

cate to record it in the minutes. Although the League worked with the Chevra Kadisha, hospital visiting is the only recorded assistance that they gave.

The main Jewish effort to counter the vice racket was concentrated in the Vigilance Committee formed by the Chevra Kadisha. Successful operations of this committee, which sought to involve the entire Jewish community, depended on interpretations of the Jewish Law which would make it possible to penalise offenders. Such interpretations were facilitated at this time by Dayan Moses Friedman, who appears to have joined the Orthodox Hebrew Congregation late in 1896.⁶¹ Moses Friedman, born in Kros, Latvia, in 1862, was a renowned scholar whose most valuable possession was a library of some 500 Hebrew volumes.⁶² Familiarly known as 'Reb Moishel',⁶³ he was greatly beloved throughout the community. (When he died on 30 May 1925,⁶⁴ his funeral was attended by some 10 000 people, hundreds of whom walked from the Beth Hamedrash in Fox Street to Brixton Cemetery.) He was said to have 'lived an entirely detached life, devoting himself to a consistent and deep study of the Torah'.⁶⁵

The formation of a vigilance committee was suggested by Rabbi Dr J.H. Hertz on 26 December 1898 when he attended his first meeting of the Chevra Kadisha after his arrival in September to minister to the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation.⁶⁶ On this occasion the Rev. Harris J. Isaacs was to be presented with a farewell gift of a silver Kiddush cup before leaving the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation and moving to Kimberley.⁶⁷ After the ceremony, when Jacob Kark, a prominent member of the Orthodox Congregation, 'brought forward the matter of breaches of the Morality Laws by Jews and Jewesses' the Rev. Harris Isaacs told

the meeting that the possibility of rescue work had already been discussed. When he suggested that a special piece of ground be set aside in the cemetery for the burial of pimps and prostitutes, it was decided 'that the Revs. Isaacs, Hertz and Friedman should investigate the ecclesiastical law re burial of *souteneurs*'.

Rabbi Dr Hertz then suggested the formation of a vigilance committee – he said nothing of the Ladies' Communal League. It was also proposed that the Russo-Jewish public should be warned, through the continental Jewish Press, of the false pretences of *souteneurs* and that these warnings should also be published in *Hamelitz*, *Hatsfira*, and other Jewish papers. Hebrew translations of the notices were undertaken by J. Traub, editor of the local Yiddish weekly *Hakochoav* ('The Star'),⁶⁸ and the congregations were apprised of the 'steps being taken in the matter'.⁶⁹

On 9 January 1899 it was reported that a sub-committee had interviewed the public prosecutor 'to consult what action might be taken to suppress the evil'.⁷⁰ The ministers reported on the ecclesiastical law concerning the burial of those involved in immoral traffic and it was resolved to set aside a special section of the cemetery for their graves. Almost a century later, a Johannesburg doctor recalled his father telling him that Jews who pursued disreputable occupations were threatened with 'burial in the *hok*', a Yiddish, not Afrikaans, word for the corner of the Jewish section of Braamfontein cemetery where known *souteneurs* were buried in unmarked graves without the usual prayers. According to the doctor's father, these people declared that they 'didn't care'.⁷¹ The site of the *hok* was levelled in recent years but it is estimated to have contained about 100 graves.⁷²

The first known photograph of a committee of the Chevra Kadisha, taken in 1898 when the Rev. Harris Isaacs of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation was given a farewell presentation of what the minutes describe as a Kiddush cup, seen on the floor, centre. It resembles a sporting trophy more than the generally rather small Kiddush cup. Left to right, seated on the ground, Samuel Goldreich and M. Dorfan, not a member of the committee but its collector, who worked on a commission; seated front row: M. Lax; the Rev. Harris Isaacs; Jacques Klisser, president; Joseph Ratzker, treasurer; J. Kark, vice president; Raphael Alexander. Standing: N. Schlyer; I. Levitatz; S. Kuper; H. Rosenberg; H. Rigal; B. Pincus Marks, BA, honorary secretary. It was at this meeting that, alarmed by the number of Jews associated with prostitution, the suggestion of a Vigilance Committee was made. S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies



was complete.⁹⁰ The various congregations and societies had been canvassed for support and the results ranged from 500 bags of flour from the Benevolent Association to the promise of the entire funds of the Jewish Guild should war break out. The members of the Orthodox Hebrew Congregation subscribed what was for them a great amount of £25. Lest they be accused of hoarding, Bension Aaron had taken the precaution of securing special government protection and immunity for all provisions stocked by the society for special relief. These included mealie meal, salt, oatmeal, beans, rice, tins of milk, tea, coffee, sugar and biscuits – all stored at the Kerk Street premises of Bension Aaron and his partner. And the ordinary work of the society continued as this important meeting concluded by passing an account for £21 to pay for an artificial leg for a Mr Altman.

