

# SYNAGOGAL ORGANIZATION IN ANGLO-JEWRY

V. D. Lipman

**T**HIS PAPER deals with two aspects of synagogal organization in Anglo-Jewry, especially London Jewry: the change from oligarchy to democracy in synagogal constitutions and the movement for the union of congregations. In both these fields, the crucial steps in the process of development took place in the middle of the last century—that period between 1845 and 1890 which saw the creation or consolidation of the great majority of Anglo-Jewish institutions.

Today, virtually all synagogal congregations have a common pattern. Three features are familiar. First, all members, or at least all male members, enjoy a common status and rights. Second, the members elect a council or committee charged with the general administration of the affairs of the congregation. Third, a small group of honorary officers responsible for the leadership or direction of the congregation's business is elected either by the membership directly or by a committee elected by them. This form of constitution can properly be called democratic, inasmuch as the executive is responsible, either directly or indirectly, to the general body of the membership. In all three respects, however, this modern form of constitution differs radically from that of the historic congregations of Anglo-Jewry up to about a century ago. The nature of these constitutions, which bear a remarkable similarity to each other, can be studied in the *Takkanoth* of the Great Synagogue (1722, 1791, 1827), the Hambro' Synagogue (1789, 1797, 1845), the New Synagogue (1801, 1824, 1851) and the Western Synagogue (1799, 1801, 1809, 1832) and also in the *Ascamot* of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation (1664, 1785, 1831, 1850, 1872, 1906). There are similar provisions in the *Takkanoth* of provincial congregations (such as Brighton, 1825; Cheltenham, 1840), although because of the smaller size of the congregations these last tend to be considerably simpler in character.

To take first the status of members, all congregations make a clear distinction between full members—*Ba'ale Batim* or those enjoying *Hezkath HaKehilla* or privileged members (*Yehidim* among the Sephardim)—and the renters of seats—*Toshavim* or seatholders (*congregantes* among

the Sephardim). Outside these classes, all others were regarded merely as *Orahim*, guests or strangers; except that the New Synagogue also had a class of *Aniyim d' Kehilla*: 'Persons who were married in the congregation or whose parents were members, and do not occupy a seat nor are capable of paying a rate towards the support of the synagogue.'

The rights of privileged members were clearly defined both in this world, where they enjoyed priority or monopoly in the award of synagogal honours, and in the next, since a special portion of the *Beth Haim* (burial ground) was reserved for them.

An applicant for privileged membership had to be admitted by vote of the honorary officers and governing body of the congregation and to pay a substantial entrance fee. At the Great Synagogue it was originally three guineas according to the *Takkanoth* of 1722, raised to five in 1736 and ten in 1740, at which sum it remained until the middle of the nineteenth century. The Hambro' scale was the same, that of the Western less (five guineas plus half a guinea admission to the *Hebra Kadisha*) and that of the New Synagogue rather cheaper. The sons and sons-in-law of privileged members could secure admission at reduced rates and the appropriate privileges were transmissible to widows and unmarried daughters. Among what may be termed the ritual privileges of the privileged members were those of serving as *Hatan Torah* and *Bereshit*; of standing *Segan* on the occasion of a son's *Barmitzvah*; or the marriage of a son or daughter, but as the New Synagogue *Takkanoth* of 1824 put it, 'they must be of irreproachable character and must not be clothed in an unbecoming manner'; and of reading part of the service on a weekday on the occasion of *Yahrzeit*. There were, of course, variations between congregations and at different dates. In some cases, the son of a privileged member might be *Hatan Torah* or *Bereshit*; conversely in the earlier *Takkanoth* of the Great and Hambro' Synagogues an unmarried privileged member is denied certain rights, for example, the right to an *Aliyah* on the High Holydays and *Shabbat Shuva*, for which privileged members had priority.

In the constitutional sphere, election to honorary office, which was the gateway to the governing body of the congregation, was also generally reserved for the privileged members, again with discrimination in the earlier *Takkanoth* against bachelors. The New Synagogue and Western Synagogue, however, permitted sons of privileged members, or other non-members who were seatholders, to be elected as honorary officers and thus acquire privileged membership.

