

ISAACS, SAMUEL MYER (Jan. 4, 1804–May 19, 1878), rabbi and journalist, was born at Leeuwarden, in the Netherlands. In 1814, his father, Myer Samuel Isaacs, ruined by Napoleonic wars, moved with his family to London. There the former banker became a rabbi, and devoted his five sons to the synagogue. Four of the five, including Samuel, entered the rabbinate. While a young man in England, Samuel was the head of the Neveh Zedek orphan asylum. In 1839 he was called to New York to be rabbi of the B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue. Eight years later, he became the spiritual leader of Congregation Shaaray Tefila, a secession group from B'nai Jeshurun, and remained its minister until his death. Shortly before coming to America he had married Jane Symmons of London. Among his children were Judge Myer S. Isaacs, president of the board of delegates of American Israelites, one of the originators and organizers of the United Hebrew Charities of New York City, and president of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, Isaac S. Isaacs, a lawyer and a prime mover in organizing the Young Men's Hebrew Association of New York, and Abram S. Isaacs [q.v.].

Samuel Isaacs was largely responsible for making unorganized New York Jewry a coherent, articulate community. He was the first rabbi in New York to introduce regular English sermons into the service, sermons in which for the most part he urged the necessity of preserving historic Jewish tradition, and he soon became, second only to Isaac Leeser in Philadelphia, the most influential orthodox rabbi in the country. As an outcome of the Mortara case, he helped create the Board of Delegates of American Israelites to defend the rights of Jews. He was one of the founders in New York of the Jews' (later Mt. Sinai) Hospital, the Hebrew Free School Association, and the United Hebrew Charities, and was influential in the establishment of Maimonides College in Philadelphia. He consecrated thirty-eight synagogues, including the first ever built in Illinois. His influence as a community organizer and as an exponent of historic Judaism was most widely spread, however, through the *Jewish Messenger*, a weekly organ of orthodox Judaism founded by him in 1857, and merged into the *American Hebrew* in 1903. In its pages he battled uncompromisingly in defense of traditional Judaism against the increasing inroads of Reform Judaism. As an ardent abolitionist, his denunciations of slavery cut off his Southern subscribers. Thereupon he wrote: "We want subscribers, for without them we cannot publish a paper, and Judaism needs an organ; but we want much more truth and loyalty, and for them, ~~we are~~ ready, if we must, to sacrifice all other ~~we are~~ **we are**

considerations" (Morais, *post*, p. 150). Integrity, fearlessness, and conscientiousness were outstanding characteristics of Isaacs and won the admiration of the very Reform Jews whose principles it was his life's work to combat. Though zealously loyal to his own religious principles, he showed a tolerance which sprang from a ready, genial humor, and an abounding benevolence. His religious devotion, high ability, warm sympathy, and sterling, unblemished character, won for him a general esteem characterized in the following editorial comment: "Mr. Isaacs during his long and busy life, did perhaps more than any other one man in New York to make the name of a Jew respected, and to reflect credit upon the Jewish Synagogue and the Jewish ministry" (*New York World*, May 21, 1878).

[*Jewish Messenger* (N. Y.), May 24, 1878, Jan. 6, 1882, supplement; *Reformer and Jewish Times* (N. Y.), May 24, 1878; H. S. Morais, *Eminent Israelites of the Nineteenth Century* (1880); A. S. Isaacs, "Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs," in *Mag. of Am. Hist.*, Mar. 1891; *Publ. Am. Jewish Hist. Soc.*, vol. IX (1901); Cyrus Adler, in *Jewish Encyc.*, vol. VI (ed. 1925); Emanuel Hertz, *Abraham Lincoln, The Tribute of the Synagogue* (1927); Israel Goldstein, *A Century of Judaism in N. Y. B'nai Jeshurun 1825-1925* (1930).] D. deS. P.