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# THE MAN MOSES MENDELSSOHN AS REFLECTED IN HIS HEBREW AND JUDAEO-GERMAN LETTERS

Thesis

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## INTRODUCTION

It is not without a deep feeling of reverence that we approach the task of investigating the letters written by Moses Mendelssohn to his coreligionists. The historical figure who was among the first to begin the slow and laborious process of ridding Judaism of its medievalism, who in his visions and dreams beheld the ancient faith once more enthroned on high, whose life was one of dedication to that noble ideal, needs no introduction to us. The world has justly acclaimed him as worthy to take his place beside two other great Moses's, him of Egypt and of Spain. It is no wonder, then, that any research into the personal life of such an individual should be conditioned by an attitude of profound respect. His is an enduring name in Israel; the neophyte can but bow the head and bend the knee...

Influenced by such thoughts, we have set ourselves to building up a comprehensive picture of the "Man, Moses Mendelssohn", utilizing for our colors the collection of Hebrew and Judaeo-German letters published by Haim Borodianski in the Jubilee edition of Mendelssohnia, 'Gesammelte Schriften', and forming volume sixteen of that edition. We have limited ourselves entirely to a consideration of these letters, disregarding the monumental works that have appeared in the past few years containing all his works, writings and correspondence in German. The handicaps with which we met, since such a picture must perforce be one-sided and deficient in isolated instances, were overcome by the realization that, to our knowledge, this is the first attempt to present an aspect of the man which until now was glossed over by his biographers. Too many accounts have been written without due regard for the personal life, the commonplaces, that of themselves must portray the greatness of their subject.

Borodianski has for the first time collected all the extant Jewish letters of Moses Mendelssohn in one volume. A complete analysis of the origins and whereabouts of the letters is contained in Borodianski's Introduction and need not concern us here. Of the 283 listed numbers, 74 are missing for various reasons: other letters refer to them, or they were seen in manuscript form by Kayserling, Steinschneider, Neubauer, Löw, and others. Of the remainder, 82 are to Fromet, Moses's wife, before and after marriage; 33 to Elkan Herz, a relative of Moses's, living in Leipzig; and 31 to Joseph Meyer (Schmalkalden), a relative of Fromet, living in Hamburg. These foregoing letters are all written in German with Hebrew script. The entire series to Joseph Meyer and many to Elkan Herz are merely business epistles, dealing with buying and selling of merchandise, bills of exchange, statements of account, and the like, reflecting Mendelssohn's activities in the commercial world. We know that as a bookkeeper and later partner in the Bernhard establishment, he was interested in various business enterprises, and we shall have occasion to refer to this later on in our discussion.

A considerable number of the remaining letters are addressed to and from Jewish contemporaries, lay and rabbinical. As a rule, this type of correspondence was written in Hebrew. It reflects Mendelssohn as the philosopher, exegete, poet, author, etc. It varies from a learned dispute with Jacob Emden to a highly laudatory letter addressed to Robert Lowth, Bishop of London, author of bible translations and commentaries.

We have devoted ourselves to an analysis of those letters that directly contribute towards the picture of the man. Hence, disputations and pilpulistic arguments, while important in other respects, have no significance for our present study other than the light they shed on the

esteem in which he had held by others. Philosophical disputations, historical data, and the like, are similarly disregarded in this study, since they have already been subjected to several learned treatises.

We have sought to read the lines and between the lines. Overcoming to the best of our ability the disadvantage of a one-sided correspondence, we present herewith, "The Man, Moses Mendelssohn, As Reflected In His Hebrew and Judaeo-German Correspondence."

## CHAPTER I - THE LOVER

Our collection contains eighty-two letters to Fromet (Gugenheim) Mendelssohn, and the vast majority of these were written by Moses before their marriage. During the period of his courtship they wrote to each other--he was in Berlin and she in Hamburg--at least once, and more often twice, a week, the frequency of their correspondence depending, as a rule, on the state of the "post". The fact that many of these letters appear in print for the first time with Borodianski's volume tends to throw new light on Mendelssohn's feelings for his future wife and his attitude towards his marriage. It has been generally accepted that, while he certainly did not dislike Fromet, he did not love her. Walter* typifies this school of thought, holding that in his thirty-second year Moses grew tired of the solitary life of a Jewish bachelor, and with this in mind bestirred himself to find a helpmate. The biblical injunction that it is not well for a man to live alone was more important in the eyes of Mendelssohn than the nobler ideal of marrying for love! This view is based chiefly on Mendelssohn's own words in a letter to his friend Lessing,** "Ich habe die Thorheit begangen, mich in meinem dreyssigsten*** Jahre zu verlieben. Sie lachen? Immerhin! Wer weise, was Ihnen noch begegnen kann?....Das Frauenzimmer, das ich zu heyrathen Willens bin, hat kein Vermögen, ist weder schön noch gelehrt, und gleichwohl bin ich verliebter Geck so sehr von ihr eingenommen, das ich glaube, glücklich mit ihr leben zu können..." This very evident attempt to overcome a natural diffidence to admit that an "enlightened philosopher"

* H. Walter, Moses Mendelssohn, p. 71ff.
** Gesammelte Schriften, vol. XI, No. 104, written May 1761.
*** should be "thirty-second".

could fall in love--and admit this especially to that cynic, Lessing--has been construed to mean that Mendelssohn had no affection for Fromet and dispassionately approached the problem of getting married.

Shall we say that love came only after marriage to this modern Jew?

Our letters emphatically point to the contrary.* As Walter himself states, Mendelssohn must have had many opportunities to marry into the wealthy Berlin Jewish families, since at this time his popularity and fame were already widespread. This in itself mitigates against Walter's conclusion that it was not an "affaire de la coeur." Furthermore, as we recall from the aforementioned quotation, she was of a poverty stricken family and could bring him no dowry. He himself, as we shall show later, often longed to remove the handicap of lack of material means; and it is difficult to believe that he voluntarily would have taken on added financial responsibilities unless he was more than merely attracted to the young girl.

Not only did she bring him no dowry, but his prospective father-in-law was not at all drawn towards the union unless Moses could ensure Fromet's material well-being by subscribing to several clauses in the Tanna'im which would have worked severe hardship on him. The ensuing controversy almost wrecked the union, if we are to judge from the independence displayed by the suitor. It is not at all far-fetched to infer from the first letter dealing with this matter[1] that he was determined to retreat honorably and not marry Fromet, rather than bemean himself in her and his own eyes by pledging himself for the impossible conditions imposed by Herr Gugenheim. In this letter, he bitterly complains to

* Walter, op. cit.

Fromet's mother, Vogel, that her husband has been pleased to lay down rules that are not only "curious" but insulting. Mendelssohn revolts at the thought that he is capable of "die allerkriechendste Denkungsart"; he insists that he would be low born if he did not provide for Fromet to the best of his abilities. What right has her father to interfere in his personal affairs? "Am I the man who would love a person and have a divided interest with that person. I myself and what I possess and will possess shall be her property!" he emphatically argues. "Why should one seek to convert even such a pleasant duty into a coercive measure? Will I always have to refer to the Tanna'im whenever I desire to show favor to my mate? I cannot possibly let myself be changed into such a machine." "Assure him," he adds as a final word to Vogel, "that he is dealing with a man who knows how to correctly evaluate the good fortune of possessing his daughter, and considers in comparison to her all riches as dust." Mendelssohn has presented his ultimatum: Take him at his own face value, and forget about senseless formalities regarding signatures, powers-of-attorney, deposits against peturim, and the like! He balks at the delay; come to a decision one way or the other!

Surely this rather hot-headed outburst reflects the lover who yearns for his adored one, rather than the austere man of the world seeking a mistress for his establishment. He had every excuse to withdraw from the affair. She could bring him no dowry, and certainly none would criticize him if he finally decided he ought to insist on that custom. And not only would she bring him no money, but her grasping father wanted him to pay for her! It is hardly conceivable that if he had sought the hand of the lady in marriage purely out of deference to the wishes of his well-intentioned friends, especially Madam Bernhard

the wife of his patron--or to satisfy a biological urge or social need, that this particular union would have materialized. He is sincerely ashamed of the childishness displayed on both sides, and worries lest because of all this, bickering, distrust, selfishness, and circumspection will creep into their married life.[2]

"Love me as much as I love you!"[3] he continually begs of her, "then surely will our union be a happy one." And we find this note in all his letters of courtship. Time and again he entreats her to be frank with him, to honestly let him know what she is thinking, that he might be able to determine what course to pursue.[4] Never does he fail to describe the depth and magnitude of his love, probably because, like the eternal feminine, she constantly reproaches him for being too matter of fact and formal. It is, indeed, unfortunate that her letters are not preserved to us.

