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The East-West Conflict IN AMERICAN REFORM JUDAISM

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In order to understand properly the nature of the conflict between East (New York City and the Atlantic Seaboard) and West (Cincinnati and the Mississippi River Basin) in American Reform Judaism, it would be well to obtain an understanding of the social, political, and economic conditions in Europe and America in the middle of the

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nineteenth century. In the 1850's, when thousands of Jewish immigrants were coming to the United States, Europe was in political ferment. This was the aftermath of an age of reaction and repression dominated by Metternich and his German Confederation. It was the failure of the sundry revolutions throughout Europe in 1848, and particularly in Germany, that accelerated the rate of Jewish immigration to America. Economic setbacks and political disillusionment brought thousands of German Jews to our shores. To America they looked with faith; in American democracy there was a new hope. But the United States, too, at mid-century, was in the throes of a serious crisis, a struggle to implement the democratic ideas of '76. North-South rivalry was at its height, and sectionalism was the determining factor in American politics.

It was during this turbulent period of history that Rabbis Isaac M. Wise and David Einhorn, the leaders of the dominant and opposing parties in American Reform Judaism in the nineteenth century, appear on the American scene. Like the thousands of refugees who were pouring into our country from Germany at this time, these rabbis came to our shores in search of a measure of freedom. These new German Jewish émigrés, the vast majority of whom had already been aware of Reform Judaism in Germany, associated themselves ultimately with American Reform temples. They came here in what was then considered such huge waves that American Reform temples soon took on a German tinge. Hence there soon emerged the conflict between the German type of Reform Judaism, as influenced by Einhorn, and the developing American Reform Judaism. It is precisely on this issue of American versus German Reform Judaism that Wise and Einhorn parted company. The latter insisted upon the sectarian pattern already in vogue in Germany, while the former stressed unity in American Judaism.

It will be the task of this study to determine whether there was a real conflict in theological outlook between East and West, or whether issues were in effect artificially created because of personality differences between Wise and Einhorn. Did each have a basically different philosophy of Jewish life? Did Wise and Einhorn, as do many leaders in history, reflect the will and religious convictions of specific groups of people? Were the differences between East and West motivated by sectional or regional considerations, as were those of the American community at large at this time? These, then, constitute some of the central questions with which this essay will concern itself. We shall explore the major areas of the East-West conflict and thereby seek to determine whether any of the considerations mentioned above motivated the clash. It is hoped that the material brought together here will shed light upon a struggle which has been, for the most part,

ignored by American Jewish historians and will help us to understand the forces which have exerted influence on the development of American Judaism.

THE DOMINANT PERSONALITIES

In the growth and development of any movement in history the element of personality plays a major role. The leaders of history lead multitudes of men and provide initiative in molding the ideas which make for change. Men of great stature have left their imprint upon their times, with the result that entire ages have been designated by their names. The Age of Caesar, The Age of Metternich, The Age of Jackson, etc., serve to demonstrate the point. In Jewish history, too, this principle may be found to be operative. If one were to designate the outstanding religious personality of the second half of the nineteenth century in American Jewish life, one would find that the choice is limited to two rabbis, Wise and Einhorn. Because they were pioneers in the area of religious reform in America, each left his impress upon a developing American Judaism. Hence, it is from the perspective of their personalities that we approach the ideational conflict in Jewish life in the nineteenth century.

Born in Steingrub, Bohemia, in 1819 in a period which marked the crumbling of French liberalism, Wise received the usual *heder* (religious school) education from his father and grandfather. Neither he nor any of his biographers records anywhere his having received a standard secular education. He was a self-educated man. Consequently, having never been exposed to what might be termed systematic university training, Wise was not dominated by the Germanizing tendencies which characterized many an immigrant rabbi. He plunged into the American scene unhampered by an overdose of Germanism and thus was better able to work towards evolving an American Judaism.

Wise came to the United States in 1846 and was elected rabbi in Albany, New York, after having served in a similar capacity in Radnitz, Bohemia, for a number of years. Already during his incumbency in Albany, where he served a comparatively Orthodox congregation, Wise gave expression to reform ideas through preaching and by his articles in *The Occident*. Only two years after his arrival in the United States, in 1848-49, Wise was already experimenting with schemes for unity in American Jewish life by joining Rabbi Isaac Leeser in calling together a conference of congregations. Though this attempt proved abortive, it nevertheless demonstrates the perspective with which Wise fearlessly viewed the future of American Israel.

