

# Jewishness, antiquity and civilization

## Alfred Mond, Lord Melchett (1868–1930) and the renewal of a collecting legacy

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*Alfred Mond (1868–1930), 1st Baron Melchett, was a towering figure in early twentieth-century politics and economics, but his significance as an art collector has never been acknowledged. Like his brother, Robert, he has been overshadowed by the stature of his father, Ludwig Mond, with whose collections both were intimately involved. This essay uses the evidence of Alfred Mond's collections of paintings, sculptures and antiquities to consider his relationship to his German cultural heritage, as well as his evolving understanding of his Jewishness. It seeks to reclaim Mond's significance as a patron and lover of the arts in both a public and a private capacity.*

ALFRED Mond had a complex relationship with both his Germanic and his Jewish heritage: the first he tried to suppress, and the second he slowly learned to reclaim. The fact that his parents were both German Jews, and that he apparently spoke with a mild German accent, was constantly used against him in his political career. During his successful bid to become the Liberal MP for Swansea Town in 1910, his Tory enemies mocked his campaign as 'Vales for the Velsh'. In the Great War, Mond served with distinction in Lloyd George's cabinet as minister of works. Nonetheless, in 1918 the *South Wales Daily Post* accused him of insider trading with the German enemy and even diverting funds to the Bolsheviks as part of a shadowy Jewish world conspiracy.<sup>1</sup> In March 1919 a poster was openly displayed in London accusing Mond of selling shares to the Germans during the war, which led to a well-publicized libel trial.<sup>2</sup> The recurrent suspicion that Mond was not a patriot only redoubled his strenuous assertion of Englishness and efforts to fit in. For one historian, he came to loathe 'the easy cosmopolitanism of his home, which suited his elder brother so well'.<sup>3</sup>

Mond's parents were proud rationalists and art lovers, who embodied the educational ideal of *Bildung*. Their world view was powerfully shaped by the values of Weimar Classicism, absorbed through their schooling, and they supported freethinker poets, such

as the German-born Mathilde Blind (née Cohen).<sup>4</sup> 'For him there was no such thing as reasonable religion', Todd Endelman has observed of Alfred's father, Ludwig Mond, who arrived in Britain in 1862. 'He and his German-born Jewish wife were completely alienated from Jewish practices . . . They failed to circumcise their sons . . . or make any effort to raise them as Jews – or, for that matter, as Christians.'<sup>5</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Alfred married out in 1892, choosing Violet Florence Mabel Goetze, from an old Huguenot family of modest means and strong artistic inclinations. The couple's children were brought up in the Established Church. Alfred's eldest daughter, Eva, reflected in her memoirs: 'He was in no sense a practising Jew, nor did I receive any Jewish instruction, but he did instil in me a pride of race.'<sup>6</sup> His pride in, and rediscovery of, his Jewish roots really flowered following a transformative visit to Palestine in 1921, in the company of Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann. In his final years, he poured money into supporting Jewish settlers in the British Mandate, becoming vice-president of the Jewish Agency, and he was recognized in 1930 as 'a great financier, a greater industrialist, and perhaps the most powerful English Jew, since Beaconsfield'.<sup>7</sup>

While his elder brother, Robert, shared their father's passion for the kind of chemical research that laid the foundations of Brunner Mond & Company, the worldly Alfred struck out in a different direction.

'He did not share his father's transnational and Western European orientation', Thomas Adam argues, rather misleadingly; 'a political career was more important to his social ambitions than a career as a businessman or a patron of the arts.'<sup>8</sup> While this parliamentary career took him to the heights of the establishment – he served in the cabinet and was created Baron Melchett of Landford on entering the Lords in 1928 – he continued to be viewed as suspiciously exotic (Fig. 1). In the title of the sole thesis dedicated to him as a politician, he is appropriately characterized as 'The Outsider'.<sup>9</sup> His gift for logistics was on show when he oversaw the merger that created the giant Imperial Chemical Industries in 1926. It was a mark of his stature and global connections that he often loomed in fantasies of the coming world order, his most famous avatar in fiction being Mustafa Mond in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931).<sup>10</sup>

But what of the private man? *Contra* Adam's summary of Alfred, his son-in-law, Gerald Isaacs, second Marquess of Reading, remembered that 'he had a passionate love, at once critical and emotional, for

beautiful things'.<sup>11</sup> Mond's collections give us a far richer understanding of how this 'outsider' negotiated his competing identities – as a European, a patriotic Briton, and a Jew – while also suggesting how the arts provided him with a refuge from his occasionally bitter experiences in business and politics. According to one obituary, Mond's life was structured by the rival pull between 'the arts' and 'affairs'; even if the latter eventually triumphed, Mond's 'interest in art was something more than the hobby of a wealthy man. His knowledge of Italian art, for example, excelled that of many experts and might well have been only gained in the lifetime of any ordinary man'.<sup>12</sup> This depth of knowledge was, of course, acquired partly from his father, whose brilliance as a chemist was balanced by his extraordinary collection of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century paintings. But for too long the interest in the Mond patriarch has obscured the significance of the other collections assembled within the family, often in a collaborative spirit. 'I am a collector of Old Engravings, Drawings of Old Masters, and Pictures of the Early Italian and Dutch Schools, also Chinese, Greek, Etruscan and Egyptian Antiquities,' Robert Mond wrote in one autobiographical sketch, 'and I assisted my father with the formation of his collection of pictures, most of which he left to the National Gallery.'<sup>13</sup> Such declarations point to the value of studying the Monds not just in a transnational framework – their donations are scattered through Britain, Germany, France, Israel, Canada and elsewhere – but also as a dynastic unit, shaped by different generational agendas.

