

## ISAAC MAYER WISE ON THE CIVIL WAR

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IN 1861 there were nine Jewish periodicals published in the United States; seven were written in English, two in German. Of these, Isaac Mayer Wise's *The Israelite* was the second oldest in continuous existence and the oldest weekly publication; its influence was strongest in the middle west and in the south. Galvanized by Wise's dynamic energies and exciting ideas, *The Israelite* exerted a powerful force in the formation of Jewish public opinion on Jewish and national problems. A study of its editorial policy, especially during the early years of Wise's editorship, when it claimed a great deal of his attention, is interesting and rewarding, because such a study reveals not only the thought and psychology of its editor, but also the ideas and attitudes which were transmitted to American Jewry. This paper will constitute an examination of Dr. Wise's editorial policy during and concerning the Civil War.

When the war broke out in April, 1861, Wise published his decision to refrain from comment on the war, in the following editorial:

### "SILENCE OUR POLICY"

"The excitement runs high, very high, wherever we turn our eyes. They say civil war is commenced. We are the servant of peace, not of war. Hitherto we sometimes thought fit to say something on public affairs, and it was our ardent hope to assist those who wished to prevent civil war; but we wasted our words. What can we say now? Shall we lament and weep like Jeremiah over a state of things too sad and too threatening to be looked

upon with indifference? We would only be laughed at in this state of excitement and passionate agitation, or probably abused for discouraging the sentiment. Or should we choose sides with one of the parties? We can not, not only because we abhor the idea of war, but also we have dear friends and near relations, beloved brethren and kinsmen in either section of the country, that our heart bleeds on thinking of their distress, of the misery that might befall them.

"Therefore silence must henceforth be our policy, silence on all the questions of the day, until a spirit of conciliation shall move the hearts of the millions to a better understanding of the blessings of peace, freedom, and union. Till then we might stop publishing *The Israelite* if our friends say so, or continue as usual, if we are patronized as heretofore. But we shall be obliged to abstain entirely from all and every commentary on the odd occurrences of the day.

"In writing these lines we feel as sorrowful and disheartened as we only once before felt — on leaving our native country. The land of our choice and adoption thus in a destructive commotion is much more than common misery to us. Still the will of God be done."<sup>1</sup>

But Wise was not telling the entire story in this brief editorial. He was not a neutral, a mere spectator, a fence-sitter, as his words might lead one to believe. He was a Peace Democrat,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> VII #42, p. 334, April 19, 1861. All references, unless otherwise noted, are to volume and number of *The Israelite*.

<sup>2</sup> See Jacob R. Marcus, *The Americanization of Isaac Mayer Wise*, Cincinnati 1931, pp. 10-18, for a detailed treatment of Wise's political ideas. Wise probably voted for Stephen Douglas in the election of '60, although he supported no candidate in the columns of *The Israelite*. His bitter eulogy of Douglas seems to indicate this: "This is one of our national sins, the bitter consequences of which we now suffer; all parties in this country committed the same sin — they killed their greatest men, and elevated imbeciles to the highest stations of honor . . . Douglas is dead, and his most bitter enemies must admit that the country has lost a great man." VII #49, p. 386, June 7, 1861. On Sept. 5, 1863, Wise himself was nominated for the office of State Senator by the Democratic Party convention at Carthage, but he declined the nomination at the behest of the officers of his congregation and of the Talmud Yelodim Institute. The letter he wrote on that occasion was full of regret: "I certainly feel obliged to decline a nomination so honorably tendered, notwithstanding my

like so many of his fellow-citizens in the border-states, the "border-state eunuchs," as Henry Ward Beecher called them. He was opposed to the ideas of both the extreme abolitionists and of the extreme secessionists. The Republican victory in the fall of '60 was, to his mind, a national calamity. The Republican radicals and the southern radicals would, together, tear the country apart. "Here is the house divided against itself," he said, "the irrepressible conflict." "Either the Republican party must be killed off forever by constitutional guarantees to the South, to make an end forever to this vexing slavery question, or the Union must be dissolved."<sup>3</sup> Peace and Union at any cost were his objectives in the weeks before the outbreak of war, even if the price involved the everlasting legalization of slavery. He published only pro-peace sermons and letters in *The Israelite*; who can say whether these were the only ones he received, or the only ones he could conscientiously publish? There were sermons by Szold, DeCordova, and Hochheimer, pleading for moderation as Wise did; letters from "Scrib" and "Millotiz" in favor of any compromise on the slavery issue, any revision of the constitution, to effectuate a peaceful solution, matching Wise's editorials; even advertisements by M. Loth favoring "Union Forever" in the place of his usual offerings of merchandise. And Wise was confident, for a while, that the counsel of moderation and compromise would win out, counsel such as his, that "a second sober thought of the people will decide in favor of union at any risk." Once South Carolina seceded, however, to be followed in rapid succession by the other slave states, Wise gave up hope altogether. He believed that every state had the right to secede; and, further, that a resort to arms was illogical: "Force will not hold together this Union; it was cemented by liberty and can stand only by the affections of the people." What, then, could a Peace Democrat do but lapse into a resentful silence when the extremists on both sides achieved their goals?<sup>4</sup>

private opinion, that I might render some services to my country, not altogether unessential, especially as those who nominated me know well my sincere attachment to this country and government." X #12, p. 92-3, Sept. 18, 1863.

<sup>3</sup> VII #26, p. 205, Dec. 28, 1860.

<sup>4</sup> VII #27, Jan. 4, 1861 to #32, Feb. 8, 1861.

