

The Rev. Dr. Joseph Chotzner

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I believe it is quite some time since your Society, Mr. Chairman, has been addressed on matters Hibernian. If I am not mistaken, this was done last on 4 May 1931, when my friend Mr. Bernard Shillman,¹ of Dublin, read a paper on 'The Jews in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century', with the late Mr. Gustave Tuck occupying your seat. Mr. Shillman has since published this and other papers in a little volume under the title of *A Short History of the Jews in Ireland*. This book, as well as the more direct contacts I had with him recently, were of great assistance to me in my researches into the history of the Jewish community in Belfast, and I gratefully acknowledge his kindness. Another historian of Irish Jewry is Mr. Louis Hyman, of Haifa, whose manuscript 'History of the Jews in Ireland' I was fortunate enough to be able to consult not long ago, and may I abuse your Society's hospitality tonight by making an urgent appeal that this solid and indeed important piece of historical scholarship ought to be helped into print as soon as possible, and who should take the initiative in such an enterprise if not the Jewish Historical Society of England? Aren't we then John Bull's other island? I add that neither Mr. Shillman nor Mr. Hyman was able to devote much space to the main subject of my paper: the Rev. Dr. Joseph Chotzner.

At this introductory stage it is only right that I should express my sincere thanks for the help I had from my friend Mr. J. M. Shaftesley, O.B.E., the former Editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, and also from Mr. C. C. Aronsfeld, of the Wiener Library. Others, too, have been helpful and must be content with a blanket acknowledgment.

Apart, of course, from primary sources, references to my subject can be found in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (IV, p. 46) and in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (V, pp. 524-525), as well as in successive volumes of the *Jewish Year Book*. Chotzner even found his way into *Stigilla Veri*, Philipp Stauff's antisemitic handbook, the

Semi-Kürschner (1929, I, p. 1007). In Brann's *Geschichte des Jüdisch-Theologischen Seminars in Breslau (Festschrift zum 50 jährigen Jubiläum der Anstalt)*, of 1894, he occupies his place as one of that seminary's alumni with a list of publications, no doubt supplied by himself, with well over 30 items listed. I was struck by the fact that more space was devoted to my early predecessor than to the illustrious Hermann Cohen, who follows him immediately in Brann's history of his great college. Chotzner, it is true, stayed the course (in more senses than one), whereas Cohen found fame in the wider world of philosophy, though he later, much later, returned to the *אכסניא של תורה*, the sacred precincts of Jewish scholarship. But Brann, though a great scholar, was no prophet. A reference to Dr. Chotzner, his life-story and his works, is also to be found in Cardozo and Goodman's *Think and Thank* account of the Montefiore College at Ramsgate, of which later.

None of the works mentioned can, however, lay claim to either completeness or unquestionable accuracy, and I have endeavoured in my paper to fill in the gaps and correct errors or ambiguities within the limits which time and space imposed on my researches. Let us not be too hard on the historian, whose path is beset by many traps and potholes. This is a paper commemorating what we thought was the centenary of the foundation of the Belfast Hebrew Congregation. It is, up to a point. In the entrance hall of what was till two and a half months ago the Belfast Synagogue could be seen a copper plaque put up in 1904 by Sir Otto Jaffe, 'whose esteemed father [so it says] the late D. J. Jaffé, Esq., erected in 1861 the Great Victoria Street Synagogue'. This 'monumental' evidence, which every archæologist a thousand years hence would accept as unimpeachable, is a monumental error, being just 10 years out, as we shall see. A similar fate hangs over the crucial year of 1864. All that happened then was, as the, I trust, unimpeach-

able *Jewish Chronicle* reports, 'that Divine Service was performed for the first time in Belfast' in the home of Martin Jaffé, Daniel's eldest son and Otto's brother, at Holywood, just outside Belfast. These services were held, so the report has it, 'under the auspices of the Rev. Dr. Adler', whatever that may mean. But what's in a date? There is no direct reference to be found to the actual founding of a congregation in Belfast except in a report of the aforementioned organ of British Jewry of 14 July 1871 on the laying of the foundation-stone of the Great Victoria Street Synagogue, which refers to the fact that the congregation was constituted 'scarcely two years ago'. You might therefore consider it right and proper that this meeting stand adjourned until some unspecified date in 1969. But may I suggest that those Divine Services on the High Holydays in 1864 be, *pro tem.*, taken as the *terminus a quo* for, let us call it, the conception if not the actual birth of the great congregation of which I happen to have the honour of being the spiritual head for the time being.

This congregation owed its inception to the fact that a handful of German-Jewish families, who were neither poor nor devoid of general culture, had settled in Belfast, capital of linen-producing Ulster, from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. Most prominent among them was the Jaffé family already mentioned: Daniel, scion of one of the great rabbinic families of Europe, which had produced Mordechai Jaffé, Chief Rabbi of Prague and author of the halachic compendium *Levush*, second in importance only to the *Shulchan Aruch* itself. Daniel was the founder of the congregation and builder of its first synagogue, Martin its first Hon. Secretary, Sir Otto its President for many years, builder of its second synagogue (whose simple beauty and dignity will be long remembered even by those who worship now in its no less beautiful and strikingly modern successor), High Sheriff and twice Lord Mayor of the city of Belfast. It was men like these who made up by their pioneering spirit and by their high sense of civic and communal responsibility what the budding congregation lacked in numbers, which, according to the official census, were no more

than 52 in 1861 and 55 in 1871—in the whole of Ulster.

