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The Attitude of Isaac Mayer Wise toward Zionism and Palestine

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INTRODUCTION — NATIONALISM

In order to understand Isaac Mayer Wise's views on Zionism as a nationalistic movement it must be remembered that he lived in America during the second half of the nineteenth century when the world saw the rise of two opposed kinds of nationalism: that of America and that of Europe.

American nationalism was based on the great universal ideals of

Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900) of Cincinnati, Ohio, was the creator of the most important institutions of American Reform Judaism. He was the dominant personality in the Liberal Jewish movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. His influence was very great. It is obvious, therefore, that his attitude toward Zionism would be decisive for thousands of American Jews, particularly in view

equality and freedom, and any man who accepted these ideals could be an American, without consideration of ancestry, language, or religious creed. Ancient traditions of blood and soil were absent here and did not constitute a part of American nationalism, which was thus, in a sense, universalistic.

Not so in Europe. The very essence of European nationalism, as it developed in almost every country, was the apotheosis of that country's traditions and cultural possessions. Ties of birth, of membership in a folk community, of loyalty to fatherland and language — these, idealized and shrouded in mystery, were the stuff of which European nationalism was made.

Zionism was an outgrowth of European nationalism. To the persecuted Jews of Europe, Zionism gave status. It glorified the Jewish past and projected a vision of restoration in their ancient homeland in the future. It gave them hope and confidence.

Wise, who had come completely under the spell of American nationalism with its basis in universal ideals, could not or would not understand the national aspirations of European Jewry. They were incompatible with his whole outlook.¹

PART ONE — ZIONISM

A. WISE'S ANTI-ZIONIST ATTITUDE

Judaism — A World Religion

In 1870, Wise reprinted a sermon of his on the Seven Sabbaths of Consolation in which he maintained that Israel generally no longer mourns for the loss of its nationality. He wrote: "Israel's aim and mission are the universal triumph of truth, the sovereign dominion of justice, equity, and freedom. . . . This being the object of Israel, its non-fulfillment was the main cause of his mourning, and the hope of its realization, the substance of his consolation."² Here we have the idea, held by Wise throughout his life, that the aim of Israel is not the re-establishment of a nationalistic community, but the promotion of universal ideals among the nations.

of the fact that his weekly paper, *The American Israelite*, was widely read in all parts of the country.

Rabbi Melvin Weinman of Waterbury, Connecticut, presented a rabbinical thesis with the above title to the faculty of the Hebrew Union College, in 1947, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Hebrew Letters. The present essay has been summarized from the original 114-page monograph by Bernard Martin of the College. All references found in the larger essay have been retained. The rabbinical thesis is deposited in the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Library in Cincinnati.

Ten years later Wise declared that the Jews did not wish a political restoration in Palestine because "we wait for the Universal Republic, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth." And again, "The idea of the Jews returning to Palestine is no part of our creed. We rather believe it is God's will that the habitable world become one holy land and the human family one chosen people."³

That Wise's ideals influenced his conduct is well illustrated by his attempt to leave his congregation in Albany, in 1848, to go to Europe, to take part in the idealistic revolutionary movements there taking place.⁴

Wise believed in what he called "the portability" of Jewish nationalism. "The Jew's nationality," he wrote, "is not endemic; it is not conditioned by space, land, or water." "The Jew's nationality . . . is not in his blood. . . . It is all intellectual and moral, without any reference to soil, climate, or any other outer circumstances. The Jewish nationality . . . has been made portable."⁵

This portability of Jewish nationalism is related to the Dispersion, which Wise saw as the will and plan of God. The presence of Jewish ideas and ideals in every country was, in his opinion, necessary for that country's moral progress.⁶

Wise's views concerning the mission and the nationality of the Jews led him to deny the claim that the Jews were a race. In 1887 he opposed such a claim on the part of an author named Eisman in his review of the latter's work, and in 1899 he opposed a similar claim made by Professor Caspar Levias.⁷

Wise's messianic views and his concept of "Jewish nationality" and race were formulated before the Zionist movement began. It may be said, therefore, that his opposition to Zionism was inherent in his entire philosophy of Judaism. His statements after the First Zionist Congress are simply repetitions of earlier ones.⁸ His opposition to Herzl's political Zionism was based on theological views adopted long before the Basle Congress. However, after Herzl and Nordau had propounded their theories about Zionism, Wise found himself opposed on two further grounds: (1) his allegiance to America, and (2) his opposition to any union of Church and State. He fully believed that Zionism constituted a threat to his American allegiance and that it implied a union of Church and State.

