

- Well, this evening in London, ladies and gentlemen, and I've just had an email from... I've just had a message from one of our students, saying how bad the air quality is. So those of you in Canada and the States, we wish you all well. What a strange world we are living in. Anyway, I'm turning away from the rather depressing issues that I've been looking at in the seven o'clock slots because today, I want to look at the family of one of the most extraordinary characters that ever graced the pages of history, and that, of course, is Benjamin Disraeli. I'm not going to lecture on his life, I've done it before, and Lauren assures me that the website will be up by the beginning of... by July.

But I really think that it's important to find out where the man came from, who he was. Now, this description by Isaiah Berlin is absolutely fascinating. It's written by another Jewish outsider, and, in a funny sort of way, I think that is a requisite for trying to understand Benjamin Disraeli. When Rishi Sunak became Prime Minister of Britain, everyone talked about his ethnicity. When John Major became Prime Minister, everyone talked about the man who didn't go to Eton and Oxford, and left school at 16. In fact, Disraeli, who became Prime Minister of Britain and the empire, at the height of empire, was actually the son of a middle class Jew whose grandfather... His grandfather had immigrated to this country. He was a novelist, he was a writer, he was a... Some would say a ne'er-do-well. He was called a ruthless opportunist. And yet, the Tory Party, the party of empire and aristocracy, made him their leader.

And so, what I'm going to do before we get onto the family, is to talk about how people viewed Disraeli because quite soon after his death, the biographies came out. He himself wrote his own story. He wrote his... But the problem with Disraeli, you see the beginning, a somewhat fantastic figure. The point about Disraeli was that it's very difficult. He writes about his own life because he becomes one of Victorian England's most popular novelists. I'm not going to say great novelists, but most popular novelists. And many of his books are about Jewish subjects or tell the story of the Jews. And this boy who comes from this middle class background, in many ways, he had his nose against the ghetto wall, even though his father had converted him. All you have to do his look at his face. He looked so foreign, he looked so different, and he is going to wear his Jewishness as his armour. So against the backdrop of Victorian England, you have this extraordinary individual.

I'm going to read for you now a few obituaries of Disraeli, or books written not long after his death, which give you an idea because, as I said, unlike most Jews who went into politics in the 19th, early 20th century, he didn't see himself as an Englishman of the Jewish persuasion, not at all. He was a converted Christian. He once said to one of the Rothschilds, "I am the old... I am the blank page between the Old and the New Testament." He knew he couldn't hide his Jewishness. There's absolutely no doubt that he was beset with antisemitism from his school days onwards, so he wore it as a cloak. And what he had to make out was that he came from the greatest race that ever walked the world. He actually said "All is race, there is no other truth." So Disraeli, Prime Minister of England at the height of empire, the man who bought the Suez Canal for Britain, the man who made Queen Victoria Empress of India, the man who settled the Peace of Europe in 1878 at the Congress of Berlin. But what was it that his great friend, Otto von Bismarck, said of him at the end of the Congress? "Der alte Jude, das ist der mann." It's a very strange phrase for the Chancellor of Germany to refer to the English Prime Minister as "The old Jew, that is the man."

So this is from William Scawen Blunt. He's writing about a biography of Disraeli he's read. "His Semitic policies, of course, were genuine and rough. For his allowing these, I hold him in esteem for a Jew

ought to be a Jew, and I enjoy as a tour de force his smashing of those solemn rogues, the Whigs, and his bamboozling of the Tories. Our dull English nation deserved what it got, and there is nothing funnier in history than the way he cajoled our square-toed aristocratic party to pull off its respectable broadcloths and rove itself in a suit of imperial spangle, and got our fine ladies after his death to worship their old, weary, Hebrew beguiler under the innocent form of a primrose." Now, what he's referring to is after Disraeli's death, primroses were his favourite flower, the Primrose League was created, and it's estimated that at least a third of the population of London joined the Primrose League. This is Sarah Bradford, who wrote a brilliant biography. "He died like the hero of one of his novels: rich, full of honours, twice Prime Minister, celebrated throughout Europe, an Earl, a Knight of the Garter. There was to be no Disraeli dynasty. Coningsby inherited Hughenden, had an undistinguished career as an MP, and died childless in 1936. Perhaps it was better so. Disraeli remained unique."

Now, the point about this is Disraeli was an extraordinary individual. He married a woman too old to give him children. He married her because he thought she was rich. In fact, he got engaged to her thinking she was rich. He found out that her state was entailed, but he went ahead with the marriage anyway. And evidently, it was very happy. And on her deathbed, he said, "Madam, you've been more to me... You'd be more far more to me as a mistress than as a wife." He had the charm of the devil. Now, this is a Dublin newspaper, the Roman Catholic Nation, after his death. "Priest or Protestant, book of prayer, cross or crescent, symbol or sign of faith; there was nothing to tell if the dying man thought of Moses, Mohamed or Christ. Lord Beaconsfield died as dies a horse." Victoria wrote, to his secretary, "I feel so deeply for you who loved him devotedly yourself as few sons do. I hardly dare to speak of him myself. The loss is so overwhelming. Never I had so kind a devoted minister, few such devoted friends." He was wonderful in the way he handled Queen Victoria. She'd written a little book of verse, and remember, he's one of the most important novelists in England. And he said of her... When he would greet her, he'd say, "Madam, we authors..." He once said... And there are more quotes by Disraeli in the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations than any other prime minister, far more than Churchill. He said, "When I want to know 'how the middle classes think, I ask the Queen.'"

