

Levi Ashkenazi
or
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Graduation Thesis

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מכתב הקדמות

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His Time

I

Hope is born in houses of trouble and reaches its zenith when affliction becomes unbearable. This maxim of human nature is borne out especially from the period of the history of the Jewish people which covers the second half of the seventeenth century. The years between 1648-1655 mark a period of extreme persecution in the annals of the Jews in Poland. The Cossacks under Chmelnikski rebelling against their Polish masters failed, in their ebullition of vengeance, to discriminate between the axe and him who bore it, between the mere agent and the true oppressor, between the Jews and the Polish nobles. In consequence, the Jewish communities of Poland, which for centuries formed the backbone of the race, were completely destroyed. The terrible massacres of Nemirov, Tulshin, Homel, Zaslav, Zytomir and numerous other communities may even to-day - the period of slaughter and carnage - excite horror and consternation. Most of their members, including women and children, were pitilessly slain, their possessions plundered and confiscated, their synagogues burned, and the remnant that escaped the sword, the flame, hunger, pestilence, and captivity wandered abroad in search for food and shelter. It is but natural that in such a stressful period of tribulation and persecution the traditional hope in the coming of Messiah to redeem the exiled and afflicted should

be greatly strengthened, and, as a result, even produce a fanatical personality who should represent the embodiment of that ideal hope.

But the more direct cause for the development of the pseudo-messianism of that period finds its origin in the study and devotion to Kabbala. After the death of the "lion and his whelps" the Kabbalistic studies found enormous ground in the East (in the place of the dream) as well as in the West. Lurja's wild notions of creation, transmigration, union of souls, miracles, redemption, attracted, long after his death, the attention of numerous rabbis and leaders of Jewish communities. But most intense was his influence regarding the expectation of the Messiah. The people, who suffered persecution for many centuries, were charmed by the new proclamation that the "kingdom of heaven was near." "The streams of mercy which were about to pour forth without hindrance upon the lower world through the channels of the Sefirot" ignited in a most violent fashion the imagination of the people. This fanciful hope had, on the one hand, led to the practical activity of Menasseh ben Israel (as he himself mentions it in his address before Cromwell), and, on the other hand, produced a pseudo-messianic movement with all its seducing and corrupting results and effects.

Thus the second half of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth mark an era of Messianic fraud and machinations in the Jewish history. The initiator of this movement was the notorious fanatic Sabatai Zvi (1626-1676) who, dazzled and bewildered by the Lurian mysticism, proclaimed himself to be the long expected redeemer. When he first revealed his pretended mission in Smyrna, his native city, he was met with severe measures, and even suffered banishment from his home city (1651). The messianic delusion, though temporarily extinguished, broke out again about fifteen years later with a much more forceful intensity. Persecution, far from terrifying Sabatai Zvi, gave him a sense of dignity. (The idea of a suffering Messiah went over from Judaism² to Christianity). In Salonica - one of the loomest centers of mysticism - he enacted a scene which worked well upon the imagination of the Kabbalists; he prepared a solemn festival at which he invited his friends, and in their presence celebrated his mystical marriage with the Torah. At Cairo he made his acquaintance with a rich tax-farmer Raphael Joseph Chelbi who credulously believed in his message and was ready to support his cause. In his house the false prophet later married the beautiful and eccentric Sarah.

In 1645 he reappeared in Smyrna, but

this time amidst many more credulous followers, and unerringly declared himself publicly in the synagogue as the expected Messiah, and the credulous multitude shouted: Long live our King, our Messiah! This bold declaration produced an electrifying effect not only upon the people of Smyrna, but spread ^{or impression} through false prophets and circulars, through ^{out} the Jewish communities in the East and West. In the beginning of the year 1666 - the date set for redemption - Zevi started for the Turkish capital with the full hope of a redeemer. But upon his arrival he was arrested and put in jail. At the instigation of the Sultan's physician (Hekim Bashi - a converted Jew) he converted himself to Islamism.

This betrayal of Judaism produced, for a moment, a marked effect; the unbelievers gained the upper hand and directed scorn and mockery against the late devotees. But the Kabbalists soon got over the objectionable difficulties, and declared that Sabatai had not changed his religion but a phantom had played that part, while he himself had retired to heaven or to the Ten Tribes. The false prophets and preachers like Samuel Primo, Jacob Teliachi, Jacob Israel Duchan and finally the great seducer Nathan Ghezati, who had planned to bring about the fall of rabbinical Judaism and refused to abandon this plan easily, still adhered to him tenaciously, and endeavored by all sorts of impostures to keep up

the ~~vanishing~~ ^{seducing} faith.

This Messianic confusion was not destined to subside quickly, the fall of Sabatai did not to a very great extent affect the inflamed imagination of the ignorant multitude. That extreme thirst for a Messiah could not be slaked easily. The recently cultivated credulity demanded satisfaction. No wonder that the post Sabatian movement was stained with numerous fraudulent and treacherous achievements perpetrated by impostures and false prophets and Messiahs.

To this class of seducers belonged a man, who, otherwise, would perhaps rank among the distinguished members of the nation. One of these was Miguel Cardosa (1630-1706). He was a brother of the famous philosopher, poet and physician Fernando Isaac. Like his brother he studied medicine, and later lived as a physician in the Bay of Tripoli. There he began his Kabbalistic adventures. With the appearance of the Sabatian movement he assumed the character of a prophet pretending to have dreams and visions. Cardosa's belief in the Messiah was not renounced even when Zevi embraced Islam; he justified the latter on the plea that it was necessary for him to be counted among the sinners in order that he might atone for Israel's sins (Isa. 53). Later Cardosa, no longer satisfied with being a prophet, gave

himself out as "Messiah ben Ephraim," asserting that the Messiah is he who teaches the true conception of God. His conception Cardoso expounded in nearly all his writings: that the true God is not the "Elohim" but the "Yahweh"; the first being a passive power which has no connection with the world, and the second the true creator and the God of Israel. Being endowed with great eloquence, Cardoso had many followers. He wandered from place to place trying everywhere to lead people astray.

A more influential character of that period was an itinerant Sabatian preacher by the name Mordecai of Eisenstadt () who, being a faithful disciple of Cardoso, decided to spread his doctrines among his brethren in the West. Being possessed of an extremely enthusiastic nature he gained the applause of his listeners whom he had never failed to inspire with his fiery utterances. This established his confidence and gave himself out as a prophet. In word and writing Mordecai maintained that Sabatai Zwi was the true Messiah, obliged to become a Mussulman by high mystical dispensation. The Hungarian, Moravian, and Bohemian Jews listened to these Sabatian preachings and prophecies with eager interest. The Sabatian frenzy had so blunted their power of thought that they were not offended at the notion of a new

Messiah who had forsaken Judaism. Later, this preacher, not satisfied with mere prophecy, gave himself out as the true Messiah of the house of David, and maintained that he was Sabatai risen from the dead. As the latter being rich, could not accomplish the work of redemption; Messiah must be poor, he, Mordecai, being poor and persecuted, was the true savior. All this nonsense was accepted with credulous devotion.

Towards the close of the seventeenth century the inflamed frenzy of the Sabatians again broke out with a sudden blaze. In Poland there arose a sect which believed that it was hastening the advent of the Kingdom of heaven by penitence and prayer. At its head stood two men Judah Chassid of Dubno (1701) and Chayim Malach (1650-1720). Both agitated the people by exciting sermons, and found an applauding audience who joined them in prayer and Kabbalistic extravagances. The association was called Chassidim. At the beginning of the year 1700 a number of this sect, under Judah Chassid, emigrated from Poland intending a journey to the Holy Land, to await redemption. But the enthusiasms of the sect soon came to an end. On the first day after their arrival in Jerusalem Judah Chassid died; his followers were helpless and instead of speedy redemption faced extreme misery. Some of the

Chassidim disappointed in their despair, went over to Islam, the rest spread in all directions.

As hinted before, the cause of all these fanatic outbursts must be looked for in the conditions of the time. The second half of the seventeenth century as well as the ^{beginning of} eighteenth must the culminating period of Jewish persecutions before the emancipation. With the exception of Holland where they enjoyed human rights, the Jews in all the other Christian countries were regarded as outcasts who had no rights and no claim to compassion.

In Spain which, at that time, was ruled by the foolish, fanatical Maria Anna of Austria, who could, under no condition, tolerate this race in her realm, the Jews suffered severe persecution and banishment. There were still Jews in some parts of the monarchy, in the north western corner of Africa, in Oran, Madagascaris, and other places. Many of them had rendered valuable services to the Spanish crown in times of peace and war against the native Moors who were still in a state of inward insurrection. But in spite of their usefulness to the country their religion could not be tolerated by the bigoted court, and were banished under extremely cruel conditions in 1669.

The same misfortune befell, about that time, the Jews of Vienna and the archduchy of Austria. At the instigation of his Jesuit queen

(daughter of the regent of Spain) emperor Leopold decreed the banishment of the Jews. In vain did they try prayers and presents, in vain did they turn every stone both at home and abroad, in vain did they prove that all the accusations brought against them were false and groundless. Their gifts were accepted, but the decree remained unrevoked, for the influence of the Jesuits was invincible. Robbed and ridiculed they were compelled to seek a new homeland (1670).