The honorary offices in the Ashkenazi congregations were very similar and formed a regular *cursus honorum*, the lower offices having to be served first before election could be secured to the higher offices. At the head were the *Parnassim* or wardens—originally two at the Great Synagogue but increased to three in 1791. The other Ashkenazi congregations all had two *Parnassim*. The *Parnassim* generally served by

turns as *Parnas* of the month or each served for several months as *Parnas President*. At the Western Synagogue, however, there was a *Rosh haKahal* (head of the congregation) in the person of Myer Solomon of Pall Mall, who sat in the box between the wardens in the early years of the St. Alban's Place Synagogue and was possibly the most versatile Honorary Officer of any London congregation.<sup>1</sup>

The *Parnassim* had, in the words of the 1827 Laws of the Great Synagogue, 'the general superintendence of all the affairs of the congregation, whether in relation to the state of the community in general or the synagogue in particular, according to the laws, resolutions and regulations established to such purpose'. This office could be obtained only by privileged members who had served, or paid fines for not serving, the lesser honorary offices of Treasurer (*Goveh*) or Charity Overseer (*Gabbai Tsedakah*). These offices may have originally been those of two *Gabbaim*—the two *Gabbaim* of the *Hebra* or religious association which was common in Central and Eastern Europe. At any rate, the Great Synagogue had originally two *Gabbaim* according to the 1722 *Takkanoth* and so had the *Hebra shel Gemiloth Hasadim* from which the Western Synagogue developed. The next stage was to replace the two *Gabbaim* with a *Gabbai Tsedakah* or charity overseer, who also acted as Treasurer of the congregation. This office was later subdivided into two: *Goveh* (treasurer) and *Gabbai Tsedakah* at the Great Synagogue in 1787, and also at an early stage in the other congregations, except the Hambro', where the *Gabbai Tsedakah* continued to act as Treasurer, and there was no separate office of Treasurer. In the other congregations the office of Treasurer could normally only be held by someone who had served the most junior office of *Gabbai Tsedakah*. This office, the precursor of that of Overseer of the Poor of the United Synagogue, now styled Treasurer of Bequests and Trusts, was evidently the most arduous and least pleasant. It had generally to be served before the senior and more honourable offices and the conditions of eligibility were usually less exacting. For instance, at the Hambro' Synagogue, the minimum age for election was 25, compared with 30 for the office of *Parnas*, and there was a similar provision at the Western Synagogue.

The *Gabbai Tsedakah* had to distribute the weekly dole to the poor and also pay out money in exceptional cases. He was, however, limited to 5s. a head without reference to the Presiding Warden. In the Great Synagogue *Takkanoth* of 1791 the Presiding Warden could authorize up to 2 guineas; up to 5 guineas required the assent of both wardens.

Beside these honorary officers (two or three wardens, a treasurer and/or overseer) there was always a committee of seven, styled in Hebrew the *Shiva Tuve Ha'ir* (the 'seven good citizens' of the Talmud and Responsa). These seven were called in English 'Elders' at the Great Synagogue or Directors at the New Synagogue, and formed an advisory body whom the wardens were obliged to consult on various

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matters stipulated in the *Takkanoth*. The number seven appears in all the Ashkenazi synagogal constitutions, and the committee of seven was generally recruited from persons who had been elected to at least the junior honorary offices. In addition, at the New and Western Synagogues there was also a body of five (*Hamisha Anashim* in Hebrew; 'governors' at the Western or 'directors' at the New Synagogue) who were apparently the immediate past honorary officers. These also formed part of the inner committee; the number five also seems to have had a special significance, since the seven Elders of the Great Synagogue were originally five, forming with the two *Parnassim* the *Shiva Tuve Ha'ir*. The Honorary Officers and the 7 or 12 were together generally styled in Hebrew the *Kahal*, or *Nesie Ha'Edah* (in English, the Committee). There was, in addition, a body comprising all those who had served as honorary officers, or paid fines for not serving. This body of ex-honorary officers—generally the Vestry or *Pekude Ha'Edah* or *Kahalsleit*—was in reality the sovereign body of the congregation. Except at the Hambro', where all privileged members paying £6 or upwards had a vote, the honorary officers were elected by the vestry of ex-honorary officers; and the list of candidates was prepared by the retiring honorary officers and committee. For some purposes, such as approving new *Takkanoth* or voting extraordinarily large sums of money, some or even all the privileged members might be summoned to vote at a general meeting with the vestry; but normally this self-recruiting oligarchy of present and ex-honorary officers was supreme. The vestry included at the Great Synagogue co-opted honorary members (Joshua van Oven was so co-opted) but, in general, the only members who had not served as honorary officers were those who had paid fines for not doing so. These fines must have provided a considerable addition to the synagogal income, since the tariff was a high one, especially when the contemporary value of money is taken into account. It varied according to the relative size and importance of the congregation. To compare rates taken from *Takkanoth* of the same decade (1824–32), the fine for not serving as warden was £40 at the Great, £30 at the New and £15 at the Western Synagogue; for treasurer at the Great £30, for overseer at the Great £25, for treasurer or overseer £15 at the New and £10 at the Western Synagogue. In 1825 the fines at Brighton were only one guinea for warden and 10s. 6d. for overseer.