He goes into ecstasy over her maidenly innocence of heart and demureness.[5] Her tender heart is the most precious thing he possesses and wishes to possess on earth.[6] When their betrothal is finally agreed upon and he can now feel himself her future husband, he naively informs her that he is too much in love with her by this time to adopt a formal tone in his letter of felicitation, to discard the intimate relationship that has sprung up. He will never cease being her faithful love--that refrain sings its way through his happy epistles.[7] What more could be expected of the enraptured swain than, "to frequent your house, to know you and your family, dearest Fromet, and then to think badly of womanhood is in my eyes impossible."[8] To him she is an angel,[9] incomparable,[10] more than noble-minded.[11]

Now and then he indulges in reminiscences. A friend, the

councillor Zalman Emmerich, is on his way to Hamburg and requests a written letter of introduction to her. Mendelssohn is gracious enough to do his friend this favor and permit him to undertake everything which he himself dared when he was by her side. "This consists in the following: In the morning, I greeted my betrothed with lowered bashful eyes and a 'Good morning, I hope you have slept well.' During the day we moralized a few hours during which I dared to look at her more boldly. I sprang to her defense when mischievous people tried to vex her. In the evening, I sat beside her at the dinner table, and after a perfect conversation was then ready for a pleasant rest. Herr Zalman will, therefore, be so good as to take my place."[12] However he hastens to remind her that he, and not friend Zalman, is her worshipper. Even a philosopher when in love may be jealous! "Do not laugh at my amorous philosophy," he urges his friend and patron, Dr. Gumpertz, who was at that time in Hamburg and seemingly intimate enough with the Gugenheim family to read all of Mendelssohn's letters. "Believe me, all of us philosophers make such figures of speech when we are in love."[13]

In the same vein he replies to some remark made by Fromet: "That means defying the comedian! You see the enamoured philosopher making a fool of himself on the stage and laugh with him; yet you decide at the same time not to love your enamoured philosopher any the less. However your philosopher is not enamoured! That he thinks continually of his Gugenheim, that he kisses every line which you write, that he longs for nothing so much as to see you happy, and at the same time to behold you happy through him, that to him every hour is a year and every step which separates you from him a mile--well, if you call this being enamoured, then I will agree that you and Madam Gottingen find me comical.

To get revenge, I will write a comedy in which the enamoured (female) philosophers will not be spared."[14] And in the same letter he admits that he can as much expect to stop being a philosopher as her lover and constant admirer.

He is proud of his love for her and the favor she finds in the eyes of other. "What can be more pleasing," he remarks, "than to have friends agree to our choice and acquaintances envy us?"[15] Truly, the "verliebter Geck" becomes egotistic when his beloved is mentioned.

What are Fromet's qualities to which he is so much attracted? Of considerable importance to him is her utter lack of vanity.[16] It is quite refreshing to know her after the primping and conceited maidens of Berlin. She is full of tenderness and true love, which he is convinced come from the heart and not affected.[17] Every line in her letters portrays this quality, and, happy lover, when he reads them he almost feels he is talking with her.[18] Moses Mendelssohn certainly needed no lessons in the art of long distance courtship. "The language of the heart is your natural mode of expression," he assures her. "Your noble thoughts can never be debased by the chilly wit that so often makes people's correspondence objectionable."[19] In this same letter he jeers at her dear father's anxiety to assure him that she is beautiful. "What do you think? Can one take an honest man's word for it?" He agrees that she is beautiful, but to him, "not as beautiful as she is virtuous, not as beautiful as she is tender." Here we have his ideal: beauty if possible, but certainly not feminine pulchritude at the expense of spiritual and moral qualities.

On one occasion he learns of some ill-feeling between two

of their friends in Hamburg, and he relies on her tender-hearted nature to restore harmonious relations.[20] He even fears that she is a little too upright for him, and hopes she will unbend somewhat so that her righteousness will not be a constant reminder to him of his own faults.[21] He sings her praise: "Everything when compared to your heart is insignificant, real contemptible insignificance, and, God be praised, I know how to evaluate a noble heart."[22] She was reared in the purest innocence, knowing nothing of evil, caprice and flattery.[23] The art of dissimulation is foreign to her nature.[24] With her, heart and mouth are in accord. Enraptured, he sends her the following poem:

"Hereuse, hereuse l'enfance
Que le Seigneur instruit et prend sous sa defense.
Tel en un secret vallon
Sur le bord d'une ombre pure
Croit a l'abri de l'Aquillon
Un jeune lys, l'amour de la nature."[25]

He must express his love in concrete fashion, by bestowing upon her some simple trinkets for her incomparable finger,[26] a pair of earrings "of not especial value" together with a medallion of the battle of Liegnits. Although he knows she is a pacifist, nevertheless he hopes the medullion will appeal to her because of the giver![27] And he instructs her to go to the shop of a mutual friend in Hamburg and select some pearls, provided she really wants to wear them. She is not to let the price disturb her. Twenty reichstaler, more or less, will not make any difference to him, he lordly assures her. And he knows that she will not let the price influence her selection (sic).[28] This last gift affords us an instance of his sensitiveness with regard to people's opinions of him.

The world expects a lover to lavish expensive jewelry on his adored one, and Mendelssohn wants to convince the childish world that he is really in love.[28] In a postscript, he anticipates any reciprocatory wish on her part by asking her to send him a bottle of tasty olives.

Of passing interest is a letter to his fiancee in which he sends her from Madam Bernhard, his patroness, a half dozen ducats as shalach monos. He strenuously objected against such a countrified manner of courtship on the part of a modern Berlin Jew, but his overzealous patroness could not be convinced.[29]

Fromet keeps on insisting that she wants to do something for him, so he consents to let her sew together a talith for him.[30] This talith was the cause of one of their very infrequent and unimportant arguments. Her family wanted to give him one made of silk, but he insisted that he would positively wear only a woolen one. Undoubtedly, he is more concerned here with their state of finances than with his own personal desires.[31] The unfortunate philosopher suffers because of his many friends. Some one tried to force several pairs of cuffs on him, and Mendelssohn finally had to accept one pair. Will Fromet be so kind as to sew them on a shirt?[32] He hates being a dandy!

He shows tender concern for her health upon different occasions. He admonishes her not to read at night, and to guard against eyestrain.[33] She must on no account write to him late at night. As much as he longs for her letters, her health is much more important. Irrational lover! His impatience knows no bounds when a letter from her is about due; but he calmly advises her to put aside his letters until the morning light.[34]

Again we recall his words to Lessing: she is neither "schön noch gelehrt." This probably accounts for his solicitude as regards

her education. He was very eager that she be properly equipped to take her place alongside him in cultured Berlin Jewish society. He even offers to pay for her French lessons, since French is the fashionable tongue of that period,[35] and he hopes she will spend a few hours daily at mastering it. He makes arrangements with a certain Herr Bode to tutor her in French, and we find him always begging her for reports on her progress. "If you love me," he arbitrarily demands, "then never cease to give me monthly reports of your studies."[36] His advice to her is to cultivate her latent possibilities. By increasing her own knowledge she will not only benefit herself but make him very happy.[37] Nevertheless, we have already noted that he will not permit her to endanger her health, even with such a laudatory aim. Fromet evidently had taken his advice to heart, and plunged herself into diligent work. He urges her to proceed moderately. To assist her, he sends her books and mentions others that she ought to get.[38] He is happy to see that she has made sufficient headway to read Lord Shaftesbury's "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit." He knows she will learn much from this little book, especially since the ever present Dr. Gumpertz can explain the difficult passages to her. Mendelssohn is so pleased with her that he promises to send her some more books,[39] and a week later we find him making good his promise by forwarding a copy of Rousseau's "Letters."

His natural anxiety that she learn French makes him very impatient with the haphazard visits of Herr Bode, the tutor. It is almost the mother tongue in Berlin.[40] Finally, he advises her to have Dr. Gumpertz locate another tutor. He has come to the conclusion that Bode is an anti-semite.[41]

At one time he seems to have decided that Fromet was doing

too much studying. Herr Zalman Emmerich, on his return to Berlin, informed Mendelssohn that his sweetheart had been going to extremes in her desire to comply with his wishes. "I cannot approve of that," he states. "What are you working for? To be educated? God protect you from that! Moderate instruction becomes a woman, but certainly not (deep) learning. A girl whose eyes are red as a result of too much reading deserves being made fun of. You, my dearest Fromet, must not rather seek refuge in books than among other things....Too much medicine (i.e. study) is harmful."[42] And this concern for her health prompts him in his next letter to advise her to postpone her French lessons until he can have the pleasure of being her instructor.[43] He has never loved a student so much!

But the fear that she will not be able to acclimatize herself in Berlin is still paramount, and several months later we find him once more urging her to continue her studies. "Keep on going to the doctor's school, for one of us must continue learning; otherwise neither of us will be benefitted."[44] On the very eve of their marriage he again requests information as to her progress in French. "I know that you are now concerned with your journey, but it ought not to make you discard a profitable pasttime."[45]

The sage philosopher reveals his lighter moments when he is engrossed with thoughts of his beloved. Whenever he writes to her he begins to babble inanities;[46] he likes being foolish and reminding her of his love and urging her not to forget him. He loves to have her rebuke him (indeed, a true sign of love!), to see if he can make her angry. Her threats to stop loving him if he continues writing idiotically mean nothing to this enraptured swain. He'll take the risk![47] The very fact that in the midst of the hustle and bustle of his daily existence he can

sit down and scribble a few lines to her about his affection affords him the greatest satisfaction.[48] The best cure for his restless spirit is just to think of her: then he is sure to find calm and peace. "Castles in the air" are common with him these days. And he has derived so much comfort from their correspondence that even when they are married they will have to keep on writing to each other. "Every day we will send letters aus der Mühlengass nach dem neuen Markt und wieder zurück."[49]

The despondent lover pines away for letters from the object of his adoration. He cannot find enough words--he who had won a prize in competition with Kant--to express his thanks every time she condescends to write him.[50] Her handwriting is all his troubled spirit needs to behold. We find him sunk in the depths of melancholy, bemoaning his unlucky lot that separates him from his heart's desire. His thoughts run away with him,[51] he becomes confused; all he wants is to see her soon, for a week or two,[52] even for an evening or two.[53] His thoughts are more often in Hamburg than in Berlin.[54] His homesickness for those walls which harbor his precious one is unbearable.[55] "How much sooner would I like to have the little room in which my friend the Doctor (Gumpertz) lives than a room in any of the stately Berlin palaces," he laments. Only in the Gugenheim household in Hamburg are love and friendship to be found.[56] He succumbs to this mood, and once again he builds castles in the air. "In you will I find the most pleasant associate," he exults, "and I, on my part, will try to be the best companion from your point of view. Why do we need other people in order to be happy?"[57] He will be completely satisfied if he finds his happiness in the quiet joy of love and friendship.[58] So he begs of her to write as often as possible. His only contentment now

is the reflection that she writes to him or is reading his letter, that she is displeased, angry or amused at something he has written.[59] To the lonely bachelor his very existence is centered around the letters he receives from her.

