Attitude of the American Jewish Community
Toward East-European Immigration

AS REFLECTED IN THE ANGLO-JEWISH PRESS (1880-1890)

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A Significant Decade in Jewish History

The seeds of emancipation planted in the early revolutionary years of the nineteenth century were blown and scattered across the plains and mountains of Europe. Jews everywhere along with the other reawakened masses of the continent were tasting for the first time the sweet fruits of liberty and breathing fresh drafts of the pure air of freedom.

But as the nineteenth century wore on, counter-movements of reaction began to embitter the fruit, and the Jews, especially those of Russia, found themselves again the victims of discrimination and prejudice. Then the desire arose in them to leave the places of persecution and to seek opportunity and freedom elsewhere. As a result, in the decade from 1880 to 1890, there developed two migrations—one toward Palestine, the other toward America—which have revolutionized modern Jewish history. For the American Jewish community this decade heralded its Sturm und Drang period prior to its coming of age.

The purpose of this study is to discover and describe the reaction of the American Jewish community to the East European immigrants who came here during that period. It is concerned with the following subjects: how the new factor of large numbers of Russian Jews was received, how the American Jewish community contributed toward their welfare, protection, and education, how the “German” Jew—the American Jew who was already here—looked upon his Russian Jewish neighbor, and how he welcomed continued emigration.

Rabbi Irving Aaron Mandel of Boston presented a rabbinical thesis with the above title to the faculty of the Hebrew Union College, in 1917, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Hebrew Letters. The present essay has been summarized by Bernard Martin of the Hebrew Union College from the original 155 page monograph.
Sources, Documents, and Limitation of Method

This study, written largely upon deductive findings, is based mainly upon material derived from two outstanding Anglo-Jewish newspapers of the eighteen-eighties. The more important of the two, The Jewish Messenger, began to appear in 1857, and was continuously in the hands of the Isaacs family of New York City. Representing the liberal German (Ashkenazic) population of the upper middle class, it printed news from outlying cities as well as from New York and often published complete transcripts of speeches, sermons, and reports of meetings of Jewish interest held throughout the world. Its letter columns were filled with correspondence from leading Jewish figures.

The second basic source, The American Israelite, began publication in 1854 and was edited by Isaac Mayer Wise. It is a valuable supplement to The Jewish Messenger inasmuch as it contains correspondence from smaller Jewish communities throughout the South and West, and further, as the organ of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Reform in general, it represents their point of view. The Jewish Messenger and The American Israelite reflect the opposition that arose in the attitudes of the Jewish communities of the East and the West respectively toward the new immigration, and thus, a comparative study of the two gives the balance required for a fuller understanding of the subject matter.

In the writing of this study caution had to be observed, of course, in evaluating the accuracy of the news reports and correspondence contained in these papers. To make the study even more complete every attempt was made to gather also those contemporaneous documents and reports of the period, which are available, and to subject them to careful examination.

The Question of Russian Emigration Before 1880

One of the earliest indications of proposed large-scale Russian emigration to America is to be found in June, 1869, when the editor of The Jewish Messenger noted, with disapproval, that there was a movement on the part of Jews in the areas of distress in Western Russia to come to America “where, as they contend, there is a wider field for their industry.” His disapproval of any such movement, based on the argument that American Jews had enough to do in caring for their own poor, and that without capital and without a knowledge of the language the immigrant would find it difficult to earn a livelihood and would encounter more misery than benefit, was repeated several times later that year.

In November, 1869, The Israelite gave notice of a meeting in
Berlin on October 4th of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* to discuss, among other things, the plight of West Russian Jewry. A result of the meeting was the establishment of a subcommittee “to give aid and support to immigrants from Russia who wish to settle in Europe and America.” *The Israelite* called upon the Polish Jews of America, who were most closely connected with the Russians, to form societies for the purpose of helping the Russian Jewish immigrants who might come to this country. When two weeks later, a petition was sent to President U. S. Grant by a group of American Jews urging him to use his good offices to assuage the misery of the Jews of West Russia, *The Israelite* printed the complete text of the document.

A month later, *The Jewish Messenger*, commenting on the news of the Berlin Committee’s intention to assist hundreds of Jewish families to emigrate to the United States, expressed its forebodings that this would prove disastrous to the immigrants themselves and would create an excessive burden on the American Jewish community.

**The First H.I.A.S. in America**

In March, 1870, *The Jewish Messenger* reported a meeting at “a Mr. Horn’s house” of the Israelites of New York with the aim of cooperating with the Berlin Committee and aiding the new immigrants. A week later, as a result of the meeting, an organization to be called “The Hebrew Immigrants Aid Society of the City of New York (HIAS)” was formed for the purpose of helping the new immigrants to support themselves and become useful members of society instead of an additional burden upon the community.

In spite of the famine in Russia in 1869-1870 only a few hundred immigrants came to America. But even these few were not kindly regarded by the editors of *The Israelite* and *The Jewish Messenger*. From 1870 onward the periodicals report the existence of the frightening apparition of mass migration in the mind of American Jewry; and though the refugees failed to arrive in any large numbers, there were outcries against the small number that did come.

**Colonization an Early Suggestion — 1879**

One of the positive notes which came out of the seventies was the increasing talk of colonization schemes. Although the editor of *The Jewish Messenger*, while maintaining his opposition to mass emigration, had in 1869 expressed his approval of a plan to settle colonists in the Middle West, it remained for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to form in 1879 an “Agricultural Pursuits Committee” composed of Moritz Ellinger of New York, Julius Freiberg of Cincinnati, Emanuel Wertheimer of Pittsburg, Lazarus Silverman of
Chicago, and Simon Wolf of Washington, to further colonization schemes with regard to future emigration.8

The Dawning of a New Jewish Era — 1880

The "enlightened" reign of Alexander II in Russia did not bring the long-sought-for emancipation of the Jews in that country.9 By 1880 the petty persecutions, the ritual murder accusations and other infamies, were forcing large numbers of Russian Jews to begin to look westward.

