

“From the Waters of Sion to Liffeside”

The Jewish Contribution: Medical and Cultural.*

EOIN O'BRIEN

The Charitable Infirmary, Jervis Street, Dublin.

It is a privilege for me, to pay homage to a great teacher, and one of the pioneers of my speciality in this country. I was for a very short time one of Leonard Abrahamson's students, and my memory of him as a teacher is of his unique ability to communicate, and his love of humour, but more of that later.

The subject I have chosen is the medical and cultural contribution of the Dublin Jewish community. My canvas is broad, my subjects are legion, omissions there will be, and the Gentile's interpretation of the Jewish creed and culture can be little more than the observations of an intrepid traveller wandering in a strange land. But this may be apposite to the subject.

Who and what is the Dublin Jew? In some ways he does not exist at all, being more a concept than a reality. And yet he is there, very real, very much alive and so much a part of Dublin that without him the city would not be quite the same. The paradox of myth and reality in the Jewish character can, of course, be attributed to the racial and religious elements in his makeup. But that is not enough. There is something quite unique about the Dublin Jew. Like his fellow Israelites in other countries he came to our land in exile, joining hands with our people who were, in effect, exiles within their own homeland. Catholic and Jew suffered under the same religious disability, each knew hardship, each knew oppression, and each succeeded, one helping the other, in establishing the right of equality. The Irish Jew is therefore, very much a part of this land — this land is very much part of the Irish Jew. History has rendered them inseparable.

The Pre-Twentieth Century Period

If we were to take the legends seriously, we would have to accept that the Irish are all direct descendants from a limb of Noah's family for which he himself did not have much regard. According to one story he refused Cessair, daughter of Bith, an apocryphal son of Noah, admission to the ark commenting “this is no ship for robbers, and

no den for thieves.” Cessair, an enterprising woman who saw female fecundity a priority in populating a new land, built her own ark and set sail for Ireland with fifty women and three men.

There is quite an amount of scholarly literature attempting to identify the Irish with the lost tribes of Israel, or to associate them with scriptural history. It has been suggested that after the destruction of Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah went into Egypt and from there came to Ireland settling at a place outside Dublin which he named in Hebrew, Torah, and now known as Tara.

The truth of the matter is that the first Jews came here in 1079, and to judge from the Annals of Innisfallen their stay was not a very long one — “five Jews came over the sea with gifts to Tairdelbach, (who was a grandson of Brian Borumha) and they were sent back again oversea”.

It is appropriate to our subject that one of the earliest records of a Jew in Ireland is that of “Joseph the Doctor” in the year 1171.

During the sixteenth century the Irish were involved with Jews overseas. The princes of Ireland engaged the much-travelled Jewish merchants for business and diplomatic missions. In London there were a number of successful Jewish doctors, and the Earl of Desmond had dealings with one — Dr. Hector Nunez, a distinguished Marrano physician and merchant.

The seventeenth century was important for the Jews of Dublin in that Hebrew was included on the curriculum when Trinity College was founded by Queen Elizabeth in 1591. The first lectureship in Hebrew was held by none other than a medical doctor John Stearne (1624-1669), who was not Jewish. Stearne was Regius Professor of Physics at the University, and first President and founder of the Fraternity of Physicians of Trinity Hall, which was later to become the Royal College of Physicians.

In the mid-seventeenth century Cromwell invited Portuguese Jews to settle in Ireland. His reasons for doing so were twofold. He saw obvious financial advantages, but perhaps more importantly he hoped that a Jewish presence would act as a further barrier to Catholic

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propagation. How different it all might have been for both the Irishman and the Jew if the move to make Ireland the Homeland of the Jew had ever become a reality.

In 1607, Sir Thomas Shirley, an oriental traveller and adventurer being in some financial difficulties, and in the hope of favours from James I petitioned that Jews "may have a free privilege to inhabit in Ireland, because doubtless their being there would make that country very rich. They are willing to pay a yearly tribute of 2 ducats for every head and they will bring great store of bullion of gold and silver by issueing of Irish commodities into Spain, such as salted salmons, corn, hides, wool and tallow".

This idea progressed no further until after the Cromwellian conquest when James Harrington, scholar and gentleman in waiting to Charles I and an admirer of Cromwell wrote his *Commonwealth of Oceana*. Why not, he suggested solve the Irish and Jewish problems by turning Ireland into a National Home for the Jews. He envisaged a Jewish Utopia, or Panopea, as he called Ireland, in which the distressed Jews of the world could settle and return to their biblical agrarian skills which when combined with their expertise in commerce in an ambience of religious freedom, could not fail to make the country a prosperous one.

The early part of the seventeenth century saw the wealthy Sephardi Jewish merchant settling and prospering in Dublin. Towards the end of the century the poorer Ashkenazi Jewish trader came to the city. Both groups worshipped in the Synagogue in Crane Lane and were buried in the little Jewish cemetery at Ballybough.