As early as 1880, upon hearing of negotiations for a Jewish state by Sir Moses Montefiore and the House of Rothschild, Wise wrote: "We want no Jewish princes, and no Jewish country or government. . . . We prefer President Hayes to a Jewish prince, simply because he is no prince, and we can just as well put up with Christian neighbors." The idea that Zionism was a threat to the position of the Jews in America led Wise to insist that America was the one country in the

world whose government was consistent with Jewish ideals as delineated by Moses on Mount Sinai.⁹

Turning from Wise's attitudes toward Zionism to his attitudes toward Palestine, we find him at first an ardent supporter of colonization schemes on a small scale there. But in 1882 Wise did not consider that country a feasible place of refuge for the hundreds of thousands of persecuted Jews fleeing from Russia and Roumania. In 1887 he declared that though Palestine still had strong religious associations for the Jew, its political associations had become almost non-existent.¹⁰

We might summarize Wise's attitudes on Zionism and Palestine as follows: The Jews are not a race or nation in the ordinary sense of these words, and their nationality consists of loyalty to a universal religious ideal rather than loyalty to a specific land or language. It is the mission of the Jews to further the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and they, therefore, cannot take part in any nationalistic movement which breaks up the human family. American Jews live under a government entirely consistent with the Mosaic moral principles and will not surrender their allegiance to such a government in order to embark on a visionary, impractical scheme.

Persecution of Jews is Disappearing

Wise was a boundless optimist. His belief that the nineteenth century would see the end everywhere of Jewish persecution is attested by many utterances. In 1895, fourteen years after the pogroms, he declared that even in Russia anti-Semitism was dying, and when he heard that a Chovevei Zion ("Lovers of Zion") group in Baltimore had said that the European Enlightenment was a failure, Wise could only marvel at such manifest ignorance. Nordau's speeches to the Zionist Congresses on Jewish misery prompted Wise to deny the existence of any such misery.¹¹

Wise's hearty optimism is difficult to explain. We can only say that it was perhaps due to the fact that he lived in America and was so thoroughly imbued with American ideas that he could not grasp or fathom European political forces.

Zionism the Result of Anti-Semitism

Wise declared that Zionism was the result solely of persecution, and that with the complete emancipation of the Jew everywhere the folly of Zionism would become evident. Any information that persecutions in Russia and elsewhere were being relaxed evoked from him prophecies of doom for Zionism. He declared that by abrogating oppressive measures the Czar of Russia could end Zionism at any time.¹² That the Czar profited by anti-Semitism and therefore would not willingly see its disappearance did not trouble Wise.

But, at any rate, it is clear that Wise did not at all appreciate the internal forces in Jewish life which contributed to the rise of Zionism.

Even Persecuted Jews Do Not Go to Palestine

Another of Wise's arguments against Zionism was that the persecuted Jews of Europe did not wish to settle in Palestine. He would cite the smallness of the number of Jewish immigrants into Palestine and conclude that Palestine was not so attractive a place of refuge as was commonly supposed. Wise thought that America was much more to the liking of oppressed Jews everywhere.¹³

Zionism Is Impractical

Wise always held that political Zionism was impractical, but, at one time, he saw considerable merit in colonization not connected with hopes of national revival but directed rather towards turning Jewish peddlers and merchants into agriculturalists. Later he changed his mind about colonization; we find him repeating again and again the impracticality of reclaiming Palestine and insisting that the Jews do not wish to go there, using such statements as "even those who pray to return don't mean it." The plans of Laurence Oliphant, one of England's outstanding non-Jewish Zionists, to purchase Gilead and Moab as a home for the Jews and to improve the territory by building railroads, canals, and highways, prompted Wise to declare that Oliphant would find it very difficult to get settlers. When, two years later, the Russian pogroms made it likely that Oliphant would not find his task so difficult after all, Wise took pains to point out the great hardships that would be encountered by the settlers, and reiterated the argument of impracticality.¹⁴

No Prayers for Restoration to Palestine

As early as 1857 Wise said that prayer for the restoration of a Jewish kingdom or king in Palestine is "sinful and un-Jewish." In his own prayer-book, *Minhag America*, he omitted the mystical hymn *L'cho Dodi* because of its reference to a Palestinian restoration, and commended Rabbi Isaac Moses' omission of the phrase "next year in Jerusalem" from the latter's booklet for devotion on Passover eve.¹⁵

Hebrew as Vernacular

Wise placed himself in opposition to the cultural as well as to the political Zionists by stating that the common man could do quite well with a mere smattering of Hebrew, and that it was a grave mistake to emphasize Hebrew at the expense of the language of the land in which the Jew found himself.¹⁶

Zionism a Threat to Jews Outside of Palestine

As early as 1883, in his criticism of the Zionistic writings of Emma Lazarus and George Eliot, Wise found occasion to attack Zionism on the grounds that it undermined the status of Jews outside of Palestine. He insisted that American Jews would remain American citizens. They had no earthly interests or aspirations different from their Christian neighbors.¹⁷

