

ISAAC MAYER WISE: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH*
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*Readers may wish to consult Professor Temkin's doctoral thesis on the life of Isaac Mayer Wise (Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1964) for full documentation pertaining to the present biographical sketch.



The town of Cheb, Czechoslovakia (formerly Eger, Bohemia), situated near the village of Steingrub, birthplace of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, publisher of *The Israelite*.

I. THE YEARS OF BECOMING

On July 23, 1846, the bark Marie, 332 tons, made port in New York after a voyage of sixty-three days from Bremen. There was nothing in the ship herself, the circumstances of her voyage or the human freight she carried to distinguish her from the many vessels bringing emigrants from Europe at that period. They included three "economists", a serving maid, a weaver, a carpenter and a bricklayer, indicative of the variety of occupations in the stream of migrants seeking new homes. The reasons for their leaving Europe and their fortunes in the new world are unknown to us. Three adjacent names attract our attention; they are "Isac Weis 27 Male Instructor", "Therese Weis 24 Female" and "Emilie Weis 1/2 Female." It is not easy to read the entry under "The Country to which they severally belong," but it has the appearance of "Steinberg," which can hardly be a true record. As with several other passengers, their luggage is given as "2 trunks."

This is the first known American document concerning the subject matter of this sketch, Isaac Mayer Wise. Concerning his life in Europe documentation is not to be found. He himself began his **Reminiscences** with the arrival of the "Marie" off the shores of North America. Undoubtedly he felt himself "born again" with his arrival in the United States. He never returned to Europe and made little reference to his early years. One might claim justification for overlooking his early life. However, they were a formative period—he himself spoke of having become an American in the streets of Prague—and it is not for completeness alone that one tries to construct an account of his early years. However, it was as an American that he made his career.

Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900) is one of the most significant figures in the history of the Jews in America. He was born in Bohemia of poor parents; his education, religious and secular, was incomplete and he was largely an autodidact. In 1843 he became the religious functionary of the Jewish congregation of Radnitz and three years later made his way to the United States.

Within a few weeks of his arrival Wise was appointed rabbi in Albany. When ejected from that position in 1850, largely because of a pro-reform attitude, he formed his own congregation, introducing moderate ritual reforms. In 1854 he was appointed to Cincinnati. He immediately founded two weekly newspapers, one in English and one in German to propagate his ideas. Besides writing voluminously for these weeklies, he wrote in the fields of history and theology. Often amid controversy, he advocated reforms in the synagogue, a book of common prayer for American Jews, a college for training American rabbis and a union of congregations which would give authority and direction to American Jewish life. In 1873, as a result of his advocacy, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was organized, and in 1875 it opened Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati with Wise as president. When the Central Conference of American Rabbis was established in 1889 Wise became its president also, holding these offices till his death in 1900.

Wise is thus considered one of the founding fathers of American Judaism. He was a fervent admirer of American ideals and American institutions, always on the alert to assert their superiority and defend their integrity; and he is to be looked upon as an American pioneer, comparable in his strivings to other institutional pioneers of nineteenth century America.

A NATURALIZED AMERICAN IN BOHEMIA

The village of Steingrub, where Wise was born on 20 March 1819, lies in the north-west corner of Bohemia, then part of the Austrian Empire, close to the German frontier and not far from the point where Bavaria and Saxony meet. The nearest town is Eger, now Cheb, historically famous as headquarters of the Imperial Army during the Thirty Years War, and the scene of the assassination of its commander, Albrecht Wallenstein, in 1634.

Of Wise's life in his native land very little is known. His grandson and biographer Max B. May, who was very close to him, wrote, "He could not be induced to talk about his early years, and often said they were too terrible to contemplate." Sometimes his writings dealt with conditions in the land of his birth, but avowed autobiography is unusual.

Wise was born into a fettered society; and its chains were heavier because they had been reimposed after a period of near freedom. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars had spread throughout Europe the aspiration for popular sovereignty and the rights of nationalities: the Congress of Vienna gave scant recognition to the new forces and set about restoring the **ancien regime**. The genius of those who set themselves to thwart the allied forces of liberalism and nationalism was Clemens von Metternich (1773-1859), Austrian Foreign Minister from 1809 till 1848, and it was in the Austrian Empire that, despite his awareness of the need for reform, Metternich's system operated to worst effect. The government was absolutist in form and tightly controlled from Vienna. Nor was the absence of parliamentary institutions or autonomy for the various parts of the Hapsburg dominions redeemed by that bureaucratic enlightenment which helped to advance the power of Prussia. There was administrative anarchy; industry and commerce were left to languish, strangled by an antiquated system of internal as well as external tariffs; an attempt at reforming taxation was made, but in the interests of the great landholders, who escaped their proper share

of the national burdens, and retained privileges which belonged to the Feudal era; the press was rigidly controlled; there was a tight alliance between Throne and Altar, resulting in clerical control over education.

For the Jews of Austria—and, indeed throughout Europe—the post-1815 period was one of intense disappointment. The enlightenment of Joseph II (d. 1790) had extended to his Jewish subjects. With good intentions, though, unfortunately, with little tact or discretion, Joseph had set about loosening the hold of the Church and improving the lot of the Jews and other depressed classes in his realm. Joseph's reforms did not go the whole way and after his death the march of tolerance came to a halt and the Jew found himself again at the mercy of the petty official. Particularly humiliating were the limitation on the number of Jewish families, the restrictions on the right of residence, the prohibition against owning land, the special taxes, and the **Familiengesetz**, (by which the number of marriages allowed to Jews was kept down).

It is pertinent to mention, as illustrative of the highly detailed regime under which the life of the Jews was regulated and against which Wise revolted that the **Familiengesetz** set out categories according to which eligibility to marry was prescribed, and that applicants for permission had to submit to an examination by the rabbi in the presence of a government official.

The intentions of the lawmakers were not everywhere carried into effect. If Jews could not own land, they might still be able to have it held for them by a Christian nominee; if marriage according to the law of the state was encompassed by restrictions, they might still be content with clandestine marriages (**stille chuppah**) according to their own religious law; if they were unable to get permission to reside in a given city, then they might eke out a possibly extensive sojourn under the guise of wayfarers.

The reversal after the death of Joseph II was all the more disappointing because the French Revolution had established equality before the law as an immediately attainable ideal. Two of the events for which the year of Wise's birth is known to history bring into prominence the reactionary trend which had set in after the Congress of Vienna: the Carlsbad Decrees, instigated by Metternich, with a view to repressing Liberal ideas still further; and the "Hep Hep" riots directed against the Jews of Germany. For many a year Jews and liberals might sustain themselves on dreams founded on memories, circumventing the law where necessary in order to try to bring their dreams nearer reality. Academic and literary figures kept alive the aspirations of the Enlightenment and censorship notwithstanding, their publications infiltrated the Hapsburg dominions. Thus Wise was able to exclaim in later years:

In an antiquarian bookstore in the city of Prague I found a collection of English American prints, and in it a set of journals from the years 1780 to 1790. I purchased the whole, and read with the heart more perhaps than with reason. That literature made me a naturalized American in the interior of Bohemia.

Wise was a boy of eleven living with his grandfather near Carlsbad when the July Revolution of 1830 demonstrated that to overthrow a reactionary government and replace it with a liberal regime was not a mere dream: it was the signal for the young German writers of the day to throw themselves into politics.

In 1835 the German Confederation issued a decree suppressing the writings of the literary school known as "Young Germany." Five writers were mentioned by name, of whom the most famous was Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), and among its representatives in the domain of scholarship were David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1872), whose sensational **Leben Jesu** appeared in the same year, and the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). In intellectual life, however, new forces were taking the lead—the protagonists of a generation which saw no finality in the Holy Alliance and the Carlsbad Decrees and which demanded intellectual and political liberty.

Isaac Mayer Wise was far removed from the literary circles which the government was trying to suppress. Whether they came at fourth hand or fifth hand, and however alloyed or re-worked in the course of transmission, it would be surprising if the ideas which these men coined and the ideals they held aloft did not color the aspirations of the Bohemian **Yeshiva bachur** (rabbinic seminary student) in whom a chance encounter with literature written in the strange but free English language had stirred feelings for something other than the orthodoxies of his day.

The influence of the eighteenth century Enlightenment can be judged from the way it remained with Wise. Repeatedly he extolled the power of reason and the rule of progress. He was past fifty and a quarter of a century in America when he wrote "The nineteenth century...subsists on the wealth of the eighteenth" an exception for "natural science and mechanical arts" making it clear that he referred to man's political and intellectual heritage.

"Liberty is not an artificial product of some ingenious minds, it is an innate principle of human nature...despotism is an imposition, an unnatural and violent check upon the natural motions and actions of man; wherefore liberty comes by itself, and takes care of itself, if the natural qualities of man are not corrupted, while despotism must be invented, studied, imposed and guarded..." This passage comes from a lecture given by Wise in New York in 1852, entitled **The End of Popes, Nobles and Kings**, these three classes being the agents of despotism. We hear the echo of Rousseau laying down that "Man is born free,

and everywhere he is in chains," and that nature gave no man rights over his equals. The power of the popes and the nobility had ceased to exist, and the dominion of the kings had been greatly impaired, Wise argued. In North America liberty found a home for the first time in modern history, and in Europe the French Revolution, inspired by the spirit of American republicanism, had burst upon the trembling tyrants. Wise was writing, it is true, six years after he had landed in America, and after his energetic mind had been given full opportunity to embrace the concepts of freedom embodied in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights. But those concepts were not unrelated to the European Enlightenment, and the fact that in the lecture in question he quotes from Karl von Rotteck (1775-1840), a teacher at the University of Freiburg, whose "Universal History" has been described as the "Bible of South German Liberalism", shows that his thinking had not been unaffected by the teachers who were active in Germany.

Though, apparently, the immediate vicinity of Eger is an exception, most of the Bohemian territory that abuts on Bavaria and Saxony is of poor soil, and before industry developed and the laying of railways made the spas accessible, the inhabitants must have led a sparse existence.

The Jews of the Bohemian villages shared the poverty of the land by acting as peddlers who took off from their homesteads each Sunday until the onset of the following Sabbath. Such small scattered communities could not sustain an elaborate religious organization. They needed Kosher meat, and a **shochet**, or person qualified to slaughter animals according to ritual law; they needed someone to teach their children—probably both functions were combined. Jewish custom required no specially consecrated house of worship; the schoolroom, if there was one, or the home of one of the members, sufficed for the purpose of prayer. Naturally a sizeable community, even if only in a village, would have a synagogue building, but the few Jewish families in Steingrub—even assuming that the number in 1819 was double the figure of nine reported in 1852—could hardly have needed anything.

In two articles written in 1852 Wise describes the life of the Bohemian village Jews in ideal terms: a patriarchal society, absorbed in its labors but elevated above the humiliations of poverty by the weekly round of Sabbath observance and other religious activities. But he went on to note the decay of the old order. Synagogues and schools were being modernized; priority was being given to secular education; talmudic learning had become a matter of professional concern to rabbis, and even rabbis were held in low esteem unless their talmudic learning was combined with secular education. The sacredness of the ceremonial laws is almost lost, and many a merchant violates the Sabbath, Wise concluded this article. The picture was a happy one. When he drew it Wise was grappling with the uncharted seas of American life, and many have had momentary pangs of yearning for the more stable order of the Jewish community which he had left. Economic analysis was no part of his purpose, and there is no reason to disturb the representation of village poverty given by other writers.

Wise's description of the Jewish religious functionary in a small Bohemian community is worth examining because it was into the household of such an official that Wise was born and it was the office he held before leaving Europe. There were district rabbis and local rabbis, but small communities which either could not afford or were unwilling to pay a rabbi sufficed with a **religionsweiser**, a maid of all work whose principal concerns lay in the fields of kosher slaughtering and the teaching of children.

Elsewhere one finds that officials of this class received the nickname **kaeserabbiner** because they were accustomed to ply for hire at the cheese market of the Pilsen fair.

As Wise himself noted, there were stirrings which within a generation transformed the life of Bohemian Jewry politically, socially, economically and religiously. The career of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) both showed the Gentile world what the despised Jew was capable of and widened the intellectual horizons of the Jews themselves. Until his time not only had Jews decided that a society which had treated them as pariahs could have nothing worth while for them, but they had shown a restricted, albeit intense interest in their own heritage. Philosophy and poetry they generally neglected; the historical sense was still medieval; while the study of the Talmud, on which they concentrated their mental energies with religious ardour, had degenerated into casuistical hair-splitting.

Mendelssohn took the lead in opening to the Jews the world of European culture, or, to relate the movement more closely to the intellectual currents of the time, the world of eighteenth century Enlightenment.

The French Revolution, offering the prospect of a new world order, which would include equality for Jews, made them more receptive to his teaching, and the tide did not turn when political reaction set in a quarter of a century later. The movement for religious reform was a logical, though unintended, consequence of Mendelssohn's teaching, but the check to the hopes of emancipation gave it an impetus. Some Jews chose the way of apostasy as a means of passing the barriers erected by the State; others took up the struggle for emancipation, and with this struggle the movement for religious reform was intimately connected. To ascribe the Reform movement solely to political motives would be one-sided. The cultural barriers between Jews and the Gentile world fell away long before the political barriers. Their removal brought an intellectual renaissance, and, under the critical scrutiny which the tools of contemporary scholarship made available, the forms and concepts appointed on the authority of tradition could not hope to survive unscathed.

The earliest efforts for reform touched only the externalities of public worship. At Seesen in the kingdom of Westphalia, Israel Jacobson established a Temple (1810) whose ritual included German prayers, and in 1815 he established a similar ritual at a private synagogue in his home in Berlin. At the same time the banker Jacob Beer (father of the composer Meyerbeer) established a second Reform chapel at his home in Berlin. No long time elapsed before the Prussian government, as fearful of innovation in the church as it was in the state, put an end to these services.

The movement took root however in the more liberal atmosphere of Free City of Hamburg. A Reform Temple opened there in 1818, and it published its own ritual in which the traditional Hebrew liturgy was abbreviated and German hymns and prayers incorporated. The Hamburg rabbinate forbade the faithful to visit the Temple or to use the prayer book, and their action was the occasion for a scholastic polemic in which opinions—mainly hostile—were expressed by notable rabbis throughout Europe.

The literary movement known as **Die Wissenschaft des Judentums**—it might be described as the Jewish New Learning of the nineteenth century—arose at the same time as the early exercises in Reform. In 1819 a group of young men—the most famous among its members was Heinrich Heine—formed a **Verein fuer Kultur und Wissenschaft des Judentums**. The member who made the outstanding contribution in the field of Jewish research was Leopold Zunz (1794-1886). His magnum opus **Die Gottesdienstliche Vortraege der Juden** (1832) was designed to prove that the vernacular sermon—one of the cardinal objects of early Reform—was a legitimate Jewish institution. One of Zunz's great admirers was Abraham Geiger (1810-1874) who made changes in the ritual which, though minor in the light of subsequent developments, were enough to brand him as a dangerous innovator. In 1835 he founded the **Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift fuer Juedisch Theologie**, in which he sought to combine historical research with practical recommendations for a reformation of Jewish religious faith. Two years later he summoned a conference, attended by fourteen of his colleagues, to discuss a practical program of reform; and in 1838 he was called to the rabbinate of Breslau, an appointment which was objected to by the Orthodox and gave rise to one of the most bitterly fought episodes in the history of Reform Judaism.

During the period in which Wise was growing up the decay of the old order and the impulse towards religious reform and the scientific investigation of the Jewish past had become marked; and it is no far fetched conjecture to assume that they were the subject of excited interest wherever Jewish matters were discussed. The Reform movement was strong enough by 1836 to draw a stirring counterblast in the form of Samson Raphael Hirsch's **Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel**.

How did this agitation affect the province in which Wise was brought up? In the articles of the Jews of Bohemia referred to earlier he alludes in general terms to the decay of the old outlook, according to which knowledge of the Talmud was the supreme goal, everything else being of minor significance in comparison. A novel with a Bohemian setting (**Er Kann Noch Sein Glueck Machen**) which he began in May, 1856 and which in more than one place suggests an autobiographical flavor, opens with the village priest anxious to encourage a ten year old Jewish boy to pursue his studies further. The boy's widowed mother tells the rebbe (Hebrew teacher) who replies that secular studies will lead to apostasy. This kind of struggle against the corruption of secular study has been authenticated in tales of other times and places and is known even today; Wise's sketch is taken from life.

Though the former isolation of Jewish religious life was breaking down, there was little attempt within the Austrian Empire to effect the thoroughgoing Reform of Judaism that was sought in Germany. The prevailing spirit is typified by the synagogue erected in Vienna in 1826—the old ritual purged of the obvious excrescences, beautified by the music of Solomon Sulzer, dignified by the eloquent preaching of Isaac Noah Mannheimer. This system formed the model for the progressive section of the Jewish community of Prague, where a temple after the Viennese model was opened in 1836. The moderate nature of the Reform movement which he encountered in his early life may suggest the background for attitudes which Wise showed in his American career: desire for adaptation coupled with distaste for radicalism, acceptance of the structure of the traditional liturgy, rapturous enthusiasm for the music of Solomon Sulzer.

The spirit of adaptation was represented by another figure who Wise referred to with great respect in later life—S.L. Rappaport (1790-1867), the famous scholar who officiated as chief rabbi in Prague from 1840. In some communities the compatibility of secular learning with the rabbinate (or even with Judaism) was the shibboleth, and here Rappaport showed himself a reformer. The question of establishing a Jewish theological seminary in Prague had been under discussion since 1837. Though the plan came to naught, the Bohemian yeshivot did not show the rigid narrowness which excluded from the students private reading all secular literature and even the works of such Jewish masters as Ibn Ezra and Maimonides. One can be sure that during the years of his study in Prague, Wise heard the pros and cons of a modern institution for the training of rabbis canvassed with ardour.

Against this background we trace the course of Wise's early years. His father, Leo Weis, was the teacher and general religious functionary of the small Jewish community of Steingrub. The family had lived in that part of Bohemia for three generations at least. Both Leo Weis father, Isaiah, and his grandfather, also Leo, were physicians who had studied in Padua and lived at Durmaul, near Carlsbad. Isaiah



THE ISAAC MAYER WISE FAMILY
(CIRCA 1850) 1 to 5; Therese Bloch Wise, Leo Wise,
Dr. Isaac M. Wise, Julius Wise; Standing, Emily Wise

Weis is stated to have been a learned Talmudist and also to have dabbled secretly in Kabbalah. Leo Weis married twice, his second wife being Regina Weis, a distant relative. To this union thirteen children were born, seven dying in infancy. Isaac Mayer Wise was the oldest surviving son. Leo Weis died shortly after the birth of his youngest child.

When Isaac Mayer Wise was six he went to live at Durmaul with his grandfather. At Durmaul there was a Jewish "trivial school" which he attended, and in the evening he received personal instruction from his grandfather. One reason assigned for Wise's being sent to his grandfather was that he showed such precocity that his father was unable to give him individual attention. In all probability part of the truth is that his parents were unable to support him: when his grandfather died he did not return to Steingrub for that reason.

At this point Isaac Mayer Wise was twelve, and from that time onwards he made his way alone. It is difficult to establish even a chronology of his activities from 1831 to 1843, and the account which follows is based on that given in Max B. May's *Life*.

Wise was twelve, May tells us, when his grandfather died and he set out for Prague, which would have been 1831; and he remained at Prague "about two years". The next stage given is that he went to Goltsch-Jenikau "about 1835". Goltsch-Jenikau, about fifty miles south-east of Prague, was the locale of a famous yeshivah, conducted at that time by Rabbi Aaron Kornfeld (1795-1881). Evidently he was a famous man in the world of Talmudic learning, for in 1842 Sir Moses Montefiore, when returning from Constantinople, made the difficult journey to Goltsch-Jenikau in order to visit him. In spite of his strict Orthodoxy, Kornfeld encouraged his pupils to acquire secular education.

Wise appears to have stayed at the yeshivah for about two years. He left with thirty other students when the government issued a decree requiring candidates for the rabbinate to take courses at the gymnasium and university. Returning to Prague, Wise supported himself by acting as tutor in the household of Leopold Jerusalem and devoted himself to the secular studies that were required if he was to exercise the rabbinical calling.

The death of Leopold Jerusalem caused Wise to seek alternative means of supporting himself, and he found them in the home of Herman Bloch a merchant in the village of Grafenried, in the Boehmerwald, not far from Eger. "Within a year" Wise returned to Prague. About five years later Wise married Herman Bloch's daughter, Therese. Considering that the Blochs were the only Jewish family in Grafenried, it is not surprising that a Jewish young man four years her senior won her heart. One speculates, however, whether the young **yeshivah bachur's** fondness for the daughter had something to do with his departure from the Bloch household. **Er Kann Noch Sein Glueck Machen** may again have a touch of autobiography. Wise tells of the agreeable young **yeshivah bachur**, "now in his twentieth year" compelled to take employment as tutor and bookkeeper in the home of Kaufman a wealthy merchant, winning the heart of the daughter of the house and being thrown out when the couple are found embracing. He makes his way back to Prague and thence (after suffering shipwreck) to New York. Eventually the Kaufmanns also settle in America (as did the Blochs) and the couple marry and prosper.

As to the next few years of Wise's life statements have been made which are difficult to reconcile: attendance at a Prague gymnasium; teacher in the Jewish community of Ronsperg, fifty miles south of Eger, a six months sojourn in Pressburg in order to qualify for admission to the university; attendance at the Universities of Prague and Vienna. It is stated that when he was twenty-three Wise received the rabbinical diploma in Prague. In 1843 he took a position in Radnitz.

The difficulties in establishing a chronology and the discrepancies between the versions given by biographers who knew Wise personally set a question mark against these statements as to this part of Wise's career. They become still more dubious in the light of evidence which shows that Wise was never registered as a student at the University of Vienna.

Probably he did stay in Vienna without being registered as a student at the university. In his early days in America he harked back to the Vienna Temple, especially to the music of Sulzer, and the statement that he dined every Saturday with Mannheimer and every Sunday with Sulzer accords with the practice recorded in many places, including Wise's **Asmonean** articles, of providing board for yeshivah bachurim.

Obviously the "D.D." which Wise sometimes appended to his name was never conferred by a university. A more serious question is whether he received the rabbinical diploma? Philipson's statement, based, it is claimed, on information given by Wise, is that he passed his rabbinical examination before the Prague Beth Din composed of Rabbis Rappaport, Freund and Teweles. When in America Wise was asked about his diploma he sidestepped, which, as we shall see, was the practice he often followed when he found himself in a difficult position. When Rappaport celebrated his seventieth birthday, Wise wrote a long review of his career, obviously based on personal knowledge, and likewise when he passed away. Both were highly laudatory, but neither mentioned that Rappaport was the source of the writer's rabbinical authority, as might have been expected had it been the case. Finally, there in the entry, presumably based on the information he provided in the passenger list. An "instructor" would be more likely to describe himself as a "rabbi" than a "rabbi" as an "instructor". On balance therefore one is inclined to believe that Wise

possessed no rabbinical diploma. On the other hand, there is every likelihood that he received some sort of document from the Prague Beth Din, e.g., a certificate testifying to his competence in **schechita** (Ritual slaughter) which one assumes would have been required by the congregation which he served.