"I must admit," he writes in a short note that is truly expressive of his ardent love for her, "that my feelings have undergone a terrific transformation. Before I knew you, my love, solitude was Paradise to me. Now it is unbearable. I am very satisfied with my circumstances, but I can no longer retire into myself as formerly. Studies still have a great attraction for me, but they cannot fill all the vacancies in the soul, and I feel that I will never again find peace until I have you, my dearest Fromet, constantly before my eyes." His love and longing but serve to deepen his morbidness. "Goodbye, my most tender one, my best Fromet," he closes, "I notice that love makes one childish." But his love simply must express itself. "I embrace you with most ardent tenderness, and am your...."[60] If only their marriage would soon take place![61] Oh, if he had the opportunity to see her and tell her that he loves her![62] And as the time of their nuptials draws near he becomes more and more urgent that she write him.[63] He is completely overpowered in his affection for her. "The nearer the time approaches when I will possess my beloved in this world, the more unbearable is my anticipation. The three or four weeks are just so many years for me."[64] Such outbursts on his part truly reflect his tormented spirit.

Let us advance other evidence to show that Mendelssohn loved Fromet before marriage. He finds himself tongue-tied and bashful in her presence. "I have more to tell you than to anyone else in the world,"

he writes, "and even so when I start to write I find myself very embarrassed. While at Hamburg I fared no better. Before I came to you I had a thousand things to tell you, but I was no sooner in your home than all my thoughts vanished. No doubt other bridegrooms have experienced the same difficulty, but I cannot find a reason for it."[65] And a year later he indulges in the most delightful of reminiscences: "What I mean by 'summer-house'? Forget it! I cannot describe to you how disturbed my heart was at that time. The kisses which I stole from your lips were mixed with some bitterness, for approaching departure made me dejected and incapable of enjoying complete happiness. I scolded myself because of my dumbness in loving you all those four weeks without having had a 'tete a tete' with you. How many pleasant hours did I not spend foolishly, absolutely let them go by uselessly! Now, I say (to myself): 'When the coachman is about to call for you at any moment, you for the first time avail yourself of the opportunity to let your beloved know you. How foolish of you!' In brief, in the midst of these unpleasant reflections the last hours which I spent in Hamburg finally faded away, and I saw myself on the mail-coach beside Herr Isaac Eisenstadt. Is it even worth the half-satisfaction of thinking of it?"[66]

How happy is he when he knows that she is pleased and content![67] His noble heart is full of joy when he reads that she is joyful. "Do you know that I am beginning to be jealous of your friend? Never have you expressed yourself so tenderly, never were your feelings so true, so natural, as when you congratulate me about the union of my friend with yours. I know of a union in which you and I do not play a small part at

all, and that does not seem to make you as pleased with the world as the happiness of your friend. Now everything which you see and hear makes you rejoice, now the world to you is bright and its inhabitants friendly and affectionate. Now you float about in pure joy, and, if I do not deceive myself, (this) friendship has likewise opened up your own heart for love, for you speak now of your own love in a much more tender fashion. I searched in your letter to see if I could uncover any traces of discontent occasioned by the delay of our happiness--and to tell the truth, as much as I love you, I wished for it--but in vain. Friendship itself is master over your heart, and you are happy as soon as your friends are. I love you because of these sentiments all the more, and am daily more strongly convinced that I was very fortunate in my choice."[68] Please tell me your troubles, he pleads, so that I will not worry. "Ah, you are too tender, you love me too much....(but) tell me, my love, what is wrong; tell me your commonest thoughts as detailed as possible; they are as well guarded in my bosom as in yours."[69] Between them there must be no restraint. If he says anything to displease her, he asks only that she let him know, because he trembles to think that she will feel herself insulted as a result of some insignificant remark on his part. Whenever he criticizes and advises it is with the best of intentions.[70] Our thoughts must always be in accord, he reminds her, and when we both pray to God in behalf of each other, then the actual distance between us means nothing, our souls are one.[71] All our happiness and joy depends upon the conformity of our feelings, he reiterates.[72]

The prospective husband takes pleasure in warning his bride

that he intends leaving all household matters to her. As the date of their marriage approaches, he is doing his best to prepare their lodgings, but he is sadly in need of her counsel.[73] "I am not troubling myself about domestic affairs," he jests, "but am behaving like that poet. He sat in his study and someone called, 'Fire! Fire!' 'Tell it to my wife,' he answered, 'I don't both about household affairs."[74]

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So ends our review of the letters addressed by Moses Mendelssohn to Fromet Gugenheim. With all due regard for the former's ability as a litterateur and his mastery of the art of writing, yet sufficient instances have been presented to warrant the conviction that he really took his love to heart, and did not regard it solely in the matter-of-fact light that characterized Jewry of his day. He was sufficiently modern to resist the attempts of professional matchmakers, as far as he was concerned, although we shall show later that he accepted the institution of shadchanuth and even tried his hand at the promotion of a marriage or two. But for himself he was determined to make his own choice, regardless of the most important element in Jewish marriages of that period, the money his wife could bring with her.

He felt his own poverty and often urked at the restraints it put upon him, but he could not allow it to sway his finer sensibilities. Probably his own ugliness and unprepossessing appearance made him all the more grateful for the favor a girl was willing to bestow upon him by being his wife. All the more reason, in our opinion, that Moses Mendelssohn should have loved Fromet Gugenheim.

We are not at all justified, after reading his letters to her, noting the familiar tone that characterizes them, the abjectness with which he literally throws himself at her feet, his worship of her, to conclude that he wrote simply from a sense of duty and nothing more. We see the worldly man in him at times unconsciously rebelling at his love-sick phrases, we can hear him saying to himself that a man in his position really ought not to lower himself so much even in the cause of love. Often, afer passionately expressing himself, he reminds the "Herr Doktor", Gumpertz, his former tutor and next to Lessing probably his dearest friend, who, as we have had occasion to point out, must have read all his letters, that the philosopher in him can not subdue the infatuated human being, that even Reason must give way to Emotion in his state of mind.

It should be noted, in passing, that while his letters were addressed primarily to Fromet, they usually turned out to be epistles to be read by the entire Gugenheim family and their circle of friends. Postage was expensive in those days, and only a spendthrift, which Moses Mendelssohn surely was not, would have allowed a half sheet or a blank side to be wasted. This fact in itself is more evidence of his sincere love for his fiancee. How could any self-respecting individual permit the whole world to peer into his soul, unless his statements were sincere and he felt he had nothing of which to be ashamed? So goes the world, and love! The man who was awarded an Academy prize chiefly because of his excellent use of the German language rambles on and on, as he wanders through the Elysian fields. Surely modern youth could use his phraseology, his figures of speech, avail themselves of his impassioned outbursts, word for word, and mayhap advance their own cause.

## CHAPTER II - THE MAN

We shall now devote ourselves to building up a picture of the man himself, as reflected from his letters. This must necessitate not only an interpretation of factual materials but likewise a constant reading between the lines, an attempt to discover the motivation for a statement. Only in this way can his qualities of character be discovered.

We already know that he is sympathetic and capable of solicitude. We have noted his independent spirit, brought to our notice by the correspondence revolving about the Tanna'im. We have seen his reluctance to harm others, deliberately or inadvertently. Of course, we recognize that these traits are revealed to us in a type of correspondence not best suited to depict the man in an unprejudiced light; the love that is contained in an epistle to a maiden, and the means he uses to show that love, naturally is bound to enhance whatever excellent qualities of character the writer possesses. We hope, however, in this section to show that Moses Mendelssohn was entirely consistent in his behavior and thinking in relation to other people besides his sweetheart, that the noble spiritual characteristics of the lover were but manifestations of a way of living and thinking peculiar to him and redounding to his glory. The laudations that were heaped upon him as a scholar, author, philosopher, and leader, were by no means formal expressions of admirers but were motivated by a sincere appreciation of the man.