Here the "dual-loyalties" argument was not yet full-blown but it had developed considerably by 1897, when Wise denounced the impending First Zionist Congress and declared that the question of a Jewish state was foreign to the spirit of the American Jew. Wise ridiculed the Congress, but, nevertheless, thought it necessary to warn against the assumption "of the existence of a desire for a separate national life among the entire body of Jews." During the remaining years of his life, Wise again attacked Zionism on the grounds that it would make of the Jews aliens in the lands of their birth and residence. In 1899 Wise's attitude toward Herzl and Nordau had become so bitter that he called their scheme "Ziomaniac." In the same year he charged that Zionism would aid the anti-Semite who could now argue that the Jew was an alien and different from his countrymen.¹⁸

Zionism a Hindrance to Immigration

By 1887, when the Turkish government began to restrict Jewish immigration into Palestine, Wise was probably beginning to see in Zionism a further threat to the welfare of the Jews. In 1891 he declared explicitly that nationalistic schemes by Eastern Jews were alienating the good will of the Turks and were the cause of the obstacles put in the way of Jewish immigration into Palestine and the rest of the Turkish Empire.¹⁹

The Turkish government did not, at first, strictly enforce the immigration laws, but it did begin to do so after the First Zionist Congress. Wise reported the news of the enforcement of the prohibitions, and, interestingly enough, called the order to stop immigration "wicked and offensive."²⁰

In June, 1898, Wise reiterated the warning that Zionism was a danger to prospective Jewish immigrants. "Zionism hitherto has been only a folly; circumstances are fast becoming such that it may be a crime." It is surprising to note, however, that in August of that year Wise ascribed the Turkish prohibitions against Jewish immigration not to Zionist activity, but rather to pressure brought to bear upon the Turkish government by Germany, France, and Italy. From these governments of Europe, Wise said, the Jews could expect no good.²¹

After a few months, however, Wise reverted to his original contention that Zionism was the cause of the Turkish restrictions, and pointed out its harmful effects for the Jews. In the very month of his death Wise again emphasized the practical harm done to Jewry by Zionism.²²

The Zionist Bank

Wise opposed and ridiculed the Jewish Colonial Trust, established by Herzl in 1899, when it was still only an idea. After it came into being, Wise called it not only impractical but positively harmful. In August of 1899, when the Trust asked for a second installment on its subscriptions, Wise commented: ". . . Every dollar . . . will be absolutely wasted."²³

Only Recent Immigrants are Zionists

The charge that in America Zionism was a movement supported only by recent immigrants from Eastern Europe crops up in Wise's writings as early as 1885. In later years he repeated over and over again that Zionism received the support only of those recent immigrants who had not yet been weaned of foreign ideas and had not made a satisfactory adjustment to America. In 1898 he asserted that in England, also, Zionism is "a Russian-Polish hobby." At one time Wise claimed that Zionist leaders in America not only had not adjusted to America, but also were completely incapable of appreciating American ideals.²⁴

Name Calling

After 1897 and the First Zionist Congress, Wise's opposition to Zionism became bitter and intolerant. That he stooped to name-calling may be inferred from the fact that he considered it necessary in October of 1897 to defend himself against the charge of vituperation. Not content with comparing Zionists to Christian Adventists, Wise descended even to attacking individual personalities, among them Stephen S. Wise and Dr. Dowie Eisenbart, the Christian Zionist of Cincinnati.²⁵

B. CAREFULLY PREPARED WORKS OF AN ANTI-ZIONIST CHARACTER

Although most of Wise's views on Zionism are to be found in editorial comments scattered through the pages of *The Israelite* and *The American Israelite*, he did prepare three systematic works, dealing with the question, from which much can be learned.

The first is his address to the Central Conference of American Rabbis on July 6, 1897. Here he traced the history of Zionism from its origins in the persecution of European Jewry, through the period when colonization of Palestine was the sole interest, up to the con-

temporary political and nationalistic phase of Herzlian Zionism. Here also he asked the Conference to make an official declaration on the question. The Conference did subsequently adopt a resolution along the lines suggested by him.²⁶

The second is an article printed originally in *The New York Times* and then reprinted in *The American Israelite* on September 16, 1897. It was called "A Jewish State Impossible." Here Wise began with the extinction of the "Judaic Nation" 1,800 years before and then discussed the rise of the messianic hopes for a Return and their disappearance with the Enlightenment. The resurgence of the hope for a Return by a small number of Jews as a result of the Russian and Roumanian pogroms next occupied his attention. After this historical review Wise set forth his opinion that the vast majority of the Jews still did not wish to go to Palestine and that the plan of the Basle Congress was visionary and impractical.²⁷

Wise's last article on Zionism was for the *Hebrew Union College Journal* of December, 1899. Here he repeated his anti-Zionist arguments and said that, even though there might have been some good in the earlier Zionism, conceived as a kind of charity to alleviate the sufferings of European Jews, the political and nationalistic plans of Herzl and Nordau now damned Zionism in his eyes and in the eyes of all right-thinking Jews.²⁸