Let us return, then, to 1864, the *annus mirabilis* in the life of the Belfast Jewish community, and once again to the indispensable *Jewish Chronicle* of 15 January, which quoted the Paris *Univers Israélite*, which in turn had quoted from an advertisement in a German-Jewish paper 'that a minister of the non-orthodox *culte* was required for the congregation about to be formed at Belfast, Ireland', with the Editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* adding rather tartly: 'should there really be a sufficient number of coreligionists at Belfast to form a congregation?' Well, apparently there was, to say the least, a good *Minyan*—and what more do we want? It may appear to us odd that the organ of British Jewry had to obtain its intelligence on matters going on under its very nose, so to speak, from second- or even third-hand Continental sources, but even today we read about our juiciest scandals in Continental or transatlantic papers. It matters little, the advertisement produced results, or rather a result, in the person of Dr. Joachim Joseph Chotzner, who thus became Belfast's first Jewish minister.

Who was Joseph Chotzner? He had been born on 11 May 1844 in the ancient city of Cracow in that part of Poland which had fallen to Austria under the various partitions of that country. We know nothing about his family background or his childhood, apart perhaps from some oblique references in his Memoir, *Zichronoth*, published in Hebrew in London in 1885, where we read of a young boy sent away from home and put in charge of a wicked, widowed landlady and of a cruel and ignorant drunkard of a *Melamed* (teacher). At the age of 19 he was admitted into the Jewish Theological Seminary, which had been founded by Zacharias Frankel nine years before and which was then in its heyday, the teaching staff including besides Frankel such men as Jacob Bernays, Heinrich Graetz, B. Zuckermann, and Manuel Joel. Chotzner, no doubt, joined first what was called the undergraduate department of the college, where, in addition to Jewish studies, pupils were prepared for matriculation at Breslau University in classical

and other subjects. In his book just quoted, Chotzner paints a lively and humorous picture of his student days, filled with poor and eccentric students, occasionally of the eternal kind, with shrewish landladies and all sorts of *Batlanim* (*Luftmenschen*—layabouts), describing a long succession of festive meals and convivialities, for which students in Germany have always been famous. He makes no secret of his aversion to serious study and his preference for writing and publishing poetry. On the other hand, in later years he wrote with great veneration of his teacher Frankel, with whom he had weekly five Talmud lessons in the old style and one 'lecture', during which no questions or *pilpul*, hairsplitting, were permitted. Frankel, so he writes, was revered as a teacher and loved as a man. We may assume that this student, as many others, received a bursary from the college, and I have a suspicion that the 40 Thaler which, according to the *Jahresbericht* of 1866, the Cracow community gave to the Seminary for one of its students, were meant for no other than our man Chotzner. According to the college's historian, Brann, he was at the college from 1863 to 1866, and, taking into consideration the two years' 'undergraduate' course, he could not in the remaining year or so have obtained any rabbinic qualifications, the course for which was meant to take seven years! Chotzner must have devoted the following years to 1869 to his university studies, in preparation for his doctorate. On the title-page of his Hebrew translation of Bodensiedt's *Songs of Mirza-Schaffy*, published in Breslau in 1868, he appears as 'Joseph Chotzner, stud. phil.' (student of philosophy, meaning an arts student), and I assume that he obtained his doctorate on the basis of this little volume, of which more presently. This was not his first publication, another small volume of humoristic essays and poems in Hebrew having appeared in Breslau in 1864 under the title of *Leyl Shimmurim* ('Watch Night'). Here, then, was a budding writer, poet, linguist, and theologian, who fell for whatever allurements the twice-reported advertisements of the as yet non-existent Jewish congregation of remote Belfast seemed to offer.

We are fortunate, indeed, to be able to accompany our 25-year-old curate on his journey by sea from Hamburg to Belfast. In the Hebrew weekly *Hammaggid* of 1 September 1869 there appeared the first of a long series of *reportages* under the heading of *מכתבים מאירלנד* ('Letters from Ireland', later called 'Letters from Belfast') and signed both in Hebrew *יוסף ג' שלמה*—note the Sephardi-medieval manner—and in English, or rather German: Dr. Chotzner. He tells the amusing story that, having been seen off in Hamburg by a friend who from the quayside called to him, 'Happy voyage, doctor!', he was called in the middle of the night to give medical assistance to a woman who claimed that her labour had started. He had great difficulty in convincing captain, crew, and passengers that his doctorate referred to poetry rather than maternity. Chotzner, in this letter, raves over the beauty of Ireland, as well he might; Belfast had then already a population of 150,000, who, the writer was not slow to observe, being very religious and Sabbatarian, amply filled the city's many churches. His own congregation was still rather small (he observes), leaving him a good deal of time for the reading and reviewing of books, which he begs authors and publishers to send him at 67 Inkerman Terrace.

So Belfast had a minister and, before 1869 was out, an established congregation as well. On 7 July 1871 Daniel Jaffé laid the foundation-stone of a synagogue in Great Victoria Street (later to become an Orange Free Hall and now for sale), which, holding about 80 worshippers, was completed in 1872. Ten days only after the laying of the foundation-stone there arrived in Belfast from Dublin Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler, accompanied by his son and later successor Dr. Hermann Adler, for what the *Jewish Chronicle* picturesquely called 'a pastoral visitation'. Though Chotzner had not been deemed worthy of note in the *J.C.*'s report on the foundation-stone ceremony, the Chief Rabbi, according to the same paper, referred to the fact that the new building included a residence for the minister, the Rev. Dr. Chotzner. Two aspects of this pastoral visit may be of interest here. One might have expected the new minister, before taking up

his post, to present himself to the Chief Rabbi in London for approval and confirmation. Then, as now, the Chief Rabbi watched with understandable jealousy over this right as far as the lower clergy was concerned. Chotzner, it appeared, had bypassed London, but no doubt obtained Rabbi Adler's accolade on the occasion of this visit if not earlier, as we have another letter from his pen in the *Hammaggid* of 24 November 1869 reporting a visit to London, its splendour and its traffic (already then!), its many synagogues and the mischievous activities of the missionaries. (The same letter, by the way, reports agitation in Belfast against the Vatican Council.) The other point of interest is that the Chief Rabbi used the opportunity to call upon Belfast to become one of the United Congregations of the British Empire—which they did and never ceased to be. Dr. Roth, in his article on the Chief Rabbinate of England in the Hertz *Festschrift*, makes no reference to this nomenclature at such an early date, though some such body had been formed in 1844 for the election of Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler.

