Skepticism is a great virtue in readers of history. It is not, to be sure, the rarest of virtues, but often enough readers forget the extent to which historians will repeat uncritically the views of their predecessors, thereby perpetuating notions that are at least dubious, or they forget the extent to which most historians seem unwilling to shake tradition. Nowhere, one supposes, is this lack of skepticism more likely to be found than in the realm of biography—which is why biographical revisionism is generally so salutary—and so unsettling.

The biographical accounts of Isaac Mayer Wise are a case in point. The earliest biographical statements—they appeared shortly after Wise's death in 1900—depict him as something of a saint, and the later biographies tend to follow suit. Surely, one would think, Wise's earliest biographer must have been one of his most ardent hasidim. The irony is that the creator of this particular tradition—or myth, if one will—would seem to have been consciously rather less than frank in his public appraisals of Wise.

David Philipson was a member of the first rabbinical class to be graduated from the Hebrew Union College and ordained by its founder-president. Philipson spent his first five years as a rabbi in Baltimore and was then in 1888 elected to the pulpit of Cincinnati's Bene Israel Congregation (now Rockdale Temple). He committed to his published writings about Wise a hagiolatrous view and tone very much at variance
with the picture of Wise (and of Philipson himself) to emerge from a reading of Philipson's private writings.

Would Wise himself have been surprised? It is difficult to believe that he did not know how much of a hero he really was in Philipson's eyes. In his autobiographical "Meine Bucherei" (1896-97)—whose translation into English, incidentally, unlike the case of his earlier "Reminiscences" (1874-75), was never to suffer Philipson's bowdlerizing hand—Wise recalled the founding of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1889. "It is true," he wrote, "that I had written . . . the first draft, but it was presented to the pre-convention group anonymously. Dr. Philipson assumed the chair. . . . My name was not mentioned at all." Wise's colleagues—largely for purposes of public relations, one cannot help thinking—insisted on electing him the first president of the Conference, but Wise understood the situation perfectly well: "I made the job easy for myself: I let the gentlemen of the conference do everything while I learned to be silent in the chair." 4

Wise went on to say something else equally, or even more, interesting. When in 1893 the Central Conference of American Rabbis asked him to be one of the Jewish representatives to the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, he felt himself alone in speaking "on the theology and the ethics of Judaism as a system." Not one of his colleagues attempted anything comparable. "They all spoke as Jewish scholars; none spoke as a Jewish theologian, not because they could not, but because they would not." As Wise put it, "the scholar and the apologist were heard in every lecture, but positive Judaism always remained in the background, often almost concealed from the view of the uninitiated." 5 His subsequent discovery that his colleagues were unenthusiastic about his "system" gave him, he said, a certain amount of pleasure. He was "convinced" that he "must have said something which the scholarly gentlemen did not know before . . ." 6

"Positive Judaism"—not Wissenschaft, not apologetics—is what Wise believed he stood for. He doubted that was what his colleagues stood for. Wise, of course, was not minded to censure them; he was seventy-four in 1893 and did not relish the prospect of acting the general without an army. He had no intention of playing Luther to Philipson's Melanchthon. But it is fair to assume that Wise was not unresentful.

Wise's discontent may be why he was unwilling to see Louis Ginzberg appointed to the Hebrew Union College faculty in 1899. 7 Wise left the impression that he opposed Ginzberg's appointment because he failed to
see in the young scholar from Heidelberg a man "to whom Judaism stands higher than the learning of the Universities"—that is, he suspected Ginzberg of an addiction to biblical criticism. Such a suspicion may have entered into it, but perhaps what most disenchanted Wise was the fact that David Philipson had offered himself as Ginzberg's sponsor.

The reader will find below two portraits of Wise by Philipson, one (A–D) derived from writings which Philipson published in the years following Wise's death, the other (E) derived from Philipson's hitherto unpublished diary, written in the late 1880s and early 1890s—some ten years before Wise's death. In 1890, Wise was approaching the end of his career; Philipson, twenty-eight years old that year, stood at the beginning of his Cincinnati ministry.