I'm now going to read you a couple of extracts from his own literature to give you a notion of his Jewishness. In his book, 'Coningsby,' he writes, "I'm not for a moment to admit that..." Talking about the hero, "that my pedigree is not as good as the cabin dishes. In the election of 1847, fancy calling a fellow an adventurer, when his ancestors were probably intimate with the Queen of Sheba." Gladstone, who'd loathed him, remember the enmity between the two, he called him a crypto-Jew, and he sometimes... He thought Disraeli was almost a satanic figure. In another book he wrote, "Influence of a great race will be felt." He believed in aristocracy, he believed in the Jewish race. And because he was of that race, in order not to pinch himself, I suppose, he becomes... Remember, he gets to the top of the gr... he himself coined the phrase, "I've got to the top of the greasy pole." When he went to the House of Lords, in the Elysian fields, how on earth do you take this on? So what he does is he constructs a biography that he comes from the greatest race that ever walked the world. He talks a little bit about antisemitism. This is in one of his earliest books. We know that... 'Vivian Grey.' We know that he went to an ordinary little primary school. We also know that he was teased, that in 'Merchant of Venice,' he played Tubal, and the only other Jewish boy, played Shylock. And he writes, "They were called my brothers, but nature gave us lie to this reiterated assertion. There was no similitude to between us. Their blue eyes, their flaxen hair, and their whole visages claimed no kindred with my Venetian countenance. Whenever I moved, I looked around me and beheld a race different from myself. There was no sympathy between my frame and the rigid clime whither I had been brought to live."

And in 'Contarini Fleming,' talking about the English, he said, "A troop of Norman Knights whose fathers were wreckers and Baltic pirates." Another quote from 'Cantorini Fleming: "Was this mixed population of Saxons and Normans of purer blood than he? Oh no, he was descended in a direct line from one of the oldest races in the world. From that rigidly separate and unmixed race were developed a high civilization at a time when the inhabitants of England were going half naked and eating acorns in the woods." Another comment, "They revere the literature, the sabbath, the sacred history of the Jews, and praise the son of a Jewish woman as their God, yet they disdain from their society and their parliament the race to which they owed their festivals, their semi-civilization, their religion, and their God." He said that in a debate on Jewish emancipation, which I'm going to be talking about next week. In the one... In one of his books, 'the Wondrous Tale of Alroy,' which is a... he was a 13th century messianic claimant who restores the Jews to their ancient homeland, and he perishes heroically. He was a great hero of Disraeli's. In his life of Bentinck... Bentinck was an aristocrat who'd lent him a lot of money, he was always in debt, so consequently he wrote a biography, and he... In that book though, a lot of it is about the Jews as the most important race. "In the end, this double alienated Jew cast a spell over England."

And in the end, sitting in his stately home in Hughenden, I think he must have pinched himself. The last extract, before we actually get onto his family, is from his most Jewish book, in my estimation, and that is 'Coningsby.' And what I've decided to do, I'm going to look at the... I'm going to look at Mary Anna Evans later on in, I think the week after next, who wrote 'Daniel Deronda,' and I'm going to look at Disraeli's 'Coningsby' to see a sort of philosemitism. Because we can talk about anti-Semitism, but there was also a philosemitism coming from England. And so, in his book, 'Coningsby,' the real hero is Sidonia. And Sidonia is the most extraordinary man in the whole world. I'm going to read you Disraeli's description and then we will go on to his family. "Sidonia had exhausted all the sources of human knowledge. He was the master of every nation, of all tongues dead and living, of every literature Western and Oriental. He had pursued the speculation of science to the last term. He had lived in all orders of society. He viewed every combination of nature and art, and observed man under every phrase of civilization. The influence of creeds, of laws, manners, customs, traditions in all their diversity had he been subject to his personal scrutiny." 'Coningsby...'

In 'Coningsby,' Sidonia is super-Jew. He is the intrepid financier who originally came from Spain, from a converso background, who has come to England and has proclaimed himself a Jew, and he's really master of the world. And he talks in it, also, about the Jews. "The Jews, for example, independently of the capital qualities for citizenship where they possess in their industry, temperance, and energy and vivacity of mind, are a race shrinking themselves from converts or from the calamity, are ever anxious to see the religious systems of the countries in which they flourish. In spite of tens of centuries of degradation, the Jewish mind exercises a vast influence on the affairs of Europe. I speak not of their laws, which you still obey, of their literature, with what your minds are saturated, but of their living intellect." In many ways, I think this is quite offensive. He's so pushing it, and yet he was adored, particularly by women.

So the last comment is from another biographer, in which he finishes up by talking about Disraeli's funeral. "The honour of a public funeral was suitably offered by a liberal government and still more suitably refused when, amongst his intimate papers, was found a letter from his wife expressing a wish they should share one grave at Hughenden. To the village churchyard, his remains were carried by tenants of the estate, and there followed the Prince of Wales and others of the royal family, nearly all the members of the late Conservative cabinet, Harcourt for the government." Gladstone was ill. It would've been impossible for Gladstone to go to Disraeli's funeral. The hatred he felt for Disraeli was

palpable. "And most of the great men of their day. The queen's wreath of Primroses was prominent on the coffin. Four days later, she herself visited the grave and, at her private expense, was erected in Hughenden Church the memorial in which were inscribed the words, 'Kings love him that speaketh right.' She, at least, his grateful sovereign and friend, had had little to quarrel with in any of the words of the great statesmen." The tributes in parliament by Gladstone, Grenville, and others were as generous as... "In opposite, as such things, all was art. Salisbury's oft-quoted line, that 'zeal for the greatness of England' was the passion of his life yields little enlightenment. Have any of these great men, in a moment of mad frankness, risen to declare that he whom they were praising was the one unquestionable genius of his age amongst the statesmen of England? But the fame of his practical statesmanship would be dim long before his qualities as a writer and thinker had been fully recognised. That he was the strangest mixture of prophet and comedian, that his make-believes and insincerities, though there were many, were superficial, and his honesty was fundamental. That he served England as well as she allowed him. And he'd learned to love England, but he could never feel for her as a son feels for her mother. That he always had an imperfect sympathy with the party he led, and indeed with the party system itself. That he'd proved himself, in most respects, a man of honour and fine feeling. But in every respect, a Jew. And if this had been said, everyone would've been profoundly shocked that something near the truth would have been told."