In April, 1880, The Jewish Messenger was urging the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to go on with its agricultural schemes for the arriving immigrants,10 and in the following months the attempts of various members of the Union's Agricultural Committee to further its projects were reported. In June, 1880, a new society, "The Independent United Hebrew Association," was formed in New York City for the purpose of assisting Jewish immigrants.11

The increasing persecution of the Jewish population of Russia, as well as disabilities placed upon American Jewish citizens of Russian birth travelling through that despotic country, aroused continuous stir in the general press of America, and expressions of sympathy for the stricken Jews of Russia were not wanting. The noble sentiments of their fellow-Americans heartened the prosperous German Jews who now wanted only to "Americanize" the Russian immigrants before they could become an eyesore. In an editorial for Rosh Hashanah, The Jewish Messenger wrote:12

The steady arrival of Russian Israelites on these shores directs attention to the large numbers who have already made their homes in America and the absence of any agency to Americanize them. In New York alone there are fully twelve thousand and throughout the country they may be estimated at that figure. They have organized exclusive congregations, have their own societies, weekly papers, and present the appearance of a separate community. There is a lack of refinement and true spirituality despite the exactness with which they adhere to their traditional habits. It is the duty of our wealthy congregations to unite in some vigorous movement for their benefit. Let our ministers arrange a movement for their benefit by means of simple lectures in German and English. Let visiting committees be organized by our ladies, which shall visit the homes of our poorer co-religionists and refine them, not by money but by the far more precious charity of personal sympathy. Let classes in English be started and the young girls further encouraged to attend the industrial schools now in successful organization. Let a branch synagogue be started downtown supported by an uptown shrine
and let the sermons be of such a simple nature that it will attract, and of such a Jewish character that it will not offend the class intended to be benefited. Is it not better that they should be taught and refined in the synagogue than in the penitentiary?

In the last months of 1880 The Jewish Messenger and The American Israelite both reiterated their requests that the UAHC pursue its agricultural plans with energy and spirit. The American Israelite considered that work second in importance only to the establishment of the Hebrew Union College. By all indications, however, the year passed largely with talk of organization rather than with any real practical results.

**The Year of Decision — 1881**

If it is true that a calm precedes a storm, that truth was certainly exemplified in the early months of 1881. References to emigrants are scant; the attention of American Jewry seems to have been directed elsewhere. The editor of The Jewish Messenger broke the uncommon silence on the aggravated Russian question when, on February 11, he urged that “more stringent emigration laws are needed” because the London Board of Guardians were sending “utterly helpless” immigrants to the United States.14

When, shortly thereafter, Alexander II was assassinated and the pogroms against the Jews began, both The American Israelite and The Jewish Messenger persisted in identifying the pogromists, later to be charged as government-inspired, as typical Nihilists.15 The reaction of one correspondent writing to The Jewish Messenger was that the three million Jews of Russia ought, like the three million American colonists of 1776, to take up arms and fight for their liberties.16 The editor of The Jewish Messenger, fearing large-scale immigration, opined that a practical solution to the problem of the Russian Jews would be “to send American Jewish missionaries to Russia to civilize them, rather than give them an opportunity to Russianize us in the event of such a colossal immigration.17

**The UAHC Agricultural Scheme**

One of the saddest failures among early efforts to help the immigrants was undoubtedly the “Union Agricultural Scheme.” The Agricultural Pursuits Committee” of the Union was created in June, 1879, but for a year and a half there were no tangible decisions. However, in January, 1881, at the semi-annual meeting of the Board, the Committee met and proposed a plan to solicit money, land, and farm implements from every congregation in the Union.18 At the Union's July Convention the following plan was proposed: “... that each
head of a family be given 100 acres of land free of rent for 7 years. And the Board then to give him a deed for it on payment of its value at the time he took it, at the same time giving him cattle and implements as a loan for five years without interest." For the next few months little was done to carry out this plan. But in November, 1881, The American Israelite announced the Union's project of raising $1,000,000 through the subscription sale of certificates to member congregations and individuals. In spite of the vigor with which the virtues of the project were extolled, the money flowed in only a very minute trickle. The grandiose nature of the plan, the fact that it competed with other campaigns, and the stony indifference which it met on the Eastern Seaboard made its coup de grace a few months later inevitable.

THE FORMATION OF THE H.E.A.S. OF NEW YORK CITY

Unlike Cincinnati and the West, New York was brought face to face with an immediate problem: the relentless arrival of ships, each bearing its cargo of impoverished Jews. Until 1881 the task of caring for the indigent immigrants was undertaken by the United Hebrew Charities, but in that year a special "Russian Emigrant Relief Fund" was organized for the purpose of both raising money and of caring for the refugees. It soon became obvious, however, that a permanent and regular organization with offices, a lodging home, employment bureau, and related services were indispensable, and that, further, it was necessary to extend help not only to the Russians but to the Jews of every nationality arriving in America. Therefore, on November 13, 1881, a committee was named to draft plans for, and to incorporate, a new society. Two weeks later the organization called "The Hebrew Emigration Aid Society of the United States" was formed. Its offices were originally at No. 1 Broadway but were later moved to 15 State Street. Among its first activities was the hiring of suitable houses to lodge the immigrants who generally arrived in a wretched condition after the crowded trans-Atlantic passage.

