

Land of Dreams

One evening in the spring of 1880, Herbert Bentwich, a bachelor twenty-four years old, attended the Jews' Infant School Ball. There he saw a girl, and without even knowing her name, he fell in love. The next morning he told his cousin, "If she hasn't a shirt to her back, I'll marry her!" It was a bold romantic statement for an ambitious young lawyer at a time when "marrying well" meant marrying money. But Herbert Bentwich, then and later, had courage, loved romance, and held determinedly to his goals. (The obverse of these virtues was a fierce, Quixotic, blindness to the worlds that other people live in.)

Susannah Solomon was a star student of piano at the London Academy of Music. She dreamed of devoting her life to music and of achieving the transcendent musicianship of Anton Rubinstein, Joseph Joachim, and the singer Adelina Patti. Her love of music and disciplined pursuit of excellence, (she practiced each morning before the rest of the household arose) had persuaded her parents to support her study, though they had doubts about a public career for a woman. Music was a family tradition. Susannah's mother, (born Helena Lichtenstadt), was related to Ignaz Moscheles, a teacher of Felix Mendelssohn, and a friend of Beethoven.

From April through August Herbert Bentwich courted Susie Solomon, and he listed their meetings in his journal :

- 1) Jews' Infant School Ball 24th March 1880;
- 2) Concert at London Academy (of Music) ;
- 3) Harris's party
- 4) at 3 Paragon [The Solomon family home;- Paragon was a gated community south of the river Thames. - A friend of the family recalled meeting him there. Susie was out and Herbert, waiting for her to come in, listened to Mr Solomon tell about his early struggles, when he was the only Jewish boy in a large factory, and used to buy books and read them to his coworkers at dinner time]
- 5) at Opera (tickets);
- 6) at 3 Paragon.[The Solomons put on a family talent show, and Susannah was impressed by Herbert's courage and verve when he sang "Ben Bolt "].
- 7) at London Academy distribution. [Susannah . received the gold medal for piano];
- 8) at Paris -Grand Hotel, July 30-August 4th. [Susie's parents took her to Paris as a graduation present, and Herbert followed. and charmed Susannah with his lively enjoyment of what Paris offered..]
- 9) at 3 Paragon spoke to Mr. S
- 10) Proposed on Sunday 22nd August at 1 p.m. and accepted

Once betrothed, Susannah turned her energies into preparing for marriage. She describes her days ; "I have been working very hard since 4 this afternoon, and nothing does

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dear mother glory in more than seeing us all busy... . As usual I've been very busy , cooking, dressmaking, mending, packing, teaching, thinking, and other things." In the week before they were married she wrote: "What was it, my sweet angel I read in your heavenly face last night. Something quite impossible to describe. It was an expression of such a sublime character that it at once united me to you. Your whole countenance shone, and one look told me our love was one. Never was I more yours; you have me before and forever after the 14th"

Herbert answered: "Oh my Love , how transcendently glorious is the thought that we two are really and indissolubly united in thoughts, aspirations and objects; and that our souls are even now bound together in a union which shall never , never be broken.....our love is so pure and unselfish that I am sure it must endure; I pray only that we may be blessed with health, strength and prosperity to reap the fruits of our affection and to enjoy here as well as hereafter - for nothing can destroy our union - the blessings which a merciful Providence has bountifully stored up for us. "

Susannah focussed on happiness. She wrote ".To know that I am loved as I love makes me so radiantly happy that you will perhaps believe me when I tell you that the only thought of your little wife (that is to be) is of her own true darling Herbert. " Her letters express her love, and her joy in effective work. but also hint ("you will perhaps believe me') that in some corner of her mind Susannah knew that she could not be just a "little wife."

At the wedding dinner, Herbert told the assembled guests that he had taken as his motto, *Laus Deo* (Praise God). He ordered notepaper headed by a stag's head rampant (Herbert= Zvi= stag) with *Laus Deo* inscribed above it. Susie's brother Tod , responded on a sheet of paper decorated with a donkey's head and "Laus Tod" : "Dear Sue and Herbert, You know I'm "en colere". What do you mean by passing off on me your old Moorgate Street paper? I can imagine Sue saying - that'll be a good opportunity to use up some of our old paper. Tod won't mind! But Tod does mind. What d'ye take me for? I'm not your waste-basket; and if you don't send me some of your initialed, scented, cream-laid, gold-edged new-shaped paper I won't answer for the consequences." (PF 44

A week after the wedding the young couple moved into "The Limes" at 145 Abbey Road. For many years they both enjoyed what seemed limitless energy, continuously recharged by achievement. and mutual expressions of love, in a world that lay before them like a land of dreams .