So Benjamin Disraeli, where did he come from? Well, one of the problems was that he, himself, created a fantasy, as I've already mentioned, that his family were actually descended in a strong long line from the most illustrious families that had ever left Sephardi Spain. Now, it's interesting because this line was pursued by people such as Leonard... Such as Lucien Wolf. Lucien Wolf himself is a fascinating character. Lucien Wolf was a journalist. He himself dreamt of being part of the upper middle class English society. He came from a relatively prosperous background. He became a newspaper editor. He was brilliant at foreign affairs, he was called 'Grammaticus.' And he involved himself in Jewish affairs, but very much in a paternalistic way. And he wrote a paper in 1904 about the Disraeli family. And what he said was that Disraeli had very little precise knowledge of his own forebears, that his grandfather was a practical man of business and his father didn't seem to have told him much. Now, according to Wolf, "His ancestry," I'm quoting, "was, to him, more a matter of race than family." And this is also quoted in Wolf's paper that he gave to the Anglo... The Jewish Historical Society in 1904. This is what he says to Lord Railton, Disraeli, "50 years ago, they used to call me adventurer. And now, when they are very angry, they cannot think of anything more scathing to say. Just fancy calling a fellow adventurer when his ancestors were probably on intimate terms with the Queen of Sheba."

Now, what is also interesting about the family, his father never became a Christian. He baptises his children and he, himself, was very, very... very, very ambiguous about his Jewish background. And Disraeli tells the story of his family as set forth in his memoir of his family, and much of the work for that was done by his sister, Sarah. And largely, it is a fantasy. According to Disraeli, they come from the Spanish Inquisition to the Venetian Republic, which... to Venice. And according to Disraeli's biography of his father, Venice was in fact very, very tolerant. In fact, if he'd bothered to check the records, there was no Disraelis in Venice before 1631. And the truth is that the name "Israeli" is not Italian but Arabic. In fact, it goes back to the family of Ibn Shaprut, who, those of you who love this period of history will know that he, was vizier to Abd al-Rahman III and he was called "El-Israel." That's what they called great figures in the Arabic world. And those of you who go to Cordoba, it was Abd al-Rahman III who built that incredible... that incredible mosque, which, unfortunately, was later turned... the mezquita, which was later turned, of course, into a church. There's no records in Venice of any family called Disraeli. And according to him, they flourished under the protection of the line of St. Mark. And it's curious that neither he nor his sister, Sarah, who supplied him with the material, didn't check anything.

In fact, we know where Benjamin Sr. came from, and the only connection with Venice is actually that two of his grandfather's sisters went to live in Venice and they set up a girl's school in the ghetto. There was a ghetto in Venice. In fact, if you think about it, that's where the word "ghetto" comes from. And the death of one of the sisters is recorded in the archive in 1821, and of another sister in 1837.

So going on... let's have a look. Shall we start having a look now at Benjamin Disraeli? And we do know quite a few things. Just the last thing to say about Lucien Wolf because the problem with Wolf is he loved aristocratic Jews. He, himself, wrote a biography of Mos... He wrote a biography of Sir Moses Montefiore, he wrote a biography of the Treves family, and he was violently anti-Zionist. And he was later responsible for the conjoint letter of the board of deputies which warned Britain of the dangers of issuing the Balfour Declaration. He very much was an Englishman. So whenever you read a biography, it's very important to know where people come from, and it's very difficult to look today... I can give you facts, after facts, after facts, but it's always about interpretation. Ironically... David Cesarani, who's done a lot of brilliant work on all of this, he said, "Ironically, Disraeli's life, the fact he concentrated so much on race, raised the level of antisemitism throughout Europe." The fact that Disraeli talked about Jews controlling the world.

So this is the grandfather, and can we see... We know where he was born. He was born in Cento, near Ferrara. Now, interesting, Ferrara was that part of Italy that was very, very... The d'Este family were very good to Jews, as were the Medicis. And it was the Medicis who set up the port of Livorno, and that becomes another strong Jewish centre. It was then in the Papal states. So his grandfather, Benjamin, is the son of Isaac Israeli, who's the eldest of three children. And Isaac's family, as I said, they're probably from the Levant. Lucien Wolf, as I said, traces him all the way back to Ibn Shaprut. Is that real? We don't know. But we do know that some part of the family came from present-day Tunisia. So he married a woman called Rika, who could actually... She had very illustrious origins. This is Benjamin Disraeli's great-grandmother. She traced her origins back to Jerusalem, and so she does come from one of the great families. So what happens? Can we go on please? So he's born in Cento, and then he has an apprenticeship in Mod... He takes an apprenticeship in Modena. Can we see the next slide please? Here, you see Modena in Italy, at the time when Benjamin Disraeli Sr. would be there.

And then, aged 18, he emigrates to England. Now why does he do so? There is quite a large community of Italian Jews living in this area. Someone who's going to have a big impact on his grandson's life is, of course, Sir Moses Montefiore, whose dates are 1784 to 1885; The dream for any historian, he lived to be 101. And his family all came from Livorno, and both of them were in the straw bonnet business. This is what Benjamin Disraeli had gone into. Benjamin Disraeli Sr was a straw bonnet maker. And in 17... That's his apprenticeship, but also he had a certain experience of banking. And in 1740... Can we see the next slide please? This is the Treves Banking House. The Treves were a fascinating Sephardi family, a very wealthy Sephardi family, with banks all over Italy and also in the Levant. They are part of what we would call the "court Jews," because obviously the majority of Jews living at this time are dirt poor. But having said that, many of the kings and princes of Europe had a court Jew who managed the finance. It's a fascinating phenomenon. And in 1740, a branch of the Treves Banking House was established in London and it attracted a lot of Italian Jews to the country. And as we've already established, the situation in England was very, very different. There weren't that many Jews at the time. They're a Sephardi... In the main, they are Sephardi community, they are used to mixing in Gentile society, and they are there because the British want them basically. In the main, they are merchants and traders. Now, Benjamin, grandson Benjamin, later stated it was the stability of England that attracted him, but, reality, it's to find the best market for the straw bonnet trade. And good luck happened, can we go on please?