They knew that he took as a guiding principle in life the Socratic dictum, "Know thyself!" and that he constantly kept this sage counsel in mind. In a collection of his writings published in the year

1761, we find on the title page an engraving of a Greek Temple with the inscription, "Know Thyself!" When he sent a copy of these writings to Fromet, he explained this phrase to her. "One means by that that no one is wise or can serve God who does not know himself. The wise Socrates stands in front of it and explains the superscription to his pupil, the young Alcibiades, whom he desired to bring to true self-knowledge through his well meant admonitions."[1]

A few months later, on Purim, he writes to Fromet, very touchingly, that he has no gift to send her but a little story: "Once a disciple came to Socrates the sage and said: My dear Socrates, everybody who travels about with you gives you something as a gift. I have nothing to give you but myself. Be so good as not to shame me! What, said the wise man, do you regard yourself so lightly that you must entreat me to take you? Well, I'll give you some advice: Endeavor to be so good that your person will be the most desirable gift. My story is finished. Also I, my dear Fromet, want to become so good that you will agree that I could not give you anything better than (myself)."[2] Surely these two excerpts, and particularly the latter, portray the man's humility. Noble lover! He longed to be as perfect in her eyes as she was in his. To him a man is to be judged by his acts.[3]

His was the happy faculty of being able to read between the lines, to discern hidden thoughts, to root out gnawing dissatisfactions, and to offer solace and counsel. Once again we must refer to the correspondence anent the Tannai'im. Several letters have passed back and forth since he presented his ultimatum[4] to Fromet's mother, Vogel, that she (Vogel) must either convince her husband of Mendelssohn's sincere

love and regard for his daughter, or there will be no engagement. Unfortunately, we do not possess Vogel's or Fromet's replies, but in a letter written two weeks later,[5] Moses deplores the fact that Vogel feels herself affronted. "I am exceedingly sorry to see you in such an unusual frame of mind," he writes. "You speak of human hatred, of lack of friendship. You best of mothers, whose friendly spirit has long been accustomed to laugh at the greatest disagreeablenesses. You still appear to be unable to control the petty emotions resulting from my own and my friend's (probably Gumpertz) selfishness. Admit it, dear madam, I believe you are not insensible to egotism (Eigensinn). You are indifferent, perhaps more than customary, to the greatest disagreeablenesses, but when you feel your self-love wronged then you become a woman (Frauenzimmer)! You see, I use a strange tone to appease anyone; I offend him by new offenses, so that he must forget the former ones. Yet, I did not act differently towards my betrothed, and I hope, dear Vogel, that you, just as my dear Fromet, would rather have a sincere friend than a flattering one." Notice how he precedes his criticism of her egotism by flattering her with "best of mothers" and reminding her that she is unlike other women in that she can have more patience with things that offend her.

The characters of various individuals revealed themselves to Mendelssohn. A friend of his, a certain Mrs. Gettingen, had made Fromet's acquaintance in Hamburg, but he now hears from Fromet that Mrs. Gettingen had done something which had met with Fromet's disfavor. He warns his beloved that she must not permit her resentment, perhaps of a petty, unconscious act, disrupt what promises to blossom into a warm friendship. "I highly prize Mrs. Gettingen," he affirms, "because in my opinion she has many good qualities and is my true friend, because she has never given

me occasion to doubt her friendship for me, because her mistakes are more often weaknesses than deliberate, and everyone has his weaknesses."[6] He is willing to take people on faith, a principle which runs through all his relations with the world about him, until they prove to him that they are unworthy of his regard.[7] To him "the word of a virtuous person is the best assurance in the world for me."[8]

His is an understanding and sympethetic nature. A Louis Hannover was involved in some financial scandal, and many people are loud in their criticism and condemnation of him. But Mendelssohn maintains that Hannover in no way acted dishonorably, and is to be admired for his courageous effort to prevent the loss of his large investments.[7] In this same letter he gives evidence of his tolerance for harmless idiosyncracies. He has had lunch at the home of Veitel Heine Ephraim, a prominent financier and leader in Berlin Jewry. We can imagine a somewhat portly, pompous individual endeavoring to impress his guest with his importance. But "he is a very fine man in whose company, however, time can be very tedious."[9] Ephraim gives one the impression that only what he says is correct, which Mendelssohn duly notes. But this can be excused, since he deserves respect for his financial acumen and his well-merited leadership. And Mendelssohn may have had such a man as Ephraim in mind when he wrote, "A heart which cherishes friendship is disposed to all goodness."[10]

Mendelssohn admires the quality of character of Moses Wessely who has married a girl not highly thought of by his friends. Wessely seems to deliberately derive happiness from this union, just to spite these friends. Why shouldn't Wessely be happy? asks Mendelssohn. First of all, he married the woman of his choice. Secondly, his is a nature which delights in proving other people wrong and acting in a manner contrary

to their expectations. Probably, adds Mendelssohn, Moses would be filled with dismay should he learn that people agreed with him and recognized his good fortune. There are some people who can only achieve happiness in spite of others.[11] Perhaps this defence of Wessely was brought on by the latter's constant and effusive praise of Fromet.[12]

Mendelssohn recommends a Moses Zulz to Fromet. The world holds him to be full of malice and of a mischievous temperament, but to Mendelssohn this youth's malicious acts and statements are merely compensations for an inability to adjust socially. He may be indifferent to other's opinions of himself, but that does not necessarily reflect his true character.[13]

Likewise does Mendelssohn show his understanding of human psychology with regard to a certain Herr Meier who is on his way to Berlin to transact some business. This man is very timid by nature, and because of his sensitivness is easily slighted. Mendelssohn is very compassionate, because he realizes that Meier will not succeed in Berlin where the magnates demand the proper amount of servility and ability to crawl on one's knees. Meier really has a fine character which he obstinately conceals. Only Mendelssohn has gone to the trouble of discovering it beneath the objectionable exterior. He certainly would have liked to be in a position to help the man.[14]

Mendelssohn's policy was always to encourage, never to condemn. It is a simple matter to discourage; in many cases all that is needed is a little enheartening by a sympathetic spirit, especially with a tractable individual.[15]

This ability to read characters stayed with Mendelssohn throughout his life. On a journey to Königsberg during his later years he writes to Fromet that while he is thrown among many Christians he for some reason

cannot feel friendly disposed to any except Kant and a few of Kant's friends. He is greeted on all sides by: How are you? But he cannot help thinking that they really mean to ask: Haven't you something to sell?[16] He cannot blind himself to the "Judenhass" of so many of his "enlightened" non-Jewish friends. This will be dealt with later on.

Several isolated remarks likewise show his complete understanding of situations. A letter from Fromet makes him believe she is dissatisfied with something she is averse to mentioning. He would like to be informed of it.[17] When peace is about to be declared with Russia he hastens to advise Fromet to inform Mrs. Gettingen who has been worrying about her parents residing in Berlin.[18] And when he learns a months later that Mrs. Gettingen is about to have a child, he counsels Fromet to cheer the young wife, because "if I were to have a child tomorrow, I wouldn't cry. A Prussian heart should be fearless!"[19]

He knows that Fromet's family is in destitute circumstances. Hence, he wants to make as little fuss as possible over the wedding in order to keep the Gugenheims but a short time in Berlin. He assures her that she must not take his talk about being very economical too seriously. It is not indicative of his affection for her. "You will find," he advances, "that my heart is the same as when I revealed it to you last year in the dirty summer house."[20]

Times are bad. Because of the war with Russia, the spectre of famine threatens, and there is real poverty. His honest nature compels him to warn his bride that married life will not be any bed of roses. Forewarned is forearmed, and the shock of beholding all the grief and unpleasantness in Berlin will thus not be as great for her.[21] And he begs Fromet not to stand on ceremony with him if she should need money

for her trousseau, but to obtain it at the establishment of a friend in Hamburg and charge to his account. He knows that she hesitates asking her parents for money in their present condition.[22]

Could we ask for more proof of an understanding nature than "I think it is an unpardonable sin to rob a young married couple of even a quarter hour"?[23]

We know from his biographers that he was a socially minded person, that he went out of his way to make friendships, and that his home in Berlin was often the meeting place of the intelligentsia of Berlin. To him "the holy bonds of friendship" which bind together kindred spirits contribute not in the least to blissfulness.[24] He realizes that some people are not disposed to forming friendships.[25] He pities them. We have already noted how he urges Fromet to retain her friends. "As wonderful as it is for me," he maintains upon another occasion, "to be convinced of the tenderness of your feelings, still it was displeasing to learn that you avoid all associations and derive no pleasure in amusements. It is true that when the heart is occupied noisy pleasures distract us more than they amuse; yet too much love of solitude is wholesome neither for the mind nor for the body. You are young, agreeable, well-behaved, and have breeding; you are, therefore, fit to become a member of any society, and ought to be able to find your own good time. Your solid way of thinking protects you from the vanities of ordinary women, and your native good breeding and distinctiveness secure you against overmastering egoism. Hence, you have nothing to fear and can receive good and bad visits without detracting at all from your own worth."[26]

He deplores the wealthy Jews who because of their wealth are not disposed to make friends, but only have acquaintances. Rather

inappropriately, in an attempt to prove this point and flatter Fromet at the same time, he states that if her family had not lost all its wealth, her good qualities would probably have been hidden under a superficial layer of tinsel, and she would not have been worthy of love.[27]

He is completely unselfish. Not only is he happy in his love, but he wants others also to fall in love and derives the same amount of happiness. To complete our contentment, he maintains, it is only necessary that we see our dear friends happy.[28]

His statements regarding the importance of friendship were translated into concrete acts. Whenever possible he would go out of his way for a friend. He spends months trying to collect a bill for his relative, Elkan Herz, from Baron Kospoth.[29] He takes care of Joseph, Fromet's brother, even before the marriage, constantly advising him, loaning him money, and setting him up in business.[30]

