

THE HISTORY OF
JEWISH EDUCATION
IN
SOUTH AFRICA

1841-1980

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Education of the University
of Cape Town in fulfilment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

by
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VOLUME ONE: THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

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SYNOPSIS

The story of Jewish education in South Africa mirrors the history of the Jewish community from the beginnings of its organised group life in 1841 when the first congregation was founded in Cape Town. There is no record of systematic Jewish instruction to the young during those early years in the tiny community, spiritually leaderless - except for the brief interlude of the ministry of the Rev Mr I Pulver - until the arrival of the Rev Mr Joel Rabinowitz from England in 1859. It was he who established the first Hebrew school on these shores; they were the Hebrew and religion classes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation attached to the synagogue. Mr Rabinowitz was to play a leading role in the establishment of the Hope Mill Hebrew Public School in the mid-nineties, the first properly organised Jewish School worthy of the name in Cape Town.

In Republican Transvaal the Jewish community had to open their "public" schools in Johannesburg and Barberton, and later in Pretoria which, like Hope Mill, provided instruction in Hebrew and Judaism during school hours. Their prime function, however, was to give a general education, especially to the children of the new immigrants hailing from Eastern Europe.

The zenith of the Jewish "Public" Schools at the Cape and in the Transvaal during the first years of this century coincided more or less with the emergence of a new-old Jewish School, the Talmud Torah. This school provided a more intensive Jewish education than the Jewish "public" Schools whose Jewish instruction was too limited for the satisfaction of the immigrant sections of the community accustomed to the traditional schools of their former homelands in Eastern

Europe. But the South African milieu forced the Talmud Torah here to be a supplemental institution, an afternoon school tagged onto the Jewish child's normal day at his general school.

Private instruction to individual pupils or to small groups in little private schools (as in the private Hedarim in Eastern Europe) was no doubt provided from the very establishment of the community, and was certainly quite common from the time the Eastern European immigrants began to arrive in the seventies. Jewish education is the sine qua non of Jewish group life and traditionally the first obligation of the Jewish community and the family.

The Talmud Torahs of the first two decades of this century were not of one uniform standard. In the better ones located in the larger centres, the Jewish instruction, even if supplemental, was sound and relatively intensive, stimulated by the new influences of the Hebrew cultural renaissance in Palestine and Russia and of the Zionist revival. In the tiny congregations scattered across the platteland interior, however, where Jewish instruction lay in the untrained and unqualified hands of the country minister, levels and achievements were all too frequently lamentably low.

It was during this developmental stage of the Talmud Torah that the Jewish Public Schools of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Pretoria made their unexpected departure from the Jewish educational scene. These had come under the control of the state which had undertaken to preserve their Jewish character. Within a few years, however, the limited Hebrew instruction dwindled and finally disappeared altogether. Jewish education in South Africa - for those children who were lucky enough to receive it - was provided only by Talmud Torah or the private sector.

As the community grew in numbers and began to evolve its organisational structure, calls were heard for improvements in Jewish education, for co-ordination of efforts and a united endeavour to solve its many problems. These emanated mostly from the influential Zionist movement, and were articulated most eloquently by Chief Rabbi Dr J L Landau of Johannesburg.

The inter-war decades witnessed the greatest successes of the Talmud Torah system. Jewish/Hebrew studies were expanded and intensified; new teachers who came from Eastern Europe were strongly imbued with Zionist ideals and had themselves been educated in the new Hebrew culture in the schools and colleges in the home-country; the growing Jewish National Home was a source of inspiration to parents and children alike. The community was no longer as poor as it had been and it began to provide increasing material support to its schools: not that levels were uniformly high, nor that there were no longer any apathetic parents who had no care about the Jewish upbringing of their children; nor, indeed, that all, or even most, Jewish children were receiving an adequate Jewish education.

The Second World War was to be a watershed in the history of Jewish education in this country. The Talmud Torah began to decline. Parents - and children - were no longer prepared to grant it equality with the secular school, or even with extra-mural activities. The afternoon Hebrew school became an inconvenience, an interference or an unbearable burden. It was no longer of very great importance, so it was regarded as expendable. Days of attendance were reduced and post-primary Jewish instruction vanished from the Talmud Torah.

If the Talmud Torah lost the support of those parents who regarded it merely as a transitory and fragmentary experience for their children, required for the social desideratum of Barmitzvah or Batmitzvah, it also lost the confidence of those who began to see its limitations as an educational instrument for the transmission of their religio-national heritage which they regarded, in accordance with the age-old traditions of the Jewish People, both as vital and worthwhile.

The solution lay in the concept of the "Jewish Day School", in contradistinction to the "afternoon" supplemental Talmud Torah school, with its harmonious combination of secular and Jewish studies in one integrated curriculum. The Holocaust and establishment of the new Jewish State had produced fundamental changes in the Jewish people of the second half of the century and had exerted equally fundamental influences on Jewish education of our period.

This was the main reason why the post-war Jewish Day School is radically different from the old Hebrew Public School of 1900.

The Talmud Torahs were rapidly eclipsed by the new Jewish schools which answered the felt needs of the Jewish community as the declining Talmud Torah could not hope to do. Within a matter of a few decades the South African Jewish community found the will and most of the means to enable it to create a network of Jewish primary and secondary all-day integrated schools in which some forty per cent of all its school-going children are educated.

This rapid expansion of the Jewish day schools has created new problems and exacerbated old ones. Of the latter, the two main ones are the burden of rising costs and, secondly, the nature and extent of the Jewish education they provide. For this is their raison d'être, as it was not in the case of the old Hebrew "public" schools; and it is closely bound up with the problem of the existence of a minority culture and the maintenance of its religio-ethnic identity.

The increasingly insistent problem of defining educational goals, determining curricular content, safeguarding standards, producing teaching personnel, finding the required material resources - these constitute the problems of the coming decades which in themselves presage an era of flux for the country and the Jewish community and, doubtless also, for Jewish education.

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P A R T O N E

INTRODUCTION

AND

BACKGROUND

FOR E W O R D

Direct personal involvement over many years in Jewish education led to the writer undertaking research in this subject for the degree of Master of Education a few years ago. As this field was so wide, I decided to restrict myself to one corner of the Republic, viz. the Cape, with which I had been intimately concerned for so long.

It had been my original intention to deal with the development of Jewish "minority" education in the whole of South Africa for, in spite of the geographical dispersal of the Jewish community and its schools throughout the country, Jewish education in South Africa is in effect a single subject and homogeneous enough to be regarded as one integrated whole.

The total Jewish community of some 118 000 souls¹ is small and homogeneous enough by virtue of its origins and cultural cohesiveness. Organisationally, it is united, and its schools constitute a well-integrated network with common educational aims and experiences, and closely linked on both the professional and lay levels.

It is now proposed to extend the scope of my previous research² so as to include the whole of the Republic. The period covered would be the last century; from the discovery of diamonds and gold, when Jewish communities, largely emanating from Russia, came to be established throughout this sub-continent, till the present.

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1. The Jewish Year Book : 1977. (Jewish Chronicle Publications, London) : p 172
 2. Katz, M E: Jewish Education at the Cape: 1841 to the Present Day. A Survey and Appraisal in the Light of Historical and Philosophical Perspectives
Unpublished Thesis for the Degree of Master of Education
(University of Cape Town, 1973)

This study proposes to examine the history of the Jewish community during these last hundred years and will endeavour to determine what changes were brought about in Jewish education during this period by internal as well as external historical forces acting on the community. It was obviously affected by the host society in which it lived and to which it was acculturised, whilst at the same time its sense of "belongingness" to the Jewish people and the constant stream of immigrants, made it subject to the main historical and cultural influences operative in the Jewish world of the period.

The writer has been an active participant in Jewish education at the Cape for an unbroken period of well over fifty years; the extensive knowledge and insights that this very intimate involvement has given him should lend some measure of added value and interest to this study.

No complete study of the development of Jewish education in South Africa has as yet been undertaken and this would be warranted for two main reasons. Firstly, the quite considerable area of the subject makes it worthy of study: there are close on eight thousand children in the eight Jewish high schools, twelve primary schools and two preparatory schools together constituting the "day-school" system, in which Jewish and general subjects are integrated in the curriculum. Probably half that number again attend the "afternoon (supplementary) schools" in which the pupils obtain their Jewish education after attending the ordinary school. Thousands attend the pre-primary Jewish schools located in the larger centres. Jewish education, therefore, is of direct concern to the great majority of South African Jews.

Secondly, a study of this nature will attempt to examine Jewish education as a special sector of education in South Africa as a whole in order to highlight those differences in content, objectives and structure - and to a lesser extent even in

methods - which distinguish it from the majority school system. As a special and identifiable area of private education the Jewish schools provide a subject of considerable academic interest to students and educators whose total involvement has been limited to the state system.

CHAPTER 1: A SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED STUDY AND AN OUTLINE
OF THE TREATMENT OF THE SUBJECT AND ITS RELATED
TOPICS

This study will examine the development of Jewish education in South Africa during the past 130 years, from the year when the Rev Mr Joel Rabinowitz, the minister of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation - and, in fact, the only Jewish spiritual leader in the whole of the sub-continent at that time - first established his Hebrew and religion classes at the synagogue in St John Street.¹ Four distinct developmental stages are discernible in the history of South African Jewish education during these last 130 years.

These chronological divisions are the result of forces operating in the Jewish communities outside South Africa with which our growing and changing community had direct links - notably Britain, Eastern Europe and Palestine. Coupled with the external influences were the more direct ones which the changing South African society itself exerted on the small Jewish ethnic/religious group living in its midst. These may be demarcated as follows: the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the first two decades of this century, the inter-war period, and, finally, the post-1945 period.

The Three Determinant Factors in the History of South African Jewish Education

The study will endeavour to show that there were three main influences acting on the development of Jewish education in South Africa during these last hundred years.

The first, and basic, factor may be termed the historical

1. See p 54

constant. It is the ancient tradition of the importance, indeed primacy, of education in Jewish life throughout the ages, and certainly since the return from the Babylonian Exile. Its core-content, too, remained largely unchanged: it was the instruction in Torah¹, in the basics, at least, of religious knowledge and Bible.

South African Jewish education developed against the background of influences emanating from the wider Jewish world, especially that of the later Victorian England, of Eastern Europe and, in due course, of Palestine. These three regions had the closest historical and cultural links with the growing community at the tip of this continent. This would constitute the contemporary external factor. Lastly, there is the contemporary internal influence, the immediate and direct effects of the South African milieu, its society as well as its educational system, on the Jewish community and on the development of the educational system during the period under review. The study will examine the nature of each of these three strands discernible in the evolution of Jewish education in this country, and their interaction on one another, during each of the four historical periods into which the century has been divided.

The Quantitative Aspect of Jewish Education

Jewish education predicates education in two cultures for the child, that of the host society, and that of the Jewish religio-ethnic sub-culture. In quantitative terms of time and effort it is obvious that the Jewish child is involved

1. Torah : Hebrew : The Law or Instruction. Interchangeably used for Scripture and the Oral Tradition based on it or, in a broader sense, the whole body of Jewish religious teaching as the expression of the spirit and ideals of Judaism.

in a more extensive educative process than his non-Jewish counterpart, the additional measure depending on the nature of this specifically Jewish component. If it is supplemental it will be much more circumscribed in scope than the kind provided in the Jewish all-day school.

A number of questions arise from this situation. Firstly, will it be possible to determine what effects, if any, this bi-cultural education has on the child's development, and what will be the nature of such influences? Does the extra content, time and effort required to deal with it adversely affect the general academic progress of the Jewish child? Such an extra learning burden over and above the ordinary curriculum could logically be expected to have this effect. And what problems are there in motivating the child to accept this extra learning burden?

This study will therefore also endeavour to answer these questions. A comparison of matriculation results may provide an acceptable criterion. If, indeed, bi-cultural education is not detrimental to the child's education and development, and the Jewish child achieves in quantity so much more than his non-Jewish peer does without any visible harm to general educational standards, then it would follow logically that the latter too could benefit from such additional education, equivalent in time and value if not in specific content. In other words, do our general schools under-educate? Or do the specific nature and objectives of Jewish education, per se, constitute the operative factor - the catalyst as it were - that makes the whole process of bi-cultural education not only feasible but possibly also beneficial in its general effect?

It is in the last period of the century that method becomes important and interesting enough to warrant attention. Jewish education is concerned with the transmission of an additional culture, through the medium of what is very largely a foreign

language, for Hebrew is neither heard nor spoken in home or street in the Jewish Diaspora. In its cognitive and affective aspects Jewish education differs radically from the general education for the dominant culture: its selected body of knowledge, unique skills and special attitudes coupled with its particular objectives are distinctly different from the corresponding constituents of general education, as will be shown later in this study. All this calls for special methods of instruction and transmission peculiar to the problem of educating effectively for this particular second culture.

The Place of Hebrew in Jewish Education, and its Objectives

It is indisputable that one of the prime elements of the historical constant in Jewish education is the Hebrew language. Chief Rabbi J H Hertz lists it as one of the four elements of Jewish education, together with religion, sacred scriptures, and Jewish history:

It is the key to all Israel's sacred treasures....
gives the child a lot and portion in the synagogue....
Hebrew-less Jewry has no future, because it cannot
fairly be said to have a present.¹

Hebrew is central to Jewish education, but it would be a fallacy to equate it with the foreign languages taught at school. Hebrew is the historical language of the Jewish people, the medium of, and key to, its national and religious culture. And the concern of Jewish education is to educate the child in this additional culture which is as relevant and desirable to its adherents as is the dominant host culture. Its objectives are not merely academic, the acquisition of an additional body of knowledge of a more or less inert nature, but are aimed at instilling a Weltanschauung, a life's

1. Hertz, J H: The Pentateuch and Haftorahs (Soncino, London, 1956) p 926

perspective and value system which characterise Judaism and Jewish culture, for an adequate understanding of which a knowledge of Hebrew is essential. Linguistic facility, indeed, assumes an importance distinctly secondary to that of affective objectives, to formation of character traits and life attitudes, to structuring of personal identity and group identification. The affective therefore assumes inordinate significance, and is indissolubly intermingled with the cognitive.

In short, this study will embrace two separate fields: firstly, it will be an historical account of the development of Jewish education in South Africa during each of the four periods into which its existence has been divided. Attention will be directed to the operation of the three main determinants which have shaped the direction and nature of this evolution. And secondly, it will examine within the present-day South African educational context, the quantitative aspect of Jewish education, and draw comparisons between it and general education.

CHAPTER 2: THE FOUR PERIODS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF JEWISH EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA IN THEIR HISTORICAL SETTING

Period 1: The Final Quarter of the Nineteenth Century.
Jewish Life in Eastern Europe.

A hundred years ago, East-Central Europe was the main centre of Jewish culture, in which the old and the new confronted each other. The modern currents of the Enlightenment Movement - Haskalah it was called in Hebrew - had swept across the tradition-bound world of strict religious observance which, virtually unchanged since mediaeval times, dominated life in the towns and hamlets of the Pale of Settlement.¹

It was an era of cultural and national reawakening. Hebrew had been reborn as a modern literary language. Abraham Mapu (1808-1867) published the first modern Hebrew novel in 1851, while Yehudah-Leib Gordon (1830-1892) was the first of the neo-Hebrew poets. Eliezer Ben-Yehudah (1858-1922) embarked on his life-work of making Hebrew a living, spoken language, when he revived it, appropriately enough, in Jerusalem and the tiny Jewish settlements in Palestine.

Amongst the national movements in the Europe of a hundred years ago there appeared the first advocates of Jewish national renaissance, writing for the most part in Hebrew. These heralded the emergence of the Zionist Movement founded by Theodor Herzl in Basle in 1897.

The Jewish world of Eastern Europe was culturally very much

1. Pale of Settlement: Most of the Jewish population of Russia was restricted to this region, comprising the fifteen western provinces of the empire, between the Baltic and the Black Seas. According to the census of 1897, 3,6 million Jews lived in the Pale and 1,3 million in the ten provinces of Crown Poland, whereas only 300 000 lived in the rest of Russia. see: Dubnov, S: History of the Jews (Thomas Yoseloff, London, 1973: trans. M Spiegel) Vol V, p 583

astir, and many of the immigrants from that part of the world, themselves materially poor enough, brought with them into their new lands of domicile a strong attachment to tradition coupled with a keen consciousness of the Jewish cultural revival in their lands of origin. It was bound to have a deep effect on Jewish education in the new country.

The thirty-four years between 1881 and 1914 saw one of the great migratory movements in history. Millions, especially from the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, left their homelands to settle in the United States of America, South America, Canada and other parts of the British Empire¹. They turned their backs on the poverty, the political oppression and the lack of economic opportunity of the old world to seek a new and better life in the new countries overseas².

The discovery of the Kimberley diamond-fields at the end of the sixties, of the gold diggings in the Barberton-Pilgrim's Rest area some years later and finally of the Witwatersrand in 1884, attracted a stream of immigrants to the country. Amongst these were a number of Jews from England, Germany and Holland, as well as a trickle from Eastern Europe, who had arrived directly from the home country or who came out after having spent some time in England. An increasing number of Jewish immigrants began arriving from Eastern Europe, especially during the eighties and nineties. These came as a direct result of the pogroms which swept through parts of Russia after 1881 and the discriminatory May Laws ("the legislative pogroms") of 1882 which still further exacerbated the economic plight

1. Between 1880 and 1920 some 20 million immigrants entered the United States from Europe. see: Historical Statistics of the United States (U S A Department of Commerce: Bureau of the Census. Washington D C, 1960) pp56-57
2. About 2,25 million Jews arrived in the United States between 1880 and 1925, when free immigration ended, from Eastern and Central Europe. see Encyclopaedia Judaica (Keter, Jerusalem 1971) Vol XV, p1608

and political oppression of the Jewish population in the Pale.

Political, social and economic persecution of the Jews was the systematic policy of the Czarist government.

The central government pursued its anti-Jewish policy calmly and methodically, considering it as one of the most important tasks in the government administration¹.

The Jewish population of the Pale was subjected to a merciless process of pauperisation. From 1894-98 the number of indigent Jewish families had increased by 17% and the number of the destitute who received public assistance for Passover reached 40-50% of the entire Jewish population².

Jews were barred from owning or leasing land³, prohibited from joining the government service, restricted in entering the free professions - there was even a quota placed on school and university admissions⁴.

The anti-semitic policy of the government and the unscrupulous incitement against Jews in the reactionary press led to the inevitable result: a pogrom⁵.

This was the background for the vast migration of the Jews from Russia and Poland during the three decades preceding the outbreak of the First World War.

A small trickle of the great human stream found its way to South Africa.

Most of these newcomers hailed from the Province of Lithuania near the Baltic. One of the reasons for this was that the

1. Dubnov, op.cit. p581

2. ibid., p583

3. ibid.

4. ibid., pp584-6

5. ibid., p568

region was most accessible to England which was a stopping place on the way to the Americas. There the immigrants learned about the colonies and republics in South Africa which, of course, maintained their closest links with England. The immigrant route was thus from one of the Baltic ports to London, and thence via Southampton to the Cape.

Period 2: The First Two Decades of the Century:
Cultural and National Revival

The Zionist movement began to revolutionise Jewish life in East-Central Europe. It spurred on the Hebrew language revival and radically changed the cultural climate in the Jewish communities, challenging the age-old authority of the traditional religious leaders. The Pale of Settlement became politicised. With few, if any, political and economic rights under the Czarist regime, many of the Russian Jews were stirred and inspired by the socio-political aims of national restoration on the ancestral soil in the land of their fathers.

Peretz Smolenskin (1842-1885) and Moshe Leib Lilienblum (1843-1910) heralded the Jewish renaissance movement in the sixties and seventies. Leon Pinsker (1831-1891) published his Auto-Emancipation in 1882 which is rightly regarded as one of the seminal works of Zionism. He and Rabbi Samuel Mohilever (1824-1898) established the Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion Movement) in the early eighties, the forerunner of the Zionist Movement established by Theodor Herzl some fifteen years later.

Groups of Jewish students turned their backs on the empire

of pogrom and persecution and went to Palestine to work on the land. They called themselves Biluim.¹ Later, these young and idealistic agricultural workers, bent on reviving the neglected ancestral soil, were known as Halutzim (pioneers). From the eighties, they organised themselves in Hebrew-speaking villages on the soil of Palestine, to "build and to be rebuilt in it" - as they sang.² A Hebrew school system came into existence by the first years of the century. This was the period of Tehiya - the cultural and national revival which stirred the masses of the East-Central European community and brought about important social changes which radically affected Jewish education not only in the home country, but even in faraway South Africa as well, where the new spirit began to penetrate the schools of the largely immigrant communities.³

Period 3: The Period between the First and Second World Wars

The Jewish communities of Eastern Europe suffered considerable destruction and much dislocation during the First World War, when much of the fighting on the eastern front took place in the regions of the Pale. The collapse of the Czarist Empire, the subsequent civil war and the wars which attended the

1. Biluim: Acronym derived from the Hebrew words of Isaiah II 5 which they adopted as their clarion.
2. "Anu banu artza, livnot-ulehibanot ba" : Hebrew song of Halutzim: (We came to the land, to build (it) and be rebuilt in it) (My translation)
3. See pp 148 et seq.

establishment of the new post-war states added to the widespread damage and losses. Economic decline and socio-political instability overtook many of the Jewish communities of the region. Anti-Jewish discrimination all too frequently survived in some of the successor states after the First World War, in spite of promises made by leaders of newly independent states, or even the safeguards incorporated in the peace treaties¹.

Zeev Jabotinsky, a prominent Zionist thinker and writer, described the salient features of the socio-political situation in Poland and the neighbouring areas during the inter-war period as "the antisemitism of men and the antisemitism of things"². Conditions in the post-war world of Eastern Europe aggravated the social and economic position of great segments of the Jewish communities and led to widespread discrimination in these spheres. And at the same time there was a resurgence of violence directed against the Jews as in the days of the pogroms. From the early thirties Germany began to export the Nazi doctrines which made Jew-hatred a prime instrument of state-policy. Its poison propaganda served the purposes of German policy and infected the whole of Europe, and even beyond, with these new and virulent doctrines of race.

From this region of political and economic pressure and threatening violence the stream of Jewish immigration resumed after the war. Jewish immigrants into South Africa numbered 1 353 in 1925 and rose to 2 788 out of a total of 7 895 in 1929, to fall thereafter to a fraction of the number after the Immigration Quota Act came into force in May 1930, drastically restricting the immigration from East-Central Europe. Under 500 Jewish immigrants entered in 1935 from

1. See Chapter 24

2. Jabotinsky, Z: The Jewish War Front (Allen and Unwin, London, 1940) pp55 et seq.

this region out of a total of 6 500 and by 1938 the figure was just over 200 out of a total of 7 435 persons who entered the Union during the year¹.

Period 4: The Post-War Period

The physical destruction of six million Jews on the continent of Europe by the Nazis also destroyed the rich cultural life which the great Jewish communities had inherited and developed throughout the many centuries of their existence in Europe. Hebrew of course remained the written medium of traditional religious literature. The Jews of Central-Eastern Europe had also produced a rich literature in Yiddish which had evolved from its Middle German origins to become the mother tongue of millions of Jews who inhabited that part of the continent. The magnitude of the spiritual loss may be gauged from an estimate that over eighty percent of all the Jewish spiritual leaders in the world perished in the Holocaust². The greatest Jewish cultural reservoir since the Golden Age of Spain had vanished in the few war years. For the Jewish people more than for most others, the post-war world was radically different from what it had been before.

Seventy years of Zionist endeavour had created a Jewish community in Palestine of 600 000 by 1945 but the obstacles in the way of the development of the Jewish National Home enunciated in the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917 soon became all too apparent. These resulted in protracted

1. Saron and Hotz, eds.: The Jews in South Africa: A History (Oxford University Press, 1955) pp378-380
2. Greenberg, I: "Cloud of Smoke and Pillar of Fire" in: Auschwitz : Beginning of a New Era ed. E Fleischner (Ktav, New York, 1977) p8 and footnote, p441.
Information supplied by Rabbi I Greenberg in letter to the writer, 7 March 1979.

military conflict which finally led to the re-establishment of the Jewish State on the 15th May, 1948, some six months after the United Nations had voted, on November 29th, 1947, to give it international recognition.

This is one of the great turning-points in Jewish history. It has had a profound impact on Jewish life during these past thirty years and no less on the nature and objectives of Jewish education throughout the Diaspora.

No study of Jewish education can ignore the cultural and demographic changes in the Jewish world of the post-war period. Six and three-quarter million of the over 11·500 000 Jews who live in the free world are English-speaking; and of the latter number the three million inhabitants of Israel use Hebrew¹. The other large communities are French- or Spanish-speaking. Arabic lands are virtually denuded of their former Jewish communities and Yiddish has all but vanished in the Holocaust of Eastern European Jewry.

In the western countries the Jewish communities enjoy full civic and political rights. They enjoy the freedom to preserve their ethnic and religious identity within the context of their wider identification with the dominant host societies in the midst of which they live as full citizens, free of any overt discrimination.

This right to Jewish cultural and religious group life which the open society of the free world has recognised has been expressed by a contemporary Jewish leader in these words:

Jews can find full expression only in a society that is free and accepting of differences, is not coercive, and which will staunchly defend the

1. 1979 American Jewish Year Book: Volume 79. Published by the American Jewish Committee, New York. (Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1978) pp 291-6

integrity of all existing educational and social institutions".

Whilst, on the one hand, the free society gives the ethnic minority freedom to be itself, on the other, by its very nature it also opens the doors to the possibility of assimilation and extinction. For the Jewish minorities dispersed throughout the free world this freedom presented grave problems of group survival, and Jewish education has once again become the "prime concern" of the communities, as it had indeed been throughout the centuries of dispersion until the European Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century.

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1. Plaut, Rabbi I G, President of the Canadian Jewish Congress, at its 18th Plenary Meeting, May 1977.
(Information in his letter to the writer, 8 June, 1979)

CHAPTER 3: DETERMINANT FACTORS IN THE HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH EDUCATION

This study will endeavour to identify three main influences which, in the view of the writer, have determined the direction of the development of Jewish education in South Africa during the period under review. One factor may have been more prominent than the other two at a particular time, but mostly they acted together, even interacting on one another. They may be termed the historical constant, the contemporary internal factor, and the contemporary external factor.

1. The Historical Constant

Foremost among the cultural values which the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe brought with them into their new land of domicile at the tip of the African continent was that of the primacy of Jewish education. It was the ancient mitzvah¹ of Talmud Torah², of the study of Torah, which the sages of old placed at the head of other important mitzvoth³ and which had in time become one of the prime duties of Jewish group life. As has been shown, Russian Jewry was only partially affected by the Enlightenment Movement (Haskalah) which aimed at modernising the life of the millions of Jews confined by law to the Pale of Settlement. These still largely adhered to the old life-style shaped by the detailed laws of the sixteenth century religious code, the Shulhan Aruch.⁴ This life-style characterised the provincial Jewish communities

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1. Mitzvah: Hebrew - commandment: in time became the fulfilment of an ethical commandment. (Plural: mitzvoth)
 2. Here in its literal meaning of study of Torah.
 3. Tractate Peah of the Mishnah I.i. Trans. H Danby (Oxford University Press, London, 1950 edition) pp 10-11.
 4. Hebrew: lit. "The Prepared Table": name for Code of Jewish Law compiled by Rabbi Joseph Caro in Safed in 1555. English translation by H E Goldin: 4 vols (Hebrew Publishing Company, New York, 1928).

of the Baltic Provinces, especially Lithuania, living in the little towns characteristic of the region, which provided most of the new immigrants to South Africa. For the most part, these early Lithuanian Jewish immigrants clung faithfully to the religious traditions and values of life in the home country. Education consequently ranked very high in their personal and group scale of values.

Transplanted into the soil of South Africa, this educational tradition underwent modification through the influence of the new conditions to which it had to adjust, but this study will show that the historical constant has remained the central factor in the development of Jewish education to this day.

2. The Contemporary External Influences

Three overseas Jewish communities exerted a direct influence in the development of Jewish education in South Africa. During the nineteenth century the small old-established communities maintained close ties with Anglo-Jewry; they recognised the authority of the Chief Rabbinate in London and turned to it for assistance and guidance. These bonds had remained strong since the early forties when the first congregation was established in Cape Town largely by British-born Jews who throughout the century remained very much under the influence of the home country¹.

From the turn of the century the influence of Eastern Europe grew with the increasing flow of immigration from that region which was destined to transform the South African Jewish

1. Herrman, L: "A History of Cape Town Jewry" in The South African Jewish Year Book 1929: ed. de Saxe and Goodman. (S A Jewish Historical Society, Johannesburg, 1929) pp48-57.

community. The cultural and personal bonds with the home country in Eastern Europe spanned some seventy years, till contact with the outside was cut off by the Russian occupation of the Baltic States following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 and the subsequent destruction of the Jewish communities of the region by the invading Nazis.

Jewish immigrants from Lithuania began to arrive in South Africa from the late seventies of the last century.¹ This immigration continued, at a greater or lesser tempo, depending on pressures in Europe or economic and political factors in South Africa itself, until the Quota Act of 1930 restricted it drastically.² The newcomers soon outnumbered their older co-religionists who had earlier established the few small congregations in the main areas. From their home country they brought with them their strong religious and ethnic commitment which strengthened the growing Jewish communities in this country. Spiritual leaders, teachers, writers and laymen learned in traditional culture came out from the old country to deepen and strengthen the Jewish cultural and spiritual life in the community, to leave their stamp on it to this day.

A third influence, as this study will show, began to emerge towards the end of the century and was destined in time to assume very much greater importance, whilst the authority of the Chief Rabbinate in London gradually diminished in the course of the years. This new influence emanated from the small Zionist settlements in Palestine and from the growing Zionist movement. The new cultural patterns of the Hebrew revival

1. Herrman, L: A History of the Jews in South Africa (Gollancz, London, 1930) pp 249 et seq.

2. Gershater, C: "From Lithuania to South Africa" in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 61

The figure of 40 000 Eastern European Jewish immigrants into South Africa is given by him for the three decades 1881-1910. Saron, ibid., p 377, estimates that 30 000 came to South Africa during the four decades after 1910.

were beginning to influence the large Jewish communities of East-Central Europe, and, in an indirect manner, the far-away South African community as well¹.

3. The Contemporary Internal Influences

Acculturation and Integration into South African Society

The small South African Jewish community did not exist in a cultural and social vacuum, sealed off from its host society. The earlier Anglo-Jewish settlers, and to some extent their co-religionists who had come from Germany, had experienced no difficulty in integrating into the general population.

Herrman² gives their number at the Cape, at the opening of our period, as several hundred families only out of a total white population of over 200 000 in the seventies. As to be expected in view of their tiny numbers and quite weak Jewish bonds, many assimilated in the course of the years.

The immigrants from Eastern Europe who began to arrive in South Africa from about the seventies were strangers in the new land. In outlook, religious observance and general mode of life, these Yiddish-speaking immigrants differed from their co-religionists whom they found here organised in a few congregations or scattered as individuals in towns or on the platteland. The process of acculturation for them was a comparatively slow one, but in time they adjusted to the freedom of their new land in which they were no longer subject to the discrimination and restrictions which they had suffered in the Pale of Settlement.

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1. Rabin, H: 'Ikkarei Toldot HaLashon Ha'Ivrit.' Hebrew: Concise History of the Hebrew Language. (Department for Education and Culture of the World Zionist Organisation - Jerusalem, 1977) pp 47 et seq.
 2. Herrman, L: "Cape Jewry before 1870" in Saron and Hotz, op. cit. p 15.

From the self-sufficiency and virtual isolation of their cultural life in Eastern Europe these immigrants entered an open society in which the maintenance of their cultural identity became the central problem of their individual and group existence. Traditional Jewish education of the shtetels was not suited to the new social conditions of South Africa in which the Jewish communities dispersed across the land in tiny communities. Jewish education was radically modified to meet the demands of the new life here, but, as will be seen, in many essential features it retained its traditional character, whilst the course of its future development came to be determined by an interaction of a number of forces operating in the Jewish world during the past century.

CHAPTER 4: THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF JEWISH EDUCATION

Although the study is concerned primarily with the development of Jewish education within definite historical and geographical limits, a full understanding of the subject demands a brief review of the origins of Jewish education and of its role in Jewish history.

This is the other aspect of the historical constant in Jewish education, in the sense of its unbroken record of primacy in the socio-religious scale of values in Jewish society during at least the last two-and-a-half millennia. Whilst South African Jewish education is but a brief chapter in the long annals of Jewish education spanning some thirty centuries, it should be seen as an example of the instrument which evolved historically from earlier religious origins to meet the requirements of a people destined to exist in religious-cultural minority communities dispersed across the face of the globe. To understand the South African example adequately, it is necessary to consider the nature and deep historical roots of education as an instrument of Jewish survival.

Education of the young in the moral principles of conduct as laid down by their religious teachings features widely in the Bible. The Book of Deuteronomy in particular stresses the importance of inculcating proper and desirable religious values and beliefs in the young and of training them in the performance of the religious precepts. The fear of heaven is an educational ideal expressed thus:

.....that they may learn to fear Me all
the days that they shall live upon the earth
and that they may teach their children.....¹

1. Deuteronomy IV, 10.

The young shall be instructed (commanded) to carry out the precepts of the Torah:

And he said unto them, set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law¹.

The father himself was the teacher; the home was the school; the instruction in the commandments ("these my words")² shall be thorough and constant, for they will shape the moral lives of the young.

And thou shalt teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou risest up.³

God's words are vital for society and for moral life; no chances are to be taken in inculcating them in the young: "and thou (the father) shalt teach them diligently unto thy children", re-iterates the Lawgiver⁴.

These last two verses form part of the Shema ("Hear, O Israel"), the extract from the Pentateuch which has formed the essence of Jewish belief and prayer and the proclamation of the faith of all Jewish generations.⁵

"These my words" of the Torah are vital for living and are eternal for all generations. Without education they will be but ephemeral, so it begins to assume the nature of a vital social obligation of religious significance. These are the biblical roots of the primacy of education in Jewish life.

1. Ibid., XXXII, 46.

2. Ibid., XI, 18.

3. Ibid., XI, 19.

4. Ibid., VI, 7.

5. Ibid., VI, 4-9.

The Jewish religion is a literature-sustained religion and there are references in the Bible to the fact that in ancient Hebrew society during the First Commonwealth literacy was hardly a rarity, as these extracts show:

And he caught a young man of the men of Succoth and inquired of him: and he wrote down for him the princes of Succoth.....¹.

And in Isaiah we read that "a child may write them".² The itinerant Levites must have received some kind of systematic education for it is recorded that during the reign of King Jehoshaphat:

they taught in Judah, and had the Book of the Law of the Lord with them and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people³.

The Book of Proverbs abounds in examples of ethical injunctions and advice concerning the upbringing of children - character education is its central topic - and is explicit enough about the value of disciplining the young:

He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth chasteneth him.⁴

During the two thousand years of dispersion education assumed even greater significance: it became the very instrument for ensuring the existence of the Jewish community as an ethnic and religious minority and the only assurance of group continuity.

1. Judges VIII, 14.

2. Isaiah X, 19

3. 2 Chronicles XVII, 9

4. Proverbs XIII, 24.

The Second Temple and Talmudic Periods (500BC-500AD)

The Jewish school, as part of a system of universal education for boys, has a longer record of continuous existence than any school in Europe - probably in the world.¹

The long tradition of Jewish religious literature did not terminate with the fixing of the Biblical canon. Soferim (scribes) and sages of the post-exilic period began to lay the basis for the Torah Shebe'Al Peh (The Oral Law) which was subsequently redacted as the Mishna, the great religio-legal digest that ranks second in importance only to the Holy Scriptures. It was a code of life rather than a code of law².

The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Midrashim (the homiletical and exegetic works based on the Biblical story) in addition to the Oral Law - all point conclusively to the existence of an intellectual life of great spiritual vigour and creativity³. It was a society, moreover, where study and teaching of Torah⁴ were of prime importance, as the Tannaim (the Sages) of the Mishna⁵ never fail to emphasise. The primacy of study is summed up vividly in the statement of the second century sage Rabbi Simon ben Lakish that one may not take away children from their studies (of Torah) even for the very rebuilding of

1. Bentwich, J: "Jewish Schools Past and Present" in 1957 Year Book of Education p 365.
2. Roth, C: A History of the Jews (Schocken, New York, 1974) p 130.
3. Silver, D J: A History of Judaism (Basic Books, New York, 1974) Vol I, pp192 et seq.
4. see p 5
5. Mishna: (Hebrew: lit. - Learning). Oral interpretation of the Torah by generations of scholars, from about the third century B C. Finally redacted in Palestine as the Six Orders of the Mishna by Rabbi Judah the Prince, c 180 A D.

the Temple.¹ It stands to reason that there must have been an adequate educational system to make all this possible.

During the Second Temple Period (c 500BC-70AD) Torah became the way of life for the individual and the basis of civil and religious law for large segments of society. Scripture was the divine message to each generation in which each, if it studied and interpreted it correctly, would find not only its own answers to its problems but....."the path that all generations ought to follow".....it became "a commandment unto itself, a part of public worship of God".²

Study of Torah was incumbent upon all men, whatever their circumstances. The Essenes studied "a third of all the nights of the year"³, and the Mishna lays down that amongst the things "for which there is no measure" are "....charitable acts and the study of Torah".⁴

A modern Jewish historian⁵ sums up the period in these words:

The rule of Torah and Halacha⁶ was one of the outstanding characteristics of the development of Judaism in the latter part of the Second Temple era.....there was no question that the Torah was always the sole foundation of Jewish life, the lynchpin that held all parts of the nation together.

It was the period of the "hegemony of the Sages".⁷

- 1. Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sabbath, p 119B, in Order Mo'ed Vol I. English Translation ed. I Epstein p 591 (Soncino, London, 1938)
- 2. Safrai, S: "Elementary Education: Its Religious and Social Significance in the Talmudic Period" in Jewish Society Through the Ages: eds. Ben-Sasson & Ettinger. (Valentine Mitchell, London, 1971) pp 155-159.
- 3. Gaster, T H: "The Manual of Discipline" (VI 1-8) in The Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect: p 59 (Secker & Warburg, London, 1957).
- 4. Tractate Peah of Mishna: Chapter I.1. op.cit.
- 5. Stern, M: "The Period of the Second Temple" in A History of the Jewish People: ed. H H Ben-Sasson (Harvard University Press, 1976) p 283
- 6. The corpus of Oral Law based on the Torah encompassing all aspects of the personal and group life of the Jew.
- 7. Stern, M: op.cit. p 283

The Jewish religion invested education with both sanctity and prime social importance.¹ The Deuteronomic injunction to "teach them diligently to thy children"² was interpreted to mean that every male was obligated to study Torah himself and also to teach it to his sons for "only Torah gives happiness in this world and the world to come".³ Torah study then served to establish a close relationship between education and the ideal good life, whilst at the same time it "unfolded life and gave it directional meaning".⁴

Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived towards the end of the first century of our era, summarises the place of education in Jewish society in these words:

.....our principal care of all is this, to educate our children well; and we think it to be the most necessary business of our whole life, to observe the laws that have been given us, and to keep those rules of piety that have been delivered down to us.⁵

It can be assumed therefore that education during this period was democratised and to a large degree universalised as can be logically deduced from these and many other references.

The Talmud⁶ actually names two historical figures directly connected with the introduction of compulsory education in the Judea of their day. The Jerusalem Talmud states

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1. Drazin, N: The History of Jewish Education from 515 B C E - 220 C E: p 17. (John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1940)
 2. Deuteronomy VI, 7.
 3. Tractate Peah of Mishna: Chapter I.1. op.cit.
 4. Drazin: op.cit., p 12.
 5. "Contra Apionem I": 12.60: in The Works of Flavius Josephus tr W Whiston. (Myers & Co, London, 1909) p 913.
 6. Talmud: (Hebrew - study, learning). Extensive literature covering the whole range of Jewish life and religion, consisting of the reports of the discussions of the sages in the land of Israel and Babylonia. It was redacted as the Jerusalem Talmud by c 400 A D and the Babylonian Talmud about a century later: both are based on the Mishna (see p 26)

concisely that:

it was Simeon ben Shetah who initiated three things.....and that children should go to school.¹

It is held that this scholar-statesman established secondary schools during the early decades of the last century before our era.² There is a more detailed reference in the Babylonian Talmud to the High Priest Joshua ben Gamla who, a few years before the outbreak of the great revolt against the Romans in 66 A D, is praised for having introduced the system of compulsory education in Judea:

.....but for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel.³

This otherwise obscure priest

came and ordained that teachers of young children should be appointed in each district and each town and that children should enter school at the age of six or seven.⁴

Mishnaic sources of the period after the destruction of the Second Temple and the State provide more information concerning the organisation of schools and the great importance of education to the Jewish people of that particular age in its history. The subject is summarised by a modern writer in these words:

In the absence of the usual attributes of national life - political independence, territorial segregation, even community of language - education became the focus of all the vital powers of the People, supplying the content as well as the form for its collective life.⁵ ✓

1. "Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Ketubot", Chapter VIII: Rule 11: quoted in Sources in the History of Jewish and General Education: Eliav & Kleinberger (edts) (Otzar Hamoreh, Tel Aviv, 1959) p 56 (my translation).
2. Drazin, op.cit., p 40.
3. Babylonian Talmud: op.cit., Tractate Bava Bathra: p 21A
4. Ibid.
5. Morris, N: The Jewish School p xxvi (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1937)

The Talmudic Period (c 200A D - 500A D), like the Mishnaic preceding it, was one of great intellectual and academic activity. The Babylonian Talmud¹ consists of over two-and-a-half million words² recording the wide-ranging discussions of the scholar-rabbis of the day - the Amoraim³ - who expounded and interpreted the Mishna in the great colleges located in such places as Sura, Pumbeditha and Nehardea in Mesopotamia⁴. Wide sections of the populace were also involved in the study and discussion of Torah, and many participated in the bi-annual Yarhei Kalla assemblies held in these colleges, when a set tractate of the Talmud was studied.⁵

The Mediaeval Period

By the end of the Talmudic period (c 500A D) the concept of the primacy of education was deeply rooted in the Jewish ethos. With the decline in the fortunes of the Babylonian Jewish community after the death of Saadia Gaon (c 882A D - 942A D)⁶ Jewish life and culture began to flourish in Moorish Spain and Italy and later also in France and the Rhineland, and in these communities of the far west, too, Jewish education retained its essential role in the socio-religious life of the individual and the group.

1. See footnote 6, p 28.

2. Silver, D J: op.cit., pp279-280.

3. Amoraim: (Aramaic - expounders or interpreters).

4. Silver, D J: op cit., ibid.

5. Ariel, S Z: Leksikon LeTodaa Yehudit: Hebrew: (Lexicon of Terms and Concepts in Judaism). (Massada, Ramat Gan, Israel, 1968) pp 84 & 156.

6. Grayzel, S: A History of the Jews (Mentor Books, 1968) pp 253-254.

During tranquil periods, study of Torah - of Scripture and Talmud and Commentaries - was pursued with traditional devotion: when persecution, suffering and expulsions became their lot, the harassed communities found their refuge in the faith and Torah. In these they found true meaning for their lives and the spiritual strength to bear their burdens and ensure their group-survival, in the certainty of God's promise of salvation and redemption.¹

The remarkable spiritual and intellectual vitality of mediaeval Jewry is exemplified in the efflorescence of Jewish and general learning during the Golden Age of Islamic Spain, as well as in the more traditionally circumscribed religious culture of the great scholars of the harassed French and German Jewish communities of that age in Christian North-West Europe.

The Golden Age of Spain began about 900 AD and lasted for several centuries during which the Jewish communities enjoyed long periods of peace in Moslem Spain and North Africa. It was an age which produced philosophers and poets, scientists and statesmen, Torah scholars and commentators who produced their works in Hebrew or Arabic in the stimulating environment of Moorish Spain.

The Jews of Europe outside Spain were not destined to produce a golden age. It was not only that Christian culture was not as inspiring as that of early Moslem Spain, but they were not vouchsafed "a few generations of mental peace".² In

1. This is given poetic expression by Hayyim Nahman Bialik:
 If thou would'st know the mystic fount from whence
 Thy brethren going to their slaughter drew
 In evil day the strength and fortitude
 To meet grim death with joy
 Go to the House of Prayer grown old....

Hebrew: If Thou Would'st Care to Know - "Im Yesh Et Nafshecha Lada'at": Tr. H H Fein in Selected Poems of H N Bialik: ed. I Efros (Bloch Publ. Co., New York, 1965) pp 70-72.

2. Grayzel: op.cit., p 303

France (outside of Provence) and Germany physical suffering inhibited cultural efflorescence. For them it was an Age of Iron: iron in the sword raised against them, iron in their determination to maintain Jewish life.¹

In their life-and-death struggle to survive as a distinct religious-ethnic group in the face of endless persecution and violence, expulsion and despoliation, the Jews of Western Europe wrote another golden page in Jewish history. It was a page of martyrdom and self-sacrifice in defence of their faith. For strength and faith to live through the "Age of Iron" the Jewish communities turned inwards to the inexhaustible sources of their Torah civilisation as it had developed and crystallised from the times of Sinai to their own day. Torah study was their refuge and shield, a source of consolation and faith.

Outstanding figure of the age was Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes, known as Rashi² (1040-1105), whose running commentary³ on the Bible and Talmud became a popular and indispensable adjunct to students of all ages, from Heder-boy to learned sage.

Far from being a dry commentator accessible only to the learned minority, Rashi became, and has remained, the people's educator distinguished by his "warmth and hortatory enthusiasm".⁴ Humash and Rashi were fused into one indivisible learning concept. His work was continued by the school of commentators called the Tosafists⁵ who clarified his

1. Ibid., p 304.

2. Acronym, from the initials of his Hebrew name.

3. Epstein, I: Judaism (Pelican Books, 1960) p 253.

4. Silver: op. cit., p 330

5. From Tosafoth: Hebrew - additions.

commentaries on the Talmud during the ensuing two centuries.¹

Rashi and the Tosafists lived during the Crusades (1096 onwards) which brought great suffering to the Jewish communities of France and Germany, particularly of the Rhineland. Rashi and the Tosafists opened the door to the Talmud for the Jews of North-Western Europe during those dark ages of persecution, so that it became their spiritual and intellectual armour in their struggle for survival during the "Age of Iron".²

Extant documents give ample evidence of the enhanced importance of education; for the mediaeval Jewish communities it was truly their "principal care" as Flavius Josephus termed it a thousand years previously. Scripture, Mishna and Talmud constituted the content of mediaeval Jewish education for the various age levels. There was a growing acceptance by the whole community of its responsibility for the education of all its children, based on the realisation that proper education was essential for their spiritual and material well-being.³

A number of mediaeval Jewish sources throw much light on the place of education in the life of the Jewish communities of those years. Sefer HaHassidim (The Book of the Pious), ascribed to Rabbi Judah the Pious, who lived in Regensburg about the year 1200⁴, and to several other authors living at the end of the twelfth and during the first half of the thirteenth centuries, is an important book which deals comprehensively and even critically with the education of that

1. Epstein: op.cit., p 253

2. Ibid., p 254

3. Morris, N: Toldot HaHinuch shel 'Am Yisrael (History of Jewish Education) Hebrew: (Omanuth, Tel Aviv, 1964: 2 Volumes) Vol II, pp 327-328

4. Ben-Sasson, H H: "The Middle Ages": Part V in A History of the Jewish People, op.cit., pp 545-546

age. Morris contends that no treatise on education of comparative value appears till the writings of Comenius in the seventeenth century.¹ Sefer Hukei HaTorah (The Book of Torah Statutes)² was compiled in 1309 by an anonymous author or authors, and gives an account of Jewish education in France and Germany of that day. In discussing and examining the methods then current, it outlines a curriculum of studies, covering fifteen years from the age of five till twenty, suited to the conditions of Jewish life of those times.

Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, (1135-1204), directed his attention to education in his Hilchoth Talmud Torah (Regulations for Torah Study) and other writings.³ Of great interest is the record of the proceedings of the synod summoned to Valladolid in 1433 by Rabbi Abraham Benvenisti⁴ which gives a vivid picture of the state of education in the Spanish-Jewish communities of that day and enacts detailed regulations for its re-organisation during the last decades of Jewish life on the Iberian Peninsula. Characteristically enough, that assembly, gathered together during the declining years of the once flourishing community, assigned to educational reforms the first 'gate' (= section) of their deliberations and decisions, for this was their first concern.⁵

For the Jews of Europe, with the notable exceptions of England⁶ and the Netherlands, the Middle Ages continued till well into

1. Morris, N: op.cit., p 358

2. Asaf, S: Mekoroth LeToldoth HaHinuch BeYisrael (Sources in the History of Jewish Education) Hebrew:
(4 Volumes: Mossad HaRav Kook: Jerusalem, 1942)
Vol I, pp 6 et seq.

3. Eliav & Kleinberger: op.cit., pp 87 et seq.

4. Asaf: op.cit., Vol II pp 80 et seq.

5. Ibid., p 81

6. Jews were re-admitted by Cromwell and enjoyed considerable freedom; full emancipation was granted to them only during the mid-nineteenth century.

the eighteenth century. Social, economic, and religious discrimination and segregation in ghetto and judengasse were interspersed with spasms of persecution, expulsion and violence for most of the communities on the Continent.

Eighteenth century Enlightenment began the process of gradual amelioration of these mediaeval conditions of life.¹ The French Revolution gave a mighty impetus to this emancipation movement for the European Jews, which continued its somewhat erratic course during the nineteenth century.²

In Russia the Jews were confined to the territorial boundaries of the Pale of Settlement till well into the twentieth century. Here the Jewish communities lived their culturally and religiously self-contained lives based on Torah and Halacha which regulated life from cradle to the grave. Torah provided the spiritual polity and the Shulhan Aruch³ was the legal code according to which the Jewish communities shaped their individual and group existence during those centuries. In the socio-religious framework education maintained its place of prime importance.

The Haskalah⁴ Movement started about the middle of the eighteenth century amongst the Jews of Central Europe who desired to break out of the exclusiveness of traditional Jewish life and thought of ghetto and judengasse in order to adopt the culture and life-style of their respective countries of domicile. Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) headed this modernisation movement⁵ and soon afterwards the French Revolution opened the way for the emancipation of the Jews from the political and

1. Moses Mendelssohn had to pay the special toll for which every Jew was liable before being allowed to enter Berlin in 1743. He did not gain the right of permanent residence in the capital.
2. The Roman ghetto was abolished only in 1870.
3. See footnote 4, p 18.
4. Haskalah: Hebrew - enlightenment.
5. Ettinger, S: "The Jewish Community in Western and Central Europe" in A History of the Jewish People: ed. H H Ben-Sasson (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1976) p 782

social disabilities which had been their lot in most European lands for many centuries.

With emancipation, Haskalah in post-revolutionary Germany lost its Jewish bearings.¹ Modernisation went hand-in-hand with secularisation; what followed was alienation from Judaism and widespread assimilation.²

As a movement aiming at radical cultural and social change the Haskalah naturally concerned itself with reforming the traditional system of Jewish education which had remained virtually unchanged since mediaeval times. The old order in Jewish education came under attack by the writers of the Haskalah during the second half of the eighteenth century.

When Emperor Joseph II of Austria issued his Toleranzpatent in 1782, calling for reforms in Jewish education, his call was taken up by the German-Jewish writer Naphtali Herz Wessely (1725-1805) in his Hebrew essay Words of Peace and Truth in which he pleaded for a new system which would combine secular as well as Jewish studies.³

During the years that followed, and especially after 1789, when the Jewish communities of West, Central and Southern Europe were granted social and political emancipation in increasing measure, such schools were set up in most countries of this region, particularly in the German States, to provide a modern education for Jewish children. The first was the Hinuch Ne'arim (Free School)⁴ established by the Maskilim⁵ of Berlin in 1778.⁶ The Philanthropin⁷, founded in

1. Ibid., p 786

2. Dubnov: Vol V. op.cit., p 208

3. Asaf: op.cit., Vol I. pp 225 et seq.

4. Hebrew - Education of Boys.

5. Hebrew - protagonists of the Haskalah.

6. Ettinger: op.cit., p 786

7. It was known as the Philanthropin Burger und Realschule der Israelitischen Gemeinde.

Franfurt-on-Main in 1804 as an orphanage comprised elementary and secondary departments and a girls' college and was still in existence in the thirties of this century.¹ The Jews' Free School established in London in 1817 and the Carolineskolen founded in Copenhagen some years earlier, are two which are still in existence.

In time, however, Jewish instruction in such schools came to be overshadowed by the demands of the general curriculum and in most cases was finally reduced to minimal proportions.²

With the spread of universal education in Europe during the nineteenth century most of these Jewish schools were superseded by state schools. Jewish education suffered a severe setback in the emancipated Jewish communities of Europe and those of the countries overseas. It became fragmentary, relegated, if provided at all, to a few lessons a week in Sunday schools, or Hebrew Religious classes, and generally terminating at Barmitzvah (religious confirmation for boys at the age of 13).

Haskalah came to Russia several generations after its appearance in Germany, and here too it aimed at secularising and modernising the rigidly traditional Jewish social order, which had remained isolated and largely unchanged for centuries.³

The tradition-bound rabbinic leaders resisted the Haskalah striving for modernisation. Haskalah and tradition struggled for supremacy in Jewish society subjected to the oppression of nineteenth century Czarist rule. Traditionalists could point to the disintegration of the emancipated and enlightened Jewish communities of Western Europe as evidence for the great harm

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1. Jewish Encyclopaedia (Shapiro and Valentine, London, 1938) p 514.
 2. This study will deal with some South African Jewish schools of a similar pattern which survived till well into the first years of the present century. These were the Miriam Marks School in Pretoria, the Johannesburg Jewish School and Hope Mill in Cape Town.
 3. Dubnov, op.cit., p 208

wrought by Haskalah to Jewish life.¹ The pogroms of 1880-1881 and the May Laws in Russia finally turned the Haskalah in that country in the direction of Jewish nationalism.

Isaac Ber Levinsohn (1788-1860) made the first call for Enlightenment in the Province of Volhynia and is regarded as the literary father of Russian Haskalah, the "Mendelssohn of the Russian Jews". Odessa and Vilna became centres of the Russian Haskalah movement.²

The vast majority of the Jews concentrated in the Pale lived their self-contained Jewish lives in the shtetels³ which covered the area, and which virtually shut them off from the mainstream of Russian life. The proposed instrument for such social reform was, naturally enough, education.

The Jewish society of the Pale, however, was more cohesive and therefore more resistant to change than its counterpart in Germany and other countries of Western Europe. It resisted an attempt by the Russian authorities to establish modern schools for Jewish children in the 1840's. Dr Max Lilienthal, a German-born maskil, who was director of a Jewish school in Riga, was appointed to launch this state system. In the places he visited in the Pale he encountered strong opposition on the part of the traditionalists. He fled Russia in 1845 when he realised that these schools were really intended for use as an instrument of state policy aimed at conversion.⁴ The old system of education remained largely unchanged, to survive into the twentieth century when the Zionist national movement and the rebirth of Hebrew virtually reformed it out of existence.

The Jewish minority community maintained itself by educating for itself and rejecting

1. Ibid., pp 784 et seq.

2. Ibid., pp 204-207

3. Shtetel : Yiddish - a village or small town (diminutive of shtot - city).

4. Ettinger: op.cit., pp 817-818

any other educational goal.¹

Traditional education was a preparation for life in the closed religious community of the shtetel which was by and large unmindful of the larger society of the land, and virtually ignored its culture.

Education was one of the main pillars of organised Jewish communal life in the Jewish world of East-Central Europe of a century and more ago. To these communities, Jewish education was the historic constant of their past and present: it was the age-old tradition which had come down to them, and to which they devotedly adhered, of Jewish learning as a prime duty of the individual and a prime responsibility of the family and the community.

The environment was permeated with love of Torah.....hardly the house without (holy) books.²

The child's introduction to learning was an important ceremony. Wrapped in a tallit³ he was carried by his parents to Heder⁴ where a shower of sweets and coins "thrown by a heavenly angel" fell onto the table as he was being shown his first letters by the teacher, as a reward from heaven and a symbol of the sweetness of learning the Torah.⁵

Heder was a whole-day school and consisted of several

1. Adar, Z: "Jewish Education Today and Some Problems of Cultural Pluralism" in Education for Cultural Pluralism: ed. E M Eppel (World Jewish Congress, London, 1972) p 103.
2. Scharfstein, Z: Toldot HaHinuch BeYisrael BaDorot HaAhronim: (Hebrew) (History of Jewish Education in Recent Times) (Ogen, New York, 1945) Vol I p 4
3. Tallit: Hebrew - prayer-shawl
4. Heder: Hebrew - room. The one-man school was located in a room of the teacher's house, or in one attached to the synagogue.
5. Scharfstein: op.cit., pp 6-7.

stages.¹ The Hebrew texts taken from the Pentateuch and Talmud were translated into Yiddish. Physical conditions were poor; the teaching was generally mechanical and harsh; the teacher was unqualified and untrained. In the Gemorrah Heder selections from the Talmud constituted the total curriculum, perhaps with an addition of elementary arithmetic. The boy might then graduate to a Yeshiva² or else might join classes in Talmud given by a rabbi in the Beth Hamedrash³ of the town. The very capable or privileged would possibly travel to study in one of the famous Yeshivot⁴ such as Slobodka in the Lithuanian town of Kovno, or Volozhin in White Russia, or Mir in Eastern Poland.

In most towns there were communally-supported Talmud-Torahs for the poorer children of the place who could not afford the fees for Heder tuition. In the course of time, Heder and Talmud Torah became interchangeable terms for what was the elementary traditional Hebrew school of Eastern Europe as well as for the afternoon supplementary Jewish school which the immigrants from that region established in South Africa at the turn of the century.

It is interesting to record that some examples of this type of education have survived here and there even to our own day. Obviously enough, the transfer of the old-world school - the Heder - from the Pale to South Africa was attended by radical transformation, as this study will show.

New cultural winds began to blow through the Jewish world of Eastern Europe during the nineteenth century. The Zionist national revival was preceded by the Haskalah which led to the

1. First there was the Beginners' Heder in which the child learned to read. This was followed by Humash Heder where the Pentateuch and Rashi Commentary were studied and the final stage was the Gemorrah Heder where Talmud was taught. See: Leksikon LaTodaah Yehudit: op.cit., p 60
2. Yeshiva: Hebrew - Talmudical College.
3. Synagogue where Talmudical studies also took place.
4. Plural of Yeshiva: see note 2 above.

renascence of Hebrew as a spoken tongue and the flowering of modern Hebrew literature. When the Enlightenment reached Russian Jewry, or sections of it, during the early decades of the nineteenth century, it used Hebrew as its vehicle of expression,¹ and thus laid the groundwork for the revival and flowering of Hebrew during the second half of the century. The first modern Hebrew novel was written by Abraham Mapu in 1851; new poets like J L Gordon and M J Lebensohn sang in the ancient tongue and new voices such as those of P Smolenskin and M L Lilienblum were raised bringing a message - in Hebrew - of national re-awakening. Modern journals - monthlies and weeklies - were established, and prose masters like Abramowitz ("Mendele the Book Seller"), I L Peretz and Asher Ginsburg appeared on the scene. It was the single-minded visionary, Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, who almost single-handedly triggered the movement for reviving the renascent language as a modern spoken tongue in Palestine where he established the first Hebrew-speaking home in 1878, and set out on his life work of compiling his monumental Thesaurus of the Hebrew Language. The Jewish inhabitants of the towns and the pioneers and farmers of the poor villages and "colonies" in Palestine gradually became Hebrew-speaking. The maskilim² and Zionists of Eastern Europe who were avid students and readers of the new literature and the new press in Hebrew now set themselves the duty of making Hebrew a living language to be spoken and taught to their children. The time was ripe for the reform of Jewish education.

The inspiration came from Palestine, from Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, the Father of Modern Hebrew, himself, and from a rising generation of young educationists. At the centre were David Yellin and Yitzhak Epstein and their reformist educational movement. In Russia this movement for educational reform expressed itself in the Heder Hametukan (the Reformed Hebrew School). The early Zionist thinker

1. Yiddish had no literature as yet.

2. See footnote 5, p 36

Ahad Ha'am spoke of hachsharat halevavot ("the preparation of the hearts"), the spiritual and intellectual preparation without which there could be no national renaissance, and this naturally called for a new education. The old communal Talmud Torah was a version of the private Heder system, itself antiquated and wanting in most respects. Demands arose for improvement in education. A new generation of idealistic and enthusiastic teachers were fired by the new national ideal of hachsharat halevavot,¹ and impelled by their social duty to establish people's schools. Supported by like-minded lay-leaders, they reformed the old worn-out institutions and inspired a new fresh spirit into them.² The old Heder was a travesty of everything that was educationally desirable: the Heder Hametukan was a radical metamorphosis in every respect. Secular subjects were also taught, in Hebrew of course, and the language itself was taught by the natural method³ as a living tongue, a system then gaining ground in European schools. Eliezer Ben-Yehudah was a pioneer of this system in a Jerusalem school in the early eighties and laid the foundation for a network of Hebrew-speaking schools in the country. His pupils David Yellin, Yitzhak Epstein and Yehudah Grasovsky developed the pedagogical aspects more fully.⁴ Epstein published his language book for the new system called

1. See above.

2. Scharfstein, Z: Toldot HaHinuch BeYisrael Badorot HaAhronim: op.cit., Vol I, pp 364 et seq.

3. Ibid., p 369.

4. Ibid., p 371.

Ivrit B'Ivrit¹ (Hebrew through the medium of Hebrew) and Yellin's more detailed Lefi Hataf ("For the Mouth of the Child") appeared in Warsaw in 1900².

These books revolutionised the teaching of Hebrew as a modern spoken language, and inspired the publication of a wide range of modern educational textbooks.³

From the Heder Hametukan and from the new Hebrew schools of Palestine at the beginning of the century came the message to faraway South Africa, to the Cape Town Talmud Torah, headed by Mr Joseph Geffen, situated in the school rooms of the New Hebrew Congregation in Roeland Street. The contemporary external factor reached South Africa for the first time.

1. Ibid., p 372.

2. Rabin, C: 'Ikkarei Toldot HaLashon Ha'Ivrit: (Hebrew: Highlights in the History of the Hebrew Language) (The Department of Education and Culture for the Diaspora, W Z O. Jerusalem, 3rd edition, 1976) p 57.

3. Scharfstein: op.cit., p 378.

P A R T T W O

JEWISH EDUCATION AT THE CAPE

DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE

NINETEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER 5: THE JEWISH COMMUNITY DURING THE SECOND HALF
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

There were great changes in the Jewish community at the Cape during the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Immigration greatly increased the size of the community, changed its cultural and social fabric, and radically altered the nature of its institutions, its educational ones notably included.

In 1855¹ the Jewish population of Cape Town was a mere 170, mostly of British and German descent. By 1875 the figure for the Cape was 538 in a total white population estimated at 225 000.² The 1891 census gave the total number of Jews living in the Colony as 3 009³ out of a total of some 320 000 with "1 200 living in Cape Town: most of them hail from Russia and Poland".⁴ By 1904, the numbers had risen to 19 537 out of a total of over 800 000, more than half of them being resident in Cape Town.⁵

This considerable increase in the white population at the Cape was primarily due to the rise in immigration. As far as the Jewish community was concerned the increase was

1. Abrahams, I: op.cit., p 137, Note 2: quotation from M Johnson's "Atlas of Physical Geography" (1855)

2. Ibid., p 145, Note 15, quotes from London Jewish Chronicle of 14 September 1883.

3. Ibid., Note 25.

4. Ibid., p 52: quotation from N D Hoffman's letter during 1891 from the Cape to the Hebrew Journal Hatzefira, in Warsaw.

5. Ibid., pp 152-153

proportionally very much higher, especially between the years 1891 and 1904, resulting from political and social factors outside South Africa.

The Discovery of Diamonds

The discovery of diamonds in 1867 attracted many fortune-seekers from overseas as well as from the other parts of the country to Griqualand West where they hoped to find wealth on the diggings or otherwise benefit from the economic opportunities offered in Kimberley and other towns of the area. Amongst these were numbers of Jews from Britain and Germany who made notable contributions to the economic development of the region and the country.

There is a record of some Jews from Eastern Europe arriving at the Cape towards the end of the seventies and proceeding inland in search of their fortunes.¹ They were few in number and had first spent some time in England where, having obviously learned at first hand about the attractions of the Colony, they joined the stream of immigrants flowing from the United Kingdom southwards towards the brilliant opportunities of Kimberley.

The few and small Jewish communities in South Africa during the first part of the Victorian era were established by groups of English, German and Dutch Jews who desired to retain their group life in the distant colonial outposts. In the course of time these pioneers were augmented by other co-religionists from the same countries of origin who formed part of the growing flow of European immigration attracted to the Cape by the bright and even dazzling economic prospects and hopes raised in the hearts of so many by the discovery of diamonds.

1. Saron, G: "The Making of South African Jewry" in South African Jewry, 1965: ed. L Feldberg (Fieldhill, Johannesburg) p 13.

The Jewish community at the Cape naturally enough maintained close links with Anglo-Jewry. The colony itself was British; most of the immigrants were British-born or had lived there before coming out to the Cape; family ties and business interests served to cement the bonds between colonials and the community of the mother country; their ministers were selected in Britain by the Chief Rabbi in London whom they acknowledged as their supreme religious authority; they organised their early congregations and the form of religious service on the lines of the Great Synagogue of London. As we have seen, their endeavours in the field of Jewish education reflected the situation in British Jewry right up to the end of the century.

Eastern European Immigration after 1881

The immigration from Eastern Europe which started from the early eighties radically changed the face and history of the Jewish community in South Africa. The immigrants effected, writes Abrahams, "a gradual but irresistible revolution in the South African Jewish community".¹

In absolute numbers Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to South Africa was barely a trickle in the vast ocean of immigration from Europe to the New World and the British Colonies during the three decades or so preceding the outbreak of the First World War. The United States admitted some 20 million immigrants during this period.²

The great emigration movement from Europe during the first seven decades of the nineteenth century passed South Africa by. It is estimated that for the years 1820-1860 the

1. Abrahams, I: op. cit., p 63.

2. See p 10

average immigration into South Africa was about 750 persons a year. The Emigration Commissioners in London did not even bother to mention the figures (for this country) in their records.¹

The white population in the Cape Colony, the most populous of the republics and colonies during the nineteenth century, was 181 592 in 1865. It grew to 223 998 a decade later. In 1891 it numbered 317 139 and rose sharply to 579 741 by 1904.² There were 19 537 Jews in the Colony in that year.³

The volume of immigration in the last decade of the preceding century increased considerably during the first years of the twentieth. It may be gauged from the number of passengers landing at Cape Town, though it should be borne in mind that not all of these had come from overseas: a certain number had voyaged down from Natal, for example.

In 1901, 30 852 passengers arrived in Table Bay, 49 060 in 1902⁴ and 53 886 in 1903⁵. For the next few years the number hovered round the 28 000-mark.⁶

During these three-and-a-half, pre-1914, decades some 40 000 Eastern-European Jews immigrated to South Africa.⁷ They constituted by-and-large a refugee immigration from the

1. de Kiewiet, C W : A History of South Africa: (Oxford University Press, 1941) p 70.
2. Statistical Register of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope for the year 1909: (Cape Times: Government Printers, 1910) p 13.
3. Ibid., : 1908, p 6.
4. Ibid., : 1902, p iii
5. Ibid., : 1907, Annual Return No 10.
6. Ibid., : 1908: Part XIII. Annual Return No 10.
7. Gershater, C: "From Lithuania to South Africa" in Saron & Hotz: op. cit., p 61

repressive regime of Czarist Russia which subjected its Jewish subjects to discrimination and persecution. It had long restricted them to specific areas of the empire called the Pale of Settlement, deprived them of political, civic and economic rights and exposed them to - or even fomented - that organised violence which gained universal opprobrium for the Russian word pogrom.

The wave of pogroms that began in 1881 was the culminating point of decades of oppression and was followed by the "legislative pogroms" of 1882 by which the reactionary regime imposed further restrictions and hardships on the Jews of the Pale in which over 90% of the entire Jewish population of the Russian Empire lived in conditions of congestion, poverty and political oppression.