With a congregation then and a synagogue, prospects were set fair for Dr. Chotzner's ministry.

By 1872 he must have taken up residence in the apartment provided for him in the synagogue building. Arriving to all appearances a bachelor, he married soon after his arrival in Belfast. I can tell you nothing about the fair lady of his choice. To her he dedicated a volume entitled *Hebrew Humour and Other Essays*, published by Luzac & Co., of London, in 1905. A son, Alfred James, was born in 1873; he was educated at Harrow School—for reasons which will become evident later—and at St. John's College, Cambridge, where he was a scholar and prizeman and gained four gold medals. He married Kathleen, a daughter of Israel Davis,² the redoubtable owner-editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*—in one form or another—from 1878 to 1906.

Alfred James Chotzner entered the Indian Civil Service and, in the heyday of British Imperialism, became a judge at Chittagong, Bengal, and rose eventually to the High Court of Judicature, Calcutta. Returning to England

in 1930 he entered Parliament as Conservative M.P. for Upton from 1931 to 1934, and died in 1945. Another Chotzner, John Raymond (his son?), of Colchester, appears in 1938 as one of several counsel, six of whom were K.C.s ('a wealth of learning and talent', remarked one of them), in an action before Mr. Justice Langton in the Probate Court in London over the will of Joseph John Jaffé, who had died at Nice in 1934 at the age of 91, leaving enormous estate both in Britain and in France. No wonder that the problem of probate for his will or wills attracted lawyers galore, and it is a curious coincidence that one of them should be a Chotzner, whose grandfather had been the protégé of both Daniel and Otto, father and brother respectively of the testator in question.

Back, then, to Joseph Chotzner. It must have been a very leisurely ministry in those days, with a congregation less than a twentieth of its size today. What were his duties? A letter published in the *Jewish Chronicle* of 19 September 1879, and written by a certain Joe Freeman in protest against an editorial suggestion of the previous issue that the Belfast community was on the decline, refers to 'the lectures occasionally delivered in the neat little synagogue by our respected minister, the Rev. Dr. Chotzner'. A few years earlier, Chotzner writes ruefully on the dangers of pluming oneself with someone else's sermons, which, I am sure, he had no need to do. *Cela ne se fait pas*. It may be asked in what language these sermons were delivered. Maybe, at first at least, he used German, which was then still the mother-tongue of most of his congregants. But by 1879 that excellent linguist must have been quite proficient in English, if he did not possess it already on arrival. This is also borne out by his lectures given to non-Jewish audiences, of which I shall speak presently.

The letter referred to also boasts the possession of a communal *Shochet*. Could Belfast then have afforded a *Shochet* in addition to a minister? Or was *Shechita* one more accomplishment of Chotzner's? It is most unlikely, though in his letter to the *Hammaggid* of 29 September 1875 he writes of the fate of the Rabbi and preacher in small communities, who is unable to follow the general fashion of taking holidays, because

he had also to carry out the functions of a *Shochet*; and this has a distinctly personal ring. Writing in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* of 9 October 1896, and giving a profile of Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler and describing his multifarious duties, he mentions among them 'examining a *Shochet* who has just arrived in the country'. But these references are mere straws in the wind.

In any event, he preached; no doubt also conducted the entire service, and gave religious instruction to the few children there were. For this we have the word of A. I. Myers's *Jewish Directory* for 1874, which states that 'instruction in Hebrew and religion is given at the residence of Rev. Chotzner'. Then already—the date is 1877—he complained in the *Hammaggid* about the Barmitzvah boys who sing and don't know what they sing. By 1878 there must have been felt the need for organised charity within the Jewish community, and a Philanthropic Society (*חברת גמילות חסדים*) was formed, with Chotzner as president, for the granting of interest-free loans, 'which shows', writes J. F. in the letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* already mentioned, 'that we are not unmindful of encouraging by timely assistance poor families resident in the town'. Chotzner, in his press reports, moans and groans about the nuisance of migrant *Shnorrers* (beggars), sometimes introducing themselves with respectable references which bore no relationship to their true character and shady antecedents. These, too, were in need of charity, both financial and moral.

I have mentioned that Chotzner frequently addressed non-Jewish audiences, then as now one of the regular and doubtless important chores of a provincial minister. That he should have been able to do so was not as obvious in Belfast as it may have been in other places less charged with religious fervour, or shall I say fanaticism. When Dr. M. J. Raphall, that well-known Anglo-Jewish and later American-Jewish preacher, educationalist, and publicist, came to Belfast in 1845 to deliver lectures on the Hebrew Scriptures, 'he was [in the words of Benn's *History of Belfast*] countenanced by the intelligent inhabitants, but a rabble gathered at the place, and with drums, noises

and riot prevented the lecture proceeding'. (This event has been variously and erroneously pre-dated to 1814.) There were no 'drums, noises and riot' when Chotzner addressed the Rev. Mr. Street's Church on 'Modern Judaism' early in 1876. On the contrary, not only did the *Jewish Chronicle* in a leader commend the Belfast minister on his enterprise, which must have been even then something of a novelty, but the (Unitarian) *Free World* joined in the chorus of praise, at the same time complimenting the Jewish community on the freedom of thought which apparently prevailed in its midst. 'In this matter [writes the paper] the Jews are certainly in advance of so many so-called orthodox Christians who are so anxious to convert Jews and who would be better converted to some of the charity characterising modern Judaism.' And the speaker had apparently quoted some Talmudic passages in support of this contention. Though this lecture was published in Belfast and obtainable at the price of sixpence, I was not fortunate enough to find a copy even in Belfast itself and to check on the speaker's conception of modern Judaism. He must have expressed himself strongly and courageously on the activities of the mission to the Jews, and this theme recurs again and again in his letters to the Hebrew and German-Jewish press. He was fully conversant with the religious bigotry so prevalent in Ireland and in Ulster in particular. (One Gentile correspondent [Isaac Hempton] went so far as to criticise, in the *Jewish Chronicle*, Jewish laxity in the observance of the Sabbath.) Chotzner also shared the view, occasionally heard even today, that the antagonism between Protestants and Catholics in Ulster somehow benefited the Jews. Whether true or not at that time, this theory does not commend itself to thinking people nowadays. He compared favourably (not to his Gentile audiences, of course) the sobriety of the Jews and their interest in the education and advance of their children with the drunkenness and low life among the non-Jewish masses. On the other hand, he had some sharp criticism to make of the lack of secular education and professional training among immigrants from Eastern Europe, who were thus thrown on undesirable occupations, such

