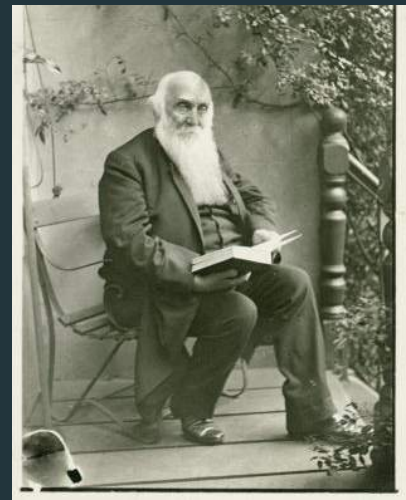
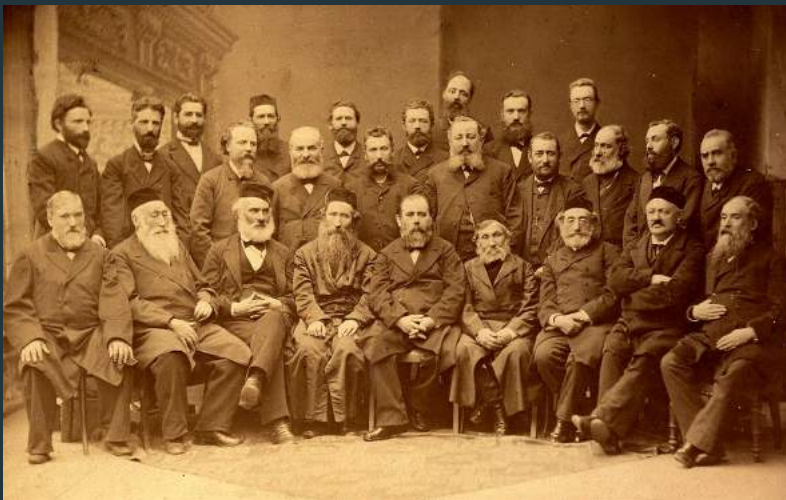
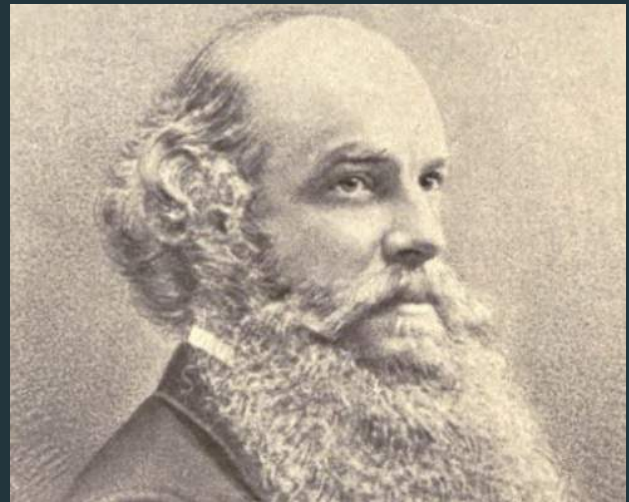
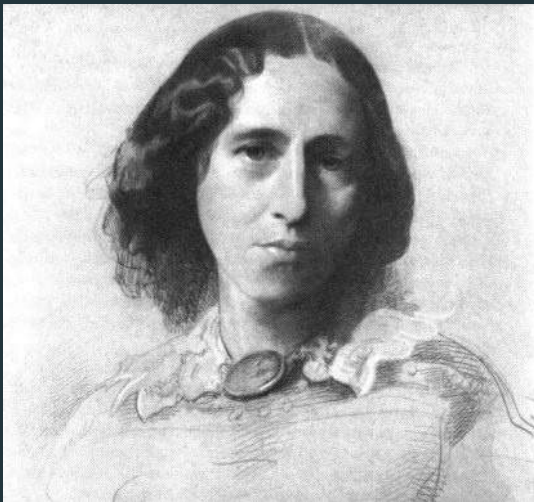


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Birthing Zionism

Studies of 19th-century British Christian Zionists: George Eliot, Laurence Oliphant and Rev. William Hechler



Philip Earl Steele

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Philip Earl Steele is an American scholar based in Warsaw, Poland, where his work on Poland's 10th-century Christian beginnings has been widely hailed. For over a decade Steele has been researching early Zionism; his papers and articles on the topic have been published in Poland, Israel and Great Britain. This summer (2023), the Polish Academy of Sciences is publishing his book, *On Theodor Herzl's encounters with Zionist thought and efforts prior to his conversion in the spring of 1895*.

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Introduction | 19th-century British Christian Zionism: a partner on the road to the creation of modern Israel

This Fathom eBook collects three essays by Philip Earl Steele published in Fathom Journal between 2019 and 2022: [‘George Eliot’s Daniel Deronda,’](#) [‘The Work of Laurence Oliphant,’](#) and [‘Reverend William Hechler: From Hovevei Zion to Herzl and Beyond.’](#) They were first published together in academic format in 2019 by the University of Białystok, in [Polish](#).

19th-century British Christian Zionism did more than to shape thinking across British society and to hone the aims of a host of political figures including Lord Shaftesbury, prime ministers Palmerston, Disraeli and Salisbury, and Princess Helena and her brother Edward, the later King Edward VII. Its impact was also crucial to the coalescence of the first Zionist movement, [Hovevei Zion](#), in the early 1880s. British Christian Zionism’s impact was also significant on the second Zionist movement – that of Theodor Herzl, which he launched in 1896 with his booklet *The Jewish State*. Indeed, as the historian Arthur Hertzberg underlined, Zionism was ‘twice born’ in the 19th century. And in each case British Christian Zionists played significant roles.

This eBook examines the contribution to early Zionism of three such outstanding British Christians, none of whom ever sought to convert Jews to Christianity: George Eliot, Laurence Oliphant and Reverend William Hechler.

But just what is Christian Zionism? The first thing to note is that for most of the 19th century it was known primarily as ‘Restorationism’, and this goes for Jewish circles, as well. After all, Vienna’s [Nathan Birnbaum](#) first coined the term ‘Zionism’ not until 1890. However, as Herzl’s close ally Max Nordau stressed in 1902, ‘Zionism is a new word for a very old thing’. Christian Zionism therefore rests essentially with the belief, grounded in St. Paul’s teaching found in Romans 9-11, that God’s covenant with Israel was not supplanted by Christianity, and that – in accordance with Biblical prophecies – the Jews would one day return to their ancient homeland.

Restorationist belief had accompanied the Protestant Reformation since its inception in the 16th century, particularly in its Calvinist form, which swiftly replaced Catholic

saints with the Hebrew prophets and heroes of the Old Testament – i.e. the Hebrew Bible. This goes far in explaining why Hebrew names have been so popular in ‘Anglo-Saxon’ countries for the past centuries – all those Christian Rachels, Ruths and Saras – Benjamins, Joshuas and Nathans. Broadly treated, Christian Zionism is most closely associated with what today we conveniently refer to as ‘Evangelical Christianity’, whose teachings were to condition its adherents to esteem European Jews as Biblical Israelites.

Nonetheless, Christian Zionism became a political objective only after the Napoleonic Wars, once Britain had become a powerful global empire possessing the means to pursue the restoration of a ‘national home for the Jewish people’ in Palestine. We then see a combination of religious faith and imperial policy on behalf of the Zionist idea that begins in the 1830s. For example, in 1833, when the Ottomans were losing their hold on the Levant, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop of Dublin explained in the House of Lords that the Bible states things plainly: the Jews were once again to establish their own state in Palestine. Britain, moreover, was widely believed to be prophesied to play a surpassing role in this enterprise. It was in this unfolding context that Britain established a consulate in Jerusalem in 1838 and a joint Anglican-Lutheran bishopric there with Prussia in 1841, with the Christian Zionist Anthony Ashley-Cooper (Lord Shaftesbury from 1851) being a moving force in each case. Thus, from the 1830s, philosemitism and Christian Zionism sank ever stronger roots in both British identity and political policy.

On the basis of some of the 19th century’s most illuminating examples of British literary, diplomatic and direct organisational efforts to restore a Jewish polity in Palestine, this book makes clear how deeply intertwined were the efforts of both Jews and Christians to restore Israel.

The Victorian writer George Eliot (1819-1880), whom we otherwise know as Mary Ann Evans, published *Daniel Deronda* in 1876. This Zionist novel ignited the imagination of the Diaspora from Britain to Russia, and was hence a weighty factor in the emergence of Hovevei Zion and the First Aliyah, remaining a mantelpiece of Zionist thought for many decades. No less than Chaim Weizmann, at the end of his life Israel’s first president, was to keep the novel ‘within easy reach’ at his bedside.

Hailed by Russian and Romanian Jews as ‘a saviour’, ‘a second Cyrus’, ‘a messiah for Israel’ – and by [Perets Smolenskin](#) in Vienna as ‘if not a Messiah, then a Samson’ – the Christian Zionist Laurence Oliphant (1829-1888), who played a galvanising role in Hovevei Zion’s rise, is a further such figure examined here. *The Land of Gilead* (1880), Oliphant’s meticulously prepared plan for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in the cradle of their religion and culture, enjoyed the backing of Great Britain’s Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Oliphant’s career as a whole persuaded [Karpel Lippe](#), who inaugurated the First Zionist Congress in 1897, to dub him the first of the great Zionist figures of ‘the old trinity’ – along with [David Gordon](#) and... Lippe himself.

The Anglican priest William Hechler (1845-1931) also helped foster the Hovevei Zion movement, including through his personal contacts in Odessa with Leon Pinsker, the author of the foundational tract *Autoemancipation!*, published in September 1882. Reverend Hechler went on to have an even greater role in Zionist history through his pivotal support of Theodor Herzl, whom he met in Vienna just weeks after *Der Judenstaat* came out in mid-February 1896, and soon ushered onto the international stage. On the eve of WWI Hechler was also instrumental in opening the doors of power in London to [Nahum Sokolow](#), who soon thereafter became a leading figure in the drafting of the Balfour Declaration.

In conclusion, this work demonstrates more clearly than in hitherto scholarship that the trio of British Christian Zionists – Eliot, Oliphant and Hechler – were indispensable to Zionism’s flowering as a movement in the late 19th century. Moreover, it departs from the pattern, still so prevalent in research into Zionist history, of compartmentalising the Jewish from the Christian. Alas, many works outright [ignore](#) the one in order to highlight the other. Here however the attempt is to integrate the story, and thereby showcase its startling richness.

1 - George Eliot's Zionist Novel *Daniel Deronda*

'In the Valhalla of the Jewish people, among the tokens of homage offered by the genius of centuries, Daniel Deronda will take its place as the proudest testimony to the English recognition of the Zionist idea' – declared the early Zionist leader Nahum Sokolow. In this chapter Philip Earl Steele examines the influence of Eliot's novel on the nascent Zionist movement and frames it within the wider context of 19th-century British Christian Zionism.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of her recent lecture-series on *Daniel Deronda* by George Eliot, Harvard Professor of Yiddish and Comparative Literature Ruth R. Wisse stated: 'Twenty years before the rise of Zionism, [Eliot] put forth the idea that Jews had to reclaim their national sovereignty in the Land of Israel.'

Theodor Herzl, however, speaking at the close of the First Zionist Congress held in Basel on 31 August 1897, even before he gratefully acknowledged the pioneering role of many Jewish Zionists, said: 'We must, moreover, thank the Christian Zionists.'

Indeed, Zionism, understood as an idea coupled with effort on behalf of creating a Jewish state in Palestine, came into fruition in the early decades of the 19th century among British Evangelical Christians, as Israeli scholar Anita Shapira has stressed. Though among both Christians and Jews this aim was known as 'Restorationism', in keeping with Herzl's own usage (and Max Nordau's remark from 1902 – 'Zionism is a new word for a very old thing'), I observe the longstanding practice of using the term 'Zionism' and its kindred forms in regard to the entire period preceding Herzl.

Much has been said and written about George Eliot's final novel *Daniel Deronda*, published just four years before she passed away at 61. However, surprisingly little of the novel's powerful impact on the early Zionist movement has been described in recent literature. This is odd as – together with the efforts of other British Christian Zionists (particularly Laurence Oliphant and Rev. William Hechler) – the impact of *Daniel Deronda* was central to the emergence of the first Zionist movement, Hovevei Zion, in

the early 1880s, as I recently described in a research paper available in [Polish](#). Here, in an adaptation of that work, I begin by focusing on the reception of George Eliot's novel as one important example of the debt owed by the Zionist movement to British Christians in the period before the establishment of Mandate Palestine following the 1917 Balfour Declaration.

BRITISH CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AND *DANIEL DERONDA*

The influence of *Daniel Deronda* on the first Aliyah is neglected by literary scholars. Moreover, many treat Eliot's novel as an anomaly, stressing that the figure of the Jew had hitherto been treated everywhere as a *schwarzcharakter* – Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1600) and Fagin in Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1839). Seldom are the Jewish heroes of Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) recalled, nor that in the early 1860s, Dickens removed the unpalatable descriptions of Fagin from renewed printings of *Oliver Twist*, and that in his *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), the Jewish character Mr Riah is portrayed as a model of virtue.

