

The Synagogue in Bevis Marks.

BY SIR FRANCIS MONTEFIORE, BART.



THE ENTRANCE TO THE SYNAGOGUE.



HE ruthless destruction of ancient historical buildings which has lately taken place in the City of London, and the threats of a like fate which hang over no small number of those which remain, cannot but give pain to all antiquarians. This vandalism, however, has had the effect of drawing attention to many interesting memorials of the past which are yet left; and of all these, perhaps one of the most noteworthy, though possibly the least well-known, is the Synagogue in Bevis Marks, the chief place of worship of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews.

The Israelitish nation, whose sacred ceremonial observances are the most ancient in the world, are so united in religion and philanthropy, that the public are not generally aware that they are divided into two communities, namely, Sephardim, or Spanish and Portuguese, and the Ashkenazim, or German congregations. And though they do not differ in any dogma, and though their Litany is, in most respects,

identical, yet they are entirely separate, being divided by those strong barriers, birth and tradition; the Sephardim being the patricians, and the Ashkenazim the plebeians of the Jewish people; for while the former, who in the Middle Ages were one of the most learned and cultivated of communities, had oftentimes been not merely the trusted financial and political advisers of kings, but even their honoured friends; the latter, at that period, dwelt chiefly in confined quarters of German cities, and occupied themselves in dealing in worn-out garments and various small commodities, and, it is to be feared, were for that reason sometimes looked down upon by the more refined Sephardim.

At the present time, of course, old prejudices and barriers are being daily swept away,



REV. S. I. ROCO, MINISTER OF THE SYNAGOGUE.



From a Photo. by]

SCROLLS OF THE LAW.

[F. Hars.

and, indeed, the excellent secretary of the Bevis Marks Synagogue belongs to the German community, which have become not merely of great numbers and importance, but likewise as well educated as their Portuguese brethren; nevertheless, a distinction still remains between them.

It is a curious and interesting fact, that nearly all the great "moneykings" of the present day, many of whom are rich beyond the dreams of avarice, and whose fortunes frequently sway

the money markets of the world, have sprung from the Ashkenazim. But the Sephardim are fully compensated by being privileged to escape, perhaps on this very account, much of that jealousy and persecution which oftentimes pursue their better endowed co-religionists.

The Synagogue, which is situated behind a row of buildings in Bevis Marks, is inclosed on three sides by a courtyard, which, though the building is in a noisy and crowded part of the City, helps greatly to maintain that quiet and seclusion which are so necessary for a House of Prayer.

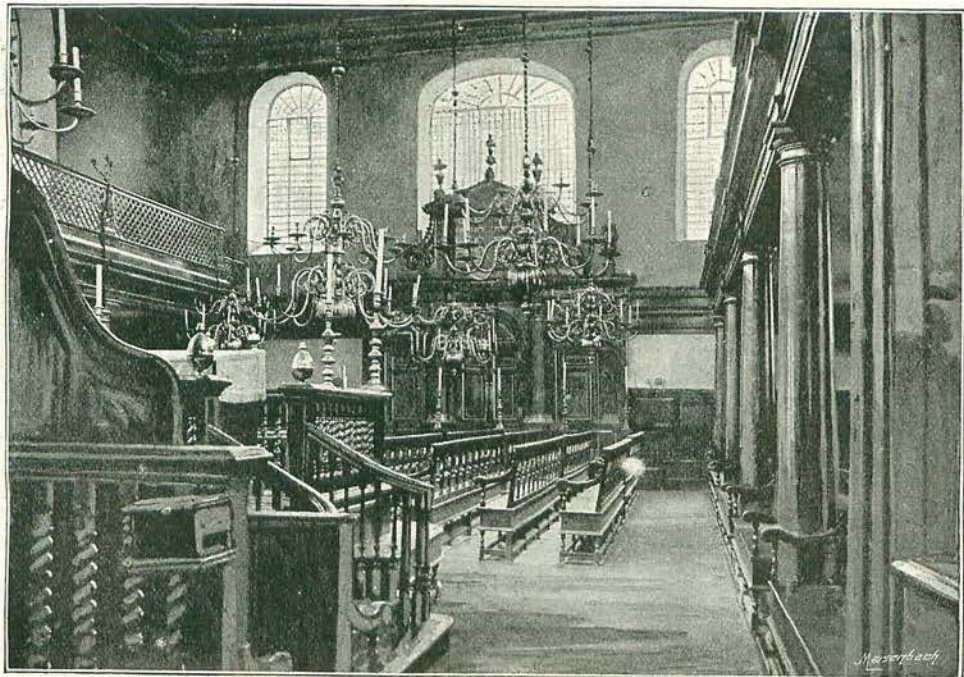
The building itself, which is 80ft. long and 50ft. wide, though externally plain, being devoid of all decoration, has a very imposing appearance. On entering the sacred edifice, the most striking object is the Ark, which is at the east end. It is a large receptacle, which contains the scrolls of the law. These are taken out and read on the Jewish Sabbath, and also at other times. They are covered with mantles of brocaded silk and