A. From Selected Writings of Isaac M. Wise, with a Biography by the Editors, edited by David Philipson and Louis Grossman (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke Co., 1900): 

... after a voyage of sixty-three days [Wise] landed in New York on the 23rd day of July, 1846, with his wife and child. He set foot upon this soil animated by high ideals and aspirations. The germs of greatness lay within him, it required only the occasion to develop them; the conditions of Jewish life in the United States offered the opportunity—he rose to it. The man and the opportunity met, and the man has so impressed his personality upon the development of Jewish life during the past half century, that without detracting from the fame rightfully attaching to any of the other great leaders, it may indeed be said that he stands easily first among American Jews for what he has accomplished. Per aspera ad astra; the difficulties were many, but he triumphed; he aspired and he achieved ... [p. 16]

... his career in Cincinnati, the western metropolis, one of whose Jewish congregations called him to its pulpit in the fall of 1853, was the most remarkable of any Jewish leader in the United States, not only for the length of time that it continued, but for the great and lasting good that he wrought for the Jewish cause. Strong and masterful, he was a leader in very truth, toiling unremittingly and unceasingly, so that, looking back over the years that had passed, he could in truth say, "I have achieved." [p. 44]

He began in the very first volume of the Israelite the agitation for the foundation of a college for the pursuit of Hebrew learning and the educa-
tion of rabbis. With his indomitable energy he succeeded in interesting Cincinnatians in his plan and the Zion Collegiate Association was formed. In the fall of 1855 Zion College was opened, the first attempt in this country at the conducting of an institute in the interest of Jewish science.

Isaac M. Wise was now fairly launched upon his life's work. All the great achievements that he carried to a successful issue he had already conceived and brought to the notice of the public. The first practical attempts towards realizing his ideas and ideals all failed, but what of that? he toiled, wrote, agitated and persevered until final success crowned his labors. The earliest efforts at a conference of rabbis, the Beth Din of 1847, failed, but the tireless worker survived to see the successful organization of that representative body of Jewish ministers, the Central Conference of American Rabbis; the first attempt to form a union of congregations in 1849 did not succeed, but he who issued the call for that first convention grew not discouraged; through the years he sounded the same note and his hope was realized in the organization of the Union of American Hebrew congregations [in 1873]; the first college for the education of rabbis lived but a brief span of years, but the idea that called it into existence died not; it found expression in the voice and pen of its originator, and at last came into being with the opening of the Hebrew Union College [in 1875].

In that year—1855—he had the threads of his activity well in hand; those threads he spun into the web of a full, useful, honored life, great in good, rich in achievement. What a faithful commentary is his career of the fine lines of the poet, for truly he was,

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
  Never doubted clouds would break,
  Never thought, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph.
  Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake. [pp. 56-58]

B. From Reminiscences by Isaac M. Wise, translated from the German and edited with an introduction by David Philipson (Cincinnati: Leo Wise and Co., 1901):

In order to give this volume a rounded form, I have added, as a concluding chapter, the short account of the closing scenes of the life of my friend and whilom teacher, which I wrote for the memorial number of the American Israelite . . .

We stand perhaps too near to Dr. Wise and his achievements to be
able to view them dispassionately and impartially from the purely objective standpoint. The future historian alone will be able to do this. And that historian, whoever he may be, will be compelled to turn to the present volume as one of the most important sources of information, if not the most important, that we have concerning the remarkable leader who, more than any one man, stamped the impress of his powerful personality upon the institutional religious development of Judaism in America. [p. 9]

The Closing Scenes of a Great Life

The week following the death of Dr. Wise, the Israelite issued a memorial number. The editor of this volume was requested to write, as a contribution to this number, a description of the closing scenes of the life that had passed to the realm of eternity. This brief essay, written within the shadow of a great grief, is reproduced without change:

"May the Lord bless thee and keep thee! May the Lord let his countenance shine upon thee and be gracious to thee! May the Lord lift up his countenance to thee and grant thee peace!"

