

REV. ELIAS BLAUBAUM (1847-1904): MINISTER, EDITOR AND SCHOLAR

by
HILARY L. RUBINSTEIN Ph.D.

Australian Jewry has not been entirely unaffected by the so-called "cultural cringe." During the evolution of our community assumptions have been voiced from time to time that the spiritual leaders who have agreed to serve in this distant outpost of the Jewish world have been second-rate men. Yet we have only to invoke such names as Dr. Joseph Abrahams (a renowned scholar who in 1913 narrowly missed being selected as Chief Rabbi of the British Empire), Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen (a universally acknowledged authority on Jewish music) and Chief Rabbi Dr. Israel Brodie (who served in Melbourne for over a decade) to realise that Australian Jewry has had spiritual leaders of distinction, men whose greatness was absolute and not relative.

Rabbis and ministers such as Abrahams and Cohen, A.T. Boas, A.B. Davis and D.I. Freedman have been accorded their due places in the annals of our community. They are the subjects of entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. The failure to include Rev. Elias Blaubaum in that invaluable and prestigious reference work is a serious sin of omission. Blaubaum, minister of the St. Kilda Hebrew Congregation for thirty-one years and editor of the *Jewish Herald* for almost twenty-five, was one of the most significant figures — clerical or lay — in the entire Australian Jewish story. He was certainly the most Jewishly creative. Unfortunately, even in Newman H. Rosenthal's history of the St. Kilda congregation, *Look Back With Pride*, Blaubaum emerges as a rather minor figure, outshone by his successor, Jacob Danglow.

Australian Jewry should be more aware of this remarkable man and his place in our history. As Rabbi Apple has observed, Blaubaum "must have wielded rather a powerful influence on communal thought in his triple capacity as minister, member of the Beth Din and editor."

Elias Blaubaum came from an Orthodox German Jewish family. He was born towards the close of 1847 in Rotenburg, a country town on the River Fulda in Hesse-Kassel. His parents were Aaron Blaubaum (Aharon ha-Levi), a drapery merchant, and Miriam, nee Nussbaum. The Jews of Hesse-Kassel, who were finally emancipated in 1866 when the principality came under Prussian rule,² had been settled in small rural communities such as Rotenburg for centuries. The unusual name Blaubaum, meaning "blue tree," may have derived from the distinguishing shield outside the family residence, a common practice among the Jews of that part of Germany, who adopted surnames long before they were compelled to do so by law.³

Throughout his life Blaubaum exhibited the traits of a cultured and enlightened German gentleman while remaining a proud and passionate Jew. He did not believe that the conferral of civil rights upon Jews obligated them to dilute their Jewishness. On the contrary, he believed that the acquisition of rights of which their forefathers never dared dream behoved the Jews to cling all the more tenaciously to their ancestral religion.⁴ His attitude exemplified that of the established Australian Jewish community, with its pursuit of integration without assimilation, and its resolve to resist both the honey and the sting of the wider society.

Reform Judaism had been popularised by one of the celebrated rabbis of Hessian Jewry (Israel Jacobson) in Kassel, the city where the country draper's clever son

received part of his education. Yet, Reform held no attractions for Blaubaum, whose Judaism revolved round his conviction that "God and His law never change," and who faithfully followed the example set by his strictly observant father. He was a gifted scholar, and he graduated about 1870 from the Royal Provincial College of Kassel, where he apparently trained as a teacher. The views of the famous Swiss educationalist J.H. Pestalozzi made a deep impression on him, and he attempted to put them into practice in his Hebrew school classes, first in Germany and later in Australia.⁶

Upon graduation he became assistant minister and Hebrew teacher at Gudensberg, a little town in the Kassel region. In 1873 Melbourne merchant Isaac Hallenstein, on a business trip to Europe, interviewed him for the post of St. Kilda's first minister. He was then twenty-five years old, a young man of "prepossessing appearance" as the *Australian Israelite* put it: slight, dark, and unmistakably "semitic."⁷ He was not an ordained rabbi, but his three years' experience at Gudensberg were sufficient to persuade a rather desperate St. Kilda congregation, which had been searching for a suitable man for months, to accept Hallenstein's recommendation that he be appointed. He came to St. Kilda as *ha-rav ha-darshan*, minister-preacher, on an initial three-yr contract. His salary was never more than meagre.⁸ Yet, the realisation comforted him that, while he could never enrich the Jewish community with material wealth, he could certainly enrich it with the fruits of his mind. For over three decades Australian Jewry had the benefit of his prodigious industry and powerful intellect.⁹

Leaving Germany in October 1873, Blaubaum travelled to London for an audience with Chief Rabbi Nathan M. Adler. The St. Kilda congregation, founded by Jews of mainly German origin, had deliberately sought a German as minister, and had solicited guidance from Samuel Meyer, Chief Rabbi of Hanover. It did not place itself under Adler's authority. Nevertheless, Blaubaum implied his allegiance to Adler by assuring him of his commitment to Orthodoxy.¹⁰ It was a pledge which was to bring him into conflict with certain members of his new congregation, which in the two years of lay leadership since its inception had been alarming Rev. Ornstein of the Bourke Street synagogue and Rev. Rintel of East Melbourne with its radical tendencies.¹¹

Blaubaum boarded the steamship *Great Britain* at Southampton knowing hardly a word of English. By the time he arrived at Sandridge (Port Melbourne) eight weeks later, on 23 December 1873, he had taught himself enough to be understood. He had even composed a sermon for *Shavuot* (Feast of Weeks) in his new language. Interestingly, his shipboard journal begins in German and ends in English.¹²