In the provincial congregations the same constitutional situation obtained, allowing for a simpler organization because of the much smaller size of the community. For instance, the Brighton *Takkanoth* of 1825, which closely resemble those of the New Synagogue of the previous year (for example, in dividing the congregation not only into *Ba'ale Batim* and seatholders, but also into 'poor of the congregation'—*Aniyim d'Kehilla*), provide for only two honorary officers—a *Parnas* and *Gabbai*: but these are appointed by the *Kahal*, which had the

'direction, care and management' of the affairs of the congregation; the *Kahal* consisted of seven named persons, 'the *Parnas* and *Gabbai* for the time being and all such persons who shall have served either of these honorary offices or paid for non-acceptance of either on being duly elected'. The *Kahal* had the right to co-opt other members, but, unless so co-opted, the ordinary members—even the *Ba'ale Batim*—had no right to attend meetings or participate in the control of the congregation. Because it was a small congregation, there was no committee or body of seven men, the two honorary officers being known as the Elders.

The description so far of this oligarchic system has been based on the constitutions of the Ashkenazi congregations in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But the constitution of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation was of a very similar pattern. The original *Mahamad* or executive body of honorary officers, as appointed in 1663, consisted of two *Parnassim* and a *Gabay*. These officers, according to the first *Ascamot*, were to be chosen by the retiring *Mahamad* and two Elders nominated by them. In 1699/1700 (5460) the number of *Parnassim* was increased to four, two of them with the *Gabay* being appointed at New Year and two six months later, thus securing an overlap; all served for one year, and this body of five corresponded to the three to five honorary officers of the Ashkenazi congregations, the *Gabay* in each case being the junior member on whom most of the work fell and whose office was regarded as the stepping-stone to the others.

The Elders (*Velhos*) among the *Sephardim* corresponded to the Vestry or *Pekude Ha'Edah* among the Ashkenazim. Beginning originally perhaps as a consultative committee of the most influential privileged members (*Yehidim*), the Elders developed into a body of the ex-members of the *Mahamad*, and became the real seat of power, the *Mahamad* acting as the executive body of the Elders. The incoming members of the *Mahamad* were selected in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries by the existing *Mahamad*, with the co-operation of nominated assessors (*Adjuntos*) from among the Elders, who were generally the most recently retired members of the *Mahamad*. General meetings of all the privileged members (*Yehidim*) were not normally summoned until the early years of the nineteenth century and then only to hear reports from the *Mahamad*.

Taking all these oligarchic constitutions together, one can generalize on their functioning as follows. The ultimate power resided in a relatively small group of ex-honorary officers, perhaps twenty or thirty in number. They elected the new honorary officers from a list prepared by the serving honorary officers and sometimes the committee; and the list could comprise generally only the privileged members, who had to buy their privileged membership and be admitted by vote of the governing body. A young man would serve first in the junior office of charity

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overseer, perhaps for two terms, and thus win the right to membership of the governing body and also of election to the higher offices. Those who wished to belong to the governing body, but did not wish to serve in office, could pay a substantial fine and thus secure membership as though they had actually served. The oligarchy, however, in so far as it comprised those who had actually served in office, was composed of those with all the experience of communal administration; it was also, because of the control exercised over election to honorary office, self-recruiting and self-perpetuating. It is not easy to find Continental precedents for this type of constitution. The nomination of new officers by the outgoing officers, fines for non-acceptance, and the division of the membership into classes (but according to the communal taxes paid) are found in Continental *Takkanoth*, but not, so far as I can at present ascertain, the vesting of authority in a body of ex-honorary officers.