This great migration changed the course of modern Jewish history.¹ A very tiny trickle of this great human stream which, strangely enough, emanated almost wholly from one particular corner of the Russian Pale flowed towards South Africa and was itself destined to change the history of the Jewish community at the southern tip of this continent.

The discovery of diamonds and gold in the seventies and eighties fired the imagination of the poverty-stricken dwellers of the Pale, but these inhabitants of obscure Lithuanian villages were hardly moved by those dreams of fantastic wealth conjured up by Kimberley, Barberton and Johannesburg in the minds of the cosmopolitan stream of fortune-seekers who streamed into South Africa from Britain, America and Europe. South Africa was to them the goldene medine², but in the figurative, very much more modest, sense of the term. The golden land held out golden

1. Ettinger: op.cit., p 861

2. Land of Gold (Yiddish).

opportunities for the impoverished immigrant to improve his economic lot, and little enough was required to improve upon the poverty of the life he had led in the shtetel. There were no Lithuanian "randlords".

Reality all too soon dissipated these hopes of swift economic betterment in the goldene medine; ¹ hard labour was the order of the day for all, and grinding poverty, to begin with anyway, for many. But this was not to be their lot forever: what they saw and appreciated was the opportunity to improve one's position, the openings leading to a better life, free from persecution and pogrom. This was the share of the South African eldorado which the immigrant looked for and valued.

The immigrants in time outnumbered their old-established co-religionists in the colonies and the republics, but there were too many differences in outlook and habits between these two sections to prevent social and personal friction which endured for many years and manifested themselves in various spheres of communal life.

The newcomers, hailing from the provincial townships of Lithuania, itself one of the less advanced of the Czar's provinces, were more committed to their Jewishness than the anglicised Jewish settlers they found here. Jewish life in the shtetel was steeped in religious tradition, self-contained, almost hermetically sealed-off from its non-Jewish environment. The immigrants were more pious, more knowledgeable Jewishly, more attached to their traditional way of life than the emancipated South African Jews. To the latter they were "foreigners", alien in appearance, dress and manners. Their language too was foreign; it was Yiddish, looked upon as mere jargon; and there were the differences in religious customs and

1. See p 48, footnote 2

general outlook. The immigrants were the "greeners" who settled in the poorer quarters of the towns or in the platteland villages where they plied their trades or engaged in petty commerce. Many became smouse or toggers, itinerant pedlars who took their wares - or carried them on their backs very frequently - to the hamlets and isolated farmhouses scattered across the countryside. In the towns they were cab-drivers, house-to-house salesmen ("triers") offering the lowliest of wares, small traders and shopkeepers, or lowly paid assistants to the latter.

They were poor, but most were, or long remained, pious with a strong sense of their Jewishness. They felt strange in the established synagogues, did not understand the English sermons and disapproved of some of the forms of service.

They established their own congregations and synagogues and clung to much of the life-style they brought from "home", subject all the while, understandably enough, to the processes of acculturation. Whilst they themselves adapted more and more to their new environment as the years went by, they could not permit their children to wait as long. For them education became an immediate necessity as a means of entry into the new cultural and social milieu. The old-established elements in the community also saw the need for this and it was no doubt the main reason that actuated them in establishing the "Hebrew public schools" in the main centres during the last decades of the century.

For the Jewish community, however, education presented a double problem: "what of the Jewish content?" asked these newcomers who had themselves known no other form of education than the Heder of the shtetel.

The question was to be answered by the establishment of the Talmud Torah, the educational instrument transferred from the home soil. It was to exist side by side with those other institutions for the education of the Jewish

young - the Jewish public school, the Sabbath and Sunday classes for Hebrew and religion and the private Hedarim.

After the turn of the century the Talmud Torah was to undergo certain changes that were to prepare it for the important role it was to play in the history of Jewish education in this country during the first half of the present century.

In time the Lithuanian immigrants and their descendants absorbed the outnumbered older co-religionists of Britain, German and West European descent, who still retained their group identity; in the process they themselves had moved far along the road of acculturation to their new environment and nearer, too, to their older anglicised fellow-Jews.

The Jewish community of South Africa has been described as "Lithuanian wine in English bottles".¹ As its face and character changed in the context of the mighty historical developments in the Jewish and general world, it began to search for new answers to the age-old problem facing every Jewish community in diaspora existence - the problem of Jewish education.

1. Saron, G: "The Making of South African Jewry" in South African Jewry 1965: op.cit., p 17.
In discussing the process whereby the Russian Jews became accustomed to the older English-speaking section, Saron states that it was a case of "pouring Litvak (Lithuanian) spirit into Anglo-Jewish bottles".

CHAPTER 6: THE REV. MR JOEL RABINOWITZ AT THE TIKVATH ISRAEL CONGREGATION, CAPE TOWN

Organised Jewish life in South Africa dates back to September 26th 1841, when seventeen males met at the home of Mr Benjamin Norden in Hof Street, Cape Town, to observe the Day of Atonement and recite the prescribed prayers as required of a ritual quorum of ten males (a minyan). On the following Sunday morning the worshippers met at the house of Simon Marcus at the corner of Loop and Longmarket Streets and formally founded the first permanent Jewish congregation in the sub-continent. They called themselves "The Society of the Jewish Community of Cape Town, the Cape of Good Hope" and for their Hebrew name - as demanded by tradition - they chose, not inappropriately, the words Tikvath Israel, the "Hope of Israel".¹

By 1849 the little congregation was strong enough to bring out a minister from England to tend to its spiritual needs and a property at the corner of St John's and Bouquet Streets was acquired for conversion into a synagogue. The Rev. Mr Isaac Pulver's ministry was unfortunately of short duration and he returned to England in 1851.

The congregation just about managed to survive during the ensuing eight years. In 1859 the Rev. Mr Joel Rabinowitz was brought out from England. He was to minister to Tikvath Israel and to those members of the Jewish faith widely dispersed across the Colony for the next twenty-five years. His notable communal and philanthropic work for the Jewish as well as the general communities only terminated with his death in 1902.²

1. Herrman, L: A History of the Jews in South Africa.
op.cit., p 15.

2. Abrahams, I: "Western Province Jewry 1870-1902" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., pp 17 et seq. (passim).

The affairs of the Tikvath Israel Congregation prospered during the first years of Mr Rabinowitz's ministry.

The first synagogue in this country was erected in St John's Street in 1863. Until 1872 he was the only Jewish minister in the country and he maintained close contacts with the little congregations in Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth as well as the scattered Jewish families in the towns and villages of the interior.¹

The end of the sixties, however, saw difficult times for the Tikvath Israel Congregation. The Jewish communities round about 1870 "were not flourishing".² Times were bad in the Colony and the members of the Tikvath Israel Congregation, who were mostly engaged in commerce, suffered a decline in fortunes as well as in numbers.

The discovery of diamonds in 1867 attracted many from the few existing congregations to the Griqualand West diggings. At the coast the older communities managed to hold their own, though not without difficulty;³ the great infusion of strength that came with the immigration from Eastern Europe still belonged to the future. In 1875, Dr J Rohlf, an African explorer, gave a figure of 538 Jews living in the Colony.⁴

Dispersed as they were in tiny numbers across the Colony, the Jews were subjected to the inevitable erosion of

1. Saron, G: "The Making of South African Jewry" in 1965 S A Jewish Year Book: op.cit., p 11.

2. Herrman, L: "Cape Jewry before 1870" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 15.

3. Ibid.

4. Abrahams, I: Birth of a Community (Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, Cape Town, 1955) p 145, Note 15.

assimilation. Most of the descendants of the founder-members of Tikvath Israel Congregation in the course of time merged with the majority population and lost their identity¹. It was only when organised Jewish communal life was established in the main towns of the Colony that "dykes were built against the forces of assimilation".² And these "dykes" were constructed by the endeavours of the minister in the synagogue and the classroom. He was not only a spiritual guide to the community but also teacher to the young; these functions were indeed inseparable from each other.

The minutes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation record the first references to an attempt to establish organised Jewish education, albeit on a very small scale.³ Mr Rabinowitz proposed to the committee that he give "Hebrew and religious instruction" as well as "a religious discourse" to the children of the community.⁴ This offer of Mr Rabinowitz's "gratuitous service for the religious education and training of the children of the Congregation"⁵ was accepted, and this "school for religious training" was opened in one of the rooms of the synagogue building. Classes were to be held twice weekly, on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons; to these would be added a "discourse" at the children's service on Saturday afternoons.

A committee of three was elected to run the school for which fourteen children of members were enrolled. It was

1. Herrman: op.cit., p 16.

2. Abrahams, I: "Western Province Jewry 1870-1902" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 21

3. Minutes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 8 March 1868.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

decided to levy a fee of two guineas per annum, payable to the teacher, since previous attempts to organise classes had ended in failure because "amongst other things, no charge had been made for them in the past".¹

The minister reported some months later, so the minutes record, that the school had indeed opened, that "the children are attending regularly and doing well"² and were preparing for the half-yearly examinations when the Congregation would have an opportunity to judge progress.³

This is the first recorded account we have of any Hebrew school in Southern Africa. The previous attempts to organise classes, referred to in the minutes, indicate that Mr Rabinowitz had tried to organise such classes earlier, obviously without success, and one may assume, too, that his predecessor, the Rev. Mr Pulver, had also attempted to do the same, with similar results. It may similarly be assumed that instruction in Hebrew and religion had previously been given by parents or private tutors to children of the community.

There is evidence that this embryonic school unfortunately floundered in the course of time.⁴ It was a difficult period for the Hope of Israel Congregation: the membership had declined to barely thirty by 1871;⁵ some members had died, others had left in search of better opportunities on

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Herrman, L: A History of the Jews in South Africa: op.cit., p 248

5. Abrahams, I: "Western Province Jewry 1870-1902" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 17.

the diamond fields or at Algoa Bay. The annual general meeting in 1871 was attended by only six members. Indicative of the situation in Cape Town was the invitation extended to Mr Rabinowitz to leave the service of the congregation and transfer to Port Elizabeth where the Jewish community was growing. The minister decided to remain with his flock during this difficult period in its history.

Within a few years, times improved for the Colony as a whole and for the congregation as well. Membership grew again and the financial position improved to such an extent that much needed renovations could be carried out in the synagogue. In particular, attention could again be given to the Jewish education of the children.

The Congregation decided to appoint a committee "to co-operate with Mr Rabinowitz, to draw up and act upon a scheme for the proper Jewish education of the Jewish children of Cape Town".¹ This committee was further authorised "to enquire into the advisability of having an elementary school established, and.....also assess the chances of its success".² It was to report back within twelve months. Life certainly moved at a more leisurely pace a century ago than it does nowadays. Or did the committee of Tikvath Israel perhaps feel that Jewish education was not really a very pressing problem at all?

This is also the first mention of the possibility of establishing "an elementary school" which would give secular as well as Jewish instruction. One may deduce from the

1. Minutes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 26th May 1878.
2. Ibid.

minutes that the committee appeared to be in doubt about the feasibility of bringing such an institution into existence. Cape education of the day was largely denominational in character, but almost wholly financed by the state. It was therefore natural for the congregation to think in terms of a synagogue school. The Jews' Free School of London¹ was a popular institution known to many in the congregation, and could serve as a fitting example.

Even though there is no record that anything materialised, this however serves at least as an indicator of the early development of Jewish education in this country, pointing to the ensuing two decades when Jewish education becomes more firmly established.

The following year the president reported that the Hebrew and religious school "is progressing satisfactorily", that the children are attending regularly twice a week, on Sundays and Saturdays, and that they have "reason to be satisfied with the results". A gratuity was voted to the minister "in appreciation of his educational labours".² We have no information about the number of pupils attending these classes, nor about the syllabus, but one may safely assume that it covered the material comprising the historical constant of Jewish instruction, in this case the barest minimum only in view of the very limited teaching time. It was most likely to have been elementary reading of Hebrew prayers (Siddur)³ and hymns; laws and customs and Bible stories in English and a little writing. More advanced pupils may have progressed to translation of

1. There were a number of such Jewish "free" schools in England; better-off pupils attended fee-paying Jewish residential schools.
2. Minutes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 1st September 1879.
3. Siddur (Hebrew): the book of daily prayer.

biblical passages and even basic grammar.¹

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1. No definite evidence is available, except by inference from the fact that this was the material covered at Hope Mill some decades later.

CHAPTER 7: THE MINISTRY OF THE REV. MR A F ORNSTIEN

Mr Rabinowitz was succeeded in 1882 by the Rev. Mr Ornstein, a qualified and experienced teacher who had served congregations in England and Australia. He had once been on the staff of the Jews' Free School in London and proposed to the congregation that it establish a school in Cape Town on similar lines.¹ Such a denominational Jewish "public" school was no novel educational idea; it had a long tradition in the home country and would, moreover, fit into the educational world at the Cape of that day.

Mr Ornstein's proposal was accepted and a special school committee was set up to work together with the minister to carry out the plan.² He undertook to draw up a suitable syllabus. Government financial aid and inspection were promised, as provided to other denominational schools.³

The plan, unfortunately, encountered serious obstacles. Whilst financial aid came from the congregation and from individual members of the Jewish community in the Colony, the government subsidy failed to materialise.⁴ More serious was the problem of the expected enrolment. The minister had reckoned on fifty boys being enrolled for the school, but this was not to be.⁵ Parents either lacked confidence in the proposed Jewish school which was a new

1. Abrahams, I: "Western Province Jewry 1870-1902" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., pp 23-24.
2. Minutes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 15th July, 1883.
3. Minutes of the School Committee of the C T Hebrew Congregation: 1st August, 1883.
4. Ibid., 15th August, 1883
5. Abrahams, I: "Western Province Jewry 1870-1902" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 27.

and untried venture for them, or were unwilling to withdraw their children from the popular school of Mr Thorner in Buitenkant Street.¹ It proved to be the undoing of Mr Ornstien's plans in 1883. The Jewish community was not ready as yet to accept the idea of a Jewish "public" school.

In the following year Mr Ornstien established his "Collegiate School" which provided a general and Jewish education for boys. The College is reputed to have been a successful educational institution which remained in existence till 1896, the year after the minister's death. It had a boarding establishment for country children of both sexes, but the girls attended other schools in town.

The private "College" did not entirely satisfy those who believed that the community needed a "public" school. A petition by about twenty persons "for the establishment of a school for Hebrew and religious instruction" was submitted to the congregational committee at the end of 1886.² For reasons of its own the committee rejected the petition. A few months later there is a reference to a Hebrew school run by a Mr Mizrahi,³ who had recently been appointed to act as shohet.⁴ It was also a private establishment and at first the committee objected to his using the Congregation's Hebrew name - Tikvath Israel - for his school. Mr Mizrahi duly apologised and the committee on its side withdrew its objection to his "carrying on a school for Hebrew and religious instruction".

1. Ibid.

2. Minutes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, December 1886.

3. Ibid., February 1887

4. Ritual slaughter of animals for human consumption.

There is no record of the enrolment or the syllabus of this private school, how long it existed, or whether it was the first of the long tradition of private Hedarim for the instruction in Hebrew and religion which became a feature of Jewish life in South Africa for decades to come.¹

Differences arose between the Congregation and Mr Ornstien over his "College". It was felt that he was spending too much of his time and energies on the running of his school and the boarding house, that it was a private profit-making venture for the benefit of only those who could afford the fees. As a compromise Mr Ornstien offered to educate six pupils free of charge; the committee on its part would recommend to the general meeting of the Congregation that school premises be erected for the "College" in the grounds of the synagogue.²

The position remained unsatisfactory, however, and a decision was taken that "he (a future minister) shall not be allowed to keep a boarding or any other school on the congregational premises or elsewhere without the consent of the committee".³ It is no surprise therefore that Mr Ornstien's contract was not renewed. He carried on with his school, however, till his death in 1895: the institution closed down in the following year.

The Congregation's minutes⁴ also record that Mr Ornstien was to establish a Sabbath School in January 1887 and it was later reported that this had been done and that the classes

1. The writer recalls a number of such private tutors in Cape Town during the twenties who ran their small classes in their own homes or went from home to home to give private lessons to their better-off pupils.
2. Minutes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, October 1890.
3. Cape Town Hebrew Congregation: Report for 1894.
4. Minutes of the Committee Meeting of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, December 1886.

were well attended. With the growth of the congregation and of the Jewish community in the Colony, co-religionists living in the country areas made "increasingly frequent calls on the minister's services"¹ and Mr Ornstien was, as a result, not infrequently absent from Cape Town. The Rev. E Lyons was appointed as assistant minister in 1889, his duties to include teaching the religion classes on Sundays.

1. Abrahams, I: op.cit., p 50.

CHAPTER 8: THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CAPE TOWN HEBREW PUBLIC SCHOOL (HOPE MILL)

A Jewish public school of some sort existed in Cape Town before the establishment of Hope Mill. There is the record of a letter written to the Tikvath Israel synagogue by "the President of the Jewish Educational School" asking for a grant towards the maintenance of his institution.¹ Shortly afterwards mention is made in the minutes of the Congregation of the committee of the "Jewish Public School" under the chairmanship of Mr M Fletcher.²

Writing from South Africa a little later, the correspondent of the Jewish Chronicle of London reported that the Jewish Public School which had been opened in Cape Town a few months earlier was making good progress. The number of pupils had increased from about forty to over eighty. The correspondent added that the institution was enjoying the active sympathy and support of several Christian friends.³ This is confirmed by Herrman who traced the origins of the Hope Mill (and the later Cape Town High School) to a Mr Peterson's one-room, one-teacher private school in Buitenkant Street somewhere between 1880 and 1882 which had some thirty or so Jewish pupils.⁴ This little school subsisted on fees and "the voluntary subscriptions zealously collected by Mr Moses Fletcher from benevolent Jews and other patrons of education".⁵ When Mr Peterson died the school became the responsibility of the Jewish community, and in 1894 became the Jewish Public School. The Education

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1. Minutes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation: 4 March, 1894.
 2. Ibid., April 1894.
 3. The Jewish Chronicle, London: 22 June 1894, p 19.
 4. Herrman, L: History and Development of the Cape Town High School: Manuscript: Copy made available to the writer by the author.
 5. Ibid.

Department made a grant and an offer of support, and Mr Fletcher became Chairman of the committee.¹ It survived barely a year before getting into difficulties and it became clear that to continue as a viable institution it would have to be properly organised and placed under the authority of the Congregation.

A letter written by Mr Fletcher invited the synagogue committee "to consider taking over the management of the school", but the committee was reluctant to do so, doubting Mr Fletcher's authority in the matter.²

Mr Ornstein viewed this scheme, now supported by his predecessor, Mr Joel Rabinowitz, who had settled in Cape Town again, as "a covert attempt to close his private college",³ though this was emphatically denied by the latter. Mr Ornstein had himself, it will be remembered, advocated this very scheme at the beginning of his ministry to Tikvath Israel but lack of support by the parents had rendered it abortive.

A special meeting was called to deal with a letter from Dr T Muir, the Superintendent-General of Education of the Cape, in which he suggested that the Congregation consider "taking over the Jewish Public School in Buitenkant Street",⁴ and this was agreed upon. A school committee was appointed to run the school which was to be called the Hebrew Congregational Public School, and Dr Muir was informed accordingly.⁵ That the matter was urgent may be deduced

1. Ibid.

2. Minutes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation: 5 May, 1895

3. Abrahams, I: op.cit., p 84

4. Minutes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 14 July, 1895

5. Ibid.

from the fact that the take-over was to become effective on the very next day, viz. 15 July. The inclusion of the word congregational in the new appellation of the school would obviously serve to demonstrate to all that a new - and patently more reliable and reputable - authority had taken control of the ailing institution.

The minutes of a meeting which took place three days later provide some interesting facts about the school.¹ It was in charge of a head-teacher, assisted by a Mr Levin, the Hebrew teacher, and a Mrs Cooper. The total expenditure was £310 per annum towards which the government contributed about a third. The average income from fees was about £60, leaving a deficit of about £130. The school was obviously in financial difficulties, hence the urgency of the appeal to the Congregation. Mr Rabinowitz was duly elected chairman of the school committee.

When the school opened in 1894 there were about forty pupils on the roll and these included boys and girls of fifteen years of age who were ignorant of the very rudiments of Judaism.² Six months later the enrolment had risen to over eighty but this only increased the school's difficulties and it faced imminent closure, when the Congregation stepped in to save it.

The Jewish community welcomed the establishment of the Jewish school for which there was a real need.³ Many children of the poorer section of the community were "pathetically neglected" and "the public conscience was

1. Minutes of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation: 18 July 1895.

2. Abrahams, I: op.cit., p 89

3. Ibid.

becoming increasingly uneasy".¹ Mr Ornstien's "College" was far beyond the means of all but the well-to-do. In reporting that the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation had taken over the Jewish Public School, the correspondent of the London Jewish Chronicle wrote that there was universal satisfaction with the action of the Board of Management in making the school a communal institution.²

Shortly after his arrival in Cape Town on the 11th September 1895, the Rev. Mr Alfred Philipp Bender embarked on his long and active association with Jewish education at the Cape that spanned a period of four decades. His arrival coincided with the establishment of the "public" school under congregational auspices to replace the tottering little institution controlled by Mr Fletcher and his committee.

Mr Rabinowitz, in retirement but indefatigable, was now supported by the young minister. He began to direct his enthusiasm and energies to placing the new school on a firm foundation. A public meeting was called to authorise the establishment of a school which would provide both general and Jewish education. Once again Dr Muir's support was obtained and a public appeal for funds launched. Hope Mill, at the top of Government Avenue, was purchased, renovated and equipped in a manner that compared favourably with other local schools.³ Mr Rabinowitz himself made a generous personal donation, and bequeathed a valuable property to it after his death. A boarding department was established in due course.

In April 1896, Mr Mark Cohen, principal of a school in London, was brought out from England to take charge of the Cape Town Hebrew Public School, which opened with an enrolment of 52

1. Ibid.

2. Jewish Chronicle, London: 23 August, 1895, p 15

3. Abrahams, I: op.cit., p 90.

pupils. Hope Mill was the first Jewish public school worthy of the name in Cape Town and was destined to have a very successful career; unfortunately, it was to prove of comparatively brief duration. The report of the Government Inspector at the end of 1896 indicates that the school had made a good start; it gives an interesting account of the Jewish school at that early phase of its development.

The School has been moved into commodious premises, in every way suitable, in the Gardens. The schoolrooms are lofty, well lighted, and well ventilated. The apparatus is good, and the furniture, which will very shortly be replaced by a new set from America, is sufficient, though somewhat rude. There is a suitable playground. The order and discipline are excellent. All the work is exceptionally good, the reading, spelling, recitation, writing and arithmetic being excellent. The history and geography of the upper standards are weak, but may be considered good when allowance is made for the time the pupils have been under instruction. Of the 49 pupils presented for standards, 47 succeeded, all the passes were good. In sewing, work for Grades I-IV was shown, as also garments in course of making. The work is neat. It is proposed to form in the near future a kindergarten department, and it will then be very desirable, not to say necessary, for the managers to provide a piano for musical drill. The time given to Hebrew is no longer excessive. In extra standard work, a beginning has been made with algebra, Latin and drawing. What work has been done is creditable. The boarding arrangements are good. The School is in a very efficient state.¹

Dr T Muir performed the official opening in April 1897. Mr Joel Rabinowitz was elected president, with Mr Bender as the vice-president. The school was state-aided, with the rest of the expenditure covered by fees and grants from the Congregation. One period a day was devoted to the teaching of Hebrew and religion which comprised reading,

1. Cited in: Abrahams, I: op.cit., p 91.

translation of Siddur and Bible, elementary writing and grammar, laws and customs.¹ The enrolment grew by leaps and bounds and by the end of the century Hope Mill was a well-established, expanding institution with a fine reputation.

Another milestone in the story of Jewish education in South Africa was the appointment of Mr Bender to the Chair of Hebrew at the South African College in 1897.² The position had remained vacant since the death of the last incumbent over twenty years previously and the new minister was in fact the first Jewish professor in South Africa.³ Once again it was Mr Rabinowitz who took the initiative in resuscitating the chair and raising the finances required for its endowment.

1. Information supplied by Dr L Herrman, later vice-principal of Hope Mill, to the writer during an interview in Dr Herrman's home in Newlands, Cape Town, on 6 July 1972.
2. Walker, E A : The South African College and the University of Cape Town 1829-1929: (Cape Times, Cape Town, 1929) p 51.
3. Kaplan, M F: "Jewish Participation in University Education in South Africa" in South African Jewry 1976-7 ed. L Feldberg (White & Co, Johannesburg, 1977) p 37.

CHAPTER 9: JEWISH EDUCATION IN NINETEENTH CENTURY
 CAPE TOWN

Hebrew and religion were imparted to the children of the Jewish community at the Cape - or rather, to those privileged to receive any Jewish education at all - during the last decades of the nineteenth century in these three, possibly four, ways.

The first vehicle for Jewish education were the two Jewish Schools. Mr Ornstien's "Collegiate School" was a private boarding school for those pupils able to afford the fees. Its last days marked the beginnings of Hope Mill Hebrew Public School which by the end of the decade had developed into a successful educational institution. Both provided a combined secular and Jewish education; the latter, being restricted to one hour daily, was religion-orientated and really minimal in scope.

The raison d'être of these Jewish schools was the secular education they provided. Society in the Colony was already open for the Jews and education was an obvious necessity for the Jewish child. As for the children of immigrant parents, the school was a vital instrument for acculturation as well as integration into the new social environment. This was the prime function of the school in the eyes of the parents. The Jewish public school then was regarded primarily as the instrument by means of which the child obtained his general education: children of the poorer sections of the community (usually immigrants) needed this schooling even more to take them off the streets and give them a chance in life. There were leaders of benevolent inclination in the community who recognised this and were moved to act on it. This was after all the rationale behind the establishment of the Jewish "free schools" in Britain earlier in the century. The school was to be the instrument for anglicising the children of

the foreign Jews who had recently settled in the country so that they would be able to integrate speedily into their new social and cultural environment. In addition, it was to provide an education, secular and Jewish, to those children of the community who were culturally, materially and religiously deprived. It was a lineal descendant, in this respect, of the old tradition of the Talmud Torah as the educational institution set up by the community for its poor children in previous centuries, as also of Eastern Europe of that day.

The second instrument for Jewish education was the Hebrew and Religion class of the Congregation, run by the minister and his assistant, mainly for children of members, once or twice a week. Limitations of time most certainly restricted tuition to Siddur reading, laws and customs of Judaism, and possibly Bible history.

Thirdly, there were the private Hedarim, run by anyone with a modicum of Jewish learning inclined - or in most cases, forced by circumstances - to take up this form of education as a means of earning a livelihood. There is the record of one such school run by the Rev. Mr Mizrahi who had some differences with the congregation over the matter of the name.¹ These "schools" - a sort of Jewish equivalent of Mr Thorner's and Mr Peterson's establishments - provided instruction on week-day afternoons and on Sunday mornings when pupils were not at ordinary school. These private Hedarim had a very long tradition in Jewish life; this was the system of education in the shtetel of the day, except of course that, by comparison with its counterpart in the Pale, the South African Heder of that day provided a Jewish education which was supplemental in nature and fractional in scope.

1. See p 60

These private schools, which were really small groups of children of similar age taught more or less what and how he chose by a private teacher in a room at his home, continued well into the twenties and thirties of this century, and the writer remembers several of them. As educational institutions they barely survived the last war.

Private Lessons

The private teacher provided another form of Jewish education: he either gave his lessons at his home or, as frequently, proceeded from one home to another to give the generally bi-weekly lessons to individual children.¹ The private practitioner may have combined his private Heder with this form of tuition: professional qualifications were unheard of in those far-off days. The teacher had most probably studied in a Yeshiva in the old country and had taken up teaching when he failed to find any other form of occupation after arriving in this country. In discussing those days with people who recalled life during the early decades of this century the writer was informed that private lessons (in Hebrew and religion) were then - to use a modern turn of phrase - the "in-thing", the fashionable custom. These private teachers still played quite an important part in Jewish education during the twenties and early thirties, after which their numbers began to decline.²

1. Feldman, L: Yidden in Johannesburg: Yiddish: (S A Yiddish Cultural Federation, Johannesburg, 1956) p 151.

2. Few parents nowadays entrust the Jewish education of their children to private tutors, a fact which illustrates the fundamental change which Jewish education has undergone since then.

CHAPTER 10: THE NEW JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE CAPE AND NATAL DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Kimberley

It has been pointed out that Jewish communal life in most South African mining towns developed along a generally uniform pattern. When some of the Jewish pioneers died they were laid to rest by their co-religionists and comrades "according to the ancient usages of Israel".¹ When the High Festivals arrived, Jews again gathered to hold services. The next step was the organisation of a congregation, the opening of a house of worship, usually with a school room attached to it.

In 1872 a local reporter wrote that the Jews on the diamond-fields already had a burial ground and that they intended to hire a place for services during the approaching holidays ".....to observe the laws of God according to the dictates of our hearts".²

A contemporary gives the following account of the beginnings of Jewish life in Kimberley during the early seventies of the last century:

On the Vaal River in the first days of the Dry Diggings at Du Toit's Pan and New Rush, the Jews had no rabbi or reader to conduct their services, nor had they a synagogue in which to read prayers with due solemnity. Consequently on holidays and festivals, of which there are six during the year, some large store or public hall was converted into a temporary synagogue where were duly explained the scrolls of the Sacred Law, and where three members of their community officiated by turns.

At that time no Sabbath holidays were kept,

1. Rosenthal, E: "On the Diamond Fields" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 116.

2. Ibid.

and if deaths occurred, or the anniversary of deaths was observed, prayers were read in some private house. When, too, the initiatory rite of circumcision had to be performed, a minister or rabbi, at great expense, was sent for from Cape Town or Port Elizabeth.¹

The foundation stone of the synagogue was laid in 1875 and a minister appointed the following year: "a Hebrew school attached to the synagogue was duly instituted".²

Port Elizabeth

The origins of the Jewish community at Algoa Bay go back to the middle fifties of the last century. A room was hired as a temporary place of worship in 1855 and a congregation was formed in 1857 with regular services on Sabbaths and festivals.

Some provision even appears to have been made for imparting the elements of Hebrew and religious knowledge to the children.³

Whether the original congregation survived is not clear, but there is a record that it was re-established in 1862, the second one in South Africa, with a membership of some 35, a year later.

Till 1872 the Rev. Mr Joel Rabinowitz was the only Jewish minister in the whole of South Africa. In that year the Rev. Mr Samuel Rapaport arrived from England to take up his appointment as spiritual leader of the Port Elizabeth Hebrew Congregation, the only other one in existence outside Cape Town. Soon after his arrival the new minister opened a

1. Dr J W Matthews, M L C, cited in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 117

2. Ibid.

3. Herrman, L: op.cit., p 207

Sabbath School which had 25 pupils.¹ His flock was dispersed over a wide area of the interior, and Mr Rapaport travelled through the whole of the Eastern Province and even as far as Natal and the Free State to attend to their Jewish needs. A new synagogue was consecrated in 1877. In all essential respects the history of the congregation at Algoa Bay mirrored that of the mother synagogue Tikvath Israel in Cape Town during this period.

Oudtshoorn

New immigrants from Eastern Europe began to settle in Oudtshoorn from the eighties onwards, attracted by the growing economic importance of this centre of the ostrich feather industry² rather than the "glittering prospects of Kimberley and, later, of the newly-opened Witwatersrand".³

A congregation was established in 1883 and a synagogue built five years later. In the 1890's another place of worship was erected by the more orthodox section of the community. The Rev. Mr Myers Woolfson arrived in 1888 from Britain; he was to minister to the congregation for more than fifty years.

In time, Oudtshoorn was to have the largest Jewish community in the country districts of South Africa.⁴ It was a community composed for the most part of immigrants straight out from Eastern Europe which long enjoyed a reputation for piety and strict observance of religious practice. Many

1. The Story of the United Hebrew Institutions of Port Elizabeth: ed. S H Symon: 1976
2. The value of feather exports in 1880 was over £800 000; it rose to £1 000 000 shortly afterwards.
3. Aschman, G: "Oudtshoorn in the Early Days" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 123
4. Aschman gives the figure of 300 families: there were probably more. Ibid., p 127

Jewish store-keepers spent long years in isolated spots in the countryside but kept their families in town, so that their children should be able to receive a Jewish education and should be near a synagogue where they could be taught the practices of their faith. Fathers were re-united with their families during festivals in town or during school holidays when the move was made in the reverse direction.¹

Both congregations gave earnest attention to the Jewish education of their children. The "English Shool" (synagogue) was to establish a Jewish (public) school where Hebrew and religion were part of the general curriculum. The "Greene Shool" (immigrants' synagogue) certainly not satisfied with the standard of Jewish education at the Jewish School opened its own Talmud Torah where Jewish subjects were taught on traditional Eastern European lines.

Durban

The origins of the community go back to the 1850's and there are records of various communal and religious activities from that date onwards.

A burial ground was consecrated in 1881 by Mr Rapaport who travelled up specially from Port Elizabeth for this purpose. For a considerable time "the community had suffered great hardship arising especially from the absence of a competent man to educate their children in the Jewish faith",² and this impelled them to call the first meeting to establish a congregation, which they succeeded in doing in 1883. A minister was appointed and their synagogue was opened soon

1. Ibid., p 126

2. Abelson, D: "In Natal" in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p338

afterwards.

A visitor to Durban in 1884 wrote that "the children attend Hebrew classes at the house of the minister"; the synagogue was "a neat little building, very simple but very decent".¹

In 1892 an additional wing built onto the synagogue was used as "a school for the instruction of the younger generation".²

Mr F C Hollander, who came from Birmingham in 1894, rendered a great service to the community by conducting Hebrew classes almost from the date of his arrival.³ Some years previously the Rev. Mr S I Pincus was appointed minister subject to the approval of Dr Hermann Adler, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire.⁴

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1. Cohen, S G: A History of the Jews in Durban: (Unpublished M A Thesis, University of Natal, 1977) cites a letter written by Dr I G D'Arbella, physician to the Sultan of Zanzibar, which appeared in the Jewish Chronicle, London, on 26th July, 1884, p 144.
 2. Abelson: op.cit., p 340
 3. Ibid.
 4. Cohen; op.cit., p 144.

P A R T T H R E E

JEWISH EDUCATION IN THE
TRANSVAAL TO THE END OF
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER 11: THE BACKGROUND

There are reports of occasional Jewish religious activities in Pretoria during the seventies of the last century,¹ years before a congregation was actually established. Jewish prospectors and traders were to be found in the Pilgrim's Rest-Barberton goldfields when these were opened in the seventies and early eighties. By 1878 there was a Jewish cemetery at Pilgrim's Rest² and a congregation had been formed at Barberton by 1886 when services were held on the High Festivals.³ The Rev. Mr P Wolfers arrived from England to serve as the first minister of the congregation in 1889. Passover services were held and the "congregational school" was opened immediately after the festival.⁴

The classes of the school, reported the correspondent from Barberton, were a great necessity, as not only were there no means whatever of obtaining Hebrew and religious instruction but even secular instruction was very unsatisfactory in the town.⁵ Mr Wolfers had had considerable teaching experience in London, and the correspondent added that the children would no doubt acquire a sound elementary education.⁶ This was the first Jewish school on the Transvaal platteland.

1. Rabinowitz, L I: "The Transvaal Congregations" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 174
2. Sowden, D L: "In the Transvaal till 1899": ibid., p 149.
3. Rabinowitz, L I: ibid., p 172.
4. Jewish Chronicle, London: 7 June 1889, p 16
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

On the Witwatersrand: Growth of Johannesburg

The Main Reef was discovered in July 1886 and the township to be known as Johannesburg was proclaimed on 4th October 1886. The Jewish New Year of that year fell about a fortnight before the latter date and there were already enough Jews in the diggers' camps by that time to come together for divine service.¹

In a matter of months the mining camps on those bare high-veld farms grew into a busy town to which fortune-seekers flocked from every corner of South Africa and from overseas. Very soon it became a thriving, bustling city literally and figuratively established on gold.

A year after the founding of Johannesburg the Jewish population was about 100. In 1888 it was "upwards of 500.....these included many entire families".² In 1891 the estimated figure had risen to 4 000 and in 1895 there were about 6 000 Jews out of an estimated population of 60 000.

Interesting figures were provided by the census of July 1896: the Jewish population was 6 253 of whom 3 335 had been born in Russia. By 1899 the figure had risen to some 10 000 out of a total European population of 85 000.³

It was only to be expected that a community with so brief a history and of diverse origins should possess a relatively weak group consciousness. What is remarkable is that the

1. Ibid.

2. Sowden, D L: "In the Transvaal till 1899" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 150.

3. Saron, G: "Boers, Uitlanders, Jews" in Saron & Hotz: op cit., footnote to p 181.

congregation was formed as early as July 1887, so soon after the establishment of the town.¹ One may contrast this with the tardiness of their co-religionists in Durban where "it was an uphill battle" to create a Jewish corporate life.² On the other hand, the adventurous spirits who flocked to seek their fortunes on the Rand - or even the more humble in aspiration who just looked forward to making a decent living there - were by their very nature energetic and decisive folk. Moreover, perhaps in the rough and even turbulent conditions of the mushrooming mining town many of the inhabitants of the day felt the need for the spiritual upliftment and consolation of their ancient faith.

The Jewish community which had grown so rapidly in the mushrooming city was far from being a homogeneous entity, but it was hardly "a rather loose association of individuals".³ It could be divided into three identifiable groups each of which possessed its own cohesive characteristics which set it apart from the other two.

Of the three main groups in the community, the earliest were mainly English-speaking; the others were the German and West Continental Jews, and lastly, the Eastern Europeans from the Lithuanian province of Russia. Whilst there were obvious differences which seemed to set each group apart from the others, there were strong and even over-riding bonds which prevailed in time and served to coalesce these communal components into a homogeneous community. This cement was their shared Jewish heritage "and a sense of kinship which

1. Herrman, L: op.cit., p 238

2. Abelson: in Saron and Hotz: op.cit., p 338

3. Sowden: ibid., p 151

found expression in the impulse towards mutual aid".¹

The Western-European Jews - acculturised, educated and at ease in the modern world - naturally played the leading roles in the community and retained their dominant position till well into the next century. The Russian Jews found themselves on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder.

They were uneducated in secular learning, unqualified, unaccustomed to urban life. They were "triers"² and cab drivers, lowly assistants in the mining stores or small shops, "toggers" and "smouse"³ in the countryside, petty shop-keepers or middlemen. Any adverse turn in the economic situation brought added hardships to many of them.

These differences between the anglicised section and the newcomers frequently manifested themselves in friction,⁴ and even degenerated into mutual contempt and dislike. The immigrants were strangers to English culture, had strange manners or none at all, lacked the refinements of cultivated society. Not infrequently the disparaging term "Peruvians" was flung at them, a word of doubtful etymology, but of no uncertain connotation.

On their part, the immigrants did not hide their contempt for the Westerners' skin-deep Jewishness, their crass ignorance of the teachings of their faith, and their haughty air of superiority which, to them, was mere aping of the gentiles. They regarded themselves as better Jews, more

1. Ibid.

2. Door-to-door buyers and sellers of a wide variety of articles, foodstuffs included: from "try".

3. Itinerant peddlars (Dutch).

4. Saron, J: "The Making of South African Jewry": in South African Jewry 1965: op.cit., pp 19-23.

loyal, in most cases certainly more knowledgeable, true heirs of Torah civilisation. They referred to the Anglo-German "aristocrats" as Yahudim¹, a contemptuous appellation for the ignorant westernised Jew who in his slavish and fawning subordination to foreign ways had cut himself adrift from his own heritage.

Conservatism and assimilation warred with each other in the Johannesburg Jewish community.² It was only natural that the immigrant Russian section should itself be subject to the process of acculturation in the incomparably freer social climate of the colonies and republics of South Africa where the shtetel - that cultural and social cocoon - was but a dim and distant memory.

Complete assimilation dissolved the Jewish links of many of the Anglo-German section, but the strong Jewish feelings of the immigrants, on the other hand, led to an intensification of the group consciousness of many others. The two groups moved towards each other, as it were, in a process of ultimate coalescence into the fairly homogeneous South African Jewish community as we know it today.³

These socio-cultural movements and adjustments in the Jewish community were clearly reflected in their communal institutions, especially their synagogues and schools. In the rapidly growing Rand community these changes were telescoped into a comparatively brief period of about two decades only.

1. Feldman, L: op. cit., p 132.

2. Sowden, : in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 157

3. Saron, G: "The Making of South African Jewry" in South African Jewry 1965: op.cit., pp 23-25.

The Jews in the South African Republic

The Jews in the South African Republic formed part of the Uitlander population consisting of the foreigners who flocked to the Rand after the opening of the goldfields in 1886. So great was the influx that a bare fifteen years later it was estimated that the number of Uitlander males probably exceeded that of Burghers in the Republic.¹ Some of the wealthier elements in the Jewish community emanating from Western Europe or the Colonies took part in the Uitlander agitation for the redress of what they considered their political and economic grievances, in time to develop into the threat of potential conflict with the Transvaal Government under President Kruger.

As a community, Jews - together with Catholics - were subjected to special religious disabilities under the constitution, operative in the main areas of political rights and education. The Grondwet of 1884² debarred both these groups from holding various positions in the state and civil service which could be filled only by Protestant Christians.

In education, too, the law discriminated against non-Calvinist Uitlanders. Jewish as well as Catholic children and teachers were excluded from state-supported schools, according to the Grondwet of 1892 and 1896.³ Subsidies were granted only to Protestant schools conducted in the Dutch language: other religious/language groups therefore had to establish and maintain their own schools without any state aid.⁴

1. Wilson & Thompson: Oxford History of South Africa: Vol II (Oxford University Press, 1971) p 308, footnote 5 - quoting Marais, J S: Fall of the Kruger Republic, p 3

2. Saron, G: "Boers, Uitlanders, Jews" in Saron & Hotz., op.cit., p 185.

3. Hertz, J H: The Jew in South Africa (C N A, Johannesburg 1905): see also Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 198

4. Malherbe, E G: Education in South Africa: Vol I (Juta's 1975) pp 259-261. See also: ibid., p 323 for a reference to the South African Republic Government's refusal to subsidise schools opened by the Witwatersrand Council of Education.

Saron contends that many of the Jews in the South African Republic, especially those of Russian extraction, did not attach much importance to these disabilities. They felt that they had little or no cause to complain of the treatment they received in the Transvaal Republic.¹ They were free to enter the country and to participate as fully in its economic life as any other Uitlanders. This might have been taken for granted by the English Jews or those who had come from the Colonies or the United States, but for the former subjects of the Czar this was a land in which they enjoyed freedom from discrimination and persecution, which permitted them to lead their lives, in security and unhindered, according to the traditional values of their faith. If they were denied those full political rights enjoyed by other Burghers, it should be remembered that they had not only been denied these in the land of their origin but had also been subjected to persecution into the bargain. Nor did their co-religionists from the western lands of the Continent find in South Africa any echo of the new racist anti-semitism gathering strength in their own countries of origin.²

The bonds of understanding between Boer and Jew are described by two observers of the period. The first was N D Hoffmann, the local correspondent of the Hebrew daily Hatzefira of Warsaw, who had arrived in South Africa via the United States in 1889;³ the other was Rabbi Dr J H Hertz

1. Saron: in Saron and Hotz, op.cit., p 181
2. Drumont in France, Treitschke and Stocker, amongst others, in Germany, preached a virulent anti-semitism based on race during the last decades of the century. In France it was to culminate in the notorious Dreyfus Affair in the nineties.
3. Hoffmann, N D: "Reports from South Africa" in the Hatzefira, 1891: cited in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 182.

the leading Jewish minister in the South African Republic.¹ The Boers regarded the People of the Book with interest and respect, sentiments which were cemented by close social and economic contacts established by the Jewish immigrant traders and shop-keepers who had settled or penetrated into every corner of the land.

"It is clear", sums up Saron, "that the general attitude of the Boer towards the Jew was a wholesome and friendly one and that the Jews appreciated the freedom which they enjoyed".²

1. Hertz, J H: "The Jew as Patriot": cited in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 183

2. Saron, G: op.cit., p 182.

CHAPTER 12: THE JEWISH PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH
AFRICAN (TRANSVAAL) REPUBLIC

The Jewish parents in the South African Republic had to worry about the secular, as well as the Jewish and religious, education of their children. For most, the former almost invariably took precedence over the latter.

The story of Jewish education in early Johannesburg is closely connected with the three synagogues established during the first few years of the town's existence. The first of these was the Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation founded on the 10th July 1887. In September of that year some 500 worshippers attended the High Festival services in a hired hall at which the veteran former minister of the Tikvath Israel Congregation of Cape Town officiated.¹

From the first, this Congregation on the goldfields was beset by dissension. A short-lived rift that occurred in 1888 was healed by the following year, and union, if not complete harmony, was restored.² The synagogue of the Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation in President Street was completed in 1888. It had a small school attached to it which, it was claimed, was the only one in the Transvaal, a claim disputed by the congregation in Barberton.³

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1. Mr Rabinowitz was then a resident of Johannesburg where he was practising his second profession of assaying.
 2. Rabinowitz, L I: in Saron & Hotz., op.cit., p 169
 3. Ibid., p 171.

An early report of the opening of "The Johannesburg Jewish Schools" appeared in the London Jewish Chronicle in mid-1890.¹ The institution was under the supervision of the Hebrew Educational Board and the principal was the Rev. Mr M L Harris, Minister of the Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation, with Mr J Posener, who had formerly been on the staff of the Jews' Free School in London, as vice-principal. The secular tuition was in accordance with the requirements of the codes² of the Transvaal Education Department and the Cape University. Hebrew instruction was on the lines of the late Chief Rabbi's Code of January 1889.³ Mr S Bebro was later brought out from England to take up the post of headmaster with the Rev. Mr Harris remaining in charge of religious instruction. There is a record of a prize-distribution function and concert which took place in the Theatre Royal on 16 September, 1891, which was attended by Captain von Brandis, the landdros of Johannesburg, who distributed the prizes.⁴ On this occasion Mr Abrahams, Chairman of the Hebrew Education Board, said that the Jews deserved the same educational and other privileges enjoyed by the general community, to which the guest of honour replied that he hoped that the constitution would be altered to put "all on the same footing".⁵ The Standard and Diggers' News carried a report of the event which mentioned that the school had upwards of a hundred pupils and a staff of four.⁶

A serious split in the Congregation took place in December

1. Jewish Chronicle, London: 27 June, 1890, p 14.

2. Curricula, or syllabus.

3. Ibid.

4. Jewish Chronicle, London: 9 October, 1891, p 14.

5. Ibid.

6. Cited by S A Rochlin in "An 1891 Prize-Giving Function" in Jewish Affairs: September 1961

1891 when prominent members broke away to form the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation. They built their own house of worship (the Park Synagogue) which was officially opened by President Paul Kruger on 15 September 1892 and the Rev. Mr H Isaacs of Kimberley was invited to become their minister. The original congregation now became known as the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation.

The disunity of the ensuing years was marked by a spirit of rivalry and more or less covert hostility which was to bedevil the history of the Jewish community of Johannesburg until the congregations were reunited on the 30th May 1915. Rabbi Dr Joseph H Hertz was appointed to the pulpit of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation in 1898 and ministered to the President Street Synagogue till his departure for the United States in 1911 prior to his appointment as Chief Rabbi of the British Empire two years later.

The Russian immigrants found the services in the President Street Synagogue strange and even unacceptable in a number of respects. Parts of the ritual differed from what they were accustomed to, and they could not comprehend the sermons which were delivered in English. In 1891 they accordingly established their own house of worship in Ferreiratown, where most of them lived, and two years later opened their permanent synagogue in Fox Street, known as the Greener Beth Medrash¹ officially called the Johannesburg Orthodox Hebrew Congregation.

Members of this congregation did not establish a Jewish school of their own. They entrusted the Jewish education of their children to private tutors who either set up their own small Hedarim as in the old country, or gave their lessons in the homes of the pupils. A pious Jew with some Yeshiva

1. Hebrew: House of worship and study of the immigrants.

learning who "could not find his place"¹ took up teaching: they were known as melamdim.²

After the split of 1891, the Witwatersrand Old and Johannesburg Congregations agreed to co-operate in running the school which would be open to all Jewish children irrespective of synagogue affiliation and would retain its own independent School Board.³ The school was to be "neutral ground", but during the ensuing years it was the cause of considerable disagreement between the rival synagogues.

Mr S Bebro "who had done so much to advance Jewish education in Johannesburg"⁴ resigned his post in 1892, when there were 84 children on the roll, but he retained his connection with the school as a member of the committee.

The two synagogues also held their own Hebrew and religion classes on Saturday afternoons, Sunday mornings and sometimes also on Wednesday afternoons. These provided instruction in Judaism and Siddur reading.

The Rev Mr Isaacs reported to the committee of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation⁵ that the Hebrew and religion classes started by him were progressing favourably. The number of pupils had increased from 15 to 60: it was evidently controlled by a school committee from both congregations.

1. Feldman, L: op.cit., pp 151-152
2. Hebrew: an old-fashioned schoolmaster without any professional qualifications.
3. Saron, G: "Early Days of Johannesburg Jewry": Jewish Affairs, March, 1976, p 40. See also: Minutes of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, 16 December 1891 and 10 January 1892.
4. Standard and Diggers' News: 20 July 1892, cited in S A Communal Notebook C. p 1.ed. S A Rochlin
5. Minutes of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation (Park Synagogue) 16 April 1893

Some years later we learn that the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation had rebuilt and enlarged its school rooms attached to the synagogue and had revived its own Hebrew and Religion classes to meet what was stated to be a very urgent demand.¹ These classes had been discontinued for some years. The Rev Mr Harris was in charge, assisted by two teachers.²

Communal leaders interested in Jewish education soon realised that the Jewish school had few prospects of progress and growth unless it obtained new and proper premises. The annual general meeting in 1893 was informed of the resignation of Mr Bebro and that Rev Mr Isaacs had consented to act as superintendent, without remuneration. The committee stated that a new building more befitting the importance of the Jewish community should be erected on the stands granted by the government (to the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation) for educational purposes.³

The Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation had been taking an increasingly active part in the working of the Jewish School and, more particularly, had already taken the initiative in the planning for the erection of new premises for it on the stands adjacent to the synagogue in de Villiers Street.⁴ It would be a spacious and adequately equipped school for "the use and benefit of the Jewish Community of the Transvaal".⁵ The negotiations and discussions for an agreement between

1. Report of the Ninth Annual General Meeting of Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation: in the Transvaal Independent: 2 September 1896, cited in S A Communal Notebook C; op.cit. p15
2. Ibid.
3. Jewish Chronicle, London: 16 June 1893, p 9: it was stated that the school was then in Kerk Street.
4. Minutes of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation (Park Synagogue) 19 February 1893.
5. See Minutes of the Committee of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation: 2 July 1893, for "conditions upon which the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation have decided to permit the School Board of the Jews' Schools of Johannesburg to erect school buildings....."

the Congregation and the School Board of the Johannesburg Jewish Schools on the question of the proposed school building were protracted - decisions were delayed for several years, as the Minutes of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation (Park Synagogue) record during that period.¹ A sign of the growing spirit of co-operation between the two bodies insofar as Jewish education was concerned was the action of the Park Synagogue in granting the use of its committee rooms to the Jewish Schools of Johannesburg.²

The final and unanimous decision to build was taken in 1895 and members set about collecting the required funds for this purpose.³ Mr Samuel Marks, one of the leading Jews of the Republic, lent his active support and helped to obtain contributions from Jewish as well as non-Jewish donors, including His Honour the State President himself.⁴ The money thus raised was handed over to the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation "for the purpose of building Jewish schools open to all Jewish children in the Transvaal".⁵

Mr Marks took a keen interest in the institution and wrote to Europe for a tutor able to teach Hebrew, English and Dutch, whose salary he undertook to pay. He had also obtained the consent of the Chief Justice of the State to lay the foundation stone of the new school.⁶

1. See, for example, Minutes of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation: 3 and 27 June, 1894
2. Ibid. 18 February 1894
3. Minutes of the Third Annual General Meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation: 19 May 1895
4. Minutes of the Committee Meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation: 14 July 1895
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid. 21 September, 1895

Finally, agreement was reached between the Congregation and the School Board. It was reported¹ that the School had been using the synagogue's anterooms and committee rooms because it could not afford to rent premises, and that the synagogue had given it the services of its minister as superintendent. Furthermore, maintained the Congregation, it had collected the money for the planned building and had undertaken to erect it and take responsibility for any future deficiency. By contrast the School Board had done "lukewarm work in the past".² The Congregation therefore demanded half the membership of the Board of Management of the School.

The agreement with the School Board was ratified a few months later. The school would be called "The Jewish School of Johannesburg" and would be controlled by a board of twelve members, half of whom would be from the Congregation. To all intents and purposes the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation would be in control of the new institution.³

The foundation stone of the Jewish School, situated near the Park Station in de Villiers Street, was laid by Chief Justice J Kotze on 26 March 1896. There was a spacious hall on the lower floor and commodious classrooms on the two upper floors.⁴ The President had promised to become a patron and would present an annual prize for Dutch.⁵ English was the medium of instruction.

The official opening took place on 14 July 1897, the Chief

1. Minutes of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation: 26 February 1896.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.: 19 May 1896

4. Standard and Diggers' News: 26 March 1896: cited in Communal Notebook C p 7

5. The Star: 18 May 1896: ibid., p 9.

Justice again performing the ceremony.¹ The press reported that the school was an imposing three-storey structure.² It would be open to all Jewish children without distinction of synagogue affiliation and would be under the control of an independent School Board composed of representatives of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, and the subscribers in equal numbers.³ The minister of this congregation, the Rev. Mr H Isaacs, would be the superintendent and Mr B P Marks the headmaster.⁴ The chairman of the School Board was Mr Leopold Grahame.

It was reported to the First Annual General Meeting of subscribers to the Jewish School held on December 3, 1897⁵ that the number of pupils had increased from 137 to 164, and that of the five pupils presented for the Cape University Examination, one was placed second in South Africa. In April of the following year the Rev. Mr D Wasserzug was appointed superintendent of the school, whilst Mr Isaacs remained honorary superintendent. Mr Marks had a staff of six teachers under him. The enrolment had risen to 230⁶ and the school was making good progress, maintaining its good results in the Cape Colony scholastic examinations.⁷

1. Jewish Chronicle, London: 13 August 1897, p 13.
2. The Johannesburg Times: 12 September 1896: cited in Communal Notebook C, p 7.
3. Saron, G: "Early Days of Johannesburg Jewry" in Jewish Affairs: March, 1976 p 41.
4. The Standard & Diggers' News: 18 May 1896: cited in Communal Notebook c, p 8.
5. Jewish Chronicle, London: 7 January 1898, p 23.
6. Ibid. 24 June 1898, p 26.
7. Ibid. 2 September 1898, p 117

The Burgomaster of Johannesburg was present at the prize-distribution ceremony that year, on which occasion Mr B P Marks made a request for a government subsidy and bursaries.¹

A description of the institution was given by a reporter of the Standard and Diggers' News who visited the Johannesburg Jewish School at the beginning of 1898:

The prevalent impression of "Jewish" schools as institutions is that they are mostly exclusively denominational benefactions or Church pertinents controlled by patriarchal pedagogues in greasy caps, where the child brain is choked into dullness or death with unconvincing theology and Rabbinical lore - all excellent things in their way, but of little commercial value nowadays. I confess that was my idea until I visited the Jewish schools, near the Park, last Tuesday afternoon, and it is now my special mission to explode so outrageous a fallacy. If the reader will accompany me around the building and among the scholars I hope to prove the injustice of popular prejudice against as catholic and effective an institution as ever struggled to make school a pleasure and learning a delight.

Here we are in a roomy hall on the ground floor, the boys divested of their little jackets, and in all the pride of comical little singlets which with difficulty contain their expanded chests. Here they are marshalled, marched and manoeuvred, as proud and as jubilant as peacocks, their bare arms and their sturdy legs in rhythmic and precise movements, and all as clean and neat as pins. Mr Carrington, a versatile gentleman who combines in himself many qualities, has disciplined these well-set-up little urchins to an extent, I trust, never reached by the doting mollycoddle parent.

MUSCULAR JUDAISM

Mr Principal Marks has adopted the cult of the Dorians and Greeks based on strength of mind and beauty of body as of vast importance. It is the youngster's best outfit for social existence. All that makes the body healthy, trains it to pliancy

1. Ibid., 7 October 1898, p 22.

strength and elegance, and induces by gymnastic drill and athletic exercises, skill of muscle and nerve, and handy readiness of frame must likewise strengthen the thinking organs, discipline the conscience and secure the healthy growth and due development of all the activities of mind and will. These things, as Plato has said, make fitness for citizenship, and it is a pity, my lords and gentlemen and reverend seignors of the School Board, that at the Park establishment the necessary hygienic equipment is restricted to the lad's own healthy zest and the teachers' enthusiasm.

"But you should see my little girls drill"! says Miss Ethel Lyons, another charming guide in the pathways of knowledge.

At the Jewish School the infants are not primarily bothered with "ologies". They have mats of brilliant colours and sometimes of quite intricate design, and they are never so happy as when thus occupied, and by this means the eye is trained and disciplined and the hands are made pliant and the whole soul is disciplined to form habits and instincts of order and neatness and form.

Concluding his interesting explanations, Mr Marks said that the subjects embraced in the curriculum (in addition to the ordinary school subjects), were Hebrew, Dutch, German, Latin, mathematics, "cutting out", and sewing, drill, singing, and that there was special instruction to foreign (i.e. Russian) boys and even youths.¹

The Sabbath and Sunday Hebrew and Religion classes of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation taken by the ministers, the Rev. Messrs Isaacs and Wasserzug, reported an average attendance of 150 children at the time. That Jewish education was a source of deep worry to some of the leaders of the community is evident from Mr Wasserzug's article in the local press in which he stated:

....but paramount above these (problems) is the great problem of Jewish Education which in a community scattered and dispersed over so vast

1. Standard & Diggers' News: 17 February 1898, p 3

an area as this calls for special attention.¹

The exodus of the civilian population out of Johannesburg had already begun before the Anglo-Boer War broke out in October 1899, only some 20 000 of the city's population remaining, including about 1 500 of the Jewish community.²

The Rev. Mr Wasserzug and the Rev. Mr Manne of the Park Synagogue did not leave the city but carried on the work of the Congregation. The Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation closed its doors for a time, but the other two synagogues remained open. Services were held daily as well as on Sabbaths and Festivals and, moreover, Mr Wasserzug reopened the Jewish School in January 1900 where, together with a lady assistant, he continued to give secular and religious instruction to some 45 pupils.³

1. Ibid., 8 March 1897, cited in the Communal Notebook C p 18

2. Rabinowitz, L I: in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 175

3. The Standard & Diggers' News: 27 March 1900: cited in Communal Notebook C p 46.

P A R T F O U R

THE JEWISH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

AT THE

BEGINNING OF THE CENTURY

CHAPTER 13: INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: THE EMERGENCE OF AN ORGANISED COMMUNITY

After the Anglo-Boer War the stage was set for the subsequent great developments in South African political life, the union of the two older British colonies and the two former republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

English arms and English culture were victorious. Johannesburg had been captured by the Imperial forces in 1900 and the thousands of refugees who had fled on the outbreak of war began to return to the city. Culturally it was a British town. The main centres of the older Colonies were even more intensely English. British immigration resumed after the war, so that teachers came out from the home country to man the schools in the South African colonies which were now in the process of re-organisation.

The war had a powerful impact on the national feelings of the Afrikaners, both in the old Colonies and in the former Republics. It stimulated their pride in their volk and gave the impetus to a powerful language movement which gave expression to their sufferings and sacrifices during the struggle. When the Milner Administration in the Transvaal established a system of free state schools with English as the medium of instruction, the Dutch Reformed Church organised its own private school network with Dutch as the main language. These were the Christelike Nasionale Onderwys schools which were established during the war and immediately afterwards to oppose the anglicisation policy of the Milner Administration.¹ The Ordinance of 1903 permitted the use of the Dutch language for only three hours a week for secular instruction.² Prominent Boer leaders like Botha, Smuts, Hertzog and Fischer lent their support to the Dutch Reformed Church in setting up

1. Malherbe, E G: Education in South Africa: Vol I (Juta, 1975 edition) p 321.

2. Ibid., p 332

the private Christelike Nasionale Onderwys schools in the two former Republics¹ which would preserve the use of the Dutch language as a medium of instruction and would safeguard the rights of the people to control their schools and choose the teachers. There were soon over two hundred Christelike Nasionale Onderwys schools in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony whose courses of study were drawn up to express "the Christian-National spirit of the South African Nation".² It is of interest that both Dutch and English were used as media of instruction in these schools,³ which were ultimately absorbed into the government network by the Smuts Education Act of 1907.⁴ It effected a compromise by which general religious, as distinct from denominational, instruction was introduced into the schools.⁵

During the war, several thousand Jewish refugees from the Transvaal had been evacuated to the coastal towns, where the existing communities did their utmost to care for them. The Rev Mr Bender, minister to the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, stood at the head of the relief committee which was responsible for the care of the Jewish refugees, "a fearful responsibility for any man, however striking and conspicuous his ability".⁶ Rabbi Dr J H Hertz, the spiritual head of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation, also spent some of the war years at the Cape after having been expelled by the Republican government for his pro-British expressions.

1. Ibid., Vol II pp 3-4.

2. Ibid., Vol I p 322.

3. Ibid., Vol II p 4.

4. Ibid., Vol I pp 335 et seq.

5. Ibid., p 341.

6. Jewish Chronicle, London: 22 December 1899, pp 11-12.

The presence of thousands of these newcomers, mostly of Russian origin, at the Cape and other places¹ served to intensify Jewish religious and cultural life in these communities, and set in train a number of important developments for the future of the Jewish community in South Africa.

The last decade of the nineteenth century witnessed far-reaching changes in the Jewish community resulting from the steadily rising tide of Eastern European immigration. The sudden increase of population at the Cape by over a third almost overnight greatly accelerated these developments which had a profound influence on the history of the community.²

The emerging Jewish national movement stirred the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe and attracted many adherents to the Hibat Zion movement whose leaders and ideologues were Russian Jews.³ The Haskalah in Russia had led to the Hebrew Revival during the latter half of the nineteenth century and produced the cultural ferment that accompanied the national reawakening.

Amongst the new immigrants who arrived in South Africa there were many who were imbued with the new national feelings and some had already identified with Hibat Zion in Eastern Europe.⁴ A branch was in fact established in Johannesburg in 1896 under the chairmanship of Maurice Abrahams.⁵

1. There were some 400 in Durban, for example: some 4 000 in Cape Town: see Jewish Chronicle, London: 16 August 1901, p 15, and 22 December 1899, p 12.

2. Abrahams, I: "Western Province Jewry 1870-1902" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., pp 38 et seq.

3. Dr Leo Pinsker convened the first conference of this movement at Kattowitz, Prussia, in 1884: - they had been forbidden to meet in Russia.

4. Gitlin: op.cit., pp 15-16

5. Ibid.

Then the Hebrew newspapers from Russia brought news of a new voice which gave renewed expression to the age-old Jewish dream of the return to Zion in a pamphlet called Der Judenstaat.¹ Theodor Herzl had suddenly appeared on the Jewish scene. Within a matter of months he launched the Zionist movement and convened the first Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, in August 1897.

In South Africa, Zionism found an instant and widespread echo amongst the immigrant sections particularly. Communal leaders of English origin also identified with the new movement. S Lennox Loewe corresponded with Herzl from the Rand. Samuel Goldreich presided over the meeting which established the Transvaal Zionist Association², and Hyman Morris, president of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, was elected chairman. The arrival of Rabbi Dr J H Hertz to occupy the pulpit of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation in 1898 gave an impetus to Zionism: his persuasive oratory drew crowded public meetings and made many new adherents.³

Zionist Societies sprang up in a number of places in the Transvaal during 1898⁴, and the membership rapidly grew to close on 5 000.⁵ Before the end of the century there were societies throughout Southern Africa, from the Cape to the Zambesi, so irresistible was the appeal of the new movement to the Jews settled in the towns and villages across the sub-continent.⁶ The first Conference - they called it a Congress - was held on 11 December 1898 when steps were initiated to create the South African Zionist Federation.⁷

1. Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State) Pamphlet published by Theodor Herzl in 1896.
2. Gitlin: op.cit., pp 23-24.
3. Ibid., p 26
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p 27.
6. Ibid., p 28.
7. Ibid., pp 30 et seq.

Stimulated by the reports of the Second World Zionist Congress which appeared in the Hebrew newspapers arriving in South Africa at the beginning of 1899, Zionists at the Cape formed the Dorshei Zion Association in September of that year and embarked on an active cultural and practical programme of work.¹ Their library and reading room in Roeland Street became a cultural centre for the newly-arrived immigrants and under Idel Schwartz the Dorshei Zion became one of the foremost Jewish societies at the Cape. From the outset it began to concern itself directly with Jewish and Hebrew education. Two years later, in August 1901, the Women Zionists formed the Bnoth Zion Association.² The presence of refugees from the Transvaal, and especially of Rabbi Dr J H Hertz, greatly increased interest in the movement in Cape Town. He was sent as a delegate to attend the Fourth Zionist Congress held in London in 1900,³ and the popularity of the movement may be gauged from the fact that a thousand people were present at a demonstration in Cape Town to mark the opening of this assembly.⁴

Zionism was not without its opponents in the community. The Rev. Mr Bender was the main focus of opposition in Cape Town and most of the English-speaking Jews, no doubt taking their cue from the unfavourable stance of the London Jewish Chronicle, followed his lead. In 1903, the S A Jewish Chronicle, then the only English-language Jewish publication in the country, faithfully reflecting the opinions and even the style of its London name-sake, could speak of Zionism as "a cult" in a largely unfavourable article on the subject.⁵

These were the early beginnings of a movement that was to play

1. Ibid., p 44.

2. Ibid., p 47. It is still in existence in Cape Town.

3. Ibid., p 50.

4. Ibid.

5. S A Jewish Chronicle, Cape Town: 13 March 1903, p 20.

a predominant role in the history of the Jewish community in South Africa throughout the twentieth century. From its earliest years Hebrew education was one of its main concerns, and as the influence of the movement continued to grow over the years, so did the importance of its role in the history and development of Jewish education in this country.

The structural framework of the growing Jewish community began to take on a clear form and shape as the new century opened. The First South African Zionist Conference was convened in Bloemfontein in 1905.¹ Separate Boards of Deputies, representing the increasing number of communal institutions, were established on the Rand and at the Cape² and religious congregations were springing up in the towns and villages across the country where sizeable Jewish communities existed. The Jewish education of the children of the community was an avowedly prime concern of all these bodies. On the national or local levels they made important contributions to the development of Jewish education in South Africa during this century, as this study will show.