velvet, and are surmounted by gold or silver bells. Some of the mantles are very beautiful, and are generally the gift of a member



PICTURE OF THE DECALOGUE IN SPANISH AND HEBREW.

From a Photo. by F. Hars.



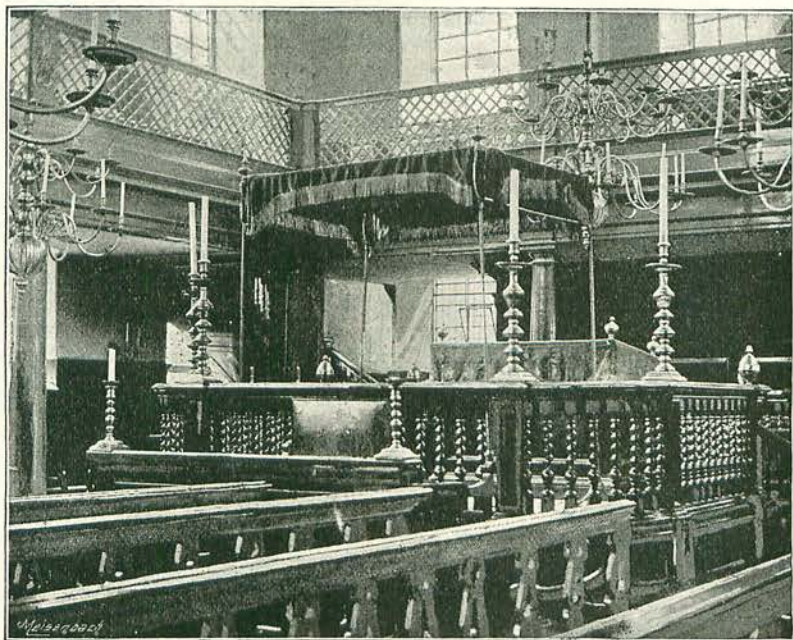
INTERIOR OF THE SYNAGOGUE—LOOKING TOWARDS THE ARK.

of the congregation. The Ark itself is inclosed by two large doors of oak richly ornamented with gold; and before these doors hangs the sacred lamp, which must always be kept alight.

In the centre of the Synagogue is a reading-desk, so large that a dozen persons can easily be accommodated in it, and it is here, under a silk canopy which is specially erected for the purpose, that the wedding ceremony takes place. The choir is stationed immediately behind the reading-desk, and it is worthy of note that the singing is unaccompanied by any organ or harmonium, for, ever since the

destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem instrumental music has been prohibited in the ordinary services of all orthodox synagogues.

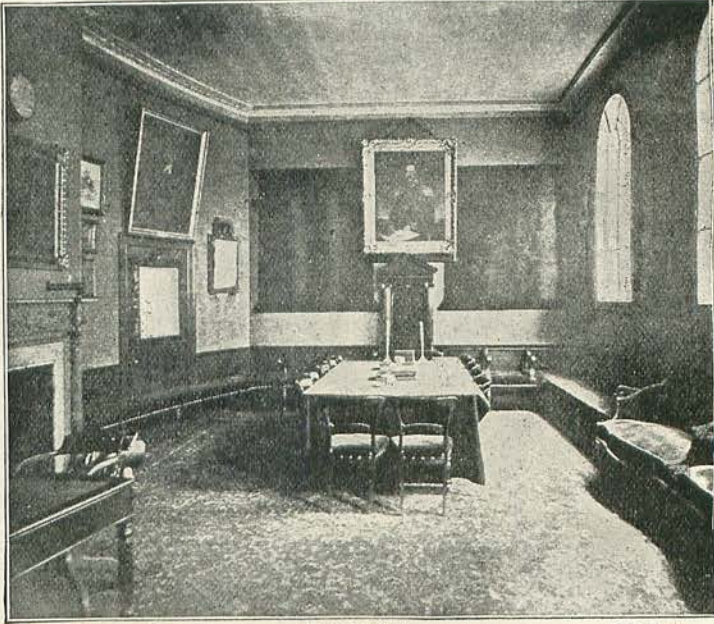
Round the walls are the seats which are



THE READING-DESK AND THE WEDDING CANOPY.