For several months Blaubaum gave sermons in German, the mother tongue of many of his congregants. Most of the German Jews at St. Kilda seem to have hailed from Prussia proper, notably the Posen region. Their native ritual was the *minhag polin* prevailing east of the River Elbe, while Blaubaum's was the *minhag ashkenazi* followed west of it. Some of those Prussians felt cheated when they discovered that he chanted unfamiliar melodies. Moreover, they grumbled, "Mr. Blaubaum is no *chazan*." Nevertheless, they had to concede that he "possesses qualities quite as valuable as a knowledge of the old tunes."¹³ Those qualities included a fine mind, an able pen, immense moral courage, "indomitable perseverance, mature wisdom and sound common sense."¹⁴ In addition he had an aptitude for teaching, he strove to forge links with Christian church representatives, and he attacked the enemies of Jewry with resolution and forcefulness.

Blaubaum was "a ripe scholar and an indefatigable student"¹⁵ who saw it both as a duty and a pleasure to share with others what he had learned. "Improve

yourself! Then endeavour to improve others!" was the rabbinic dictum which served as his watchword.¹⁶ He had a deep sense of history and was always very conscious of his ministerial role as a steward of Judaism, whose task it was to guard and to hand on his heritage to the next generation.

Rabbi Dr. Abrahams, who arrived in Victoria in 1885 and quickly became one of Blaubaum's most devoted admirers, remarked that never had he met anyone with such "restless energy":

The mainspring of his life's work was the desire for improvement. This influence was magnetic and contagious and induced me to take up certain studies which otherwise I would have neglected. He sought at the close of each year to be able to answer satisfactorily the question "Am I richer in knowledge and good deeds than I was twelve months ago?" Indeed, every evening he wished to look back on something attempted, something done, to the glory of God and the well-being of his fellow creatures.¹⁷

In 1877 Blaubaum married Agnes Rebecca Cohen, daughter of Samuel Cohen of East Melbourne and later of St. Kilda, an official assignee of insolvent estates. Samuel Cohen was a Londoner whose family originated in Amersfoort, Holland, and was related to the Waley-Cohens, distinguished in Anglo-Jewry. For the first few years of their married life the Blaubaums lived close to the synagogue in Charnwood Grove and accepted Jewish boy boarders. Blaubaum offered private after-school tuition to these boys and also optional German. He advertised Charnwood Grove as one of the healthiest parts of St. Kilda and only fifteen minutes walk from Wesley College, the great public school which soon became favoured by St. Kilda Jews.¹⁸ Later, as their family increased in size, the Blaubaums moved to Mozart Street, near St. Kilda's then fashionable Blessington Gardens, and there the minister lived for the rest of his life. The Blaubaums had seven children. Two girls, Meta and Zilla, were followed by five boys: Athol, Hubert, Eric, Otto and Ivan. Mrs. Blaubaum died in 1892, when the youngest child was still a baby. Blaubaum, who believed that "husband and wife be . . . one in life and death,"¹⁹ never remarried. All his children were academically gifted and he sacrificed his own comfort in order to pay for their education.²⁰ Meta, a piano student at Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, became a well-known accompanist and eventually married David Phillips of Dunedin. Zilla, who won a Melbourne University exhibition for French and German, went on to study medicine. She abandoned her course on her marriage in 1903 to Isidore Marks, dentist son of a former president of the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation. Blaubaum's sons, particularly the two eldest, excelled at Wesley and carried off a truly impressive number of prizes and scholarships. Athol was, in addition, a good sportsman and a member of the Wesley College football team. Blaubaum encouraged his children to pursue careers which would benefit humanity.²¹ Athol, Hubert and Ivan became doctors in Melbourne. Otto became a dentist in Launceston, Tasmania. Eric, who suffered from ill-health, worked for Michaelis-Hallenstein's Dunedin branch, and was killed in France during the First World War. Otto and Eric were members of St. Kilda synagogue boys' choir. Otto and Ivan headed the lists of prizewinners in Hebrew at St. Kilda Sabbath School. Yet, Athol and Otto married out of Judaism and the entire male line of the Blaubaums ceased to be Jewish by the next generation. It was an ironical twist of fate for the descendants of a man who strove to make young Jews "proud of their lineage and conscious of their religion"²² and who had declared that "we are not now so often exposed to the shame of seeing our men of intellect and ability

abandon their inheritance for a mess of pottage."²³ The situation was a salutary reminder of the fragile ties binding Jews to their heritage in Australia's easy and tolerant society during the first half of the twentieth century.

The formidable intellectual gifts which Blaubaum evidently passed on to his children ensured that his influence extended far beyond the walls of his own synagogue. "We must not be satisfied to let things take their course," he remarked. "We must be up and doing . . . and . . . help to mould the state of Judaism, not only of our own time, but of times long after we have gone to rest."²⁴ He was as good as his word, always busy in the interests of Judaism. Indeed, he confided to his dear friend Rabbi Abrahams that "Had I devoted the same time and energy to the pursuit of any other profession I should probably have benefited more materially and risen to a higher position."²⁵ He devoted so much time to Jewish secular and religious causes, to promoting the reputation of Jewry in the Christian community and to writing and lecturing on Jewish topics that Abrahams believed this unremitting work — much of it undertaken while Blaubaum was raising his large motherless family — contributed to his comparatively early death.²⁶