REACTION TO RUSSIAN IMMIGRANTS — 1881

After the news of the assassination of Alexander II, in March, 1881, and the consequent pogroms, had reached America, new appeals for funds to aid the persecuted Russian Jews were printed in the Anglo-Jewish press. The Jewish Messenger in August of that year pointed out that while the five leading cities of Europe had already subscribed $200,000 for the Russian Jewish Relief Fund "New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and other prominent cities of the Union are extraordinarily backward." When, after the Russian exiles had arrived in
America and had been relayed to various communities in the interior, complaints began to come in against them from these points, *The Jewish Messenger* pointed out that no complaints were ethical because "the crime which Russia committed in driving out of her cities these industrious and honest residents, bears in its train unmerited suffering for the exiles and a great responsibility imposed upon their brethren of Europe and America."²⁵

Isaac Mayer Wise in *The American Israelite* also wrote with sympathy for the suffering Jews of Europe:

We ought to bear in mind that the Jews of Russia and Prussia are insulted and maltreated simply because they are Jews; hence every Jew in the world is insulted and outraged with them ... Tens of thousands of non-Israelites here, in England, France, in fact in all constitutional countries, will be ready if we move to condemn loudly and publicly the proceedings in Russia and Prussia against Jews. *We propose to marshal the most terrible army*, the public opinion of the most civilized nations.²⁶

Nevertheless, the American Jewish community was still not ready to accept the prospect of really large-scale immigration. When M. Goldschmidt of the Paris Branch of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* wrote to the New York Board of Delegates asking for the furtherance of agricultural colonies and pointing out the likelihood of increased immigration,²⁷ the Board replied that it could not agree that immigration to America was the great panacea for the woes of the Russian Jews. After pointing out the difficulty of colonization schemes, it agreed grudgingly to accept 150 able-bodied immigrants a month, provided they had been given clean, substantial clothing before leaving Europe.²⁸

This exchange of letters proves that, as far as the American Jewish community is concerned, the year 1881 ended with a half-hearted decision: Russian emigration to America must go on. The die was cast; America was prepared to receive a handful of immigrants. But conditions in Europe were relentlessly forcing thousands, and ultimately, hundreds of thousands to seek new homes.

**THE FIRST YEAR OF THE GREAT EXODUS — 1882**

**NATIONAL DEMONSTRATIONS**

In the early weeks of 1882 the continuous news of Russian persecution called forth demonstrations and mass meetings of protest in New York, Pittsburg, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and Montreal.

The New York meeting, held in Chickering Hall on February 1, 1882, was called through a proclamation among whose signers were ex-President U. S. Grant, Carl Schurz, Oliver Harriman, Whitelaw
Reid, and Leland Stanford. The proclamation summoned the citizens of New York, without distinction of creed, to assemble for the purpose of expressing their sympathy with the persecuted Hebrews of the Russian Empire. From the outset it was desired to achieve a certain moral effect by having the meetings endorsed, attended, and addressed by non-Israelites. Thus the New York meeting appeared to have been planned under Christian auspices. But the initiative, the funds to support it, and the implementation of the results of the meeting, were handled by Jewish leaders who remained anonymous.

The Chickering Hall meeting was well attended, with an overflow crowd in the streets, and tremendous indignation was generated. A resolution was adopted to appeal to the United States Government to use its influence with the Russian government to stay the persecutions of the Jews, to redress their injuries, and to secure their safety.29

The mass meetings held in the early months of 1882 in the other cities mentioned above passed resolutions of a similar character. In all of these convocations Christian clergymen, Protestant and Catholic, took leading parts.

All of these mass meetings had a great moral effect on the Jewish community of America in that it gave it a sense of brotherliness and unity with its Christian neighbors. But besides this moral effect the assemblies achieved little. The Jews of America were still saddled with the whole financial, moral, and social responsibility for the incoming Russian refugees. Nor had the chimera of unity on a national scale erased the conflicts and disharmonies which the previous years had bred between the Jews of the Atlantic Coast and the Jews of the Midwest, between colonization and non-colonization schemes, between the big cities and the small communities. These conflicts were yet to be resolved.

THE EAST OUBIDS THE WEST

By 1882 a very real conflict was developing between the forces in New York City and the forces in Cincinnati dealing with the immigration problem. One excellent illustration of the presence of this situation was the reaction of the West (or the Union Board of Delegates) to the decision of the East (or the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society) as to who should represent America in Europe.

When the H.E.A.S. in January, 1882, authorized Moritz Ellinger to travel to Europe as its representative, Judge M. Isaacs, chairman of the Board of Delegates, announced that the “Committee in charge of Russian exiles appointed at the motion of the Executive Board (in June, 1881) had been superseded by the H.E.A.S.”28 This was one of the first signs of defeat suffered by the Board of Delegates.
Though the Midwest-dominated Board of Delegates temporarily admitted defeat concerning the disposition of, and responsibility for, the Russian exiles, the editor of *The American Israelite* was not ready to give in completely. In January, an article was published which criticized the New York Committee and implied that the Union of American Hebrew Congregations must still be looked to for leadership.31

In a remarkably caustic letter, J. Stanwood Menken, who was the head of the H.E.A.S., denounced the Union, declaring that so far it had done little more than make promises, and that it had failed both in raising funds and in implementing its colonization schemes.32

In an unusually weak reply in the following issue of *The American Israelite*, Wise editorially remarked that both the U.A.H.C. and the H.E.A.S. could participate in the work.33 But at its semi-annual meeting, the Board of Delegates announced that, though it had adhered to its promise of cooperation with the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* made in June, 1881, and despite the fact that the U.A.H.C. had already made attempts to implement its promise by circularizing the country, “since the immigrants are now received at New York by a chartered organization, the H.E.A.S. of the United States, accordingly, this Board no longer assumes any charge of the subject of material aid for emigrants arriving in the U. S.”34

**CONFERENCE OF AID SOCIETIES**

In March, 1882, the “Emigrant Aid Society of Cincinnati,” led by the same representatives of the Union Agricultural Plan but with no official connection, printed and distributed a resolution calling for a national convention of Emigrant Aid Societies.35

The suggestion was eagerly accepted by New York, and the resulting conference of the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Societies held in New York on June 4, 1882, was the first really successful united Jewish gathering on behalf of the Russian emigrant in the history of the United States.

The one-day meeting, called to order by H. S. Henry, president of the New York H.E.A.S., attracted delegates from all over the country.36 It listened to an address by Henry on the history of the H.E.A.S. and on some reasons for the convention, to a report by Mr. George S. Yates of the Mansion House in England who declared that Europe now recognized the H.E.A.S. of the United States, and that in the future New York would receive from England emigrants and funds, both unfettered by conditions of any kind, to an account
by Moritz Ellinger of his trip to Europe and of the message he had
given to the European Jewish leaders,37 to a report by J. Stanwood
Menken on the first Russian colony in the United States, in Cata-
houla Parish, Louisiana;38 and to a report by Julius Goldman on his
trip to the West.39 The results of this trip were epitomized, it is
interesting to note, in the principles that no American agricultural
colony should be organized upon a communistic or cooperative plan
and that colonization should be conducted strictly on business prin-
ciples and not as charity.