The condition of the Jews in Prussia though comparatively much better than in other Protestant countries, still was far from being satisfactory with respect to human rights. ~~Frederick~~ Frederick William allowed some of the exiles of Vienna to settle in the Mark of Brandenburg, but as his object was the financial improvement of his state, he placed heavy protective taxes upon the new comers and subjected them to severe restrictions. Later these restrictions even increased and the Jews were not allowed to own houses and land.

In the South the condition of the Jews was still worse. Italy had always been a crater of Jewish hostility. Their persecutions as well as their lives were at the disposal of the good or ill will of the popes. In addition to this, the terrible famine which broke out at the beginning of the second half of the seventeenth century and

lasted for many years destroyed numerous Jewish families. the terrible pestilence which followed, again caused many losses in the Jewish community. the ghetto was closed for fear of spreading the disease and no aid could reach it from without.

Judaism likewise underwent many changes. Before the Cossack rebellion, Poland, the home of Shachna, Solomon Luria, and Moshe Isserles, was considered the very center of Talmudic education. the Jewish jurisdiction of that country lay entirely in the hands of the rabbis. there was even a Jewish synod which met twice a year at Lublin and Jaroslov, thus forming a legislative and judicial court. the study of the Talmud in Poland had therefore reached a height attained in no other country, since there it was of greater necessity than in the rest of Europe. We therefore find that the number of rabbinical authors in Poland in the first half of the seventeenth century is actually astonishing. All the productions of that period bear directly or indirectly the rabbinical tone. the ambition of the age was the cultivation and development of the faculty of hair-splitting judgment.

During the Cossack-Polish war a vast number of Jewish Polish fugitives made their way westward and southward. Many settled in Amsterdam, in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, in Moravia,

Bohemia, Austria and Hungary. These new comers remodelled Judaism wherever they settled; they Polonized it. Rabbinical appointments were largely conferred on Polish Talmudists, who were regarded high authorities in this department. These Polish rabbis were far from giving up their own method in foreign countries, on the contrary, they demanded that the whole world should be regulated by their teachings and principles. Thus, "while the Christian world was striking death blows to Medievalism, the Polish rabbis introduced it to the Jewish world."

The second generation of this stock show, however, a marked influence of the environment. Though, like their fathers, they still cling with absolute devotion and zeal to the Talmud, still show much less fanaticism, and are, in a way, much more practical. To this class belongs the man whose life and character I shall endeavor to treat in the following pages.

II

His Early Life

Zevi Ashkenazi was born in 1658 in Moravia. His father, Jacob Ashkenazi, was a prominent talmudist and died who attained great distinction among the Jewish scholars of Wilna. His mother known as the "kind hearted Sarah" was the daughter of the famous rabbi Ephraim Ha-Kohen¹⁾. In 1648, the date which marks the Cossack rebellion and the severe persecutions of the Jews, Jacob Ashkenazi was compelled to quit his native city and wander into foreign countries where he finally settled in Moravia. Later he joined his father-in-law then rabbi in Old-Opava.

Zevi received his first instruction from his father and grandfather. From his early youth he distinguished himself with a wonderfully retentive memory, a clear, intuitive perception and ingenious judgment. At the age of seventeen he went to Salonica where he attended the school of Elihu Cobi²⁾. During his stay in Salonica he witnessed the deplorable aberrations which had grown out of the schism engendered by the Sabbatai Zevi movement. Salonica, the place where Sabbatai Zevi had formerly so boldly indulged in Kabbalistic extravagances and where his adherents were numerous even after his conversion, had, at that time, become the seat of

1) Author of *ענין חסד*

2) " " *מורה נבוכים*

of strife and degeneracy. That period marks the adventures of the widow of Sabatai Zevi, who, from ambition or, as her enemies declared, from licentious motives led the Sabatians of Salonica into fresh frenzy. She is said to have passed off her brother Jacob (surnamed Currida) as her son by Sabatai Zevi. This boy, who received the name Jacob Zevi, became the object of devout veneration to the Sabatians. The widow of the Messiah and her pretended son are said to have recommended and practiced sexual indulgence as a means of promoting the work of redemption. The sinfulness of the world, they maintained, could be overcome only by a superabundance of sin. Among these Salonica Sabatians, then, shameless profligacy was openly practiced. Among those who shared ⁱⁿ this loose life was a young man named Solomon Aylon, afterwards rabbi in London and Amsterdam of whom we shall hear later as the bitterest opponent of Zevi Ashkenazi.

This degenerate life of the Sabatians in Salonica made a deep impression upon the innocent heart of the young Ashkenazi, and this experience became a determining factor in his following career.

During his stay at Salonica, Ashkenazi devoted himself mainly to an investigation of the

Sephardic method of study. His fame as a scholar soon spread not only among the Jews of Salonica, but among the neighboring communities. He was invited in the company of senior scholars, and his opinions on Talmudic topics were highly respected! Considering his comparatively young age, his profound and systematic knowledge of the Talmud and Halakha was regarded as a prodigy. No wonder that later when he visited Constantinople he found that he was no stranger among the Jews of that city. And though a Polish scholar he was given the title "Hakam" which he henceforth retained and by which he is known in history.

In 1679 Ashkenazi returned to his parents in Alt Ofen. Shortly after he married the daughter of a rich and prominent member of his father's community who provided him with an enormous dowry so that he be able to continue his studies without any material inconveniences.

The year 1686 marks the expulsions of the Turks from Alt Ofen, and while the city was invaded Ashkenazi suffered the misfortune of seeing his beloved wife and daughter killed by a cannon-shot, and he himself was compelled to flee. Thus he became

¹⁾ His son Jacob Emdin relates (in his *Sefer Emdin*) that he found a number of important responses among his father's manuscripts written at that early period of his life.

separated from his parents who were taken captive by the Prussians and transported to Berlin where they were redeemed by the local Jewish community. He proceeded to Saragosa, and then he received an appointment as rabbi. He joined the rabbinate with the spirit of an independent leader. He refused to accept gifts from the members of his congregation also rejected favors from people he had given legal decisions, so that he might feel free from obligation to any one. These reforms soon aroused the indignation of those who adhered to traditional customs. So after much opposition and reproach Kobenzl resigned his post (1689) and left for Germany. His destination was Berlin. On his way he was well received by the Jewish congregations wherever he stopped. The people of Wendisch, Firk, especially those of Prager treated him with great kindness and respect.

In Berlin he married the daughter of Meshullam Salomon Meir Gensmark, chief rabbi of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbeck. In 1690 he received, at the advice of his father-in-law, the appointment extended to him by the Jewish community of Altona. Then he was placed at the head of the Yeshiva, and also filled the position of assistant to his father-in-law. His school soon became celebrated for its new method (Sepherdic) which he introduced, and many students flocked to his Klass.

He stayed in Altona for about twenty years. During that period he instructed hundreds of students not only in Talmud, Halacha and their subsequent commentators, but also "morals and ethics". That long period also marks great augmentation of his own knowledge. His thoroughness in the Talmudic and Halachic literature began to attract the attention and admiration of the Jewish scholars in Germany and Poland who termed him "The Ark of Knowledge." Rabbis and scholars of high repute consulted him in many religious-legal questions, most of which are incorporated in his valuable volume of responsa.

He also introduced in his community customs which greatly facilitated the observance of many ritual laws. Jewish wine was very scarce in Germany at that period, so, for Kידוש and Havdala the people had to use some other home made beverage which hardly served the purpose. Ashkenazi sent an agent to Italy and France in order to produce the proper liquor. Again, the preparing and baking of the unleavened bread for Passover had ~~was~~ been done without strict religious care; the bakers handled the unleavened bread as they did their ordinary cakes. Ashkenazi appointed a supervisor for each of these bakeries to see that the work be carried out in accordance with the rabbinical law. Finally, he renounced the prohibition against

the collection of interest laid down by contemporary rabbis and which had given rise to many derogations.

His income was very small, the sixty thalers which he received annually were hardly sufficient to defray his most necessary expenses. Thus he lived rather poorly, and his family which was constantly increasing during that period (five sons and five daughters were born to him in Altona) suffered extreme misery. Under such unfavorable conditions he still continued to live in accordance with his principle of independence and refused to accept gifts or favors from anybody. Once the famous Jewish educator and philanthropist Herz happened to pass Altona. He stopped to pay a visit to Ahlkenazi's Yeshiva. Before he left he offered the rabbi a large sum of money in order that the study one hour every day for his ^(honour) sake. Ahlkenazi obstinately rejected the offer, saying: I study the Law for its own sake, and for no other purpose.

Later, however, his income increased. One of the rich members of his congregation undertook the importation of Kosher wine from France and Italy and engaged the rabbi as manager and supervisor of this transaction which yielded a considerable profit.

He devoted a great deal of his time to the study of secular knowledge, as he believed that he would thereby gain a better understanding

of some portions of the Talmud. Unlike his contemporaries rabbis he expressed an appreciation for all branches of study. He showed a remarkable inclination and capacity for the study of languages. He was capable of conversing fluently in several foreign languages and possessed an appreciative knowledge in mathematics, philosophy, and other sciences.

The people of Altona paid him great respect and honor, not so much for his vast and profound knowledge but for his high virtues and saintly qualities. He had taken great care of the poor. Himself poor and unable he urged the rich to support them. The destitute and neglected found shelter under his roof, the despondent and depressed found cheer and comfort in his presence. Communal as well as individual difficulties were always brought before him for judgment, advice and decision.