97	Christians (Lionel)	to	9th Dec 1856	9th Dec 1856	9th Dec 1856
98	Christians (Lionel)	to	9th Dec 1856	9th Dec 1856	9th Dec 1856
99	Christians (Lionel)	to	9th Dec 1856	9th Dec 1856	9th Dec 1856
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149	Christians (Lionel)	to	9th Dec 1856	9th Dec 1856	9th Dec 1856
150	Christians (Lionel)	to	9th Dec 1856	9th Dec 1856	9th Dec 1856

THE REGISTER OF THE BIRTH OF BENJAMIN D'ISRAELI.



From a Photo. by] THE VESTRY. [F. Hars.

occupied by the male portion of the congregation, as women are not permitted to take part in the service, but sit by themselves in a gallery which runs round three sides of the building.

This Synagogue is the only one in the United Kingdom which is not lighted by lamps or gas. Large wax candles, which are specially manufactured for this purpose, are used, and are fitted into very curious old brass chandeliers, some of which originally came from Holland, where there had been an older congregation of Sephardim Jews.

such as the vestry-room, readers' houses, almshouses, and schools; but the necessity for procuring funds has unfortunately made it needful for some of these to be removed to where land is less valuable, and now warehouses are being erected on the site. Of all the removals, the loss of the vestry-room is perhaps most to be deplored, for it was replete with interesting associations—nearly all the benefits which English Jews now enjoy originated within its walls.

It contained several valuable portraits of men who had been connected with the Synagogue, and also a very curious and excellent picture representing Moses and Aaron supporting two large stone slabs, on which is written the Decalogue in Spanish and Hebrew.

These paintings are all to be hung in the new vestry-room, where also will be put the very interesting old registers in which have been carefully recorded the births of all the members of the congregation, including that of the late Lord Beaconsfield.

This is the first regular Synagogue which was built in England after the re-admission of the Jews under Cromwell, though it was not erected until the reign of Queen Anne; and the Sephardim congregation were justly proud of being allowed, at a time when bigotry and intolerance were still rife, not merely to build a place of worship, but to build it with the approval, and even the

Until quite lately the Synagogue was almost entirely surrounded by its own buildings—

help, of the reigning monarch ; for the Queen presented the Synagogue with a beam, which is said to be preserved in the ceiling at the present day.

The land on which the building was erected was at first leased from Sir Thomas and Lady Ann Pointz ; later on, it was converted into a freehold. It ought to be mentioned that the builder was a Quaker, who, when his work was completed, restored the money which he had made out of his contract, he being, as he said, unwilling to make any profit out of a temple erected to the glory of God.

For some years it was the only Synagogue in London, and was used both by the Portuguese and by the German congregations.

But as the latter were not admitted to any religious honours, and as the only office which any one of them was allowed to fill was that of beadle, it is probable that they were not satisfied with their position when they had increased in wealth and numbers, for they then built a place of worship of their own.

Some years ago there was great danger of

the Synagogue in Bevis Marks being pulled down ; for many members of the congregation had moved away from their old houses in the neighbourhood, and were desirous of building a place of worship nearer to where they lived ; and, as a further justification for this proposed act of vandalism, they alleged that scarcely any worshippers attended there. But, when the matter was thoroughly investigated, it was found that, not only were the congregations far larger than had been supposed, but that many, though residing at a distance too great for them to be able to attend, opposed the scheme on the ground that the building wherein their fathers had so long worshipped, and which was so intimately connected with much that was

most interesting in their history, ought to be regarded as sacred. Happily, in this case as in many others, the threatened danger to the building has resulted in greatly strengthening its position ; and there is now little doubt that it will henceforth for generations remain the chief Synagogue of the oldest community of the British Jews.



SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE.
From a Painting by S. Hart, R.A.