The priestly benediction was the subject of the last discourse of the master; each one who had the privilege of being present at that service must consider himself especially blessed, and must feel how singularly appropriate it was that he took leave, though unknowingly, of his people in these soulful words that have sounded through the ages as the blessing of God upon his people. Never had he preached better; although the body had been growing weaker, yet the spirit glowed none the less luminously than in the days of his youthful vigor. It was his swan song; loudly and clearly the ringing voice sounded through the halls of the spacious temple, and the lessons which he drew for his people from that text will abide forever in the hearts and lives of those who listened for the last time to the wise utterances of the prophet who had stood for years upon the watch-tower of Zion and proclaimed the truth of the Lord. After the services were concluded, he was affectionately accosted and surrounded, as had been the case weekly for years, by dear ones and by friends, and for each one he had a genial word; the ever-young patriarch smiled his benediction even as he had spoken it, and so he passed out of the life of his congregation with a blessing upon his lips and with love in his heart, a precious memory, a priceless legacy!

From out the temple halls he wended his way to that other temple, his home, and there his bright cheeriness enlivened the midday meal; no sign was there of the approaching calamity; in response to a wish expressed by one of the company for the possession of the beautiful sermon of the morning, he promised to write it out for publication. With a light,
happy word for parting, he left his home to repair to that third sanctuary
of his, the college, and his last service on earth was performed in the
cause that lay nearest to his heart, the instruction of his disciples. The
moments wore on; the hour came to its close; the afternoon service in the
college chapel had begun; teachers and pupils had repaired thither. The
father of the college had remained below; without warning the blow fell;
loving hands helped him to the couch; skilled physicians were summoned,
but he was past all human help, although the seriousness of the blow did
not appear at first. He was carried to the home whence a few short hours
before he had gone forth, and the beginning of the end was to come.
The weary hours of the night passed; he grew steadily worse; the dawn
brought no comfort; the man of science expressed his fears for the worst.
The morning dragged slowly on; the great mind lapsed into semi-con­
sciousness; the dear voice tried to shape a message, but to no avail; the
hand skilled in writing refused to obey for the first time the will of the
master. The afternoon wore on; the night, too, and brought no change.

The last day, Monday, dawned; consciousness had fled; he knew no
pain; thank God for that! From the very first hour that he had been
brought back to her, the tender wife sat by him devotedly, patiently,
hoping against hope; on that Monday morning she knew that the closing
scene in the earthly life of her beloved was drawing toward its consum­
mation. The children watched with her; one by one the colleagues and
pupils came to condole with her and them. Below stairs friends made
anxious inquiries. In the chamber of death naught but the breathing of
the striken man could be heard; the silence was intense; he lay in perfect
quiet. As the day advanced his breathing grew softer and lower. The
afternoon declined apace; those present felt that they were standing on
holy ground. It was a wondrous picture. The westering sun was sinking
below the hills; dusk was enshrouding the chamber; the central figure
was scarcely breathing; he seemed to be sleeping gently as a little child;
there was perfect peace; for hours the faithful wife had knelt by the
bedside with her arms thrown around him, peering into the beloved face,
but no responsive light came from the eyes that were almost closed in the
last long sleep. The weeping children and the few sorrowing friends who
had watched the livelong day stood about the bed, a living frame to the
picture. The sun had set; the shadows were lengthening; fainter and
fainter grew the light of day; softer and softer sounded the breathing;
more and more peaceful became the beloved countenance; not a word
was spoken, not a sound was heard; a great soul was taking flight; the
mystery of mysteries was being enacted; he was at the door of the Infinite;
brokenly his oldest colleague spoke: "The Lord has given, the Lord has
taken away; may the name of the Lord be blessed!" The end had come.
God kissed him, and he slept. [pp. 351–54]
My task in this appreciation penned in honor of the centenary of the birth of the great leader is not to produce a biographical sketch. . . . It shall rather be my purpose to attempt to visualize the man and his achievements and thus give a pen picture of the career which stands easily first in the annals of American Jewry.