There were a couple of very beautiful sisters. Maria Coventry and her sister, Elizabeth Hamilton. Maria Coventry and Elizabeth Hamilton, in fact, they were the daughters of Irish landowners. They were incredibly beautiful, they were part of the court scene, they were trendsetters and fashionistas. In fact, Maria Coventry, her claim to fame is that she died of cosmetics. She died very young. You see that very white skin, there was an incredible price to be paid for that very white skin. Layers of paint layered with arsenic. But they really made the straw bonnet trade very, very important. They're made fashionable by the their... Their single name was 'The Beautiful Mrs. Gunnings'. Particularly Italian bonnets, that's what they make famous. They're also society hostesses and they both marry brilliantly. Elizabeth marries the Duke of Hamilton, should we have a look at her? And Maria marries the Sixth Duke of Coventry. And here, you see Elizabeth Hamilton. Interesting stories. Those of you who love biography, there's a good biography on both of them now.

So that's why he comes to London, and he's making certain money. He first is.... before he develops that, he is employed at a moderate salary at the counting house of Treves in Fenchurch Street. Let's have a look at the next slide, please. Here, you see Sir Moses Montefiore in old age, and his family are already established in England, and he's going to be terribly important in the whole Disraeli story. Now, through... And remember it's a small community of Sephardi Jews. He goes to Bevis Mark Synagogue, and he also makes the acquaintance of a man called Aaron Lara, who's a prosperous city trader who introduces him to his family. And in 1756, Benjamin Sr., the grandfather, marries Lara's sister-in-law, Rebecca Mendez Furtado, whose father was from Portugal. And on his marriage, he had enough of a dowry to leave Treves and establish himself in New Broad Street as an Italian merchant. And he imports straw bonnets, marble, alum, currants, similar merchandise. Britain is going through a bit of a boom at that time, and the emerging middle classes... Remember, the British are going to have their industrial revolution way before everyone else, and this is really the beginnings of the height of the British empire, and merchants are very important in the city. So as far as his grandson is concerned, he came because of the great climate of Britain. Really, he came because Britain was so tolerant. Really, he came because he wanted a market. And interesting because of what his grandson later called his "ardent temperament," he found this far too restrictive. And in 1759, he attained an address at Sam's Coffee House in Change Alley. Can we go on with the slides please?

There is no picture of Rebecca Mendez Furtado, but they were married in... But they were married in Bevis Marks Synagogue. It's in the records. Of course, the records were kept in Portuguese. And that's a lovely... That's a lovely etching of the interior of Bevis Mark Synagogue. And those of you who don't live in London, or those of you who visit London, it really is worth a visit. And I was mentioning in another talk, I had the honour of going to a wedding there, and the bride is brought in with candles. It's a very, very extraordinary building, and of course is very much built on the model of the Sephardi synagogue in Holland. So with money from the dowry, he obtains an address at Sam's Coffee House in Change Alley. Can we go along? This is his second wife. Can we go on again? Have I? Yes, that's it, that's Jonathan's Coffee House. What you have... This is really the beginnings of the English stock market. And where do they meet? They meet in the coffee houses. He had capital, he had experience and credit but he doesn't do very well, and then his wife died after five years of marriage.

May 1765, he remarries. Can we go back please? He marries Sarah Syprut De Gabay Villa Real. She's the younger daughter, again, of a wealthy city merchant whose mother was sister-in-law to the chief rabbi of Venice. Now, we're talking a little more about... and her dowry restores her husband's fortune. In fact, the London Gazette would often record the dowries of these wealthy Jewesses. Soon, he's a man of substance. And for 10 years he devotes himself to... In the import business in number five, Great

Street, St. Helens. And by the 17... By 1770, he's one of the 16 leading coral merchants in London. He's still very close to the Treves Bank in Livorno. And he lives there until 1783, when he leases a large house in Enfield. Those of you who know London will know that, basically, Enfield today is really part of London, 9 million people, remember? But at that stage, it was a country village. He's still attracted to the stock market and in 1776, he rents an office in Hamlin's Alley, Cornhill. He becomes a licenced broker. Let's have a look at the stock exchange. Here, you see the London Stock Exchange in Capel Court. Three years later, he takes in two partners, two non-Jewish partners, Stoke and Parkins.

This is what is interesting, this is why people always thought England was different. English merchants, on the whole, were quite happy to work with Jewish merchants. He transfers to old... In 1792, he transfers to Old Broad Street. He's so successful, and he's one of the brokers who organised the beginnings of the stock exchange at New Jonathan's Coffee House, which I've shown you, and he admits them to their body. And he's elected as a member of the Committee for General Purposes, which builds the London Stock Exchange in Capel Court, which is there until 1672. And that it... Because that's when it was decided to build new premises. And he was made a member of the committee, which plans the conversion. And he remains a member of the stock exchange until his retirement in 1803. But to the day of his death, he retained his address. He still dabbles in stocks and shares. He dies November 1816 in Stoke Newington. He didn't really like the country. He preferred his house in town, where the neighbours referred to him as old Mr. Israel. He left a fortune of £35,000, which was equivalent to over 3 million now.

Benjamin was born in 1804 and he loved his grandfather. He was the darling. And this is... This is Benjamin Disraeli, the grandson, being fanciful about his grandfather. "He formed an Italian garden, entertained his friends, played whist with Sir Horace Mann, who had known his brother at Venice as a banker." Totally untrue. Sir Horace Mann wasn't in England at this time. "Ate macaroni, which was dressed by the Venetian consul, sang... sung songs, and notwithstanding a wife, who never pardoned him for his name, and a son who disappointed his plans, and to who the last hour of his life was an enigma to him, lived till he was nearly ninety and then, he died in 1817 in the full enjoyment of a prolonged existence." Disraeli loathed his grandmother, who hated being Jewish by the way. She felt... she very much... she very much wouldn't have kosher food, she didn't want what she thought was a stain of Jewishness. She wanted to be a member of the English upper middle classes.