What should be especially noted is Mendelssohn's optimism. He refuses to permit economic and political misfortunes to dampen his spirits. We find a reflection of it during the war with Russia, when his letters show him exceedingly hopeful of peace. He refuses to give way to despair.[31] In his later years, when he was forced by ill-health to go from one resort to another for cures and treatments, we glimpse the indomnitable courage and the same spirit of optimism. In a letter to Fromet from Pyrmont he describes his situation, "drinking and bathing, bathing and drinking, seeing strangers arrive and leave, and, as is customary in Pyrmont, having rain or sunshine ten or twelve times a day." Truly, not a cheerful prospect. But he hastens to reassure Fromet that he is not at all downcast. "I am getting my fourth bath today, thank God thus far with

good results, and I am willing without delay to bathe every day."[32] In his letter a week later he mentions that "the bathing did me a lot of good and I feel brighter and happier."[33] His guiding principle may be found in the words: "Nothing is so bad, that one really has to worry."[34]

He is essentially a modest person. Fame has not intoxicated him and given him grandiose feelings of his own importance. Friends like to tell Fromet of her lover's excellence, but he assures her that their statements are motivated by friendship and not by a sincere insight into his capabilities.[35] As far as he is concerned, he is so little interested in himself that he has no mirror in his room and is scarcely acquainted with his own features![36]

He regards criticism as wholesome. He likes to criticize and be criticized. While he feels himself very much in the right about the matter of drawing up the Tanna'im, he writes Fromet that he will gladly modify his position if she honestly feels he is in the wrong.[37] And twenty years later, when he is at the height of his fame, he writes to a friend seeking his sincere criticism of the Genesis translation.[38] He gladly embodies his critics' suggestions into his works.[39] We have already noted how he pleads for his betrothed's frankness in order to ensure a happy union.

Like most rational beings, he dislikes getting angry. He realizes that passion is not conducive to clear thinking.[40] And so he is very tolerant of things which tend to provoke him. He admits to Fromet that a part of her letter is very displeasing to him, but he will pass over it because he is not sufficiently informed to pass judgment.[41] And that spirit of tolerance still guides him twenty years later in the midst of the criticisms hurled at his Pentateuch translation. He

cannot understand why he is being condemned, but "let them curse me, I will bless them."[42]

An integral feature of Mendelssohn's psychical makeup is his refusal to accept hearsay evidence about any individual. He will not form an opinion of a person from a third person's characterization, but must see and talk with the individual concerned. And so when he is asked for his advice about a proposed marriage, although he has heard about the bride, he will not commit himself because he has never seen her.[43]

He cannot temporize or evade the issue. "I always have loved to clearly explain that which comes to my mind, and to make clear my meaning as the noonday sun, not to cover it with darkness and cloud."[44] He reproaches a friend for giving explanations of scriptural passages which he knows are untrue, and for speaking against his better judgment. Mendelssohn would never cheapen himself by such a despicable practice.[45]

We have had occasion to notice his independent spirit. We have also remarked how the magnates of Berlin are full of their own importance so that one must be very abject and servile to have dealings with them. Mendelssohn is vehement in his denunciation of this attitude. As far as he is concerned, he would much rather keep his self-respect than humble himself to obtain a favor.[46] However, he is very sincere in admitting his pride in having the above-mentioned Veitel Heine Ephraim as his patron during his early years in Berlin.[47] This same financier tried to get Mendelssohn to join him in the business of mint-coining, but Mendelssohn refused because he had no ambitions to get rich quick. He admits that he is being obstinate in not availing himself of such an entrancing offer, but he knows he will not be happy as a mint-coiner, and so he must refuse.[48]

He has no desire to become a great and wealthy personage all at once; he would much rather make a humble beginning.[49] We find this position somewhat modified as a husband and father. In a letter to Elkan Herz, he describes the fortunate circumstances of one Hirsch Prager who has married off all his children except a daughter, and in his old age transferred his factory to his sons. Now he is taking a well-deserved rest. A note of envy may be detected in Mendelssohn's remark, "May my end be like his." (Num. 23:10)[50]

Mendelssohn never did care for public celebrations. "As long as I can remember," he says in a letter to Fromet, "I have never been at a wedding. It may be that this is because at a public amusement I play a most unsuitable role; it is enough that at present I have lost all taste for it." Here perhaps is a reference to his physical handicaps. And he goes on to say, "I am at all times in high spirits, but seldom comical and never wildly delighted. I seek my happinesses in the quiet joy of love and friendship, and God, be praised, I do not seek them in vain."[51] Thus, when Madam Bernhard his patroness as usual attempts to interfere in his love affair and demands that they have a big and ornate wedding, he balks at the idea. He leaves the whole matter for Fromet's decision.[52] We do not know the result.

We know that Moses Mendelssohn did not think much of his own appearance. Possibly this explains his antipathy towards sartorial innovations and the constantly changing styles in dress. He will not wear a silk talith, as we already have had occasion to note, perhaps because he knew he could do nothing to improve his appearance.

On another occasion we find him engaged in what threatened to be a serious argument with Fromet concerning hair-dressing fashions for

men. To him a "frisirten Kopf" is a useless vanity, and he advises Fromet to urge Moses Wessely to bow to the will of his aged father, Baer Wessely, and not comb his locks. "Parents still believe they have a right to bring us up," says Mendelssohn, and in this matter the old man's sensibilities should be taken into account. Jokingly, Mendelssohn tells Fromet to play the Delilah to Moses Wessely's Samson and cut off the latter's locks when he is asleep.[53] "The hair is ordained by nature to flow unruly over one's neck, and now we desire to have it carefully combed." People make fun of him who considers his time too precious to waste at the hair-dresser's. "He ought to evolve a system whereby he can send his hair to the barber and use his head at home for more important things." Furthermore, it is not befitting the dignity of a Jew to have his hair cut too short and appear among respectable people on the Sabbath and Holydays.[54] It appears that Fromet disagreed with him on this subject, but he managed to retain his sense of humor throughout the argument.[55]

A phase of Mendelssohn's nature that should not be passed over is his extreme reluctance to waste his all too insufficient finances. He does not bemoan his poverty, and he cheerfuly recognizes the fact, when mentioned by Fromet, that he is somewhat penurious. He has faith in her ability to bring him to the happy mean between spendthriftness and miserliness.[56] One of his chief arguments in the writing of the Tannai'im was that in Hamburg it would cost ten times as much as in Berlin.[57]

Because of the high rate of postage he urges Fromet to be careful when she writes him. "When you have to enclose letters in the future, like the last one from Herr Bode, then rather make two or three simple letters than one bulky one. The extortion by the mail here is

unbearable. Your last letter cost 15 Gr. for postage. If it had been two simple letters, it would have cost only 5 Gr. I likewise received a letter from Moise Bernhard which was thinner than yours and likewise had to pay 15 Gr."[58]

We have noted his reluctance to go to the expense of a big wedding, because neither her family nor he were in too comfortable financial circumstances. And he would gladly send Fromet a copy of his work on Megillas Esther, if she would advise him how to send it to her without having to mail it.[59] Four years later he will do the same for Avigdor Levi as regards his Koheleth,[60] if he does not have to pay the postage. But his thrift is disregarded when his own education is concerned. He constantly buys books, although he is on the alert to avail himself of a bargain.[61]

Now for a somewhat lighter phase of Mendelssohn's personality! He has a very sweet tooth for olives, which are difficult to obtain in Berlin.[62] He asks Fromet to send him some. The lover writes poetry to his adored one,[63] just for her own eyes, because he knows how bad it is. The Berlin environment has sharpened his sense of humor, and at times his manner of speech gets him into difficulties.[64] Women are incomprehensible to him.[65] "Das Frauenzimmer" will go to any lengths to have her way. She can so easily deceive worthy man, especially on the stage where she is at her best.[66] She will get a headache, cultivate a fever, be very demure, indifferent--anything to maintain her majesty. How grateful is he that Fromet is not like the ordinary run of women![67]

As we know, Mendelssohn was bookkeeper and later partner in the Bernhard establishment. Several letters in our correspondence are strictly

of a business content, such as those addressed to Elkan Herz and Joseph Meyer (Schmalkalden). We shall not attempt any discussion of these particular letters, since they are on the whole one-sided and are matter-of-fact business items, relating to buying and seeling, credit, exchange, etc. From some of the other letters, however, we are led to believe that Mendelssohn was as expert in finance as he was proficient in the field of thought. The least detail does not escape him. He requests Fromet's friend, who seemingly has returned goods to him in Berlin, to wrap them much better next time, because when he received them they were soiled.[68] Several letters to Fromet deal with the purchase of garments and his advice as to whether the prices asked are suitable.[69] He sends Fromet's mother some materials to help her start in business.[70]

Some fifteen years later, when he goes to Königsberg for his health, he does not neglect the opportunity to notice that the price of grain has risen considerably, chiefly because of the unsettled weather. This leads him to remark that while he has no grain investments, prices will be sure to rise, to his own regret. He does not expect Fromet to understand this economic doctrine, and tells her to get David Friedlander to explain his statement.[71]