Isaac M. Wise was both a dreamer and a man of affairs, an idealist and a realizer, a thinker and an achiever, student and an organizer. [His] was the indomitable optimism of the men who dare and who never acknowledge defeat. Obstacle and difficulty but spurred him on to further effort. Discouragement gave way constantly to renewed hope. He fitted thoroughly into the American environment. Freedom was the breath of his nostrils. He came to these shores because of the opportunities here offered for the unhampered development of human powers. As Jew and as man he had chafed under the restrictions of the Hapsburg rule in his native land. Had he remained in Europe he would in all likelihood have cast his lot with the brave spirits who arose against autocracy and tyrannical authority in the revolutionary year 1848; in fact the only time that he ever felt a desire to return to Europe was in that year. But though his was a free spirit he was a devout believer in constituted authority, the authority set up by the people themselves whether now it was in the general sphere of government or in private institutional life. A thorough going individualist he was yet a devoted adherent to the idea of organization. As a reformer he contended for the right of the individual Jew living in the nineteenth century to an interpretation of his faith comfortably with the thought and the needs of the time but he insisted also that such individualism, necessary as it was, must yet be curbed by organization if it was not to degenerate into religious anarchy. Individual freedom and organized effort may therefore be considered the watchwords of his life. His many sided activity as rabbi, as citizen, as editor, as founder of a congregational union, a rabbinical seminary, and a rabbinical conference, was the expression of these watchwords . . . [pp. 19–20] . . . Isaac M. Wise was a prophet and a pioneer. Where others failed, he succeeded. His masterful will, his unquenchable optimism, his unceasing activity and his intrepid spirit rose triumphant over all obstacles; it is not too much to say that his is the most impressive figure in the history of Judaism in the United States. [p. 42]

. . . the college has become the corner stone of the temple of progressive American Judaism. The unconquerable spirit of Isaac M. Wise achieved
Through the Hebrew Union College he became the foremost benefactor of American Judaism. Had he done nothing else but found this institution it would have been enough. But he did much more. And because of all that he dared and achieved, it may be claimed, without detracting in any way from the merit of others, that his is the first place among the religious leaders in American Israel. In the Hebrew Union College he built his own perpetual memorial. . . . Isaac M. Wise built for the ages. Long as Judaism shall exist in America his name shall stand among the highest in the record of spiritual achievement. [pp. 48–49]

. . . Dark clouds had appeared frequently on the horizon during his lifetime but he never lost heart completely. He continued optimistic and forward looking to the very end. His elasticity and youthfulness of spirit never forsook him. Who that was present on the memorable occasion of the celebration of his eightieth birthday can ever forget that thrilling moment when at the very close of a prolonged celebration, the hero of the hour, the ever youthful octogenarian, in response to the call that he speak a few words before the gathering dispersed, arose in his place and gave voice to the prophetic utterance: “The teachings of reform Judaism will be the religion of the twentieth century.” Bold words, but announced with all the intensity of conviction. These words were spoken in the closing year of the nineteenth century and just one year before the final curtain was rung down on the stirring drama of the hero’s life. . . .

In that faith he lived and in that faith he died. His entire life was a progression. Obstacles were often thrown in his way, and though he might be momentarily discouraged, his dauntless spirit conquered and he began the contest anew. He went from strength to strength. He bore down all opposition, he triumphed [sic] over every difficulty. He was a master in the sphere of his activity. When the end came life for him was all complete. The visions of his youth had become realized. Great institutions in American Judaism had arisen as he had planned them. He had grandly conceived, and he had grandly achieved. His soul is marching on. He speaks today through his disciples from scores of pulpits. On this occasion of the centenary of his birth, as so frequently before, thousands are arising and calling him blessed. Blessed was he in his coming into life, blessed was he in his earthly activity, blessed shall be his name throughout eternity. [pp. 60–62]

... his eightieth birthday was celebrated gloriously on the twenty-ninth of March [1899]. His disciples gathered from far and near. The spiritually youthful octogenarian was the center of the greatest demonstration of admiration and affection ever accorded any man in the history of the American rabbinate. The climax of the celebration was reached when in response to the many expressions of love and appreciation that had been uttered by the speakers at the dinner given in his honor he uttered the striking words, "Twenty-five years hence, or the utmost fifty years hence, the faith of the rational world will be the faith of the rational Jew." The indomitable optimism which was so characteristic of the man and which was in great part the secret of his amazing achievements found expression in this prophecy. Though unfulfilled literally, there can be no doubt that the trend of religious thought is in the direction he indicated. The world is turning towards the vision of Judaism as fashioned by the messages of the prophets and the high spirits in whose company Isaac M. Wise stands. . . .