The Jewish community at the Cape had increased sufficiently by the turn of the century to warrant the establishment of other congregations, in addition to the Mother Synagogue in St John's Street. Its estimated strength around 1900 was about 7 000 souls and minyanim (prayer meetings) at various venues had been regularly held for some years, in addition to the services in the synagogue.³ It was only a matter of time before a new congregation was established. A meeting was held in 1900 when the New Hebrew Congregation

1. Alexander, J: "South African Zionism" in The S A Jewish Year Book 1929: op.cit., pp 181-183

2. See p 105

3. Geffen, M: "Cape Town Jewry 1902-1910": in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 46.

was formed and a decision taken to build a new synagogue and Talmud Torah,¹ in Roeland Street. This was the Tifereth Israel Congregation, whose place of worship was consecrated by Rabbi Dr J H Hertz in 1902. The members were drawn mostly from immigrants who had already succeeded in establishing themselves in their new surroundings and were identified with the emerging Zionist Movement. Its leaders were people who were steeped in Jewish traditional culture and were deeply interested in Jewish affairs.² It was only natural, then, that they should attach a Hebrew school to their new synagogue to cater for 200 children. The leaders of the New Hebrew Congregation were in closer touch with, and certainly more representative of, the majority of the community, than were those of the older Tikvath Israel Congregation whose minister publicly espoused the cause of Zionism only after the issuance of the Balfour Declaration on 2 November 1917.³

Those immigrants who were more sedulous in their orthodox observance, and were still struggling to establish themselves, founded their own congregation in 1903 in Constitution Street, situated in the Castle Division (District Six) where they mostly resided. They called it the Beth Hamedrash Hachodosh (the New House of Study and Prayer) and there they indeed studied and worshipped as they were wont to do in their shtetels at home. This congregation and its first minister, the Rabbi M Ch Mirvish who came out from Lithuania in 1908, were to play an important part in the development of Jewish education at the Cape.⁴ By 1903, there were thus three main congregations in Cape Town, apart from ten up-country.⁵

1. The S A Jewish Year Book 1929: op.cit., p 69

2. Geffen, M: in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 49

3. Ibid., p 47.

4. The S A Jewish Year Book 1929: op.cit., p 65

5. S A Jewish Chronicle: 29 May 1903, p 26

Congregations in the Transvaal were formed wherever there were sizeable Jewish communities along the Reef and elsewhere in the South African Republic. These included Barberton, established in 1886; Boksburg (before 1899); Ermelo (1898); Germiston (1897); Klerksdorp (1889); Krugersdorp (before 1899); Pretoria (1890); Springs (1898).¹ These little congregations, as tradition demanded, concerned themselves with the Jewish education of their children as one of their main activities.²

In Johannesburg itself, Jewish life continued throughout the war period although in a very restricted manner. The first refugees were permitted to return in May 1901 and Jewish life was gradually restored to normal during the ensuing months.³ The destruction and dislocation of war plunged the ravaged country into depression and many of the returning Jewish refugees, too, suffered considerable hardship and even destitution, and became a charge on the charities of the community which were established in the aftermath of the war.

In Johannesburg, too, the tendency in Jewish congregational life was towards decentralisation.⁴ In addition to the three main congregations established during the nineties, new suburban communities organised themselves when things returned to normal. Jeppestown built its own synagogue in 1903, followed by other centres in the city and on the Reef in quick succession.⁵ Religious and communal life

1. Rabinowitz, L I: in Saron & Hotz., op.cit., pp 172-174
2. Advertisements in the S A Jewish Chronicle from 1902 onwards for ministers to serve the country communities invariably mention that the applicant must include teaching amongst his other duties.
3. Rabinowitz, L I: in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 177
4. Sowden, D L: in Saron & Hotz., op.cit., p 215
5. Ibid.

received a great impetus with the arrival of Rabbi Dr Judah Leo Landau to occupy the pulpit of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation (Park Synagogue). He was already noted as a Hebrew scholar and littérateur.¹

Sowden writes that in few modern western communities of comparable size could there have been found two ministers of such stature as Rabbi Dr Joseph Herman Hertz of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation and Rabbi Dr Judah Leo Landau of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation.²

The 1904 census indicated that the Jewish population of the Transvaal was on the point of overtaking that of the Cape Colony (15 478 in the former against 19 537 in the latter), whilst the Johannesburg community itself was just about equal to that of the greater Cape Town community with about 10 000 in each.³

The flow of immigration, previously interrupted by the war, resumed after 1902, spurred on by the sharpening antisemitism in Russia. In November 1902, 657 Jewish immigrants left London for South Africa; the number rose to 870 in the following month: whilst on one day in January 1903, 118 Jewish souls passed through the Jewish Immigrants' Shelter in London en route to the Cape.⁴

For Abrahams, 1902 is a turning point in the history of the Jewish community in South Africa.⁵ On the one hand it marks the definite beginning of the hegemony of the Eastern

1. Bernstein, E: My Judaism, My Jews: (Exclusive Books, Johannesburg, 1962) pp 22 et seq.

2. Sowden, D L: in Saron & Hotz., op.cit., p 214

3. Abrahams, I and Saron, G: in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., footnotes to pp 44 and 181.

4. S A Jewish Chronicle, 23 January 1903, p 12.

5. Abrahams, I: in Saron & Hotz:, op.cit., pp 43-44

European Jews who now constitute the numerical majority in the community and have begun to shape its character. It is these "colonists from Lithuania" who are going to determine the quality and nature of Jewish life in the South Africa of the twentieth century and gradually take over its leadership from the older settlers. On the other hand, this turning point in the history of the country marks another important development for the Jewish community - the beginning of the predominance of the Transvaal in Jewish life in South Africa.

Representatives of the seven main Jewish institutions and congregations in Johannesburg and independent leaders met in April 1903, in the schoolroom attached to the Park Synagogue in de Villiers Street, to form the Transvaal Jewish Board of Deputies. The first meeting of what was later called the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Transvaal and Natal was convened in July and the Board was launched at a public meeting when the High Commissioner, Lord Milner, delivered an important address. In this respect too the South African community was modelling itself on British Jewry which had since 1760 had its officially recognised umbrella organisation, the Board of Deputies of British Jews.²

The following year a similar body was established at the Cape which concerned itself with the political struggle to have Yiddish recognised as a European language by statute and not merely by government regulation, a struggle successfully concluded when the Cape Parliament passed its Act 30 of 1906.³

1. Abrahams, I: in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 44.

2. Cowen, P: "The Jewish Board of Deputies in South Africa": 1929 S A Jewish Year Book: op.cit., pp 149-153

3. Ibid., pp 156-157

It was only after Union that these two boards themselves united to form the S A Jewish Board of Deputies in August 1912 in Bloemfontein.¹ Co-operation in Jewish education was much longer in coming.

1. Ibid., p 157.

CHAPTER 14: THE CAPE TOWN HEBREW PUBLIC SCHOOL.
HOPE MILL SCHOOL DURING THE EARLY YEARS
OF THE CENTURY

1. The Progress of the Hope Mill Hebrew Public School

In its third issue,¹ the recently established S A Jewish Chronicle carried a detailed description of the Hope Mill Hebrew Public School which had, by the time of writing, moved into what it termed as its own palatial buildings in Government Avenue, with over 350 pupils on its roll.

The school had made great progress under the capable principalship of Mr Mark Cohen. The staff now numbered eight, with Mr E H Kloot as vice-principal. Dr T Muir, the Superintendent-General of Education, had opened the first block of new buildings in August 1901,² and at the end of the year the Inspector of the Department of Public Education had given a very favourable report on the work of the school, remarking on its "exemplary tone and discipline" and adding that "the work was of very exceptional merit".³

The writer of the article reported favourably on Albert House, the boarding establishment attached to Hope Mill. Mention was made of the intention of the Committee to open a branch school in District Six on ground granted by the Cape Town Corporation. The library contained 400 volumes. The school was state-aided, according to the £-for-£ system prevailing at the time. There were 120 "honorary pupils", mostly children of the poorer immigrants in the community, who received free tuition.⁴ This was

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1. S A Jewish Chronicle: Vol I No 3: 7 March 1902, pp 27-29
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid.

in keeping with the tradition of congregational responsibility for the provision of free education for all. In spite of the state aid and the support of the Tikvath Israel Congregation, the school had its financial problems. Income from fees was low and many were free scholars. Furthermore, there was evidently not much support from the public.¹ An appeal to the Jewish community of Cape Town² was circulated, probably in 1901 or thereabouts, and signed by the President of the school, the Rev. Mr Joel Rabinowitz, its vice-president, the Rev. Mr A P Bender, and various other members of the committee.

(They) regret that they are compelled to make an urgent and earnest appeal for the relief of the school finances which have unfortunately fallen of late into a lamentable condition.

The mortgage on the school property stood at £6 500, and "there is an undischarged deficit of £300 on the past year's work".³

It was a cry which was to be heard incessantly from the mouths of the leaders responsible for Jewish education from that day onwards and for many years to come. Subscriptions and donations had not kept pace with expansion and increased costs. It had therefore become more and more difficult

to do justice to the religious and Hebrew education of the children and the instruction in Jewish subjects had become admittedly inadequate.

The Committee of the Hebrew Public School are convinced that the spiritual welfare of the rising generation and the future of the community in Cape Town are largely, if not entirely, dependent upon the early religious training imparted in the schools.....⁴

1. Ibid., p 27

2. Appeal on behalf of the Cape Town Hebrew Public School to the Jewish Community of Cape Town by the President and Committee: c 1900 (Ms by courtesy of the Jewish Museum, Cape Town). See appendices A4 and A5 of the writer's M Ed thesis: op.cit.

3. Ibid., p A4

4. Ibid., pp A4-A5

A strictly orthodox instructor in Jewish religion, history and tradition, and Hebrew language and literature would be appointed as a full-time teacher without extra charge to the pupils.¹

The appeal concludes with an urgent call "to the benevolent members of the Jewish Community in Cape Town to lend their cordial support to this pressing work of charity and necessity....."²

This document possesses a threefold interest. It throws light on the financial difficulties already facing the committee so early in the history of the school and is of considerable relevance in explaining its decision a few years later to cede control of the school to the government. Secondly, it could be the prototype of all the future appeals made from that day to our very own by lay-leaders of Jewish education in this country calling on their contemporaries to lend a willing hand to what they considered to be the sacred and prime duty of any Jewish community anywhere and at any time - Talmud Torah, or Jewish education. And lastly, it may be inferred from the appeal that the school's Jewish curriculum had come under criticism, hence the explicit promise on the part of the signatories to strengthen this department.

Hope Mill was the subject of a leading article later in the year³ in which the writer (presumably L L Goldsmid, the editor) criticised the composition of the school committee. This was a closed body consisting largely of nominees of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation and, as such, out of touch

1. Ibid., p A5

2. Ibid.

3. S A Jewish Chronicle, 19 September 1902, p 3.

with the community. The paper strongly advocated greater community involvement in the school which would ensure it of wider support. There is an allusion to the dissatisfaction at the paucity of religious instruction - so much so that many (of the pupils) supplement the little knowledge they obtain in the Gardens by the attendance at the Beth Hamedrash.

Hebrew and religious instruction at Hope Mill was indeed limited in time and content. One period a day was devoted to these studies, which were concerned mainly with reading Siddur, instruction in English in religious lore, the synagogue service, Hebrew language and elementary grammar, and in the higher classes probably translation of passages from the Pentateuch, and preparation for Barmitzvah. Writing was done in the square script; nobody could speak Hebrew.¹

A detailed report of the Annual General Meeting of the Cape Town Hebrew Public School (Hope Mill) which appeared in the S A Jewish Chronicle at the end of 1902 provides interesting information on the school at that time.² The Rev. Mr Bender presided over the gathering and delivered the report. He announced that a piece of ground had been obtained in District Six through the instrumentality of Mr H Liberman, treasurer of the school, to erect a preparatory school for the convenience of younger children who resided in that area and obviously found the considerable distance to Hope Mill in Government Avenue too much for them.

The number on the roll had risen to 370, an increase of 70 over that of the previous year, and the general progress of the school had been entirely satisfactory. The physical drill class had won the second prize in the Coronation

1. Information supplied to the writer by Dr L Herrman, vice-principal of Hope Mill from 1907, during an interview at his home in Newlands, Cape, on 6 July 1972.
2. Report of the Annual General Meeting of the Cape Town Hebrew Public School, in the S A Jewish Chronicle, 5 November 1902, pp 24-25

Competition, an achievement which, according to the words of the chairman, did not substantiate the statement that the boys and girls in continental countries were stunted in their growth.¹

The examination in religious teaching conducted by the committee had proved entirely satisfactory, continued the minister, and added that he had instructed the headmaster to introduce the study of post-Biblical history. It should be clear that advanced Hebrew could not be taught at an elementary school. Anyone who desired to study Hebrew at this level, however, could do so by courtesy of the College Council for a nominal fee at the S A College where he (Mr Bender) was professor.²

It was his earnest desire, concluded the chairman, to make the children of the school worthy of a country in which they enjoyed every freedom and advantage.

In his treasurer's report, Mr Liberman reported that fully one third of the pupils were entirely exempted from fees; another third paid half fees (twenty five shillings a year); whilst the rest paid the full school fees of fifty shillings a year.³

In the general discussion, Mr Advocate Alexander expressed criticism of the committee. There was a need for a wider outlook, he said, and he called for an increase in the time allotted to Hebrew. Mr I Schwartz, a prominent member of the Dorshei Zion Association, also expressed his dissatisfaction with the Hebrew results achieved, judging by the knowledge of a number of pupils whom he had himself examined. The committee, according to him, was unwilling to listen to

1. Ibid. p 25.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

criticism.¹

Hope Mill, it would seem, was the jealous preserve of the Tikvath Israel Congregation and obviously under the control of its minister. Alexander and Schwartz represented the rival congregation in Roeland Street with its modern Hebrew-Zionist spirit.

The committee of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation served also as the committee of the Hebrew Public School even though the latter was nominally independent. At the Annual General Meeting of the Congregation in 1903² it was reported that 140 children were attending the school free of charge and, furthermore, as a criticism that "...a slight amount of Hebrew is taught at the Hebrew School".³

The annual report of Hope Mill for the year 5663 (1902-3) appeared in a later issue of the paper.⁴ The enrolment was 385; in addition to the headmaster and vice-principal (Messrs Mark Cohen and E H Kloot respectively) there was a staff of nine teachers; the Junior Primary School (up to Standard III) was to be established in District Six to cater for younger children living in the area. Once again the Inspector's report was very positive:...."the school quite maintains its reputation".⁵ Mr Bender and four other gentlemen had carried out examinations in Bible, Hebrew and religious knowledge and the results in this sphere they regarded as thoroughly satisfactory.

The committee could, with full justification, report a "marked advance in every branch". It was recorded that state-aid covered about a third of the total expenditure.⁶

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid. 9 October 1903, p 19.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid. 27 November 1903, p 14.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

The editorial in the same issue expressed satisfaction with the report of what it termed "this popular institution", whose importance to the future of the Jewish community warranted the support for which the committee had appealed.¹

In its issue of 15 January 1904 the S A Jewish Chronicle carried a notice to the effect that the Junior Department of Hope Mill would open at 62 Constitution Street under Mr E H Kloot.² The premises had been altered and renovated. This branch would go up to Standard III, after which the children would be old enough to make their way to the main school which by then went up to Standard VII.³

Hope Mill and its Junior Department reported a successful year of progress and growth at the 1904 prize distribution function.⁴ There were no fewer than 508 on the roll, and the Inspectors of the Department of Public Education continued to praise the work done by the school.

By 1904 the Jewish community on the Rand had outgrown the one at the Cape in numerical strength; against an estimate of some 12 000 in the Peninsula, the number of Jews in the north was given as 20 000.⁵ The S A Jewish Chronicle was transferred to Johannesburg at the end of that year where it continued to appear as a weekly for over twenty years, returning to Cape Town in 1927. The first number of any English-Jewish journal to be published in Johannesburg appeared on 5 May 1905.⁶ Naturally enough, this weekly

1. Ibid., p 8.

2. Ibid. 15 January 1904, p 57.

3. Ibid. 29 January 1904, p 122.

4. Ibid. 1 July 1904, p 705.

5. Ibid. 29 April, 1904, p 480.

6. Ibid. 5 May 1905, p 20: and: Sowden: "Transvaal Jewry 1902-1910" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 223

thereafter gave more prominence to the events in the Transvaal and the colonies to the north which now contained the major part of the Jewish community in South Africa. This move was symptomatic of the growing dominance of the northern community in Jewish affairs in South Africa.

By 1905 Hope Mill was a flourishing institution. It was one of the largest schools in Cape Town, being graded A2, intermediate between primary and high levels.¹ It had a boarding department under the control of the headmaster, Mr Mark Cohen, who ran a very efficient establishment. When the pupils obtained the School Certificate, they proceeded to the South African College, the Good Hope Seminary, or the Normal College for their matriculation course.

The year 1905 was, in retrospect, an important and fateful one in the history of the school. The School Board Act was passed by the Cape Parliament which set up some 100 such boards in the Colony, primarily as an instrument for the introduction of compulsory education for white children up to the age of 14.² For many years up to that time schools had been established by the different religious denominations to meet the needs of the growing population and, if they received the approval of the Cape Department of Public Education, they were eligible for state-aid. Hope Mill's genesis was a typical example.

Various education commissions set up during the latter part of the last century by the Cape legislature recommended far-reaching reforms to this system of education based merely on state-aid. After the 1870 Education Act which introduced compulsory elementary schooling in England, it was inevitable that a similar

1. Herrman, L: The Cape Town High School: An Historical Sketch:
unpublished ms., p 2.

2. Malherbe, E G: Education in South Africa: 1652-1922
(Juta, Cape Town, 1925) pp 127 et seq.

provision would be introduced in the Colony and the School Board system was set up to effect this desideratum of free and compulsory education for the white population.¹

For the committee of the Hebrew Public School the new dispensation meant the prospect of an end to the financial burdens that were steadily growing in size as the school itself was expanding. Success had brought its own problems. State-aid barely amounted to one third of the expenditure;² the school had an inordinately large proportion of "honorary pupils";³ and the Rev. Mr Bender, its president, was the very embodiment of generosity, especially where education was concerned. Public support was very limited in scope.⁴

The Tikvath Israel Congregation had insufficient resources to spare for the growing school which was subordinate to the demands of the synagogue. Some few may have entertained misgivings about handing over the control of the school to the governmental authority. The advantages in favour of the step were, of course, obvious. The Department of Education was to permit Hope Mill to continue to provide Hebrew and religious instruction for one period daily, and additional Hebrew tuition would be available after school hours, if desired and paid for by the committee of the Congregation. But funds were not available and the proposal lapsed.

By 1907, the year in which a new vice-principal, Mr Louis Herrman, arrived from London, the school passed completely into the control of the School Board, and became known as the Hope Mill Public School. It was still permitted to

1. Malherbe: *ibid.*

2. See p 112

3. See p 107

4. See "Appeal for Support" pp 108-109

devote one period daily to Jewish religious instruction. Whilst non-Jewish pupils were admitted, the enrolment remained almost totally Jewish for years.¹

Hebrew and religion were taught by members of the staff, including the Rev. Mr Weinberg, cantor to the Congregation.² Mr Herrman himself had obtained qualifications in these subjects at the Jews' College in London, prior to his departure for the Cape.

Most of the instruction was of an elementary nature and consisted of translation of passages from the Hebrew of the Pentateuch and Siddur. There was some writing in the square script, as well as basic grammar, but no language tuition.³ The Hebrew language revival was just reaching South Africa, but had not as yet penetrated the walls of Hope Mill. The school was almost identical to the London Jewish schools of the day, when the limited translation and religious instruction constituted the bulk of the curriculum. The school was closed on Jewish holidays.⁴

A Jewish denominational school was a normal phenomenon in the educational world of the turn of the century when most schools were founded and maintained by various denominations. S A C S and Good Hope Seminary were notable exceptions.

For some of the founders and teachers of Hope Mill, Jewish instruction may have been the main objective of the school. This had certainly been uppermost in the mind of the Rev. Mr Joel Rabinowitz, but one doubts whether the majority of its lay leaders or its parents shared this view. At the

1. Interview granted to the writer by Dr L Herrman in July, 1972 - see p110. footnote 1.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

annual prize-distribution function in 1903 Mr Bender said that the aim of the school was to provide a broad religious training - but thorough and inspiring - in order to make the boys and girls useful and valuable citizens¹, and he added that the school was indeed succeeding in achieving its great objective - to create in everyone a sound mind in a healthy body.² Its main objective, then, was the instruction of Jewish children, not the Jewish instruction of children, to educate the children from immigrant homes so that they could take their place in the totally anglicised society at the Cape.

The time allocated to Jewish instruction was so limited, the content matter so restricted, that one is led to the inevitable conclusion that as an educational aim, it certainly did not rank very high in the scale of values of most of the leaders and teachers. Many parents, whom this Jewish education did not satisfy, sent their children to hedarim after school hours to obtain more substantial Jewish instruction.³

During the ensuing years Hope Mill gradually lost its Jewish character. The proportion of non-Jewish pupils at the school increased⁴ and the Hebrew Public School Committee, with no say any longer at the school, ultimately sold the property to the South African College Council in 1914. Some years later the school was obliged to vacate its premises and, finally, in 1919 Hope Mill's career came to an end.⁵ Mr Mark Cohen took his pupils over to the new Orange Grove departmental school in Breda Street for a few years. In 1920 this school was again reorganised: the higher classes became the Cape Town Secondary School

1. S A Jewish Chronicle 26 June 1903, p 25

2. Ibid.

3. Interview with Dr L Herrman: see p 110, footnote 1.

4. Ibid.

5. Herrman, L: "The Cape Town High School" op.cit. pp 3-6

under Mr A P Blair, whilst the primary classes were taken by Mr Cohen to the Normal College premises in Buitenkant Street which had lately been acquired from the Dutch Reformed Church. Together these classes and the primary standards of the Normal College formed the Cape Town Central Primary School, from which Mr Cohen retired in 1923.¹

In 1925 the Cape Town High School was also moved to the Normal College premises from which the primary boys had been removed to the Hope Lodge Primary School in Roeland Street, with Mr Kloot as principal. The girls' primary school (Cape Town Central) remained behind in a section of the Normal College buildings.² Strange to relate, two generations after it had left the old Hope Mill site in Government Avenue, and after many vicissitudes, the Cape Town High School returned to the original premises of Hope Mill, thanks largely to demographic and other changes in the centre of Cape Town.

1. The school had become undenominational in 1912. (Letter from Secretary of the Cape School Board to Miss R van Gelderen: 6 March 1943) (Jewish Museum, Johannesburg).
2. After the Second World War, the Girls' Central School was combined with the Hope Lodge (Boys') School to form the new Vredehoek Primary School.

CHAPTER 15: THE JOHANNESBURG JEWISH SCHOOL:
HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

A Critical Review of the State of Jewish Education on the Rand in 1902

One of the earliest issues of the S A Jewish Chronicle,¹ carried a review of the situation of Jewish education in Johannesburg by Maurice Abrahams, a well-known communal figure, who had been active in this sphere for some years.²

He was highly critical of the Johannesburg Jewish community for "culpably neglecting the cause of Jewish education", and hoped that his article would be a contribution "to remedy this disregard". Engrossed as members of the committee were in inter-communal politics, they had neglected education - that first obligation of Judaism. Condemning "all that has been done and all that had been left undone" Abrahams recorded that during a 15-month period, to the end of February 1899, the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation had spent a mere £17-13-0 on its Jewish religion classes. In the early days the Congregation had had a school on its premises³ and in "an act of vandalism" had "deliberately shut the doors of the school and turned all the Jewish little children adrift".⁴

The Beth Hamedrash, the stronghold of orthodoxy, had no Talmud Torah. The Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation had done most for Jewish education and given its support to the Jewish School, but this had not been enough, wrote Abrahams.⁵

1. Abrahams, M: "Jewish Education on the Rand" in S A Jewish Chronicle: 21 March 1902, pp 19-21.

2. See p. 86

3. See pp. 85 et seq.

4. Abrahams, M: "Jewish Education on the Rand" op.cit., pp 19-21

5. Ibid.

The enrolment did not exceed 200 in a school that had room for 500: the interests of the school had been subordinated to the interests of the Congregation. After twelve years of communal work, concluded the writer bitingly, there were about 200 children in the Jewish School, about 100 in various religious classes - and "about 3 000 left to grow up in crass ignorance".¹

It is impossible from this distance in time to judge whether this review of Abrahams was a reliable analysis of the true state of Jewish education in Johannesburg at the turn of the century or to what degree it was tendentious, impelled by the writer's personal animus towards the President Street Synagogue.

In his "Letter from Johannesburg" a few months later, Abrahams averred that this Congregation

failed to maintain a position of paramount importance in the Community.....because of its luke-warm, half-hearted support for Jewish education.²

The reliability of Abrahams' strictures may be queried on two points. The estimate of 3 300 school-going children in a community estimated to have numbered between 10 000 and 12 000 in 1899 is exaggerated. At least half this number was composed of immigrants, a large proportion of whom were single males or married men who had not as yet brought out their families. A more likely figure would be around 2 000, high enough admittedly.³ Nor did he mention the probably quite considerable number of children receiving tuition in hedarim or from private tutors. These observations, however, would not invalidate his condemnation of the indifferent record of achievement and

1. Ibid.

2. S A Jewish Chronicle: 18 July 1902, p 25.

3. Saron and Hotz: op.cit., pp 150 and 181.

responsibility in Jewish education of the Johannesburg Jewish community, when compared with that of the Cape.

The Johannesburg Jewish School becomes the Jewish Government School

The British Administration began to introduce far-reaching reforms in education even before the final peace was signed in 1902.¹ Free schools were being established all over the Rand and, in view of this, the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation decided to hand over its school to the Transvaal Government with whom it had been negotiating on this issue since the end of 1900.² The transfer of the Jewish School to the Government was confirmed at a meeting convened for the purpose on 30 March 1902.³ The Chairman, Mr H Morris, pointed out that the School had been a great financial strain on the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation because the previous government had never given the congregation any assistance in helping it to run the institution. The new administration was preparing to introduce free education in the Transvaal which would be financed out of rates and, Mr Morris stated, it would hardly be the proper thing to contribute towards the education of everyone in Johannesburg and in addition have to pay extra for their own children's schooling in the Jewish School.⁴

Times were hard for poor people and it could not be expected that they should continue sending their children to a fee-paying school when government schooling would be free. The

1. Malherbe, E G: Education in South Africa: (Juta, Cape Town 1975 edition): Vol I, pp 332 et seq.
2. The Star: 1 April 1902: see S A Communal Notebook C: op. cit., p 50.
3. Jewish Chronicle, London: 2 May 1902, p 23. See also The Transference of the Jewish School to the Government. Monograph of S A Jewish Sociological and Historical Society (Jewish Museum, Johannesburg).
4. Jewish Chronicle, London: ibid.

Congregation really had no choice. If it carried on as a private fee-paying school it would lose four-fifths of the pupils, so why lose them first and then have nothing to hand over later when this step became inevitable.¹

Morris stressed that under the proposed dispensation the school would remain "a Jewish school in every sense of the word".² It would be a school for Jewish children only, and the Government would certainly see that the best qualified teachers, belonging to the Jewish faith if at all possible, would be appointed to the staff. For the Congregation to continue running the school would entail an expenditure of at least £1 500 a year and he saw no reason why the community should bear this extra expenditure seeing that it would in any case be taxed for education generally.³

The meeting considered the draft agreement between the Committee of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation and the Director of Education concerning the transfer of the school to the government and unanimously accepted what were regarded as the liberal and fair terms offered by the Administration which, to the mind of everybody present, ensured that the school would "remain a Jewish institution in every sense" and would be in a position, moreover, to expand its activities and accommodate many more pupils.

The Jewish School of Johannesburg was henceforth called the Jewish Government School.⁴ From the Congregation's point of view it was an eminently favourable arrangement which took

1. The Star: 1 April 1902: see Note 2 above.

2. Jewish Chronicle, London: 2 May 1902, p 23: see also footnote 3, p 121.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

away nothing from the Jewish character of the school, relieved the synagogue of the onerous financial burden amounting to £1 500 a year, and, moreover, gave assurances in regard to proper school facilities and the professional standards of the staff.

Mr A M Abrahams Takes Over the Jewish Government School

Mr A M Abrahams, a vice-principal of the Jews' Free School in London, came from England in mid-1902 to take over as principal of the new school.¹ He was one of the "Milner Boys", the teachers imported from the United Kingdom at the direction of the High Commissioner, Lord Milner, to staff the new English-medium schools being opened on the Rand and elsewhere after the war.²

Abrahams was an energetic and capable man. He was prominent in communal affairs, later rising to become Chairman of the South African Zionist Federation. The Jewish Government School grew rapidly under his leadership and became known as one of the leading educational institutions in Johannesburg.

When he took over he had a staff of five teachers with about 150 pupils.³ The school was reorganised on the lines of similar institutions in England and syllabuses were drawn up for Hebrew and secular subjects. The school soon began to attract more pupils and more teachers were appointed, so that barely nine months later the enrolment stood at 406 and

1. S A Jewish Chronicle: 13 July 1903, p 13

2. About 300 teachers were brought out. See: Malherbe, Vol I, op.cit., p 299.

3. Report on the Progress of the Jewish School: submitted to the Committee of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation by the Headmaster, Mr A M Abrahams, 1903.: cited in Tyson & Rubin: Effects of Evolution and Change in an Area on the Local School (Doornfontein and the I H Harris Primary School): Unpublished Thesis submitted to the Johannesburg College of Education 1976: Appendix I.

the staff numbered eight.¹ "The accommodation is now taxed to its utmost limits" wrote Mr Abrahams, and many children had to be turned away in consequence.² The school had made good progress, a fine esprit was emerging and extra-mural activities organised: the school would, indeed, "not suffer by comparison with similar institutions in England".³

The lack of a playing field was keenly felt and reference was made to the "Jewish School Supplementary Education Fund" to provide "additional necessaries"⁴ and in this connection a gymnasium and library were already being planned. In addition, the Fund was to be used to pay for Sabbath and Sunday Hebrew classes which would be open to all Jewish children, for the employment of additional teachers for the daily Hebrew classes, and for prizes and outings.

The sub-committee appointed by the Congregation to be in control of this Fund, of which Mr A M Abrahams was the secretary, made a successful appeal for support.

In accordance with the conditions of the agreement with the Government, the committee arranged for examinations in Hebrew reading and related subjects to be held in April 1903. It is noteworthy that the report used - for the first time on record - the phrase "the children attending the Day School" when referring to the proposed examination. The examiners were the Rev. Mr M Rosenberg of Pretoria and Mr E Jaffe of Johannesburg. Their report stated that considering that the average period of attendance was only four and a half months, the progress had been very satisfactory, though the classes were too large to allow of sufficient time for individual attention in reading, so that this "remains the great defect in the school".⁵

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. "Report of the Jewish School Supplementary Education Fund" cited in Tyson & Rubin, op.cit., Appendix II

5. Ibid. Examiners' Report.

The Fund Committee further reported that Sabbath and Sunday classes were attended by 115 children, about half of whom were not pupils at the Day School. The establishment of a "gymnasium and library" was furthermore "in active prosecution"¹ and the committee concluded with the observation that the community would have to give serious consideration to the provision of additional schools, as the available accommodation was entirely inadequate and new children who were clamouring for instruction almost daily, were unable to gain admittance.²

The syllabus in Hebrew and religion followed the Chief Rabbi's Code but Mr Abrahams had advanced somewhat as he had introduced Hebrew writing, grammar and vocabulary, reported the correspondent of the S A Jewish Chronicle during his visit to the school in de Villiers Street.³ The general curriculum went as far as the Cape Elementary Examination, though the headmaster hoped to go up to matriculation level eventually. The general impression created was that of a well-ordered, clean, busy and happy school, though "the building has its disadvantages".⁴

At the first prize distribution, attended by a very large gathering, the children gave a callisthenics display and the chairman reported with satisfaction on the progress and state of the school which was by that time "practically under government control". The school had been considerably improved "by the action of the government": it was, he concluded "a happy state of affairs".⁵

Under Mr Abrahams the Jewish Government School became a very successful educational establishment, its growth restricted only by the limited accommodation of the old three-storey

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. S A Jewish Chronicle: 3 July 1903. p 13.

4. Ibid.

5. The Star: 26 June 1903: cited in S A Communal Notebook C: p 62.

building in de Villiers Street. The government authorities were dissatisfied with the over-crowded conditions, the unsatisfactory situation near the station, and the general inadequacy of the buildings which had been condemned by the Medical Officer of Health¹ and gave notice of their intention not to renew the lease.² For some time there was a see-saw struggle between it and the Congregation and the threat of closure hung over the school. The Congregation could not sell the building because of the servitude on the property imposed by the old Republican authorities to the effect that the land had been granted for educational and religious purposes only.³

The other problem that faced the school, and particularly the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, was the scope and adequacy of the Jewish education. The place of Jewish/Hebrew instruction in the curriculum was indeed fixed in the original agreement; but in practice there were other important factors such as the availability of proper teachers, the actual syllabus, the status of the subject in the eyes of pupils and parents. The Jewish Government School was primarily an institution to provide secular education for immigrant Jewish children. English education took preference over Jewish education in the eyes of most parents and, one would also imagine, in the eyes of most teachers and pupils.

The first ten years of the century present a confused picture of Jewish education on the Rand as it is reflected in the S A Jewish Chronicle, the lengthy "Jottings from South Africa" which appeared regularly in the London Jewish Chronicle, and the reports in the local daily papers. This state of

1. Jewish Chronicle, London: 6 July 1906: p 43.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. : 2 August, 1907, p 11.

disorganisation brought calls for the establishment of a Central Board to exercise overall control and guidance for the benefit of the various bodies and institutions active in the field of Jewish education.¹ The Jewish population on the Rand was being rapidly augmented by immigration, predominantly from Eastern Europe.² Jewish society was in an almost constant state of visible tension and underlying friction bordering on conflict, mirroring perhaps the fluid, unstable nature of post-war society on the Rand. It was a society whose eyes were directed to one main objective - the single-minded search for gold. It was a society which had been thrown together in the space of a decade or two; it was composed of heterogeneous elements, and was devoid of the solid social foundation of the older centres, and the dignity and stability flowing from historical traditions.

The Jewish community, too, in spite of being cemented by bonds of a common faith and common historical experience, manifested serious signs of disunity and dissension. Reporting from Johannesburg - that "town of makeshift and stop-gaps....careless of the present in its expectations of future developments...."³ - to the Cape Town fortnightly, the correspondent wrote of the "demon of discord that has lodged itself with exceptional tenacity" in the midst of the Johannesburg Jewish community.⁴ The alliterative figure may have been somewhat exaggerated, but the communal scene on the Rand was indeed criss-crossed by tensions, rivalries and a spirit of disunity which were strongly reflected in the sphere of Jewish education.

1. Jewish Chronicle, London: 5 August, 1904, p 20
2. S A Jewish Chronicle of 15 April 1904 reported that Rabbi Dr J H Hertz of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation had consecrated six synagogues during the previous eighteen months. p 439.
3. S A Jewish Chronicle, 15 April 1904, p 436
4. Ibid., 29 April 1904, p 483.

The community was divided by socio-economic and cultural divisions, expressed frequently in such derogatory terms as "foreign Judaism".¹ A meeting called to discuss Jewish education in Johannesburg was "not representative enough", because it was attended mainly by Yiddish-speakers who "looked at matters from a more or less foreign point of view".²

The immigrants had established their own main Beth Hamedrash Congregation before the war and there were doubtless other smaller synagogues. Apart from this the relationship between the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation (President Street) led by Rabbi Dr J H Hertz and the Johannesburg New Hebrew Congregation (Park Synagogue) whose pulpit was now occupied by Rabbi Dr J L Landau was marked by tensions and rivalry which were regrettably exacerbated by the disharmony between their respective religious leaders. Whilst there was co-operation on occasion, the ministers mostly operated as individuals, often moved by a spirit of unfriendly rivalry and of jealousy. The correspondent of the London Jewish Chronicle drew cautious attention to these differences on a number of occasions. Because of "petty jealousy in this community, parents, it is alleged, have refused permission to their children to attend Hebrew classes (at government schools) for fear of offending their particular minister".³

The ministers differed publicly on the issue of Hebrew and religious instruction in Church schools. The whole question of Jewish children attending private Church schools (particularly the Marist Brothers' School and various convents) agitated leaders of the community for years.⁴ There were differences too over the Jewish Government School and the Talmud Torah.⁵

1. S A Jewish Chronicle: 11 September 1903, p 24.

2. Ibid., 10 June 1904, p 643.

3. Jewish Chronicle, London: 20 May 1904, p 14

4. Ibid., 24 June 1904, p 23

5. Ibid., 5 August 1904, p 20: and S A Jewish Chronicle: 29 April 1904, pp 487-488

There were calls for the establishment of a "Central Education Board for the Supervision of Hebrew Instruction"¹ at a meeting held in the hall of the Jewish School on 26 June to consider the problems of Jewish education and particularly the crying need of those "hundreds of Jewish children who receive no Hebrew tuition of any kind".² The meeting was inconclusive, to the deep regret of the correspondent, and it was a victory for the "more orthodox co-religionists".³ This failure to co-operate and act constituted a "severe stigma"⁴ on the Jews of Johannesburg, which was deserved in view of the fact that there were hundreds of Jewish children without Hebrew education at all. Looking for some solution, the correspondent thought that the newly established Board of Deputies, a neutral body, should take a hand in this matter, and help the extreme orthodox and moderate sections sink their differences.⁵ This was an indication of the gulf in the community between the anglicised and immigrant sections and the considerable divergence between them in regard to Jewish education. It is a discordant note to be heard on more than one occasion years later in different times and other circumstances. Underlying the disharmony was a widespread apathy in the community⁶, as if "its energies seem to have exhausted themselves in the creation of the present Jewish School", an institution which, in the words of the correspondent, did excellent work but had its obvious inadequacies.⁷

1. Ibid.: see issues of 20 May 1904, p 14; 5 August 1904, p 20; and 3 November 1905, p 26.

2. Ibid.: 5 August 1904, p 20.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.: 5 August 1904, p 20.

5. Ibid.

6. Jewish Chronicle, London: 28 October, 1904, p 23.

7. S A Jewish Chronicle: 15 April 1904. "Johannesburg Supplement" p 436

Problems of the Jewish Government School.

The Jewish School in de Villiers Street was a flourishing and well-run institution of learning under Abrahams: the enrolment rose to 406 in 1903 and grew to over 500 in 1904,¹ but the three-storey building was grossly overcrowded and became so dilapidated that it was ultimately condemned. A protracted tussle ensued between the educational authorities and the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation about the future of the building and, indeed, of the school. The old Republican Government had granted the site adjacent to the Park Synagogue in de Villiers Street to the Congregation for the construction of a school and when the agreement was made with the new government in 1902, the Congregation leased the school to the authorities who, as a quid pro quo, recognised the rights of the Jewish community by permitting one hour of Hebrew and religious instruction daily, thus making it, in effect, the only state denominational school in the city.²

The old servitude on the site prevented its sale and there was a feeling that the government would welcome the transfer of the school to another location where much larger and more suitable premises could be created so that the valuable site would revert to it.³ There was scant support in the community for this plan: some felt that the responsibility for education was now the government's, in contradistinction to the situation before the war, and during the bad economic times it was unwarranted to expect the Jewish community to raise the considerable finance required to build another and larger school. There were no doubt, too, questions about the justification for such a step, considering the very restricted parameters of the Jewish instruction provided at

1. Report of Mr A M Abrahams, Headmaster of the Jewish Government School, to the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, 17 April 1904: in Jewish Chronicle, London: 20 May 1904, p 14.
2. Jewish Chronicle, London: 6 July 1906, p 43
3. Ibid., 2 August 1907, p 11.

the Jewish Government School, was it fair to expect the community to build another school? Was it worth-while to do so from the community's point of view? One hour of Hebrew and religious instruction daily was all that was permitted, and there were deep reservations about the quality of this instruction.¹ There were strong indications that the new Education Act to be introduced by General Smuts, the Colonial Secretary, was going to bring about many changes likely to affect the Jewish School radically, on which particular subject the community entertained considerable anxiety.

The Jewish School Supplementary Education Fund² had been established to meet these misgivings concerning the limited scope of Jewish instruction in the Jewish Government School, and was originally intended to be used for supplementing it, mainly by means of the Sabbath and Sunday classes taken by teachers of the school.³ However, only a fraction of the 500 children of the school attended these classes. The Fund had been increasingly directed to ameliorating the poverty of many children at the school who were provided with clothing, books and other necessities twice a year before Passover and New Year.⁴

It was further reported that Dr Landau was taking a keen interest in the school. He had arranged a Hebrew refresher course for teachers of the school to improve their knowledge as well as their teaching and he came to examine the pupils in Hebrew.⁵ No formal examinations in Hebrew had taken place as yet. Abrahams gave a detailed account of the very satisfactory general activities of the Jewish School, but little about its Jewish tuition. Hebrew

1. See p. 126

2. See p. 124

3. Ibid.

4. Report at Twelfth Annual General Meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation held on April 17 1904: Reported in the Jewish Chronicle, London, 20 May 1904, p 14.

5. Ibid.

instruction in the school, added the headmaster somewhat vaguely, had been somewhat modified in order to fall in with Dr Landau's views.¹

Whilst the future of the Jewish School still remained unsettled, the Smuts Education Act (25 of 1907) was introduced in the Transvaal legislature, providing, inter alia, for basic changes in religious instruction which would affect the school radically.

Denominational instruction of any kind was to be excluded. The school day in all public schools would open with morning prayers, to be followed by two-and-a-half hours of instruction in Bible History per week, preferably during the first half-hour of each day, and was to be given only by a teacher on the staff. No doctrine or dogma peculiar to any religious denomination would be taught in any public school. All teachers would have to be prepared 'conscientiously' to give such Bible History instruction.²

There were aspects of the Bill which caused concern to the Jewish community, as these directly affected the Jewish Government School and the position of Jewish teachers.³ Morning prayers would be Christian prayers, and Bible History would naturally be presented from the Christian viewpoint. The position of Jewish teachers serving in government schools would also be directly affected, for they would not be expected 'conscientiously to give' instruction in the New Testament as historical fact.⁴ The Director of Education, it had been reported, had spoken about the

1. Report of Mr A M Abrahams to the Twelfth Annual General Meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation: *ibid.*

2. Jewish Chronicle, London: 2 August 1907, p 11: and Malherbe, *op.cit.*, pp 341-342.

3. Sowden, D L: "Transvaal Jewry 1902-1910" in Saron & Hotz *op.cit.*, pp 219-220

4. Jewish Chronicle, London: 2 August 1907, p 11

difficulty of imparting instruction in the Bible to Jews and Christians together.¹ These were worrying questions for the Jewish community and equally worrying was the position of the Jewish Government School under the new dispensation.²

A deputation consisting of Rabbi Dr Landau and Messrs Cohn and Raphaely, together with the Rev Mr Rosenberg and Mr Lichtenstein of Pretoria, representing the Jewish Board of Deputies, interviewed General J C Smuts, the Colonial Secretary, who was also in charge of education, to express the concern which the Jewish community entertained regarding those provisions of the Bill which, it was felt, discriminated against Jewish teachers and children.³ Rabbi Landau suggested that the first half-hour at the beginning of the day, scheduled for Bible History, be extended to one hour so as to embrace instruction in the Hebrew language. General Smuts sympathised "with the natural instinct of the Jewish people to keep their ancient language alive",⁴ and promised to give his earnest consideration to the proposal.

Other members of the delegation dealt with those proposals of the Bill as they directly affected the schools in Johannesburg and Pretoria. These related particularly to the provision that only teachers on the staff would be permitted to teach Bible History and that all teachers would have to undertake to give such instruction. This would exclude Jewish ministers of religion and, furthermore, would present grave problems of conscience to Jewish teachers having to teach New Testament history. The latter provision might indeed create difficulties for Jewish teachers seeking employment in state schools. The

1. Sowden: op.cit., pp 219-220.

2. Ibid.

3. S A Jewish Chronicle: 18 October 1907, p 317

4. Ibid.

prohibition of denominational instruction of any kind would also present a grave problem for the Jewish schools which, it was common knowledge, had been specifically established for the prime purpose of teaching the Jewish religion.¹

The Minister pointed out that, outside the ordinary school hours, which had to be devoted to education under the Act, the Jewish community was at liberty to provide religious instruction on the premises of Jewish schools.² The deputation also discussed the anxiety felt by Jewish parents whose children might be compelled to receive instruction in New Testament history. It was well satisfied with "the liberal and tolerant spirit displayed by the Minister of Education".³

In piloting the Bill through the legislature General Smuts referred to the difficulties for the Jewish community presented by some of its provisions and in the final form, in fact, met all the objections which the delegation had advanced against it.⁴ Jewish teachers were granted the right to request to be excused from having to teach Bible (New Testament) History: it was indeed a "conscience clause" for them. Pupils whose parents notified the principal in writing that they did not want their children to receive instruction in Bible History were also exempted from such instruction.⁵ In schools where the majority of children were Jewish, instruction in Old Testament history might be given.⁶

As sectarian instruction was now forbidden, the hour of

1. Jewish Chronicle, London: 2 August 1907, p 11

2. S.A. Jewish Chronicle: ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Sowden: op.cit., p 220

5. Ibid.

6. Jewish Chronicle, London: 18 October 1907, p 15.

religious instruction and Hebrew formerly given was shifted to the afternoon after the secular instruction had been completed. Hebrew was therefore no longer part of the school curriculum, and teachers would have to be paid extra for the work done.¹ The correspondent of the London Jewish Chronicle called for co-ordinated action to organise classes on these lines not only in the Jewish School but also in other schools in Johannesburg where the number of Jewish pupils was large enough to warrant the expenditure.² A Jewish Religious Education Board was urgently needed to take necessary initiatives in the matter, concluded the correspondent.³

The agreement of the Colonial Secretary to permit the Jewish community "to make arrangements for the teaching of dogmas (of their faith).....in those buildings (erected by it and used for public schools) after school hours" was hailed by the Pretoria News which welcomed what it regarded as a departure from the spirit of the Education Ordinance; since "it implies a broad-minded tolerance".⁴

The community could be reasonably satisfied with what it had succeeded in safeguarding in the Jewish School after the Education Act had been passed. Hebrew and religious instruction had been moved to the end of the day, but it was still part of the overall curriculum anyway.

Meantime, Abrahams continued to run a well-ordered and successful school, even though the buildings were regularly condemned by engineering as well as health authorities. The enrolment by 1907 exceeded 500⁵, when the Colonial

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Quoted in S A Jewish Chronicle: 18 October 1907, p 334.

5. Jewish Chronicle, London: 24 May 1907, p 15.

Secretary in due course removed the servitude on the land on which the Jewish School stood next to the Park Synagogue in de Villiers Street, and the way was now cleared for the construction of a badly-needed new school.¹

Changes were taking place in the community. Voices advocating amalgamation of the two main Congregations were being heard more and more frequently. At a special general meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, the committee was authorised to buy ground in Wolmarans Street for a new synagogue, to replace the old edifice in de Villiers Street.² Rabbi Dr J H Hertz had left South Africa at the end of 1911 for America³ whence he proceeded to Britain on his elevation to the position of Chief Rabbi of the British Empire.

A new location was also found for the Jewish School. The 22nd Annual General Meeting of the Congregation confirmed the purchase of land in End Street for the new school, which the government would erect⁴. Early the following year the Jewish School moved from the dilapidated building next to what was formerly the Park Synagogue to a most suitable and commodious building near Doornfontein Station, which Mr J Adamson, the Director of Education, formally opened some months later.⁵

The S A Jewish Chronicle gave a full report of the event, mentioning that the site had been purchased with the proceeds of the sale of the ground on which the old school had stood.⁶

1. Ibid. : 13 November 1908, p 10.

2. S A Jewish Chronicle: 7 May 1915, pp 299 et seq

3. Transvaal Leader 25 November 1911: in S A Communal Notebook C: op.cit., p 122.

4. S A Jewish Chronicle, 24 April 1914, p 471

5. Ibid., 22 January 1915, p 51

6. Ibid., 7 May 1915, pp 296-297.

Abrahams spoke on "the objects of the School to make good citizens, real Jews and patriotic Englishmen" and referred to "scholars who though only recently from Russia had rapidly assimilated British ideas".¹ Could this have been a reflection of the raison d'être of the school, or perhaps an echo of the current war-spirit? Rabbi Landau regarded the school as a "monument testifying to earnest efforts made by the older generation on behalf of secular and Jewish education".²

The school now had over 600 pupils³ and long retained its well-earned reputation as one of the foremost primary schools in Johannesburg. It would appear that the teaching of Hebrew declined in time. By 1918, according to a teacher on the staff, "the teaching of Hebrew was sporadic" and the children did not receive the allotted one hour per day.⁴

In 1925, Mr Abrahams was succeeded by Mr I H Harris, who had himself come from England in 1905 as one the "Milner Boys".⁵

The socio-economic changes in the area during the twenties gathered momentum in the course of the ensuing years. There was a shift in the Jewish population from Doornfontein and its surroundings towards the newer Northern Suburbs.⁶ In time, many non-Jewish families who moved into the area began to send their children to this school which boasted so fine a reputation. Mr Harris endeavoured to maintain the Jewish atmosphere of the school and took steps to carry on the original arrangement by which the teaching of Hebrew was to form part of the school curriculum. In time he

1. Ibid, p 301.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Tyson & Rubin: op.cit., Chapter IX, Section 2.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid. Chapters VIII and IX.

found that fewer and fewer teachers on the staff were qualified to teach it. He appealed to the Congregation at Wolmarans Street for assistance and for a time five or six teachers came in to teach Hebrew as a school subject at the end of the day.

This arrangement was not a success and Hebrew teaching as part of the school curriculum at the Jewish Government School finally ceased.¹ The United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg later opened afternoon classes at the school on the lines of the other Talmud Torahs which it controlled. In 1955 there were 103 pupils divided into seven classes taught by five teachers.² By 1960 the number had decreased to 63³; in 1964 there were only 28 children⁴, and the classes were thereafter terminated. The number of Jewish pupils continued to drop⁵ and in 1966 the Jewish Government School went out of existence when its name was changed to the I H Harris Primary School.⁶

1. Hotz, L: "The Jewish Government School" in Jewish Affairs, June 1966, p 15.
2. Report and Balance Sheet of the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg for the year ending 31 December 1955.
3. Ibid.: for the year ending 31 December 1960.
4. Ibid.: for the year ending 31 December 1964.
5. It was lower than a quarter of the total enrolment in 1960.
See: Tyson & Rubin: op.cit., Chapter IX, Section 2
6. Ibid. : Appendix 16.

P A R T F I V E

THE TALMUD TORAH SCHOOLS

OF THE EARLY 1900'S

CHAPTER 16: THE BACKGROUND

The Jewish public schools of Johannesburg and Cape Town played their respective roles on the educational stage and in due course each disappeared. In each case, the controlling body, in its wisdom, handed the school to the state as soon as the opportunity for doing so presented itself. It was a time of the rapid expansion of government control in education and, in the nature of things, the state had to lay down a policy of non-denominational, non-sectarian religious instruction in its schools.

The Jewish schools, whilst endeavouring to retain their specifically religious character, finally had to reconcile themselves to a situation which they might not have foreseen at the time they agreed to enter the state system. Being public schools, they lost control over their admissions and when these became overwhelmingly non-Jewish the schools inevitably lost whatever Jewish character their founders had succeeded in giving them.

Insofar as these Jewish public schools were concerned, the historical constant of Jewish education played a very subsidiary role to the internal contemporary factor. The main concern of these schools was to provide a general education for Jewish children and only secondarily to couple this with a modicum of Hebrew and religious instruction. In this respect, the historical constant of Jewish education in its double connotation of primacy in the scale of values in the eyes of parents and pupils alike and as well as the primacy of the traditional religio-Biblical content matter, was subordinated to the immediate demands of social and cultural integration. In regard to the children of immigrant families, the need for speedy acculturation to, and integration into, the South African social setting was a predominant educational objective. Hebrew education took a definite second place: in the case of many it had no place at all. The internal contemporary factor - the demands

of the immediate social environment - provided the raison d'être of the school and conditioned the historic constant. The demands of secular education overshadowed the Jewish instruction and indeed determined its scope and nature.

Some of the leaders did see the shortcomings of this Jewish education and organised additional classes for Hebrew and religious instruction to supplement the admittedly inadequate educational fare provided in the Jewish public school. There was a notice to the effect that such classes would be held in the Jewish School (Hope Mill) on Sunday mornings under the supervision of Mr Mark Cohen, the headmaster,¹ and similar supplementary education was provided at the Johannesburg Jewish School on Sabbaths and Sundays for which purpose a special fund had indeed been established.²

To many of the immigrant section of the community, who had received the intensive and total Jewish education of the chedarim and talmud torahs of the villages and towns of Eastern Europe, this Jewish education was altogether inadequate. The historical constant was the predominant factor of Jewish education in their eyes: Jewish education was not worth its salt unless it included basic education in Hebrew, Pentateuch, Prophets and Hagiographa, together with at least a modicum of traditional commentaries and Oral Law, as had been taught to Jewish children since time immemorial. Furthermore, it was a vital necessity, ranking at least with secular education, if not superior to it. This was the historical constant as they understood it and as they had received it from their own parents in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, even if they did have to make considerable adjustments in their life-style to adapt to the new environment in South Africa, they nevertheless regarded an adequate

1. S A Jewish Chronicle, 21 March 1902, p 12.

2. See p124

and comprehensive Jewish education - or as comprehensive as was possible under the changed South African conditions - as an absolute necessity.

They established schools which they called Talmud Torahs as in the old country, but with this great difference: whereas in the shtetel these were all-day schools, here in South Africa they were mere appendages to the secular school, which was the real educational world of the child. The great handicap from which the Talmud Torah suffered was its supplemental nature which restricted the tuition it provided to perhaps one-and-a-quarter hours daily at first. Moreover, it placed extra demands on the Jewish child who attended it, substantially more than was demanded of the non-Jewish child whose needs and limitations formed the norms of the general education.

During the first half of the century there were successful Talmud Torahs which transmitted a worthwhile Jewish education to pupils and, in addition, implanted in them a love for and attachment to their heritage, which served to shape their whole lives. Many others of course failed for a variety of reasons. For one thing they had to possess superior qualities to overcome the intrinsic difficulties of being plainly and simply supplemental schools, tagged on to a long day, in competition with the temptations of recreation and amusement which form a natural part of a child's day.

Success depended primarily on the teacher, to a greater degree than in the structured organisation of the regular school. And it was precisely in this vital factor that the greatest weakness of the South African Talmud Torah lay. It was the exceptional teacher who, during those first decades of the existence of Talmud Torah in the new century, was equal to the task. He was generally a

kolbonik¹ as so many advertisements bear out.² With the increase of immigration at the end of the Anglo-Boer War and the dispersal of many of the newcomers throughout the country districts, congregations sprang up in quick succession across the land, and each needed a multi-functioning minister, and more likely than not the incumbent would possess indifferent or at least incomplete qualifications in each. These in combination constituted an amalgamation of qualifications and tasks bound to test any ordinary intellect, and it was precisely the teaching side of such a multi-faceted personage that was almost invariably the weakest. There were of course exceptions who made a life-long impression on their charges, but the one-man Talmud Torah of the South African country town was, generally speaking, far from an outstanding or even adequate Jewish educational institution. The country minister-teacher was an additional weak point in the supplemental Jewish educational system, but he was nevertheless an indispensable element in it.

For the child, particularly the adolescent, the Talmud Torah was a cause for mental and personal conflict. Secular education, based largely on British culture and British ideals, were in his eyes infinitely superior and more attractive than Jewish culture as he learned it at home and at hester. Parents rarely had the time or the aptitude to provide any appreciable Jewish culture. At the Talmud Torah, at the end of a long day, he learned little from a

1. Yiddish corruption from the Hebrew "kol bo" ("all in him", or "possessing everything"): in other words - a jack-of-all-trades, in the clerical sense of the term.
2. The Klerksdorp Hebrew Congregation, for example, advertised in the S A Jewish Chronicle (9 January 1903, p 3) for "a gentleman to perform duties of Reader (= cantor and Torah reader), Mohel (person qualified to perform rite of circumcision), Shohet (person qualified to carry out ritual slaughtering of cattle) and Teacher". In the last-named capacity he was "to be conversant in English". Vryheid wanted a shohet....."capable to give Hebrew instructions (sic) in English". (See S A Jewish Chronicle 31 July 1903, p 2.)

bearded gentleman "of another age and another world"¹ endeavouring to transmit whatever he could in Yiddish or broken English. The contrast between the schools - secular and Jewish - in order, discipline, importance, was proportionate to their relative effectiveness as vehicles for the transmission of their respective cultures. The child learned little enough of Jewishness: and as the inevitable consequence of his ignorance was the inseparable corollary of its inferiority. Indifference, contempt and resentment in some drifted into self-hatred and led to alienation and assimilation.²

1. Gitlin, M: op.cit., pp 162-164

2. Ibid.

CHAPTER 17: THE TALMUD TORAH AT THE CAPE BECOME THE
 CAPE TOWN TALMUD TORAH (THE UNITED HEBREW
 SCHOOLS)

There is evidence that the Talmud Torah was established in Cape Town a few years prior to 1899, which is the date accepted by several writers.¹ The fourteenth annual report of the Roeland Street Talmud Torah was presented at the annual general meeting which took place at the end of 1910.² It is recorded that the same Ivris B'Ivris (Hebrew-medium) Talmud Torah held a meeting at the Zionist Hall, Hope Street, Cape Town, on Sunday 17th October 1915, when the chairman presented the Nineteenth Annual Report and Statement of Revenue and Expenditure of your Institution for the year September 1914 to August 1915.³

A third source of evidence that would place the inaugural year at 1896 may be deduced from the speech of Dr Viljoen, the then Superintendent-General of Education, delivered on the occasion of the formal opening of the new premises of the United Hebrew Schools in Hope Street in November 1921. The report stated that "he reviewed the past 25 years" from the time when "a small committee" established a school of "10 pupils in a small room".⁴

The Cape Town Jewish community was no longer organised round the Tikvath Israel Congregation in St John Street. A second congregation - The New Hebrew Congregation - was

1. Herrman, L: A Centenary History: The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation 1841-1941 (Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, Cape Town, 1941), p 74: and: 1929 S A Jewish Year Book: op.cit., p 77
2. S A Jewish Chronicle, 16 December 1910, p 171
3. The Nineteenth Annual Report and Statement of Revenue and Expenditure of the Talmud Torah Ivris B'Ivris, Roeland Street, Cape Town. (By courtesy of Mr D Zuckerman, Cape Town) Appendix A 21 in M Ed Thesis of the writer, op.cit.
4. S A Jewish Chronicle, 18 November 1921: "Cape Town Notes" p 1020.

formally established in 1900 and its synagogue in Roeland Street was consecrated in 1902 by Dr J H Hertz, Rabbi of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation.¹ The history of this congregation however goes back to 1895 when a meeting was convened to consider the formation of a new congregation,² since which date services had been held on Sabbaths and Festivals. The leaders of the New Hebrew Congregation were Russian Jews who were inspired by Zionism. They combined their traditional religious lore with a modicum of knowledge of the renascent Hebrew culture which the Haskalah movement (Enlightenment) had produced in nineteenth century Russia.³ They had, by and large, passed the early stage of social and economic adjustment which the immigrant faced on his arrival to this strange and distant country at the tip of Africa.

There were more orthodox sections amongst the immigrants who adhered strictly to the minutiae of their faith as they had practised it in the old country. They had hardly had the opportunity of contact with the modernising cultural influences of the Haskalah and the Hebrew renascence. For them the ancient learning - the Talmud and its interpreters and the codifiers - remained the sole desirable intellectual activity as it had been for generations of their forebears. These more recent and poorer arrivals established their Beth Hamedrash Hachodosh (New House of Study) in 1903 in the heart of the Jewish immigrant district in Constitution Street.⁴

In 1908 they appointed Rabbi Moshe Chaim Mirvish as their spiritual leader; he was to play a prominent role in the affairs of the Jewish community for the next forty years. In the same year the first suburban synagogue was established

1. Abrahams, I: Birth of a Community: op.cit., p 110

2. Ibid., p 109.

3. See pp 40-41.

4. Geffen, M: "Cape Town Jewry 1902-1910" in Saron & Hotz, op. cit., p 50.

at Woodstock.¹

The immigrant community was not satisfied with the quality of Jewish education provided at Hope Mill and at the "Sunday School" classes of the Tikvath Israel Congregation where ladies of the congregation gave instruction in Bible History, Hebrew and religion.² It was too superficial and too limited for them: they wanted more substance, more attention to be given to the historical constant of Jewish instruction - Pentateuch with Rashi³ interpretation, a deeper knowledge of Siddur and customs and traditions, Bible for the older children, even Mishna and Talmud selections.⁴ And for the "modern" orthodox, the devoted Zionists and Hebraists who led the new and fast-growing Dorshei Zion Association and the Bnoth Zion Association,⁵ and were the founders and supporters of the New Hebrew Congregation, there was also the new literature of the Russian Haskalah writers of the Hebrew renaissance during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶ For these reasons they established the Cape Town Talmud Torah.

The first definite record is of a Talmud Torah opened in 1899 by Mr M L Schrire and Mr S Friedgood in Brown Street, off Caledon Street, in District Six, with Mr Shulman as first principal.⁷ It was the beginning of the setting up in the community of independent organisations, wrote Herrman in retrospect.⁸ There were about one hundred pupils, many of them children of Transvaal refugees,

1. Herrman, L: "A History of Cape Town Jewry" in 1929 S A Jewish Year Book: op.cit., p 65.

2. ibid, p 57

3. See p 32

4. Geffen, M: "Cape Town Jewry 1902-1910" in Saron & Hotz., op.cit., p 51

5. See p 100

6. Abrahams, I: Birth of a Community: op.cit., p 102.

7. 1929 S A Jewish Year Book: op.cit., pp 77-78.

8. Herrman, L: A Centenary History: op.cit., p 74

temporarily resident in Cape Town. The school moved to St Patrick's Hall in Buitenkant Street when the premises in Brown Street proved inadequate.¹

The meeting called in 1900 to establish the New Hebrew Congregation, resolved on the necessity for establishing a new synagogue and Talmud Torah.² The new house of worship was erected in Roeland Street a few years later, with three classrooms and a hall, planned to accommodate about 200 children, attached to it. The Talmud Torah was taken over by the congregation and Mr J Geffen became the headmaster with a staff of two additional teachers. The first distribution of prizes at the Talmud Torah School took place in the synagogue hall in Roeland Street in February 1903, by which time the school enrolment exceeded 100. The children were presented with Hebrew and English Bibles and Siddurim. On entering the hall, "the children sang Hatikvo, one of the Jewish national songs". Speeches were in Yiddish. The first function of "what promises to be one of the most successful institutions" (in Cape Town) terminated with Dort Wu die Zeder ("There where the Cedars").³

The report of the Cape Town Talmud Torah School, or The Hebrew Free School, as it called itself, for 1903 recorded that the enrolment had increased to 140 from the figure of 72 in 1902, the growth in numbers, according to the report, being due to the growing confidence in the school.⁴ Average attendance was a satisfactory 85%.⁵ One class had been established to impart "the rudiments of the English language and other secular school subjects to those boys not attending a secular school yet".⁶ Evidently the

1. 1929 S A Jewish Year Book, op.cit., p 78

2. Ibid., p 69.

3. S A Jewish Chronicle: 20 February 1903, p 7.

4. Ibid: 25 March 1904, p 363

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

children were waiting for the opening of the school year before entering a public school.

The school had been examined by Rabbi Dr J H Hertz of Johannesburg and the Rev. Mr Cohen of Bulawayo, whose reports were "very favourable on the whole".¹ The results in Hebrew "were excellent". The Committee, in the words of the report, had striven to place the Hebrew and religious instruction on a higher pedestal, and an appeal was made for more assistance by the community to improve staffing and standards.²

In its appeal to the general community the Cape Town Talmud Torah was enunciating an important principle. It may have been housed in the premises of the New Hebrew Congregation, but it was neither under its control nor its total responsibility. The leaders of this young school even at this early stage in its history considered themselves responsible for a school providing for the whole community. So important was it for the very existence and future of the community that it could justifiably lay claim to being its total responsibility.³ It was a claim which was to be heard throughout the years and only became a reality very much later in the century.

The Cape Town Talmud Torah Ivris B'Ivris (The Hebrew-medium Afternoon School)

Mr Geffen urged that the new method of Ivris B'Ivris⁴ be introduced to replace the Yiddish or English-medium translation

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., pp 363-364.

4. Palestine used the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew in which the "s" in these words was pronounced as a "t". In Cape Town, the Ashkenazic form was still used, hence the variant transliteration of this phrase which means "Hebrew in Hebrew".

method and in 1906 a decision was taken to do so¹ in the face of strong objections raised by the ultra-orthodox elements in the community belonging to the Constitution Street Beth Hamedrash.² Hebrew was to them the holy tongue, not to be profaned by its use as a modern educational method. The old curriculum and methods of heder were not to be tampered with.³ The orthodox traditionalists enlisted the support of the anglicised section belonging to the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation who were opposed to the Zionist ideology and to the reforms proposed by the modernist Zionist-Hebraists.⁴ They established a school which became known as the Cape Town Public Talmud Torah School whilst Mr Geffen's school was the Talmud Torah Ivris B'Ivris. The first was controlled by members of the Tikvath Israel Congregation, whilst the Hebrew-medium Talmud Torah Ivris B'Ivris was located in the school rooms of the New Hebrew Congregation in Roeland Street and was closely connected with this synagogue and through it, with the Dorshei Zion Association, whose leadership also stood at the head of the Congregation.⁵

The Talmud Torah Ivris B'Ivris reported an enrolment of 155 at its annual general meeting in September 1907.⁶ Mr Geffen and his staff, Messrs Morrison and Rogoff, were giving "a good Hebrew and religious training" to the children. The supporters were mainly the "poorer section of our community".⁷

1. 1929 S A Jewish Year Book: op.cit., p 78
2. Geffen, M: in Saron & Hotz., op.cit., pp 50-51
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p 47: Geffen states that Bender was an anti-Zionist until the day of the Balfour Declaration in 1917.
5. Geffen: op.cit., p 44.
6. S A Jewish Chronicle 11 October 1907, p 299
7. Ibid.

A later report¹ stated that the Talmud Torah in Roeland Street teaching Ivris B'Ivris had been examined by Rabbi Mirvish of the Beth Hamedrash and the Rev. Mr Strod. The children "answered freely in Hebrew and explained, in Hebrew, Biblical passages quoted to them". Both examiners commended "the new mode of teaching".² It is interesting to note that Rabbi Mirvish was the minister of the Beth Hamedrash, the orthodox synagogue in District Six which had originally opposed the introduction of the direct method of Hebrew teaching. Rabbi Mirvish was obviously not of one mind with his congregation on this issue and this early contact with the modernist Hebrew-medium Talmud Torah is, in retrospect, the prelude to the central role he was to play in the development of Jewish education at the Cape during the ensuing forty years.

The Curriculum of Studies at the Talmud Torah Ivris B'Ivris

Max Geffen, who was a pupil in his father's school for seven years at the beginning of the century, gives a detailed description of the comprehensive syllabus of Hebrew studies covered in the seven standards.³

Bible Studies included the Pentateuch with Rashi Commentary in the senior classes. The study of the Former Prophets led on to selections from Isaiah and Jeremiah. Pupils also went on to Psalms and Proverbs (a selection), and the books of Ruth, Lamentations and Esther were studied in connection with the day in the Jewish calendar relevant to each.⁴ Religion and ritual were taught through the

1. Ibid., 1 October 1909, p 91.

2. Ibid.

3. Geffen, M: "Cape Town Jewry 1902-1910" in Saron & Hotz., op.cit., p 51.

4. Ruth is read on Shavuot (Pentecost); Lamentations on Tisha BeAv (Anniversary of the Destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem on 9th day of the month of Av); Esther on the festival of Purim (14th day of Adar).

abridged Shulhan 'Aruch, the sixteenth century code of Jewish laws and customs, and some Talmudic selections; and, in addition, pupils were trained to conduct the synagogue services.

Hebrew language and literature, of course, received full attention, especially selections from the poets and writers of the Hebrew renaissance. History teaching covered the period up to the destruction of the Second Temple, as well as outstanding events and figures of more modern times.

Grammar, composition, songs, recitation and dramatic performances were also part of the curriculum of studies. Pupils were encouraged to read children's magazines which arrived by the weekly mail.

It was a surprisingly modern syllabus for a Hebrew school in faraway South Africa of seventy years ago. Unfortunately, Geffen does not indicate what emphasis, if any, was placed on oral composition, nor to what depth these texts were studied.

