

## **A History of the Dunedin (N.Z.) Jewish Congregation.**

By the Rev. A. ASTOR, B.A.,

Chief Minister of the Auckland Congregation.

*(Continued from page 212 of this Volume.)*

In 1885 the congregation received an invitation from the officers of the Auckland community to attend the Consecration on November 8th, 1885, of the new Auckland Synagogue. In September, 1885, the congregation sent a message to Lord Rothschild congratulating him on his elevation to the Peerage. The Synagogue service was revised during this year. Mr. Saul Solomon was elected to the Committee.

On March 7th, 1886, due largely to the efforts of Mr. Sam Jacobs, a meeting of the ladies of the congregation was held, and led to the formation of the Ladies' Hand-in-Hand Society "for the relief and assistance of distressed women who may be either in the province or strangers."

On May 23rd of the same year, a special Confirmation Service for girls was held in the Synagogue. The service, which was fully choral, struck a very high level.

In 1887, with a view to reducing the heavy mortgage on the Synagogue, the congregation organised an Oriental Bazaar under the management of Mr. Julius Hyman, President, and Mr. D. E. Theomin, Treasurer, while Mr. Bendix Hallenstein acted as special Bazaar Treasurer. The success of the enterprise was phenomenal, and a net sum of £1,650 was raised. To Messrs. J. Hyman and D. E. Theomin the congregation presented special addresses of thanks.

In the same year Dunedin Jewry joined with their co-religionists in New Zealand in tendering to Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria an address of congratulation on the occasion of her Jubilee. The event was marked by the holding of a special service.

In the year 1888, the Rev. B. Lichtenstein travelled to Queenstown for the purpose of consecrating the Jewish Burial Ground of that town. At the annual elections, Mr. D. E. Theomin was unanimously elected President of the congregation.

In May, 1889, at the instigation of the new President, a special effort was made for the better observance of the Sabbath and for obtaining larger attendances at the services. The Rev. Mr. Lichtenstein was requested to do all in his power to induce the members of the community to close their places of business on the Sabbath. In June of this year the congregation was in communication with the London Emigration Society with regard to the suitability of Dunedin as a field for Jewish immigration. In August, a special sub-committee was set up, consisting of



**Benjamin L. Farjeon.**

Messrs. J. Hyman, M. Joel, J. Isaacs and S. Jacobs, for the purpose of instituting a Social Union among the younger members of the community.

In 1890 the congregation, together with the rest of British Jewry, mourned the death of their venerable and esteemed Chief Rabbi, Dr. Nathan Marcus Adler. The Synagogue was this year re-decorated, the cost being borne by the members as a result of a special collection.

In April, 1891, the President, Mr. D. E. Theomin, being about to leave for England, was granted leave of

absence. Prior to his departure, the committee tendered him a reception, at which he was presented with an engrossed letter of appreciation for his services.

The congregation, through the formation of various societies for communal, educational and philanthropic work, was now well in line with the most progressive communities in England. It was left to the Dunedin congregation, however, to show the way in a new avenue of benevolence. This was the formation of the Chevra Kadisha, or Holy Brotherhood, the duties of which are connected with the care of the sick and dying, the necessary attendance on the dead, and the care of the Cemetery. The Dunedin congregation was the first, under the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, to form such a society, an example which has since been widely followed. The inaugural meeting was held at the home of Mr. Godfrey Jacobs on November 21st, 1891. To defray the expenses of the society, a small sum was charged annually to every member of the congregation.

On June 19th, 1892, the Rev. B. Lichtenstein passed away after a short illness. His death came as a severe blow to the congregation, which he had served faithfully for seventeen years. The Rev. A. T. Chodowski, of Christchurch, officiated at the funeral, and delivered an impressive address at a special memorial service.

Following the death of its Minister, the committee wrote to the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Herman Adler, and to Messrs. H. Hayman, L. Hayman and Henry Hart asking them to act as an advisory committee for the selection of a suitable successor. The Synagogue services in the meantime were conducted by the President, Mr. L. Mendelsohn, assisted by Mr. S. Goldston. In February, 1893, Messrs. Hayman and Hart wrote from London that they were recommending the Rev. J. L. Harrison of Norwich, England, for the post. The new minister arrived in April to take up his duties, and he was tendered a reception by the committee.

