish writings and because he lacked the scientific spirit. His ignorance may be condoned, however, on the ground that his education was that of a Marrano, oppressed and harried, so that he never had the opportunity to study as did the real Jew. He cannot be compared in this respect to Chisdai Shaprut nor to Samuel ibn Nagdela, both of whom encouraged to a high degree the cultivation of scientific Judaism. He supported it is true, a rabbinic college in his palace at Belvidere but he was more or less compelled to do so because of his wealth and position. It was less from conviction than from the exigencies of display which every rich man feels it necessary to meet. Had he been a Gentile he would have devoted some of his wealth to the building of monasteries.¹⁷

He was first a business man and then a Jew. He did little that was essential or lasting in Judaism. He was always on the verge of doing something for his religion but he either desisted or was forced to lose interest. His enthusiasm reflected that of Dona Nasi and when she died he had no stimulus to Jewishness. Given her undying love for her faith and his unbounded power under Selim II, Nasi might have changed the course of Jewish history in the Near East. With the passing of Gracia his great energy was directed to other channels.

Joseph Nasi died of some stone disease on August 2, 1579, greatly mourned by all. Funeral orations were given all over the

Turkish Empire. The learned Hebrew poet, Saadia Longo of Salonika gave the memorial address, deploring the death of Nasi:¹⁸

"Our unhappy life must cry out above everything, in seeing raised from our shores, to dwell in the shadow of the Most High, a brilliant light, a luminous star, the scepter of Israel, the standard bearer who assembled scattered Israelites, the noble Duke, the sublime Lord, Don Joseph Nasi."

With the death of Nasi the great treasure he had accumulated evaporated like many of his far-flung ambitions. The greedy Sultan, Murad, who according to legend slept on bags of gold to make sure they would not disappear, on the advice of his greatest enemy, Sokolli, seized Joseph's fortune - allegedly to pay his debts. He stated that Nasi owed the State a large debt, so that the widow Reyna hardly received the amount of her original dowry of 90,000 ducats.¹⁹ When the French ambassador heard of the death he attempted to seize some of the property of Don Joseph's estate to compensate for the goods taken at Alexandria but Murad refused to allow him to touch any part of the estate and declared that it now all belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Thus even after his death did Nasi prove the nemesis of the French; once more his persecutors were foiled.

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58. Levy, p. 12
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