The Sephardi Jews were prominent in wholesale trade as merchants and general dealers, and from them developed some consummate craftsman. The Ashkenazi Jew often knew no trade, and had to survive by peddling and hawking trays of cloth and goods on a buy-now-pay-later basis, but there were among them some fine Hebrew scholars. Jewish craftsmen were, and still are among the finest in the world and Georgian Dublin gave them every opportunity to express their skills. There were jewellers, goldsmiths and silversmiths, watch and clock makers, swordcane makers and umbrella makers. Some excelled as painters of miniatures and as engravers. Others brought to Dublin new trades such as pencil manufacturing and chocolate making. There were snuff and tobacco dealers and liquor importers. Some were especially skilled as bog oak ornamentalists. There were musicians, druggists, and teachers of language. In the world of commerce freemasonry was an important sphere of contact between Jew and gentile. Excluded from the freedom of the city and the guilds and from the benefits of naturalisation, the Irish Jew saw advantages in a non-sectarian organisation, and he was furthermore attracted by the masonic ritual so similar to Judaic custom.

It is hardly surprising that the Jews with their commercial interests in and their appreciation for the fine arts, should in time contribute to creative art. This they were to do in no small measure. The first artist of note was the engraver Solomon Polack. Between 1790

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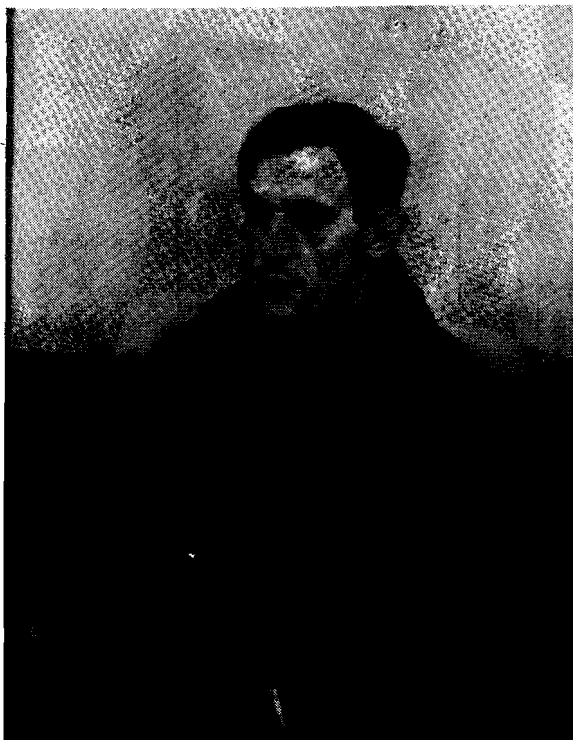


Fig. 1 Bethel Solomons: portrait by Estella.

and 1831 he exhibited some 57 pictures at the Royal Academy. George Francis Joseph, born in Dublin in 1764, may have been the son of one, Joseph a fashionable juggler, but it is more likely that he was of Dutch descent. He painted the Lords Avonmore, Downes and Kilwarden, and Hussey Burgh whose portraits hang in the Dining Hall of Trinity, and in the Common Room there is an excellent portrait of "Jacky" Barrett, one of Trinity's more eccentric Vice-Provosts.

The Jews of Dublin from the earliest took an active interest in the political activities of their adopted country and whereas their inclinations did not lead many of them towards political involvement, when they did participate their influence was considerable. The first successes in politics were the sons of Dr. Mayer Loew Schomberg, an Ashkenazi Jew, and physician to the Great Synagogue in London. He was a half brother to Captain Alexander of the Royal Navy, and to Lieutenant-Colonel Henry the first Anglo-Jew to achieve such rank. His first son Solomon, was sworn in as a member of the privy council of Ireland in 1770. The second son Alexander was the more successful. He was given command of the *Dorset*, the yacht of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. He distinguished himself in action on a number of campaigns and was knighted in 1776. He died at his home in Ely Place in 1804. The Schomberg brothers had, of course, accepted baptism as a prerequisite to holding office.

The Irish were not without their interest in Jewish

affairs and this symbiosis is one of the more fascinating aspects of the Irish-Jewish relationship. It was an Irishman of Catholic parentage who made one of the earliest pleas for Jewish emancipation. John Toland of Inishowen, in County Donegal published anonymously in 1714 a pamphlet entitled "Reasons for naturalising the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland on the same foot as all other nations". His plea was sincere but far too liberal for the times and he had to flee his birth place as Joyce was later to note in *Finnegans Wake* – "Tolan who farshook our shows".

In the great famine of 1847 Baron Lionel de Rothschild contributed £10,000 to the relief fund — "a sum to quote contemporary comment" far beyond the joint contributions of the Devonshires, and Herefords, Lansdownes, Fitzwilliams and Herberts who annually drew so many times that amount from their Irish estates". Nor was this to be the last example of Jewish philanthropy — over the years they were to contribute to Catholic schools, churches, hospitals and societies.

The Jews in eighteenth and nineteenth century Ireland had not only to survive political unrest, religious disabilities, famine and emigration; there was the additional threat of conversion to Christianity. Conversion of Jews was something of a pastime for the Established Church, and in London The Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews was not without success. Much rejoicing and publicity accompanied a conversion, an example being that of Abraham Jacobs who wrote — "Then I joyfully published and declared my baptism through all the City of Dublin where the Jews were mightily incensed at me", and just to show their annoyance they shipped his wife and family overseas to prevent their conversion. The temptations to convert to Christianity were strong, and there was often considerable personal conflict as evidenced in the words of Rebecca Jo'hanna Moses McDormon — "When I was a Jewess I thought I was wrong and turned Protestant; I was then worse and unsettled in mind; I tried the Methodists and my mind was more unsettled. Now that I am a Catholic I am alright".