In April, 1894, the new ground of the Jewish Cemetery was consecrated, and on this occasion Mr. Wolf Harris presented a handsome set of gates for the entrance. Arbor Day (15th Shevat) occurring in the following month,

twenty-four children of the Hebrew School planted trees at the Cemetery.

In July, the Minister and Executive, with the co-operation of the Mayor of Dunedin, telegraphed Mr. D. Pinkerton to insert a clause in his Bill on Slaughtering of Cattle that the Jewish community be allowed to carry out their rites as hitherto. This representation proved successful.

In 1895, Dr. Wolf Heinemann, a profound scholar and pedagogue, arrived with his family in Dunedin. He became associated for many years with the University of New Zealand, acting as examiner in German and Hebrew, and did much for the cause of education in Otago. He founded Selwyn College School. On many occasions he delivered lectures in the Synagogue, and his valuable work as Superintendent of the Dunedin Hebrew School helped considerably to raise the standard of Hebrew and religious knowledge in the community. His son, Mr. M. M. Heinemann, a Past President of the Wellington congregation, also served the Dunedin community in the capacity of Hon. Secretary for some time.

In 1896, with the Synagogue Choir as a nucleus, the Dunedin Jewish Choral Society was formed. A special Chanukah Service was held, the success of which was largely due to the excellent services rendered by the newly formed society under the direction of Mr. S. Jacobs.

In 1897, Dunedin Jewry joined their co-religionists throughout New Zealand and Australia in sending expressions of loyalty and congratulations to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, on her Diamond Jubilee. In commemoration of this great event, a special thanksgiving service was held in the Synagogue on June 20th. The Choral Society again assisted, and the service was of a high standard.

In July, 1897, the Rev. J. L. Harrison was granted leave of absence to visit the home country. Dr. Heinemann and Mr. L. Mendelsohn took charge of the services, and Mr. Saxton was engaged to perform Schechitah during his absence. In September of the same year, the Rev. Mr. Harrison cabled from England tendering his resignation as minister, etc., to the congregation.

In January, 1898, the congregation advertised in the Sydney and Melbourne Jewish press inviting applications

for the post of Minister at a salary of £350 per annum. The presidents of the three Melbourne congregations, together with Rabbi Dr. Abrahams and the Rev. Blaubaum, were asked to act as an advisory board to choose a suitable gentleman for the position.

In the meantime Mr. L. Mendelsohn and Dr. Heine-  
mann continued to act as lay-readers, and Mr. D. Lichten-  
stein, a son of the late Rev. B. Lichtenstein, acted as  
Schochet.

In April, 1898, the Rev. A. T. Chodowski, who had  
been acting as minister to the Brisbane congregation,  
Queensland, was appointed, and arrived in Dunedin in  
June of the same year to take up his duties. Mr.  
Chodowski was a native of Russia, and had received his  
ministerial training in Germany, and at the Jews' College,  
London. He had been minister in Christchurch, New  
Zealand, for six years before going to Brisbane. Dr.  
Heinemann, after nearly three years of outstanding and  
creditable service as Headmaster of the Hebrew School,  
resigned, and the congregation showed their appreciation  
of his services by presenting him with a letter of thanks  
and a purse of sovereigns.

His services, together with those of Mr. L. Mendelsohn,  
during the twelve months that the community was without  
a minister, were gratefully acknowledged by the com-  
munity.

In March, 1900, the Rev. Elias Blaubaum, a minister  
of the St. Kilda congregation, Victoria, visited Dunedin,  
and under authority of the Chief Rabbi formed a special  
Beth Din in Dunedin. The question of proselyzation  
was thoroughly discussed, and the future policy of the  
congregation in the matter was defined.