Though cherished and beloved by many people still he was not altogether without adversaries. His spirit of independence and absolute frankness created him opposition among the higher, honor seeking class, which he never shunned or spared. Ben Cohn, leader (of) of the community professed dissatisfaction with the stiff necked rabbi who had never bent his knee before him. This chief had some followers, especially members of his own family. After the death of the chief rabbi (whom Ashkenazi had latterly aided in ^{all} his official duties) Ashkenazi

was chosen by a majority to take his place. But his antagonists, among whom there were some rich people, favoured the election of Moses ben Alexander. The latter married the daughter of a rich Jew in Hamburg and was, therefore, strongly supported by the friends of his father-in-law. Finally it was decided that both candidates be accepted, and serve alternately each for a period of six months. Friction and strife ensued, and finally became so intense that in 1709 Ashkenazi deemed it advisable to resign and resume his duties as rabbi of the Klaus.

But ^{Ashkenazi} was not destined to carry on his rabbinical activities on a small scale in an obscure corner, he was born for a higher purpose. On Jan. 10 1710 he received a letter of appointment to the chief rabbinate of the Ashkenazim of Amsterdam. At first he hesitated to accept this position since the terms of the contract were rather unsatisfactory. It read: "..... the rabbi will receive from the congregation an annual salary of 2000 Dutch guilders for a period of three years..... One half of the fees for issuing legal decisions (which are numerous in Amsterdam on account of its being a business center and a harbor city) amounting to one half per cent, should belong to the rabbi,"

1) Alexander was rabbi in Wijnhamer and Lublin.

while ^{the} other half compensated the deficiency for their service. Fees for performing marriage ceremonies, amounting to half per cent, belong exclusively to the rabbi..... In addition to this, six reistaler for conferring the title "צדק" and twelve for that of "לצדק" ... Also a free residence near the synagogue and furniture..."

Ushkenazi's objection to this agreement was based on the fact that a great part of his income was to derive from sources which might, in consequence, lead him to forfeit his much cherished personal independence. He refused to depend upon gifts and voluntary contributions as sources for his livelihood. In turn, he demanded an additional sum of 500 guilders from the treasury of the congregation to enable him to live respectably, and that he would accept the position only upon condition that under no circumstances should he be required to subordinate himself to the members of the congregation, or obliged to receive gifts, and be permitted to preserve absolute freedom of action on all occasions. His request were granted, and he immediately left for Amsterdam.

III

In Amsterdam.

Amsterdam, at that time, had two distinct Jewish communities, the Sephardic and the Ashkenazic. The former dated its settlement from a much earlier period (about the latter half of the sixteenth century). They formed the rich, aristocratic class. We could find among its members people who stood at the head of vast business enterprises, also people of high culture and intellectual attainments. These people had constantly been in touch with the non-Jewish world, and exercised, in great measure, its influence in matters of customs and fashions. They had produced many physicians and teachers, and even poets of high merits. Towards the end of the seventeenth century this congregation numbered about 1200 souls.

It is not definitely known the exact date of the settlement of the Ashkenazim. In the beginning of the seventeenth century a few German Jews seem to have dwelt in Amsterdam, for in the burial-lists of the Portuguese congregation, several "Fidescos" (rentons) are mentioned. A congregation, however, was not formed until 1635. Soon after the persecutions of the Jews in Poland under

Chmelnitz, and especially after the massacre of 1654 and 1655 many Jews came to Amsterdam by sea. These foreigners, being stringently forbidden by the magistrate to form a separate community, joined the Ashkenazim in 1673. This consolidation 1) introduced various colors within the congregation and 2) made the Ashkenazim numerically superior to the Sephardim.

Prior to Levi Ashkenazi the Ashkenazic community enjoyed the guidance of many a great and prominent rabbi; scholars like Meir Stern of Fulda, David Lida, Leib Charif, Judah Kalish occupied successively the chief rabbinate of that community. These sages, though great and prominent were not free from opposition during their stay on this post in Amsterdam. The various elements of that community were constantly at strife, and the intimacy of the rabbi with one of the struggling parties would readily provoke against him the indignation of the other contestants.

At his arrival Ashkenazi was warmly received both by the Ashkenazim and Sephardim. Here he found many who had formerly communicated with him on Talmudic and Halachic questions, also many who had known him personally, and some who had previously studied under him at the Klaus. The Sephardim, regardless of their

alopness, paid great respect to this rabbi; first because of his Sephardic title (Chasam); again, because of his high attainments in the Sephardic system of learning; finally, because of his refined character and worldly knowledge. (It was not only till a few years later that a bitter animosity sprang up between him and that community).

No sooner did Ashkenazi assume the duties of his high position than he discovered that the members of his German community were engaged in a deadly conflict on account of two cantors, who, equally qualified for the position of a reader in the synagogue, endeavoured to secure it at all cost. These two officials were supported by two classes of the community; one by the rich and therefore dominant class, the other - by the less wealthy and also by the poor class. Even long before the arrival of Ashkenazi this struggle had been bravely contested by both belligerent groups, each aiming to suppress and crush the power of the opponents. Many victims fell in that battle, thousands of guilders were spent but to no purpose. The matter was pushed so far that on ^{the} Sabbath of Repentance (of 1709) when rabbi Kalish came to the synagogue to deliver the message of the day to his congregation, he found the members engaged in a deadly combat; prayer books, ~~Gemara~~

stands, candles moved through the air from one side of the synagogue to the other. Skulls were fractured, faces were bleeding, arms broken, and the cries and confusion were so great that the rabbi struck with fright and terror, fell ~~on~~ to bed on the very same day and never rose again.

The wealthy class headed by a certain Aaron Polack Gokker offered Ashkenazi an enormous amount of money to aid them in their conflict. The rabbi, unselfish and independent in spirit, scornfully rejected the bribe and promised to give an impartial judgment in that case. After hearing the pleas of both sides and after examining carefully all the evidences of the matter, he issued a decision in favor of the poorer class. This naturally ignited the ~~ing~~ indignation of the leaders and supporters of the congregation against him, and they, forgetting the cantors all together, took up their arms against the rabbi.

There was another factor which contributed greatly to his early disaster. The slaughterer of the Ashkenazic butchers was a very old man, and because of his advanced age his hands were much weakened and constantly trembling - a state in which, according to the law, he was prohibited to continue his service. Ashkenazi removed him

from his post, and the veteran with his numerous friends rose against him.

thus his opponents constantly increased. the parnasim or directors were also induced to join his antagonists. Indeed the difficulties became so serious and strained that on May 26, 1712 it was decided to dismiss the chief rabbi at the end of the term mentioned in the letter of his appointment. Ashkenazi announced that he would, under no circumstances accept this dismissal which he regarded as unjust. the rabbi's salary does not seem to have been paid, for in the register of the records of the congregation there is an entry to the effect that on Saturday, Nisan 4, 5472 (April 12, 1712) the parnasim sent a secretary and two attendants of the congregation to Ashkenazi to inform him that if he returns the letter of appointment he would be paid the money to which he was still entitled. Ashkenazi, however, declined to return it.

But the worst was yet to come.

We must bear in mind that the mud-fountain of Sabbatian fanaticism was not stopped. New streams burst forth in various directions and besmirched all those who came in contact with them. Here and there you could find new impostors, new Messiahs,

new prophets, each attracting a new crowd of followers. Men such as Michael Cordover and L'lovel Prostig, who practiced all sorts of jugglery; fanatics like Mendelshai of Eisenstadt and Judah Chasid, succeeded in leading astray multitudes of credulous believers, inducing them to extravagant Kabbalistic indulgence. In the West the Sabatian influence, though strongly opposed and counteracted by the great rabbis of the day, gained a strong and lasting hold, primarily through the bold and active efforts of emissaries and itinerant preachers who, pretending to be messengers from the Holy Land, continually incited fresh errors and delusions. To this corrupt class of seducers belonged a man, who in imposition, hypocrisy and audacity had but a few rivals in the eighteenth century. This arch-impostor was Nehemiah Chiya Chayun. The life of this Kabbalistic adventurer is characteristic as it shows the demoralization of the age, and I shall therefore endeavor to sketch it briefly.

He was of Sephardic descent, born in Sarajevo, Bosnia in 1650 (later he pretended to be a Palestinian emissary born in Safed). He received his Talmudic education in Hebron, where the Sabatian agitation had made many victims. He possessed an acute mind, was ready at discovering contradictions and incongruities; but was bent to make corrupt use

of his powers. At that early period of his life he had acquired a considerable knowledge of the Talmud and other rabbinical literature, but showed no real attraction for these studies, nor did he possess any religious feeling. On the other hand, he cultivated strong hypocritical tenderness, and when not watched, he disregarded the demands of religion and morality.