The Jews and the Catholics of Ireland shared similar religious disabilities and the leaders of both communities met frequently to discuss the best means of advancing their mutual cause. O'Connell wrote to Isaac Goldsmid on gaining Catholic emancipation — "Ireland has claims on your ancient race, as it is the only country I know of unsullied by one act of persecution of the Jews". O'Connell spoke out against the Damascus blood libel — "Is not a Jew in every relation of life an example? Is he not a good father? A good son? Are they not true friends? Are they not honest, industrious? I appeal to all Englishmen to raise their voices in defence of the victims of shameful oppression. May the appeal go from one end of the British Isles to the other, and if the concurrence of an Irishman be wanting, here am I to testify it!" Indeed it was at the insistence of Daniel O'Connell that in 1846 the obsolete *Statute de Judaismo* which proscribed a special dress for the Jews, was repealed.

The first professing Jew to hold public office before
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Fig. 2. Estella Solomons: self-portrait

1900 was Lewis Harris. From humble beginning, as a cloth trader, he became a merchant of note and in 1874 offered himself as a candidate for aldermanship and was successful. His untimely death postponed the elevation of a Jew to the Mayoralty of Dublin.

The world of entertainment and theatre has always been dear to Jewish culture, and Georgian Dublin being the second city of the commonwealth offered much opportunity for singers and actors, many of whom came to Dublin from London. Thomas Pinto arrived in 1774 to lead the orchestra at Smock Alley Theatre. A contemporary tells us that "without any previous practice or trial of the band, at the proper time Pinto would step into the orchestra, take up his violin, just throw a glance on the bit of music paper before him, give three taps of his bow on the desk, and of set the whole concert in full and complete harmony".

In 1777 Michael Leoni sang at the Rotunda Gardens. Leoni was a Jewish cantor whose real name was Meir Lyon. Reputedly of German descent, he had by all accounts quite a remarkable voice, and to-day he would probably be classified as counter-tenor. His most famous role was Don Carlos in *The Duenna*. With Tommasco Giordani, Leoni attempted to give to Dublin its own National Opera House, but the venture failed. Leoni continued to sing in Dublin and London for many years, and eventually emigrated to Kingston, Jamaica, where he was appointed "Chazan" at the local synagogue, and he died there in about 1800.

In 1789 Philip Astley the famous London equestrian and circus owner built a circus-playhouse amphitheatre at the rear of the famous Molyneux mansion on Peter Street. Astley brought a number of Jews to Dublin, including the Mendoza brothers of whom Daniel must have been the Muhammad Ali of his day. Astley also brought over Jacob de Castro, one of London's best known Jewish actors.

In the mid-Victorian period a Dublin singer Dotie Davis professionally known as Hope Temple entertained London and Parisian audiences. She also composed many songs and an operetta *The Wooden Spoon*. The great musical tradition that is so much a part of Jewish life was carried on by the Levenston and Rosenberg families who produced some fine musicians and contributed greatly to the musical life of the city.

As we approach the twentieth century in this historical overture let us not omit to mention the Jewish interest in medicine tenuous though that was in these early days. We have observed that a number of Jewish doctors, or their progeny had been involved in Irish business affairs, and occasionally in diplomatic roles. Many of the early Jews were druggists, dentists and opticians, and as such were highly successful.

Our first Dublin Jewish doctor was not medically qualified at all although he did profess a degree from Aberdeen, but so colourful was his personality and so great his success, that I feel we can overlook this minor defect in his medical background. Samuel Solomon, M.D. as he liked to style himself came to Dublin from Cork in or about 1768. From a shop in Fleet Street he sold and advertised his patent medicine *The Balm of Gilead* which sold throughout the British Isles and America, and made for its inventor a small fortune. Lacking medical qualifications though he might, Samuel Solomon was undoubtedly years ahead of his time in advertising and publicity methods. An early advertisement in the Dublin Press reads as follows — "Dr. Solomon in Fleet Street, Having performed many Cures on Persons With inveterate Scurvies, Cancers and Evils, thinks it his Duty to inform the Public thereof that his Medicines may become more useful by being more generally known for which purpose it will be sufficient to name a few Instances only, as the Degree of Credit due to the Persons whose cases he shall quote and whose Certificates are in his Possession can leave no Room to doubt their Veracity and Efficacy of his Medicines". He advertised in books, news-sheets and by mail — "Dr. Solomon" he declared "expects when consulted by letter the usual compliment of £1 note to be included" — and this in 1780! In 1796 he published a book with the very modern title *A Guide to Health* in which, playing on the sexual fears of young people he advocates the *Balm* and defends his medicine against attack from qualified practitioners. He moved to Liverpool in 1803 where he built a mansion which he called *Gilead House*. He was married three times and had ten children many of whom became famous in the arts and literature.

Then as now dentistry was a popular specialty. Few

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Fig. 3. A. J. (Con) Leventhal.

can have been more colourful than Philip Aron who did not confine his practice to Dublin but was also prominent in Athlone, Galway, Tuam, Castlebar, Sligo, and many a town in England and Scotland under the alias Philip Feely. He appears to have been in constant difficulty with the authorities on suspicion of being a spy which he may well have been, and he spent many a term in prison. During one of these while imbibing with a fellow prisoner he demonstrated his sympathy with the United Irishmen by saluting the memory of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and when his companion countered by raising his glass to His Majesty, Aron took off his coat to box him. He is last heard of in Kilmainham Jail and his final fate is unknown.

