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A NOTE ON JEWISH DOCTORS IN ENGLAND
IN THE REIGN OF HENRY IV.

THROUGHOUT the Middle Ages the Jews held an honourable record for the study and practice of medicine. Whilst the art of healing was reduced by most Westerns to a mass of superstitions or to a body of traditional lore, the Jews, with the Arabs, devoted themselves to the unravelling of the problems of medical science with singular pertinacity. They were hampered by various prohibitions against the employment of Jewish doctors by Christians, but in practice these prohibitions had no great weight.

Dispensations and *non-obstantes*, licences and permits were scattered profusely until they wholly nullified the prohibitory legislation; nay, the legislators and popes themselves were among the first to set aside their own ordinances and statutes. From the tenth century onwards many courts possessed their Jewish doctors.

Jews had been banished from England more than a hundred years before the accession of Henry IV, during which period few conforming Jews appear to have visited these shores openly. Here and there it is true some converted Jews, hearing of the royal bounty to their class, followed the victorious armies of Edward III and his heroic son, and settled in the *Domus Conversorum*.

It was not until disease had tightened its grip upon Henry IV that we find authentic evidence of Jews re-visiting these shores. A successful combination of the Church and nobility had driven Richard II from the throne. His cousin, Henry of Derby, the leader of the rebellious elements, then received the crown as a reward for his services in restoring the authority of these powerful sections of the nation. But to defend his prize against all comers proved no easy task. Rebellion succeeded rebellion until the labour and anxiety of crushing them had shattered the king's health.

The decline in the king's vigour began as early as 1406, and for seven long years he remained a victim to the ravages of disease. Yet his work was far from being complete. Glendower still roamed about in Wales at the head of armed bands threatening the Marches, nor had that Arch-plotter, Percy, Earl of Northumberland, run his fatal course. The task of securing his kingdom against these internal enemies and their external allies, Scotland and France, overtaxed the king's energies and wore out his strength. His malady now assumed

such a serious character that the skill of his native physicians was totally baffled.

In his younger days, when he was still Henry of Derby, the king had wandered over Europe a good deal. He had visited Italy, had fought under the banner of the Teutonic knights against the Lithuanians, and had entered Wilna with the victorious German army¹. In these wanderings he had come into contact with Jews, and even made purchases of them². It was at this time that the fame of the Jewish doctors must have reached him, for several of them occupied eminent positions at the courts of his contemporaries. I will but mention two or three of the most distinguished.

Don Meier Alguades, the author of *ספר המדות לאריסטו*, a translation of the Arabic version of Aristotle's Ethics, and afterwards Rabbi of the Jews of Castile, was the private doctor of Henry III of Castile, who reigned from 1390-1406. Boniface IX, who wore the tiara from 1389-1404, employed two Jews—Manuela and his son Angelo, to minister to his bodily ailments³. In Germany and Poland the reputation of the Jews in the medical world would be often brought to his knowledge. Upon these half-forgotten memories of his youth the king fell back in his time of need. In 1410 the king's illness had become so serious that foreign aid was necessary. The first of the newcomers was Doctor Elias Sabot the Hebrew, brought specially from Bologna to prescribe for the illustrious patient⁴. Of Sabot's antecedents the official documents unfortunately tell us nothing⁵. My own researches have been no more fruitful in discovering any particulars of his birth or education. Nor is our knowledge of his subsequent history more extensive. The description of him in the safe-conduct permitting him to enter England terms him "doctorem in artibus medicinarum." His retinue included ten servants with their horses and harness⁶. Does this indicate that our medico travelled with a private *minyán*, knowing that in far-off Britain

¹ *Derby Accounts* (Camden Soc.), xix, xxx, cvi; Wylie, *England under Henry IV.*

² "Super officio pulleterei per manus Iacob Iudei pro xxviii caponibus xxxi gallinis per ipsum emptis, ibidem pro providenciis viii duc. 54 s.," *Derby Accounts.*

³ Mandosio: *Degli archiati Pontifici*, I, 107, 111. "Angelo di Manuele, Giudeo del Rione di Trastevere, al primo di Luglio 1392 ottenne di essere annoverato tra famigliari e medici del papa e della santa sede."

⁴ Ramsay, *Lancaster and York*, I, 123 n. 7; Wylie, III, 231 n. 5.

⁵ Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, XXIV, 993, mentions a Dr. Elias who may possibly be identical with Sabot. If so, he had a stormy career before his appearance in England.

⁶ Rymer, VIII, 667.

that "alter orbis," he would find no Jews, and it would be impossible to obtain the number of adult males requisite for public worship? Perhaps it was this that prompted the Rev. M. Adler in his paper on the *Domus Conversorum* to assert that Dr. Sabot remained staunch to his ancestral faith—though Mr. Adler furnishes no reasons for his conjecture¹. The royal protection was extended to Sabot and his retinue for two years with permission to practise his art unmolested in any part of the kingdom, provided that they always showed their safe-conduct before entering any town, fortress, or camp of the king.

The king's health under Dr. Sabot's ministrations had not improved, he could scarcely take part in public business, hence, in the words of Dr. Wylie, "he followed the prevailing fashion and called in the services of an Italian Jew, Dr. David di Nigarelli of Lucca who remained in this country until his death in 1412."