The position he took at Radnitz in 1843 was, it is suggested, that of **religionsweiser** in a community which was reported as having 69 souls in 1838 and 57 in 1850. Though in later life Wise was concerned to emphasize his status as a rabbi, his duties at Radnitz would be likely to include those of *schohet*, and the customary certificate of competence (**Kabbalah**) from a rabbinic authority would be requisite. To this the Prague Beth Din would doubtless add testimony of the candidate's fitness for his other duties.

After three years in Radnitz Wise pulled up stakes and left for America. As with other aspects of his European career, reasons for his decision have been conjured up for which the evidence is scanty. In 1893, on the fiftieth anniversary of his entering upon his duties in Radnitz he preached a sermon describing his situation there as satisfactory and attributing his decision to dissatisfaction with the whole state of affairs in the country and to the impression made on his mind by the literature on America he had read. There have been suggestions that he defied the authorities in the matter of solemnizing marriages not allowed by the **familiengesetz**; and even that he had developed plans for fulfilling his religious ideals in the New World.

In the absence of contemporary evidence it is hard to justify assertions in respect of this unknown figure beyond those attributed to the other nameless individuals who at this time were crossing the Atlantic in search of a new life. Though the emigration of Jews from Bohemia was not as heavy as that from neighboring Bavaria, emigration from Bohemia there was. It was a radical solution for the problems of a community repressed by discriminatory laws. A minority was ready to adopt that solution.

If it be assumed that primarily it was want of personal position and prospects which drove Wise to emigrate, this should not lead us to deny that the personal was intertwined with something larger. "It was his fault," wrote Wise of Gabriel Riesser, "that I could not endure to remain in narrow-minded Austria after I had reached years of discretion."

Wise held office at Radnitz in a period when religious reform shared with civil Emancipation the attention of European Jewry. The publication of the second Prayer Book of the Hamburg Temple (1842), and the establishment of the Frankfurt Society of Friends of Reform (1842) provoked arguments far and wide. Out of the polemics a reform alignment appeared, and it was crystallized in three German rabbinical conferences—Brunswick (1844), Frankfurt (1845) and Breslan (1846). In the free atmosphere of America Wise's reform inclinations developed tentatively; except in preaching in German, there was nothing in his European career to characterize him as a reformer. He was not a member of any of the rabbinical conferences, but we are told that he was a spectator at the second while visiting Frankfurt in 1845. It is natural to assume that meeting the intellectual leaders of German Judaism and listening to their debates on current theological and liturgical questions influenced the thinking of the Bohemian **religionsweiser**, and perhaps stimulated his desire for an environment less constricted than the one then open to him. Little by way of detail can be added. On the motion of Ludwig Philipson the Frankfurt Conference declared itself in favor of the foundation of "one or more Jewish theological faculties in Germany"; the phrase reappears in Wise's early advocacy of an American rabbinical college. The participants in the conference included Samuel Hirsch, then of Luxembourg. In the same year that Wise settled in Radnitz, Samuel Hirsch had published his great work, **Religionsphilosophie der Juden**. When he was seventy Wise wrote that this book "which appeared when we had entered upon the twenty-second year of our age, exercised a similar influence upon the formation of our character"—similar, that is, to the writings of Gabriel Riesser—and he added "Riesser made us feel free, and Hirsch led us to think free." There is a discrepancy in the dating and one wonders whether it was not really an encounter with Hirsch at the Frankfurt Conference which led Wise to read his philosophy of religion and to give thought to the fundamental beliefs of Judaism.

Wise left without a passport. From this it is not to be assumed that there was something ominous in his relations with the Austrian government; evasion of the law in the matter of emigration was nothing uncommon.

Wise made his way to Bremen. He did not go direct but spent several weeks travelling in Germany, visiting Leipzig, Magdeburg, Breslan, Frankfurt and Berlin. To travel from place to place in Germany with one's wife and infant child (He had married Theresa Bloch on May 26, 1844, and their first child, Emily, had been born on February 22, 1846) must have been an arduous proceeding, not lightly undertaken. One wonders how Wise accomplished it and whether he was seeking a position in Germany which would satisfy his aspirations before deciding finally to break with the Old World, and whether economic necessity as much as other factor drove him across the Atlantic.

A LAND OF MANIFEST DESTINY

Wise begins his **Reminiscences** with 23 July 1846, the day his ship arrived in New York: it is as if he felt that his life really began when he set foot on the New World. He does give a few details as to the voyage: it took sixty-three days and was marred by a smallpox epidemic; he waited on his sea-sick wife,

carried his little child about, and ate onions and herring—presumably he did not think of departing from the Jewish dietary laws—and of the limited fare then available to travellers by sea he had to deny himself an important part. By the time of Wise's voyage steamships were crossing the Atlantic in two weeks, but they were not for poor emigrants. As the poor emigrant may have been compelled to rely on the power of his own legs to bring him to the seaport, he probably took philosophically the delays which arose thereafter through reliance on the caprice of the winds; or at least he would readily have suffered the delays of the voyage had conditions been tolerable in other respects. The living quarters between decks in an emigrant ship of that period were dark, crowded and squalid. Rats, lice, and fleas were the passengers constant companions, and in bad weather the hatches were battened down so that cooking, which was done on deck, became impossible. Water descended in large quantities and sluiced about the deck in the darkness. Sanitation was neither valued nor understood by the emigrants, and, even if it had been, the facilities on board were so primitive that no proper standard could be maintained. Death from epidemic was a recognized hazard of the crossing, the normal mortality being about ten per cent.

Wise has nothing worse to say about the voyage than that "I railed at the stupidity of my surroundings." The Atlantic may have favored him, though we may note that throughout his life he travelled great distances with little complaint of hardship. The hardships of the voyage in the emigrant sailing ship have been described often enough to have become a matter of common knowledge. Wise does not mention them; what he gives prominence to at the onset of his **Reminiscences** is a dream which he says came to him three days before he landed. This account of his dream appeared towards the end of 1874, nearly thirty years after it had come to him. That alone makes it a matter of wonder and suspicion, that he should be able to fill out the details. By 1874 Wise was within sight of the green pastures towards which in the dream he was struggling. He had battled with a hostile element in his first congregation in Albany; there he had propounded great schemes for the Union of American Jewry; he had moved to Cincinnati where again he had put forward large schemes, embracing a synod, a theological college and a uniform prayerbook, only to meet with the obstruction of indifference and hostility ("ghostly grinning dwarfs, lascivious ragged goblins and tiny poodles . . . night owls . . . angry wasps . . . they did everything to harass me and prevent my further progress"). But he persisted, and the year before he began his **Reminiscences** the object of his strivings had come an important stage nearer realization: the Union of American Hebrew Congregations had been established with the support of a theological seminary as its primary object. The resemblance between the incidents in the dream and Wise's experiences in America is striking "I have often thought of that dream," Wise concludes, hinting broadly that just before he set foot on the Promised Land he was visited with a premonition of the dangers, the struggles and the victory that were to be his, which he called to mind while they were being experienced.

The story bears a strong suggestion of fantasy. Clearly it is the **leit motif** for Wise's life, partly in the subsequent pages of the **Reminiscences**. Clearly there is a strong similarity both in its tone and its language to the way Wise wrote about himself when he encountered opposition. A dream or fear of shipwreck Wise may well have had as the Marie neared land—he was undergoing his first frightening experience of the ocean—and thirty years later he embroidered on to that dream a fantasy generated by his years of struggle for leadership.

The importance of the story of the dream does not lie in the date of its origin but in what it tells of Wise. It reveals Wise as a man possessed by an inner drive and an intense belief in himself: a great storm arises—"everyone swayed, trembled, feared, prayed"—but he (apparently no one else) "spoke words of calm and comfort." An instant and frightful choice has to be taken; he (again apparently no one else) takes a daring leap into the unknown, and saves those for whom he is responsible as well as himself. Though immediate disaster has been averted, they are still in danger, to avert which a steep upward climb is needed; so with his child on one arm and his trembling wife clinging to the other he pushes "forward, in God's name." They climb "from rock to rock, higher and higher, constantly, untiringly." Their further progress is obstructed by his enemies. His wife weeps bitterly, his child cries for fright, but his "courage, strength, and confidence grew." But his enemies are only dwarfs; he marches straight through them and reaches his goal. Wise sees himself as the lone hero, the instrument of salvation, and the idea of presenting himself to the public in that light does not abash him.

With Wise's arrival in America we leave the shadows and enter a period in which there is always some documentation of his doings. The greater part is documentation of his own manufacture; Wise's career as a writer begins. When he established himself in Cincinnati in 1854, Wise began to publish two weeklies, for both of which he wrote profusely. For the period prior to that the chronicle is less ample, but he did figure in such other Jewish periodicals as appeared at that time, and in such other records as, e.g., of synagogues. After his death no diary or other memoranda were found, and few letters had been preserved. In 1874-5 Wise wrote the **Reminiscences** previously referred to. These begin with his arrival in New York and break off abruptly with the publication of his prayer book **Minhag America** in 1857. Naturally, they form the principal guiding lines for a sketch of his career during those eleven years, but they cannot be accepted without qualification. Apart from the strong personal coloration, there is an important gap in the **Reminiscences**. They are the story of Wise the public man; Wise the private man hardly emerges. We are

given a picture of Wise travelling, preaching, writing, fighting; his wife, afflicted with illness at the time they were written, is a shadowy figure, and of himself as husband and father he has little to say. Recollections of Wise in his old age speak of him as an affable and even an indulgent parent, and it is no far fetched conjecture to imagine that in the days of his prime, the fighter, withdrawn into his own den, relaxed into the same attitudes. But that was not the part of his life which he thought it important to describe, and one has the impression that his wife played no direct part in his public career.

According to the **Reminiscences**, Wise's first impressions of New York were decidedly unfavorable, but he quickly sensed that he was "no longer an Imperial Royal Bohemian **schutz-jude** (protected Jew), but . . . breathing a free atmosphere." The contrast between what he had left and what he found must have been sharp in the extreme.

From a society dominated by a ruling order which sought above all things to preserve the acquisitions of the past, and in which for the individual inherited status was all-important, Wise came to one in which there was no ruling order, in which the rules limiting the freedom of the individual—whether laid down by positive law or prescribed by convention—were minimal, in which the original territory of the Republic, considerable in area as it was, even when measured by the amplitude of the Hapsburg realm was a mere springboard to the acquisition of yet greater dominions. The depression of 1837 had long passed, and the United States was taking "a great leap forward."

Terms such as "Manifest Destiny" and "Young America" do much to express the feeling that was abroad. In the year before Wise's arrival, John L. Sullivan, writing in the **Democratic Review** for July-August, 1845, had referred to "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our multiplying millions," and for many a year the phrase he coined, "manifest destiny," reverberating in American minds, was to sum up the urge to conquer and fill the land. The term "Young America" was a figure of speech which designated to the youthful spirit of energy and enterprise characteristic of the times.

"Multiplying millions" was no empty phrase. In 1840 the population was 17,069,000; in 1850 it was 23,192,000—an increase of more than one-third in ten years. The rate of expansion appears more vividly by contrasting the mid-century position with that of 1800, when the population was only 5,308,000. One million four hundred thousand immigrants had arrived between 1840 and 1850, a figure which was doubled in the following decade.

"Society is full of excitement," wrote Daniel Webster, "and intelligence and industry ask only for fair play and an open field." The political and intellectual climate matched this feeling. Jacksonian democracy was in vogue. The decorous, orderly and dignified democracy of Jefferson had been left behind and replaced by something that was rude, vociferous, powerful and aggressive.

If the newcomer had been blind enough not to realize for himself that the term "New World" was something more than a geographical expression, it would have been dinned into his ears. The progress of the country justified the hopes of the founders of the Republic and buttressed the belief of its citizenry in the inherent superiority and eventual triumph of American institutions. That belief was no "inarticulate major premiss" but was spelled out on all levels. In the press, from the pulpit, and even in casual conversation the superiority of republican institutions was not left to inference, but driven home by black-and-white comparisons with those of the "effete monarchies of Europe." This was a spirit which the naturalized American from the interior of Bohemia came conditioned to accept.

The Jacksonian confidence in the worth of the common man had its counterpart in the realm of thought. "A man contains all that is needful to his government within his soul," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and "The highest revelation is that God is in every man." This was the kernel of the thinking of a man who was recognized as emancipating American thought from its European leading strings.

The fruits of his philosophy are to be found in the life of the churches, in the establishment of new sects, or in the disruption of old ones, which we find at this time. There had been a religious revival: the Deism and Rationalism common at the time of the Declaration of Independence had ebbed before a reawakening of Christian belief, a fact which it is important to bear in mind when considering the reaction to the ideas propounded by Wise shortly after his arrival. This, the Jewish community of America was expanding under conditions which favored the establishment of religious institutions: "...the Awakening meant that the United States, despite the shocks of eighteenth century rationalism and "infidelity," remained predominantly a religious-minded nation, with an emotional, pietistic, moralistic spirit that would color its social, political and economic thinking for generations to come."

The religious revival took place in a country in which the State was precluded from supporting any Church; it was achieved through the agency of voluntary associations, and it helped to create a society which, unlike those of the Old World, became accustomed to the idea of voluntary association for public purposes. The obverse side of the medal was, as Wise himself noted shortly after his arrival, a tendency to schism; and in religion as in politics sectionalism was in vogue during the period from 1830 to the Civil War.

The first eight years of Wise's career in America were spent in the State of New York. The general progress of the country was being refracted on New York in an intense degree. In 1825 the Erie Canal had been opened. This made accessible to the coast the prairies of the West, and enhanced the commercial position of New York, so that all the advances in agriculture, commerce and industry which followed in the country as a whole solidified its leadership. Until 1821 Massachusetts was ahead in exports; then New York took the lead and kept it. By the middle of the nineteenth century New York had won the position of the Empire State in wealth and population. The confluence of these forces was New York city itself, whose population grew from 60,000 in 1800 to 202,000 in 1830 and 312,000 in 1840. This rise of fifty percent in a decade was almost matched—and in absolute terms greatly exceeded,—by the increase from 312,000 to 515,000 in the decade (1840-1850) during which Wise arrived.

Advances were being made which placed New York in the first rank as regards painting, music, architecture, journalism and the theatre; the level of popular education was low but progress towards a public school system was being made. In the field of higher education the most noteworthy development was the founding of several important colleges under denominational inspiration.

The general trend can be matched within the Jewish community. Twenty three refugees from Brazil, unwillingly received by the governor of Nieuw Amsterdam in 1654, made the beginning. When the Republic was founded there were, it has been estimated, 2,500 Jews in the United States; in 1840 the number was 15,000, but by 1850 it had risen to 50,000. Just when the ending of the Napoleonic wars reopened the channels of emigration, the deferring of the hope of Jewish emancipation and the upsurge of anti-Jewish feeling in Germany stimulated the desire to leave, and the improved organization of emigration traffic made the journey less of an obstacle ("By steamship these days it is a pleasure trip of eleven days," wrote Joseph Goldmark to a friend in Switzerland in 1850).

Southern Germany sent a high proportion of the newcomers; some were craftsmen, many were peddlers. They swelled the Jewish population of New York City, and they founded new Jewish communities inland. Thus the predominance of New York was established among the Jewish communities of the country. The estimated number of Jews in New York rose from 500 in 1825 (when a second congregation was formed) to 7,000 in 1840 and 12,000 in 1846. More striking was the establishment of new Jewish communities in the hinterland. Forty-five congregations were established between 1776 and 1849.

"Far and near," wrote Isaac Leeser almost contemporaneously with Wise's arrival, "the sons of Jacob are diffusing themselves over the area where liberty of conscience is the inalienable right of all the inhabitants, and glad are we that they are remembering the God of their fathers in the new homes which they possess in peace and security." These conditions, together with economic opportunity, beckoned the Jewish immigrants. However, every solution creates a problem. The problem of adjustment and acculturation faced by the individual are not part of this study, but they form part of the problems besetting the organized Jewish community. No struggle for emancipation conditioned the religious thinking of the American Jews; he was called upon, however, to confront the fact of emancipation from the moment he set foot on American soil. Language and culture were different; he left a world which was all tradition and found himself in a world which had no traditions.

In the first congregations, strung along the Eastern seaboard, the Sephardi element had predominated. Fewness of numbers and a sense of insecurity had encouraged selfdiscipline; the thin stream of newcomers fed existing congregations without overflowing into new groupings. The increase in numbers, the casting together of groups of individuals hailing from diverse areas, the inexperience of new congregations far distant from the established communities led to disunion. The absence of any heirarchical structure and the informality with which Jewish law allows congregations to be organized and worship to be conducted facilitated disunion. It might have been different had the immigrants to America included a leavening of rabbis and communal leaders. They did not. If by chance the immigrant was well versed in Talmudic law, the difficulties of his new environment gave him little encouragement to apply or develop his knowledge. "In America a man must be either all head or all back. Those who are all head remain in Europe; those who are in this country must be all back, and forgo all intellectual pursuits." Thus, the black-and-white picture given to Wise when he arrived. The immigrants were poor, and, though the land was rich in natural resources, they could establish themselves only by unremitting toil. One of the privileges of the ill-informed is to make great issues out of trivial points of difference, and the stability of congregational life could easily hang on minor customs peculiar to the part of Europe from which a group of members had come.

Wise expressed himself in various ways on the state of American Judaism at the time of his arrival. In an editorial in **The Israelite** written twenty-seven years later he reflected adversely—"Most were poor, none considerably rich, and intelligence not very abundant . . . The worst of all was the low standard of the ministry . . . United action among those congregations was impossible . . ." It is true that in an article addressed to the German-Jewish public twelve months after he reached America Wise expressed himself buoyantly, but not long afterwards he was writing that the majority of the congregations were "generally composed of the most negative elements from all the different parts of Europe" and were "governed for the

greater part by men of no considerable knowledge of our religion." In fact, the whole record, including Wise's own struggles, goes along way to establishing the correctness of his adverse assessment.

At the time of Wise's arrival there were two ordained rabbis in New York—Leo Merzbacher (1810-1856) and Max Lilienthal (1815-1882), and as to the qualifications of the former doubts have been expressed. The latter was by far the more influential, but he seems to have been a man of moods and to have been content, both in New York and later, when he became Wise's colleague in Cincinnati, to work on the local scene.

The "free land" system produced one far-sighted spirit in the person of Isaac Leeser (1806-1868). Like Wise, he was largely an autodidact, though he had the advantage of a more sustained gymnasium education (in Germany) than is claimed for Wise. He came to America in 1824, and at first followed a commercial career. In 1829 he became hazan of the Mikveh Israel Congregation in Philadelphia.

Leeser's work for Judaism in America extended far beyond his congregation. In 1843 he founded **The Occident**, "a monthly periodical devoted to the diffusion of knowledge on Jewish literature and religion", to quote the description on its own title page; he translated both the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi prayer books into English; singlehanded he produced a translation of the Bible; he travelled constantly, preaching throughout the land. This largely forgotten figure was responsible for many of the "firsts" of American Jewish history and was a pioneer advocate of several of the causes which Wise took up and brought to fruition. At the time Wise arrived in the country **The Occident** was the one national platform available to the Jews of the United States, and Leeser had already made two attempts, neither of them successful, to form a union of congregations.

Until the year of Leeser's death the careers of the two men frequently intersect, sometimes in harmony, more often in conflict. Leeser was willing to make changes in the external procedures of the synagogue, where no conflict with the Law was involved, but in doctrine and in practice he would admit of no deviation from Orthodoxy. Moreover, despite his diligence and self-sacrifice, he appears to have suffered from an inferiority complex: he was over-diffident as to his intellectual attainments, over-sensitive as to his personal disadvantages and awkward in manner. We have a sense of the opposite of Wise's boisterous self-confidence.

The openness of society in America, the absence of any legal or conventional restraints or innovation or diffidence in religious affairs, the inevitability of some change as part of the process of acculturation made America fertile soil for Reform. Allusion already has been made to the germination of the movement in Europe. In the circles in which Wise moved in Europe the issues must have been argued out passionately, though there is no evidence that he had taken a stand before he settled down in Albany.

A whiff of reform had crossed to America by 1846. In 1824 a reformed congregation had been founded in Charleston, South Carolina, apparently influenced by the example of the Hamburg Temple. The milieu, however, was unlikely to affect the immigrants from Germany. In 1845 a group of German Jews in New York founded Temple Emanuel. The reforms it made in the ritual were very modest, and no reform doctrine was articulated. At that period Max Lilienthal's position was analogous to Isaac Leeser's; in the synagogues under his jurisdiction in New York he sought to curtail the abuses that had crept into the synagogue service, being careful to justify his changes in terms of traditional ritual law.

A DREAMER PURSUING A DREAM

This then was the general background which the Bohemian **religionsweiser** faced as he set about finding his place in the New World. There is no evidence which suggests that Wise had a settled intention to follow any particular calling; there is evidence which suggests that he had not come to America with the settled intention of continuing as a rabbi. His first attempt at earning a living was by teaching English—this only lasted a week or two; certain physicians to whom he brought letters of introduction advised him to peddle or to learn a trade. This may suggest an impression of Wise's credentials. On the other hand, he says that he had "a good prospect of receiving a professorship at a prominent college." It was Max Lilienthal, one gathers, who either by advice or by example, encouraged Wise to serve as a rabbi ("the impression which I received in the Lilienthal home perhaps decided my career in America"), and Lilienthal's introductions paved the way for Wise's first appointment.

By August 1 (**The Reminiscences** say "the first of July", but this is clearly a mistake), when he met Leo Merzbacher, Wise intended to continue in his former career. Later in the month Lilienthal sent him to consecrate a new synagogue at New Haven (for which he earned \$60). This is the first public act which Wise performed in the United States, and the commendatory note in the New Haven "Palladium" declared that Wise's lecture "is spoken of by those who understand the language as a most excellent discussion and the speaker, certainly in his manner, gave evidence of a most perfect style of oratory."

Wise himself was impressed by the honorarium of \$60—no less than 300 gulden—which he received for his services. Early in September he again went to dedicate a synagogue as substitute for Lilienthal, this time in Syracuse. This gave Wise his first occasion to visit Albany. Shortly afterwards he anglicised his name. A New York friend gave him an introduction to his brother-in-law, who was at that time president of the Beth El, the older of the two Albany congregations, and en route for Syracuse Wise spent a weekend at Albany, preaching in the synagogue on August 29. He later recorded that the reaction to his sermon

there was none too favorable and, though it produced an invitation to return for the ensuing holidays, "aggravated and humiliated" him. Wise was delayed in Syracuse because the dedication of the synagogue had been postponed and did not take place till "the Friday and Saturday preceeding the Jewish New Year in 1846," i.e., September 18 and 19. New Year's day was Monday, September 21. Wise had to be in Albany by the afternoon of the 20th to take advantage of the invitation extended to him for the holiday, and this made him abandon a plan to visit Cincinnati.