Also worthy of attention is the presence of the Zionist idea in English poetry of the 19th century – for instance, in Byron's *Hebrew Melodies* (1815) and Browning's *Holy-Cross Day* (1855). Among Byron's *Melodies* is the poem 'O, weep for those!', which, as Sheila A. Spector found, was translated into Hebrew and Yiddish more than 20 times:

O! weep for those that wept by Babel's stream,
Whose shrines are desolate, whose land a dream;
Weep for the harp of Judah's broken shell;
Mourn – where their God that dwelt the godless dwell!
And where shall Israel lave her bleeding feet?

And when shall Zion's songs again seem sweet?

And Judah's melody once more rejoice

The hearts that leap'd before its heavenly voice?

Tribes of the wandering foot and weary breast,

How shall ye flee away and be at rest!

The wild-dove hath her nest, the fox his cave,

Mankind their country – Israel but the grave!

The Zionist leader and historian of early Zionism Nahum Sokolow (1859-1936) dubbed the final two lines of this poem a 'Zionist motto', and claimed that in Hebrew 'there are no lines more popular and more often quoted'.

Many of today's scholars examining *Daniel Deronda* are unaware of the striking power and scope of Christian Zionism in 19th-century Britain. They seemingly believe that the Zionism in Eliot's work appeared serendipitously and without context, despite the fact that Restorationism was ubiquitous in 19th-century British politics and culture, one that owed its strength to Evangelicalism, the faith George Eliot (more correctly, Mary Ann Evans) had been imbued with. For Evangelicalism radically departed from the 'teaching of contempt' of the Jews prevalent within other Christian traditions, and promoted a 'teaching of esteem', one that rejected the thinking 'Jesus – yes, His people – no'. Evangelical Christians in Britain (and elsewhere) recognized the continuing Divine covenant with Israel and placed a premium on Biblical prophecies foretelling Israel's restoration in the Holy Land. Many became pro-active toward that end.

Among the most outstanding such British Christian Zionists in the 19th century was Anthony Ashley-Cooper (1801-1885), Lord Shaftesbury from 1851. He was also the most important social reformer of his day, promoting laws of historic significance concerning the mentally disabled, children, women and mineworkers. We might well picture Dickens in the role of legislator. However, Shaftesbury was above all

committed to the restoration of the Jews to Palestine – in Parliament, the press and Evangelical organisations. As the son-in-law of Lord Palmerston (Foreign Secretary, twice Prime Minister of Great Britain), Lord Shaftesbury enjoyed Palmerston's active support, and thus played a leading role in establishing the British Consulate in Jerusalem in 1838 and founding the joint Anglican-Lutheran bishopric there with Prussia in 1841, believing that these matters would foster the Jewish settlement of Palestine and precipitate the return of Jesus. In February of that same year – 55 years (virtually to the day) before Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* – he published in the British *Colonial Times* a 'Memorandum to the Protestant Powers of the North of Europe and America', appealing for the convening of an international congress with the purpose of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine.

Restorationism was everywhere to be found in mid-19th-century British society. For example, in 1865, archaeologists and clergymen set up the Palestine Exploration Fund, which conducted wide-ranging research into Biblical sites – with Lord Shaftesbury being one of the founders. The discoveries made by the Fund were regularly noted in the press, thereby keeping the attention of Evangelicals pinned on the Holy Land. The list of Brits who, starting in the 1830s, tabled serious plans for the Jewish settlement of Palestine is astounding in length, and (to mention only a few individuals) includes Alexander McCaul, Samuel Bradshaw, Edward Bickersteth, A.G.H. Hollingworth, Charles Henry Churchill, George Gawler, Charles Warren and Claude Conder.

Oliphant's Plan

Laurence Oliphant, who enjoyed a high standing in the British establishment, presented Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lord Salisbury, with his 'Plan for Gilead' in 1879. The plan – which postulated the Jewish colonisation of the northern lands of Biblical Israel – was then published as a book in 1880 under the title *The Land of Gilead*. Oliphant even won an assurance of £40,000 for the enterprise from the Palestine Exploration Fund, which would arise as a 25-year lease. Thanks to the support of Disraeli and Salisbury, in 1879 Oliphant left to explore the Levant. Once his investigations were complete, he travelled to Istanbul where he sought a *firman* – the permission of the Turkish Sultan – for the settlement in Gilead of a Jewish colony. Though having failed in that bid, Oliphant tried again in 1882 and 1883 in the wake of

the 1881 pogroms. He worked directly with Jewish refugees in the Pale of Settlement and co-operated with the newly arisen Hovevei Zion societies there and in Romania.

THE IMPACT OF DANIEL DERONDA

George Eliot published *Daniel Deronda* in 1876. The titular hero is a young English gentleman who discovers his Jewish origins and becomes captivated by the Zionist vision of a Jewish mystic named Mordechai/Ezra. Ultimately, he determines to dedicate his life to building a Jewish national home in Palestine. The novel, which was rapidly translated into numerous languages – there were *three* translations into Russian within a year alone – commanded enormous popularity within the Diaspora and inspired leading Zionists including Albert Goldsmid, leader of Hovevei Zion in Britain, and Emma Lazarus, the American poet who penned the famous verse found at the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. On the continent, *Deronda* inspired an untold number of Jewish readers. Worthy of mention among the more prominent are: the financier Haim Guedalla (a close nephew of Moses Montefiore), who in 1876 was drafting plans to finance Ottoman debt and, inspired by the instalments of *Daniel Deronda* he was avidly reading, revised his plan and built them around persuading the Turks to sell vast tracts of ‘Syria’ for Jewish settlement. Indeed, that autumn he initiated correspondence with George Eliot, in the course of which the two remarked, with obvious delight, on the consonance of their ideas. Others include rabbi professor [David Kaufmann](#) of Budapest, who published a sparkling tract on Eliot’s opus in German in 1877, with an English version coming out that same year – and Moritz Schnirer, who lauded the novel as the first of his early inspirations and together with Nathan Birnbaum went on to found the Viennese group of student-Zionists, Kadimah, in 1882. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the father of modern Hebrew, and Perets Smolenskin, the publisher of the highly influential Hebrew-language journal *Ha-Shahar* (Vienna), were also impacted by Eliot’s novel. As his readings indicate, Theodor Herzl himself became acquainted with *Daniel Deronda* prior to writing *Der Judenstaat*. Among the many other Jews upon whom Eliot’s novel exerted an influence were such writers as Isaac Leib Peretz and Abraham Goldfaden, and none other than the fathers of modern Israel [David Ben-Gurion](#) and [Chaim Weizmann](#) (who kept the novel ‘within easy reach’ in his bedroom).

David Frischmann's Hebrew translation of *Daniel Deronda* was published in 1893 in Warsaw. However in December 1876, the British press reported that the leading Hebrew-language weekly *Ha-Magid*, published by David Gordon in Elk (north-eastern Poland), had been printing important fragments of the novel in Hebrew, ones that were being republished in the Hebrew press in Germany, Russia, Poland and even Jerusalem. Already in 1877, *Daniel Deronda* had appeared in German and Dutch, and in 1878 Calmann Lévy published it in French. By 1883 there was even an Italian translation.

On the basis of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda's autobiography *A Dream Come True* (available only in Hebrew), Shalom Goldman wrote:

Ben Yehuda ... tells of the rabbinic education he rejected and of the secular Jewish nationalist vision that replaced it. His life task ... would be 'the restoration of Israel and its language on the land of its ancestors'. To his dismay, Perlman/Ben-Yehuda's Orthodox yeshiva teachers and fellow students rejected his Zionist ideas. One yeshiva friend, though, did not reject him. Rather, he told Perlman of 'an English story he had read in the monthly Russian journal *Vestnik Evropi* in which a man was described who had a vision similar to [Perlman's] own ... It was the novel *Daniel Deronda*, by George Eliot'. 'After I had read the story a few times', Perlman wrote, 'I made up my mind and I acted: I went to Paris ... in order to learn and equip myself there with the information needed for my work in the Land of Israel'.

The Polish-language Jewish weekly *Izraelita* – which advocated assimilation – noted *Daniel Deronda* in its final edition of 1876 and published a very positive review in its first edition of 1877. However, in July 1877, *Izraelita* published a 19-page review in three instalments entitled 'Genjalne złudzenie' – 'A brilliant illusion'. The first instalment read:

Not since Lessing wrote *Nathan the Wise* have Judaism and its adherents obtained such a full and just appraisal as in this work. What most astounds is the vast knowledge of Judaic literature, beginning with the Bible and the Prophets – and extending to the most recent works of the German school. The lady-author knows the Talmud, the Midrash and Kabala. She often quotes passages from those collections and interprets them in a way so apt and original that it would

bring honour to many a Talmudist or preacher by vocation.

However, regarding the Zionist vision held up in *Daniel Deronda*, the reviewer does not conceal their perplexity: ‘The brilliant and learned author, by lineage and faith a Christian woman, is an advocate of the idea of rebuilding the national life of the Israelites!’. In the third instalment, the reviewer grapples with the viability of Eliot’s idea – and rejects it:

The authoress shows how Deronda, slowly freeing himself from prejudice toward the Jews, over the course of acquainting himself with their customs, studying their writings, and becoming initiated into the ideas of Mordechai, transforms into a gladiator for Judaism and stands ready to take the helm of the Jewish ship, in order to rekindle the Jews’ national feeling and rebuild their unity and autonomy. The author wished to show what is working against the Jews of today’s epoch, and at the same time to point out what they should pursue. On that fine day when the Jews will come to that recognition, when they will be capable of rising to the heights of national fervour and follow one such as Deronda – on that fine day the novel about the young pair [Daniel and his wife, Mira] heading off to the Holy Land in order to bring Mordechai’s mystical dreams to life will be ripe for continuation.

... It seems certain, however, that in regard to the reality now unfolding of the state and social life of peoples, and of the inseparable portions of the Jewish race; that in regard to civilisation and science levelling all possible social irregularities; and lastly, in regard to the assimilationist trend that has appeared in the state field, and which drives not toward atomizing and separating, but toward uniting and gathering scattered elements – in light, as I say, of these irresistible manifestations of real life, ones which no doubt are the result of the unchanging law of humanity’s development – a law that we dub ‘the Divine idea in history’ – the notion of Mrs. George Eliot to rebuild the state life of the Jews, no matter how fiery its expression and no matter the rapturous power of its inspired words, is and shall remain but a – brilliant illusion...

The Polish-Jew and Zionist Nahum Sokolow – an early Hovev Zion (lover of Zion), observer at the First Zionist Congress in Basel, luminary of Hebrew journalism and president of the World Zionist Congress from 1931 to 1935 – devoted much space in his two most important historical works (*History of Zionism 1600-1918*, vols. 1 & 2, 1919, and *Hibbath Zion – The Love for Zion*, 1935) to the role of Christians in the development of Zionism. For example, when British Mandatory Palestine was coming into being, Sokolow (echoing rabbi professor David Kaufmann's words) wrote this of Eliot's novel:

Among English writers who have understood the [Zionist] idea in all its depth and breadth, the place of honour belongs unquestionably to George Eliot (1819-1880). She chose the Zionist idea for the theme of an imaginative creation, wherein she displayed unequalled depth of comprehension and breadth of conception. In *Daniel Deronda* ... the Jew demands the rights pertaining to his race, and claims admittance into the community of nations as one of its legitimate members. He demands real emancipation, real equality. The blood of the prophets surges in his veins, the voice of God calls to him, and he becomes conscious, and emphatically declares that he has a distinct nationality; the days of levelling are over. Where calumny and obtuseness see nothing but *disjecta membra*, the eye of the English poetess perceives a complete national entity destined to begin life afresh, full of strength and vigour ... In the Valhalla of the Jewish people, among the tokens of homage offered by the genius of centuries, *Daniel Deronda* will take its place as the proudest testimony to the English recognition of the Zionist idea.

JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND GEORGE ELIOT

Eliot's mature fascination with Jews and Judaism became earnest in 1866 upon meeting Emanuel Deutsch, the outstanding scholar and Hebraist born in today's Nysa (southern Poland). While employed at the library of the British Museum, Deutsch wrote his highly acclaimed work 'The Talmud', which was published in the *Quarterly Review* in 1867 and went far in deflecting the disparaging views of the Talmud spread by the missionary Alexander McCaul's book *The Old Paths* (1836). Deutsch had shared the paper's rough-

draft with Eliot, who called it 'glorious'. As Professor Gertrude Himmelfarb, author of *The Jewish Odyssey of George Eliot*, recounted, it was under the careful eye of her new friend that Eliot learned Hebrew. Deutsch also 'introduced her to ancient Jewish sages and modern Jewish scholarship, and spoke eloquently of his vision of national redemption in Palestine'. Indeed, Deutsch was the model for *Daniel Deronda's* Mordechai. In 1872, Eliot threw herself into 'a massive work of research into Jewish learning and lore. Eliot's notebooks for this period contained excerpts from the Bible and Prophets, the Mishnah and Talmud, Maimonides, medieval rabbis and Kabbalistic works, as well as contemporary German scholars (Moses Mendelssohn, Heinrich Graetz ...), French scholars (Ernest Renan, Jassuda Bédarride ...), English scholars (Henry Milman, Christian David Ginsburg, Abraham Benisch ...) and scores of others'.