The first professing Jew to graduate at an Anglican University was Nathan Lazarus Benmohel who received a B.A. in Trinity College in 1836. The first Dublin Jew to qualify in medicine was Selim Salamon who received his Master of Arts and of Medicine in 1869, and his contemporary at Trinity John David Rosenthal was the first Irish-born Jew to graduate in Law.

The wars of upheaval in eighteenth century Europe drove many poor Jews from Germany and Poland to London and hence to Dublin, but unrest and uncertainty

in Ireland caused many of the wealthy Sephardi to depart back to England or onwards to the New World. Towards the close of the century the Jewish community was in a precarious state. Most of the wealthy Sephardi had left, and the poorer Ashkenazi had difficulty in sustaining the community.

With the right of naturalisation Polish and German Jews from England came to settle in Dublin. Then in 1881 the May Laws were introduced in Russia, and there began the great influx of Lithuanian Jews to the city. In 1881 the Dublin Jewish community numbered only 300 whereas at the turn of the century there were 2,000.

The Dublin Jew with his multi-racial background and Judaic philosophy intrigued, amused, at times irritated, but in the end influenced greatly the Irish character of the Dubliner. And the Jew in his turn blended into the character of the city to the extent of remaining individual but being unmistakably a Dubliner. All Dubliners absorb in their development something of the Jewish tradition, and although not all are aware of the extent of the Jewish influence, few can fail to notice its presence. One departed Dubliner unable to forget the city and more aware than most of the Jewish influence — James Joyce took with him the embryonic concept that was to become Leopold Bloom, one of literature's most celebrated Jews.

Leopold Bloom

Joyce's Jew, Leopold Bloom is an in-depth portrayal of the Dublin Jew at the turn of the century. Bloom's father Rudolph Virag an Hungarian Jew from Szombathely Vienna, Budapest, Milan and London was converted from the Israelite faith to Protestantism by the *Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews*, and died by his own hand in Ennis. The son, Leopold Bloom was baptised no less than three times — first in the protestant church of St. Nicolas Without, then under a pump in the village of Swords, and finally as a catholic by the Reverend Malone in the church of the Three Patrons in Rathgar before his marriage to Molly. Although ostensibly a catholic, Bloom was at heart a Jew. Why then did Joyce make him a catholic? Well, historically as we have seen there were good reasons but that is not enough. Bloom's catholicism permits us to look through Bloom's eye — a very jaundiced one — at his adopted religion, — "Good idea the Latin. Stupelies them first...Then feel like one family party, same in the theatre, all in the same swim...Not so lonely...Those crawthumpers, now that's a good name for them, there's always something shiftylooking about them. They're not straight men of business either...Wonderful organisation certainly, goes like clockwork. Confession...Great weapon in their hands. More than doctor or solicitor... Squareheaded chaps those must be in Rome: they work the whole show. And don't they rake in the money too?" How effectively Joyce removes himself from invective by letting the Jew, one of a foreign religion and yet a convert and therefore *au fait* with the teachings of Rome, give free rein to his thoughts on those ministers of catholicism of whom Joyce was so critical — "Eat you out of house and home. No families themselves to feed. Living on the fat of the land. Their butteries and larders. I'd like to see them do the black fast of Yom Kippur." What a melange of Jewish humour

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Fig. 4. Robert Briscoe: a portrait by Sean O'Sullivan.

and Dublin wit and Joycean genius there is Bloom's one-sentenced analysis of nuns — "It was a nun they say invented barbed wire."

What antisemitism there is in Ulysses is comparatively mild, but it was palpable in Dublin at the turn of the century and Joyce did not fail to observe it. In fact it serves his purpose very well — what better foil for the injustices and hypocrisy of catholicism than Dublin antisemitism, and what better target than the gentle, humorous, sensitive character that is Bloom? But Bloom serves Joyce further as a means of exposing the futility of antisemitism, although he is unable to explain its irrationality — "When in doubt persecute Bloom." When Deasy explains to young Stephen Dedalus — "England is in the hand of the Jews. In all the highest places: her finance, her press. And they are the signs of a nation's decay . . . As sure as we are standing here the Jew merchants are already at their work of destruction. Old England is dying." But, asks Stephen, is not a merchant one who buys cheap and sells dear, be he Jew or gentile? In the hospitable ambience of Barney Kiernan's public house at numbers 9, 10 & 11 Little Britain Street, we are given one of the great moments of Joycean epiphany and Dublin antisemitism. What better fuse for the bang than alcohol, and what better flame than that favoured topic of Irish pub conversation — God, or his immediate descendants and close relatives. Bloom accustomed to mild taunts from the drinking Dubliners ignores the likes of "We want no more strangers in our house," but is finally goaded to retribution by a slur on his nationality. He declares — "Mendelssohn was a Jew and Karl Marx and Mercadante and Spinoza. And the Saviour was a Jew . . . Your God was a Jew. Christ was a Jew like me." This blasphemy, for such it is taken to be, provokes an immediate reaction — "By Jesus . . . I'll brain that bloody

jewman for using the holy name. By Jesus, I'll crucify him so I will." And with what does the noble citizen endeavour to give to Dublin that which it would so dearly like — a real live crucifixion? With a biscuit tin hurled after Bloom as he canters down the Liffey side in a jaunting car. Later Bloom reflects on his victory and concludes that the truth has been particularly shocking for the gathering — "because mostly they appeared to imagine that he (God) came from Carrick-on-Shannon or somewhere about in the county Sligo".