C. UNFAVORABLE REPORTS ON ZIONIST CONGRESSES

Wise's first reports on the Basle Congress of 1897 were accompanied by comments on what he thought to be its insignificance, its unrepresentative character, and its un-Jewishness. Two weeks later he described the Congress as a "farce, a crazy antic of irresponsible men." The very next week Wise wrote a kinder and much calmer statement. Summarizing the actions of the Congress and finding no terribly shocking things such as plans for a national state and political independence, Wise concluded that there must have been some sober and sensible men at the Congress. The plans of the Congress dealt only with colonization activities, and on these Wise was not ready to offer a verdict.²⁹ Two years later Wise did offer his verdict on the colonization schemes; he was opposed to them because he had discovered that they were inseparable from nationalistic Zionism.

Wise reported the preliminary plans for the Second Congress with contempt. Emphasizing the failures of the First Congress, he decided that neither could much be expected of the Second. Three days before the Second Congress met, Wise, describing it as a discordant group composed of political Zionists, proponents of colonization, and mere dreamers, declared: "That nothing good can come

from the Congress is a foregone conclusion." When the Second Congress had met and proposed the establishment of a bank for financing colonization enterprises in Palestine and Syria, Wise declared: "It is no longer Zionism pure and simple, but adulterated with Syrianism."³⁰

Without even reading the report of the proceedings of the Third Congress of August, 1899, Wise said that he could well imagine what its results were from his knowledge of the two previous Congresses. In the same article he stated that American Jews generally "have nothing to do with Zionism or that nationality swindle." Two weeks later, having read the proceedings, Wise attacked the Congress for maintaining a political aim while still using the colonization argument, thereby misleading the people. He reproached them also for refusing to issue a full financial report. Wise saw in the Third Congress "the beginning of the end" of Zionism.³¹ In reality, the Third Congress insured the continuance of Zionism as a movement.

D. DEFENSE OF ANTI-ZIONIST VIEWS IN REPLIES TO PRO-ZIONIST ARTICLES IN THE SECULAR PRESS

In 1871, a Titusville, Pennsylvania, paper printed an article about the Jews of Frankfort-on-the-Main going to Palestine to revive a Jewish kingdom. Wise hastened to say that there were only a very few fantastic Jews with romantic ideas about the Holy Land, who wished to go there.³²

When, in 1876, the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* reported that the Jews "will certainly find their nationalization again," Wise denied this and insisted that a national revival in Palestine was opposed to the final cause of the logic of history which demands the unification of the entire human family under one God and one law.³³

In August, 1897, just before the first Zionist Congress, the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* referred to the restoration of Jews in Palestine by purchase of the land from the Sultan. Wise denied the correctness of the paper's information and stated that there was no one to buy Palestine for the Jews and, besides, the Jews did not wish to go there.³⁴

When the same paper, a few weeks later, reported that Herzl's plan for purchasing Palestine found favor in the London Stock Exchange, all Wise could say—and he was right—was: "There must be a mistake in this matter." Wise now added a new argument to his previous ones, namely, that the non-Jewish population of Palestine was much larger than all the Jews the Zionists could bring into Palestine in the next twenty-five years.³⁵

A year later the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* reported a statement of the Rev. H. Pereira Mendes to the effect that Zionism was an attempt to establish a just government because all governments in the world were worthless. Wise answered that Mendes, with his Zion-

istic friends and their silly and, indeed, somewhat crooked schemes, were not representative of Jewish opinion, and that Zionism, if it had any hold in America, had obtained it through misrepresentation.³⁶

A statement in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* that the Jews of America tacitly endorse Zionism evoked from Wise the reply that American Jews are, in the main, "bitterly opposed to it in all its phases."³⁷

When a Shreveport paper reported that every synagogue in Cincinnati was flying the Hebrew flag adopted at Basle, Wise, of course, called the report ridiculous, and added that even the Russian and Roumanian Zionists in America advocate a return to Palestine not for themselves but for their oppressed countrymen in Continental Europe.³⁸ This recognition of the fact is difficult to explain in view of so many other utterances of Wise's in which he represented Zionism as advocating the return of all Jews to Palestine. It seems to open Wise to the suspicion that he misrepresented Zionism in order to influence his readers to become anti-Zionist.

