

## MY MOTHER'S SIDDIR

In memoriam Kislev 17th 5709

IN times gone by, on the continent of Europe, it was the custom that the bride presented the bridegroom on their wedding day with a Tallith and a Zargenes (also called Kittle) and he gave her a Siddur and a set of Machzorim. These mutual presents were called by an old talmudic term of Sivlonoth, and one could buy special, finely-bound prayerbooks called Sivlonoth Siddurim. Such a Siddur my father gave to my mother on her wedding day. It was the one edited and translated into beautiful German by Michael Sachs, rabbi of the Berlin Jewish community in the middle of the last century. He was a great preacher, a fine Jewish scholar and a staunch defender of traditional Judaism. This Siddur occupied, among loyal German Jews, the same position as does Singer's Prayerbook in Anglo-Jewry. On the fly-leaf of my mother's Tephillah, as German Jews called their Siddur, my father entered, in German and in Hebrew, in a copper-plate hand, the dates of their engagement, their wedding, and one after another, the births of their four sons. For some reason, but quite undeservedly, as time was to show, the Hebrew inscription referring to my birth was much longer than any of the others. Later my father added the Jahrzeit dates of mother's parents and those of his own and of two brothers who had died in his life-time. After my father's death, mother entered his Jahrzeit date in her handwriting, which was very much like his.

Father died towards the end of 1927, less than 54 years old, leaving mother to a widowhood lasting 21 years. True she had her sons, the three older ones married and with growing families, around her. But the dark and terrible years had begun. On the evening when her children and friends celebrated her 60th birthday, the news of the Reichstag fire and the beginning of the Nazi terror, cast gloom and dark foreboding over German Jewry. One after another her children left Cologne, and in the end, so did she, in April, 1939, five months before the outbreak of war. In the preceding six years she had witnessed and experienced much misery and anxiety. But worse was still to come.

Mother had joined one of her sons who lived in Brussels, and she now had her own home again. Soon after, the war broke out, but remained the "phoney war" for a while. Then came the invasions of Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Belgium and France. My brother was interned as an enemy alien and sent south into France. My mother, much against her better judgment, joined the tens of thousands of refugees who thronged the roads into France. For six terrible weeks she walked or rode on army lorries and jeeps, befriended by Belgian, French and British soldiers, without plan or direction, with little food or sleep, in the midst of a merciless air war, till she finally reached Boulogne. With a little more luck she might have been taken off, on one of the

British ships which were then evacuating soldiers and civilians alike. In the event, she with many others, spent a gruesome 48 hours standing up against the wall of Boulogne Station, the town being bombarded by both friend and foe, until in the end, the Germans won the day. Their soldiers cared in a quite friendly way for these stranded civilians; my mother was brought back to Brussels, and, taking her key out of her bag, let herself into her apartment, which she need not have left.

The four years of war in Nazi-occupied Brussels that followed were no picnic. Soon the Gestapo had established themselves and began to harass Jews with restrictions and petty persecutions—curfews, wearing of the Yellow Star and the like. In 1941, deportations started. Mother, of course, lived quite openly and officially under her name and address and known to the police. One night the Gestapo arrived and arrested another German-Jewish widow, with whom she was sharing her flat, for deportation. They left mother behind. Why? A miracle? It was a time as rich in miracles as it was in misery. But the threat of deportation hung over her—and every other Jew—for every day and every night for more than four years. To this fear was added the growing food shortage which soon meant near-starvation. And with it the anxiety over the fate of her four sons and their families, now living far apart in Palestine, America, France (later Switzerland) and England. Though, again, it was something of a miracle that hardly a month passed without her being in contact with her children. But mother, in all this adversity, kept her head high, she was always cheerful and replete with wit and sarcasm, and thus not only kept her own nerve and sanity, but inspired her many friends and acquaintances, who were all in the same boat, by her courage and good sense. It was all a matter of *Bitachon*, of her unshaken confidence in the essential goodness and justice of God. He would look after her, and whatever fate He held in store, she was ready to accept.

The British liberated Brussels in September, 1944. Even while they approached, the Gestapo decided to deport the remaining Jews, who were given time and place when and where to report. Friends urged mother to go into hiding, but she refused. Then, once more, a Purim miracle—the Gestapo lost their nerve and departed in haste without carrying out their last devilish plan. A friend of mine, then serving in the British army, was her first visitor from the world outside. It was an extraordinary meeting, they both crying and laughing in each other's arms. The next year and a half, during which she remained in Brussels, were by no means easy, but they were free. I was not able to visit her till early in 1946. By that time my brother in Jerusalem had obtained for her an immigration certificate for Palestine still under the British Mandate. She would have

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liked to visit us in London, before leaving Belgium. She had not yet seen her granddaughter there. But she was refused a visitor's visa. "Why are they afraid of me?" she asked in her letters. There were many then who asked this question. But the Home Office is the Home Office, and an alien was an alien.