Blaubaum was appointed to the Victorian Beth Din shortly after his arrival in Melbourne and served on it for the rest of his life. He was a prison visitor — his interesting account of a visit to Pentridge appears in an early issue of the *Jewish Herald*²⁷ — and he served as Melbourne's Jewish chaplain when Abrahams was away on holiday. At the time of his death he was president of Melbourne's United Jewish Education Board. A year before he died he accepted the post of honorary lecturer in Hebrew to the theology students at the Congregational College.²⁸

Accustomed from childhood to calling Germany his "Fatherland,"²⁹ Blaubaum believed — in common with the emancipated Jews of Australia and other western lands — "that a man may be a good Jew and yet a devoted patriot, a firm believer in the coming Messiah and yet an able and zealous administrator of the law under which he lives."³⁰ Regretting "the spirit of levity and frivolity stealing over our rising youth"³¹ he believed "the stricter the Jew the happier the man"³² and he aimed, from pulpit and editorial chair, "to magnify the Torah and make it honourable."³³ When he arrived at St. Kilda he found a mixed choir. This he tolerated, and indeed shortly afterwards introduced a quartet of four young ladies into the services. He also acceded to demands for other piecemeal reforms such as the limited use of English in the liturgy (St. Kilda was the first Victorian congregation to employ the vernacular) and the confirmation of girls, which he introduced in 1889.³⁴ Indeed, Blaubaum was a staunch and outspoken believer in the equality of women, their right to social emancipation, higher education and economic independence.³⁵ Righteous and fair-minded, he held progressive views on a number of subjects, but he refused to countenance reforms which he felt contradicted Jewish law. He wrote of the "hideousness" of Reform Judaism³⁶ and led the Orthodox attack on Rev. Dr. Dattner Jacobson — whose dubious behaviour as a member of the Beth Din Blaubaum exposed to the Chief Rabbi and to the Melbourne law courts³⁷ — and Jacobson's shortlived Temple of Israel in 1885.³⁸ He fought Abraham Michael Samuël's proposal for a Jewish Sunday Sabbath Observance Society in 1882 and Isaac Jacobs' scheme to launch a Reform movement in 1902.³⁹ Together with the other members of the Victorian Beth Din he attacked the proposed interstate Jewish conference in 1901 on the grounds that laymen who aimed at "remodelling Judaism from top to bottom" would be present.⁴⁰

Blaubaum's organic view of history, his sense of being a link in a chain binding the Jewish past and future, pervaded what he wrote and did. In one of his earliest sermons he declared that Jewish children "may hear with enthusiasm the history of



THE BETH DIN OF AUSTRALIA

*(From left, Rev. Blaubaum, Rev. Goldreich, Rabbi Dr. Abrahams)
from the Weekly Times, 23.9.1899*

their great mother country, but they must also be acquainted with the glorious deeds of our Jewish heroes!"⁴¹ On another occasion he observed that "The Torah represents the essence of all that we are. Without it we are nothing... For it tens of thousands of our ancestors have joyfully suffered misery, persecution, torture, death..."⁴² Identifying materialistic strivings as the greatest single cause of indifference to Judaism,⁴³ he laboured incessantly to imbue Jews, particularly young ones, with the deep love of Judaism and Jewishness which motivated him. But not at any price: "not an inch will we move from the old landmark!"⁴⁴ It was an uphill battle against an apathy prevailing in many homes where the Jewish practices taught at Sabbath school were never observed. Around the turn of the century literary evenings and Sunday morning Hebrew and Jewish history classes, which he started for youngsters past school-age, had to be discontinued through lack of interest.⁴⁵

In 1879, when the Melbourne Hebrew School — a day school — was threatened with closure, Blaubaum wrote a long letter to Jewish parliamentarian E.L. Zox imploring him to use his influence to keep the school open. A day school was preferable to after-school Hebrew classes, Blaubaum insisted, because the children who came to classes after their regular lessons were tired and unreceptive and in the hot Australian summer often debilitated as well.⁴⁶ But following the establishment of the United Jewish Education Board in 1895 under his joint vice-presidency with Rev. Jacob Lenzer, Blaubaum grew less convinced of the need for a Jewish day school (as propounded by Jewish parliamentarian Nathaniel Levi) and doubted whether it would find favour with parents.⁴⁷

On the issue of political Zionism the usually steadfast Blaubaum had a change of heart. He was always wary of the "sturdy beggars of Jerusalem" and the "rabbinical tramps" who came to Australia collecting for the poor Jews of Palestine. In 1879 he and Melbourne philanthropist Woolf Davis began what proved to be an annual collection for Palestinian Jewry in order to prevent the visits of persistent *shlichim* whose travel expenses, Blaubaum observed, consumed much of what they were given. Yet, his sense of Jewish peoplehood was also a factor: "Where is the Jew who, feeling proud of his race, as well he might, could look with indifference towards Jerusalem?"⁴⁸ He described political Zionism as "bunkum" and mocked Dattner Jacobson's professed attachment to the cause. In 1900, when Perth Jews set up Australia's first Zionist society, Blaubaum asked sarcastically whether they needed a "legally assured home" and when would they be leaving for Jerusalem.⁴⁹ But something — perhaps the Kishineff atrocities of 1903 — changed Blaubaum's mind. In an essay discovered and published posthumously he wrote:

Is it desirable that Israel shall again become a nation? Is it likely? Modern Jews, and especially those that are so fortunate as to live in free countries, generally maintain that to entertain a hope for the realisation of Israel's nationality would be incompatible with true patriotism, or the duty which the Jews owe to the country of which they are citizens. But those that raise this objection think of themselves only... Would it not be a blessing to these people (oppressed Jews) if they could all be gathered to one spot on God's earth where, perhaps under the protection of one or all of the great powers, they could form a nation, and thus be able to ventilate in the right quarter, and with united voice, whatever grievances their people in any part of the world may have? And what country would be more suitable... than... the cradle of our people?