Bloom is handsome; Bloom is libidinous, and women find Bloom agreeable. Bloom is kind to his fellow-Dubliners and to animals; Bloom is cultured — as Lenehan remarks to McCoy on Wellington Quay — "he's a cultured allroundman. Bloom is...he's not one of your common or garden ... you know ... There's a touch of the artist about old Bloom." This is important to Joyce's theme; he regards Jewish culture as superior to most — "The Jews in the wilderness and on the mountain top said, *It is meet to be here. Let us build an altar to Jehovah.*" The Roman in the same situation said—"It is meet to be here: *Let us construct a water-closet.*" Bloom loves music; Bloom is a diplomat and a gentleman; Bloom is a man of only modest means; Bloom is a freemason. Bloom is temperate — almost a complete TT as Davy Byrne was to remark to Nosey Flynn — "I often saw him in here and I never once saw him, you know, over the line." Bloom's abstemiousness is in contrast to his gentile fellow-Dubliner. Again we have an example of Joyce using Bloom to illuminate aspects of character

peculiar to the Irish — "Ireland sober is Ireland free." Bloom is Irish and proud to be — "What is your nation if I may ask, says the citizen — Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland." We know that Joyce was fond of Jews, but he was often irritated and bored by them, and Bloom is a bloody bore — "I declare to my anti-macassar if you took up a straw from the bloody floor and if you said to Bloom: *Look at, Bloom. Do you see that straw? That's a straw.* Declare to my aunt he'd talk about it for an hour so he would and talk steady." On another occasion, Stephen unable to stand Bloom's dissertation on Ireland any longer says "We can't change the country. Let us change the subject."

But of all Bloom's traits, it is the wanderer and the exile in him that appeals most to Joyce. Bloom is neither accepted nor rejected by Dublin. He is never completely at home, because he has no home. To add to his isolation he has left his religion, and is no longer accepted by his own people. Though Bloom is exiled, he accepts his lot without much difficulty, and at heart likes Dublin. He fantasises about travel and Zion, but he can never bring himself to do anything about either. Joyce identifies readily with the exiled spirit. Like the Jew he knows the call of the homeland — "They have forgotten Kevin Eagan, not he them. Remembering thee, O Sion." The Jew, the diaspora, the distillation of centuries, the instillation of diverse cultures, and for all their differences the blending of Irish and Jewish cultures and their mutual, albeit begrudging admiration for each other, is what makes Bloom the Dublin Jew, the



Fig. 5. Leonard Abrahamson (left) in a Richmond Hospital Staff photograph of 1933, with G. T. O'Brien (centre), and Alan Thompson.

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everyman of all men's philosophy — "The oldest people. Wandered far away over all the earth, captivity to captivity, multiplying, dying, being born everywhere." How like the Jews were the Irish once — invaded, persecuted, decimated by the famine, exiled and dispersed to foreign lands, to "the greater Ireland beyond the sea." The similarities were seen thus by Joyce in 1904—

"The presence of guttural sounds, diacritic aspirations, epenthetic and servile letters in both languages: their antiquity, both having been taught on the plain of Shinar 242 years after the deluge in the seminary instituted by Fenius Farsaigh, descendant of Noah, progenitor of Israel, and ascendent of Heber and Heremon progenitors of Ireland: their archeological, genealogical, hagiographical, exegetical, homilectic, toponomastic, historical and religious literatures comprising the works of rabbis and culdees, Torah, Talmud (Mischana and Ghemara) Massor, Pentateuch, Book of the Dun Cow, Book of Ballymote, Garland of Howth, Book of Kells: their dispersal, persecution, survival and revival: the isolation of their synagogical and ecclesiastical rites in ghetto (S. Mary's Abbey) and masshouse (Adam and Eves' tavern): The proscription of their national costumes in penal laws and Jewish dress acts: the restoration in Chanan David of Zion and the possibility of Irish political autonomy or devolution."

Let us bestir ourselves from *Ulysses* - "An epic of two races (Israelite — Irish) and at the same time the cycle of the human body, as well as a little story of a day (life)." "Old Methusalem Bloom" embodies all the weaknesses and the strengths, the humour and the sadness, the myth and the reality, the past and the future dreams, that was the Dublin Jew at the turn of the century. Let us look now at the dream become reality.

The Twentieth Century Contribution

The first signs of Jewish intellectual development in the twentieth century were to be seen in a remarkable group of young Jews at Trinity College. To name but a few — there was Bethel Solomons, Leonard Abrahamson, A.J. Leventhal, Eddie Lippmann and Michael Noyek.

At this time there lived at 32 Waterlood Road an exemplary Jewish couple, Maurice and Rosa Solomons. Maurice, born in Dublin of English parents was an Imperialist who claimed Irish Nationality. A successful optician who wrote some dramatic criticism, he was a student of free-masonry and was successful in a number of businesses. He was honorary consul in Dublin to the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. His wife Rosa from Yorkshire, was an imaginative and cultured woman who wrote pleasant verse, spoke many languages and was an accomplished musician. Active in Jewish community affairs, she was one of the driving forces in the establishment of the Synagogue at Adelaide Road. Together she and her husband founded the first secular school for Jewish children in Dublin.