as moneylending. But people like that, he complained, are allowed to play an important role in communal life and would not part with a single *Piyut* (liturgical poem) in the synagogue service.

The lecture on Modern Judaism did not remain an isolated event. He spoke on the Talmud to the Church of the 2nd Congregation in Rosemary Street; on Heinrich Heine and Lessing to the Mountpottinger Mutual Improvement Society and to some Sunday school. He also read various papers to the Belfast Literary Society, the oldest learned society in Belfast, now over 150 years old and with a limited and select membership. Like my immediate predecessor and myself, Chotzner was elected as one of its members. Two of his papers were published in New York in those years: one on 'Immanuel of Rome, a Great Hebrew Satirist', in 1877 (it had appeared in the original German before then); the other on 'Hebrew Poetry During the Middle Ages', in 1878.

In 1876 we see Dr. Chotzner active in the wider Anglo-Jewish community. He attended the annual meeting of the Anglo-Jewish Association as a Belfast representative and was asked to propose a vote of thanks. Articles of his began to appear in the *Jewish Chronicle*, such as one series on the *Piyutim*, and he answered queries in a special column which was at the time a regular feature of that paper. And we may assume that, as long as he was in Belfast, he acted as the *Chronicle's* local correspondent.

Some time in 1880 Dr. Chotzner left Belfast for Harrow; Harrow-on-the-Hill and the famous school that bears its name. What did he do in Harrow? What was his position? Somehow and somewhere the legend was allowed to grow that he was Hebrew Tutor at Harrow School and a member of its staff. On the title-page of *Humour and Irony in the Bible*, an article-lecture published by Chotzner in Harrow in 1883, he calls himself 'Rev. Dr. Chotzner, late minister of the Belfast Hebrew Congregation'. His *Zichronoth*, to which I have referred above and was published in London in 1885, give on the title-page the author's name as 'the Rev. Dr. Chotzner' and no more. But

he dedicated these Hebrew memoirs (with their introductory essay in English on post-Biblical Hebrew poetry) 'To the Very Rev. H. M. Butler, D.D., Dean of Gloucester and Late Head Master of Harrow School'. When the volume *Hebrew Humour and Other Essays* appeared in London in 1905, the author is styled 'Late Hebrew Tutor at Harrow', and it is the same for *Hebrew Satire*, out in 1911. In an article on Byron and his Hebrew Melodies in *Rahmer's Literaturblatt* of February 1884, he purports to write 'from Harrow College'. This is rather explicit, though the earlier 'at Harrow' is less so. Even the late Paul Goodman, in his part of *Think and Thank*, speaks of Chotzner as 'house-master and teacher of Hebrew at Harrow School' (p. 179). What was the true position?

Well, it can all be found in cold print in the Harrow School Register (1800-1911), p. 916, where a footnote reads:

Up to the middle of the last century certain of the Curates of Harrow and other responsible persons in the town received Boarders (e.g., the Rev. R. J. Knight, 1854-61), but they were not technically House Masters. Dr. Chotzner also had a House for Jews from 1881 to 1892.

I am indebted to the secretary of the Headmaster of that famous school for drawing my attention to this needle in a big haystack. In fact, in its issue of 15 October 1880, the *Jewish Chronicle* announced on a note of triumph that the Headmaster of Harrow, acting on the authority of the Governors, had licensed the Rev. Joseph Chotzner to keep a small house for Jewish boys to be educated 'at this great Public School'. A special editorial was devoted to this event, revealing that up to then Harrow had a *numerus clausus* admitting only six Jewish boys, which was now increased to a full dozen. Those select six had up to now been quartered with the (non-Jewish) drawing master, though they did observe *Kashruth* and *Shabbat*, being allowed to spend that day at home with their families. The new arrangement made it possible for the Jewish boys to receive religious instruction on Sabbath and Sunday and also to catch up on Sunday with lessons missed on Saturday.

What happened, then, was that Dr. Chotzner, with the approval and, indeed, co-operation of the school, had a private house which received Jewish pupils at Harrow School, who were thus enabled to lead a Jewish life, observe *Kashruth*, etc., and, no doubt, benefit from religious instruction given by the reverend head of the house. This is really all and no more than the somewhat grandiloquent 'Hebrew Tutor at Harrow' implied. Perhaps we should not judge too severely the obvious attempt to catch the maximum reflection of glory from an association with this public school. As Paul Goodman writes, this 'attempted segregation of Jewish boys was ultimately not considered desirable' and Dr. Chotzner had to move on, as we shall see. We now can understand how his obviously gifted son obtained admission to such an exclusive establishment, a favour amply justified by his subsequent career. During these 12 years some 40 to 50 Jewish boys were able to enter the school, all coming from the upper crust, financially and socially speaking, of Anglo-Jewry. There is no knowing how many of those were entrusted to the care, physical and spiritual, of the Rev. Dr. Chotzner, but surely a good proportion, large enough to make 'Beeligh House'—that was the name—an economic proposition. Reading through the Register of the relevant years, it was the name of Charles Emanuel³ above all that caught my eye; he later made an important contribution to Anglo-Jewish life and history. (That the name of Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill occurs during the same period is purely incidental.) Two scions of the Rubens family also were at Harrow in the Chotzner era. Let me add that a house such as this had an important role to play in the preservation of Jewishness in the offspring of families from which some of the leaders of our religious community were recruited.