Does the label 'Christian Zionist' truly apply to Eliot? After all, she is sometimes portrayed as an atheist, and at the very least as someone who had abandoned Christianity. Hence the 'watered-down' descriptor 'Gentile Zionist' one sometimes meets. The form of Christianity in which Eliot was raised was Evangelicalism. As an 8-year-old, she began attending 'a boarding school, where an Evangelical teacher instilled in her the habit of the daily reading of the Bible and study of the Scriptures', writes Himmelfarb. 'Transferred to another school four years later, she encountered a more rigorous Calvinistic form of Evangelicalism ... Returning home at the age of 16... she brought with her that religious and moral earnestness. Three years later, on her first visit to London with her brother ... she refused to accompany him to the theatre, spending the evening instead reading Josephus's *History of the Jews*'.

As it oftentimes happens, Eliot later passed through a period of rebellion toward the religion inculcated during her girlhood. In her case, this rebellion had a markedly intellectual character. She fell in with a milieu of freethinkers, thanks to whom she discovered the higher Biblical criticism then developing, especially in Germany. In 1842, she began the translation of *Das Leben Jesu* by David Strauss into English: the final version of *The Life of Jesus* (numbering approximately 1,500 pages) was published in 1846. As Himmelfarb notes, 'her immersion in Strauss had given her a more acerbic view of both Christianity and Judaism – and of religion in general'.

Eliot's father died in the spring of 1849, her mother having passed away 14 years earlier. Soon after finding herself parentless, she departed with married friends on a trip to Geneva, where she was to live from that July until March the next year. In October, now without her friends, she took a room at the home of the painter François D'Albert Durade and his wife. In fact, the well-known portrait of the young, pretty Eliot is Durade's work.

That Eliot was unabashed about her animosity toward religion while in Geneva is altogether plain from the correspondence between her and Durade ten years later in December 1859, when she was 40-years-old. In a letter to Eliot, Durade expresses his surprise that her latest novel *Adam Bede* (which Leo Tolstoy categorized as 'religious art ... flowing from love of God and man') evinced such a strong sympathy for religion. Eliot's response was this:

I can understand that there are many pages in 'Adam Bede' in which you do not recognize the 'Marian' or 'Minie' of the Geneva days. We knew each other too short a time, & I was under too partial and transient a phase of my mental history, for me to pour out to you much of my earlier experience. I think I hardly ever spoke to you of the strong hold Evangelical Christianity had on me from the age of fifteen to two&twenty & of the abundant intercourse I had had with earnest people of various religious sects. When I was at Geneva, I had not yet lost the attitude of antagonism which belongs to the renunciation of any belief – also, I was very unhappy, & in a state of discord & rebellion towards my own lot. Ten years of experience have wrought great changes in that inward self: I have no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow & human longing for purity have expressed themselves; on the contrary, I have a sympathy with it that predominates over all argumentative tendencies. I have not returned to dogmatic Christianity – with the acceptance of any set of doctrines as a creed & a superhuman revelation of the unseen, but I see in it the highest expression of the religious sentiment that has yet formed its place in the history of mankind, & I have the profoundest interest in the inward life of sincere Christians in all ages. Many things that I should have argued against ten years ago, I now feel myself too ignorant & too limited in moral sensibility to speak of with confident

disapprobation: on many points where I used to delight in expressing intellectual difference, I now delight in feeling an emotional agreement. On that question of our future existence, to which you allude, I have undergone the sort of change I have just indicated, although my most rooted conviction is, that the immediate object & the proper sphere of all our highest emotions are our struggling fellow-men & this earthly existence.

CONCLUSION

Daniel Deronda was a spark that ignited the imagination of the Jewish Diaspora from Britain to Russia. Though those who wished to travel to Palestine were a small minority of the Jews fleeing the pogroms of the early 1880s, in many cases they had been inspired to do so by Eliot, and thus were all the more willing to respond to the outreach efforts led in the Pale and Romania by the Christian Zionists Laurence Oliphant and Rev. William Hechler.

As Paul Johnson concluded, ‘in terms of its practical effects [*Daniel Deronda*] was probably the most influential novel of the nineteenth century’. The novel powerfully argued that the Jews are a people, a people with a praiseworthy religion and past, and thus deserving of a shining future again in their ancient home, there to enjoy national sovereignty. The novel’s universal message is that devotion to society, to one’s own community – to something greater than oneself – can impart the life of the individual with a deep, indeed redeeming significance.

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2 - Laurence Oliphant: First in the ‘Trinity’ of Early Zionists

The British Christian Zionist Laurence Oliphant played a surpassing role in Zionism’s birth. About this precursor of Herzl, and an important influence upon him, the historian Nathan Gelber wrote, ‘In cities and small towns in Russia, Romania, and Galicia you could find in the houses of poor Jews a picture of Oliphant.’ In this chapter Philip Earl Steele uses neglected Polish sources to re-examine Oliphant’s contribution to the nascent Zionist movement.

INTRODUCTION

In the first place, it is noteworthy that *Hibbath Zion* [The Love for Zion] is not an exclusively Jewish idea...There is hardly anything astonishing in the fact that a Gentile can be a *Hovev Zion* [Lover of Zion] as he can be a Philhellenist. The disinterestedness required makes such allegiance still nobler. In the second place, there is a very close connection between Jewish *Hibbath Zion* and the appearance and progress of this idea in the Gentile world. [Nahum Sokolow](#), *Hibbath Zion*, 1935, p. 75.

Like Mary Ann Evans / George Eliot, Laurence Oliphant (1829-1888) was raised in the religious atmosphere of Evangelical Christianity. However, unlike Eliot, the adult Oliphant’s faith did not develop along intellectual and emotional lines, but gravitated toward mysticisms that were nominally Christian, though widely considered cultic. Indeed, in 1868 Oliphant caused a scandal when he surrendered his seat in Parliament in order to join the sect of the spiritualist Thomas Lake Harris in Brocton, New York. Ultimately, he was to draw both his mother and his two wives into this adventure. In 1882, during their lengthy and bitter rupture with Harris, Oliphant and his first wife, Alice, settled in Haifa on the northern coast of today’s Israel in order, together with Jewish pioneers, to realise what to outsiders were murky eschatological intentions to redeem the Holy Land.

As both his contemporaries and later biographers stress, Oliphant led a double-life from his early adult years. On the one hand he was a seasoned diplomat (and intelligence

agent) who for decades enjoyed the trust of the British establishment, as well as a prolific foreign correspondent and writer who was widely admired, and not only in Great Britain. On the other hand, he oftentimes succumbed to the allure of curious religious endeavours that astonished people in his own milieu. Much of the riddle of his person seems easy to solve: Oliphant was at least as promiscuous sexually as he was religiously. As a young man he contracted syphilis. This goes far in explaining his submissiveness to Harris, who promised Laurence he could cure him. When we add to this Laurence's fiery mysticism, it becomes easier to understand 'the cracks in his cathedral' – such as his readiness to believe in the spiritual salvation of marital celibacy and in 'sympneuma', a form of joint breathing the Oliphants came to advocate for people feeling a strong spiritual affinity toward one another. Following his death, *The Times* wrote what has become Oliphant's epitaph: 'Seldom has there been a more romantic or amply filled career; never, perhaps, a stranger or more apparently contradictory personality.'

PRELUDIUM: OLIPHANT ACQUAINTS HIMSELF WITH GALICIA IN 1863

Laurence Oliphant had only freshly returned to England from Italy, when in late January 1863 the Poles rose up against the Tsarist occupation of much of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, dismembered by the Russians, Prussians, and Habsburgs at the close of the 18th century. As Oliphant later wrote, the British government almost at once determined to send him on a mission to observe the fighting. In mid-March he had reached Vienna, and just days later he was in Kraków, where he lodged with his 'friend' Adam Potocki, an important leader among the Poles of Galicia, then under Habsburg rule. The first news Oliphant received reported that the Polish armies under General Langiewicz had been shattered, and that Langiewicz himself was under Austrian arrest (19 March, 1863). Having spent roughly a month travelling throughout Galicia, including to Lwów/Lviv in today's Ukraine, Oliphant departed for Warsaw. After a week of making the rounds there, he managed to join a unit of Polish insurgents. He spent a week with them and then departed for England. However, he returned to Galicia on 13 September of that same year, during which stay he went back to Lwów/Lviv and visited nearby Brody before continuing on to Jassy and other places in Moldova and Romania.

Laurence was to return again to those lands 19 years later – in the wake of the terrible pogroms that broke out in the Pale of Settlement in 1881.

OLIPHANT'S PLAN FOR GILEAD

Oliphant's parents were adherents of Edward Irving, one of the 19th century's very most important millennialists, and by that very token a leading advocate of Restorationism, as both Protestants and Jews typically referred to Zionism before Nathan Birnbaum coined the term in 1890. Thus, Oliphant had a lifelong interest in Palestine and its development. Knowing this, in the spring of 1856 Prime Minister Palmerston invited Oliphant to a meeting in London with the Grand Vizier Ali Pasha, Moses Montefiore (Britain's leading patron of the Jewish community in Palestine), and a few others concerning the construction of a railroad from Jaffa to Jerusalem. A year later Laurence was again to meet with Moses Montefiore, this time for a private lunch described by his assistant Lewis Loewe thus: 'Mr. Oliphant took a great interest in all matters relating to the Holy Land, and conversed freely with [Montefiore] on certain schemes which might serve to improve the condition of its inhabitants.'

However, it was in 1878 that Oliphant began to squarely focus his attention on Palestine. Several factors contributed to this. On the one hand was the impasse with his wife Alice, from whom he had been separated for the past two years. For in contrast to Laurence (and his mother), Alice was unable to extricate herself from the influence of Thomas Lake Harris, the leader of the sect they had joined. When in 1876 Laurence fell out with Harris and returned from America to London, Alice remained behind with the Brotherhood of the New Life in Brocton. That autumn she moved to the sect's new colony in northern California, where Harris had already begun living. This is when he declared himself a new incarnation of Christ and orchestrated the grandiose spectacle in which the lovely Alice was to perform the role of 'the Lily Queen', whose precise functions remain unclear. So it comes as small surprise that Oliphant, in searching for a new field of endeavour for his restless energy and feverish mysticism, turned toward the Restorationism he had been raised with. Another factor was that of the changing international situation. This particularly concerned the fears of Great Britain that, following the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Russia (blocked in the Balkans because of the

emergence of the new states – namely, Romania and Bulgaria) would now attempt to seize areas in the Levant from the Ottomans.

Thus, combining his religious and imperial motives, Oliphant devised his 'Plan for Gilead', presenting it as a way to solve Britain's worries by establishing a Jewish colony under the protection of Great Britain. In a letter dated 10 December, 1878, Oliphant described his Plan thus:

My Eastern project is as follows: To obtain a concession from the Turkish Government in the northern and more fertile half of Palestine, which the recent survey of the Palestine Exploration Fund proves to be capable of immense development. Any amount of money can be raised upon it, owing to the belief which people have that they would be fulfilling prophecy and bringing on the end of the world. I don't know why they are so anxious for this latter event, but it makes the commercial speculation easy, as it is a combination of the financial and sentimental elements which will, I think, ensure success. And it will be a good political move for the Government, as it will enable them to carry out reforms in Asiatic Turkey, provide money for the Porte, and by uniting the French in it, and possibly the Italians, be a powerful religious move against the Russians, who are trying to obtain a hold of the country by their pilgrims. It would also secure the Government a large religious support in this country, as even the Radicals would waive their political in favour of their religious crotchets. I also anticipate a very good subscription in America.

Oliphant's Plan for Gilead soon obtained the backing of Prime Minister Disraeli (a longstanding Zionist), and he in turn swiftly won over Foreign Minister Salisbury. In late November 1878 the three men met together to discuss the idea with the Prince of Wales (the later King Edward VII) at Sandringham, one result of which was that Oliphant received his credentials. In February 1879 he set sail for the Levant on a mission George Eliot also expressed approval for. Once in Beirut, Oliphant was joined by Captain Owen Phipps, who knew the local languages and culture, and the two men headed out to examine the lands north and east of the Jordan river. Once Oliphant had thereby fleshed out his Plan for Gilead, he presented it to the local governor, Midhat

Pasha, who promised his active support – on condition that Oliphant obtain the permission of Sultan Abdul Hamid.

SEEKING A FIRMAN IN ISTANBUL

With that aim in mind, in May 1879 Oliphant travelled to Istanbul, where at once he had successes in his contacts with court dignitaries, including the Grand Vizier Heyreddin Pasha, about which he at once informed Disraeli. In his talks with the Turks, Oliphant stressed that Protestants from Great Britain and the United States would provide enormous funding to help realise the aim of establishing a Jewish colony; and he confessed to the Prime Minister that it was difficult to explain to the Turks why that was.