Before proceeding to give a detailed account of Nigarellis I would point out that none of the documents in which he is mentioned contains the slightest hint of his racial origin. But the learned historian whom I have just quoted assigns him to the Jewish race upon the grounds of his name, his place of origin, the undisputed pre-eminence of Jewish doctors, and the prevailing fashion of the time upon which I commented in my opening remarks.

I have endeavoured to track Nigarellis to his lair and establish his identity beyond the possibilities of doubt, but many weary hours spent in the British Museum and Record Office failed to reveal anything more than is contained in these notes.

From the first document extant relating to him, tested by the king on Feb. 2, 1412², some thirteen months before his death, we learn that the king has granted to David de Nigarellis "*ffisicus penes nos*," the sum of eighty marks per annum for his services, secured upon certain lands administered by Walter Beauchamp on behalf of John de Beyton, a minor, who held "*in capite*" from the king. This amount should be paid in two instalments at Easter and Michaelmas. This information is duplicated by a "closed letter" of the following April, addressed to Walter Beauchamp ordering him to make the payments granted by the king from the lands which Beauchamp administered³. A side note on the patent-roll records the death of David and the surrender of the lands by his executors, though no date of the event is given. The services rendered by the king's new doctor must have been efficacious in affording some relief from his sufferings, if we may judge by the

¹ *Trans. Jew. Hist. Soc.*, IV, 36.

² *Pat. Rolls*, 13 Henry IV, p. i. m. 10.

³ *Close Rolls*, 13 Henry IV, m. 22.

ample rewards showered upon his medical adviser. Within sixteen days of the grants referred to in the previous documents the king issued letters of naturalization to Nigarellis whereby he was henceforth to be treated as a native, to have the right of receiving, obtaining, giving, granting, alienating, enjoying and inheriting any lands, tenements, revenues, advowsons, services, reversions, and other possessions whatsoever¹. The said David might plead in any court in all matters affecting realty as well as personalty, always providing that he pays scot and lot, taxes, tallages, customs, subsidies and all other dues paid by the king's lieges. This was a comprehensive grant, and if I am right in claiming the doctor as a Jew we have here the first grant of naturalization to a Jew within the British Isles. The patent just summarized was preceded by an order in French, under the privy seal, addressed to the Chancellor, Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, who entered upon his fifth term of office about a month before Nigarellis came to this country (Jan. 5, 1412)². The two documents are identical in date and in subject-matter, though the privy seal must have, as I stated, preceded the patent—the latter being a Latin version entered upon the public records and the date copied from the mandate addressed to the Chancellor.

In addition to the 80 marks per annum which Nigarellis received from his lands he was also made Warden of the Royal Mint. A document has been preserved in the mint accounts of the Exchequer setting out an indenture between the executors of the late Warden, Lodowick Recouche, and Master Davynus de Nigarellis de Luca, "physicus et custos monete regis³." The document is undated, but I have no hesitation in ascribing it to the early part of 1412. Recouche, whom Nigarellis succeeded, held the office of Warden from 5 Henry IV i. e. from 1403 onwards, but the date of his death is unknown. On the other hand the holders of the office for the last year of Henry's reign are known⁴. Thus far the king's physician.

My third Jewish doctor is connected with the life-story of a less exalted individual than the King of England, but is linked to the fortunes of one whose fame surpasses that of kings. I speak of Sir Richard Whittington, the hero of the well-known nursery tale, and of Alice, his wife.

Into the history of Whittington, or the curious fate that has overtaken his memory, and transferred his activities from the counting-house to the realms of fairy-land and the pantomime I do not propose

¹ *Foedera*, VIII, 725.

² Campbell, *Lives of the Lord Chancellors*, I, 317.

³ *Excheq. K. R. Mint Accounts*, 293.

⁴ Ruding, *Annals of Coinage*, I, 27 and 46.

to enter. Suffice it to say that the Richard of history when he had grown to manhood married Alice, the daughter of Sir Ivo Fitzwarren, who, like her husband, has been a source of amusement to generations of the young. About the year 1409 the lady was seriously ill—in fact so serious was her condition that her husband had recourse to the indispensable Jewish doctor. The king readily granted the necessary permission to import a “destitute alien” and “Maistre Sampson de Mierbeawe judeus” came from the South of France to tend the Lady Alice¹.

The “Mierbeawe” of the MSS. is no doubt Mirabeau. But there are two places of this name situated in the modern departments of Basses Alpes and Vaucluse respectively. The latter is the more considerable, so that probably Master Sampson came from Mirabeau in Vaucluse, since the Jews generally lived in the largest towns. In any case Sampson hailed from a region where Jews abounded in large numbers, and where they were especially distinguished in medical science. The papal dominions in the South of France, Marseilles, Montpellier, Lunel, Carpentras, Vienne, and many other places in that region were centres of Jewish life and learning.

Of Sampson, as of the others, I have found no trace previous or subsequent to his coming to England. The permission granted to him by the king was very comprehensive, and included the privilege of sojourning in London, practising his art throughout the whole realm, by day and night, by land or sea, “as well as by marque of war.” The grant is for one year, and contains the usual commands against interference with Sampson in the exercise of his calling. What the results of Master Sampson’s ministrations were I am unable to say—information on that point is wholly lacking, nor are we able to infer it from other events, since the exact date of the death of the Lady Alice is unknown.

A. WEINER.

¹ *French Rolls*, 11 Henry IV, m. 20; Rice and Besant, *Life of Whittington*.