One of their four children Bethel, was educated at St. Andrew's School, where he showed academic promise and aptitude for sport, particularly rugby (Fig. 1). His father, who had himself aspired towards medicine sent his son to Trinity, where as a medical student he excelled in rugby and captained the first fifteen. At Sir Patrick Duns Hospital he walked the wards, but found ample time to relax with Guinness available at 1s. 10d. a dozen, whiskey at 2½d. a glass, and pipe tobacco to be had for 5d. an ounce.

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Bethel was very close to his younger sister Estella, and she was able to introduce the medical student to the artistic and literary youth of the city. Estella had been educated firstly at Miss Wade's School for Young Ladies in Morehampton Road, then in Hanover where she became fluent in German, and finally at Alexandra College. She went from there to the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art. A bewitchingly beautiful girl, with sensuous eyes and a gipsy like expression as her later self portrait shows, (Fig 2) she had a sensitive and sweet personality and endeared herself to all. At the Metropolitan School one of her teachers was William Orpen and she later went to the school that he and Augustus John (A.E.) opened in London and there she was to be greatly influenced by Walter Osborne. At this early stage she excelled in etching, and the magic of her Dublin street scenes is to be seen in Kelleher's *The Glamour of Dublin* and other books that she illustrated.

Two other bright Jewish children entered Trinity together in the early twentieth century to study modern languages. They were Leonard Abrahamson and Abraham Jacob Leventhal, known affectionately to his friends as Con. Outwardly he had the appurtenances of a serious boy but he was full of humour, and passionately fond of books and literature. He entered Trinity with a Board Examination and completed his course with the degree of Senior Moderator and later he was awarded his doctorate in Philosophy. (Fig 3) He wrote with humour, affection and some sadness about Jewish Dublin in the early part of this century — "When I look back" he says "on those days it seems to me that we young Jewish boys must have appeared curious creatures to our young native neighbours. Though we attended the same National Schools, played the same games, spoke the same language and returned to our dinners at the same hour yet there were definite differences. We looked foreign, to begin with. And in the afternoons when all schoolboys left their homes to indulge in such street games as marbles, relieve, handball and the like, we were not available. Secular schooling for the day was over but we had still to spend a further two to three hours at Hebrew school". The young Jewish schoolboy in Dublin did not have it easy, but he learned to give as good as he got both in pugilism and wit. The Lombard Street Catholics had for their battle cry a verse that went as follows:

'Two shillies, two shillies,' the Jewman did cry,

'For a fine pair of blankets from me you did buy;

Do you think me von idjit or von bloomin' fool,

If I don't get my shillie I must have my vool'.

How quickly the young Oakfield Israelites capitalised on the great weakness of their taunters with —

'Two pennies, two pennies', the Christian did shout,

'For a bottle of porter or Guinness's stout;

My wife's got no shawl and my kids have no shoes,

But I must have my money. I must have my booze'.

Much of the difference between the Jew and his fellow-Dubliner was one of creed rather than race, or as Con Leventhal puts it — "Thus, while the Sassenach might have referred to the drunken Irish, we merely saw tipping followers of Christ".

Leonard Abrahamson was born a few years before the turn of the century in Russia and the family then emigrated to Ireland and settled in Newry where Leonard was sent to the Christian Brothers school. He entered Trinity College in 1912 with an entrance prize in Hebrew and modern Irish, and was awarded a Sizarship in Irish. With Con Leventhal he studied French and German, and obtained first class honours in all examinations for three

successive years. He was an active member of the Dublin Union Gaelic Society and represented Trinity in the Intersociety Debates that were held in Irish. This Society's activities were suspended when its members ignored the Provost's opposition and invited Padraig Pearse to address them. Leonard was awarded a Foundation Scholarship in Modern Languages and was a Senior Exhibitioner. However, he decided that medicine rather than arts was to be his career, and he proved no less successful in this course of study. He obtained first class honours in Midwifery, Surgery and Medicine, won the FitzPatrick Prize, and was awarded the University Travelling Prize in Medicine. In 1919 he married Tillie Nurock and went to Paris for a year's postgraduate study.

Two other students not disinterested in politics were Eddie Lippman, a medical student and Michael Noyek, who had a distinguished academic career at Trinity. He became much involved in the politics of the day and was later to become famous for his defence of many Sinn Fein Nationalists, and was to be close friend and legal adviser to Michael Collins. The political happenings of a country about to demand its freedom were not passing unnoticed by the Jewish community outside the University. Many a young Dublin Jew found himself torn between two loyalties. Patriotically he aligned himself with the country of his birth or adoption, whilst at the same time being conscious of his own race and religion. The Jew's loyalty to his adopted nation may be very intense and none was to demonstrate this more selflessly than a young Jewish boy brought up in an apartment above a furniture shop on the Liffeside.

Robert Briscoe born in 1894 learned from his Lithuanian father Abraham about Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet and Charles Stewart Parnell at an early age. As a young boy he had watched Queen Victoria's procession to Dublin from Kingstown. Later, as a prospecting young business man in America he heard with horror of the Easter Executions, and returned to Dublin with Liam Mellows having sold his business interests.

In Dublin he joined the IRA and gave himself totally to their cause. He was much influenced by De Valera who he saw as one having "the indomitable determination of a Washington; the militant faith of St. Paul and the moral grandeur of the Prophet Elija." A peaceful, rather humble, Jewish wool merchant with a knowledge of the German language and German business methods was ideally suited for gun-running missions between Ireland and the Continent, a hazardous occupation that young Briscoe accomplished successfully for many years.