In his eighteenth year he became ^{rabbi} of the small community of Ukeap, near Salonica. This position, however, he held for a very short period. Thenceforth he led a wandering life under various guises. He was especially successful in assuming a serious, awe-inspiring appearance. This, together with his Kabbalistic scraps and mysterious demeanor, gained him a number of light minded admirers. He gracefully enacted the part of a saint, at the same time seeking constantly adventures of love. He was in close relation with the Sabatians at Salonica, and had taken great trouble in studying their writings. He came in close contact with their leader, Samuel Primo, and in one of these interviews he proposed a new doctrine of trinity. At that period he composed a work called "Mehrmanta de Kulla" in which he asserts that Judaism teaches a Trinitarian God. This God, he declared,

embodies three individualities (עֲשֵׂי בְּרִיָּה) - the primordial one (גִּיּוֹר), the Holy King (מֶלֶךְ עֲלֵי עַמּוּל) and a female individuality (נְשִׂיָּה). This book was published in Smyrna (1708). Chayun, at that time, had rapidly advanced from the stages of saintliness and holiness to that of prophecy. The people of Smyrna, to whom he appeared as a divine messenger and before whom he performed many fraudulent miracles, provided him with abundant means and conducted him to Jerusalem with ceremony and pomp. But the rabbis of Smyrna, who understood the rogue very well, warned the rabbis of Jerusalem of his tricks. The immediate consequence was, that even before his arrival the rabbis of Jerusalem excommunicated him as a "min" and condemned his book to be burned.

For a moment Chayun was defeated. excommunicated he met little sympathy anywhere with his Kabbalistic fraud, even the enthusiasm of his patrons in Smyrna extinguished. Thus Chayun after a few days of good fortune was again reduced to mendicancy. In Italy, whither he had gone after leaving Egypt, and where he spent some years (1709-1711) his schemes met with little success. In Venice, however, with the approval of the rabbis of that community, he published an extract of his work

under the title "Raza di-Yechuda" (1711) into the beginning of which he had impudently woven the first stanza of a lascivious Italian love song "La Bella Margarettia" with a mystical hymn "Kether Elyon".

Chayum did not stay long in Venice. He betook himself to Prague where he found an appropriate soil for his deceptions. Joseph Oppenheim, son of the chief rabbi David Oppenheim, ignorant of the stranger's past and enchanted by his Kabbalistic juggling, received him into his house. The Kabbalistic rabbi of Prague Naphtali Cohen was also greatly impressed with the stranger's bearing and personality. He even recommended his book highly, basing his judgment merely on fraudulent testimonials. Now, if these respected rabbis honoured him who would fail to do so? No wonder that numerous youthful students of the Talmud, thirsting for knowledge, thronged to him. (Among them was Jonathan Eibreditz, afterwards so notorious). Chayum preached sermons in Prague and entranced his hearers by his sophistical and witty manners, which made the most inconsistent things appear reconcilable. Now and then he gave expressions to the demoralizing doctrine of the Salonica Saboteur "that sin can be overcome only by a superabundance of sinfulness". These sermons were later

published in Breslau (1713) under the title "ענין יג'".

Here he also played the part of a prophet and told his adherents that he had intercourse with Elijah, and that he could compel the "Godhead" to reveal itself to him. He wrote charms and amulets and sold them at high prices. He gradually gained power and boldness, and, at last, even dared to submit his heretical work, his Sabatian confession of faith in Trinity, to Naphtali Cohen for his sanction, and showed him the forged testimonials from Italian rabbis. From respect to the stranger's person, Naphtali Cohen, without even glancing at the manuscript, expressed not only his approval but even gave him a recommendation.

By fraudulent introduction he, later, managed to deceive many other communities, those of Vienna, Nikolsburg, Prosnitz, Breslau and Berlin. In the latter community he formed connections with the famous impostor Löbke Prosnitz. The Jewish congregation of Berlin was, at that time, split into two opposing parties. Chayum allied himself with one of the ^{richer} struggling classes and thereby succeeded in having his book printed with the approval of the Berlin rabbi Aaron Benjamin Wolf.

On the prestige he obtained from his book he now tried his fortune in Amsterdam

where he arrived June 13, 1714. at first he conducted himself modestly; he requested permission of the Portuguese congregation to circulate his writings which had been published at Berlin.

Almost from the outset he encountered the antagonism of Levi Ashkenazi, who mistook him for an old enemy of his from Sarajeva, and immediately intimated to the Portuguese Parnasim and their rabbi Solomon Aylow to accord no patronage to the stranger, since he was a man of evil notoriety. Chayim thereupon called upon Ashkenazi personally and made an explanation. The rabbi, convinced that it was a case of mistaken identity, retracted his accusations and informed the same directors that he had nothing to urge against the visitor.

At that time their sojourn in Amsterdam a famous Talmudic scholar Moses Hagiz, the directorate of the Portuguese congregation, which were approached by Chayim for permission to circulate his book, were not inclined to trust the opinion of their own Chacham¹ and therefore submitted the new comer's writings to this Palestinian scholar. Hagiz immediately discovered the Sabbatian

¹ A year previous the heretical works of the Sabbatian Cordos, published in Spanish, were brought to Amsterdam. the Portuguese Chacham sanctioned it stating that they contain no blasphemy against the Jewish religion. the directorate, however, condemned them to be burnt.

spirit and principles laid down in this work, and he ^{in turn} recalled the attention of Ashkenazi to the dangerous doctrines contained in this book. The rabbi again warned the parnasim of the Sephardic congregation not to support the author. The council, not inclined to accept such abrupt orders, requested Chacham Zevi either to point out the objectionable passages in Chayim's book, or to join with them Chacham as members of a committee nominated by the council to examine it. Ashkenazi rejected both proposals, saying that as a rabbi he was not obliged to state reasons for his decision, but only to pronounce final judgment. Still less did he choose to take council with Ayyllon whom he did not regard a competent authority on such questions.

Solomon Ayyllon was a native of Palestine, born at Zafet (1667). In his youth he filled his mind with Kabbalistic ideas and later joined the Sabatians at Salonica, and in part shared their extravagances. Later he went to Leghorn, and ^{at the death} of the learned rabbi, Jacob Abradana, he was invited to London to fill his place (1696-1707). He was not distinguished in any branch of learning, not even in knowledge of the Talmud, nor could he have had a pure conscience, as he frequently played a role of duplicity in his community. Later as Chacham of the Portuguese

congregation at Amsterdam he showed that he had not entirely abandoned his former predilection for Sabatizism and so he was easily induced to render support to Chayun.

Again, Solomon Aylow had reason to feel himself degraded, since his congregation had passed him over and showed distrust towards him, and showed preference to his opponent who, in turn, refused to take council with him in this question. Besides, he feared the new comer, who seemed familiar with his past history, and who, if persecuted, might reveal his relations to with the Salonica Sabatians. He felt it his interest and duty to remain on Chayun's side and protect him from the threatened banishment.')

Aylow decided to make Chayun's case a communal one, and the question of issue should no longer be as to whether he or the Ashkenazic rabbi was in the right, but whether the Ashkenazim or Sephardim are the superior class. Appealing to patriotic feeling he succeeded in prejudicing a prominent member of the Portuguese directorate, Aaron de Pinto, a resolute, unyielding, hard man against the German rabbi, and persuaded him of his duty to defend the reputation of the old, reputable and superior Portuguese against

the presumptuousness of the hitherto subordinate German community. Dr Rintz treated the affair in this light and induced the other members of the directorate to conform to his will. He straightway rejected the interference of Ashkenazi in a matter that concerned the Portuguese community only, broke off all negotiations with him, and authorized Aylow to appoint a committee of Portuguese to examine and report on Chayun's work.

The committee consisted of seven members from the rich of the community, some of whom had hardly understood the nature of the task nor the subject of controversy. Their examiners, each of whom received a copy of Chayun's work, were made to swear that they would not show the copies of Chayun's work to any one, and keep everything secret until the final judgment was pronounced. Thus, the petty question of accommodating an itinerant author attained great importance.

A fiery and intense struggle ensued.

Ashkenazi, conscious of the chasm which set in in the community, sent, at the advice of Hagiz, a letter to the Parnassium of the Portuguese congregation in which he pointed out the heretical views expressed in the book of Chayun, and warned them again against supporting the skeptical intruder. But the gulf was already

unbudgeable; the directors flatly ignored the monition, and declared that they represent an independent community and would act accordingly.

Ashkenazi now realized fully the great danger which ^{was} threatening not only the peace of the Jewish community of his city but the Jewish faith as well. The controversy reached a higher stage. The question as appeared to him was as to whether a book professing a Trinity should be permitted to exert an influence among the Jews. To him it was no longer a matter of "local interest," but one which concerned every Jewish leader and teacher. And being unsuccessful in his own community he gave the alarm without. He sent letters to the rabbis and leaders of the prominent communities informing them of the peril which was menacing the Jewish faith. The latter, in return, encouraged him to stand firm against the rising tide and promised to fight at his side.

They kept their promise. Soon a multitude of warnings and protests invaded the Jewish community of Amsterdam. Letters arrived from rabbis, teachers, leaders and ^{also} educators who denounced in bitter language the ideas of Chayim and unanimously upheld the hands of Ashkenazi. Here is what some of these zealous write:—

"... Our heart is bleeding, the calamity

which befell Israel had touched our very soul, the atrocities committed in your midst is more than a Jewish eye can witness. ... Who is that man who dared to lift his hand against the Holy Law which had existed long before the world was created: What right has this man to stay in our midst, let him join our enemies who are waiting for our destruction. This mighty Nimrod who made it his object to hunt Jewish souls must be captured in his own trap... We, the undersigned, therefore resolve to put him under the ban, and condemn his heretical books to the flames, and no one should, under the penalty of excommunication, read or keep them.

Signed The Rabbinate of Rome.