A week before war broke out, Bension Aaron suggested that the committee should be divided into sections for performing various functions such as relief, burial and so on. A government-controlled Central Relief Committee was already in operation in Johannesburg and the society decided that, instead of throwing open its own stores, cases for relief should be referred to this organisation for the present.⁹¹

On 9 October, the day when the Boer ultimatum was sent to Britain, Bension Aaron tabled documents exempting committee members, together with the Rev. S. Manne, Cantor to the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, Jacques Klisser and Samuel Bebro from military or other state service and appointing him, as chairman, and Jacob Kark, H. Rosenberg, B.P. Marks (the secretary), and Leon Steinweis, to the government sub-commission for foodstuffs, under the Government Relief Commission. Rosenberg, however, declined as he was about to leave Johannesburg. Besides the three mentioned above, Dayan Friedman, Mark Fine, J. Freundlich, Adam Alexander and three others had all become what was termed 'temporary assistant members of the committee'. Freundlich, like Fine, was a member of the committee of the Benevolent Association.

Rations of foodstuffs for adults and children were calculated⁹² and it was resolved to buy candles, soap and pepper – also books, so that proper records could be kept of distributions. Applicants for aid were still being referred to the Central Relief Committee but it was decided that should this organisation discontinue operations, grants of provisions would be made in special cases.

Bension Aaron had interviewed the committee of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation, which had not come forward with a contribution, and persuaded it to donate £100 towards foodstuffs. Flour was purchased but payment of the congregation's cheque was then 'suspended'. A contretemps followed in November when the society had to pay £95 for flour supplied and inform Emanuel Mendelssohn, president of the congregation, that the committee held it liable for the amount since payment of their cheque had been 'stopped'.⁹³ As most of the committee had left for Cape Town, nothing

could be done about it. The main reason for this action was that no arrangements had been made for payment prior to issuing the cheque!⁹⁴ All members of the committee eventually left Johannesburg and Rabbi Dr Hertz, whose strong pro-Uitlander sympathies had annoyed the government, was forced to join them in exile. No services were held in the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation until he received permission to return after the British occupation of Johannesburg at the end of May 1900.⁹⁵

In the midst of all this organisation, social welfare work continued in Johannesburg. Bension Aaron visited a hospital patient named Barnet Fine who was in a critical condition after being stabbed in the throat. Fine had made over £70 in cash, as well as fixed deposit slips for £140 with the Standard Bank, to the society as his trustees, with Aaron and the secretary as executors. Aaron also had to obtain an amount from the Germiston savings bank for the Charmetz orphan and place it in her trust fund.⁹⁶ This fund was administered by the Chevra Kadisha for many years – presumably until the girl reached her majority.

On 13 October, two days after the outbreak of war, the chairman learnt from the Government Relief Commission that relief was to be granted only to the families of burghers away on commando and that no one else could therefore be referred to the Central Relief Committee. In spite of this, when the Chevra Kadisha's committee met on the 16th, it decided that their own relief work should be started only after the government had stopped the deportation of the Uitlander population from the town.

To add to the society's responsibilities, it had to take over the administration of the Christian undertaking firm of Hobkirks which housed its hearse and hired horses to it. As Hobkirk and his employees had been unable to obtain 'Britishers' permits to remain', he placed his store, stock and horses in the charge of the Chevra Kadisha. Of the five horses Hobkirk kept in the stables attached to his store in Kerk Street, one had been commandeered. With an eye to what else the Boers might take, the society's new hearse was removed from Hobkirk's premises to the cemetery! Committee member N. Schlyer was delegated to take direct charge of Hobkirk's store, and the young son of a Mr Racof was appointed caretaker.⁹⁷