The reports and the discussion which followed crystallized in a
series of unanimously adopted resolutions: (1) that a national organi-
ization had come into being known as the H.E.A.S. of the United
States; (2) that the burden of incoming refugees required the estab-
lishment of a new organization, a colonization society to operate on
commercial principles; (3) that emigrants were to be forwarded to the
port of New York; (4) that a new drive was to be organized for a
larger accession of funds; and (5) that the parent society in New York
was to have branches in every principal city of the United States.

Jubilation reigned at the adjournment of this conference. The
delegates returned to their respective cities heartened by a sense of
accomplishment and unified in purpose. Superficially all the bickering,
jockeying for position, and inter-organizational squabbles seemed to
have been dissipated by the superb harmony achieved. Little did these
men realize that by the following June, most of the emigration
societies in the United States would be dissolved and that the unity
of June, 1882, would be but a passing memory.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE FRATERNAL ORDERS TOWARD
THE IMMIGRATION PROBLEM

We must now consider the role of the three important orders which
controlled Jewish fraternal life in the eighties—the Kesher Shel Barzel,
the Free Sons of Israel, and the International Order of Bnai Brith
(I.O.B.B.)—in dealing with the problem of aiding the refugees.

An examination of the newspaper reports shows that each of these
orders examined its relationship to the immigration problem, but that
all of them shied away from it realizing that it was rightfully a na-
tional issue and that, were the orders to assume responsibility for the
Russian Jews, the rest of the country, with a sigh of relief, would
saddle the problem on them.

RUSSIAN SELF-HELP

It must be said, in all fairness, that the American Jews of Russian
and Polish extraction also realized their responsibilities toward the
incoming refugees. On January 13, 1882, a report appeared in The Jewish Messenger describing a meeting of delegates from fifteen downtown congregations to organize an auxiliary society for Russian immigrants. This meeting of Russian and Polish Jews resulted in the formation of the "Down-Town Emigrant Society" as a subsidiary of the H.E.A.S. In the period that followed collections were made by these poorer Jews and turned over to the main society.

THE RUSSIAN REFUGEE AND COLONIZATION FUND

Against the backdrop of a continuous stream of emigrants making unabated demands upon the resources of American Jewry, one must visualize the attempts to raise unprecedented sums of money. The first ambitious campaign for funds was an aftermath of the Chickering Hall Mass Meeting. With Jacob Schiff as one of its leaders, the "Russian Refugee and Colonization Fund, announced a large-scale fundraising program in March, 1883. Schiff himself contributed $10,000 to erect the "Schiff Refuge" on Ward's Island, and a few other large donors contributed sizeable sums. But on the whole the results were very disappointing. Letters from correspondents in various cities to the editors of the Anglo-Jewish papers contained blistering indictments of the callousness and indifference of American Jewry to the sufferings of the Russian refugees.

Indeed, the philanthropy of American Jewry was in no way equal to its capacity to give. The work done in 1882 on behalf of the immigrants was rightly called "the gloomiest chapter in the history of American Jewish charity."

REACTION TO RUSSIAN IMMIGRANTS

From the very first weeks of 1882 on the Russian immigrants poured into America. The method of handling them was never really well-organized though valiant attempts were made to deal with each boat-load systematically.

The usual procedure was to meet the incoming boats and take the immigrants to the offices of the H.E.A.S. There they were fed and in some cases given new clothing. Those who could be employed in trades were "weaned out" while the remainder were shipped to Ward's Island as wards of the Emigrant Society. Representatives of outlying cities were then called in to take as many of the emigrants as possible to the various cities.

While the New York Committee received numerous complaints from the communities to which immigrants had been sent for not using discretion, the immigrants themselves had serious grievances against the H.E.A.S. In the disputes that came into public view The
east side, new york city
Jewish Messenger often pleaded for more decent treatment of the immigrants. In reporting complaints of the immigrants against the H.E.A.S. in April, 1882, The Jewish Messenger commented: "It is not to be expected that the attachés will tender the emigrants cologne and kid gloves, but kind words cost nothing."46

The emigrants themselves created problems which resulted in rifts and misunderstandings. Large numbers refused to accept employment which required work on the Sabbath.47 The question of kosher food came up,48 although Voorsanger of Texas wrote to The American Israelite that "the Russian Jews who have arrived here are not as scrupulous about orthodoxy as one might have thought initially."49

While early in 1882 The Jewish Messenger had suggested the establishment of "Down-town Synagogues" along modern lines for the Russians,50 The American Israelite had an even more startling proposal, namely, to enroll some of the young Russian Jews at the Hebrew Union College to enable them to become enlightened teachers of their brethren.51 This was just one year before the first class at the College graduated.

Notices of success in adjusting the Russian refugees to the American scene are not wanting,52 but they are few and far between. More general was the attitude of the Cincinnati Emigrant Society which received 146 refugees in 1882 and expressed the following dictum:

The sluggards of the flock are made to understand that they must work or perish and all their excuses and arguments will not move the committee from their adopted rule to aid the industrious to the fullest extent of their ability, but the sluggard who means to live by charity must help himself, and teaching him that great lesson is doing the best charity for him.53

THE YEARS OF TRANSITION - 1883-1884
DISSOLUTION OF THE EMIGRANT AID SOCIETIES

By November, 1882, the death-knell was already being sounded for the Emigrant Aid Societies which had sprung into existence spasmodically during that fateful year, in spite of the fact that the national convention of the societies held in June had given a boost to the efforts of the individual organizations.