In this article, Alfred Mond's collecting will be analysed along two axes: first, the collection of Renaissance art, which was very visible in Mond's London town house and in his country home, Melchet Court, Hampshire, and through which he sought to uphold and extend his father's example; second, the remarkable collection of antiquities, through which Mond drew in some of the finest classical scholars and reflected on the growth of civilization. Through his collections, Mond was compelled to engage with different aspects of his Jewish heritage, and thereby explore forms of identification that pointed beyond his alleged assimilation into narrowly English aristocratic norms.

### Old Masters

In August 1930 *Country Life* dedicated an article to Melchet Court, a neo-Elizabethan manor from the



Fig. 1. John Lavery, *Sir Alfred Moritz Mond, First Lord Melchett*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 60.9 × 45 cm, Imperial War Museum, London, IWM Art 6222.

1860s, built near Romsey in Hampshire. If the origins of the house dated back to the early Middle Ages, when it belonged to the royal forest of Wiltshire, the chief interest of the interiors came from bold designs by Alfred Stevens, still visible on the staircase and ceilings, despite a fire of 1872.<sup>14</sup> Mond had acquired Melchet from the Baring family in 1911, and entrusted its renovation to the rising architect Thomas Darcy Braddell. In her memoirs, Mond's daughter Eva admitted that the house had 'no special merit' but it afforded access to a beautiful stretch of parkland bordering the New Forest. The dominant style of the interiors, she recalled, was 'undoubtedly Italian', chosen to complement 'paintings from the Mond collection as well as other objets d'art, such as drawings, sculptures and bronzes' (Fig. 2).<sup>15</sup>

On entering the large entrance hall, the visitor was struck by the monumental fireplaces (four of which were added by Braddell) and imposing tapestries.<sup>16</sup>

Opening from the hall was the library, [Eva recalled] as well as my father's study where the best pictures were hung. A long, panelled passage hung with drawings led to a dining-room which contained a long refectory table and Charles II chairs. There was a painting of my mother in fancy dress costume as the wife of Richard II on one wall and a Fabricius on the other.<sup>17</sup>

Eva's mother donned the outfit as part of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Ball, and a

striking photographic portrait was published in 1912.<sup>18</sup> As the sister of painter Sigismund Goetze, Violet was a keen society hostess and deeply attached to her family's artistic achievements.<sup>19</sup> She took the lead in finding additional furniture for Melchet, making an expedition to Italy with a curator from the Victoria and Albert Museum, H. Clifford Smith, to identify suitable pieces.<sup>20</sup> In a subsequent article, *Country Life* also admired the selection of Jacobean and Stuart furniture in oak and walnut dotted throughout the rooms of Melchet, especially one red and gold lacquered cabinet in the early William and Mary style.<sup>21</sup>

The interiors at Melchet remained marked by the presence of Ludwig Mond. His portrait, by Solomon J. Solomon (1909), which hung in the entrance hall, depicted him in the red robes of a fellow of the Royal Society.<sup>22</sup> Solomon also produced a handsome portrait of Violet and her two younger daughters, hung at the top of the stairs.<sup>23</sup> Some of the finest furniture in the house had also been acquired by Ludwig Mond in Rome, including a richly decorated *cassone* and a sixteenth-century table, both covered with the arms of the Borgia family and grotesque designs in ivory and mother of pearl, bought from the Palazzo Borgia.<sup>24</sup> Then there were the pictures that remained among the Mond heirs. When Ellis Waterhouse went to visit Melchet in 1931, he found the house shut up, but he