There were evidently steps to amalgamate the new Talmud Torah in Constitution Street with the one in Roeland Street, but the scheme fell through, so it was reported in the 14th Annual Report of the latter institution.¹ A full decade was to elapse before this was effected. The Ivris B'Ivris system had proved a great success. Notable visitors had examined the school, among them Prof. Solomon Schechter, the noted scholar from the United States of America, Rabbis Landau and Hertz from Johannesburg, and the Rev. Mr Isaacs of Kimberley: all expressed their satisfaction and commended the school highly on its results.²

1. S A Jewish Chronicle, 16 December 1910, p 171

2. Ibid.

The Nineteenth Annual Report submitted to the Annual General Meeting of members on Sunday 17 October 1915, in the Zionist Hall, Cape Town, provides informative sidelights on the work of this school. Mr I Schwartz was the president: Mr J Geffen the headmaster, and Messrs Rubin and Rogoff were his assistants.¹

The report referred to the Great European War and the difficult times which had compelled the school to exercise what it termed the strictest economy - they had barely managed to pay their way. Members of the committee had collected donations at functions, subscriptions and fees. There was satisfaction with the standards of the work as well as with the attendance of pupils. The total expenditure amounted to £614. 5. 1d, whereas school fees had brought in £240. 3. 0d for the year.²

The Talmud Torah Ivris B'Ivris moved from its home at 18 Roeland Street, whither it had transferred from the synagogue premises, to a suitable building in Wandel Street, considered one of the best localities of the city. The school had 150 pupils: the medium was still Ivris B'Ivris and it was reported that the committee was launching a building fund.³

The introduction of the Ivris B'Ivris system resulted in the establishment of the other Talmud Torah school in Constitution Street, where the medium was Yiddish: English was gradually added and in time became the main language of instruction, under the principalship of Mr B Turtledove. This school adhered to the traditional subjects, concentrating on Bible and the Oral Law, translation being the main method used. Was the word "public" included in the name of the new Talmud Torah to imply some sort of relationship with the Hope Mill Hebrew Public School originally

1. See p 144 Footnote 3.

2. Ibid.

3. S A Jewish Chronicle 3 January 1919, p 1174

established by the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation and still linked with it? Was it intended to demonstrate to the community that the old congregation was as directly connected with, and as closely interested in, the Constitution Street Talmud Torah as the new rival synagogue in Roeland Street was with the new-fangled school located in its premises? Synagogue rivalry here manifested itself in the sphere of Jewish education.

English was now the medium of instruction in the Public Talmud Torah in Constitution Street. An advertisement for teachers stipulated that "a sound knowledge of Hebrew and English translation and religion (is) essential".¹

The report presented to the Annual General Meeting of the Cape Town Public Talmud Torah in 1915 provides interesting information on the work of this school. Instruction consisted of

rudiments of the Hebrew religion, language
.....a considerable part of the curriculum
is devoted to reading and translation of
prayers as well as to familiarising the
pupils with the manifold laws and
ceremonies clustering round the Jewish daily
home life and Hebrew calendar.²

Better pupils, it was hoped, should continue to take Hebrew for the Junior Certificate and Matriculation examinations. Thanks to the efforts of Mr Bender, Hebrew had been included by the University of the Cape of Good Hope amongst the subjects for matriculation. The Committee appealed for support which the school badly needed; a new building which would be more central and more commodious "would attract children of wealthier members". And another familiar complaint was - the difficulty of obtaining teachers.³ The chairman was Mr Eilenberg, a leading member of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation.

1. S A Jewish Chronicle 7 November 1913, p 167

2. Ibid, 12 May 1916, p 1007.

3. Ibid.

The annual reports for 1917 and 1918 provide some idea of the nature and work of this school at that stage of its existence.¹ The minister of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation was the President; the Chairman was Mr M Rosen, who was President of the Tikvath Israel Synagogue in the Gardens. A member of the committee was Mr W Harris, also a prominent leader of this Congregation and another was Rabbi M C Mirvish of the Beth Hamedrash Orthodox Synagogue in Constitution Street.²

It was reported that there were about 250 boys and girls at the school, many of whose parents did not possess the means to provide them with a thorough Hebrew and religious education, which they obtained at the Talmud Torah.³

As for the place and value of Jewish education the report had this to say to its members and parents:

it being a well-established fact that one of the primary factors in the marvellous preservation and vitality of the Jewish people, in spite of 2000 years of persecution, was and is the community's keen anxiety and most strenuous and unflagging efforts to instil into their youth a thorough knowledge of our holy Torah which, in turn, evokes in their breasts a warm and lasting attachment to our ancient race and creed.⁴

Mr M Pogrund was the acting headmaster at the time. His report indicated that there were 135 boys and 100 girls in the school organised, it would seem, in separate departments, with six classes in each. The curriculum had, stated the report, been raised to enable the pupils ultimately to take

1. Cape Town Public Talmud Torah: Constitution Street, Cape Town. Reports and Financial Statements for 1917 and 1918. See M Ed thesis by the writer. op.cit., Appendices A23-A30 (Jewish Museum, Cape Town).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, p A24
4. Ibid.

Hebrew as one of the main subjects for Junior Certificate and Matriculation.¹ This added emphasis on Hebrew probably brought the school nearer to the syllabus of its Hebrew-medium counterpart in Roeland Street and served to clear the way for ultimate amalgamation.²

The curriculum was as follows:

Junior Classes

1. Correct and Fluent Reading
2. Translation of Pentateuch
3. First Rudiments of Grammar
4. Religion and Rites
5. Language and Writing
6. Biblical History

Senior Classes

7. Translation of Selected Prayers
8. Translation of Prophets
9. Grammar and Composition
10. History, including Post-Biblical
11. Intonation (for Barmitzvah)
12. Religion and Ethics of the Fathers³

That the progress during the year "was thoroughly satisfactory", continued the report, was proved by the awarding of prizes to "the considerable number of 75 pupils who distinguished themselves at the annual examinations".⁴

The report for the following year indicated a slight fall-off in the enrolment.⁵ An innovation was the arrangement for special classes to be held in the Old Synagogue (of the Cape

1. Ibid. p A25

2. S A Jewish Chronicle 12 September 1919, p 4501

3. Cape Town Public Talmud Torah: Annual Report for 1917.
M Ed thesis, op.cit., p A25

4. Ibid.

5. Cape Town Hebrew Public School: Report for 1917-18:
M Ed thesis, op.cit., p A29

Town Hebrew Congregation) "for the convenience of the girls residing in that district".¹ The committee again appealed for more children to be sent to the school and was ready to arrange more advanced classes for students who would like to take Hebrew for Junior Certificate and Matriculation examinations. The examiners in 1917 were the Rev. Mr Bender, Rabbi M C Mirvish and Mr J Gesundheit, whose report was again most satisfactory.

The notice for the Annual General Meeting held on Sunday 13 July 1919, in the Old Synagogue stated that

the Committee will bring forward at this meeting the very important and weighty matters affecting the future welfare of the School.....²

Negotiations for the amalgamation of the two Hebrew schools were at an advanced stage and what was required to complete it was the confirmation of the annual general meeting.

Of significance too is that a few months after the University of Cape Town came into being on 24 March 1918, Hebrew was recognised as a B A subject, a fact which it was hoped would induce the Talmud Torahs to aim at Junior Certificate and Matriculation levels of Hebrew in their schools.³ A precedent was established during the previous year when the Rev. Mr S H Michelson started teaching Hebrew at the South African College High School to some 70 pupils.⁴

Not to be outdone, the Cape Town Public Talmud Torah was also showing signs of life and activity. The enrolment had increased to around 300 boys and girls, and plans were in hand to move to Hope Street in the Gardens, by now the

1. Ibid. This is evidence of the shift of the Jewish population to the Gardens area and also shows the close ties of the school with the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation.
2. Notice of Annual General Meeting of the Cape Town Public Talmud Torah, Constitution Street: Ibid., p A31
3. S A Jewish Chronicle 17 May 1918, p 489
4. Ibid. 11 May 1917, p329

centre of Jewish population in the city.¹ The paths of the two Talmud Torahs were converging - geographically at first - as if to herald the good news of imminent amalgamation which appeared in the Cape Town Letter of the S A Jewish Chronicle a month or two later.² It greeted the moves with some envy, hoping that the Johannesburg schools would emulate this decision and combine or federate.³

Both media of instruction would be permitted and Mr B Turtledove was appointed principal of the new School. The United Hebrew Schools of Cape Town had been launched on the communal scene, in due course to play a significant role in the development of Jewish education at the Cape, and indeed in South Africa.

The Rules of the United Hebrew Schools throw much light on the background of Jewish education in post-World-War-One Cape Town and the thinking of the leadership of the day.⁴

The list of "Officers and Committee" for 1920-1921 indicates, inter alia, that the Rev Mr Bender was President and Rabbi M Ch Mirvish one of the vice-chairmen of the enlarged committee. The first part was devoted to the details of the agreement covering the aims and general organisation of the united institution.

The object of the institution was to teach Hebrew:

not only as a language but also as a medium of enabling them to learn and practise the teachings of traditional Judaism:.....
that an orthodox spirit and atmosphere be fostered in the school.....

and, as a corollary to this, only observant Jews would be

1. S A Jewish Chronicle 18 July 1919, p 4354.

2. Ibid., 12 September 1919, p 4501.

3. Ibid., 19 September 1919, p 4521.

4. Rules of the United Hebrew Schools (Progress Printing Works, 1921) M Ed Thesis, op.cit., pp A32-A36

engaged as teachers.¹ This was evidently enough to satisfy the people of the Beth Hamedrash in Constitution Street. Both media of instruction were to be used though there would be a gradual transition to the Ivris B'Ivris system, if possible and if not objected to by parents. The agreement itself was dated 22 August 1919. The Rules further declared that the United Hebrew Schools would be entirely independent of any congregation or other institution. The object of the institution was:

the efficient tuition....of:

- a) Religious and Ritual instruction
- b) Ivris B'Ivris and Ivris B'English
- c) Jewish History and Tradition
- d) The Hebrew Language in all its stages.²

There was no mention of translation, though it was implied in clause (b): Bible was included under (a). The hours of instruction would be three-and-a-half hours daily on each of six days of the week.

The Annual Report and Revenue and Expenditure Accounts for the United Hebrew Schools for the year ending October 1921 called attention to the inadequacy of the income derived from all sources for the institution's needs and made an earnest appeal for increased support.³ It further recorded that the teaching of religion and Jewish history in all the classes received much attention and, indeed, educational standards throughout the school had been raised. The committee was considering a scheme to open a kindergarten for children below school-going age where, stated the report, they would be initiated into the Hebrew tongue and imbued with the Jewish spirit.⁴ The report of Mr Turtledove, the headmaster, referred to the sound levels of teaching and curriculum, which were confirmed by the honorary examiners.⁵

1. Ibid. p A34

2. Ibid. p A36

3. The Zionist Record: 30 November 1921, p 21

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

The new Cape Town Talmud Torah - the United Hebrew Schools - was formally opened by Dr Viljoen, the Superintendent-General of Education for the Cape, at an open-air function held in the grounds of its new premises in Hope Street on 6 November 1921.¹

Reviewing the previous twenty-five years, Dr Viljoen remarked that though the Cape Town Jewish Community was small they wanted to preserve their individuality and all that was good and noble in Jewish traditions, language, Law, Writings and religion.² For this reason they had established a school of their own, starting with ten pupils in a hired room.³ In 1902 the school had occupied the classrooms at the rear of the synagogue in Roeland Street with 100 pupils. It made several more moves before it amalgamated with the school in Constitution Street and then acquired the premises at 101-103 Hope Street, which catered for 250 pupils, with enough space for another 150.

The union of the schools was thus an indication of the gradual growth of a spirit of unity in the community. Zionism was no longer a divisive factor. After the issue of the Balfour Declaration on 2 November 1917 the conservative members of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, with their minister at their head, dropped their opposition to the Jewish national movement. The Dorshei Zion and Bnoth Zion commanded very wide support in the community, and the fact that they identified closely with the Hebrew-medium Talmud Torah in Roeland Street no longer constituted an ideological hindrance to amalgamation.

To what degree the support of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation for the Public Talmud Torah in Constitution Street was

1. S A Jewish Chronicle: "Cape Town Notes": 18 November 1921 p 1020; and The Zionist Record 30 November 1921 p 21.
2. The Zionist Record 30 November 1921, p 21.
3. S A Jewish Chronicle 18 November 1921, p 1020

actuated by a realisation that they had lost their first Hebrew Public School one cannot ascertain with any certainty. The identification of the Tikvath Israel Congregation with the Cape Town Public Talmud Torah in Constitution Street, so far away from the synagogue in the Gardens and from the residential area of most of its members, would indicate much more than mere rivalry with the Zionist-orientated New Hebrew Congregation in Roeland Street from which came the main support for the Ivris B'Ivris school.¹

Tikvath Israel had signed away its rights in Hope Mill when it transferred control to the School Board in order to relieve the Congregation of the financial burden of maintaining the school. Had it realised by 1908 that it had forfeited the prime and traditional duty of any congregation - to give children instruction in their religious and national heritage?

Maurice Rosen, Woolf Harris and Maurice Eilenberg, leaders of the Cape Town Public Talmud Torah also served at various periods as wardens of the congregation: Mr Bender himself became president of the school. Was the Tikvath Israel Congregation impelled by a sense of guilt at having surrendered control over its school? Did it already then perceive that its Jewish character would be gradually whittled away during the coming few years? Perhaps the consciousness of a betrayal of the trust bequeathed to it was not absent from their minds. Was the inclusion of the epithet "public" in the name of the Talmud Torah a conscious or sub-conscious gesture to themselves and the community that the Congregation had remembered its duty of educating the young in Torah, and had thereby made amends for its regretted act of having given away Hope Mill?

1. Geffen, M: in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., pp 49 and 51.

CHAPTER 18: SUBURBAN AND COUNTRY CONGREGATIONS AND TALMUD TORAHS AND THE BNOTH ZION CLASSES FOR GIRLS

An Interesting Experiment in Hebrew Education in Cape Town

The Bnoth Zion Hebrew Classes Association: Jewish Education for Girls

Girls were enrolled at Hope Mill and attended the Sabbath Bible and religious classes established by Mr Bender soon after his arrival, but they were at first not admitted to the Talmud Torah. Zionist ladies organised in the Bnoth Zion Association¹ of Cape Town took steps to remedy this situation.² They established Hebrew classes in 1905 in the Zionist Hall at 47 Hope Street. Mrs J Zuckerman and her committee undertook this important task.³

The ladies went from door to door to canvass for pupils and encountered considerable difficulty in breaking down "mother resistance"⁴ to the quite novel idea. Torah study was traditionally the preserve of the man in Eastern Europe, and in South Africa secular education, dancing, elocution and music had prior call on the time and energies of girls.

The classes were finally organised; the only extant enrolment figures are those for May 1909 when at least 46 children attended.⁵ Some time previously it had been 75.⁶ The

1. Bnoth Zion: Hebrew - "Daughters of Zion": an organisation of women Zionists established in 1901.
2. Zuckerman, D: Bnoth Zion Hebrew Classes Association: Ms. prepared in 1961 from the minute books kept by his sister Mrs Sonia Glaser and made available to the writer by the author: M Ed thesis., op.cit., pp A6-A15
3. Annual Report of the Bnoth Zion Hebrew Classes Association: (Jewish Museum, Cape Town) M Ed thesis. op.cit., p A 11.
4. See Zuckerman's Ms: p A8
5. Ibid. p A10
6. S A Jewish Chronicle 30 July 1909: "Report from Cape Town" p 1081

annual reports for 1908-1910¹ indicate that the classes were well-organised. Ladies of the committee were in constant attendance during the three hours of instruction daily for the purpose of supervising the classes. Others collected subscriptions or visited the homes of children who absented themselves from the classes. One member attended daily to assist the teacher in maintaining order, keeping the register and collecting the fees. These were reduced in time from 6d to 3d per week.² There were prize distributions, examinations and examiners' reports, concerts, outings, and "happy afternoons", apart from the constant struggle to find the finance to cover the modest expenses.³

The curriculum consisted of Hebrew translation, conversation, reading, writing and dictation, and in 1909 we read that it was hoped that Mrs Ruth Alexander

would soon be able to resume her good work of acquainting the little ones with the morals and beauties of the Scriptures.⁴

In 1913 the girls' classes passed into the control of the Talmud Torah and in time the girls were absorbed into the afternoon classes of this school.

By 1904 about a quarter of the ten thousand-strong Jewish community in Cape Town resided in the suburbs, with Woodstock and Wynberg as the two main centres.⁵ The rest of the approximately 15 000 Jews in the Cape Colony were dispersed in the main towns and numerous dorps in small communities which were organised in congregations.⁶ These included such places as Williston, Dordrecht and Middelburg, amongst

1. Annual Reports of the Bnoth Zion Hebrew Classes Association:
M Ed thesis. op.cit., pp A11-A15.
2. Zuckerman: op.cit: cited in the writer's M Ed thesis. op.cit., p A9
3. Ibid., and Annual Reports: M Ed thesis. op.cit., pp A11 et seq.
4. Annual Report of the Bnoth Zion Hebrew Classes Association: For the Year Ending July 1909: M Ed thesis. op.cit., p A11.
5. Abrahams: Birth of a Community: op.cit., p 152, Note 25.
6. Ibid.

others. Congregations were established in the country towns and urban suburbs around the turn of the century, beginning with Wynberg in July 1897, and followed by others during the next few years.¹ The Paarl congregation had been established in 1894 and decided to build a new synagogue in 1902.² The Rev. Mr Bender consecrated the synagogue in Robertson in 1896 and in 1903 he performed the same holy duty in Laingsburg.³ In 1904 he laid the foundation-stone of the new Paarl synagogue and consecrated the house of worship in Worcester.⁴ The Riversdale Hebrew Congregation advertised for a minister-teacher in 1904.

All these congregations established Hebrew and religious classes to be taught by the minister who was expected to serve in a number of capacities. There were country ministers who were outstanding personalities and ministered to the congregations with ability and devotion: very many, it must be recorded, were less than successful in their teaching.

The Eastern European ministers really had no qualifications except for a period of Yeshiva study and the specific technical training required for their duties as shohet and mohel. None were trained teachers, in contrast to the ministers brought out from England by the city congregations. There were born teachers amongst the "country reverends", as they were known, but most were at best indifferent pedagogues.⁵ And the Jewish instruction they imparted was largely formless, with no organised curriculum. So, devoid of methods, aims and curricula, it was largely a matter of hit-and-miss in the

1. Ibid., pp 111-118.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. p 114

4. Ibid. p 117

5. Rabbi Landau on "Hebrew in Small Towns" at Hebrew Session of the Ninth Zionist Conference, 5-9 March 1923: Zionist Record 31 March 1924, p 11

case of the Jewish education of the country children and few Jewish "country parsons" succeeded in making much of an impression on the mind and heart of the Jewish child.¹

Writing on the "Problem of Jewish Education" in 1912, David Mierowsky, principal of the Oudtshoorn Hebrew School, deplored "the chaos, disorder and confusion" reigning in Jewish education. Anyone who proclaimed himself a Hebrew teacher was unhesitatingly accepted by those in charge and this resulted in the "deplorable plight of our Hebrew education", whose results, he stated, were so poor and meagre. No wonder, then, the schools presented what he termed a "miserable and piteous appearance".² The Hebrew school was, in his eyes, a travesty of what a proper school should be: its teachers were unqualified and incompetent, there were no curricula, no methods, no sympathetic intercourse between master and pupil.³

This picture of disorder and confusion in so many of the Talmud Torahs of yesteryear has been confirmed by verbal information personally conveyed by some who were the pupils at the time, especially in country hedarim. Practised by the unqualified, lacking any semblance of an organised curriculum or an orderly environment, devoid of any system of authority or guidance, shunted to the end of the school day, Jewish education during the early decades of this century truly presented "a miserable and piteous appearance", which pedagogues like Mierowsky regarded with utter despair.⁴

With the growth of the Jewish population in South Africa from 38 100 in 1904 to 46 900 in 1911⁵, and its diffusion over

1. Ibid.

2. Mierowsky, D: "Premeditations to the Fifth S A Zionist Conference" The Zionist Record, 15 July 1912, pp 9-11 and 11 August 1912, pp 18-19.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. 1929 S A Jewish Year Book, op.cit., p 38

the land, Jewish congregations sprang up in many towns and dorps throughout South Africa, sometimes established by tiny communities numbering no more than a few dozen families.¹ By that date, Johannesburg, with its 15 000 Jews, had outstripped the mother city in the size of its Jewish population.²

In Johannesburg itself synagogues were established in the various suburbs as the population and the city grew from the first years of the century. The report of the opening of the Jeppestown synagogue in 1903 stated that "the third English synagogue opened....belongs to English and not to foreign Judaism"³, in itself an illuminating little side-light on inter-communal relationships. There was a Talmud Torah in Fordsburg - there is a report of a collection at a bris (circumcision) ceremony for this obviously impecunious institution⁴ - and an interesting account exists of the school at Ophirton, where Rabbi Dr Landau conducted the two-hour examination of the children (between the ages of 6 and 12) in the presence of the committee and parents.⁵ The advanced class was able to translate the greater part of Deuteronomy and the infants, it was reported, read the Hebrew Primer with sufficient fluency.⁶ It is noteworthy that girls were admitted to this Talmud Torah, the more to be applauded, the report stated, as the Talmud Torah in Johannesburg had not done so yet, to the writer's obvious disapproval.⁷

1. S A Jewish Chronicle, 9 October 1914, p 844

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 11 September 1903, p 24.

4. Ibid., 2 June 1905, p 119.

5. Ibid., 12 March 1909, p 637.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

Dr Landau remarked that "although they themselves were poor and struggling for a livelihood" they would not neglect their sacred duty towards their children.¹ There is unfortunately no record of the enrolment. There were 57 on the roll of the Jeppestown Talmud Torah in 1910.² In the same year the Germiston Talmud Torah required a Hebrew teacher "with English translation knowledge".³

The Potchefstroom Congregation, reported the paper in 1903, would be adding a schoolroom to the renovated synagogue⁴, and in the same year two places as far afield as Klerksdorp in the west and Vryheid in the east of the country advertised for minister-teachers.

Whenever a community established itself as a congregation and built its synagogue, it never failed to add a classroom to the house of worship, a Heder room for the Jewish education of the children, as ancient tradition demanded, where the "reverend" gave instruction in what he and his committee considered to be essential Jewish knowledge.

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid. 4 November 1910, p 68.

3. Ibid. 11 March 1910, p 551

4. Ibid. 6 February 1903, p 8

CHAPTER 19: THE JOHANNESBURG TALMUD TORAH (or THE HEBREW HIGH SCHOOL OF JOHANNESBURG)

There were people in Johannesburg who shared Maurice Abrahams' dissatisfaction with the state of Jewish education in the post-war years as expressed in his report to one of the first issue of the S A Jewish Chronicle then appearing in Cape Town.¹ The platform for such opinions was the Hevrah Kadishah, formed in 1887 for the traditional purpose of acting as a burial society, but in time to become "a social and economic force within the community".² "Like Atlas, it bore on its shoulders the whole of Jewish life in Johannesburg"³ during those early years. For one thing it was a united endeavour of all sections of the community and its annual banquets, held by tradition on the 7th day of the month of Adar⁴, provided the occasion and opportunity for leaders in the community to deliver public addresses on matters of moment, and to propose activities for its benefit. The first steps to establish a Talmud Torah were taken by the acting chairman of the Hevrah Kadishah, Mr Siegmund Shapiro.

The story of those early years was told by Mr J H Isaacs who presided at the festive opening of the new school building of the Hebrew High School at the corner of Claim and Wolmarans Streets in April 1911.⁵ The school was established by a committee of the Hevrah Kadishah, under Mr Shapiro, during the latter part of 1902, to provide a "thorough knowledge of Hebrew and tradition" for those many Jewish children not at the Jewish School.⁶

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1. See Chapter 15: pp 119 et seq.
 2. Sowden, D L: "In the Transvaal Till 1899" in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 154
 3. Feldman, L: "Yidden in Johannesburg" (Yiddish): op.cit p 145 (translation by the writer).
 4. Ibid.
 5. S A Jewish Chronicle 14 April 1911, p 463
 6. Ibid.

The Talmud Torah opened in the premises of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation (President Street Synagogue) in 1902, with the full support and encouragement of Rabbi Dr J H Hertz.¹ Some time later the committee decided to move to a more central part of the city, a wing of an hotel in Marshall Street, where Messrs Helfand and Goodman were the teachers. It was a small school with about 40 children on the roll. Hebrew was taught in the morning, and in the afternoon a Mr Evans taught secular subjects. Dogged by financial problems, the little school struggled along and was more than once under threat of closure. But it survived and looked for "more commodious premises in a healthier part of the town".² The premises were found in von Brandis Square and appeals again went out for financial support. Mr I Levinson was appointed superintendent in 1907,³ but the decision to launch a building fund was shelved because of the economic depression which actually threatened to close the institution. An endeavour to form a Jewish Education Board for the Rand proved unsuccessful because of the opposition of the orthodox section.⁴

The school passed through a severe crisis at the beginning of 1908 when the chairman and treasurer resigned, as also did Messrs Levinson and Evans. Mrs Rosenthal was appointed as the new superintendent and teacher of secular subjects to Standard II and Mr J H Isaacs became the new chairman. The lessors, it was recorded, had to waive demands for rental for

1. Transvaal Leader: 23 May 1904: in S A Communal Notebook C p 76 (Jewish Museum, Johannesburg)
2. Transvaal Leader: 15 December 1906: in S A Communal Notebook C P 98 (Jewish Museum, Johannesburg)
3. S A Jewish Chronicle 14 April 1911, p 463
4. Ibid.

a few months.¹ The position of the school, however, changed for the better, and by the Seventh Annual General Meeting in November 1908 an all-round improvement was recorded.² The attendance had improved and for the first time ever there was even a credit balance. The leadership now had the peace of mind to attend to matters educational. A committee was formed to draw up a curriculum for Hebrew, English and religious studies.³ In the following year the school moved into temporary premises in Kerk Street and on the 7th September 1910 the foundation stone for the new building was laid on the new site, and the structure was completed the following year.

The school had 500 members and public support for the new building was forthcoming, reported Mr Isaacs.⁴ The roll stood at 120: there were four afternoon classes - one for girls - Sabbath afternoon and Sunday morning Hebrew and religion classes, and an evening class for senior pupils. Fees were waived wherever necessary, and every month there was a "magic lantern entertainment on Biblical subjects".⁵

This was the bare outline of the history of the Hebrew High School, also known as the Johannesburg Talmud Torah, from its inception in 1902 to the proud day in April 1911 which saw the official opening and consecration of the new building in Wolmarans Street. The anonymous reporter of the event faithfully recorded the joy and pride of the leaders who, after years of struggle and penury, were at last witnessing the realisation of their dreams for their school. Even across

1. Ibid.

2. Isaacs, J H: "The History of the Hebrew High School": address at the opening of the new building, April 1911 in S A Jewish Chronicle, 14 April, 1911, pp 459 et seq.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

the years one cannot fail to be moved by the genuine elation which beat in the hearts of the founders and workers of the Hebrew High School. The day "will ever be memorable"; the event was "full of promise and hope of better things for the future history of Johannesburg and the Jewish Community". Phrases such as "sacred building" and ".....noble work for the holy institution" occur in the report. Communal discord, wrote the reporter, had given place to "union and concord....", an "object that is common and dear to all".¹

And Mr Isaacs himself expressed his "unbounded delight and happiness" to see the "work of his hands". Rabbi Dr Landau "spoke with great emotion"²: Mr S Shapiro spoke of the early difficulties of the Talmud Torah. Dr Landau consecrated the building. He referred to the state of the community, most of whom were still struggling hard to build up their own homes and endeavouring to establish themselves in their new country and new city: great were the difficulties of those whom he termed "our foreign brethren". Yet the old idealism still lived, synagogues were being built and Talmud Torahs being established.³

Mr George Albu, the mining magnate, referred to what he on his part considered to be the function of the Talmud Torah, namely to provide "foreign Jewish children unable to speak English with an elementary English education.....". They came from countries of oppression, speaking Yiddish only. It was the duty of those who "enjoyed the blessings of British liberal institutions" to give them an opportunity of acquiring an education.⁴

Children recited Hebrew poems and delivered short speeches in Hebrew and English. Thus was consecrated the Hebrew

1. Editorial in the S A Jewish Chronicle 14 April 1911, pp 459-60

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p 459

4. Ibid.

High School building at the corner of Claim and Wolmarans Streets, standing directly opposite the site on which the Great Synagogue was to rise a few years later. Its objectives and functions were viewed from two diametrically opposed viewpoints, respectively by the man who consecrated the building and the one who opened it. Perhaps Mr George Albu was thinking in terms of the Jewish Government School: Rabbi Dr Landau and Mr Shapiro, on the other hand, surely saw the new school building as the fulfilment of their hopes of a Jewish education worthy of the name, nearer to its true tradition than the limited version provided by the Jewish Government School.

The First Years of the Johannesburg Talmud Torah School (or the Hebrew High School)

During its first years, the Johannesburg Talmud Torah was beset by difficulties and problems. A report to the S A Jewish Chronicle in Cape Town early in 1904 stated that the Talmud Torah was not a great success.¹ The reasons for this were to be heard more and more frequently whenever Jewish education in Johannesburg was discussed or reported - indifference of parents and lack of support. It was a dual curse that was to beset Jewish education for many years. The "little work it is doing is not satisfactory" was the blunt summary.²

In an editorial a few months later,³ the editor tried to soften this criticism by pointing to some of the achievements of the Talmud Torah school. It had by then been in existence for about two years, during which period the attendance had doubled and good progress had been made by the three classes, considering the handicap of the lack of funds.

1. S A Jewish Chronicle 22 January 1904, p 114

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 25 March 1904, p 353

The S A Jewish Chronicle was to adopt this positive approach throughout the years ahead. In a vigorous appeal to all to provide the means to enable the school to teach the young Hebrew and Judaism in order to preserve the Jewish people, it wrote that the education of its children was one of the most sacred trusts reposed in the community.¹

A function of the Talmud Torah School was described in a report from Johannesburg that appeared in the S A Jewish Chronicle in May 1904. It took place in the hall of the Jewish School next to the Park Synagogue. Mr S Shapiro, "originator" of the Talmud Torah, was in the chair and reference was made to Rabbi Dr J H Hertz of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation who had devoted much labour to it "in support of Mr Shapiro".² Some 40 pupils of the school, between the ages of 7 and 11, gave a display of Hebrew knowledge before an admiring circle of parents and friends, some hundred of whom were present.³

The teaching was "on an enlightened system", partly in English and partly in Yiddish: Hebrew grammar was taught together "with a certain fluency in writing and speaking it". The school was suffering from a shortage of funds because many parents could not afford the fees. A membership drive was planned to set the institution on a sound footing.⁴

Mr Shapiro called a meeting to discuss Jewish education in Johannesburg but it achieved nothing because it was not representative enough, reported the S A Jewish Chronicle.⁵ It continued in a patronising tone that most of the speakers dealt only

with the needs of the children of their own

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., 13 May 1904, p 533.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 10 June 1904, p 643.

5. Ibid., 10 June 1904, p 643

class, that is, children whose parents are imperfectly anglicised and who grow up in what may be called a more or less Yiddish atmosphere.¹

The problem of Jewish education, stated the correspondent, lay with the children who were thoroughly English in their upbringing, who could hardly be distinguished from the children of Christian parents.²

Because Dr Landau understood this situation he was, in the opinion of the same writer, therefore somewhat indifferent to the existing Talmud Torah which the journal considered to be wholly out of touch with the anglicised part of the community.³ Dr Hertz, on the other hand, was more concerned with the poorer section of the community and the Talmud Torah.⁴ Whilst the meeting served to bring that important question to the public notice, it had no really practical results, for neither of the synagogues, nor the newly-established Board of Deputies, undertook a commitment to help.⁵

With the transfer of the S A Jewish Chronicle to Johannesburg, where it began publishing in April 1905 as a weekly, the journal naturally began to give more cover to the local scene and to the northern regions of the country generally. The quiet tenor, the atmosphere of Victorian provincialism, the plentiful news from the United Kingdom, sustained by a dignified style aspiring almost to elegance, are strongly reminiscent of its exemplar, the London Jewish Chronicle. It adopted a patronising tone towards the "foreigners":

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

this is what, for example, the Chronicle wrote in 1905 concerning Yiddish:¹

to the English-reading Jew, whose knowledge of Yiddish is confined to the belief that it is a mere jargon, it will come as a surprise to learn on excellent authority that it is a language, and a language within the meaning of the Act.²

The issue of 16 February 1906 carried a report of the examinations of the Talmud Torah School held on a Sunday morning in the hall of the Jewish Government School next to the Park Synagogue. It was carried out by Rabbis Hertz and Landau. Mr Shapiro presided and handed out the prizes.³ In their "certificate" the examiners reported on what they regarded as the very remarkable progress and interest of the children especially in the higher standards. They translated from four Books of Moses with considerable ease and expressed themselves with great fluency in Hebrew. And, added the examiners, progress would have been greater if financial support and suitable premises had been available to the school.⁴

The Annual General Meeting of the Talmud Torah in September 1906 heard that the school had about 50 pupils.⁵ Once again there was fulsome praise by the writer of the report for what he termed a laudable institution, and the appeal by the president for support to improve the Hebrew knowledge and extend the secular education.⁶

1. S A Jewish Chronicle 12 May 1905, p 35.
2. The Cape Immigration Restrictions Act (Act No 47 of 1902) which laid down that an immigrant had to know and be able to write a European language. Advocate Morris Alexander led the successful fight for the recognition of Yiddish as a European language under this act.
3. S A Jewish Chronicle 16 February 1906, p 149
4. Ibid. 2 March 1906, p 229
5. Ibid. 28 September 1906, p 377
6. Ibid.

The issue of 19 October 1906 carried a notice that the Hebrew High School (Talmud Torah) would be moving to new premises near the Union Grounds.¹ This was the first mention of the new name, the origin of which is puzzling in view of the fact that the school never went beyond the primary standards.²

Mr I Levinson of London became superintendent of the Hebrew High School in 1907 and taught Hebrew and English. In a press advertisement the school offered a "first-class secular education" in addition to Hebrew and added that afternoon classes for Hebrew and religion would be organised four times weekly from 3.30pm to 6.00pm, for children attending government schools.³

The Transvaal Leader reported⁴ that the examination had been held in the Hebrew High School in its new premises at the corner of von Brandis and Kerk Streets. There were 44 pupils on the roll of this "high school", mostly children of poor Russian parents and chiefly from Ferreira Township.

At the Annual Meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation (Park Synagogue) the following month it was reported that the Talmud Torah classes of the Congregation had been amalgamated with those of the Hebrew High School. The management of the latter was now in the hands of "energetic and responsible communal workers".⁵ Rabbi Landau deplored the fact that so few parents appreciated the work of the

1. S A Jewish Chronicle 19 October 1906, p 440
2. See "Jewish Education in Early Johannesburg" in Jewish Affairs, September 1977, pp 97 et seq., in which Saron, himself an old pupil of the school, suggests an explanation for this "rather grandiloquent name". The epithet "high" qualified the first word of the name - Hebrew, and did not refer to the word which followed it - school. It described the high level of Hebrew which the school hoped to attain, according to Saron.
3. S A Jewish Chronicle 25 January 1907, p 65
4. Transvaal Leader, 27 March 1907: in the S A Communal Notebook C op.cit., p 99
5. S A Jewish Chronicle 26 April 1907, p 430

Hebrew High School, the only school where so much time and attention were devoted to the study of Hebrew. Only 35 pupils attended the afternoon Talmud Torah.¹

The apathy of Johannesburg parents towards the Jewish education of their children was a reason for recurring reproof by rabbi, communal leader and Jewish press. Again and again the S A Jewish Chronicle urged financial support for the Hebrew High School whose "coffers are depleted almost to extinction".² Without a knowledge of Hebrew, stated the leader in the journal, "it is impossible to perpetuate Judaism".³ The Talmud Torah was the principal means of instruction in the town, and the Jewish community of Johannesburg was adjured to help. The school should not be permitted to languish because of indifference.

In a public report on the 8th Zionist Congress held at The Hague in 1907, Dr Landau called for support for the "only establishment in Johannesburg which teaches the language of our Bible and Prayer Book". It was for Zionists to prevent the closure of such a badly needed institution.⁴

A graphic description of his visit to this little school in the autumn of 1906 was given many years later by Mr I Levinson, writing in the S A Jewish Chronicle in Cape Town.⁵

In the autumn of 1906 I decided to pay a visit to a South African Talmud Torah in the slums. I found the object of my quest in an old dilapidated building in Ferreira's. When I entered the schoolroom I had the surprise of my life. Picture a large room, with bare walls unrelieved by pictures, maps or charts, some 14 desks at which were seated the same number of boys, aged from 11 to 14 years, studying - what do you think? - Isaiah. In Yiddish it is true, but with a geshmak and a cheshek⁶ - I know no other words to describe it, which

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., 23 August, 1907, p 152

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p 180.

5. Ibid., 9 March, 1951, p 17.

6. Geshmak: Yiddish - relish: Cheshek: Hebrew - enjoyment.

held me spellbound. Standing before them was a man, teaching with a fire and enthusiasm and inspiration and clarity such as I have never before witnessed. The teacher was none other than the late Reb Helfand. When the morning sessions were over, I learned to my intense surprise that these young lads met again in the afternoon for secular instruction. I could not but return after lunch to see "this great sight". I found a Christian gentleman engaged in group-teaching of English and general school subjects; there was the same keenness and appreciation and enthusiasm on the part of both teacher and pupils.

The issue of the S A Jewish Chronicle of 6 September 1907¹ carried a report of "a visit of inspection" to the Talmud Torah as well as a leading article on the examinations at which the writer had evidently been present.

Mr Levinson who had assumed the office of superintendent in February 1907, when 40 pupils were on the roll, had introduced many improvements since then. The Hebrew lessons were given during the morning and English ones after lunch, till 4.00p.m. In spite of the "gloomy and depressing building" and the poor equipment - the children sat on backless forms and there were no decorations on the walls - the school was clean and well ventilated. A medical inspection had taken place. There were 72 on the roll. A government inspector had examined the secular subjects and Rabbis Landau, Hertz and Friedman had tested the Hebrew.²

One class visited was busy construing the tenth chapter of Genesis; another was engaged in the study "of our mother tongue"; a third was studying the twenty-fourth chapter of Deuteronomy.³

1. Ibid., 6 September 1907, pp 192-193

2. Ibid., p 195

3. Ibid.

There were afternoon classes on four days a week, from the hours of 3.00p.m. to 5.30p.m., for instruction in Hebrew and religion. Thirty-five children from various other schools attended, ranging in age from six-and-a-half to fourteen years. Here standards were lamentably low and much remained to be done.

The correspondent's praise for the institution was mingled with criticism of the community for its lack of interest and support, and for "starving" this institution.¹

The Johannesburg community had failed to carry out its highest obligation - the instruction of their children: "we have failed in making the religious instruction of our children our first care" concluded the writer.²

At the annual meeting reported in the Transvaal Leader³ Mr J Ratzker stated that the revenue was satisfactory in spite of the bad times and that the enrolment had risen to 93. Sir William van Hulsteyn, M L A, had been present during the examination held earlier and was "very impressed".⁴

An amusing mock-serious account of the prize-distribution and examination of the Hebrew High School appeared in the S A Jewish Chronicle a little later. Over 90 children between the ages of six and thirteen were present in the hall of the Jewish school next to the Park Synagogue.

A public oral examination in Hebrew preceded the distribution of prizes. Learned doctor vied with learned doctor (Hertz and Landau) in the severity of the tests imposed upon the dauntless candidates.....questions now in English now in Hebrew ranged....over the realms of Hebrew language, literature and history, grammar, composition and translation.⁵

1. Ibid., p 192

2. Ibid., p 193

3. Transvaal Leader, 28 October 1907: S A Communal Notebook C
p 102

4. Ibid.

5. S A Jewish Chronicle 1 November 1907, p 8

The report continued:

....there was great applause when a contestant emerged unscathed from a particularly hot engagement.....one of the two youthful combatants retired discomfited.....at the end... the inveterate rabbis were confronted by a solid phalanx of the undefeated.....the award of the medal was postponed.

Again we have a spirited advocacy of the school, probably written by L L Goldsmid himself, and an attack on the detractors of the school who were more competent to misrepresent than to examine and report.¹

Some communal leaders were concerned about the position of Jewish education in Johannesburg in general and that of the Hebrew High School or Talmud Torah in particular.

Many children received either little or no Jewish education. The hundreds of Jewish pupils at Marist Brothers and at convents received no Jewish instruction whatsoever. One such large meeting towards the end of 1907, called "to further consider the business of the Talmud Torah or Hebrew High School", considered a proposal to establish an educational board to control the imparting of Hebrew and secular knowledge to all Jewish children in Johannesburg and its suburbs.²

There was evidence of distance between the foreign element in the community and the English and German sections.³ The former were accused of not supporting the Talmud Torah. The meeting was dissatisfied with the small number of children being educated and urged that plans be formulated whereby Jewish children of Johannesburg as a whole, and not merely a small section of them, might be educated.⁴

The editorial in the same issue mentioned that there were

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., 8 November 1907, p 26

3. Ibid., p 27

4. Ibid.

perhaps two thousand and more Jewish children to be educated in Hebrew and religion, a figure impossible to verify at this distance in time.¹

The cost structure of the Hebrew High School, continued the editorial, was too high and it went on to query the whole principle of providing a secular education at the Hebrew High School itself on several grounds. The government's system of education was considered excellent and broadminded and there was therefore no need for the Hebrew High School to attempt to do what it could only do indifferently. The community was poverty-stricken, so why then should it pay twice for the same thing.²

Jews provided a portion of the money which the government spent on education, and the editorial asked why the Jewish community should not then receive the benefit of that education "since we are not in a position to improve upon it".³ The Jewish community's responsibility began and ended with the provision of Jewish education for the children: secular instruction, it was universally recognised, was the responsibility of the government. It was, in any case, unwarranted to educate 60 to 70 children Jewishly, whilst losing sight of the existence of forty times that number. The Talmud Torah spent £25 per child per annum; to do so for the rest of the estimated 2 000 children in need of Jewish instruction would be simply prohibitive.⁴ The article concluded with two rather impractical proposals: one was that the children of the two most densely populated Jewish districts should go to one particular school in each where Hebrew and religious instruction could be given after school hours. The other, and even more sanguine proposal, was to get government agreement for the inclusion of these

1. Ibid., p 27

2. Ibid., p 28

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

subjects in the school-day's curriculum.¹

In a letter to the journal some time later,² the Treasurer of the Hebrew High School replied to criticism which had been levelled at the institution by the Johannesburg correspondent of the London Jewish Chronicle, and stated that the school did not cater for the few at the expense of the many.³ The committee was realising that in view of the new Education Bill, secular education should be left to the government.⁴ It was considering merging the morning classes with the afternoon classes, if it could be assured that the teaching of Hebrew would not suffer. If the school started at 2.00p.m., some 400 pupils could then be instructed daily.⁵

The Hebrew High School suffered from the chronic inadequacy of communal support and its sporadic nature. Furthermore, parents lacked confidence in the small school, so obviously inferior in equipment and facilities, and without the status and appeal of the large denominational and state educational institutions in the city.

Another worry was whether the expenditure on secular education was warranted in view of the limited financial resources available to the institution and whether it was necessary at all, seeing that the government could do it better.

The Hebrew High School in Johannesburg differed in this regard from the Jewish Government School and Hope Mill in Cape Town. For it, Jewish instruction was at least equal in importance to secular instruction and it would very probably be nearer the mark to say that it actually took pride of place. Hence, the school was prepared to forego

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., 27 December 1907, p 192

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

the secular provided the Hebrew objectives were attained. The Jewish public schools in Johannesburg and Cape Town had not only surrendered their independence, but had also, in so doing, waived their rights in the area of Jewish instruction. But this step was of secondary significance for these schools because Hebrew and religious instruction was not their primary objective.

In the face of financial stringency the Johannesburg Hebrew High School took the logical step of cutting down on its secular education and concentrating on expanding its Jewish instruction. By the following year, Mrs Sarah Rosenthal, the lady-superintendent, reported that the enrolment was 48 in the morning classes and 36 in the afternoon, with an average daily attendance of 65.¹ Messrs Helfand and Goodman taught Hebrew. The general tone was much improved and "the school was now firmly established".²

By the end of 1908 there were an estimated 20 000 Jews on the Reef, the largest Jewish community in the British Empire outside Gibraltar and Aden.³ And again the editorial in the S A Jewish Chronicle accused the community of apathy towards the Hebrew High School which, in consequence of inadequate support, "simply drags along".⁴

In a special article on Jewish education⁵, the editor reported that things had started to improve for the little school; it had begun to receive better support and was actually out of debt. The enrolment had grown and the premises in von Brandis Square had become inadequate. The article concluded with a call for a Jewish Teachers' Union.⁶

1. Ibid., 12 June 1908, p 711

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 7 August 1908, p 6

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 16 October 1908, p 195

6. Ibid.

At the Seventh Annual General Meeting¹ of the Johannesburg Hebrew High School it was reported that under five percent of the Jewish community were subscribers, that there was a gradual reduction in secular instruction, that a Teachers' Union had been established, and a call was made again for a Board of Jewish Education.²

Detailed examiners' reports were submitted to this meeting by Rabbis J L Landau, J H Hertz and Dayan Freedman respectively, as also by the Government Inspector of Schools,³ and provide an interesting review of the work of the Hebrew High School at that time.

Dr Landau reported that Mr Rom's class of 21 children from the ages of seven to twelve, 15 of whom had been attending for six months only, had learned to read and translate two chapters of Genesis and write most of the words they knew with surprising ease and correctness. Most children had made very good progress, read the Bible portions with great fluency and were able to translate from Hebrew into English and vice versa, and could understand the questions set to them in pure Hebrew.⁴

Dr Landau was disappointed though that, at the request of the parents, Mr Rom had given up Ivris B'Ivris. He recommended that the teacher should not suppress his own methods to please parents. He advocated the drawing up of a syllabus for the various classes and the adoption of modern methods of Hebrew instruction, and again called for support for the Talmud Torah.⁵

Dr Hertz had examined the highest class of the school and reported on the very high average knowledge of the class.

1. Ibid., 6 November 1908, p 265

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., pp 265-266

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

All understood the Hebrew text of Psalms, Ezekiel and Proverbs, which pointed to an "unusual familiarity with the vocabulary and nature of the Sacred Tongue". He also recommended a "greater definiteness and correlation of the studies" and added that he would assist in drawing up such a syllabus.¹ The Talmud Torah had withstood opposition and neglect for six years and its good work was at last getting the support of the community.

Rabbi Friedman also reported on the progress made by the classes, compared to the position in 1907 when they were neglected and unattended to. This was a direct criticism of the previous superintendent. He praised Messrs Helfand and Goodman and expressed his "absolute surprise" at the improvement.²

Rabbi Landau told the meeting that his work as examiner of the Talmud Torah was one of the most important duties of his office. He was disappointed that his proposal to provide refresher courses in Hebrew for teachers had not materialised: it was also necessary to teach English to Hebrew teachers because of the great difficulty in finding good Hebrew teachers who also knew English. He once more deplored the apathy of parents who did not worry about the Hebrew education of their children.³

The Government Inspector reported on the examination of the first three classes (in secular subjects). He was well satisfied with the work, orderliness and attention and had noted an improvement in the school rooms.⁴

The meeting considered the establishment of classes for girls, a step supported by Rabbi Landau, though conservative

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p 266

4. Report submitted to the Seventh Annual General Meeting of the Hebrew High School (Johannesburg Talmud Torah): see S A Jewish Chronicle 6 November 1908, p 266.

opinion opposed it.¹ He pointed out that the girls were more interested in Jewish education than the boys, as evidenced by the fact that two-thirds of the 125 children attending Sabbath and Sunday religion classes at the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation were girls. No decision to proceed with the matter was however taken.²

A Syllabus for Hebrew Studies in the Hebrew High School

A syllabus for the afternoon classes of the Hebrew High School, to be acted upon from April 19 1909 until further notice, was published in the S A Jewish Chronicle on 30 April 1909³ and throws additional light on the work of the school.

The document indicated that there were 65 boys divided into four classes under Messrs Helfand and Rom; they attended classes from Sunday mornings to Thursdays.

Class A was Junior Hebrew. Reading was to be taught from Singer's Prayer Book; translation would be taken from the last two pages of the same; the history book was Tales and Teachings from the Pentateuch; Religious Instruction would be according to Greenstone's Religion of Israel.⁴ In grammar the children were to be taught some "elementary facts about verbs" and "easy suffixes, affixes and prefixes". As for writing, in all cases this was to consist of words or sentences, not single letters.⁵

Class B was Intermediate Hebrew. The syllabus consisted of reading and translation from Singer's Prayer Book (including the whole of the Shema and Shemono Esrei);

1. S A Jewish Chronicle 27 November 1908, p 317

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 30 April 1909, p 813

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

grammar from Schneider's Beth Hasepher; History - the periods from Moses to David, from Davidson's Bible Reader; Religious Instruction would be given in conjunction with Classes A and C.

Class C was Moderate Advanced Hebrew. Schneider's Beth Hasepher was to be used for grammar and writing.¹ Translations were to include Yishtabah, to end of Shemono Esrei in the Prayer Book; the Ten Commandments; Yigdal; and the first ten chapters of Genesis.

In the Advanced Class D, translation would be any part of Singer's Prayer Book; Humash and Rashi.² Grammar was from Vehrner's Moreh HaLoshown. Writing would comprise dictation, free composition and essays, and History teaching would cover the period from the Destruction of the Temple to the Spanish Inquisition.

The time-table and syllabus was signed by M P Vallentine, the Honorary Secretary of the school.

In 1909 a monthly visiting committee was appointed to report on the school's progress.³ The enrolment increased to 128, the school's financial position improved and plans were drawn up for a new building.⁴ The adjourned annual meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew High School discussed a suggestion to delete "High" from its name, as it gave a wrong impression of its work; it was after all an elementary school. But the word was retained because though the English instruction was elementary "a higher Hebrew education was imparted".⁵ The meeting further heard that the new curriculum was working

1. Ibid.

2. Pentateuch and (Rashi) Commentary

3. S A Jewish Chronicle 13 August 1909, p1114

4. Ibid., 5 November 1909, p 190

5. Ibid., 3 December 1909, pp 265-266

well and the secular instruction was limited to Standard II. Evening classes in advanced Hebrew and Talmud opened later and Rabbi Landau lectured once a fortnight on Jewish history.¹ The building fund was progressing successfully and on 1 July 1910 came the announcement of the purchase of a plot at the corner of Claim and Wolmarans Streets.² The S A Jewish Chronicle published monthly lists of donations to the Talmud Torah from donation boxes, weddings, Bris Milah (circumcision ceremony) functions, subscriptions and fees, so keeping the school in the public eye.³

The foundation-stone laying ceremony was reported on the 9 September 1910. The new building would consist of four classrooms and an assembly hall. Foreign children would be received up to Standard II to enable them to master English. An unusual arrangement was that private teachers would be permitted to give instruction to their private pupils in the school building, on condition that these children were examined by the school examiners.⁴

A very serious problem arose in 1910 when it was reported that the Witwatersrand Central School Board had decided to introduce the dual-session day in mid-year.⁵ The lengthening of the school-day to 4.00 p.m. seriously interfered with the afternoon Hebrew classes, so that in July 1910 the roll fell from 74 to 58.⁶ The attendance also became irregular. If there were no change, Hebrew tuition and religious instruction would soon be impossible in Johannesburg.⁷ The Board of Deputies made representations to the authorities in this regard, but without immediate success.⁸

1. Ibid., 18 March 1910, p 571

2. Ibid., 1 July 1910, p 878

3. Ibid., 5 February 1909, p 536

4. Ibid., 9 September 1910, p 1070

5. Ibid., 3 February 1911, p 275

6. Ibid., 23 September 1910, p 1113

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 3 February 1911, p 275

An average of 50 pupils attended the morning sessions of the Talmud Torah from 9.00a.m. to 1.00p.m. Secular instruction was given up to Standard II. 58 attended the afternoon classes: this figure could have been increased three-fold were it not for the dual-session system.¹

The evening classes for advanced pupils met thrice weekly and studied Bible, Talmud and Hebrew.

The school position was improving steadily and the move to the new school building was a great event for the community.² At the annual general meeting held in the new building, the chairman announced that girls were to be admitted to the afternoon Talmud Torah.³

There were 117 pupils in the new school in 1912,⁴ and by the following year the numbers had grown to over 200 in the morning and afternoon sections with children arriving from a number of schools. The dual-session still created many difficulties and resulted in duplication of labour and wastage of time.

The annual report of the school called on the Jewish community to deal with this matter of great urgency and to remedy this situation by making united representations to the authorities.⁵ Only the Jewish and Market Street schools had obtained a concession, and the dual-session regulations had been waived for them.⁶ There was an

1. Ibid., p 276

2. See pp169-71for an account of the festive opening of the new school buildings of the Johannesburg Hebrew High School at the corner of Wolmarans and Claim Streets.

3. S A Jewish Chronicle 10 February 1911, p 292

4. Ibid., 2 February 1912, p 57

5. Ibid., p 74

6. Ibid.

evening class of 11 boys, graduates of the Hebrew High School who did advanced Hebrew studies.

The moves towards the political unification of Southern Africa seemed to have found an echo in the Jewish community. The formation of a United Board of Deputies for the whole of the South African Jewish community was imminent and public opinion in the Jewish community of Johannesburg was veering strongly in favour of the amalgamation of the two main congregations. A meeting of delegates from all Talmud Torahs in Johannesburg took place in 1911 in Johannesburg to consider the adoption of a unified curriculum drawn up by the Curriculum Committee of the Hebrew High School at which it was proposed to unite all the Talmud Torahs in the town.¹

There was a call at the same annual general meeting for an effort to be made to secure teachers from the material they had in hand. Pupils who had been taught in their own school could be trained to become modern teachers. The school also needed a headmaster, preferably a person with a rabbinical diploma and a university degree. This reflected the increased confidence in the institution. It was already producing graduates fit to be considered for teaching and its image in the community too had improved for the better. It aspired to be a modern school, led by a headmaster equally at home in both the general and Jewish cultures.² Opinion in the community was not unanimous and the Zionist viewpoint was expressed in the Zionist Record³ which regarded these moves for amalgamation of the Talmud Torahs and the formulation and introduction of a uniform

1. Report submitted to the 10th Annual General Meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew High School: S A Jewish Chronicle 2 February 1912, p 74.
2. S A Jewish Chronicle 2 February 1912, p 68
3. The Zionist Record 15 January 1912, p 15

curriculum as very ambitious. This journal was critical of the Hebrew levels in the proposed unified curriculum and doubted whether the time was ripe as yet for such developments.¹

Later in the year L L Goldsmid, again in the editorial chair of the S A Jewish Chronicle after a break of two-and-a-half years, returned in a leader to the subject of the union of the Johannesburg Talmud Torah, asking why no action had been taken.² Fordsburg, Ophirton and Braamfontein were in favour of union, as was the Hebrew High School, on the proviso that a unified curriculum was accepted by all. The Jeppestown school was holding out; the latter was in an unsatisfactory situation and union would help to overcome its problems. Its classes were being held in the shul itself, there were no desks even and no writing was being taught: so much for a suburban Talmud Torah of those days.³

Jeppestown's opposition to amalgamation stemmed from its financial inability to adopt the new curriculum and organisation, wrote Goldsmid later.⁴ A proper staff would have to be engaged; standardised textbooks purchased, decent premises assured, satisfactory equipment and proper organisation introduced.⁵ The detrimental effects of the government schools' dual-session were still being felt, because this limited the hours of instruction at the Hebrew High School, and the apathy of parents was again deplored. There was no reason for not sending their children to the Talmud Torah, which was by then a well-organised and well-run school in a fine new building.⁶

1. Ibid.

2. S A Jewish Chronicle, 11 October 1912, pp 234-235.

3. Ibid., 1 November 1912, p 295

4. Ibid., 15 November 1912, p 319

5. Ibid.

6. Report of Eleventh Annual General Meeting of the Hebrew High School: S A Jewish Chronicle, 14 March 1913, p 164

The annual general meeting in 1914 heard that the financial state of the school was parlous, times were bad and teachers' salaries had to be reduced.¹ The dual-session in the government schools still hindered the work of the Talmud Torah and there was still a lack of interest on the part of the parents. Rabbi Landau reported very favourably on his visits and his examination: his impressions were always of the best. An advertisement that appeared early in 1915 informed the public that the school, under the principalship of Mr D Cohen B A, prepared pupils for the Primary School Certificate Examination and that it offered instruction in elementary and advanced Hebrew.² A Gemorrah³ class was to be opened. The report to the Thirteenth Annual General Meeting in 1915 indicated the problems faced by the growing school and its leadership. Its financial position was so serious that it faced the possibility of closing down the secular classes. Parents were apathetic and the community's support was not forthcoming.⁴

When Mr Cohen had taken up his post the enrolment stood at 187; by 1915 the number had risen to 275 and the average attendance was 92%, with a marked improvement in discipline and tone. There were about 120 pupils in the morning session and about 150 in the afternoon classes, with a small number of girls included. The examiners' reports were very satisfactory and the Government Inspector, too, was well satisfied.⁵ The Hebrew High School had obviously had a successful academic year, but its financial position was so grave that it could not even give the headmaster a

1. Ibid., 23 October 1914, p 875

2. Ibid., 1 January 1915, p 2.

3. Gemorrah (Aramaic): another word for a section of the Talmud comprising commentaries on Mishna, generally used for Babylonian Talmud, completed c 500 A D.

4. S A Jewish Chronicle, 2 July 1915 pp 91-95.

5. Ibid.

two-year contract. The war depression had resulted in a growing deficit.¹

The school went up to Standard III and a Standard IV was planned for 1916, but there were calls for the closure of the secular classes. They constituted a financial burden and in any case it was the government's duty to provide a general education. Rabbi Landau again criticised the apathy of the parents, demonstrated by the poor attendance at the meeting. He agreed that the school was not in the position to maintain its secular classes, which, he urged, should be handed over to the government whilst the Jewish community should retain control of the afternoon Hebrew classes.²

There were opposing voices to this suggestion, notably that of Mr S Shapiro, founder of the institution in 1902. He regarded the secular classes as a means of getting the children to Hebrew education and the morning Hebrew instruction had distinct advantages over that imparted late in the afternoon and was more effective. He expressed anxiety about handing the school to the government.³ This was a more circumspect judgment and at the same time showed a deeper insight into the problem, and was less actuated by the financial considerations of the moment. It was moreover a recognition of the superiority of Hebrew instruction given in the morning classes over the "appendage-system" of the supplemental Hebrew school tagged on at the end of a long school day in a government school. This thinking was to have relevance to the establishment of the present-day Jewish "day schools" three decades and more later.

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

A letter written by Mr S Shapiro, President of the Hebrew High School, to the S A Jewish Chronicle¹ informed the public that there was room for more pupils at the school, which by then went up to Standard V. The hours were from 8.30a.m. to 3.30p.m. From 3.30p.m. to 6.00p.m. there were classes for Hebrew only. In addition, there were religion classes on Saturdays and Sunday mornings.²

The Fourteenth Annual General Meeting of the Hebrew High School³ heard that the attendance at the morning session of the school averaged 97% and at the afternoon classes 84%. The financial position was bad and the danger of closing a section of the school still hovered over their heads.⁴

A sub-leader in the S A Jewish Chronicle on the annual report of the Hebrew High School summarised the place of the Talmud Torah in Jewish education in these words:

in a community such as ours, offering few opportunities to the children at school and even at home for learning the Jewish ideals, this institution is an absolute essential in the maintenance of our faith and nationality...⁵

The article further deplored the withdrawal of pupils by parents "at the most promising period of their education".⁶

The movement of the Jewish population out of the neighbourhood

1. Ibid., 11 August 1916, p 216.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 22 September 1916, p 337.

4. One sentence of the report merits repetition: "In the Talmud Torah children were enabled to inhale the Jewish spirit thanks to the Jewish atmosphere which surrounded them".

5. S A Jewish Chronicle, 22 September 1916, p 331-332.

6. Many years later, the writer noticed this practice on the part of parents who, far from sending their children to a Jewish school by reason of their commitment to the idea of a Jewish education, were using the school merely as a convenient means of getting their children admitted to government schools of their choice.

during subsequent years radically affected the Hebrew High School of Johannesburg, as it did the Jewish Government School situated in the vicinity.¹ The enrolment began its inevitable decline; by 1958² the number of pupils had dropped to a mere seven and the Johannesburg Hebrew High School went out of existence.

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1. Tyson and Rubin: op.cit., Chapters VIII-X, pp 44 et seq.
 2. Report and Balance Sheet of the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg for the year ending 31 December 1958.

CHAPTER 20: FURTHER ASPECTS OF JEWISH EDUCATION IN
JOHANNESBURG DURING THE EARLY DECADES
OF THE CENTURY

Whilst the Jewish Government School and the Talmud Torah (Hebrew High School) dominated the Jewish education scene, the growth of the Jewish population resulted in the opening of a number of suburban Talmud Torahs attached to the new congregations which were being established in various parts of the growing city.

The Jeppestown congregation was established in 1903. The report presented to the general meeting of its Talmud Torah in 1911¹ indicated that there were five classes in the school with an average daily attendance of 60, though the number on the roll was 77. The results of the examination were favourable. The late closing of the government schools occasioned by the dual-session system compelled the Talmud Torah to start at 4.00p.m. Parents were blamed for the irregular attendance of pupils. The idea of amalgamating Talmud Torahs in the city and establishing a Central Religious Education Board was proposed at the meeting and welcomed by Mr J H Isaacs, Chairman of the Hebrew High School, who was present.

A negative description of conditions at this little school appeared in the S A Jewish Chronicle of 1 November 1912.² Jeppestown was opposed to the amalgamation of the Hebrew High School and Talmud Torahs. At the prize-distribution of the Jeppestown Talmud Torah in 1915 an interesting account was given of the subjects taught at this school. The function was, by the way, presided over by a Mrs Bloom. The Eastern Districts Women's League was indeed the main supporter

1. S A Jewish Chronicle 10 November 1911, p 960

2. See p 190

of this Talmud Torah.¹

Rabbi Dr J L Landau had recently examined the school and one may gather from his report what material was covered in the various classes. The syllabus for the second, third and fourth classes comprised reading, translation of Genesis and the Prayer Book, and some parts of the Former Prophets, Hebrew grammar and conversation. The children, so ran the report, read fluently and translated with much intelligence.²

In Mr Shapiro's advanced class, the children could easily follow when spoken to in Hebrew and some of them were even able to reply "in our sacred tongue".³ The classrooms were "absolutely unfit", concluded the report.⁴

The new Talmud Torah in Ophirton was located in two rooms attached to the synagogue. Twenty-two children were taught here by two teachers. Dr Landau was present at the opening and Mr L L Goldsmid, editor of the S A Jewish Chronicle also spoke. He wrote that he saw a sign of what he termed an awakening on the part of older members of the community to their responsibilities towards the future generation.⁵

Early in the following year, the S A Jewish Chronicle carried a report of an examination carried out by Dr Landau at Ophirton in the presence of the committee and parents, which lasted for over two hours.⁶ The children were between the ages of 6 and 12. The advanced class, said the report,

1. S A Jewish Chronicle, 14 May 1915, p 321.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 30 October, 1908, p 238.

6. Ibid., 12 March 1909, p 637

"were able to translate the greater part of Deuteronomy" whilst the infants read their Hebrew Primer with sufficient fluency. It is interesting to note that girls were admitted to this Talmud Torah, a welcome situation in view of the fact that the Talmud Torah School in Johannesburg had not done so yet.¹

Dr Landau praised the community, stating that although they themselves "were poor and struggling for a livelihood, they did not neglect their sacred duty towards their children".²

The Fordsburg-Mayfair Congregation dated back to the early nineties, soon after the Johannesburg Jewish community developed almost overnight "like the gourd of Jonah".³ In his history, Bernard Sachs gives a vivid and sympathetic portrayal of the Rev. Mr Jacob Zidel who had been appointed to the Talmud Torah in 1904. The hours of tuition were from 4.00p.m. to 7.00p.m. daily, except Fridays, and no classes were held on Saturday mornings.⁴

Dr L F Freed, a pupil of those days, describes that "strange secluded little world" that was the Fordsburg Talmud Torah in 1909.⁵ The Heder was in a basement, neither well-lit nor sufficiently ventilated, and partitioned into three sections. The basic part of Jewish instruction was the translation of Humash (Pentateuch) into Yiddish. Few went as far as I and II Samuel but fewer still had, so he puts it, the mental stamina to reach out to the Latter Prophets. Dr Freed gives a sentimental pen-picture of his rebbe (teacher), Mr Shulman, as the latter read, or rather

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Sachs, Bernard: The Fordsburg-Mayfair Hebrew Congregation 1893-1964: (Published by the Congregation, Johannesburg) p 49

4. Ibid., p 227

5. Ibid., pp 241 et seq.

declaimed from Isaiah. He was a dignified figure, and a strict disciplinarian; the long cane lay on his desk in front of him - a visible rod of office. Lessons lasted for an hour-and-a-half, four times weekly and on Saturday afternoons. Mr Shulman was no doubt a fervent Zionist: every lesson ended with the singing of all nine stanzas of Hatikvah.¹

Dr J Harte was a pupil in the Ferreira town Talmud Torah² (later the Hebrew High School), situated in the vicinity of the present-day Johannesburg City Hall and Rissik Street Post Office, in 1904 and 1905. The chairman was Mr Siegmund Shapiro, a produce merchant: the teachers, he recalls, were Mr Moshe Helfand and Mr Chaim Peretz Goodman. Mr Helfand taught Humash in Yiddish and English, with some Rashi commentaries. Mr Evans, who also taught in the German School, came in the afternoon to teach English and arithmetic for about an hour to the twenty-odd pupils. Dr Harte recalls his reading stories from Greek mythology. Mrs Rosenthal, "a very fine woman, born in England" taught sums and spelling.³ The school-day ended at 4.00 p.m.: no fees were paid. Later, the "school" moved to von Brandis Square and then to the Hebrew High School in Wolmarans Street.

Chaim Peretz Goodman who hailed from Shavel in Lithuania was a talmudist and taught Bava Metzia⁴ to the older boys instead of Humash. Dr Harte attended the Talmud Torah until he was 12 years old, and then entered the Market Street Government School. When Mr Helfand left a Mr Rom took

1. Hatikvah (Hebrew) "The Hope" - the Zionist anthem.
2. Interview with Dr J Harte on 18 July 1978 at his residence in Kenilworth, Cape.
3. This would be a year or two after 1905.
4. One of the books of the Gemara (Talmud).

his place: he spoke Hebrew and taught in Ivris B'Ivris. The book used for history was Divrei Hayomim by Yavitz. Goodman continued with Bava Kamma.¹

When the Talmud Torah moved to Wolmarans Street, Dr Harte, then a student, became a part-time teacher at the school. He taught science and Latin in Standard VI, but it was decided to limit the school to Standard V at that time, and he then taught English and science. After the First World War, he left for overseas to continue his studies and severed his connection with the Hebrew High School.

Some children walked the three miles or so to Fordsburg to attend the Talmud Torah. The von Brandis Square premises were an improvement on the poor premises in Ferreiras.

Levinson² was not paid, and when he resigned he started a private school of his own.³

Other Talmud Torahs sprang up all over the Rand and in the Transvaal as the number of congregations grew. The S A Jewish Chronicle reported the opening of a Talmud Torah in Boksburg,⁴ and in the following year the Benoni School opened with 60 children.⁵ Further afield, towns like Krugersdorp, Klerksdorp, Potchefstroom and Standerton had already established their Hebrew schools some years previously.

1. Another book of Gemara.
2. He was superintendent for some time, see p 168
3. In the 1920's he opened his school, Hillel College, in Main Road, Muizenberg, where he ran a private educational institution for boarders and day pupils till about the outbreak of the Second World War. There were about 40-50 pupils in the school, which was later converted into a convalescent home.
4. S A Jewish Chronicle, 26 May 1911, p 557
5. Ibid., 19 July 1912, p 44

Amongst the various problems and issues in the sphere of Jewish education engaging the attention of religious and lay leaders of the Johannesburg Jewish community of those days one of the most worrying, and that appears to have given rise to considerable anxiety, concerned the large number of Jewish children attending denominational, especially Catholic, private schools.