One year later almost to the day, the mortal end came to this great life of service and achievement on March 26, 1900. He was the last of his generation, the mightiest of them all. He was the great organizer of the religious forces, the constructive builder of the religious institutions. He builded indeed for the ages. His monuments are the works of his own hands, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Hebrew Union College, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. And best beloved of these children of his spirit was undoubtedly the Hebrew Union College which was "nearer to him than breathing, closer than hands and feet." With it his name and fame are inextricably intertwined, he and his college are one, forever united and inseparable.

. . . The college is the everlasting earthly home of his immortal spirit. Every nook of the institution is eloquent of him and his achievement. Long as the institution shall last, so long shall men say, behold the monument of American Judaism's great spiritual architect and builder! [pp. 37-39]

E. From the manuscript diary of David Philipson, American Jewish Archives (Box 1323):

_Baltimore, January 15, 1888:_

Dr. [Kaufmann] Kohler's unwarranted attack on Dr. Wise was very uncalled for and very hasty. These errors of the History of the First Commonwealth and the Cleveland Conference have been so often cast
up to Dr. W. that it seems as if his opponents had nothing else to take hold of and they seize at any opportunity the rash conclusions of a young man without showing any spirit of pardon for past errors of thought. Surely Dr. W. has advanced and corrected these early opinions and his enemies if fair minded would judge him by his latest and not his earliest expression. The righteous indignation at the fact that Dr. [David] Einhorn is made so little mention of in the so-called History of 50 Years of American Judaism is well assumed by a son-in-law [Kohler] of the eminent reformer but it was ill-advised for Dr. E.'s merits cannot be slighted or passed over by any pamphleteer. His work stands on its own footing, but true it is that he did little of the work; he wrote, he studied, he was the scholar, he remained with his books. Dr. W. did the work and more than any other man has stamped his individuality [and ?] spirit [? on ?] a great part of the establishment and development of Judaism in this country particularly in the West and South. . . .

Cincinnati, September 11, 1890:

. . . It is a great comfort to be able to put one's thoughts on paper for outside of my darling Ella, who is a great comfort and aid to me God bless her! and make her well and strong again for she is ailing now, there is no one in whom I can or would confide . . .

Although I feel that in my work I have improved, although in my home I have been very very happy, although materially I have prospered, yet these two years [in Cincinnati] have contained many a disappointment for me and as I stand at the threshold of the new year it may be well to run these disappointments shortly in review. I have been bitterly, bitterly, disappointed in men whom I had thought my friends. First and foremost in Dr. W. Who would have believed, had he been told two years ago, that Dr. W. would place any obstacle in the way of me, his quondam pupil? Yet so it has been. I have taken scarcely any step that he has not opposed. When I advocated Sunday services in my Temple, when I had succeeded in establishing them (it is unnecessary for me to go into that interesting point in my career (Nov. Dec. 1889) the whole country was agog with it) it was Dr. W. who most violently and bitterly opposed, who aroused fanaticism against the movement, who succeeded in throwing the firebrand of discord into the ranks of my congregation and in temporarily putting an end to the Sunday lectures which however will yet be delivered ere many years have passed not only from my pulpit, but mark me, from the pulpit of [Wise's congregation] B'ne Jeshurun temple, in spite of the present attitude of its rabbi. Then when I was asked by Leo W. to write for the Israelite [the weekly of which Leo's father, Isaac M. Wise, was founder-editor], I replied that I would do so if my name appeared as assistant editor. He seemed perfectly satisfied but Dr. W. objected; he
would have no one associated with him on the paper. Well and good! so be it. To me it makes no difference, if my writing will only do some good, my name need not appear at the head of the paper. When, at the Rabbinical Conference held in Cleveland in July last, I offered the resolution that the term Jew was the proper one to be applied to the adherents of Judaism Dr. W. the next week came forth with a double-column editorial protesting against it and in spite of the protest I believe most thinking people will agree with the statement that we are Hebrews in race and Israelites in nationality but are Jews in religion. And only two weeks ago Dr. W. had a long and weary editorial in his paper against the lazy ministers who take vacations in the summer time; whoever could read between the lines could see that this was directed at me. The editorial began “we as usual took no vacation.” These words, in order that the whole truth had been told, should have been followed by the parenthesis (but, as we have been doing for the past thirty years, we went out to our farm of forty acres in the middle of April and will stay there till the middle of November, farming, planting, etc. and finding great recreation in the free pure air).