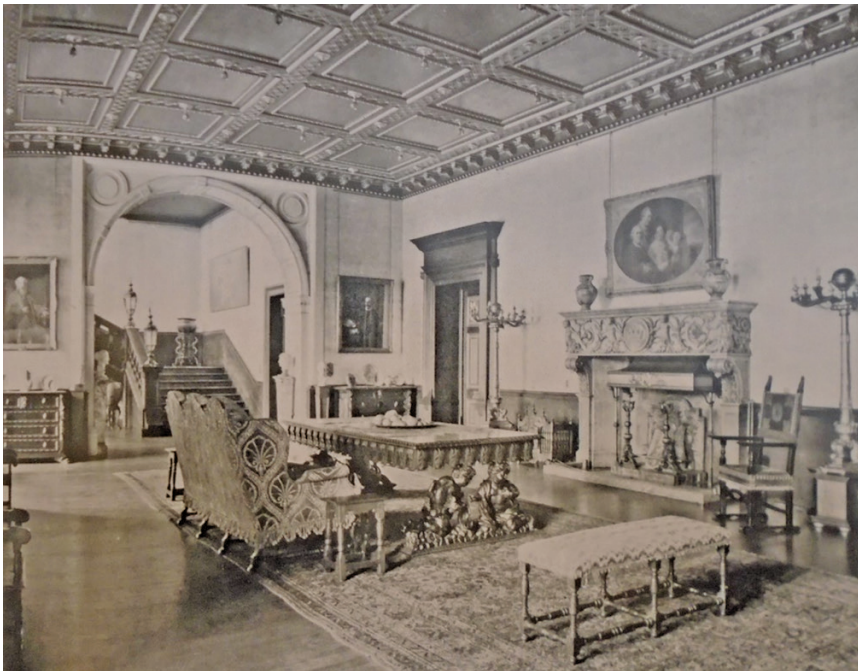


Fig. 2. The entrance hall at Melchet Court. Reproduced from Arthur Oswald, 'Melchet Court, Romsey, Hampshire: the seat of Lord Melchet', *Country Life* (9 August 1930), pp. 176–83. Photo: author.



noted the works that had been relocated to Bourlet & Sons for safekeeping: the list of Italian masters includes works by Tintoretto (a Venetian portrait), Titian, Caroto, Catena, Lo Spagna, Canaletto, Guardi and Paris Bordone (a portrait of Isabella d'Este).<sup>25</sup>

In contrast to many of his industrialist peers in Britain, who often invested in contemporary British painters, Ludwig Mond was determined to create a European collection of scholarly depth and significance. In this he turned to the services of Jean-Paul Richter, who not only assembled the collection but also produced a substantial memorial catalogue. Louise Richter recalled the delight the chemist took in Richter's achievement: 'as if moved by a sudden impulse,' she recalled of their last meetings, 'he took me by the hand and going with me from picture to picture he commented on the artistic value, the pleasure they gave him, and how and when they were purchased'.<sup>26</sup> Although it bore the name of Ludwig Mond, the gallery was the work of several hands: not just Jean-Paul and Louise Richter, but also Ludwig's wife, Frida, their elder son, Robert, and Henriette Hertz, for whom Mond acquired the Palazzo Zuccari in Rome in 1887. Hertz became an important figure for both of Mond's children: Robert wrote a preface to the publication of the *Collezione Hertziana*, while she became a trusted confidante for Alfred in his awkward teenage years.<sup>27</sup>

Growing up in this remarkable Roman milieu represented a unique induction into connoisseurship. Robert recalled:

My father, the late Dr Ludwig Mond, commenced his collection of Italian paintings of the Quattro and Cinquecento, when I came down from Cheltenham college before going to Cambridge in 1884. This first brought me into contact with the love and study of the Old Masters. Some five years later at Edinburgh University I commenced collecting old engravings. The many learned discussions I had been privileged to listen to by such authorities as Senator Morelli, Dr Frizzoni, Directors Bode, Friedländer and Aldenhoven, Mr Bernard Berenson, Dr J P Richter and Dr Steinmann, amongst others, caused me to shun the responsibility of collecting either pictures or drawings, and I continued collecting old engraving as the opportunity offered in the very limited time at my disposal I could spare from my technical and scientific research work. It is due to a lecture given by Professor Fischel at my father's house in Rome, the Casa Zuccari, on the role that drawings played in the design and construction of Raphael's fresco of the Disputa at the Vatican, that I learned to appreciate the importance of drawings and even of their copies, as the raw material for works of Art.<sup>28</sup>

Some of Robert's finest drawings were acquired from the collection of the barrister Sir Charles Newton Robinson, just as Ludwig had been proud to possess works once owned by the latter's father, John Charles Robinson, famed curator of South Kensington.<sup>29</sup> Robert enlisted the help of outstanding continental and émigré scholars – notably Tancred Borenius and Rudolf Wittkower – when it came to drawing up the catalogue of his own Old Master drawings in the 1930s. His London town house on Cavendish Square also contained Italian masters from his father's collection, including works by Boccacino, Farinato and Sebastiano Ricci, and two Cima panels (bequeathed to the National Gallery upon his death).<sup>30</sup>

Alfred, too, was profoundly entangled with the fate of his father's collection. When the possibility of a donation by Ludwig Mond to the National Gallery was first mooted in July 1907, Alfred was already leading the correspondence; after all, his father, in the estimate of the curators, was 'getting old and feeble'.<sup>31</sup> Already at this early juncture, Alfred anticipated some of the key administrative problems that would dog the bequest, especially his father's stipulation that the paintings chosen be kept together, or even housed in a special room. He wrote to Lord Harcourt that August:

Cannot some binding arrangement be arrived at as obviously a private donor cannot very well be expected to build a gallery for his collection and at some future date the Trustees be empowered to disperse the collection by hanging them in different rooms and using the room provided for other pictures? I mention this as I feel sure that my father will ask for some assurance on this point before he goes into further details.<sup>32</sup>

In the short term, these problems were deferred, and relations between the gallery and the family remained very good. Indeed, on Alfred's request, some of the paintings kept in his mother's house in St John's Wood (The Poplars), were transferred to the vaults of the National Gallery during the First World War to protect them from Zeppelin raids.<sup>33</sup> However, it was upon her death in 1923, when the curators then were invited to make their selection of up to three-quarters of the works from a designated list, that the problems really began, with the gallery querying which lists were authoritative and which works were eligible for selection.