Nevertheless, because of palace intrigues (the Grand Vizier was dismissed in July 1879), as well as a series of tensions in British-Ottoman relations (e.g. regarding Egypt), matters came to a halt. The Turkish ministers continued, however, to affirm the assent of the Porte (i.e. the central government of the Ottoman Empire), and thus Oliphant decided to remain in Istanbul and await the *firman*, that is, the Sultan's permission. During that period he managed to travel to Romania in order to meet with Jews there and present them with his plan. These contacts bore fruit over the coming years in the form of close and important ties between Oliphant and those communities. Back in Istanbul, however – in a scene straight out of Kafka's *The Castle* – Oliphant waited all autumn and winter for an audience with the Sultan. Seeking leverage, in February 1880 he made a bid for assistance from the Germans, explaining to the British Ambassador to Berlin that Bismarck, were he to push matters forward, would loom in the eyes of Protestants as the agent for the fulfilment of prophecy.

After 11 months of anxious waiting and manoeuvring, the meeting with the Sultan finally took place in April, 1880 – and, as Oliphant's biographer Anne Taylor describes, it was a complete failure. The Sultan explained to Oliphant that he supported the plan for Jewish colonisation, but his ministers were against the idea. Oliphant could not pretend that he believed the Sultan's words and a heated exchange erupted, prompting one of the Sultan's attendants to escort Oliphant out to an adjoining room. Henry Layard, the British ambassador to the Porte at that time, later explained that the whole

effort to obtain a *firman* had collapsed because Oliphant had been talking about Biblical prophecies and how the return of the Jews to Palestine was to usher in the return of Jesus – and this was not something the Sultan wished for.

And indeed, throughout his efforts on behalf of the Jewish colonisation of Palestine, Oliphant again and again stressed the advantages that Evangelical beliefs would offer to his plan. A well-known example is from that same year, when he noted that the Jews' Restoration to the Holy Land was 'a favourite religious theory', adding that this fact 'does not necessarily impair its political value' but 'on the contrary, its political value once estimated on its own merits and admitted, the fact that it will carry with it the sympathy and support of those who are not usually particularly well versed in foreign policies is decidedly in its favour.'

The news of Oliphant's failed audience with the Sultan was nonetheless slow to leak out. For example, a newspaper report that was published the next month (28 May, 1880) in Lwów/Lviv in the *Gazeta Lwowska* revealed no awareness of the failure. What is more notable in that report is the detailed information on Oliphant's plan – and the use of the term *państwo żydowskie* – 'Jewish state':

Palestine for the Jews! This is the slogan now being repeated here in London with increasing enthusiasm by both practicing Jews and a sizeable number of Christian friends of the Jews. This slogan wins all the more adherents, the weaker the [Sultan's] power over the Holy Land becomes ... The Englishman Oliphant has presented the Sultan with the following plan: the lands of Gilead and Moab, once belonging to the Israelite tribes of Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh, are to be turned into a Jewish colony. It is understood that the Sultan will be paid in jangling gold coins ... The Sultan [it has been reported] has expressed himself favourably inclined toward the project ... The country [in question] embraces approximately ... 600,000 hectares ... and is inhabited by nomadic tribes. The colony is to remain under the rule of the Sultan, though it will have an autonomous council and its own governor, no doubt a Jew, as its direct head. In this way the Jews are to return to their own land. This will be the gathering point for the scattered people of Israel – and, as should be anticipated, for a restored Jewish state ... Two

be built; one from Jaffa to Jerusalem, the other from Haifa to the banks of the Jordan. Sir Moses Montefiore, the widely known Jewish patriarch, has promised considerable sums for the building of the two lines ... The New Palestine is to conform to the ideas of the 19th century. But will a sufficient number of Jews be found who wish to settle there?

AWAKENING JEWISH SUPPORT

*To Her Royal Highness The Princess Christian Of Schleswig-Holstein Sonderburg-Augustenburg, Princess Of Great Britain And Ireland, The Following Pages Are, By Permission, Most Respectfully Dedicated As A Mark Of Deep Gratitude For The Warm Sympathy And Cordial Interest Manifested By Her Royal Highness In The Author's Efforts To Promote Jewish Colonisation In Palestine. – The dedication to Oliphant's *The Land of Gilead*, 1880, addressed to Princess Helena, daughter of Queen Victoria.*

Once back in England, Oliphant completed the work on his book *The Land of Gilead*, which came out in December 1880. He also pursued his contacts with Romanian Jews – in particular with Bucharest's newly created Society for the Colonisation of the Holy Land. Oliphant's efforts in the Ottoman Empire and now the publication of his resulting book made him an all-but universally known figure in the Jewish Diaspora, with the Jewish press extensively, and most often excitedly, reporting on the progress of his plan. For instance, already on 9 January, 1880 London's *The Jewish Chronicle*, the most important Jewish newspaper in Great Britain, had commented on Oliphant's efforts thus:

It cannot be denied that at no period of our modern history have there been so many forces at work which tend directly to the Great Restoration. Signs and portents abound ... Can these be the precursors of the Event? ... Mr. Laurence Oliphant's scheme, detailed by a correspondent in our last week's issue, contains the most feasible plan that has yet been put before the world.

... At present, the matter is a purely commercial and administrative speculation; but the very practicability and non-sentimentality ... is an assurance of its

feasibility ... It would be a great elevation of the Jewish character in the eyes of the world at large, could they prove themselves capable of conducting a colony, harmoniously and reputably, under the present lawless conditions of Ottoman rule. It must be a peaceful triumph worthy of the days of the Messiah, when all shall be peace ... We can go so far as to say that ... the scheme recommends itself strongly to the consideration of all earnest and sincere Jews. We shall watch its completer development with intense interest and watchful anxiety ... There are persons who think that the Restoration is to be brought about by a supernatural coup de theatre, and that it cannot be accomplished without the intervention of startling and directly apparent miraculous means ... There is no reason why all the prophecies, in which the vast majority of us devoutly believe, may not be fulfilled in an apparently natural and consequent manner. To wait for a miracle ... is to resemble children who, not strong enough ... to assist in the father's work, wait for him to give them their daily bread, without doing aught to contribute personally to its obtention. To work and to pray is the surest means of accomplishing human aims ... *Laborare et orare*.

THE POGROMS OF 1881-2 AND THE JEWISH REFUGEE CRISIS

Assassins murdered Tsar Aleksander II in Saint Petersburg in March 1881. Their organisation – *Narodnaya Volya* – was comprised primarily of Russians, though Ignacy Hryniewiecki, who threw the second, fatal bomb was a Pole. Nonetheless – despite the fact that only a single member of the organisation was Jewish (namely, Hesia Helfman, who played a secondary role in the assassination) – it was the Jews who met with universal blame. Hence the terrible wave of pogroms that swiftly engulfed the western provinces of the Tsarist empire that year. Hence also the dozens of associations that came into being by early 1882 – the very first of them having been founded by Eliezer Mordechai Altschuler in Suwałki, northeastern Poland – by the name of *Hovevei Zion*, ‘The Lovers of Zion’.

Among the Jews fleeing the attacks across the Pale was a steadily rising number of those who crossed the border into Habsburg Galicia, where they gathered in Brody and nearby Lwów/Lviv. The refugees' living conditions soon began to require humanitarian

intervention. During the winter of 1881-82 the British press devoted great attention to their plight. At the initiative of Lord Shaftesbury (again, the most distinguished British Christian Zionist of the 19th century) and the Archbishop of Canterbury, on 1 February 1882 a boisterous meeting was convened at London's Mansion House, during which urgent help for the refugees was promised. On 7 February *The Daily Telegraph* reported on its front page that some £10,000 had already been donated. Over the next several months the press regularly reported on the rising sum, *The Globe* giving a tally of £72,000 on 20 May.

The Mansion House Committee had decided at once in early February that the money would be spent above all in helping the refugees make their way to America – and this compelled Laurence Oliphant to act. He wrote an article for *The Times* on 15 February explaining that many of the refugees wished to settle in Palestine, where – differently than in America – their religion and way of life would be safeguarded and invigorated. News of Oliphant's stance spread at once across Europe, with much of the Diaspora again placing its hopes in him. Mansion House responded by drafting Oliphant into its special committee and then dispatching him as a commissioner to Galicia.

On 28 March, while en route to eastern Galicia, Laurence – now reunited with his wife, Alice – arrived in Vienna for a stay that stretched to 10 April. The Polish press, which was monitoring his every move, reported on the 30th that his first meeting concerned the refugee crisis and included F.D. Mocatta of the Anglo-Jewish Association and Moritz Ellinger, representing American Jewry's 'Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society'. *Gazeta Narodowa* described Oliphant himself as:

the author of a work concerning the colonisation of Palestine. His aim is for the Jews to settle the fertile areas to the east of the Jordan. Mr. Oliphant is a Christian, but he has nonetheless eagerly offered his services to the Jewish committee.

Oliphant soon also met Vienna's Perets Smolenskin, the eminent Zionist activist who published the Hebrew-language journal *Ha-Shahar* (The Dawn). Smolenskin had been very favourably impressed with Oliphant's plan for the Jewish colonisation of Palestine and in fact had presented it in *Ha-Shahar* the previous autumn. In Vienna, in the early

spring of 1882, Smolenskin and the Oliphants became friends – Laurence and Alice even invited Perets to travel on with them to Palestine in the aim of fostering the Jewish colonies anticipated to soon arise there. Unfortunately, Smolenskin’s health did not permit that, however *Ha-Shahar* did go on to energetically endorse Oliphant’s efforts. Smolenskin also expressed his enthusiastic support for Oliphant privately – for instance, when he wrote to the Jewish scholar Ephraim Deinard of his trust for Laurence and Alice, ‘they have only the welfare of Israel in their hearts’; and when elsewhere he stated of Oliphant, ‘if not a Messiah, then a Samson’.

Oliphant also enjoyed the endorsement of *Ha-Magid* (The Preacher), the outstanding Hebrew-language Zionist journal run by [David Gordon](#) in today’s Ełk, in northeast Poland. In late April *Ha-Magid* published an article written by Oliphant, in which he explained to the weekly’s readers that it wouldn’t be the Jews of Great Britain who would help in the colonisation of Palestine, but rather the Protestants: ‘as soon as your Christian sympathizers in England are convinced the Jews fleeing from Russia can settle with safety in the land of their ancestors, then they will contribute thousands, I may well say, hundreds of thousands of pounds to promote this great object’.

THE OLIPHANTS AMONG THE REFUGEES IN EASTERN GALICIA

By the time *Ha-Magid* published the article, the Oliphants had been in eastern Galicia among the Jewish refugees for about two weeks. As the Polish daily *Czas* reported, having left Vienna on the 10th of April, they spent the 11th in Kraków, reached Łwów/Lviv on the 12th, and then immediately began their direct work with the refugees. This was when the Oliphant cult that had been swelling for several years in the Diaspora reached its zenith. He was now widely spoken of as a ‘saviour’ and ‘another Cyrus’. No less than [Moses Lilienblum](#), Leon Pinsker’s closest associate in Odessa, harboured the hope that Oliphant would prove to be ‘the Messiah for Israel’. ‘In cities and small towns in Russia, Romania, and Galicia’, writes the historian of Zionism Nathan Gelber, ‘you could find in the houses of poor Jews a picture of Oliphant. It would be hung right next to the pictures of the great philanthropists Moses Montefiore and Baron Hirsch’.

When Laurence and Alice Oliphant visited Brody, they encountered approximately 1,200 registered refugees and another several hundred unregistered ones. On 19 April they were joined in the work there by Samuel Montagu and Dr. Asher Asher from England, whom the Mansion House Committee had also dispatched to Galicia. These two men, leading English Jews, were also seasoned fellow-travellers, having gone together to Palestine in early 1875 on behalf of the Board of Deputies of British Jews to investigate the living conditions of their compatriots in the Holy Land. But despite this added English presence, along with that of numerous individuals from other, kindred aid organisations, the circumstances on the ground were overwhelming. By mid-May, the emigration fever in the Pale, which Laurence Oliphant had helped fuel, caused the number of refugees to rise 10-fold to 12,000. Indeed, some 7,000 had arrived in the first week of May alone. Oliphant strove to divert as many as possible to Palestine, and not to America. However, the difficulties involved forced him to issue to the Jews of the Pale an appeal, together with the Paris-based *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, that they remain where they were for at least the next four months, until such time as the Turks would allow them to settle in Palestine.

During his efforts to orchestrate the safe departure of the refugees in Brody, Oliphant received one delegation after another of so-called 'Oliphant Committees', formed by Jews from the Pale enthralled with his seeming power. Here he also met the eminent Zionist activist, Rabbi [Samuel Mohilever](#), then serving the Jewish community in Radom, Poland. It is hardly a surprise that the two men virtually at once understood one another, and soon enjoyed a sincere warmth. Mohilever publicly voiced his approval of Oliphant: 'Our brethren should not suspect that his intention is to strengthen the Christian religion and divert our people from their faith ... He told me that ... he and his wife wish only for the fulfillment of the words of the prophets that Israel will be restored to its land, and that they should do this in a way that enables [Jews] to keep every detail of the Jewish religion'. At this time Oliphant also met with a representative of BILU, the organisation of young, fervent Zionists (many from Kharkiv) who were determined to settle in *Eretz Yisrael* as farmers. The young Nahum Sokolow, who went on to become one of the most illustrious leaders of the early Zionist movement, is another person Oliphant met in eastern Galicia. Years later, Sokolow recalled Laurence Oliphant as 'a sincere Christian Hovev Zion'.