Such schools in Johannesburg and elsewhere had already attracted many Jewish pupils in the republican era when they were established to cater for children professing the Catholic faith who were at the time - like their Jewish counterparts - not admitted to the state schools.

More than half the Jews of Johannesburg sent their sons to Marist Brothers, reported the local correspondent of the London Jewish Chronicle.¹ It was a problem that was to agitate the Jewish community for years and became a cause of contention between Rabbis Hertz and Landau in the years after the war.

The "Jottings from South Africa" column in the same journal reported a few years later that the number of Jewish pupils was higher than ever before at Marist, one of the largest private scholastic institutions in the country.² Rabbi Dr Landau had concerned himself with the Jewish instruction of these pupils. He himself taught over 100 pupils³ and he arranged for another teacher to teach Hebrew and religion at two other large schools, the Johannesburg College for boys and Cleveland High School for girls.⁴ The correspondent of the London Jewish Chronicle⁵ stressed that attention had also to be given to those many Jewish pupils in free government schools who were receiving no Hebrew and

1. Jewish Chronicle, London: 16 August 1901, p 15

2. Ibid., 20 May 1904, p 14.

3. S A Jewish Chronicle, 29 April 1904, p 487

4. Ibid.

5. Jewish Chronicle, London: 20 May 1904, p 14

religious tuition whatsoever, and united action was called for to deal with this problem. The great differences that existed between the various sections of the community should be sunk, continued the correspondent, if only for the sake of the coming Jewish generation.¹

Dr Hertz criticised Dr Landau's classes at Marist Brothers, terming the arrangement "a menace and danger to Judaism".² While the school did not discriminate against Jewish boys and the atmosphere was generally a tolerant one, it did demand attendance on Sabbath and holy days.³ Dr Landau was thus compromising with what the correspondent regarded as a state of affairs unequalled in any country, namely, the sending of Jewish boys and girls in very large numbers to obtain their education in sectarian schools.⁴ Dr Hertz contended that it was impossible to teach Judaism in schools of another faith, and urged his congregation not to allow their children to attend Hebrew classes at Marist. They should attend the free Hebrew and religion classes at the synagogue on Sabbaths and Sundays. He also called for an increase in Jewish schools.

The correspondent proceeded to analyse the question of Jewish education which he considered to be one of the most serious problems confronting the Jewish community.⁵ He was critical of Dr Hertz, remarking that having been in Johannesburg for the last seven years he himself should have known the danger posed by Marist. During his short stay, Dr Landau had also arranged for Jewish instruction to be

1. Ibid.

2. S A Jewish Chronicle 6 May 1904, pp 510-511

3. Ibid.

4. Jewish Chronicle, London, 24 June 1904, p 23

5. Ibid.

given at two other schools, to neither of which Dr Hertz objected. The Marist Brothers had been punctilious about respecting the religious beliefs of non-Catholic pupils, and the correspondent was not aware that they had in any way interfered with the beliefs of any one of the hundreds of Jewish boys who had passed through their hands. Was it advisable, then, to leave so large a number of Jewish boys without Hebrew instruction of any kind?

Many of the over 100 boys at the Marist Brothers' School were, he wrote, ignorant of the very rudiments of the Jewish faith. The best solution would be the establishment of Jewish schools, concluded the correspondent, but he did not know how that was to be accomplished.¹

The Jewish education of the girls of the community was regarded as an even more acute problem.² The Johannesburg Talmud Torah (Hebrew High School) did not accept girls during its earlier years, neither did some of the suburban Talmud Torahs: the confirmation and religion classes arranged for them at the synagogues in those days attracted only limited numbers.³ Extra mural activities of an artistic and musical nature were considered much more important

1. Ibid.

2. Goldsmid returned to the subject more than once in a number of critical and even agitated editorials in the S A Jewish Chronicle (see p 203)

3. The Jewish Chronicle, London, reported in the issue of 24 May 1907 (p 15) that Rabbi Dr Landau was unable to hold a second confirmation service for girls owing to the bad attendance and lack of interest. Nor were the Synagogue Religion Classes properly supported. Rabbi Landau publicly complained of the apathy of parents in this regard (see S A Jewish Chronicle of 24 April 1908, p 566) and deplored the fact that only about a quarter of the children of the members (of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation) attended the classes provided by him (reported in the S A Jewish Chronicle of 15 October 1909, p 130). The same report stated that classes run by Rabbi Dr J H Hertz of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation in President Street could only muster a total of 115 children.

for the social and aesthetic development of the girls than Hebrew and religious instruction. Convent schools were the popular choice of very many parents who could afford to send their daughters to receive what was no doubt a sound academic education which the sisters provided, together with their traditional attention to finer points of conduct, personal bearing and character. Girls from country towns were sent to convents in the Transvaal and in the other colonies as boarders, a tradition which persisted for decades in the Jewish community in Southern Africa, and which aroused grave anxiety among the religious leaders and more orthodox laymen.¹

The problem of Jewish education of girls was a recurring point in the editorials of the S A Jewish Chronicle almost from the first day of the paper's appearance in 1902. A critical leader in that year stated that nearly 40% of the pupils at Springfield Convent in Wynberg were Jewish.² These were to be the mothers of the next generation, brought up in an alien religious environment without any Jewish education whatsoever. The journal returned to this subject the following year, asking why there was no "High School for young ladies of our denomination in the Cape Peninsula".³ In an urgent and almost agitated leader - "The Education of Our Girls" - the paper deplored the neglect of the girls and warned of irreparable injury should the community postpone action, and called on the leadership to remedy the situation.⁴ In November of that year, the paper

1. See a letter in the S A Jewish Chronicle of 3 February 1911 (p 283) stating, inter alia, that "convents all over the country are fed by Jewish children". Reference was made to the same subject in the issue of 18 April 1913 (p 250) in which the columnist Veritas wrote in alarm that ".....Judaism in this country is threatened".
2. S A Jewish Chronicle 22 August 1902, p 3
3. Ibid., 15 May 1903, p 7
4. Ibid., 22 May 1903, p 2

again deplored the apathy of the parents and the general indifference of the community to the Jewish education of the girls: the future generation had been abandoned, it claimed.¹

In 1904 came the news that a hostel for Jewish girls was to be established next to the synagogue in the Gardens, Cape Town, a move warmly welcomed by the paper which also refuted the argument that girls must first and foremost receive what it termed a refined education. Refinement, it stated, should go hand in hand with love of Judaism, appreciation of its teachings and knowledge of its observances.² A revealing sentence appeared the following month under "Social Matters":

the Rev Mr Bender recommended that she be sent to Springfield Convent.....whether he recommends so many up-country Jewish girls.³

Disapproval and anxiety are expressed in other references to this subject in the paper. Surely, contended Goldsmid, the Catholics were contemptuous of the Jews who cared so little for their own religion.⁴

The correspondent of the London Jewish Chronicle wrote in 1909 that the Jews were important supporters of Catholic educational institutions in Johannesburg. The ever-increasing applications for admission were largely from Jews. He deplored the snobbery of those prospering members of the community who withdrew their children from the Jewish Government School, which was free, in order to send them to fee-paying schools, irrespective of whether the children were progressing or not.⁵ He failed to understand how his

1. Ibid., 6 November 1903, p 3

2. Ibid., 8 January 1904, p 4

3. Ibid., 12 February 1904, p 204.

4. Ibid., 20 December 1907, pp 165-166

5. Jewish Chronicle, London, 20 August 1909, p 11

fellow-Jews could give no thought "to the future welfare of the race" and sarcastically, even bitterly, wrote that

Catholic schools and convents have so many Jewish boys and girls in their keeping that it would not be at all surprising to find the reverend fathers organising special classes, conducted by themselves, to teach Jewish religion to Jewish heathens.¹

And in the conclusion he asked despondently when the leaders of the Jewish community would awaken to their duties of seeing that the Jewish youth of Johannesburg came into their proper heritage.²

It is somewhat ironic to find an advertisement in the S A Jewish Chronicle inserted by the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Potchefstroom, which called itself the oldest boarding school in the Western Transvaal, and which announced that pupils of all creeds were accepted and their religion respected.³

In an editorial headed "Catholic Jews and Convent Jewesses" the Zionist Record⁴ strongly criticised those Jewish parents who put their children under Catholic influence unthinkingly, not knowing the harm they were doing, nor knowing that they were depriving their children of their most sacred heritage. From the home, empty of Jewish influence, the defenceless children were moved into a "hostile" boarding school atmosphere. The journal asked why they were not rather sent to the many "splendid undenominational schools" where they would not receive "negative sympathies". Parents then salved their consciences by giving what it termed a little private Hebrew tuition of poor quality. This was

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. S A Jewish Chronicle 8 January 1915, p 28. A large illustrated advertisement was inserted by the Maris Stella Convent, Durban, in the issue of the S A Jewish Chronicle of 30 July 1915, p 157

4. Zionist Record 15 April 1912, p 3

in itself also harmful because by comparison with the good education in the Catholic school, this Jewish education was lifeless, colourless and inferior.¹ Was it any wonder then, asked the journal, that the inevitable result was contempt for things Jewish (not excluding the parents) and the all too frequent estrangement from the customs and manners of their parents.²

The fluidity as well as the social tensions of what was still a largely unsettled community in the fast-growing city were reflected in the educational scene of the first three decades or so of Johannesburg's existence and also in the words of leaders who agonised over the daunting problems of providing a proper Jewish education for the children of the community of Johannesburg of that day. There is an almost bewildering babel of words - spoken and printed - on the subject during those years when the city and its Jewish community were passing through rapid political, social and economic phases of change and development.³

Parental apathy there surely was, also the snobbery of the purse-proud, the pride of the "better-born", the materialism of a society based on gold, the desperate desire of poor immigrants to acculturise and escape their poverty and

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. The subject is rarely absent from the pages of the S A Jewish Chronicle and the Zionist Record during the first two decades of this century and the Johannesburg correspondent of the London Jewish Chronicle also dealt with it frequently and in considerable detail in the reports from South Africa. It goes without saying that the problems of Jewish education were constantly highlighted in the sermons and public addresses of both Rabbis Landau and Hertz.

especially to give their children what they themselves never managed to obtain. And yet there is an unceasing stream of worry and concern about the Jewishness of the community, and the innate realisation of the need to hand on the national-religious tradition to the young.¹ In retrospect, one wonders at this unceasing concern so frequently expressed by so many speakers and writers whilst at the same time so little really was achieved in practice during those early days. The wealthy were indifferent to the point of being alienated; those who cared were, by and large, as yet too new in the land and too poor to effect very much. In between were so many whose values were deficient because of ignorance or their own personal failings. One wonders how much more could, or would, have been achieved had the leadership not been cursed by the discord which descended on the community early in the nineties, and was to sap its energies for so many years thereafter.

Rabbi Dr Landau was particularly aware of the need for a boarding establishment for country children, and again and again returned to the subject to urge the establishment of such an institution.² A vigorous appeal for a Jewish boarding school to accommodate country children was made by the S A Jewish Chronicle in these words:

What use is it to succour a few old men and old women.....if we allow the vast majority of the future men and women of the community to grow up amidst Christian surroundings attended by all the numerous influences which the assimilating conditions under which we live bring to bear

1. Rabbi Dr Landau expressed these feelings when he spoke of the "tragic consequences" for South African Jewry if, in the absence of an adequate Jewish school system, parents were compelled to entrust their children to "non-Jewish or even un-Jewish schools". Would such children, he asked, be strong-minded enough to remain faithful to their religion? See S A Jewish Chronicle 15 October 1909, p 120.
2. In his report to the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation on 31 March 1910, Rabbi Dr Landau made a strong appeal for a Jewish boarding-school, which, he said, was a crying need to house the many Jewish children who were being brought up in Christian boarding establishments. See S A Jewish Chronicle 22 April 1910, p 690

upon their lives.¹

Rabbis Hertz and Landau co-operated in a short-lived experiment to establish one under Mr and Mrs Friedlander in Yeoville² which closed because of lack of support. Jewish children were however placed as boarders in private homes, usually those of teachers who also provided some Jewish instruction.

The Hebrew and religion classes organised by the rabbis of the two main congregations provided another form of Jewish instruction. These classes took place on Sabbath afternoons and Sunday mornings with fluctuating numbers and support. This was but peripheral Jewish education.

At the Sixteenth Annual General Meeting of his congregation, Rabbi Dr Landau complained of the apathy of parents who did not send their children to these week-end classes. The rising generation, said the Rabbi, knew nothing of the Jewish past and cared nothing for the Jewish future.³ In a subsequent letter to the paper he stressed that Sabbath and Sunday classes alone were not enough unless accompanied by thorough religious education in Hebrew to equip the children with their heritage:⁴ Sabbath classes were advocated by those who reduced Judaism to synagogue services held once a week: they were advocates of assimilation. The S A Jewish Chronicle reported in 1909 that the religion classes at both synagogues combined showed an attendance of only 225 pupils: there were probably over 1 000 who received no religious teaching at all.⁵

1. S A Jewish Chronicle 2 May 1913, pp 287-288

2. Ibid., 24 June 1910, p 849

3. Ibid., 24 April 1908, p 567

4. Ibid., 1 May 1908, p 595

5. Ibid., 15 October 1909, p 120.

Dr Landau criticised the synagogue religion classes in his report to the Nineteenth Annual General Meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation.¹ Since 1905, not one examination had been held: the education was poor, consisting of one hour only a week, and there was no curriculum.

He proposed that the classes of both synagogues be amalgamated on neutral ground in the new building of the Hebrew High School in Wolmarans Street. Barmitzvah classes for boys and confirmation classes for girls were not proving a success, continued Rabbi Landau. Attendances were poor and interest was lacking.² To ensure more success with the Barmitzvah classes, he had advocated that every boy be required to pass an examination prior to the ceremony in the synagogue, but the committee had not accepted this proposal and the class was not successful. So the ceremony itself remained the main event, devoid in most cases of any educational content.

Ministers, leaders and the Jewish press early saw the need for an overall framework for Jewish education. This was also a will-o'-the-wisp, ardently pursued from platform, pulpit and press, but never attained until well into the twenties of the century.

A revealing picture of the state of Jewish education in Johannesburg was painted by the correspondent of the London Jewish Chronicle, "A.M.A."³ in his "Jottings from South Africa" in November 1905, who reported on what he termed the unsatisfactory arrangements for providing Hebrew education in this town and in South Africa generally.⁴

First of all, stated the writer, there was a need for Hebrew

1. Ibid., 28 April 1911, p 494

2. Jewish Chronicle, London, 24 May 1907, p 15

3. "A.M.A." was A M Abrahams, headmaster of the Jewish Government School.

4. Jewish Chronicle, London, 3 November 1905, p 26

studies to be systematised to put an end to the existing chaos, especially in the Talmud Torahs, each of which taught what it liked and how it liked.¹ As for children left to, what he termed, the tender mercies of private melamdim (tutors), if they picked up a smattering of reading, that was as much as could be expected.² Co-ordination was necessary, instead of "present aimlessness", to be achieved by the establishment of a central body on the lines of the London Religious Education Board³ to perform such essential duties as the drawing up of a workable code (syllabus) for various levels, the regularisation of finances, the establishment of classes in areas where needed, the appointment of inspectors, the importation of text books, and continuation classes for those beyond school age.⁴

The fact that so many children who attended government schools received no Jewish education at all was a cause of deep concern and finally Dr Landau obtained permission for Hebrew lessons to be given after school hours in at least one school, in Market Street.⁵

Constant warnings, reproofs and urgings by Rabbi, lay leader and journalist had little effect on indifferent parents who did not bother about the Jewish education of their children. Deep regret and self-reproach would beset the community in future if energetic steps were not taken without delay

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. A central board of this nature came into existence only in the late twenties.

4. Ibid.

5. A M Abrahams stated, however, that of the 300 Jewish pupils at the school only about 60 were receiving "some desultory" instruction for a few hours a week after school hours, "without any aim in view". See Jewish Chronicle, London, ibid. A year later the S A Jewish Chronicle (16 August 1907, p 129) reported that a second class had been established at the school.

warned Rabbi Landau.¹

The report of the speeches delivered at the prize-distribution function of the Park Synagogue religion classes² indicated that there were only about 125 children in these classes of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, a figure, which Rabbi Landau noted, constituted but a quarter of the members' children.³ Rabbi Dr Hertz, whose Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation could muster only 115 pupils, urged that they had "to get the thousands".⁴ One of the speakers appealed for unification of these classes which were only "touching the fringe of the vast number of Jewish children in the city".⁵

A new note was heard in the words of Mr S Raphaely⁶, the Chairman of the Educational Sub-Committee, who called for the establishment of a Jewish school for 1 000 pupils where the teaching of Hebrew could go hand in hand with secular instruction. It was too much for the child to come home after a day's work in one school to attend another, said Mr Raphaely. It enhanced the difficulties of the teacher to instruct tired children.⁷ Implicit in Mr Raphaely's suggestion was obvious dissatisfaction with both the Jewish Government School and the afternoon Talmud Torahs as

1. Report to the Fourteenth Annual General Meeting of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation: see S A Jewish Chronicle 27 April 1906, p 463. See also footnote 1 p 207.
2. S A Jewish Chronicle 15 October 1909, p 130
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. He became President of the Transvaal and Natal Jewish Board of Deputies in 1911 and President of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, and was later to become one of the most prominent leaders of the South African Jewish community: see 1929 Jewish Year Book, op.cit., p 177
7. S A Jewish Chronicle 15 October 1909, p 130

instruments of Jewish education.¹

Here was an expression of the obvious pedagogical rationale for the "day school" of a later age, a phrase which appeared already in those days.²

We come upon other seminal ideas in Jewish education: the need for a secondary school, for the training of "our own teachers", for the premier place of Hebrew in Jewish education, and for the best methods of imparting it. The growing Zionist movement was slowly creating its organisational framework and, from the first S A Zionist Conference in 1905 onwards, manifested an interest in Jewish education; but it was too early then to achieve much except to promote the introduction of the Ivris B'Ivris method of instruction.

The Board of Deputies for the Transvaal and Natal came into being in 1903, to be followed a year later by a similar body for the Cape: but it, too, was too weak an organisation to do much for Jewish education. These provincial bodies were united only in 1912. It was only when it ensured its sources of revenue by establishing the United Communal Fund in the post-World War Two era that it began to play an important role in Jewish education.

1. The Hebrew High School of Johannesburg did provide secular education for the first few years of primary schooling, but it was a tiny, struggling little institution with only about 50 children in the morning classes. See pp 177-84
2. Report of the Prize-Distribution Function of the Park Synagogue Religion Classes (Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation) in S.A. Jewish Chronicle 15 October 1909, p 130.

By 1911 the Jewish population in South Africa was about 47 000, with over 15 000 in Johannesburg.¹ There were 44 Hebrew Congregations in the country, of which number 21 were in the Cape Province, 17 in the Transvaal, 4 in the Orange Free State and 2 in Natal.² The 1918 Census showed that of the 58 700 Jews in the Union, just over 20 000 lived on the Rand whilst just over 9 000 were at the Cape.³

A new theme in the long, and frequently agitated, discussions on the problems of Jewish education in Johannesburg was introduced by Goldsmid in an important article in the S A Jewish Chronicle towards the end of 1908.⁴ In his call for the establishment of a Teachers' Union he shifted the emphasis away from the usual matters that had long constituted the main subject of speeches, sermons and articles on Jewish education and for the first time made the teacher the centre-point of the problem. The vital role of the teacher had merited but scant attention in the past in all the public statements on Jewish education and it is to the credit of Goldsmid and Israel Levinson that they rectified this omission.

Goldsmid called on the teachers to recognise their responsibility to the community; they had a central role to play in improving Jewish education and to do that effectively they needed to organise themselves properly in a union which would aim at raising professional levels and improving educational

1. Hotz, L: "A Survey of the Jewish Population in South Africa" in the S A Jewish Year Book 1929, op.cit., p 35
2. Ibid.
3. The Zionist Record: 30 April 1922, p 25. The census taken in 1921 showed that 54% of the total Jewish population of just over 62 000 lived in the Transvaal. (See: Ibid., 7 November 1924, p 19).
4. "The State of Jewish Education in Johannesburg" in the S A Jewish Chronicle 16 October 1908, p 195

standards.¹ He announced that Levinson and he had decided to take the initiative by calling a meeting to establish such a body.²

The teachers in the various Jewish schools of the day could be divided into three main categories. There were those who had received their professional training in England and had come out to South Africa to teach in the Jewish public schools.³

At the other extreme were the "reverend"-teachers and melamdim from Eastern Europe. Amongst them, of course, there were outstanding personalities who were born teachers and had, moreover, immersed themselves in the new Hebrew culture of the Haskalah. Geffen⁴ and Turtledove in Cape Town; Zidel, Goodman, Helfand and Shulman in Johannesburg belonged to this category, and there were no doubt others like them. In contrast to them were the majority of the melamdim and country ministers from Eastern Europe who lacked academic qualifications and professional training for their work as teachers.

The Transvaal Jewish Teachers' Union was in due course established. Its aims were to safeguard the interests of the teachers and to involve itself actively in the whole question of Hebrew and religious education. Goldsmid was elected president.⁵

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Mark Cohen, E H Kloot and Louis Herrman at Hope Mill: S Bebro, P D Marks and, later, A M Abrahams and I H Harris at the Jewish schools in Johannesburg. Most had qualified at Jews' College in London, as had some of the minister-teachers like Messrs Ornstein and Harris Isaacs.

4. Mr D Zuckerman of Cape Town mentioned to the writer that Mr Geffen, whom he had known personally, was a maskil, viz. a cultured person versed in the modern Hebrew culture of the Haskalah.

5. S A Jewish Chronicle 30 October 1908, p 238

A little later, the journal reported that the Ebrija¹, an association of Hebrew-speakers founded by Dr Landau, had discussed the relative merits of the Ivris B'Ivris and Ivris B'Anglis (translation into English) methods and was also considering the formulation of proper teaching methods.² It urged the Ebrija to co-operate in this regard with the Talmud Torah and the Union of Jewish Teachers and even questioned the right of that organisation to lay down a syllabus for the teaching of Hebrew.³ The Teachers' Union was the natural body to determine methods of instruction and not the Ebrija; the former had not been consulted in the matter.

There is a reference a year later⁴ to the activities of the Jewish Teachers' Union for the Diffusion of Hebrew and Religious Knowledge established by Goldsmid and Levinson in 1908. It had endeavoured to obtain the use of government schools after hours to give instruction in Hebrew and religion and had compiled a text-book for such classes.⁵ There is no further information on the history of this Union after this date. Levinson left Johannesburg for Cape Town where he served for some time as headmaster of the Cape Town Public Talmud Torah School in Constitution Street,⁶ prior to his appointment as Jewish chaplain in the South African forces.

There is a reference to a general meeting of another teachers'

1. A corruption of Ivriya from the Hebrew word Ivri, a Hebrew.
2. S A Jewish Chronicle, 13 November 1908, p 277
3. Ibid., 20 November 1908, p 298
4. Ibid., 15 October, 1909, p 121.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 31 December 1915, p 605.

association a year later.¹ This was the Transvaal Society of Hebrew Teachers which had been founded in 1912. The S A Jewish Chronicle carried editorial comment on this body in its columns a fortnight later,² giving its objects as the development of the study of the Hebrew language and its literature "on modern national lines" and the "amelioration of the position of the Hebrew teacher both morally and financially".³ The Society, stated the journal, had endeavoured to co-ordinate methods and draw up a curriculum acceptable to all. How long this obviously Zionistically-orientated body lasted it is impossible to ascertain.

It was only during the late twenties and the thirties, with the arrival of a considerable number of trained teachers from Eastern Europe and the moves towards greater unity and better organisation in South African Jewish education⁴ that a strong Hebrew Teachers' Association emerged to play its rightful part in the development of Jewish education for several decades.⁵

Early South African Zionism and Jewish Education

The first S A Zionist Conference met in Johannesburg in July 1905, and the 75 delegates also discussed the problems of Jewish education in the country, led by two ministers who ever had this subject at heart - Rabbi Dr Landau of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation and the Rev. Mr I M Cohen of Bulawayo.⁶ L L Goldsmid, editor of the S A Jewish Chronicle,

1. Ibid., 14 April 1916, p 921

2. Ibid., 28 April 1916, p 961

3. Ibid.

4. The two Cape Town Talmud Torahs united in 1920; the United Talmud Torahs of Johannesburg followed a few years later and the S A Board of Jewish Education came into existence in 1928.

5. See Levin, op.cit., pp 195 et seq and pp 217-221 (*passim*).

6. Gitlin, Marcia: The Vision Amazing (Menorah Book Club, Johannesburg, 1950) pp 121-122.

whose attitude towards Zionism was rather ambivalent in contradistinction to his fervid and unremitting commitment to the cause of Jewish education, in an editorial¹ about the conference wrote that the Zionists ought to take a lesson from the Boers insofar as the struggle for their language was concerned. Nationalism needed a national language, but the Zionists did not seem to appreciate the truism that the first prerequisite for the preservation of Jewish nationality was to teach Hebrew to the children.² The writer attacked the class of Zionist who regarded Zionism as a revolt from Judaism: Zionism was old, generations of their ancestors had been very good Zionists before them. The editorial concluded with a call to Zionists to use their influence on behalf of Jewish education.³

In his sermon to delegates on the Sabbath before the conference, Rabbi Dr Landau urged them to conquer the school and the future would belong to them.⁴

The same issue of the paper reported - Goldsmid had clearly been greatly impressed - that at a social function held for delegates a seven-year old boy from the Talmud Torah school welcomed delegates in pure Hebrew and later a teacher from the same institution "spoke ably in the ancient tongue".⁵

At the Zionist Conference, Dr Landau returned to the subject of education. In a city where the Jewish community already numbered over 10 000 souls there was no free school. He called for the establishment of Hebrew schools. Jewish

1. S A Jewish Chronicle, 14 July 1905, p 267

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p 269

5. Ibid.

education was vital to their existence as a nation.¹ The Rev Mr Lawrence of Bloemfontein advocated the Heder system as the method of yielding best results in Hebrew. The Russian melamed, asserted Mr Lawrence, was a better teacher than an English gentleman with his degree. Delegates were in favour of giving more attention to Hebrew education.²

The paper subsequently reported the proceedings of the Executive Meeting of the S A Zionist Federation held on the 20 September 1905 which dealt with the Conference resolutions on Jewish education. These were as follows:³

Every Zionist society was to endeavour to improve the standard of Jewish education in accordance with religion and Judaism and to establish new schools. An education tax was to be levied to establish Hebrew classes and provide grants to further Hebrew education. A small committee was to be set up to draw up a curriculum of instruction in "Hebrew, national songs, and Jewish history", to be sent to affiliated societies which would have it taught in local schools. It was the duty of all Zionists to take an active interest in existing Hebrew schools and Talmud Torahs.⁴

The Executive of the S A Zionist Federation decided that these resolutions could be carried out only gradually, and the first one would be adopted as the umbrella resolution. It did not possess the means to carry out all the rest; instead, it adopted a somewhat petty scheme of a Hebrew correspondence course, at 6d per lesson, on the model of a similar one in America. It was a complicated and impractical scheme about which little more was heard.

1. Gitlin: op.cit., p 123.

2. S A Jewish Chronicle 14 July 1905, p 278

3. Ibid., 20 October 1905, p 655.

4. Ibid.

From the earliest years of the Zionist Movement calls had been made to strengthen Jewish education. The Fifth S A Zionist Conference held at the end of 1912 in Cape Town considered "propositions" urging Zionists to take an active part in Hebrew education and called on the Federation to do likewise and to convene a special Hebrew Educational Conference on Jewish education.¹ This was repeated at the Sixth Conference held in 1916. Noting that Hebrew and religious education of the young in this country was at a very low standard, the Conference called for a National Education Committee to establish a standing Hebrew Education Board.²

A few months later, the Rev. Mr M I Cohen, who was secretary of the commission set up by the Conference to enquire into the question of Jewish education, wrote to the paper inviting suggestions and comments for consideration by his committee to aid it in paving the way for the establishment of a S A Jewish Board of Education which was the concern of the whole community.³ A detailed questionnaire of 42 items⁴ was subsequently sent out by the Education Commission, covering such matters as statistics, attendances, duties of parents, scripture teaching in schools, Heder and private teachers, central Talmud Torahs, problems of country communities, Jewish children in large boarding-schools, Board of Education, continuation classes, central book depot, etc. Information was essential, stressed Mr Cohen, before a report could be drawn up and practical measures taken.⁵

The Seventh S A Zionist Conference met in Cape Town in January 1919, and heard the report of the Investigation

1. Zionist Record, 23 January 1913, p 29

2. S A Jewish Chronicle 5 May 1916, p 989

3. Ibid., 14 July 1916, p 135

4. Ibid., 25 August 1916, pp 251-253

5. Ibid.

Committee under Mr M I Cohen. The Education Commission had found itself unable to meet but the above committee had ascertained the views of the community.¹ It proposed that Jewish hostels be set up to cater for country children, that a S A Board of Jewish Education be established for which purpose a special Education Conference should be convened with the participation of congregations and schools. In addition, the Committee further recommended that pupils should be encouraged to take Hebrew for the Junior Certificate and Matriculation Examinations and that the educational authorities be requested to include Hebrew in the curricula of schools.²

Rabbi Dr J L Landau was chairman of the committee and the Rev. Mr M I Cohen the secretary. It was to mark the beginning of increasing Zionist involvement in Jewish education during the coming decade and, in conjunction with the S A Jewish Board of Deputies, the Zionist Federation was finally to take the initiative in the establishment of the long-hoped for S A Jewish Board of Education.

1. S A Jewish Chronicle 24 January 1919, pp 1231-1232

2. Ibid.

CHAPTER 21: SOME THINKERS AND CRITICS ON THE PHILOSOPHY
OF JEWISH EDUCATION

Amidst all these trials and tribulations of the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of this generation whose principal care was Jewish education during the first decades of the century, there were already people who pondered the problem carefully and recorded their thoughts for us of a later age. Notable amongst them were two ministers, a journalist and two schoolmasters.

The Rev Mr M I Cohen, the English-born minister of the Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation, was a graduate of Jews' College and London University, and an active Zionist, in contrast to the majority of the ministers during the early days.¹ His article entitled "The Problem of Jewish Education in South Africa" appeared in the S A Jewish Chronicle several months after the First Zionist Conference in 1905.² It was a penetrating analysis of the contemporary position as well as a remarkably accurate prognosis of future development.

The preponderance of denominational schools at that time was a passing phase; they would soon be replaced by a national system of public schools, wrote Mr Cohen. Secular education was the duty of the state, Jewish education the duty of the community, and the provision of Jewish education would tax all the community's resources. The function of the Talmud Torah in the Southern African countries was very clear: its purpose was to challenge the non-Jewishness of the environment in which the Jewish community existed.³

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1. Alexander, J: "South African Zionism" in Saron & Hotz, op. cit., p 272
 2. S A Jewish Chronicle, 20 October 1905, pp 645 et seq.
 3. Ibid.

The Talmud Torah should spur the Jewish public schools, by emulation or rivalry, to greater activity in Jewish instruction in order to take Jewish children further in their national studies than the ordinary schools were able to do.¹ By implication Cohen expressed dissatisfaction with the Jewish content of these schools which did not educate more than a mere fraction of Jewish children. If there were other means of inducing strong Jewish feelings in the children, then the argument for such schools largely fell to the ground, continued Mr Cohen.

He noted that in Rhodesia the first half-hour each morning was devoted to religious instruction. Although he agreed that half-an-hour was insufficient for implanting pure knowledge, even this concession might be valuable if it were used to implant, what he termed, a fine national spirit of Jewish idealism based on history and festivals, so that the children might grow progressively more staunch in their adherence to their faith and nation. Here, then, was affective Jewish education, education for attitudes and sentiments as a function of the school.²

Cohen called for a Board of Education which would select teachers and draw up a programme of instruction for all sections. Many children received either no Jewish education whatsoever or an inadequate one; only a small minority received a fair measure of instruction. Good schools and good teachers would attract all Jewish children.³

Cohen regarded the teacher as vital to his "new deal" for Jewish education. The reality was that at that time they were a negative factor. Many men of what he called the old-fashioned type repelled the young, failed to command their respect, giving them a distaste for Jewish studies

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p 647

3. Ibid.

and even something of contempt for the learned and observant Jew. This was the bitter truth which the minister had the courage to record; he was careful not to generalise, nor can he be accused of bias against the old-fashioned melamed.¹ But his was a call for the professional teacher for Jewish education to take the place of the clerical jack-of-all-trades who ministered to the tiny congregations dispersed across the length and breadth of the land. Of all the duties they were called upon to perform for their communities they were least qualified to teach the young. Teachers, wrote Cohen, should be trained and paid proper salaries. There would be no problem in procuring staff for a model Talmud Torah of 1 000 children.²

He advocated a model Talmud Torah to supersede what were to him competing Talmud Torahs and a Jewish Educational Alliance to replace the then existing various school committees, which would be representative of the whole community. A special educational centre should be established, to be the locale for elementary and continuation classes and advanced education. Classes should be carefully limited in size and with the increase of population, the community should plan to open more schools.³

Elementary Jewish education was not enough, continued Cohen.

Watch your children to the threshold of manhood and womanhood.....care of them in their most susceptible period of their life will be commensurate with the success of the next generation in tackling the problems of South African Jewry.⁴

He called for continuation classes till the age of 16 or 17, leading to the confirmation for girls, like Barmitzvah for boys, who had graduated from the Talmud Torah. Both these

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

ceremonies were relatively useless: they should be fully utilised so as to be of real importance in Jewish life. The personality of the instructor for these continuation classes was of prime importance, therefore only rabbis themselves should teach them. They would then exert a direct influence on the potential future leaders of the Jewish community who would be guided and inspired eventually to take responsibility for running the institutions of the community, to become its future teachers and bring trained Jewish knowledge and sympathies to bear on the solution of the community's future problems.

Cohen, en passant, called for English classes for adults to facilitate the process of anglicisation and help remove social and economic handicaps. It was for the Zionists, he stated, to take practical steps to implement these proposals. They should establish Jewish libraries, send lecturers to address the community, stimulate the study of Hebrew, Jewish history and literature, and arrange debates and discussions on Jewish subjects.

The Rev Mr Cohen outlined desirable reforms in Jewish education for young and old which were introduced only many years later. His proposals were far ahead of his day and far removed from the educational reality of South Africa of 1905. Decades were to pass before they were to gain wide acceptance in the community and more time before they were to be put into practice. Much of what he wrote then may be regarded as the philosophical groundwork for the Jewish day school as we know it today, seventy-five years later.

It is difficult to state categorically to what degree Cohen's thinking was a reflection of the thinking of some elements of the leadership in South Africa, or, alternatively, to what extent it was an original advance, stimulated no doubt by the strong Zionist convictions of the author.

There were obvious shortcomings in his thinking. He did not pursue his argument to its logical conclusions. No integrated Jewish day school was advocated. He was on sure ground in giving prime importance to the affective aims in Jewish education, to the central place of the teacher, to co-ordination and planning. To be consistent, he could not speak of a high school as an extension of a Talmud Torah, so he called for continuation classes to the age of 16/17.

A novel idea in Jewish education was his advocacy of adult education. His call for injecting educational content into the largely empty ceremonial of Barmitzvah and confirmation was as outspoken as was his condemnation of the old-fashioned melamed and reverend-teacher. In recognising the great importance of Jewish education at the adolescent stage, the inspirational role of the rabbi, the great value of informal and indirect means of education in the form of libraries, public debates and discussions as an ongoing process of education at the adult level, he was before his time, but he was both impractical and mistaken in advocating what was a supplemental form of education particularly at the adolescent stage. Nor was he realistic enough to appreciate the innate deficiencies of this type of education even at the elementary level. Historical experience was to demonstrate the limitations of the supplemental Talmud Torah to future generations and to lead to the ineluctable conclusion that the most effective form of education for the Jewish cultural/religious minority was the Jewish day school.

A second interesting analysis of Johannesburg Jewish life at the turn of the century was provided by A M Abrahams, the local correspondent, in his "Jottings from South Africa" which appeared in the London Jewish Chronicle in 1904.¹

The correspondent referred to a highly critical letter from a Mr Louis Z Levy on the subject of religious education in

1. Jewish Chronicle, London, 28 October 1904, p 23.

Johannesburg which had appeared in the London Jewish Chronicle a few months previously and had created a far from favourable impression "in the better circles here". Mr Levy had roundly condemned the attitude of the Jewish Chronicle's Johannesburg correspondent for having written in favour of the Hebrew and religion classes organised by Dr Landau for the many Jewish pupils in Catholic schools.¹ The root cause of all the problems, averred Mr Levy, lay in the disunity existing in the Johannesburg Jewish community which consisted of several conflicting parties with the synagogues as the direct headquarters of each particular party. Judaism in Johannesburg would not improve whilst the petty jealousy and all the bickerings existed, "nor will the education disgrace, as it exists here today, become extinct".²

The correspondent admitted to the seriousness of the question which was recognised by all thinking men, but he deplored what he termed the heat and passion of the letter dealing with so delicate an issue.³ The great obstacle was apathy on the part of the parents which, like an immovable dead-weight, crushed every endeavour on the part of the workers.⁴ The efforts of ministers to arouse them from their apathy had been to no avail. Although the majority of Johannesburg Jews would have been seriously concerned had their children assimilated, they were doing nothing to prevent it.

Abrahams deplored the permissiveness of parents towards their children whom they allowed to go their own way. Ministers were not to blame; they did their best in and out of the pulpit, and their words did not altogether fall on deaf ears. There was a feeling of uneasiness in the community that things were not as they should be, but no one had a practical remedy.

1. see Jewish Chronicle, London, 24 June 1904, p 23

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 28 October 1904, p 23

4. Ibid.

He blamed modern society. So deep was the root of the evil that it was just impossible to eradicate the tendency to allow the fullest possible liberty to children, to free them from authority and restraint, and nowhere was this more marked than in Johannesburg. So parents could not control their children when they were faced by their decided will and strong individuality. Their impulses were looked upon as predestined and their actions were accepted with resignation. Attempting to explain the reasons for the widespread indifference to Jewish education, Abrahams wondered whether it was not that the community felt instinctively that the preservation of Judaism in South Africa depended on circumstances beyond their control. So people waited fatalistically and prepared for the worst. He continued with his report without realising that he had now stumbled upon the real cause of the parental indifference.¹

These remarks applied "to children who are thoroughly Englishbrought up in the English language".² But the case was different with children who used Yiddish. From such children, he stated, it might still be possible to build up the Jewish community in South Africa. And the Zionist movement should be the medium for doing so.³ He failed to see how Johannesburg could take the lead in this. The city was "intensely English in tone". Its population was cosmopolitan but there were great assimilative influences on the younger generation and these would doubtless completely anglicise the great majority.

How to combine this British spirit with any considerable measure of Judaism was a problem that was recognised by thinking men as the deepest which faced the Jewish community in the country.⁴ If "full South African citizenship" is

1. See p 228

2. Jewish Chronicle, London, 28 October 1904, p 23

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

substituted for the British spirit we have one of the problems which leaders of Jewish education faced during a later day and age in laying the philosophical basis for the Jewish day school. The apathy of the older anglicised Jew towards Jewish education lay not in their attitude towards their children but in their own attitude towards their Jewishness. He did not state this explicitly, but by implication he deplored their lack of will to survive as Jews. Their laissez-faire attitude to their children was but their external symptom of this. His prognosis that the future of the community would be largely dependent on the Yiddish-speakers was a correct one, as was indeed his analysis that only a synthesis of secular culture and Jewishness could provide a modus vivendi, a way for Judaism to exist in a free society.

The S A Jewish Chronicle placed Jewish education and its problems at the top of its concerns. Its editor-founder, L L Goldsmid, patently conscious of its significance, rarely permitted an educational event or report to pass by without editorial comment, more frequently than not positive and encouraging in tone. Sometimes this was to the point of euphoric, heady optimism - but critical if the occasion called for it. The journal also initiated discussions on some educational subjects and spoke out vigorously on matters of educational moment. The Jewish education of girls was a recurring topic from the earliest years and editorials spoke with considerable feeling deplored, what he termed, the "criminal neglect" of the education of Jewish girls.¹ In 1905 the paper called for a Jewish high school, in view of the fact that the Jewish School was doing excellent work.² On another occasion he wrote:

The decay of Judaism - we mean the Jewish spirit - in English-speaking countries is principally attributed to the want of proper schools.³

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1. S A Jewish Chronicle, 22 May 1903, p 2, and 8 January 1904, p 4
 2. Ibid., 13 October 1905, p 619 and 17 November 1905, p 737
 3. Ibid., 29 June 1906, p 685

In the editor's opinion, a Jewish high school was essential for the existence and strengthening of the Jewish community - without it Judaism in this city would be like a tree without sap, which could produce neither fruit nor flowers.¹

A scheme was adumbrated for secular and religious training²... the latter to consist principally in the teaching of the Hebrew language. Hebrew, according to the editorial, was not the whole of Judaism but an important part of it and should be taught in a day school under proper conditions.

This was the first use of the words day school and the article also provided an interesting account of Goldsmid's conception of the role of Hebrew in such a Jewish school. The Jewish community wanted a high school where Hebrew could be made part of the regular curriculum, where it would be regarded as of equal importance with every other subject and where as much pains and care would be bestowed upon the imparting of it as of any other subject.³ This was only possible in a specifically Jewish school. It would have to maintain high secular standards to justify its existence and be able to compete with other schools of its class. But, wrote the editor, it might be thought that time devoted to compulsory Hebrew would interfere with this object. There was little need to have any fear of that: Jewish intellect would prove itself equal to the extra strain and everything would ultimately depend upon the teachers. He stressed the absolute importance of obtaining the best teachers, especially for Hebrew. To sum up, what was wanted was a good English school where men, qualified to teach Hebrew, would be able to exercise a proper influence.⁴ If he was indeed the author of this analysis, Goldsmid must surely be reckoned amongst those who foresaw the virtual inevitability of the day school as a cultural necessity in the social and cultural milieu of the open society. He accurately

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p 687

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

outlined the rationale for its establishment thirty or forty years before its emergence on South African soil. As for the younger generation which was

not attuned to orations from the pulpit...a more potent force, a keener instrument is needed than the minister and the pulpit, a force to mould the mind whilst it is still plastic....and before it has become estranged from the traditions of its people.¹

This force, opined the editorial, was the teacher; the instrument, the school-room.

The article stressed the need for respect for the teaching profession and appealed to all who had Judaism at heart to take up the teaching profession.²

In 1906 Goldsmid devoted an editorial to the subject of Bible teaching.³ If Bible teaching were to be a reality and not a sham, denominational schools were called for. Jewish children could not have proper Bible instruction in a school where they were an insignificant minority. The editorial made out a case for knowledge of the Bible in the original Hebrew. The language had already "assumed something of a character of a modern and living language".⁴ It differed from Latin and Greek which were dead and did not have to be learnt till the child was older, but Hebrew had to be learned while the child was very young because it was required in the synagogue, the home, and on other occasions.

Another editorial discussed what was and what was not the teaching of Hebrew, referring to what the ordinary boy went through in what was called the Hebrew lesson.⁵ He was taught to read certain passages of the prayer book or

1. Ibid., 10 November 1905, p 715

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 17 August 1906, p 153

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 5 October 1906, p 387

the Bible, punctuating each Hebrew word with an English word corresponding to it in meaning. When he was able to do this fluently, he was supposed to know the translation of the text, generally the Siddur, and to have learned as much Hebrew as he would ever require.¹ There were Bible primers where the words of the text and the corresponding meaning were arranged in descending columns, and the sentences were read downwards, like Chinese.²

The editorial stated that that could not be called the teaching of Hebrew. The pupils understood very little of what was meant by the English which had been substituted for the Hebrew, and they learned neither to speak nor to compose in it, and nor had they any idea what the Hebrew had lost in the translation. The most that could be claimed for this method was that it improved mechanical reading, and even that did not always follow. The editorial called for that method to be replaced by some other systems as follows: the teaching of Hebrew through grammar book and dictionary, for example, Davidson's Grammar.³ This method had been adopted by non-Jewish scholars of the language and its literature. The second was the conversational method, in which connection the article referred to Mr Yellin⁴ who, it stated, was the best-known exponent of spoken Hebrew. The exercises covered the ordinary affairs of daily life. That system had been fostered by the Zionist Movement and was being followed in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Palestine, where it originated.⁵

1. Ibid.

2. Magil's Linear School Bible (Hebrew Publishing Co., New York, 1905)

3. A Hebrew grammar in popular use at the turn of the century.

4. See p 41. David Yellin was one of the pioneers of Hebrew-medium education in Palestine at the turn of the century and a disciple of Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, the Father of modern spoken Hebrew. This was the Ivris B'Ivris system of using Hebrew as the medium of instruction.

5. See pp. 42-43.

The literary method was the time-honoured, traditional method of keeping alive the knowledge of Hebrew, but was hardly to be found outside Russia, Rumania and Galicia. It was based on the study of the Bible and Talmud from childhood days. The Hebrew language was mastered and used for thought and composition. This, claimed the article, was real knowledge of Hebrew.¹ And, concluded the editorial, this was the kind of knowledge which should be possessed in however small a degree by every Jew who wished to be worthy of his heritage and people. The "talmudical grind" of old-world Heder and Yeshiva were, however, out of the question in Western Europe and, asked Goldsmid, could any other system then be devised which was more in keeping with conditions of modern education.

The editor held that Mr Yellin had invented the way² of imparting conversational Hebrew capable of being employed in modern schools, and yet the Jews of England still adhered to their method - "which is no method".³ Goldsmid could not comprehend it, when they had the Yellin System ready at hand to produce vastly better results.⁴ But the editorial concluded with a volte face: conversational Hebrew of Mr Yellin was good, but the desideratum was the power to compose. Until a way of doing that was discovered, perhaps the English Jews were right in not having changed their method.⁵

This was a lucid critique of the system based on a logical analysis of comparative methods of language teaching. The editorial was again forward-looking in accepting Yellin's pioneering work in the revival of modern Hebrew and the introduction to Ivris B'Ivris method of teaching. Having recognised the shortcomings of the existing system, he failed at the very last moment to deliver the coup de grâce, on the

1. S A Jewish Chronicle, 5 October 1906, p 387

2. See p 231 footnote 4

3. S.A. Jewish Chronicle, 5 October 1906, p 387

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

questionable grounds of the new system's inability to teach "the power to compose" in addition to conversational facility. This was a puzzling conclusion. Composition - oral as well as written - was certainly part of Mr Yellin's method in the Hebrew-medium schools. Or was the writer but inadequately acquainted with this system as yet?

Another reasoned editorial dealt with the friction that had developed between the Johannesburg Talmud Torah and the Jewish Government School and their protagonists.¹ Both provided religious instruction during regular school hours. Each was at an experimental stage and the editor stated that he would endeavour to prove that there really was room for both, because each met a definite want. Instead of friction there should have been healthy rivalry. The writer stated that first of all one had to examine the relationship between the secular and religious education to determine which was the principal and which subordinate. The answer to that question differentiated the two institutions. In the Talmud Torah religious education was the principal component. The reverse held for the Jewish School. Religious education, stressed the editorial, included the study of Hebrew, which imparted a Jewish consciousness, whereas secular education taught them to be citizens.² The aim, claimed the editorial, was to blend, harmonise and combine. Opinions might reasonably differ as to the proportions in which the combination was to take place. There was therefore a need for each type of school. Needless to say, the subsidiary branch in each was not to be neglected. Hebrew should not have to struggle for existence in the Jewish School, nor should secular education be similarly placed in the Talmud Torah.

The editorial was encouraging: both schools had managed to tide over the first three years of existence, which was a

1. S A Jewish Chronicle, 18 January 1907, p 47

2. Ibid.

good augury for the future. Each member of the community was at liberty to choose which form of education he desired for his child.¹

Here again Goldsmid stopped short of following his argument to its logical conclusion. If the aim were "to blend, harmonise and combine"², then this operation could not be executed when the two components were so disproportionate and unbalanced as to invite the inevitable overwhelming of the weaker by the stronger. The day school of a later day so balanced the secular and Judaic that a blending and harmonisation was indeed effected. It was too much to expect Goldsmid to have been so far ahead of his time. So far as is known to the present writer, he was not a teacher, but his shrewd observations on the educational scene of his day certainly make him a notable, pioneering thinker in the story of the development of Jewish education in this country. It is impossible to ascertain whether Goldsmid - if indeed he was the author of these editorials in his paper - actually led the thinking on these educational matters or was the medium for expressing others' opinions. What he did say in the columns of his journal during those early years constitutes much that is relevant to the underlying philosophy of the Jewish day school of the second half of this century.

Throughout his long and distinguished ministry to the Jewish community of Johannesburg and, indeed, of other centres and other provinces, Rabbi Dr Judah Leo Landau remained intimately and constantly concerned with Jewish education on the Rand and in the country. The range of his activities in this field was as wide as it was varied: his endeavours were tireless, his many initiatives were notable; he encouraged, prodded, complained, reproved and even denounced where necessary.³

1. Ibid.,

2. Ibid.

3. He expressed his opinions in sermons, at Zionist Conferences, in his reports to his Congregation and on other occasions: see Chapters

Rabbi Landau was behind all educational activities on the Rand for many years. Fearlessly expressing his disappointments at errors of omission and acts of commission when these deserved disapproval, he stimulated Zionist thinking and action on Hebrew education, personally examined the schools and classes, and identified with all endeavours to promote the cause of Jewish education. In education, at least, there was a good measure of co-operation with Rabbi Dr Joseph Hertz during the seven or eight years that they both ministered to the main congregations, but after the latter's departure for America in 1911, Rabbi Landau remained the champion of Jewish education and the central figure in the developments that took place in the inter-war period.¹

David Mierowsky (1888-1949), principal of the Oudtshoorn Hebrew School until 1918, surveyed the problems of Jewish education in his article entitled: "Premeditations to the Fifth Zionist Conference" which appeared in the Zionist Record in July 1912.² The national and spiritual training of the Jewish youth, wrote Mierowsky, was of prime concern to Zionists who held with Theodor Herzl that "Zionism is a return to Judaism even before a return to the Jewish State".³

Mierowsky was critical to the point of despondency as he described what he termed the chaotic disorder and confusion of the Jewish educational scene. Anyone who maintained that he was a Hebrew teacher was readily accepted as such by those in charge of Hebrew schools who were quite incapable of discerning - or unwilling to do so - who was or was not qualified. The lack of trained teachers was "the greatest evil of the deplorable plight of our Hebrew education".⁴

1. See Chapters 18, 19, 28 and 29.

2. Zionist Record, 15 July 1912, pp 9-11.

3. Herzl, T: "Opening Address at First Zionist Congress" in Kol Kitve Theodor Herzl (Hebrew: Collected Works of Theodor Herzl) Book II, pp 39-40. Translated by M Berkowitz (Ahiassaf, Warsaw, 1922).

4. Zionist Record, 15 July 1912, pp 9-11.

The movement to reform Jewish educational institutions was a concomitant of the Jewish national renaissance. The Heder Hametukan¹ had brought in many changes during the previous fifteen years, most notably the introduction of what Mierowsky termed "the natural method" of Ivris B'Ivris. Yet, in spite of the modern pedagogics of the Heder Hametukan much of the old system remained, for the reforms were hardly universal. The Hebrew melamed was still largely in control. "The half-educated undisciplined batlon"², was the contemptuous summing-up by Mierowsky, doubtlessly alluding to what he had seen in many of the South African Hedarim.

In the second part of his "Preliminaries" Mierowsky decried the type of Hebrew education in the western countries and British colonies.³ In these places the position was very bad. What people regarded as a thorough Hebrew training consisted of mechanical reading and translation of some prayers recited parrot-wise. Bible knowledge was a scholarly acquisition, he remarked derisively.⁴

The main cause of failure, he stressed, lay in the lack of trained Hebrew teachers. Those in the profession, he added scathingly, were mostly unemployed worthless young men who drew information from advertisements of educational books and from one or two text books.⁵ Devoid of any knowledge of the method of instruction, they imparted their teachings either in broken, unintelligible English or in what they called Hebrew, which was, indeed, no more Hebrew than Chinese. This travesty of education only planted dislike and contempt for all Hebrew learning in the heart of the young. There was no sympathetic intercourse between master and pupil - only threat and punishment.⁶

1. Hebrew: The Reformed School: see pp 42-43

2. Batlon: Hebrew: Unworldly person or, in a more disparaging sense, one who is useless and impractical. Here used as a combination of both.

3. Zionist Record, 11 August 1912, pp 18-19

4. Ibid. 5. Ibid. 6. Ibid.

Was it any surprise, therefore, if the results of Hebrew schooling were so meagre? How different was the position in the government school, added Mierowsky enviously. The teacher who had to instruct beginners in the mother tongue had undergone three years' training and had at hand elaborate methods, framed curricula and educational auxiliaries.¹

In contrast to all this, the Hebrew teacher had to teach a language which was strange to the children, with severely limited time at his disposal.

We have no established ways.....there are no curricula and we have to entrust our national education to anyone who offers his services and has very likely been a failure in everything else.²

The Froebellian doctrine³ was that teachers, no less than doctors, had to go through a course of professional training, a basic truth of which those who were in charge of the community's Hebrew schools and Talmud Torahs were ignorant. No wonder then, added Mierowsky sadly, that the schools presented a miserable and piteous appearance.⁴

Mierowsky called for a move to train a vigorous army of schoolmasters, conscious of their high and noble duty. It was a call for the spirit which actuated the pioneer student-teachers of the Grodno Hebrew Seminary which Alexander Levin⁵ had attended five years previously. Mierowsky himself was to effect much of all this in his own school, in the Port Elizabeth Talmud Torah, to which

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Froebel, Friedrich Wilhelm (1782-1852): German educationist and founder of Kindergarten system of education.

4. Zionist Record, 11 August 1912, p 19.

5. Principal of the Cape Town United Hebrew Schools (1929-1944): See Chapter 27.

he moved in 1918 and, a decade later, in much wider spheres, when he was appointed Organiser-Secretary, and then Director, of the South African Board of Jewish Education, and subsequently Director of the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg.²

1. The S A Jewish Year Book 1929: op.cit., p 119.

2. See Report and Balance Sheet of the S A Jewish Board of Education (1933-1935) submitted to the Fourth Biennial Conference, Johannesburg, 15 March 1936, p 2.

CHAPTER 22: JEWISH EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOME OF THE MAIN CENTRES OF SOUTH AFRICA

PRETORIA

Mr Samuel Marks built and equipped the Jewish School in Pretoria in 1905, naming it the Miriam Marks School after his wife. Rabbi Dr J L Landau and Mr A M Abrahams, Headmaster of the Johannesburg Jewish Government School, examined the pupils towards the end of that year, only some eight months after its establishment and were very satisfied.¹ The Rev Mr M Rosenberg, Minister to the Congregation, assisted by two teachers, was in charge of Jewish studies. An interesting point in the examiners' report is the allusion to the "Yellin System"² used in the school: the Ivris B'Ivris method must have been in use, if not throughout the school, then in some sections of the work.

A "Report from Pretoria"³ some time later mentioned that the children at the Miriam Marks School received their Hebrew after school hours, and as a result progress was disappointing. There was a move to teach it during school hours, which would create the problem of replacing gentile staff. At about this time there were 220 children in elementary Hebrew and secular elementary education.⁴

At the prize distribution ceremony in 1907,⁵ reference was made to the supervision by the Education Department over the

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1. Jewish Chronicle, London, ("Jottings from South Africa") 3 November 1905, p 26.
 2. See pages 41-43.
 3. S A Jewish Chronicle, 26 April 1907, p 431
 4. Sowden, D L: "Transvaal Jewry 1902-1910" in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 218
 5. S A Jewish Chronicle, 9 August 1907, p 115

secular education at the school and the inspection by the Government Inspectors. Secular education "could look after itself", the Rev Mr Rosenberg said, but he added that there was an "evident deterioration of present-day Hebrew tuition" and he made an appeal to parents to rectify this.¹

The position in regard to Hebrew instruction as it was developing in the Jewish Government School in Johannesburg was evidently manifesting itself in the Miriam Marks School in Pretoria - Hebrew and religious studies were being relegated to a position of lesser importance by the emphasis on the secular instruction, which was the main concern of the School. This is borne out by a letter over the name of J Manfried published a few months later² in which the writer charged that Hebrew was being neglected at the Miriam Marks School. He laid the blame for this unsatisfactory position on the unqualified Jewish teachers and the committee.

In an issue of the S A Jewish Chronicle in 1909, a correspondent from Pretoria wrote: "a homaeopathic dose of knowledge administered by our teachers (at the Miriam Marks School) is not sufficient to mark our youth with a religious label".³

A letter from the pen of a Mr A Rabinowitz, who was a member of the Miriam Marks Hebrew School Board, constitutes a more telling charge by virtue of the factual details it provided.⁴ He drew attention to what he termed the grave position of the Hebrew and religion classes owing largely to a lack of funds. There was a danger of closing them down. Instead of the classes being their pride and a model, their closure would be an everlasting stain on the good name of the Pretoria Jewish community. After this introduction, Mr Rabinowitz proceeded

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., 11 October 1907, p 299

3. Ibid., 10 September 1909, p 30

4. Ibid., 5 November 1909, p 184

to give interesting historical background facts pertaining to the school.

Not satisfied with the Hebrew and religious education available for their children, some members of the Pretoria community had decided to establish a school on a sound foundation. Mr Marks built the school for £5 000 as "one of the best in Pretoria".¹ The Education Department took over the secular side of the school and provided the teachers. Hebrew education was vested in the committee of parents, Mr Marks covering most of the costs here (£27.10 out of £35). Two years previously this responsibility had been transferred to the Pretoria Congregation when Mr Marks reduced his contribution to less than one half, viz. £10 per month.²

Mr Rabinowitz charged the Congregation with indifference to the cause of Hebrew education. A Ladies' Talmud Torah Committee had been formed and had done its best, but a considerable deficit had meanwhile accumulated and the correspondent reported that there was an outrageous proposal to close the Hebrew classes. He called on the Community to reconsider this seriously,³ for it would be an effectual blow to its future existence.

And again one hears the argument which champions of Jewish education advance as incontrovertible: if the children are not brought up as Jews

we will not have any need neither of a congregation nor of a synagogue....because there will be no one to attend the services.

Our Law allows us to sell a synagogue for the purpose of building a school. Whilst we are spending over £1 000 per annum on the synagogue and its ministers....when we ask for a paltry £60 for Hebrew tuition they say there are no funds.⁴

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

He concluded with an impassioned plea for ways to be found to keep up the only institution that could implant and nourish Jewish feelings in their children.¹

DURBAN

A report of the prize distribution to pupils of the Durban Hebrew and religious classes² appeared in the S A Jewish Chronicle at the beginning of 1908, on which occasion the Rev Mr A Levy noted the good progress made. Classes were larger and attendances more regular. The senior division had exhaustively studied the Book of Genesis in Hebrew and English and could, with previous notice, correctly intone any of the Haftorahs.³ Councillor Hollander had examined the children and their knowledge had more than come up to his expectations. The councillor stated that a Jewish day school would be considered after the depression.⁴

A report of a similar function some years later⁵ revealed that the daily attendance had dropped from 35 to 26 as a result of the alteration of government school hours.⁶ The head teacher was glad to say that nearly every child could read Hebrew.

A meeting was held "to establish an independent and self-supporting Talmud Torah school" for the whole of the Durban community.⁷ The synagogues had their own Talmud Torahs but this move, inspired no doubt by the Durban New Hebrew

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., 7 February 1908, p 317

3. Haftorah: Extract from the Prophets intoned at the end of Torah reading on Sabbaths and Festivals.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 1 December 1911, p 1006.

6. There were approximately 1 500 Jewish souls in Natal in 1911 according to the census for that year: see Saron & Hotz, op. cit, p 372. Durban had approximately 1 100 in 1919, (S A Jewish Chronicle, 9 May 1919, p 4149)

7. S A Jewish Chronicle, 27 December 1912, pp 418 and 423.

Congregation which asserted the traditional orthodox emphasis on education,¹ was intended to serve the whole community and hopefully attract more children, especially girls, only some 12 of whom in Durban were receiving a Jewish education.²

The institution was established, in spite of the opposition on the part of those who wanted to retain the synagogue schools and by some who said it would deprive private teachers of their livelihood.³ An appeal was made to parents to send their children to the Talmud Torah and not wait till before Barmitzvah. Another deplorable aspect of the supplementary school, not confined to Durban, was the unsatisfactory attendance. "It is no use", said the report, "attending once a week".⁴ There were three teachers at the school. By this time a split had occurred in the community. The Durban New Hebrew Congregation which had a more orthodox orientation had been established in 1909 and opened its own Talmud Torah a little later.⁵

A proper Talmud Torah, similar to the one in Johannesburg, was opened in 1914, with Mr M Jacobson of Liverpool as headmaster.⁶ The prizegiving report a year or two later,⁷ mentioned discouraging support given by Jewish parents, and the position was no better in 1918 when the

1. Cohen, S J: op.cit., pp 247-249.

2. Ibid. See also S A Jewish Chronicle, 27 December 1912, p 423, for a detailed report.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. S A Jewish Chronicle, 13 February 1914, p 294

7. Ibid., 4 February 1916, p 709

Durban correspondent reported that the majority of the Durban parents did not send their children to Hebrew classes.¹ In fact, the daily average attendance was 47.² There were recurring reports of dissatisfaction with the Talmud Torah. The report for 1919 spoke of the parrot-like repetition of the Parsha.³

There was again a call for a day school. The independent committee of the Durban Hebrew School, beset by financial problems, poor parental support and criticism of its achievements met for the last time in February 1920, when the school "was dissolved as an entity" and the responsibility assumed by the Durban Hebrew Congregation.⁴

PORT ELIZABETH

There is a report of an examination of pupils of the Port Elizabeth Hebrew classes taught by the Rev Mr Hilkowitz which was held in September 1908.⁵ It provides an interesting picture of what took place in those days and what the pupils of Port Elizabeth learned at Hebrew classes. There were three examiners, and the examination was a public affair, in the presence of the committees of the Hebrew Congregation and the Zionist Society and of the parents.

The examiners declared themselves highly delighted with the progress made within a space of three months. The subjects

1. Ibid., 4 January 1918, p 13.
2. Ibid., 21 June 1918, p 585
3. Bible portion chanted by Barmitzvah boy.
4. S A Jewish Chronicle, 5 March 1920, p 25.
5. Ibid., 9 October 1908, p 181.

taught were Hebrew readings, Bible and prayer translation, grammar, spelling, reading the Torah (viz. Haftorah), singing and Jewish history. It was a wide enough range but no indication is unfortunately given of the depth of the studies.

The phenomenon of the inevitable social and cultural polarisation within the Jewish communities of the urban centres was manifested in the establishment of an orthodox congregation in Port Elizabeth. A synagogue was in time erected and consecrated in 1912 by Rabbi Dr J L Landau of Johannesburg. As in other centres, the immigrant sections were also dissatisfied with the inadequate Jewish education provided by the older-established congregations and took the lead in establishing Talmud Torahs to give more comprehensive instruction in Hebrew and religious knowledge. As in Durban, so in Port Elizabeth they gave the impetus for the establishment of Hebrew schools for the whole community. The Port Elizabeth Hebrew School was established in 1918 by a band of voluntary workers representing all sections of the community on the initiative of Mr A Schauder who became its chairman.¹

For years prior to this date the need to establish such a united communal institution had been widely felt but steps taken to effect it were without result.² By 1917 the community had grown to such an extent that the need for a properly organised, united institution for Jewish instruction was recognised and a number of public meetings were held for this purpose with Adolf Schauder as its moving spirit.³ The school was housed in temporary premises in the Central Public School with the well-known educationist, Mr David Mierowsky, former principal of the Oudtshoorn Hebrew School

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1. "The Port Elizabeth Hebrew School" in: The Story of the United Hebrew Institutions of Port Elizabeth: op.cit..
 2. Schauder, H: "The History of Jewry in Port Elizabeth" in The South African Jewish Year Book 1929. op.cit., p 119
 3. Ibid.

as headmaster.

Dr J L Landau opened the school on 21 July 1918. The occasion was a turning point in the Jewish communal life of the city and it was the first time that all sections of both communities rallied round one purpose.¹

Shortly thereafter a school building and a hall were acquired, and in time the school in Port Elizabeth, under David Mierowsky, built up a good reputation as one of the leading Talmud Torahs in the country.

OUDTSHOORN

The history of the Oudtshoorn Hebrew Public School, the only one in the Cape Colony besides Hope Mill in Cape Town, goes back to mid-1903 when Councillor M Aschman of Oudtshoorn came to Cape Town to interview the Superintendent-General of Education, Dr T Muir, on the subject of starting a Jewish school in the town.² The proposal was accepted and financial aid granted. The community possessed suitable buildings and grounds and would itself also undertake part responsibility for the upkeep of the school. The paradigm was, of course, Hope Mill. The chief aim of the movers in the matter was, according to Councillor Aschman, to provide a good education for Jewish children and more particularly in Hebrew and religious knowledge.³

The first pupil was enrolled on 16 May 1904⁴ and the Oudtshoorn Hebrew School became the third such Jewish day

1. Ibid.

2. S A Jewish Chronicle, 10 July 1903, p 14

3. Ibid.

4. Aschman, G: "Oudtshoorn in the Early Days" in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 128

school in South Africa, together with the Jewish Government School in Johannesburg and Hope Mill in Cape Town.¹ It was destined to outlive its Cape contemporary by two decades, and retained its Jewish character after the Johannesburg school had virtually lost its own. Mr I Abrahams, brother of Mr A M Abrahams, head of the Jewish School in Johannesburg, was the first principal.

A year later there was a report that the Rev Mr Menkin had been engaged as an additional Hebrew teacher, to give seven hours of instruction a week, presumably in addition to his ministerial duties.² The correspondent noted that the school was not as yet receiving overwhelming support from the community. Many still held to the Heder system, which he did not favour. A former resident of Oudtshoorn who grew up in the town just before World War One informed the writer that he and others actually attended both the Jewish School as well as the afternoon Heder classes.³

A report from Oudtshoorn carried in an issue of the S A Jewish Chronicle in 1906⁴ recorded that the Oudtshoorn Hebrew Public School, by then some 20 months in existence, had been examined by the Government Inspector in December 1905. It had done excellent work. The school now went up to Standard IV and two periods a day were allocated to Hebrew and religious instruction.⁵

The School came in time to be controlled by the Municipal School Board;⁶ the translation method was used, as may be

1. The Barberton school was by then no longer in existence.
2. S A Jewish Chronicle, 29 September 1905, p 579
3. Dr A E Davis of Cape Town: in an interview with the writer in Sea Point, Cape Town on 24 December 1978.
4. S A Jewish Chronicle, 26 January 1906, pp 66-67
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 17 May 1918, p 491; see also Zionist Record 8 April 1925 p 7.

seen from an advertisement of a vacancy for a teacher of Hebrew to teach through the medium of English,¹ probably to replace the principal, Mr D Mierowsky, who had been appointed head of the newly-established Hebrew School in Port Elizabeth.

1. Ibid.

CHAPTER 23: HEBREW IN THE SECULAR SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIESHebrew as a Subject for the Matriculation Examination

Hebrew was recognised as a matriculation subject in 1911 by the University of the Cape of Good Hope. The S A Jewish Chronicle congratulated Mr I Levinson¹ who had originated the idea of a petition to be presented to the University urging the inclusion of Hebrew as a matriculation subject, to which the authorities had acceded.² The paper hailed this as a major achievement which would serve as an incentive to the study and use of Hebrew in this country.³ This was to prove of great importance in later years when the Jewish high schools were established and Hebrew formed one of the subjects recognised by the educational authorities for the purposes of admission to university. There were somewhat negative developments in this connection in later times, attention to which will be drawn later. It is of interest that there are countries in Europe at present where this position has not yet been reached.⁴

The editor returned to the subject in a prominently placed article headed "The Hebrew Renascence in South Africa" which is virtually a panegyric on the great achievement of the placing of Hebrew on the same footing as Latin and Greek in schools and the university, which would result in the survival of the sacred tongue.⁵ Seen in the perspective of history, this was a notable achievement. Latin and Greek still reigned supreme over the curriculum and to be

1. See p 162.

2. S A Jewish Chronicle, 21 July 1911, p 686

3. Ibid.

4. Belgium and Holland are instances known to the writer.

5. S A Jewish Chronicle, 3 November 1911, p 937

compared with them was to achieve real academic status. Perhaps the inclusion of the subject in the matriculation examination was no mean recognition of its status. In retrospect, it was a necessary condition for the establishment and development of the Jewish high school later in the century.