The intricacies of the dispute have been lucidly reconstructed elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> What matters for our purpose is Alfred's insistence that this was a moral issue,

not purely a legal one. He was shocked by the confrontational attitude of the trustees, writing to Lord Lansdowne in confidence:

Very candidly, I must confess that I am astonished that the Trustees, with whom I am personally acquainted, should think it right to permit such a letter to be written to me. I cannot imagine how it can be desirable in the interests of the Trustees of the Gallery or anyone else to proceed on lines which must necessarily result in lengthy and costly litigation. You, surely, will quite understand that the Trustees of the Estates must respect what they know are the wishes of my late father and late mother. I am amazed that apparently no regard whatsoever appears to be paid to considerations which would appear to all men as almost a sacred matter.<sup>35</sup>

In the complex dispute that followed, Mond insisted again and again that he and his brother were acting not from self-interest, but from a deep ‘filial sentiment’ to retain ‘memorials of a great collection with which we have lived all our lives’.<sup>36</sup> For their part, the director and trustees were torn over whether to fight hard for their legal rights – unwilling to ‘give away valuable National possessions, rather than risk a quarrel with a prominent public man’ – or to reach a compromise that avoided legal action.<sup>37</sup> After lengthy negotiations, a list of forty-three works was finally agreed on, and in 1924 it was decided that a special room should be built to house them, at a cost of £12,000, half of which was covered by Alfred, who took an active interest in its decoration.<sup>38</sup> Its opening in 1928 was a grand society affair, attended by the new trustee Ramsay MacDonald and Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, who gave a speech in praise of generous donors to the nation’s museums.<sup>39</sup> When curators appeared to have reorganized the room in the 1930s, and had even gone so far as to disperse the contents in the 1950s, Alfred’s children Henry and Eva took the fight to the National Gallery, accusing it of betraying their father’s and grandfather’s generosity.<sup>40</sup>

Mond divided his inherited treasures between Melchet Court and Belgravia. His town house at 35–7 Lowndes Square, which he occupied from 1905, contained a dining room designed by Edwin Lutyens and some prize pictures from his father, most strikingly a Mantegna, known as the *Imperator mundi*, over the mantelpiece (gifted to the National Gallery after Violet’s death) (Fig. 3).<sup>41</sup> It was flanked by a Bellini and *Virgin and Child with a Saint* by Bartolomeo Montagna, once owned by Henriette Hertz, while elsewhere in the house hung Rubens’s atmospheric *Moonlight Landscape*, today in the Courtauld



Fig. 3. Andrea Mantegna, *The Holy Family with St John the Baptist*, c. 1500. Glue size on canvas, 71.1 × 50.8 cm, National Gallery, London, NG5641, Mond Bequest (1924; the picture entered the National Gallery in 1946).

Institute.<sup>42</sup> But the prevailing tone of the rooms was set by eighteenth-century France, in keeping with the opulent taste of many Edwardian mansions. Violet was especially keen on music, and invited performers of the calibre of Elisabeth Schumann, Lotte Lehmann and Thomas Beecham to entertain guests. ‘These soirées were held in the lovely white and gold drawing room, decorated in the French style,’ Eva recalled, ‘with its Aubusson carpet and tapestry-covered chairs, each chair depicting some fable of La Fontaine.’ The *pièce de résistance* of such entertainments was a ‘soirée Watteau’, in which the garden was transformed with imported roses to resemble a *fête champêtre*, animated by delicate music by Fauré.<sup>43</sup> This interest in eighteenth-century France was mirrored in some of the drawings Alfred collected, such as a homage by Eisen to Louis XV as a patron of the arts, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum.<sup>44</sup>

In his final years, Alfred was prompted to buy significant pictures to rival some of the glories of his father’s collection. Sir Martin Conway proved the

crucial intermediary in introducing Mond to the firm of Duveen Brothers in 1927, counselling the dealers that offering a low purchase price for a Pieter de Hooch and a Botticelli tondo that had caught Mond's interest 'would be a good means of getting friendly with him, for business and other purposes'.<sup>45</sup> It worked: the Pieter de Hooch was bought for £10,000, and the new owners were 'extremely delighted with it. Sir Alfred mentioned that he was dining last night with his friend Mr Beit and considered that the latter had not such a fine picture in his collection.'<sup>46</sup> It was the prelude to more substantial purchases, including a Rembrandt *Head of Christ* in January 1928, which Lord and Lady Melchett had seen at Duveen's in New York, for £19,000, and a female portrait attributed to Titian for £17,000. Assistant at the National Gallery Harold Kay Isherwood, who had the chance to inspect these pictures at Bourlet & Sons in 1931, was dubious about both the condition of the works and the attributions – 'Titian (!)' – wrongly suspecting that the *Head of Christ* was even a nineteenth-century French copy.<sup>47</sup>