If Wise, then, was prepared to see slavery established as a permanent American institution, to save the Union, was he pro-slavery, as he has generally been regarded?<sup>5</sup> The answer is "no" if it must be stated in one word. But it cannot be stated in one word, for the slavery issue itself was such a complex of ethics and politics that only the extremists on both sides could answer in one word. Many of the rabbis declared themselves to be abolitionists or pro-slavery men; Wise did not. In fact, he avoided discussion of the question on a political plane, since it was obvious to him that the political and economic aspects of slavery were paramount in most discussions.<sup>6</sup> As a rabbi, he said, he had no right to use his religious office, or his religious journal, for political purposes; and we shall see that he attacked the abolitionist clergymen for what he thought was their degradation of religion into a political tool. After the war ended, Wise was willing to admit that the abolition of slavery had been a desirable and progressive step; but he never supported it as a reason for going to war with the South.

On an ethical and moral plane, however, Wise was obviously not pro-slavery, although he never reached such heights of moral indignation as the leaders of the abolition movement. Far from approving the stand taken by Rabbi Raphall in his famous "Bible View of Slavery"<sup>7</sup> sermon, as has been charged, Wise refuted several of the Biblical arguments for slavery which were used by Raphall and other pro-slavery divines. "Among all the

<sup>5</sup> Max Kohler (*Jews and the American Anti-Slavery Movement*, PAJHS, V, p. 150) and Philip S. Foner (*The Jews in American History, 1654-1865*, N. Y. 1945, p. 60) state erroneously that Dr. Wise endorsed the pro-slavery sermon preached on Jan. 4, 1861 by Rabbi Morris J. Raphall.

<sup>6</sup> IX #34, p. 268, Feb. 27, 1863.

<sup>7</sup> Included in the collection, *Fast Day Sermons*, N. Y., 1861. Among other things, Raphall insisted that the Bible favored the institution of slavery, and that no Biblical passages could be furnished to defend the abolitionist viewpoint. On the other hand, he was fully aware of the differences between the Biblical conception of the slave as "a *person* in whom the dignity of human nature is to be respected" and "the heathen view of slavery which prevailed at Rome, and which, I am sorry to say, is adopted in the South, [which] reduces the slave to a *thing*, and a thing can have no rights." Raphall was a defender of slavery, but not a defender of Southern slavery!

nonsense imposed on the Bible," he wrote, "the greatest is to suppose the Negroes are the descendants of Ham, and the curse of Noah is applicable to them . . . Canaanites are never mentioned in the Bible as men of color . . . Besides we can not see how the curse of Noah could take effect on the unborn generations of Canaan . . . when the Bible teaches that God visits the iniquity of parents to the third and fourth generation only and [upon] those who hate Him?"<sup>8</sup> When Raphall died in 1868, Dr. Wise, perhaps using hind-sight, wrote that Raphall had given "a divine sanction to an inhuman institution," and "this was a great blunder." Wise even tried to clear the pro-slavery blot off of Raphall's name by recording that "in a subsequent thanksgiving oration he attempted to correct his error, but it was too late, the impression of his first sermon on the subject was firmly seated among friend and foe."<sup>9</sup>

Wise was always horrified at the thought of a reopened slave-trade. He believed that this was the intention of the extreme southerners, and hoped this could be avoided in a compromise settlement before the war. During the war, he broke his political silence once to warn of another possibility of the same thing. In late '61 he became convinced that the European Confederate agents would be successful in aligning France and Spain against the north, that Spain would invade Mexico and place a Spanish monarch on the throne, and that Mexico would then join hands

<sup>8</sup> VII #29, p. 230, Jan. 18, 1861. Dr. Wise knew, however, that arguments from the Bible are dangerous. Proofs could be cited for almost any point of view. So he also cited refutations of abolitionist arguments based on Biblical passages and events. He believed, for instance, that "the Hyksos of Manetho, who oppressed the Israelites in Egypt, were Negroes." See VII #38, p. 300, March 22, 1861, which concludes with the amazing statement that "the unity of the human race can not successfully be defended either biblically or scientifically."

<sup>9</sup> XIV #52, p. 4, July 3, 1868. Wise was quite unsuccessful. No writer on the subject has ever regarded Raphall as other than a convinced pro-slavery adherent. As late as 1897 Wise himself was forced to print a formal denial that he "shared the opinion of Dr. Raphael . . . that slavery was a divine institution, sanctioned by the Old Testament Scriptures, or that there is on record one paragraph to show that the said Isaac M. Wise ever was a pro-slavery man or favored the institution of slavery at any time." LXVIII #52, p. 4, June 21, 1897, answering the *London Jewish Chronicle*.

with the Confederacy. The idea of a European monarchy transplanted to the western hemisphere was a frightening one to him; he wanted America to bring democracy to Europe! His youth in Austria left him with only hatred for monarchy. So he appealed for an immediate drive to crush the rebellion, or, if this was impossible, a compromise peace with the South. But a secondary reason for his fear of a European invasion of Mexico was that "Spain is the only slaveholding power of Europe . . . the only power that has not prohibited the slave trade." If a juncture were effected between Mexico and the Confederacy, then the slave-trade, with all its horrors, would begin anew. The war and the abolition of slavery were unimportant to him, when there was, to his mind, a real danger that the greater evil of the slave traffic would be reinstituted.<sup>10</sup>

Long after the final draft of the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, Wise finally gave an expression of his views on slavery in the Bible. He showed no unwillingness to state his beliefs once slavery had ceased to be a political issue. They are, of course, the ideas of a man opposed to slavery. In a series of articles in late '64, he made a thorough survey of the Biblical laws and concluded that Moses had attempted to abolish slavery "by indirect-direct laws which rendered its existence impossible." "It is evident," he claimed, "that Moses was opposed to slavery from the facts: 1. He prohibited to enslave a Hebrew, male or female, adult or child. 2. He legislated to a people just emerging from bondage and slavery. 3. He legislated for an agricultural community with whom labor was honorable. 4. He legislated not only to humanize the condition of the alien laborers, but to render the acquisition and the retention of bondmen contrary to their will a matter of impossibility." So much for the Biblical view of slavery.