But this constitutional pattern of the London synagogues was of course the general one of the closed municipal corporations of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England, with the status of privileged membership (*Hezkath HaKehilla*) corresponding to that of the freedom of a corporation, which was capable of purchase and inheritance in a similar way. An even nearer parallel is found in the close vestries of the parishes, especially in the City of London, Westminster and East London, where there was even identity of nomenclature. In these parishes, a relatively small group of substantial householders had—either by long-established custom, bishop's faculty or Local Act of Parliament—assumed the powers of all the parishioners and formed a select or close vestry, in place of the open vestry to which all rate-paying inhabitants might come and vote. These close vestries might initially have comprised certain persons named in the Act or faculty; but, once begun, they were generally composed of those who had served (or paid fines for not serving) the parish offices; and the selection of the parish officers was by the close vestry of ex-officers. The junior office was that of overseer of the poor, which had to be served before that of churchwarden could be obtained. For instance, in the parish of Holy Trinity, Minorities, where there was a considerable Jewish population and Jews filled parish offices, there was a body of 'ancients', who alone were summoned for important parish business; and these 'ancients' were those who had filled the higher parish offices. This sort of parochial constitution was found commonly in the City parishes, in the parishes of Whitechapel and Spitalfields and in St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the areas in or near which the eighteenth-century synagogues were situated. The parallels with the synagogal constitutions—the governing body of self-recruiting ex-honorary officers; the system of fines; and the similarities of nomenclature, vestry, overseers and wardens—are too close and obvious to be ignored.

The process of opening the close vestries in the London parishes

began in the late 1820's and made considerable headway in the 1830's (the age of reform in national and local government), with a number of local Acts and the adoption by London parishes of Hobhouse's Act of 1831 enabling all ratepayers to elect a vestry on a high property qualification. The 1855 Metropolis Management Act provided for elected vestries in all the parishes of what is now the County of London (and these are the predecessors of the Metropolitan Borough Councils). The opening of the close vestries in the London synagogues followed close behind the opening of the parish or local government vestries.

The process of democratization in the Great Synagogue was gradual. The first step was taken in 1847 when a conjoint meeting was summoned to enact certain new laws implementing the Chief Rabbi's 'Laws and Regulations' relating to the conduct of the service. The conjoint meeting consisted of the vestry and 36 privileged members summoned by the committee. After the new laws about the conduct of services had been enacted, a resolution was moved and carried recommending to the vestry that the *Ba'ale Batim* or privileged members should be entitled biennially to elect ten of their number as additional members of the vestry and that, as vacancies occurred in the number of co-opted life members of the vestry, elected members should replace them up to a maximum of 20. In 1847 in addition to the ex-honorary officers there were ten of these members co-opted for life and, the vestry accepting the resolution, and a new law being enacted, the privileged members elected another ten to serve for two years. These biennial elections continued and, as the number of co-opted life members was reduced, by 1861 there were 15 elected members. But the vestry, not the privileged members, continued to elect the honorary officers; and, as these still became automatically members of the vestry on or after election, the elected element remained in a minority on the vestry. When the scheme for the United Synagogue was drafted, it originally provided for 20 elected members of the vestry, as the Council of the United Synagogue was then called; but, as all honorary officers of the United Synagogue were to become members of the vestry for life once elected as honorary officers, and all life members of the governing bodies of the constituent synagogues were to be members of the vestry of the United Synagogue, the 20 elected representatives would probably still have been in a minority. However, pressure at the general meetings by which the draft scheme had to be approved resulted in the number of elected members being raised to one per 50 seat-holders. With the rapid expansion of the United Synagogue and the dwindling away of the life members of the governing bodies of the constituent synagogues, the elected members soon dominated the new Council of the United Synagogue.