Dr. W’s conduct during all this time that I have been in Cincinnati has been the source of great sorrow to me. He was my teacher. He was one of my ideals. He stood on a very high pedestal; I thought him one of the superior beings but have found him to be only common clay. An ideal has been shattered. Sad it is, perhaps the saddest experience in my life; I would have given much not to have lived through it. He is correctly evaluated in the East; he is a man of great, of vast learning, of mighty energy but of a very envious and jealous disposition. He can not endure that anyone shall stand near him, independent in thought and action; he must rule; the name the Jewish Pope has been well applied to him; he would gladly excommunicate all whom he cannot subdue, even his own pupil; but happily we are not in the Church Catholic; I still stand free and active and will carry on my work as I best know how without fear and without terror. O! would that my old teacher stood in my estimation where he stood two years ago! but that is past! that can be no more! Very few men can successfully endure the bright light of scrutiny to be thrown upon their actions; greatness loses from proximity; how few great men are great to those with whom they are thrown into daily contact. When in time the true verdict will have been passed upon Dr. W. it will read somewhat in this wise: a man who did much for Judaism but who made everything subserve his own ambition; he would use every means to crush his opponents; his energy was restless, his mind active, but his nature jealous of all. He helped to shape or perhaps himself shaped the form Judaism has taken in the West and South but this will not last. There is too great an element of time serving, too small an
element of consistency. A man, great in many ways, the center well nigh of Judaism in America for over forty years but very faulty, always at variance with all other leaders. But wherefore write more on this subject? I feel it very keenly and could fill a volume without giving adequate expression to all I feel and know. . . .

Cincinnati, October 29, 1891:

. . . Well, my congregation has done a foolish thing again. . . . it was resolved to have Friday evening lectures. Let them resolve; I will not deliver them; the people do not and will not and can not come on that evening. If Sunday services or lectures are a giving in to the needs of the people, an innovation, Friday evening lectures were none the less so; late services on Friday evening were never known in Judaism until Dr. Wise introduced them. They have not been a success; in his own Temple he never has more than a corporal's guard and yet today in the Israelite he goes into hysterics about Sunday lectures, warns the people not to have anything to do with the innovation, bids them take care of their Friday evening lectures, calls them the salvation of Judaism etc. etc. Not a word of truth in the whole business, but it is quite in the Israelite's usual style, whitewashing, boasting of Cincinnati, B'ne Jeshurun and everything with which the editor of the Israelite has anything to do. No wonder the outside world thinks that Cincinnati is the center of Judaism, that here there is more religious spirit than anywhere else. The boasting tone of the Israelite is the cause thereof but quite the opposite is true. There is less of the true spirit of religion here than in the East. It is remarkable how little influence Dr. W. has had in this community, considering the length of time he has been here. His work here has amounted to very little. He is getting old and in charity I throw a mantle over the many, many things he has done and the many unkind acts he has been guilty of towards me. In spite of all asseverations to the contrary, Friday evening lectures are not the proper thing and I will not deliver them. . . .