On Sunday, April 29th, 1900, a service unique in the  
history of the Synagogue took place in Dunedin, the  
occasion being the golden wedding of Mr. and Mrs. Julius  
Hyman, the first in the annals of the community. The  
Synagogue was transformed by decorations, and the build-  
ing was crowded. The choral part of the service was  
under the direction of Mr. A. Robertshaw. The Minister,  
the Rev. A. T. Chodowski, gave an appropriate address and  
prayer of thanksgiving. The occasion evoked a wonderful  
amount of feeling, and the functions connected with it

were attended by all classes and creeds, showing at once the respect in which Mr. and Mrs. Hayman were held, and the pleasure of the congregation in honouring them. Amongst those who attended the "Conversazione" held in the Choral Hall on April 30th were his Worship the Mayor of Dunedin, Mr. R. Chisholm, who presided; representatives of the Masonic fraternity, and of the various bodies connected with the Synagogue. Most gratifying letters and telegrams of congratulation were received from Sir Robert Stout, Chief Justice; the Hon. (afterwards Sir) Joseph Ward, on behalf of the Government; the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Adler; the Rev. Van Staveren, and many others.



**The Hon. S. E. Shrimski, M.L.C.**

The success of the proceedings was due to the energy of Mr. D. E. Theomin, then treasurer of the congregation, assisted by the members of the committee.

On the passing of Queen Victoria in 1901, the congregation expressed its sympathy in a message to his Excellency the Governor of New Zealand. The memorial service in the Synagogue was rendered more impressive by the attendance of officers and members of the North Dunedin Rifles, headed by Mr. S. S. Myers.

An address of welcome on behalf of Dunedin Jewry was presented to T.R.H. the Duke and Duchess of Corn-

wall and York (King George V. and Queen Mary) during their visit to New Zealand.

In June, 1903, at a special meeting convened for the purpose, the congregation passed a resolution declaring its abhorrence at the outrages perpetrated on men, women and children of the Jewish Faith at Kishineff, and calling upon the Russian Government to prevent their repetition. A fund was inaugurated, and the amount collected was transmitted to the Rt. Hon. Sir Marcus Samuel, Lord Mayor of London.

In July, Mr. Woolf Harris, on the occasion of his 70th birthday, donated £50 to the congregation. In December, a similar sum was donated by Mr. Henry Hart, of London.

In 1904, at a general meeting, members of the congregation expressed their deepest regret at the loss the Jewish people had sustained by the untimely death of Dr. Theodore Hertzfel.

This year, a new by-law was passed "that no boy could be allowed to recite his Bar-Mitzvah portion in the Synagogue without first passing an examination of proficiency in Hebrew and religious knowledge."

Mr. Bendix Hallenstein, who for some years had been a member of the Executive, bequeathed the sum of £250 to the Synagogue.

In 1905, the handsome brass lectern which at present adorns the Synagogue was presented by Mr. D. E. Theomin.

In 1906, as the result of a special collection, the congregation cabled to Messrs. Rothschild, London, the sum of £452 towards the fund for relief of survivors of the Russian atrocities.

In May, 1906, the long desired liquidation of the debt upon the Synagogue was effected by the munificent gift of £500 from Mr. Woolf Harris (then in London), to whom an engrossed letter of thanks was sent.

In 1907, Mr. Maurice Joel, who had served the congregation in many ways for over forty-four years, passed away.

In 1908, another zealous worker was lost to the congregation by the death of Mr. L. Mendelsohn. He had filled the position of President and Treasurer for many

years, and, when occasion arose, had ably assisted in conducting the Divine Service as a lay-reader.

In 1909, after eleven years' service as Minister of the congregation, the Rev. Chodowski's engagement with the congregation terminated. For a period of three years the congregation was without a minister, and during this time Mr. J. Rittenberg acted as lay-reader.

In September, 1909, Mr. A. Spiro was elected as Schochet and assistant teacher, in which capacity he served the congregation for many years.

In 1911, at the instigation of the Rev. A. T. Boas, of Adelaide, South Australia, the Triennial Reading of the Law was introduced into the service. It was then in vogue in Brisbane and Adelaide, and was current in many Synagogues in the U.S.A.



**Maurice Joel.**

In June, 1912, the Rev. Morris Diamond was appointed to the position of Minister of the congregation. Mr. Diamond had been for some time Choirmaster of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, and prior to his appointment to Dunedin had acted as Minister in Newcastle, New South Wales.