His assertion "It does not follow that all Jews should be domiciled there" is a far

cry from his sarcastic attitude towards Perth Zionists in 1900. Now he could say "what a standing this realisation of the national idea would give us in the estimation of the world" and he maintained that to doubt the eventual rebirth of Israel "means to doubt all our prophets, without exception... What has been may be again."⁵⁰

There was no champion of Jewish rights more redoubtable than Blaubaum. He campaigned resolutely against any manifestation of anti-semitism. In 1888, for instance, he vehemently attacked the editor of the Sydney magazine *Young Australia*, who had explained to his adolescent readers why Jews made unsuitable colonists.⁵¹ "I can conscientiously say that during the fifteen years that I have resided in this colony I have never come across a literary production so manifestly unjust, and unfair, and so much at variance with the facts."⁵² Nothing exemplifies Blaubaum's direct, hard-hitting style and remorseless logic better than his long rejoinder in this case. During the 1890s he had plenty of opportunities to defend his people, for the economic depression was accompanied by a wave of anti-semitism fuelled by a rumour of mass Russian Jewish pauper migration to Australia.⁵³ He opened the decade with a stinging rebuke to E.W. Cole, proprietor of Melbourne's celebrated Book Arcade, who had asserted that Jews hated Gentiles as a matter of course, and in 1891 he demanded an explanation from well-known cleric Rev. Alexander Marshall, who had reportedly told a distinguished congregation at Scots Church, Collins Street, that Jews were "greedy, gutter-grubbing bloodsuckers" and more besides.⁵⁴ Blaubaum termed Marshall's "evasive" reply unworthy of a clergyman.⁵⁵

In 1881, Blaubaum was the first Australian publicly to call for relief measures for the Jews of the Czarist Empire, which he did in an editorial.⁵⁶ He had immense sympathy for the Russian Jews, "hounded from home and hearth, like beasts in the field, by an unscrupulous, bloodthirsty mob,"⁵⁷ and he wrote on his own initiative to the South Australian Minister for Lands and the *South Australian Register* advocating a Russian Jewish agricultural settlement in their colony.⁵⁸ This brought him into conflict with his fellow members of the executive of the Melbourne branch of the Anglo-Jewish Association, who deplored his unilateral action and icily accepted his resignation (being too valuable to lose he was soon reinstated.)⁵⁹ During the 1880s and 1890s Blaubaum staunchly defended Russian Jewry from charges of usury and other slanders which appeared in the Melbourne daily press and elsewhere.⁶⁰ Yet, the moderated editorial stance he adopted in the *Jewish Herald* indicates that he — or perhaps more accurately the paper's management committee — became alarmed at the effect anti-semitism could have on the status of the established Australian Jewish community. From a position advocating the migration of Russian Jews to Australia despite adverse public comment, his editorials came to caution that no such migration should occur so long as the depression lasted, even though — as he admitted — this was pandering to anti-semitism.⁶¹ He also expressed concern at the activities of an enclave of Russian Jews in Carlton, who attracted "sensational" press coverage. He asked these new migrants to bring their civil disputes with one another before the Beth Din and not the courts: "we Jews ought to wash our dirty linen at home."⁶² He was also a crusader against the Yiddish language, which he disparaged as a "jargon" unworthy of Jews in free societies.⁶³ Nevertheless, Blaubaum would almost certainly have had little sympathy with the down-play of Jewish conspicuousness adopted as an integral part of Jacob Danglow's approach — he was too aggressive and too comfortable with his Jewishness for that.

Blaubaum excelled at wedding addresses.⁶⁴ He often travelled great distances to perform marriages. For example, in 1882 he solemnised the first Jewish wedding in

Victoria's Western District (Hermann Rehfish to Charlotte Horwitz) and also journeyed to Albury to marry a couple (Ralph Abrahams to Eve Cohen) who afterwards moved to Sydney. On these and similar occasions he was specially requested owing to "his eloquence and courtesy."⁶⁵

During the search for a suitable memorial for Sir Moses Montefiore in 1884, Blaubaum advocated the establishment of a Jewish Pastoral Aid Fund for the Australian colonies. "We [it was the editorial pronoun] have repeatedly pointed out how necessary it is that the smaller settlements of Jews in the interior of the various colonies must not be lost sight of. They are our own flesh and blood, and it is in our own interest to strengthen their allegiance to us." He held that a stipend should be provided for the services of a minister to spend perhaps a year in one remote congregation, the following year in another. Otherwise he despaired of the future Jewish identity of the youth in the smaller communities. A "half-loaf scheme" was preferable to "spiritual desolation."⁶⁶ In 1885 he proposed that a Melbourne Jewish orphan asylum be established in Montefiore's name.⁶⁷ He was a devoted supporter of the Jewish almshouses in St. Kilda Road which were renamed the Montefiore Homes for Aged and Infirm Jews, and for years he led the second-night Pesach seder there. But he firmly believed that charity did not end at home where it began. He told an audience of Jews and Christians that charity should be dispensed irrespective of "race and creed" and he practised what he preached.⁶⁸

Blaubaum was on amicable terms with several Christian clergymen, who readily admired his efforts for his own "denomination" and his attempts to make the principles of Judaism intelligible to interested non-Jews. In true Jewish tradition he did not seek to proselytise — "the converts we desire to make are of our own people"⁶⁹ — and he despised Jewish apostates. One such was Hermann Herlitz, Melbourne's leading Lutheran clergyman, who had been born a German Jew. It would be interesting to know if he and Blaubaum ever met!