The opinion of the general meetings of the synagogues, to which the draft scheme for the United Synagogue had to be submitted,

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was responsible for another notable advance. So far any step towards democratization had given rights from the vestry to the general body of privileged members. But the ordinary seatholders of the Great Synagogue had by the 1860's gained only the right to vote for the synagogal representatives on the Board of Deputies and to serve as *Hatan Torah* or *Bereshit*. But they managed, when the scheme for the United Synagogue was adopted, to secure an amendment giving all seatholders of twelve months' tenure the right to vote for the elected members of the Council; the latter, however, still had to be privileged members.

Between 1870 and 1880 the maintenance of privileged membership itself was attacked at several meetings of some of the constituent synagogues, and the Council eventually decided to submit the question of abolishing privileged membership to a meeting of delegates from the synagogues in conference with the Council. As a result, in 1880, the United Synagogue Act was amended enabling any seatholder to be elected to any office previously reserved for privileged members, and providing that no further privileged members should be made, although preserving the existing rights of privileged members (especially their preferential participation in the special Benevolent Fund which existed for their benefit).

Democratization took place in the provincial communities also in the middle of the nineteenth century. For instance at Canterbury, as the honorary secretary, Jacob Jacobs, wrote in his manuscript account of the Congregation's development, 'no one could become a member unless he was the son of a member or had married a member's daughter, unless he got a majority of votes permitting him to purchase the privilege at a certain sum; and the law up to this time (1846) had been somewhat jealously adhered to, so that several persons, who were only seatholders and not free members, complained that they were called on to contribute to the exigencies of the Congregation but had no vote in any of its affairs'. But in 1846 the congregation were compelled to raise a substantial sum to provide a new synagogue and the first step taken in the campaign was to abolish the distinction between privileged members and seatholders, so as to 'lay the foundation for the future unanimity and undivided exertions of every Hebrew resident of Canterbury to carry out the important work about to be commenced'. Henceforward, full membership could be obtained by any person of the Jewish faith who had resided twelve months in Canterbury and had paid a subscription of not less than one guinea for a year.<sup>2</sup>

The first move among the Sephardim was in 1845, when a meeting of the *Yehidim* asked for a joint committee of Elders and *Yehidim* (5 of each) to consider changes in the *Ascamos* to render them 'more in unison with the feelings and wishes of the *Yehidim* at large'. Although this resolution was confirmed by a subsequent meeting of *Yehidim* (by 17 votes to 10), it was rejected by the Elders (by 9 to 8). A committee

did, however, report in the following year, 1846, in favour of a 'limited, periodical, and responsible' board of legislation to be elected by the *Yehidim*; all the *Yehidim* should elect a board of 21 Elders, one third of whom would retire annually (the normal local government practice introduced in the nineteenth century); the *Mahamad* would be chosen by this elected Board of Elders from their own number. This proposal was too revolutionary, however, even for the general body of the *Yehidim*, and the matter was dropped until 1848, when the *Yehidim* resolved in favour of the election of elders in principle; but this resolution failed to secure confirmation, and the 1850 *Ascamot* retained the method of choosing the *Mahamad* by the retiring *Mahamad* and certain Elders, and preserving the Elders as a body of all persons who had been elected members of the *Mahamad*.

In 1851 another attempt by the *Yehidim* at reform failed but in 1858—a year in which the Jews secured a decisive step in political emancipation—the *Yehidim* of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation also obtained a marked advance. The Elders agreed that henceforward the *Mahamad* were to be elected by the *Yehidim*, and not by the Elders; any *Yahid* of two years' standing who had paid for that period £6 per annum in *fnuta* and offerings was eligible for election. In 1860 the *Yehidim* received the right to elect the paid officers of the Congregation, who had formerly been chosen by the Elders.<sup>3</sup> With the election of the *Mahamad* by the *Yehidim*, it remained only to provide for the election of the Elders as well. But this proved a lengthy process. An attempt in 1884 to provide for elected elders failed but in 1893 a new scheme was adopted, providing for the existing Elders to remain for life, for ex-members of the *Mahamad* in future to serve for three years as Elders but be eligible for re-election as Elders by the *Yehidim*. In 1905, the Elders were empowered to co-opt 3 *Yehidim* to serve as Elders for three years; in 1922 this number was raised to 4, to serve for two years, and the *Yehidim* were given the right to elect 2 Elders for two years.<sup>4</sup>