The Rev Mr Bender had taken up the matter and had presented the petition in Cape Town and telegraphed the Chronicle that Hebrew "may already be offered this year".¹

Hebrew in Government Schools

Goldsmid, who resumed the editorship of the S A Jewish Chronicle in mid-1912, after a break of two-and-a-half years, initiated a petition in the paper to request the Director of Education for the Transvaal to permit the teaching of Hebrew in government secondary schools and colleges.² The community should take advantage of the new status afforded Hebrew by the recent agreement of Cape University to introduce it as an optional subject for matriculation. Goldsmid pressed the petition issue vigorously in the columns of his paper. It was a great thing that they were striving for, he wrote, and if achieved would be to the great future advantage of the whole Jewish community of South Africa.³

The same issue⁴ carried a letter from Rabbi Dr Landau in which he referred to his endeavours a number of years previously in regard to the teaching of Hebrew during school

1. Ibid., 7 June 1912, p 318

2. Ibid., 28 June 1912, p 352

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

hours. The authorities had been favourably disposed towards the idea, but it had aroused opposition within the Jewish community. Except for the Market Street School, where these classes were still being continued, classes in other schools had been abandoned. He had had to struggle not only against indifference but also against undisguised hostility, a clear enough reference to the public conflict with Dr Hertz.¹

The idea of Hebrew classes in government schools again came to the fore, continued the Rabbi, in view of the fact that the Cape University had admitted Hebrew, otherwise the concession granted would be of little use. Appealing for vigorous action to induce the Transvaal education authorities to meet the wishes of the Jewish community, he added, significantly, that such classes would in no way interfere with existing Talmud Torahs. These would still have an important role to play, especially in the education of those children who wished to receive what he termed a thorough grounding in Hebrew. It would appear that Rabbi Landau set quite limited aims for these Hebrew classes in government schools; or was he endeavouring to disarm the opposition to his proposals which emanated from the Talmud Torah supporters?

The petition was printed in the paper and Goldsmid defended it against the attacks that it reflected discreditably on existing institutions and private teachers.² The Johannesburg community, controversy-prone as usual, now found a new bone of contention in the petition. The opposition to Goldsmid's initiative came from the suburban Talmud Torahs in Jeppestown, Fordsburg and Ophirton and from private Hebrew teachers who feared that they would lose pupils if Hebrew were introduced into government schools, a step

1. Ibid.

2. S A Jewish Chronicle, 5 July 1912, pp 2-3

that, they charged, would undermine the Jewish educational system in South Africa.¹

Goldsmid decided to hold the petition in abeyance in the face of this opposition until the responsible leaders of the community could decide on an agreed course of action. He did not wish to drive a wedge into the community and create two camps. The Beth Hamedrash representatives at a gathering called to discuss the matter were strongly opposed to it, whereas those of the other synagogues were in favour. Rabbi Landau and Mr Levinson were also strongly in favour and there was danger of a counter-petition.²

Criticism of the matriculation Hebrew syllabus of the University of the Cape of Good Hope³ was publicly expressed by Mr D Mierowsky of the Oudtshoorn Hebrew Public School.⁴ In his letters to the Chronicle and the Zionist Record he asked why it was restricted to Biblical Hebrew. He assumed that the learned professors had heard of Mishnaic, mediaeval and modern Hebrew. Modern Hebrew had grown by eclecticism from all preceding styles and comprised within itself the treasures of all former ages.⁵ It was a shock to see the Liber Librorum used as a mere text book. And why did the syllabus insist on the use of the square script when all now

1. Ibid., 15 November 1912, pp 318-319

2. Ibid.

3. The Zionist Record (15 May 1912, p 4) printed the following syllabus for Hebrew for the Matriculation Examination set by the University of the Cape of Good Hope:

Section A: Grammatical questions (115 marks)

Section B: a) Translation into English of some detached sentences of two or more continuous passages

b) Translation from English of some detached sentences and of a very simple continuous prose passage. (185 marks).

4. Zionist Record, 15 October 1912, p 37

5. S A Jewish Chronicle, 10 September 1912, pp 180-181

used the cursive script?

The Rev Mr Bender informed Mr Goldsmid that as from 1914 candidates for the Junior Certificate examination of the University of the Cape of Good Hope would also be able to offer Hebrew as one of their subjects.¹

The report of the examiners in Hebrew in the recent Matriculation Examination was reported in the Chronicle in May 1914.²

Bible translation (from English to Hebrew) lacked accuracy in grammar; the pointing of Hebrew requires great care and....the dagesh³ is sometimes left out in the hurry of writingand the shin is often written as sin⁴

This report speaks eloquently for itself. Hebrew was in 1913 very far from a living language. There was the old emphasis on the punctilios of grammar. It would appear that news of the Hebrew revival had not as yet reached the ears of the persons responsible for drawing up the syllabus of matriculation Hebrew in South Africa.

In Cape Town Hebrew classes were started at S A College High School in 1917. The Rev Mr S H Michelson was the tutor to about 70 pupils.⁵

The University of Cape Town came into being on 24 March 1918. Mr Bender continued to occupy the chair of Hebrew which had been established in the mid-nineties at the then S A College. This had been effected largely as a result of the efforts of

1. Ibid. 16 May 1913, p 317

2. Ibid., 8 May 1914, p 499

3. Dagesh: Hebrew: A dot inserted inside certain consonants in Hebrew to harden them or to indicate that the letter should be repeated in pronouncing the word. Really a finer point in Hebrew grammar.

4. A dot placed on top of the left or right arm of the same letter indicates the respective 'sh' or 's' sounds.

5. S A Jewish Chronicle, 11 May 1917, p 329

the Rev Mr Rabinowitz who had himself contributed towards the original endowment, as had Mr Marks.

Rabbi Dr J L Landau was appointed to the chair of Hebrew at the South African School of Mines and Technology (the University College of Johannesburg) in 1919, later to become the University of the Witwatersrand.¹

When the Provincial Education Departments were granted the right by the Joint Matriculation Board to set their own school-leaving examinations in the early twenties,² both the Transvaal and the Cape withheld their recognition of Hebrew as one of the subjects which could be offered by candidates.³

The Port Elizabeth Jewish community took the initiative in an endeavour to rectify this position. A deputation consisting of Messrs A Gumpert, M P C; D Mierowsky and A Schauder interceded with the then Superintendent-General of Education of the Cape, Dr Viljoen, who acceded to their request for the recognition of Hebrew as one of the subjects for the Cape Senior Certificate Examination.⁴

In the Transvaal, the S A Board of Jewish Deputies and Rabbi W Hirsch of Pretoria made representations to the educational authorities, who also recognised Hebrew as a subject that could be offered for the Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination of that Province.⁵

1. Zionist Record, 18 June 1919 p 2.

2. Malherbe: op.cit., Vol II, p 245.

3. The University of the Cape of Good Hope had recognised Hebrew in 1911. See p 249

4. The South African Jewish Year Book 1929, op.cit., p 121.

5. Zionist Record, 22 May 1925, p 25.

P A R T S I X

BETWEEN THE
WORLD WARS

CHAPTER 24: THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND ITS AFTERMATHThe Devastation of War in Eastern Europe

The eastern front during World War I moved back and forth across the regions of densest Jewish population - Poland, White Russia, Galicia and Rumania. The Baltic States, too, witnessed the clash of armies and suffered the devastation and ravages of war and of deportation. Fortunately, they were spared the terrible pogroms, the violence and the destitution that overwhelmed the Jews of the other regions, especially the Ukraine and Poland, during and immediately after the war years.¹

When the years of turmoil, civil strife and disorder ended, more than half of the five million and more Jewish former subjects of the Czar were citizens of the new states carved out of his empire,² the vast majority being in Poland. Here, as in the other of the successor states, the various national minorities - Jews included - were guaranteed equality of rights and the recognition of their cultural and ethnic autonomy in the "minority clauses" written into the peace treaties.³

In Lithuania the government actually established a Ministry of Jewish Affairs⁴ and the Jewish National Council pronounced optimistically and hopefully that

(this is) an era when we are not merely silent witnesses to the restoration of the other nations but we are participants in our own renascence.⁵

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1. Roth, C: A History of the Jews (Schocken Books, New York: 1974) pp 364 et seq.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Dawidowicz, L: The Golden Tradition (Vallentine Mitchell, London: 1967) p 76
 4. Ibid.
 5. "Report of the Jewish National Council, Kovno 1922", cited in Dawidowicz, op.cit., p 76.

These hopes were shortlived and in the reaction that followed both council and ministry were abolished and discrimination - civic and economic - again reared its head. In Latvia, too, dictatorship introduced a reaction during which Jewish rights were restricted.¹

Politically and socially insecure, impoverished by the war and economically depressed and restricted, Jewish immigration resumed after the termination of hostilities. Once again they moved away from the area of the "antisemitism of men and of things"², to look for better opportunities in other places where they would find freedom from discrimination and be granted the possibility of enjoying social and economic equality.

Immigration to South Africa from Lithuania resumed. Older immigrants remembered their relatives in the now independent Lithuania, heard of their difficulties, and brought them over.³ From 1 353 Jewish immigrants in 1925 the number rose to 2 788 in 1929, falling to 1 881 in the following year when the Immigration Quota Act came into force.⁴ By 1933 the figure had dropped to 446.⁵

Relative to the total Jewish population, the post-war Jewish immigration was significant in numbers. In 1911 the census gave the Jewish population as 46 926 out of a total white population of 1 276 242.⁶ During the four decades after 1912 about 30 000 Jews came into the country, compared to 40 000 who had immigrated during the course of the three

1. Ibid., op.cit., p 76

2. See p 14.

3. "Opnemen" - Yiddish phrase used then (to take or bring over).

4. Saron, G: "Epilogue 1910-1955" in Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 378

5. Ibid., p 379

6. Ibid., p 372

preceding decades.¹

This meant more than a strengthening of the South African Jewish community merely in terms of numbers. More important was the accretion in strength in terms of culture and Jewish commitment. The post-war Jewish immigrants, in the wake of the war, had themselves been influenced by the Jewish cultural revival in Eastern Europe. The Lithuanian shtetels and towns had been rapidly and deeply affected by the Hebrew-Zionist renaissance movement. Every one of them had its Hebrew school, be it Heder Hametukan or the modern Hebrew-medium gymnasium established by the Tarbut network. A large part of the youth was Hebrew-speaking. Many of the immigrants from Latvia and Lithuania had imbibed the new spirit in the Hebrew-medium schools. Idealistic elements among them entered the teaching profession in which they felt they could best find concrete expression for their national ideals.

For Jewish education in this country this meant an important infusion of new manpower, almost all trained and qualified, and a strong reinforcement of ideas and spiritual commitment, which had a profound bearing on the course of Jewish education in South Africa during subsequent years.

Alexander Chaim Levin: Principal of the Cape Town Talmud Torah: Founder-Headmaster of Herzlia School: 1929-1945

One of these men was A C Levin. His life and professional career exemplify this historical era for the Jewish people of the western provinces of the Czarist empire as well as some of the educational phenomena of those times.

1. Ibid., p 377

After studying in a Yeshiva, in 1907 he enrolled at the teachers' seminary in Grodno, near the border between Lithuania and Poland.¹ This was the first such college in that part of the world using Hebrew as a medium of instruction. Before the war he taught in various Hebrew schools which were being established at that time. Under the influence of the growing Zionist movement and the spread of Hebrew as a spoken tongue, especially as a result of the language revival in Palestine, individual laymen of influence in the community took the initiative in establishing modern Hebrew schools. They wished to remove Jewish education from its narrow confines of Heder and tradition, to modernise its methods and content, deepen and widen its scope, and place it in the hands of professionally trained and dedicated teachers. In some places there was a communal endeavour to bring about these reforms.²

In Vilna, a Jewish gymnasium was established before the outbreak of the First World War as the result of the initiative of a well-known communal leader, Pavel Isakowitz Kagan.³ Secular subjects were taught in Russian whilst Hebrew and cognate studies, to which a portion of the day was devoted, were taught by the "natural method", or Ivris B'Ivris. This high school established a fine reputation, attracting interested visitors and students from other towns and stimulating the establishment of similar schools in a number of other places. Alexander Levin was on the Hebrew staff of this modern school.⁴

The Vilna Hebrew Gymnasium of the pre-1914 years could well have been the prototype for the Jewish day school that Alexander Levin established in Cape Town after his arrival here fifteen and more years later. Levin did not know

1. Levin, Alexander: BeMa'agloth HaHinuch (In the Pathways of Education) Hebrew: (Histadrut Ivrit, Johannesburg, 1954) pp 91 et seq.

2. Ibid., pp 123-124

3. Ibid., p 123

4. Ibid., p 125

Hope Mill School personally, for it had long been out of existence by the time he arrived in Cape Town in 1929, though he must have known Mark Cohen, who died in 1933. He may possibly have learned about the Hebrew High School in Johannesburg during his stay there for part of 1928, but his two attempts to establish a Jewish day school in Cape Town - the short-lived one in 1930 and then the firm beginnings in 1940 - were assuredly actuated directly by his personal experience at the Vilna Hebrew Gymnasium of 1909.

In general terms the curricula of both institutions are, mutatis mutandis, identical, as this extract will indicate:

.....in those days there was established in Vilna a special gymnasium for Jewish pupils according to the complete curriculum of the (Russian) government middle school with the addition of a Jewish-national programme of studies including our language (Hebrew), our literature and history.¹

Here was the contemporary external factor acting directly on the development of Jewish education in South Africa. In itself, of course, Vilna was influenced by the Hebrew renaissance in Palestine where the first Hebrew gymnasium in modern times - Herzlia - was established in 1906 in what was then a suburb of Jaffa.

It should be pointed out that the ideal of the Hebrew-Zionist renewal was hardly universally accepted in the cities and towns of Eastern Europe of those days. Side-by-side with the Hebrew educationists, the educational pioneers of the Grodno Hebrew Teachers' Seminary, were the sections of the urbanised Jewish population who were largely removed from their Jewish commitment and were completely Russified or Polonised. On the other hand, there were the Yiddish

1. Ibid., p 123

cultural leaders who, with the support of the Bund¹, established Yiddish schools which were largely apathetic, and even hostile, to the Hebrew-Zionist concepts.

Alexander Levin had himself experienced and witnessed the havoc and ravages of war. When the Jewish communities of parts of Poland and Lithuania were deported into central Russia by the Czarist authorities, he and his young family were also arbitrarily uprooted and sent off on their wanderings to return after many trials to Vilna only in 1918. The city was changing hands in bewildering succession as Poles, Lithuanians, Germans and Bolsheviks advanced and retreated across the region. It was a city plunged into poverty and pessimism, its life disrupted, its wealth systematically plundered or destroyed, its future uncertain.²

Levin found that a Hebrew gymnasium named after Dr Joseph Epstein was in existence in the city. This man had arrived in Vilna during the German occupation and had then established the gymnasium after much effort and with limited means.³

It was a successful institution. He was the actual founder of the Tarbut (culture) movement in Vilna from where it spread to Lithuania and as far as Warsaw. Dr Epstein died before seeing the full fruits of his educational labours. The Hebrew Gymnasium and the Tarbut Elementary School were the "twin pillars of the Hebrew renascence movement in education".⁴ Levin was appointed principal of the primary school.

The political chaos was accompanied by economic decline, lawlessness and violence directed against the Jewish population, of which Levin himself was a victim.

1. Bund: Yiddish: Union (of Jewish Workers). Organisation of Jewish Socialist Workers who adopted Yiddish as their cultural language.

2. Ibid., p 153.

3. Ibid., p 154.

4. Ibid.

Vilna was annexed to Poland and the early twenties saw the inexorable impoverishment of the Jewish community and the increasing difficulties for the network of schools.¹ The general economic position deteriorated and life for the Jew became a struggle in new Poland. Antisemitism became overt and active. At a meeting of the League of Nations in Geneva the Polish delegate publicly renounced the minority rights clause of the Treaty of Versailles. For the Jews of Poland, ten percent of the country's population, it was the twilight stage of their history which stretched back for over eight centuries. The great community, deprived of its rights, subjected to growing political, social and economic discrimination, was on the threshold of the terrible night of the Holocaust in which it was finally engulfed and utterly broken.

Like many others Levin looked across the seas for a better deal in life. News filtered through that Hebrew teachers were needed in South Africa. The salary was an incredible £30 or even £40 per month, entry into the country was permitted, life was free from threats of violence and anti-Jewish bias.² An acquaintance was asked to enquire into the possibilities of emigration to South Africa and the prospects of work for teachers of Hebrew. He was to attend the Zionist Congress in Basle in 1927 and would ascertain the information from the South African delegates who would also be attending. The South African delegate contacted was Rabbi Dr J L Landau of Johannesburg. In due course his letter arrived inviting him and his friend to come out to South Africa where suitable openings for good and experienced Hebrew teachers existed in Johannesburg. He left for South Africa, settling in Johannesburg in 1928 and in January 1929 was appointed principal of the United

1. Ibid., p 167

2. Ibid., p 172

Hebrew Schools in Cape Town.¹ His friend and colleague, who postponed his departure until the gates of South Africa were closed in 1930, perished a decade later at the hands of the Germans in the Vilna Ghetto.

On his appointment to the United Hebrew Schools, Alexander Levin determined to introduce his direct method of teaching (Ivris B'Ivris) into the school. It was a period of adjustment to a new life and a new system of education. The current method of teaching-translation- and of inspection were pedagogically backward in his eyes, and unacceptable. A sign of hope was the establishment in August 1928 of the S.A Board of Jewish Education, under the Chairmanship of Mr Harry Lourie, with Mr D Mierowsky, principal of the Port Elizabeth Talmud Torah School, as director.² It was the first step towards order in South African Jewish education.³

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1. The writer of this study was a pupil at the school at the time.
 2. Levin: op.cit., p 196
 3. See Chapter 29.

CHAPTER 25: THE UNITED HEBREW SCHOOLS OF CAPE TOWN (THE
CAPE TOWN TALMUD TORAH) 1921 - 1928

By 1924 the amalgamated school at 101-103 Hope Street under Mr B Turtledove had an enrolment of 212 pupils and there were an additional 50 in the branch in Constitution Street.¹

This branch was housed in very unsuitable premises indeed in the heart of District Six, the poor area of the city. They were, in fact, considered detrimental to the health of the pupils and a decision was taken to look for alternative accommodation. The Hope Street school was located in the very centre of the Jewish area in the Gardens and had a sizeable playground and a small garden. It was a large, rambling house with the characteristic pillared veranda facing on Hope Street, a facade which the committee, proud of its united school in this good area, reproduced on the school letter-heads for over a decade and a half.

Even though the schools had united they had not succeeded in solving their financial problems. Times were bad and many in the community were poor. There were difficulties in paying the salaries of the five or six teachers in time. The school carried an overdraft and it is recorded that no repayment of an urgent loan of £100 could be made to a committee member.² Income was derived from fees, which committee members personally collected from those parents who paid. There were also subscribers in the community, from whom the amounts accruing were very modest; collection boxes placed in houses or business premises; and actual house-to-house collections carried out by the committee members and ladies of the Bnoth Zion. The annual ball

1. Minutes of Committee Meeting of the United Hebrew Schools, Cape Town - 27 April 1924.

2. Ibid., 4 March 1923

was a valuable source of much needed revenue. The overdraft became a permanent feature of the school finances. In 1925 it was over £400.¹

These methods reflected the committee's own self-image. They regarded themselves as the representatives of the whole community, providing a Jewish education for the Jewish children of Cape Town. They were performing one of the prime functions of a Jewish community and were, as such, entitled to appeal to it for the wherewithal to carry out their duty. The methods were circumscribed and modest but suited to the community of that day. They were quite primitive compared with the sophisticated methods and scale which the lay-leadership has adopted nowadays for raising its finances. But the principle of total communal responsibility for Jewish education was being crystallised in the 1920's and was gradually implanted in the consciousness of the community during the ensuing decades.

Over 100 children received free education, over 50 paid reduced fees.² Very many of the pupils then came from the poorer section of the community, but no child was turned away. This was an aspect of the historical constant element of Jewish education to which the committee of the United Hebrew Schools was undeviatingly faithful. In the first place, it regarded the provision of Jewish instruction as the prime duty of any Jewish community anywhere. Secondly, it looked upon itself as the instrument of the community in this sphere, elected or deputed to fulfil the great Mitzvah (sacred duty) of Talmud Torah, in the sense of transmitting Torah knowledge to the young.

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1. Minutes of the Committee Meeting of the Cape Town Talmud Torah (United Hebrew Schools) 22 January 1925
 2. "Cape Town Notes": S A Jewish Chronicle, 30 November 1923, p 965

On occasion, teachers wrote to the committee for salary rises, for there were no fixed scales and increments laid down in those days. Sometimes these were granted, but when the finances were not available, the teachers had to be satisfied with the committee's regrets coupled with words of praise for their devoted work.¹

The United Hebrew Schools' Committee was invited to attend an Education Conference in Johannesburg in October 1924.² This was a promising step towards co-operation in the field of Jewish education and a further symptom of the growing unity and cohesiveness in the South African community.

It would appear that the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation was not in agreement with such a move. Perhaps it considered that the initiative for so important a step in Jewish education should, by virtue of tradition and history, have emanated from the mother congregation of South African Jewry. It announced that the Congregation itself was thinking of convening such a conference to discuss the problems facing Jewish education, and a Board of Education was actually mooted. It is recorded that such a body for the Cape Peninsula was established in February 1925, with Mr Hirschon, one of the teachers at the United Hebrew Schools, as its secretary.³ It was sponsored by the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation⁴ and a decision was taken to appoint a director to guide Hebrew education in the city.⁵

1. Minutes of Committee Meeting of United Hebrew Schools
27 April 1924

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 1 March 1925: see also p 346

4. Mr Bender and Rabbi Mirvish were presidents and Mr Harry Harris was chairman.

5. The post remained vacant.

By this time a whole network of Talmud Torahs was in existence in the Peninsula. The largest and oldest was the Cape Town Talmud Torah in Hope Street with its branch in Constitution Street. Each of the congregations from Woodstock southwards had its own Hebrew supplementary school. There were suburban synagogues at Woodstock, Observatory, Claremont, Wynberg and Muizenberg, as well as at Maitland, Parow and Sea Point. Each had its Heder, the larger ones among them with an enrolment of 50 or 60 pupils.¹ Although each regarded itself as a self-contained school or Talmud Torah it was hardly so in fact. The classes were small and, unless there was more than one teacher, they did not attend simultaneously, but in succession, with one group of children coming in as the previous one was leaving. The school population was thus fragmented into more or less detached components with little chance for the development of a school spirit during the brief sojourn of each class for an hour or so daily. There was thus little hope of establishing a proper authority. If the teacher was not an exceptional personality who rose above these educational shortcomings, the one or two-man Talmud Torah of those days was a weak instrument indeed for the transmission of Jewish knowledge. All too frequently it was housed in one inadequate room, with facilities far inferior to those in the secular schools, with few or no educational aids, with a teacher lacking any professional training, and, all too often, prone to fall back on that time-hallowed teaching method credited with instantaneous powers of pedagogical success - the stick, or belt, or the palm of the hand.²

1. There were 65 pupils at the Talmud Torah of the Woodstock and Salt River Hebrew Congregation in 1929, according to the annual report of that year. See p 387
2. Information personally given to the writer by Mr J S of Cape Town on several occasions in 1978-1979. He is a former teacher who was a pupil at the Maitland Talmud Torah in the years during and after World War I.

A generalisation along these lines would be inaccurate, however. There were outstanding personalities in the supplemental Hebrew schools, but they were in the minority. For the most part the Heder was a faulty educational instrument; supplemental in nature; attended by the child who was already tired; in conflict with his extra-mural activities; poorly staffed; possessing but fractional authority and status by comparison with the main school; for long lacking clear programmes of study and even proper text-books. Its total educational effects were frequently far from successful.

These deficiencies did not go unrecognised. Percipient lay and professional leaders endeavoured to solve the problems posed by this situation in three ways. Firstly, they realised that these fragment-schools, working in isolation under all these handicaps, were not self-sufficient entities. They needed overall direction which would lay down a common curriculum of studies, provide inspectorial services, and some sort of unified organisational framework. A Board of Education would carry out such functions. There were calls for such a body in Johannesburg and Cape Town from the early years of the century onwards.¹

Secondly, if geographical conditions permitted it, there were moves to unite such splinter-schools in order to give them the authority and educational strength which lay in numbers. In Cape Town this tendency resulted in the establishment of the United Hebrew Schools in 1919: in Johannesburg such a union came about some years later,² though here the net was cast wider than in the south.

The third reaction was a call for a more radical solution to the problem posed by the supplemental Hebrew school. It

1. See pp 126-127; Chapter 21 (*passim*) and p 265.

2. See: Curriculum of Instruction of the United Talmud Torah Schools of Johannesburg: 1927

would be found in the establishment of all-day schools which would give a synthesis of secular and Jewish education, but would avoid the obvious imbalance of the older Hebrew public schools which had largely, if not wholly, surrendered any functions they might have had in specifically Jewish education.

A call for the establishment of a "day school to Standard III" was made at the annual general meeting of the United Hebrew Schools of Cape Town in November 1924,¹ and the representatives of the school were instructed to raise this subject at the local education conference: the main problems were "the availability of finance and of an efficient headmaster".²

This was echoed in the annual report presented in August 1928, by one of the more influential leaders of the school, Mr Baruch Chideckel, in his capacity as secretary of the Education Sub-Committee.³ Drawing attention to the brief period of one hour which the child could afford to devote to his Hebrew education, Mr Chideckel pointed out that even that was vitiated by the tiredness and reluctance of the child who had already spent a long day at secular school. Little could be expected from a child under existing conditions, stated Mr Chideckel.

The only remedy was the establishment of a morning school.⁴ An experiment should be made up to Standard II, and if a success - note the diffidence even on the part of this learned and devoted layman - it could be extended. And to give his argument a moral-cum-educational slant, he appealed to the community to take steps to alleviate what he termed the hardships imposed on the children by the

1. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools: 30 November 1924.

2. Ibid.

3. Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools (101-103 Hope Street and 62 Constitution Street) for the year ending 31 August 1928: p 13

4. Ibid.

existing system. The means would be found.¹

The minutes of a meeting in 1925 record the visit of Rabbi J L Zlotnik who was destined to play a leading role in the history of Jewish education in South Africa. He was a well-known educationalist and writer, then living in Canada, who arrived in South Africa on a Zionist mission in 1925, and during his visit to Cape Town attended a meeting of the school committee.² He recommended that the Ivris B'Ivris method be adopted throughout the school. It is obvious that the old translation method (Ivris B'Anglis) was still very much in use. In this he was supported by Rabbi M Ch Mirvish. The visitor carried out an inspection of the school and expressed himself as satisfied.³

Examinations in those days were of an oral nature carried out by a panel of examiners. There is a record of examinations extending over three days carried out by the Rev Mr Bender, Rabbi Mirvish and Mr Gesundheit.⁴

At the meeting at the end of 1925⁵, it was reported that Mr Turtledove had resigned and had been succeeded by Mr Joseph Homa, principal of the Hebrew School in Oudtshoorn. The meeting was informed of, and accepted, the suggestion of Rabbi Zlotnik that the Ivris B'Ivris system be adopted. It was further decided that the Constitution Street branch would not be closed down, though the building was unsuitable, as this would deprive the children living in District Six of their Hebrew education.⁶

1. Ibid.

2. Minutes of the Committee of United Hebrew Schools: 30 August 1925.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 4 March 1923

5. Ibid., 15 November 1925

6. Ibid.

Mr Homa, whose period of service extended over a little more than two years, was an experienced pedagogue, and a man of wide culture. The writer recalls him as an energetic man who commanded the respect of the children and staff, especially the younger members who had recently arrived from Eastern Europe. One of these teachers was Mr Joseph Abitz, who recalled Mr Homa as a firm yet kindly disciplinarian and a man of good presence, courteous and articulate, and "fit to be respected".¹ He did use the translation method, but aimed at the total use of Ivris B'Ivris throughout the school.

Mr Homa introduced new methods and improvements. He inaugurated the school congregation and trained the boys to lead the prayers at the Friday evening and Sabbath morning services. He brought in such teaching aids as cyclostyled vocabulary lists, maps, pictures and festival pamphlets. The Boys' Minyan (Congregation) was a great success and was attended by many pupils.² The direct system of the teaching of Hebrew was gradually extended.

The same meeting heard that no director of education for the Peninsula had as yet been appointed.³ The Constitution Street Branch continued to be the poor relation, and although the committee felt unhappy about the premises and the running of the classes in District Six it let matters drift. Even though it was reported that the Jewish residents were obviously moving out of the area as they improved their economic and social positions, the school committee decided not to accept this and held to its plan to find or build new premises in District Six.

Mr Homa had set the papers for the written examinations for all classes from Standard II upwards and these had been marked

1. Interview granted to the writer by the late Mr Joseph Abitz, who was on the staff at that time, in Claremont in March 1973.
2. Report of the Annual General Meeting of the United Hebrew Schools: 10 October 1926.
3. See footnote 5 p 265

by Rabbi Mirvish and Messrs Chideckel and Helfand.¹ The results were "very, very gratifying".²

The writer still clearly recalls the oral examinations by a panel of four or five examiners led by Rabbi Mirvish who visited classes a number of times a year, generally on Sunday mornings. These were verbal cross-examinations of some length conducted in Hebrew, the elderly gentleman still unable to throw off the antiquated pronunciation, with its accented penultimate syllables. But across the years still comes the impression of those searching questions couched in a style and manner intelligible and interesting to a boy's ear. They were born pedagogues, those gentlemen of the Education Committee of half a century ago, deputed to examine the pupils of the Cape Town Talmud Torah ranged in front of them in those rooms of the school at 101-103 Hope Street, which was already then declining into an increasing state of dilapidation.

At a meeting of the Committee towards the end of 1927, Rabbi Mirvish spoke in glowing terms of the work done by Mr Homa. The discipline and cleanliness of the school had improved beyond description.³ The Committee agreed to send the pamphlets on the Jewish festivals compiled by the headmaster to other Talmud Torahs in the Peninsula. The Boys' Minyan (Congregation) celebrated the first anniversary of its existence, and at the end of 1927 the Education Committee recommended that Ivris B'Ivris be introduced in all standards above Standard IV. A concert was to be produced for the festival of Hanukka by the headmaster.

Mr Homa died on the 5th March 1928. During his brief tenure of the principalship he had succeeded in infusing a

1. They were members of the Education Committee who were well-versed in Hebrew and Judaism.
2. Minutes of the Committee of the United Hebrew Schools: 10 July 1927.
3. Ibid., 25 September 1927

new spirit into the school. He had introduced new methods, extended the Ivris B'Ivris system, created an esprit de corps among the pupils with whom he had an excellent rapport, established good order and a visible school spirit. The foundation for the future progress of the Cape Town Talmud Torah and its development was surely laid by Mr Joseph Homa.

Mr I Levinson was appointed temporary principal for the rest of the year until the arrival of Mr Alexander Levin from Johannesburg to assume the post of headmaster in succession to Mr Homa.

The report for the year ending 31 August 1928¹ mentioned the lamented loss sustained in the death of Mr Homa which cast a shadow over the general meeting of the School. As a tribute to his memory and his services to the School, the Boys' Congregation had been named Minyan Joseph². Ivris B'Anglis (translation of Hebrew texts into English) was used in the lower classes whilst the Ivris B'Ivris was used in the upper classes. This had been fixed by the late Mr Homa to replace the mixed method.

The Chairman's report was pessimistic: the support of the community was grossly inadequate; the Constitution Street School was uninhabitable. Financial resources were limited. It was a cry to be heard year-in and year-out, uttered by those who had voluntarily assumed responsibility for the Talmud Torah.

Yet, in the midst of these worries, Mr Chideckel's plea for a morning school³ was passionately repeated in Hebrew in the

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1. Report of the United Hebrew Schools of Cape Town for the year ending 31 August 1928.
 2. The Congregation of Joseph (Homa): it has continued its uninterrupted existence to this day as the congregation of the United Hebrew Schools and, thereafter, of the Herzlia School.
 3. See p268

same printed report issued in 1928 by Rabbi M Ch Mirvish:

We cannot ignore the bitter truth that in spite of all the effort and trouble on the part of teacher and layman, we have virtually failed to realise our hope to bring about any real improvements in Jewish education and to establish the education of our children on a sound and proper basis - to know their People, its Torah, its language, its history. What can we expect in today's situation from our youth which is busy for most of the day with secular studies and finds one bare hour for Torah studies....and even this is irregular... they have activities and private concerns..... we must devote much thought to it.¹

His suggestion was to establish day classes in the Talmud Torah itself, starting in the lower classes and proceeding upwards. He urged that the parents should be educated towards acceptance of this idea. Their dream of the future was a full day school, and Cape Town would provide an example in this regard, he stated.²

Rabbi Mirvish's analysis and his vision - especially as expressed in the last sentence - constitute an objective assessment of the innate shortcomings of supplementary Hebrew education and a plea for a new direction. He was anxious not to frighten the leadership, so he called for day classes only, and not for a day school with its prospects of considerable expenditure, which the United Hebrew Schools were hardly in a position to undertake. It is impossible to ascertain whether Rabbi Mirvish or Mr Chideckel was the initiator of the day class idea expressed in English and Hebrew in the same report, even though one may feel that the Rabbinic message was the more stirring and imbued with more authority. The almost complete identity of ideas suggests a common source of inspiration and, indeed, of method.

1. Report of Rabbi M Ch Mirvish, Chairman of the Education Sub-Committee in The Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools - year ended 31 August 1928. (My translation)

2. Ibid.

In an interview with the writer in 1978, Mrs Sonia Hoberman (née Effman), who was a teacher at the Cape Town Talmud Torah during the twenties, described her work at the school during those early days. She had started as an assistant in the Nursery School during the time of Mr Turtledove and then began teaching under Mr Homa whom she recalled with respect as a gentleman and an excellent teacher. Some teachers did not accept his Ivris B'Ivris method of teaching. She remembered the 'Chinese' Humash², with its vertical word-for-word translation, then in use.

The three daily periods were called "bells". The writer recalls graduating from first "bell" (for the junior classes) to second, and then to third "bell", which introduced the 5.50p.m. period, ending at 7.05p.m. One could generally manage to arrive in time for third "bell" during the winter season: the long cricket matches in summer, however, presented serious problems. Pupils attended six days a week: on Friday afternoons the "bells" were shorter to enable pupils to prepare for the Sabbath. Classes on Sunday mornings began at 9.00a.m. and terminated at 12.55p.m. For years, too, attendance at Mr Bender's Saturday Minha (afternoon) services in the Great Synagogue was compulsory, with teachers in attendance to take charge. Many pupils also attended Friday evening and Saturday morning services at the Minyan itself.

For the boy or girl of the decade starting from the mid-twenties who was a pupil of the Cape Town Talmud Torah, Hebrew education, then, occupied an important part of his week, and the writer clearly recalls attending classes in those days even during the school holidays. Life was quieter and simpler half a century ago, with few distractions. Family authority was certainly stronger, and the

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1. Oral information given during an interview with the writer on 28 June 1978, in Sea Point, Cape Town.
 2. See p 231.

immigrant tradition still strong. Jewish education was for very many of those who lived in the Gardens and Tamboers Kloof districts, not to speak of those still residing in District Six, no less important than secular education. There was hardly a question of non-attendance or of the wholesale exodus after Barmitzvah. These were the favourable conditions for the flowering period of Jewish education in Cape Town during the thirties and early forties of the century. It was to provide the positive basis for the evolution of the Jewish Day School from the forties onwards.

CHAPTER 26: THE UNITED HEBREW SCHOOLS OF CAPE TOWN
UNDER MR A C LEVIN - 1929-1939

Alexander Levin's first contact with Hebrew education in South Africa was his nine-month period of service in a Johannesburg Talmud Torah. It was a large institution with over 200 pupils and five teachers, the name of which he forbears to mention in his autobiography.¹

For the immigrant teacher - especially for one of his temperament, sentiments and experience - it was a period fraught with problems of adjustment to a strange land, foreign language, unknown mores, and an educational milieu far removed from Grodno and Vilna, not to speak of shtetel and yeshiva. The psychological and personal problems manifested themselves in a number of ways. The Talmud Torah had hardly any educational framework. There was no fixed syllabus, no staff meetings, no discussion and guidance from above, no systematic records of work done. Added to all this, he knew no English and did not understand the local children. By force of circumstances, then, no less than by conviction, he adopted the natural method, Ivris B'Ivris, to which he was accustomed from experience in the old country.

Levin was already in his late forties when he emigrated to South Africa. He belonged to the pioneering generation of Hebrew educationists in Western Russia, men actuated by the ideals of the Hebrew revival and impelled by a strong sense of purpose to instruct and guide the young in the new Jewish spirit. His ideas and ideals were strengthened and deepened by the vicissitudes and hardships of those war years and their aftermath. He and those like him who came out in the post-war period constituted in their persons what

1. Levin, A C: op.cit., p 193. The only Talmud Torah in Johannesburg at that time with an enrolment of over 200 pupils was the one in Doornfontein, according to the Annual Report of the United Talmud Torah Schools for the year ending 31 December 1929. p 4.

may be termed the contemporary external factor in Jewish education. Adjustment presented many difficulties, while compromise on principles was unthinkable. It was not surprising that there was friction as well as dissatisfaction with the system of supplemental Jewish education and with its mechanical translation methods. There was friction with the lay leadership which was frequently regarded as both culturally ignorant and quite unworthy of laying down the law in the educational sphere; with the parents who would look down on the "greenhorns"; and with old-established teachers who felt threatened by the competition of those better qualified professionally. And, added to this, was the lack of rapport with the children who could not communicate with the immigrant teachers with their foreign ways and strange accents.

Levin stuck to the principle of Ivris B'Ivris in the face of criticism and did not himself desist from expressing his dissatisfaction with much of what he saw and experienced in the Johannesburg Talmud Torah, which he found wanting in a number of respects, educational as well as organisational. He noted the antipathy of the older-established Hebrew teachers towards the new arrivals, whom they regarded as competitors and as a threat to the traditional norms of Hebrew education as they themselves understood and practised them.¹

His "natural method" (Hebrew-medium instruction) in time convinced Rabbi Dr J L Landau, who visited his classes and came away converted.² He was also spokesman for the group, mostly of new teachers, which urged that a professional organisation was essential to press for the recognition of the rights of the teachers to participate in those areas of the control of the schools which touched them closely, notably in the drawing up of syllabuses, examinations and evaluation of teachers' work. It was a new note in

1. Levin, A C: op.cit., p 194.

2. Ibid., p 197.

Hebrew education in this country. Needless to say, the old teachers opposed these new ideas, and only a few of the lay-leaders saw the justice of such claims.¹ Before this was finalised, however, preparations began for the establishment of the South African Board of Jewish Education which was to provide a proper organisational framework for the schools in the country.

Levin typified many of the immigrant teachers who arrived in South Africa from the twenties onwards. A number of these decided that conditions in the new country were so different from those they were accustomed to, and so impossible of change and improvement, that they abandoned the profession for more suitable and more lucrative employment. Levin, and those like him, stayed on, and in so doing introduced a new spirit and a new content into their schools. What was no less important, they infused into them a good measure of their own idealism and devotion which added a new dimension to Jewish education in this country, without which subsequent developments could not have taken place.

Levin's first exposure to Jewish education in South Africa during his stay in Johannesburg in 1928 is described in his autobiography, in the chapter headed Nosah Drom Afrika² (South African Style). Significantly enough, the period of his life and work as principal of the Cape Town United Hebrew Schools (Cape Town Talmud Torah), from his assumption of the office at the inception in 1929, is told under the heading of Nosah Grodno (Grodno Style).³ This epitomises Levin's own evaluation of his work in Jewish education extending over the sixteen years he served as headmaster in Cape Town. It was in effect a period of educational endeavour

1. Ibid., pp 195-196

2. Ibid., pp 189 et seq.

3. Ibid., pp 202 et seq.

which witnessed the realisation of many of the ideals inculcated by the Grodno Hebrew Teachers' Seminary, and in Cape Town Levin found the opportunity of putting some of these ideals and ideas into practice. So Grodno came to Cape Town and South Africa.

Levin encountered opposition to these firmly-fixed educational principles of his.¹ The Talmud Torah had remained virtually leaderless since Homa's death and Levin set about energetically reorganising it in his own image. Translation was abolished and Ivris B'Ivris strictly enforced in the face of opposition by older teachers.² He introduced modern text-books, drew up a proper syllabus,³ experimented constantly with methods of teaching, guided and checked the staff in the planning of their work, laboured to rectify faults of various kinds, and all this was done with single-minded devotion to his educational and national ideals and standards. The school was not large at the time, with 175 pupils at Hope Street and 46 at the Constitution Street branch.⁴

In reviewing the work and achievements of the Talmud Torah, Levin recorded his own amazement at what was achieved, and that in spite of adverse factors, especially lack of time, which was the most serious in a number of respects. The lessons took place in the afternoon at the end of a tiring day when the freshness and vigour of the child had departed. To aggravate matters, there were the difficulties emanating from the parents who were unwilling to tire their children

1. The Minutes of the Committee of the Cape Town Talmud Torah of 18 April 1929 allude to "friction between the new principal and teachers". The Education Sub-Committee was instructed to "order the teachers to carry out the orders of the Principal".
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

at a tender age with Hebrew lessons. The time available was limited to one hour and ten minutes a day: and yet, notwithstanding all this, the educational results achieved were remarkable and gratifying.

Levin even drew a comparison between the Cape Town Talmud Torah and the old style all-day Heder in the old country.¹ Quantitatively, the time at the disposal of the educationist in Cape Town did not constitute even ten percent of that devoted to tuition in the Heder. Yet the effective method in the hands of the efficient and devoted teacher were the deciding factor and this was the reason for the fine progress of the school during the thirties.

Evidence of this was the virtual elimination of the Barmitzvah syndrome, the phenomenon of almost universal termination of Jewish education on reaching the age of confirmation at thirteen. In the Cape Town Talmud Torah more and more pupils chose to continue their Hebrew studies throughout their high school careers, right up to matriculation level, offering Hebrew as one of their subjects for this examination.² This attachment to the school and their Jewish studies was a source of gratification and pride to Levin and his teachers, and inspired them to feel that here indeed was the hoped-for fruit of their labours.³ Within a few years the highest classes in the school rose from Standard VII to Standard IX and thereafter to matriculation. At this stage, studies included the Latter Prophets, Pentateuch with Rashi Commentary, Hagiographa, Ethics of the Fathers, Mishna and Elementary Talmud, in addition to Hebrew language and literature.⁴ Frequently, parents, rather than pupils, had to be persuaded to break the

1. Levin: op.cit., pp 212-213.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p 215

4. Ibid.

Barmitzvah barrier. Pupils stayed to do the Junior Certificate and Matriculation Hebrew, and the proportion of girls also grew steadily. In some senior classes they even outnumbered the boys.¹ A source of further gratification was the bi-weekly evening continuation class attended by former pupils who were already university students or office workers.

Levin, and others on the Committee, turned their minds to the possibility of establishing a day school within the Talmud Torah itself. He termed it an "internal branch" which could bring about a more normal educational position.² Only a day school with an integrated curriculum of secular and Jewish studies would bring about the realisation of this ideal. The study of Judaism and Hebrew would then be an integral part of the school-day: it would no longer be destined to be a mere appendage of the "twilight hours", a minor adjunct to the school-day of the child, and, inevitably, of minor importance.³ This was the rationale for the establishment of the first Jewish day school in Cape Town.

Rabbi M Ch Mirvish proposed the opening of the first three such classes in mid-1929,⁴ but the Committee was afraid of the expense involved and rejected the motion. It is recorded that a few months later the Rabbi again moved the same proposal and a few members actually consulted Mr Herrman, vice-principal of the Cape Town High School, about its feasibility.⁵

Nothing very much could be achieved at the Talmud Torah until such time as a day school was opened, stated Rabbi Mirvish,⁶ urging again that a commission consult some of

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., pp 217-219.

3. Ibid.

4. Minutes of the Committee of the Cape Town Talmud Torah: 30 June 1929.

5. Ibid., 1 September 1929.

6. Ibid., 5 September 1929.

the leading local Jewish educationists like Louis Herrman, Roza van Gelderen and E H Kloot on the possibility of opening the classes. Mr Mark Cohen, last principal of Hope Mill, had already been consulted and had recommended such a step. The Committee was divided: Mr I Mauerberger, the Chairman, was against the proposal because of the expense involved, while Mr B Chideckel, secretary of the Education Committee, strongly supported the Rabbi and the Principal.¹

The decision to open was taken in January 1930, but the immediate problem was to obtain pupils.² The parents were satisfied with the general schools and were quite against entrusting their little ones to an untried and unproved experimental Jewish school, whatever the putative advantages might be gained for a normal Jewish education in such an institution. Mr Ornstein had encountered the same obstacle nearly fifty years before.³ Levin records that this initial problem was solved in an unorthodox manner. They decided to accept children who had not as yet reached the official admission age demanded by departmental schools.⁴

The argument was that once the children had been enrolled they would make such good progress that the parents would be satisfied to let them remain in the day school. The ploy seems to have worked. Twelve children were on the roll by March⁵, and in May the number had grown to twenty,⁶ while the little Sub A class was settling down and the children

1. Ibid., 7 November 1929

2. Ibid., 8 December 1929

3. See Chapter 7, pp 59 et seq.

4. Levin: op.cit., p 219

5. Minutes of Committee of the Cape Town Talmud Torah:
20 March 1920

6. Ibid., 4 May 1930.

were making progress.¹

The little day school was beset by difficulties. From above, the opposition to this "luxury"² grew stronger, especially as the school was struggling financially. Suitable teachers were hard to obtain. They feared that service at the day school would make it impossible to obtain a post under the School Board later.³ The building itself was in a very poor condition. Rabbi Mirvish urged the continuance of the day school at the Annual General Meeting at the end of the year since it would prove to be the real foundation of their school.⁴

The day school struggled on into 1931 with growing doubts about its viability. Some of the children were obviously too young; the unsuitable premises had been criticised by Mr Kloot, former principal of Hope Lodge School, and support on the Committee was limited. Most of the members regarded it as a waste of money.⁵ The school overdraft was growing, and it was noted that over a quarter of the sum was occasioned by the loss on the day classes.

The Talmud Torah was expanding in numbers and the need for better premises became really pressing. It was decided to close down "temporarily" the morning classes so that all efforts could be concentrated on building a new school which would then provide congenial conditions for a day school.⁶ Levin and his supporters strongly opposed the closing of the morning school with its 37 pupils. After heated discussions, they won a reprieve from the Committee.⁷

1. Ibid.

2. Levin: op.cit., p 219

3. Minutes of the Committee of the United Hebrew Schools (Cape Town Talmud Torah) 4 May 1930

4. Annual General Meeting of the Cape Town Talmud Torah: 30 November 1930.

5. Minutes of the Cape Town Talmud Torah 7 May 1931.

6. Ibid., 13 May 1931

7. Ibid., 27 December 1931

It was to continue for another six months only. The serious financial troubles of the School,¹ the lack of means to supply proper facilities, the unsuitability of the premises, the poor enrolment, the personal opposition of members all contributed to its demise in mid-1932.²

If the experiment of the morning classes was a failure and seven-and-a-half years had to elapse before they were resuscitated, the Talmud Torah itself under Alexander Levin progressed steadily during those difficult years of the depression. Levin spared neither himself nor his teachers in the pursuit of his educational goals. He aimed at transforming the Talmud Torah into a Centre for Hebrew Education.³ The enrolment grew steadily and by mid-1930 it stood at 277.⁴ A vastly encouraging development was the willingness of pupils of senior classes to continue further with their Hebrew education. Mr D Mierowsky, Inspector of the South African Board of Jewish Education in Johannesburg, reported very favourably on the work and achievements of the school, adding that Standards VI and VII had impressed him greatly.⁵ Reporting on the examinations which had been held at mid-year, Mr B Chideckel, secretary of the Education Sub-Committee, used such terms as "very impressive" and "wonderful achievements".⁶ Some months later, Rabbi Mirvish, Chairman of this same body, reported to the Committee that whilst in the past pupils used to leave at 13 (sometimes even in the lower classes), they now wanted to stay on.⁷

1. Salaries of the teachers were reduced in March 1932:
(Minutes of Committee Meeting: 16 March 1932)
2. Levin: op.cit., p 219: and Minutes of the Committee of the Cape Town United Hebrew Schools 1931-1932, *passim*.
3. Levin: op.cit., heading of Chapter 27, p 217.
4. Minutes of the Committee of the Cape Town United Hebrew Schools: 4 May 1930.
5. Ibid., 8 August 1929.
6. Ibid., 27 July 1931.
7. Ibid., 20 December 1931.

At a meeting held just after the morning classes had been closed, the Committee was no doubt greatly consoled to hear that the Standard VII class had agreed to stay on for another year and construed this as a proof of the love and consciousness the Institution was able to instil in the hearts of the future generation.¹

The financial struggle continued throughout the thirties. It was an unremitting search by the school for the means to pay its way in the face of the worsening economic situation, the growing demands of the expanding school population, and the limited support that was forthcoming from the Jewish community. Although the Committee fully accepted the principle of communal responsibility for the Jewish education of the children, the same concept was but slowly penetrating the consciousness of the community. The Constitution Street premises were in an even worse state than the deteriorating building in Hope Street and the Committee vacillated between closing it down altogether and procuring new premises. It realised that a new building was urgently needed for the Hope Street school which was beginning to evoke so much praise from eminent overseas and local visitors.² "Its outward appearance shamed its interior", wrote Levin,³ but the Committee was absolutely powerless to do anything about it for lack of resources.

The financial position became so bad that the teachers' salaries had to be reduced,⁴ and Standard VIII had to be discontinued the following year to cut down expenditure.⁵

1. Ibid., 24 July 1932

2. Rabbi Dr Hirsch of Pretoria had inspected classes and expressed himself as "absolutely charmed....the Talmud Torah was the most unique in South Africa": Reported in the Minutes of 13 March 1934

3. Levin: op.cit., p 223

4. See footnote 1, p 284

5. Minutes of the Committee of the United Hebrew Schools
Cape Town 15 January 1933

The Annual General Meeting at the end of 1933 heard that of the close on 400 pupils at the school, only 60 paid full fees, a similar number paid half fees, and the rest no fees at all.¹ It is no surprise to read then that three committee members had to advance £150 for salaries on two occasions.²

The solution to the problem of building a new school to replace the uninhabitable old premises was tantalisingly near. It lay in the hands of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation which held considerable funds in trust from the estate of the late Mr Hyman Liberman, as well as from the Hebrew Public School (Hope Mill) Fund. The Liberman Trust was to be utilised for the establishment of a Hebrew high school. The legal restrictions of the bequest presented an insurmountable obstacle in making monies available to the Cape Town Talmud Torah.

The year 1934 saw a visible improvement on the organisational side, with new workers coming forward to serve in the school leadership. Among these was Morris Alexander, M P. He deplored the ceaseless anxiety and the total preoccupation with making ends meet, and urged a direct appeal to the community.³ The School had advanced to a leading position amongst the institutions of the community and had achieved an outstanding educational reputation. It should now be able to call on the whole community for support.⁴

A meeting of prominent communal workers and representatives of institutions was convened at the home of Mr Woolf Harris⁵ on 13 May 1934 to deal with the serious financial position in which the School found itself. Woolf Harris told the

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1. Report of the Annual General Meeting of the Cape Town United Hebrew Schools: 18 December 1933.
 2. Minutes of the Committee of the United Hebrew Schools, Cape Town: 2 November 1933.
 3. Ibid., 7 May 1934.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Perhaps the most influential member of the Cape Town Jewish Community. He served as President of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation and Chairman of the Cape Committee of the Jewish Board of Deputies as well as of the Talmud Torah.

45 people present that the Committee was overtired of the constant worry as to how to finance this institution. The School belonged to all of them and not to the Committee only. They were compelled to borrow money at the end of every month to pay salaries and unless the Jewish community gave assistance they would be compelled to close, and, added Mr Harris, if they closed the Talmud Torah, they might as well close the synagogues.¹

This is the first recorded step of any significance on the part of the Committee to achieve some measure of communal responsibility for the School. It was largely successful and may be regarded as the first stage of what was to be a cardinal school policy over the years, achieving gradual acceptance on the part of the community.²

Two other seminal concepts were voiced at the same meeting. Rabbi M Ch Mirvish suggested that an annual tax be imposed on every Jewish member of the community to provide for the financial needs of the various institutions.³ Advocate P M Clouts proposed that the Zionist Organisation should be called upon to render financial assistance to Jewish education. The proposal was not carried.⁴ Councillor L Gradner, Mayor of Cape Town, returned to the subject of a federation of institutions,⁵ with a rationalisation of fund-raising to finance the needs of all the community's charitable and educational bodies, a proposal which gained support at the time. This was, in substance, close to the basic concept

1. Report of a special meeting at the residence of Mr W Harris in Oranjezicht, Cape Town, on 13 May 1934.
2. It took some three decades for this to be fully accepted, by which time the place of the Cape Town Talmud Torah had long since been taken by its daughter school, Herzlia.
3. Report of a special meeting at the residence of Mr W Harris on 13 May 1934. This idea was put into practice many years later by the "voluntary system of taxation" of the United Communal Fund.
4. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee Meeting; 15 August 1934.
5. This also became a reality three decades later.

of what is now the United Communal Fund.¹

The provisions of the law firmly tied up the Liberman Bequest and placed it beyond the reach of the Talmud Torah Committee as it looked in despair at the crumbling school premises. The impasse was finally broken by an ingenious proposal emanating from Rabbi Mirvish. The Talmud Torah now had senior classes, so why not split the school into two, with a primary section up to Standard III and a high school composed of Standards IV to VII or VIII. Such a high school would qualify for the Liberman Bequest which stipulated that the trust funds be used for a Hebrew high school,² and the money would become available for the sorely needed new building. This prospect no doubt excited the Committee and the proposal was accepted.³

The report presented to the annual general meeting held at the end of 1934⁴ again presented a contrast between material poverty and spiritual wealth. Visitors had judged the Talmud Torah to be "of outstanding merit" reported the Chairman, and Dr C Resnekov, the Chairman of the Cape Board of Jewish Education, who had attended the examinations conducted by Dr A Birnbaum from Johannesburg, had "been highly impressed"⁵, but the financial position was parlous and the old building "was falling to pieces".⁶ The School had 381 pupils, but the fees had diminished. Communal support was poor and they could not continue beyond Standard VII because of the lack of funds. The Talmud Torah, said Mr Woolf Harris, "was the cinderella of local Jewish

1. The United Communal Fund was established in 1949 to cater for the financial needs of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the Jewish schools and sundry communal organisations. It organises biennial appeals among the Jewish community for these purposes.
2. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee: 3 October 1934
3. Ibid.
4. Report of Annual General Meeting of United Hebrew Schools: 2 December 1934.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

institutions",¹ and that was accepted by the community.

In its annual report for 1935, the Education Sub-Committee stated that the School had twenty classes. The syllabus for the primary classes consisted of reading, writing, elementary grammar, Humash (Pentateuch) to Beshalah (Chapter XVII of Exodus), Bible History to the Partition of the Kingdom, Laws and Customs.

The nine classes of the high school section (Standards V-VIII) studied the Humash in the original, the Former Prophets, selections from the Latter Prophets and Psalms, Hebrew reading without vowels, essay writing and history to modern times. An endeavour had also been made to inaugurate teacher training.² The school had gained the praise and admiration of every distinguished visitor.³ Dr A Birnbaum's report on the examination was laudatory:

The most admirable feature is the spirit prevalent in your school,....(a spirit) of voluntary study. (There is a) vivid interest of the pupils in subjects taught in the spirit of traditional Judaism combined with the spirit of modern Jewish revival.⁴

Mr Levin's report⁵ gave a detailed break-down of the curriculum as well as interesting sidelights on the school in general. The method used was Ivris B'Ivris throughout. Attendances were very good with few absences, even on Sundays. Sabbath services at the school synagogue (Minyan Joseph) were also well attended, the pupils themselves leading the prayers. The pupils also attended Sabbath minha (afternoon) services at the Great Synagogue. Not a single pupil left the Talmud Torah when he reached Barmitzvah age, proudly stated the principal.⁶

1. Ibid.

2. Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools for 1935.

3. Ibid. Dr Nahum Sokolow, the famous Hebrew writer and Zionist leader, had expressed himself as being "astonished at the results achieved", when he visited the school in 1934.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid. (Principal's Report)

6. Ibid.

There was good news to report to the Committee at the end of 1935. Mr Harris announced that agreement had been reached with the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation on the matter of the Liberman Trust.¹ Standards V and upwards would constitute the Hyman Liberman High School which would come under the control of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation and be financed by it. The lower classes would retain the name of the United Hebrew Schools. Both schools would be housed under one roof and controlled by one principal. It was a neat legal solution to the seemingly insoluble problem of the Liberman Bequest, achieved after years of effort. The money would now be released and made available for the construction of a new building for the School.

Lack of public interest in the Talmud Torah was a perennial complaint on the part of the lay leadership. At the annual general meeting in December 1935, Mr Chideckel may have proudly asserted that the attendance of pupils was fully 95% and he was therefore justified in his inference that "our pupils are imbued with a feeling that the Hebrew school is as important as the secular school".² But his audience numbered hardly 40. This contrast was a source of simultaneous inspiration and despair to the lay leadership. Of course they were greatly heartened by the progress of the school, its very good enrolment and the glowing reports of examiners and notable visitors alike. But the lack of public support, manifested in the chronic failure of the community to provide reasonable financial support for what were really the modest requirements of the School, coupled with the indifference manifest in the handful of people attending the annual general meetings of the institution, were twin factors that depressed the leadership.³ That

1. Minutes of the Committee of the United Hebrew Schools, Cape Town: 9 December 1935.
2. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the United Hebrew Schools, Cape Town: 15 December 1935.
3. The Report of the United Hebrew Schools for the year ending 31 March 1937 deplored the "platform platitudes on the need for Jewish education" and asked "but where is the assistance?"

they struggled on doggedly is manifest proof of the high national and religious ideals which inspired them and to which they were devoted.

A typical year was 1936. The finances were in a parlous state. There were no pension or insurance arrangements yet for married men on the staff, nor had the School been able to repay the salary deductions, as it had promised to do.¹ A memorandum, signed by the seven members of the staff, and submitted to the Committee,² warned that the building was a source of danger to the minds of all the pupils, and even of physical danger. The teachers protested against the disgraceful conditions under which they had to work. The numbers were falling - they were down to 322 by the middle of the year - because, in the opinion of the teachers, the dilapidated building repelled pupils and parents. The memorandum urged the Committee to take immediate steps to demolish the house.

The teachers were evidently perturbed by the apparent spectacle of the Committee dragging its feet in regard to the erection of a new school building. The agreement with the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation to release the Liberman Trust had been announced at the end of the previous year, but nothing had been done in the meantime. A contributory cause of the fall in numbers may be found in a small item, recorded a little while later, to the effect that most suburbs already had their own Talmud Torahs.³ The movement of the Jewish population from the central city area in the Gardens where the Talmud Torah was situated had been gathering momentum, with the consequent gradual increase in the suburban congregations. And, by contrast, there was the comment of Professor Selig Brodetsky, noted British scientist and Zionist leader, whose visit to the Talmud Torah gave him

1. Minutes of the Committee of the United Hebrew Schools, Cape Town: 10 February 1936.
2. Ibid., 1 July 1936.
3. Ibid., 5 August 1936.

nahas ruah (great spiritual pleasure); it was a "great surprise" to him to see the work done.¹

The report of the annual examinations carried out by Rabbi Dr B Rabinowitz, Inspector of the Cape Committee of the South African Board of Jewish Education, in the presence of the Chairman and members of the Education Sub-Committee² was full of enthusiastic praise for the achievements of the School and for what was termed its living spirit diffused with traditional Judaism. He was most impressed with the school congregation (Minyan Joseph), with the fine teacher-pupil relationship and, most of all, by the fact that there were pupils up to the age of 16 at the Cape Town Talmud Torah, an illuminating observation on this particular aspect of Jewish education in the country. Alexander Levin reported on an improvement in standards and methods, and that the number of departures before completion of all classes was negligible.³

Finally the funds⁴ from the Hyman Liberman Bequest and the Trust of the Hope Mill School became available. The old building was demolished and the foundation stone of the new was laid by Maurice Rosen on 28 April 1937. Temporary accommodation was found at 16 Breda Street whilst the new building was in the course of construction.

The Committee looked forward to two-fold relief: firstly, a fine new building so longingly awaited for years and, secondly, and no less important, the prospect at long last of an end to its chronic poverty and its very struggle for existence. The upper classes would become the Hyman

1. Ibid., 1 July 1936.

2. Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools, Cape Town for the year ending 31 March 1937

3. Ibid.

4. The sum was £7 400.

Liberman School for Higher Hebrew Education for which the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation would assume financial responsibility.¹

It was confidently expected that the fine new building would raise the status of the school. The Talmud Torah would shed its image of a poor school, unfortunately an all too faithful reflection of its very poor building. Children of better-off parents would be attracted, mostly from the fragmentary kind of tuition provided by private teachers, and the numbers would rise again.²

Every now and again there were voices in the Committee expressing important ideas which had somehow remained forgotten. The need for a day school was mentioned, and the conviction that communal taxation was essential for the upkeep of the Community's educational institutions.³ As yet, there were no proper salary scales for teachers⁴. These would have obviated the frequent demands and disagreements over salary between the Committee and the staff.

The new school building erected on the same site in Hope Street was opened on 5 December 1937. It was a fine double-storied structure consisting of eight large classrooms, a room for the nursery school and a hall to seat 450 persons. The School would be able to accommodate 600 pupils in shifts. The United Hebrew Schools (Sub A to Standard III) and the Hyman Liberman School for Higher Hebrew Education (Standards IV-VIII) were now separate, even if located under the same roof, under the principalship of Mr Levin: there were two separate education committees of the United Hebrew Schools and the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation respectively.

1. Minutes of the Committee Meeting of the United Hebrew Schools Cape Town: 27 December 1936

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 7 July 1937

It was a great event in the history of Hebrew education in Cape Town, stated Mr Harris in his Chairman's report, and no less for the Committee.¹ He and Rabbi M Ch Mirvish had been given the honour of performing the official opening and a spirit of elation informed the proceedings.² The new minister of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, Rabbi Israel Abrahams, stated that the Committee and the community had regained their self-respect: the status of Torah had risen in the city, the community had gained in dignity.³

At the opening, Rabbi Mirvish spoke of the School as "the power station of the Community connected by wires to every Jewish home and providing light for the whole community".⁴

In the first report of the School to be issued after his assumption of the pulpit at the Gardens Synagogue,⁵ Rabbi Abrahams wrote vigorously and eloquently on the role of Jewish education and the new school, praising the achievements of the Talmud Torah, at once criticising and inspiring the community. It was to set the tone for his words and deeds on behalf of Jewish education, which formed so notable a part of his ministry during the ensuing three decades.⁶

At the first combined meetings of the Committees of the United Hebrew Schools and the Liberman High School in the new building, Mr Woolf Harris said that great things would be achieved in the new premises; at long last they would attain success in the field of Hebrew education.⁷

1. Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools for the year ending 31 March 1938.
2. On 5 December 1937: reported in above Annual Report.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Mr Bender died at the end of 1937 and in his successor Jewish education at the Cape gained an even more energetic champion.
6. Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools for the year ending 31 March 1938.
7. Minutes of the Combined Meeting: 6 January 1938.

The leadership, too, was inspired to new activity. A campaign for funds was planned - in those days it was still called a "house-to-house" collection¹. A new-fangled idea - the stop-order system - was proposed. By the beginning of 1939 the school overdraft had been wiped-off.² However, teachers were still dissatisfied over salaries and little had been done about the insurance-pension scheme.³

A notable achievement was the establishment of the first class for matriculation Hebrew in 1938, giving the school real high school status⁴ and a Talmud class was also started. The enrolment at the United Hebrew Schools was 192 and there were 170 in the Hyman Liberman School for Higher Hebrew Education (Standards III-VIII).⁵ The children actually attended seven days a week. On Sabbaths they came to the services at the Minyan Joseph and on the third Saturday of every month they attended services at the Great Synagogue in the Gardens where there were also special services for the younger children.⁶ The good number of post-Barmitzvah pupils had destroyed the custom of making maftir the close of Jewish study, asserted the report with pride.⁷

The Barmitzvah classes were instructed according to the syllabus of the Cape Board of Jewish Education and there was also a Dedication Class for girls which followed the syllabus drawn up by Rabbi Abrahams. Dr A Birnbaum, who had examined the school in the past, was appointed Director of the Board of Jewish Education in 1939. The enrolment

1. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee Meeting: 9 October 1938.
2. Ibid., 26 February 1939
3. Ibid., 13 April 1939
4. Report for the year ending 31 March 1939.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid: Maftir: Hebrew: final portion of weekly reading from the Pentateuch chanted by Barmitzvah boy.

that year for the two schools was 362; extra room was needed; financial appeals in the synagogues during the High Holy Days were successful. An insurance scheme for teachers was adopted. The fortunes of the School in the new building were on the rise. An historic decision was taken at the annual general meeting that year.¹ Woolf Harris reported that the financial position was not really bad, the deficit was a mere £200. By the last term the roll stood at 386 children, and people were beginning to understand that the Talmud Torah was the foundation of the community's existence.² The war had already cast its shadow over the gathering. In pursuance of the decision taken at the annual general meeting of a fortnight earlier,³ the Education Sub-Committee agreed that the time was ripe to re-establish the Day School.⁴

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1. Report of the Annual General Meeting of the United Hebrew Schools, Cape Town, held on 8 October 1939: see pp 297 et seq.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Minutes of the Committee of the United Hebrew Schools, 23 October 1939.

CHAPTER 27: HERZLIA SCHOOL : THE EARLY YEARS

Some of the communal leaders active in the field of Jewish education at the Cape regularly returned to the idea of a Jewish day school, as minutes of school committee meetings and reports of annual general meetings indicate throughout the thirties.¹ Rabbi M Ch Mirvish on more than one occasion spoke in favour of resuscitating the morning classes;² so did Dr Charles Resnekov, Chairman of the Cape Board of Jewish Education,³ and a lay leader of progressive views and influence; Rabbi Abrahams, too, lent his considerable authority to the idea which he began to expound publicly soon after his arrival.⁴

The erection of the new building removed what was one of the main obstacles to the implementation of the day school idea, and further inspired some of the leadership with new vigour. The agreement with the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation had brought at least temporary relief from the chronic financial burden. Dr Resnekov interviewed the Superintendent-General of Education in a vain attempt to obtain the support for such a school, and was told that the Department would not support a denominational institution.⁵ The Committee nevertheless adopted a resolution to restore the morning classes.⁶

An interesting proposal was submitted to the Committee in October 1938⁷ by Captain I Levinson, who was principal of Hillel College, a small private Jewish boarding school in Muizenberg. He applied for permission to use the new

1. See p.293 and footnotes 2-6 below.
2. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the United Hebrew Schools: 18 September 1938
3. Minutes of Special General Meeting of the United Hebrew Schools: 26 November 1933
4. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee Meeting: 28 December 1937
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee Meeting: 9 October 1938.

premises during the mornings for his school as he wished to move out of Muizenberg and establish a hostel in Cape Town. The School Committee opposed this because it would spoil the chances of establishing a morning school, which was, after all, the aim of the Committee and for which purpose so big a building had been erected.¹

This request appears to have galvanised the Committee into action, for a sub-committee was immediately appointed to prepare plans for the establishment of day classes. That opinion in the community was now favourable to the idea was expressed in the report of the United Hebrew Schools issued early in 1939, which stated that "time is opportune for serious thought to be given to establish a properly constituted day school".²

The outbreak of the war and the fears engendered by the Nazi Blitzkrieg against Poland stirred conscious and subconscious anxiety in the hearts and minds of the community. Mortal dangers were looming on the horizon for European Jewry. Jews everywhere had to see to the strengthening of their moral, cultural and national defences. If Jewish education were the instrument for this, as history so clearly taught, it had better be as effective as possible. At the annual general meeting held in October 1939, Rabbi Mirvish, the veteran leader of the United Hebrew Schools, referred to the very bad times for the Jewish people. "Torah is the foundation for Jewish existence - we must teach it", he added.³

The Education Sub-Committee reported to the full body what preparatory steps it proposed taking to launch the morning

1. Ibid.

2. Report of the United Hebrew Schools for the year ending 31 March 1939.

3. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the United Hebrew Schools, 8 October 1939.

classes.¹ To secure pupils, intensive publicity would have to be undertaken. Levin refers to this "important spiritual achievement",² and to the formidable obstacles that stood in its way. As in 1930, now again there were apathy and opposition on the part of parents who did not want their children to be segregated in a Jewish "ghetto" school, a separation which they were convinced would result in inevitable harm.³

This issue of segregation - itself an emotive word in South African society - was the axis round which the polemic revolved for decades.⁴ No doubt it served to inhibit the growth of the day school, especially during the early years of its existence, when it was still small and vulnerable.