The venue for meetings now changed from the Jewish School to the Aaron & Steinweis Cigar Factory, the first taking place on 23 October. Bension Aaron had two particularly able men to assist him: Jacques Klisser, the former chairman, and Sigmund Shapiro who was to succeed him. Like his friend Bension Aaron, the latter was a strong personality, liable to react in an extreme way on any matter of principle,⁹⁸ so the tactful Klisser would have been a moderating influence. The meeting was simply to make official a radical new plan to form an ambulance corps for which Bension Aaron had offered his services, and the committee's, to the Transvaal government. Properly equipped and staffed, it was to



The earliest group photograph of the Witwatersrand Hebrew Benevolent Association, taken in 1909. Left to right, top row: R. Barb; S. Chaskowitz; J. Rakster; S. Katz; S.B. Asher. Centre row: E.V. Fine; N. Kawarksky; M. Reuvid; M.D. Sack; E. Levy; J. Kark. Front row: A. Rogaly; J. Berkman (president); M. Fine (founder); B.S. Ginsberg; W. Begg (secretary). Courtesy Witwatersrand Hebrew Benevolent Association

come and the Kosher Kitchen became a well-supported enterprise. It is now incorporated into the Federation of Synagogues Women's Guilds of South Africa with its separate Provincial Hospitals Kosher Kitchens Committee and serves all Provincial Hospitals. Only items such as salads are still prepared *in situ* as its modern factory in Rosslyn, Pretoria, cooks and freezes meals which are distributed to various hospitals on the Reef.¹⁷³

While the two congregational organisations, the Jewish Ladies' Association and the Jewish Ladies' Communal League, were running the Kosher Kitchen and the Orphanage, the Johannesburg Jewish Ladies' Benevolent Society continued its work. It, too, had a 'Dorcas Branch' which made and distributed clothing to the poor, particularly women and children. 'Deserving cases' were given money for food and clothing, or to help them to start some sort of business. In certain special cases, monthly pensions were granted.¹⁷⁴ Applications for aid were thoroughly investigated before monthly meetings and in emergencies the president was empowered to act immediately.¹⁷⁵

The maternity work, with which the society had begun in the early 1890s,¹⁷⁶ continued, at first in the patient's own home and later in the Queen Victoria Hospital, started in 1904 by the Guild of Loyal Women in a

house in End Street, Doornfontein. If her family responsibilities precluded a patient from going to hospital, a nurse was engaged for her 'lying-in period' which, in those days, could be up to three weeks after her confinement, and a certain sum of money was provided each day. By 1913, the society was dealing with an average of over 200 cases a year and raising its funds from about 300 members, each of whom paid £1 per annum, from the proceeds of private collections and from its annual 'Simchos Torah' Ball, held in October.¹⁷⁷

The work of the Witwatersrand Hebrew Benevolent Association continued. In 1906-1907, for example, 140 loans were granted totalling £4 008 – an average of just over £28 per man and an increase of £588 over the previous financial year. In addition, however, £692 was granted to 25 further applicants subject to their providing satisfactory sureties. As these were not forthcoming, the loans were not paid out. It is interesting that in the same period repayment of loans amounted to £3 586, an increase of £153, but that 'owing to the great depression during the past year, the repayments made by borrowers did not increase in the same proportion to advances made by the Association'. Its income was derived not only from repaid loans but also from subscriptions and donations.¹⁷⁸ If, from the time of its founda-

ing the country he would impel the rising in Johannesburg.⁷¹ To make matters worse, he chose to invade the Transvaal on Sunday morning, 29 December. Before Jameson set off, he telegraphed Dr Wolff, instructing him to carry out the arrangements to cut the telegraph wires between Rustenburg and Pretoria but the telegram arrived only on the Monday morning, too late for the order to be executed. As a result of the open lines, the government learnt of the Raid shortly after the force crossed the Transvaal border;⁷² on 1 January, the Boer commandos trapped the raiders near Krugersdorp and they were forced to surrender.

Dr Wolff did not wait to be arrested with the rest of the Reformers. Had he done so, he would doubtless have joined the four leaders who were condemned to death – although they were eventually released on payment of a heavy fine. Wolff managed to reach Cape Town where he persuaded the acting secretary of the British South Africa Company to buy him a ticket under an assumed name in the next ship leaving for England. In 1897, he appeared before the enquiry into the Raid by the Select Committee of the British Parliament.⁷³ With that, he passed out of South African history, both medical and political, and probably returned to America.