## CHAPTER III - MENDELSSOHN AND JUDAISM

It will be of advantage to precede our discussion of Moses Mendelssohn, the Jew, and his attitude towards Jews and Judaism, with a summary of his beliefs, so far as we can discern them from his letters themselves. The "affair with Kölbele" called forth a vehement denial on his part that Judaism runs contrary to reason. "We have no creeds that are contrary to reason." God has given us the teaching of truth. While laws and commandments are part of Judaism, their principles rest on fundamental reason. They agree in every respect with experience, and are not contradicted by experience. "And that is the excellence of our religion, the honest and divine one, over all other creeds."[1] We do not accept prophets or a Bath Kol which contradict any commandment of the Torah or one explanation of the sages in regard to the Thirteen Principles of Faith.[2] He insists that he is a traditionalist, that he would never call the decisions of the sages "trashy literature".[3] He is violently opposed to Karaism.[4]

He is a faithful believer in God. Moreover he maintains that inner piety is to be preferred to the external acts of so many "pious Jews"[5], with especial reference to their grimacing and shaking at prayer. "Man must reflect about the ways of God, give honor and be silent, for before His wideopen eyes they are unfathomable."[6] And again, "How wonderful are God's ways, and how little does He forsake those who rely on Him!"[7] During his controversy with Lavater, he "trusted in the Lord my strength; He will make me steadfast for His battle; and He put into my heart what I should say, and I knew that I would not be ashamed."[8] And although it

has no meaning for our discussion, it is worthy of note that he likes to give the Torah as a wedding gift.[9]

We know from his biographers about the controversy he entered into with Jacob Emden over the burial of the dead. It would be well to quote some excerpts from his letter to the Jewish Community of Schwerin in reply to their plea for his intercession in their behalf regarding the Duke's decree that all corpses must wait three days before burial. Whether Mendelssohn was justified in his belief that it is not contrary to Jewish law to keep the corpse three days, does not concern us. The talmudic proofs quoted by him were refuted by Emden and others. Suffice for our purpose to know that "although I know your pious teacher (Marcus Lazarus Jaffe) has studied from and served the sages and knows how to judge and teach, in spite of this I will not hesitate to express my opinion; and if I am in error I shall be most happy to be corrected, for in my humble opinion as far as this matter is concerned there is no question of breaking the law, as you think." To him the principle of kibbud hames is more important than the fear of breaking a negative commandment, especially where the humanitarian element is so vital. There is no absolute certainty as regards an infallible sign of death, even among physicians, and this for Mendelssohn is sufficient reason to adhere to the Duke's edict.

Yet, after disagreeing with them, he includes a formula for a petition to be presented to the Duke, and he feels the latter will be well disposed to look favorably upon it. Thus everybody will be happy. He gives his opinion, knowing full well that they will not agree, but he feels himself constrained to tell the truth at all times.[10] Respectfully he replies to Emden's strong letter criticizing him, once more positing his arguments from the point of view of medicine and Talmud. "Behold,"

he says, "I have submitted the doubts which have occured to me in this matter before my master, and I trust in his patience (with me), that I will not be a burden to him, for I am always eager to learn."[11] He is very sincere in his praise of Emden. He devotes a whole letter in telling Emden how highly he thinks of him.[12] Whenever he writes to him, he is very profuse in his laudatory adjectives.[13]

Moses Mendelssohn loved his people. He was deeply moved by their miseries. In 1777 the community of Dresden appeals to him to intercede with their ruler because of the heavy taxes laid upon them, and the edict that those who could not meet the taxes must leave. They point to the length of time the Jews have been in Dresden. And yet times are so bad that at least half of them will be forced to depart. They beg of Mendelssohn to encourage them, to do what he can to help them. He is the only Jew sufficiently prominent to save them.[14] Mendelssohn's heart is torn to shreds when he hears this news. He writes immediately to the Count of Ferber in his bitterness of spirit, and, as he later states to Samuel Halberstadt, he is a little fearful that in his grief he might have said things which would offend the honor of the Count. Significant is his closing sentence to Halberstadt, "I am not able to continue because of my great sorry and worry."[15]

He is fully cognizant of Jewish disabilities. He himself has suffered because of them. What irks him mostly are the inconsistencies that abound in the Christian attitude. A Jew can register a mortgage in his own name without official permission, whether the debtor is Jew or Christian, but that same Jew cannot have possessions "even as little a thing as citizenship" without especial permission.[16]

Fervent believer in Judaism, he lauds Prussian justice to the

skies in a court decision against two Jewesses who had turned Christian. "May Justice be blessed in Prussian lands! Herr Moses Chalven's two daughters have forsaken their religion and want to upset the will which provides that if a child be converted he is to be cut off from the entail; and they have lost their lawsuit in every court." Gleefully he adds in a postscript, "I have just learned that the heirs of Moses Chalven have not had enough fun. The daughters who have been converted have taken other steps, and still hope to attain their goal."[17]

The best Mendelssohn can wish for Jewish children is that they be nurtured in piety and good conduct, not in wealth or glory.[18] He is a firm believer in education of the youth in matters Jewish and non-Jewish. He hails the Emperor's decree founding secular schools for the Jewish young.[19] He hopes for a century when Jewish scholarship will once again flourish.[20]

He does not have a high opinion of the wealthy Jews of Berlin. The poor Jew cannot accomplish anything without first submitting his proposal for the approval of the magnates. To Fromet he remarks, "You think too nobly to be able to get a correct idea of a rich Berlin citizen." He intends to see to it that she has nothing to do with them after marriage, so that she will not be spoiled in any way.[21] He will not deceive her by picturing them in glowing terms.[22] It is his firm conviction that they are not disposed to friendship. Benjamin Veitel Ephraim, for example, appears to be a friend of the Gugenheim household, but "only in the way wealthy men are friends."[23] They trust each other so little that they have their spies all over the country in the mercantile establishments of their rivals.[24] And their promises are all right, just so long as they

do not have to fulfill them.[25] Further remarks of the same nature are found in other letters.[26] Truly, not a complimentary picture of his own wealthy coreligionists.

We find him not overly enthustiastic, either, about his rabbinical and learned coreligionists. He himself is not afraid to fight in behalf of his religion and people. He has no compunctions about his dispute with Lavater; in fact, he wishes it had really been a "dispute". He firmly believes that Jews should not remain silent when they are attacked, especially by such "trashy publications", when they will go to any length to have Judaism recognized as a religion and not a superstition.[27] This does not mean that a Jew should indulge in polemics or apologetics needlessly.[28]

Herz Wessely has written a book (probably Dibre Sholom v'Emes) on the education of the young, which the rabbis are vigorously attacking. Mendelssohn has no patience with them. He demands honest criticism. "It is up to you," he addresses himself to them, "the whole house of Israel, to whom God has given a heart of understanding, to investigate his words with an honest and true standard and to judge between him and his opponents, for judgment belongs to God. And He will make His face shine upon you for the sake of truth and peace, to merit fame and praise among all peoples."[29]

He is disgusted with the attitude of those rabbis who are putting his Pentateuch translation under the ban without even giving him an opportunity to justify it. "Is this just?" he asks.[30] The rabbis are so reactionary that they would never agree to the publication of a book written in Yiddish-Deutsch for the benefit of the young.[31]

On this same matter of education he says, "God knows that my heart is revolted within me and my inwards are being consumed at hearing about the turning and evasion of our brethren who live under the rule of the Kaiser, may God remember him for good, because they take very great pains to nullify the advice of this wise ruler and frustrate his desire, and incite him to anger, for it is said: 'It is a people of no understanding'; he has no delight in fools who do not know what is good for them; they pursue their own counsels." Mendelssohn can be very harsh in his criticism upon occasion. "To this extent has the folly of the ignorant gone, who cannot distinguish between their right and left, or the presumption of the hypocrites, who try to pierce the eyes of those who recognize defects and destructive elements (in the congregation of Israel)."[32]

The rabbis delight in pilpul and hair-splitting.[33] They refuse to adapt themselves to modern conditions. As regards his translation, "the more the so-called wise men of the generation are opposed, the more necessary is it. At first I made it only for the common people, but find it, however, to be more necessary for the rabbis, and desire (if God so decree it and His grace be upon me) to publish also the Prophets and Hagiographia."[34] Jews can always find mistakes and questionable passages in books, when they are disposed to do so.[35]

The marriage contract between Fromet and Mendelssohn has had sufficient attention at our hands by this time to warrant the assumption that as far as Tannaïm are concerned he thinks it is an archaic institution. However, he is still a believer in the Jewish custom of shadchanuth. He

objects to a young man entering a synagogue with his hair cut. These are about all the items available to us in the correspondence under investigation, but it is safe to assert that he was in all respects an observing and observant Jew. He fervently denies any aspersions on the sincerity of his loyalty to Judaism.