The Sub A class was in due course opened in the Hope Street building in January 1940, as the nucleus for a day school, with 15 pupils.⁵ The total enrolment at the United Hebrew Schools (Sub A-Standard III) was 205.⁶

The staff during 1940 consisted of Messrs A Levin, Z Avin, J Abitz, D Rosen, J Sadowsky, and Mesdames F Smolensky and H Zbenovich, and the Misses A G Jaches and H Boerbaitz. All had qualified in Eastern Europe except Miss Jaches, who was locally trained.

The chairman's report for 1940 referred to the ravages of war and the sufferings of the Jewish people. "The culture of our People is being systematically destroyed (as well as)

1. Minutes of the Committee of the United Hebrew Schools: 29 October 1939: see also p
2. Levin: op.cit., p 223 section 6.
3. Ibid., p 224.
4. It continued for years - probably a decade and longer - after the writer assumed the principalship of Herzlia School in 1955.
5. Annual Report for the United Hebrew Schools of Cape Town for the year ending 31 December 1940.
6. Minutes of the Committee Meeting of the United Hebrew Schools: 10 March 1940.

our places of worship and learning".¹ It was their sacred duty to support the Talmud Torah. Considering the size of the community, continued Mr I Mauerberger, it was sad to note that the school had only 500 subscribers.

The morning classes had settled down well. Mr W Harris was so moved by the re-opening that he pledged a monthly subvention towards its upkeep which indeed exceeded that of the New Hebrew Congregation in Roeland Street.²

The state of the Talmud Torah and the Liberman High School was most satisfactory. The average attendance was 95%, and about 40% of the pupils were girls. The Committee was very satisfied with the progress and order of the schools. A new Sub A class in the day school had been opened in July with 13 pupils. It was planned to go up to Standard I so that the little ones could be educated in a Jewish atmosphere, at least for a few years.³ The total enrolment now stood at 363 for both schools. The Matriculation and Junior Certificate Hebrew classes inaugurated in 1938 raised the tone and status of the school and numbered 16 pupils.⁴ A Parents' Committee had also been established.

Levin's report indicated that the Schools were following the syllabus laid down by the Cape Board of Jewish Education in 1939, that the Ivris B'Ivris method was in full use and that a start had been made in introducing the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew, beginning with the morning classes. The transition was not without its problems, but it was felt that a living link between the Hebrew-speaking community of Palestine and the Diaspora was desirable.⁵ The Committee

1. Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools of Cape Town for the year ending 31 December 1940.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., Headmaster's Report

4. Ibid.

5. Levin: op.cit., p 224.

itself was conscious of the important step.¹

Dr A Birnbaum, the Director of the Cape Board of Jewish Education, wrote in the same report that the experiment of teaching Talmud in Standard VIII and Rashi in lower classes was not a success. He advocated that these be introduced into Standards IX or X to be established in the future. "Ignorance", he stated, using a military figure of speech, "is the Fifth Column of our nation... (but)... it is being beaten in the Talmud Torah."² He too expressed his joy at the re-opening of the day school. The Committee deserved the gratitude of the community for this "real pioneer work".³

The finances remained in a chronically parlous state and the Committee was hardly ever in a position to satisfy the teachers' salary demands, especially as these increased with the wartime rise in the cost of living. Relationships between Committee and teachers not infrequently lacked mutual understanding and, at times, even bordered on the unfriendly. Symptomatic of the poor support from the community was the subsidy paid by the New Hebrew Congregation towards the upkeep of the morning classes. The amount was £5 a month, and it was in arrears with the payments.⁴ There was hesitation about opening a new morning class in July 1940 because of the extra expense involved; it was Dr Resnekov, once again true to form, who moved that this step be taken.

A weakness of the financial set-up of the school was the very inadequate fee system. Many parents paid no fees at all or very little. It was a long tradition going back decades. From the first, the Committee was very careful not to keep out pupils whose parents were too poor to afford the modest

1. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee: 19 February 1940.
2. Report of the United Hebrew Schools and the Hyman Liberman High School for the year ending 31 December 1940.
3. Ibid.
4. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee: 22 May 1940

school fees laid down. In time it became the widely accepted norm that one paid little or nothing at the Talmud Torah. Education was, after all, a free commodity in the government schools as well.

In an endeavour to solve the problem a Parents' Committee was established in August 1940 to stimulate parental support and guide it into the right channels. It was a great success:¹ and a later report stated that its work would be very beneficial to the School.² Thus began the long tradition of active commitment on the part of parents which grew in the course of years into a source of great value for the School.

The annual report for the year proudly stated that the day school had met with success and its progress had been to the satisfaction of the examiners.³ The enrolment in the three classes was 34: there were 166 in the Talmud Torah (up to Standard II) and 185 in the Hyman Liberman High School.⁴

Sub B and Standard I of the morning school showed a fall-off in numbers. It would appear that parents sent their children for a year or two because they were accepted at a younger age than stipulated by the departmental regulations and then enrolled them in government schools. The little morning school was exploited by unscrupulous parents who in this manner circumvented the regulations regarding minimal admission age.⁵

The close relationship between the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation and the School was expressed not only in the vigorous and

1. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee: 16 September 1940.
2. Minutes of Parents' Committee Meeting: 9 October 1940
3. Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools and the Hyman Liberman High School for the year ending 31 December 1941.
4. Promotion occurred every six months: the morning school was then only two years old.
5. Minutes of Meeting of the Education Sub-Committee: 27 March 1941

eloquent advocacy of its Rabbi, but in material support as well. The annual general meeting at the beginning of 1941 heard that during the previous 21 months the Congregation had donated about £1 000 to the United Hebrew Schools and, in addition, the Liberman High School had been granted an annual subvention of £1 400 for the running of the five upper standards.¹

This close relationship unfortunately evoked a negative, if covert, reaction from the New Hebrew Congregation in Roeland Street. The old rivalry which had once expressed itself in the competing Talmud Torahs at the beginning of the century had hardly been eliminated. The subvention which the New Hebrew Congregation paid somewhat reluctantly for the morning classes was ridiculously small. In 1941, Mr Levin drew attention to the Talmud classes run by the synagogue of this Congregation which either drew off pupils of the Liberman High School or hindered them in their studies, considering the limited time available to them in the afternoons.²

There were hard feelings on the School Committee over what they considered to be an organised attempt to break the Talmud Torah as an institution. And again using a topical figure of speech it stated that there was a danger that the only educational centre in Cape Town would be "torpedoed".³

The old tensions between the two Congregations had been greatly exacerbated by personal rivalries between the respective spiritual leaders, Rabbis I Abrahams and E W Kirzner.

1. Report of the Annual General Meeting of the United Hebrew Schools: 2 March 1941.
2. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee Meeting: 5 February 1941
3. Ibid: 10 March 1941.

The establishment of a Standard IX which the senior pupils unanimously agreed to join, was a matter for great satisfaction to the Committee and also to Rabbi Abrahams, who had evidently interviewed the pupils personally. Standard III would now revert to the United Hebrew Schools.¹ Mr W Harris, who presided at the meeting, stressed the need for proper salary scales for Hebrew teachers, as was the case in government schools, so that teachers would not have to come cap in hand begging for an increase. It was degrading not only to the teachers' dignity but also to the dignity of Hebrew education as a whole.²

This is further evidence of the central role played by Harris in the development of education at the Cape. He discerned the essential value of that imponderable concept of dignity, regrettably all too frequently absent in the story of the Jewish educational institutions, but indispensable for the evolution of the next stage of Jewish education, that of the integrated day school.

Salary scales were finally adopted after discussions with the Hebrew Teachers' Association later in the year,³ though the Committee pointed out that teachers had extra sources of income from the extensive practice of giving private lessons in actual competition with Talmud Torahs. As soon as parents could afford it, they removed their children to private teachers, recorded the minutes interestingly. Some members of the Committee felt, however, that it had to be admitted that teachers were not paid a living wage and that was why they gave private lessons.⁴ Others, however, were not so sympathetic and displayed what had become known as the balebatim⁵ approach - purse-proud, tight-fisted and

1. Minutes of the Committee of the Liberman School for Higher Hebrew Education: 25 June 1941.
2. Ibid.
3. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee Meeting: 10 August 1941.
4. Ibid., 2 September 1941.
5. Balebatim: Hebrew: literally - "house-holders". It assumed the negative connotation of hard-fisted, philistine employers, especially of teachers and other communal servants.

even contemptuous of the teacher and of the value of his work. The teachers' demand for a 21-hour teaching week was, however, finally accepted.¹

A disquieting phenomenon, noted early in 1942, was the decline in numbers on the roll.² There was talk again of closing the morning school.

In June 1941 the enrolment stood at 378 with 36 children in the three morning classes (20 of them in Sub A). By December, the numbers had dropped to 357, whereas in June 1942, the total had decreased to 322 with only 22 in the morning school, which now went up to Standard II.³ Dr Resnekov had already pointed out in the previous year that the Jewish population was moving away and had advocated that the Talmud Torah should follow the population and open a branch in the suburb of Oranjezicht.⁴ The annual report for the year ending 31 December 1941 again expressed regret that so few parents had taken advantage of the morning school and complained about those who were indifferent to the Jewish education of their children. Nevertheless, it reported a year of sound progress and achievement and reasserted that the Talmud Torah and the Hyman Liberman High School bore comparison with the best institutions of a similar character anywhere in the Diaspora, a conviction fully borne out by the opinions of important visitors to the Cape.⁵

From 1942, the Education Sub-Committee of the United Hebrew Schools and of the Liberman High School were combined and this further reduced the fiction of two separate schools. The annual report indicated that the Committee had organised two successful drives: one was for more pupils, and the other

1. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee: 2 September 1941.

2. Ibid., 18 March 1942

3. Ibid., 29 June 1942

4. Ibid., 10 August 1941

5. Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools for the year ending 31 December 1941.

was for funds.¹

The report opened on a solemn, even anguished, note:

The sufferings endured by the Jewish race have reached unprecedented extremities. One by one the seats of Jewish learning and culture in Europe have been obliterated and all outward expressions of Jewish life have been crushed. At such time it is our grave responsibility to keep aloft the banner of Jewish learning.....counteract the ravages of Nazi barbarism....to enable the Jewish spirit to survive the present catastrophe.²

The enrolment in January 1943 was up again to 377, the morning school showing a gratifying increase from 25 to 63. In addition, 32 pupils were attending two classes. The branch in Oranjezicht opened in 1943 with 19 pupils. The campaign for funds towards the end of the year had been a success. The community had at last realised the importance of the institution by giving liberally, stated the Chairman's report.³

Even the Beth Hamedrash Hachodosh Congregation, which had moved to Vredehoek a few years earlier, had agreed to assist by a small levy on its members. There were functions for parents; Ongei Shabbat (cultural function on the Sabbath) were instituted; the Minyan Joseph was well attended; a Batmitzvah (girls' dedication) class was opened; methods were improved as a result of experience gained and also in accordance with the practice in Eretz Israel.⁴ An interesting development was the participation of the Jewish Day School League, composed of Zionist Youth under Mr R B Egert, in canvassing for pupils. This gentleman submitted a draft prospectus to the Committee, organised the

1. Ibid., for the year ending 31 December 1942: presented at the Annual General Meeting on 11 April 1943.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

publicity, and together with other members, visited the homes of likely pupils.¹ The result was a gratifying increase in the enrolment for 1943 which also saw the opening of a Standard II.

Levin's report reflected his pleasure at the rise in numbers thanks to the energetic efforts of the Committee and the influence of Rabbi Abrahams. The re-opening of a Standard IX at the Hyman Liberman High School and of the post-matric class of volunteers was a cause for further gratification, as were the Barmitzvah syllabus class and the attendance of past pupils at Minyan Joseph and the Oneg Shabbat functions.²

The young people of the Jewish Day School League increased their active support for the morning school. They suggested that a school blazer and badge be adopted and that better publicity be prepared and directed to parents in order to persuade them to send their children to the morning classes.³ This was a symptom of the growing support for the School in the community. They again carried out a successful canvass for pupils.

An event of importance was the announcement that Hebrew had become a major course for the Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Cape Town, thanks to the efforts of Rabbi Professor Abrahams who had been appointed to the Chair of Hebrew in succession to the late Rev Professor A P Bender. The continuation class was attending twice weekly.

By August, the enrolment reached 422, 74 of whom were in the morning classes, and 30 of the total attended two classes,

1. Ibid. : see also the Minutes of Committee Meeting of 16 May 1943.

2. Ibid.

3. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee: 16 May 1943 and 18 July 1943.

leaving a net figure of 392.¹ The young workers urged the Committee to open a Standard III the following year and, indeed, pointed out that an undertaking should be given that the School would ultimately go up to Standard VI, so that parents should be secure in their knowledge that the whole primary course would be available.² A special Day School Committee was called into being, consisting of representatives of the combined Education Sub-Committees of both Schools, together with the representatives of the Cape Zionist Youth Executive, to promote the interests and progress of the day school.³

The doubts and hesitations of the School Committee were dispelled. It was decided to open a Standard III class in 1944 and plans were again made to canvass pupils, publicise the School, arrange a concert by the day school pupils, and adopt a badge. The fledgling institution was assuming the outward form of a proper school and embarking on its own line of development.⁴ The morning school was beginning to generate its own dynamism. To a large extent this was, no doubt, due to the energy and involvement of the young people under Egert who also drafted a suitable pamphlet to be distributed to prospective parents. The Committee accepted the recommendations of the Day School Committee. It was apparent that the morning school was beginning to occupy more and more of its attention.⁵

The annual report for 1943⁶ noted that there was a staff shortage because of the war and the suspension of immigration. The Evening (Continuation) Class of over 20 ex-pupils

1. Annual Report for the year ending 31 December 1943.
2. Minutes of the Day School Committee of the United Hebrew Schools: 5 September 1943.
3. Ibid.
4. Egert was himself a trained teacher.
5. Minutes of the Meeting of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee: 12 September 1943
6. Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools for the year ending 31 December 1943

attended thrice-weekly and was progressing most satisfactorily. Mr Levin called it "the crowning glory of our institution".¹

He reported another innovation: 28 girls had passed the Batmitzvah examination and had participated in an impressive ceremony. Nine pupils had written the Senior Certificate Hebrew examination and eleven the Junior Certificate (Standard VIII) examination.² In an obvious reference to what he considered to be the disappointing enrolment in the School, he reported that it showed greater development internally than externally³ and he could not forbear to criticise those parents who exploited the school by enrolling their children for a short period in order to gain easy admission to government schools. A Standard III class was to be opened in 1944. The slow growth of the Oranjezicht branch was even more disappointing to Mr Levin,⁴ who referred in his report to the emergence of a certain negative attitude on the part of Jewish parents towards the Jewish education of their children.⁵

At the beginning of 1944, the last year of Mr Levin's principalship, the Committee, too, noted the disappointing enrolment at the Oranjezicht branch, with its 28 pupils, and the opinion was expressed that this number would increase greatly if children had to attend only thrice-weekly.⁶ This view was repeated at a meeting a little later and the retort of Mr J Gitlin, the Chairman, was prophetic in its prescience - that such a step would undermine Hebrew education

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid

5. Ibid.

6. Minutes of the United Hebrew Schools' Committee Meeting; 13 February 1944

in South Africa.¹

Gitlin may have assessed the danger correctly. He was, however, not to realise the inevitability of this negative development. The canvass for pupils for the morning classes and for the Oranjezicht branch was resumed with general and press publicity, drawing-room meetings and interviews.

In mid-1944, Dr A Birnbaum, Director of the Cape Board of Jewish Education, would travel to Palestine in order to interview teachers.² This was the first recorded step of the endeavour to obtain staff from a new source, to replace that from Eastern Europe which first the immigration quota and then the war had eliminated. The importation of Hebrew teachers from Israel on short-term contracts was to become policy for the ensuing decades. Although endeavours were made to produce local teachers of Jewish studies, the limited supply was outstripped by the demand of the fast-expanding day schools during the fifties and sixties. Teachers from Israel were to play an important role in the development of Hebrew education during these decades. Their contribution was very considerable, but there were serious problems attendant upon this scheme.

Another problem besetting the afternoon Hebrew school was presented by the sporting activities of the pupils on week days, as well as on Saturday mornings. Dr Resnekov, Chairman of the Cape Board of Jewish Education, undertook to interview the Superintendent-General of Education, Dr de Vos Malan, on this matter. The minutes do not record the outcome of this meeting, but one can confidently assume that little, if anything, was achieved. This problem was

1. Ibid: 5 March 1944

2. Minutes of Combined Education Sub-Committee of the United Hebrew Schools and the Hyman Liberman School for Higher Hebrew Education: 14 July 1944.

to take on more serious proportions during future years and was to cause the breakdown of one of the pillars supporting the whole structure of the supplemental school - the six-day week.

The preamble to the annual report - the equivalent in print of the chairman's address to parents and subscribers - noted that the Committee was aware that the Jewish atmosphere in homes of most pupils had further deteriorated and it was up to the schools to implement what was lacking in the homes.¹ This may have been due to the deleterious influences of the war. The more likely reason was that these were increasingly the homes of first and second generation members of the community who had received an inadequate Jewish education in their youth and had, as a result, easily severed their links with tradition. Immigration from Eastern Europe had been drastically reduced during the previous decade and the old religious ways were gradually dying out with the departure of the older immigrants.⁵

The day school was inspected by Mr L Simenhoff, Principal of the Salt River Public School, and Dr A Birnbaum, Director of Hebrew Education, both of whom praised the excellent standards achieved,³ and the report again appealed to parents, who "would be well-advised to send their children in increasing numbers to the Jewish Day School".⁴

That Jewish parents still lacked sufficient faith in the new School was borne out by the fact that there were but 68 pupils in the five standards. It would appear, however,

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1. Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools for the year ending 31 December 1944
 2. Saron, G: "Epilogue 1910-1955" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., cites these figures: 2 394 Jewish immigrants in 1929 (before the Quota Act came into operation), fell to 498 in 1935 (from the "quota" countries, viz. Eastern Europe) pp 378-379.
 3. Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools for 1944
 4. Ibid.

that educationally the little school had attained good standards and was doing good work.

The year ended amidst growing anxiety in view of the rising costs. Mr Z Avin, a senior teacher on the staff since 1928, was appointed headmaster in place of Mr Levin who retired after sixteen years of service. He had arrived to take over a small, and largely neglected, Hebrew school in a crumbling building in Hope Street. It had not as yet recovered from the trauma of the sudden demise of its previous principal: its enrolment was small; its support in the community very limited; its chronic financial problems were stifling its growth.

When Alexander Chaim Levin left it at the end of 1944, the School had an enrolment of close on 400. He had pioneered the "internal expansion" experiment - the day school classes - and established a successful little school which was the later Herzlia in embryo. He had firmly established the Ivris B'Ivris method and greatly raised standards of learning and teaching. He had broken the "Barmitzvah barrier" - the 13-year old terminal point of Jewish education. His pupils had for years been attending six or even seven times a week. His high school classes extended to Standard IX and took Hebrew for the Cape Senior Certificate Examination. His Continuation Class was his "crowning glory"; the red-brick school in Hope Street was a fit centre for Hebrew education in Cape Town, and was indeed the foremost Talmud Torah in South Africa in quality no less than in numbers. Famous men visited it and sang its praises. Alexander Levin had made a worthy contribution to Jewish education in South Africa.

CHAPTER 28: JEWISH EDUCATION IN JOHANNESBURG BETWEEN
THE WORLD WARS

The Hebrew High School (The Johannesburg Talmud Torah School)

By the end of 1911, the Hebrew High School, now in new premises in Wolmarans Street, had an enrolment of 72 boys and 12 girls divided into 4 classes.¹ It provided a secular as well as a Jewish education for the children of those whom Dr Landau termed "our foreign brethren... (who know neither)....the language nor the conditions of the country".² The school day ended at 1.00p.m. What is noteworthy is that it also admitted girls.

The afternoon session had an enrolment of 159 boys and 18 girls and was purely a Talmud Torah catering for children attending neighbouring schools, many of whom arrived late because of the dual-session system in operation there. The report also mentioned that the evening class with 11 senior pupils doing advanced Hebrew studies was a credit to the institution.³

Sabbath and Sunday morning classes in religion were well attended. A Minhah (afternoon) service was held on Saturdays and some classes also received tuition on Sunday mornings. The Curriculum Committee drew up a revised syllabus and submitted it to delegates of other Talmud Torahs in the hope that all schools would be persuaded to adopt a uniform syllabus of studies, ultimately leading to the very desirable amalgamation of all Talmud Torahs

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1. Annual Report of the Hebrew High School (Johannesburg Talmud Torah) for the year ending 31 December 1911: p 3.
 2. Rabbi Dr J L Landau in his address at the opening of the new Hebrew High School building on 9 April 1911: cited in "The Johannesburg Hebrew High School" in Jewish Affairs, February 1961, by S A Rochlin.
 3. Annual Report of the Hebrew High School for the year ending 31 December 1911: p 4

under one central committee.¹

The report of the Inspector of the Transvaal Education Department reflected the praiseworthy progress made, but considered that the two hours devoted daily to English instruction were inadequate, in view of the fact that to most of the children, who were of tender years, both English and Hebrew were unknown languages.² The report also revealed that the staff were teaching every day of the week and the only vacations they had were the religious holidays. "They should get away entirely from their work for three or four weeks during the year", stated the Inspector.³

By 1916, the enrolment had risen to 102 boys and girls in the morning classes and there were 129 in the afternoon sessions, which actually included a Sunday morning class.⁴

The religion classes of the United Hebrew Congregation across the road were taken over during the year by the Hebrew High School. There were two hourly classes on Saturday and Sunday mornings for Hebrew reading, Scripture and Religious Instruction.⁵

The report on the Hebrew examinations held in June 1916⁶, provides a detailed picture of the little school and its three Hebrew teachers. About one-and-three-quarter hours daily were devoted to Hebrew studies in the four morning classes. The subjects were Hebrew reading and writing,

1. Ibid., p 5.

2. Ibid., p 19.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., for the year ending 31 December 1916.

5. Ibid.

6. Hersch, M D: Report on Hebrew Examinations at the Johannesburg Talmud Torah: June 5676 (1916)
(supplied by the Jewish Museum, Johannesburg)

translation of prayers and Torah (Pentateuch), consisting of selected chapters from Genesis and Exodus. The afternoon advanced classes attended for one-and-a-half hours daily, from 4.30-6.00p.m. The average age in the senior class was twelve-and-a-half years. The three lower classes received one hour's tuition from 3.30-4.30p.m. The syllabus was similar to that of the morning classes. The senior class had studied the Book of Numbers. Mr M D Hersch, who was the examiner, expressed his entire satisfaction with the results generally.¹

In a leaflet sent to Jewish parents in Johannesburg, Mr S Shapiro, the President of the Hebrew High School (the Johannesburg Talmud Torah) appealed to them to avail themselves of the excellent opportunities offered for the education of their children by the Hebrew High School which was being thoroughly reorganised at the time.² The rooms were described as "lofty and airy". There was a new principal, Mr D Mann, M A., and a thoroughly efficient Hebrew and English staff. The School had ample room for additional pupils, whereas many local schools were so overcrowded that (Jewish) parents were encountering difficulties in obtaining admission into them for their children. We learn that the Day School was assisted by the Transvaal Education Department and inspected by Departmental Inspectors, and already went up to Standard VI (Form I). A Form II was to be started in 1920, with the object of raising the secular education gradually up to the Matriculation standard. The leaflet pointed out the great advantage of the day school in that pupils received their full Hebrew education together with their secular studies and were thereby relieved of the burden of private or class instruction in Hebrew after school

1. Ibid.

2. The Hebrew High School (The Johannesburg Talmud Torah): November 1919. Printed leaflet sent to parents. (Jewish Museum).

hours when they were entitled to their recreation and sport.¹

The report issued at the end of the year reiterated the appeal for more pupils and for more financial support and recorded that it was the ambition of the Committee to extend the secular education of the School to matriculation level from the then highest standard (From II) established when the School was reorganised by the new principal. The Committee urged parents to allow their children who had passed Standard VI to continue in Standard VII.²

This upward extension would achieve the valuable objective implied in the report as the raison d'être of the school, namely, the introduction of a more advanced Hebrew syllabus.³ In its own eyes, the Hebrew High School was still the "special Hebrew School.....the central Talmud Torah" - in contradistinction to the Jewish Government School - for which the need had been more and more felt in this ever-growing community.⁴ The School, noted the report, was most centrally situated, in close proximity to the tram.⁵

The Jewish population was, in fact, moving away from the city area towards the suburbs, and the Hebrew High School, like the Jewish Government School situated not far away, was the victim of demographic changes in the city area which were to deprive it of its reservoir of pupils.

A few years later, the S A Jewish Chronicle commented

1. Ibid.

2. Hebrew High School: Reports for the two years ending 31 December 1919, p 5.

3. Ibid.

4. Address by Rabbi Dr J L Landau at the opening of the new school in April 1911, quoted by S A Rochlin in "The Johannesburg Hebrew High School" in Jewish Affairs, February 1961.

5. Would this be a clear indication that it was really no longer centrally situated in relation to the main areas of Jewish residence?

critically on the annual report of the School, and on the parlous condition not only of the Hebrew High School but of Hebrew education generally on the Witwatersrand.¹ The editorial blamed the Committee of the previous few years for the deterioration in the position of the School. A decade previously it had been able to purchase stands in Wolmarans Street and erect a fine school building, but had now reached such a pass that the bank was threatening to dishonour its salary cheques.² It accused the leaders of partisanship in keeping out all but those emanating from Eastern Europe, so that a large section of the community which was only too willing to help in the work of Hebrew education (viz. British-born Jews) for the benefit of all, were excluded from the leadership. No wonder then, added the editorial, that "the school still struggles with but little signs of animation".³ Social tensions and schism in the Jewish community were still alive as late as the nineteen-twenties.

Rabbi Dr Landau had proposed that the School be transformed into a boarding establishment and transferred to the Houghton Estate, far from the city centre.⁴ This proposal was opposed by the journal. On the one hand it doubted whether the project would materialise at all, and, if brought into being, it would be a case of "stillbirth" because the "class of children" who could make it a viable project would not go to a purely Jewish academy. Furthermore, the pupils then at the Wolmarans Street School would certainly not go all the way to Houghton.⁵ The editorial called for communal co-operation and for an end to the attitude which looked upon the School as the peculiar and private preserve for a particular section (viz. the Eastern

1. S A Jewish Chronicle: 17 June 1921, p 562.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

European). Only full communal support would help to overcome its difficulties.

Efforts to achieve the amalgamation of the town's six Talmud Torahs at the end of the year were abortive, a failure regretted by the Chronicle.¹ The opportunity was thus lost of standardising the syllabus, of rationalising finances and administration, of procuring staff and pooling resources to solve common problems. The main cause of the failure, continued the acerbic article, was the parents, who were callous and indifferent to Jewish education except for the empty farce of the Barmitzvah celebration.²

Rabbi Dr J H Hertz, Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, visited his former country of domicile during his pastoral tour of the overseas dominions at the end of 1920 and beginning of 1921. By that time, the Jewish population in the Union had risen to 62 100, according to the 1921 census,³ with the largest community being located on the Rand. Chief Rabbi Hertz noted that Jewish religious education was the most insistent topic of discussion in every South African centre. Addressing himself to several South African congregations, he expressed his sorrow at what he had seen in many of the Talmud Torahs he had visited, where children were being trained neither as Jews nor for Judaism.⁴ In some there was no teaching of the Shema (central prayer of Jewish liturgy) or the blessings or anything of the synagogue service, nor, for that matter any Bible History, or the commandments or the festivals of

1. "The Talmud Torahs' Failure" in S A Jewish Chronicle 9 December 1921, p 1078.

2. Ibid.

3. 1929 S A Jewish Year Book: op.cit., p 38

4. See Communal Notebook C: op.cit., p 153 for letter by Chief Rabbi J H Hertz to South African Congregations: Muizenberg, 9 February 1921.

the Jewish faith.¹ The schools were secularised. Attention was focussed on the teaching of Hebrew as a language and even this was not efficiently imparted. He also deplored the mechanical reading in the infant classes. He promised to furnish a Code of Instruction (syllabus) and a list of text books.²

The provincial grant to the Hebrew High School was withdrawn in 1923. The struggling School could ill afford to lose it and this so aggravated its financial position that the Chronicle even wrote of the danger of closure.³ The Doornfontein Talmud Torah, too, was in difficulties. Three thousand Jews lived in the suburb and there were 229 children in the school of whom 125 were receiving free tuition. It was a very poor community - probably the poorest on the Rand - and the Congregation was not providing any support.⁴

The Ninth Zionist Conference, held in Johannesburg from the 5th to the 9th March 1924, devoted a special session to Hebrew education. In his presidential address Chief Rabbi Dr J L Landau was pessimistic and critical when he spoke of the various problems besetting Hebrew education in the country. It was very difficult to organise a uniform programme for all the schools, even in Johannesburg, because only a portion of the teachers were competent to carry it out. The position was very much worse in the country towns with their one-teacher schools.⁵

For two decades he had urged the community to establish a "real" Hebrew school. He had implored them not to send their children to convent schools where they ran the risk of

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. S A Jewish Chronicle, 4 October 1923, p 795.

4. Ibid., 14 December 1923, p 1014

5. Rabbi Dr J L Landau: Presidential Address to Ninth South African Zionist Conference: Zionist Record, 31 March 1924. p 11.

estrangement from their parents and their religion. He had tried to collect funds - all had been in vain. The few hours a week of instruction in a supplemental school, or even less at the hands of a private tutor, were useless, especially when most Jewish homes were negative, lacking in any real Jewish spirit, and the parents observed neither the Sabbath nor the traditional laws.¹

He called for essential reforms: a uniform programme (syllabus) for all schools had to be introduced; an inspector was needed to examine schools and safeguard standards; Jewish boarding schools would have to be established and it was up to congregations to provide the really modest resources required.²

The conference adopted a resolution calling on the South African Zionist Federation, together with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, to call a conference to deal specifically with the problems confronting Hebrew education.³

Ideas on the subject had crystallised sufficiently a few months later for preparations to be made to convene such a representative conference in Kimberley.⁴ The draft constitution for a Board of Education was drawn up and adopted at a preliminary meeting. It incorporated the following proposals: a South African Board of Jewish Education was to be set up, with a central education fund; and a Director of Jewish Education would be appointed. The tasks of such a body would be to promote and co-ordinate Jewish educational endeavours, advise and guide school committees, undertake the training of teachers, see to inspections and examinations, prepare and publish suitable

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p 12. Years were to pass before this was to materialise.

4. Ibid., 15 August 1924, p 17.

text books and initiate the establishment of nursery schools and boarding establishments.

The thinking on the problems of Jewish education had advanced considerably and the community was about to take a great step forward in its endeavours to solve the ever-presenting problems of Jewish education in this country.¹

But it was not to be. A few months later the Zionist Record announced that the proposed representative education conference had been "indefinitely postponed".² The response to invitations to participate had been so miserable from the very quarters who had always agitated for improvement that the plans had had to be abandoned for the time being owing to the opposition and lukewarmness of those who should have been the keenest.³ The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation was not blameless in this regard.

The opening of the Hebrew University at the beginning of 1925⁴ aroused enthusiasm and happiness in the South African Jewish community. Writing in the Zionist Record,⁵ Mr D Mann, Principal of the Hebrew High School, stated that there was no better way of commemorating that glorious event than to establish a Jewish High School with a hostel for country boarders. Such an institution would combine a sound secular education up to matriculation standard with a higher Hebrew education up to matriculation standard and would assuredly, in years to come, produce future students for the Hebrew University in Palestine.⁶ Such a school, Mr Mann stressed, should have all the required sporting facilities

1. Ibid.

2. "Indifference": Zionist Record, 5 December 1924, pp 1-2

3. Ibid.

4. On Mount Scopus, Jerusalem.

5. Mann, D: "A High School": Zionist Record, 27 March 1925, p 7

6 Ibid.

which would make parents proud to send their children to it.¹

The existing Talmud Torah system, he continued, was an inadequate instrument for the spiritual needs of the community. The only school that placed Hebrew education in the forefront of the curriculum was the Hebrew High School in Wolmarans Street, but it had long been crippled by lack of funds so that it could not go beyond Standard VII; the modest building and absence of playgrounds had prevented any expansion of its activities. Yet it had acquired valuable experience which could provide the nucleus of the primary department of a real Hebrew High School.²

With the Hebrew Education Conference postponed sine die, the Johannesburg leadership decided to solve their own problems of Hebrew education. Dr Landau convened a meeting of the lay leaders of the Talmud Torahs and persuaded them to form a United School Board with the immediate aim of adopting one curriculum, to be followed by other forms of co-operation.³

By the following year Chief Rabbi Landau could report progress in their endeavours aiming at the amalgamation of

1. Ibid.

2. Years were to pass before the dream of the Principal of the Hebrew High School, inspired by the wonderful event of the opening of the first Hebrew-medium University in modern times, was to be realised. Here was an instance of the action of the contemporary external factor in Jewish education, more specifically an example of the spiritual link between the renascent Jewish culture in its old-new Homeland and Jewish education in this part of the continent.

3. Zionist Record, 16 January 1925, p 14.

the various Talmud Torahs,¹ though Jeppestown still held out from joining the Union of Hebrew Educational Institutions of Johannesburg.

Early in 1927², representatives of twenty-one of the twenty five congregations on the Rand met to discuss the proposed Federation of Synagogues and shortly after this body came into existence a crowded mass meeting unanimously voted in support of the Union of Talmud Torahs of Johannesburg.³ The Johannesburg Jewish community was evidently taking steps to eradicate in practice the long tradition of disharmony which had been so prominent a feature of its history from its very beginnings as well as the equally long tradition of apathy in regard to Jewish education.

Mr S Raphaely, Chairman of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, presided over the meeting and Chief Rabbi Landau was the main advocate of the move towards amalgamation.⁴ The Hebrew High School also joined the Union which came into being on the 10th March 1927 with the first meeting of the United Council.⁵ Its report for 1926 was again satisfactory; the inspectors remarked that the School was altogether in a satisfactory state of efficiency.⁶ During the four previous years 54 of 59 candidates had passed the High School Entrance Examination at the end of Standard V.⁷ For the first time in three years the revenue exceeded the expenditure.⁸

1. Report of the Annual General Meeting of the Hebrew High School of Johannesburg: *ibid.*, 16 April 1926, p 11.
2. *Ibid.*, 28 January 1927, p 17.
3. S A Jewish Chronicle, 18 February 1927, p 231.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Report of the Hebrew High School for the year ending 31 December 1926, p 4.
6. *Ibid.*, p 4.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*

There were 170 children in the day school, 36 in the afternoon classes, and 100 in the Sabbath/Sunday religion classes. The report mentioned that there were organised games and the school had entered teams in the football and cricket leagues. The United Hebrew Congregation made a regular subvention to the school which had about 700 subscribing members. Income from school fees for the year amounted to £774-13-0d.¹

The Curriculum of Instruction of the United Talmud Torah Schools of Johannesburg was drawn up in 1927.² It gives an outline of the work to be covered in the two grades and six standards during seven years of instruction. All this is set out on one page. A number of Scharfstein's readers and abridgements, printed in the United States of America, feature prominently on this list,³ though portions of the Pentateuch and Former Prophets in the original are introduced during the fourth year. Surprising items are the appearance of Adler's Hebrew Grammar in Standard III and the reading of an unpunctuated Hebrew book in Standard VI where "Ezra and Nehemiah are to be added".

The 1928 report of the United Talmud Torah Schools of Johannesburg⁴ listed the following seven schools: the Hebrew High School in Wolmarans Street, Doornfontein, Fordsburg, La Rochelle, Mayfair, Bertrams and Ophirton, with a total enrolment of 655 children: there were close on 200 in each of the first two.⁵

1. Ibid.
2. Curriculum of Instruction of the United Talmud Torah Schools of Johannesburg: 1927. Typescript (Supplied by the Jewish Museum, Johannesburg).
3. Some of the texts were also used in the Cape Town Talmud Torah of the same period. Examples of school texts in Hebrew by Zvi Scharfstein were: Bilshon Ami (In My People's Tongue) (Shilo, New York) Parts I, II & III (1927 editions): Sippurei HaTorah: (Shilo, New York) (Stories from the Pentateuch for Children) (No date of publication). Others were Likkutei Aggadah: Part I & II (Aggadic Selections) (Shilo, New York 1919). The same author published other school texts.
4. Report of the United Talmud Torah Schools of Johannesburg: Issued by the Committee: October 1928 (Jewish Museum, Johannesburg)
5. Ibid.

In addition to these Talmud Torahs, the Union was also in charge of the Johannesburg Hebrew College for Higher Hebrew and Talmudical Instruction as well as the Hebrew tuition in the Jewish Government School in End Street where six teachers attended thrice weekly to conduct Hebrew classes. About half the pupils paid no fees at all, and many of the rest only nominal amounts. The Union employed 27 teachers under the Rev Mr Lipschitz, who served as Inspector.¹

The report noted the considerable all-round improvement made since the inception of the Union. A uniform curriculum had been introduced into all the Talmud Torahs with beneficial results. Children could be transferred from one school to another without suffering any educational harm. Schools could now be compared, and the inadequate supply of text books and educational material had been remedied. Attendances, too, had improved. The pupils of the higher classes had been promoted to the Hebrew College for Advanced Study at the Hebrew High School to study Bible, Talmud and Rabbinic Literature.² The Union Council intended to proceed to matriculation level at the Hebrew High School. The number of subscribers had grown to 2 000³ and more support was needed to establish Talmud Torahs to cater for Jewish children not receiving Hebrew instruction. Chief Rabbi Dr J L Landau was the President of the Council.

With the increase of the Jewish population in the suburbs of Berea and Yeoville, the Council of the United Talmud Torah Schools established small Talmud Torahs in rooms attached to the respective synagogues of these congregations.⁴ The Union now had nine schools staffed by 30 teachers under its control. Doornfontein was the largest, with an

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. The Jewish population was approximately 30 000. The Zionist Record published a breakdown of the 1921 census in its issue of 30 April 1923 and gave the figure of 22 380 for Johannesburg.

4. Report of the United Talmud Torah Schools of Johannesburg for the year ending 31 December 1929, p 4.

enrolment of 261. The Hebrew High School in Wolmarans Street had 150 pupils, and all the rest enrolments of 65 and under.¹ In addition, the Union was in charge of the Hebrew education of the 500 children attending the Government School in End Street. The instruction given there must have been of a very restricted nature, for the total cost amounted to only £30 per month.²

The Curriculum Committee of the Council was responsible for the drawing up of the syllabus, engagement of teachers and the general supervision of all the schools. Two members of the Hebrew Teachers' Association served on this Committee in an advisory capacity. The Committee paid frequent visits to the schools, watching the teaching methods and their general progress.³

The Committee indicated its intention of extending the scope of the schools to matriculation standard, and an important decision was that Hebrew would be the medium of instruction in the early grades to pave the way for the gradual introduction of Hebrew throughout all the schools.⁴ Could this decision have been connected with Alexander Levin's stubborn pioneering experiment in Johannesburg classes in 1928 when Dr Landau and Mr C P Goodman came to see the Ivris B'Ivris system in operation with their own eyes and came away convinced?⁵

A detailed syllabus was drawn up in 1933 and, except for a few items in Yiddish, was written completely in Hebrew.⁶

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p 5.

4. Ibid.

5. Levin, A C : op.cit., pp 197-198.

6. Tochnit HaLimudim HaIvriim BeVatei HaSefer HaOrtodoksim BeJohannesburg: Hebrew: (Curriculum of Hebrew Studies in the Orthodox Schools of Johannesburg) 5693 (1933). 7

It covered the work for two grades and eight standards. The subjects listed were: Siddur reading: Torah: Hebrew Language and Literature: Prophets: Yiddish and History: Laws and Customs: Mishna: Gemara. Each standard received a total of nine hours' tuition weekly in some of the above subjects. Siddur and the liturgy were started in the grades and continued to Standard VI. Torah (Pentateuch) was introduced in Standard I (in the original) with the study of the first few chapters of Genesis, and continued throughout, culminating with the study of the weekly portion of the Pentatuech with its Rashi commentary. Hebrew tuition was based on Scharfstein's readers compiled for American Talmud Torahs (such as Mereshit and Bilshon Ami)¹ and Gordon's three-volume Halashon. In the two upper standards, the prescribed texts included prose and poetry selections from modern Hebrew literature, including the then contemporary writers Agnon and Bialik, and excerpts from mediaeval writers like Yehudah Halevi and Maimonides specially arranged for school use. The Former Prophets were introduced in Standard IV and selections from some of the Latter Prophets in Standard VI. It may be assumed that these two were studied in the original. The Books of Esther and Ruth, Ezra and Nehemiah were also included.

A surprising feature of the syllabus was the inclusion of Yiddish in Standards II-V. There was a reader in the first of these standards, followed by Dubnov's Yiddische Geschichte fir Kinder.² Hebrew texts were used for history from Standard VI onwards. The Shulhan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law), adapted for schools, was prescribed

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1. The Cape Town Talmud Torah also used these texts at the time. See p 324 footnote 3. S Dubnov's History of the Hebrews: (Translated into Hebrew and adapted for schools by A Luboschitzky) (Aviv, Warsaw, 1926) Volume I (Bible Period) was used in Cape Town. /
 2. Yiddish: Jewish History for Children.

for the higher classes. Mishna¹ was to be studied in Standard VI and several chapters of Talmud in Standards VII and VIII.²

The syllabus specified these seven aims:

- a) to familiarise the pupils with our prayers and inculcate them thoroughly.
- b) to give the child a thorough grounding in all the Books of the Pentateuch.
- c) to transmit to the child the contents of and the exalted ideas contained in the Books of the Prophets.
- d) to provide the pupils with a reasonable knowledge of the Hebrew language and its grammar.
- e) to provide the pupils with a satisfactory knowledge of our history.
- f) to inculcate in the young generation a proper knowledge of Jewish laws and customs.
- g) to open for the young people the gates to the treasures of our literature.³

This programme postulated that each standard would receive a minimum of one-and-a-half hours of instruction daily and, furthermore, that there would be six teaching days a week.⁴

Reports of the Council of the Union of Talmud Torahs⁵

Sources of revenue were school fees, members' subscriptions, subsidies from congregations, especially from the United Hebrew Congregation and the Talmud Torah Sunday collection. The last-named was a house-to-house canvass by voluntary workers of the institution.⁶

1. Mishna: Tractates Avoth and Berachot (Omanut, Tel Aviv)
2. Curriculum of Hebrew Studies in the Orthodox Schools of Johannesburg, 1933.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. 8th Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg for the year ending 31 December 1935, p 8
6. Ibid

The Union's Inspector, Mr D Mierowsky, reported very favourably on the very satisfactory year of progress in all the schools during 1935.

Religion, Hebrew Language both ancient and modern, Bible and Jewish Literature, have all been taught with a thoroughness unique in this country.¹

In some schools with continuation classes, Talmud and more advanced literature were also studied. The same report mentioned that negotiations were proceeding for the grading of teachers and systemisation of their salaries. The total enrolment in the nine constituent schools was 873² with the Doornfontein Talmud Torah in the lead with over 280 pupils, and the schools in Yeoville, Bertrams and Berea showing most expansion. The roll at the Hebrew High School had dropped considerably during the preceding few years.² Three modern Hebrew nursery schools at Doornfontein, Yeoville and Berea were conducted under the auspices of the Council.

The annual report for 1938³ records an increased enrolment, even though the Berea school was no longer included in the Union. A revised syllabus, "more in conformity with local needs and conditions" had been drawn up. A central class for senior pupils was being planned for the following year under the guidance of Mr Mierowsky and would study modern Hebrew literature, history and advanced composition.⁴

If the three besetting problems of Jewish supplemental education provided by Talmud Torahs (viz. lack of co-operation by parents, irregular attendance, and curtailed period of study) could be overcome, stated the report, still better work could be accomplished.⁵

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p 9.

3. 11th Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg for the year ending 31 December 1938, p 5

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

The new syllabus introduced at the beginning of 1939 was reported to be working well.¹ It laid greater stress than heretofore on Hebrew conversation and liturgy, not surprising in view of the fact that two of the three compilers of the syllabus were rabbis.²

Senior pupils studied advanced Bible - portions of the Latter Prophets and Hagiographa - and eight candidates offered Hebrew for their matriculation. There were over 20 pupils in Mr Mierowsky's Advanced Central Class and the Curriculum Committee was more than satisfied with its achievements, as, indeed, with the general picture of all-round progress.³ The enrolment at the Hebrew High School had remained stationary at just over a hundred pupils; it had now become one of the smaller schools of the Union. No doubt reflecting the demographic changes in the Johannesburg Jewish community, the numbers in the Doornfontein school had declined to below 300, to fall drastically to just over 200 by 1940.⁴ Mr Mierowsky was again able to report a year's good and solid work. There was a marked increase in pupils taking Hebrew for their matriculation, one school having a class of 28 senior pupils. Several schools already taught Talmud and the Advanced Central Class held on Sundays in the Hebrew High School also made fine progress.⁵ The number of pupils had fallen to barely 800, though the report for 1941 notes a slight improvement, with the enrolment at 838, with 15 teachers:

1. Annual Report for the year ending 31 December 1939, p 5.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Thirteenth Annual Report of the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg for the year ending 31 December 1940, p 6.
5. Ibid.

only about fifteen per cent of the students were girls.¹ The Ophirton Talmud Torah had by now disappeared from the list, to be replaced by the little school at Rosebank. Yeoville had overtaken Doornfontein as the largest constituent school with 255 pupils. The report provided another very interesting figure - the average attendances for the month of October were 70,5%.

Other Talmud Torahs were being opened up in various suburbs by newly-established congregations. These became affiliated to the Union only some years later.²

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1. Report of the Executive Committee of the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg for the year ending 31 January 1941.
 2. Ibid., for the year ending 31 December 1951.

CHAPTER 29: THE SOUTH AFRICAN BOARD OF JEWISH EDUCATION

The organisational framework of the South African Jewish community was taking final shape with the imminent unification of its educational institutions. The Zionist Movement, with its large following, was united in the S A Zionist Federation. The S A Jewish Board of Deputies was the umbrella organisation for the communal institutions and congregations. Most of the Johannesburg Talmud Torahs had recently amalgamated to form their union, following the example of Cape Town some years earlier. A federation of synagogues was mooted and the rift in the Johannesburg community had been healed with the formation of the United Hebrew Congregation. The Jewish community, by then numbering 72 000 souls,¹ was achieving a sense of unity, communal responsibility and orderliness, which were to become its proud and admired characteristics in later years.

The Early Years

Chief Rabbi Dr J L Landau's constant urgings² at one Zionist Conference after another, that attention be given to the ever-pressing problems of Jewish education in this country, finally bore fruit.³

He and others in the community had made many calls over the years for order and co-operation in Jewish education to replace the fragmentation and aimlessness which had become so characteristic of it. They had dreamt of the day when

1. 1929 S A Jewish Year Book: op.cit., p 38.
2. Misheiker, A: "50 Years: The S A Board of Jewish Education" in the Report of the Eighteenth National Education Conference Johannesburg: August 1978, p 11.
3. Landau, J L: "Jewish Education in South Africa": Zionist Record: 15 August 1924, p 3. See also Chapter 28.

it would become sufficiently organised to be in a position to tackle its problems and plan its activities on a country-wide basis. This dream and vision were finally to see the beginnings of their realisation at the end of the twenties, after the abortive move in this direction made a few years earlier.¹

August 1928 was to see the consummation of the labours of those who had for years keenly felt the great need to bring an end to the disunity and disorder in Jewish education which was still the principal care of the community. Unity, they hoped, would also bring strength.

The forthcoming conference aroused considerable interest in the community and the Zionist Record gave considerable attention to the subject in a number of leading articles. It was "the Community's Acid Test" was the title of one leader² and "An Epoch-Making Event" it was called the following week.³ The Bloemfontein Conference was hailed as the launching of a great cultural movement on the community "for the education of the young is the very basis of a people's culture"⁴

Over sixty delegates, representing forty-seven institutions and organisations all over Southern Africa gathered in the Communal Hall, Bloemfontein, on Sunday morning the 26th August at the opening session of the first conference on Hebrew and religious education ever held in this country.⁵ Rabbi Landau presided over the gathering and in his opening

1. See pp 320-321

2. Zionist Record, 17 August 1928, p 4

3. Ibid., 24 August 1928, p 4

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 31 August 1928, p 577

address summed up the aims of the conference as their effort "to save the Jewish past for the coming generations in this country and.....to save the next generation from complete alienation from Judaism".¹ The past was dead to the children of the community, said the Chief Rabbi, for the roots had been dried up and their generation was spiritually rootless, and therefore so many dropped out of Judaism like faded leaves off the dead branches. All this was due to ignorance of their heritage. Neither the parents nor the children realised the seriousness of the moral and spiritual loss. Education would provide knowledge drawn from the fountain of Jewish history and literature and bring true meaning into their lives as members of the Jewish people.²

David Mierowsky, Principal of the Port Elizabeth Hebrew School, analysed the problems of Jewish education of the time and proposed some solutions, in the key note address to the Conference.³ He identified what he termed the main evils besetting the system of Jewish education and the main obstacles impeding its progress, and proceeded to set out in clear and practical terms the proposed remedies which really form the foundation on which the whole structure of the future S A Board of Jewish Education was erected.

The problem of Jewish education was, historically speaking, of comparatively modern origin and existed in lands where the Jew had been emancipated and admitted into the daily life of the general community. The core of the problem, he stated, was how a distinctive minority may dwell in the midst of an overwhelming majority without entirely losing

1. S A Jewish Chronicle, 31 August 1928, p 577

2. Zionist Record, 31 August 1928, pp 7-8

3. Mierowsky, D: "An Analysis of the Problems of Hebrew Education in South Africa": Zionist Record, 31 August 1928, pp 13-15.

its identity. Partial loss of identity, or acculturation, was however inevitable and constituted indeed a fact which further complicated the problem.¹

In South Africa the problem was even more difficult because the small community² was scattered over a vast sub-continent in such small groups that it was hardly possible for them to make anything like adequate provision for the Jewish education of their children.³

The efforts of the comparatively young South African community in the field of Jewish education, whilst creditable in themselves, had been "so desultory, spasmodic and non-systematic"⁴ that they had met with little success, and Mierowsky called for a "definite, conscious, systematic, concentrated effort to grapple with the difficulties besetting the path of the Jewish education of the child".⁵ He then proceeded to enumerate the obstacles that impeded the progress of Jewish education and which he regarded as the evils responsible for its deplorable condition.⁶ The first and foremost, he stressed, was the utter indifference of the Jewish masses towards Jewish education. He scathingly condemned the poor attitude of most parents who gave Hebrew education that "last and least" place in the scheme of the child's education.⁷ Most parents simply did not care, he added despondently; if they did provide any instruction for the boys, "any Jewish education will do, just to satisfy scruples of conscience or convention".⁸

1. Ibid.

2. There were 71 816 Jews in South Africa according to the 1926 census. See Saron & Hotz, op.cit., p 371

3. Mierowsky, D: op.cit., p 14.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

The second problem was the poor conception of what Hebrew education ought to be.

It would be no exaggeration to state that to a large portion of the community, Ivre,¹ i.e. the ability to read Hebrew (of the prayer book) mechanically and unintelligibly and the readings of the small sections of the Pentateuch and Prophets required for the Barmitzvah formed the be-all and end-all of Jewish education.²

Other aspects of the problem were the preoccupation of Jewish children with their general school and extra-mural activities which left him virtually too exhausted to absorb their Hebrew tuition, at Talmud Torah or at home. The lack of trained and suitable Hebrew teachers constituted one of the most serious defects in Hebrew education. Mierowsky compared and contrasted many of the Hebrew teachers of his day with their counterparts in general education. Perhaps in this sphere more than in any other, order and reform were vital. And the effects on the child were catastrophic as he compared his Hebrew teacher - generally unqualified, often lacking in general culture and even ignorant of the language spoken by the child - with the teacher in the public school. No wonder that he developed a contempt not only for the teacher but also for the subject taught by him.³

Mierowsky enumerated other problems, such as irregular attendance caused through an overburdened curriculum or more likely than not through the indifference of parents; the lack of proper text books; the absence of any co-ordinating organisation empowered to plan and organise for the whole country and the deleterious effects of ignorant and

1. Corruption from Ivris - meaning Hebrew: here more specifically - correct Hebrew reading.

2. Ibid., p 14.

3. Ibid.

unqualified school committees.

He could offer no immediate panacea for the inherent ills in the system,¹ but adumbrated a practical programme which in the course of time, he maintained, would bring about an improvement in the situation. What was needed first of all was an extensive organisation embracing all educational institutions to organise Hebrew education throughout the country, and to direct it towards general improvement. A proper syllabus would have to be drafted, sufficiently comprehensive and elastic in nature to accommodate all the types of schools. Uniform text-books would be introduced in all schools under the control of the proposed Board of Education. A director of education should be appointed to inspect, carry out examinations, organise the work and stimulate interest in Hebrew education.

Another suggestion of Mierowsky's was the establishment of one model school with a comprehensive secular syllabus where students might acquire a thoroughly general and, at the same time, Jewish education without detriment to either. This suggestion was the logical sequence to Mierowsky's historical analysis of the background problems of Jewish education which formed the introductory portion of the paper. The Jewish child needed both his secular and his Jewish education, but the latter had been truncated and so deformed as to be hardly recognisable for what it should be. To restore some force and value to it vis-a-vis his secular education would only be possible in a school where both would enjoy parity of status and effectiveness and the disabilities of Jewish education would be removed once and for all. Mierowsky's argument formed the rationale for a Jewish day school and echoed the thinking of others like Mirvish, Chideckel and Levin, who were contemporaneous with him.

1. Ibid.

He also advocated continuation classes for the post-Barmitzvah stage to remedy the prevailing phenomenon of "pediatric" Jewish education which terminated with this ceremony. Vacation refresher courses for the teachers would be organised to raise professional levels, and they would be examined and graded at the end of each course.¹ To negate the harmful work of school committees, the proposed central board would supervise and authorise the appointment of teachers.²

This was the key-note address and message to the delegates assembled in Bloemfontein to bring the first S A Board of Jewish Education into existence, which body Mierowsky was to serve as chief professional officer for over a decade.³

The delegates adopted a resolution to establish a South African Board of Hebrew Education for the purpose of promoting and co-ordinating the Jewish educational effort throughout South Africa.⁴ Rabbi Landau and the Rev Mr Bender were elected honorary president and vice-president respectively, and Mr Harry Lourie became the Board's president. The objectives of the Board were, inter alia, to promote and co-ordinate Jewish educational effort, the ultimate ideal being that every Jewish boy or girl in South Africa should receive an adequate Jewish education. The Board would advise committees and bodies in control of Jewish schools, would secure the adequate inspection of schools, further the training of teachers of Hebrew and religion, and encourage the preparation of suitable text books. As proof of the close links with the sponsoring bodies, there was the proviso that the presidents of the two

1. Ibid., p 11.

2. Ibid.

3. When Rabbi J L Zlotnik was appointed director - in 1938 - Mierowsky became Director of the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg.

4. S A Jewish Chronicle, 31 August 1928, p 577

sponsoring bodies, the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation, were to serve, ex officio, on the executive of the Board.

Mr D Mierowsky (1888-1949) was appointed to the post of Organiser-Secretary of the new body, and applied himself to the immediate organisational tasks of the Board.

Rabbi M Ch Mirvish and Mr S Gesundheit were the two Cape Town delegates, representing the United Hebrew Schools and the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation respectively.¹ The Chronicle later referred to "certain friction" between the Board and the mother congregation and regretted that the disharmony had not been removed.² The representatives of the Western Province to the executive were indeed not appointed at conference.

Various signs of tension manifested themselves in the relationship with Cape Town over the years. Obviously enough, this was occasioned by the 1 000-mile distance between Johannesburg, the seat of the Board, and Cape Town. Geographical distance all too often gave rise to differences of approach, method and ideas, and a complicating factor was the role which the Mother Synagogue in Cape Town felt it ought to play, by virtue of its historical seniority and pre-eminence, in organising and leading the South African Jewish community.

During the decade of Mierowsky's tenure of office (1928-1937) the Board engaged in comparatively small-scale activity

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1. It is interesting to read that during the course of the conference deliberations Rabbi Mirvish had strongly advocated the establishment of Jewish secondary schools with Hebrew as a major subject. Zionist Record, 31 August 1928, p 10.
 2. S A Jewish Chronicle, 7 September 1928, p 592

occasioned by its very limited resources, as one may gather from the first balance-sheet, which showed an expenditure of £376.19.0d over a period of six months and a deficit of £13.3.0d.¹ In fact, the Board's work was made possible by modest grants from the Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation. Very little support for the new and untried body was as yet forthcoming from the Jewish community at large.

Mierowsky inspected the first school - Benoni - in October 1928.² Inspector-instructors appointed thereafter not only inspected schools but demonstrated desirable methods of instruction in loco to teachers, and first steps were taken to draw up a unified syllabus.

The report submitted to the Fourth Biennial Conference, held at the Hebrew High School in Wolmarans Street in 1936, provides a detailed account of the activities of the S A Board of Jewish Education about six years after its establishment.³ Its achievements, asserted the report, had vindicated the efforts of all those who had struggled for so many years to bring it into being. The work had expanded considerably during the two years under review; the Board's representatives had spread the message of Jewish education to some of the remotest corners of the sub-continent; had stimulated interest in education in many communities and had provided advice and guidance to individuals and school committees.⁴ Whilst standards had been improved and much progress made, many problems remained unsolved.

Many congregations and institutions, as far north as Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia, had affiliated to the Board. Some

1. Misheiker: op.cit., p 11

2. Ibid., p 12.

3. Report and Balance Sheet of the S A Board of Jewish Education for the period 1 December 1933 to 31 December 1935
submitted to the Fourth Biennial Conference, 15 March 1936.

4. Ibid., p 2

smaller communities in Northern Rhodesia had established contact with the Board as a result of which some of them had engaged teachers and Shohtim and thus created the nucleus of new congregations.¹

David Mierowsky had by now become Director of the Board² and Mr A Lewin the travelling inspector whose duties included public relations,³ on which the Board laid considerable stress.⁴ Inspection visits were generally combined with propaganda in the cause of Jewish education and with practical guidance and assistance to local committees.⁵

A measure of the guidance rendered by the Board to school committees is the fact that over 60 teachers had been appointed over the two years on the advice and authority of the Board.⁶ A Register of Teachers had also been completed and a measure of control introduced in that no recommendation was made by the Board unless a candidate for a post had given a test lesson in the presence of the Director and members of a special Selection Committee.⁷

1. Ibid.

2. He was initially organiser-secretary.

3. The report calls him Inspector-Propagandist.

4. The report (pp12-13) contains a list of no fewer than 158 constituent bodies visited by the Board's officials during the two years under review, located from Elizabethville in the then Belgian Congo in the north, to George and Swellendam in the south, from Windhoek in the west, to Durban in the east. Most of these communities have disappeared as a result of the pronounced urbanisation movement to the main centres in the post-war era.

5. Ibid., p 3.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

The Board had established an Education Bulletin which appeared as a supplement to the Zionist Record and which dealt with current educational subjects. It was planned to introduce Proficiency Tests in Hebrew at junior and senior levels.¹ With the assistance of Rabbi Hirsch of Pretoria, the Board had made successful representations to the Transvaal Education Department to introduce Hebrew as one of the subjects in its Junior Certificate Examination.

In an effort to solve the acute shortage of trained teachers of Hebrew, the Board initiated an experiment at the Normal College² to give Hebrew and religious instruction to Jewish student-teachers in training. The scheme unfortunately proved impracticable and had to be abandoned.

Other activities included the compilation of a series of Lessons in Jewish History written in a style suitable for use in the schools under its auspices and a start was made with similar lessons in "Present Day Jewish Knowledge".³

The Jewish National Fund Department of the S A Zionist Federation had compiled a course dealing with "Palestine and the Modern Jewish Revival" for schools under the Board, which had been received with enthusiasm.

On his return from a tour of the Rhodesias and the Belgian Congo, the Board's Inspector-Propagandist reported on the problems of the many tiny scattered Jewish communities and individuals who were too dispersed and isolated to be in a position to receive any spiritual or cultural instruction and guidance. There were hundreds of such families and individuals all over Southern Africa who were anxious to acquire a knowledge of Hebrew and general Jewish subjects,

1. Ibid., p 4.

2. Ibid., pp4-5.

3. Ibid., p 5.

and the Board inaugurated a course of "Hebrew Self Taught" for this purpose. These had been compiled by the Director and had been enthusiastically received.¹ A depot for text-books used by schools had also been established.

The Board's revenue and expenditure for the two years involved the modest sum of £4 600, and the treasurer's report indicated that the income was not only inadequate but also unreliable² and obviously acted as a serious brake on the Board's activities and plans. It was a national institution catering for the needs of the most distant and scattered communities and individuals and the whole community had a responsibility to it.³

During the thirties, the Board was plunged into an "acute ideological controversy"⁴ with conservative members of the rabbinate, led by Rabbi I Kossowsky, over the content and spirit of the curriculum. The orthodox charges were that the Board was too secular in its approach to Jewish education, that the religious content was inadequate. Instruction should be primarily concerned with the synagogue service, religious laws and customs and Scripture. This controversy lasted for a number of years and led to the resignation of Mierowsky in 1937.⁵

Rabbi Judah Leib Zlotnik⁶ (1887-1962), a noted folklorist and scholar, who had visited South Africa in the late twenties, and was at that time engaged in Jewish education in Canada,

1. Ibid., pp 5-6. There were no fewer than 700 names on the mailing list, some from outside the continent.
2. Ibid., p 7.
3. The community began to accept this argument to an increasing degree during subsequent years.
4. Misheiker: op.cit., p 12.
5. Ibid.
6. When he settled in Israel in 1949, he assumed the name of Avida.

was invited to assume the post of Director of the Board in 1938. A man of vision and wide experience, his eleven years of service to Jewish education in South Africa were to determine the course of its development during the ensuing decades.

Shortly after his arrival, Rabbi Zlotnik compiled his Survey of the Present Situation and Suggestions for the Future¹, which he termed "The Actualities and Possibilities of Jewish Education for South Africa" for submission to the Board. It was a comprehensive and incisive study of the position of the Johannesburg Talmud Torahs and the problems inherent in the system of supplemental Jewish education in general and of the local position in particular. He also dealt with such subjects as methodology, suitability of buildings, and nursery school education. It contained an exhaustive discussion of the curriculum and the place of religious instruction and prayers in it, and to settle the ideological controversy,² Rabbi Zlotnik placed these in their proper setting as essential components of the totality of Jewish education. The other subjects constituting the curriculum - Humash, Prophets, History, Laws and Customs, Language - were also discussed in this lengthy memorandum.

He advocated the amalgamation of several city Talmud Torahs into one modern, up-to-date central school, which should become "the pride and tower of strength for our whole school system in Johannesburg".³ No doubt, he had had experience of such large schools at first hand in Canada and the United States of America. He also advocated the setting up of large well-appointed kindergartens, one of which - the model school - would serve as a training centre for teachers.

1. Zlotnik, J L: Jewish Education in South Africa - Actualities and Possibilities: January 1939
Typed MS.

2. See p 343

3. Zlotnik, J L: op.cit., p 29.

A hostel which would provide a real Jewish home atmosphere for up-country children was also a necessity.¹

More unusual was his suggestion for the establishment of a farm-school in which agriculture, horticulture and mechanics would also be taught - an echo surely of the Kibbutz schools with which the new director, who had once served as a Zionist emissary, was acquainted. Zlotnik had been influenced by Dewey's writings on this subject, since he quotes from Education Today. He held up the boarding-schools of the Society of Friends in England as desirable models.² His suggestions and solutions are a blend of the imaginative and down-to-earth, the realistic and the impracticable, and encompassed the total range of Jewish education from nursery school to university students and the adult stage, from school extra-murals to libraries, from camps to inspections. The status of teachers was also dealt with and he added that there was also a need to bring in teachers on contract from Palestine and the United States of America. South African Jewish education had never before come under so close a scrutiny.

1. Ibid., p 30.

2. Ibid., pp 50-51.

CHAPTER 30: THE CAPE BOARD OF JEWISH EDUCATION

The idea of establishing a central body to introduce some measure of co-ordination and order into the work of the growing number of small Talmud Torahs at the Cape was given practical expression in 1925 with the formation of the Board of Education for the Cape Peninsula.

Dr Landau's advocacy of such a body for the Transvaal, if not for South Africa, at Zionist Conferences and on other platforms, was indeed echoed at the Third Conference of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies in 1919, which called for the setting up of such boards in each of the main centres, no doubt as a preparatory step to the emergence of a national body.¹

The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation took the initiative in 1925 in convening a meeting of representatives of congregations and institutions in the Cape Peninsula, "with the object of preparing a scheme for increasing the efficiency and the usefulness of Schools and Classes for Hebrew and Religious Education".² The Rev Mr Bender and Rabbi M Ch Mirvish were elected presidents, with Mr Harry Harris, Chairman, and Mr I Hirschon as Secretary.

In a report issued in June 1925,³ and presented to the 83rd Annual General Meeting of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, the Educational Sub-Committee of this Board stated that there was no uniformity in the different Hebrew schools. Hebrew, English or Yiddish, or mixtures of these, were used as media of instruction and curricula varied widely. About a

1. Misheiker, A: op.cit., p 11.

2. Report to 83rd Annual General Meeting of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation held on 26 September 1926.

3. Ibid. Annex 1. Report of the Educational Sub-Committee of the Board of Hebrew Education for the Cape Peninsula.
June 1925.

third of Jewish children received no Jewish education whatsoever. Indeed, the Talmud Torah system was slow and inefficient because the children arrived tired after a day at school, frequently followed by a session of sport. Its main recommendations were the establishment of a day school up to Standard III or IV¹, the appointment of a director of education,² and the institution of a pedagogical training course for teachers.³ The Sub-Committee urged that immediate steps be taken to induce those parents whose children did not receive any Hebrew instruction to send their children to a Hebrew school or obtain private tuition⁴ and, furthermore, that "a uniform medium of instruction"⁵ be adopted at the various schools. The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation voted £200 towards the salary of a director, but no one had been engaged as yet. By the end of 1927 the Cape Peninsula Board of Jewish Education appears to have died a natural death.