Being a man of rational thought, sophistication and culture, Blaubaum involved himself in issues facing the general community. He was in the forefront of the successful agitation, in 1883, to open Melbourne Public Library on Sundays. In 1896 he exhibited a set of rare seventeenth century German Jewish volumes at a book convention held there.⁷⁰

His "scholarly attainments and literary abilities" led Blaubaum to develop in Australia a branch of Jewish knowledge he made "uniquely his own."⁷¹ He was a frequent lecturer on Jewish intellectual and historical topics and published several instructive pamphlets, beginning with *What the Shofar Relates* (1879). His extant publications include a most informative article entitled "Judaism" which he wrote at the urging of an interested Christian. It appeared in the *Melbourne Review* (1883). More tedious to our modern eyes is his *On the Mountains* (1893), a typically late nineteenth century collection of sermons dedicated to the memory of his wife.⁷²

It was in the *Jewish Herald*, the journal Blaubaum established in December 1879 and edited until his death, that his moral and intellectual greatness became apparent. He believed that a Jewish newspaper, by going into homes, could exert more influence than the pulpit could, and he had been a passionate advocate of the abortive *Colonial Jewish Times*, which Moritz Michaelis and others had intended as a successor to the defunct *Australian Israelite*.⁷³ Blaubaum was justifiably proud of the high journalistic reputation of the *Jewish Herald*, and though he experimented with a "children's page" he refused to report "social trivia" in the paper's columns. On learning of the demise of the Sydney weekly, the *Australasian Hebrew*, in November 1896, he commented smugly that "there is no room in the Australian colonies for a second Jewish paper, and every fresh attempt to start one

must sooner or later end in failure."⁷⁴ He had already witnessed the cessation of the *Sydney Australian Hebrew Times* in 1895 and the *Sydney Hebrew Standard* the following year, but he had to eat his words in mid-1897 when the *Hebrew Standard* was revived on a firm footing. Nevertheless, he had the satisfaction of knowing that his paper set the standard for Australian Jewish journalism and also had a bearing on the editorial posture of its "Sydney contemporary."⁷⁵ In the early years of its existence — before the arrival in 1905 of Rabbi Cohen who exerted a powerful influence on its editor, Alfred Harris — the *Hebrew Standard*, though a Jewish newspaper of commendable quality, did not rival the *Jewish Herald* in terms of coverage, particularly of international events. Moreover, its editorials, while thoughtful and well written, lack that aggressive self-confident thrust which mark Blaubaum's. Nor did the *Hebrew Standard* have an editor who was able to produce scholarly though eminently readable essays about aspects of the ritual, such as the *Alenu* prayer, and about notable figures in the history of Judaism like Rashi, as Blaubaum did. Contributions of this sort made the *Jewish Herald* an organ of instruction, not a mere chronicle of news and views, and those who took the trouble to read them undoubtedly found much to enjoy and imbibe.

Among the most memorable of Blaubaum's contributions to the *Jewish Herald* are a series of articles recording his impressions of New Zealand, where he went early in 1900 as the guest of Rev. A.T. Chodowski of Dunedin, leaving his congregation in the care of Joel Fredman. No professional travel writer could have left more evocative accounts — of climate, landscape, social life and customs and inevitably the Jewish community. On 17 March he occupied the Dunedin Synagogue pulpit, speaking on the "Principles of Judaism," and a few days later he delivered a public lecture on "What the Jews have done for the world," which drew a large audience of Jews and non-Jews.⁷⁶ Some time later he submitted this lecture as an article for publication in the *Age* — and could see the funny side when it was rejected as too lengthy.⁷⁷

Blaubaum's strong, dogmatic personality brought him his share of opponents and detractors. The *Jewish Herald* conceded as much when, in an unattributed obituary for him, it observed that no man who ever lived was entirely free of enemies.⁷⁸ Active communal figure, Isaac Barnet, refused to join other members of the Melbourne Anglo-Jewish Association executive in paying tribute to Blaubaum's editorship — a personality conflict was probably the reason. A group of St. Kilda congregants complained that his style was too detached and that he did not do enough social visiting. They compared him unfavourably in this regard with the genial and gregarious Rev. Jacob Lenzer of East Melbourne. Reform advocate Isaac Jacobs, a prominent member of Blaubaum's congregation, resented his commitment to Orthodoxy and accused him — most unjustly — of not being interested in the Jewish education of post-Bar Mitzvah youth. *Table Talk* editor Maurice Brodzky, after bringing an unsuccessful suit for slander against Blaubaum which resulted in a long period of undischarged bankruptcy, disparaged the *Jewish Herald*. In the pages of *Table Talk* he implied that Blaubaum was associated with it only for the money and stated that it had been "foisted on the Hebrew community as the mouthpiece of Orthodox Judaism" and had only 500 subscribers. He claimed that Blaubaum was a slave to rabbinic legalism and a tool of the Chief Rabbi. After Blaubaum gave a talk to the Melbourne Jewish Literary and Debating Society on "The Jewish Origins of Christianity" Brodzky put forward the childish suggestion that Blaubaum's favourable references to Christianity meant that he was now surreptitiously undermining Judaism and feeding Christianity to his congregants by degrees. As a result, Blaubaum had his talk printed in pamphlet form, to safeguard