We find him always eager and ready to lend a helping hand to his Jewish brethren. His friend Naphtali Herz asks him to see if he can arrange a marriage for his (Naphtali's) son. Mendelssohn promises to look after his friend's interest, and recommends to him a Reb Bezalel, a worthy man and an excellent teacher, who can be the marriage-broker, and needs the money.[36] He recommends the Rabbi of the community of Neuwied to Elkan Herz,[37] and upon another occasion asks Elkan to find a position for a deserving friend.[38] He is at all times ready to intercede in behalf of oppressed communities, as we have seen.[39] Avigdor Levi is a harsh critic of his modernistic views, but Mendelssohn writes to him, "Whatever I can do at any time to contribute to the alleviation of your hard lot I will certainly gladly do."[40] "I am ready day and night to attend to your wishes and do what is best in your eyes," he can write to a friend.[41] When he is in Königsberg he writes to Fromet, evidently knowing that she will not like the idea, that he has invited a worthy individual to stay with them in Berlin. The man is shy and diffident, and needs someone to look out for him.[42] He is always thinking of young and deserving friends, and eager to give them a helping hand.[43]

One of his letters of recommendation merits attention:

"To my dear brothers in Copenhagen, Moses Furst and Joseph Gugenheim, my brotherly blessings and greetings, firstly:

Dear Faithful Brothers: When I recommend any one to you, it is--you can rely on my word--certainly not a man who would deprive you of your money or of your good name, none who in your house or in your kitchen, or in your wine cellar (if you have one), or in your bedroom, would like to play the master; nor one who would offer you a book which you do not need, and would get money from you for that, which you do indeed need; but a man who would rather hope to find your door open and not your purse, one who at the most would only require little of your time, of which people are in any case usually not so stingy, and an hour spent with this man would certainly be anything but lost since his conversations are very useful and instructive so that they would compensate your loss doubly--such a man is Isaac (Abraham) Euchel, who will show you this note, or this letter, or this order-in-council from your brother....."[44] This letter reflects Mendelssohn's delightful sense of humor, evidences of which are found elsewhere.[45]

He is never niggardly in his praise of others' works. To the physician and philosopher, Jehuda ben Mordecai Halevi Hurwitz of Wilna, he extends lavish commendation for his work, "Book of the Pillars of Beth Jehuda". "Every maskil and fearer of the Lord, without flattering or deceiving you, will rejoice in your book," he tells him. "And it must be admitted that many of its words are decorated with sapphires, hewn from wisdom itself, studded with precious stones of Ethics, and the contents embellished with true love of the faith and respect for Torah and Mitzwoth. When the scholars of our generation will come to reflect on the loss of wisdom and the laxity of morals in our midst, they will without a doubt agree to inscribe your words, so that our children might learn wisdom,

knowledge and fear of the Lord, wholeheartedly and with understanding and knowledge of Him."[46]

He assures Jacob Emden that the latter's projected commentary to the Scriptures will certainly find favor in the eyes of his coreligionists who will hasten to subscribe for its publication just as soon as they see a prospectus.[47] He hastens to advise Herz Ullmann that a work by the latter on the existence of God is excellent, and that he (Mendelssohn) would not presume to make any corrections. "It is full of the wisdom and knowledge of God," is his characterization. "The manner of presentation is excellent. This book should be translated into all languages." It grieves Mendelssohn that at the present time he is unable to collect subscriptions for its publication, but he will keep on trying.[48] He gladly subscribes to Wolf Dessau's commentary on Job, chiefly because such a difficult subject has been handled clearly and understandably by the author.[49]

He writes the Bishop of London, Robert Lowth: "To the Cedar in Lebanon, Prince of Torah and Wisdom, High Priest among his brethren, who is in the capital city of London...How shall we greet you, master, we who long for the language of your land and yearn for its dust! How shall we give thanks to you for the good which you have wrought in your very excellent works, either through 'The Sacred Hebrew Poetry' which I have read--and they were as good wine to the palate--or by 'Isaiah, a New Translation', which is especially fine. This I have determined, after seeing that you have arrived at the essence of that precious language and devoted yourself to an explanation of its phrases (poetry), to send you the Pentateuch which I am happy now to sign with a leadpencil....You are the prince. Be so good as to look at it because you are a master of

investigation....I will not trouble you, master, to answer this letter, because I know many things must occupy the time of such a great worker as you, and whom am I to interfere?"[50] The prince in Israel can call one of another faith by the same term. By this time, 1781, he is at the height of his fame. Princes and nobles take pride in his friendship, and yet he is great enough to recognize the true merit of others who labor in the vineyard of the Lord.

Further expressions by him concerning the works of others may also be noted.[51]

He refers to his own works upon occasion: Megillas Esther,[52] Koheleth,[53] Psalms and Jerusalem,[54] Ritual Laws of the Jews published at the request of the Council of State.[55]

Some correspondence passes between him and his coreligionists regarding the matter of his Pentateuch translation. We quote the first of these in full, since in it he gives his reasons for undertaking the project. He is writing to Avigdor Levi of Prague, a relative of Rabbi Zebi Hirsch of Berlin. Mendelssohn appears to have thought a great deal of Avigdor's ability as a scholar; hence his troubling himself to justify the work:

"I am hastening to answer you concerning the extraordinary reason why I did not seek to obtain from the local rabbi (Ezekiel Landau), may God keep and prosper him, approval for the printing of the Pentateuch, so that I shall not appear in your eyes as a foolish man and hasty in my deeds, or as one who exalts himself above the great ones; and I will tell you how it all came about.

"I translated the Pentateuch in German, not to excel in my work and make a name for myself, or to have an axe to grind, but for the

needs of the children with which God favored me. The eldest died and only my son Joseph was left (may God strengthen his heart in His torah). I taught him the German translation so that he would understand the simple sense of the Scripture, until the boy should grow up and be able to understand it for himself. I happened to meet Solomon Dubno, the esteemed grammarian, and I had him teach my son grammar for one hour a day.

"When he (Dubno) saw my translation, he found it favorable and asked me to give him permission to publish it for the benefit of the Jewish children, who study the interpretation of the Scriptures and their translation from the German of inaccurate Christian works. I agreed, but on the condition that concerning every place in my translation where I differ from a preceding commentator, or where I deviated from the accepted opinion to choose a translation which (to me) was more in accord with the language and context or the basic meaning, he should comment on each one of them and write it down, and it should be a brief explanation of the Scriptures, easily understandable to every reader. He did so and added the Tikkun Soferim, and arranged it opposite it (my work); and it is an excellent work of great benefit to the writers on the Torah and to grammarians, as the reader will see after the publication is complete, a specimen of which he has already shown in his paper 'Alim l'truphah. And I also made another condition, that he should share in the work of the publication with my brother Saul, and in its correct appearance, and they should share equally in the proceeds, besides the reward that is kept by God for those who do good works, to make great His Torah and to glorify Him, and to separate the heart of the Jewish youth from strange youth, with which they have been content until now.

"I never thought nor hoped for monetary gain or material fame; I did not even want to have it published in my name; but Dubno urged me to do so for the sake of the many people who desire it and those who pay for it, because the cost of publication is exceedingly great, amounting to the thousands. Therefore, why should I go knocking on the doors of the great men in Israel to seek either approval or refusal, in a matter from which I will not get any benefit at all? Besides, it is a German work for the benefit of the youth and their teachers; and I have never seen these sages and rabbis setting themselves to find a book written in Yiddish-Deutsch and agree to its publication; rather they hinder those who undertake it. If God will favor me to publish a Hebrew work, I will not hesitate to seek permission and approval from the sages, according as is my duty.

"Furthermore, Dubno, author of the Biur and the Tikkun Soferim, did not want at first to obtain approval from the sages for his work, since most of his comments are quotations from the great commentators--Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, and Redak--and he did not deviate to the left or right from their views, except in a few places which a child can list. But in his uprightness he went to get approval from the Chief Rabbi of our community, according to the established custom of not publishing anything new or old without the approval of the Chief Rabbi. He went to the Chief Rabbi of your congregation, and asked him concerning the inverted nun's in the Torah, for we have seen in his (the latter's) work that he devoted himself to thoroughly investigating this matter, and Dubno quoted him in his Tikkun Soferim as an authority. But in some instances he is not clear, and Dubno determined to ask this rabbi about them. The letter was written and left lying on his desk for several days, because the land

of Böhmen until now has been closed up, no one being able to leave or enter. But now, since the inhabitants of that country are at peace with us, there is nothing to prevent him from carrying out his intention, and today he sent his questions to that Gaon; and we hope that our words will find favor in his eyes to show us kindness, and to support Dubno against all his opponents, and also to answer me through one of his disciples."

Mendelssohn closes this letter with the fervent prayer, "May God heal me and steady me to serve Him and fear Him."[56]

We know of the storm of criticism that arose on the appearance of Mendelssohn's translation. The orthodox rabbis would not countenance such a modernistic innovation. A year after this letter, the disillusioned Mendelssohn writes to the same Avigdor Levi, asking him for his "honest criticism" of the book of Genesis.[57] And he tells him some time later that he cannot understand why the rabbis are condemning him and putting the translation under the ban without first giving him a chance to justify it. To him it is not justice. But, "Let them curse me, I will bless them," he avows in the true prophetic spirit.[58]

He is indeed grateful for the words of commendation he receives, and is eager to carefully consider all suggested corrections and embody them when they are acceptable to him.[59] His intentions were of the best--that is his excuse. He realizes that he is a pioneer in the field of translating Hebrew works into the German, and he expects that he has made mistakes. He sincerely thanks a friend who has pointed out some omissions. He decries the attitude of his critics who indulge in hair-splitting without due regard for Hebrew grammar. The real goal of philology is to establish the correct sense of the text, not to distort it. He is very proud of his ability to translate several of the

difficult passages in the Psalms--he even permits himself to boast about his proficiency.[60]

## CHAPTER IV - MENDELSSOHN AND CHRISTIANITY

There are all too few references in this correspondence to give us a clear picture of Mendelssohn's attitude towards Christianity and Christians. This, of course, is accounted for by the fact that the letters at our disposal were written to Jews. We know that he had a large circle of acquaintances in the Christian world, and that he carried on a prolific correspondence with them. This latter, unfortunately, is not under investigation by us; hence, we must content ourselves with whatever gleanings we may discover in our own materials. Few though they are, they are nevertheless valuable in that any opinion expressed is not influenced by the consciousness that it is addressed to a Christian.