The issue of a united Jewish educational body for the whole community was revived with the convening of the foundation conference of the S A Board of Jewish Education in August 1928 in Bloemfontein. This was attended by Rabbi M Ch Mirvish and Mr S Gesundheit as representatives of the Cape Town Talmud Torah (United Hebrew Schools) and the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, respectively.⁶

By August 1929, the United Hebrew Schools and the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation were the only two bodies of the Cape affiliated to the S A Board of Jewish Education. A further development took place at the beginning of 1930, when the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education was established.⁷

1. Ibid., Section 3, p 33.

2. Ibid., Section 5, p 34.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., Section 1, p 33. The Sub-Committee reported that about 500, or just under one-third of the Jewish children of school-going age, received no Jewish instruction whatever.

5. Ibid., Section 2, p 33.

6. See pp 338-339 above.

7. Zionist Record, 17 January 1930, p 10

Owing to problems evidently connected with its relationship with the Johannesburg central body, this committee resigned in 1932. Mr Mierowsky, by then Director of the S A Board of Jewish Education, arrived in Cape Town in June of that year to heal the rift and resolve the situation.

A total misunderstanding of the position was the reason he gave for the resignation of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education and the withdrawal of support by the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation.¹ It was occasioned by a lack of contact resulting from the difficult position of the Central Board in Johannesburg which was "in a state of suspended activity"² because it had no offices of its own and no staff at that time. He rejected the charge that the Board was a "Johannesburg-body", only and solely concerned with the problems on the Rand.

Mierowsky claimed that the Board, weak though it was, had not neglected its duty towards other communities and pointed out that the large centres should support the Board to enable it to serve the smaller centres which were most in need of such assistance.³

Having cleared the atmosphere in this interview in the press, Mierowsky consulted Mr Bender and obtained his consent to the re-establishment of the Cape Committee.⁴ He then convened a meeting to re-constitute the local committee of the Board at which he re-stated its objectives to be as follows: to bring about the affiliation of congregations and schools; to introduce uniformity of curriculum and texts; to carry out regular inspections; to raise standards of instruction; to organise vacation refresher courses for teachers and to stimulate public and individual interest in

1. See Interview with Mr D Mierowsky in S A Jewish Chronicle, 24 June 1932, p 429.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Minutes of the Meeting of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education, 23 June 1932

Jewish education and culture.¹ He was very fortunate indeed in the people who had responded to his invitation to resuscitate the Cape Committee. At its head stood Dr Charles Resnekov, supported by Mrs Sarah L Cohen, Mr J Gitlin and Advocate J Herbstein.² Dr Resnekov, a scholarly and articulate physician and a dynamic personality thoroughly committed to the cause of Judaism and Zionism, was to guide the Cape Board of Jewish Education for many years and was largely responsible for its considerable achievements. Mrs Cohen was to serve as the capable honorary secretary of the Committee: Gitlin and Herbstein³ were leaders of the Zionist community.

The Cape Committee set about energetically to build up an organisation. The first essential step was to revive its membership and restore the affiliation of the Peninsula congregations and Talmud Torahs.⁴ Meetings were arranged with these bodies and delegations travelled to communities throughout the Western Province. Everywhere they promised assistance in the form of supervision, guidance and inspection.⁵ They addressed public meetings of the communities to highlight the importance of Jewish education and combat the apathy of parents. The Committee sent out honorary examiners⁶ to carry out inspections and examinations. It enlisted the assistance of the recently established Hebrew Teachers' Association in support of a proposed new syllabus and generally encouraged this body to bring organisation and discipline into the ranks of the teachers. It was the start of close co-operation between the Board and the teaching body that was to mark the operations

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. He was later elevated to the Bench in Cape Town.

4. Minutes of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education, 30 June 1932.

5. Ibid., 2 August 1932.

6. These were educated laymen like Messrs Chideckel and Gesundheit and the Chairman, teachers of city schools like A Levin and M Lazar, rabbis like Mirvish and Bender.

of the Board for many years. Two teachers were co-opted to serve on the Board as full members.¹

The Committee found much to rectify in many places.² Disorganisation and chaos reigned in many schools, especially in the country. It gradually introduced the beginning of a central supervision and check on committees and schools who came in time to accept their responsibility to the Board.

The first Council Meeting of the Committee took place towards the end of the year, when some thirty representatives met in conference to receive a report of the stewardship of the Cape Committee during the four months of its existence.³

Mr M Alexander, M.P. and Rabbi M Ch Mirvish, the respected leader of the orthodox section, opened the Council meeting, which was, in effect, an educational conference. Both praised the Board for its endeavours to bring order and discipline into the Talmud Torahs. Dr Resnekov referred to the previous Cape Committee which had been in existence a few years previously but which had become defunct, and Jewish education had been allowed to drift into a chaotic state. By contrast, much had been achieved by the new Committee during the short period of its existence. Most congregations and Talmud Torahs in the Western Province had affiliated. It had endeavoured to educate the parents as well in order to bring them to a realisation of the value of proper Jewish education for their children. Parental apathy was one of the grave problems of Jewish education. The Committee's efforts had met with a large measure of success: parents and schools had been persuaded to co-operate and adopt the Board's curriculum and methods.

1. Ibid., 31 August 1932.

2. Ibid., 20 October 1932.

3. Report of the Council Meeting of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education, 27 November 1932.

He welcomed the Hebrew Teachers' Association which would contribute much to Jewish education.¹ It was a record of achievement which was a tribute to the drive and leadership of Resnekov and the other members of the Board. In the space of a few months the picture of Jewish education in the Western Province had begun to change for the better. New winds had begun to blow through the unorganised and disunited little Talmud Torahs, only too often ill-served by their committees and teachers.

At the same Council Meeting, Alexander Levin, Principal of the Cape Town Talmud Torah, reported that the Hebrew Teachers' Association had also been reconstituted; no similar body was in existence at the time in Johannesburg.² The Association had been encouraged by the spirit of co-operation displayed by the Board which had co-opted two representatives of the teachers.

The Rev Professor Bender deplored the fact that so few took Hebrew for Junior Certificate (Standard VIII) and Matriculation Examinations, as well as at University.³

The Council urged that boys should be encouraged to sit the Board's Barmitzvah Examination, and called on congregations to require, in due course, that boys presenting themselves for the synagogue ceremony should have passed this examination. Other recommendations were that, where there were no regular Sabbath services, special services for children should be organised in order to accustom them to prayers, and, further, that special attention should be paid to the Jewish education of girls.⁴

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. Hebrew could, by then, no longer be taken at the South African College High School.

4. Ibid.

The first Council Meeting of the Cape Committee laid down the guidelines for its future activities and, moreover, in the words of the Chairman the congregations and Talmud Torah committees heard the voice of order and authority in Jewish education.

To enable it to plan its activities efficiently, the Cape Committee required some essential factual information and for this purpose it boldly decided on a practical step.¹ It approached the Cape Education Department to help it take a census to ascertain the numbers of Jewish children who were receiving Hebrew and religious education. In due course the Department replied that it had no objection to the Committee making a direct approach to the principals of departmental schools to ask them to ascertain whether their Jewish pupils were receiving a Hebrew education or otherwise. A suitable questionnaire was prepared and sent to the principals.²

The Cape Committee continued its busy programme of establishing contacts with the congregations and Talmud Torah committees throughout the Western Province. Its honorary inspectors and supervisors - more often than not under the leadership of the Chairman or the elderly Mr Chideckel - visited one dorp after another,³ one suburb after another, examining, criticising, cajoling and persuading, ever and always endeavouring to rectify what they considered to be unsatisfactory. Most of the communities rallied to the Board, deferred to its authority, accepted its guidance, and even gave it some limited financial support. Jewish education in the Western Cape was assuming an orderliness and discipline and a qualitative improvement hitherto

1. Minutes of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education, 1 January 1933.
2. Ibid., 16 March 1933. As far as is known to the writer, this is the only example of such a census in South Africa.
3. They addressed meetings and visited schools as far afield as Calvinia, van Rhynsdorp and Upington.

unknown. Resnekov inspired his colleagues and enjoyed the support of the organised teachers. There was little, if any, support from Johannesburg and seeing that the Cape had to fend for itself there were increasing doubts about the need for maintaining the union with the S A Board.

The census figures became available by mid-year and confirmed the worst anxieties of the Cape Committee.¹ There were 1 119 boys and 474 girls of all ages receiving a Jewish education. Added to these were 68 girls at the Girls' Central School in Buitenkant Street where the Board² supervised Hebrew instruction for girls who did not receive it elsewhere. The numbers of those who had never received any Jewish instruction were 331 boys and 992 girls.³

Another almost intractable problem which hardly ever escaped the Board's attention was the difficulty of introducing acceptable salary scales and pension rights for Hebrew teachers. From the first it went on record as favouring a living wage for teachers: at that early stage it was not strong enough, however, to enforce new scales.⁴

The report of the Cape Committee presented to the Second Council Meeting⁵ gave an interesting resumé of the activities during the first year of its existence, and provided a picture of the state of Hebrew education in the Western Cape of the time. Twenty schools had been visited and examined, half of them in country towns. Thirty meetings had been held with committees or congregations and Talmud Torahs. Thirty eight visits had been paid to schools, when inspections, examinations and consultations had taken place and 38 reports had been sent to committees. The

1. Minutes of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education, 27 July 1933.
2. The two names - the Board and the Cape Committee - were used interchangeably.
3. Very interesting is the detailed breakdown of these figures for the various Cape Town suburbs - see S A Jewish Chronicle 4 August 1933, p 526
4. Ibid., 2 August 1933.
5. Report of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education submitted to the Second Council Meeting: S A Jewish Chronicle 4 August 1933, pp 525-527

Board had assisted in the selection of teachers and had carried out the census. It had fulfilled its promise of service and had been generally accepted as an important factor in Jewish life at the Cape.¹ The immediate problem of Jewish education was to strengthen order and raise standards. The co-operation of the Hebrew Teachers' Association was of great assistance, especially as inspectors of schools.² It had established a modest college for about twenty graduates of the Cape Town Talmud Torah who studied Talmud under Rabbi M Morgenstern and Ancient and Modern Hebrew Literature and Bible under Dr J Mibashan in the Old Synagogue in the Gardens.³

The proceedings of the Council Meeting were prominently reported in the press.⁴ Resnekov drew attention to the "tragic figures" revealed in the census, especially in regard to the girls, the future mothers of the community. A special syllabus for the Barmitzvah examination was to be drawn up and a similar ceremony was being considered for girls. The balance sheet for the year showed that the Board's expenditure had been £136.

Local conditions demanded a professional expert on the spot to deal with the constant problems as they arose, to assist and guide teachers in their daily work and plan for the future: constant contact with the schools was essential. The honorary worker could not manage to deal with all these tasks. Whilst the Cape Committee was prepared to remain affiliated to the S A Board for the sake of unity, it felt that it had to have autonomy with freedom of action to operate as its situation demanded.⁵

The tempo of the work was maintained. In spite of the

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p 526

3. Ibid.

4. See S A Jewish Chronicle 11 August 1933, pp 547-548. The paper was published in Cape Town and was widely read in the community and the country towns.

5. Minutes of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education, 16 August 1933.

very modest finances, the Cape Committee carried on the continuous meetings with congregations; schools were inspected and problems tackled; examinations carried out; addresses delivered to communities and parents. The Barmitzvah examination was established and certificates printed. If a congregation was proving difficult, the Board would try persuasion, and if this was insufficient, pressure of a sort was used.¹ Congregations and committees began to accept the authority of the Board; they deferred to its decisions and turned more and more to it for teachers, for guidance and leadership.

The Board was the educational watchdog of the community. It established Hebrew classes for close on a hundred girls at the Central Girls' School in Buitenkant Street, who were receiving no Jewish education whatsoever.² It endeavoured to revive the teaching of Hebrew at the South African College High School and spent much time and effort in what proved to be a vain endeavour to introduce the subject at the Paarl Gymnasium. Resnekov was in the lead in all this, interviewing educational authorities where necessary, guiding and leading with characteristic energy and decisiveness. The Cape Committee was, in effect, School Board, Inspector and Principal rolled into one for the Talmud Torahs of the Western Cape. It had no financial resources and no professional leader; its authority was a moral one, bolstered by what it termed "the service" it provided the schools, which were in reality no more than isolated clusters of primary classes scattered across the city and the Boland.

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1. There is an example of this: when the Committee was unable to make any headway in regard to a certain congregation in the countryside, they decided to send out Rabbi Mirvish. His mission was a success and the congregation agreed to the Board's demands.
 2. Minutes of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education, 26 October 1933.

To combat apathy, the Committee endeavoured to create a social climate in the community in which the need for Jewish education would become accepted as the unquestioned norm by the family and the group. So it organised Hinuch weeks, its representatives spoke on every available public platform, it co-opted youth representatives and maintained a steady stream of publicity in the press.²

The report presented to the Education Conference at the beginning of 1935³ on its activities since the previous Council Meeting a year-and-a-half earlier indicated continued improvement in the quality of instruction as well as in the numbers of pupils at Talmud Torahs. There had been some fifty visits by honorary supervisors to schools; annual examinations had been carried out, but these had to be followed by regular visits. There was a definite need for a full time Inspector/Supervisor.⁴ A very successful Educational Conference and Vacation Course for Hebrew teachers had been held under the aegis of the Cape Committee.⁵ It had encouraged the opening of nursery schools, had organised Hebrew classes for adolescents, had examined some pupils of private teachers and was pursuing its efforts to have Hebrew taught in some secular schools with large numbers of Jewish pupils. Congregations were looking for better teachers for their improved schools, but the immigration restrictions had created a shortage and the Cape Committee would have to try to import a number. Its finances were meagre;⁶ it needed professional assistance and an administration.

1. Hinuch: Hebrew - education. See Minutes of Meeting 5 August 1934.
2. Dr Resnekov was as articulate in print as in speech.
3. Report of the Activities of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education submitted to the Education Conference held on 13 January 1935.
4. Ibid.
5. About sixty teachers and visitors attended the Hebrew Teachers' Educational Conference and Vacational Course in January 1935. Resnekov gave an opening address and there were two overseas visitors: see S A Jewish Chronicle 11 January 1935, p 28.
6. The Report records that the total expenditure of the Board for the period August 1932 to December 1934 had been £666.

In his address to Conference, Resnekov called for a United Talmud Torah Fund based on the voluntary taxation of the Jewish community.¹

The Cape Committee began asserting its right to be consulted by all congregations before these appointed teachers to their Talmud Torahs,² and was giving attention to drawing up a new syllabus for schools under its supervision, in co-operation with the Hebrew Teachers' Association. A deputation, led by Resnekov, interviewed the Superintendent-General of Education (Dr de Vos Malan) regarding Hebrew instruction during school hours³ and had been informed that the Department would be prepared to appoint part-time teachers if the demand was there.⁴ For the first time there was mention of a Pupil-Teachers' Course, for suitable senior pupils who had passed through the Cape Town Talmud Torah. But the Board shied away from the suggestion to train local teachers: it had no money for such a project.⁵

Resnekov again led a deputation to Mr J H Hofmeyr, the Minister of the Interior, to request that Hebrew teachers be granted exemption from the provisions of the Quota Act. It met with some success: temporary permits would be granted for six months and then deducted from the quota.⁶

An interesting innovation was that intending teachers were required to give trial lessons in the presence of inspectors of the Board before they could be permitted to apply for

1. An idea that materialised some fifteen years later when the United Communal Fund was established.
2. Minutes of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education: 23 January 1935.
3. Ibid., 28 February 1935.
4. Dr Herrman, principal of the Cape Town High School which had a large number of Jewish pupils, had signified his willingness to introduce Hebrew in his school.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 28 March 1935.

positions.¹ A move by a suburban Talmud Torah to introduce a three-day week evoked strong opposition on the part of the Board² and it is later recorded that at its meetings with the Committee of this Congregation the Board's representatives had "insisted inflexibly" that the Board would not countenance the reduction in teaching time, in spite of the fact that a large number of parents had signed a petition for a three-day week. The Congregation sided with the Board.³ Further evidence of the growing prestige and authority of the Board is the record of the reproof to a congregation for not accepting the newly-published syllabus: "this action in flouting the authority of the Board must be censured" stated the minutes.⁴

Written examinations were to be set to supplement the customary oral ones.

The Second Hebrew Teachers' Conference and Vacation Course at the beginning of 1936 had also proved a success. The Board directed its attention to the desirability of introducing a Confirmation Ceremony for girls, and sent an enquiry to the London Jewish Educational Council for information on this subject.⁵

The report presented to the Third Biennial Conference of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education noted that in August of the previous year all schools had written the Board's Hebrew Examinations, which, the report stated, encouraged pupils to regard Hebrew in the same light as their

1. Ibid., 12 August 1935.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 24 October 1935.

4. Ibid., 13 February 1936.

5. Ibid., 21 May 1936.

secular studies.¹ The Board had continued its regular supervision of the schools. The number of boys taking the Barmitzvah examination was still disappointing. Fifteen girls had participated in a Dedication Ceremony at the Great Synagogue in December, an innovation which had been welcomed with enthusiasm. In his Conference address, Dr Resnekov contrasted the existing situation to that of the old days when "every teacher was a law unto himself and every Talmud Torah school was a law unto the teacher".² He appealed for support needed to engage a full-time inspector, launch a pension fund for teachers and subsidise some small schools.³ Some country communities were declining, he warned, and might soon have to come to the Board for assistance. As yet, there were no fixed salary scales for teachers who objected to what they considered to be their low salaries. The Cape Committee had met Rabbi W Hirsch of Pretoria who had served as examiner and moderator in Hebrew for the Senior Certificate and Matriculation Examinations and suggested improvements in the syllabuses and form of the papers which had been subject to criticism.

Later in the year, the Board heard from Professor Gemser of Pretoria that he had accepted the Board's suggestions for improving the Cape Departmental Hebrew papers.⁴

Rabbi Dr B Rabinowitz of Jerusalem was appointed first full-time inspector in May and reported that the advanced class composed of graduates of the Talmud Torah was an "asset to the community".⁵ He and Dr Resnekov had undertaken a tour of the country communities as far as Oudtshoorn to inspect schools and address meetings. Relations with

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1. Report of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education submitted to the Third Biennial Conference 10 January 1937.
 2. "Report of the Third Biennial Conference of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education" : in S A Jewish Chronicle 15 January 1937, p 52.
 3. The sum acquired was £2 500.
 4. Minutes of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education, 1 July 1937.
 5. Ibid., 26 August 1937.

the Johannesburg Board were getting progressively cooler: symptomatic was the decision merely to send a letter of greetings to the Conference of the S A Board.¹

The public relations work of the Board achieved a notable success in the consent of Mr J H Hofmeyr, Union Minister of Education, to be its guest of honour at a special banquet to launch its campaign for funds.² The report of the meeting held in October contains several interesting points.³ There is the first detailed salary scale for teachers drawn up by the Hebrew Teachers' Association and a sub-committee of the Board. And there is the first reference to Rabbi Israel Abrahams, who had recently arrived from England to assume the post of minister of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation.

In November⁴, a hostel for country children was proposed by Dr I M Hurwitz, a new member of the Committee. The same meeting heard a report of a meeting with the S A Board of Jewish Education, which had also been attended by representatives of the Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation, at which a working agreement had been reached to maintain the unity between Johannesburg and the Cape. The Cape would be the sphere of activity of the Cape Committee, three inspectors would be appointed (one for each province), and the Cape Committee would be responsible for its own finances.⁵

In January, Rabbi Dr Rabinowitz resigned to become principal of the Paarl Talmud Torah and the Cape Committee began to look around for a successor.

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 31 October 1937

4. Ibid., 25 November 1937

5. Ibid.

The S A Jewish Chronicle printed a special report of the banquet in honour of Mr J H Hofmeyr which took place on 17 February 1938¹ when about two hundred guests were present, including Professor M C Botha, the Secretary for Education, Dr de Vos Malan, Superintendent-General of Education for the Cape, and Jewish leaders from other centres in the Union. Mr Hofmeyr's address was prominently featured in the general and Jewish press and the financial response to the appeal met with success.²

Dr A Birnbaum of Johannesburg was appointed Director of the Cape Board of Jewish Education in July 1938.³ He was already well-known to the Board, having previously acted as visiting inspector on a few occasions, and knew local conditions well. This was clear enough evidence that the rift with Johannesburg had re-opened: the cause of this was that the Cape had not been consulted in regard to the appointment of Rabbi J L Zlotnik as the Director of the S A Board, in spite of the memorandum of agreement reached in November 1937.⁴ The Cape Board decided that it would not re-affiliate, but indicated that it would always be prepared to co-operate in the spirit of the November memorandum.⁵

There was frequent correspondence with the Department of the Interior in regard to the immigration of Hebrew teachers whom the Board needed.⁶ The negotiations were long-drawn out

1. S A Jewish Chronicle 18 February 1938, pp i-ii.
2. Zionist Record 25 February 1938, p 18
3. Minutes of the Cape Board of Jewish Education, 17 July 1938
4. Minutes of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education, 25 November 1937.
5. Minutes of the Cape Board of Jewish Education 17 July 1938
6. Ibid., 14 October 1938. Nazi Germany had thrown its shadow over Eastern Europe.

and disappointing, the South African immigration authorities were unhelpful and obviously unwilling to relax the stringent provisions of the Quota Act in spite of promises made to the Board which had received requests from many applicants.¹ Interviews were indecisive; there was hedging and delays,² and letters from the Board remained long unanswered.

The enhanced status and growing activities of the Cape Board are reflected in the reports submitted to its Fourth Biennial Conference held in January 1939.³ Rabbi Abrahams stated that the Board had done much towards systematising, co-ordinating and generally raising the standard of Hebrew teaching in town and province.⁴ No mean achievement was the degree of co-operation attained with the Cape Department of Education in regard to the compilation of the Hebrew syllabuses and examinations for the Senior and Junior Certificate Examinations. Matriculation and Junior Certificate Hebrew had been brought into line with the Hebrew at the Talmud Torahs, whereas the subject had formerly been approached from an entirely different angle. The latter was an obvious reference to the old approach to Hebrew as a classical dead language, with emphasis on grammar and translation. The Cape Town Talmud Torah, which prepared candidates for these examinations, had long since discarded this old method when it adopted the Ivris B'Ivris system and introduced Scripture and modern Hebrew literature.

It was an important step for Hebrew education in this part of the country and the Union as a whole. The demands of the government education department were attuned to the

1. Ibid., 10 November 1938.

2. See also: ibid., 2 March 1939.

3. Report of Activities of the Cape Board of Jewish Education submitted to the Fourth Biennial Conference: 15 January 1939: see also S A Jewish Chronicle, 13 January 1939 pp 17 et seq.

4. Ibid.

spirit and content of the advanced Talmud Torahs with obvious advantages to the latter. It established a position which has continued to this day.¹

The Conference was further informed that the original syllabus for the Talmud Torahs compiled four years previously was being revised and would hopefully lead to uniformity in teaching. The Barmitzvah examination syllabus was also being up-dated, and the Board would have liked this to be a condition for the actual celebration. It was greatly disappointed to record that the dedication service for girls, that it had inaugurated in 1937, had had to be discontinued. It welcomed the co-operation of the Hebrew Teachers' Association in its efforts to improve conditions in the profession, to improve its status and organise vacation courses. The fine new Talmud Torah in Cape Town was a welcome achievement, but many other schools were inadequately housed. It had received calls for assistance from far and wide. The Board stated that it felt that it was fulfilling not merely useful but even necessary functions.²

A hostel to provide a Jewish home for country children was one of its most cherished projects,³ and finances were also required for an organised administration. As for future staff requirements, it saw no prospect of filling such vacancies as might arise with candidates who could be trained in South Africa. It therefore considered that such

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1. The writer has for some years been chairman of the Sub-Committee for the selection of prescribed books for Hebrew for the Senior Certificate Examination. He has also served as a member of the committees responsible for drawing up the Hebrew syllabuses for the high schools of the Cape Education Department, as well as for the Joint Matriculation Board.
 2. "Report to the Fourth Biennial Conference 15 January 1939" S A Jewish Chronicle 13 January 1939, p 28.
 3. Ibid.

personnel should be brought from Eretz Israel who.....

could bring to our shore the spirit of culture which quickens and animates Jewry in Palestine....(such) teachers would be invaluable in forging a chain of association and understanding (between Palestine and the Diaspora.....)

Dr Birnbaum reported to the Conference² that there were 26 Talmud Torahs with a total of 1 100 pupils, situated in the city and other places in the Western half of the Cape Province, which were affiliated to the Board. Of this number, however, only six schools (with some 600 pupils) qualified as normal according to the following criteria: the children were generally enrolled at the age of seven or eight; they were taught for approximately five-and-a-half hours weekly and continued at school for five to six years (in exceptional cases the period was eight to nine years); and the teachers who taught in them regarded their work as their profession. Such schools reached a comparatively high level of knowledge of Jewish subjects. The children were able to carry on a simple Hebrew conversation, had a fair knowledge of Humash and the Former Prophets and in some cases even of parts of the Latter Prophets and Hagiographa. They knew the main facts of Jewish history and had a knowledge of Jewish laws and customs.⁵

The second category consisted of the nine "medium schools" with 350 pupils. These enrolled children at the age of nine and provided four years of tuition of four to six hours per week. Most of the teachers were ministers who were teachers only "accidentally". Stress was placed on fluency in Siddur reading. The third group consisted of the elementary schools where the results were limited, except for Siddur reading, as the minister-teachers had,

1. Ibid., p 29.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

according to the Director, little inclination for teaching.¹

The aim of the Board, stated Dr Birnbaum, was to bring up the second and third groups as near as possible to the normal level. This would require the co-operation of parents and committees who would have to realise the importance of Jewish education. The report decried the anomaly of children of different ages in the same class, a situation caused by the indifference of parents who did not care very much about the Jewishness of their children, as well as the irregular attendance so prevalent in the schools.

Birnbaum's ideal was a learning week of ten hours and a much later age of departure from Hebrew School as was the case, he mentioned, in the United States of America and England. Even in the difficult conditions of Germany a recent conference had decided to increase tuition to between eight and ten hours weekly.² He urged that a campaign be organised with the aim of increasing enrolments, and stressed the need for establishing nursery schools. In a community numbering over 90 000³, a mere 4 000 children were estimated to be receiving any sort of Hebrew education.

A new revised syllabus was drawn up by the Board and introduced in 1940.⁴ Dr Birnbaum and Rabbi Abrahams jointly drew up a syllabus for the Dedication Services for girls which became an annual ceremony at the Great Synagogue in the Gardens, and the Board's certificates were awarded to successful candidates in the Barmitzvah examinations which it set and which were taken by the majority of boys preparing themselves for the ceremony.

There were disappointments, too. The move for a hostel

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Saron, G: "Epilogue" in Saron & Hotz: op.cit., p 371
the 1936 Jewish population stood at 90 645.

4. S A Jewish Chronicle, 27 December 1940, p 932.

fell through because the Board could not find the money for it, and it was decided that Dr Resnekov should see the principal of the South African College High School about the possibility of establishing a "Jewish House". This also proved abortive.¹ Other disappointments were the closure of the Hebrew classes at the Girls' Central School and the continuing shortage of funds which was severely restricting the implementation of the Board's plans.

Dr Birnbaum reported later in the year that he had inspected about 1 000 children in 22 schools.² He had given model lessons at Talmud Torahs and some of the schools had been visited eight to twelve times during the year. A considerable all-round improvement had been noted.

That the two Boards were drawing further apart may be gathered from the fact that the Cape Board had not thought it fit to accept the invitation to attend the Sixth Biennial Conference of the South African Board.³

Dr Resnekov reported that the Cape Town United Hebrew Schools had decided to open a day school at the beginning of 1940⁴ and that Rabbi Zlotnik had arranged a meeting of the Boards, with the participation of the Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation, to restore unity in Jewish education.⁵ This meeting took place later that month and was attended by Dr Resnekov, Mr J Gitlin and Dr Birnbaum. The times demanded unity and a spirit of co-operation on all sides and led to an agreement publicly welcomed by the President of the Board of Deputies and the Chairman of the S A Zionist Federation who made a public appeal for support of the two Boards,⁶ and

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1. Minutes of the Cape Board of Jewish Education: 2 March 1939.
 2. Ibid., 20 July 1939
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid., 2 November 1939
 5. Ibid.
 6. S A Jewish Chronicle 1 December 1939, p i.

promised their full support for a financial drive for funds for Jewish education.

A decision to open a hostel for country children was taken at the end of 1939.¹ There were further discussions regarding salary increases and the resistance of some congregations in granting these was reported.² The Board obtained financial relief from the Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation and Drs Resnekov and Birnbaum travelled as far north as Port Nolloth and O'Okiep in a drive for funds. Suitable premises for a hostel were rented in Vredehoek Avenue and Dr H Abt, formerly principal of the Jewish School in Breslau, Germany, and Mrs Abt were appointed to take charge when the Hostel, for boys from the ages of seven to thirteen and girls from the age of seven upwards, would open in 1941.³

At a meeting later in the year, Dr Birnbaum reported on a Conference of the S A Board of Jewish Education which he had attended in Johannesburg and mentioned the unpleasant friction between orthodoxy, as represented by Rabbi I Kossowsky, and other groups.⁴ The Board again organised a special Yom Kippur service for children at the Hope Street School; a Standard IX had been established at the Talmud Torah with Rabbi I Abrahams as teacher of Mishna and Dr Birnbaum of Tanach. The day school had 28 pupils and was "excellent in both Hebrew and general subjects",⁵ reported Dr Birnbaum.

Dr Resnekov served on the Committee of the Cape Town United Hebrew Schools throughout most of this period. The exact relationship between the Board and the School was really never clearly outlined. The Board was, after all, only

1. Minutes of the Cape Board of Jewish Education, 21 December 1939.
2. Ibid., 2 May 1940
3. Ibid., 5 June 1940
4. Ibid., 8 August 1940
5. Ibid.

an "umbrella" body: its director carried out inspections in the various Talmud Torahs; examined the pupils; drew up syllabuses which it could really only persuade its affiliates to adhere to by virtue of its moral authority; and issued certificates for the Barmitzvah and dedication examinations. Except for the hostel, it did not own or control any schools.

There had been signs of certain tensions between it and the largest of the city's Talmud Torahs - the United Hebrew Schools - already in the thirties. The School could claim pride of seniority and of achievements. It was an independent entity which had successfully struggled for decades against poverty and lack of support. The minutes of the committee meetings during the thirties provide glimpses of such friction; one instance were the words of Rabbi M Ch Mirvish, the only member of the Education Sub-Committee of the United Hebrew Schools who was not on the Board of Education. The Board, he stated, had taken over the functions of the Sub-Committee insofar as examinations were concerned and there was no reason why an examiner had to be "imported". He did not want an institution such as theirs to be subordinate to another.¹ He was opposed by Mr J Gitlin who upheld the right of the Board to organise and conduct examinations in every affiliated school.² The matter was allowed to rest there for the moment but the relationship between the Board and Herzlia School was never specified constitutionally and in the course of time led to certain tensions which came to a head in the early seventies with a determined move to establish a centralised system at the Cape on the lines of the position existing in Johannesburg.³

1. Minutes of the Committee of the United Hebrew Schools, Cape Town: 18 May 1936.
2. Ibid.
3. This occurred during the tenure of office (as Director of the Board of Education) of Dr A Zeevi. See chapter

CHAPTER 31: THE SOUTH AFRICAN BOARD OF JEWISH EDUCATIONPossibilities and Actualities

The first years of Rabbi Zlotnik's tenure of office were difficult ones for the Board. With its finances at a low ebb there was barely enough for the office administration, let alone the expansion of activities advocated by the new director.¹ The Board brought its financial plight to the attention of the S A Zionist Federation and the S A Jewish Board of Deputies in April 1941, pointing out that without adequate resources the continuance of its work and its very existence were hardly possible. The two bodies concerned appointed a joint commission under Mr Joseph Daleski to investigate the whole position of Jewish education and of the S A Board of Jewish Education in particular.²

The Commission recommended that the Board be reconstituted, that it should then take immediate steps to secure its source of funds, and that it revitalise and expand its activities.³ The newly-constituted Council of the Board met in September 1942, with Mr Harry Herber as President. A successful public drive for funds was immediately launched and an Educational Investigation Commission was appointed in April 1943 to report on how to improve Jewish education in South Africa.⁴

Members of the Commission were Mr L Braude, Chairman, Dr A Birnbaum, Director of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education, Mr D Mierowsky, Director of the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg and Rabbi J L Zlotnik, Director of the S A Board of Jewish Education, with Mr A Misheiker as

1. Misheiker, A: op.cit., p 12.

2. Ibid., p 13.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

Secretary. As Mr Braude was precluded from participating because of ill-health, the work was carried out by the professional educationists on the Commission.

Under the general heading of "How to Improve Jewish Education in South Africa", the Commission's terms of reference were specified as follows:¹

- a) How to increase the number of pupils in our schools and prolong the school-life of the child
- b) How to improve the quality of teaching
- c) The desirability of importing teachers
- d) Improving the status of the teacher
- e) Syllabi and curricula
- f) Extending the educational facilities for students of higher schools and universities
- g) Establishment of educational and cognate institutions (hostels, day schools, country boarding schools, secondary Hebrew education, seminary)
- h) Control of private teaching
- i) Statistics²

The Commission brought the whole of Jewish education in South Africa under its microscope, analysed it carefully, pointed out its defects and shortcomings fearlessly, advocated wide-ranging reforms and laid down suggested solutions to problems. A blend of pragmatism and idealism, the document is a milestone in the history of Jewish education in South Africa. At one and the same time a penetrating analysis of the present as well as a clear direction for the future, the report may be regarded as a charter for Jewish education which Judah Leib Zlotnik and his colleagues bequeathed to the Jewish community of South Africa during the eleven-year period of his service as Director of the S A Board of Jewish Education.

1. Report of the Educational Investigation Committee submitted to the S A Board of Jewish Education, Johannesburg, 1943.

2. Ibid.

In his introduction Rabbi Zlotnik stated that the report of the Commission was the expression of a vision of an educational structure which should fully serve all their needs..."a clear view of what it should, and will be".¹ Jewish education should be for all and not for the chosen few.² The greatest problem was how to persuade the community that all Jewish children must receive an adequate, if elementary, education. Jewish education involved a voluntary action and, as such, could only be undertaken by those who were convinced of its need and prepared to make the effort involved. Only about 4 000 pupils attended Hebrew schools at the time (including the area of the Cape Committee) out of an estimated total of 15 000-18 000 children of school-going age. Only about 40% of the total of Jewish children attending general secular schools had received, at any given period, any Jewish education. As for girls, the figure was but 15%.³ Almost every Jewish boy received some sort of Hebrew education as preparation for his Barmitzvah, but the tuition was too inadequate to be of any permanent value and he had probably forgotten the Hebrew alphabet by the time he reached majority.⁴

A deplorable feature of Talmud Torah life was the all too frequent admission of children at an "advanced" age which created serious problems for themselves and for younger pupils, disrupting the regularity of the work and progress of entire classes. This was an instance of the indifference of Jewish parents to the "essentiality of Jewish education".⁵ So many of them lacked any appreciation of the inestimable value of Jewish education in moulding the character of the Jewish child and in developing his full

1. Ibid., p 5.

2. Ibid., p 7

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

personality.¹ The study of French or German by children was considered by any intelligent person to be a privilege and not a sacrifice, but there was a prevalent notion among Jews that the study of Hebrew and cognate subjects was the extraordinary "Jewish man's burden".² It was a notion which, the Commission urged, had to be totally eradicated.

To achieve all this, a sustained enlightenment campaign would have to be mounted to educate parents and community, requiring the establishment of a "Propaganda Department" to make the community alive to the values of Jewish education. Unless its levels of spiritual life were raised and infused with Jewish ideals, it would persist in considering even a minimum of Jewish education not as a necessity but as a burden and sacrifice. Jewish home life would need to be revitalised and made more meaningful and purposeful.³

The Commission devoted considerable attention to the nature and importance of the work to be undertaken by the "Propaganda Department" - one would call it "Public Relations" these days. Jewish education was essentially a voluntary action on the part of the parent. It had neither the force of law behind it nor the power of socio-economic motivation to activate it. If ignorance or indifference or whatever other human foible intervened it was either entirely not bothered about or otherwise given the scantiest attention as preparation for the accepted social desideratum of Barmitzvah. So Jewish education for the children had to be preceded by preparing and motivating the parent to undertake the voluntary process of educating his child Jewishly. The equation was simple: raising the Jewish consciousness of the community and deepening its religious feeling would produce an equivalent rise in the appreciation of the value of Jewish education and, conversely, if the religious life of the community were permitted to remain in a state of decay, there would be little desire to train the children in

1. Ibid., p 8.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Jewishness, and Jewish education would be looked upon as a sacrifice.¹

The Commission recommended that "modern" religious leaders be brought out from America to reawaken religious feeling in the community, to keep it alive and ensure its survival.²

This was the holistic approach of the Commission to Jewish education. To provide as effective and meaningful a Jewish upbringing as possible for the child under the existing circumstances and conditions of Jewish minority cultural and ethnic existence in the open society, it was vital to create as Jewishly committed a society as possible. By implication it was futile to enforce religious training in the schools. If the community was inadequately motivated it just did not send its children. Furthermore, if it was not itself sufficiently committed to Jewish national-religious culture it would hardly bother or even desire to have this transmitted to its children. Parental education was a sine qua non of Jewish education.

The Commission rightly gave pride of place to the discussion of, and proposals for, its "Propaganda Department" to prepare the ground for Jewish education of the children in the hearts of the Jewish parents and in the homes of the community. It was once again a case of hachsharat halevavot (the preparation of the hearts) which the modern Jewish philosopher Ahad Ha'Am had enunciated as a cornerstone of his doctrine of Spiritual Zionism.³

Zlotnik and his co-commissioners did not utter one word of complaint against the community for its errors of omission in the Jewish education of their children. There was no word of reproof or castigation as was so frequently heard

1. Ibid., p 10.

2. Ibid., p 11.

3. Ahad Ha'Am (pen-name of Asher Ginsburg): "The Spiritual Revival" in Selected Essays: translated Leon Simon. (Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1948) pp 296 et seq.

from pulpit or public platform or expressed in innumerable annual reports. As educationists, they advocated another course of action, that of education and persuasion, in enlisting parental commitment to Jewish education.

The principle came in time to be widely recognised and accepted, gaining more sophistication with the passage of the years. House-to-house canvassing for pupils and for funds, pleas to, and condemnations of, congregations and the even smaller gatherings at general meetings were more suited to the early days. The community at that stage was more inchoate, still struggling to establish itself economically, as yet disunited socially. The Jewish national renascence had, as yet, had little opportunity of influencing Jewish society and revolutionising its social and national norms.

It is a moot point whether the Jewish community has become more religious over the years, more attentive to observance at home and more supportive of synagogue services. What is incontrovertible, however, is that its national commitment has been greatly enhanced by the establishment of the State of Israel and the events during the first three decades of its history, and its Jewish consciousness deeply stirred by the searing experience of the Holocaust. Acculturation was already accomplished: assimilation, the next stage, was recognised as a threat. The community was ready to listen to voices advocating a new Jewish education as the instrument of meaningful existence and assurance of a future. Many were receptive to the message of the Zlotnik Commission, telling them how to educate the community to accept Jewish education as a prime activity. With conviction, born of common historical experience, they addressed themselves to the community in the printed word,¹ from the pulpit, by

1. See for example the articles of Isaac Goss, who succeeded Rabbi Zlotnik as director of the S A Board of Jewish Education, collected in Reflections on Jewish Education in South Africa, (Pacific Press, Johannesburg, 1951) and 'Ollelot: Hebrew - Miscellania (Photostat). The four main Jewish weeklies also gave constant attention to Jewish education in their leading articles and reports. In the Cape, Chief Rabbi I Abrahams was a powerful advocate of Jewish education from pulpit and public platform.

personal contact at home gatherings,¹ by exercises in public relations of a kind unknown in days gone by and, not least, by constantly demonstrating the achievements of Jewish education - its fine fruit in the remarkable network of the Jewish days schools which evolved during the post-war period.

On Elementary Jewish Education²

The Commission pointed out that there was very little interest in the community in any Hebrew education above the elementary stage. Leaders expected the Heder to produce Hebrew scholars of high scholastic attainments,³ remarked the report sarcastically, summarising these unreasonable expectations with the jibe that they wanted "talmidei hachamim from Hedarim".⁴ The crux of the matter, stated the report, was that they had to realise that from primary schools they could expect only elementary education and no more.⁵

The aim which this report set itself was a minimum of five years of Jewish education for all boys and girls. This was a radical lowering of objectives and an indication of the seriousness of the real situation. The report noted that this might be enforced at some time in the future. Rabbi Zlotnik hoped that the time might come when no boy would be permitted to celebrate his Barmitzvah unless he was able to produce a certificate that he had attended Hebrew School for the minimum of five years.⁶ The duration of tuition in South Africa was five to six hours per week, much

1. Prospective parents were invited to drawing-room meetings in private houses where representatives of the day schools endeavoured to persuade them.
2. Ibid., pp 12-17.
3. Ibid., p 12.
4. Ibid. Hebrew: "scholars and learned persons (to emerge) from elementary schools".
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p 14.

less than was devoted to it in American schools.¹

The syllabus was to be drawn up on the basis of a five-year course of five to six hours per week. The fluent reading of Siddur was an essential. In addition, provision would be made for the acquisition of an elementary knowledge of Hebrew with about 1 000-1 500 essential words; construction of simple Hebrew sentences; selections from the Pentateuch; a bird's-eye view of Jewish history, mainly based on biographies; the meaning of Jewish festivals and holy days and religious ceremonies.² Rabbi Zlotnik stated that this syllabus was capable of being covered if attendance were more regular, if grading were observed on basis of age, if best modern methods were employed and if co-operation were obtained from teachers and committees. If these conditions were fulfilled it would assure an adequate, if elementary, knowledge of Judaism and Jewish subjects.³

Zlotnik could not tolerate what he termed the evil of admitting children to Hebrew school at any odd age and, in fact, he even proposed that Barmitzvah be postponed in the case of a boy sent to school after the age of eight.⁴ To compensate for missed lessons resulting from absences occasioned by illness or sport, Zlotnik suggested special coaching in the form of week-end classes. He was envious of the American Hebrew school programmes, based as they were on a longer teaching week and a longer school career, when he suggested his five-year course based on a five-hour week.⁵

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1. Ibid., p 13. This objective in regard to tuition was never to be attained; the reverse trend soon became the reality. In less than a generation the weekly quota of teaching hours was drastically halved, with the almost universal adoption of the three-period week in most Hebrew supplemental schools in the country.
 2. Ibid., p 14.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid., p 15.
 5. Ibid., p 16

To give status to the course and to Hebrew education generally, he advocated a country-wide final examination and the award of a graduating certificate to be presented at a ceremony which pupils and community would regard as something significant in the life of the Barmitzvah boy.¹ In fact, no young man or woman would in time be able to hold any position of leadership in the community unless in possession of such a certificate. It would be the task of the "Propaganda Department" to convince the community of the value of this certificate and more hopefully, the time might come when no synagogue would permit any Barmitzvah celebration unless the boy had such a graduation certificate.²

He came out against special Barmitzvah examinations, set on a necessarily very restricted area of Jewish knowledge for which the child might be prepared during a short period preceding the ceremony. It degenerated into a system of training the child to give set answers to set questions... it had nothing to do with education in the true sense of the word.³ All too often the preparation, the examination and the ceremony itself became the culminating point of Jewish education in the eyes of parents and boy, entirely overshadowing whatever else he had learned or even altogether superseding any other Hebrew instruction.

Yet Judah Leib Zlotnik remained somehow optimistic as he examined the depressing Jewish educational scene around him. He comforted himself by saying that there was delayed action in education and he quoted the analogy of the seeds which lie inert till outside sun and moisture awaken them. So it is with education: ideas and information may lie inert in the mind till experience brings them to life.⁴

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p 17.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p 18.

The community cannot flourish, stated Zlotnik, if it provided for elementary education only. An elementary course was insufficient in itself to nourish the cultural and spiritual life of a community and, moreover, children forgot most of it by the time they came into contact with the community in early manhood.¹ He quoted Sir Richard Livingstone to the effect that elementary education was not complete in itself but was a preparation"to enable a minority to proceed to further education".²

But this belonged to the distant future, stated the report. Zlotnik dreamt of the day when boys and girls would continue with Hebrew studies for as long as they attended secular school. It was a vain dream except for the few who, in Cape Town and Johannesburg, chose Hebrew as a matriculation subject and attended special central classes several times a week to prepare for the examination. Its fulfilment really lay in another sphere - in the yet embryonic day school in Cape Town, barely three years old, in Johannesburg as yet unborn, in 1943. So he returned to reality from his flight of fancy: they must aim at the attainable goal of giving an efficient elementary education to every Jewish boy and girl in the country: that was the first great step.³

He recommended that children be encouraged to join the Zionist Youth Movements so as to continue their Jewish connection⁴, and he recognised the considerable educational benefit these could render to the Jewish development of the children.

Zlotnik called for the establishment of Jewish High Schools, evidently of the supplemental kind, and adumbrated a five-year syllabus for them. He obviously envisaged such schools

1. Ibid., p 20.

2. Livingstone, Sir Richard: The Future of Education (Cambridge University Press, 1943) quoted in this report, p 21.

3. Zlotnik Report, p 21.

4. Ibid., p 22

for a very select and restricted minority. Pupils would be found for them. They had to aspire to the day when the South African Jewish community would be able to supply its own teachers and spiritual leaders.¹

Rabbi Zlotnik strongly advocated the establishment of a local teachers' seminary and was opposed to those who were in favour of bursaries for overseas study. Such higher institutions of learning would contribute to raising the cultural level of the community, he averred. The report outlined the curricula of such institutions which would be set up to train teachers and ministers and provide the opportunity for tertiary Hebrew education for those who would desire it.² And, in a characteristic vision for the future, he added that the government might be induced to recognise such a seminary and allow it to confer higher scholastic degrees upon its students.³

The report descended right into the middle of the Talmud Torah classroom in discussing the real problems posed by the teaching of Siddur reading. Teachers complained that it was a time-consuming exercise, that the pupils found difficulty in coping with the complicated liturgical style. They did not understand the text and consequently soon lost interest. Ability to read the Siddur was an essential in order to be able to participate in the synagogue services and parents and congregations demanded that Siddur fluency take precedence over all other subjects. To many, Siddur and Barmitzvah were the be-all and end-all of Hebrew education. Rabbi Zlotnik admitted to the difficulties involved but was nevertheless in favour of the acquisition of Siddur fluency because this was functional as it was needed for religious participation.⁴

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., pp 24-26.

3. Ibid., p 26.

4. Ibid., p 32.

Another difficulty was the need to teach Biblical, Liturgical and Modern Hebrew; but there was no choice in the matter for the Hebrew school. As for the natural, or direct, method (Ivris B'Ivris) Zlotnik was surprisingly ambivalent and he proposed an eclectic system or a multiple-line approach.¹

It would have to be left to the individual teacher to use as much Hebrew as he found possible in his lesson, and was compatible with the conditions and capabilities of the class. The problem lay in the nature of the material to be transmitted in Jewish education. The Ivris B'Ivris method was of little use in teaching Bible and Liturgy, especially to pupils who had hardly managed to master a few hundred essential words. This was a courageous questioning of the unquestioning acceptance of one method, especially in the peculiar conditions of the supplemental Hebrew school in South African conditions. He was, however, much more definite in regard to Jewish history and religion. These would have to be taught in the mother-tongue, because they constituted affective Jewish education, and in this area the pupil must not be hampered by limitations of vocabulary.²

If the analysis was valid for his day a generation and more ago, how much more so is it for our own day when we may discern in the supplemental school an almost total cutting down in teaching hours by as much as a half, to three times or even twice a week.

The report advocated a programme of Adult Jewish Education and strongly recommended the provision of Jewish instruction for students who would be the future leaders of the community. A special guide should be appointed to work among students who should become the backbone of higher cultural life in the Jewish community.³ Such guides were appointed in time,

1. Ibid., p 35.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p 39.

with varying success, depending largely on the personality and qualifications of the appointee. They have generally been unable to interest more than a comparatively small minority in their cultural activities, especially at the larger universities. There were long intervals between one appointment and another, when the work inevitably lapsed.¹

Rabbi Zlotnik deplored the existence of a gap between nursery school and Hebrew school during which the child forgot what he had learned prior to his arrival at school. He proposed the establishment of a model nursery school attached to the Day School which would also serve as a training centre where good teachers, especially brought in from Palestine, would train local students. The report stressed the necessity for the child to proceed straight from nursery school to Hebrew school.²

Zlotnik strongly advocated the amalgamation of small Talmud Torahs into large central schools and suggested that four such schools be established in Johannesburg. The supplemental school had its innate shortcomings and these were compounded if the school itself was small, consisting merely of ungraded little groups of children.

Zlotnik pointed out that the S A Board of Jewish Education was merely a supervisory body, giving advice and guidance where necessary, which was not however always accepted.³ The Board should have at least one school under its complete control. It should be a model institution to provide an example fit for others to follow, and, moreover, it should be a day school. He advanced cogent philosophical reasons for such an institution. The duality between the general and Jewish education would be eliminated and conflicts would

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1. The writer knew a number of such guides (shlihim in Hebrew) who were appointed to work with Jewish students at the Cape and was acquainted with their work here.
 2. Ibid., p 40.
 3. Ibid., p 43.

be avoided and the child would no longer look upon his Jewish education as a burden to be carried because of his Jewishness.¹ Jewish studies would come into their own to take their place at the side of general studies, and would not be something to be relegated to the twilight hour..."at the fag-end of the day".² That bane of the supplemental school - irregular attendance - would be no more. Periods of study could be increased to seven or even ten a week, in a total Jewish school atmosphere.

Such schools had proved "a boon and a blessing" in the United States of America and Canada,³ continued the report, but Zlotnik advised caution in establishing such a day school. It would have to be carefully built up stage by stage from the nursery school upwards. He noted that this would provide a pre-secondary stage extending at least over eight years, possibly nine, if the child spent two years at nursery school. It would be a valuable preparatory stage which might revolutionise Jewish education in this country⁴ in contrast to the 8-13 age-period spent in the afternoon school.

Again he stressed the need for the "preparation of the hearts"⁵ of the parents to accept the day school concept. They would have to be educated to the idea that they would be able to entrust the general education of their children to the Jewish day school, that it would not suffer because Hebrew and its cognate subjects would be included in the curriculum of studies which would obviously demand extra time and effort on the part of teachers and pupils alike. Zlotnik was no doubt aware of this problem of the parental unwillingness to entrust the education of their children to an untried type of school. If a failure, it would jeopardise their children's whole future. The only other form of Jewish school known to them were the Talmud Torah and this institution could hardly measure up to the established state or private

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p 44

4. Ibid.

5. See p 373 footnote 3.

educational institutions of the day.

Zlotnik perceived the full magnitude of the problem. The road would be thorny, but success would be achieved. They would create a "tower of strength"¹ he added prophetically. Then he continued on a note akin to elation at the prospect

.....Jewish education in South Africa will come into its own and will be a great force and influence in the life and shaping of the character of the community.²

It was a vision and faith which were to be fulfilled during the second half of this century, the first stages of which Rabbi Zlotnik was vouchsafed to witness from his home in Jerusalem where he had settled in 1949.

The report advocated the establishment of other educational institutions which the Director had already mooted. An experimental school for girls was suggested with its modified curriculum of studies, and with a "Palestinian" to head it. It was never to be realised. Another that remained in the realm of a theory was the country boarding-school, a sort of farm-school, a composite product created in the image of some of the institutions favoured by Judah Leib Zlotnik.

The need was stressed for the establishment of hostels for country children but the report advised that other centres should wait until more experience would have been gained by the Johannesburg hostel which had already opened in 1943.

Formal teaching was not sufficient to develop the Jewish personality of the pupils and engage their interest in matters Jewish, stated the report, which stressed the importance of extra-mural activities, religious services and libraries. All these would have to wait for a well-equipped school and a proper staff - obviously a day school.

1. Ibid., p 45.

2. Ibid.

The report reiterated the Rabbi's enthusiastic advocacy of camps which would provide valuable supplementary Jewish education, for the Jewish teacher had little opportunity for character-building during the minimal time at his disposal in the Hebrew supplemental school. It was important, too, for Jewish children to spend time in the company of other Jewish children. The great educational value of summer camps in the United States of America was well-known.

The report dealt with the need for the regular and frequent inspections of Hebrew schools; and it also pointed out the necessity of keeping in touch with big centres and modern trends in education, mentioning Palestine and the United States of America specifically in this regard. As for Yiddish, he regretfully stated that it had no place in the primary school but could be introduced in the higher schools for Jewish studies. The Sephardic pronunciation should be introduced only in the secondary school.

The status of the teachers would only be improved if there were one employer who would determine salaries commensurate with the importance of their work and establish a pension scheme. This one employer should obviously be the Board of Jewish Education itself, and this would only be possible if Jewish education were unified throughout the country, and the Board itself established on a proper financial basis.¹

The report stated that a third of all children receiving Jewish education were being taught privately,² and there was an obvious need therefore to supervise and control private teaching.

A related problem was that teachers in regular posts in schools themselves engaged in private tuition, to the detriment of their school work, so that few could put anything into

1. Ibid., p 69.

2. Ibid., p 70.

their teaching beyond the three hours daily at school, or even do adequate preparation.

Zlotnik could not refrain from giving expression to criticism over resistance to any suggestion related to change of method or text-books.¹ He complained of lack of co-operation and effort on the part of teachers, and added pertinently that if teachers demanded, as they had the right to do, a full living wage then they had to be prepared to put in a full day's work.²

Zlotnik proposed refresher courses for teachers who should be encouraged to subscribe to overseas magazines to help them keep abreast of educational developments.

Finally, he warned of the danger of the Board's losing touch with the people and realities.³ The new constitution would have to give scope for full participation by the Jewish community on various bodies of the Board and at regular conferences.

In spite of the wide-ranging and basic nature of the report, there is a certain unreality about much of it. Not that the more idealistic proposals remained in the sphere of theory and never saw realisation: one expects all educational reality to be informed by a streak of idealism. It was the reality of its day on which he built so much of the structure

1. Ibid.

2. The status, remuneration and scope of work of teachers of the afternoon Hebrew school long remained one of the thorniest problems of the whole supplemental system of schooling. It is in essence an "unnatural" education and its problems include the whole area of the teaching service. The position remained intractable of solution for generations and in this regard is but a reflection of the problems besetting these schools themselves.

3. Ibid., p 74

of his reforms and plans that became the unreality of the morrow. The Talmud Torah proved to be a false foundation for his projected educational structure. Here and there he himself provided evidence of his deep-seated and intuitive reservations about its stability and future. The alternative to the supplemental school - the day school - was in 1943 too much of a dream of the future to be regarded as such. Zlotnik had, perforce, to build the greater part of his educational edifice on the foundation of the Talmud Torah, a foundation whose faults and blemishes were all too apparent to him, but which he, nonetheless, did his best to rectify.

The newly-constituted Board did not fail to act on the recommendations of the Commission, and took immediate steps to expand its activities. Mr J Klewansky was appointed Inspector in March 1943, and Mr A Misheiker became Organiser-Secretary the following month. Mr (now Rabbi) I Goss became Assistant-Director at the beginning of 1944.¹

There were further important developments during the next few years. A hostel for country children (Herber House) was opened by the Board in Johannesburg in 1944, and the same year saw the establishment of a Teachers' Seminary (named in honour of the Director) for the training of Hebrew school and nursery school teachers.

The first Hebrew nursery school of the Board - the Rose Gordon Model Nursery School - was opened in Yeoville in 1946 and later developed into the Board's Nursery School Department and Training Centre.² A milestone in the history of Jewish education in Johannesburg was the opening of the King David Primary and Nursery Schools in Linksfield in 1948. It was another of Rabbi Zlotnik's recommendations. There was

1. Misheiker: op.cit., p 13.

2. Dr A Moar arrived from Palestine in 1947 to head the Training Centre for Hebrew Nursery School Teachers and Lecture in the Teachers' Seminary of the Board. See Zionist Record 22 August 1947, p 16.

opposition from a number of communal leaders when the school opened with seven pupils which number increased to 26 by the end of the year.¹

A unified syllabus was adopted by the affiliated schools and a scale of teachers' salaries was laid down. After eleven years of Jewish education in South Africa, Rabbi Zlotnik retired in 1949 and settled in the newly-established State of Israel. His contributions to the development of Jewish education in this country were truly distinguished and productive and constitute a watershed in its history. Within the short space of just over a decade Rabbi Zlotnik's inspired planning gave a new direction and new dynamism to Jewish education in South Africa which determined much of its development during the modern, post-World War II period of its history.

1. Misheiker: op.cit., p 13.

CHAPTER 32: THE HISTORY OF A TYPICAL SUBURBAN TALMUD TORAHThe Woodstock and Salt River Talmud Torah School: 1924-1964

By 1904 there were close on 800 Jewish souls in Woodstock¹ which is the nearest suburb to Cape Town along the Peninsula suburban railway line; it was the largest Jewish concentration outside the city area. It was originally called Papendorp, and the first Jewish cemetery was consecrated there in 1842.² The congregation was formed early in the century and erected its synagogue in 1913. The records of its Talmud Torah go back to the early twenties, when Mr M Kaplan and the Rev S Kassel were the teachers.³ The former was a teacher from 1916 to his retirement in 1941.

The Talmud Torah had its own separate committee which was responsible for the finances and the control of the school.

There is the usual appeal for support for, and interest in, the school which had 65 pupils in 1929, 16 of whom received free tuition, in 6 classes.⁴ Good and steady progress had been made, and the report further mentions "....the incalculable good which the School is quietly doing".⁵ The Rev Mr A P Bender had examined the pupils and found them admirably taught with a high standard in reading and even in grammar.⁶

The community was far from being an affluent one, though somewhat better off than those still living in District Six. The Committee was evidently satisfied with its little Hebrew

1. Abrahams: Birth of a Community. op.cit., p 152 note 25

2. Ibid., p 4.

3. Annual Reports of the Woodstock and Salt River Hebrew School: 1924-1961. Supplied by the former secretary, Mr A Rubin, to the writer.

4. Annual Report for 1929-1930.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

School if one is to judge by the report with its somewhat grandiloquent phrases.¹

The following year's report again appeals for subscribers and donors to help alleviate the chronic financial difficulties which had resulted in what it termed trials for the school committee.² There were 77 pupils on the roll, 28 of whom were receiving free tuition and 14 received a "reduced tariff".³ 14 pupils had left at the end of the previous year and 26 new ones were enrolled. A nursery school had been opened by Dr C Resnekov for 14 children. The Rev Mr H Isaacs had examined the 72 pupils (including many girls) divided into seven classes, in reading, translation, writing and grammar, and expressed himself as being very satisfied with the results. Once again there are the words of somewhat fulsome self-praise expressed in the report - the view that the Woodstock and Salt River Talmud Torah could rank foremost amongst Hebrew schools in the Cape Peninsula.⁴

The report for 1932-1933 speaks of "depressed times", aggravating still further the poor financial position of the school.⁵ Mr David Mierowsky, Director of the S A Board of Jewish Education, had visited the school during his stay in Cape Town in June 1932. The enrolment remained about the same. The school became affiliated to the S A Board of Jewish Education and adopted its syllabus.⁶ Twenty-one pupils had left the school and new enrolments once again numbered 26.

A new, anxious note crept into the report for 1933-1934. Nazism had triumphed in Germany and even in the faraway

1. See p 388

2. Annual Report for the Woodstock and Salt River Hebrew School: for the year 1931-1932.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Annual Report for 1932-1933.

6. Ibid.

community on the boundary of Cape Town, the secretary of the little Hebrew school could write in his report of "....a serious danger threatening the very existence of the entire Jewish culture...". Hebrew education therefore had to be strengthened.¹ The instruction at the school had been reorganised at the instance of the S A Board of Jewish Education with beneficial results. There was a note of new self-confidence and of trust in the Cape Committee which had obviously succeeded in bringing about improvements in the education at the little school. The enrolment had topped the 80 mark in 7 classes: 23 pupils had left and 27 were admitted. So bad were the finances that there had to be a cut in salaries. The nursery school was a success with an increased enrolment.²

New Talmud Torah rooms were completed to replace the previous very unsuitable ones. The syllabus instructions of the S A Board were now carried out to the letter, stated the report, and this had resulted in marked progress. The report complained that some parents who were better off did not send their children to the Talmud Torah as if there were some stigma attached to doing so "that smacks of charity".³ The enrolment had fallen to 63, 33 having left with only 15 coming in (only 19 were at the "standard tariff"). This may indicate the beginning of the movement of the Jewish community out of Woodstock towards more socially desirable areas. In May 1935, the three classrooms were officially opened, as also a Talmud Torah hall and a nursery school room. Dr C Resnekov, chairman of the Cape Committee of the S A Board of Jewish Education, spoke on this occasion of the importance of Hebrew education at a time when "....hounds had been let loose after 150 years of freedom".⁴ Nazism was a cause

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1. Annual Report of the Woodstock and Salt River Hebrew School for 1933-1934.
 2. Ibid:
 3. Ibid: for 1934-1935
 4. Ibid:

of grave worry, added Dr Resnekov: the Jewish People must strengthen itself.¹

The next report recorded that the Ivris B'Ivris method - evidently introduced during the year - had been a success. The new premises were a boon: the school had presented an enjoyable concert (one sketch in Hebrew and one in Yiddish). But finances were a constant problem. Of the 75 pupils in the six classes, 21 were at standard tariff. A disquieting feature - and a sign of the demographic change - was the drop of numbers in the nursery class.²

Interesting facts emerge from the report for 1936: the average age in Sub A was 7-8: in this class Sifri was used. Other books used in the School were Hamechin Lamikra³ and Bilshon 'Ami (Parts I, II and III)⁴, all published in America. Siddur reading and Dinnim (Laws and Customs) were taught in all classes. Humash (Gutman's abridged edition) was started in Standard I (age 9-10) and in the highest class (Standard V) 9 chapters of Shoftim (Judges) were covered. Ivris B'Ivris was used. Pupils attended six times a week. The anthology Ben Yisrael I⁵ was studied in the highest class. Scharfstein's Historia Liladim⁶ and Goldin's Korot 'Am Yisrael⁷ were used for history in the higher classes.

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., for the year 1936-1937

3. Hamechin Lamikra: Hebrew - "Preparation for Scripture": school anthology.

4. Bilshon 'Ami: Hebrew - "In My People's Tongue" by Z Scharfstein (Shilo, New York, 1927)

5. Ben Yisrael: Hebrew - "Son of Israel" by Z Scharfstein: Hebrew Anthology for Middle School (Shilo, New York, nd)

6. Historia Liladim: Hebrew - A Children's History in Simplified Hebrew

7. Korot 'Am Yisrael: Hebrew - "A History of the People of Israel": also a school history.

Every report contained a reference to the value of Jewish education couched in dignified language, laced with words of anxiety:"the task...is becoming more arduous daily".¹ The number on the roll was 84 but the continued drop in the nursery school was ominous for the future. The Inspector's report was reasonable, but there could have been more progress registered had the Talmud Torah carried out the Board's syllabus fully.² The departures and admission were evenly balanced at 23.³

The following years witnessed a steady fall in the enrolment when the departures began to exceed the admissions. There were "severe trials" for the school.⁴ The Woodstock/Salt River Jewish community was decreasing quite rapidly. By 1945 the number was 56 in 6 classes: 10 had left and only 3 had been admitted. This phenomenon was to continue throughout the following years. "Our Talmud Torah is passing through a critical phase of its existence" stated the report for 1947. Dr Birnbaum, the Director of the Cape Board of Jewish Education, was concerned at the rapid decrease in numbers and the "disquieting irregularity of attendance".⁵

The report for the year 1949-1950, not printed this time, but cyclostyled, speaks of a "most trying period". The enrolment had dropped again, to just over 40. "Our future lies in the hands of our children.....to keep Judaism alive in this congregation".⁶ The school was going downhill rapidly: Woodstock was not only losing Jewish residents, but no young families were coming in with children.

1. Report of the Woodstock and Salt River Hebrew School for the year 1936-1937.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., for 1943-1944.
5. Ibid., for 1947.
6. Ibid., for 1949-1950.

In 1952 the locally published texts, Ivrit I and II¹ written by Dr A Moar, Director of the Cape Board of Jewish Education, and Y Blesovsky, Principal of the Sea Point Talmud Torah, were in use up to Standard III. Standard IV read Artzenu, a modern American publication containing up-to-date material on life in Israel. Humash (the Books of Exodus and Numbers in Gutman's Abridged Edition) was being taught in Standard IV, Historia Liladim Part II was still in use; Siddur and Dinnim were other subjects.

By 1956, there were only 17 children in the school. The last report is for the year 1961 when there were just 15 children on the roll. The Talmud Torah had reached the end of the road. The remaining children in the community were pupils at the Herzlia Day School and in a last gesture of loyalty to the ideal of Jewish education expressed in the annual reports over the course of four decades the congregation handed over its desks to Herzlia in July 1964 and transferred the modest Talmud Torah funds to it in 1968.

The history of the Woodstock and Salt River Talmud Torah is typical of many other Talmud Torahs attached to suburban congregations which rose and declined in the course of the years following the internal demographic changes in the two largest concentrations of Jewish populations in South Africa, Cape Town and Johannesburg. A similar story may be told of the Hebrew schools in the Cape Town suburbs of Observatory-Mowbray, Maitland and Muizenberg, and, more recently, Wynberg and Sea Point.²

The above patterns are to be observed in Johannesburg where, from the twenties and thirties, Jewish centres of residence

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1. Moar, A and Blesovsky, J: Ivrit: Hebrew Readers for Primary Classes (Cape Board of Jewish Education, Cape Town: Part I - 1950, Part II - 1951, Part III - 1956).
 2. Many Jewish communities in the country districts have, in the course of the years, become defunct as a result of the urbanisation movement which became apparent in the forties. At present only Paarl and Worcester have Talmud Torahs, with mere handfuls of pupils in Stellenbosch, Strand and Somerset West.

began to move away from the city area to the northern suburbs. The demographic changes in Doornfontein have been studied by Tyson and Rubin¹ and Chapter 29 indicates the decline in numbers at the Talmud Torah (Hebrew High School) and the simultaneous growth of the suburban Talmud Torahs.

The overall decline of the supplementary system of Hebrew education is not to be explained mainly by the population shifts, though these constitute a very important factor for the existence and continuance of a small Hebrew school generally numbering below a hundred pupils all told. A fall of 40 pupils very often meant that a Talmud Torah was halved, with some classes becoming so depleted as to be no longer viable.

The main factor in the decline of the Talmud Torah was the growth of the day school. It was not that the Jewish integrated school rose, phoenix-like, from the ashes of the bankrupt Talmud Torah. On the contrary, it developed from a relatively strongly-based supplementary school which may be said to have reached the limits of its development. Once the new day school emerged and, in the nature of things, grew so that it ultimately overtook the essentially restricted Jewish education provided by the Talmud Torah, the foundation - the afternoon school - itself began to shrink. For one thing, the Talmud Torah's most committed parents, whose children, it may be assumed, reflected the very positive parental attitudes to Jewish education, moved into the new area of Jewish education provided by the day school. Those who did not follow suit were the less committed, the less caring, for whom Jewish education was not their principal care. And, generally speaking, children of this group, too, were less caring and less motivated.

The Talmud Torahs then abdicated pride of place to the day schools which provided maximal Jewish education possible under the circumstances. So it was not merely a numerical decline of the supplementary school, but a concurrent

1. Tyson and Rubin: op.cit.,

qualitative one which was as serious. As the South African Jewish day school system waxed the Talmud Torah perforce waned.

In Cape Town the day school actually gestated within the Talmud Torah in Hope Street, sharing the self-same building for over a decade-and-a-half, and even some of the staff; for a certain period also the same principals.

It was in many ways an organic evolution from Talmud Torah education, much more so than in Johannesburg, where the day school was established as the result of a preconceived, conscious decision of the S A Board of Jewish Education and there, in fact, it was not organically connected with any specific afternoon school as was the case in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, as well as in Durban and Pretoria. These dissimilar origins have had a direct bearing on the history and growth of these respective schools and are responsible to some extent for certain differences of approach to some aspects of Jewish education between Cape Town and Johannesburg.