In Syracuse Wise seems to have obtained a more optimistic outlook on the prospects of American Judaism. His New Year appearance in Albany he recalls as one unrelieved triumph. His success at Beth El spread his fame beyond its walls. The officers of the second congregation, Beth El Jacob, waited on him, and with the permission of his hosts, he preached for them on the second day of the festival, again coming off with flying colors. "**Veni, vidi, vici**, is the burden of his **Reminiscences**, but the story rings true. Wise's forceful personality would have made an impression, sermons in German elevated the status of the service, and his background gave his message the authenticity of the old world Judaism from which they had sprung. Beth El speedily made Wise its rabbi, and that fact provides confirmation for his recollections of triumph.

Emissaries of the congregation, he says, began their negotiations as early as the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashanah, and a formal request came on the second day. Wise makes clear that salary did not bother him but status did. Though but a couple of months in America, to be a religious functionary of indeterminate state, be it hazan, minister, or **religionsweiser** did not satisfy him; he insisted that he was to be called to the office of rabbi: "If you wish to elect me, you must elect me as a rabbi. I will write no petition. I have never sought a position and will never do so." Beth El accepted his terms. He returned to Albany for Yom Kippur and with his family settled into their new home, 77 Ferry Street, during the festival of Sukkot.

Jews had lived in Albany as early as the eighteenth century, but the organized Jewish community was of recent origin; it was one of those which had come into being as part of the expansion of American Jewry in the post-1815 period and more particularly after the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. The Beth El congregation was incorporated in 1838, and a second congregation (Beth El Jacob) was organized in 1841. When Wise took up his position with the congregation Beth El had outgrown its first building and was worshipping in a church in Herkimer Street which it had purchased in 1841. It was a small building, and the **Reminiscences** give the picture of a group of poor newcomers, most of them peddlers.

Wise's salary was \$250 per annum plus \$9 for each pupil in the school. Comparisons bear out his reflections that his "position in Albany was not brilliant financially." Lienthal's salary in New York was \$1,000, and in 1839 the Hazan of Shearith Israel was receiving \$1,500. But Merzbacher at the infant Temple Emanuel was at that time receiving \$250. The Albany congregation had 130 members at the time of Wise's arrival which suggests, on the footing of Wise's statement as to dues, a regular income of less than \$800. Wise, about whom there has been no suggestion that money was a primary consideration, was well satisfied to have firm ground under his feet, not least the status of rabbi about which he was so insistent.

Wise stayed in Albany for eight years, this period being divided between Congregation Beth El and Congregation Anshe Emeth. They were fruitful years during which the energies which had lain under restraint in Europe were unfettered and expressed themselves in self assertiveness within his congregation, in the advocacy of bold ideas for American Jewry and in an entry into new fields as an author and journalist.

The relationship between Wise and Congregation Beth El began with acclamation and ended with violence. The tale has been told and retold, but it was Wise who was the literate figure among the combatants, and his version forms the basis of most of what has been written. At this stage we cannot determine whether Wise's zeal for ritual reform and the congregation's mulishness was the cause of the break up (as is usually assumed), or whether Wise's self-assertiveness and the congregation's need to maintain its rights was the basic reason.

The deterioration in relations did not come overnight. As events developed, the congregation felt the need to lay down its rabbi's obligations in a specific and formal manner. A detailed contract, dated 14 April 1849 opens by giving Wise a two year contract at the enhanced salary of \$550 per annum. The provisions are fairly detailed and suggest points which had been at issue between rabbi and congregation during their honeymoon period.

The second clause is revealing; the rabbi was not to change the prevailing ritual without the consent of the trustees. Several clauses (3-8) related to the conduct of the school and indicate a desire on the part of the trustees to obtain closer control.

By now the congregation felt the need to keep a closer rein on its rabbi. How difficult relations had become appears from Wise's own account of how he came to tear up the contract and throw it in their faces.

In 1849 he actually began to prepare himself for a legal career, and this determination persisted in December of that year. In 1848 he had been ready to return to Europe when the outbreak of revolution seemed to promise a liberal Austria and actually resigned his position, though without giving the reason. Owing to his wife's refusal he abandoned the idea of returning to Europe. Next he planned to go to

Louisville to speak at the dedication of the new synagogue there in the anticipation of being elected rabbi but gave up owing to the difficulties of the journey.

At this point in 1849 a contract appears to have been drawn up. Albany, alarmed at the prospect of his departure, elected him for a further period (three years according to **Reminiscences**, two years according to the contract) at an enhanced salary. This is the salary provided for by the document of April 13, and one infers that, despite the **opera bouffe** episode which followed, this term remained valid.

Agreement was not reached without difficulty. Wise had opponents, and, at a stormy meeting held during the middle days of Pesach, they were active, and evidently the rescission of the contract was a possibility. Wise, about to take the steamer to New York, marched into the meeting, tore up his contract, and went immediately to the steamer. Wise says that he had "intended to take a trip to New York." It is, of course, possible that Wise had planned to take a holiday during **hol hamoed**, especially as in 1849, the major days fell on Saturday and Sunday. One suspects that, as mercurial as his flock, Wise despaired of Albany and that the purpose of this visit was to obtain a position in New York—possibly with the union of congregations which he was then active in furthering. In a letter to **The Occident** dated February 14, Wise had declared: "I will never accept any salaried office from this convention." In New York he found his project for a union of congregations—to be referred to later—in low water. Telegrams and letters were sent to him in New York bidding him continue his ministry, and when he returned to Albany he preached to a crowded synagogue on the last days of the festival. Immediately after the conclusion of the festival and the adjourned meeting of the congregation took place, and at eight o'clock in the evening "A committee composed of my most violent opponents" informed him that he had been elected unanimously for three years at a salary of \$800. His position with his congregation was by the spring of 1849 an unstable one, and it is not surprising that the new agreement proved to be a temporary truce rather than a lasting peace. What was the cause of the dissension? "Notwithstanding the new agreement," wrote Max B. May, "the dissensions in the congregation continued. The ultraorthodox element was dissatisfied with even the moderate reforms introduced, and whenever a new reform was advocated the storm broke out anew."

Beth El had conducted its affairs on orthodox lines, no different from those of other congregations of similar origin, and there is no suggestion at the time of his appointment that Wise had embraced the ideas of Reform Judaism. Early in his ministry, however he took measures to improve the service, in particular by modernizing the music and instituting a choir. It was not plain sailing. To Wise's opponents the choir "was a thorn in their side. They bewailed the disappearance of the old sing-song and there were constant bickerings." It is not difficult to visualize the existence of a faction who would cry to heaven that the substitution of Sulzer's new fangled "fancy" music for old-fashioned **hazzanuth** was a first step to turning the synagogue into a church. And to make matters worse, the rabbi had introduced female singers, which was more clearly in defiance of Talmudic precept.

Wise next sought the elimination of the **piyyutim**. These are additional hymns inserted within the regular liturgy on special occasions. For the most part they are complicated in form and obscure in content, and their recitation is more a matter of local custom than of religious law. The optional character of these insertions became a moot point since they added to the length of the service.

Wise obtained the elimination of these insertions. Again it is not difficult to visualize the existence of a faction which would have been outraged at their rabbi's eliminating a treasured if little understood part of the ritual.

While difficulties persisted in Albany Wise developed broader concerns. This began within a few weeks of his becoming rabbi of Beth El. A Beth Din or rabbinical court is the traditional Jewish authority in ritual matters, and after Max Lilienthal became chief rabbi of the United German Congregations of New York he took up the establishment of such a court. Wise was one of the four members, the others, apart from Lilienthal himself, being Herman Felshenheld and Herman Kohlmayer. The Beth Din held a preliminary meeting on 18 October 1846. Its tasks were to be wider than answering such questions on ritual as might arise in the three constituent congregations—"their services were ready to be given", Lilienthal declared, "to every Jewish congregation in America, without claiming any clerical rights or dues". A comprehensive range of activities was to be initiated—Lilienthal was to prepare a history, Felsenheld a catechism, and Kohlmayer a Hebrew grammar. To Wise was assigned the task of preparing a "Minhag America,"—a ritual which all Jewish congregations in America would be asked to adopt.

These plans came to naught. Wise says that he worked diligently on his allotted task during the first winter in Albany, and as his energy was always unflagging we may readily believe him when he remarks that he had his manuscript in his valise when he went to New York for the second meeting of the Beth Din, on 18 April 1847. The report in **The Occident** as far as concerns the ritual indicates that a common ritual for American Jews was needed because experience teaches that in most places different congregations are set up, and the strength of the Israelites is divided, "because every emigrant brings his own Minhag from his home, and the German will not give way to the Polish, nor he to the English, nor the latter to the Portuguese Jew. Such a cause for dissention would be obviated by a "Minhag America" which would promote the harmonious development of the young congregations." Whether these words actually

originated with Wise we do not know, but they are consistent with the line of thinking he advocated for the rest of his American career.

Details of his plan have not come to light, but again the report in **The Occident** conforms to his phraseology. "The project of the Minhag is introduced by Dr. Wise, treats of the Tephillah according to the Din, upon scientific principles and the demands of the times, and shows plainly, that the new Minhag must be based on those three pillars, to be entirely satisfactory." Acceptance of **din** as the basis is clear, and, while there would be a party which would regard the least change unorthodox, it is clear that Wise was not offering a Reform concept.

A resolution was adopted to lay the question over till the next meeting in order to give the members time for deliberation: but no further meeting took place; Lilienthal's Beth Din simply expired. Wise's liturgical proposals were reported in **The Occident** for May 1847. There are passages which indicate that an attitude which was to form a central thread in Wise's subsequent activity had already crystallised.

What stands out in Wise's proposals is not so much reform as union. "To bring unity among the members of every congregation as well as among all the American synagogues" is the first of the two aims stated to be directing the project; and the exposition of Wise's principles concludes with the hope that "according to them all the congregations of Israel may be led to adore our God, and that the consequence may be to unite all the congregations in America into one great and harmonious body, with revelation as their stronghold, and with peace presiding over their assemblies."

Though his colleagues may have participated in composing this statement and the words may not be his, it is not unreasonable to regard them as representing Wise's views. Not long afterwards he was writing to the **Allegemeine Zeitung des Judenthums** that "'Union' is the significant word." At Cleveland in 1856 he agreed to a platform which lost him the confidence of the ideologues of Reform in order to achieve union. In the debates which preceded the Civil War he put the maintenance of the Union first. In the manoeuvres which preceded the formation of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the same holds good for his statement on becoming president of Hebrew Union College, his aim was comprehensiveness. A Union of American Israel was a cause to which he never lost sight of. Coming from a part of the world where the independence of a large number of petty principalities went hand in hand with social and political stagnation, Wise may have been impressed with the strength and progress which the voluntary association of the independent units—whether states or congregations—brought about. Though failing in 1847 in the attempt to use the Beth Din as the means to promote a book of common prayer, he soon returned to the charge in a more direct way.

A great part of **The Occident** for December 1848 is taken up with "A Call to Israelites." Conciseness was not the rule in those days, and we must digest ten pages of editorial **vorspeise** before arriving at the main item, which is a call "To the Ministers and other Israelites" over the name of "Isaac Wise, D.D., Rabbi of Albany" dated "the Ninth Day of Marches-van, 5609, A.M." This five page statement is a call for union. An "association of Israelitish congregations in North America, to produce one grant and sublime and—to defend and maintain our sacred faith, to the glory of God and for the benefit of Israel and all mankind."

"... something must be done," he proclaimed, "to defend and maintain our sacred faith" and he called upon ministers and laymen to "be assembled in order to become united... Let the place of assembly be Philadelphia... and let the time of meeting be the second day of Rosh Hodesh Iyar, 5609"—i.e. April 23, 1849.

Wise's proclamation, it is entitled to a description no less portentous, strikes one immediately for its oracular tone. It breathes self-confidence, an impression which the show of humility in the second paragraph only heightens. Could this be the work of a young man, who, the humble **religionsweiser** of an obscure Bohemian township, had arrived in the United States two-and-a-half years earlier? Wise's whole career, particularly the list of his writings, is a story of self-confidence. American life was shot through with self-confidence, and it had not taken Wise long to exhale the air he breathed.

The idea of a union of congregations was not new. Leeser had put it forward in 1841, but his plea went unheeded. Now Leeser and Wise were collaborating in an attempt to put it into effect.

Exhortations in favor of the Philadelphia meeting rang through many issues of **The Occident**, but the project came to nought. The venue was changed to New York and the date postponed to June 11. The plan assumed a more ambitious form, developing into a proposal for a convention of the Jews in the United States. Wise and Leeser agreed to a division of labor in making propaganda, and Wise spoke twice in New York in support of his plan. It is evident that he needed to overcome suspicion on two counts—first, that he sought office for himself and secondly, that he was a reformer. Further, his description (general, it is true and not relating especially to New York) of the congregations as "composed of the most negative elements from all the different parts of Europe" and "governed for the greater part by men of no considerable knowledge of our religion" was hardly ingratiating.

Wise felt the need to state his attitude to reform. "You aver that I am a reformer", he wrote in **The Occident** for March 1849, "to prejudice the people against this sound plan; to be sure, I am a reformer, as much so as our age requires; because I am convinced that none can stop the stream of time, none can

check the swift wheels of the age; but I have always the **Halacha** for my basis. I am a reformer, if the people long for it, but then I seek to direct the public mind on the path of the **Din**; but I never urge my principles upon another, not do I commence to start a reform in a Synagogue."

Unfortunately, while Wise met the accusation that he was an advocate of Reform, it became apparent that he had close relations with a group known as the **Lichtfreunde** and may even have inspired its foundation. The manoeuvres concerning this association, which harbored tendencies of a radical character, are extremely obscure, and while they were proceeding the movement for a convention fizzled out. The minimum of twenty congregations was not forth-coming. Wise and Leiser were ahead of their time: both men of vision, they were thinking of the needs of the American Jewish community at a range far more extended than that of the isolated and recently established congregations. Wise was new to the scene. The status of the rabbi had yet to be established. After three years in the country, attached to a non-metropolitan congregation, and without the means of making his voice heard far and wide, Wise did not have the commanding position to get his idea across. Even in Albany his position was unstable. Yet he had already taken hold of certain ideas—union of congregations and a ritual for American Jews to use in common which he was to fight for throughout his prime.

AN INNOVATOR AND A BATTLER

After the failure of the Union effort, Wise seems to have remained in the background for a while. During the summer of 1849 he suffered a severe personal blow: a cholera epidemic carried off his two-year old daughter, Laura. The loss affected him severely; he writes in his "**Reminiscences**:" "I had frequent attacks of hypochondria, and became entirely unfitted for society." The genuineness of his grief is not to be doubted. Yet one wonders whether his mood at this time did not also flow from his defeat over the Union scheme. Early in 1850, when he was still confined to his limited sphere in Albany, he "coughed terribly", and his physician ordered him South. However, his journey had another cause, and on the steamer to Charleston, probably comforted by the belief that his election to the pulpit there was a probability, he discovered that his illness was imaginary.

As a result of the epidemic, Wise writes, "An armistice was declared" in the running fight between a section of his congregation and himself. Instead of the upsurge of sympathy which his loss would naturally evoke lengthening the armistice into lasting peace, it soured quickly. "At the funeral of my Laura," the **Reminiscences** tell us, "the 'pious' members of the congregation wanted to cut the **K'riah** for me. I repelled them, and forbade the women to even suggest this observance to my wife. People visited me after the funeral, but they did not find me sitting on the floor; further, my feet were shod in boots; in short, I observed none of the traditional mourning customs."

Wise comments: "This fanned the slumbering embers of the old quarrel into flame." One is not surprised. Despite the minor liturgical changes introduced by Wise, and whatever the personal habits of its individual members, the Albany congregation could only be classed as Orthodox. In such congregations the members look to the rabbi to set an example in personal observance, even where they had become lax; how much more in regard to practices (such as those of mourning) to which they continued to adhere. Many members of the congregation must have felt genuinely shocked when their rabbi peremptorily cast aside the traditional mourning rites. The vigour of these criticisms would have been heightened by the fact that Wise did not hesitate to upbraid his flock about not observing Sabbath. One can almost hear the bewilderment (and resentment too) of the untutored peddler and storekeeper, a little guilty at following his calling on the seventh day, harangued by the rabbi for not keeping mitzvah whose observance involved sacrifice, finding that his pastor had **motu proprio** discarded another mitzvah whose observance would have involved him in no sacrifice.

Amid these troubles Wise seems to have kept steadily at work. His regular duties as rabbi and teacher were substantial; he wanted to turn his back on the rabbinate, and continue his study of the law ("I wanted to become a lawyer as quickly as possible in order to protect my family against future eventualities").

Wise also set to work on his first book, a work on the Jewish religion. On 1 December 1849 we find him writing to Isaac Leiser enclosing the first three chapters and asking for an opinion. Though he was feeling peeved with Wise on account of the version of the union project which he had given to **The Asmonean**, Leiser obliged by publishing in **The Occident** for January 1850 a summary of the three chapters together with some flattering personal references. This book failed to see the light of day. In February 1851 Wise wrote: "the want of pecuniary means and the efforts of my opponents to decry me as a base denier of our faith have prevented me from publishing it."

Before the year 1849 had drawn to a close, there opened up a new opportunity for Wise to make himself known beyond the confines of Albany. In October Robert Lyon, of New York, began the publication of an Anglo-Jewish weekly, **The Asmonean**. Immediately Wise addressed the editor a letter for publication, and this personal manifesto appeared on the front page of the third issue.

He has retired from the public scene, the letter related, and confined himself to his "solitary closet, behind the dusty barricades of the large books of antiquity" because of the shame and disappointment he

experienced through the failure of the convention project; but if "advantageous to the sacred cause" he would leave the solitary closet and do battle again.

It shows some hardihood and an intense belief in himself for a man of thirty, occupying an unimportant position, the center of strife in his congregation and lacking any record of achievement to advertise his meekness and assume the character of a wounded sage, the long suffering servant of the people who has withdrawn far from the "madding crowd's ignoble strife" and broods over higher things in solitude. But Wise had shown himself susceptible to the milieu in which he lived: he had grasped that in the democracy of Andrew Jackson it was not the meek who inherited the earth. Above all, he was waiting ready to throw himself into the fray once more. The appearance of a Jewish weekly in New York opened up the possibility of a worthwhile platform, and, through the verbal device of stating that he would be silent if his cooperation was thought injurious to the case, he asked for an invitation to a place on it.

Wise was to do battle again, but for the time being no one showed interest in the cause so as to require him to emerge from his solitary closet. Leeser, put out of countenance through Wise's usurping the stage, issued a pained rejoinder in **The Occident**. Otherwise, there was no "follow-on" of any kind to Wise's manifesto in **The Asmonean**.

The following year was to see a turning point in Wise's career. Early in 1850 he made a journey South—no everyday occurrence when transport was indifferent. He attributed this to the necessity of recovering his health, and his **Reminiscences** invest his eventual arrival at Charleston, South Carolina, with a casual and unpremeditated character. In fact he was seeking the vacant pulpit of Congregation Beth Elohim.

This was a period which has been described as the golden age of Charleston Jewry. No longer the largest Jewish community in the country, as it had been in the post-Revolutionary period, in wealth and culture it still ranked high. There had been Jews in Charleston since the seventeenth century, and Congregation Beth Elohim, founded in 1749, could boast a hundred years of history, as compared with the mere decade of the one which Wise was then serving. Moreover, the congregation had taken a stand on the issue of Reform, and its position was confirmed by the secession of 1841 of the Orthodox members.

While in Charleston Wise became involved in public debates on Orthodoxy versus Reform, and on one such occasion denied belief in bodily resurrection and a personal messiah.

On March 12 Beth Elohim elected Wise its rabbi and he forthwith resigned his Albany position. He changed his mind, however, and on April 15 signed a fresh contract for three years with Beth El. This did not sit well with the Charleston congregation which raised disagreeable questions as to liability for the money it had expended in connection with Wise's visit.

This would hardly have ignited any fires in Albany because they had never died out, but it would have kept the pot boiling. In Charleston the rabbi unfurled his colors as a reformer without special pleading, which was grist to the mill of enemies who professed concern for orthodoxy. To others his reappointment to Albany suggested an abandonment of the cause of Reform in the interests of material reward. A letter in **The Asmonean** for April 19 shows Wise under the necessity of justifying himself. He emphasised his Reform convictions and argued that by re-electing him Beth El had accepted his standpoint. It was a claim calculated to arouse the Orthodox party in Albany.

It took six months for things to come to a head. The president of the congregation remonstrated with Wise over doctrines he had expressed in a Confirmation sermon and even forbade him to preach on June 1. Then Wise found fault with the conduct of the schochet and dismissed him. Nine members wrote to the president requesting an investigation of the heresies expressed by Wise in Charleston and his suspension pending resolution of the matter. The President evidently communicated with rabbinic authorities in Europe concerning Wise's attitude. In July the board of the congregation resolved to withhold his salary until the charges against him had been resolved; he remained at his post without salary. On September 5 (two days before Rosh Hashanah) a meeting of the congregation resolved to depose Wise; he refused to treat the resolution as valid. When he sought to officiate on Rosh Hashanah the president intervened. A melee' ensued as a result of which the police were called. They closed the synagogue and took some of the participants to the police station.

On the next day Wise and his followers held services at his home. They proceeded to organise themselves into Congregation Anshe Emet with Wise as their rabbi.

Here was a great turning point in Wise's career. For a few hours it seemed that he might desert the ministry for the law. He remained wedded to the rabbinate, but his was a fighting rabbinate. In his native Bohemia, indeed in most parts of Europe, some officer of government would have issued a decree regulating the affairs of the congregation, and a rabbi who proved recalcitrant would probably have found himself debarred from exercising rabbinical functions anywhere in the country. In Breslau, Geiger's right to officiate, though a reformer, was settled by the Royal Prussian government; in Budapest, Einhorn's reform temple was closed by state authority. Most of those officiating in American congregations had grown up in that atmosphere, and would have submitted, either by following the line indicated by the laity or withdrawing from office. Wise did neither; he fought. The story is not the black and white one depicted by Wise

and repeated by his admirers. In his own portrayal he stands a picture of thrusting bumptiousness, abusive when criticised, blustering when he sensed that he might be cornered. He clearly commanded a following in Albany, and this was due primarily to the force of his personality, though intellectually he stood out in his environment. Above all, he acknowledged no superior, and was ready to fight for his position; and in young America the fighter was respected-when he won.

This quarrel has become something of a **cause celebre** in American Jewish history. For one thing one of the parties placed it on record, whereas in the pietistic style of writing communal history such incidents are rarely disinterred. The strands in Wise's case were of mixed texture: the rabbi's personal relations were interwoven with his championing of a theological position, and with the successes achieved by Wise and the advance of the Reform movement this event has grown in significance. A Rabbi has insisted that he was an independent figure, something other than an official beholden to the laymen who appointed him; and he had asserted his independence in the cause of Reform.