Another one¹⁾:

..... This man and his book are the abomination of God. His impudence knows no limit.... He is a gambler, charlatan, impostor, and skeptic. Those who come in contact with him will soon discover his base character. I therefore warn all those in whose hearts the fear of the Lord has not been entirely extinguished, not to render him any support... I am greatly surprised at Aylton and his assistants that they fail to understand the true nature of this rascal.

1) Naphtali Chren

Askenazi, encouraged by this support and fearing lest the committee decide in favor of Chayun, issued the following letter (July 23 1714):

"... the heresy of Sabatai Zvi has cracked our community. Abominable things, which make both the body and soul unclean, gained a foothold in our midst. The Torah is trampled upon and the holy words of the rabbis are rejected. See what this skeptical author did. In his blasphemous works he states that the "First Cause" is destitute of any power, that it possesses neither will nor volition, that it is not capable of receiving any knowledge from without nor able to impart it to others; furthermore, that it is not active for it is unlike any created being to which activity is imputed. He further states that it is absurd to offer prayers to this "Universal Power" and to attribute to it the miracles performed in Egypt or the redemption of the Israelites from that land, or the revelation at Sinai, etc. All these he ascribes to another God - the "Second Cause", the God of the patriarchs who, under the surveillance of the First Cause, brought out his people of the land of Egypt, gave them commandments, and guided them through the wilderness..."

"Now, ye children of Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob, disciples of Moses, children of the living God, lend me your ears. In the name of everything that is sacred unto Israel... I excommunicate this man Mehemiel Chaja Chayun, and from now on he is forbidden to enter the holy congregation of Israel until he recants his errors, and his book be burned and its ashes removed so that none make any use of them..."

This was a hard blow, but struck not at Chayun but at Ashkenazi himself. Numerous copies of this letter in Hebrew and Portuguese circulated among the community and ignited the indignation of the Sephardim to the highest degree. Were they to obey the rabbi's order the investigating committee must immediately stop its work, the copies of the book burned, and its author banished from their midst. But no, they would not yield! They were joined by many Ashkenazim, who, being bitter enemies of their rabbi for his attitude towards them on previous occasions, found now a good opportunity to avenge themselves. The directorate of the Ashkenazim prohibited the announcement of the sentence of excommunication in their synagogue, and severely attacked their rabbi for his tactless aggressiveness. The Sephardic directorate, for its share, prohibited, under threat of excommunication, the reading of Ashkenazi's

circular, and ordered that all copies of the letter be brought to its quarters.

Ashkenazi lost all the influence of his high position; people stopped to ask for his decisions in legal and ritual matters. He and ~~his~~ only faithful friend Moshe Hatziz became subjects to stout attacks, more particularly at the hands of the Sephardim. They were affronted, abused in public places, and, on many occasions, even threatened with death. Attempts of reconciliation failed, partly through the irrevocable dogmatism of Aylow, partly through the firmness of the Directorate, and partly because matters had gone too far and the aroused feelings refused to be calmed.

The bitterness and animosity increased every day more intensely. Ashkenazi with his small band of followers on our side and the Sephardic congregation with some hostile Ashkenazim on the other were now engaged in a deadly struggle, each defending vigorously the cause of the God of Israel. People neglected their private business affairs, even their most important interests, and joined the colors of one of the fighting camps. The synagogues as well as the market places became the battle fields of the fiercest combats. All peace vanished.

Proclamations and pamphlets were issued almost every day, each denouncing in bitter terms the opposing sect. Among these we find the famous booklet 123 335 by Chayun in which he denounces vilily Ashkenazi's letter of excommunication and tries to show that its author was the real heretic and seducer. It reads in part: "... Zevi states that I in my book misinterpret the Law of God and will therefore suffer the punishment of purgatory; but I say that the people who will go to hell are Zevi Ashkenazi and Moshe Hagiz because they have publicly insulted a pious and religious man (page 10)."

"Ashkenazi states that I ^{have} introduced a First Cause and other causes. I must inform him that it is below my dignity to discuss such deep and vital questions with an ignorant simpleton like himself, for what does he know the profound meaning of "First Cause"? (p. 18)."

"Then, I see that with an evil intention he misquotes my book, and where I use 123 he quotes it as 73, 73 for 133, 1155 for 115 etc. (p. 18)."

In the midst of this bloody struggle the report of the committee (which had been prepared by Aylow alone) was publicly announced Aug. 7, 1713. In direct opposition to Chayun Zevi it was to the effect that the writings of Chayun contained ~~which~~

nothing which could be construed as offensive to the Jewish faith, and that it contained only the doctrines found in other Kabbalistic writings.

It was also officially announced in the synagogue that Chayun was exonerated from the charge of heresy brought against him and that he had been innocently persecuted. On the following day a public reception was tendered him at the Portuguese synagogue, on which occasion unparalleled honor was shown him. The Portuguese, whose ancestors had sacrificed their very lives for the Unity of God, had actually worshiped a false prophet who had professed a new Trinity. Chayun was cheered and wherever he turned he prospered.

We can easily imagine the position of Ashkenazi at that period. Though abused and ridiculed, scorned and persecuted, he determined to hold his ground regardless the peril which was constantly increasing. And help came from without. The rabbis whose pretended letters of recommendation Chayun had persisted to his work declared them to be forged. Naphtali Cohen made an open confession that he had given his signature to the book without having read a single line in it, but relied upon the letters of recommendation by prominent rabbis shown to him by the author which, of course, were forged.

Our rabbi¹⁾ writes:

"... What has become of our wise men, and our leaders? Open your eyes and see! How can you put your trust in a man who, in the name of Kabala, endeavors to lead you astray? We have no use for any mystical theories, our duty in life is to study and keep the Torah which we fully comprehend. Even Isaac Luria, the great mystic, states that the sacrifices which Kabala demands are to be offered by non-Jews, but we, Jews, make enough sacrifices by studying and observing the Law of God."

Another one²⁾ writes:

"... I am astonished to see how low impostors succeed in gaining numerous adherents in such a distinguished community. The sin of Nehemiah ben Chachalya changed its form but not its matter, it has reappeared in Nehemiah Chayun."

"Israel! open your eyes and see that Philistines came upon you; their object is to deprive you of your divine power which had always conquered your oppressors..."

"Flie from the serpent whose aim is to seduce you and lead you astray from your God. He shall be excommunicated and prohibited to enter the congregation of the Lord. His book

¹⁾ of Ankuna

²⁾ rabbi of Turin

... burnt and no one should dare to have any
 intercourse with him...."

Letters written in the same tone were
 received from the rabbinate of Jerusalem, Constanti-
 nople, Algiers, Frankfurt-on-Main, Berlin and many
 others. But the deepest impression was made by the
 letters of the highly respected, aged rabbi of Mantua,
 Leon Brilli, who, knowing the past history of the im-
 postor, unmasked him, and announced a sentence
 of excommunication not only against the heretical
 author and his work, but also included those
 who came in personal touch with him. Brilli wrote
 vigorously to the Amsterdam parnassim and to all
 in France and Italy imploring them to retract
 their support to so bad a cause. But of no avail.

The Sephardim prohibited, under penalty of
 excommunication, the circulation of these letters received
 from abroad as well as those published by their
 opponents. The contest became more and more
 intense every day; every one defended his view with
 bitterness, passion and frequently with vigorous action.
 Peace vanished from the community, and dissension
 was carried even into family life. Matters here grew so
 bad that none could yield. The Sephardic leaders
 went to a greater length in their pertinacity; they
 summoned the German Chacham (over whom they
 had no authority at all) to appear before their
 tribunal - and ^{act} which, of course, had no justification.

He refused to comply with this request because he
 feared some rumors to the effect that he would be
 requested to retract and recommend Chayun.
 Later he was requested through a Christian advocate
 to make a public confession that his accusations
 against Chayun were unfounded, and then he
 paid no heed, he and Moshe Hagiz were formally
 placed under the ban (Nov. 9, 1713) strictly forbidding
 the members of the community to have any deal-
 ings with them, support them, or intercede for them
 with the civic authorities.

To bring the measure of troubles Chayun published
 a number of ^{new} booklets in which he ~~is~~ ridicules and
 curses his present opponent. He was retorted
 by the young Joseph Eger in a pamphlet called
 "נאמר ונאמר", and by Moshe Hagiz in his work "נאמר ונאמר".
 Eger writes in a very bitter and sarcastic style. He
 states in part:

"Kabala has become a free and open field,
 everybody takes from it all that his heart desires,
 and if one desires more than it contains he
 extends the field in order to find his object there...
 Chayun, unable to find true support in traditional
 Kabala for his heretical ideas, misinterprets the
 meaning of certain passages in the Zohar in order
 to make the Zohar support his views" (page 3)

"He introduced a trinity in the Jewish religion

and threatens all those who fail to follow it that they thereby forfeit their share in the future world. You unto us that we have come to such a state of humiliation!" (p. 12)

"The doctrine which he advocates in his book is one which, since Sabatai Zvi, had led many people to commit adultery, to violate all moral laws, and to embrace other religions." (p. 19)

After discussing the fallacies and absurdities of this Sabatist work he writes:

"Now, serpent (נחש), your cunning and treacherous tricks have been laid open, we all know now that your aim was to poison the children of the holy nation. Flie from our midst now despised, abominable, hateful, detestable, loathsome creature." (p. 41).