himself by demonstrating that it contained nothing unacceptable from a Jewish standpoint.⁷⁹ The Reform episode of 1885 brought Blaubaum into bitter public conflict with Dattner Jacobson's right hand man, Abraham Michael Samuelli. The latter — who appears to have been an unsuccessful applicant for the post of *shammas* at St. Kilda synagogue — first ventured into print in the correspondence columns of the *Jewish Herald*, where Blaubaum made sport of his shaky spelling. In a letter to the *Age* he accused Blaubaum of inconsistency in opposing mixed marriages since his own wife was the product of such a union. Blaubaum answered this and other nonsensical allegations, including claims that he was charging extortionate sums for making proselytes, with the skilful sarcasm he usually employed to get the better of opponents.⁸⁰

In 1902 Blaubaum's health began to deteriorate. Over the next two years "his sufferings were intense, to what extent none but his intimate friends knew," recalled Rabbi Abrahams, "yet in the midst of severe pain his sense of duty was always predominant."⁸¹ In 1903 his congregation persuaded him to take a leave of absence. Directly after Yom Kippur, during which, against medical advice, he insisted on intoning the *ne'ilah* service which he loved, he left Melbourne on a nine-week vacation to Sydney, the Pacific Islands and New Zealand. His elder daughter Meta accompanied him. From each place on his route this diligent (and, as it proved, dying) man sent long, entertaining and informative articles back to Melbourne for inclusion in the *Jewish Herald*. They show that, ill as he was, his writing had lost none of its verve and vigour. These last offerings from Blaubaum's pen are marvellous social and historical documents. They give more than a tourist's superficial impressions. They provide a vivid and valuable insight into Pacific life and administration at the turn of the century. Modestly, he entitled them "Sketches By the Way — by a Wandering Jew," but everyone realised who their author was.⁸²

Finding himself in Sydney on *Erev Succot*, Blaubaum hastened to service at the Great Synagogue. It was five-thirty, and as he set off for Elizabeth Street he fretted that he would not arrive for the start at quarter to six. "However, a few minutes late does not matter much: it puts you on a par with the generality of your people, who are never very punctual in attending synagogue. Nor are they very decorous while there." He also gave his views on Jewish liturgical music, prompted by the "English *chazanuth*" which he found at the Great Synagogue.⁸³

From Suva he wrote a very lively and interesting article on *Erev Shabbat Bereshit*: "However great the development of the human race has been since the first Sabbath *B'rishith* . . . there has been one creator for all . . . the Divine image is stamped on all alike."⁸⁴ This essentially Jewish view made him issue, from Tonga, a spirited attack on Australian immigration policy: "We, that is, those that rule us, want a white Australia, and to let a South Sea Islander enter our territory would be downright contamination. And worst of all, the churches stand quietly by and raise no protest against such an intolerant policy! . . ."⁸⁵

Blaubaum met a few Jews on Tonga, but lamented that "they are Jews only in name and physiognomy. They have lost all touch with their brethren abroad and observe nothing."⁸⁶ In Levuka, Fiji, he found a few Jewish businessmen, and in Suva he found a Jewish community with strong Melbourne connections, including the Marks family.⁸⁷

Samoa was swarming with German officials, and Blaubaum poured scorn on his native land's efforts to establish a colonial presence in the Pacific. He had heard reports of the physical beauty of the Samoan women, but was disappointed. In their "shabby teagowns," without "hats or boots or stockings" and smeared all over with coconut oil they failed to attract him. On Samoa, however, he succumbed to

delights of another kind. In his description of Robert Louis Stevenson's former property there he revealed something of his own soul: "It is an ideal spot for a man of thought and feeling — a man who desires to be in close communion with nature, and to whom trees and shrubs and flowers and the birds high in the air are more than dumb creatures..."¹

He returned from his travels refreshed and apparently cured. But his illness was more serious than his doctor — the eminent Jewish physician Dr. Louis Henry — imagined. He had an obstructive tumour of the bladder and in April 1904 was admitted to Dr. Moore's Private Hospital, Little Flinders Street, where he underwent surgery. While there the man, who could not be idle, wrote two sermons, delivered during Pesach by Joel Fredman. The operation was considered a success, but less than a fortnight afterwards, on 21 April 1904, Blaubaum died. Two days later he was buried beside his wife in St. Kilda cemetery. The funeral was attended by a number of prominent non-Jews, including the local parliamentarian. Despite his own failing health, Blaubaum's close colleague on the Beth Din, Rev. I.M. Goldreich, insisted on coming from Ballarat to officiate at the burial.²

Blaubaum was only fifty-six when he died, and tributes arrived at St. Kilda from Jewish communities throughout Australia. Rabbi Abrahams summed up the situation best when he pointed out: "if life is measured by deeds and not by years then [Blaubaum] lived to a ripe old age."³ The departed minister was succeeded in the pulpit by Jacob Danglow and in the editorial chair by lawyer Moses Moses.