E. WISE'S ATTITUDES TOWARD ZIONIST LEADERS

As a means of making Zionism appear ridiculous, Wise did not hesitate to discredit the Zionist leaders. In his first reference to Herzl, Wise accused him of playing the part of a Messiah. Wise denounced as foolish the statement of a London preacher who had called Herzl one of Israel's prophets. The next year, with the news that Herzl had called a Zionist Congress, Wise said that all the men associated with the pseudo-Congress, except perhaps Max Nordau, were harmless zealots standing with one foot in the sixteenth century. Later he characterized them as "hare-brained," and warned his people that they were false Messiahs.³⁹

After the First Congress, Wise accused Herzl of egotism and self-interest and asserted "it is high time that he (Herzl) were summarily silenced." Wise prophesied that Nordau, whose brilliance he recognized, would soon see the error of his ways and abandon Zionism. When the Emperor of Germany visited Palestine, Wise suggested him as a much better candidate for the position of Messiah than either Herzl or Nordau "in whom there is very little Judaism left."⁴⁰

After the Second Zionist Congress, Wise accused Stephen S. Wise and Professor Richard Gottheil of being "utterly unfit to be leaders of men" and unpatriotic citizens because they had permitted Nordau to speak of anti-Semitism in the United States. "Nothing can excuse the utter lack of patriotism and abject cowardice . . . that prevented them from defending the honor of their country, when it was unjustly assailed before a cosmopolitan assemblage."⁴¹

As far as the local leaders of Zionist groups in America were con-



Etching by Hermann Struck, HUC-JIR MUSEUM

THEODOR HERZL.

cerned, Wise could describe them only as insignificant, idle dreamers, and socialists.⁴²

F. WISE'S ANALYSIS OF CONTRADICTIONS IN EARLY ZIONISM

Wise recognized clearly the multiplicity of opinions that prevailed among the adherents of Zionism. He lost no opportunity to exploit these differences in order to discredit the Zionists and to minimize their importance.

In 1897 he called attention to the fact that the Orthodox Jews who followed Herzl expected the proposed Jewish state to be run according to the Mosaic law, whereas Herzl's *Judenstaat* does not even mention the Jewish religion as one of the bases of the state.⁴³

In the same year he pointed out that the major Zionists in America, Gustav and Richard Gottheil and Rabbi Felsenthal, were in disagreement with the Herzl-Nordau brand of Zionism, although the public generally considered them backers of the state idea.⁴⁴

When, at a meeting in Syracuse, Richard Gottheil and a certain rabbi voiced different opinions about Zionism, Wise cited this as evidence of the weakness and absurdity of Zionism.⁴⁵

Wise predicted that the differences between Herzl and both the European and American Zionists would probably deal a deathblow to their organization, and quoted a speaker at a Zionist convention in New York who expressed ideas contrary to those of Herzl. Wise also claimed that the withdrawal of the Chovevei Zion of England from Zionism was due to Herzl's state scheme.⁴⁶

In his final days Wise warned newspaper editors not to be blind to the realities of Zionism. The Basle Congresses had declared the establishment of a Jewish nation and state in Palestine to be the objective of Zionism. Their incidental inclusion of colonization schemes in Zionism should blind no one to the fact that the political aim was the major one.⁴⁷

G. REPLY TO CHRISTIANS WHO SAW ZIONISM AS THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

As early as 1868, Wise, replying to the questions of Christians on the subject of a Jewish return to Palestine, said: "American Jews feel no desire to return to Palestine. The inhabited world must become one holy land, every house a temple, and every man a priest; that is God's promise to Israel. . . ." This theme he repeated over and over again. In 1897 he wrote two full columns, in reply to Christians who interpreted Zionism as the fulfillment of prophecy, in which he again insisted that the fate of the future is not in dividing mankind further by reviving old nations, but in unity against evil. This is the will of God expressed in Holy Writ.⁴⁸

Wise described as misguided the activities of various Englishmen who, laboring under the notion that it was the expressed will of God that the Jews return to Palestine, had worked toward this end. He concluded with the observation that belief in the restoration of the Jews as a religious doctrine might be taken as an excuse for anti-Semitism and for the expulsion of Jews from all lands.⁴⁹

In 1895, Wise cited the fact that most of the Jews who left Europe had come to America and not to Palestine as proof that the alleged restoration prophecies were not being fulfilled. Wise also denounced as "a pernicious doctrine and rank blasphemy" the claim made in a book called *Herald of Christ's Presence*, that God would drive the Jews back to Palestine in accordance with the predictions of the prophets. A month later he declared that Christian ministers were misinterpreting the prophets who had never predicted a reestablishment of a Jewish state in the Holy Land: "They stated in unmistakable language that the Jewish faith will eventually become the faith of the world and their writings meant nothing else."⁵⁰

H. WISE'S ANTI-ZIONIST ABERRATIONS

That Wise was a thorough and consistent anti-Zionist throughout his life cannot be doubted. There are, however, several statements of his which would indicate that he was sympathetic to Zionism. These can be construed only as aberrations.