Wise seems to have taken a lesson from his Beth El experience. He worked in the American rabbinate for another half century, and in a most important respect his career was remarkable for its stability. For another four years he remained in Albany, and then he accepted a call to Congregation Bnai Jeshurun, Cincinnati, where he remained for the rest of his life. These years are remarkable for the absence of strain between him and the laymen of his congregation. There are no grounds for believing that in the second half of the century a sudden concord overtook Jewish congregational life. Was Wise singularly unfortunate in his early Albany experience, circumstances rendering a clash of personalities inevitable? Did that experience teach him to curb his temper and exercise more restraint when criticised? Did the successful fight he made in Albany cause him to be treated with unusual deference? Did the wider ambitions which he formed in Albany and to which he devoted himself in Cincinnati provide all the outlets which his combativeness needed and make him cherish quiet on the home front?

The quarrels between Beth El and the secessionists were quickly composed, and each congregation went its own way. Anshe Emet worshipped first in a rented loft, then in another rented premises. In October 1851 it was able to consecrate as its synagogue a former Baptist Church. Wise again broke new ground by travelling to New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia to raise funds for his congregation. It might have been expected that the establishment of their own congregation by the pro-Wise, pro-Reform group would lead to a pronounced move in the direction of Reform: it did not, which confirms that Wise was not pressing in the direction of radicalism. Congregation Anshe Emeth made arrangements for schechita early in its history and not long afterwards gave orders for the construction of a mikvah. The most remarkable innovation came when the new synagogue was opened and an organ and family pews were introduced.

A third innovation was the abolition of chanting at the services of Anshe Emeth: "All the singing was done by the choir and I myself read the prayers". Wise felt very strongly that a rabbi should not be called upon to chant prayers: "singing ministers" was one of the epithets he flung about, directed, no doubt, at ecclesiastics of the position of Isaac Leeser. Wise looked upon the abolition of chanting as an important reform.

When asked shortly before he left for Albany for his view, Wise responded that it would not be against Jewish law to reduce to three the number called to the Reading of the Law.

Wise's name continued to come before a wider public. In January 1852 he officiated as chaplain of the New York State legislature. He wrote for **The Occident** replying to pro-Christian indoctrination or controverting Leeser's exposition of the principles of Judaism.

In the second of a series of three letters Wise made his first attempt at anything like a systematic exposition of the basic ideas of Judaism. The sequence suggests that he did not think out the three articles as a whole, and the content is overlaid with sermonic matter. In the first place he expounded a Maimonidean viewpoint as regards the Bible. "...the Bible is a divine truth as a whole and in all its particulars... all laws of nature and all experience of history" are as true as the deductions of mathematics. If the one is proved to contradict the other then "the expounder made a willful or accidental mistake... Wherefore we must come to the conclusion, that as dogmas have been taught, and even proved by biblical texts, which are contradicted by the laws of nature, or by the facts of history, whoever has so expounded them, must have taken an erroneous view of his subject, or has misinterpreted the word of God."

"Judiasm," he declared, "is based upon four leading ideas and has, therefore, four principles." Doctrines and observances which did not correspond to these ideas had to be rejected as "anti-Jewish and foreign to our system." The four principles were

1. *There is but one God, who is the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of the Universe; an absolute, pure, and eternal Spirit; the primitive life, Power, Intellect and Love; who has revealed himself in the Bible, in all nature, and in all history.*

2. *Man is the image of God, and is therefore not only endowed with all the superior capacities which are the necessary qualifications of an image of the Most High, and bound in duty to develop them to the utmost extent; but he is also immortal in this respect, in quality of his being made in the image of his Creator.*

3. Man is accountable to God for all his deeds, for which he is rewarded or punished here and here-after.

4. God has chosen the people of Israel to promulgate through them these divine and sublime truths to mankind at large.

Except for the fourth these principles repeat the religious ideas of the French Enlightenment; and the fourth is a Mendelssohnian addendum to that viewpoint. The four truths, he says "are plainly announced in the Pentateuch, re-echoed by the Psalmists, and by all and each of the Prophets; nature and history do not merely not contradict them, but they are the living witnesses, they bear the strongest evidence, to the verity of all these four dogmas". This is a doctrine which Wise continued to adumbrate in later years. It led Wise to question the authority of the Talmud. Conflict between the Bible and the law of nature could only be apparent, the fault of the expounder; conflict between the Talmud and the law of nature meant that the Talmudic doctrine must be wrong since it conflicted with part of God's revelation.

By contrast with the Bible, the Talmud and the Midrashim were "of a human origin, liable to mistakes, fallible in many respects, and therefore subject to a sound and scientific criticism." He venerated these incomparable treasures for their great value as a whole, "but—where the Talmud comes in conflict with the facts of natural philosophy, and their logical consequences, or with the events, as experienced in history, and their natural results, I am fearless on the side of truth..." That, however, was not enough. He had to clinch his statement of principle with an attack on the influence of Talmudic Judaism:

"...which infested us for many centuries with the spirit of intolerance, and of separation; which degraded religion into a compendium of blind and insignificant rites; which depressed the youthful spirit of Judaism, and drove thousands from our community...."

Here, indeed was an attack on the Talmud, not essential to any case which Wise was trying to make out, which must have angered the Orthodox. Anticipating future events, we can imagine with what joy Leeser discovered at Cleveland in 1855 that the man who had written these words was prepared to subscribe to the principle that the biblical laws must be expounded and practised according to the comments of the Talmud, and with what anger the Reformers must have viewed this statement as a recantation of his former position.

Leeser published Wise's views with a closely reasoned rejoinder of his own. This goaded Wise who, though violent in controversy, was sensitive to criticism of his arguments.

Thus there came about a breach between Wise and Leeser, and for some time thereafter Wise's name was little mentioned in **The Occident**. In the following year (1852) Wise was already to contribute to **The Occident** again, but Leeser was "stand-offish." Wise found another and more effective platform, a weekly with all round concerns, not a stodgy monthly sustained by the heavy discourses of its editor.

The Asmonean began publication in 1849. In September 1852 it announced that Wise was being given direction of the "theological and philosophical department," emphasising that "**the principles of the paper will be unaltered.**" In the same issue as that in which his appointment was announced Wise gave out his platform: "It will be my first endeavour to promulgate correct information on Jewish learning... prejudice is... the second foe against which I shall direct my arrows... I hate long articles on little subjects... Wherefore I shall be concise and cogent... I intend to aim at instructing the people at large, wherefore I shall make choice of the most popular and simple style. I... acknowledge every man's right to his own opinion, and am not vexed if my views are gainsaid by others; wherefore I shall utter truth boldly, and only notice arguments of opponents for refutation or acknowledgment when they are founded upon truth, sound in their logic or free from personal feelings."

Having grandiloquently set forth his aims, Wise proceeded by imparting New Year greetings in a style which showed none of the hatred of "long articles on little subjects" to which he had confessed earlier.

Week by week the articles poured from Wise's pen. The field they covered was wide. Much that he wrote was the summary of scholarly material appearing in Europe, making clear geographical remoteness from the sources had not lessened his zest for Jewish scholarship. He also dealt with theological topics and set forth his views on the history and destiny of Judaism and the needs of the American Jewish community. In his exposition of the principles of Judaism we find him sounding a note which he often repeated thereafter, "Judaism is not a sectarian religion; it is destined to become the religion of mankind." He adds, "Universal love without limits is another name for Judaism". Various "ascetic practices" he enumerates as inconsistent with this first principle: fasting, eating no meat and drinking no wine for so many days annually, midnight prayers, not shaving, sitting on the floor on the ninth of Ab, being beaten on the eve of the day of Atonement." The American view that man is made for the pursuit of happiness was evidently attuned to his outlook.

Wise's **Asmonean** articles display all the rough energy of Young America. It was harnessed first to the author's voracious appetite for reading, and then to the need, no less compelling, to feed the press week by

week. What becomes equally apparent is that the material was not properly digested nor subject to the scrutiny of a tutored mind.

As contributions to literature or scholarship therefore these articles would not rate high, but in their time it must have had no small effect on Wise's status in the American Jewish community that his name was before it week after week and that he became the interpreter of Jewish literature to its reading public. The style of **The Israelite**, which Wise founded after leaving Albany, and the capacity for prolific writing which he displayed as its editor, reflect the lessons he had learnt during his apprenticeship in popular journalism with **The Asmonean**. Finally, being chained to his books and pen must have helped the mental equilibrium of a man of huge energy who otherwise would have been confined to a small congregation.

Profuse as were Wise's contributions to weekly journalism they did not exhaust his appetite for writing, and even before his articles began to appear in **The Asmonean** he was thinking of literature on a grander scale. By the end of 1852 he resolved to write his own history of the Jews. This he announced in **The Asmonean** for 7 January 1853. Wise had to set in motion for himself the mechanics of publication, and he succeeded in obtaining the patronage of the notabilities of Albany. An agent was sent to Philadelphia to solicit subscriptions.

The intention was to issue four volumes: in fact only the first appeared, covering the period from Abraham to the destruction of Solomon's Temple. Not until 1880 did Wise's **History of the Hebrew's Second Commonwealth** appear, an independent work, though beginning where the earlier work left off. Wise could not get a publisher to accept his manuscript and decided to have it printed on his own account.

When it appeared the **History** drew criticisms for its unorthodoxy. Writing for people who had grown up to believe that, if recorded in Scripture, an event must have taken place as recorded, Wise excluded the miraculous from the domain of history. Elsewhere he was prepared to equate Judaism with reason and therefore (though he did not say so) to deny the need for revelation. His **History** evoked strong criticism. It also had warm admirers, but it made little impact.

The claims he made for himself may be noted. He wrote in the Preface:

"We have ample access to the whole literature, ancient and modern, belonging to this history; and having discarded all prejudices, national and religious, we are able to lay before our readers a complete and pragmatistical history of the Israelitish nation, derived from the original sources, written in a spirit of philosophical criticism, independence and impartiality."

In the "Introduction to Volume I" Wise mentions that in dealing with the history contained in the books of the Bible he has "consulted Josephus, Philo and the ancient rabbis, because they were so much nearer in time this period of history, were better acquainted with the manners, customs, and circumstances of that age, and, probably, were in possession of more extensive circumstances than we." He did not confine his attention to these: "We have not neglected to bestow attention on the biblical criticisms of the modern schools, both orthodox and rational." However, the interpretations Wise gives to the Biblical narrative suggest a rationalist Midrash.

Returning to the 'Preface' we find a passage which, however divergent from the Biblical text gives one of the **leit motifs** of Wise's outlook. Extolling Moses as "the grandest character of antiquity," he declares that he "promulgated the unsophisticated principles of democratic liberty and stern justice in an age of general despotism and arbitrary rule." He went on to find fulfilment of the teachings of Moses in the American system: "Moses formed one pole and the American the other, of an axis around which revolved the political history of thirty-three centuries." The principles of government embodied in the constitution of the United States were linked directly to the truths revealed on Sinai. This was a standpoint to which Wise adhered throughout his life. Half a century later he could write: "... the government of the United States in principle and form is identical with the Mosaic State as laid down in the Pentateuch".



RABBI ISAAC MAYER WISE,
during the decade before the Civil War, Rabbi of K. K. Bnai Jeshurun, Cincinnati, Ohio

II. THE YEARS OF DOING

A GRAND DESIGN FOR AMERICAN JEWRY

In October, 1853 Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, Cincinnati, unanimously elected Wise "during good behavior as our minister at a salary of \$1,500 per annum." He took up his position in the following April and remained there for the rest of his life.

In 1854 Cincinnati was in truth "The Queen City of the West." Between 1840 and 1850 the population all but trebled, rising from 46,000 to 115,000. By 1860 the figure was 161,000, and in 1900, the year of Wise's death, it was 325,000. All the time the frontier was being pushed westwards, but when the nineteenth century had reached half-way point the movement had placed Cincinnati in approximately the middle of the century.

The destructive effect of the Civil War on the economy of the South, the receding of the frontier farther west, and the building of trans-continental railroads which converged on Chicago to the North deprived Cincinnati of the lead which it had early established. That, however, was to come. Between 1830 and 1860 there had been an extensive immigration from Germany, and the presence of these industrious (and in some cases cultivated) people helped to solidify the gains brought by a favorable geographical position.

In view of Cincinnati's expansive prosperity, in view of its business relations with all parts of the United States, in view of its position as a meeting place of merchants, it would be only natural for Wise to encounter a broader outlook than would exist in most congregations. Moreover, for a man who harbored "bold plans" and "grand schemes", as he wrote to the congregation in accepting its "call", plans which extended far beyond the confines of a single town, his position was ideal.

Within a very short time Wise had begun to put into operation these "bold plans"—a weekly newspaper, which would carry his voice through the land, a synod which would provide a religious authority and a common liturgy, a college which would train rabbis—all with Wise in charge. Success did not come immediately, and it was his persistence that won him the war where his impetuosity lost him many battles. He had come to Albany unknown; he arrived in Cincinnati with a reputation. He also came to Cincinnati with greater experience, and one thing which he showed he had learned was that he could not hope to conquer outlying territory if his home base was insecure.

This does not mean that the violence which Wise had shown in Albany deserted him after 1854; his energy in writing, travelling and lecturing increased. He used the strongest language against rabbis and laymen who acted contrary to his views, against organizations which he did not control, against Christians who insulted Jews, or denied them equal rights; he had local quarrels, but with members of other congregations. With Congregation B'nai Jeshurun he remained on good terms.

The Jewish community of Cincinnati was about a quarter of a century old when Wise made his home in the town. In 1820 there were enough Jews in the town to celebrate the festivals; in 1824 they formed themselves into a Congregation—B'nai Israel.

The considerable German immigration between 1830 and 1860 brought with it a number of German Jews. These at first joined the existing congregation, but differences—personal, linguistic and liturgical—were a barrier to full harmony. The first meetings of a second congregation took place in 1840, and in 1842 it was incorporated under the name of B'nai Jeshurun. In 1848 B'nai Jeshurun erected its first synagogue building in Lodge Street, remaining there till 1866, when it moved to the present structure in Plum Street.

The Congregation took the initiative in 1849 in establishing the Talmud Yelodim Institute, which served first as a parochial and later as a Sabbath school and which, though under a separate constitution, was an adjunct of B'nai Jeshurun. The rabbi was also Superintendent of the Talmud Yelodim Institute.

There was nothing in the record of B'nai Jeshurun prior to Wise's advent to suggest a tendency to Reform. Nevertheless, Wise, apparently without opposition, was able to introduce reforms—gradually, it is true, but still no different from those which at Albany had brought down fire on his head.

First, he introduced a choir (August 1854). Then he proposed modifications in the ritual by way of changing the style of recitation and eliminating a number of unnecessary accretions. In 1857 Wise brought out his own ritual (**Minhag America**), and the congregation adopted it; in 1859 it did away with the second days of festivals (except for Rosh Hashanah whose turn came in 1873); in 1860 it introduced the biennial cycle of the reading of the law; and in 1873 the covering of the head in worship was made optional. Throughout Wise's ministry there were daily services, though he was dispensed from attending them because he had objections to laying Tefillin. In 1865 he began the practice of having a Friday evening service with a lecture at a fixed hour.

An eloquent tribute to the impact made by Wise's ministry is that in November, 1854, a little more than six months after he assumed office, the B'nai Israel Congregation, which had seen at times a little friction between itself and B'nai Jeshurun, invited him to be their rabbi, too. A member of B'nai Israel, traditional in sentiment, who held Wise in no great admiration said that Wise's eloquence as a preacher had advanced the position of B'nai Jeshurun while the senior congregation "was fast sinking."

B'nai Jeshurun refused to allow its rabbi to divide his ministry and, as a result, the sister congregation appointed his mentor, Max Lilienthal.

Wise had been in Cincinnati scarcely six months when he added the responsibilities of a newspaper editor to those of a preacher. The first number of **The Israelite**, flying at its masthead the flag "Let there be Light", bears the date "July 15, 5614, A.M., 1854 A.D."

It would be hard to over-emphasize the role played by **The Israelite** in establishing Wise as a leader of American Jewry. It carried his voice throughout the land, made some people fear his censure and others curry his favor. It brought him callers and information from all parts and, as in those days many railroads provided free passes for newspaper editors, it gave him the means of undertaking the many journeys to distant congregations which did so much to enhance his influence among the communities of the South and the West.

As Wise had settled in his new position only as recently as April, the appearance of **The Israelite** in July testified to his determination and energy. He related that he planned **The Israelite** before he left Albany, and that in New York he "received very encouraging promises, many of which were even kept, but money simply was not available at that time, at least not for me."

The pages of **The Israelite** bear out Wise's statement that he "possessed rare facility in the use of the English language" and that "writing itself was a mere play after I had thought out a theme." In after life, when he could look at these early efforts in the mellow light of success, he lifted the curtain on struggles which, though not world shattering in their dimensions or effects, must have been stupendous enough to the early participants. The first issue of **The Israelite** mentions that its appearance had been delayed in consequence of the severe sickness of Charles Schmidt, the publisher, so one can understand that the labor pains, inevitable when any new weekly is born, were acute. Everything, Wise says, had to be written or edited by him. With the readiness to try his hand at something new so characteristic of the American pioneer, Wise wrote novels himself when the translations of French and German stories promised by friends failed to materialize. The first installment of his novel "The Convert" is in fact **The Israelite's** opening piece and, even had not Wise subsequently admitted authorship, the opening scene ("At the eastern end of the Egen Valley in Bohemia") being that of Wise's birthplace would have revealed the author. The same applies to his novel "The Catastrophe at Eger," the first installment of which appeared on September 29 and which opens "In the North-western part of Bohemia . . ."

In the **Reminiscences** (p. 270), Wise is candid as to his literary technique, describing how a character who had become redundant was disposed of in a novel which was being written as the printer clamored for the week's installment. Elsewhere, Wise recalled, "Usually the manuscript went red hot from my pen to the printing press, often without being checked, and generally without even having been outlined in advance."

The agonies that go behind the grim mask of print could hardly have spared **The Israelite**. At one time (apparently in the early days) there was a typesetter who not only corrected the spelling and grammar of the copy handed to him but also altered statements with which he did not agree, from which treatment not even the contributions of the editor-proprietor were exempt. There is no means of knowing where the opinions which appearance causes us to ascribe to Wise should be credited to the overzealous typesetter.

The Israelite was far from being on a firm footing when Wise launched **Die Deborah** (July, 1855). Normally a German supplement to **The Israelite**, **Die Deborah** was in effect an independent weekly. The majority of the potential readers of a Jewish weekly were German speaking and Wise saw that he needed to cater to their tastes. One suspects moreover that he liked to express his feelings in his mother tongue—berating, as he often did, the "Germanizing of the American synagogue."

Eventually, **The Israelite** appears to have prospered and was taken over by Wise's son, Leo. **Die Deborah** ceased publication on Wise's death. Its constituency had withered away and it had continued out of its founder's sentimental attachment.

Die Deborah was, in fact, the third of Wise's enterprises. The second in point of time was inaugurated when he had been just six months in Cincinnati. Nothing less than "a college on the pattern of German Universities, connected with a theological seminary and a seminary for teachers, in order to promulgate science and the interests of Judaism among our fellow-citizens." Thus there came into being "The Zion Collegiate Association." Encouraging support was enlisted in Cincinnati where the venture was initiated. Planning to make it a national enterprise, Wise made a trip to the East and returned in a mood of triumph, buoyed by the expectation of support for his plan. The scheme petered out. Though details are obscure, Wise's group in Cincinnati seems to have opened Zion College on its own initiative (there was an inaugural banquet replete with the florid speechmaking customary at this time), but the New York supporters withdrew, regarding this unilateral act as a breach of faith. There were denials and bluster on Wise's part, but he could not keep the College going. Wise's advocacy of a college persisted, as did the aversion between him and the leading Jews of the East.

Just as Wise had not been satisfied to wait until his first weekly rested on a firm foundation before launching a second, so, in his attempts to solve the problems of American Israel at once and under his own

leadership, he was taking up another project before the university had left the "drawing board" stage. In the same month (July, 1855), Wise was reviving his old plan for a rabbinical conference, and this actually met in Cleveland before the year was out.

Wise had begun to renew his agitation for a Conference early in 1855. "Let us Have a Conference" was the title of an article in **The Israelite** for January 26. Wise wanted a general "get together" without regard to ideology. He enumerated some of the questions which lay before American Jewry—Zion College, which had been started in Cincinnati, the Orphan Asylum which had been started in New Orleans, whether or not to have Jewish parochial schools, "our standing complaint about the serious want of textbooks for Hebrew schools."

"The grand problem—to be solved at present—is this," said Wise, "how to unite all these endeavors into one focus." Here, indeed, we see a mind working on a Grand Design for American Jewry. It is a conference on practical issues, not on ideologies, that Wise is advocating. The note is definitely union, not reform:

We propose a conference, a personal interview of all men who take an interest in the progress of Judaism and its institutions. Let Rabbis, Hazanim and Laymen, if a laity we have—meet, to come to a definite conclusion, what measures should be adopted, recommended to our friends, and advocated by each and all of us. A colloquial and friendly interview can exercise only a benevolent influence on our affairs, and must necessarily tend towards prompt and united action.

In time, Wise moved away from this idea to a conference which, though not exclusively rabbinic, had a more ideological flavor; but his premise, sometimes articulate sometimes not, was that practical union came before theological order.

Wise worked on the conference idea with his accustomed force. The theme of union permeates his propaganda, and with this occupying his mind it is not a hierarchy but individualism that is the danger. Thus he criticizes on the one hand the Orthodox for demanding compliance with rabbinical law and on the other Reformers for failing to see that "...if we throw off the rabbinical and cabalistical literature, we either cease altogether to be a community ... or we represent mummies remaining from the Mosaic age, as the karaites do." Israel as a nation, he argued, had a sacred mission to perform to humanity and in order to discharge that mission needed to remain united: "Grant to every preacher the right to promulgate his own views in the Synagogue and in a few years we present the miserable prospect of a thousand Jewish sects." He went on to urge a point of view which contained the seeds of what was to emerge at Cleveland later in the year:

As little as we are opposed to free investigation and exposition, so much we must oppose it when endangering the union of Israel... and unless we have a firm basis of exegesis, a standard to expound the Scriptures, we must necessarily divide into sects... Our predecessors clung firmly to the rabbinical standard of exegesis, in as far as the practical application of the Law was concerned... retaining for themselves the right of free investigation in as far as theoretical theology was concerned.

The remedy for the evil was "A REGULAR TRIENNIAL SYNOD." The staunchest Orthodox Jew must admit that "the principle of progress lays at the basis of the Mosaic dispensation"—otherwise the whole rabbinical development of the Law would be illegal. The principle of progress had been set aside in the Middle Ages. Moses Mendelssohn and his followers had revived the Jewish spirit, and the American and French Revolutions had transformed the position of the Jew. Some had bridged the gap between religion and life by abandoning Judaism. The efforts of those who had "reformed Judaism and its institutions, to agree with the demands of the age" he observed had been harmed by "modern materialism, infidelity and atheism." To heal the breach between religion and life and to protect Judaism against the noisy voice of materialism, infidelity and atheism was needed "a perpetual synod whose decisions and resolutions are binding upon all Jewish communities." Such a synod derived its power from the Talmud.

It is not easy to determine what the word "reform" conjured up when he wrote this article. What does emerge is the view that change must be sought on the basis of the past and that the proper authority was collective, not individual action.