Reference has been made to the parallel with the English environment in the internal constitutions of the congregations. There was an even more important influence of the environment on the external relations of the congregations, both with each other and with the State. Continental Jewish communities in the middle ages and down to the nineteenth or twentieth centuries followed one of two patterns. In the medieval society, the Jewish community would form an autonomous unit, responsible collectively to the state for certain obligations such as taxation, but enjoying considerable powers of discipline over its own members; and the fundamental unit of organization was the community, not the individual synagogue congregation. Such were the *aljamas* of medieval Spain, the *Kehilloth* of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Poland-Lithuania, and indeed the Jewries of medieval England. The second pattern was that of the state-regulated confession, typified

by the Napoleonic *consistoires* and the elaborate confessional organizations of nineteenth-century Germany. The state, now equipped with its own fiscal organization, taxed Jews, like other subjects, individually not collectively; but it sought to regulate religious matters, including ecclesiastical appointments, in various ways; it compelled all those who declared themselves Jews to become members of the community; and it gave the communal authorities certain powers of taxation over their members. Here again, the community, rather than the synagogue congregation, tended to be the unit of organization.

In England, the situation was entirely different: in a society based on voluntary associations, each synagogue was merely a voluntary association, on the pattern adopted by certain of the dissenting churches, notably the Independents or Congregationalists; and this pattern of voluntary association became characteristic among the Jewish communities of the English-speaking world. Apart from the proposals of Colquhoun and Van Oven for the use of poor rates paid by Jews and communal taxation for the relief of the Jewish poor, there was never any question of state control or intervention in the organization of the community. As a corollary, the basis of organization was the voluntary association forming the individual synagogue congregation, not the community as such. It is true that the Spanish and Portuguese congregation sought by its first *Ascama*, banning other synagogues in the Metropolis, to make the congregation and the community or *Kahal Kadosh* identical; and they succeeded, so far as the Sephardim were concerned. But the Ashkenazim could not keep their fast-growing community within the organizational structure of the original Great Synagogue; the eighteenth century saw the formation of three other substantial Ashkenazi synagogues and at least three smaller prayer-groups. Yet in the nineteenth century a considerable degree of communal unity or co-operation was built up, from below, by combination of these independent voluntary associations; a development not equalled by the independent congregations in other countries in that period. How and why was this achieved?

In reviewing the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries we can see three factors which brought about some manner of unity in the London Ashkenazi congregations. The first factor was the influence of the Chief Rabbinate. Developing from the Rabbinate of the Great Synagogue, its recognition by the other City Synagogues and by the Western Synagogue was a potent force for unification.

The second factor was the need to provide certain communal services which could be more economically provided on a joint basis or in which it was essential to secure co-ordination. An early example was the formation in 1804 of the London Board of Shechita, in which the Sephardim, as well as the Ashkenazi Congregations, joined. Similarly, disputes over the maintenance of the 'foreign poor' (that is, those not

attached to any congregation), their provision with *Matzoth*, and the cost of their burial were the subject of a succession of agreements in 1794, 1804 and 1815—the last two formally denominated ‘treaties’. In 1834, a new ‘Treaty’ established a permanent working arrangement between the three City Ashkenazi Synagogues, henceforward known as ‘Conjoint Synagogues’. It provided for the cost of burying strangers, purchasing flour for *Matzoth* and medical attention for the poor, and the maintenance of a Beth Din to be shared in a fixed ratio by the three congregations; for their overseers of the poor to act each in turn for all three in relieving the casual poor; and for a Conjoint Board to supervise the working of the arrangements. The establishment of the Board of Guardians in 1859 marked not only an improvement in the methods of relieving the poor but also a further development in organization: the establishment on a permanent basis of an *ad hoc* functional body for carrying out a communal service.