But the serpent did not flie, and in a pamphlet "נחש נכבד" he retorted this zealous author in the most defiled and contemptuous terms, which, in turn, was retorted in similar language by the author in a booklet under the title "נחש נכבד".

Hagiz in his "פירוש חזקוני" writes in part:

".... In his abominable pamphlets this skeptic instead of meeting the objections raised against him and his cursed book resorts to points of minor significance, and intentionally avoids the main difficulties raised against his book.... The chief

objections to this skeptic are; first, he preaches that God is finite and can be comprehended and perceived by finite things, and he (Chayun) receives now inspiration from Him ~~as ^{than any} before~~ ^{him} did. Again, he states that God is subject to change contrary to the view expressed in the Bible (Isaiah 41:2). Then he states that the Infinite and God of Israel are two different forces, each operating separately in the universe - a view which violates the Unity of God. Finally, since the Infinite and God of Israel are not identified, and the latter is subject to change, then the God of the past is not the one of the present, and the one of the present will not be the God of the future..."

Chayun knew that he could not face these objections directly, and being conscious of the fact that the common crowd, upon whom he depended most, did not at all follow the theological arguments, he therefore chose a much easier road. He evasively assaulted his antagonists as people void of all knowledge and understanding, and their criticisms were the result of ignorance and fallacious reasoning. These attacks were published under the titles

"*הנהגת חכמים*", "*הנהגת חכמים*", "*הנהגת חכמים*" and "*הנהגת חכמים*".

The Portuguese directorate and the rabbinate seems to have been infected with

Chayun's baseness, they committed our misdeeds after another. To justify their course of action they distorted the actual facts of the case and made use of vile falsehoods. They encouraged Chayun in his calumniations against the prominent rabbis of the day and persecuted his opponents as if they were outcasts of the lowest sort. The community which, about half a century ago, excommunicated Spinoza for his so-called heretical views, had given the most vigorous support to one whose heresy threatened the very foundation of the Jewish faith.

In order to appear just and gain the favor of the outside communities the Sephardic directorate issued the following proclamation:

"..... Considering the fact that our opponents refused to participate in examining the works of Chayun and express their objections openly, and considering the fact that they have used him as a scapegoat for their intentional scheme to bring chaos in the midst of Israel - a plan which they have greatly succeeded in carrying out, and considering the fact that a righteous and honorable person has been degraded, we declare that all the blame ^{for} the confusion and disunion which exist in our midst falls upon the shoulders of our opponents... We sought peace but they preferred war... therefore no one should venture to offer

them any aid or support."

Over Moser Hagez they had an easy victory. He was supported during his in Amsterdam by the Portuguese community, and when they cut off his means of sustenance, he was compelled to leave Amsterdam. But Chacham Zevi could not be conquered easily. His opponents, feeling their inability to overpower him completely, accused him before the civil authorities, and he was placed under arrest in his own house. Later, the whole matter was brought before the magistrate in order to secure his deposition and banishment from Amsterdam. The court, unable to comprehend the real nature of the dispute, sought the opinions of certain professors at Leyden, Utrecht and Harderwyk including William Surinckhis and Adriaan Reland, on the controversy; but their decision, if given, has not been made known.

Ashkenazi, fearing a scandalous expulsion, forestalled the magisterial action by resigning his office and fleeing, in the beginning of 1714, from Amsterdam. 1)

אפי' שפיקול צב השתתף בצינורותיהם בעצמך ולא ככה אמרת! י)

ע"י בין האלוות (חוקי הקניאות בצד).

IV

His Last Years.

Ashkenazi left his wife and children at Emden and proceeded to London at the invitation of the Sephardic congregation of that city. He was no stranger to the Jewish community of London; his decisions on religio-~~religious~~ legal matters had been frequently sought by the Jewish leaders of that city.¹⁾ In former days he was even offered

- 1) It is of special importance to mention the decisions he issued on August 7, 1705 and December 14, 1706 both of which concern our and the same matter. Reb Abels, the "boss" of the London Kehila, pretended to have discovered Spinozism in his rabbi's sermon, the latter having used אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים in a philosophical sense. To this complaint Ashkenazi answers: "... Your rabbi uses אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים in the same sense as Judah Halvi, Joshua Halvi (author of $\text{מִשְׁנֵת הַרְבֵּי הַיָּדֵי}$) do. If this be the case your accusations must not be directed against your rabbi, who only follows those prominent Jewish scholars and thinkers, but against those who are the originators of this use ($\text{הַיָּדֵי הַזֵּה, 123 עַל הַיָּדֵי}$)
- Another case of high significance offered to him for decision was this: the same Reb Abels accused

the position of the rabbinate of the Portuguese, but refused to accept it on account of differences in the ritual.

The London community, in whose conscience he had found great respect and support in his ardent defence of the traditional views of Judaism against Chayim, gave him a reception worthy of his fame. Then his picture was painted, a copy of which is found in the Jewish Historical Society (Pl. III).

Chachem Levi, while in London, remained faithful to his principle of never accepting any gift which would produce in him a feeling of dependence. No one could boast of having made a present to the rabbi, although many were eager for the honor. He did not deviate one finger's breadth from his rule although he was in such dire straits that he had to sell his silver plate in order to defray the expenses of moving to far distant Poland (1730 or 1740).

one of the prominent members of the German community. Mordecai Hamburger, with some blasphemous deed, and on this account urged his rabbi to excommunicate the offender. The persecuted brought the case before Ashkenazi, then rabbi in Altona. The indignities done to a distinguished family in Israel aroused Ashkenazi's indignation, and immediately sent his verdict excommunicating Hamburger from the ban.

the appearance of Ashkenazi among the Jews of London was of such a lasting influence that his grandson reaped later what he had sown. While he himself could not be induced to accept the rabbinate of the London metropolis, his grandson Meshulam Salomon, son of Jacob Emdin, did accept (September 16, 1764).

In the following spring he returned to Emdin and proceeded thence to Poland. On his way he stopped in Hanover where he was friendly received by those who heard his fame, he also spent some time in Halberstadt with his friend rabbi Benjamin, thence he travelled to Berlin where he joined his brother-in-law Wolf Meier, and finally went to Breslau where he found a great number of congenial friends. There his oldest son Jacob became engaged to the granddaughter of the famous rabbi Naphtali Cohn.

With a family numbering twenty souls he at last arrived in Poland and settled in the small town of Opatow. No sooner had he established himself than a congregation broke out and comprised almost the whole town. Ashkenazi and his family (his ^{wife} was in a delicate condition) were compelled to seek shelter in a neighboring village.

At that hour of distress a messenger suddenly arrived summoning him to Hamburg to serve as a member of a judicial body to settle a complicated legal ~~for~~ question. The litigation

was between his old acquaintance Reb Abels of London and his (Abels) son-in-law, and was to be decided before an ecclesiastical court. Reb Abels, whose whole fortune was trembling in the balance of this case, recognized only one advocate, Zwi Ashkenazi - the model of justice and quintessence of legal erudition. He promised 700 ducats and travelling expenses and board and lodging in Hamburg. Ashkenazi came and pleaded. But Abels and invariably successful as he had always proved, his efforts on this occasion were doomed to failure. His client lost.

Horried and disgusted he returned to his family in Poland which ^{was} suffering great misery. In that hour of affliction help came to him in a strange unexpected way: a rich land owner, Israel Rifkin, offered the Chacham a home on his farm. After much hesitation he accepted the offer and spent there three happy years of his life, till, upon the death of Semel Chay Rapoport in 1718, he was called to ~~the~~ accept the rabbinate of Lemberg.

His stay in Lemberg was of short duration, about three months. But in this short period he reorganized the community. He deposed some treacherous parnasim who took advantage of their office and robbed the Kehila; he also raised

to a high degree the standard of his people in social and moral life. Here, as on previous occasions, made himself a number of antagonists by his firm and uncompromising attitude towards matters which he considered hostile to religion and law. But here his enemies bowed their heads; the Ashkenazim, unlike the Sephardim, insist much less upon method and form, they rather appreciated the spirit which underlined Ashkenazi's activities.

On May 2, 1718 the sun of Lemberg set, Ashkenazi died suddenly.

His death was mourned not only by the Jews of Lemberg and Poland at large but by all communities wherever the news was received. In the city of London the Sephardim decked their synagogue in Brix Mark in black, put up a catafalque, before which rabbi David Nieto recited the Kaddisha. In Amsterdam the loss was lamented both by the German and Portuguese congregations. Solomon Aylton, who eulogized him, confessed in public that he "committed many wrongs against Chacham Zevi." (שם הרב ז"ל).