Then he offered a few general comments of his own. "We are not prepared, nobody is, to maintain it is absolutely unjust to purchase savages, or rather their labor, place them under the protection of law, and secure them the benefit of civilized society and their sustenance for their labor. Man in a savage

<sup>10</sup> VIII #25, p. 196, Dec. 20, 1861.

state is not free; the alien servant under the Mosaic law was a free man, excepting only the fruits of his labor. The abstract idea of liberty is more applicable to the alien laborer of the Mosaic system than to the savage, and savages only will sell themselves or their offspring." Wise was still unwilling to come to grips with the evils of southern slavery which so infuriated the north, or with the economic conditions which perpetuated those evils. He even bespoke an idea which had long motivated the program of the American Colonization Society which had, since 1821, colonized freed Negroes in Liberia: "Negro slavery, if it could have been brought under the control of the Mosaic or similar laws, must have tended to the blessing of the negro race by frequent emigration of civilized negroes back to the interior of Africa."<sup>11</sup>

But nowhere in his writings on slavery does he approach the radical and violent anti-slavery position of the abolitionists. Actually he was constitutionally unable to adopt a radical attitude on any issue. Passionate and vehement he was many times, but never radical. In a very revealing editorial on "Radicalism and Reform," published before the war, Wise expressed his utter opposition to radicalism in politics and in religion. "The present state of political affairs should convince every sober-minded and well informed man that radicalism will not do in any province of human activity. There are no leaps in human history . . . Radicalism will not do in politics, because there are historical rights, inveterate views and habits, thousands of interests connected with the existing state of affairs which will not yield to theories. It is easy for agitators to excite the passions of the populace, make friends and arm defenders for any theory; but it is impossible to revolutionize radically all historical rights."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> XI #20, p. 156, Nov. 11, 1864 to #26, p. 204, Dec. 23. The series is entitled "On the Provisional Portion of the Mosaic Code, with Special Reference to Polygamy and Slavery."

<sup>12</sup> VII #28, p. 221, Jan. 11, 1861. Wise continues, applying this reasoning to religious radicalism, "As easy as it is by stringent conservatism to drive the intelligent from the Synagogue, so easy it is by radicalism to deprive a man of religion . . . Support the spirit of progress by rational reforms. But

It was no coincidence that the two leading lights of the American Reform movement were at odds in both religion and politics. Rabbi David Einhorn the abolitionist, who almost paid for his political radicalism with his life, was a radical in religion as well. Wise opposed him in both. After a visit to Baltimore in '60, Wise wrote that Einhorn's congregation "is half very radical in practice, and entirely so in theory." Much more to Wise's liking was Rabbi Benjamin Szold, also of Baltimore; Szold shared Wise's political and religious opinions. Wise sympathized with Szold because his conservative religious opinions "made him the aim of the warfare of both extreme parties" in Baltimore, Einhorn's radical reform and the extreme orthodoxy of Rabbi Illowy. And Szold preached a sermon pleading for peace at any price which Wise printed in *The Israelite* in January, 1861.<sup>13</sup>

Although Wise never attacked Einhorn directly for his abolition ideas, he wrote with deep acrimony and rancor of abolitionists in general. He considered them to be "fanatics," "demagogues," "red republicans and habitual revolutionaries, who feed on excitement and delight in civil wars, German atheism coupled with American puritanism who know of no limits to their fanaticism, visionary philanthropists and wicked preachers who have that religion which is most suitable to their congregations," and "demons of hatred and destruction."<sup>14</sup> He saw only war and bloodshed, chaos and suffering, as the result of their agitation, and he could not be convinced that this was desirable or advisable under any circumstances, certainly not with slavery as the crucial issue.

And the most guilty of all the abolitionists, in his eyes, were the Protestant clergymen. No minister should participate in the "vulgar business" of politics, he thought; one who does, "abuses the place and misuses the trust placed in him." But if politics

forget not, that religion is the most sacred boon God has granted to man and play not with it as a child does with the ball . . . Let us be reasonable in piety and pious in our reasoning. Let us be progressive in improvements and conservative in principles."

<sup>13</sup> VII #7, p. 5., Aug. 17, 1860; VII #28, p. 220, Jan. 11, 1861.

<sup>14</sup> VII #22, p. 173, Nov. 30, 1860; #24, p. 188, Dec. 14; #26, p. 205, Dec. 28; #37, p. 292, March 15, 1861; VIII #30, p. 236. Jan. 24, 1862.



had any place in the pulpit, surely now that the Union was in danger, clergymen should plead for peace and conciliation, save the Union from bloodshed and the horrors of war. Instead, they were, in Wise's opinion, the instigators of the war. "Who in the world could act worse, more extravagant and reckless in this crisis than Protestant priests did. From the very start of the unfortunate difficulties the consequences of which we now suffer so severely, the Protestant priests threw the firebrand of abolitionism into the very heart of this country . . . There was not a Protestant paper in existence that had not weekly an abolitionist tirade. There was scarcely a sermon preached without a touch at least of the 'existing evil.' You know who made Jefferson Davis and the rebellion? The priests did, and their whiners and howlers in the press. The whole host of priests would rather see this country crushed and crippled than discard their fanaticism or give up their political influence."<sup>15</sup>

One characteristic of the abolitionists which aroused Wise's heated resentment was the ethical inconsistency revealed in their lack of concern for other minority groups. In 1859, for instance, the people of Massachusetts, by referendum, adopted an anti-alien law whereby the right to vote and hold office was denied to the foreign-born until they could certify a residence of seven years in the United States, and naturalization as citizens.<sup>16</sup> This curtailment of the rights of white men in a state notorious for its violent abolitionists, convinced Wise that the abolitionists were not humanitarians, but that they, rather, were politicians with a peculiar program for achieving power. "Do you think the Israelites of the South must be your white slaves," he asked, "as you in your naturalization laws treat the foreigner, placing him below the negro?" Bitterly conscious that the Jew still had to fight for the recognition of his rights, even against the pretended defenders of fairness and righteousness, he pointed his finger at them and exclaimed, "Too often . . . those who faint away on hearing of a negro thousands of miles distant having

<sup>15</sup> VII #31, p. 244, Feb. 1, 1861; #48, p. 381, May 31; VIII #16, p. 124, Oct. 18; cf. X #8, p. 60, Aug. 19, 1864.