But Benjamin Disraeli Sr, of course he's a member of Bevis Marks. His (*indistinct word*), which are the Jews to the synagogue, at the beginning was for 10 shillings. By the time he dies, it's 22... It's £22, which gives you a notion of his wealth. He remained there to his death. He was involved in... Oh, he wasn't really a synagogue-goer. Very few of the Sephardi were, you know? They built their country houses away from the city. He did... he was, for a year, an inspector at Bet Chaim, which was the charity hospital set up by Bevis Marks to deal with poorer Jews who were coming in, some fleeing from the Inquisition, others of course coming in from Central Europe. I mentioned last week that in the reign of Maria Theresa, she began expelling Jews from Bohemia, and some begin to come to England. Also, some Moroccan Jews came over. So he's one... for one year, he's an inspector at Bet Chaim, and also at the charity school. He was never appointed to another office. This is Picotti, who in his Anglo... In his Anglo-Jewish history, he said "A very lax Jew, "but liberal in his charities." So he gave money.

Now, what of his father, Isaac? Isaac... Can we go on please to the next slide? Now, Isaac Disraeli. He was the only child of Benjamin and his second wife, Sarah. He was educated in Leiden. Look, Jews could not attend universities in England. Oxford and Cambridge did not... The problem with Oxford and Cambridge was that you had to swear the oath on the St. James' Bible, and that oath was not removed

until 1871. It also excluded dissenters, free thinkers. And that is why some Jewish financiers were behind the establishment of University College London, that godless institution in Gower Street. So he goes to the University of Leiden, and he ha... His dream is a literary career. And he begins his career with verses addressed to Samuel Johnson. Let's have a look at Samuel Johnson. Samuel Johnson was one of the most distinguished men of letters, and Benjamin Jr. begins to publish, and he becomes a frequent guest at the table of John Murray, the publisher. Now, this is important because this is going to... The son, Isaac Disraeli, he was a great disappointment to his father. He had no reason... He had no wish to go into business. What he wanted... And because luckily his father was wealthy and when his grandmother died, he inherited much of her money, so he's the only child. So consequently, he has the luxury of pleasing himself. And he's very amiable, he's a member of Bevis Mark Synagogue, but he becomes a frequent guest at the table of John Murray, and also at the table of his son.

Now let's have a look at John Murray because his publishing house was incredibly important. He founded his business in 1768, and he also founded the Star Magazine. Now, this is important because there are a lot of interesting literary figures who are really becoming important in what is going to emerge as a liberal trend in England. Let's have a look at John Murray II. This is his son. John Murray II, whose dates were 1772 to 1843, and it's him who's really going to launch Disraeli into his literary career. Benjamin Disraeli Jr., I mean. He was a very important publisher. Let's have a look at some of the characters he published. Oh, sorry, go back. I'm sorry, I thought I had another slide. He published Sir Walter Scott, he published Byron, and of course Byron had written "The Hebrew Melodies," which are very, very pro-Jewish. He also published Jane Austen, so he's a very important publisher. And Isaac Disraeli becomes a very, very welcome guest at his home. So consequently, and not only that, he writes a very important book, "Curiosities of English Literature." It's an annotation... Can we go on please and have a look at it? This is the "Curiosities of English literature" by Isaac Disraeli. He has five children... He marries Maria Basevi. Can we see her please?

Maria Basevi, her dates are 1775 to 1847. Evidently, Isaac, the women listening will not like it, but he writes to a friend saying that his marriage was perfect because she never in any way interfered or troubled him in any way. Basically, she let him do exactly what he liked. She also brought money to the family. She was the daughter of an Italian merchant family. They had five children, four of whom survived. Let's have a look at the children. There, you see Sarah Disraeli. Sarah Disraeli never married. Of course, the children are going to be converted. Sarah had herself a boyfriend, but he died on... He was engaged to Sarah, and he and Benjamin went on a grand tour, as many young men of fashion did. But unfortunately, he contracted... He contracted a disease and died. And Disraeli's ma... Disraeli Jr's letter of condolence to his sister was absolutely extraordinary because he says, basically, all you're going to do now is have the time to devote yourself to me. And he, Disraeli Jr., was extraordinarily attractive to women. Sarah hated his wife, Mary Anne. And she lived in Twickenham and Disraeli managed to keep the two of them apart.

But these are the children. He had two younger brothers who survived. Raphael Disraeli, can we go on please? Can we see the other two? James Disraeli and Benjamin Disraeli. Now, what is interesting about the children is that Benjamin, who is the oldest son, he goes to a little prep school and leaves school at 16, and then is apprentice to a solicitor, a friend of his father's, a man called Mr. Maples. And there's a wonderful story, when young Disraeli, Benjamin, goes to work at the solicitor's office, he carries a copy of Spenser's "Faerie Queene," he dresses in Byronic fashion, ringlets, elaborate rings, on his fingers, and he courts rather, in not a very interesting or interested way, Mr. Maple's daughter. And after six months, Mr. Maples has to write to his friend Isaac, "Your son is far too clever for the law." But it's interesting that the two younger brothers, James and Raphael, they both went to English public

schools. They were both blonde and blue-eyed. Interesting, they brought them up in a different way. But all the children were... so the children are circumcised. In fact, we know that Isaac had Benjamin circumcised in what is now the boardroom of the Board of Deputies in Bedford Row. And he leaves Judaism because of a dispute at Bevis Marks. What happened was he refused to take an office, and he was fined 40 shillings. And can we see the next slide, please? His friend... No, can you go on to the next slide, and then go back, I'm afraid?

His friend, Sharon Turner, says to him, "Look, your Judaism doesn't really mean very much to you. Why don't you give your children a chance in life?" So he does decide to baptise his children. So consequently, Benjamin Disraeli, who becomes Prime Minister, is baptised when he is 12 years old, before his bar mitzvah. And consequence... It's interesting because Isaac never converts, and there's a bit of a story here because according to Lucien Wolf, he attends the opening of the new Reform Synagogue, which was set up in 1840. Now, this is disputed by other historians, but he never deserts Judaism because in one way... Can we go back? He writes "The Genius of Judaism." He becomes very interested in important Jewish figures and in "The Genius of Judaism..." He was going to publish it anonymously. Much of the work for it was prepared by Sarah, who becomes her father's eyes towards the end of his life, but it is published. And what is also interesting is his son, Ben, actually writes 'Alroy' at the same time. And 'Alroy,' I've already mentioned to you, is the story of a Jewish messianic claimant. It's a critical analysis of Judaism, but he never indicated... but he, himself, never indicates any desire to exchange Judaism for Christianity.