During his years at Harrow, Chotzner continued to write and to lecture. I have mentioned already *Humour and Irony of the Hebrew Bible*, a paper published at Harrow in 1883; and also *Zichronoth*, his student memoirs, published in Hebrew by David Nutt, 270 Strand, in 1885, with an 8-page preface in English on 'The Rise and Progress of Hebrew

Poetry in Post-Biblical Times'. (This Hebrew book, by the way, is the only one of Chotzner's numerous publications which has found its way into Dr. Roth's *Magna Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica*.) A lecture on 'Art among the Ancient Hebrews', delivered to the Jews' College Literary Society in 1886, was published in the *Jewish Chronicle* and reprinted in the Society's Transactions. A paper 'On the Life and Social Position of Hebrew Women in Biblical Times' read before the Society for Biblical Archaeology, was printed in the sixth volume of its Transactions, and what must be more or less the same lecture appeared in the *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review* of 1894. Chotzner was a great one in what one may call 'intellectual economy' in refurbishing, repeating, publishing, and republishing papers and articles (some of which he carried in his German knapsack when sailing from Hamburg) and in several languages, French included, until they found a final resting place in his collected essays, *Hebrew Humour*, of 1905. In his Harrow days began his connection with the young *Jewish Quarterly Review*, under Montefiore and Abrahams, and his first article on 'Isaac Erter: A Modern Hebrew Humorist', appeared in its third volume in 1891. So did, in the next year, 'Immanuel di Romi [*sic!*], a 13th-century Hebrew Poet and Novelist', now seeing the light of day for the third time. From 1879 to 1894 he regularly contributed articles to the well-reputed *Rahmers Jüdisches Literaturblatt* as well as continuing his letters to the *Hammagid* up to 1900 and perhaps beyond. One of the articles in the *Literaturblatt* of 1893, by the way, deals with 'the past and present Jewish population of Ireland'; to my regret I was unable to trace the volume containing this article.

Having to give up his work and livelihood in Harrow, where was Chotzner to turn? In the event he returned to his old post in Belfast. In the account-books of the Belfast Hebrew Congregation of 1893—there are no minutes extant for that period—the name of Dr. Chotzner is mentioned for the first time under the date of 13 June. He then received the princely salary of £13 per quarter, £1 per week and free residence, once more in Great

Victoria Street. The minutes, available from November 1897, refer to an annual sum of £50 received, through Chief Rabbi Dr. Adler, from a London society as a subsidy for Rev. Chotzner, who by that date had again left Belfast. However happy he may have been during his first ministry—and there is nothing to suggest that he was not—he cannot have felt very content in this second period. The complexion of the congregation had meanwhile undergone a radical change. The original German-Jewish founder families were now very much in a minority, to the extent that they were still there at all. Immigrants from Russia, and to a lesser extent from Poland, were the dominant element. Some of them had seceded from the existing congregation and established their own synagogue (or Beth Hamedrash). Chotzner, who by now was thoroughly anglicised—or had been so from the start!—was out of sympathy with the manners, the business ethics, and, above all, the religious outlook of the newcomers. We get a glimpse of his attitude, or rather prejudices, in one of his early letters from England, which, beginning with the issue of 27 December 1895, he contributed to the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, one of the leading Jewish weeklies in Germany from its foundation in 1837 by Ludwig Philippson to its demise in 1921. During the years of Chotzner's letters, from 1895 to 1913, the paper was edited first by Gustav Karpeles and then by Ludwig Geiger. Well then, in a letter in the issue of 14 February 1896 he writes, apropos of Herzl's *Judenstaat*, of the low cultural level of most Jews, of their bigotry in petty religious matters, of their fanaticism, which is almost unbearable to every even moderately educated person. Eight years later he still holds forth, this time in a hardly concealed advocacy of the proposed Aliens Bill, about an undesirable Jewish immigration, about some unspecified sordid actions, and a *Chillul Hashem* in connection with a Shechita affair in Liverpool, all of which do damage to our reputation in the eyes of our English co-citizens; and he proceeds to ridicule those who make of Judaism a *Küchenreligion*, the Chief Rabbi's main task being the supervision of Shechita, etc., etc., and a little later he continues in the same vein

inveighing against a limitless immigration from half-civilised countries and refers as an illustration of the dire consequences to the recent pogrom at Limerick.

This seems, indeed, an extraordinary attitude in a man who himself stemmed from half-civilised Poland. But Chotzner had left his own past far behind. Whatever judgment we may form about these outbursts and the mentality they betray, it is certainly a fact that the *revenant* minister lacked all sympathy and understanding for the type of Russian and, in particular, Lithuanian Jew which now made up the majority of his congregation. He did not, or perhaps could not, appreciate their deeply rooted Jewishness, untouched by the pale cast of thought and the corroding influence of European civilisation; their religious ethos, moulded by generations of *Musar* training, and the presence among not a few of them of a wide Talmudic learning and a passion for study, for *תורה לשמה*—its own sake. These great qualities lived side by side, perhaps rather incongruously, with those religious, economic, and social weaknesses which so much irritated people like Chotzner. He might have evinced a better understanding for the unhappy position of these fellow-Jews who had emigrated, because they had to, to foreign climes, mostly without a trade or any capital, ignorant of the vernacular and certainly without benefit of a university education and a Ph.D. This lack of sympathy was certainly mutual. The recent arrivals, with the memory of the saintly and scholarly Rabbis at home still fresh in their minds, could have had but scant respect for their Anglicised minister, who outwardly looked little different from non-Jewish clergymen; neither his Rabbinic learning nor his observance were such as to make a deep impression. I have it on the authority of the G.O.M. of my community, Judge Fox, former Recorder of Belfast, who remembered Chotzner well in his second Belfast period, when he received religious instruction from him, that *Baale-Battim* entering the synagogue building in Great Victoria Street would hold their noses, as the smells coming from the minister's kitchen apparently did not quite live up to Kashruth Commission standards. Judge

Fox remembers, too, the stately appearance, the neat turn-out of Dr. Chotzner, always wearing a spotless white cravat. Unruly pupils would be threatened with immediate deportation to the *Cheder* (Hebrew classes) of the 'foreign' Jews in rival Jackson Street Synagogue!