Most dramatic of all was the purchase by Mond in September 1928 of a portrait of Hendrickje Stoffels by Rembrandt, for the enormous sum of £40,000, a move written up in the press on both sides of the Atlantic as a bid to prevent another masterpiece going to the United States (Fig. 4).<sup>48</sup> The attribution has since been downgraded, as Isherwood would have expected ('Really, Henrike [*sic*], a well-preserved lass in some critics' estimation!').<sup>49</sup> But at the time of purchase, Mond asked Duveen to demonstrate its credentials in scholarly publications, and he proudly loaned it to the Exhibition of Dutch Art, 1450–1900, held at the Royal Academy in 1929, where it was received enthusiastically.<sup>50</sup> This loan illustrates another aspect of Melchett's relationship to art – namely its strategic value as a means of publicity and an expression of cultural stewardship.<sup>51</sup>

The Duveen files show the coordination of actors who smoothed the path to these ambitious purchases, including some dubious stories about provenance, Berenson's services of authentication and Conway's encouragement as a mediator (he took a cut for his services). According to a telegram from Eddy Duveen in 1929:

Conway dined with Melchett last night, and Melchett when bidding him goodbye said 'I made £600,000 last week and am ready to buy something else.' Conway says if Melchett made this, his son Henry will also have made money, and



Fig. 4. Studio of Rembrandt van Rijn, *Portrait of a Lady*, traditionally said to be Hendrickje Stoffels, c.1653. Oil on canvas, 65.5 × 54.0 cm. Sold by Christie's, London, 7 June 2002. RKD Images.

therefore has it to spend. I suggest you advise me which pictures you think would suit them, and of which I can show them photographs.<sup>52</sup>

The flow of information had to be carefully managed. When Mond suggested lending his new Titian to the major exhibition of Italian art at the Royal Academy, Duveen tried steering him off the idea, keen to avoid exposing the fact that it had originated from a block purchase of Cassirer stock.<sup>53</sup> The dealer also knew how to flatter his client, acting to correct an article in the *Daily Mail* that suggested the value of his father's donation to the National Gallery amounted to £250,000 – whereas, in fact, that figure should be doubled.<sup>54</sup> But the correspondence shows other, less mercenary, elements of this relationship, including invitations to birthday dinners and 'at homes', donations from Lady Duveen to Violet's charities, and even requests from Alfred to combat Jewish unemployment and support the Palestine Emergency Relief Fund (to which Duveen gave £250).<sup>55</sup> Alfred Mond's growing investment in Old Master paintings was interrupted by the contraction of his fortune during the Depression and by his sudden death.



## Antiquities

In contrast to the public equation of the Monds with the art of the Italian Renaissance, the more private aspects of Alfred's collecting have never been discussed, especially his personal delight in antiquities. The 1928 catalogue of antiquities, put together by Eugenie Sellers Strong, noted that 'Few . . . outside their own personal friends, know that Lord and Lady Melchett are gradually bringing together in their beautiful Hampshire home at Melchet, numerous works of art ranging from the antique to the Renaissance [*sic*] and modern times, and already including several pieces of note.'<sup>56</sup> Collecting sculpture became a way of coming out from his father's shadow, although his understanding of the medium had been profoundly shaped by summers spent at the Palazzo Zuccari, where the whole family had followed the progress of excavations, and socialized with neoclassical sculptors. Marble statues of Sappho and Socrates by the German sculptors Ferdinand Seeboeck and Constantin Dausch in Rome flanked the entrance to The Poplars. After the death of Mond's mother, Frida, in 1923, Israel Gollancz succeeded in persuading Alfred to send the beloved statues to King's College London, where they still grace the entrance halls.<sup>57</sup>

The origins of Alfred's personal collection began after 1913 with pieces like the head of Menander and the Greek vases inherited from his father, and with gifts from Henriette Hertz. Provenances reveal that several items had been sourced from Jewish dealers in Rome and Venice, such as Ludwig Pollak and Solomon Guggenheim.<sup>58</sup> Alfred bought several Greek portrait heads from the collection of Sir Charles Newton Robinson, whose collection of drawings had appealed to Robert. Most imposing, though, was the grand marble of Hygieia acquired from the Thomas Hope collection in 1917 for the vast sum of 4,000 guineas, a sign of the vogue for these monumental, highly restored sculptures (Fig. 5). His bronzes were no less spectacular, including a statuette of Apollo discovered in Thrace in 1921 and a dancing figure of Marsyas purchased in 1928, which Strong reckoned 'a treasure of the first order in any collection whether public or private'.<sup>59</sup> The relief to Asklepios and Hygieia, purchased in 1928, perhaps carried extra significance for Lord Melchett, considering his stint as minister of health in Lloyd George's government in 1921–2, just as his fame as a parliamentary orator may have spurred his desire to own a bust of Demosthenes.<sup>60</sup>