In 1871 Wise declared that the 2000-year-old claim of the Jews to possession of Palestine should be recognized by the Great Powers. In 1886, however, Wise redeemed this glaring inconsistency by declaring that, since in modern times conquest gives title to land, the Jews had forfeited their right to Palestine 1800 years before, at the time of the Roman conquest.⁵¹

Another statement of Wise's that might be interpreted to imply a favorable attitude toward Zionism is his approval of the words of the Prince of Wales who, in 1885, denied that Zionism meant lack of patriotism and who cited the eminent British Zionist, Sir Moses Montefiore, as proof of the fact that a man may be a Zionist and at the same time loyal to the country of his adoption.⁵²

Another statement which seems to indicate a favorable attitude toward Zionism is one in which Wise expressed approval of a plan to settle Jews in Yemen and eventually to form a Jewish state there.⁵³ All of his other writings indicate, however, that Wise disapproved of the idea of a Jewish state anywhere in the world and not only in Palestine.

One more statement might fittingly be mentioned here. In 1898 Wise was confident that political Zionism had practically ceased to exist. He thought that the only thing left of Zionism was a plan

to settle persecuted Jews in Palestine as agriculturists, and of this he was in favor. "This kind of Zionism will recommend itself to every good man, and all who can spare even a little should contribute to it."⁵⁴

PART TWO — PALESTINE

INTRODUCTION — THE CONDITION OF PALESTINE

In 1868, Wise gave his readers a thorough description of the conditions of the Jews in Palestine: educational, economic, and religious. He pictured the poor state of the country and the hard life of the Jewish community which then numbered between thirty and forty thousand persons. Sixteen years later Wise reported the poor and dilapidated condition of Jerusalem and estimated its Jewish population at twenty thousand.⁵⁵

In 1891, Wise approvingly printed a letter from Major Claude Conder which ascribed the poverty of the country not to nature but to an unjust and unwise government.⁵⁶ This was the Palestine of Wise's day—a land ruined by neglect and maladministration. The early Jews did practically nothing to improve the country. They went there to study and to die. Against this background we must appraise Wise's attitude toward Palestine.

A. WISE FAVORS COLONIZATION

As early as 1857 Wise evinced an interest in making a home for Jews in the Holy Land. In that year he approved a report by the American Geographical and Statistical Society to the Navy Department proposing a railroad to link Palestine to the Euphrates, thereby encouraging Jewish colonization. Wise was careful to point out that Jewish settlement in Palestine would be "under the protection of the great powers."⁵⁷

In 1860 Wise suggested that the Jewish exiles from Morocco, where riots had flared up and many Jews had been killed, be settled as colonists in Palestine. Here, too, Wise insisted that colonization would be feasible only if Palestine were "placed under the protection of European consuls." Wise viewed colonization as a plan that would be of mutual benefit and profit both to the Jews and to the world powers. He appealed to the rich to invest in Palestine because "agriculture will soon be profitable there."⁵⁸

In 1863, Wise recommended the collection of funds in every congregation in America for the purpose of building in Palestine a permanent, self-sustaining community of colonists.⁵⁹ Nothing ever came of this suggestion, but it does indicate Wise's attitude at the time toward the Holy Land as a refuge for persecuted Jews.

Wise was opposed, in 1867, to the existent forms of charitable

relief given to Palestine. He wanted no more beggars to go there to die. In 1870, he insisted upon the necessity for a radical change which would turn the thirty or forty thousand Jews in that country into productive citizens rather than idle beggars ruined by charity.⁶⁰

As late as 1892 Wise proposed that \$1,000,000 of the Baron de Hirsch Fund be used to buy arable land and the other \$5,000,000 be used to bring and establish Jews in Palestine. These figures were based upon the possibility of 1,000,000 being absorbed, a number which Wise apparently got from the letter of Major Conder mentioned above.⁶¹

In a long editorial, written in 1892, Wise went on record as approving the settling of a million Jews in Palestine and declared that, if he were not so heavily taxed with other affairs, he would establish societies all over the United States to assist in carrying out the project. He went so far in his thinking as to propose that land speculation should "be prevented by making occupation and improvement the only valid titles to the land given to a colonist."⁶²

Wise recognized the place of Palestine in Jewish life, for he argued that the Morocco exiles would find more support from abroad by going to the Holy Land than to Algiers. In 1885, while arguing against schemes of national restoration in Palestine, he admitted that "the religious idea tends much more to the Holy Land than to the land of freedom." Moreover, love and zeal for the Promised Land, he thought, gave the Jew spiritual power to accomplish difficult tasks there more easily and surely than elsewhere.⁶³

We suspect, in spite of all the other considerations adduced by Wise, that one of his major motives in favoring colonization in Palestine was his repugnance to the idea of wholesale immigration into America of the persecuted European Jews. This motive is clearly stated in an article on April 15, 1887.⁶⁴

