

TRADITION VS MODERNITY

RABBI NATHAN MARCUS ADLER AND THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE

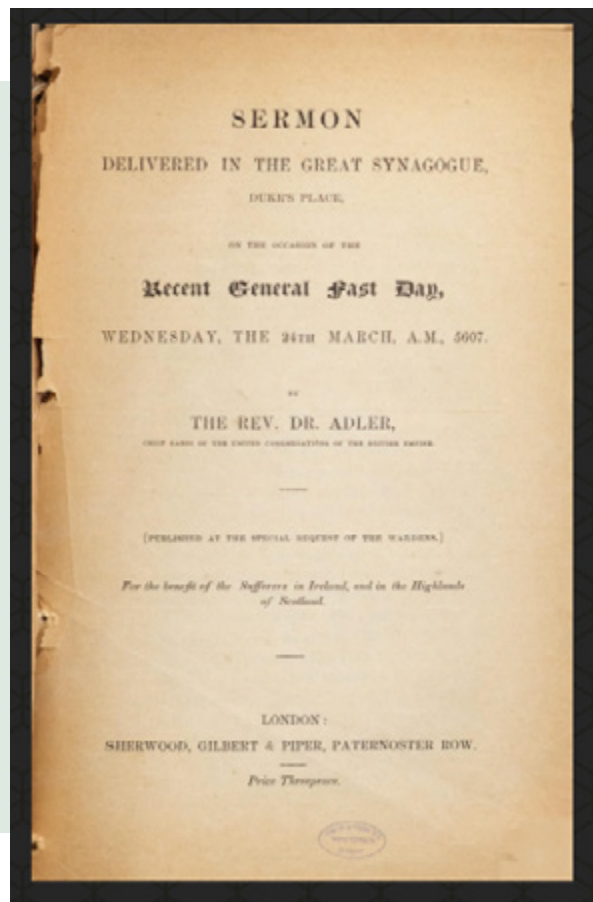


Portraits of Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler, End of Nineteenth Century
The National Library of Israel

Nathan Marcus Adler was born in Hanover, Germany in 1803. He was ordained as a rabbi in 1828, the same year that he earned a doctorate in classics and modern languages. After serving in a rabbinical post in Hanover, he was elected Chief Rabbi of the British Empire in 1844. Rabbi Adler was an important figure in the changing face of newly emancipated British Jewry and reflected both traditional Orthodox Judaism and modernity. He was the first Chief Rabbi in Britain to go to university and also the first to pay regular visits to the various Jewish communities around the country. He also participated in activities for the sake of the general public and founded the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty and Better Protection of Children. Rabbi Adler established the United Synagogue, an umbrella organisation uniting many British synagogues under one leadership. He believed in the need for high quality rabbinical training, and together with Sir Moses Montefiore, founded Jews' College (today known as the London School of Jewish Studies). Rabbi Adler's leading work was *Netina LaGer*, a commentary on the Onkelos Aramaic translation of the Torah. He died in 1890.

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RABBI ADLER'S SERMON ON THE GREAT FAMINE, 1847



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This is the printed text of a sermon given by Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, on March 24, 1847, referring to the “recent general fast day...for the benefit of the Sufferers in Ireland, and in the Highlands of Scotland.” The sermon was written in English with various Hebrew quotes and a concluding prayer in Hebrew translated into English. This sermon was given on the occasion of a national day of fasting that was observed throughout the United Kingdom in response to the Irish famine.

Rabbi Adler’s sermon demonstrates the Jewish community’s solidarity with people in need outside of the community. It is interesting to note that in January 1847, Lionel de Rothschild, the first Jewish MP in England, together with other Jewish philanthropists and leaders such as David Salomons, the first Jewish mayor of London, formed the British Association for the Relief of Distress in Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland. The association raised approximately £390,000 for Irish relief, which was a huge amount at the time.