Bethel Solomons having graduated from Trinity and then studied for a time in Paris was appointed Assistant Master at the Rotunda Hospital, where he began to turn his energies towards making obstetrics his career. To judge from his reminiscences of those days, student life in that Rabelaisian institute was little different from later years, although the nurses were unable to participate as freely. It was looked upon as a most serious misdemeanour when a group of final year students in drunken unison sang outside the Matron's door — "We want hot-battered nurses on toast".

Bethel, did not devote himself entirely to medicine. He was capped ten times for Ireland, and was the first Jew to play for his country. There is the delightful mot of the Dublin wag who being asked what he thought of Ireland's chances replied — "Ireland — you call that
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Ireland, fourteen Protestants and one bloody Jew."

He was the first Jew to become Master of the Rotunda Hospital and to be elected President of the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland, an event which the *Irish Times* reported as follows —

"Dr. Bethel Solomons who has been elected President of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, played rugby for Ireland ten times".

Proud to be a Jew he wrote thus — "I do not think that there can ever be real converts from our ancient race. We are born Jews and nothing can alter that fact. Why a Jew would want to forsake his birthright is a mystery to me for he can be very proud to belong to a people who have done so much for mankind".

Bethel was a keen rider to hounds and one day an American visitor enquiring who he was was told —

"Oh, that's Dr. Solomons, the Master of the Rotunda" "What pack is that? I have never heard of it" asked the American.

"It is one of the most notable packs in Ireland — the Maternity Harriers", was the rejoinder.

Successful in practice, handsome in appearance and attractive in manner he was a well-known and respected figure in the city. With Estella he was part of the Dublin literary circle. James Stephens was a close friend and dedicated his first novel *The Charwoman's Daughter* to him, and Denis Johnston inscribed a play — "To B.S. because of the part he took in my greatest work" — the birth of his children.

Estella was making quite a reputation as a painter. These were exciting times for an artist. In Dublin Jack Yeats was beginning to achieve recognition. No one did more to promote his reputation than Victor Waddington through his art galleries in Dublin and London. Then there was the influence of the impressionist movement to which Estella was inevitably drawn. Estella was also attracted to politics with Kathleen Goodfellow whose patriotic writings appeared under the pseudonym of Michael Scot. She enlisted in Cumann na mBan and thereafter Estella's studio at Great Brunswick Street became a place of refuge for those on the run. Estella was able to meet and paint portraits of Irish patriots and these have been collected in a small volume by Hilary Pyle.

Estella married James Starkey, better known by his *nom de plume* of Seumas O'Sullivan. A tall handsome poet with a slight stoop, he carried a pipe and walking stick wherever he went. Actor, poet, publisher, bibliophile, he will probably be best remembered as the editor of the *Dublin Magazine*, which he founded in 1923 and brought out quarterly until publication ceased with his death in 1958. His remarkable journal survived difficult times, and much of the credit for its success must go to Estella and Kathleen Goodfellow. When Con Leventhal submitted a review of *Ulysses*, the printers in Dollards downed tools when they saw the name of James Joyce, and Leventhal had to found the little magazine named *The Klaxon* which survived just long enough to publish his review under the pseudonym of L.K. Emery. At least the effort earned him the gratitude of Joyce for one of the most prescient criticisms of his novel.

In the *Dublin Magazine* hitherto unknown and little published poets were launched in print — Patrick Kavanagh, Patrick McDonagh, Alun Lewis, Samuel Becket and John Montague are examples of Seumas O'Sullivan's remarkable ability to recognise talent. Estella and Seumas lived at first in a large house called the

Grange in Rathfarnham, where on Sunday afternoons and evenings after a prolonged and sumptuous tea, the collected literati would play croquet. Gogarty was probably responsible for the story of the rustic in the bus who pointed to the Grange and exclaimed to the passengers that the man who lived there was "a jewman be the name of Seamus O'Soloman".

The Starkey salon at The Grange and later at Morehampton Road included A. E., W. B. Yeats, Stephens, Leventhal, Austin Clark, Michael Noyek, Steven McKenna, Cathal O'Shannon, Patrick McDonagh, Mary Lavin, Beatrice Gleneavy, and Albert Power, and Niall Sheridan whose imitation of Brinsley MacNamara was so good Seamus used to say that when he met Brinsley he got the impression that the latter was imitating Niall imitating himself. These were the halcyon days when Dublin was the largest village in Europe, and in this village another jewish artist Harry Kernoff was endearing himself to the people with his paintings of Dublin scenery and its citizens.

If Leopold Bloom was the wandering jew in mind, then Bob Briscoe was he in reality. (Fig. 4) When the civil war broke out he was on the move again, this time to New York to further the Republican cause. One way in which he did this was to take over the Irish Consular Offices in New York from the Free State Government, and to proclaim them held for the Irish Republican Government. The occupation which did not last long appears to have been managed with humour and tact on all sides, and was seen by the Americans as an event almost too Irish to be true, and furthermore taking place right in New York. Briscoe and his companions were finally lifted gently from the offices by the burly New York cops many of whom were Irish on the directive of my grandfather, Professor Timothy Smiddy who was Free State Minister Plenipotentiary to Washington, and as such was understandably anxious to reoccupy the Consular Offices.