Blaubaum's anonymous obituarist wrote that even those who had crossed swords with him must agree that he was "a good man and a good Jew."⁴ Rabbi Abrahams, badly shaken by the loss, penned an editorial tribute in the *Jewish Herald*, delivered a graveside eulogy, and gave a stirring panegyric at a memorial service. He recognised his colleague's extraordinary qualities and acknowledged him as a true sage in Israel. He recalled that Blaubaum's "efforts were not showy or ostentatious, but modest, quiet and practical."⁵ Blaubaum's lasting legacy was the *Jewish Herald*.⁶ Happily, the quarter-century's issues which he edited are still extant. They are an indispensable source for the history of Australian Jewry. They illustrate the timelessness of Judaism, and remind us that its adherents can communicate not only across continents but across centuries. They help us to understand ourselves, for their pages consider the sorts of problems and issues which our Jewish community is confronting today. The busy pen of Elias Blaubaum can still instruct and inspire.

NOTES

1. Raymond Apple, "The Victorian Jewish Community, 1900-1909," *A.J.H.S. Journal*, vol. 5, part 1, 1959.
2. Under Joseph II's Edict of Toleration, enforced in 1781, the Jews were permitted to attend schools and universities. In 1808, when Hesse-Kassel comprised part of the short-lived Kingdom of Westphalia, an emancipation law granted civil rights to Jews, but a restrictive ordinance was issued in 1823. It was not rescinded until 1866.
3. See *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York, 1941, vol. 5, pp. 346-47.
4. See *Jewish Herald*, 4 September 1885.
5. *Ibid.*, 31 October 1884. His fusion of Orthodoxy with modernity is reminiscent of the great German Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, whose stance may have influenced him.
6. See Elias Blaubaum, "Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi," *Victorian Review*, vol. 1, 1879-80.

7. *Australian Israelite*, 26 December 1873. Three photographs of Blaubaum are in existence. He is pictured with fellow *dayanim* Abrahams and Goldreich in the *Weekly Times*, 23 September 1899. That issue contains a special feature on Melbourne Jewry and has photographs of several communal personalities and scenes. Two photographs in the possession of the St. Kilda Hebrew Congregation show Blaubaum in his ministerial robes and with his seven children. Both were taken in 1902 outside the St. Kilda Sabbath School, by headmaster Joel Fredman.
8. St. Kilda's search for a minister is described in Newman Rosenthal, *Look Back With Pride*, Melbourne, 1971, pp. 15-18.
9. See *Jewish Herald*, 30 April 1904.
10. *Australian Israelite*, 26 December 1873.
11. *Ibid.*, 2 January 1874.
12. *Ibid.*, 26 December 1873. I am grateful to Rabbi John Levi, who viewed Blaubaum's journal some years ago, for information concerning it. Unfortunately, its current whereabouts are uncertain, and it is to be hoped that it is not permanently misplaced and will eventually be returned to its owner. Two bound volumes of letters by Isaac Hallenstein, who discovered Blaubaum, are also apparently missing.
13. *Australian Israelite*, 25 September 1874. Blaubaum, for his part, found aspects of the *minhag polin* "melancholy." See *Jewish Herald*, 6 November 1903.
14. *Ibid.*, 30 April 1904.
15. *Ibid.*, 6 May 1904.
16. *Ibid.*, 11 January 1880.
17. *Ibid.*, 17 June 1904.
18. *Ibid.*, 10 December 1879.
19. *Ibid.*, 21 April 1893.
20. *Ibid.*, 17 June 1904.
21. *Ibid.*, 30 April 1904.
22. *Ibid.*, 5 September 1884.
23. *Ibid.*, 17 October 1884. For the Blaubaum genealogy in Australia see W.S. Jessop, "Genealogies of Jewish Families in Australia," La Trobe Library, State Library of Victoria, ms 8553/69.
24. *Jewish Herald*, 3 April 1896.
25. *Ibid.*, 17 June 1904.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, 21 March 1880.
28. *Ibid.*, 27 March 1903. See also *ibid.*, 21 January 1880 and 19 January 1900.
29. *Australian Israelite*, 9 January 1874. This issue gives the text of Blaubaum's inaugural sermon, translated from the German by "M.M." For his first sermon in English see *ibid.*, 21 August 1874.
30. *Jewish Herald*, 4 September 1885.
31. *Ibid.*, 4 November 1892.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, 10 December 1879.
34. *Ibid.*, 29 March 1889.
35. *Ibid.*, 20 May 1881.
36. *Ibid.*, 20 August 1897. Blaubaum believed that Reform was motivated "either from a silly love of modernisation or from a fruitless attempt to bring the indifferent back to the fold." *Ibid.*, 26 December 1884. See also Abrahams' explanation of Blaubaum's philosophy of Judaism, *ibid.*, 6 May 1904.