<sup>16</sup> Emanuel Hertz, *Lincoln, The Tribute of the Synagogue*, N. Y. 1927, p. 571, quotes Lincoln's public repudiation of this law and its intention.

been abused, are always ready to wrong their next neighbor."<sup>17</sup> When abolitionist newspapers and senators selected the southern Jews as their special targets, abused them for supporting their gentile fellow-citizens in the Confederacy, and branded Judah P. Benjamin, with special vehemence, as a member of that "race that stoned prophets and crucified the Redeemer of the world," Wise was almost prepared to become an out-and-out copperhead. He believed that the anti-Semitic character of some abolitionists discredited the entire movement.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, few of the non-Jewish leaders of the time were interested in defending the Jews against the anti-Semitic attacks so characteristic of the Civil War period. Logically, of course, the abolitionists should have been the first to champion the Jew. That they did not was a continual source of irritation to Wise. "If so many Negroes had been injured," he wrote with flaming pen, "as were Hebrews by the order of General Grant, the bottomless absurdities of Parson Brownlow, and the heartless agent of the Associated Press, you would have cried as loudly as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah; but for the white Hebrew who gave you a God and a religion, you had not a word to say."<sup>19</sup>

Too often the very clergymen who fired their congregants with appeals to righteousness and justice for the negro were the same ones who urged that the United States be designated a Christian nation by the insertion into the Constitution of pro-

<sup>17</sup> VII #30, p. 238, Jan. 25, 1861.

<sup>18</sup> VII #38, p. 301, March 22, 1861; VIII #35, p. 278, Feb. 28, 1862. Senator Henry Wilson, of Mass., quoted above, attacked the Jews several times in Congressional speeches. In 1872, when Wilson was nominated for the Vice-Presidency, Wise reminded his readers of Wilson's past record and urged them not to vote for a man "whose conceptions of justice, equality, and liberty, are so narrow and ungenerous." XIX #9, p. 8, Aug. 30, 1872; #10, p. 8, Sept. 6. Wise overlooked Wilson's liberal championship of Jewish chaplains in 1862; Rabbi Felsenthal thought Wilson the hero of the entire chaplaincy controversy: *Sinai*, 7:200-201.

<sup>19</sup> IX #34, p. 268, Feb. 27, 1863. Parson William G. Brownlow, Tennessee editor and pro-Union agitator, later post-bellum Governor of Tennessee, was a bitter anti-Semite, and wrote and spoke unceasingly against the Jews. He was saved from lynching by a safe-conduct pass to the north ordered by Secretary of War J. P. Benjamin; despite this act of generosity, Benjamin's Jewishness continued to be one of Brownlow's favorite avenues of attack.

visions for the acknowledgement of Christian dogma. Wise wrote at a fever pitch on this matter as frequently as it was presented. In 1861 such a proposal was forwarded to Congress by a Pennsylvania Synod of the Presbyterian Church, and Wise waxed furiously eloquent: "O, ye hypocrites and pharisees! You would trample under your impious feet the rights of the Israelite and millions of intelligent citizens who believe not in Christ—you would cast the firebrand of civil war in our midst to slay innocent women and children . . . [you] embrace the distant negro and rebuke the distant slave-holder whom you fear not, who can not come and join your church, increase your salaries, or praise your superlative wisdom."<sup>20</sup> Nothing the abolitionists did, could please Wise!

Convinced that the abolitionists were in control of the Republican party, and that only disaster could result from the Republican victory in '60, Wise had no sympathy whatever for President-Elect Lincoln. When he visited Cincinnati in his wearisome series of receptions and parades leading up to the inauguration in Washington, Wise wrote of him most patronizingly: "Poor old Abe Lincoln, who had the quiet life of a country lawyer, having been elected President of this country, and now going to

<sup>20</sup> VII #29, p. 229, Jan. 18, 1861. During the war, Wise found yet another reason for hating the abolitionists. He believed that they were responsible, in the final analysis, for the exclusion of rabbis from the chaplaincy provisions of the Act of Congress, passed July 22, 1861. He wrote, in one of a long series of editorials on the chaplaincy controversy running for over a year, that "a score of fanatics, adepts in the act of Salem witch-burning, abolitionists, know-nothings, and detesters of everything except Natick leather and niggers, have, true to their avowed purpose of troubling and pestering the foreigner and the 'Christ-killer' . . . instigated the unconstitutional provision limiting chaplains to ministers of 'a Christian denomination.'" VIII #25, p. 196, Dec. 20, 1861. Believing that the establishment of a Chaplains Corps was unconstitutional, because it provided for the employment of clergymen by the state, Wise accused Congress of violating the constitution to pay a political debt to the abolitionist ministers who helped elect them; since "the Hebrew Rabbis are no politicians . . . [and] proved to be conservative in politics while Christian clergymen are the most violent abolitionists," there was no need to provide political offices for rabbis! VIII #44, p. 348, May 2, 1862. In his hatred of abolitionists, in this instance, Wise was deliberately forgetting that there were more than a few abolitionist rabbis.

