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Introduction: A parting shot

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INTRODUCTION

A parting shot

On Sunday 26 February 2023 I participated in the re-dedication of a fountain in Stepney Green, London, which is a memorial to Leonard A. Montefiore (1857–1879). The Heritage of London Trust refurbished the water fountain, installed in 1884, which had been long derelict. The event, which began with a jam-packed walking tour, was conceived and directed by Clive Bettington, the driving force behind the Jewish East End Celebration Society. Preparing my remarks for that occasion reminded me that there remain a number of unexplored problems and personalities in Anglo-Jewish history that deserve greater scrutiny.

Leonard A. Montefiore is one of the less recognized men in that distinguished and complicated Anglo-Jewish family, whose towering figure is Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885). Sir Moses probably didn't think much of his grand-nephew, Leonard. Abigail Green's magisterial biography of Sir Moses includes only one passing reference to Leonard. He is at the receiving end of a story meant to underscore that Sir Moses' Orthodox piety was strongly tied to the Holy Land – and reveals nothing at all about Leonard.¹ Most likely, Sir Moses would have scoffed at the fact that Leonard's funeral was held at New York's Temple Emanuel, the pinnacle of America's Reform establishment, and the guests included leading lights of Jewry's progressive wing.² Leonard was close in spirit to his brother Claude Montefiore (1858–1938), a founder of Anglo-Liberal Judaism and the World Union for Progressive Judaism. The younger brother possessed only a fraction of the tactical wiles and clout of Sir Moses. Claude, whose portraits were interpreted in these pages by Bryan Diamond,³ and who has been richly served by Daniel Langton as a biographer, was also a President of the Jewish Historical Society of England (JHSE).⁴ He was not, though, a

1 Abigail Green, *Moses Montefiore: Jewish Liberator, Imperial Hero* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 61.

2 "Leonard Montefiore's Funeral: Impressive Services in Honor of His Memory at the Temple Emanu-El", *New York Times*, 13 Sept. 1897, 3.

3 Bryan Diamond, "Portraits of Claude Montefiore", *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* (hereafter, *Transactions*) 46 (2014): 189–202.

4 Daniel R. Langton, *Claude Montefiore: His Life and Thought* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002).

historian, and he seemed to be sincerely surprised – however honoured – by his appointment to the presidency of the JHSE.⁵

Rabbi Julia Neuberger, who was at the dedication of the fountain, informed me that although Leonard Montefiore's life was cut tragically short, he made real inroads on early efforts to modernize education for girls and women in England. Coincidentally, I had selected a short piece of Montefiore's to read which concerned that particular subject, "My Cousin Ethel".⁶ It is an amusing but poignant critique of how the energy, goodwill, and intellect of women are squandered, as they are channelled into narrow conventions. Leonard also was taken by Heinrich Heine's social visions, and he believed that Heine's ideas could inspire democratic and egalitarian changes in Britain. He was on the way to crafting other efforts at ameliorating diverse social ills, which was part of the background of his planned, long-term journey to the United States. He died in Newport, Rhode Island, age twenty-seven.

There is a question that was not raised at the event of 26 February, that might have seemed self-evident. Why Stepney Green? Why place a fountain for this obscure Montefiore in such a spot? Obviously, it is the East End, with a synagogue nearby. I believe, though, that the fountain was originally located there because Leonard had written a piece, in *The Jewish World*, about the "Jewish Home" in Stepney Green. The article is not only warmly descriptive of the elderly "needy" and their environs. It ends with a plea for financial support. "The public", he wrote, must respond generously to the Home: "For at present the pecuniary position of the institution is far from satisfactory, and money is urgently needed. . . . Many will be glad to help in furthering such ends as the Home seeks to accomplish, providing for the last years of the poor some means of comfort, and lessening the pain of age, giving, when they are most needed, the joys of companionship" to fellow Jews.⁷ We can recall, therefore, a young man who cared for those well outside his own circle. His words can also help us to see both intellectual and physical Jewish spaces that are worth revisiting.

The theme of memorialization is taken up in this issue by Rebecca Pollack. Her work is a penetrating analysis of the most recent efforts to create an official Holocaust memorial in Britain. The next article is the

5 Claude G. Montefiore, "Nation or Religious Community? Presidential Address", *Transactions* 4 (1899): 1–2.

6 Leonard A. Montefiore, "My Cousin Ethel", in *Essays and Letters: Contributions to Various Periodicals between September, 1877, and August, 1879, Together with Some Unpublished Fragments* (London: privately printed, 1881), 314–19.

7 Leonard A. Montefiore, "A Visit to the Jewish Home", in *ibid.*, 297.

second and final instalment of Jonathan Lewis's study of Jewish chaplains at the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. Third is an article about Jewish medical professionals in Yorkshire, a true labour of love by Arnold Zermansky, a practitioner in the field. The fourth article, from which the cover illustration derives, is a biographical study of the photographer Lotte Meitner-Graf. Its author, Amanda Hopkinson, is a historian and critic of photography who situates the talented Meitner-Graf in her diverse social, vocations, and aesthetic contexts. Next, Philip Williamson offers an addendum to his earlier article on "special acts of worship" among Jews in Britain.

For the first time, *Transactions* addresses Jews and disability with a thoughtful review essay on the subject by Sam Brady. A study of European Jewish emancipation by David Sorkin is then surveyed by Susan Tananbaum, and this section concludes with a review by Andrew Preston of Charles Gallagher's unravelling of Nazi spycraft in the Second World War in Boston.

Between the publication of Volume 53 of *Transactions* and the current issue, we note the passing of Edgar Samuel (1928–2023). An obituary by David Jacobs, written for the London Jewish Museum, closes out this issue. Edgar preceded me as the head of publications of the JHSE, and the first *Transactions* volume I edited, number 44, was dedicated, with a portrait, to "Edgar Samuel, FSA, FRHistS, Former President and former Chairman of the Publications Committee of the Society." Katharine Ridler, our long-term copy-editor, warmly recalls that Edgar "was always a model author to me."

This is the end of my own stint as editor of *Transactions*. I have styled my mission, in part, as attempting to bring together, where relevant, the history of Jewry in Britain, America, and elsewhere in the English-speaking world. The new editorial team will energize this ideal and no doubt move *Transactions* in new, propitious directions. I wish to again thank our colleagues at UCL Press, my much-valued contributing editor, Jeremy Schonfield, our expert designer, Tony Kitzinger, and super copy-editor, Katharine Ridler. My gratitude extends to all of those whom I have had the privilege of meeting and knowing through my association with *Transactions*.

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