Wise's agitation bore fruit. Eventually a "call" appeared in **The Israelite** for 10 August 1855:

IN THE NAME OF ISRAEL'S GOD AND ISRAEL'S RELIGION, the Conference would take place the 17th day of October 5616 A.M. in the city of Cleveland, Ohio, to deliberate on the following points:

- 1. The articles of Union of American Israel in theory and practice.*
- 2. A plan to organize a regular synod, consisting of delegates chosen by the congregations and societies, whose powers, privileges and duties shall be defined, to be sent to the several congregations for their approbation.*
- 3. To discuss and refer to a committee a plan for a Minhag America, to be reported to the synod*

at its first session.

4. A plan for scholastic education in the lower and higher branches of learning.

5. Other propositions either sent in by congregations, or made by the ministers or delegates at the conference

Wise was identified as "Corresponding Secretary."

GERMANY IN AMERICA?

On September 27, 1855 Rabbi David Einhorn arrived in the United States, and on October 4 he preached his inaugural sermon at the Temple of the Har-Sinai Verein in Baltimore. He was invited to attend the conference at Cleveland but replied that "being but lately arrived in this country and still too much engaged with his private affairs" he was prevented from doing so.

David Einhorn was ten years older than Wise. At the age of ten he was sent to the yeshivah in Fuerth, where he remained for seven years. In 1826 he began to study at the Universities of Munich and Wuerzburg. After six years in this pursuit he appears to have returned to the yeshivah, but instead of obtaining a position immediately he had to languish for ten years, suspicions as to his orthodoxy closing doors which otherwise would have remained open. His first appointment to Hoppstaedten in Oldenburg came in 1842. In 1847 he moved to Mecklenberg-Schwerin, but his participation in the German rabbinical conferences marked him out as a reformer, convinced that the new situation of the Jew required not the adjustment of what had been received from the past but the complete reconstruction of Judaism, and the Orthodox made his position uncomfortable. A Reform Temple was being opened in Budapest, and Einhorn sought escape from the restrictions which surrounded him by being appointed its preacher. He delivered his inaugural sermon in January, 1852, but the Government, prodded by the Orthodox and fearful of change anywhere, closed the Temple after a bare two months.

Thereafter Europe seemed to offer no outlet for Einhorn's talents, and eventually he determined to settle in the United States. Because of his strong advocacy of the abolition of slavery, he had to flee Baltimore in 1861, and he did not return. He served the Keneseth-Israel Congregation of Philadelphia from 1861 to 1866. In 1866 he moved to New York, where he served the Adath Jeshurun Congregation (later amalgamated with Congregation Beth El) until his retirement in 1879, shortly before his death.

It is not easy, at this distance in time, to assess Einhorn's character and personality, or the impact which he made upon his generation. He was an eloquent preacher and a considerable scholar, well-versed in literature, both Jewish and German.

From the record of his career, as from the tone of his writings, one infers that Einhorn arrived in America a bitter and frustrated man. Endowed with considerable talents, he could find no position open to him in Europe. At 46 he had to make his way in the insecure position of a rabbi of a minor American congregation in a milieu which he probably regarded with contempt and set himself on the same level as colleagues whose qualifications he regarded as vastly inferior to his own. Having labored for years to obtain immaculate title deeds to academic and theological standing, he found himself in a strange world where the ignorant started equal with the learned, and his diplomas, with the habits of care which the obtaining of them induced, did less to assure him a following than did the stream of brash pronouncements put out by men who were unrestrained by the discipline of scholarship. "Though their own native countries had rejected them," Jacob Marcus has observed of Einhorn and rabbis like him, "they were perversely German to the core That generation of religious leaders had no real understanding of America, of its idiom, of its way of life, of its needs" Einhorn lived in America for a quarter of a century, and it does not appear that he ever returned to Europe. In his farewell sermon, delivered (in German, of course, for he neither preached nor wrote in English) shortly before he died, he protested his gratitude to his adopted country but, by way of adjuration to his flock, not to forget "die alte Heimath"—"the country of the thinker, at the present time the country that is first in civilization, above all the country of Mendelssohn, the birthplace of the reform of Judaism which, expanding splendidly, brought up by a deeply learned spirit that is cherished and copied, as in Jewish literature that is always becoming richer, by degrees penetrated other countries and was even borne across the ocean." This is the language of a man who might still be speaking in Germany, and it prepares the way for a farewell warning:

Throw off the German spirit, or, what amounts to the same thing, the German language, and you tear away the mother earth, and the lovely flowers must wither away. Bar the German language from your religious institutions, and you rob your children of the understanding of the most precious writings of the Jews and Judaism and surrender ultimately to stagnation and even treachery.

He continued with a reference to his opposition to those who criticized "the so-called Germanization of the synagogue"—a phrase that Wise never tired of repeating.

We see one great difference between the profound Einhorn, who was nevertheless blind to the forces at

work around him, and the untutored Wise, who from the moment he landed in America grasped intuitively that the old ideas and the old language were not the medium with which to capture the New World. But if he differed from Wise so much (incidentally, in achievement as much as in outlook), Einhorn was as fierce a controversialist, indulging, in particular, in a biting sarcasm; but where Wise thumped with a bludgeon Einhorn squirted acid.

"There are happy days in Cleveland." Thus Wise began his first report on the Conference. The mood of elation which had borne him to Cleveland remained after the meeting opened. Both as regards locality and viewpoint, diverse congregations were represented. Shortly after opening, the Conference proceeded to elect officers, and Wise was chosen president.

After the elections, it was proposed to appoint a committee to prepare an agenda. Before the resolution could be put, Wise intervened and produced a platform which became the focus around which the Conference revolved. Wise's platform "commenced with two important articles:"

1. That all Israelites agree upon the divinity of the Bible, and
2. That the Talmud is acknowledged by all as the legal and obligatory commentary of the Bible.

With this declaration Wise was able to dissipate Orthodox suspicions and plaster together a union on the spot. The clause relating to the authority of the Bible was adopted with discussion. The second clause attracted closer examination. Various amendments were suggested, but eventually an agreed form of wording was accepted.

The Conference continued until October 24. The "Platform" or "Articles of Union," as finally adopted, were as follows:

The conference of the rabbis and congregational delegates, assembled in Cleveland, actuated by the earnest desire to preserve the union of Israel and its religion by a mutual understanding and union, and convinced that the organization of a Synod is the most efficient means to attain this sacred aim, and whose legality and utility is taught in the Bible, Talmud and history—consider it their duty:

To convene a synod, and call upon the American Jewish congregations in an extra circular, to send their ministers and delegates to the said synod.

The conference also feels obliged to give utterance to the following points on which they unanimously agree to be the leading principles of the future synods.

- 1) *The Bible as delivered to us by our fathers and as now in our possession is of immediate divine origin and the standard of our religion.*
- 2) *The Talmud contains the traditional, legal and logical exposition of the biblical laws which must be expounded and practiced according to the comments of the Talmud.*
- 3) *The resolutions of a Synod in accordance with the above principles are legally valid.*
- 4) *Statutes and ordinances contrary to the laws of the land are invalid.*

This was not all. The Conference appointed three different committees—one to settle a constitution for the Synod and to frame a common liturgy (Minhag America); one for ritual questions; and one for schools and textbooks. These committees were to report to the synod, which was to meet in Philadelphia in December, 1856. Finally, the Conference appointed a standing committee to see that its resolutions were carried out. This Committee consisted of Wise and Lilienthal, his colleague in Cincinnati, together with Jacob L. Miller, president of Wise's congregation. Thus, control was left in the hands of a Cincinnati group, which would be dominated by Wise. He could be excused for feeling well satisfied with the progress of events as he returned to Cincinnati to preside over the opening of Zion College.

Before the "happy days" gave way to dirty weather, Wise seems to have had some inkling that he was being inconsistent in putting forward the Cleveland Platform. Immediately after setting it forth in **The Israelite** he adds "we must protect ourselves against the accusation of having changed our views," which he sought to do by quoting from the article advocating a Synod which had been referred to earlier.

"What will the progressive man of Israel say to these articles of union?" he asks. "Will they not think their cause betrayed by those who advocated it for so many years? We hope not."

When the Conference was an aspiration, reform was pushed into the wings and Union held the stage; when the Conference had become a reality, this part of the scenery could again be brought into view. Wise closes the article on the note that he still proposes reforms though, now expecting to lead a synod, he is willing to bow to its authority: "We bow our neck before the highest tribunal, because we want peace and union, and for this we are ready to sacrifice anything, principles excepted."

Wise must have been thrown off his guard at the force of the indictment which was levelled against his handiwork. The melee which ensued coincided with the collapse of Zion College, and the two fiascos made an end of his chance of emerging forthwith as the leader of a united American Jewry.

The attack came from Einhorn, who did not wait for the final report of the proceedings at Cleveland to get into **The Israelite**, but prepared and launched his thunderbolt on the strength of the report that the

authority of the Talmud had been accepted. Time was not on Wise's side on this occasion. His contemptuous assailant arrived too late to share responsibility for shaping the Cleveland Platform, and too early for it to have established itself through acquiescence. Moreover, Wise gave Einhorn immediate offense by printing his inaugural sermon in **The Israelite** without permission. To the accusation of breach of copyright was added the complaint that Wise had mutilated the sermon because "the omitted passages stand in little harmony with that foul peace of Cleveland."

Wise replied that the "mutilation" was a printer's error and he rebuked Einhorn for accusing him of "impure motives and a foul treachery of the public confidence", adding "thank God, we have the stomach of an ostrich, we can swallow the stones thrown at us." He found an excuse to turn away from Einhorn's attack on the Cleveland Conference:

...that we can not take any notice of it, being written in a style becoming neither the station he occupies, nor the personal character of a scholar. As soon as the doctor, in a style becoming the dignity of the subject, will address us his remarks against the Conference, we are willing to enter the lists, and to explain the principles and views leading the same.

The declaration of the Har Sinai Verein had fastened on the second of the articles agreed upon at Cleveland, excoriating in strong terms "the declared legitimacy of Talmudic authority . . . with the Talmud in hand it is no longer possible to obtain the honorable and efficient means of healing the gaping wound in the heart of Israel . . . and reforms . . . can at best be only smuggled in by a disregard of law, and a resort to juridical tricks and chicanery." The statement of principle did not lack force. The sting, however, came in the insinuation of personal ambitions:

...a few men in the name of collective Israel set up articles of faith which deny to dissenters a place in the communion of professing Israelites . . . and everything brought under one hood, it would be an easy matter to change this hood into a bishop's mitre—and nothing more reasonable that the great united flock must have a chief pastor—and all is ready for the advent of Jewish popes.

It is not difficult to sum up the avowed difference between Wise and Einhorn. Wise was fighting for union, Einhorn for reform. Wise believed that if the discordant elements in American Jewry could be brought into one organization, an American minhag would emerge; Einhorn believed that an association except on the basis of a prior agreement as to principles was a "foul peace."

Behind the array of principles, personal antipathies flourished. The priority which Wise gave to "Union" was believed to be bound up with ambitions to preside over any union, and the gibe "western pope" shows how feeling went.

The contending parties stoked each other's fire. Wise had at his disposal two newspapers in which to take a weekly fling. Einhorn began to publish **Sinai** which compounded the offense of denouncing the Cleveland Conference by printing devastating comments on Wise's **History of the Israelitish Nation**. His language shows how easily Wise could be goaded by criticism, and there are long passages revealing his assessment of his own record and character.

The immediate polemics which arose out of the Cleveland Platform were extended enough; the breach between two groups in American Reform Judaism, between East and West, lasted for a quarter of a century. Indeed, Einhorn went out of the way to refer to the differences in the farewell sermon he delivered in 1879. Cleveland had brought within Wise's grasp the possibility of sitting at the controls of a United American Jewry, and to buttress that position he was ready to summon arguments which he would not use in his conflicts with the Orthodox and to resort to almost any tactics to discredit those who stood in his way.

In time the controversy ceased to splutter. The rabbis who joined Wise in adopting the Cleveland Platform gave him no support. The Synod and the Platform as the means of uniting a section, let alone the whole of American Jewry, simply faded into oblivion. Did his colleagues realize, once they were out of Wise's presence, that the programme to which they had assented would make him an American Nasi? Was Einhorn's standing such that his protest tore up his sketchy plan that the Cleveland Conference had outlined?

Though the engagement was broken off, for long years the war between Wise and the East smouldered and sometimes flared: "the spirit of faction outlived the cause of faction, and became in itself the new and prolific source of a useless and endless strife."

Wise had lost. Doubtless he was as ambitious as he was impetuous, and organizational goals drew him forward rather than religious principles. However, he was defeated as much as anything by the fact that, as in 1849, he was ahead of his time. The proposal for a synod stirred up theological controversy and personal suspicions, while offering little practical advantage to those who were preoccupied with local synagogue affairs. If Wise had suffered the fate of Sisyphus, he was also resilient. He stuck to his programme, and he lost no opportunity of advertising his cure for the ills of American Jewish life. If he felt mortified by the rejection of his prescription, he never lost confidence in himself. That sense we get from the article "**Unser Nachtrag**" (Our Rearguard) appearing in **Die Deborah** for 9 May 1856: Americans were "extreme, fickle

and colossal in intelligence or folly . . . The sensible, thinking observant Jew, who is true to the faith of his fathers, submitting to the rational doctrines of his religion without insulting or sacrificing his reason, stands between two extremes, as huge in our mountains in their folly." These extremes, however, constitute the rearguard on whom Amalek will fall when the tribes press through the desert. The rational man presses forward to the assured goal. There is no difficulty in casting the rôle of the leader, the man of rational outlook who disdains extremes, who is unconcerned at the yelping dogs around him but keeps to the path pre-ordained by a higher power; for one thing, he was seen in the dream which came to Wise just before he landed in New York.

Wise was conscious of the imputations laid against his motives. Reflecting on the wreck of his plans in October, 1857, he noted:

On one side our motives were questioned; 'it is ambition that prompts him,' was the outcry of our opponents. Yes, gentlemen, while you had the ambition to do nothing, it was our ambition to work for the benefit of our people; while you delighted in overthrowing, we took pride in building up. . . . On the other side, petty leaders and petty scribblers, prompted by envy, and agitated by malice, insulted, slandered, outraged us in public print, to spit gall in our cup of life, in order to disgust us with all public affairs. . . . The orthodox cried: Heresy! the reformers vociferated: Treason! and the people on whom we did not call personally, betrayed no token of life, or sympathy for either side. So we were discouraged, disgusted, and a sentiment of indifference overcame us, and we relaxed. . . .

WAR AND A FRAGILE UNION

From another direction also comes evidence of the overwhelming desire for personal ascendancy. In 1859 a New York group established the Board of Delegates of American Israelites. Its objects were similar to those which Wise was persuing. He would have nothing to do with the Board and sowed scorn on all it's activities (not least on its attempt to train American rabbis, something that he was always urging as a primary need), except for a brief period in the early seventies when he hoped to harness it to the College project for which he was seeking support.

One item was salvaged from the wreck of Cleveland. A major part of Wise's program was a book of common prayer for the American Jewish community, and he was put on the committee which was to frame a plan for presentation to the Synod. The synod was stillborn, but the committee persevered in its work while the polemical storm raged outside. The results were published in 1857 under the title "**Minhag America** . . . Revised and compiled by the Committee of the Cleveland Conference, translated by Isaac M. Wise." There was a companion edition with a German translation.

The compilers worked hastily and in isolation; it would be easy to find errors and inconsistencies in **Minhag America**. What stands out is a desire to purge the traditional prayer book of its repetitive and Kabbalistical elements while giving the American Jew a **siddur** with which he was familiar. The point becomes more vivid when one contrasts **Minhag America** with **Olat Tamid**, which Einhorn published at about the same time. **Olat Tamid** is a complete reconstruction of the prayer book, basically in German and including a considerable proportion of newly composed prayers. The skirmishes of the two parents often focused on their liturgical offspring. Wise was unabashed in pushing **Minhag America** and as defensive as any parent in repelling criticisms of his child.

Wise never lost sight of the plans which seemed to be on the way to fruition. To the need for a college he returned time and time again and actually announced that such an institution would open in September, 1861 (it did not open). The times were not propitious. The Jewish communities had still not risen above the parochial level and would hardly be encouraged to do so by the climate of sectionalism which spread through the country, leading in a short time to the Civil War. With the future of the American Union in doubt, it was untimely to fashion plans for the union of American Jewry.

The Civil War and the issues leading up to it seem to have imposed on Wise a reticence that was strange to his nature. Designs for the better ordering of Jewish life had not been the sole objects of his concern. He had leapt to the defense of the rights of the Jew whenever he felt them to be threatened. Suggestions that the United States was a "Christian country", invasion of the principle of separation of church and state, the treaty with Switzerland which derogated from the rights of American Jews, a petition to the government to intervene with the Vatican in the case of Edgar Mortara—such matters brought him instantly into action. He liked to picture himself as the lonely defender of his people.

The threat of Civil War produced a financial panic; Cincinnati was a border town whose future was uncertain; many of the subscribers to his papers lived in the South. Not only were the "bold plans" scratched, but what he had built up lay in danger. A mood of depression and self-pity comes out in an article in **The Israelite** for 12 April 1861, of which the title and refrain was "Serves Him Right." He had been the lonely fighter in all good causes, and now all people said was "Serves Him Right." Details of the complaint which produced this retort are not given; we are left to infer that the writer's fortunes must have been at a low ebb.

Earlier Wise had taken the view that the crisis was an artificial one and that the fires would cool. Even when South Carolina seceded he continued in the "plague on both your houses" vein.

What concerned him most of all was the maintenance of the Union and he looked upon the Abolitionists as prepared to jeopardize the Union for the sake of their sectarian convictions as the villains of the situation. He was not among the rabbis who denounced slavery on religious grounds, but it is not true that he spoke of it as an institution sanctioned by Judaism. Alluding to press comments on a pro-slavery sermon by Morris J. Raphall, Wise wrote "that among all nonsense imposed on the Bible the greatest is to suppose the Negroes are the descendants of Ham, and the curse of Noah is applicable to them." But, though he contested the view that Negro slavery was supported by Scriptural texts, the issue of slavery was not one on which he felt strongly. He did say that he was against it, but in terms which, having regard to the issues, amounted to acquiescence in continuance. His position comes out in an article printed in the *Deborah* in December 1859 more clearly than anywhere else:

We are no apologists for slavery. We have always declared our view candidly that by constitutional means it should be kept far from the territories of the great West. But we have no constitutional right to snatch from the South its slaves through revolution and abolitionist agitation.

If America were divided, would its liberties remain free from the encroachments of European empire builders? It was the Union, blemished slightly though it might be by Negro servitude, which had guaranteed freedom to whites who had fled the shores of Europe, and that came first.

Rightly or wrongly, Wise appears to have suspected some of the Abolitionists of a disposition to tamper with the liberty and equality the guarantee of which he regarded as the crowning glory of the American state and Federal constitutions. Massachusetts was a center of Abolitionism; Massachusetts was also anti-alien—specifically anti-Irish—but what immigrant was to know where the canker would spread? Therefore, Abolitionists were hypocrites. Such a picture may be oversimplified, but the lines are clear in Wise's view of the Abolitionists. He regarded them as ethically inconsistent for having adopted in Massachusetts in 1859 a law requiring of aliens seven years residence and naturalization as qualifications for holding public office.

That Abolitionism was espoused by the Christian clergy in the North did not endear the cause to Wise. He denounced vehemently the slightest interference with the separation of Church and State; he suspected the "political parsons" of trying to inject Christianity into the Constitution. He was grateful for the liberty and equality afforded by the open frontier, the open society and the political system of the United States and there, of all places, he seems to have felt men should live and let live. He saw in the Abolitionists not men who wanted to grant liberty to slaves, but men who wanted to interfere with the liberty of the states. He lumped them together with those who would restrict the liquor traffic, enforce the observance of Sunday, and somehow make Christianity a legally established religion.

While he deplored secession ("the most terrible blow the cause of humanity is likely to suffer in the year 1861") "Silence our policy" was the heading of an article on that issue. "We are the servant of peace, not of war." The weeks rolled on with only the faintest suggestion of a war penetrating the columns of **The Israelite**.

Although Wise placed the main issues of the war outside his purview, his thunder pealed forth when the rights or the honor of Jews were touched; when anti-Semitic accusations were made; when Congress denied Jews the right to have army chaplains; or when General Grant issued his notorious General Order No. 11—which Wise did not overlook when Grant was nominated for the Presidency. More surprising, however, was one of his sudden incursions into politics, at a time of acute controversy and when the Union cause was greatly harassed by war-weariness and internal dissension.

In September 1863, he suddenly allowed the Peace Democrats of Ohio to nominate him for election as state senator. The reaction of his usually complaisant congregation was swift and pointed: "You are hereby politely but most emphatically requested to decline the said nomination at once." Wise complied.

Before this, with the outcome of the Civil War far from certain, Wise took another of those steps which showed that he was ready to strike out on his own path: in December 1861, he bought a large farm between College Hill and Mount Healthy, and made it his principal residence. The farm lay nine miles north of Cincinnati. It is unusual, even in these days of instantaneous communications, for a clergyman to live at such a distance from the scene of his activities; in 1861 it must have been astonishing. Cincinnati in those days was a city turbulent enough in times of peace, and the excitement of the Civil War must have added to the violence. It was still confined to the river basin and could be prostrated by a sweltering summer. Wise had a large family (his first wife bore him ten children altogether; by his second wife there were four); and he may have calculated that, apart from other advantages, the produce of the farm would at least fill the mouths of his brood. More, there were educational institutions at College Hill to which he could send them; and he hinted that he might use them as a stepping stone to a college under his own control.

His congregation did not demur at Wise's removing himself a distance of nine miles and Wise, of

whose endurance as a traveller there is ample sufficient evidence, presumably found driving to and from the city no strain on his energies. The picture retained by his family, presumably formed out of his later years, is one of him sitting in his study at the farm, writing without intermission for hours on end. He had an eye for the panorama of nature, and this probably gave him strength when he withdrew, as from 1861 he was able to do regularly, from the turbulence of the city. One area of speculation is the role played by his wife in this removal (it is remarkable how little is known about his private life). Family recollections suggest that the decision to move to the farm was basically Wise's and that his wife at first acquiesced reluctantly.

Altogether Therese Wise appears as a shadowy figure in her husband's **Reminiscences**. She was concerned about his health and his absentmindedness; she took a stand when he wanted to return to Europe in 1848 or when it was represented to her that Charleston, whither he proposed to move in 1850, was dangerous because of the Yellow Fever; she wept in times of trouble. Wise's frequent journeyings do not suggest that Wise felt chained to his home, and his **Reminiscences** do not point to his wife as the inspiration of his activities.

Domestic tranquility was not Wise's lot after his removal to the North College Hill. Therese Wise was overcome with illness; she died in 1874, and the last decade of her life was almost uninterrupted sickness and suffering. There was reticence about the nature of her illness. In the preface to **The Cosmic God** (published in 1876) we have one of the few occasions on which Wise lifts the veil on his private life. "... My wife was frustrated with an incurable disease. For nearly two years she lived the life of a shadow, without affection or clear consciousness, no more herself than the ruin is the castle." He describes the book as "conceived in sorrow, composed in grief and constructed at the brink of despair." He goes on to refer to "Ruthless attacks upon my character, restless assailants from the camp of implacable foes," which is familiar enough. However, the presence of domestic misfortune beyond remedy is to be borne in mind when considering Wise's public contentiousness at this period.