On his monument we read the following inscription:

"קבורה ביום יום כ"ב חשוון ה'תק"ח
 ב' ה'תק"ח. קבורה ביום יום כ"ב חשוון ה'תק"ח
 אשתו ר' חנה ז"ל, נסתה וסתה, ה'תק"ח
 אשתו ר' חנה ז"ל, נסתה וסתה, ה'תק"ח

V

His Character and Work

Sketching Ashkenaz's literary activities and character I wish to call attention to the fact that, with the exception of a few "discreets", Judaism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was predominantly of a rabbinical nature. This period marks the uninterrupted development of a strong tendency towards Pilpulism. The more the rabbinical scholars neglected the study of secular education the further they became entangled in the pathless jungle of Pilpul and the more they despised methodical and systematic thinking. Proceeding in this manner, Judaism had, for a while, lost its original meaning; the Law at Sinai and the principles upon which the prophets laid most emphasis were, at that period, entirely forgotten, and the chief authorities of Judaism were Joseph Caro (1488-1575) and Moses Isserles (1520-1572). The "Beth Joseph" (published between 1550-1559) which forms a sort of commentary to R. Jacob ben Asher's "Arba Turim" tracing each law to its original source for nearly fifteen hundred years pursuing it through its various stages of different interpretations and codifiers, and the "Shulchan Aruch" (finished in 1555) stating the law in an abridged, undiscussed

and most concise form, served as the sole books of reference for the scholars of the age. During the period of the Sabatai Zevi movement we see that Halacha has, to a certain extent, been influenced by Kabala, and a number of Kabbalistic rabbis quote the Zohar and many other Kabbalistic authoritative works for Halachic purposes. The post Sabatai Zevi movement on the other hand, marks a distinct aversion towards Kabala as a reliable source for Halachic decisions. The rabbis of that period, in order to suppress the temporary influence of Kabala, not only repeat their objections to mystical books as a source for Halachic references, but emphasize again and again that the works of Caro, Isserles and other Halachists are the only authorities in matters of law.

Zevi Ashkenazi belongs to this class of rabbinic scholars. He was not a prolific writer, this was perhaps due to the fact that he was a student by nature, and spent most of his time in studying the works of others. He was a scholar of high merits: not only was he at home in all branches of rabbinical learning, but also in secular studies like mathematics, anatomy, and philosophy (this you see from the references he makes in his writings to these secular studies). His literary works consist

of a volume of responsa containing religious and legal problems. This volume, though small in size reflects sufficiently upon the character of the author and, to a large extent, upon the conditions of his time.

The tendency of the rabbinic authors of that period was, as I stated before, without exception sophistical and pilpulistic. Ashkenager was greatly influenced by the disposition of his age; but his Pilpul is, in a way, unique in its kind. He abhors argument for its own sake, but considers it only a means towards the specific end of establishing the law on a more firm ground. He does not raise problems because he has in his store sophistical answers, as most of his contemporaries do, but endeavors to find an answer or solution to a problem laid before him. His Pilpul is subtle, and frequently, very much so, but it differs from that of many other rabbis in the fact that it is not far fetched and never loses sight of the starting point and the original problem. Let me quote some of his pilpulistic responsa.

(פ"ק פ"ק) A man married in Krotshin under the name פ"ק פ"ק פ"ק. But later he deserted his wife and sent her a divorce from Kovel where his name is given as פ"ק פ"ק. The question is whether this bill of divorce where

the man changed his father's name and left his title H out entirely ~~except~~ its purpose.

Answer: In order to satisfy all opinions on this subject the man must write four bills of divorce stating his name differently in each one: 1) H H H H H 2) H H H H H
3) H H H H H 4) H H H H H

But it is possible that his father had two names H and H ; if there be ground for such doubt the man would have to write six bills (the additional two bearing his father's middle ^{name} with and without H), or, according to the opinion of some Halachists, eight bills of divorce, stating his name in each as follows: 1) H H H H H 2) H H H H H
3) H H H H H 4) H H H H H
5) H H H H H 6) H H H H H 7) H H H H H
(without mentioning his father's name, since the man lived, perhaps his father has an entirely different name), 8) H H H H H .

My decision would be - he states - that the man should write two bills only, 1) H H H H H H 2) H H H H H H and not H H H H H H . We take it for granted that his father's name is either Moers or Gershow, we may also grant him the title Levi, since he was known as such for a period of thirty days (after his marriage); but the chief difficulty would be as to whether his father was a H . We therefore write H H H H H .

If his father was a Levi we could easily deduce it from the present statement (since the son is such), and if the father was not a Levi, then the text of the bill states no falsehood.

But a still shorter way would be - he argues - to omit his father's name entirely and merely write two bills under 1) היה and 2) היה היה . I would rely on the many authorities who maintain that the name of the parent in a bill of divorce is necessary.

Another one, in the Talmudic mode²:

(היה היה) the question is whether there would be a difference with regard to the charge of interest between one who opposes circumcision (היה היה) and apostates in general (היה היה).

Answer: The Talmud states (היה היה היה) that all are permitted to slaughter animals, even a Samaritan, an uncircumcised^(יה) and apostate. Now, under what circumstances does this so violate the law of circumcision? If he has not been circumcised because his leather died from the effect of circumcision, then the restrictions applied to an uncircumcised cannot be considered in this case, for this one is a Jew in every respect. But you must say that the term so is used here with reference to one who opposes the law

of circumcision, and yet the law permits him to slaughter animals. This evidently shows that if one opposes the practice of our law, is not considered a rebel against the entire Law, and this one is therefore permitted to slaughter. But if this be the case, how will you explain the latter part of the above mentioned statement: "and even an apostate"; if by this term you mean one who opposes the practice of our law and not all the others, then this would be the same case as the one who opposes circumcision and still is permitted to slaughter. You must therefore contend that *אדם ששם* means *אדם ששם*, and although he opposes the practice of this ritual (*אדם ששם*) still the law does not prohibit him from practicing it.

Now - Ashkenazi argues - if there would be a difference between a *אדם ששם* and an *אדם ששם* with regard to the charge of interest, how would the Berajsa state that an *אדם ששם* cannot mean *אדם ששם* because this we would know from *אדם ששם*; *אדם ששם* - according to this difference - would be entirely different from an *אדם ששם* with respect to this case. We would say that a *אדם ששם* towards whom the law takes a mild attitude with regard to interest is also leniently treated with respect to the practice of slaughtering, but an *אדם ששם* whom the law does not shun in case of interest his slaughtering should also be prohibited.

Now, since the Braganza does not refute the comparison on this ground, it is evident that there is no difference between one who opposes the ritual of circumcision only and apostates in general in matters of interest.

Frequently, after a long pilpulistic discussion, he arrives at a common sense point of view:
 (30 ש"ק) A woman gave birth to a child soon after her husband's death. Physicians prohibited her to nurse the child because her milk was found to be infectious. The question is whether she would be permitted to marry within the first twenty four months after her first husband's death.

Answer: She would be allowed to do so. In spite of the opinion of many rabbis who maintain that even in case where she is unable to nurse the child still she must wait the full period of twenty four months; this would only hold good in case her physical defect is temporary, but here the physicians declared that the disease is of a chronic nature, therefore she cannot be placed in the category נאנסת ונאנסת and is surely permitted to marry as soon as she likes.

Another drift from Pilpul to common sense:
 (35 ש"ק) A baron ~~converted~~^{turned} from his Jewish subjects a large sum of money. After the time

expired the creditors came to collect the debt. the debtor met them with rebukes and refused to pay. the Jews, unable to call the baron to court ^{if possible}, gave up the loan as hopeless and despaired from it. Soon after the baron died, and his son, unwilling to have his father's memory dishonoured, decided to defray this debt. the question is which members of the Jewish community receive the money; the original creditors or the other members, since the baron had once given it up and the law of Joseph (2181) would be applied in this case.

Joseph Colow (1420-1486) treats such a question (ל' ע"ה ג'י"ח ו'ל' ע"ה) and decides in favor of the latter, saying that the law of 2181 holds good in this case. Ashkenazi, after a long pilpulistic argument in which he shows ^{that} it would be absurd to apply the law of 2181 in such a case, comes to the conclusion that the money belongs to the creditors. Says he - You cannot compare this case to one where money is stolen; in the latter case the law of 2181 can be applied, since the act of stealing is a crime and therefore it is perfectly understood that the person from whom the money was stolen would surely give it, if after a short time, the money has not been found, but here, the loan itself is a legitimate act and it is therefore impossible that the creditors should despair from it. Again, you cannot apply the law of 2181

by a conclusion a minor ad majus from "something lost", because even in the latter case, if the finder intends to misappropriate the found object after its owner despaired from it, he transgresses the commandment of *עליון*, because the duty of returning the object lies upon the finder from the moment he picked it up. So here too the duty of paying the debt is incumbent upon the debtor from the moment he ^{received} ~~made~~ the loan, and the law of *עליון* cannot be applied here.

Humanitarianism.

Sometimes he forgets his pitiful and even rejects the opinions of other rabbis, and gives a decision from a humanitarian point of view.

The question was offered to him (י"ג ע"ה) as to whether one who had formerly belonged to the Sabatai Zevi movement be permitted to be called to *עליון* *פון*. He answers that there should be no question about it, he surely may.

The Parussians of the London congregation attempting to find faults with their rabbi (David Nits) discovered that he gave utterance to Spinozic views by using the word *אמת* in the sense of "universal reality." (נ"י ע"ה). Ashkenazi saw clearly what was behind it, and replied that Judah Halevi in his *Kuzari* and many other

medieval poets use the word in the same sense, and therefore no claim can be made against this rabbi who only follows these Jewish scholars.

Many rabbis objected to his ~~his~~ decisions quoted before (30 ד/הר). These objections Ashkenazi meets first on pilpulistic grounds, and towards the end (16 ד/הר) states that he who prohibits the marriage of this widow does an unjust act, and he will surely be called to account before the Supreme Judge.