Now, the Reform synagogue, by the way, had been set up by 24 members of the Mocatta, Goldsmith, and other families. They were defecting from Bevis Marks, and also from the Ashkenazi Great Synagogue, to find a prayer group "neither German nor Portuguese, "but for British Jews." He also penned a series of English adaptations of traditional Middle Eastern tales, and published a number of poems. So he was very popular, he sold widely. His books... He writes a lot of history books. 'Life and Reign of Charles I' resulted in him being awarded a doctorate from Oxford University. He bought himself a stately home. Can we see it, please? Bradenham. So what he does is he takes on the mantle of an English man of letters, he's mixing when he is in town in literary circles, he's evidently very, very popular. Disraeli adored his father, who was not a very strong man. That seems to be another clue to the very great. In his incredible book, 'Against The Current,' which if you haven't read it... Isaiah Berlin's brilliant book, 'Against The Current,' there's this chapter when he compares Marx and Disraeli, and he does it like this. He says, "They were both men of genius, they were both alienated, they both had weak fathers and didn't get on well with their mothers." One wanted a... they both lived most of their lives in England. And in fact, Marx applied for citizenship when Disraeli was prime minister. He was turned down... they never met of course, but he was turned down because he was not loyal to his own king. But according to Berlin's hypothesis, Marx wanted to smash society, Disraeli wanted to win.

But that is the stately home, Bradenham. And he dies in... He dies elderly, 81, and he dies in 1848. As I said, he had a very close relationship with his son, Benjamin, and he also got on very well with Disraeli's wife, Mary Anne. Disraeli said of his wife, "She's a wonderful woman but she can never remember who comes first, the Greeks or the Romans." And it was Mary Anne who set up a memorial to her beloved father-in-law. Now, let's talk a bit more about Isaac's Jewishness because these are the peop... He's the man who had a huge impact on his son. He never disguised his Jewishness, and at intervals was very... He wrote extensively about it. He also wrote an article on Moses Mendelssohn. He wrote an article on the Grand Sanhedrin of 1807. You will remember that that was the time when Napoleon had asked the Jews of his empire 12 questions about whether Jews could really become part of society. Questions such as, "Is there any aspect of Jewish law which stops you being Frenchmen? Who elects the rabbis?

Are you loyal to France for all purposes?" And he writes about it. But interesting, when he writes about Jews, he writes in the third... The third person. And I think another clue to his ambiguity is that, at first, he wanted 'The Genius of Judaism' to be published anonymously.

But his interest in Jews is very much reflected in his papers, some of which were included in the archive of his son, and they're preserved at Hughenden, and now in the Bodleian. Disraeli himself had quite an extensive Jewish library. And also, there was a leather-bound notebook which contained a lot of material on Jewish history in his own hand, with references to many works. So Isaac had obviously spent a lot of time studying Jewish history. Interesting, the fact that his son was such a fantasist about his own origins, is it that his father just didn't tell him? And interesting, there's also a first draught, a preface, on 'The History of the Jews' and it appears that in old age, he becomes increasingly interested in Jewish identity, with particular interest on the persecution of the Jews in different countries and the struggle for emancipation. And this does go hand in hand with liberalism that's sweeping England. It's fascinating. When I look at philosemitism in England with you next week, you're going to find out, there's going to be a lot of meetings in London. For example, when things go wrong for Jews in Romania, when things go wrong for Jews with the Mortara affair, or the Damascus affair, it is leading Englishmen who complain and set up petitions to assault the various governments. So there is this tide of liberalism.

Now... But I think what we can say is that he wasn't particularly interested in religion at all. How much of Isaac's increased Ben's interest? How much was transmitted to his son? As I said, he wrote 'Alroy' when his father is working on 'Curiosities of English literature.' But ironically, although his father was interested in emancipation, at first Benjamin voted against it. It was only in 1847 that he crossed the floor. And David Cesarani, who's written extensively about Disraeli and is much more cynical about him than I am, he said, "Is it possible that he wanted to curry favour with the Rothschilds? Is it possible that Benjamin Jr wanted to curry favour with a woman called Mrs. Brydges Willyams?" Another fascinating story. Mrs. Brydges Willyams was a Sephardi heiress who was married to a colonel and she loved Disraeli's books. Remember Disraeli becomes one of Victorian England's most famous novelists, and she becomes a fan. And she writes to him and basically says, "If you will be my friend, when I die, I will leave you my fortune. And also, I want to be buried next to you." And if you ever visit Hughenden, Disraeli's stately home, and you go to the churchyard, you will see the mausoleum, Disraeli in the middle, Mary Anne one side, and Mrs. Brydges Willyams the other side.

Or was it that he put around his cloak the mask of Jewishness? He knew he couldn't hide from it. For example, when he first stood for parliament, somebody pushed a pig's head in his space. Yes, there was philosemitism, but there was also antisemitism. Some might say that Disraeli's personality itself... But his father was a much, much more gentle soul. We do know that neither father or son was involved in the campaign by Montefiore and Goldschmidt, the people who met at the Rothschild's offices to plan emancipation. And also, it's interesting to know that Isaac did not leave Bevis Marks until after his father's death. Now... So how can we sum it up? It's a progression, isn't it? They were not a deeply religious family. Disraeli Jr's mother didn't like being a Jewess at all. She found it stultifying. She found it... if I can quote cross across the world, she found it like a cross around her neck she didn't want to bear. Disraeli himself wore it as a cloak. He built up the image of the Jew.

I think Disraeli, Isaac... I think Benjamin Disraeli Sr. was a practical man of business who came to England, who married well, who got on with his fellow men, and built up a good business career. He had this son who, to him, was an oddity. He was a man of letters. He lived a life in his stately home, but also living a bit within the world of the lesser nobility, and also of the literati. He obviously had a very,

very equable nature because people like to be around him. And then, he produces these five children, four of whom live, and then this extraordinary son, who he lives to see really beginning to be launched on his career. So consequently, I think what we can say is that a lot of Disraeli's further career is very much marked by his background. Not just the fact that he saw Jewishness as a race, but also from his own family. And I think it's important to remember that even today, Disraeli, in a recent poll of Tory ministers and MPs, the second most popular prime minister is Benjamin Disraeli, after Winston Churchill. And yet, I remember when I had to write an essay on him at uni, the title was, "Was Benjamin Disraeli an unscrupulous opportunist?" I think the majority of prime ministers are unscrupulous opportunists, and I wonder if that is tinged just a little bit with antisemitism. And certainly, another ironic thought, which is much the work of David Cesarani, that Disraeli himself increased the antisemitism in Europe.