One of the reasons given, which seems fallacious in view of immigration statistics,54 was that immigration no longer warranted the need for such societies. Perhaps the real reason was given by Augustus A. Levey in his letter of resignation from the H.E.A.S.55 In this important document Levey pointed out that many emigrants were incapable of becoming American citizens fully employed. Hence further aid to those already in New York might be construed as an invitation to the millions still in Europe.
The final end of the H.E.A.S. was announced on March 2, 1883. On that day *The Jewish Messenger* reported: "The attention of the officers of the H.E.A.S. is devoted at present to the winding up of its affairs. It will go out of existence on the 15th inst."56 The same issue reported: "The various emigrant societies in the different interior cities have now dissolved, and Russian emigrants will have to shift for themselves, as those of other nationalities have done for decades."57

Funds which had been collected for the Russian emigrants were transferred to the account of the United Hebrew Charities and all incoming funds earmarked for Russian emigrants were placed in the special fund now created.58

Thus ended an exciting episode in American Jewish philanthropy and unity. It must be noted here, however, that the creation of emigrant aid societies had ceased only for a time. And the sense of unity needed for implementing national philanthropic aid would in future years be applied with more beneficial results to other organizations.

**Activity of the U.A.H.C. — 1883-1884**

The "Committee on Agricultural Pursuits" of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations continued in existence during the years 1883-1884. Its avowed purpose was still the promotion of agricultural schemes for the incoming Russian refugees. However, the U.A.H.C., not unlike the whole country, was going through a readjustment following the exciting events of 1882, so that the years 1883-84 were barren of any tangible results on behalf of the Russian refugees.

**Return of Immigrants to Europe**

By 1883, a tendency was noted of the desire on the part of certain immigrants to return to Europe. In January of that year the Executive Committee of the New York United Hebrew Charities had to act on 138 such cases.59

By 1883 also, the increased rate of immigration, not only of Russian Jews, but of Irishmen, Germans, and Italians, had brought about a deep resentment against "pauper immigration" on the part of the American public. By March, 1884, the State of New York had passed restrictive immigration laws, and *The American Israelite* suggested the use of these laws by the immigration authorities to return some 200 indigent Russian refugees who were about to arrive on the steamer California.60

Constant agitation against indiscriminate immigration had its overtones in the relations between New York and the European committees. The United Hebrew Charities was authorized to officially notify the European committees that United States immigration laws
would be strictly enforced owing to the constant influx of "assisted" foreign poor. Blame for the arrival of the pauper class was divided between the shipping companies and the European committees.\textsuperscript{61}

**EDUCATIONAL MEDIA AND REACTIONS**

The presence of a presumed "uneducated" class of Russian Jews prompted many programs for helping those immigrants who remained in New York City. In October, 1883, evening classes for the instruction of Russian workingmen were established at the "Five Points House of Industry."\textsuperscript{62}

Agitation for "mission work among the Hebrew tenements" was strongly advocated. The editor of *The Jewish Messenger*, evidently overwhelmed by his contact with the Russian Jews, called for a "genuine reformer" to teach these newcomers to distinguish between "the Judaism of an Isaiah and of an obscure cabbalistical Maggid."\textsuperscript{63} Some of the reformers did confront the Russians. Noteworthy among them were Kaufmann Kohler who consented to give a series of Sabbath afternoon addresses downtown\textsuperscript{64} and Emma Lazarus who agreed to give up her Sunday afternoons to instruct young Russian Jewesses in the English language.\textsuperscript{65}

But perhaps the best practical effort made to help the Russian emigrant was the opening of the New Hebrew Technical Institute at 206, East Broadway in January, 1884.\textsuperscript{66} Industrial training of the kind offered in this school would make the immigrants independent of the apathetic charity givers of New York.

Not a little of the enthusiasm for religious reformation among the Russian Jews was prompted by the fear that the struggling immigrants might "contaminate" themselves by joining labor unions unless they were properly indoctrinated "morally." Fair warning was given the Russian Jews by their uptown patrons not to allow themselves to become identified with socialistic labor movements "led by a few doctrinaires and demagogues."\textsuperscript{67} When the 'segar' makers of New York went on strike in August, 1883, the Jewish workers were promptly informed that they could not hope for charity while they refused to go back to work.\textsuperscript{68}

**TENEMENT REFORM**

One of the most disagreeable results of the Russian emigration was the creation of an American ghetto in downtown New York where, in dark, dank, unventilated tenement houses, the refugees eked out a miserable existence. The wretched conditions in the tenements were the subject of many anxious editorials,\textsuperscript{69} and by the close of 1884 tangible results were forthcoming. At that time the "Montefiore
HESTER STREET, NEW YORK CITY

J. Y. Public Library Picture Collection
Society for Tenement House Reform was founded. Among its members were Felix Adler, Kaufmann Kohler, and Cyrus Sulzberger.70

THE RUSSIAN PERIOD BEGINS 1885-1890

The period from 1885 to 1890 is noteworthy for its evidence of vital and powerful impulses toward organization and creativity in the formation of synagogues, clubs, newspapers, labor unions, and similar institutions by the Russian Jews who had already arrived and were beginning to adjust themselves to the American scene.

The editor of The Jewish Messenger expressed the keynote of the years 1885-1890 when he wrote early in 1884:

... The situation in Russia is growing less hopeful, despite occasional rifts in the clouds. Another exodus is by no means so impossible if fresh persecutions arise; and even without any such painful stimulus, the success of their brethren will prove a powerful magnet for further settlements. America has had its periods of Portuguese, Polish, and German settlement. The Russian period has begun in earnest. Will its influence prove wholesome or the reverse?71

THE SILVER ANNIVERSARY OF THE ALLIANCE ISRAELITE UNIVERSELLE

The year 1885 marked the silver anniversary of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the European branches of which had until that time been instrumental in shipping large numbers of refugees to the United States.

Responding to appeals for the formation of new branches of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a number of American communities organized active societies in 1885. Up until that time the only branch of the Alliance Israélite Universelle had been in Philadelphia, but in that year branches were also formed in New York, Houston, New Orleans, San Francisco, St. Paul, and other cities. However, in spite of the interest manifested in helping the educational programs of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the results were not great.