In 1927 Briscoe was elected to the Dail and he has left us some interesting vignettes of the "Chief". When Vladimir Jabotinsky came to Ireland to study IRA methods for his militant Zionist organisation, the Irgun, Briscoe arranged for him to meet De Valera.

"How can the Jews establish a legitimate claim to Palestine?" asked Dev "Did they not leave it; and has it not been in the possession of the Arabs for nearly 2,000 years?"

"Mr. De Valera" said Jabotinsky "I have been reading Irish history. As a result of the great famine of 1847 and 1848, I believe the population of Ireland fell from 8 millions to 4 millions. Now supposing it had been reduced to 50,000 and the country had been resettled by the Welsh, Scots and English, would you then have given up the claim of Ireland for the Irish?"

In 1937 when the British Government proposed to partition Palestine between Jews and Arabs Professor Brodetsky came from England to see De Valera to persuade him to support partition when it came before the League of Nations.

"Professor" said De Valera "I read the Old Testament many years ago. I am afraid I have forgotten many things I read; but one passage I recall clearly. It is the story of Solomon's judgement of the two women who claimed the same baby. I remember how when Solomon ruled that the baby be divided the real mother screamed, 'No! No! give the baby to the other woman!' This is my answer to partition. The rightful owners of a country will never
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agree to partition".

In 1938 Briscoe was on the move again — this time to Warsaw to the Jewish Ghettos. He described his meeting with the Chief Rabbi as follows — "The chief rabbi was a big man wearing a long black coat and a magnificent black beard. Glassy black side curls hung beneath his flat black hat. The other two rabbis were smaller but identical in their sombre garb. To these men then I made my plea that they consent to a plan for large-scale emigration to Palestine. I spoke with an ardour and eloquence inspired by the terrible urgency I felt . . . Standing like a figure carved in basalt on a Judean tomb, with Europe in flames around him and Azrael soaring on sable wings above his people, he gave this pronouncement, 'We must wait for the Messiah to lead us to the Holy Land. All forms of Zionism are to us *traif* (unclean).'"

In 1956 Robert Briscoe was elected Lord Mayor of Dublin, a position to which no other jew had risen. He was one of Dublin's most popular Lord Mayors, and when he died the Americans, who idolised him, wanted to commemorate "The Fabulous Irishman", as they called him in a Broadway musical.

Many Dublin jews moved between Dublin and other cities and some left Dublin altogether. To London went Hannah Berman; Hannah a member of the Zlotover family from Lithuania left Dublin after the publication of her first novel "Meletovna" in 1914. She attempted to recreate the spirit of Yiddish folk-writing in English, and was in the opinion of Con Leventhal a neglected Irish Jewish novelist. Hyman Edelstein, a classical scholar, a talented poet and prose writer left Dublin to settle in Montreal.

And that figure who has cropped up so much — Con Leventhal finally settled in Paris, where he continued his literary criticism. He will, I feel, come to be recognised as one of the great significant background figures of twentieth century literature. Friend and adviser to Joyce and subsequently friend and confidant of Sam Beckett he was the epitome of cultural sensitivity and sophistication.

Let us close by focussing our attention on Leonard Abrahamson—or the Abe as he was affectionately called. Appointed to Mercers Hospital in 1922 he was the first doctor in this country to study electrocardiography then a new technique. He founded the first department of electrocardiography which was subsequently taken over by another jewish cardiologist of repute — Joe Lewis. From a study of the Abe's papers, it is clear that he had mastered the new innovation and saw clearly the great potential for its development in cardiology. He was appointed to the Chair of Pharmacology in 1926, became a member of the Richmond Hospital Staff in 1932, (Fig 5) and a Professor of Medicine in The Royal College of Surgeons in 1934. He was President of Royal College of Physicians of Ireland for three years, President of the Section of Medicine of the Royal Irish Academy, President of the Biological Society of Trinity College and the College of Surgeons, and a founder member of the British Cardiac Society. In addition to his medical activities, he was active in Jewish community work and was Honorary President of the Jewish National Fund.

But as I have said at the outset it was his humour, wit and ability to communicate as a lecturer that made him unique as a clinical teacher, and a character. "There is only one thing", he remarked, "that I like writing better than a bill and that is a receipt".

What a marvellous mixture of Jewish and Dublin

humour and wit there is in the delightful Flood-Abrahamson clash which took place in the Academy of Medicine. J. C. Flood, surgeon to the Charitable Infirmary, Jervis Street was renowned and feared as a wit and orator. In addition to his medical degree he had a Bachelor of Arts, a Bachelor of Commerce, and he was a Barrister at Law. He had also a postgraduate Doctorate of Medicine, and a Masters in Surgery. When later he was to give up medicine to join the Benedictine Order, he would acquire Doctorates of Canon Law and Moral Theology in Rome. On the evening in question, the Abe presented to the Academy a complicated case of a woman with rheumatoid arthritis, to whom he had given gold injections over many years. Eventually after many remissions and relapses the patient succumbed to her illness and died. In his presentation Abe had clearly demonstrated the beneficial effect of gold. When the applause from the impressed and appreciative audience had ceased Flood rose and asked if he might enquire from the Professor if he had managed to recover the gold after the good lady's demise. *Touche* it seemed, but the Abe was to have the last laugh when he said "Flood has more degrees than a thermometer without the same capacity for registering warmth".

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