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Herbert's professional success supported a comfortable life for the household with its regularly increasing number of children. He had attended Whitechapel Grammar School, from 1869-1874 and after graduation studied law at University College in London, the only English university then open to Jewish students. While at the University he also worked as an articled clerk for a firm of solicitors. In January 1877 he passed the LL B exam with honors. A few months later, on reaching the age of twenty one, he set up an independent practice as a solicitor in Moorgate Street. As a solicitor his focussed energy and conviction of right won cases, and sometimes raised questions that changed laws. Susannah's personal charm and her well-developed skill at household management (including supervision of servants) made the days and months run smoothly

Herbert wrote to Susannah from the office every day and wanted letters from her in return. She complied. On June 14, 1881, commemorating the sixth month of their marriage, she wrote: "According your wishes, my Blessed, I sat me down to write almost immediately you left; but now I'm quite at a standstill, a complete Narr, not knowing in the least with what I can fill these pages" - which she then proceeds to fill with rapturous assurances of happiness (enclosed in brackets where they were to be whispered). And a month later "sooner than you should feel angry with me, my darling Hubby, I would write until you were absolutely tired of reading my words and thoughts."

Annual "honeymoons" contributed to their continuing happiness. They would leave the children in the care of a grandmother or an aunt (with the help of servants), while they went on holiday together, traveling around the English Lakes or the Highlands of Scotland. They had been married five years when Herbert wrote: "I have been hunting after mottoes **lately**, but I can find none so expressive of my feelings as that which I adopted on our wedding day "Laus Deo". My heart was then overflowing with thankfulness and God has not ceased to shower blessings on us for which morning, noon and night expression of gratitude springs to my lips.

In 1886 Herbert's diary notes "We take our grand long-promised trip to Switzerland. Zurich, Lucerne, the Rigi, Andermatt, St Gotthard, Brunig Pass, Berne, Lausanne, Martigny, over the tete noir to Chamonix. the Mer de Glace, Mt Blanc, Geneva, Paris and home. Three weeks of lakes, mountains, valleys, and glaciers; a whole life of enjoyment."

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On holiday with Susannah in Italy, Herbert sent the children:

PAPA'S ALPHABET, 1893

A Stands for ALL of you
B BENTWICHES seven
C CHILDREN of brightness
D DEAR gifts from Heaven
E for old ENGLAND
F FREE and so fair to us
G GIRL in her white cliffs
H HOMELAND so glorious
I Stands for ITALY
J JOY breathes from her shores
K KINDHEARTED her people
L LETTING her stores
M for MAGNIFICENCE
N NO words can express
O OLD and new mingled
P PICTURES, PALACES, dress
Q for a QUERY
R RAISED now in our minds
S SAY, children, what is it
T THAT these two lands binds
U for the UNIVERSE
V VAST and ne'er ending
W WHICH love can still span for us
XYZ Yes. this is their blending.



Spring 1890

:Susannah with Budge(12 mos)and Margery(3 yrs) in a pram and Dorothy(4 years) standing behind.

Susannah's ability to keep Herbert happy looks particularly impressive when we realize that Herbert always needed to be right, had great difficulty seeing the other side of a question, and was easily angry when crossed. Like George Bernard Shaw -his exact contemporary- . Herbert Bentwich believed the world should be made better (pf 20=21.); and some arrogant righteousness went with the territory . Bentwich took pride in being English. He also believed that Jewish religion embodied high morality. In a report acknowledging that his effort to establish a Jewish Middle Class School in North London had failed for lack of public support, he wrote: "Through many ages Judaism has been the means of conveying all that is best in morals and religion...(and therefore) it is our clear duty to communicate to posterity the privileges we have received.'

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In 1892 Herbert Bentwich , working to establish a new synagogue in St John's Wood intended it to embody a new vital spirit in Anglo-Jewish life. Unfortunately his vision of synagogue ritual included the custom of volunteering donations in the course of a service, - a tradition that other congregational leaders considered obsolete and demeaning; and in committees Bentwich was his own worst enemy. The St John's Wood synagogue was built and flourished as a symbol of good-tempered respectability,- generous response to charitable appeals, thronged congregations on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur - but not as a source of spiritual energy and renewed religious observance. On Sabbaths Finchley Road was crowded with Jewish shoppers.

After two years of office as Warden Herbert Bentwich was not re-elected. He retreated to a small pew from which he could survey the congregation without mixing with it. Within a few years, demand for seating accommodations made it necessary to extend the synagogue building widely, and his pew was removed. He discontinued his membership, saying : 'It is quite fitting,.... that the movement which consecrates by your proposed extension the success of the material element in the government and direction of affairs of the congregation should have chosen to displace the originator of the movement in which the ideal held so large a place.