He was asked (41 ד/הר) whether one, who had committed adultery and repented after, be compelled to divorce his wife. His answer is that he is not. Although - says he - this man had violated one of the most important laws, still if he repented he must be considered a good Jew.

The question was presented to him that in case one died and the widow gave birth to a child that died within thirty days from its birth, whether it would be necessary that the ceremony of Cheliza be performed by each one of her late husband's brothers. Samuel di Medina (1505-1589) decides, in a similar case, that the ceremony must be performed by each one of the brothers, (נ"י פ"ח פ"ג ע"ב ד"ה). Ashkenazi disregards this decision.

states that only one would be necessary (ה' דהר).

He always shows leniency where human suffering is involved:

He was asked (ה' דהר) whether one may divorce his wife who bore him no children during the first thirteen years after marriage, while his wife is unwilling to receive a divorce.

He answers that the man cannot compel his wife to accept a divorce; a) because the law that a man should divorce his wife that bears no children during the first ten years after marriage finds its origin in the passage (Gen. 16:3)

וְיָשָׁב וְיִסְּרָהּ כַּמִּצְוָה וְיִסְּרָהּ כַּמִּצְוָה
why does it state explicitly "in the land of Canaan" to indicate that only in Canaan or Eretz should one marry another wife after ten years of childlessness, but not in countries outside of Palestine; b) Again, this man lived with his wife thirteen years (more than ten) and this itself is enough reason not to divorce her, contrary to her will.

Common Sense Decisions.

Sometimes he lays aside the technical phrase of the law and gives decisions from a common sense viewpoint; thus he does

in cases of minor importance, and where the law proper is too general to be applied in that specific instance:

(31 2182) The law states that an elevation or depression surrounding a certain area would make the inclosed space be regarded as private ground with respect to the law of 1708. Now, England, we know, is an island, surrounded by water, would it not be proper to regard it as private ground with regard to this law? He answers that such an inference is absurd, because one would go a little further and ask: the whole earth is surrounded by the ocean would it not be proper to regard it as private property? This law of inclosure holds good only when the elevation or depression has been made by human hands, but not when formed by God.

Another one:

The question of a "chicken without a heart" had been a subject of discussion by many a prominent rabbi, and some decide that the chicken be prohibited. Ashkenaz's opinion is (31 2182) that people who have any sense at all will understand that no creature can live without a heart even for the shortest period of time. The reason that they found no heart in the chicken was due to the fact that it dropped

on the floor while handling it and a cat must have snatched it.

The question as to whether women be prohibited to work on Hanukkah he answers (ע"ז סי' קע) that such a prohibition would be absolutely improper; there is no reason why people should waste time, waste of this sort should always be prohibited.

In the following decision he shows his kind sense of reverence:

(ע"ז סי' קע) There had been a custom in the community of Amsterdam to auction old scrolls of the Law in the synagogues. He prohibits such a practice stating that we thereby degrade the Law. When an Israelite sold himself as a slave they would not place him on the ordinary market in order not to disgrace him (see ע"ז סי' קע), but make the sale privately, how much more so when the object is a holy scroll.

Attitude towards Kabala.

He is very indifferent towards Kabala, the important thing to him is Halacha. He has no use for the Zohar when it contradicts the law, but quotes it occasionally, and with great caution, when it corroborates it. In his reply to the question about "a chicken without a heart"

he quotes the Zohar (נ"ס כ') "they would not be able to exist in this world without a heart", and immediately apologizes and says: not that I regard the Zohar authoritative in matters of law, but because it affirms a fact which is commonly understood.

His position towards the Zohar is more clearly seen from the following decision:

(י"ד ס/כ"ח) two people arrived in the synagogue while the reader had already advanced in the services. One skipped the portion already recited and joined the congregation, the other started from the very beginning. The last one quoted the Zohar which justifies his procedure. To this Ashkenazi replies: what right has one to quote the Zohar where there is a traditional law? Where the Zohar contradicts the decisions of the Poskim it is not reliable and should not be followed. We can rely only upon the open law which is clear and understood by every one and we cannot confuse it with mysticism which had never been clearly understood. The confusions and mysticisms with which the Zohar is full had been and still are the cause of many ridiculous interpretations of Judaism.

Absurdities

While he had no use for mysticism

and Kabala, still he did not hesitate to cope with a problem like this:

(§3 אהל) should a dummy^(פלג) be counted among the ten people necessary for religious services. Should we argue that since the Scripture states פלג ושרץ וכל חיה אשר תהיה (Lev. 17) and this one is of no Jewish origin, and therefore he cannot be counted to Minyan, or perhaps since there is a statement in the Talmud to the effect that "he who raises an orphan is considered its parent" (פלוני אב), and this one is held in a Jewish house.

He decides that a ~~off~~ should not be counted to Minyan, because R. Saisa said to a dummy "be decomposed and return to your original form", in other words, R. Saisa killed it. Now, if you say that a dummy cannot be counted to Minyan R. Saisa then, committed no act of murder, but if it can be counted to Minyan why did R. Saisa destroy it?

His Relation to Rabbinical Authorities.

While he shows great respect and politeness towards contemporary rabbis still he seldom consults their opinion on religious questions. Not only this, but frequently opposes and attacks their views in many decisions. He does the same with regard to traditional authorities like Moses Isserles, Solomon ben Abraham (H"p),

Alfasi (ג"ו), etc.

(י"א פ' ט"ק) A woman, who was known as a widow, married. Before her second husband had come to live with her, a message came from a rabbi stating that she was a divorced woman (ג'ל"ט). The second husband, therefore, wants to divorce her.

The rabbi to whom this case was originally presented decides that the second husband not only can but must divorce her, since the marriage was illegal. Ashkenazi shows that this rabbi overlooked many important discussions on this subject and that the woman cannot be divorced under these circumstances. Suppose he argues - that witnesses have come now and testify that her first husband is dead would you still insist that the second husband must divorce her because the marriage was illegal?

(ג' ט"ק) In case there was written in the scroll י"ב ט"ו ע"ב instead of י"ב ט"ו ע"ב (נ) whether this mistake would disqualify the scroll. He states that this is a very important problem. We should not rely on the author of the book ג'ל"ט who regards such a matter with considerable lightness, (ג'ל"ט ט' ג'ל"ט נ"ג), but this scroll is surely disqualified.

(ג' ט"ק) One bought a citron (ע"ט) for a high price, his neighbor took it from him before the Feast of Tabernacles ^{begun} and disqualified it. The question is how much should he pay for it; whether

the real price, or only the value of any citron qualified for performing the ritual ceremony.

The same question is treated by Tjib ^{ע"ז} (ג"ז 'ו ס"ק) who decides that he should pay only the price of an ordinary citron, basing his decision on the case (פ"י נ"ג ד' ס' פ"ק) where an ox devoted for a burnt-offering was stolen. There the law decides that the thief does not at all ^{pay} ^{any} ^{money} but that a lamb would do, since this cheaper animal can be substituted for this purpose.

Ashkenazi says that Ming is entirely wrong, his reasoning is not logical at all, and the analogy is not valid. The animal separated for a sacrifice can, under no condition, be sold, while there is no law to prohibit the sale of the citron. He, therefore, decides that the full amount should be paid.

He shows great regard for Mimoni and Joseph Caro. While he is always ready to differ in opinion with many Talmudic authorities he is unwilling to do so with respect to these two. Whenever he finds an opposition to Mimoni he endeavors to show that the antagonist either did not understand the spirit behind Mimoni's statement or ~~he~~ failed to apply it in the proper place.

Historical Reflections.

In this volume of responses a number

of contemporary events of historical value are found. We discover the relation between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim in the congregation of Hamburg, Amsterdam, and London; the attitude ~~of the~~ towards the sabbatians in the beginning of the eighteenth century; and the relation between the local governments and the Jews. A question "Is an Ashkenazi permitted to read in a Sephardic scroll (ס"ד)?" would tell a great deal; or "can a Sephardi separate from his community and join the Ashkenazim?" would reflect upon conditions. Can a former adherent of the Sabbatai Zevi movement be called תשובה? "The Jews despaired from the money borrowed by the Baron, for no one dared to call him to the court of justice..."

We also find a reference to the big congregation in Prague (ס"ד).

Quarrels and Mistakes.

Tracing carefully his quotations we can easily see that ~~he~~ in most cases he quotes from memory and therefore makes a great number of mistakes. I shall quote some:-

He quotes (ס"ד):

אשר נקרא קר אקרא אמת קו תנו אמתו קח צדק
 צדק אהיין פאלוי אהיין פאלוי אמת קו תנו
 אמתו קח צדק אהיין פאלוי אמת קו תנו.

in Hebrew grammar and uses his tenses with great exactness. He is very brief and concise when he quotes the Talmud or Talmudic authorities, but oversteps this limit when he explains his own opinion even on a matter of minor significance. He always starts with the subject matter, then endeavors to find cases of similar nature, discusses ^{it} from every possible point of view, and finally arrives to a conclusion. There is, however, a marked difference between the style and treatment ~~between~~ ^{of} some responses and others; for instance, the responses forty one and ~~forty~~ seventy seven are distinguished for their brevity but fluent and direct presentation, while in three and sixty one the author is inclined to confuse the chief problem with the examples quoted thus losing sight of the original problem. These last are rare cases, and as a rule he is clear and vivid and frequently very logical.