Fig. 5. *The Hope Hygieia*, Ostia or Rome, Roman copy, c. AD 130–61, after a Greek original, c.360 BC. Marble, 190.5 × 63.5 × 45.7 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Following his father's scholarly example, Alfred ensured that his works were catalogued by the brilliant Strong and photographed with precision by the up-and-coming classicist Bernard Ashmole.<sup>61</sup> The luxuriant folio publication was intended to rival the standard Michaelis inventory of Greek and Roman pieces in country houses, but, noted the *Classical Review*, 'on a scale of magnificence which would have made Michaelis stare and gasp'.<sup>62</sup> He was clearly proud of the final result, sending a copy to Duveen at the start of 1929, who replied:

I do indeed appreciate you presenting me with this beautiful book, with which I spent many pleasant hours this weekend. May I congratulate you not only upon what you inherited, but also what you yourself have acquired, to produce such a comprehensive gathering of the art of that wonderful era. While I knew that you had a very choice collection, I am frankly amazed, not only at its great importance, but its wide range.<sup>63</sup>

As with paintings, so too Alfred's purchasing ambitions for antiquities accelerated in the final years of his life. He proposed an astonishing offer of £110,000 ('payable twenty five percent cash down remainder') to acquire the celebrated Lansdowne marbles in August 1929.<sup>64</sup> The bid fell short, and the marbles were auctioned at Christie's in 1930, in a landmark sale.<sup>65</sup>

For all the intellectual prestige and financial investment they represented, it is clear that Mond's relationship to his sculptures was idiosyncratic and woven into family mythology. Marbles from the Melchett collection inspired the Dionysian murals his brother-in-law Sigismund Goetze executed in the music room of Grove House, his Regent's Park home.<sup>66</sup> According to his first biographer, Hector Bolitho, Mond's relationship with the marbles was intimate, even sensual: 'The Greek marbles would possess him. He would stroke the flanks of one of them with his hand and tell a story.'<sup>67</sup> Bolitho's biography of 1933 combines adulation for his subject with problematic racist thinking and generalizations;<sup>68</sup> but it was written with family support and with access to papers that were otherwise destroyed when Lowndes Square was bombed in the Second World War. It contains a series of personal vignettes that point to the deeper intellectual and psycho-sexual anxieties involved in Mond's encounter with antiquity.

In 1889 the young Alfred visited Tivoli Gardens and wandered among the toppled columns and fragments of Hadrian's Palace. In a remarkable passage, Bolitho describes Alfred seized by a disorientating and ecstatic vision: he came to see the depths of the past opening before him; he felt the victory of Roman law, and the contrast between the decisive and mighty Romans and puny Englishmen of his own days. Above all, he was confronted with the hedonism of the pagan tradition, what Bolitho calls the 'whole psychological and physiological mystery of sex'. Mond felt, viscerally, 'where the marble had been warm from the bodies which were pressed against it, where love had been free and courageous, with no hypocrisy and respectability to taint it with superstitions which God never intended'. Reeling from this vision of physical beauty and forced to confront 'his own individual place in the procession of propagation', young Mond apparently 'contemplated his own body with terror'. In later years, he confessed: 'During that time, I vowed that I would never marry, because I felt my own physical defects so deeply that I would not have dared to

take advantage of my inheritance as a man, I would not have dared to marry; I would not have dared to perpetuate my own defects in a child.'<sup>69</sup>

There is much that could be unpacked in this disturbing passage: Mond's self-disgust on the one hand stemmed from his own appearance, for which he was mercilessly teased as a young man. 'Beau Mond' was his ironic nickname among his schoolboy peers.<sup>70</sup> But it suggested an awareness of the opposition posited by critics like Matthew Arnold between Hellenism and Hebraism, the former endowed with radiance and idealism, the latter trapped in textual literalism and prohibition.<sup>71</sup> Solomon J. Solomon, portraitist to the Monds, grappled with how the 'modern Jew' might 'assimilate what is best of Hellenic influence without prejudice to his individuality'.<sup>72</sup> In Bolitho's biography, the changing encounter with Greco-Roman art serves as an index of Alfred's slow and painful growth towards self-acceptance of his own defects and his search for authenticity. Already when he visited Rome in 1913, to see Henriette Hertz on her deathbed, Alfred shunned the ruins of Tivoli but instead went to study the frescos of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel. To cite Bolitho again, probably echoing Mond's own writings: 'The Romans had made beauty for their own pleasure and for the worship of themselves. The Renaissance painters had gone beyond this. They had made beauty through worship of something outside themselves, something more spiritual.'<sup>73</sup>

In Bolitho's telling, this quest for transcendent, spiritual values reached its climax with Mond's visit to the Holy Land in 1921, a trip during which he wrote to friends that he at last came to feel authentically Jewish. Chaim Weizmann recalled that during their January and February tour together he found this 'hard-headed man of affairs' actually 'profoundly susceptible to the more romantic aspects of the [Zionist] work'.<sup>74</sup> During this trip to Palestine, Mond recalled Hadrian not as a paragon of civilization but as a tyrant, who had expelled the Jews from Jerusalem, had forbidden the Sabbath and had hung an impaled pig's head over the gate of the city. By contrast, he found a new depth in reflecting upon Michelangelo's statue of Moses. 'I never understood its greatness when I was younger,' he remarked. 'But now I know, when I look at those amazing eyes, why he looks like that. He was the man who had seen God.'<sup>75</sup>