As it has not proved possible to find out if Dr Henry



Cutting telegraph wires during the Jameson Raid, from a sketch by Captain Thatcher supplied to The Illustrated London News and published in February 1896. Dr Henry A. Wolff failed to perform the same operation on the wires between Rustenburg and Pretoria which resulted in the government's receiving timely news of the Raid. History does not relate whether he contemplated personally shinning up the pole with wire-cutters. Africana Museum

A. Wolff was Jewish, his spectacular career cannot be included in a review of Jewish doctors in Johannesburg. With the exception of Dr Aaron Abelheim, they made no lasting individual imprint on medical history. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that they were dedicated professionals who fought endemic typhoid, dysentery and smallpox, that they struggled against appalling sanitary conditions and, without decent health care facilities, helped to establish the foundations of a proud medical tradition. Their dauntless courage in staving off epidemics and in fighting suffering with makeshift methods, doubtless drew not only upon their skills but upon their resources of ingenuity. They gained such esteem that it served to inspire generations of young people to seek their future in the same profession.

Dr Louis Herrman has commented on the number of young Jewish doctors who joined the medical corps of the South African or Allied forces during the First World War. Because there were no facilities for training doctors in South Africa in those days, these men had studied overseas, particularly in Edinburgh, but some at Dublin or Continental universities.⁷⁴ In the RAMC, in 1917, a young Jewess, Dr Mary Sylvia Gordon, was appointed the first woman resident medical officer at the Johannesburg Hospital which was then serving both military and civilian patients. Although slightly out of our period, she is so outstanding that she deserves mention. Her father, Mottel Gordon, was 'one of the pillars of Orthodoxy in Johannesburg'⁷⁵ and founder of the Beth Hamedrash Hagodel, and although Mary herself did not come to South Africa until 1917, he and the rest of the family had arrived much earlier.

Mary, one of his five daughters, was born in Telz, Lithuania, in 1890. In 1896, her father went to Johannesburg but returned to Europe in 1900 when the family moved to Warsaw. Four years later he settled again in Johannesburg but left his family in Warsaw. Here, having had to learn Polish at the age of ten, Mary, who had a burning desire to serve humanity as a doctor, studied as far as she was allowed as a Jewess. 'We could take extra-mural studies up to, but not including, our final year,' she told W. Warden towards the end of her life, 'and come what might, I had to have my university entrance qualification.' She realised that this, and medical studies, would mean moving to a foreign country. So, although the family emigrated to Johannesburg, in February 1907 17-year-old Mary went to Sunderland, England, where, while learning English and supporting herself by taking various jobs, she eventually not only matriculated but, in 1914, qualified as a doctor.

Although some medical studies had been possible in South Africa from 1912, the first medical degrees, both to Jews, were conferred at a South African University in 1922. Dr Mary Gordon, who had struggled against such tremendous odds to become a doctor, lectured at the Medical School of the University of the Witwatersrand from its inception in 1919 until 1945.⁷⁶ After the Second World War, she performed sterling work in Israel, re-



Manfred Nathan at the Transvaal Bar in 1904, a photograph published in his autobiography *Not Heaven Itself*.

Finding the life of an articled clerk uncongenial, in mid-1895 Manfred Nathan joined *The Star* as a journalist. He earned £20 per month as a court reporter, although he also covered such events as the Braamfontein dynamite explosion of 1896.¹⁰¹ Even after he was called to the Bar, having studied for his LL B by correspondence, he pursued journalism as a free-lancer as it gave him some means of livelihood until he could establish a sufficiently lucrative practice. In June 1897 he passed his finals, heading the list of candidates; he was admitted as an advocate in Cape Town in August and, in October, in the Transvaal. Eventually, he also successfully wrote dissertations for the degrees of MA and, just after the Anglo-Boer War, LL D.

In September 1899, when war seemed imminent, Nathan left for Cape Town. *I decided that as a British-born subject my duty of allegiance required me to leave the Transvaal. No doubt, had I remained, I should not have been subjected to inconvenience of any kind. But I could not reconcile remaining there with what was right and proper.* He shared an office with Morris Alexander, next door to that of the eminent Sir Henry Juta. While devilling for Juta and acting as his junior in several cases, he eventually worked up a small practice.