be inaugurated in his office, the Philistines from all corners of the land congregate around their Dagon and worship him . . . Why all this noise? . . . Wait till he has done something . . . Some of our friends might like to know how the president looks, and we can tell them; he looks . . . 'like a country squire for the first time in the city.' He wept on leaving Springfield and invited his friends to pray for him; that is exactly the picture of his looks. We have no doubt he is an honest man, and, as much as we can learn, also quite an intelligent man; but he will look queer, in the white house, with his primitive manner."<sup>21</sup>

In his first inaugural address, Lincoln referred to Christianity as one of the principal supports of the nation in its days of crisis. *The Israelite* shortly thereafter published a bitterly partisan letter from a correspondent in New York, attacking him for this apparent identification of the United States as a Christian country, and also branding Lincoln a coward for his trip by stealth from Harrisburg to Washington for the inauguration. Wise editorialized in a note following the letter: "From a dozen of letters on the same topic we publish only the above, because it comes from a particular friend. We have only to say for Mr. Lincoln, that his style of writing is so careless and without any successful attempt at either correctness or elegance that he must not be criticized in using this or that word to express an idea. He takes domestic words, as used in Springfield and vicinity to express familiar ideas. In Springfield religion is called Christianity, because people there do not think of any other form of worship, hence Mr. Lincoln uses the same word to express the same sentiment. Mr. Lincoln received the heaviest vote of infidels ever given to any man in this country. We do not believe there is a German infidel, American eccentric, spiritual rapper or atheist in the northern states who did not vote for Mr. Lincoln. Let us see how much benefit he will derive from their Christianity, or how he will settle the political troubles with such piety. He does not care for words. By and by he will learn the precise use and import of terms."<sup>22</sup> Wise would never have written in this manner

<sup>21</sup> VII #33, p. 262, Feb. 15, 1861.

<sup>22</sup> VII #37, p. 294, March 15, 1861. Wise, also, believed that Lincoln had been a coward in running away from the threatened assassination. In VII

had he not been aroused as he always was by careless references to the United States as a Christian country in official documents or speeches. *The Israelite* pages are replete with attacks on governors, mayors, senators and other officials who apparently believed Christianity was the American state religion. And this was, also, another occasion for Wise, the Democrat, to attack the Republican President!

When the President was murdered, however, Wise spoke, with great understanding, of "the generous, genial and honest man, who stood at the head of our people in this unprecedented struggle for national existence and popular liberty; whose words and deeds speak alike and aloud of his unsophisticated mind, purity of heart, honesty of purpose, confidence in the great cause, and implicit faith in the justice of Providence, which inspired him to consistency, courage and self-denial; this Abraham Lincoln, who endeared himself to so many millions of hearts, and gained the admiration of other millions of people, both at home and abroad; whom the myriads of freedmen consider their savior . . . the man who stood at the head of affairs during this gigantic struggle, his cares and troubles, his sleepless nights and days of anxiety, his thoughts and his schemes, his triumphs and mortifications, his hopes and fears, and ten thousand more sentiments, feelings and thoughts . . ." <sup>23</sup> Between 1861 and 1865 Wise's conception of Lincoln's character and significance swerved from the one pole to the other.

During the years that intervened between Lincoln's inauguration and his assassination, Wise wrote indirectly of the occasion for his new insight into the soul of Lincoln. This was in a letter which he wrote to *The Israelite* on January 8, 1863, after his only personal visit with the President. Dr. Wise had been drafted into the delegation of Cincinnati Jews who were going to Washington to protest to the President and their Congressmen against General Grant's notorious Order No. 11. They arrived too late, for their mission had already been accomplished by a similar

#35, p. 278, March 1, 1861, under the Hebrew title, "Haftoras Lincoln," but without comment, Wise quoted Neh. 6.10-12, where Nehemiah tells of his refusal to flee a threatened assault.

<sup>23</sup> XI #44, p. 348, April 28, 1865.

delegation from Paducah, Ky., who were personally involved in the expulsion order, and who were promised by the President that the order would be rescinded immediately.

"Still we thought proper to see the President and express our thanks for his promptness in this matter," Wise wrote the next day, "and before 8 P.M. we were introduced to the President, who being all alone, received us with that frank cordiality, which, though usually neglected, becomes men high in office so well . . . The President gave utterance to his surprise that Gen. Grant should have issued so ridiculous an order, and added — 'to condemn a class is, to say the least, to wrong the good with the bad. I do not like to hear a class or nationality condemned on account of a few sinners.' The President, we must confess, fully illustrated to us and convinced us that he knows of no distinction between Jew and Gentile, that he feels no prejudice against any nationality, and that he by no means will allow that a citizen in any wise be wronged on account of his place of birth or religious confession. He illustrated this point to us in a very happy manner, of which we can only give the substance at present . . . Now, then, in our traveling habiliments, we spoke about half an hour to the President of the U. S. in an open and frank manner, and were dismissed in the same simple style. Sorry we are to say that Congress did not think proper to be as just as the President is . . ."

Dr. Wise was warmly impressed by "poor old Abe Lincoln," the "country squire," whom, he had predicted in February of '61, would "look queer, in the white house, with his primitive manner." Nothing here, in January of '63, about Lincoln's "primitive manner" or his careless style. Wise, like so many visitors to the large office on the second floor of the White House, fell under the spell of Lincoln's democratic manner, good humor, and disarming frankness. Wise spoke with a President whose sense of justice measured his own, and he came away convinced that the President, for one, would not be among those who delighted in casting barbs at American Jewry. This visit, then, is the key to Wise's understanding of the man "who endeared himself to so many millions of hearts, and gained the admiration of other millions of people . . ." Wise became one of the millions,

because he met the President face to face, and saw the true Lincoln.

But Wise held more true to his "silence" resolve than we might expect him to do; once he had done what he could to prevent the war, warning the people against the evils of militarism, against empowering the politicians with greater and greater prerogatives, against the danger to democracy and liberty involved in war, against the bloodshed and tears and pain which would come with the first battle, against the corruption and abuse of position and fanaticism and hatred which would rise with the smoke of the cannon and musket, Wise held to his resolution.