Once more Joseph Chotzner left Belfast, *sang-und klanglos*, this time for the Yeshivath Ohel Moshe Ve-Yehudit, the college at Rams-gate endowed and opened in 1869 by Sir Moses Montefiore. It was a peculiar institution: Yeshiva-Kollel (Talmud school) cum Rabbinical Seminary, with overtones of an Anglican retreat or a Chelsea Hospital for Rabbis. Paul Goodman rightly points to the German Jewish *Klaus* as the model and the nearest thing to what Sir Moses wished to create. The first phase of the college's history had come to an end in 1896, but soon after it was reopened, and advertisements inviting applications for admission appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle* of 6 and 13 August 1897. Chotzner had no doubt applied and was accepted and in residence when the college reopened with five members on 2 November. By the terms of the original endowment the college was 'to consist of ten members, distinguished for their profound and extensive learning in Hebrew theology, and well-known for their purity of mind and pious course of life'. To be elected a member of the college under such conditions, both flattering and exacting, was certainly no small honour and an act of faith. This membership involved a very strenuous time-table of study, teaching, and worship, laid down in great detail by the pious founder—it even included the observance of a midnightly *Tikkun Chatzoth* (service in memory of the Temple and of the exiled *Shechina*) at the end of a four-hour evening period of study. And, in the words of the college's historian, 'the demands made on the members of the college were . . . in some respects forbidding and . . . have called forth protestations of physical inability to carry them out in their entirety'. It is unlikely that Chotzner, now in his fifty-fourth year and being the man he was, made any superhuman efforts to do so. All the same, for a man of his scholarly leanings this new life must have been ideal. He went on writing and publishing

articles for the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, letters to the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, and in 1905 brought out the collection of essays, already referred to, under the title of *Hebrew Humour and Other Essays*, without doubt his most substantial and important book in English. The year 1905 is also that of his retirement from the college, where his place was taken by the Rev. J. E. Myers, who had been his successor as Minister to the Belfast Hebrew Congregation—he, too, was quite an interesting figure.

Chotzner now took up residence in London, in Warrington Crescent, Maida Vale, to be exact. In the 'Who's Who' of the *Jewish Year Book* his address is subsequently given as 'The Authors' Club, 2 Whitehall Court, S.W.' Joachim Joseph Chotzner had, indeed, arrived. He wrote one more book on his favourite theme, *Hebrew Satire*, published by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, etc., in 1911. It is more of an anthology than a descriptive treatise, but an elegant and well-written little book. He was now approaching his three-score and ten, and sure enough he died, as the Sages of the Talmud say the righteous would, in the fullness of his 70 years in May 1914 at Harrogate, as appropriate a place as any for a retired clergyman to pass into eternity.

I ought to devote the time which is left to me to a short but searching evaluation of Chotzner, the man, and of his work to the extent that this has not already been done in what I have said. He started as a *Maskil*, as a young and hopeful follower of *Haskalah*, the East European movement for enlightenment which tried to break out of the introvert and obscurantist world of the eastern ghetto dominated largely by the Chasidim and their leaders. This drive for a new and wider culture expressed itself in a revived Hebrew, a revival which in itself became a symbol of a complete renaissance of the Jewish people as opposed to an enlightenment which led to mere civic and political emancipation and to a de-judaizing assimilation. His enthusiasm for *Haskalah* Chotzner brought with him to the West, where he began broadcasting its existence and message by numerous articles on such men as Isaac Erter, on modern Hebrew journalism, and, in his last book in particular,

by translating into English examples from the writings of Joseph Perl, M. D. Brandstätter, J. L. Gordon, Peretz Smolenskin, Mendel Dolitzki, Simon Buchner, M. Scheikewitz, down to such contemporary writers and poets as Bialik, Berdashewsky, Genesin, Frischmann, and Peretz. I confess that many of these names I learned through him for the first time, and there are more of them: Ben Ze'ev, M. Schlesinger, Yeiteles Mandelkern, B. Schwarzfild, and Ben Jacob.

Chotzner was not content to act as a herald for these writers; he himself contributed to modern Hebrew literature, and it seems less than just that one should have to look in vain for his name in the standard works on that literature. Just as in his evocations of the writers mentioned he looked for the humorous and satirical element, so his own contributions were all in a light-hearted vein. I could not trace his poetical and literary first-fruits called *Leyl Shimmurim*, humorous sketches and poems, to which I have referred, though he still held them for sale in 1883 at the price of 1s. 6d. But Jews' College Library did possess his next work, *The Songs of Mirza-Schaffy*, 'translated into Hebrew and provided with a prologue'. It took me some time to find out that Mirza Schaffy was not a medieval Persian poet, as I suspected, but was *qua poeta*, a mythical figure created by the German writer Friedrich von Bodenstedt, who, while spending some years in Tiflis, had a sage of that name for his teacher and mentor. Bodenstedt, on his return to Germany, published in 1851 these *Lieder*, which were an instant and lasting success, so much so that by the turn of the century the little volume had reached its 152nd edition! It became 'the most popular book of poetry of its time'. Not unlike the success of Edward Fitzgerald's Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, first published in 1859, this kind of poetry met the emotional needs of a Europe disenchanted by the ravages of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism; men found refuge in the evocation of a mysterious, sceptical, and indolent East. Bodenstedt's songs were translated into many languages, and their translator into Hebrew was Chotzner, who dedicated his rendering to the poet. The latter returned the compliment by a

very laudatory reference to it in the Prologue to another volume of similar poems (*Aus dem Nachlass Mirza Schaffys*). 'Sie sind selbst ein Gesang geworden im Mund der Kinder Israel (durch Dr. Chotznern schöne hebraische Übersetzung)'. This translation is a remarkable *tour de force*; its mood is so realistically Biblical or medieval that at some moments I doubted whether it was a translation at all. Chotzner rightly felt and feared that the very worldly tone of these poems could give offence to the Chasidim, though I hasten to add that he constantly preserves a most decorous stance even while singing the praises of wine, women, and song.