37. For further details and references see my *The Jews in Victoria, 1835-1985*, Sydney, 1985, Chapter 5.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Jewish Herald*, 18 January 1901: thinking, no doubt, of such people as Abraham Michael Samuells and Isaac Jacobs, Blaubaum fumed that "Unlike in days gone by, when Hebrew learning was far more common than it is now, every Jew at the present day considers himself quite competent to form and express opinions on ecclesiastic matters, with which those who have studied them during the greater part of their lives are slow in dealing." See also *ibid.*, 12 April 1901. Blaubaum's congregation criticised him for boycotting the conference (which as a result of the Victorian Beth Din's attitude was not held) and for not consulting them beforehand.
41. *Australian Israelite*, 16 January 1874.
42. *Jewish Herald*, 9 October 1903. These remarks are contained in an unattributed article by Blaubaum entitled "The Abuse of Mi-Sheberach." His strictures against "this shnoddering business" are accompanied by satirical amusing asides.
43. *Ibid.*, 9 January 1880 and 25 April 1890.
44. *Ibid.*, 17 October 1884.
45. *Ibid.*, 20 December 1901.
46. Blaubaum to Zox, 14 November 1879, quoted in Geulah Solomon, "Minority Education in a Free Society: a Community History of Jewish Education in Victoria, 1788-1920," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Faculty of Education, Monash University, pp. 492-94.
47. *Jewish Herald*, 11 May 1900.
48. *Ibid.*, 26 October 1888.
49. *Ibid.*, 7 December 1900.
50. Elias Blaubaum, "Purim and Zionism," *ibid.*, 7 March 1919.
51. *Young Australia*, 30 June 1888.
52. *Jewish Herald*, 3 August 1888.
53. See my "Australian Jewish Reactions to Russian Jewish Distress, 1891-1913," *A.J.H.S. Journal*, vol. 9, part 6, 1984.
54. *Bohemia*, 30 April 1891.
55. *Jewish Herald*, 8 May 1891.
56. *Ibid.*, 2 December 1881.
57. *Ibid.*, 15 July 1881.
58. See *ibid.*, 24 February 1882.
59. *Ibid.*
60. See, for example, *Argus*, 14 May 1891, *Jewish Herald*, 5 June 1891, *Age*, 25 May 1894, *Jewish Herald*, 1 June 1894.
61. *Ibid.*, 2 November 1894; cf. *ibid.*, 5 June 1891 and 15 January 1892.
62. *Ibid.*, 11 December 1896.
63. *Ibid.*, 1 October 1897.
64. *Ibid.*, 30 April 1904.
65. *Hebrew Standard*, 15 November 1897; *Western Agriculturalist*, 10 June 1882.
66. *Jewish Herald*, 31 October 1884.
67. *Ibid.*, 21 August 1885.
68. *Ibid.*, 21 August 1881. To give but two examples: in his editorial of 9 January 1880 he called on "every Israelite in this colony" to contribute towards Irish famine relief, and in that of 27 February 1891 he commended the work of the Salvation Army.

69. *Ibid.*, 12 August 1892.
70. The books were Job Jakob Schmidt's four volume *Juedische Merkmuerdigkeiten*, a source history of Frankfurt Jewry, published in Frankfurt-am-Main 1714-17. Altogether, one gets the impression that Blaubaum, who called himself "an Australian German," was well-known and respected figure in Melbourne's intellectual and literary circles. Not all his contributions to the general press bear his name, but the connoisseur of Blaubaumisms, such as the present writer, soon learns to detect them by their content and distinctively lively, erudite and aggressive style. Most, however, bear the modest signature "E. Blaubaum."
71. This was part of Abrahams' tribute. See *Jewish Herald*, 20 May 1904.
72. For a fuller bibliography (exclusive of letters and contributions to the general daily press) see my *The Jews in Victoria, 1835-1985*. See also Elias Blaubaum, 'Lessing's "Nathan Der Weise,"' *Melbourne Review*, vol. 4, October 1879, pp. 390-96.
73. See my *The Jews in Victoria, 1835-1985*, Chapter 4.
74. *Jewish Herald*, 11 December 1896.
75. For the Sydney Jewish press see Suzanne D. Rutland, *Seventy-five Years: the History of a Jewish Newspaper*, Sydney, A.J.H.S., 1970.
76. *Jewish Herald*, 13 April 1900. For his impressions of New Zealand see that issue and 30 March 1900, 27 April 1900, 11 May 1900.
77. *Ibid.*, 2 August 1901. This article was published years after Blaubaum's death over 2 issues of *Jewish Herald*, 5 & 19 August 1921. He made the common mistake of assuming that French Statesman, Leon Gambetta was a Jew.
79. Elias Blaubaum, *Judaism and Christianity*, Melbourne, 1887. The Supreme Court of Victoria contains no record of the Brodzky-Blaubaum lawsuit, which historian Michael Cannon tells me he discovered in the Public Record Office of Victoria at Laverton. See his *The Landboomers*, rev. ed., Melbourne, 1972, p. 90.
80. *Age*, 6 July and 11 July 1885.
81. *Jewish Herald*, 17 June 1904.
82. See *ibid.*, 6 November 1903, 20 November 1903, 4 December 1903, 18 December 1903, 1 January 1904, 15 January 1904.
83. *Ibid.*, 6 November 1903.
84. *Ibid.*, 20 November 1903. His further impressions of Suva and admiration of Christian missionary activity there appear in *ibid.*, 4 December 1903.
85. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1904.
86. *Ibid.*
87. *Ibid.*, 20 November 1903 and 18 December 1903.
88. *Ibid.*, 1 January 1904.
89. *Ibid.*, 30 April 1904 and 5 May 1904. Details of Blaubaum's illness from his death certificate. Goldreich died the following year.
90. *Ibid.*, 6 May 1904.
91. *Ibid.*, 30 April 1904.
92. See *ibid.*, 30 April 1904, 6 May 1904, 17 June 1904. The editorial movingly pointed to the rabbinic saying: "There is no difference between the living righteous and the dead righteous except in the power of speech." For Blaubaum, who made such an impact on the Victorian Jewish community, it was appropriate indeed.
93. The *Jewish Herald* finally folded in 1968. After Blaubaum its most distinguished editors were Nahum Barnet and Newman Rosenthal. One of

Blaubaum's most accurate prophecies involved Sir Isaac Isaacs: 'his co-religionists can little rely upon his assistance in obtaining the rights due to them' he remarked in 1896. See *Jewish Herald*, 13 November 1896. This assumed significance in the 1940s, when Isaacs emerged as the principal anti-Zionist spokesman in Australia.