The pages of *The Israelite* contain practically no references to the great military and political events of the war years; the battles, the political struggles for power, the anguish of casualty figures, the threatened invasions, the Emancipation Proclamation, the election of '64, are all passed over in all but silence.

On a few occasions, however, Wise felt impelled to treat of the war from a religious viewpoint. He wrote almost from the isolation of a religious neutrality. In one editorial he wrote of the salvation of the individual soul as more important than all the "political crises and financial panics." "If for a moment," he cautioned, "the popular topics of the day absorb the whole attention of the thousands, you should not forget that topics, events, days and generations pass on the fleet wings of time, and your soul remains, with or without salvation, with everlasting joy or remorse, bliss or torment." He came to believe that the war was a punishment from God, designed to cleanse the American soul of materialism, corruption, the love of luxury, the neglect of culture. "Would to God," he prayed, "the calamity of civil war that has befallen us would lead us to investigate closely the national sins that exist among us, and rouse us to extinguish them for ever." "If the war costs us ten thousand professed politicians," he said bitterly, believing as always that the preachers and politicians were alone responsible for the war, "it will turn out a blessing at last, a blessing to the whole land . . . We cannot enumerate the ten thousand national vices that exist among us, vices which directly or indirectly brought on

us the national calamity under which we now suffer. Let these suffice to establish the fact, that this storm deservedly came upon us, that it will purify the atmosphere, and we shall go forth purified and improved to a great extent." "All the standing armies, navies, national guards, armories, forts and fortresses," he exclaimed, "can not save this republic from ultimate destruction, if the nation comes not to the conclusion that there are more precious and desirable objects, holier and more lasting interests, to be attended to than the one and ever annoying object of making money."<sup>24</sup>

Wise supported the various war efforts, howbeit in a mild fashion. Advertisements to stimulate war loans were printed in the pages of *The Israelite* and were reinforced by editorial notes; charitable campaigns connected with the war were given ample publicity; news of Jewish soldiers and officers was given at great length. None of this was, however, based on a partisan conception of the war, for Wise's interest in and sympathy for Southern Jewry remained steadfast. From the beginning to the end he had only friendship to offer to the Jews of the South, never the rancour or resentment or even hatred some of the other rabbis of the time seemed to bear.

The influence of *The Israelite*, before the war, had been strongest in the west and in the south. Wise had created valuable contacts with southern congregations, rabbis, and persons in the pre-war years. Almost half of his subscribers lived in the south. As long as he could, he printed advertisements for southern business firms and congregations, letters from southern subscribers, reports from southern congregations, and lists of his agents in southern cities. Immediately after the outbreak of the war he printed directions for the payment of monies owed to him to two agents in the south; copies of *The Israelite* and *Die Deborah* were mailed to the south as long as it was legal to do so. When, finally, in June '61, the Postmaster General of the United States halted all mails to the Confederate States, except under flag of truce through military channels, Wise complained vociferously.

<sup>24</sup> VII #37, p. 292, March 15, 1861; #45, p. 356, May 10; VIII #1, p. 4, July 5, 1861; #3, p. 20, July 19. See also VIII #30, p. 236, Jan. 24, 1862; X #2, p. 12, July 10, 1863; XI #8, p. 60, Aug. 19, 1864.



"Thus nearly one half of our list of subscribers is gone without prospect of an early settlement of this affair. . . It strikes us that [it] is unconstitutional . . . We know that we will hardly be able to stand this shock."<sup>25</sup> And for some time *The Israelite* continued to print appeals for additional subscribers and for prompt payment of back subscription monies. The financial crisis was passed, after a while, but for several months Wise had been prepared to accept the eventuality of ceasing publication for the duration of the war.

Financial crisis or not, however, Wise lost those subscribers and the influence he wielded over them and the support they gave to his ideas, projects, and plans for American Jewry. This he could not forget. And it is likely that when, ever and again, there seemed to be a possibility of a final conclusion to the war, his hopes soared for a reintegration of southern Jewry into his fold of *Israelite* readers and supporters.

He always defended their right to support the Confederacy together with their neighbors; he was never willing to disown them for disloyalty to the Union, as were Einhorn and Felsenthal, for instance. When news of southern Jewish congregations filtered through the grape-vine, when Southern cities were captured by the armies of the Union, when letters were smuggled or legally delivered across the blockade lines, Wise eagerly printed such tidings as were communicated to him. In 1862, for instance, he obtained information about the congregations in Jackson and Summit, Miss., Atlanta and Columbus, Ga., Montgomery and Mobile, Ala., and was happy to relate that "our informant tells us wonders of the material prosperity of our friends in the far South."<sup>26</sup> Earlier the same year he printed an advertisement for a rabbi for the Charleston Reform Congregation and added an editorial word for good measure. The congregation is an excellent one, he says, and therefore competent men, only, need apply. He will recommend none but the finest candidates. But "letters to Charleston," he adds, "must be sent via Fortress Monroe, by flag of truce." There is no other indication that a bitter war is in progress and that the rabbi is to minister to a congregation

<sup>25</sup> VII #50, p. 396, June 14, 1861; cf. XIII #1, p. 5, July 6, 1866.

<sup>26</sup> IX #19, p. 147, Nov. 14, 1862.

of the enemy. Wise did not consider them enemies, but friends.<sup>26a</sup> In '63 and '64 *The Israelite* printed several letters from Jewish Confederate prisoners at Fort Delaware, appealing for help and assistance; Wise forwarded one of these to the proper authorities at Washington, but to no avail.<sup>27</sup> Once the war had ended, and communications of one sort or another were restored, *The Israelite* printed voluminous reports from the South as rapidly as Wise could obtain them, as though he were consciously trying to erase the four year period during which his contact with southern Jewry had been slight if not non-existent.