Look, for example, in 1878, at the Congress of Berlin, he refuses to ratify Romanian independence unless the Jews were emancipated. And we know that his first private visit was to Sir Moses Montefiore, who fought so much for it. That same year, a man called Wilhelm Marr, who created The League of Antisemites, actually said "The Semite, Disraeli, holds in his coat pocket the key to war and peace in the Orient." And believe it or not, ... Der Stürmer quoted Disraeli, "All is race, there is no truth." And Hitler talked about it in a rally of 1925. But this is totally consequential. Disraeli could not possibly have foreseen it, so we can in no way blame him for it. And as far as I'm concerned, he's still one of the most fascinating characters of the... In fact, of the whole of history. And I do, in my own ironic way, believe he chose a woman deliberately who could never give him children. She was too old. He had a penchant for older women by the way. Most of his mistresses on the way up, apart from one, Henrietta Sykes, were older, married women. And I think, in a way, it was partly his incredible ego. But I think, at some level, he knew that there could be no room for another Disraeli. So I will stop there, and it is so nice to come to a subject that at least is a little more light. Can I say that?

Q&A and Comments

Let's have a look at questions. Karen saying, "Glad to listen to lockdown, horrible to go out today."

Q: "Are you saying that Disraeli considered Jews as a race, even if they are converted? Sounds like Nazi racism."

A: I hope I've answered that for you, Shelly. You've got to remember the term 'race' in the 19th century was not a dirty word. Look, of course, to... They even talked about eugenics. Now, today we find it horrifying to talk about race, and in fact there are thousands and thousands of different groups, ethnic groups, within the world, it doesn't marry up in any way, because if you are ever going to talk about pure bloodline, you have to geographically isolate for hundreds of years. So of course, today, we would find it disgusting. But at that time, in the 19th century, it was regarded... Disraeli talked to himself as a Jew by race, most people refer to Jews as a race, but they talked about the British race too. Race theory is beginning. Race theory really begins by the... Look, antisemitism, the word is coined in 1878 by Wilhelm Marr. It comes into being really... The notion of race, it grows out of social Darwinism and many other different factors. But we really... so at this stage, it... at this stage, Disraeli certainly regarded the Jews as a race. Most people did.

This is one of the dilemmas of being a Jew, and it coming up time and time again, and Wendy and I are debating how to put on the debate of what it means to be a Jew. Today, I would suggest there are many categories. It is a religious definition, which is so much easier. It is a cultural definition, you can be a cultural Jew without religion. As far as the Disraelis are concerned, it's a national definition. 'Race' is

not a term I would use, but it is often a word employed by enemies of the Jews, and that's how you get to that mad notion of Jewish conspiracy theories. How, if you think about it, capitalist Jews, communist Jews, Jews in the press, well they must all be bounding together for some sort of Jewish race theory, which is insane. Unfortunately, in times of economic and social unrest, they come to the fore. And I don't suggest you go on the net looking for it because you'll find plenty and it'll depress you.

This is from Tim. "The phrase you used about Disraeli wearing his Judaism like a cloak reminds me of something that was said in an early episode of Game and Thrones. It was said to John Snow, who was a bastard. The quote was, 'Never forget what you are, the rest of the world will not. Wear it like armour, it can never be used to hurt you.' It's along similar lines to Disraeli wearing his Judaism like a cloak. What a fascinating comparison, Tim. Thank you for that.

Q: What were the reasons for Gladstone's "personal dislike of Disraeli? Was this basic prejudice?

A: David, not necessarily. Disraeli was probably the wittiest man in parliament. Gladstone was a dour Scot. He was also a brilliant man, but Gladstone's habit was to go amongst the prostitutes of London to try and save them. Disraeli was mocking. Disraeli once said of Gladstone and his party, "The opposition is like a range of spluttering Italian volcanoes, spluttering and about to become extinct." He was pretty cutting about Gladstone. And you see, they were such polar opposites. Disraeli who was seen as a... Look, he was a dandy, he managed to beguile people, women in particular adored him. Men, in the beginning of his career, with his Byron-esque type appearance. The fact that he was part of the Romantic movement, the fact that he was a novelist, the fact that he had lots of mistresses until he married, by the way, and then there's no evidence he ever strayed. Except there are some historians, and I know my daughter shares this belief that probably he was gay, but I'm not going that route. I don't know. But the point is, Disraeli had this incredible mockery. He was so quick that Gladstone had enough reasons to dislike him. He was religious. He also... He found Disraeli offensive, and he also had a terrible temper, Gladstone, whereas Disraeli would mock everything and mock everything off. And yet, I think in the end, he did fall in love with England. That's the story. He was a Hebrew adventurer. Is that necessarily pejorative? It's complicated.

"Treves might have been present day Trier. Is that where they came from?" I've never researched the Treves family. I think they sound incredibly interesting, Lily, if you've got any information on them.

Q: "If the English were accepting of the Jews, why would the Disraeli family (think) that conversion was necessary for greater success?"

A: Oh, Anita, because of English law, and I'll be talking about it, in fact, next week. The emancipation in England was very slow. Jews, when they came back, never had to live in ghettos. They could go into trade, but they couldn't sit in parliament because of the oath. They couldn't become members of all sorts of things because of the English oath. It was more to stop Catholics. And basically, Sharon Turner realised that Ben Disraeli Jr was very ambitious. Give him England, it was obvious from the beginning. Look, Disraeli, he tried everything. He tried the stock market, it bankrupted him. He was an adventurer in his youth, there's no way around it, and it would give opportunities. He wanted more than just to become a banker.