We have already dealt with Herr Bode who was Fromet's French tutor and whom Mendelssohn finally decided as an anti-semite.[1] He does not accept Fromet's suggestion that he write to Bode urging him to continue tutoring Fromet. "I think, however, it is superfluous," he says, "to try to appeal to one who has pledged himself so often not only for satisfactory wages but also as regards being courteous. I have embraced the gentleman enough. If, however, he is an anti-semite, then he does not deserve that one should seek his company. I really believe that my courtesy in giving him a copy of my writings did deserve a reply. Be so, good, therefore, and let him know that if he does not want to come, to be so kind as to tell you how much is owing to him and to recommend someone else in his place....Nothing disturbs me so much as when a Christian holds my friendship so dear, and at heart thinks he has lowered himself by being

intimate with an Israelite (Bar Yisroel). As soon as I am aware of that, I become very proud."[2]

Mendelssohn throws himself heart and soul into the Lavater controversy, although "all my life I kept myself from every religious disputation and argument."[3] We are made aware of his disgust at the whole affair by the following: "After I began to speak and refute the words of that irresponsible one, all the men of that religion and those who support it descended upon me from all sides--this one came in his furious anger, this one with tender, nice and flattering speeches, this one praised, and that one mocked--for this is their manner, and from all this they confused me with their words and their visions. But I trusted in the Lord my strength--He will make me steadfast for His war--and He put into my heart what I should say, and I knew that I would not be ashamed. And for a month I have read the riddle which he (Lavater) propounded, and the next which he created through fine and innocent words. And I shall tell the truth, that I have not solved this riddle, since I have never tried such a thing, and I always have loved to clearly explain that which comes to my mind and to make clear my meaning as the noonday sun, not to cover it with darkness and cloud." He cannot refrain from comparing their method to that of his own people: "However, I do not blame this course of action, for I have seen among the great and wise men of Israel that they love to spin riddles and to hide the meaning in the secret of a parable."[4]

At least he is happy that the "great men of Israel and the princes of the Torah" are supporting him in this controversy and vouching for everything he has written. Triumphantly does he point out that he is a true traditionalist. We note that his first task was to satisfy the

orthodox among his brethren that he himself was orthodox and capable of fighting their cause.[5] The pamphlets issued against him and Judaism he dismisses as trashy literature, and "he who has brains in his head" must understand that they are senseless.[6]

The Kölbeles among the Christians do not disturb him nearly as much as the Kölbeles of his own faith who attach so much importance to the minutiae of ritual and forget the spirit underlying it.[7] He laughs heartily at Kölbele's accusation that he is a deist. Any sensible person ought to see the unreasonableness of such an allegation upon reading Mendelssohn's writings. His opponent, however, "is dishonest enough to appear ignorant."[8]

Mendelssohn labored for a long while to obtain the "Right of Settling". He irked at the restrictions put upon him in Berlin as a foreigner.[9] When he finally does obtain it for himself and Fromet,[10] he triumphantly announces to her, "I have some news for you. Yesterday our Right of Settling was granted. Now you are...a Prussian subject and must espouse the Prussian cause. You will, therefore, believe everything that is Prussian to be good, which is to our advantage. The Russians, Turks and Americans all are at our service and are just waiting for our nod. Our coinage will become better than Banko; the whole world will seek security in Berlin, and our exchange will become famous from the court-yard to our house. You must believe all this, for you have the Right of Settling in Berlin." How he mocks at the attitude which regards Berlin as the El Dorado, as the fashionable center of the world![11] He knows that his innocent young bride will feel very strange when she comes there, and we have noted how he urges her to begin the process of adjustment by

learning the French language.[12] What the rich citizens in Berlin want to see is a country yokel, clad in rags and making a fool of himself.[13]

Of his friendship with Lessing we have but one reference in this correspondence. In a letter to Fromet he relates a joke he has played on Lessing by affixing a humorous dedication to the copy of the writings sent him. Mendelssohn fears that his friend will be vexed.[14] Of his friendship with the other great German of his time, Kant, these letters likewise contain a reference.[15]

## NOTES

### CHAPTER I

1. Letter No. 6.
2. No. 7.
3. Ibid.
4. See especially Nos. 23, 30, 38, 55.
5. No. 8.
6. No. 11.
7. No. 21.
8. No. 29. The same thought is expressed in No. 34.
9. No. 30.
10. No. 32.
11. No. 35.
12. No. 32.
13. No. 13.
14. No. 34.
15. No. 37.
16. Nos. 4 and 27.
17. No. 15.
18. Ibid.
19. No. 25.
20. No. 19.
21. No. 21.
22. No. 30.
23. No. 36.

24. No. 55.

25. No. 36.

26. No. 13.

27. No. 26.

28. Nos. 28, 29.

29. No. 64.

30. No. 49.

31. No. 79.

32. No. 72.

33. No. 8.

34. No. 28.

35. No. 4.

36. No. 29.

37. No. 4.

38. Nos. 4, 18,20.

39. No. 13.

40. No. 17.

41. No. 59.

42. No. 48.

43. No. 49.

44. No. 73.

45. No. 82.

46. No. 35.

47. No. 44.

48. No. 53.

49. No. 57.

50. No. 28.

51. No. 33.

52. No. 29.

53. No. 37.

54. No. 13.

55. No. 17.

56. No. 34.

57. No. 21.

58. No. 23.

59. No. 25.

60. No. 44.

61. No. 73.

62. No. 56.

63. Nos. 74, 77, 82.

64. No. 83.

65. No. 4.

66. No. 78.

67. No. 40.

68. No. 8.

69. No. 30.

70. Nos. 7, 11, 32.

71. No. 37.

72. No. 29.

73. Nos. 73, 84.

74. No. 84.

CHAPTER II

1. No. 42.
2. No. 65.
3. No. 49.
4. No. 6.
5. No. 14.
6. No. 20.
7. No. 19.
8. No. 7.
9. No. 31; in this same regard see Nos. 196 and 199 concerning Joseph Gugenheim's financial situation.
10. No. 8.
11. No. 33.
12. No. 29.
13. No. 37.
14. No. 84.
15. No. 75.
16. No. 196.
17. No. 37.
18. No. 61.
19. No. 72.
20. No. 76.
21. No. 83.
22. No. 85.
23. No. 35.
24. No. 15.

25. No. 22.

26. No. 23.

27. No. 32.

28. Nos.,4, 35.

29. See his correspondence with Elkan, Nos. 207ff.

30. Nos. 27, 40, 46, 52, 75, 199, 244.

31. Nos. 42, 46, 83.

32. No. 170.

33. No. 199.

35. Nos. 35, 53.

36. No. 33.

37. No. 7.

38. No. 236.

39. No. 252.

40. No. 7.

41. No. 19.

42. No. 248.

43. No. 94.

44. No. 118.

45. No. 267.

46. No. 22.

47. No. 19.

48. Nos. 62, 63.

49. No. 19.

50. No. 125.

51. No. 23.

52. No. 87.

53. No. 38.

54. No. 39.

55. No. 40.

56. No. 23.

57. No. 27.

58. No. 38.

59. No. 118.

60. No. 160.

61. No. 38.

62. Nos. 29, 63.

63. No. 42.

64. Nos. 11, 38.

65. No. 26.

66. No. 50.

67. No. 55.

68. No. 11.

69. Nos. 14, 17, 18.

70. Nos. 21, 24, 47.

71. No. 203.

CHAPTER III

1. No. 127.

2. No. 129.

3. No. 120.

4. No. 120.

5. No. 27.

6. No. 26.

7. No. 49.

8. No. 118.

9. No. 117.

10. No. 133.

11. No. 135.

12. No. 93.

13. No. 108.

14. No. 205.

15. No. 206.

16. No. 262.

17. No. 279.

18. No. 189.

19. No. 254.

20. No. 273.

21. No. 21.

22. No. 36.

23. No. 32.

24. No. 63.

25. No. 84.

26. Nos. 1, 47.

27. No. 125.

28. No. 118.

29. No. 254.

30. No. 248.

31. No. 227.

32. No. 254.

33. No. 272.

34. No. 277.

35. No. 282.

36. No. 94.

37. No. 120.

38. No. 213.

39. Nos. 133, 206.

40. No. 160.

41. No. 188.

42. No. 203.

43. Nos. 217, 242, 274.

44. No. 275.

45. Nos. 8, 17, 21, 33, 36, 38, etc.

46. No. 92.

47. No. 135.

48. No. 179.

49. No. 190.

50. No. 239.

51. Nos. 280, 281, 282.

52. No. 118.

53. Nos. 126, 232.

54. Nos. 267, 273.

55. No. 279.

56. No. 227.

57. No. 236.

58. No. 248.

59. Nos. 252, 263, 272, 277.

60. No. 272.

CHAPTER IV

1. Nos. 17, 52, 59.

2. No. 59.

3. No. 118.

4. No. 118.

5. No. 120.

6. No. 125.

7. No. 127

8. No. 129.

9. Nos. 21, 44, 63, 71.

10. No. 72.

11. No. 32.

12. No. 17.

13. No. 70.

14. No. 42.

15. Nos. 196, 200.