Published English-language research on Laurence Oliphant seems to have entirely neglected the wealth of precise information about his whereabouts, exploits, and intentions as found in Polish sources. One of the many pearls to be found in them is from the assimilationist ('integrationist') Jewish weekly *Izraelita*. On 28 April, 1882 *Izraelita* published a report on the Oliphants written by the Lwów/Lviv correspondent after he had spent time with them among the refugees. Here are important fragments of that article:

As is widely known, the emigration efforts are being led primarily by Mr. Oliphant, the representative of the English committee ... The sullen figures pouring out of the rail carriages made an utmost sorrowful sight ... the clothing the stricken people wore was no more than rags. One had to witness for oneself how the faces changed beyond recognition when, thanks to the generosity of the relief workers, soon each person donned new clothing! Their gratitude was sincere and quite moving. Mr. Oliphant, in receiving each one of them, issued them registration cards, sharing with each a word or friendly smile. With incomparable cordiality his spouse embraced the poor children accompanying their parents and spoke with the ladies present. The sparse information we have about this virtuous Englishman, who so energetically is executing objectives until recently decried as utopian, is riveting. Sir Oliphant ... is renowned ... for his extraordinary friendship with the tribe of Israel, this being an attitude altogether typical of a large portion of the English intelligentsia. This is exemplified by the extraordinary religious zeal of the English, as well as by their respect for the people of the Patriarchs and the Prophets ... Asked about his religious creed, Mr. Oliphant answered that, although he is a good Christian, he is above all someone sensitive to the suffering of his neighbour.

As far as I was able to discern in my conversation with him, Mr. Oliphant views the Israelites from a Biblical perspective, and that his utmost desire is to contribute to the happiness of our fellow-believers. The committee, which is chaired by the archbishop of Canterbury, initially intended to settle the Israelites in Turkey, but that aim was blocked by the will of the Sultan. Currently the persons emigrating to America are designated, in accord with their hitherto

employment, to various professions ... This categorisation was underway also here at the train station, and Mrs. Oliphant, who speaks better German [than Laurence], participated in this work together with one of the emigrants who speaks English. At the same time hot meals were being served, and the majority of people passing through here did not disparage any of the food they were given ...

In the end, money was also handed out to the poorest. It moved many of those present when one of the refugees pushed the helping hand aside with the words, 'Thank you, but I still have some of my own money'. This response so pleased the Oliphants that they decided to take that particular Israelite under their personal care, and settle him on their own lands. Would that our own ladies heeded the example of that virtuous woman. Mrs. Oliphant, who is the lady of an English manor and the mistress of vast estates, has endured the discomfort of a long journey to come to the cities of Galicia in order to assist her husband in his endeavours for the good of several hundred needy strangers – Jews, no less!

Of course, the overwhelming majority of the Jewish refugees in 1882 departed for America. The US-based 'Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society', which worked closely with the Mansion House Committee, resettled some 14,000 Russian Jews in the wake of the pogroms. The 'Aid Committee for the Persecuted Russian Jews' in Lwów/Lviv records having spent Mansion House funds in a sum of 77,000 Austro-Hungarian guildens to pay for train tickets, requisite food, and the like over just the brief period from 30 April to 7 June. As reported on 27 April, 1882 by the Kraków-based newspaper *Reforma*:

The Russian Jews have no words to express their gratitude to Mr. Oliphant, who – as the second Moses – is leading them out of Muscovite captivity. Numerous Jewish families, protecting themselves from persecution, are now passing through Lwów and Warsaw on their way to America. Mr. Oliphant negotiated such a significant reduction of the travel costs that the journey over land and sea to New York amounts to no more than 45 roubles per person.

THE OLIPHANTS' 'TRIUMPHAL MARCH' TO ISTANBUL

At the very beginning of May, with the Ottomans having banned all Jewish settlement in key areas of Palestine, Oliphant resigned from the mission entrusted to him by the Mansion House Committee. Montagu and Asher remained just a few days longer, and then departed together to Budapest. As Laurence and Alice had planned back in February, they then set out on a journey through Moldova and Romania to Constantinople, intending ultimately to press on from there to the Holy Land in order to assist in the establishment of Jewish settlements. On 4 May, at the final train stop just before the Moldovan border they disembarked. For here in Sadagura/Sadhora Laurence was to meet the great Hasidic rabbi, Avrohom Yaakov Friedman. Oliphant had sought him out, believing the famous rabbi to be 'the leader of world Jewry'. As Isaac Ewen later recalled, once with Rabbi Friedman in his chambers, Oliphant endeavoured to persuade him 'to establish a national fund to buy Palestine from Turkey. The rebbe ... refused on the ground that he was a Turkish subject ... Moreover, he believed Jews must await redemption by a miracle, not by purchasing land.' Oliphant himself wrote nothing of these proposals and their rejection, but he did share this account that November in *Blackwood's Magazine*:

The whole Jewish community of Sadeger awaited our arrival, lining both sides of the street to see the Gentile coming to their rebbe. [...] I was led into a room, much like a princely court, furnished with precious gold and silver antiques. There I met the rabbi, accompanied by two servants. Regal authority was in his face ... I was ... convinced that he could lead and command his people with just the barest gesture.

Oliphant's pronounced mysticism – indeed, his willingness to believe that Rabbi Friedman was a miracle-worker – had also compelled him to seek an audience with 'the wonder rabbi', as he called him:

As the rabbi is by no means the only individual I have come across in the course of my life claiming to have higher gifts than those of ordinary mortals, and as I am convinced in some instances these persons were sincere – and it would be

rash, therefore, to assume that such specially endowed persons were all imposters – I am by no means prepared to pass any opinion upon the claims of the rabbi.

The Oliphants' next stop was in Jassy, in today's Romania, where, at the invitation of [Moses Gaster](#) (the later Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Great Britain), Laurence participated together with Romanian Jews in a Hovevei Zion conference:

At Jassy I attended a meeting composed of thirty-nine delegates, representing twenty-eight Palestine Colonisation Societies [i.e. Hovevei Zion], who had come at their own expense from the most distant towns in the kingdom. There are forty-nine of these societies altogether, and about 10 000 pounds has already been subscribed, while many of the richer merchants and bankers have promised to contribute when the emigration actually commences. It is advocated in almost all the Hebrew papers published in Russia, and has penetrated the mind of the nation with overpowering force.

In his address to the conference, Oliphant stressed that he supported with his whole heart the attendees' efforts to organise the settlement of their ancient homeland. Moreover, he explained – no doubt feeling his views had been reconfirmed by Rabbi Friedman – that they could count on enormous sums of money not from Jewish benefactors, but from British Protestants. Later a measure was tabled that Oliphant be made the president of the central committee being formed, but he declined, opting rather to become an honorary member. Laurence and Alice next travelled to Bucharest to attend a similar conference of Hovevei Zion societies, again at the invitation of Moses Gaster. The British press presented Oliphant's journey to Istanbul as a 'triumphal march'. In 1887, Laurence himself recalled that period thus:

Five years ago ... I ... had occasion to visit Brody, this time as the emissary of the Mansion House Committee, for the purpose of distributing relief to some fifteen thousand distressed Russian refugee Jews, who had taken refuge there in a starving condition ... I then made the journey from Brody to Jassy by rail; and so intensely wrought up were the expectations of the much-suffering race who form the largest proportion of the population of this part of Europe, that at every

station they were assembled in crowds with petitions to be transported to Palestine, the conviction apparently having taken possession of their minds that the time appointed for their return to the land of their ancestors had arrived, and that I was to be their Moses on the occasion.

AGAIN AT THE PORTE, SEEKING A CHARTER

The problems in Istanbul erupted before the Oliphants ever got there – after all, in early May the Turks had barred all Jews from settling in Jerusalem and all Judea. Russia's May Laws, which two weeks thereafter barred Jews from leaving Tsarist lands, only worsened things. Nonetheless, Laurence refused to give up. He continued corresponding with the Hovevei Zion societies in Romania and the Russian Pale of Settlement, beseeching them to be patient and promising that he would do all in his power to effect a breakthrough. His success proved only partial, and concerned only the Romanian Jews. Specifically, Laurence had discerned a legal loophole: in spite of the Treaty of Berlin of 1878, by which Romania as a state was liberated from Turkish rule, Romania had not recognised its Jews as citizens – *ergo* they were still subjects of the Sultan. This fact opened the doors to establishing the first new Jewish colonies in Palestine – namely, Rosh Pina and Zikhron Ya'akov (Zamarin), founded in today's northern Israel in late 1882.

About the Russian Jews, in turn, Oliphant sought the help of the US ambassador, Lew Wallace (*nota bene*, the author of *Ben Hur*) – but to no avail. Oliphant promptly conveyed the sad news to as many interested groups as he could, including representatives of BILU with whom he met in Istanbul. The refugees from Russia simply had to wait, and perhaps even return to Odessa (where BILU then had its main office) or to various other cities of the Pale. This was Oliphant's advice from early June 1882 to the innumerable Jews with whom he corresponded at that time, incurring upon himself 'a perfectly ruinous bill for postage'. For example, when Oliphant received a letter concerning the chances for settling in *Eretz Yisrael* from one Moshe Katzinovsky in Pińsk (in today's Belarus), he responded by saying that right now (2 June 1882) there was no hope the Sultan would change his mind – but perhaps in a few months? 'For the time being', Oliphant concluded, 'I do not advise anyone to move'.

Writing from Istanbul a week later (9 June) to Moses Gaster back in Bucharest, Oliphant blamed his being 'completely paralysed' in convincing the Sultan and his ministers to lift the ban on Jewish settlement in Palestine on the crisis then underway between Britain and Egypt (which is why he had solicited the US ambassador for help). Nonetheless, he concluded his letter optimistically, stressing that 'a great agitation' was gaining momentum in both England and America – and that the Turks could not put off a favourable solution much longer.

Not incidentally, much of Oliphant's voluminous letter-writing fell to his private secretary, Naftali Imber, the well-remembered author of *Ha-Tikvah* (The Hope), sung at the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897 – today the Israeli national anthem. Thanks to his command of nearly a dozen languages, Imber was at once hired as Oliphant's secretary upon their first meeting in Istanbul. In fact, it was while working for Oliphant that Imber wrote *Ha-Tikvah*, and he dedicated the volume in which it was published to none other than Laurence and Alice Oliphant. Imber also accompanied them when in late October 1882 they lost all hope in soon changing the Sultan's decision and sailed off to Haifa. There Naftali lived with the Oliphants together in their home until July the next year.

Laurence and Alice were to spend over three years together in today's northern Israel, during which time they continued to labour on behalf of their dream for a Jewish Restoration in Palestine. Laurence often travelled about Galilee, helping the *halutzim* (Jewish pioneers) and cultivating ties with them. By a happy fate, this included Eliezer Mordechai Altschuler, the above-mentioned founder of the first Hovevei Zion group, who had come from his native Suwałki, Poland, entrusted with the task of purchasing land for a settlement. In his memoirs, Altschuler wrote:

... it became known that Mr Oliphant was in Tiberias [on the shore of the Sea of Galilee]. This was the Oliphant lauded by all the Jewish newspapers for his love of Israel, his consuming desire being to return the Children of Israel to their Land. He had already written a book in which he set out the idea; he was urging all the important people in England to help the Children of Israel achieve this aim, to which end he had given the settlers many donations and gifts [as an example,

Altschuler elsewhere in his memoirs notes that Oliphant gave 1,000 roubles to the founding settlers of Yesud Hama'Ala]. I thought to go and meet this excellent man, so I [and two others] went to where he was staying in the courtyard of the Christian church and announced ourselves. Oliphant ordered his servants to bring us to him. We entered the room where he sat with two of his friends and were brought coffee and smoking tobacco and asked to sit. We told him of our purchase of the [nearby] estate of Arbel, he questioned us about the presence of water there and we told him of the well. We spoke at great length about the principles involved; then we asked him if he could be of any help in preparing the certificates of sale. He told us that he would have helped us willingly but the Turkish Government was suspicious of him, fearing the intrusion of English national interests into our efforts to settle the land. He advised us not to come in great numbers but to settle a few at a time. He further requested us to bring him any antiquities we found in the ruins of Arbel and said he would give us very good prices for them. We stayed with him for about an hour and then, after he had shaken us by the hand and promised to be of what help he could, we took our leave of him and returned home.

In late December 1885, Laurence and Alice became terribly sick with fever. On January 2, 1886 Alice died. Laurence managed to recover, though not for long. During a visit to London in late 1888 he was discovered to have advanced lung cancer and soon succumbed, just 59 years of age. Naftali Imber was present at Laurence's funeral in England, directly after which he published a moving obituary of his friend in the Hebrew-language journal *Ha-Havatzelet*: 'Mr. Oliphant ... the true Lover of Zion, is no longer with us ... His love for the people of Israel and its land, a love that had no hidden agenda, a love not dependent on any other cause – this I will relate here.'