There were further demonstrations of his sympathy for the south. Wise preached forgiveness and conciliation as soon as the war was won. In his Victory Sermon preached on April 14, 1865, and printed in *The Israelite* on April 21, 1865, he pleaded for mercy towards the vanquished, asked that they be welcomed back into the Union, and that no spirit of revenge be borne against them. Even after the assassination of Lincoln, when Wise himself realized that the perpetrators of that infamous deed had to be punished severely, he hoped that vengeance would not be exacted from the entire south. In 1867 he attacked those clergymen who were still calling for revenge against the south, and asserted that, as Christians, they demonstrated very little of the Christian spirit. When the amnesty proclamation was issued in that same year he greeted it with "joyous satisfaction" as "a blessing and an honor to our country," and looked forward to the time when all southern prisoners would be freed.<sup>28</sup> As late

<sup>26a</sup> VIII #36, pp. 283, 285, March 7, 1862.

<sup>27</sup> X #16, p. 122, Oct. 16, 1863; XI #16, p. 124, Oct. 14, 1864.

<sup>28</sup> XIV #3, p. 4, July 19, 1867; #12, p. 4, Sept. 20. In June, 1867, Wise visited Richmond and was bitter in his reaction to the results of the war, whereby the negroes seemed destined to assume control of the entire Southland. He wrote of the negroes roaming the streets at will, while the whites remained in their homes. Undoubtedly he was absorbing the propaganda line of the defeated Confederates when he predicted that the whites would eventually be forced to leave the South; then the negroes would be in full command and would stimulate a flood of negro immigration from Africa. There was no humanitarianism in his sarcastic comments on the significance of the emancipation of the Southern slaves: "posterity will consider us an admirably generous class of people, who not only expunged the disgrace of

as 1873 he was still the champion of the south and wrote in an editorial, "As long as the South is interfered with, any way molested, or denied any rights or privileges which others enjoy anywhere, we will be found to stand with the South."<sup>29</sup> He was ever true to the "dear friends and near relations, beloved brethren and kinsmen" against whom he had never desired the north to go to war.

## II

Judging from the available sources and published studies,<sup>30</sup> there was relatively little anti-Semitism in the United States prior to the Civil War, and that, apparently, stemmed from fundamentalist Christian doctrine and indefinite suspicions carried on from the mediaeval world. From the outbreak of the Civil War and onward, however, a veritable torrent of slander and abuse was loosed upon the Jews, stimulated primarily by economic and political tensions. A detailed study of the growth of anti-Semitism in the United States will undoubtedly demonstrate that, contrary to popular supposition, the Civil War was the period in which modern anti-Semitism began in America, and not the later period of intensive Eastern-European Jewish immigration to the United States. Simon Wolf, who, in after years devoted his career to Jewish defense work in government circles in Washington, wrote in a letter to the editor of the New York *Evening Post* of November 22, 1864, "the war now raging has developed an intensity of malice that borders upon the darkest days of superstition and the Spanish Inquisition." Wise said a year previously, "as Israelites, we were more mortified and outraged during this war than we were in Austria under the Metternich regime, in Russia under Nesselrode, in Bavaria under Mounteufel . . . We feel sorely af-

slavery at an expense of a million of men and three thousand millions of treasure, and now support a standing army at an expense of two hundred millions a year, to protect the freedmen; but also virtually give them eleven States, to be entirely under their control and safe-keeping." XIII #51, p. 4, June 28, 1867.

<sup>29</sup> XX #8, p. 4, Feb. 21, 1873.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Gustavus Myers, *History of Bigotry in the United States*, N. Y. 1943.

flicted and disgusted, and wish nothing more earnestly than peace."<sup>31</sup>

There was a rising crescendo of shrieking libels hurled at the Jews almost from the very beginning of the war, libels remarkably similar to those with which the Jews were plagued during the Second World War. In both the North and the South, these were the accusations: draft-dodging, the purchase of officer-commissions, war profiteering, bribery, smuggling and black-marketeering, speculation at the expense of the government, and many other types of foul disloyalty. Judah P. Benjamin was a favorite target in the north, but also among his enemies in the south; August Belmont was his northern counterpart. Jews were excoriated in the Congress of the north, and in the legislatures of the Confederacy. Public heroes, military and civilian, took occasion to accuse the Jews of every kind of treachery and baseness. The notorious Grant Order #11, by which, in late '62, all Jews were expelled from the Department of the Tennessee for trading with the enemy, was only one of a number of anti-Semitic orders and statements issuing from prominent military quarters. Wise wrote, after the war, and in reference to another libel concerning Belmont, "since the outbreak of the late rebellion we have been used to the outpourings of such persons."<sup>32</sup>

Yes, Wise was used to such outpourings. He took pains to publish them in *The Israelite*, so that his readers might know their enemies, as many as he heard or saw or as were reported to him: dozens and dozens of clippings from newspapers in cities large and small, quotations from speeches by politicians and clergymen prominent and unknown, libels from sources north and south. Wise published them all, together with all the evidence he could gather, and answered them with an unflagging zeal, though with a rising temper. At the same time, he carefully printed many pro-Jewish statements, defenses of the Jews by public newspapers and magazines, comments by gentiles who, also, were zealous to oppose the bigotry of their day.

<sup>31</sup> X #24, p. 188, Dec. 11, 1863.

<sup>32</sup> XIV #35, p. 4, March 6, 1868.