Cincinnati, November 1, 1891:

. . . Friday evening lectures were instituted by Dr. W. years ago because his people did not attend on Sabbath. They were an innovation and I firmly believe that to them in great part is due the fact of the non-observance of the Sabbath here. These evening lectures detract from the morning service. Of that there can be no doubt. But of all places here in Cincinnati even they have not been a success. There is as irreligious and at the same time as backward and superstitious a set of Jews here as can be found anywhere. Kaddish Jews, graveyard Jews, club Jews predominate. Of true pure religious feeling there is very little. . . .
NOTES


These accounts of Wise's life are obviously all posthumous. An adulatory account of his life appeared while he was still living: see Joseph Krauskopf, “Half a Century of Judaism in the United States,” in The American Jews' Annual for 5648 A[nn]o.[M]undi. (New York, Chicago, and Cincinnati, December 1887), especially pp. 76 ff. Krauskopf was, like Philipson, a member of the Hebrew Union College's first graduating class.

It is worth noting here that Philipson, in his own autobiography, My Life as an American Jew (Cincinnati, 1941), made no mention of Wise that conflicted with the hagiography he had developed in his earlier writings.


3. See Wise, Reminiscences, translated and edited by David Philipson (Cincinnati, 1901). The German original, “Reminiscenzen,” began appearing in Die Deborah on July 3, 1894. Philipson declared in his introduction to the English version that he had “aimed to conform as far as possible to the original; but my chief object has been to reproduce the spirit of the author” (Reminiscences, p. 9).


6. AJA, VI, 146.


8. Ibid., p. 149.

9. Ibid., p. 147.

10. The Philipson diary is part of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. (Box 1323).

11. See Selected Writings, p. iii: “The first part of the [Wise] biography (pp. 1–58) is from the pen of David Philipson . . . ”

12. Philipson is referring to Kohler's two-part polemic, “Some Plain and Telling Words Regarding Rabbi J. Krauskopf,” in the New York weekly, American
Kohler was incensed by the fact that Joseph Krauskopf's "Half a Century of Judaism in the United States," in The American Jews' Annual for 1887, issued in December 1887, focused on Wise's "leadership of the Reform Movement in the United States" (p. 76) and scarcely mentioned David Einhorn at all. Kohler snapped: "There is but one I aM Wise, and Dr. Joseph Krauskopf is his prophet." Then Kohler proceeded to excoriate Wise for his readiness to recognize the Talmud as "the legal and obligatory commentary on the Bible" at the Cleveland Conference of 1855 and to shred Wise's History of the Israelitish Nation, from Abraham to the Present Time, published at Albany, N. Y., in 1854.

Some years later, it is worth noting, Kohler found it possible to salute Wise as "the master-builder of Progressive American Judaism": See Kohler, "Isaac M. Wise; or, The Heroic Qualities of the God-Chosen Leader," Hebrew Union College and Other Addresses (Cincinnati, 1916), p. 51. Kohler had by then succeeded Wise as president of the Hebrew Union College.

Wise's opposition to Sunday services is very well documented. See, for example, comments in American Israelite, July 15, 1870, p. 8; April 3, 1874, p. 5; May 1, 1874, p. 4; March 21, 1879, p. 4; May 30, 1879, p. 4; August 8, 1879, p. 4; January 2, 1880, p. 4; February 13, 1885, p. 4; August 6, 1886, p. 4; November 23, 1888, p. 7; January 3, 1889, p. 4; December 3, 1891, p. 4. Philipson's remark that, in November-December, 1889, "the whole country was agog with" his introduction of Sunday services is not borne out by a perusal of the Israelite during that period (though New York's American Hebrew, December 7, 1888, pp. 86, 89—a year earlier, that is—reported with satisfaction how "the effort made in [Philipson's congregation] to institute Sunday lectures . . . failed by so decisive a vote as 50 to 30." A Cincinnati correspondent wrote the American Hebrew of young Philipson's "mis-step": "It is a good lesson for those too radically inclined, and let them take note of it!" Wise's Israelite gave it only the briefest mention: December 7, 1888, p. 4). Wise did editorialize in the Israelite, October 17, 1889, p. 4, that Philipson was expected to "deliver the Friday evening lectures" at Bene Israel, and that: "Wherever the Friday evening services are well attended, Sunday lectures are superfluous and a violation of Jewish custom."