In 1913, Mr. Woolf Harris was appointed to represent the congregation as delegate in connection with the election of the Chief Rabbi.

1914 was the first year passed under the shadow of the Great War, and was characterised by devoted activity in which leaders and members of the congregation took their parts in the national efforts. This spirit was continued throughout the period of the war. Apart from contributing to local patriotic efforts, sums of money were collected on behalf of the Jewish war victims in Poland, and of Jewish refugees who had fled from Belgium.

In 1917, Mr. Woolf Harris was appointed as the congregation's representative on the Board of Deputies, London. Further sums were sent to London on behalf of distressed co-religionists.

In 1917, on the occasion of the 70th birthday of Mr. S. Jacobs, who for many years had been President of the Chevra Kadisha, Overseer of the Burial Ground, and Treasurer of the Philanthropic Society, an engrossed letter of congratulation, suitably bound, was presented to him.

In 1918, Mr. A. Spiro resigned his position as Schochet to the community. The year of Armistice and the Declaration of Peace saw most impressive services held in the Synagogue.

In 1919, a communal reception was given in honour of Mr. and Mrs. R. M. Marks (both workers of long standing in the community) on the occasion of their golden wedding, when a suitable presentation was made to them. A Roll of Honour to members and sons of members who had served in the Great War was erected.

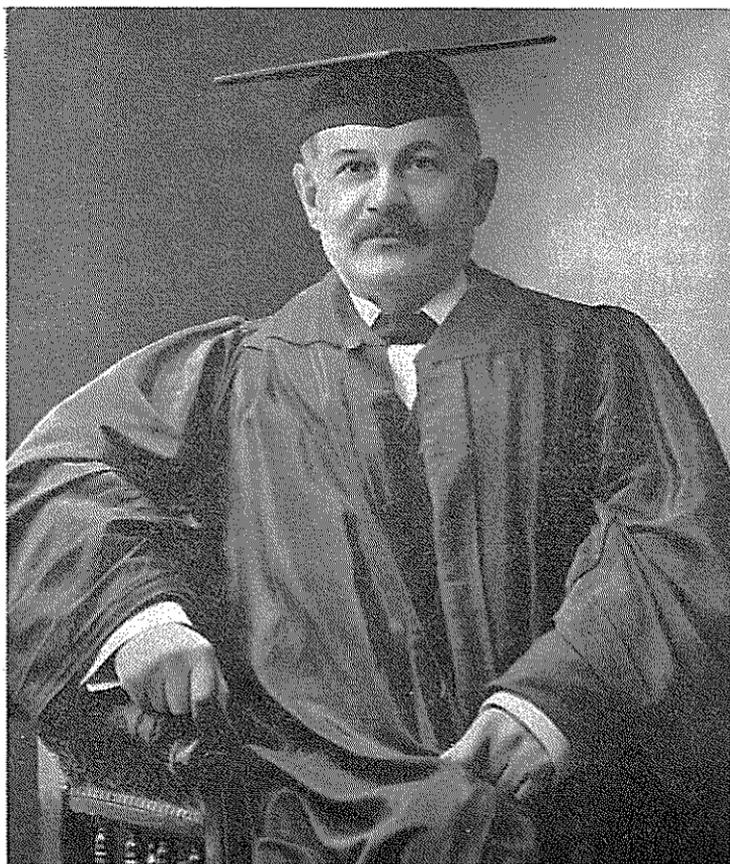
Mr. H. Isaacs, a Past President of the congregation, being about to leave the Province, left the sum of £50 for investment, the interest on which was to provide a Hebrew School Prize Fund.

Mr. L. Phillips, of Auckland, champion and zealous worker in the cause of Zionism in New Zealand, addressed the members of the congregation on November 13th, 1919, on the Zionist position and prospects. A resolution was unanimously passed by the congregation pledging its support, and promising to raise a fund for the purpose among the members.

In 1920, on the occasion of the visit of H.R.H. Prince of Wales, a loyal address on behalf of the Jews of New Zealand was presented to him in Wellington.

The Hon. Mark Cohen, M.L.C., who for many years had been editor of the *Evening Star*, was called to the Upper House.