Another argument employed by Wise for colonization in the land of the patriarchs was that the Jews might well become missionary bearers of civilization to the Arabs.⁶⁵

Wise saw great good in the idea of turning Jews into farmers and urged its application through colonization in Palestine. He wished success to the "Moses Montefiore Agricultural Aid Association" which had this as its object. The agriculturalist, in Wise's opinion, was a man in nobody's way. Unlike men engaged in mill trades and handicrafts, farmers do not invite competition, envy, or contempt. In a review of a book by a Mr. Eisman, Wise declared all its principles false except one, namely, "to get as many Jews as possible out of those God forsaken countries and to turn their attention from the commercial to agricultural pursuits."⁶⁶

In 1890 Wise declared that no matter whether persecuted Jews

went to Palestine or to North America, once they turned their attention to agricultural pursuits their sufferings would be ended.⁶⁷

Over and over again he declared that salvation for the persecuted Jews of Europe lay in their becoming farmers. He deplored the failure of America in this task inasmuch as the immigrants here had only formed "new ghettos" in New York and Chicago.⁶⁸

In 1893 Wise said that what the poor exiles from Russia needed was "physical and moral redemption, which a long and intelligent toiling and tilling of the soil, steady association with nature can only effect."⁶⁹

He expressed his pleasure at the success of the Jewish agricultural colonies in Palestine and said: "It proves that the Jew can succeed in anything he undertakes."⁷⁰

In 1897, the year of the First Zionist Congress, there were only two approving references to agricultural colonies.⁷¹ After the Congress we hear little more of Wise's old faith in the regenerative powers of agriculture.

B. WISE'S RESISTANCE TO COLONIZATION

Even though the great Cincinnati leader was full of hope and trust in colonization plans between 1885 and 1897, as early as 1880 he had already seen a disadvantage in Jewish settlement in Palestine, namely, the unfavorable conditions prevailing there. Two years later he graphically described these conditions and concluded by saying: "It does not appear that any considerable number of emigrants could be settled in Palestine with a fair prospect of success. We take no stock in dreamland."⁷²

These statements of 1880 and 1882, opposing colonization, appear to be contradictory to Wise's earlier views in 1860 (concerning the Morocco exiles) and in the years following. The contradiction is more apparent than real. Then — before 1881 — colonization was conceived as involving only a relatively small number of Jews who could easily be absorbed in their ancestral home. But after the Russian pogroms of the early 1880's, hundreds of thousands of Jews had to find new homes, and Wise ridiculed the idea that Palestine could absorb all of them. Even though he disliked the idea, he admitted that America must take most of them. Wise could not see the feasibility of large-scale immigration into Palestine, at least not until the idea of turning Jews to agriculture gripped his imagination. When that happened, he began to believe that all the obstacles which he had previously thought insurmountable could be overcome.

By 1883 Wise had reached a transitional stage in his thinking. In February of that year he was in favor of colonization and of turning Jews into farmers, but doubted that colonization in Palestine would

meet with any marked success.⁷³ But very soon after, probably because of his extreme dislike of the idea of wholesale immigration of the Russian and Roumanian exiles into America, he began to accept the feasibility of the immigration of a million Jews into Palestine. Between 1885 and 1897 he seems to have been convinced that his earlier objections to Palestine — poor land, no commerce, no transportation, poor government, etc. — could be overcome by the zeal of the colonists and the benevolence of Jewry, especially of a Hirsch and of a Rothschild.

But after the Basle Congresses and their espousal of political Zionism, Wise no longer saw colonization as a good thing. Believing that colonization was inseparably linked with the Jewish state idea, the Cincinnati lost all his previous enthusiasm for it and, though not opposed to giving it a fair trial, no longer considered it wise.⁷⁴

C. ADVANCE OF EDUCATION AND PUBLICATIONS

Wise was very favorably disposed toward all manifestations of cultural and educational progress in Palestine. Plans to publish a *Midrash Rabba* there met with his approval, as did the publication of a Hebrew anatomy manual. The name of Ben Jehudah — the Hebrew lexicographer — is often mentioned in Wise's writings, always in a good light. In 1887 he sympathized with Ben Jehudah when the latter was attacked by the Sephardic rabbis of Jerusalem, and in 1899 he supported an attempt to raise money for the publication of Ben Jehudah's dictionary. A. M. Luncz, a blind writer of Jerusalem, also received the support of Wise, who asked his readers to purchase Luncz's books.⁷⁵

Although Wise wished the Jews in Palestine to speak the vernacular, he viewed with favor the development of Hebrew as a spoken tongue there.⁷⁶

In 1895 he considered the proposal to establish a university in Jerusalem feasible. He doubted, however, that the necessary funds could be raised. A much more realistic project, in his opinion, was the library in Jerusalem founded by B'nai B'rith. To this he asked his readers to contribute.⁷⁷