In the Israelite, December 12, 1889, p. 6, Wise published a letter by S. M. Winkler, a member of Philipson's Bene Israel board, protesting Sunday lectures at his congregation. (Philipson may have had Winkler's letter in mind when he declared in the Israelite, January 2, 1890, p. 4: "Dirty linen should be washed in private, away from the gaze of any looker on.") Even so, the Israelite with some regularity—and without critical comment—noted and summarized Philipson's Sunday morning lectures at the Mound Street Temple (Bene Israel): See Israelite, November 21, 1889, p. 6; November 28, 1889, p. 6; December 5, 1889, p. 6; December 12, 1889, p. 6; December 19, 1889, p. 6.

Wise did not hesitate to publish the text of Philipson's Saturday morning sermon "Ludwig Philipson, a Man of His Time" and quoted in extenso from the Cincinnati Commercial-Gazette's, highly complimentary report on the sermon, "a wonderfully clever panegyric, none the less entertaining than instructive": See Israelite, January 23, 1890, pp. 4-6.

On the July 1890 meeting of the Central Conference of American Rabbis at Cleveland, Ohio, see Israelite, July 17, 1890, p. 4; July 24, 1890, p. 7; July 31, 1890, p. 4. Philipson's resolution appears in ibid., July 24, 1890, p. 7, cols. 1-2. Wise's editorial blast against the word Jew—"a corruption from the Latin Judaean"—appears in ibid., July 31, 1890, p. 4, cols. 1-2.
15. See Wise’s editorial, “During Vacation,” Israelite, August 28, 1890, p. 4:
“The writer of these lines, as usual, took also this year no vacation. His colleagues being absent from the city, he preached . . . before the two largest congregations of Cincinnati—the Bene Yeshurun and Bene Israel congregations, worshiping together in the palatial temple of the latter, in which . . . every Sabbath the congregation was very numerous. . . . We think [non-vacationing congregants] deserve the special consideration of their ministers, who should strive to be with them at least every Sabbath. . . . We take notice thereof to inform all earnest preachers that it is not good for congregations to be alone six to eight weeks in succession.”

16. See Israelite, October 19, 1866, p. 4:
“K. K. Bene Yeshurun, at a general meeting, Oct. 13, gave card-blank to Rev. Dr. Wise, to arrange the time of divine services according to his judgment. Therefore, after due preparation will be made, the service in the Temple will begin on Sabbath morning, at 10 o’clock, and Friday evening at 7 P.M., all year round, the holidays excepted. After arrangements shall be completed, there will be held a regular divine service on Friday evening, with choir and sermon, to last about one hour or thereabout. There is no doubt that this evening service will do a vast deal of good to our cause.”

See also Israelite, December 31, 1869, p. 8; August 2, 1872, p. 8; July 11, 1873, p. 4; August 8, 1879, p. 4; November 11, 1881, p. 156; April 2, 1886, p. 4; October 29, 1891, p. 4.

17. See Israelite, October 29, 1891, p. 4:
“Look out for your Friday evening service and lectures; it is the salvation of Judaism under the circumstances under which we are placed. It is the salvation of the congregation that can not get its members to assemble numerously on Saturday morning. It is the salvation of the rising generation not to be estranged from Judaism and the congregation. It gives satisfaction everywhere, if the preacher is enthusiastic and competent to rouse the dormant sentiments of religion and the attachment to Judaism, also those who are chilled by influences from [a]broad. It is the salvation of the Sabbath in the consciousness and conscience of those whose hearts are still with God and Israel. It redeems men and women out of the bondage of unbecoming habits and the slavery of fashion, the sensual pleasure seeking inebriation which benights and bewilders ever so many. Take care of your Friday evening service and lecture. Be not led astray by the Sunday innovation; it is not for the congregation, it is for outsiders, and will be short-lived everywhere where Judaism is prized higher than style, fashion and whim.”