So she left Brussels en route for Palestine. Travelling through war-ravaged Europe in 1946 was no pleasure ride. Allowed only a minimum of luggage, she was lucky to get a seat on an overcrowded train, first to Paris and thence to Marseilles. It was a long and exhausting journey for my mother, who by then, was 73. At Marseilles she was taken into a camp where she had to spend several days in primitive, chaotic conditions. Finally the great day arrived. They were taken in big lorries, whose floor was more than six feet from the ground to the waiting ship. Mother wrote that she did not believe she would ever make the climb into the vehicle.

The boat was small and overcrowded. It was Erev Pesach. Though she had arrived well-prepared for this contingency, she and some other orthodox people set about "making Pesach" against fearful odds. But they succeeded and would never forget this Pesach on which they needed no reminder to feel "as if they had left Egypt themselves". The sea-journey took 10 days and mother proved to be one of the few good sailors. In Jerusalem she moved into a so-called Parents' Home where she shared a relatively small room with two other women who were both older than she was. These two quarrelled a good deal and mother continuously had to act as peace-maker. In spite of difficult conditions she was proud and happy to be in Eretz Israel and near her children and grandchildren.

These were the days of mounting conflict, of violent and bloody clashes between the British and the Yishuv. Mother lived in "Bevingrad", near the Keren Kayemeth building, which had been cordoned off as a military compound, and she needed a pass to visit her children 15 minutes away. With her good English, she soon made friends and cracked jokes with the Tommies on guard. She had a front-stand view of all that was going on—the explosions, the shootings, the arrests. Then came the Partition Decision of the United Nations, followed six months later by the Declaration of Independence. She was out in the streets, singing and dancing with the rest. Then more war and anxiety—her grandson was fighting in the Gush Etzyon, where he was a Kibbutznik. The good news came that he was a prisoner in Transjordan, well and unharmed. That good old heart, never very strong, had had enough. It was Shabbath, Kislev 16th. An ambulance had to take her to the Sha'arey Tzedek Hospital. She grumbled at having to travel for the first time on Shabbos "on the last day of my life". That night she closed her eyes for ever to wake into the day "which is all Shabbath and rest for all eternity". At her bedside sat Dr. Moritz Wallach, the hospital's chief physician and a friend for over 40 years. Her simple grave is in the grounds of "Sha'arey Tzedek".

Last January, one day before leaving New York for home, one of my cousins came to see me at my hotel. A friend of his, a young rabbi, had been visiting Europe recently. When in Brussels he had visited the flea-market there and found a somewhat tattered Siddur which he bought for a few francs. On close inspection, he found that the fly-leaves had a number of inscriptions with the name Carlebach recurring several times. Back in New York he gave it to my cousin, who had no difficulty in recognizing to whom it had belonged. Now he had come to give it to me, who was now and only, for the last few weeks, her sole surviving son. Why the Siddur had to be left behind, no one will ever know. Perhaps the small luggage allowance did not suffice, or perhaps it was forgotten in the rush and excitement of departure. But Someone had kept an eye on it and had it returned to where it belonged—almost 16 years later.

A.C.

### LAMPS OF DEDICATION

SHINE, lamps of Dedication, shine,  
Your hallowed radiance be the sign  
That still there burns undimmed by years,  
Not quenched, but fed by blood and tears,  
In Israel's heart, clear, steadfast, bright,  
The flame it caught from Sinai's height.

Solomon & Solis-Cohen  
(from *Hanukkah* (ed. E. Solis-Cohen)  
J.P.S.A., Philadelphia, 1937).

### MONEY WELL SPENT

Most of us—we hope—contribute to the Belfast Jewish Charitable Trust Fund (as it is called) and we know that the Fund distributes a good deal of money to many good causes and worthy institutions. But occasionally it may be worth while to give an example of what a relatively small sum of money can do.

Recently the Fund voted a £35 scholarship for a student in the Teachers' Training College "Ephratha" in Jerusalem. The principal has now given details of the recipient of the scholarship. She comes from Givat Yearim near Jerusalem where her mother, a widow, has to provide for five children. The cost of the girl's upkeep and studies in the college is I£800 to which the Ministry of Welfare contributes I£350. Our grant means almost another I£300. The student, who is now in her second year, has great ability, is hard working and of excellent character. So writes her principal, and Belfast is proud to be able to help her.

All communications to the Hon. Secretary, Stanley Shapiro, 7 Brianville Park, Belfast, 14. Phone: 79945. Date line for the January issue: January 15th, 1963.