"I find it hard to believe that Isaac Disraeli can write 'The Genius of Judaism' and then baptise his son, Benjamin, and importantly, he never convert himself. Strange behaviour indeed. And must have not had any true feelings of Judaism, no matter what he wrote or said." Yes, Ron, I think you've got... Look, I think, basically, Isaac Disraeli was a man of the Enlightenment. These Sephardim, they did wear their Judaism quite lightly. Look, many of them converted, many of them married into the English

aristocracy. I don't think he had much feeling for religious Judaism, that is the point. It depends on how you... And I think it is rather sad that he baptised his son, Benjamin. But then, if he hadn't been baptised, he would not have gone into parliament. He couldn't have gone into Parliament until 1858, that is when the first Jew takes his seat by swearing on the Hebrew Bible, and that was actually Lionel Rothschild, who was a great friend of Disraeli's.

Q: Did Disraeli court the Rothschilds because they were so wealthy?

A: In fact, Nathan Rothschild was his executor. And there is a story that Benjamin Jr. said the Shema on his deathbed. We will never know the truth, will we? Not really. There are so many stories about Benjamin Disraeli. He is so complicated. If you live in England... I don't know where you live, Rod, but it's worth going to Hughenden. I wonder around Hughenden, and Disraeli, in his day, had peacocks on the lawn, and I wonder... For me, he sold out for a mess of pottage. I don't know that the English aristocracy was really, for a man like Disraeli, worth having, but that's just my view. That's not to say there wasn't merit in the English aristocracy, but it's fascinating how they took him to their heart. He created Young England, a group of young aristocrats in parliament. He was an extraordinary individual. His achievement of becoming head of the Tory party at the height of empire is breathtaking. And the fact that he seduced a queen. She hated Gladstone. She said that Gladstone treated her like a public meeting, whereas Disraeli, he had gout, and she'd would allow him to sit in her presence. When he was dying, she wanted to visit him. And he said to his secretary, "Don't let her come. She'll only want me to send a message to Albert." So even at the end, he had that incredible humour. "Was Isaac..." One plus, I don't know your name.

Q: "Since Isaac was very Jewish at heart, it's strange he would baptise his son, who was also very Jewish. "How do you explain that?"

A: What does it mean to be Jewish at heart? You see, they are not religious. I've given you this quote before, Elias Canetti, "There are no people more difficult to understand than the Jews," and that is so true. What does it mean to be a Jew? Can you actually be a cultural Jew? Well, honestly, when I have my Seder, I like to have a big Seder, and so many people who attend, it's the only religious affiliation they have at all. So coming to my Seder. What does it mean to be a Jew? So complicated? You can be a secular Israeli. Can you be a secular Jew? Can you be a cultural Jew? Yes, you can, can't you? Because it's self-identification. The word 'race' is applied by the outside.

"The husband of Queen Camilla's daughter, Lopez, is an example of someone who's English Sephardi ancestor married into the English aristocracy." Oh, thank you for that, Danny. Yeah, yeah. So many of the English aristocracy, their fortunes were saved by the fact that their families, Jewish... Wealthy Jews married into their families. Princess Anne's husband is of Jewish descent. It's fascinating, isn't it? But... So England's complicated.

Next week, I'm going to look at emancipation in England, and I'm going to look at philosemitism, we spend a lot of time looking at antisemitism, and I'm also going to look at proto-Zionism with you. People like Mary Ann Evans and 'Daniel Deronda,' but also people like Lord Shaftesbury, and the extraordinary Laurence Oliphant, who had, as his secretary, the man who wrote 'Hatikva.' So we live in a strange world. Anyway, I wish you all well and best wishes to all of you in Canada and America, who are having this terrible pollution problem. I think that's... Carol's going to...

Rod is saying, "To be a Jew requires one critical factor: Pride. You must proud to be a Jew." You see, that's what's so interesting about... Rod... About Disraeli, Rod. He was proud of his Jewish origins. He made himself proud. He threw it in their faces all the time. Can you imagine? He writes a biography of

an English aristocrat, a third of it's devoted to the subject of how wonderful the Jews are. He exaggerates the Jewish story. Look what... Think about 'Coningsby,' Super Jew. In 'Coningsby,' the figure of Sidonia is a mixture of the Rothschilds, Montefiore and Disraeli himself. He's a man who conquers the world. So it's a strange story. Disraeli is a strange character. I have read, and read, and read about him. I have a whole shelf behind me just devoted to Benjamin Disraeli. He absolutely fascinates me. He is unique. I can't get to grips with it, really. I can talk about him, I can talk 'round him. So many of his, I think... This is going to sound appalling. I think in many ways, it's Isaiah Berlin who got him best because Isaiah Berlin was, in many ways... Here's the Jew who comes from... He comes from Riga, he comes to London, he finishes up at Oxford, the first Jewish Fellow of All Souls, an incredible intellectual. When he died, in fact... No, sorry, just before he died, The Guardian, the headline, "The Greatest Living Englishman." And at the end, when Isaiah Berlin was asked about his identity, he said, "I'm a Jew." And he... That's why I'm suggesting, read his chapter, really, on Jewish alienation. It keeps on coming into the story of 19th and 20th century Jewry.

And on that note, I wish you well. And if you haven't read about Disraeli, you are in for a wonderful treat. Disraeli's novels, they're not easy to read, but he also was very insightful, by the way. In his novel, 'Sybil,' he's the man who said, "England is two nations, the rich and the poor." And what is also interesting about Disraeli, as Tory Prime Minister, there were more reforms for the working classes than in the whole of the Liberal administration. And he also said something very interesting. "When the cottages are rested, the stately homes should tremble." He understood. He understood that you ha... He was a paternalist, he was not a reformer. He hated revolution. He said the English will never have a revolution because of the fog. And in fact, in 1848, when Marx came to London, he was furious because the most the British would come up with was a Chartist demonstration. There were 52 revolutions in Europe but perhaps that's not the English way, or it never was.

And on that note, I leave you on the question. So God bless. And Lauren, thank you, and I will see you all next week. We've got a great weekend coming up for you all. Some very, very interesting lectures. And thank you all for supporting Lockdown, take care.