

NORMAN JEWISH SEAL.¹

By C. W. KING, M.A.

In Mr. Frank's collection of Mediæval seals is a circular matrix of pewter, one and a quarter inch in diameter; the device, a large fleur-de-lys, or some such floral ornament, occupying the centre; legend,

S · PURNEL · FILI · R · BATHIE ·

Two peculiarities in the seal make me regard it as that of some Norman Jew who flourished in the course of the 12th century in this country. The device is unusual for a Christian of the period to which the fashion of its Lombardic lettering restricts its date, and may even be a conventional representation of the Aaron's Rod still carried in the seals of our Rabbis as a professional badge. Secondly, the designation "filius" is not to be found on the Mediæval seals of Christians, so far as my knowledge of them extends. In documents, whenever a Norman describes himself as "filius," *i.e.*, *Fitz* so and so, his father is always a noble, with a surname derived from an estate; never a plebeian possessing only a single baptismal name, like "Purnel, son of Matthias" on the legend before us. On the other hand, the Jews of those times invariably so designated themselves when they used the Latin language, thus, "Magister Benedict filius Magistri Moses" is the signature of the most important man amongst the Lincoln Jews in the latter years of Henry III. In this instance, "Magister" stands for "Rabbi," that official being recognised by the government as the secular as well as spiritual chief of the Hebrew community.

What the "R" preceding "Mathiae" in our seal means must be left to conjecture; all that can be assumed is

¹Addendum to page 170.

that it indicated some title of the person whose name it precedes.

Dr. Schiller-Zinissy is convinced that it is the initial of *Rabbi*; he also points out that the B is put for M in the name of Matthew, through a very facile error of the seal cutter, who took down the word by ear, being necessarily unacquainted with the true spelling of the Hebrew, which is correctly transliterated by *Mattiaho*, a sound which a French Jew clips down to *Mathée*. This is analagous to "Basshomet," the mysterious idol which the Templars were accused of worshipping, a name now allowed to be nothing worse than "Mahomet" in the vulgar pronunciation. But I must confess that to my own eye the character appears the ordinary Lombard M, with an accidental, or ornamental, inflection of the further limb.