THE FORMATION OF THE ASSOCIATED HEBREW CHARITIES

The “Associated Hebrew Charities of the U.S.” was organized at a convention in St. Louis in July, 1885. A month after the convention, which was attended by delegates from practically every large city in the United States, Marcus Bernheimer addressed a letter to every Jewish community in America urging the formation of more Relief Societies and their affiliation with the Associated Charities, “for it is only by a united effort that success can be obtained.”72 The success of the Associated Charities in attracting into membership the various
local organizations was considerable, Cleveland and Cincinnati being the only important cities in the West which refused to join.

**ATTITUDE TOWARD INCREASED IMMIGRATION**

The floods of pauperized immigrants pouring into America were generally not pleasing to the majority of American Jewry. The immigrants were not completely without advocates, however. In a lecture in 1887 the Hon. B. F. Peixotto depicted the wholesale migrations as historical necessities and urged the furthering of colonization schemes.73

The editor of *The Jewish Messenger*, too, when the Russian emigrants were attacked by a general newspaper,74 or when the news spread of a proposed new party to restrict immigration,75 rose to their defense with vigor and decision.

What really troubled the American Jewish community was the proverbial pauper class. These might conceivably remain permanent wards of the charitable societies, depleting resources, filling the charitable institutions, bringing a black name to the record of American Jewry, and perhaps even inciting anti-Semitism. American Jewry was very sensitive on this score.

The increased persecutions in Russia brought new thousands of refugees. These new immigrants convinced American Jewry that debates over immigration control, could only be "an absorbing topic of conversation" or an academic question. The immigrants were coming; they could not be stopped. American Israel had now become a "Neapolitan Cream" (an early version of the "melting pot").76

**THE HEBREW IMMIGRANT PROTECTIVE SOCIETY**

During the years of greatest immigration in the eighties, from 1885 to 1890, the most important organization established on behalf of the Russian Jews was the "Jewish Protective Emigrant Aid Society." It was formally called into existence at a meeting held on February 20, 1885, at Pythagoras Hall in New York. The organizer was J. Judelsohn of Philadelphia, a Russian-born Jew who was known as a champion of his fellow Russian Jews, and the chairman of the meeting was Coroner Ferdinand Levy. The objects of the Society, as outlined in a circular issued on September 1, 1886, were:

1. . . . To assist immigrants on their arriving here to reach their respective place of destination, so that they may not all crowd in this city.
2. . . . To help them find their relatives and friends and communicate with them with a view to putting them under their protection and care.
3. . . . To obviate misunderstandings between the immigrants
Orchard Street in the East Side Ghetto, N.Y.
and the authorities at the busy Castle Garden reception center.
4. . . . To guard immigrants against impositions . . .
5. . . . To procure useful wcrk and employment for the newcomers.77

The Immigrant Protective Society was, by comparison, a modern Traveler's Aid Society and an Anti-Defamation League rolled into one. Though its work was limited (at its first annual meeting the I.P.S. reported the expenditure of $1000 with 200 emigrants assisted), it did provide a real service to the emigrant. The experience its officers gained was useful in saving emigrants from being shipped back to Europe for various reasons and in making their first crucial hours upon the American shore a little easier.

CONTINUATION OF TENEMENT REFORM

For mixed reasons—civic pride, religious sentiment, loyalty, shame, and fear—the older Jewish inhabitants of New York, as a class, viewed with dismay the growth of a ghetto of miserable tenement houses on the East Side and worked for a reform in the living conditions of their poverty-stricken co-religionists.

The methods of tenement reform were constantly discussed in the pages of The Jewish Messenger. Often those who wrote about conditions in the ghetto were merely horror-striicken and not too sympathetic. But Nathan Bijur wrote: “I saw how men with talent and wit and power to do great things were here cramped within the narrow compass of poverty-stricken and squalid surroundings.”

In May, 1885, a “Tenement House Building Committee” was organized by leading Jews and Christians of New York which had as its object “to purchase, maintain and improve real estate for residence and apartment houses.”78 The “Sanitary Aid Society,” founded in 1884, was immediately involved in efforts to improve sanitary and health conditions in the Lower East Side.79 One of its most significant undertakings was the opening of model lodging houses. The society also took up cudgels against unscrupulous landlords and renting agents. It publicized its investigations and openly denounced the worst of the offending landlords.

ATTITUDE TOWARD RUSSIAN JEWISH SYNAGOGUE ACTIVITY

The wave of immigration in the eighties brought in its wake the flourishing development of synagogue life by the Russian Jews. By the end of the decade “shools” had sprung up in practically all the large cities.80

To the fashionable uptown Jews of New York, already grown accustomed to limiting their synagogue activity to perfunctory attend-
ance at services several times a year, the feverish activity of the Russian Jews, not only in building synagogues but in frequenting them, was a source of amazement.

The prolific growth of synagogue activity brought about, in 1888, the election of a chief rabbi by the larger Russian and Polish congregations of New York. The coming of the chief rabbi, Jacob Joseph of Wilna, was viewed with tremendous enthusiasm by the Orthodox Russian Jews but with some apprehension by the German Jews. Joseph's first public address on Shabbath Nachamu was viewed with considerable disdain by The Jewish Messenger, although The American Israelite found it commendable, as did Felix Adler, the leader of the Ethical Culture Society, who wrote: "... The standard of piety which Rabbi Joseph described is one by which we must all abide."

Relations between the down-town "Chief Rabbi" and the uptown press soon became strained. The Jewish Messenger found it necessary to remind the rabbi that his authority was limited "to his own congregation or congregations only." When Joseph publicized an edict of his concerning the kosher killing of chickens, the bad publicity irked The Jewish Messenger. It was again particularly disturbed when, in 1889, Joseph was chosen as the spokesman for American Jewry at the proposed Centennial Celebration. Salt was added to the smarting wounds of the uptowners when the New York Herald referred to Joseph as the "Chief Rabbi of the Jews of New York."

