

THE SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE JEWS

"SHEARITH ISRAEL"

OF MONTREAL



NE hundred and fifty years have passed since the founding in Montreal of the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish Congregation "Shearith Israel" ("Remnant of Israel"). More than ordinary notice attaches to the event, owing to the historical interest which centres round this congregation, for it was the first Jewish body of any kind established in Canada.

Among its founders it counts the first Jews known to have put foot in Canada, and for the greater part of a century after its organization it remained the sole Jewish congregation in the Dominion.

"Spanish and Portuguese Jews"—or, in Hebrew, "Sephardim"—they are styled. Whence comes this designation? One must search far back into history for the explanation.

When the Hebrew people began to be scattered and dispersed, one stream, separating from the others, moved westward along the shores of the Mediterranean, then under the civilization of Carthage and Rome, and, crossing the Straits of Gibraltar, settled in Spain long before either Goth or Moor had seen that fair land. And when the iron legions of Titus carried ruin and devastation into Judea and desolated Zion, many a Hebrew fugitive sought a new home in the Iberian Peninsula, where once more the shattered fortunes of his race were re-constructed and re-established amid new conditions and new surroundings. Later on, when the conquering Saracens drove the Goths to the Pyrenees, and established their rule in Spain, the Jews shared fully in their prosperity and splendor. For centuries the Omeyadian Caliphs ruled a land that was the centre of a high civilization, and the home of science, arts and letters. During the early mediaeval ages, when other parts of Europe were enveloped in ignorance, and