The third factor making for integration was the need to sort out the conflicting proprietary rights which the Congregations claimed over their members and their members’ families. The relationship between the City Synagogues and the Westminster Congregation was regulated by a Treaty in 1808; that between the City Synagogues themselves was formalized in the New Treaty of 1834. Under this each synagogue could claim as its own all persons married in it, with their wives and unmarried sons under the age of 21; and a synagogue was not to let a seat to a member of another synagogue, his wife, widow, or child. There were detailed provisions to regulate the position of a member of one congregation marrying the daughter of a member of another. The situation was complicated when the Great Synagogue opened its Portland Street branch in 1855 and the Bayswater Synagogue was opened in 1863 as a joint venture of the Great and New Synagogues. Members of a City Synagogue living in the West End could not normally join a branch synagogue near their homes, if it was not connected with their City congregation; nor could they, even if permitted to join, exercise any share in the government of the branch congregation. Disputes arose because one congregation was accused of ‘poaching’ members from another. All these problems made some union to overcome them almost inevitable, and it was also encouraged by the unfavourable financial position of the Hambro’ Synagogue in the 1860’s, which felt it could hardly continue unaided much longer.

These were the three main factors, operating in the first half of the nineteenth century and culminating in the 1860’s. They gave rise to the protracted negotiations that ended in the formation of the United Synagogue in 1870. It is unnecessary here to detail the course of these negotiations, the references back to the congregational meetings to secure confirmation, and the ultimate discussions with the Charity Commission on the form of the Scheme. It is sufficient to emphasize its

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unitary character, the pooling of assets, and the use of the surpluses of the stronger congregations to help the weaker; and the power to admit existing new congregations and to use the resources of the Union to help the foundation of new congregations which would join the Union. Although the name of the Act is the 'Jewish United Synagogues Act'; the term United Synagogue, which gained immediate acceptance, more correctly expresses the unitary character of the institution.

In accounting for the creation of the United Synagogue, three factors were adduced: the institution of the Chief Rabbinate, the trend towards the provision of common services, and the need to sort out the tangle of conflicting claims of the synagogues to property in their members. But there was another factor at least as potent: the personalities of the men who worked for synagogal union. To mention only three names in describing this human factor: the Chief Rabbi himself was a persistent advocate of congregational union and the idea of the United Synagogue is said to have been first proposed by him to the wardens of the City Synagogues assembled in his *Succah* in September 1860. Lionel Louis Cohen was Chairman of the delegates who framed the scheme for submission to the Charity Commission and conducted the negotiations; evidence of his indefatigable concern for detail and his diplomatic skill remains in the innumerable letters, many in his own hand, which can be seen in the minute book of the delegates. And he was ably assisted by the versatile and scholarly Asher Asher, M.D., Secretary of the Great Synagogue, of the Delegates framing the scheme, and then of the United Synagogue.

The personal factor was even more important—indeed it may be regarded as dominant—in the formation of the other great synagogal union of Victorian London: the Federation of Synagogues. This was due almost entirely to the vision and leadership of Samuel Montagu. As he said in 1903, 'I found there were different isolated minor synagogues in the East End of London which were disposed rather to quarrel among themselves and I formed the idea of amalgamating them together—quite a voluntary association for their general benefit. The chief object was to get rid of the insanitary places of worship and to amalgamate two or three small ones together and have a suitable building. We have succeeded very well in that respect. . . . We cater, if I may call it, for the working classes among Jews.'

The Federation of Synagogues, as formed in 1887, differed from the United Synagogue in two marked respects: the history and character of the individual congregations, and the principles on which their federation itself was based. The congregations themselves were all small, though they were not all of recent origin. They included congregations tracing their descent from the three *Hebroth* of eighteenth-century foundation: Prescott Street from the Rosemary Lane congregation; Cutler Street; and Scarborough Street, formerly the Gun Yard