The remarkable success which Joseph had in imposing his authority on a large segment of the Russian Jewish population and the accompanying prestige and publicity which he brought to his flock encouraged other groups to look for a chief rabbi. In May, 1889, the Galician congregations engaged Rabbi Moses Rappaport of Galicia, and in the following August, the Hungarians also voted to obtain a chief rabbi.

In general, the reaction of the German Jewish population to this "European" method of organizing Jewish life was one of resentment, dismay, and cynicism.

NEGATIVE REACTION TO RUSSIAN JEWISH PRACTICES

The feverish struggle for existence by the Russian Jewish population during the eighties was colored by its attempt to adjust its religious and social practices to the American scene. That the process of adjustment did not pass without frictions and conflicts is completely understandable. Huddled in crowded tenements, the refugees lived their unusual way of life with its old-world flavor and its Orthodox strictures, receiving much attention from the daily press and the uptown Anglo-Jewish papers.
The Jewish Messenger rebuked the Russian Jews when a disturbance was created at a meeting of one of their societies over the election of officers. The American Hebrew and Jewish Tribune sharply criticized a group of Russian Jews who had held a Yom Kippur Ball. The Jewish Messenger also expressed its severe disapproval of the socialistic and anarchistic tendencies of some of the Russian Jews. The Yiddish press was also criticized on two counts, namely, that Yiddish was detrimental to the Americanizing process and that the Yiddish papers tended to be socialistic. Contempt was expressed for the Russian Jews who Americanized their exotic patronymics into shorter ones, for the kosher restaurants which began to abound, for certain Russian Jewish tailors arrested for working on Sundays, for the custom of "schnorring" (begging) at cemeteries, for the Yiddish theatres in the Bowery, and, finally, for the Orthodox practice of obtaining a get (divorce) without procuring a legal civil divorce.

ATTITUDE TOWARD RUSSIAN JEWS AS STRIKERS

That means of economic integration which was adopted by the Russian Jews, joining unions and strikes, met consistent opposition from the Anglo-Jewish press. The Jewish Messenger was not a workingman's newspaper. It mirrored the social snobbishness, the middle-class stirrings, the conservative politics of an employer class. It was also the organ of those who considered themselves the benefactors of the Russian Jewish masses.

What perhaps irked The Jewish Messenger more than anything else was that the immigrants who had arrived but a year or so before, poor and pleading for help, were now showing their ungratefulness by engaging in strikes.

Labeling such activity "moral hydrophobia," The Jewish Messenger cautioned Jews not to affiliate themselves with the "Russian Protective Union," supposedly a Nihilistic movement. The reason given was that the newspapers were beginning to identify the words "Jew" and "Nihilist." At least one man, however, tried to be impartial. In one of his Sunday lectures Felix Adler forcibly objected to a few foreign immigrants being made the scapegoat for anarchism in America. "It is the enormous growth and power of corporations," he said, "which is the real cause of the evil and a source of greater apprehension for America's future than the vagaries of Most, Spies [the anarchists] and kindred spirits."

POSITIVE REACTIONS TO RUSSIAN IMMIGRATIONS

Frictions between Russian Jew and German Jew (upper class and lower class, old immigrant and new immigrant, rich and poor, eman-
ciated and tradition bound, etc.) were bound to arise in the hectic ninth decade of the nineteenth century. To have had none would have been cause for wonder. But the crucial points to be observed, for these would indicate the path to future rapprochement, were those instances where “Uptown” Jew and “Downtown” Jew were appreciative of one another. There are not many illustrations of the spirit of harmony, for during the eighties the salutary adjustments of the earlier refugees were overshadowed by the arrival of new problems in the form of more hungry, homeless, jobless immigrants.

The first and best results of immigration are to be found in the smaller towns and not in the densely populated sections of the larger cities. By 1886 it was already noticeable how peacefully and capably the immigrants of 1881 and 1882 had adjusted to the new life in these smaller centers. The older inhabitants of Milwaukee, New Haven, Dayton, Memphis, Scranton, and Portland, Oregon, reported with pleasure the remarkably quick success of the efforts of the new immigrants to establish themselves as respectable members of the community.

A new spirit of cooperation and friendliness was developing by 1890 between the Russian and German Jews. When outrages were committed against their Russian coreligionists, the German Jews were quick to voice their concern and exercise their sympathy. Some of the latter were even beginning to show signs of irritation towards the icy snobbishness of members of their own groups toward the Russians. One of the most important of these foes of prejudice from within was Mayer Sulzberger.

By the end of the first decade of immigration there was a growing number of German Jews who felt a real tie of kinship and fraternity with the Russian Jews. In the early eighties these individuals could be classed in two categories. First and most significant were such radiant idealists as Emma Lazarus, Henrietta Szold, Michael Heilprin, and the enlightened members of the rabbinate (Kohler, Morais, et al.). These people, immediately sensing the historic import of the mass migrations, reacted warmly and sympathetically. Following their inspiration, many other men and women gave of their time, money, effort, and encouragement. Their names are mostly anonymous, but their deeds, especially in the early years of the decade, gave impetus to the still larger immigrations of later years.

In the second important category were the rich, high-placed Jews who became leaders in the crisis. These men, Jacob Schiff, Moritz Ellinger, M. Loth, C. Sulzberger, H. S. Henry, Benjamin Peixotto, and numerous others, filled with a profound sense of responsibility for their fellow-Jews, gave of their money and time liberally, adding pres-
tige and power to the cause of the helpless refugees and bringing it about that the Russian Jewish immigrants, the most cursed people of Europe, were the most fortunate arrivals on the American shore, for no nationality group already in America was so cognizant of their responsibility as the American Jewish population which received the immigrant in the eighties.

In the last analysis the one profound contribution of the American Jew to his Russian brethren, made unwittingly though forcibly, was the honored name which the Jew in general had already achieved by 1880. The heart of America had already warmed to the progress and position of her Sephardic and German Jews. And during those troubled years, in the throes of vexations, with depressing news daily pouring in from Russian zones of persecution, a Christian newspaper, understanding the perplexity and the fear of the Jews of America, published the following words of encouragement:

We would have no apology made for this immigration. We would not have our Jewish friends feel that such immigrants, however humble, are unwelcome. We will find room for them, work for them, homes for them, ballots for them. They will add to our strength, to our wealth, to our material, and in the end, to our moral forces... We welcome them. We are grieved at their sufferings; we offer them our liberties and our opportunities. Let them come!

