

THE  
BELMONT-BELMONTE FAMILY

A RECORD OF FOUR HUNDRED YEARS

Put together from the Original Documents in  
the Archives and Libraries of Spain  
Portugal, Holland, England  
and Germany  
as well as from private sources

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Rhine, and especially in the district of which Mannheim was the centre. It has further been shown that there were precise connections between such northern cities as Amsterdam with Frankfort itself, and it is interesting to note that in Frankfort to-day there live descendants of both the Belmonte and Belmont families. The suggestion is, therefore, offered here that some member of the Belmonte group, either from Hamburg or from Amsterdam, found his way up the Rhine, settled in a purely Ashkenazic (German) community, such as were those of Sobernheim and Alzey; that his family became completely absorbed into its surroundings, but was able to preserve the tradition of its descent; and that a late descendant revived the name when the Jews of the Pfalz accepted family designations. It is, naturally, impossible to present in documentary form all the individual links that go to make up this chain. The reason for this is that only in a few cases have Ashkenazic Jews preserved the knowledge and the account of their lineage. They moved about too freely and lived too often in untoward circumstances to make this possible. But in all genealogical studies such breaks are apt to occur, and in fact do occur. The presumption of all the available evidence becomes then the only ground upon which one can stand, and that presumption is exceedingly strong in the case of the Belmonts.

The earliest history of the Belmonts in Alzey, as evidenced in the "Memor-Buch" of that community, leads us back to a certain Simhah, son of Ephraim, who, it is stated, died in 1685 and was buried in Sobernheim. It will be noticed that this date synchronizes in point of time with the period during which the Belmonte family was most flourishing both in Amsterdam and Hamburg. Where Ephraim was born we are not told, not even where he lived and died. His burial-place, Sobernheim, is a picturesque little place, still walled as it was centuries ago, about twenty-two kilometres from Kreuznach on the road to Mayence. The stone marking Ephraim's grave would, no doubt, have given some further information in regard to his person. A most diligent search, however, failed to reveal its whereabouts. The older part of the present cemetery is all fallen into ruins, the stones are broken into hundreds of pieces, and not one of the inscriptions can be deciphered. We are, therefore, left to speculate why Ephraim was buried there. It is possible that, at that time, permission was refused to bury Jewish bodies in Alzey and that it was necessary to take them to Sobernheim. Or he may have lived in that place (Sobernheim being mentioned as a

residence of Jews as early as 1348)<sup>1</sup> and his son have come to settle in Alzey. This son is named Joseph Jessel, the second name being one often used by the Jews, and conspicuously so by the late Master of the Rolls in England, Sir Joseph Jessel. Joseph Jessel's wife, Hannah, died in 1716; he himself in 1738. The couple had two sons, Isaac, who died in 1712, and Ephraim Simon, who died in 1742. The family seems to have used by preference the names "Jessel" and "Simon," either of which might, had there not existed the tradition referred to above, have developed into a real "family-name." It should be added that in the accounts of the Leipzig "Messe" there appear between the years 1678 and 1690 the following names:

Joachim Simon  
Joseph Simon  
Lazarus Simon  
Joseph Simon

It is possible that reference is had here to our Joseph Simon and to members of his family.<sup>2</sup>

Who, then, was this Joseph Simon? The veil of mystery that envelops these forebears of the Belmonts is raised a little at one of its corners, and we get a slight view behind. This view is sufficient to convince us at least that even at that early time the family was of some importance. In the Alzey "Memor-Buch" Joseph Jessel is mentioned as "Vorsteher der Juden in Amt Alzei," leader of the Jews in the circumscription of Alzey. Now in the list drawn up in 1722 and cited above, the first entry is that of "Joseph Simon Vorsteher." There can be no reasonable doubt that the two are identical, and it is probable that the man's full name was "Joseph Jessel Simon." As the acknowledged head of the Jews in Alzey, he was responsible to the government for the good order of the community, as well as for the strict enforcement of all obligations that had been laid upon them. The second list of 1743, also cited above, commences with the item "Simon Jessel." There are several other Jessels in the list. Joseph, it is true, died in 1738; but the reference may well refer to his family, especially as we have seen that he was taxed a much larger amount than any other mentioned on the list.

Of the two sons of Joseph, Isaac and Ephraim, we know nothing, unless

<sup>1</sup> A family tradition has it that he lived for a time at Waldböckelheim.