For the rest of his life, except during the years of the Anglo-Boer War when he was in Cape Town, Nathan practised law in Johannesburg. His legal career was successful and his practice, which was fairly substantial, dealt mainly with commercial and civil matters. He was noted for his patient and exhaustive research, especially into contentious legal points. In 1919 he took silk. According to some accounts, Nathan was a good, but

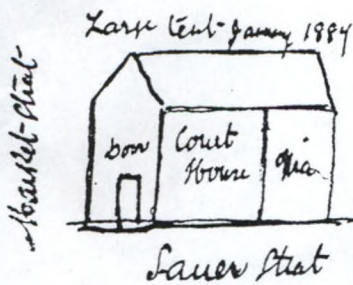
not particularly remarkable lawyer; it is as an author that he is best remembered. But for all that, in his autobiography, *Not Heaven Itself*, he stresses that he regarded law as the main occupation of his life and that he derived the greatest satisfaction from this aspect of his work.

During my years of practice at the Bar, Nathan wrote, I was briefed by three or four score of solicitors. . . There were others, however, who kept entirely aloof. . . There is no knowing why solicitors brief you or do not brief you. Some young co-religionists among my colleagues put down their brieflessness to the fact that the attorneys were anti-Semitic. This is sheer nonsense. With the exception of three or four firms, who openly avowed their anti-Semitism (two firms definitely stated that they never briefed Jews), I never experienced anything of the sort; and I have known Jewish firms who, for one reason or another, preferred to brief Gentiles. Certainly I had more Christian than Jewish supporters among the solicitors. Two or three Jewish attorneys positively loathed me, whether for my looks or why I cannot say.¹⁰² He enjoyed a warm relationship with many Afrikaners and, when his friend J.C. Smuts gave up his law classes on becoming State Attorney, Manfred Nathan took them over.

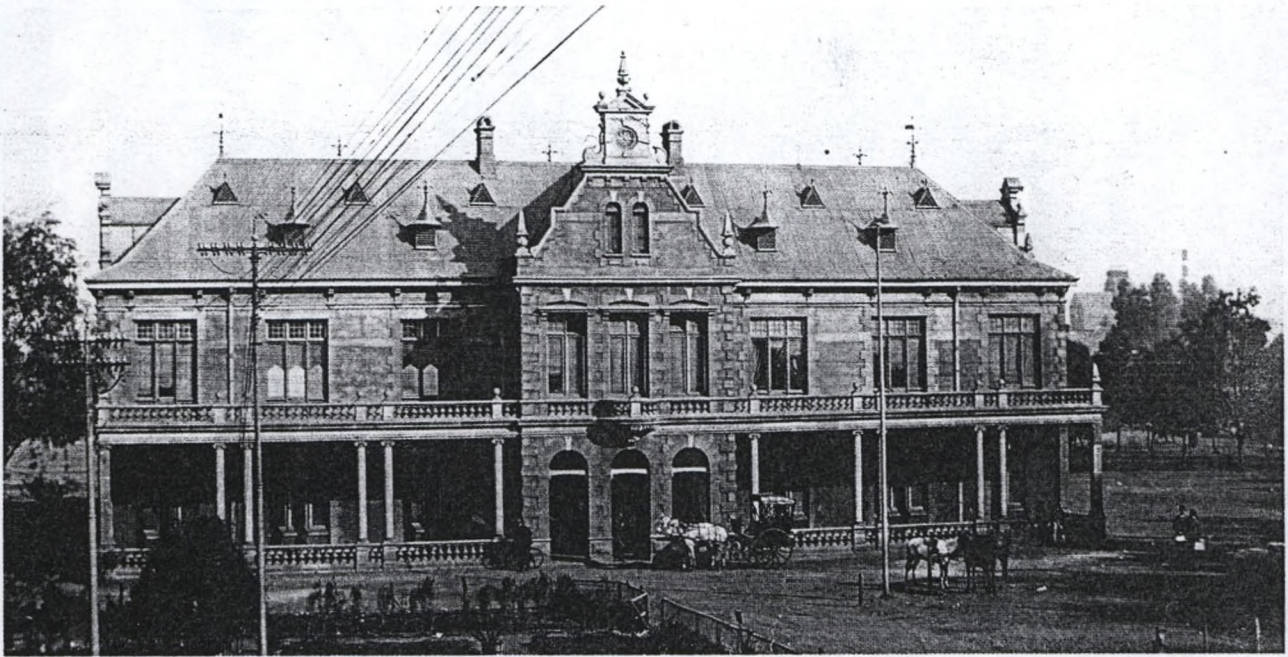
The first of Nathan's works on legal subjects, written in Cape Town during the Anglo-Boer War, was a treatise on war liabilities inspired by the complaint of H.P. Papenfus, former partner of his cousin Emile, that no book existed on the subject. *It had a fair circulation, but was published too cheaply to bring me any financial rewards. . . I began a tentative translation from the Latin of Voet's Commentaries. Voet is one of the great classic authorities on Roman-Dutch Law. . . Then I began to add comparisons with other authorities, and the comments contained in the more recent law reports. This became the nucleus of my Common Law of South Africa, the first two volumes of which I published in 1904.¹⁰³ By the time he started this monumental four-volume work, the last volume of which was published in 1907,¹⁰⁴ he had compiled, together with W.H.S. Bell, *The Legal Handbook of Practical Law . . . in British South Africa*. Many other legal books followed. The opinion has been expressed that his works were ' . . . avowedly compilations, principally on statutes, without any deliberate attempt at profound legal analysis, but in their time they proved useful'.¹⁰⁵*