On September 2nd, Mr. Israel Cohen visited Dunedin



**Dr. Wolf Heinemann.**

(Photo. by courtesy of his grandson, Mr. J. W. Heinemann.)

as an emissary of the Zionist Organisation in London, and was given wholehearted support by the local community. He was given a communal reception, and addressed a large

meeting of representative Dunedin citizens at the Burns Hall. As a result of his visit, the Dunedin congregation transmitted the sum of £4,000 to headquarters in London for the Palestine Restoration Fund (now known as Keren Hayesod).

The year 1921 was marked by the arrival on a pastoral visit of the Chief Rabbi, Dr. J. H. Hertz, accompanied by the late Mr. Albert M. Woolf, Vice-President of the United Synagogue. The distinguished visitors were the guests of our President, Mr. D. E. Theomin, at whose house a communal reception was held. His very forceful address to the large assembly of Dunedin citizens in the Burns Hall created a stir in the city. During his visit, the Chief Rabbi was instrumental in obtaining considerable support in the congregation on behalf of the Jewish War Memorial.

In November, 1923, after eleven years' service as Minister of the congregation, the Rev. Mr. Diamond relinquished his position owing to ill-health. In appreciation of his past services, the congregation assisted him to travel with his family to South Africa.

Mr. J. Rittenberg acted as Honorary Reader for a period of two years.

In 1924, the Dunedin Jewish Social Club came into existence, and has proved a great influence for good in the community ever since.

Following upon the departure of the Rev. Diamond, the Executive communicated with the Chief Rabbi asking him to co-operate with Mr. E. I. Halsted, then in London, in the selection of a suitable successor. The service, in the meantime, was conducted by Mr. Rittenberg until his death, after which Mr. E. Frienlander was appointed lay-reader at a salary of £150 per annum.

In 1925, Mr. Halsted, after making careful search in the United Kingdom, ultimately decided to recommend for the vacant place the Rev. A. Astor, a student of Jews' College, London, who was then 24 years old. After the approval of the Chief Rabbi had been obtained and the recommendation of Mr. Halsted confirmed by the Board of Management, the Rev. Alexander Astor was unanimously elected Minister of the Dunedin Jewish congregation at a general meeting held on September 16th, 1925.

The new minister and his wife set sail from England

on January 29th, 1926, a few days after thir marriage, and arrived in Dunedin on March 29th of that year. The communal reception which was tendered to them by the Social Club was attended by the largest gathering seen for many years.

One of the first acts of the new minister was the re-organisation of the Hebrew School. Modern text-books were introduced, and an up-to-date system of instruction inaugurated. The number of children grew much larger, so that voluntary assistance had to be obtained, and for some years Miss E. Jacobs and Mr. D. Langley gave their services.

The Friday evening services, which for many years had lapsed, were resumed.

In 1927, at the request of the Minister, a special Education Committee consisting of Messrs. E. I. Halsted, G. Benson, L. Cohen and E. Friedlander was appointed to assist the work of the Hebrew and Sabbath Schools, and conduct examinations from time to time.

During this year Dr. Alexander Goldstein, an emissary from the Zionist Organisation in Palestine, visited Dunedin, and created a great deal of enthusiasm on behalf of the movement by his brilliant oratory. He was given a civic reception by the Mayor (Hon. W. B. Taverner, M.P.) in the Town Hall, and gave an address at Burns Hall to a crowded meeting of Dunedin citizens. His visit is still remembered with a great deal of pleasure by Jews and non-Jews alike. As the result nearly £1,000 was collected in Dunedin, and in a very short space of time the sum was cabled to Palestine.

(Rev. Adolf Treitel Chadowski, who died in 1926, aged 63 years, was minister of Hebrew congregations at Leicester, England; Christchurch, N.Z.; Brisbane, Q'ld.; Dunedin, N.Z.; Carlton, Vic.; Newtown, N.S.W.; and founded the "Australian Jewish Chronicle" in 1922.—Editor.)

## **Seventh Annual Report and Financial Statement.**

**To be presented at the Annual General Meeting of Members,  
to be held on 4th July, 1946.**

Since our last Annual Report, hostilities in the campaign in the Pacific have ended. May this be the beginning of long years of peace and progress for all mankind.