LEGACY

In the committed efforts of Laurence Oliphant we have a painstakingly researched plan for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in the cradle of their religion and culture. It was a plan that won the backing of Great Britain's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, and one Oliphant sought energetically to implement by whatever

means at his disposal. Moreover, Oliphant's plan met with the enthusiasm of Jewish communities both across Central and Eastern Europe and in Britain. Over a dozen years after the peak of Oliphant's Zionist career, the outstanding early Zionist Karpel Lippe recalled Laurence in his review of Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* as the first of the great Zionist figures of 'the old trinity' – comprised of Oliphant, David Gordon and... himself.

Oliphant's place in 'the old trinity' was secured by the many reasons outlined above – and by others, as well. For instance, as Karpel Lippe well knew, Oliphant had been central to both the establishment and survival of Rosh Pina and Zikhron Ya'akov, settled under the aegis of Lippe, Gaster, and the other Romanian Zionist leaders. Oliphant's most significant contribution was as a 'bridge' until the time when those two *moshavot* (settlements) – along with the Yishuv (the Jewish population in the Holy Land) more generally – won the support of Baron Rothschild. In the spring of 1882 a Christian group in Birmingham – the Christadelphians – contacted Oliphant. Once he had arrived in Haifa, they sent him £300 – and then twice that amount in 1883. The Christadelphians wished the money to be used to assist the recently arriving Jewish *halutzim* and unreservedly trusted Oliphant to know how best to do so. Indeed, the Christadelphians saw him as an instrument in the Divine Plan. Laurence passed all of the money to the settlers of Rosh Pina and Zikhron Ya'akov, and thereby allowed the struggling settlements to survive until Baron Rothschild's munificence rescued them and many of the other new settlements in Palestine.

Another reason is that Oliphant – posthumously – helped shape Theodor Herzl's Zionism as presented in *Der Judenstaat* and at the first Congresses. Specifically, Herzl rejected the makeshift, piecemeal settlement strategy pursued by the Hovevei Zion movement in favour of a formal charter – this being the very idea Oliphant had relentlessly pursued. Nor was there any coincidence here. Moses Gaster described in detail to Herzl the efforts of his friend Laurence Oliphant, and won Herzl over to the charter strategy for achieving a Jewish state. As Gaster later wrote:

[In 1882 Oliphant] promised every help and advice, and he went to Constantinople to obtain a Charter for establishing a Jewish colony near

Tiberias. This was the origin of the famous Charter of a later kind, when Dr. Herzl was informed by me of the steps taken by Laurence Oliphant, and of the means by which he had hoped to establish an autonomous Jewish colony in Palestine.

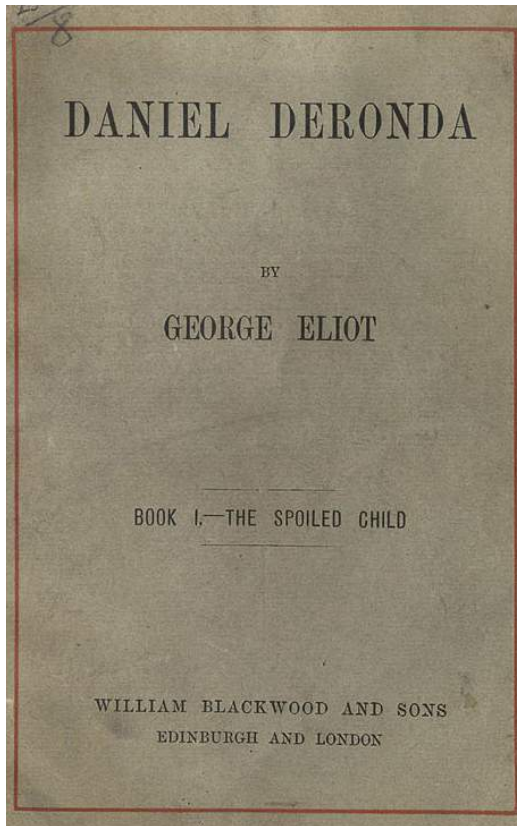
Of course, Oliphant did not achieve the political framework for the Jewish colonisation of Palestine he dreamt of. He failed in his bids to obtain the Sultan's *firman*, to win a charter – just as Herzl and the early Zionist Congresses were to, also. Ultimately the matter was to be resolved not until General Allenby entered Palestine in the autumn of 1917 and created the physical basis for the Mandate.

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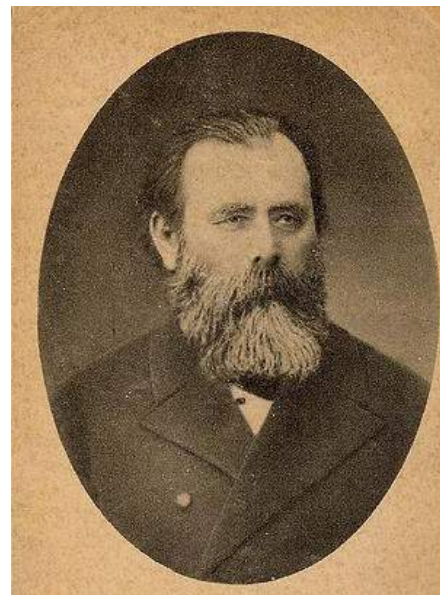
George Eliot's Zionist novel *Daniel Deronda*, original 1876 edition. A spark that lit the Jewish national revival



Emanuel Deutsch, 1829-1873, born in today's Nysa, Poland. Restorer of respect for the Talmud in the non-Jewish world.



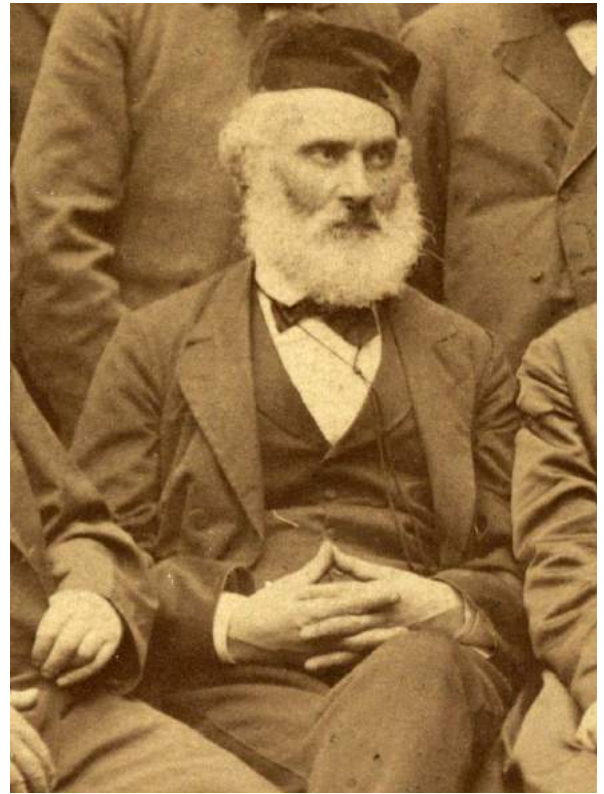
Opening page of Deutsch's famous article "The Talmud", first published in *The Quarterly Review*, Oct. 1867, vol. 123, no. 246.



Leon Pinsker, 1821-1891, physician based in Odessa, Ukraine. Author of the foundational Zionist tract *Autoemancipation!*, Sept. 1882



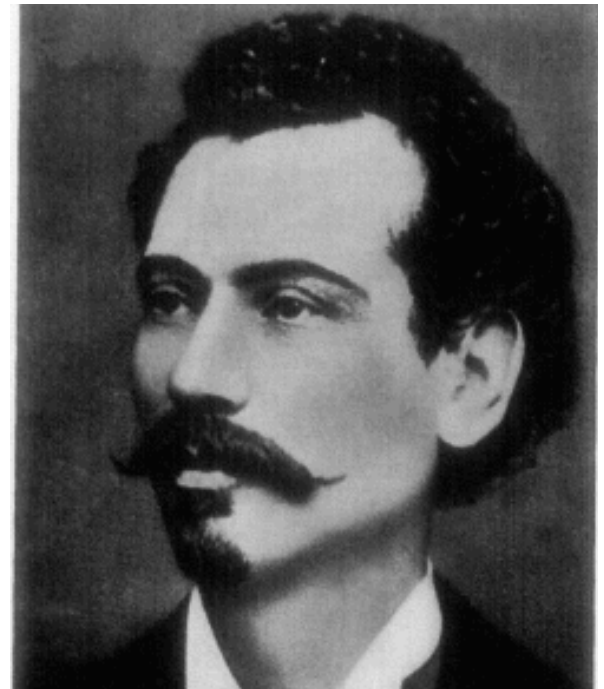
*Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, 1801-1885.
Central figure of British Christian Zionism in the 19th century.*



*David Gordon, 1826?,31?,32?-1886, from 1858 based in Lyck/
Elk, Poland, where he was the senior figure behind Ha-Magid, the
Zionist, Hebrew-language weekly.*



*Nahum Sokolow, 1859-1936, from Wyszogród/Plock, Poland
Titan of Hebrew journalism, historian, president of the WZO,
1931-1935.*



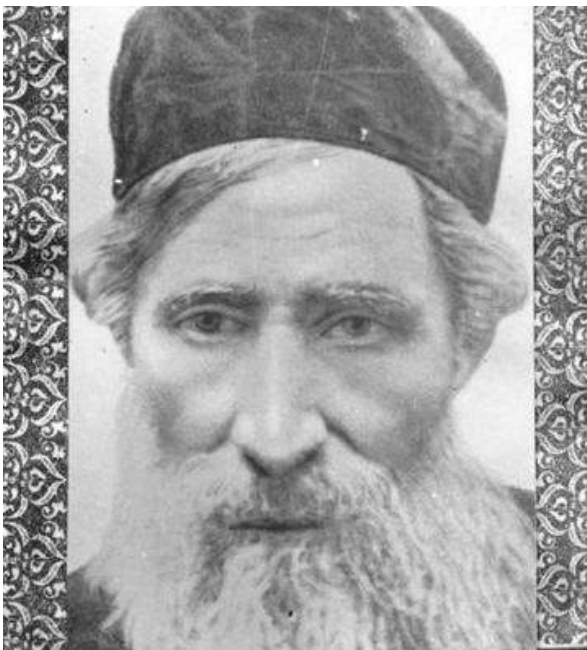
*Perets Smolenskin, 1842-1885, based in Vienna. Founder, editor-
in-chief of Ha-Shahar; guiding light behind Kadimah, the student
Zionist fraternity.*



Eliezer Mordechai Altschuler, 1844-1920, from Suwalki, Poland. Founder of the first Hovevei Zion group in late 1881.



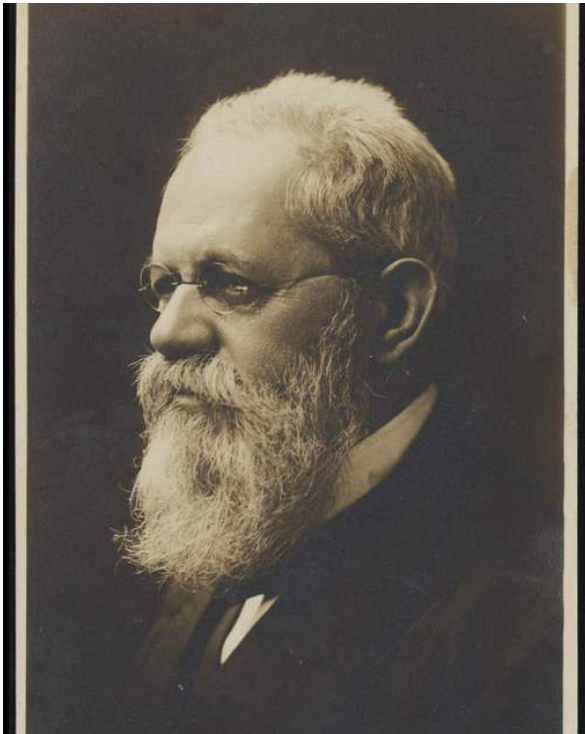
Karpel Lippe, 1830-1915, physician based in Jassy, Romania. A leader of Hovevei Zion; delivered opening address at the First Zionist Congress in 1897.