Nathan wrote much on a wide variety of subjects other than South African law. On constitutional matters he published, among others, *The South African Commonwealth* (Johannesburg and Cape Town, 1919) and *Empire Government* (London, 1928). His work on international law resulted in *The Renascence of International Law* (London, 1925). Later in his life he wrote on historical subjects as well – *The Voortrekkers of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1937) and *The Huguenots of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1939), among others.

He always hoped that he might eventually be appointed to a permanent seat on the Supreme Court Bench, but this aspiration was never realised. He did sit



J. Hunter McLea drew this tiny sketch of the tent, or rather, canvas building, on the corner of Market and Sauer Streets which in January 1887 became Johannesburg's first magistrate's court. The next law court was a building in President Street, later converted into a post office. The third law courts building, in Government Square, below, was built c.1892, a mere five years after the canvas building. The foundation stone of the present Supreme Court in Von Brandis Square was laid in 1910 and, after this building came into use, the old law courts were used as magistrates' courts. They were finally demolished in 1948, having been 'sentenced' in 1929. Africana Museum



as a Supreme Court judge for a short time both of the Natal Provincial Division (1928) and the Eastern Districts Local Division (1930), and as president of the special court for hearing income tax appeals (1931).

Manfred Nathan always endeavoured to be impartial, especially concerning contentious issues in South Africa. This was reflected in his historical writings in which he evinced sympathy for the Boers rather than support for more extreme pro-British sentiments, and on the Bench, by being the first judge to provide a case summary in Afrikaans.¹⁰⁶

Despite his dedication to law and writing, Nathan's contribution to political and public life was varied and full. In 1910, he became one of the founders of the South African Party. From 1916 to 1919 he was a member of the Johannesburg City Council and between 1917 and 1920 represented the Commissioner Street constituency in the Transvaal Provincial Council. He was chairman of the Witwatersrand Central School Board and also served on the council of the University of South Africa.

In the small Cape town of Hanover, where Manfred Nathan was born and had his primary education, the Nathans were the only Jewish family and he therefore did not have the benefit of a formal Jewish education nor did he have a Barmitzvah. He was drawn into a closer observance of Judaism, however, by Samuel

Goldreich and Adam and Bernard Alexander and became a member of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation, together with 25 others, on 6 November 1898, shortly after the arrival of the dynamic young Rabbi Dr Joseph Hertz¹⁰⁷ who clearly had a strong appeal for young men. Before the end of the Anglo-Boer War, Nathan was elected to the congregational committee,¹⁰⁸ indicating his own dynamism. He was somewhat reluctant to accept office. *I always felt diffident about this, because rightly or wrongly I held and have always held that although the governing body of a congregation is concerned, in the main, with the business or secular side of its affairs, its members ought to be strictly orthodox in their religious observances.* This would have been his reason for not serving on the committee again.

When Manfred Nathan returned to Johannesburg during the Anglo-Boer War after the British occupation, he became a table boarder with a Mrs Cohen in Leyds Street, the two other boarders being Rabbi Dr Hertz and the Rev. S. Manne, Cantor of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation. 'Though they belonged to the so-called rival congregations,' Nathan observed, 'they were on excellent terms.' For himself, he was indifferent to the quarrels between the two congregations. *What concerned me was that in Dr Hertz, who was a little more than three years my senior, I found a congenial soul, always*

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