Through his engagement with the history of sculpture, then, we can see Mond thinking through bigger narratives of civilization. Initially intimidated by the physical perfection of classical bodies, Alfred had come to accept his own manhood only through his redemptive marriage to Violet Goetze, and his experiences of fatherhood. As he began assembling his own collection of antiquities, he found a pleasure in mastering these fears, and recognizing that the classical world was one strand within a richer canvas of civilizations, in which his own Jewish heritage also had a place. Michelangelo's Moses fascinated him as the ultimate synthesis of Hellenistic and Hebraic traditions. This understanding of cultural fusion was central to his vision of Zionism too. 'There is one race which is especially fitted and might have been created for the purpose of acting as interpreter of the East to the West and the West to the East, and that is the Jewish race,' Mond declared at an anniversary dinner in New York in 1923. 'The Jews have the Eastern feeling and intuition and the Western ideals of civilized nations.'<sup>76</sup>

An interest in the dialogue between East and West was another family inheritance. Among the lesser-known components of Ludwig Mond's bequest to the National Gallery are two remarkably naturalistic portraits from Roman Egypt in the second century AD.<sup>77</sup> Robert Mond had a passion for ancient Egypt too: he sponsored excavations of the tombs at Thebes and worked closely with the archaeologists Howard Carter and Oliver Myers at Armant. His funding was essential to the establishment of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, within Mandate Palestine, and he had a room of his mansion in Cavendish Square, Marylebone, decorated as a pharaoh's burial chamber to house his personal collection of Egyptian antiquities, which he bequeathed to the British Museum.<sup>78</sup> In studying Egypt, Robert was also engaged in research into the shared origin of civilizations. In 1906 he had funded the retrieval and publication of the so-called Elephantine Papyri, which according to early interpreters proved the existence of ancient monotheistic beliefs. The thrill of such discoveries probably prompted Robert's cousin Constance – the wife of Sigismund Goetze – to invest £10,000 in 1906 to create the Schweich Lectures on Biblical Archaeology at the British Academy.<sup>79</sup>

In this highly intellectual family, an interest in myth and comparative religion was a common



Fig. 6. Charles Jagger, *Nymph and Satyr*, c.1927. Portland stone, height 350 cm. Sold by Summers Place Auctions, Billingshurst, Sussex, 11 June 2019. Reproduced from Arthur Oswald, 'Melchet Court, Romsey, Hampshire: the seat of Lord Melchett', *Country Life* (9 August 1930), pp. 176–83. Photo: author.

preoccupation. In this spirit, there was little friction between Robert's interest in Egypt and Alfred's devotion to the classical world; indeed, the latter had bought a Greco-Alexandrian head from Cairo in 1925, its transitional style an emblem of East–West fusion.<sup>80</sup> This syncretism, or dialogue between ancient civilizations, was embodied above all in the Mond mausoleum. Ludwig had abandoned Jewish religious observance in his lifetime, but on his deathbed he asked for a rabbi and hence had Jewish rites for his burial in East Finchley at the St Pancras and Islington cemetery.<sup>81</sup> In subsequent years, this plot would become the resting place for all the family members, both Christian (like Violet) and Jewish (like Alfred from 1921, though he never formally converted). Their bodies lie in a building designed by Darcy Braddell, the architect of Melchet Court, inspired by the Greek temple of Nemesis at Rhamnus, Attica. In the exterior and interior of this structure – the largest

private mausoleum in London – Israel, Egypt and Greece join in a fascinating symbiosis.<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusion

Alfred Mond's place in a special issue on German–Jewish collectors is therefore a curious one. Alfred was certainly eager to assert his Englishness, and suppress his German heritage, to an extent that outstripped other family members. But the cultural education he received from his parents continued to surface across his adult life. Mond's desire to assimilate needs to be weighed against his proud display of European cultural pedigree via the arts of the Renaissance and antiquity. Even when collecting things of the kinds found in the homes of aristocratic peers, as with his country house sculpture gallery, he seems to have approached these works with idiosyncratically Jewish questions.

Recognizing Mond's significance as a private collector also casts new light on his contribution to public collections. Some donations were rooted in his political career: in 1920, when MP for Swansea West, he presented the National Museum of Wales with a patriotic work that he had commissioned from Louis Gillot: the investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarvon Castle in 1911.<sup>83</sup> Conscious of his family's scientific eminence, he bequeathed a portrait of Joseph Priestley (though it proved to be a fake) to the Royal Society, where he was elected fellow in 1928.<sup>84</sup> All the Monds also laboured to promote the work of Sigismund Goetze, with Ludwig Mond, and later Robert Mond in 1911, eager to present *He was Despised and Rejected of Men* to the Tate Gallery.<sup>85</sup> In 1919 Alfred was dragged into the very ugly polemic surrounding Goetze's murals for the Foreign Office, denounced by Lord Curzon and polemical journalists as unpatriotic, German and Jewish in character. In truth, none of these labels could apply to Goetze personally, but he was left a broken man.<sup>86</sup>