Zichronoth, too, of which I have spoken several times, are written in verse (so-called *Makamen*, an Arabic verse-form, introduced into Hebrew poetry by Yehuda al-Charizi), a ribald doggerel in keeping with its subject-matter: student life. Here we find some barbed quips at certain features of Jewish life: the antics of *Chazanim*, *Gabbaim*, and *Shammashim*; or Rabbis anxious to gain immortality by publishing unwanted *Pilpul* and *Responsa*; at customs such as *Tikkun Leyl Shavuoth* and *Hoshana Rabba*, *Kapparoth* on Erev Yom Kippur, and the relative importance of the recital of *איזהו מקומן*. It is a rollicking little book, believe me. I assume that the manuscript of *Zichronoth* was in the knapsack mentioned before, though it was published only in 1885. Chotzner occasionally did write Hebrew poems after arriving in Belfast, like one written in lyrical mood at the seaside (could it have been Donaghadee?) watching the constant struggle and onslaught of the mighty waves. They reminded him of the conflict between the ultra-Orthodox Rabbis and those who call themselves 'progressives'. Then already he betrayed his preference for a middle-of-the-road religious course. This poem appeared in the *Hammaggid* of 20 October 1869. In the issue of 17 February 1874, he reports on the premature death of Daniel Jaffé, whom he honours by a memorial poem in Hebrew. I should add that his Hebrew style was still deeply steeped in *Melitza*, florid, literary, and allusive, though he once permitted himself a criticism of this form of writing—in others.

This is as true of his poetry as of his Hebrew journalism, but it strikes the modern ear as less odd and grotesque in poetry than in prose.

The Hebrew muse, so it seems, does not flourish in an Irish climate. But Chotzner remained faithful to the themes of humour, irony, and satire which he set out to detect in various periods of Jewish literature. As you may have noticed already, it was the dominant *motif* of all his scholarly work. He lectured and wrote, as we have seen, on the humour and irony of the Hebrew Bible in a rather summary and superficial manner, without making any fine distinction between humour and wit, irony, satire, and sarcasm. As a scholar he may have lacked originality, standing, as he did, on the shoulders of the giant founders of modern Jewish learning on the Continent. All the same, his articles on some medieval writers, the lone representatives of the renaissance spirit in Jewish literature, such as Immanuel of Rome, Dante's contemporary and alleged friend, Yedaya Berdarsi, Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, and Abraham Ibn Chasdai, are solid enough contributions to Jewish scholarship. The same is true of the introductory essay to *Zichronoth*, 'On the Rise and Progress of Hebrew Poetry in Post-Biblical Times'. All along he illustrates his descriptions with what are mostly his own well-turned metrical translations of Hebrew poetry, reversing the role of translator into Hebrew, which we have so much admired. And his good classical education enables him to find and draw interesting parallels in Greek and Latin literature. His general reading was very wide indeed. Chotzner, as I have mentioned, devoted the same interest to more modern satirical writers (in Hebrew) and, of course, to the greatest of them all, Heinrich Heine, for whom he had a great weakness; who wouldn't? This predilection for such writers and such themes speaks volumes about Chotzner himself: his own sense of humour, his indulgent curiosity about men's foibles and eccentricities, his love of the laughing muse, of the good things that life invites us to enjoy. He made his protest, and made it well, against the equation of a glum, gloomy, killjoy gravity with religion in general and Judaism in particular. Joseph Chotzner must have been great company.

Apart from humorous and satirical poetry and writing, the other subject to which he devoted his scholarly and publicistic talents was *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and its protagonists, such as Leopold Zunz, on whom he wrote in Hebrew, German, and English, Zacharias Frankel, and Solomon David Luzzatto. In his letters from England, too, he keeps his readers fully informed about matters great and small that occurred in the world of Jewish scholarship; every new issue of the *Jewish Quarterly Review* is fully described, every new book, every public lecture of importance in this field receives immediate and critical notice. He praises Anglo-Jewry's generosity but deplores its lack of interest in Jewish scholarship and the Hebrew language. Chotzner's interest in these matters is genuine and passionate, as one might expect from a pupil of the Breslau Seminary. Other themes to which he paid attention were the position of women in the Bible, a subject which had both apologetical and socio-critical overtones; and what he calls 'Curiosities of Some Biblical Proper Names', which interested him on account of the punning, the play on words, involved.

Finally, a few words on Chotzner the journalist. It was not possible to keep this subject entirely separate from those previously touched upon. As a poet and writer he was a journalist and *vice versa*. His letters to the Jewish press abroad reveal to us a keen-eyed though not always detached observer of the Anglo-Jewish scene. Chotzner was a staunch *defensor fidei* and for ever on the look-out for any attacks on Judaism or his sacred texts, whether Bible or Talmud, particularly if they came from those in clerical garb or in professorial chairs. Whether it was Mark Twain or Israel Zangwill, Chotzner would not brook any criticism of Jews or Judaism, though he permitted himself occasionally what he reproved in others. On the other hand, he was quick to note every favourable pronouncement from prominent quarters, an apologetic attitude out of which we have grown today or should have. Of his antimissionary protest I have spoken already.