Wise had great praise for the technological school of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in Jerusalem and reported its growth and progress. He recorded with pride the Turkish Governor's praise of another *Alliance* school in Joppa. Wise also supported the appeal of B'nai B'rith for money for educational purposes in Palestine.⁷⁸

D. WISE'S INTEREST IN TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Cincinnati religious leader followed with pride and interest every technological advance in the Holy Land. In 1888 he prematurely announced, with some humor, the forthcoming opening of the rail-

road from Joppa to Jerusalem: "This improvement does away with the ass for the coming Messiah; he can ride in a railroad car clear into the city of Jerusalem." The next year Wise reported also another railroad building plan by the engineer Joseph Elias. That very little had been done with either of these projects by 1890 is clear from Wise's somewhat sarcastic and humorous comments in that year. In 1891 Wise reported that the railroad might be finished that year. Here again he was too optimistic. It was not until 1892 that the railroad from Joppa to Jerusalem was finished and he could say the ass is superfluous, for now the Messiah can ride in Vanderbilt style.⁷⁹

Wise also recorded the efforts to build water-works in Jerusalem by the Baroness Burdett Coutts and by the United States Consul, Henry Gillman.⁸⁰

In 1894 he described the building of a steamboat in Holland to transport products over the Dead Sea. In 1897 he announced the forthcoming opening of an astronomical observatory and a scientific museum in Jerusalem.⁸¹

In 1888 Wise could report great progress in the modernization and Europeanization of Palestinian cities. Two years later he told his readers of the recent resurrection of Jerusalem from "Its widowed, forgotten, and dilapidated state," and, a year later, he reported general commercial progress in the city. In 1894 he described Jerusalem as a city with all modern conveniences and appurtenances.⁸²

It is interesting and instructive to note that all of Wise's references to technological progress in the patriarchal homeland are in the period 1885 - 1897, the years when he was interested in large-scale colonization. There are none before and none after.

E. PALESTINE AS A FACTOR IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Wise did not ever really consider Palestine a strategic point in international relations. Rumors that the papacy might move to Jerusalem in the 1860's and 1870's he discounted as unimportant. Only once, in 1883, while commenting on the proposed canal from the Gulf of Akabah to the Mediterranean Sea, did he refer to the political importance of the Holy Land. In 1898, Wise commented on the international factors behind the German Emperor's visit to Palestine.⁸³

In 1890, Wise sarcastically brushed aside the proposal of the English magazine *Blackwood's* that the United States take over the Holy Land.⁸⁴ A proposal by Henry Wentworth Monk of Chicago, that the President of the United States call a convention of all nations to protest Russian barbarism and to make of Palestine a Hebrew country again, under the protection of the United States, met with no direct reply on Wise's part, but only with a restatement of his standard anti-Zionist arguments.

F. PALESTINE AS CHARITY

Though Wise at first showed uncritical sympathy for the poor of Palestine, as the years passed he found a great deal wrong with the Jews of that land and with the distribution of charity money sent there. By 1890 he no longer urged his readers to give indiscriminately but listed specific projects which he considered worthwhile. Eventually, in 1899, Wise had to advise his readers to ignore letters and collectors in favor of well-known and established agencies.⁸⁵

Wise always approved of charity for the Holy Land but insisted that it be used for good ends and not as a substitute for honest work.

SUMMARY

There can be no doubt whatever that Isaac Mayer Wise was not at any time in his life a Zionist. His conception of Judaism and his interpretation of its history militated against any nationalistic view of the Jewish people. He considered it un-Jewish to pray for, or work toward, the restoration of a Jewish state. He considered it unnecessary, too, for he believed that in his own lifetime constitutional liberties for Jews, patterned after those of the United States, would be established everywhere.

There can be no doubt, also, that Wise was not *deeply* interested in making Palestine a haven of refuge for Jews. His original interest in the land of his fathers was the result of appeals for the poor of Palestine. It was his hope that the money sent there would be used to make productive citizens of the poor. He did not relish the thought that the funds forwarded to the Holy Land were being used merely to encourage unproductive talmudic learning and useless spiritual exercises. He was willing to see a few thousand Moroccan exiles go to Palestine as subjects of Turkey. This was his attitude until the Russian pogroms of 1881. Then, from about 1881 to 1885, he favored the coming of refugees to America which he considered a better home for them than Palestine. In that five-year period he met these immigrants from Eastern Europe, saw how much it would cost to bring them here, and decided that any place, even Palestine, would be preferable to their settlement in America, where—so he believed—they might become a source of trouble and embarrassment to American Jewry. He therefore reversed his stand and from 1885 to 1897 urged that the refugees go to the Holy Land and become farmers. In 1897, with the First Zionist Congress, he reversed himself again so that by the time of his death in 1900 he was definitely opposed to colonization as well as to statehood in Palestine.