The civic dimension of Mond's patronage was on show when he was appointed as First Commissioner of Works in 1916. In this position, he was one of the key proponents of the Imperial War Museum, which finally opened its doors in 1920, with Mond as chairman of trustees and Sir Martin Conway as first director.<sup>87</sup> The position also gave him responsibility for commissioning other memorials to the sacrifices

of the war, most notably the Cenotaph. Lutyens had already worked on Lowndes Square, and the architect responded sympathetically to the minister's insistence that this non-denominational site should contain no 'cross elements in the design'.<sup>88</sup> Mond was profoundly interested in the aesthetics of monuments, and he attended conferences at the Royal Academy and wrote editorials on the subject.<sup>89</sup> It is worth noting the high-quality funerary sculpture commissioned by the Mond family in a personal capacity. Lieutenant Francis L. Mond was shot down in an aerial battle in May 1918; his sacrifice inspired a bronze knight by George Frampton, as well as a moving Pietà by George Rainer Hoff, installed in a church at Storrington, Sussex, commissioned by his mother Angela Primrose Schweich-Mond (née Goetze), Alfred's sister-in-law.<sup>90</sup>

The most spectacular architectural commission from Mond was Imperial Chemical House at Milbank, constructed between 1929 and 1931. The architect of the building, Frank Baines, had already created the permanent Mond room at the National Gallery.<sup>91</sup> William Bateman Fagan undertook the sculpted portraits (of figures including Ludwig and Alfred Mond) that form the keystones of arches surmounting seven giant niches on the façade; he also created the monumental doors, with bronze reliefs alluding to Lorenzo Ghiberti's Baptistery in Florence. A series of heroic allegorical figures representing chemistry, marine transport and construction were entrusted to Charles Jagger, who would become one of Mond's closest artistic collaborators. Mond had already awarded him the commission for the iconic Royal Artillery memorial at Hyde Park Corner.<sup>92</sup> He also charged Jagger to produce sculptures for the gardens of Melchet Court, modelled on the erotic encounter between playfully repulsive satyrs and beguiling nymphs. In other private commissions in the 1920s, Jagger frequently riffed on the theme of mismatched seductions, alluding to his patrons' private lives.<sup>93</sup> His work at Melchet is arguably no exception: the satyrs and nymphs evoked not simply some of Alfred's beloved antiquities, but also commented obliquely on the improbable marriage of Alfred (the much-teased 'Beau Mond') and the society beauty Violet, and thereby on the transformative power of love (Fig. 6).<sup>94</sup>

Indebted to the inheritance from his father – which gave him a strong sense of trusteeship – Alfred's

achievements as a collector have been obscured by the dispersal of his treasures in the years after his death in 1930. The Depression imposed a sharp retrenchment on Henry Mond, second Lord Melchett, who was obliged to return the two Rembrandts and a Titian to Duveen (unable to settle the outstanding bill) and to sell the Rubens in 1937.<sup>95</sup> In 1935 he also sold the Asklepios relief, and, for a mere 570 guineas (compared to the 4,000 guineas paid for it in 1917), the *Hope Hygieia* – a sign of the grim effects of the Depression as well as the ‘dramatic change in taste of a later generation’.<sup>96</sup> After Violet’s death in 1945, the Mantegna passed to the National Gallery, while other drawings and paintings were dispersed at her Sotheby’s sale the following year.<sup>97</sup> Alfred’s little-acknowledged interest in modern art was transmitted more effectively to his son. In creating his own homes, both in the country – at Woodfalls, on the other side of Melchet Park – and in London – at Mulberry House – Henry drew on artists and architects to whom his father had introduced him, such as Braddell and Glyn Philpot, to create his own blend of classical iconography, antiquities and art deco modernity.<sup>98</sup>

Studied largely in connection with politics and economics, Alfred Mond’s interest in the visual arts should not be understated. The letters to Duveen demonstrate his keen interest in the provenance of his paintings, and confidence in his own judgements (for instance, he suspected the Titian was probably a Giorgione).<sup>99</sup> In notes written in memory of his father, Henry Mond reflected:

Only those who were very intimate with my father knew the deep passion for beauty that was his inward characteristic. His love of the arts, and chiefly of the most inspired and freest works, constantly transcended his disappointment in the weakness and failure of human life, which his intellect displayed to him too clearly for real happiness. Next to establishing his people, the Jews, on their sacred land, he would, I know, rather have produced a work of art of the highest order, than have achieved any other ambition during his passage in this world.<sup>100</sup>

This pursuit of beauty in its myriad forms was a consolation for the toil and disappointment of his public life, but also a complement to the ongoing search for dignity and self-acceptance, a search with personal, communal and national dimensions. In her bereavement, Violet described to Duveen how her husband ‘passed in the midst of those he loved so dearly & surrounded with the beautiful things that brought such joy into his life’.<sup>101</sup>

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## Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/S006656/1) as part of the project Jewish Country Houses – Objects, Networks, People. Grateful thanks for helpful comments on the text go to John Hilary, Paul Zuckerman and Michael Trapp.

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