congregation. Among them also were several congregations of twenty or thirty years' standing: Spital Square (which began as the German Synagogue in Old Broad Street), Fashion Street, and Princes (later Princelet) Street. The principle which many of these congregations had introduced was the combination of synagogue with benefit or friendly society and the formation of the congregation on a *Landsmannschaft* basis, grouping immigrants from a particular town or district in Eastern Europe. Neither of these features was entirely novel in Anglo-Jewry. There had been *Hebroth* associated with the main City synagogues in the eighteenth century, for visiting the sick, for comforting the mourners, and for study; the Western Synagogue at least had developed from a *Hebra Shel Gemiloth Hasadim* of this kind. But, apart from one or two instances, they do not seem to have provided financial benefits on a friendly society basis; from the close of the eighteenth century there were some independent friendly societies for this purpose. A *Landsmannschaft* flavour can also be seen in the fact that the two small congregations founded in the 1790's in Cutler Street and Gun Yard were known specifically as 'Polish Synagogues'. But the real prototype of the Synagogue-cum-friendly society, recruiting its members mainly among immigrants from a particular area, was the Sandys Row Congregation—'Society Kindness and Truth' (*Hebrath Menahem Abelim Hesel V'Emeth*)—founded in 1853 by a group of Dutch Jewish workers as a friendly society to provide a *Shiva* (mourning) benefit of 10s. a week, *minyán* during the *Shiva*, and the services of a Rabbi to preach at the mourner's house. The synagogue which soon was provided to accommodate this group was followed in the next fifteen or twenty years by about a score of similar congregations, which in 1870 served the 10,000 Jews in a comparatively small area in Spitalfields, along the Whitechapel Road, and in Goodman's Fields. Between 1870 and 1880 their number steadily increased and, after the mass immigration began in 1881, the formation of *Hebroth* of this kind naturally proceeded with much greater speed.

Attempts to force the members of the small congregations either into one of the larger City Synagogues or into a new large East End Synagogue, provided especially for them, failed, although as time went on many of their members voluntarily joined the larger congregations. The small congregations had several champions among the established leaders of the community, who prized them as 'hotbeds of Judaism'. These were the 'small men of great faith' whom Samuel Montagu felt could best preserve the traditions of their Judaism in the small *Hebroth* to which they were accustomed. But some form of co-operation would be advantageous even for them. First, it was essential to see that the buildings were of a suitable standard, even if this included some amalgamation of small congregations. Second, they needed burial arrangements. Previously individual congregations had made arrange-

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ments with the City Synagogues for burial; the Cutler Street Synagogue had done so with the Great Synagogue and the Gun Yard Synagogue had done so with the New Synagogue. It was hoped that the Federation, by collective action, could secure favourable arrangements for burial with the United Synagogue, but, this failing, the Federation formed its own burial society in 1889. Third, the small congregations individually were too small to participate in the work of the communal services run by specialist agencies, or to bear a part of the common responsibilities of the London community as a whole. Through the Federation, they were enabled to be represented on the Board of Guardians, the Board of Shechita and, after it was formed in 1894, the Jewish Religious Education Board.

Yet this co-operation in the Federation was for certain limited objectives. As the inaugural meeting in 1887 resolved, 'it is desirable for the Chevras to become federated for clearly defined objectives'. The Federation was conceived as a loose federation of synagogues, each retaining the maximum of autonomy, as distinct from the unitary principle of the United Synagogue.

With the history of synagogal organization after the foundation of these two bodies this paper is not concerned. Its object has been to show how the two unions of synagogues came into existence and the differences of history and principle between them; to show how different was the original constitution of congregations from what it is today, how it resembled in its essential features the contemporary English institutions, and how, at the same period as these institutions were reformed and democratized, a similar development occurred in the government of the synagogue. Finally, it should be remarked that these two great changes—the transition from oligarchy to democracy and from isolation to union in synagogal government—occurred within a comparatively short period in the middle of the last century: a period which was the most important for the formation of Anglo-Jewish institutions and in which Anglo-Jewry prepared its organizational framework to receive the great immigration which began over seventy years ago.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Myer Solomon, who died in 1840, was a pupil of the Rabbi H. Kalisch who was the familiar of the Baal Shem of London. As a young man he acted as *Hazan* at the New Synagogue; he had a *Kabbalah* as *Shohet* from Moses Myers and R. Tevele Schiff; he acted as *Mohel* on 1568 occasions; a *Sepher Torah* and other manuscripts show his capacity as a *Sopher* and he preached in English on

several occasions at the Western Synagogue (see C. Roth, *Records of the Western Synagogue*, especially p. 191).

<sup>2</sup> MS. account of erection of New Synagogue at Canterbury, 1851 (Jewish Museum, London, Collection, No. 80).

<sup>3</sup> A. M. Hyamson, *The Sephardim of England*, London, 1952, pp. 333-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 382.