Notes

1The Jewish Messenger, June 25, 1869, p. 4.
2The Israelite, November 26, 1869, p. 11.
3The Israelite, December 10, 1869, p. 11.
4The Jewish Messenger, January 7, 1870, p. 4.
5The Jewish Messenger, March 18, 1870, p. 2.
6The Jewish Messenger, March 25, 1870, p. 4.
7The Jewish Messenger, December 10, 1869, p. 1.
8The Jewish Messenger, June 27, 1879, p. 4.
10The Jewish Messenger, April 9, 1880, p. 1.
11The Jewish Messenger, June 11, 1880, p. 2.
12The Jewish Messenger, September 17, 1880, p. 4.
14The Jewish Messenger, February 11, 1881, p. 4.
15The Jewish Messenger, May 27, 1881, p. 4.
16The Jewish Messenger, May 20, 1881, p. 5 (Correspondence).
17The Jewish Messenger, May 20, 1881, p. 4.
18The American Israelite, February 4, 1881, p. 254.
19The Jewish Messenger, July 15, 1881, p. 5.
20The American Israelite, December 2, 1881, p. 181.
21The Jewish Messenger, September 16, 1881, p. 2.
22The Jewish Messenger, November 18, 1881, p. 6.
23Cf. Z. Szajkowski, "How the Mass Migration to America Began," Jewish
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24 The Jewish Messenger, August 12, 1881, p. 4.
25 The Jewish Messenger, October 28, 1881, p. 4.
26 The American Israelite, August 5, 1881, p. 44.
27 The Jewish Messenger, November 11, 1881, p. 2.
28 The Jewish Messenger, November 11, 1881, pp. 5-6.
29 The addresses of the main speakers, as well as a report of the London Mansion House meeting held on the same day, is found in Proceedings of Meetings Held Feb. 1, 1882, at New York and London To Express Sympathy with the Oppressed Jews in Russia. New York, 1882.
30 The Jewish Messenger, January 13, 1882, p. 4.
31 The American Israelite, January 20, 1882 (Signed by "Star").
32 The Jewish Messenger, January 29, 1882, p. 5 (Correspondence).
33 The American Israelite, February 3, 1882.
34 The Jewish Messenger, February 3, 1882, p. 2.
35 The Jewish Messenger, February 10, 1882, p. 3.
36 Cf. Proceedings of the Conference of Hebrew Emigrant Aid Societies June 4, 1882. Pamphlet found in Jewish Theological Seminary Library. For a complete contemporaneous newspaper account, if pamphlet is unavailable, see The Jewish Messenger of June 9, 1882, pp. 4-5.
39 Report on Colonization of Russian Refugees in the West, New York, 1882. This pamphlet is found also in the Jewish Theological Seminary Library.
40 The Jewish Messenger, January 13, 1882, p. 2.
41 The Jewish Messenger, March 17, 1882, p. 4.
42 The American Israelite, March 17, 1882, p. 298.
43 The American Israelite, July 14, 1882, p. 12.
44 The Jewish Messenger, February 24, 1882, p. 2.
45 The American Israelite, January 13, 1882, p. 231.
46 The Jewish Messenger, April 21, 1882, p. 2. (Cf. The American Israelite August 18, 1882, p. 51, for similar attitude.)
48 The Jewish Messenger, June 23, 1882, p. 4.
49 The American Israelite, September 8, 1882, p. 77.
50 The Jewish Messenger, April 7, 1882, p. 4.
51 The American Israelite, May 26, 1882, p. 581.
52 The American Israelite, July 28, 1882, p. 29; September 8, 1882, p. 78.
53 The American Israelite, January 27, 1882, p. 245.
55 The Jewish Messenger, September 8, 1882, p. 2. (Correspondence).
56 The Jewish Messenger, March 2, 1883, p. 2.
57 Ibid.
58 The Jewish Messenger, March 16, 1883, p. 3.
59 The Jewish Messenger, January 5, 1883, p. 2.
60 The American Israelite, March 15, 1884, p. 2.
61 The Jewish Messenger, August 1, 1884, p. 4.
62 The American Israelite, November 2, 1883, p. 4.
63 The Jewish Messenger, May 23, 1884, p. 4.
64 The Jewish Messenger, June 27, 1884, p. 4.
65 The American Israelite, December 28, 1883, p. 2.
The Jewish Messenger, January 11, 1884, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, July 4, 1884, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, August 10, 1883, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, December 5, 1884, p. 2.
The Jewish Messenger, March 7, 1884, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, January 9, 1885, p. 4; January 23, 1885, p. 4.
The American Israelite, August 21, 1885, p. 2.
The Jewish Messenger, February 4, 1887, p. 2.
The Jewish Messenger, July 8, 1887, p. 1.
The Jewish Messenger, July 29, 1887, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, August 29, 1890, p. 4.
The American Israelite, September 10, 1886, p. 5.
The American Israelite, May 15, 1885, p. 2.
The Jewish Messenger, January 9, 1885, p. 3.
The Jewish Messenger, August 12, 1887, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, August 5, 1887, p. 2.
The Jewish Messenger, July 27, 1888, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, August 10, 1888, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, September 28, 1888, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, October 12, 1888, p. 1.
The Jewish Messenger, December 11, 1885, p. 7.
The Jewish Messenger, January 10, 1890, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, September 19, 1890, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, March 18, 1887, p. 1.
The Jewish Messenger, August 3, 1886, p. 4.
The American Israelite, September 7, 1888, p. 3.
The Jewish Messenger, January 21, 1887, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, April 5, 1889, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, June 18, 1886, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, December 2, 1887, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, December 9, 1887, p. 4.
The Jewish Messenger, October 1, 1886, p. 4.