With the issues of the Civil War resolved, the country forged ahead; the economy expanded and there was a greater sense of cohesion. The poor immigrants of earlier decades were more attuned to the American environment and, in many cases, had risen on the economic ladder.

A GREAT DREAM BECOMES REALITY

In Wise's world, first fruits began to blossom. In 1866 his congregation moved to a spacious and ornate house of worship in Plum Street. The rabbi was, naturally, the central figure in the grandiloquent dedication ceremonies. As the chorus and orchestra performed before 2,000 worshippers, his mind may have wandered back to the straitened environment of the Bohemian **religionsweiser** and to his own first ventures, with limited resources, in making Jewish ritual compatible with the American environment. The nature of the occasion and the tribute paid to him would not have allowed him to forget his success.

Wise was much in demand as chief officiant on such occasions. His travels to neighboring communities were frequent and one gets the impression that he had made himself the celebrity whom outlying congregations wanted to grace special occasions.

One such occasion may be noted. Two years after the ceremonies at Plum Street Wise was chosen to speak at the opening of a yet larger shrine, the new Temple Emanu-El of Fifth Avenue, New York. The antagonism between him and the eastern rabbis was well known; whether any politicking lay behind the invitation is not known, but for New York to reach out to Cincinnati for a special preacher must have been a feather in his cap.

The compliments addressed to Wise were renewed and intensified in 1869 at a festivity of which he was the center. Wise and his wife celebrated their silver wedding on 6 June 1869. "Young and old, male and female, Jew and Gentile—all were there, without distinction of creed or nationality,—to celebrate the day," wrote **The Israelite** of the reception which the couple gave at their country home. The B'nai Jeshurun choir sang a hymn; Lilienthal spoke on the text "God is with thee, thou brave warrior" and later read an address signed on behalf of his congregation. Naturally, the principal address came from Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, and it was accompanied by a gift of \$5,000. The boys of the top class of his school presented him with an easy chair. There is scarcely need to allude to the compliments which the great day brought forth, for his support of the Orphan Asylum, for his instruction to the young, for his efforts to establish a college, for his defense of the Jew against prejudice and bigotry. The struggles were not yet over, but at this milestone of his life Wise could feel that he was beginning to reap the harvest.

No doubt there was an element of the conventional in the bestowal of compliments on the occasions mentioned. In December 1867, there came a melancholy tribute from an opponent. With little of his earnest life to run, Isaac Leiser turned once more to the need for "a due training of youth in religious knowledge," and in the course of comments on the general preference for moneymaking over education that run parallel to those which Wise frequently made in **The Israelite** he observed: "The learned stand at such an elevation above the people that, if they have influence, they can lead the congregations as they please. We have in our mind especially **one**, who resides in the West, we may as well name him, Dr. I.M. Wise, who

seems to have obtained almost unlimited control over entire districts." Wise must have read those words with great satisfaction, though what immediately followed must have reminded him that his authority was not unchallenged—"and he would be irresistible, were it not that an antagonistic influence, of a more radical kind yet, has been brought forward in the person of Dr. Einhorn."

Wise had good reason to be satisfied, but the hankering after "bold plans" was such that these compliments were a spur to a fresh attempt to scale the heights.

However remote the possibilities of practical action, Wise never lost sight of his projects for a union, a seminary and a common liturgy. He kept them before the American Jewish public, even on the most unlikely occasions.

Then in February 1869 he announced the convening of a synod to meet that summer in Cincinnati, "... a conference... to be composed of all Hebrew ministers, teachers and representatives of the congregations, and Young Men's Associations..." This announcement brought no immediate response, and at the end of April Wise stated that if twenty-five congregations signified their desire, there would be a conference; and later he set up a conference committee of rabbis and laymen, on which, however, no representatives of the eastern congregations were to be found. Then a move came from the enemy camp.

During the Civil War Einhorn had been forced to flee from Baltimore, and in 1866 he moved to New York as rabbi of Congregation Adath Jeshurun, upon the condition that Wise's **Minhag America** should be discarded in favor of his own **Olat Tamid**. Over the years the number of German trained Reform rabbis in the country had grown. Wise frequently fulminated against the Germanizing of the American synagogue as well as against his enemies in general, and the need for American trained rabbis was an important plank in his platform. Since his own magazine **Sinai** had folded up during the Civil War Einhorn lacked a platform from which to expound his views, and we can only guess how he and his friends felt towards Wise and Wise's ideas.

In March 1869 Einhorn acquired an organ of the press, a new weekly journal, **The Jewish Times**, began publication in German and English. The appearance of **The Jewish Times** paved the way for a further move. On 1 June, when Wise's projected conference was gathering strength, Samuel Adler (of Temple Emanu-El) and Einhorn issued a call inviting their "theologically educated colleagues who favored decided progress in religious matters (die theologisch gebildeten Collegen, welche dem entschiedenen religioesen Fortschritte huldigen)" to a conference which would meet after the ensuing holy days. Here would be a limited conference—limited to rabbis (and only those who were theologically educated), and limited also to the formulation of principles. The things which Wise had urged—synod, college, uniform prayer book—were to be off limits.

The calling of the Adler-Einhorn conference must have presented Wise with a problem. Later Wise complained that they had wronged him by taking action just as his own project was getting under way, but for the time being he showed unusual restraint.

The limitation of the invitation to the "theologically educated" may have been intended to place a weapon in the hands of its authors whereby to repel those whom they chose to consider undesirable, for instance, because they were not university graduates. Fifteen months after the "call", Wise's opponents stated that at the time he felt the need to inquire whether he would be received as a member, and it must be assumed that Wise's relationships with the New York rabbis were such that he feared a rebuff if, without receiving assurances in advance, he made to join their assembly.

The rabbis assembled in Philadelphia on November 3. Wise arrived after the proceedings opened, having been engaged in a round of lectures. He took little part in the discussions. The meetings were dominated by Einhorn, who produced a draft of a set of principles and succeeded in getting them adopted with few modifications. The language of the conference was German. In keeping with the summons, the set of seven resolutions adopted by the Conference did not prescribe any practical measures; and in line with the complaint in that summons that in deciding practical questions it was frequently the **Shulhan Aruch** and not Reform principles that were decisive, there was a negative tone about the resolutions. Wise offered no dissent.

Reporting on the closing session of the Conference, **The Jewish Times** observed "... the proceedings were marked throughout by a spirit of harmony, kindness and good nature and almost unanimity, unprecedented in the history of rabbinic conventions." That sounds too good to have been really true, for the aftermath was one of the most rancorous episodes in American Jewish life, reminiscent of what had happened in Cleveland a quarter of a century before, only in a more intensified form. Yet these convulsions proved to be the birth pangs of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and its offspring, Hebrew Union College, which brought Wise to national office.

On Wise's motion, the decision was taken at Philadelphia that a second rabbinic conference should meet in Cincinnati in November 1870, and with sound logic his colleagues left Wise in charge of the arrangements. Immediately on returning to Cincinnati, Wise began to disengage himself, not from the decision to meet again, but from the whole posture taken by the Philadelphia meeting.

Two years before the Philadelphia Conference, reflecting on "Some Lessons" drawn from one of his periodical visits to other congregations, Wise had reiterated his middle-of-the-road point of view, and this article is typical of his general attitude. After asserting that "The benumbed conservatism, the congealed and crystallized dogmatism and ritualism, commonly but falsely called orthodoxy, takes no longer," he pushed the helm over to prevent the course veering too much to the left:

Our travels teach another lesson still. Our people are much too pious and conservative in matters of religion, to be hurled and precipitated into extreme, radical and impracticable measures. Nobody believes that one must smoke cigars on Sabbath and eat pork in vindication of principle, in order to be considered an honest friend of Israel's consecrated cause. Nobody believes that any reform is necessary or lawfully admissible, unless it elevates Judaism and endears it to the thousands of Israel. Innovations for the sake of innovation, and reforms for the sake of reform, find no favor with our people who, thank God, care little for the whims of fashion, and are pervaded with the desire to remodel the external modern standard of taste and the acknowledged canon of religion, are naturally as odious to our people as is the attempt to Germanize the synagogue, and make Judaism a stranger in this land of freedom.

His antipathy to "attempts to Germanize the synagogue" led to an expression of his views on Hebrew:

We are Jews, and will steadfastly remain in the path of our fathers; we are the bearers and preservers of the great and holy book which God entrusted to our care and safe-keeping; therefore we will preserve the Hebrew language in our schools and in our temples; the main portion of divine service must be in Hebrew, the balance of prayers, hymns, instructions and admonitions must be in the vernacular of the country.

And there were more animadversions on "extreme and radical measures" and attempts to Germanize the synagogue. This remained Wise's position. The Resolutions of the Philadelphia Conference were just such "extreme and radical measures"—e.g., the unequivocal subordination of Hebrew to the vernacular as the language of prayer. One surmises that when he returned home he was reminded of the conservative disposition of the laity and saw that the Philadelphia resolutions would win little popular support.

Wise had decided to "go along" with the Philadelphia Conference, but from what one knows of his sense of his own destiny could not have felt happy at not being the leader. When he found that the decisions of the Conference were unpalatable to a large section of the community, he must have felt himself chained to a chariot whose course he had not set and could not alter and which was driving straight to the wilderness. He had the promise that the proposals which he had long been advocating would be considered at the next meeting, but it would be a select gathering of German-speaking colleagues as skillful in dialectic as he, where the kind of harangue which had made him popular with the people was looked upon with disdain and where the atmosphere would freeze it on his lips if he attempted it.

So it was that Wise edged away from the Philadelphia Conference. He made it clear that its decisions were not final and complained that every decision other than Einhorn's "was treated with a sort of contempt for which we cannot account."

Before the year 1869 was out Wise made it clear that what had been agreed upon in Philadelphia (including his own assumption of responsibility for arranging the successor announced meeting) had not caused him to abandon his earlier announced plans, and he gave out that the twentieth congregation had adhered to his call for a union, and he underlined his own standpoint—no sects or factions in American Judaism:

To us, we must repeat, all shades of opinion appear justifiable and necessary for a healthy development and sound progress. Not a step out of the center, is our invariable and unchangeable standpoint.

Reform and progress were always necessary, but Judaism, not reform, was the main thing. This was in reply to a correspondent, and the same reply gave Wise occasion to hoist the flag of **Minhag America** under which he had sailed into battle before and under which he was to do so again:

*We adhere to the **Minhag America** with its Hebrew ritual and its hymn book in the vernacular. While we are ready to correct such passages, of which there are very few, if any, as are not in perfect harmony with the enlightened and broad principles of Judaism, we will not have the **Minhag America** changed or replaced.*

The ways and means of effecting a fusion of the prayer-books most current in American reform congregations was one of the subjects on which a commission set up in Philadelphia was to report to the next conference, and here was Wise not merely proclaiming the immutability of **Minhag America**—the old dividing line between him and Einhorn—but putting it forward as the basis (the sole possible basis?) for the union of American Israel.

By February Wise was sufficiently confident to press "the necessity of a general convention of all

American Jewish congregations." The title of the article in which he did this ("The Convention and the Liturgy") indicates the point. In the ensuing weeks Wise made it clear that he was pressing forward with his plan for "the convention of all congregations and the adoption of rules and regulations, to the effect that the liturgy and the ritual of the temple must not be changed by any individual or congregation . . ." Here was the prospect of an American Jewish "Act of Uniformity," with Wise's **Minhag America** as the book of common prayer and—who could say?—its editor as the heirarch.

Shortly afterwards there came yet another twist on the part of Wise in his endeavors to attain a commanding position on the national scene.

The question of a seminary was among those which the Philadelphia Conference had referred to a commission for presentation to the next meeting. On 25 February Wise had written in **The Israelite** contesting the view that the question of Orthodoxy or Reform needed to be settled before a rabbinic seminary was founded: ". . . we need but one seminary for all parties, one in which the original sources are scientifically taught and expounded."

This expression of opinion was received with joy in an unexpected quarter. **The Jewish Messenger** (New York), an organ of Orthodoxy closely connected with the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, printed in its issue on 11 March lengthy extracts from Wise's article, prefaced with a commendatory introduction in which the editor appealed for his co-operation.

What **The Jewish Messenger** sought was Wise's help for Maimonides College, the seminary for training rabbis which the Board of Delegates had opened in 1867, with Isaac Leeser as Provost. Wise had refused to support the Board of Delegates, and one of his diatribes against Maimonides College described it as "a Polish **cheder** in a modernized garb." Now, when he was committed to sitting down with his Reform colleagues to discuss *inter alia* the training of rabbis, Wise began a brief flirtation with the Board of Delegates and Maimonides College.

So we find that in May 1870 Wise was present at a meeting of the Board (he represented Portland, Oregon) and accepted election to a committee to consider plans for a rabbinical seminary. No practical action resulted and the unexpected courtship came to a silent end. Before the year was out Wise received a promise of \$10,000 for a seminary from Henry Adler, who lived near Cincinnati, and probably that made him disinclined to share the project with the Board of Delegates.

In the meantime there was the Philadelphia Conference and its proposed continuation in Cincinnati. The definite breach came when Wise announced that on 11 July there would be a meeting in Cleveland of "the rabbis favorable to the preservation and further promulgation of the **Minhag America**." Thirteen rabbis attended. They began to revise **Minhag America** and adjourned to meet in New York in October, apparently with the hope of bringing in the Eastern rabbis. Wise still wrote as if the conference of rabbis set to meet in Cincinnati in November was to take place, but the Eastern Reformers, as represented by **The Jewish Times**, now broke their silence and launched a quiverful of accusations at him in one issue (26 August).

The violent recriminations which now ensued need not detain us. Wise affected to be ready to go on with the Second Rabbinical Conference in Cincinnati, only on terms which would have entitled him to exclude Einhorn and his friends. On 14 October nine of the rabbis who had attended the Philadelphia Conference published in **The Jewish Times** a Declaration in which they accused Wise of "double dealing":

" . . . he has not ceased in his newspapers to throw abuse and derision at several of the prominent members of the conference and to stir up the suspicion of the congregations against them. Finally, always with the phrase of unity on his lips, he violently brought about a schism, in that he set up a separate group to decide a question which was already on the agenda of the second conference, having been remitted to a committee for report, so as to push through his so-called, (if only in name) Minhag America."

That settled the affair, but it leaves us asking why these gentlemen failed to take the convening of the second conference into their own hands, which points to a major difference between Wise and his colleagues.

Polemics between the rabbis continued. The thirteen rabbis who met in Cleveland did not confine themselves to the revision of **Minhag America**. Wise had been trumpeting the inviolability of **Minhag America**, and when the New York meeting adopted a proposal that the name of the book be changed Wise left the Conference having declared in writing his inability to participate further. He returned in the morning, having signed a written declaration which left open the possibility of change. The New York meeting did not confine itself to prayer book revision but discussed all those matters which Wise had been seeking to have discussed at a congregational convention. All these matters it decided to take up at a further meeting to be held in Cincinnati in June 1871. This meeting **The Israelite** referred to as "the next Conference of rabbis, preachers, and delegates of congregations." It looked as if Wise had outflanked the eastern faction and was pressing towards his goal.

Twenty-seven persons attended the Cincinnati meeting.

At Wise's instance the Conference declared its permanency, membership being open to all officiating rabbis, preachers, teachers of religion and readers. More, he secured the adoption of a scheme for the establishment of a "Union of Israelite Congregations of America," whose objects were to include the establishment and maintenance of a seminary, the provision of Bibles and text books and the support of weak congregations. The Union was to be governed by a Synod, which was to meet biennially and to consist of the representatives of affiliated congregations together with their rabbis, preachers or teachers of religion. A committee of five, appointed by the Conference was to call the synod into being as soon as twenty congregations ("adhering to reformed principles (not none others)") with less than 2,000 members should have resolved to enter the Union.

The Conference also considered in some detail the curriculum of the proposed rabbinical seminary. It resolved to meet annually, except on the synodal year, and the 1872 meeting was fixed for the second Monday after **Shevuot** in Chicago.

Here then was what Wise had been fighting for ever since he had arrived in the country twenty-five years before. We need not suppose for one moment that he shed a tear at the absence of Einhorn and his friends—for one thing it spared him the sadness of parting (in accordance with the New York decision) with the title of his beloved **Minhag America**. He had organized a permanent rabbinical conference, and it had decided to call into being a congregational union, a synod and a theological college; and it was concerting plans for the conduct of religion schools, for the supply of text books, and for the organization of circuit preaching; the conference had "finally settled the liturgical questions." Well might he say towards the end of three long columns of enthusiastic summary "The Conference was a brilliant success."

But the clear blue sky gave way to a storm as fierce as any in which Wise had been involved; and instead of the speedy accomplishment of the intentions of the Conference we have another interlude of violent recrimination, which doubtless led the "old hands" to recall the Conference of 1855 and to prophesy similar results.

In the course of an excited debate Wise used language which seemed to indicate denial of the existence of a personal God. Here was the opportunity for his enemies to pay him back. Fourteen rabbis of various shades of opinion joined in a statement denouncing him for "flagrant blasphemies . . . unheard of, impious desecration of our sanctuary." Naturally Wise replied, outdoing his accusers in volume and fury ("They started from falsehoods, progressed in wickedness and landed in a hell of absurdity"). Was it really to be Cleveland over again? So it might have appeared.

Adherence to the congregational Union lagged, and, despite Wise's reminders, the rabbis failed to act on their decision to meet in Chicago in 1872.

Thus there were conferences and plans for conferences, but little to remember except the smoke of battle. Eventually the Cincinnati laity seem to have taken matters out of their rabbi's hands. Wise's congregation had agreed to join the proposed "Union of Israelite Congregations" but when it met in October 1872 that proposal had fizzled out. The meeting adopted a proposal for the setting up of a joint committee of the Cincinnati congregations which would call a conference of congregations of the West, South and Northwest with a view to forming a union of congregations. The regional limitation would exclude the element with which Wise was at war. As a result of this proposal a convention of congregations—the rabbinical element was in the background—met in Cincinnati in July 1873 and resolved to establish the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Naturally, Einhorn and his friends were not involved; Wise was present but assumed no prominent part. The Union took no theological position; by its constitution it expressly disclaimed the right to interfere in the internal affairs of its constituents, and the word "synod", with its suggestion of oversight, was not used. Here was a sidestepping, both of the agreement on principles which Einhorn thought essential, and the adoption of his prayer book which Wise had done battle. Altogether it was something less than what Wise had been striving for from the day he set foot in America, and in the resolution of the issues Wise appears to have played no part.

Was this the reason why one month after the founding convention Wise suddenly decided to leave Cincinnati and accept the call to Congregation Anshe Hesed, New York? We do not know. He thought that "he had been neglected somewhat by his congregation," but what that involved was never made clear; a man of his fighting disposition may have cherished the opportunity to lodge himself in the camp of the enemy (he referred to the chance of establishing **Minhag America** there); and his wife's condition may have left him distraught.

The prospect of Wise's departure caused consternation among his flock. An influential deputation waited on him and secured his decision to remain in Cincinnati and the New York congregation's relinquishment of its appointment.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations did not represent everything that he had striven for and, at best, it was a plan rather than a reality.

Once his position in Cincinnati had been confirmed, Wise resumed his campaign for support for the Union, and in particular for the educational institution which it was its task to bring to birth. "Unless

summoned from our post by a decree of Providence before it can be accomplished," he wrote immediately after the formation of the Union, "we will not lay down our pen until there shall stand firmly THE Union of THE American Hebrew Congregations; until we shall have the Hebrew classical and rabbinical college on American soil. If we exercise any influence on the American Hebrews, and wherever we do or will exercise any, it will be used fully and vigorously in favor of "Union" and "College." If we have any friends in this country, we will unceasingly entreat them to come forward liberally and generously in aid of "Union" and "College."

And he gave himself to this task with an enthusiasm and a singlemindedness which recalls the spirit with which he had carried the flag of Zion College twenty years before. Harnessed to a practical task, working in the midst of an organized body of men, the goal of his strivings in sight there is little occasion for personal complaints of persecution and victimization, "... we do not expect," he allowed himself to grumble, "that this cause, however sacred and universal, will receive much encouragement from either our denominational press, or our aristocracy, both of which have stood aloof of all reform movements," but he had faith in the people and was confident of being able to push forward without the "big men" of the East: "Happily we muster over twenty thousand men enrolled in congregations outside of our largest cities. If we can unite half of them to erect institutions to the glory of God, the elevation of Judaism, and the honor of Israel, the rest will come gradually, a little later, but they will. It is to those twenty thousand in Israel to whom the Congregational Convention has spoken, and upon whose fidelity and religious zeal reliance has been placed... The people will move, the masses will speak, and they need no particular assistance; nor is their onward march much retarded by any single-handed opposition." Naturally anyone who was indifferent to the cause of the Union and the College incurred his wrath. "... the frogs quack and the earth moves forever" was the conclusion of an article built round a tale of some frogs who were troubled because the movement of the earth disturbed their sleep. The names neither of individuals nor institutions were mentioned, but it is not far fetched to assume that he was aiming at those who wanted to do nothing. In the same issue of *The Israelite* Wise was complaining at absence of interest on the part of the congregation in California and Oregon. There was no excuse—that hundreds of miles of largely uninhabited country isolated the Pacific Coast from Cincinnati does not appear to have entered Wise's reckoning; the cause was too big for regard to be had for such trifles: "We beg, not for ourselves, but for a sacred cause, for Israel's holy heritage; to be rescued from under the ruins of destructive materialism and crushing indifferentism, we beg."

Wise now became concerned at the fact that a large percentage of the Jews in Cincinnati and elsewhere were not members of congregations. "Are You a Member of a Congregation?" is the title of an article expounding "the solemn duty of every Israelite who has reached the age of manhood to join a congregation." An adjoining column carries an article with the simple heading "One Dollar," and it reveals the cause of Wise's sudden feeling over the question of non-affiliation; a dollar per head per annum was the quota which each congregation was obliged to pay to the Union. That was September 19. A week later he was upbraiding those who merely desired to be buried as Jews, but who stood aloof from congregational responsibilities during their lifetime. On 19 June 1874 he returned to the theme. "It must become a general maxim among the American Israelites, that every one must be a member of a congregation, and every congregation a member of the Union. The one must make and support the other," was the starting point, from which he proceeded to complain against several classes of "outsiders"—"overdone individuals among us who are **too enlightened** to belong to any congregation... those in large cities who take all they can and pay nothing for it." His desire to gather strength through the congregations for the Union led him to declare that, "No minister of any synagogue ought to be permitted to attend to any wedding unless the groom is a member of a congregation; and to no funeral, unless the family is truly Jewish—i.e., members of a congregation."