Herbert's ideal of Jewish life grew out of his childhood. When he was born , on May 11 1856, his family lived at 56 Church Lane in Whitechapel, a Jewish district in London Herbert's father, Marks Bentwich, had left Peizer in Russian Poland as a young man in 1840, to seek his fortune in England , while his brothers sought theirs in Australia. Once settled in London, Marks prospered as a jeweller and traveller in jewelry. In the course of his travels he met and married Rose Levy, of Bedford . Her father, Godfrey Levy , an established member of the Bedford community, and a strong advocate of Jewish civil rights had procured concessions from the local educational body in favor of Jewish pupils, including his own daughters.

Herbert , his parents' third and youngest child, was the apple of his mother's eye,- particularly after his brother Norman died young. When Herbert married and the young couple bought a house five miles away, his mother wrote, "Oh , my dear son, you have left a blank in my heart....for you have taken yourself to such a distance that it is impossible for me to indulge in the many tete-a-tetes which I should have done had you been nearer. .. You are happy and therefore I feel satisfied if not content in your loss; but still the pill is bitter to swallow."

In Herbert's childhood Marks Bentwich served on the Council of the Great Synagogue in Aldgate, then the center of Jewish communal life. When Mark's parents, Behr and Handel

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Bentwich came to live in England in 1861, they brought with them a prayer book inscribed as a gift from the head of the Bet Din in Peizer. These family ties gave Herbert a deep and abiding identification with the Jews of Eastern Europe.

As a devout Jew, Marks Bentwich saw to it that his son received a good Jewish education, including three years at a Jewish boarding school, - where the headmaster, H. N. Solomon, a recognized scholar, and community leader, gave his pupils a sane and broad conception of religion and citizenship. In the spring of 1869, Herbert, celebrating his Bar Mitzvah, read from a scroll in the Great Synagogue the portion of the week (Leviticus chapter XIX). It is a memorable chapter, devoted largely to laws that relate to social justice. Herbert learned this portion so well that when he was an old man in Jerusalem. he could still read it aloud in the synagogue service.

Besides his devotion to Jewish life and practice, Herbert Bentwich was an active member of the student community, and served as Hon. Secretary of the Jewish Scholar's Lifeboat Fund. Michael Henry, a philanthropist who taught at Jew's College had died suddenly, and Bentwich worked hard, enthusiastically, and successfully to complete a fund for a lifeboat to bear his name, as a fitting memorial. (In those days lifeboats were a standard symbol of humanitarian efforts.) On May 14 1876, in a ceremony at the Jews Infant School, Miss Hannah de Rothschild handed 400 guineas to the official representative of National Life-Boat Institution for the purchase of a life-boat, to be named " Michael Henry ". The Jewish Chronicle described the gathering in celebration of this gift: " A happy blending of the dual national sentiments .. pervaded the assemblage. From the chanting of the 150th Psalm to the singing of "Rule Britannia" and "God Save the Queen", the audience were reminded by singers and speakers alike that, while Englishmen to the core, they as Jews rendered praise to the Lord in uniting with their fellow citizens in the cause of humanity."

On this occasion the grateful committee gave Herbert Bentwich a model life-boat that, stood as an icon in the Bentwich household for many years. In 1935 it was still intact in Jerusalem in the Evelina de Rothschild school

In the Bentwich household Father's word was Law. The Sabbath, and the rules of Kashrut were strictly observed, and all the children learned some Hebrew language, as well as the prayers. Herbert represented religious ideals, Jewish learning, and the rule of Law. But where Susannah always kept in mind the persons she was dealing with, In matters of family

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policy Herbert's decisions were final. Nevertheless, Susannah usually managed to get her way

Herbert characteristically disregarded other people's desires and circumstances. Susannah's success came partly from her certainty and tact in asserting her own opinions. . After the birth of their fourth child, while she was kept in bed with "nothing else to disturb you:"- [this to a woman with four children under the age of five]- Herbert suggested that she might "plan and devise how Lillian shall be an example and a pattern by which the others may be trained - I mean of course the girls, for as to the Boy he must have a different scheme all to himself.. ..Send me some of your ideas and I will send you mine, and we will work together hand in hand." But his next letter acknowledges and approves her very different thoughts about parenting. "You will not discuss a plan of campaign about the chicks, and perhaps wisely, for I freely admit the difficulty of putting little children's minds into a mold and turning them out all beautifully shaped and rounded. "

