

Albert Löwy

1816-1908

Author Unknown: written circa 1944

Although Albert Löwy was born 128 years ago there are members of the Council of the Anglo Jewish Association today who remember him, not as an old man long past his activities, but as one still mentally alert, interest in all questions of Jewish Concern and if in his last years no longer able to take part in Jewish administration, yet an eager and valuable participant in discussions- even controversies - in matters of Jewish learning and scholarship.

Löwy was one of the trio of young students at the University of Vienna who, eager to help forward the emancipation of the Jews of the world which was then dawning, formed a University Jewish Society, Unity or Die Einheit, which, they hoped, would organise Jewry towards the end. Unity as has been narrated on earlier occasion failed in its immediate object, but out of its failure sprang the Anglo Jewish Association and the Alliance Israelite Universelle and other similar organisations that arose later in other countries for the protection of the interest of Jews in the less fortunate lands.

Löwy was born in Aussee in Moravia in December 1816. When he was seven his parents moved to the larger centre of Friedland, a small country town. There, there were no facilities for a wider education such as his parents desired and at thirteen the boy left home to attend school, ending at the University of Vienna. In 1840 having graduated he left the University and went to England, then the magnet of all Jews and also others of liberal tendencies. England remains his home until the end of his life sixty-eight years later.

Löwy's main purpose in coming to England as was that of his friend and colleague, Abraham Benisch, who followed him a few months later, was to secure support for the programme that Unity had adopted. In this he failed as did Benisch who made the same attempt. The proposal was too revolutionary for those who were directing the affairs of Anglo Jewry: the other Jews of England were either uninterested in the larger affairs of Jewry or were satisfied to leave them in the hands of those with whom they knew their interests were safe. Both Löwy and Benisch, despite their failures, however had sown seed which fructified in due course. Among the fruit that came from that seed are the Anglo Jewish Association and its valuable

work for Jewry over almost three-quarters of a century.

Löwy was not the first Minister, either in time or seniority, of the West London Synagogue, the first organised movement for religious reform in Anglo-Jewry. The Synagogue had been open about six months before he was appointed its second Minister. The Senior Minister was David Woolf Marks, better known as Professor Marks, who had previously been a preacher to the Hebrew Congregation of Liverpool and was, in the Jewish clergy, the pioneer of religious reform in England. Both Marks and Löwy served very long term as Ministers of the new community, Marks outliving Löwy by almost exactly a year. Marks remained in office until the day of his death at the age of 98: Löwy retired after fifty years in office.

A scholar as well as a man of letters Löwy found his metier in his new undertaking. To him and his colleagues fell the building up or more properly the adaptation of a new ritual for their community. The first prayer books of the Congregation were compiled by Löwy and Marks. Some of the prayers were original: others such as the *Mi Yiteneni* of Jehuda Ha Levi were the result of Löwy's research. In the West London Synagogue also, Löwy initiated with the assistance of the Countess of d'Avigdor and Benjamin Kisch, the first Jewish Sabbath school in London. He also founded a Jewish day school, whose latest form was that of the High School for Jewish Girls in Chenies Street, which came to an end about forty years ago.

Löwy was active in the formation of the Anglo Jewish Association in 1871. With tireless application he interested prominent members of his congregation in the project and the resolution founding the Association was moved by Sir Francis Goldsmid, one of the principal members of that Congregation and also of Anglo Jewry. Of the five members of the "Correspondence Committee" which brought the Association into existence he was one and he was also a member of the original Council. Later, in 1875, he became secretary of the A.J.A. in succession to Herbert Lousada, the father of the present Honorary Solicitor, and held that office until his retirement in 1889, retaining, by a special vote of the Council, his membership of that body. Löwy remained a member of the Council after he had laid down his secretaryship and was later elected a vice president.

In the years proceeding his appointment as secretary Löwy went to Russia on a mission on behalf of the Association. Little reliable was known in England then of the conditions under which lived in that Empire. Löwy was sent to obtain information to supplement that little. He had previously attended a Jewish conference on the Russo-Jewish question at Kömogsberg. He brought back an account of the social and economic conditions that was new even to most of those Jews in England on whom the responsibility rested for working for the improvement of those conditions. In the last year of his term of office as secretary he went abroad on another mission on behalf of the Association. This was to the Levant and especially to Istanbul, then Constantinople, where he investigated the conditions of Jewish education. One result was the foundation in Adrianople of a seminary for the training of Jewish education. The seminary was later transferred

to Constantinople. While in Turkey Löwy approached the Government authorities with a view to suppressing the white slave traffic which was then rife there.