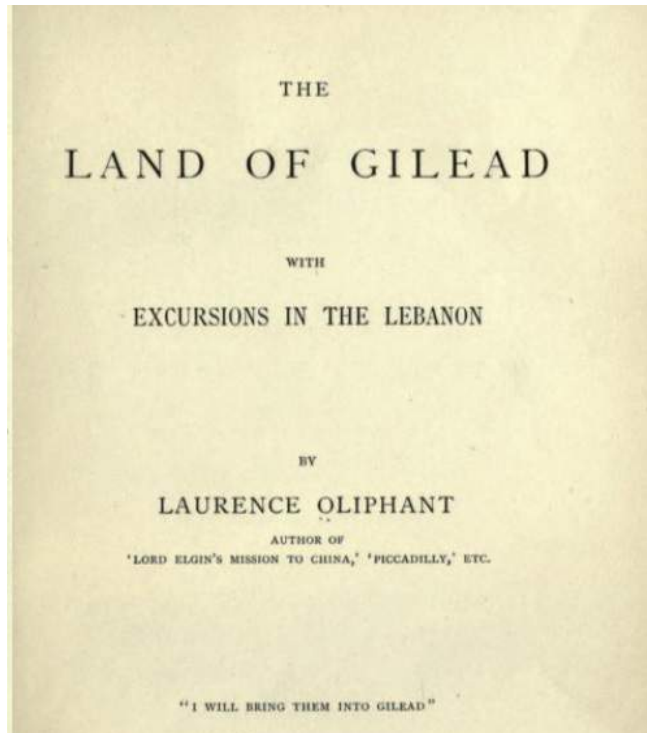
Samuel Mohilever, 1824-1898, rabbi serving i.a. in Suwalki, Radom and Bialystok, Poland. Co-leader of the Hovevei Zion movement, and supporter of Herzl.



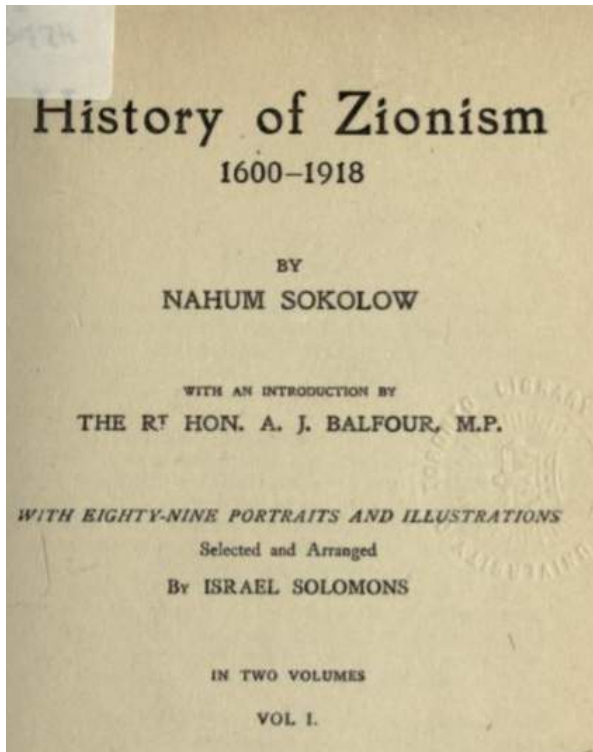
Naftali Imber, 1856-1909, from eastern Galicia (Ukraine). Author of Ha-Tikvah.



Moses Gaster, 1856-1939, from Bucharest, Romania.
 Leader of Hovevei Zion; Haham of Great Britain; Herzlian
 Zionist; collaborator behind the Balfour Declaration.



Title page of *The Land of Gilead*, Dec. 1880, Laurence Oliphant's
 Zionist plan.



Title page of Sokolow's magisterial *History of Zionism, 1600-1918*,
 vol. 1, 1919, which Sokolow completed during the conference in
 Versailles.



Henry Dunant (1828-1910), from Geneva, Switzerland
 Founder of the Red Cross, Christian Activist - and Zionist

3 - Reverend William Hechler: From Hovevei Zion to Herzl and Beyond

In chapter three Philip Earl Steele examines the contribution of Reverend William Hechler to the early Zionist movement and argues that Hechler's career was an outstanding example of how deeply intertwined were the efforts of both Jews and Christians to restore Israel.

INTRODUCTION

Like Laurence Oliphant, who was born in Cape Town in what is now South Africa, William Hechler (1845-1931) was also born far from the British Isles – namely, in Benares in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. As a young man, his father Dietrich, a native of Baden, Germany, had moved to England, where he studied at an Anglican seminary and became a missionary pastor. He married an Englishwoman, Catherine Palmer, and shortly after their wedding the young couple travelled with the Christian Missionary Society to British India. Their life in the Raj began in 1844. In October the following year their first child was born: William Henry Hechler.

Meanwhile, it so happened that Oliphant's first independent trip – in the winter of 1850/1851 – was with the ruler of Nepal, Jung Bahadur, to none other than Benares, where Oliphant made the rounds among the European community resident there. Was the 21-year-old Laurence introduced to the 5-year-old William while in Benares? Perhaps so – but whatever the case, their paths were somehow never to cross again. Though overlap they did, as both men were steeped in Evangelical Protestantism and its theology of recognizing modern Jews as the Biblical Israelites and of affirming that God's ancient covenant with them remains valid. Thus, scholars sharply distinguish Evangelicalism's 'teaching of esteem' from the Catholic church's former 'teaching of contempt' – which was overturned not until the Second Vatican Council's document *Nostra Aetate* in 1965, a stance made clearer in 2013's *Evangelii Gaudium*: 'We hold the Jewish people in special regard because their covenant with God has never been revoked'. However, today's Catholic doctrine is not Zionist, whereas Evangelical doctrine continues to be so.

When he was six years old, William left India with his father and two sisters (his mother had died in the summer of 1850) and travelled to Baden, where Dietrich Hechler, an ardent philosemite and scholar of Biblical prophecy, became associated with the London Society for the Jews (LSJ) headed by Lord Shaftesbury, one of 19th-century Britain's most significant Christian Zionists. Shortly thereafter, young William began attending the Christian Missionary Society school in London (Islington). He also went on to study there at the Christian Missionary College.

In 1870 Hechler was ordained an Anglican minister. He was sent on his first missionary post to Lagos, Nigeria, but malaria soon forced him to return to Karlsruhe in Baden, where his father had again been working since 1865. There William won a job teaching the children of Frederick I, Grand Duke of Baden. From 1876 he was in Ireland, where he married Henrietta Huggins and worked in County Cork for four years before taking up a post in London with the Church Pastoral Aid Society. During his early years with the CPAS he produced two important written works. The first was an article entitled 'The Restoration of the Jews' published in June 1882, although in fact Hechler had been handing it out since January that year as a broadsheet (i.e., a one-page pamphlet in newspaper format) among members of the LSJ and sundry prayer groups. In August 1883 he completed a documentary history of the Anglican-Lutheran bishopric in Jerusalem founded jointly in 1841 by England and Prussia. Scholars surmise that this may have been part of a bid to become Jerusalem's bishop himself, following bishop Joseph Barclay's death in October 1881 and the ensuing, prolonged vacancy. Whatever the case, in June 1885, Hechler became the chaplain at the British Embassy in Vienna – keeping that post for 25 years, until retirement in June 1910 when he moved to London.

HECHLER AND HOVEVEI ZION

As a result of the widespread pogroms of 1881-1882 in western Russia, not only the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and Mansion House sent representatives to Habsburg eastern Galicia, where a swelling number of Jewish refugees found safe haven. On 24 February 1882, at the London headquarters of the Protestant Association, a meeting took place that was similar to the one held by Mansion House a few weeks earlier. It differed, however, in that it explicitly referred to Jews 'who were desirous of emigrating to Palestine as agriculturalists. It was their wish to go to Gilead, as this was deemed the

best spot for such work'. As Donald M. Lewis writes, 'A resolution in support of this group [...was] moved by the Rev. Mr. William Hechler, and when a relief committee was formed [for what was called the *Syrian Colonisation Fund*], Shaftesbury was the President and Hechler the key activist'.

Hechler's role at the meeting had come about in part by happenstance. As he explained at the time in a letter, in mid-February 1882, while returning by train from Cologne to London, 'in the same railway carriage with me sat ... a descendant of Abraham' who turned out to be from Russia and had been 'sent as a deputy by some 200 to 300 Jews, representing 25 families, to appeal for help to enable them to settle in Palestine'. These Jews had evidently been impressed by Laurence Oliphant's recent efforts with the Sultan and had therefore sent a representative to London. This is made clear by their intention to settle in the Biblical land of Gilead, which Oliphant had chosen as the site of his plan for Jewish settlement in Palestine, most fully elaborated in his book *The Land of Gilead*, published in December 1880. As newspaper articles reporting on the 24 February meeting in London explain, the name of the Jewish envoy whom Hechler met was Niesen Rappaport and he came from Mogilev, in today's Belarus. Having been invited by Hechler to attend the Protestant Association's meeting, Rappaport described through an interpreter the terrible situation of the victims of the pogroms. As *The Daily Telegraph* reported on 25 February 1882, 'Reverend William Henry Hechler, who fell in with Mr. Rappaport penniless in Coln [sic], read the translation of a letter that gentleman carried, which was signed by the Rabbi of Mohileff [sic] and 34 heads of families there resident, representing 220 persons'. *The Globe* (also on 25 Feb. 1882) added, 'The Rev. Mr. Heckler [sic], the Rev. Dr. Laseron, and the Rev. Mr. Stern supported the resolution [to help the group from Mogilev] which was unanimously adopted'.

Meanwhile in Palestine, the Protestant Association's related organisation – the aforementioned London Society for the Jews (LSJ) – struggled, as Lewis writes, with 'the flood of desperate Russian immigrants [...] at its center in Jaffa [...] and at its Sanatorium in Jerusalem. [...] The LSJ workers responded so generously that the Jerusalem mission station was soon near financial collapse and had to be bailed out by the London committee. In England, the LSJ established a 'Committee on the Persecution of the Jews in Russia' [...with which] the Reverend William Henry

Hechler [...] worked closely [...] to resettle these refugees in Palestine. Later in 1882, he was dispatched by the committee to investigate what was happening in Russia.

HECHLER AND PINSKER

Hechler set out for today's Ukraine in mid-May, 1882 – alone. Which is to stress that, as opposed to how many secondary sources present the matter, Hechler was not accompanying Oliphant. His most important destination was Odessa, but he also visited Mogilev (the town of Niesen Rappaport), Kishinev and Balta, as his later friend Nahum Sokolow reported in *History of Zionism, 1600-1918*. In Odessa Hechler met with Leon Pinsker, who had just returned from a spring tour of Western European capitals (Vienna, Berlin, Paris, London), during which time he had discussed with Jewish leaders the pogroms still in progress – and above all presented his ideas on a remedy. Pinsker showed Hechler the German-language manuscript of *Autoemancipation!*, which was published several months later, in September, 1882. In the draft of that foundational work of early Zionism, Pinsker argued that the Jews needed their own homeland, but he didn't specify where. Hechler earnestly pleaded with him that the only fitting place for a restored Israel was Palestine, and he based his conviction on Biblical prophecy. As Paul C. Merkley wrote, Hechler 'took out his Bible and found the passages in Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah, and elsewhere that made clear God's plan to bring the diaspora to Jerusalem'. In all likelihood Hechler also discussed with Pinsker the LSJ's recent settlement activities in Palestine and assured him that enormous financial support for a Jewish Palestine could be expected from English and German Protestants. From press reports Pinsker was already familiar with Oliphant's similar argument, and in fact Pinsker would soon seek direct contact with Oliphant. Lastly, Pinsker was no doubt also impressed by a letter the Anglican clergyman carried with him – namely, one from Queen Victoria addressed to Sultan Abdul Hamid II. In it the British monarch is to have asked for permission for Jewish settlement in Palestine.

Hechler claimed to have influenced *Autoemancipation!*'s published form, in which Pinsker did express qualified favour for Palestine as the territorial homeland for the Jews. The passage, 'Perhaps the Holy Land will again become ours. If so, all the better', certainly has the ring of a concession made in debate – and thus may be attributable to

the Anglican's influence. Nevertheless, Pinsker went on to stress that the Jewish homeland he was calling for need not necessarily arise in Palestine: it might also arise in North America. As we know from the history of the Hovevei Zion movement, of which Pinsker became one of the pre-eminent leaders, his sights were indeed to settle ever more squarely on Palestine. It is therefore reasonable to infer that Pinsker's contact with Hechler and knowledge of Oliphant's strivings reinforced the efforts of his close collaborators Moshe Lilienblum and rabbi Samuel Mohilever to convince him of Palestine.

During his stay in Odessa, Hechler also established contacts with the leadership of BILU, the organisation of young Russian Jews (many of them students) who were earnestly organising to go to Palestine as pioneers. A letter sent on 6 June 1882 by the BILU Central Office in Odessa to Vladimir Eisemann, who was in Istanbul, stated that Reverend Hechler was 'pleasantly surprised' by the existence of the movement and that he would soon be travelling to the Turkish capital.

Nonetheless, there is no clarity about Hechler's activities in Istanbul in June 1882 – nor even about the fate of Queen Victoria's letter, with some scholars doubting its existence. Though it is true that in mid-August the mouth-piece of the Hovevei Zion movement – i.e., the Hebrew-language weekly *Ha-Magid*, headed by David Gordon in today's Elk, Poland – did publish a piece stating that Rev. Hechler 'had shaken heaven and earth and gone to high places to awaken a feeling of compassion for the Jews'.

'THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS'

What is best known about Hechler from that June regards London, where his pamphlet entitled 'The Restoration of the Jews' was published in the journal *The Prophetic News and Israel's Watchman*. In five short chapters he outlined the typical Evangelical thinking of the day on the restoration of Israel – albeit with one very significant exception: in Chapter III, Section 9, he explained that 'With reference to the *conversion* of the Jews – a) Some passages [of the Bible] speak of their conversion *before the restoration* [here he cites several verses] b) Other passages, however, state that their conversion will follow *after the restoration*' (here, too, he cites several). Hechler adds in Section 10: 'From these passages we conclude that *some* [of the Jews] *return, believing* in Jesus, their Messiah; whilst *others*

will see their error only at the sight of the Messiah. In other words, Hechler treated the issue of conversion as irrelevant to the Jewish resettlement of Palestine. It is also important to note that in Chapter IV, Hechler referred to the recent pogroms in Russia as signs and foreshadowings of the coming Restoration. Moreover, in the fifth and final chapter of his text – ‘Our Duty’ – Reverend Hechler emphasised that ‘The duty of every Christian is to ... LOVE THE JEWS ... for they are *still beloved for their fathers’ sakes*’, adding the venerable tenet of Christian Zionism, ‘Blessed shall that nation be which *loves the Jews*; for God promised to Abraham and his children, “I will bless them that bless thee.” [All italics and capitalisations from the original.]

‘THE PRINCE AND THE PROPHET’

Reverend Hechler was to become one of Theodor Herzl’s closest associates, and thereby played an even more significant role in the early history of Zionism. One measure: Herzl refers to Hechler by name in his diaries more than 120 times. Just how meaningful Hechler was to Herzl was described in 1929 by Maurice Samuel in the volume *Theodor Herzl: A Memorial*, compiled for the 25th anniversary of Herzl’s passing:

Herzl himself calmly records that one of his chief worries at the first Congress was to prevent his feeble left hand from knowing what his feeble right hand was doing. He was afraid that Hechler and [Philip Michael] Newlinsky might discover that they were, in fact, the Zionist movement apart from the Congress. The first was a priest and a dreamer, sunk in cabbalistic calculations of the end of all things, and convinced by Prophetic Tables dated at the beginning of the Mohammedan era that the time of the Jewish return was at hand; the second was a Polish nobleman in Galuth, a winning adventurer, a landless and penniless weaver of intangible international intrigues. They and Herzl – *die drei Helden von Schem* – started that Zionist movement on its fabulous international career. Such are the mechanics of the first days of the movement.

The chaplain at the British Embassy in Vienna, Rev. William Hechler, announced himself at the home of the author of *Der Judenstaat* on 10 March 1896. Herzl described the figure he then encountered as ‘a likeable, sensitive man with the long grey beard of a prophet’ who explained to him that he considered his work (published a few weeks

earlier on 14 February) to be the fulfilment of prophecy, and offered to open the door for him to the German royal family. Hechler explained to Herzl what we have already learnt – that he had been the teacher of the children of Frederick I, Grand Duke of Baden, adding that he also knew his nephew, Kaiser Wilhelm II. Hechler was swift to act: already on 23 April 1896, the first of a series of meetings between Herzl and the Grand Duke took place in Karlsruhe, the capital of Baden. Thus was the Hungarian Zionist ushered onto the international stage. Having been won over to the plans for a Jewish State in Palestine – as we shall see, every bit as much by Hechler as Herzl himself – the Grand Duke agreed to open the door for him the Kaiser. This bid came to fruition in Istanbul (Yıldız) on 18 October 1898. Ten days later at Mikveh Israel in Palestine, Herzl stood hat in hand to greet the Kaiser, who was mounted on horseback. Wilhelm II reached down smiling to shake Herzl's hand, exchanged pleasantries with him, and then again gave him his hand before riding off – an honour that left everyone murmuring. The two men and their advisors met yet a third time in Jerusalem five days later (Nov. 2, 1898) for proper talks, albeit ones that mysteriously failed. During both occasions in Palestine, Rev. Hechler was present with Herzl on what was to be the latter's only trip to *Eretz Israel*.

And so it was not Germany, as we know, but Great Britain that continued making steps toward fostering the creation of modern Israel. Not that the efforts vis-à-vis the Kaiser were wasted – they of course created excellent PR and thus further elevated both the Zionist cause and Herzl's person in Europe. But the unceremonious collapse of talks in Jerusalem left Theodor reeling. After all, the initial meeting in Yıldız had been so extremely promising. The nearly three-hour discussion with the Kaiser, which Herzl at length recorded in his diary over the following days shipboard to Jaffa, ended so optimistically – with Kaiser Wilhelm II promising Herzl over a handshake that he would intercede with the Sultan and ask for 'a Chartered Company under German protection' – that Herzl was stirred to a vision. 'I had the magic-forest sensation,' he wrote in one of two accounts of the experience, 'of encountering the fabulous unicorn which said with a human voice "I am the fabled unicorn"'.

HERZL'S FAILING

Theodor Herzl adopted a high-minded tolerance toward eccentricity in the case of 'the good Hechler's' focus on Biblical prophecies and their fulfilment. Likewise, Herzl also shielded himself from the fact that Protestant concepts regarding the prophesied Restoration of Israel operated powerfully in the mind of the Grand Duke. His diary contains little more than glimmerings of understanding this aspect of Frederick I's thinking. For instance, about their first meeting in Karlsruhe, Herzl wrote that once he had presented his case in full, 'Hechler took the floor ... and discoursed on the imminent fulfilment of the prophecy. The Grand Duke,' Herzl observed, 'listened silently, magnificently, and full of faith, with a strikingly peaceful look in his fine, steady eyes. Finally he said something that he had said several times before: "I should like to see it come about. I believe it will be a blessing for many human beings"'.

At the broader level, this raises one of Herzl's greatest failings – i.e., his allergy to strong religious belief, especially overt messianism. This, after all, is what allowed him to take the disastrous position he did in 1903 regarding Uganda. Concerning Rev. Hechler and Christian Zionism generally, Herzl was unable to discern Zionism's natural ally in Evangelicalism and thereby to devise a strategy of 'faith-based diplomacy', as we would put it today. Thus Herzl preferred to keep himself unaware of the deeply religious nature of Rev. Hechler's conversations with the Grand Duke regarding Zionism – though it is true that their written exchanges came to light not until Hermann and Bessi Ellern discovered them in 1959 and 1960.

In the Introduction to the published facsimiles of the correspondence between *Herzl, Hechler, the Grand Duke and the German Emperor*, as the Ellerns' book is titled, Alex Bein, one of Herzl's biographers, wrote: 'The intermingling, here, of Christian calculations of the end of days, the second advent and the return of Israel to the Holy Land, is to our minds astonishing. Already in his first letter to the Duke [26 March 1896], Hechler renders an account of his abstruse computations according to which the Redemption must take a new course from the years 1897-1898. He regards Herzl as an instrument in the hands of Divine Providence, unfaltering though modest in fulfilling his role, though he himself is unaware of his part in the divine plan. *From the letters we see that it was this religious approach... that appealed most to the Duke [italics mine]*'.

Though the Kaiser was less religiously-minded than the Grand Duke, he did frame ‘the Jewish question’ theologically – though by no means was his theology Evangelical or Pietist, as in the case of Frederick I. Rather, it was steeped in the antisemitism then known to Catholicism and mainline Lutheranism. Hence, having expressed his support of Zionism in the famous letter to his uncle the Grand Duke dated 29 September 1898, the Kaiser at once clarified that it was after all not his responsibility as emperor to pursue revenge against the Jews because ‘they killed Jesus.’ ‘Thou shalt love thy enemy’, he declared, adding, ‘Make friends even with unjust Mammon.’

Also worth noting is that Wilhelm II’s imaginarium was furnished with various Biblical literalisms, as we see in how he was willing to entertain conjoining his trip to Jerusalem in November 1898 with a search for the Ark of the Covenant. As Alex Bein noted in 1961: ‘The connection established by both Hechler and the Grand Duke between a purely political matter and the quest for the Ark of the Covenant – about which a number of articles had been published at the time in *Die Welt* – is an entirely new revelation.’

THE FIRST ZIONIST CONGRESS

In the meantime, over a year earlier in late August 1897, the First Zionist Congress had been held in Basel, Switzerland. In the spring of 1896, during the run-up to the Congress, Hechler had republished in Vienna his broadsheet ‘The Restoration of the Jews’ in a German translation that dismissed the question of conversion even further than had the English original. On the eve of the Congress, Hechler offered a lengthy testimony in the second edition of the new Zionist newspaper, *Die Welt* (11 June 1897). Entitled, ‘Christen über die Judenfrage’ (Christians on the Jewish Question), it amply referenced Bible passages and sundry prophecies, and included this ringing declaration:

As a Christian, I believe in the Jewish National Movement called ‘Zionism’ because, according to the Bible, yes, according to the ancient Hebrew prophets themselves, a Jewish State must once again arise in Palestine. And, as it seems to me, judging by the signs of the times the Jews will again soon occupy their own beloved home in their ancient G-d given Fatherland. May they soon respond to the call.

Hechler signed his testimony in *Die Welt*, ‘William Henry Hechler, Chaplain to Her Britannic Majesty’s Embassy in Vienna.’

At the Congress itself, the Anglican clergyman was a guest of honour. At the closing session, Herzl thanked him publicly among other ‘Christian Zionists’ (including – albeit *in absentia* – [Henry Dunant](#), founder of the Red Cross), in one of the earliest uses of the label. Hechler also attended subsequent Congresses, and was immortalised by Herzl in his novel *Altneuland*, published in October, 1902, as the character Reverend Hopkins. Less than two years later, in July 1904, Hechler was one of the people keeping vigil at his friend’s deathbed in the Austrian mountains.

HECHLER AND SOKOLOW

William Hechler’s career offers an outstanding example of how deeply intertwined were the efforts of both Jews and Christians to restore Israel. And how broadly intertwined, as well. For besides his relations with Pinsker and Herzl, Rev. Hechler also became a valuable ally to Nahum Sokolow, as alluded to above. Their acquaintance began in the summer of 1912 when Sokolow – who later, having become the head of both the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency for Palestine, was dubbed ‘the most important Jew in the world’ – visited London. As Sokolow’s son Florian wrote in his Polish-language biography of his father, Hechler enthusiastically helped Sokolow make the contacts in Anglican circles he sought, knowing (in sharp contrast to Herzl) how important Evangelical beliefs concerning the Jewish world were to the Zionist cause. This knowledge was central to Sokolow’s rising presence in British governing circles and to his becoming one of the drafters of the Balfour Declaration.

An especially memorable encounter that Nahum Sokolow owed to Hechler took place at the home of one Rev. William Henry Baptist Proby, a prominent Bible scholar. Florian Sokołow describes how Proby, Hechler and his father entered into a passionate discussion on Old Testament arcana, almost forgetting their meeting was to focus on Zionism’s challenges. When Sokolow did, at long last, manage to turn to the Zionist movement, ‘the old theologian Proby was so moved that he rose up out of his chair and started to fervently pray, and Rev. Hechler right along with him. It was a sight my father

would never forget. Two venerable pastors awash in tears, calling upon the grace of God for the success of his mission in England. He was at once transported back to his childhood and youth in Wyszogród, Płock and Maków in Poland. The sagely theologians, each of whom resembled the author of the Torah, the pile of Hebrew works stacked on the table, the discussions of the Scriptures ... for a moment my father succumbed to the illusion that he was once again standing beside his rabbis of old, his Talmudic masters’.

EPILOGUE

In 1929, when the volume *Theodor Herzl: A Memorial* was being put together, the 83-year-old Reverend Hechler agreed to share his recollections of Theodor Herzl, whose death – though now a quarter-century past – left him with some misdirected, unresolved bitterness. Below I give Hechler’s remarks in full:

It was God’s will that I should help my dear friend Dr. Theodor Herzl. That will was made manifest in my being in Vienna from the year 1885 to 1910, in a position which enabled me to bring to the attention of certain people of importance the Messianic vision of the Jewish leader.

The memory of our work together for God’s ancient people is precious and sacred to me: too sacred for me to dwell long upon it.

I was with him at the beginning of his dreams, and I was with him almost at the last moment of his earthly life.

On Saturday, July 2, 1904, I sat at his bedside, in his home at Edlach, on the Semmering mountains. I comforted him in his sickness, and I recalled the days when we had traveled together to Palestine, six years before, filled with hope and certain of early success. I told him what his own medical adviser had said to me: that he might go again with me to the Holy Land, and look again with me on Jerusalem. The sea journey would restore him to his strength and enable him to continue his labors.

But he seems to have known that there was no hope for him. He placed his right hand on his heart, and holding my right hand in his left hand, he said: *Grüssen Sie Alle von mir, und sagen Sie ihnen, ich habe mein Herz-Blut für mein Volk gegeben* [Greet everyone from me, and tell them I have given my lifeblood for my people].

He turned from me, then, coughing, and bringing up blood.

The next day, Sunday, July 3rd, while I was preaching in Christ Church, our British Embassy Chapel in Vienna, God took Herzl from us, for the Jews were not worthy of him. And a month later I was delivering Herzl's dying message to his friends in the Holy Land. I deliver it again to you now, throughout all the world, twenty-five years after he gave it to me.

God bless you all.

The eighty-three-year-old pilgrim from the earthly to the heavenly.

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