With all Herbert's opinionated crankiness and obstinacy, he could be a life enhancing father. Margery writes: ..weekends were festive affairs and once he took his cap off we were free to laugh and romp with him and be indulged as our mother never allowed us on week-days..And if we were very good Father would take us for treats - to Margate by boat, to the pantomime, and he always had such luck getting the best places and catching trains. It was exciting going out with him; he made jokes with everyone and looked like the merry Prince" (PF 82) (Herbert Bentwich did in fact notably resemble Edward, then Prince of Wales later Edward VII, to the extent that once, when Bentwich was returning to London and got off the train, some attendant ran up with a red carpet to spread for His Majesty, who was traveling on the same train.) Herbert was a sociable man who enjoyed travel, theater, and games of chess. He was sometimes able to laugh at himself,- as when his devoutly atheist friend Hermann Cohen looked at him praying, and said "Worrying the Almighty again?" . He kept warm, lifelong friendships that flourished in spite of quarrels.

Week in, week out, Susannah shaped home life as it was lived. The children thought her perfect. The music that all the family shared, and the strictly ordered home that Margery hints at, were made possible by Susannah's example, her self discipline, and her intuitive charm.

Music was part of the atmosphere in which the Bentwich children grew. Each one learned to play an instrument. They were set up in "squads" of three; Lillian playing the piano, Norman studying violin, and Nita the cello; Dorothy at the piano, Margery the violin, and so forth. Susannah sought out the best teachers; she practiced every day (except on the Sabbath)

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with each child in turn. She was up at 6:30, summer and winter, seeing to it that each child had time to practice before going to school.

Susannah's love of music, and interest in people also led her to seek out other musicians and to offer help when needed. Michael Hambourg, being suspected of revolutionary sympathies, lost his position as teacher of piano at the St Petersburg Conservatoire. When he and his family came to London, Susannah welcomed them warmly, She took lessons with him, and guided his eldest son, Mark to the great master, Leschetitzky in Vienna,. The younger boys, Jasha and Boris, studied with the same masters as her children of their age.

For Susannah's children playing music was an integral part of life. Lilian played the piano with distinction at Michael Hambourg's Pupils' Concerts in the Salle Erard, London; Norman, on the violin, led the orchestra at St. Paul's; Nita kept up her cello playing throughout her life; Margery and Thelma went on to professional training and careers, Budge played the piano sufficiently well to accompany Margery at a public concert; Carmel, a gifted pianist, was employed for some years as an accompanist at a ballet school; Jose, as an adult, was heard to play the violin in the garden for his own pleasure. Listening to music, playing alone or together, remained a joy to each of the Bentwich children and a bond among them all their lives.

Even as children, the Bentwiches learned to play for an audience. During summer holidays in country villages Susannah, would organize a concert for some charitable purpose, - a seaman's charity, a lifeboat-. Besides coaching the children's performance, she found a place for the concert, sold the tickets, and distributed handbills.- In a letter to Herbert she describes going about the neighboring villages with posters and paste pots, ("Willings wasn't in it!") - People found it hard to believe that she was also the mother of the various sized children who appeared on the program.

Susannah made Friday night dinners, joyous occasions. "The shining cloth and silver, the flowers, the golden fish, the bread, wine and salt, all appeared as if by magic... We children, each attired in her best, would descend and find it there. ... Father in a brown velvet coat and tarboosh [a red hat similar to a fez], sang the psalms with a lustiness that both urged and shamed our piping response." The sanctification of the Sabbath felt natural and easy. Margery writes: "Any testiness that might appear in my Father before supper had completely disappeared when his hunger and his God appeased (after that long Grace) he sat around the fire in his armchair, fondling one or another small child at his feet.... The beauty of the children,

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like Botticelli angels with the light and dark curls and shining eyes suffused our Friday nights with a loveliness comparable to a night sky in Palestine...I have seen Mother's large eyes on the brink of tears contemplating the little ones."

Solomon Schechter, a frequent houseguest, confirms this vision " What impressed even the stranger most [about Sabbath and holiday observance] was the religious atmosphere in which the whole family moved and had all their being. Family worship is a subject familiar enough to the Englishman, and frequent enough in the best of English households; but there is always the feeling of something makeshift about it, or a substitute for something better. In the Bentwich household it attained the dignity of a real service... ...[And] the central figure in the service was Susie Bentwich, whose quiet presence with her happy face gave evidence of her gratification in every religious function."



Susie Bentwich , 1882, from a painting by her brother S. J. Solomon

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In this land of dreams the children , though aware of the separate values of their father and their mother felt no conflict. The enforced silence of their instruments on the Sabbath made a welcome break Lillian , when she was ten years old, wrote: “ Dear Papa, I will always try and get my Hebrew known for you, as I know that is a thing that makes you pleased, and for you , dear Mama, my music.”



“The First Squad” 1892

Norman(9) , Lillian(10) , Nita (6)