With his upbraiding of those who stood aloof from the congregations (and thereby from the Union) Wise combined appeals to observe the Sabbath and opposition to every attempt to abandon the Sabbath of the decalogue, and... every proposition of adopting, in any shape or form, the day of resurrection as a Jewish holiday." He also took up the cause of the Sabbath schools, whose improvement was on the agenda of the Union, and in the same article denounced both the chevras who had no schools ("uncivilized **Tsaddikim**, who make noise enough in their little places of worship, and let their children grow up like heathens") and those who had religious schools without Hebrew instruction: "Your Bible is Hebrew. You have no authorized version. A large portion of your prayers is Hebrew. The preservation of the Hebrew and the purity of the Hebrew doctrine are inseparable."

While these things were being written the Union was taking shape and the plans were being laid for the opening of Hebrew Union College. As the day approached Wise seems to have risen into something of a frenzy, not this time of denunciation or self pity, but of elation at the prospects which lay ahead. "To our friends we must say, never stop agitating, never forget that we must have "Union in Israel," in order to do our duty before God and man, to us and to our children, to our country and the human family." And to this he appended a six point programme.

The programme does not say a word about Reform. He wants American rabbis, and his comments on

the "quarrelsome; selfish and silly demigods" imported from Europe is obviously directed at the Eastern Reformers. It is true that in the same article Wise says that it was the "reform agitation" which had "set in motion the indifferent mass" and was therefore responsible for the progress of Jewish life, but there is no hint of Reform in this programme.

Wise would not have been his old self had he confined his enthusiasms and his expostulations to the editorial chair. Only twenty-seven congregations, most of them small, had been represented at the meeting which set up the Union in 1873; more needed to be enrolled and funds needed to be raised if it was to be other than a skeleton organization. The officers of the Union might be devoted committee workers, but no one but Wise had the strength or the competence to rouse the community to its duty.

In September 1873 he raised the Union flag in Philadelphia. In February 1874 we find Wise in Chicago. The Constitution Grand Lodge of B'nai Brith was holding its annual session there, and, notwithstanding previous rebuffs, Wise, ever persistent where the College idea was concerned, tried once more to harness B'nai Brith to the project and was rebuffed once more.

Still, to capture the B'nai Brith was not the only object of Wise's visit to Chicago. He spoke to three of the congregations in that city and to two in Milwaukee. There were no immediate results. Kehilath Anshe Maarive, Chicago, was one of the original members of the Union, but the others did not respond immediately to Wise's visit.

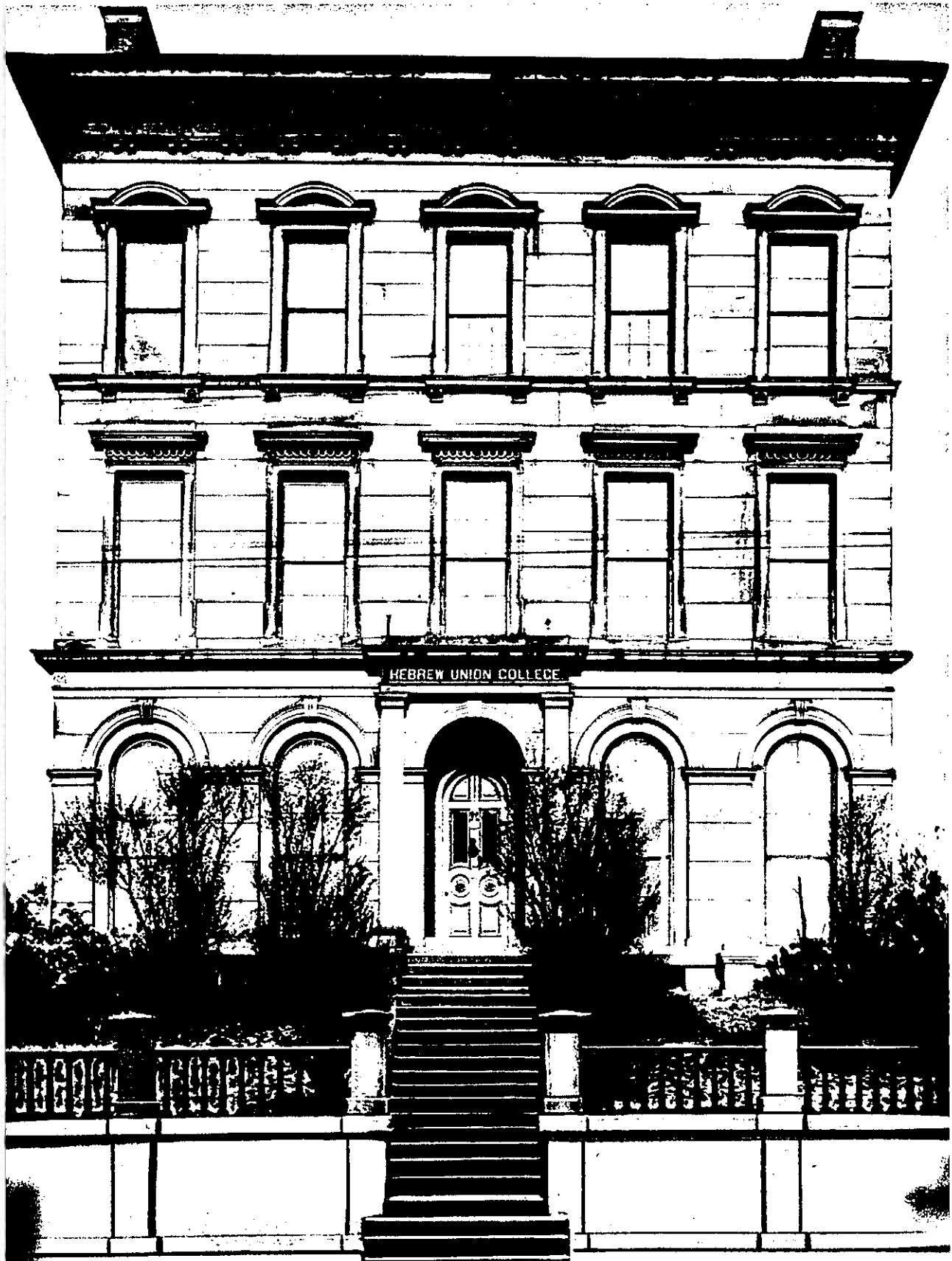
In the early summer of 1874 Wise visited Pittsburgh and persuaded Congregation Rodeph Shalom to adhere to the Union. For the rest of 1874 we do not find much travelling; this was the period when his wife was lying incurably ill, and in December she succumbed. In April 1875 he visited the East. In the previous year the Union had abolished the original limitation to congregations of the West and South when the Council decided to invite every Hebrew congregation of the United States and its territories to join, and the way was open to Wise to see that the invitation was accepted. Hence he spoke on April 8—apparently in discouraging circumstances—to the Washington Hebrew Congregation, and on the 10th (Sabbath) he spoke to Dr. Szold's congregation in Baltimore. He won part success, for on May 7 he was able to publish a stop press telegram announcing that the Washington Congregation had joined the Union. Whatever may have seemed the case to Wise's enemies in New York, it was Wise's energy and persistence which carried the Union through its shaky start. On May 17 he set out by river steamer for Huntington, and after spending a few hours of the following morning there left by train for Charleston, West Virginia. There he lectured on the doctrines of Judaism at the Methodist Church. On the following day he made calls (by way of propaganda for the Union and the College, one assumes, though he does not say so) and on May 20 he proceeded to Richmond. There he preached in the synagogue and addressed the Sabbath School: "I made my set speech for 'Union and College;' and when I had done, the Parnass said to me: 'Count us in; if the congregation does not pay, I will pay for it.'" When the Council of the Union assembled in the following month the Richmond congregation was represented. On Monday he went to Petersburg, Virginia—"I spoke earnestly, I believe fervently, which had the effect that this congregation at once voted itself into the Union of American Hebrew Congregations."

Once the Union of American Hebrew Congregations came into being several projects were taken in hand—the provision of a cheap translation of the Scriptures, the sending of preachers to small congregations and the improvement of Sabbath schools. The main question in Wise's eyes was the establishment of a "Theological Institute." The first Council of the Union (1874), upon the recommendation of a committee of which Wise was a member, decided that the institute was to be called Hebrew Union College and was to be under the "control, management and government" of a Board of Governors of twelve members, who were to have their own officers. The scheme also provided that the College should have three departments—Preparatory, Hebrew Classical and Rabbinical—and should be open to students of all denominations gratuitously. The provisions regarding the first two departments made it clear that the College was not intended for students for the ministry only. Here we have a reflection of Wise's old plan for a Jewish university. Cincinnati was designated as the seat of the College, and the Governors were ordered to open at least the Preparatory Department by October 1875. Before it dispersed the Council elected the first Board of Governors, of whom Wise was one.

The decisions taken at Cleveland raised Wise's spirits to fresh heights: "It is reality that all those cherished dreams of the past have been incarnated? Union and united action in the American Israel, the College and the resurrection of Hebrew literature and philosophy—are they indeed realities?" The meeting was as important in its day as were those under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, the sons and daughters of future generations would feel happy "if they discover the names of their sires among the men in Israel enrolled in the people's Council to guard and forward the most sacred cause, bearing the impress of God's seal of truth." By this time he had begun to write his *Reminiscences* in the *Deborah*, and the motif of his dream finds a place also in his words of advice:

Go on, leap or climb over the rocks rolled in your path; creep through the thorny hedges in your way; swim the streams, circumpass mountains; go on and on and never pause.

Wise's enthusiasm extended, as is hardly surprising, to the choice of Cincinnati as the locale of the



The original building of the Hebrew Union College. It was first opened in 1881 and was used until 1912.

College: geographically it was in a central position; it was "healthy, clean and in all moral points of view well governed;" on top of existing educational institutions a new university was growing; the spirit prevailing was one of "liberality and literary ambition." Moreover, Cincinnati was ideal because Cincinnati Israelites as a class occupied a "high and respected social position" and because they had "those large and costly temples in which wealth and art combined glorify the name of God, elevate the character of the worshippers, and do honor to Judaism and in the name of Israel." Thirdly, Cincinnati was "the successful hot-house for the tender plant of American Judaism . . . the **Zion of the New World**, which sent forth that light and spirit of progressive, liberalized and Americanized Judaism, now prevailing over the length and breadth of this country . . . with us Judaism is nothing outlandish; it is no exotic curiosity; it is neither German, French, nor Polish: it is American, and fully so, in language, spirit and form.

Wise was writing not in *The Israelite* but in *The American Israelite*. Six weeks before July 3, 1874, he had changed the name of the paper—impetuously one surmises, since the appearance of the first issue in the new guise was delayed and it did not mark a regular break, such as the beginning of a new volume. Wise claimed that *The Israelite* had fought the battles of the Lord "for truth, reform, progression, light and charity" and had won—"It has emancipated and naturalized Judaism on the American soil"—and again he emphasized "The Hebrew is Americanized, and his religion naturalized; they are no longer stranger: they are perfectly at home in this blessed country."

But the decisions still had to be brought to fruition. The Constitution of the Union provided that when \$60,000 had been raised the income should be applied to the maintenance of the College and that when this had been increased to \$160,000 the balance of \$100,000 might be applied to the erection or purchase of a college building. These cautionary provisions may well have been based in roseate expectations as to the degree of support which the Union might expect. Unfortunately, financial panic gripped the country a few weeks after the founding convention. Worse, the fact that congregations had lent their names to the Union involved no commitment to anything but nominal financial support. Nevertheless, when the Council met in 1875 the President was optimistic as to the meeting of immediate financial needs. This could only be because the College was to be opened on a modest scale. On May 28 Wise was able to confirm that the Preparatory Department would open early in the fall and that the Board of Governors was completing arrangements to establish a code of laws and to appoint a faculty. The laws were comprehensive enough, but the faculty was limited to one teacher apart from the President. Clearly the plan was to build slowly from the ground. Wise, we may guess, might have started with a completed structure in being, but, though he was the driving force, he had to reckon with the prudence of his colleagues.

The laws provided that the superintendence of the College should be vested in a President and it appears that although no announcement was then made, it was assumed when the Union Council met in Buffalo that the office would devolve upon Wise. The College needed not only funds and a home and teachers, but also pupils. There was little suggestion that, despite Wise's pleas for a native rabbinate and a Jewishly educated laity, parents were anxious to enroll their sons in the College; thus, if there was to be a College, Wise had to search for pupils also. Thus, in March 1875 the father of David Philipson in Columbus, Ohio was surprised to receive from Rabbi Wise a letter asking whether he would like to enroll his son as a pupil at the new institution. Wise was at work in this direction also.

Here the picture begins to unfold of another side of Wise's personality. We have seen much of Wise the fighter, the violent antagonist. Wise had asked Joseph Philipson to bring his son to see him, which he did in August, and David Philipson recalled the trepidation with which he entered the presence of the great man:

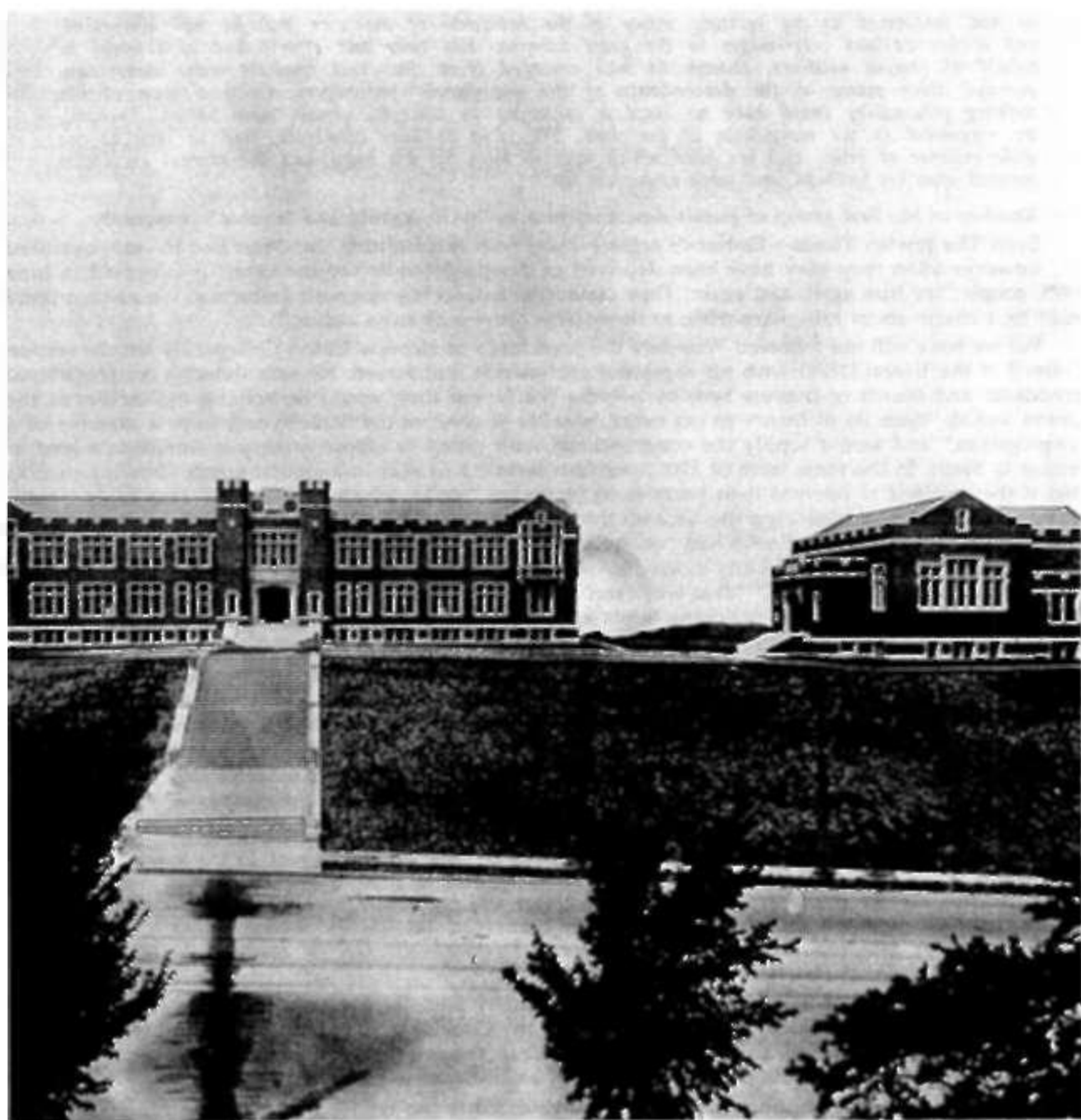
After the first few moments of the dreaded interview, the fear that possessed the lad disappeared entirely. The geniality of the famous rabbi put the quaking boy entirely at his ease and he left the house enamoured of the prospect of becoming a pupil of this remarkable man. The compelling personality of Isaac M. Wise impressed all, old and young, who came into personal contact with him in the same manner. Even bitter opponents who knew him only at a distance were disarmed when they were brought within the circle of intimate greatness and the loveliness of true humanity.

The evidence of Wise's solicitude for the young can be multiplied. Thus, a little later we find him writing to the Board of Governors.

*There is now here a Russian-German boy, Morris Sachs, 14 years old, poor and friendless. He studied in the **Gymnasium** of Liban in Kurland, to the fourth class thereof, is tolerably versed in Hebrew and German, has a fair start in Latin, Greek and mathematics, and appears to be quite intelligent and desirous to study. His father is a poor immigrant, now in Chicago. The boy appears to me very promising and worthy of your support. He came to me penniless and friendless. I will keep him in my house till you decide what shall be done with him. He could conveniently go along with Grade D, and has the qualifications of the law, because he was in the Gymnasium. I recommend this boy to your particular grace, and, if you resolve so, I will keep him in my house till July for half price, at \$3 a week. I will also care for his clothing.*



Vestry Room of Mound Street Temple, Cincinnati,
where the first class of Hebrew Union College met in October, 1875.



The first two buildings on the present campus of Hebrew Union College, 1912.

When Wise had visited Richmond he was the guest of Dr. A.S. Bettelheim, the local rabbi. The rabbi's eleven year old daughter, later Mrs. Rebecca Kohut, recalled in her memoirs what the presence of Rabbi Wise meant to the Bettelheim children when he stayed in their home:

This great man, who so thoroughly imposed his personality upon American Judaism, was a delightful talker and full of fun. Dignity and command were his, but not austerity. He encouraged us to be intimate with him. And our ease in his presence was in delightful contrast with the solemn reverence we had been taught to show our elders. In Richmond he had fascinated us by relating many of the incidents of the war that he had witnessed, and of his various pilgrimages to the great Lincoln. His time and efforts had been spent in behalf of Jewish soldiers, though he had emerged from the civil conflict more American, perhaps, than many of the descendants of the Mayflower passengers. Only a man of his striking personality could have so large a following as his. As almost mere babies, I recall, we responded to the magnetism of the man. We liked to hear him talk, and to look at his wide expanse of brow, and his head which was so huge for his body, and the eternal spectacles perched upon his forehead, and worn under his hat.

Another of his first group of pupils describes him as "mild, kindly and lovable" personally.

Even **The Jewish Times**—Einhorn's organ—came near to admitting that Wise had likeable qualities, "... however often they may have been deceived or disappointed by the conjurer," it lamented in June 1875, people "try him again and again. They cannot withstand his magnetic influence. We confess there must be a charm about him, irresistible to those who come within its radius."

But we have still not followed Wise into the presidency of Hebrew Union College. He left the second Council of the Union (1875) with his rapturous enthusiasm undimmed. He was showing congregational presidents and boards of trustees how by helping the Union they would be helping themselves as the Union would "exert its influence to get every Israelite to observe the Sabbath and to be a member of a congregation," and would supply the congregations with rabbis to whose oratory it would be a feast of reason to listen. In the same issue of **The American Israelite** he was in a second article showing parents that if they wished to prevent their babes from becoming "social deformities for life" they must "instill into them the love of observing the Sabbath and of practicing liberality;" and a third, entitled "Social Deformities," belabored those who had "no feeling for anybody or anything"—"Nothing is a reality but money, and if they cannot make any money out of it, they have no use for it; it is a waste of time, and they turn a deaf ear to every appeal." What was exercising him is made clear by the expression of hope in the final paragraph the committees soliciting funds for the College would not meet such "social deformities."

On August 28 the Board of Governors resolved formally to appoint Wise President of Hebrew Union College. He performed his services gratuitously, and his only assistant was Solomon Eppinger, who had been on the staff of the Talmud Yelodim Institute.

Though there was no ready made grandeur surrounding the presidency, Wise responded to the appointment in a tone which suggests that the official appointment affected him deeply. He published a lengthy manifesto in **The American Israelite** which, while it is not self-effacing, is quiet in its self-confidence and comprehensive in its sympathies. The first of its eight paragraphs sets the tone:

We deem it our duty to speak a few words for the President elected, and may say, that he considers it the highest honor which could have been conferred on him. Neither a seat in the Senate of the United States, nor the office of the Chief Justice, appears to him as responsible and honorable a position, as the presidency of the Hebrew Union College, where the finest opportunity offers to contribute largely to the education of the young people of our country; to lay a solid foundation to the future greatness of American Judaism; and to promulgate Hebrew learning, to raise high the moral and intellectual standard of Judaism.

Of course, he could not forbear to allude to his "many and fierce opponents. If his enemies have a better candidate for the presidency let them come to the Council of the Union and vote him out. In the meantime, he would 'earnestly and steadfastly endeavor . . . to open the treasures of Israel's literature to Jew and Gentile, reformer and orthodox, in justice to all and offense to none'."

"No thunder of cannon, no ringing of bells announced to the world, which cared little enough, the great event when, in October 1875, the Hebrew Union College opened at Bene Israel Temple in Cincinnati, one story below the surface of the earth." Wise's memory was at fault. Whether or not the world realized that this was "a great event full of incalculable importance to the cause of Israel," Hebrew Union College had to be drummed up, and the modesty of the circumstances in which it began its work was drowned by the flourish of the "grand celebration of a great event," as Wise's manifesto put it. At 7:30 on the evening of Sunday October 3, 1875 the Plum Street Temple was filled "to its utmost capacity by ladies and gentlemen, both Jews and Gentiles, of the highest intelligence of Cincinnati," if the enthusiastic report in **The American Israelite** is to be believed. The organ pealed forth a prelude; an augmented choir, accompanied by a full orchestra, sang a hymn, which must have been florid indeed if it matched the lyrical description in the same report:

...it electrified at once the whole audience, so that two thousand intelligent countenances radiated a luster, which is probably the most beautiful on earth. Your humble reporter was struck with admiration. The grand and palatial building, with its oriental fresco lit by hundreds of gas flames, filled to its utmost capacity by the highest intelligence of the city, now fairly ablaze with that higher inspiration which classical music rouses in appreciative souls, presented a panorama to the quiet observer, which no pen can describe, no artist paint, and no eloquence reproduce.