<sup>2</sup> See *Monatsschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, XLV, p. 487.

the first be the "Isaac Jessel" found in the list of 1743. Ephraim Simon (died 1742) had at least two sons, (1) Elias Simon who married Schendel (died 1786) and who died 1795, and (2) Isaac Simon. We would willingly read more about this Isaac Simon; but all we know about him is that he was the first to take the family-name Belmont and that he was the most prosperous Jew in Alzey. He had some time previous to the year 1800 loaned to the town the sum of 30,000 florins.<sup>1</sup> Of this sum, 9500 florins had been paid back; the 20,500 florins remained as a debt due to his heirs. The documents collected by G. L. Kayser say that in the year 1790 this sum was turned by the four children of Isaac Simon into a "Belmont-Stiftung." Either he then was already dead, and the date given in the "Memor-Buch," 1813, must be wrong, or he must have distributed his fortune among his children before his death. The objects of the "Stiftung" were to provide in part for the salary of the Alzey rabbi and verger, in part for the expenses of the synagogue and in part for purely eleemosynary help. The members of the family are bound to meet once a year in Alzey for the election of the board of trustees of the "Stiftung."

Isaac Belmont died in 1813, having been predeceased by his wife Rosa in 1786. The two may be regarded as the direct forebears of the four branches of the Belmont family. They had issue:

1. Aaron Isaac Belmont, died 1791.
2. Simon Isaac Belmont, died 1805.
3. Loeb Isaac Belmont.
4. Johanna Belmont.

Leaving Aaron for the moment, it is sufficient to state that, according to the official registers, Simon Isaac Belmont died Mar. 26, 1805. According to the "Memor-Buch" he had a son Nathan Belmont, who died in 1810 aged 25 years.

The third son, Loeb Isaac Belmont, is the only one of Isaac Simon's children whose descendants still live in Alzey, though some of his great-grandchildren are inhabitants of the city of Philadelphia. Loeb had a son, Charles Frederick Belmont, born in the year 1777. He married Mariana Leopold.<sup>2</sup> Their children were three daughters and one son,

<sup>1</sup> I was told by surviving members of the family in Hamburg that this loan was made at the time to permit the town to buy its freedom from the French invaders.

<sup>2</sup> The following information was given me by Dr. Herbert Friedenwald of Philadelphia, at one time head Librarian of the Manuscript Department of the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., a nephew by marriage of Max Belmont (No. 8).

Leo Belmont, born Oct. 5, 1812, married Rosina Laib, died Nov. 28, 1891. His tombstone is No. 4 in the list aforementioned. Of his marriage there was the following issue:

1. Simon Belmont, born July 24, 1833; died Mar. 10, 1891 (List No. 7).
2. Isaac Belmont, born Oct. 27, 1839; died Dec. 26, 1886 (List No. 8). His widow was living in Frankfort-on-the-Main in 1901.
3. Henry Belmont, living in Philadelphia, Pa. (U. S. A.); had issue:
  - (a) Leo, living in Mayence, Germany.
  - (b) Theresa.
4. Emil Belmont; had issue living in Alzey.
5. Sigismund Belmont; widow and son of Louis living in Philadelphia, Pa.
6. Mary, married Sternberg, living in Limburg-on-the-Lahn.
7. Louis (Ludwig) Belmont, born May 28, 1847; died Aug. 22, 1892; no issue (List No. 9).
8. Max Belmont, married Belle Friedenwald, living in Philadelphia, Pa.; has issue, Emily Belmont.
9. Mathilda Belmont, married Charles Neuberger; living in Alzey.
10. Moritz Belmont, unmarried, living in Alzey.
11. Emma Belmont, unmarried; lives in Alzey.
12. } Two children, died in infancy.
13. }

Johanna Belmont, the daughter of Isaac Simon, married a Mr. Reinach in Mayence, of a family that in recent times has become famous in Paris through the Baron Joseph de Reinach the banker, and his three nephews, Joseph Reinach, *député* in the French Chamber and writer on economic subjects, Solomon Reinach, Membre de l'Institut, *député* and archaeologist, and Théodore Reinach, *député* and historian. The present representative of the family in Mayence is Geheimer Commerzienrat Hermann Reinach, who is described as "Grossherzoglicher Beigeordneter." A "Belmont-Stiftung" also exists in this place, with the purpose of providing a marriage-portion for improvident girls. Aaron Isaac Belmont, the eldest son of Isaac Simon Belmont, married Gertrude Lorsch and died in 1791. He had issue:

1. Simon Belmont, b. 1789; d. 1859.
2. Joseph Florian Belmont, b. 1790; d. 1870.

The eldest son of Aaron Isaac, Simon Belmont, was born on Jan. 31, 1789, and died in Alzey, Nov. 30, 1859 (see the copy of the entry in the Notarial Book, Appendix X). He married in 1808 Frederika Elsass (born 1790; died June 9, 1821), daughter of Joseph Elsass of Mannheim (see copy of entry in the Registry of Deaths, Appendix

