49. The Statute of the Jewry, 1275

(*Statutes of the Realm* (1810), I, pp. 221–3 [French])

Issued at Westminster in the Michaelmas parliament of 1275 (Richardson and Sayles, "The Early Statutes", *L.Q.R.* vol. 50 (1934), p. 220; and Roth, *History of the Jews in England*, p. 70). A far-reaching, but not necessarily benevolent or practicable "attempt to emancipate the Jews economically". On the difficulties to which it gave rise, see Roth, op. cit. ch. 4. The petition of the Jews in response to this statute is given as No. 50 below.

Because the king has seen that many evils and instances of the disinheriting of good men of his land have happened as a result of the usuries which the Jews have made in the past, and that many sins have followed thereupon, the king though he and his ancestors have always received great benefit from the Jewish people in the past, has nevertheless for the honour of God and the common benefit of the people ordained and established that from now on no Jew shall lend anything at usury, either on land or rent or any thing else, and that usuries shall not continue beyond the feast of St Edward last. Agreements made before that shall be kept, save that the usuries shall cease. All those who owe debts to Jews on pledges of movables are to clear them between now and Easter; if not the pledges shall be forfeited. And if any Jew shall lend at usury contrary to what the king has established the king will not concern himself either personally or through his officials to get him recovery of his loan, but will punish him at his discretion for the offence and will do justice to the Christian that he may recover his pledge.

And so that distresses for debts due to Jews shall not henceforth be so grievous, a half of the lands and chattels of Christians is to be kept for their sustenance, and no distress for a debt owing to a Jew is to be made upon the heir of the debtor named in the Jew’s deed or other person holding the land that was the debtor’s before the debt is proved and acknowledged in court.

And if a sheriff or other bailiff has by the king’s command to give a Jew, or a number of Jews, for a debt due to them seisin of chattels or land to the value of the debt, the chattels are to be valued by the oaths of good men and be delivered to the Jew or Jews or to their agent to the amount of the debt, and if the chattels do not suffice, the lands shall be extended by the same oath before seisin is given to the Jew or Jews, to each one according to what is due to him, so that it may be known for certain that the debt is paid and the Christian may have his land again, saving always to the Christian half of his land and chattels for his sustenance as aforesaid, and the chief dwelling.

And if any movables be found hereafter in the seisin of a Jew and any one wishes to sue him, the Jew shall have his warranty if he is entitled to it, and if not, let him answer: so that in future he is not in this matter to be otherwise privileged than a Christian.

And that all Jews shall dwell in the king’s own cities and boroughs, where the chirograph chests of the Jews are wont to be: and that each Jew after he is seven years old shall wear a distinguishing mark on his outer garment, that is to say in the form of two Tables joined, of yellow felt of the length of six inches and of the breadth of three inches. And that each one after he is twelve years old shall yearly at Easter pay
to the king, whose serf he is, a tax of three pence, and this be understood to hold as well for a woman as for a man.

And that no Jew have power to enfeoff another, Jew or Christian, with houses, rents or tenements that he now has, or to alienate them in any other manner, or to acquit any Christian of his debt without special permission of the king, until the king shall have otherwise ordained thereon.

And as it is the will and sufferance of holy church that they may live and be preserved, the king takes them into his protection and grants them his peace; and wills that they may be safely preserved and defended by his sheriffs and his other bailiffs and faithful; and commands that none shall do them harm or damage or wrong in their bodies or in their goods movable or immovable and that they shall neither plead nor be impleaded in any court, nor be challenged or troubled in any court, save in the court of the king, whose bondmen they are. And that none shall owe obedience or service or rent save to the king or to his bailiffs in his name, unless it be for their dwellings which they now hold by paying rent, saving the right of holy church.

And the king grants them that they may live by lawful trade and by their labour and that they may have intercourse with Christians in order to carry on lawful trade by selling and buying. But that no Christian for this cause or any other shall dwell among them. And the king wills that they shall not by reason of their trading be put to scot and lot or tallaged with those of the cities and boroughs where they live because they are liable for tallage to the king as his serfs and to no one other than the king.

Moreover the king grants them that they may buy houses and curtilages in the cities and boroughs where they live, so that they hold them in chief of the king, saving to the lords of the fee their services due and accustomed. And they may take and buy farms or land for the term of ten years or less, without taking homages or fealties or such sort of obedience from Christians, and without having advowsons of churches, that they may be able to gain their living in the world if they have not the means of trading or cannot labour. And this power of taking lands at farm shall be open to them only for fifteen years from this time forward.