Turning to the inner problems of Anglo-Jewry, we have heard enough to gather that he was *not* a staunch adherent of uncompromis-

ing Orthodoxy. In fact, he never pretended to be Orthodox at all; how otherwise could he have applied in answer to an advertisement which asked for 'a minister of the non-orthodox culte'? But not being Orthodox, or at least not very much so, brought him no trouble from high ecclesiastical authority or prevented his admission to the sacred precincts of Montefiore College. He advocated a moderate reform, as we have seen. *Piyutim* should be dispensed with, so should be the traditional hundred Shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanah; the original wording in Hebrew of the Royal Prayer did not appeal to him, nor did the **אב הרחמים** Memorial Prayer. And in another savage attack on immigrants from Russia, he speaks of their superstitions, calls them bigoted and fanatical; they have no idea of a refined Judaism and stick, out of stupidity and ignorance, to disgusting customs which every English Jew has long relegated to the lumber-room of oblivion. They desecrate the Sabbath, but they have to hear those Hundred *Tekioth* in their small filthy synagogues. (*His words and my translation.*) Chotzner looks with some envy and approval on what's going on in the camp of Reform: choir accompanied by organ, prayers in English, confirmations, clergy with academic and Jewish-theological training, etc., and he writes hopefully of some freak experiment by Simeon Singer and Claude Montefiore, who had organised a sort of semi-religious service in an hotel room, without ark or Sefer Torah, and English hymns only; and there is a reference to the comments of the 'liberal-minded' *Jewish Chronicle*. Yet, 'liberal-minded' as he may have been in matters of *ritus*, Chotzner had no time for Higher Biblical Criticism, and he even criticised the great Zunz for not resisting its blandishments. That was in 1902.

What about Zionism? When Herzl's *Judenstaat* appeared in English, he commented on his idea as attractive and beautiful, but . . . and there followed his doubts whether the Jews with their narrow-minded religious contentious-

ness would not ruin such a departure by the ensuing *Kulturkampf*. The prophecy was not entirely his own, the antagonism and apprehension were shared by the editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, who expressed similar opinions in his editorials. A year later, in September 1897, Chotzner reports with approval Chief Rabbi Adler's attack on Zionism 'as an egregious blunder' and his endorsement of the action of the *Protestrabbiner*. Chotzner adds that the Chief Rabbi has Anglo-Jewry behind him in this stand. The *Maskil* and Hebraist of the Cracow and Breslau days had travelled a long way. (None the less he gave a good deal of attention and praise to George Eliot for her favourable attitude to Jews and Judaism and the 'Zionist' ideas in *Daniel Deronda*.)

Indeed, it was a long way from Cracow via Breslau to Belfast, Harrow, Ramsgate, and finally the Authors' Club in Whitehall Court, London, S.W., and, posthumously, to a son with a seat at Westminster. Chotzner was, no doubt, a colourful personality, a man of many parts. Whatever he may have been, and achieved, as a man of God and keeper of souls, he had great gifts as a poet and writer, as a scholar and publicist; he was as good a specimen as any of that early vintage of Anglo-Jewish ministers: versatile, a little amateurish, and very Anglo-Jewish. Belfast Hebrew Congregation, after half a century of ministers of this type, has for the last 50 years turned to men of different outlook and qualifications, and Belfast may be typical of the rest of Anglo-Jewry, or perhaps slightly ahead of it.

Members of the Society here tonight, I trust, will not regret having a man like Joseph Chotzner brought to their attention. I believe he has earned his place not only in the annals of our great city of Belfast and of Anglo-Jewry but also, perhaps, beyond.

* * * This paper was delivered to the Society on 6 January 1965.

NOTES

¹ Mr. Shillman has since died, in 1966.

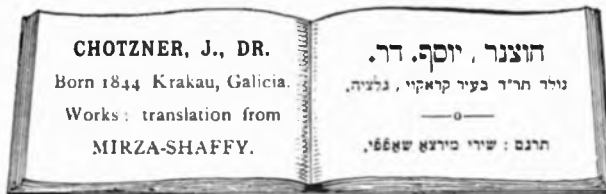
² Israel Davis had married Jane, ninth and

youngest child of Daniel Jaffé. Cf. M. Stern, *Der Schweriner Oberrabbiner Mordechai Jaffé, seine Ahnen*

und seine Nachkommen, Berlin, 1933, where their daughter Kathleen is erroneously stated to have married Chotzner father and not the son. This intermarriage of the Jaffé and Chotzner families is all the same remarkable.

³ Since I read this paper there has come to my notice an article in the *Jewish Chronicle* of 29 September 1938, previously overlooked, in which the late Mr. Charles H. L. Emanuel reminisced under the title of 'The Jewish House at Harrow—Recollections of the 'Eighties'. He describes Chotzner, affectionately called 'Joe' by the boys in his charge, as florid, pleasant, round-bodied, and speaking a fluent English with a German accent. Not even being a schoolmaster, he had obvious difficulties in imposing his authority on the boys, who had no appreciation of his scholarly attainments, while he had little understanding of

the mentality of these English schoolboys, Mr. Emanuel believed that it was due to Chotzner's foreignness that the house was not a success; there were only 9 to 10 boys there in his time. Mrs. Chotzner is described as 'handsome and capable'. The day began with 'short prayers and cocoa'. The Sabbath morning services, which Chotzner conducted, lacked in appeal, though the shortness of his sermons was appreciated by the boys. The service over, they rushed out for a game of cricket. The meat, so they thought, was tough from repeated *Kashering* by the various Shechita Boards through whose hands it had passed on its journey to Harrow! The boys in the Jewish House were looked down upon by the other boys, with whom they hardly mixed. But Mr. Emanuel admits that if not for Chotzner's house many of the Jewish boys would never have got to Harrow.



Dr. Joseph Chotzner—a photograph in *Gallery of Hebrew Poets*, published by Greenberg & Co., London (p. 68) (1903), and printed by Massel, of Manchester [See pp. 261-273