Introduction

Claude Montefiore (1858-1938) was a well-educated and affluent English Jew who was inspired by the principles of 19th century cultural and religious Liberalism. This inspiration gave a breadth of vision which took in the whole of the then current Western European scene, as well as causing him to look far into the future. The dominant factor in this scene was not his own Jewish faith, nor Roman Catholicism. Rather, it was Protestant Christianity, and this because of the ascendancy of Great Britain and Germany, the Protestant leaders of Europe and the world. Because Montefiore was in touch with English and German theological writings, he was well aware that the apparently solid foundations of Protestant Christianity were subject to very considerable erosion due to the inroads of modern scholarship. This scholarship was revising considerably Protestantism's attitude to its touchstone, the Bible. Montefiore saw a similar "shaking of the foundations" in his own Jewish faith, and conceived the idea of a "new and purified Judaism" which would contain the best of both Jewish and Christian faiths and which would take over as a universal religion as the traditional forms of Christianity and Judaism withered away. In this scheme, Montefiore overlooked the residual momentum in both faiths which was to bring them both through their "turn of the century" crises. In order to facilitate his synthesizing work, Montefiore made himself master of the Christian sources in the New Testament, and also mastered contemporary radical scholarship pertaining to these sources. Much of his considerable literary output is taken up with Christian studies and the present thesis seeks to analyse Montefiore's treatment of Christian sources and themes. In order to understand more fully the influences which shaped his outlook, an examination of Montefiore's life and milieu precedes the analysis of his literary work.