There were speeches—from Bernhard Bettman, Chairman of the Board (which office he was to fill for thirty-five years), from Rabbi Sonneschein (of St. Louis), from Lilienthall, and finally (and with the greatest brevity) from Wise; a psalm and a hymn, an overture and a symphony filled out the proceedings. How that day marked a milestone in Wise's life was best evoked by the simple words of the Chairman of the Board:

Postponing to a later day the election of a full Faculty, the Board of Governors, simply ratifying the choice of the people, have elected as President of the College, the man to whom indisputably belongs the the honor of having originated and amidst discouraging conditions, persistently advocated it, the Rev. Dr. Isaac M. Wise. The occasion and the hour are too solemn and great for personal praise. All we say to him, on surrendering to him the college, is: Let your own conscience and the appreciation of those who know you best be your reward at this moment. Here is the college of which you have thought, for which you have worked, so long: may it, under your administration, grow into a full realization of your brightest dreams.

III. THE FINAL YEARS THE FORCES OF JEWISH HISTORY

When the glow of the inauguration had receded, Wise may have realized that he now had one more burden on his shoulders, over and above his congregation and two weekly newspapers. Further, he has several books to his credit during this latter period. At the outset Wise remarried. He pursued Selma Bondi with the passion of a youth; they were wed in April 1876.

In the meantime a college had come into being and he was a president. However, it was a mere shell, without teachers, pupils, premises, library, funds. It did have critics or, as Wise preferred to style them, enemies. They did not believe that America provided the soil on which rabbinic studies could be pursued; they did not trust his scholarship or his designs. In theory foundations for the College had been provided for. The College was a branch of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and responsibility for its management was vested in a board of governors, and the printed **Proceedings** of the Union with their well drawn minutes and reports might suggest a smoothly running institution moving of necessity under an established code of laws. The reality was different, and Wise's bombast in the **The American Israelite**, his puffing of the College whenever opportunity came to him to report any event in its life must have amused his detractors as much as it sustained his supporters. In fact, the College met in the basement of the Mound Street Temple. The student body, as Wise recalled in later years, consisted of fourteen noisy boys, four of them came to study, and ten to create a disturbance. Textbooks had to be improvised because those available were in German which the pupils did not understand. The library was not too large to be locked in a tin box at nights, a precaution taken not against thieves but against mice. Faculty? The President had the assistance of one underpaid teacher, which is testimony to the resources at the College's disposal. Orators might declaim in public at Union meetings about the significance of Hebrew Union College, but a sense of collective responsibility was not there; we are a long way from the era in which organized fund raising on a national basis had become a commonplace of American Jewish life.

Out of these inauspicious beginnings something permanent arose. The College ordained more than sixty rabbis in Wise's lifetime, and he left it with its own building, a faculty of nine and an ever growing library. There was no aspect of the development of Hebrew Union College which he did not make part of his life and no possibility of advancing its cause to which he did not harness his energies. He canvassed for funds, for books, for students. There are stories of students being admitted against the wishes of the governors (the College had funds to maintain them)—Wise assumed responsibility. He acted as father to his students, was assiduous in finding positions for them and advised them on their problems. The accepted technique was to present a good face to the world, but to the extent that the curtain has been lifted on the early struggles, one has a picture not only of Wise's energy and devotion but of his invincible optimism: In April 1886 he was able to look back on ten years of struggle:

Never has such a permanent establishment been erected and grown in such a short time as has the rabbinical college in Cincinnati. When the idea occurred to found it, everyone laughed mockingly, and they did not really believe that American born children, who then did not know Judaism and had no apparent desire to learn matters relating to Judaism and Hebrew literature, could understand Mishnah and Gamorrah, Midrash and Philosophy. All thought it to be an impossible matter. "Where is the American who would want to be a

rabbi?" was heard from all Jews. "The Torah has been forgotten in Israel, it has fallen and shall not rise again," they were thinking. People with widely varying opinions determined our policy, and therefore the student body consists of both Orthodox and Reform students. Nonetheless, we began. Don't ask how or with what! With one teacher I toiled daily in a dark room under a synagogue. I taught like an elementary school teacher who starts with the alphabet. I knocked on the doors of the rich to ask for some copies of the Pentateuch and old prayerbooks in order to have a text for "The Sayings of the Fathers" and "Psalms." Now, thank God, we have a treasury of books which amounts to some ten thousand volumes and a beautiful and splendid building which is the finest of all rabbinical seminaries in the world.

How far he paid heed to the views of others must be an open question. Nominally the curriculum was the responsibility of a committee set up in 1874. The recollections of one of its members, Dr. Solomon Wolfenstein are in point:

We met a consecutive number of Sundays at Cincinnati... Our meetings were very animated as a rule. Lilienthal and myself agreeing and Wise opposing us... It was on one of these occasions when Lilienthal, lighting a fresh cigar, broke out in a laugh, in which he liked to indulge so heartily, and turning to me exclaimed: "Wolfenstein, you are a fool and I am another. We quarrel with Wise and, nevertheless, he will do as he pleases." He certainly was right. When I attended the College examination in May or June 1878, Rabbis Morais and Zirndorf (then in Detroit, later on the faculty) were my colleagues. I did not find much of the program we had prepared carried out. Wise had cut down the scientific and theoretic subjects, laying stress upon matters touching and pertaining to practical life. Most probably he was right.

The impression that the achievement was the result of one man's tenacity is reinforced by the failure of parallel activities. The College was one only of the plans taken up by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, but it was the only one in which any achievement was to be recorded. Six months after Hebrew Union College opened the presidents of the principal New York congregations called a convention for the establishment of a College of Jewish learning—apparently to be an extension of the preparatory school established by Temple Emanu-El: despite the resources at the disposal of the sponsors the effort came to nothing. More than once Wise offered to resign. These offers the Board of Governors steadfastly refused. It is difficult to believe that they were intended as anything more than a feint: Wise would not have readily parted from his nursling. More than once suggestions came from outside that he should resign. If they were never taken further, can it not be that no one was willing to assume the burden that rested on his shoulders. And if by the time of his parting he was acknowledged as first among the rabbis of America, this was due not to exceptional intellectual or oratorical power but to twenty-five years given to the nurturing of the American rabbinate.

In a sense, Hebrew Union College, like **Minhag America**, was the remainder of a more comprehensive scheme. The all-embracing Synod, which would legislate for American Judaism and authorize an official prayer book and an official seminary for training rabbis had been laid on one side. The Union, as established in 1873, was a deliberately circumscribed body, both as the scope of its powers and the area of its membership. Within the Union as a whole Wise was definitely backstage—one is tempted to ask whether the Cincinnati laity believed that the presence of a rabbi (particularly **this** rabbi) would be a stumbling block, and he was given charge of one part only of the Union's field of potential activity. If, as his critics charged, Wise was bent on becoming a "Western Pope," being given the presidency of Hebrew Union College was hardly a coronation.

It was not long before the geographical limitation on the Union's membership was removed. Wise's perseverance and charm won over the leaders of Temple Emanu-El New York, and their adhesion gave the Union respectability in the East. The Union absorbed the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, the protective functions of the older body being handed over to a "Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights." The negotiations which led to this enlargement of the Union included the appointment of a special commission on the curriculum of Hebrew Union College, and of that commission David Einhorn was a member.

The lodgement of the Union in the East was symbolized by its meeting in New York in 1879. In the same week David Einhorn preached his farewell sermon (he died later in the year). Samuel Adler, Co-sponsor of the Philadelphia Conference, had retired in 1874. The field was becoming Wise's by survivorship to the extent that seniority won deference in America. More effective, if Hebrew Union College succeeded, the American rabbinate would in time be populated by his disciples. Whether Wise expected his labors for the College to lead to the realization of his grander aims we do not know.

There seems to have been some expectation among the Easterners that what had been opened in Cincinnati was merely a preparatory school and that the locale (and control) of the rabbinical seminary proper was still open for decision. It happened otherwise. The faculty was reinforced by the addition of Moses Mielziner, a New York rabbi, but possession is nine points of the law, and control remained with Wise.

Wise's career reached a fresh plateau in June 1883 when Hebrew Union College, its faculty strengthened and possessed of its own home, was ready to send forth a quartet of rabbis. For the first time rabbis had been trained and ordained on American soil. In itself this was a notable event and, if he wore no bishop's mitre, his role in the proceedings signified a primacy among his colleagues. Surveying the wider scene he would have found things going his way. The German immigrants had established themselves, and Judaism had become naturalized. Of the two thousand congregations in the United States, all but a dozen had moved along the path of Reform. Many used **Minhag America**, but the parochialisms of the European past were being left behind; the united American Judaism for which he had strived was emerging.

The perfection of the scene was marred somewhat by the incident of the trifa banquet. Wise had confided to a Jewish caterer the feast which was to celebrate the ordination. The first dish he provided was shrimp, and the traditionalists who had participated in the event despite Wise's leanings departed in anger at the flouting of the dietary laws. Wise was not one to confess a mistake, and his making light of the incident could not have soothed their injured feelings.

Attitudes on the left as well as the right diminished the possibility that a united American Judaism would emerge. Wise had stood for moderate Reform. Judaism was a religion of reason. Words such as "mysticism" and "kabbalism" signified excrescences which the enlightened New World could only discard. Nevertheless, the Bible was divine, revelation on Sinai a fact and the Pentateuch the work of Moses. These beliefs the biology of Charles Darwin and the Bible criticism of Julius Welhausen called into question. The advanced Reformer of an earlier generation, who denied the divine character of the Talmud, was left behind. Could it be said that the books attributed to Moses were in fact his handiwork? Was revelation on Sinai a fact? The career of Felix Adler who, trained in Germany for the rabbinate of Temple Emanu-El, found Reform Judaism too narrow taught the **avant-garde** among the Jews that their fathers' changes were not the last word in progress and enlightenment. Wise did not cease to be a child of the eighteenth century. He might deride Felix Adler's ethical movement; he might forbid the teaching of Bible criticism at Hebrew Union College; but the rabbis he ordained were children of nineteenth century America and were found to be impressed by the turbulence around them.

Ostensibly the radical statement of Reform principles adopted by the rabbinical conference were met in Pittsburgh in November 1885 was called forth by the counter-reform preaching of Alexander Kohut. The tenor of the statement makes one wonder whether the real object was not to retain the loyalty of those who were attracted by Felix Adler's Ethical Culture movement. The Pittsburgh Platform was the work of Kaufmann Kohler, Einhorn's son-in-law and Wise's eventual successor. Wise was given the honor of presiding over the Conference. He lauded the statement as a "Jewish Declaration of Independence." This time however there was no edging away, as there had been after Philadelphia in 1869, though there were disclaimers of any identification of the College with the point of view expressed.

The Pittsburgh Platform does give voice to the belief often expressed by Wise that Judaism, shorn of time-bound accretions, was destined to be the universal religion of mankind, but in important respects it ran contrary to what he had taught. The divinity of Mosaic had been the cornerstone of his faith: the Pittsburgh Platform laid down "We accept as binding only its moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization . . ."

Had Wise's views changed or, with an inversion of forces, do we have Cleveland all over again? Then he was able to prescribe not only the Divine character of the Bible but the quasi-canonical authority of the Talmud, but the overriding concern in both cases was unity. In 1885 Wise faced a constituency whose religious outlook had been thrown off balance by scientific thought.

That Wise clung to his old beliefs is evident from a passage, written twelve years later in **The World of My Books**:

...Now (after writing 'History of the Hebrews' Second Commonwealth) I had a period of rest and I did not have to write a book... Then came the Pentateuch or Hexateuch criticism and it aroused me once again... I was seized with fear for historical Judaism on the one hand, and on the other hand I had to speak against this to the students of the College.

If the Pentateuch was a lie on which all of historical Judaism based itself, than all our great spirits were either deceived deceivers or despicable hypocrites. If this is so, why is there Judaism in the nineteenth century? Why all the sacrifices offered on the altar of our faith, so often with bleeding hearts, not only by our fathers but also by us? If this is so, whence do I know that there is an only, unique, and eternal God, who is merciful, just, loving and true? Whence do I know that justice, righteousness, and virtue are what we claim them to be? Whence do I know that there is a moral order of the universe and immortality, when all the world has gone off into materialism, all philosophy into the unconsciousness and into agnosticism?

The Pittsburgh Platform, and particularly the identification with it of the man responsible for training American rabbis vexed the conservatives and led directly to the establishment in New York of the Jewish Theological Seminary, avowedly intended to offset the tendencies of Hebrew Union College. The

competition could not fail to push the College and Wise with it more positively into the Reform camp. The vision of a united American Judaism was fading.

Wise saw this development in a different light: American Judaism was Reform Judaism. This becomes clear from his message to the 1896 meeting of the Central Conference of American Rabbis:

American Judaism is identical with reformatory Judaism; the conservative, orthodox or anarchronistic parties are minority sects, whom we ought to respect and treat with fraternal kindness and consideration, but no longer as a vox populi or an influential factor in the historical process of American Judaism.

This illustrates how in a more vital sense American Jewish life was moving away from Wise's position. By 1896 a second Jewish community was arising alongside the one whose Americanization Wise had been concerned to promote and may already have overwhelmed it in numbers. Practices which he thought had no place in the west, a style which was repugnant to him, a language that was far from tugging at his heart-strings were being established in American cities. Feeling the attraction of Vienna, the Bohemian Jews had no special ties with their East European brethren, and perhaps Wise was influenced by what Herz Homberg had told him of his battles against the backwardness and obscurantism of the Orthodox Jews of Galicia.

It may be noted that in the year following the statement just quoted the Orthodox element in New York felt strong enough to found a Yeshivah—the Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Theological Seminary, which was the nucleus out of which Yeshiva University grew.

The dominance of Zionism among the movements affecting Jewry in the half century after Wise's death has given to his view on the subject more topicality than on most. To a man who saw Messianic fulfilment in the American republic the idea of re-creating a Jewish state was an attempt to reverse history, and he denounced the movement in his 1897 address to the Central Conference:

I consider it my duty...to call your attention to the political projects engaging now a considerable portion of our co-religionists in Europe and also in our country, especially in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other large cities. I refer, of course, to the so-called "Friends of Zion," Chovaveh Zion, who revive among certain classes of people the political national sentiment of olden times, and turn the mission of Israel from the province of religion and humanity to the narrow political and national field, where Judaism loses its universal and sanctified ground and its historical signification. The persecution of the Jews in Russia and Roumania and the anti-Semitic hatred against the Jewish race and religion, as it still exists in Germany, Austria, and partly in France, roused among the persecuted and outraged persons the hapless feeling of being hated strangers among hostile Gentiles. It was quite natural that this humiliating experience roused in their memory the glory of the past, when Israel was the great nation, the chosen people, and inspired in them the consolation, "we are the great nation yet." So the wronged man revenges himself on his oppressors generally with the pretense, "I am as good and better than you." Generally spoken it is true, the persecuted is always better than his persecutors. This experience roused in those outraged men and women the old hope of restoration, the reconstruction of the Hebrew nationality, as in days of yore. The first step in this direction was the colonization of Palestine with Jewish agriculturists. This, of course, found favor and support among all good people, not indeed for the sake of Zion, but for the redemption of the persecuted, and with the conviction, that those poor and neglected families can be redeemed morally and physically only by making of them honest and industrious tillers of the soil. Idealists and religious phantasts took hold upon this situation, and made of it a general restoration of the Jews, and their returning to the holy land, although the greatest number of Jewish citizens in the countries when they enjoy all civil and political rights, loudly disavowed any such beliefs, hopes or wishes; yet the persecuted and expatriated from Russia and such other countries preached their new doctrine loudly and emphatically, and found advocates and friends also among Christians, more so even than among Jews. At last politicians seized the situation, and one of them called Dr. Herzl proposed to establish and constitute at once the Jewish State in Palestine, worked the scheme, and placed it so eloquently before the Jewish communities that the utopian idea of a Jewish state took hold of many minds, and a congress of all "Friends of Zion" was convoked to the city of Munich, to meet there in August next. However, all this agitation on the other side of the ocean concerned us very little. We are perfectly satisfied with our political and social position. It can make no difference to us in what form our fellow citizens worship God, or what particular spot of the earth's surface we occupy. We want freedom, equality, justice and equity to reign and govern the community in which we live. This we possess in such a fullness, that no State whatever could improve on it. That new Messianic movement over the ocean does not concern us at all. But the same expatriated, persecuted and outrageously wronged people came in large numbers also to us, and they bring still imbued with their home ideas, ideals and beliefs, voiced these projects among themselves and their friends so loudly and so vehemently, that the subject was discussed rather passionately in public meetings, and some petty politicians of that class are appointed as delegates, we learn, to the Basle Congress, and in each of

those meetings, as reported by the press, so and so many rabbis advocated those political schemes, and compromised in the eyes of the public the whole of American Judaism as the phantastic dupes of a thoughtless Utopia, which is to us a fata morgana, a momentary inebriation of morbid minds, and a prostitution of Israel's holy cause to a madman's dance of unsound politicians.

Wise followed contemporary Hebrew literature and showed a liking for it. Noting the death of Naphtali Herz Imber, author of **Hatikvah** (he once instituted a \$5,000 libel suit against **The American Israelite**) Wise observed "he produced nothing that was remembered a day after it was read or heard . . ."

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, to which reference has been made, came into being in 1889. Wise had noted five years earlier that the formation of an association of Hebrew Union College alumni provided the groundwork for a broader rabbinical association, and it came into being at a meeting of the Council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations apparently with very little effort; certainly with none of the rivalries which had been openly displayed when he had made similar attempts in the past.

Wise was elected first president of the Central Conference without dissent, and he held office for the rest of his life. By this time he had passed his seventieth birthday, which naturally his congregation celebrated with suitable eclat. Intimations have come down to the effect that Congregation B'nai Jeshurun would have been ready for him to accept the status of rabbi emeritus. He refused, saying that he wished to die in harness. An assistant rabbi was appointed, and presumably the need indicates a diminution of Wise's physical powers.

Undisputed tenure as president of the Central Conference reinforced Wise's primacy among the rabbis of America. He still hankered after a synod. In his first message as president of the Conference he said:

The united Rabbis have undoubtedly the right—also according to Talmudic teachings—to declare and decide, anyhow for our country, with its peculiar circumstances, unforeseen anywhere, which of our religious forms, institutions, observances, usages, customs, ordinances and prescriptions are still living factors in our religious, ethical and intellectual life, and which are so no longer and ought to be replaced by more adequate means to give expression to the spirit of Judaism and to reveal its character of universal religion—All reforms ought to go into practice as the authority of the Conference, not only to protect the individual Rabbi, but to protect Judaism against presumptuous innovations and the precipitation of rash and inconsiderate men. The Conference is the lawful authority in all matters of form.

The individualism encouraged by the open society of America, of which he had taken full advantage, animated his colleagues also and the suggestion that some kind of national authority be established never came near acceptance. **De facto** the College and the Conference were able to accomplish some mitigation of the anarchy which Wise had deplored ever since his arrival in America. Its outstanding piece of work was the publication of the **Union Prayer Book** (1892). In form it drew upon Einhorn's **Olat Tamid** rather than upon Wise's **Minhag America**. Wise graciously withdrew his own beloved compilation in favor of the new work. Thus was a longstanding conflict laid to rest (The spirit of faction was still around: directly upon the appearance of the Union Prayer Book Einhorn's son-in-law Emil G. Hirsch brought out a new edition of **Olat Tamid**).

The pattern of Wise's life did not change substantially during its last decade. He wrote for his two papers till the very end. He no longer felt able to undertake long journeys, but we can still note his presence on special occasions in various mid-western communities. There were many anniversaries for him to celebrate: the fiftieth anniversary of his own congregation 1892, the fiftieth anniversary of his sermon at Radnitz in 1893, his seventy-ninth birthday in 1898. Finally came the grand celebration of his eightieth birthday in March 1899. The Central Conference arranged to meet in Cincinnati in honor of the occasion and naturally all the institutions with which he was connected joined in the celebration: a special service with many speeches, a banquet tendered by the students of Hebrew Union College, a special number of the **Hebrew Union College Journal**, a bronze bust and other gifts marked the commemoration.

The round of work did not let up. Some years before his death a slight stroke had left him with a weakness in his gait. He made light of it, commenting to a young friend "Rather a stiff leg which is curable than a stiff neck for which there is no remedy, as Moses himself will testify." As the old man alighted from a street car a few weeks before his death, a young man rushed up to him saying "Doctor, let me help you down." "Never help a man down, help him up" came the reply. The days of battle were over, but the cheerful optimism remained.

Battles with personal enemies were over, but the struggle to ensure the future of what he had built remained. Early in 1900 Rabbi Moses Gries wrote to the alumni

. . . You will be pleased to know that the Doctor, in spite of his years and physical infirmities, is still healthy in body and clear in mind, is looking forward to the future, and planning what he will do in order to ensure that the College may be put on a sure financial basis . . .



RABBI ISAAC MAYER WISE
(1819-1900)

On March 24, he preached at the Plum Street Temple, and in the afternoon he taught his class at the College. Thereafter he had a seizure, fell into a coma and died without pain on March 26. There was a lying in state at the Plum Street Temple on March 29, followed by a great procession to the cemetery. There were memorial services, pulpit eulogies and newspaper tributes not only in Cincinnati but throughout the land.

Isaac M. Wise Memorial Sabbath became a feature of Reform synagogue life from year to year. From the outpouring of words selection is difficult. Naturally when the centenary of his birth came round recollections of his personality and achievement reached an unusual level. Max Heller, a fellow Bohemian, was more mature than most students when he entered the College, and his recollections of the impression made by his personality give a key to the secret of his achievement which may not come from his writings:

The merest glance at those kindly features conveys their unique combination of leonine strength with innate benevolence. My most striking recollections of Dr. Wise at his best are just of those seemingly opposite traits. I recall the profound, entrancing seriousness with which he opened what was the most impressive sermon I have ever heard, when, one Yom Kippur eve, he depicted Judaism as a widow bereft of her children; I seem to see him again, as he rose at the New Orleans Council, flaming with intense indignation, to command a stop to a wave of cynical mocking in the train of Leo N. Levi's bombshell address; I have in vivid memory the sternness with which he was accustomed to reprove any remissness to import duty.

But these were merely the moments when the inward force of his virile determination rose to the full majesty of its hidden power. The face that comes back spontaneously, as one's memory lingers among these far-off days, is the kindly, smiling face, the face of the fatherly friend, of the genial companion, of the every cheerful, every whole-souled, never weary, never ill-humored, much less ill-tempered toiler in great causes.

It has been my good fortune to be present on a number of occasions when I could observe Dr. Wise's attitude towards men who had assailed, maligned, traduced him for a succession of years. I happened to witness an episode in which he came near being assaulted by an infuriated colleague; he had complete control over himself and utterly abstained from all retort or defense. At another time he amazed us students by the courtesy with which he received, at College, a certain Jewish journalist who had villified him in the most indefensible manner. I can never forget my sensations when, at an eastern resort, I saw him set down genially, over a glass of beer, with another Jewish journalist whose treatment of him had been scarcely better; it was an experience to see the man melting under the unaffected geniality of his utterly forgiving victim.

I wish it were in my power to describe what were the most intimate days I ever passed with him, when, noting my pallor at a rather trying time, he insisted on my spending some days on his farm. His democratic habits with his neighbors, his genial good humor, his endless fund of anecdotes and reminiscences, his unaffected kindness with people of all stations and degrees, all these drew one's heart irresistibly to him; to be within his closest privacy was to appreciate that elemental simplicity which is the criterion of true greatness.