Löwy attended the International Jewish Congress in Paris in 1878 as a representative of the Anglo Jewish Association and was one of the Honorary Secretaries. Of the Mansion House Committee on the subject of the Russian persecution in 1882 he was also a member. While Secretary of the Association he was active in the discovery and the safeguarding for Judaism of the Bene Israelites of Bombay, the tribe of native Jews of mysterious origins who are now, largely thanks to Löwy's exertions an integral part of world Jewry.

Löwy's work as a minister and communal worker did not absorb the whole of his activities. He was an Hebraist and oriental scholar of standing. He did not accept the authenticity of the "Moabite Stone"¹ (Mesa's Stele) and wrote two or three pamphlets arguing against it. Perhaps his best literary work was that as bibliographer. He catalogued the unique collection of Samaritan literature of the Earl of Crawford and the collection of Hebraica and Judaica in the Guildhall Library which originated in the library of Levy Solomons, the father of the first Sir David. This library he induced friends to supplement, among the accessions being the collection of his old friend Moritz Steinschneider, acquired and presented by Frederic Mocatta. Löwy's own library was bought by Mocatta and other friends and presented to Jews' College. Löwy was also joint author of a biography of Sir Francis Goldsmid.

Löwy was one of the founders of the Society of Hebrew Literature and Editor of its publications. He was also a member of the Council and an active member of the Society of Biblical Archaeology. He was a fellow of the royal Geographical Society and an active members of the Society of Philology to whose transactions he was a frequent and welcome contributor and whose meetings he often addressed.

He did not publish much, but his knowledge and interests were encyclopaedic. Some hint of their range has already been given. But the hint by no means covers the entire ground. Philology and oriental languages were perhaps his speciality. In an age when Hebrew was still practically a dead language so far as Western Europe was concerned he not only spoke and wrote it but was sufficiently master of the tongue as to compose sermons in it. His knowledge of other languages enabled him to related its bases to those of kindred and even more distant tongues. In an altogether different and unrelated field Löwy shone. He was a naturalist of some distinction and natural history and in particular biology attracted him to the end of his days. He eve in his last years studied the noises that animals made with a view to discovering if possible some coherence among them.

Löwy taught Hebrew to a number of distinguished public men, among others Chenery, the editor of The Times who had previously been Lord Almoner's

Professor of Arabic at Oxford and the learned and beneficent third Marquis of Bute. At an earlier period Löwy had taught languages at Eton College and included among his pupils some of the court circle at Windsor.

Löwy life was very full. This is a foregoing brief and inadequate mention of his interests will show. Age hardly reduced its compass and even in his nineties his days were well occupied. But definite employment in his various offices or in scholarship by no means filled his day. For one reason there was his ever present feeling of kindness to all and everyone, to the community as a whole, to his friends and acquaintances and also to the unknown, the ever readiness to help, not only for the relief of poverty or suffering but not less noticeably with encouragement to young men at the opening of their lives, to whom encouragement and guidance may mean far more than any definite gifts.

In all matters he was enthusiastic, but enthusiastic to the point that protected him against the bitterness of disappointment. His philosophy was of the practical order and he was far more ready to devise a new way of helping a cause in which he was interested than in speculating or theorising about the future. In religious matters he could well be described as a conservative reformer. To him tradition loomed very large and he was never at one with that party in his congregation that wished to break with tradition and eradicate their Judaism that which without perhaps concerning the core of their faith is yet an essential part of it. He had a historical sense and knew that to sever the connection of the present with the past meant death not life.

Löwy was born on the 10th December 1816 and died at his home in London on the 21st May 1908, leaving a number of children several of whom took an active part in the work of the Jewish Community. One of them still does so. In 1893, a year after his retirement from active work he had been made an honorary L.L.D. of the University of St. Andrews.

¹ usually given to the only known surviving inscribed monument of ancient Moab. It was discovered in 1868 at Dhiban, the ancient Dibon, four miles north of the River Arnon. When first seen by Europeans (including a German missionary named Klein) it was an inscribed slab of black basalt 3½ feet long by 2 feet wide. The Arabs of the neighborhood, dreading the loss of such a talisman, broke the stone into pieces; but a squeeze had already been obtained by Clermont-Ganneau, and most of the fragments were recovered and pieced together by him. The reconstructed monument is now, together with the squeeze, in the museum of the Louvre in Paris. From the Jewish Encyclopaedia

[Back to congregation page](#)



Copyright © 2002 - 2009 JCR-UK. All Rights Reserved