This is not the proper place to analyze all of these libels, but a few instances will illustrate their character and the nature of Wise's defense. On November 30, 1863, Major General S. A. Hurlbut issued his Order #162, prohibiting 14 Jewish clothing houses in the Memphis, Tenn., area from selling military clothing, and ordering them to send their goods back across the lines. Wise comments, "the goods were bought and shipped on legal permits, and five percent duty was paid thereon, which is a clear loss to the merchants. The cause for the order is not clearly stated, so we cannot tell why it was issued." But his correspondents had given him additional information concerning the case, which he considered reliable enough to offer to his readers. "Most wonderful, however, in this matter, is that two non-Jewish houses, of Memphis, Tickner & Co., and Waggnar and Cheek, were not included in this order. On the contrary, it is maintained, on good authority, that Tickner & Co. not only knew in advance that such an order was to be issued, but were given permits to bring military goods to Memphis and monopolize the trade." Wise concludes a tirade against military rule with a quotation from a Washington dispatch, detailing the news of another huge Quartermaster Department fraud involving millions of dollars, perpetrated by high ranking officers, whose religion is of course not mentioned, because they were not Jews.<sup>33</sup>

On February 16, 1863, an Associated Press dispatch from New Orleans, telegraphed to all the member-newspapers, told of three Jews who had been caught in a fishing smack on Lake Ponchartrain, carrying medicine and letters from New Orleans to the Confederate lines. The letters, the report said, were "from forty or fifty leading citizens of New Orleans to persons high in authority in the Confederate government." The article concluded with the following sentences: "The Jews in New Orleans and all the South ought to be exterminated. They run the blockade, and are always to be found at the bottom of every new villainy." The religion of the "leading citizens" and of the "persons high in authority in the Confederate government" was not specified, of course, nor was extermination urged as the only

<sup>33</sup> X #24, p. 188, Dec. 11, 1863.

course of procedure for dealing with them. Wise demanded an investigation of the Associated Press, and quoted editorials to that effect from the Cincinnati dailies, which also defended the Jews and attacked the A.P. reporter responsible for this bitter assault. The *Enquirer* surmised that the report was inspired by Massachusetts Yankees who had been out-smarted by local Jews in their first attempts at carpet-bagging.<sup>34</sup>

Wise admitted that there were Jews who were unscrupulous, but insisted that they be judged as individuals, not as members of the Jewish people. Jews are not a class apart, he believed, but part and parcel of the society in which they live. He pointed to the efforts of Jews in the cause of the Union, pleading as Jews have pleaded before and since his time: "Our sons enlisted in the army, our daughters sew and knit for the wounded soldiers and their poor families, our capitalists spend freely, our hospitals are thrown open to the sick soldiers of all creeds, our merchants represented at every benevolent association contribute largely to the wealth and prosperity of the cities, give bread and employment to thousands; we keep from politics, gambling houses, public-offices, penitentiaries, and newspaper publications—what else must we do to heal those petty scribblers from their mad prejudice?"<sup>35</sup>

As the war progressed, congressional committees made periodic examinations into the political and military agencies responsible for carrying on the war, and uncovered mountains of evidence of misappropriation, bribery, waste, corruption, and speculation. Wise printed excerpts from the public reports of these committees. It became more and more obvious to him that many of the libels about Jewish corruption, smuggling, and other dishonesty had been circulated as a smoke screen, to draw attention away from the activities of the financiers, profiteers, incompetent and dishonest office-holders, and bribe-taking politicians. The Jews were then, as always, a convenient scape-goat.

Occasionally a libel could be run into the ground. The Cincinnati *Enquirer* of October 20, 1861, reported that a "combina-

<sup>34</sup> IX #33, p. 258, Feb. 20, 1863.

<sup>35</sup> VIII #36, p. 284, March 7, 1862.

tion of Jewish clothing houses in this city" had been organized "to take advantage of the pressing necessity of our Western soldiers for blankets, etc." The Jews of Cincinnati became so aroused that the editors were forced to interview the business men concerned, to examine their records, and then to retract the statement. The apology stated that one clothing man said "that they had made contracts at an early period in the war, when prices were down, and were now uncomplainingly living up to them, since prices had materially raised. His figures were sufficient assurance of his truthfulness." Wise suspected that *The Enquirer* had published the report in an effort to divert the public from inquiring too closely into its own "supposed secession proclivities"; and, further, that the Jews, being defenseless, could not retaliate against the paper whereas the powerful interests, who were actually guilty of such practices, could deal the paper a staggering blow for such an expose. Nevertheless, the retraction was printed.<sup>36</sup>

This did not happen very frequently, however, and Wise reluctantly had to admit that the truth made little impression. Anti-Semitism was now a political and economic weapon. Was it here to stay? Wise could not tell, but he was willing to resort to any measure to nail the lie. In 1868, he fell in heartily with the proposal of the Jews of Chattanooga, Tenn., who determined to build a monument to the Jewish war dead who had fallen in their area. He offered the suggestion to all communities: "The Jews have been outraged during the war by officials, such as Grant, Butler, and others, by many a corporal and many a scribe whose names are not worth mentioning, although Brownlow is now Governor and senator. They always assumed the Jews were idle spectators in the great drama . . . Coming generations may accept the slanderous statements made against our brethren as being true. Therefore, also, we admonish our coreligionists to have every dead soldier exhumed and buried in our cemeteries, and let the monuments to the deceased Soldiers of our persuasion put to shame all those who slandered the Jews in a dangerous and excitable time." A desperate measure, indeed, to counteract anti-Semitism! And yet how modern the need appears, measured

<sup>36</sup> VIII #17, p. 132, Oct. 25, 1861.

by the anti-Semitic libels of World War II. As late as 1891, however, Wise was still defending the Jews against the old accusations he had answered in almost every issue of *The Israelite* from 1861 to 1865, and Simon Wolf was gathering statistics to prove that the Jews had been patriotic during the Civil War.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> XIV #31, p. 4, February 7, 1868; XXXVIII #23, p. 4, Dec. 3, 1891 ff.