Wise left Albany in 1854 after beginning his career as a reformer and was elected rabbi of Congregation Bene Yeshurun in Cincinnati,

a pulpit he occupied for the rest of his life. He founded *The Israelite*, an Anglo-Jewish weekly newspaper, in 1854, and in 1855 added a weekly German companion newspaper called *Die Deborah*. Via his multifarious articles on Jewish theology and on political rights for the Jew, Wise attained country-wide renown and became a leading figure in the American Reform movement. His constant pleas for unity were finally crowned with success with the establishment of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1873 and of the Hebrew Union College in 1875.¹ Thus did Wise become the anchor of Judaism in the Midwest.

David Einhorn, the great leader of Eastern Reform, differed from Wise in many respects. Born in 1809 in the small Bavarian village of Dispeck, Einhorn from early childhood was known as an *iluy* ("genius"). When only seventeen years of age he was the recipient of the rabbinical degree at the Orthodox *yeshivah* ("academy") in Fuerth. Unlike Wise, Einhorn did receive a systematic university education. Soon after his ordination, Einhorn pursued his secular studies at the Bavarian universities of Erlangen, Wuerzburg, and Munich, respectively. Upon his return to Fuerth from the universities he was no longer regarded as an adherent of Orthodox Judaism by the *yeshivah*. Denied the recommendations of his teachers because of his "Reformism," Einhorn was compelled to delay his entry into the active rabbinate for ten years.²

After occupying several minor pulpits from 1842 to 1847, he was appointed chief rabbi of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, the successor of the famed leader of German Reform Judaism, Samuel Holdheim. It was upon his selection for this not unimportant position that Rabbi Wolf Hamburger of Fuerth, who had ordained Einhorn, denounced him as "an insolent and wicked infidel." All during the 1840's Einhorn played an active role in the German rabbinical conferences, where he became a leading spokesman for Reform Judaism. Long before his departure from Europe, Einhorn had already published scholarly articles in the leading journals of the German Reform movement.

In an attempt to escape from reactionary Germany, Einhorn accepted a call to the Reform temple in Budapest, in 1852. When the news of his appointment reached the Austrian government, the authorities, apprehensive of Einhorn's liberalism, ordered the closing of this temple in Budapest. Hence, unlike Wise, Einhorn, upon his arrival in the United States in 1855, had reached a high level of maturity in the struggle for religious and political emancipation. On the Continent he was considered a fighting reformer and had achieved a reputation as one of the distinguished leaders of the German Reform movement. This might very well explain why Einhorn was not so flexible as Wise and less amenable to compromise.

Immediately upon his arrival in America Einhorn became rabbi of Har Sinai Congregation in Baltimore, where he soon emerged as the leader of the Eastern or radical reformers in opposition to the moderate reformers led by Isaac M. Wise. His very first sermon was roundly attacked by Wise as "Deistical," and he was invited "to join the Unitarian Church."³ In 1856 Einhorn commenced the publication of a monthly called *Sinai* which preached a Reform much more radical than that advocated by Wise in the columns of *The Israelite*. In 1858 he published a new prayer book, *Olath Tamid*, which, according to his son-in-law Kaufmann Kohler, formed the basis for the *Union Prayer Book* many years later. Thus we see the beginnings of what soon was to become the conflict between East and West in American Reform Judaism.

Before we embark upon our major theme, it would repay us well to place both Wise and Einhorn in the proper perspective, so far as American geo-political forces are concerned. At that juncture in American history, sectionalism, as we have suggested, was a potent factor in politics. For decades almost all legislative measures had been determined principally by sectional considerations. It may well be that these geographical differences in the community at large reflected themselves in Jewish life. Wise, who lived in Cincinnati, on the border line between the North and the South, was a States' rights man who constantly "soft-pedaled" the issue of slavery for the purpose of preserving the Union. Just as in the religious arena, where he was essentially a compromiser, so also in the arena of politics he played the role of a middle-of-the-road man. In an article aimed at the Abolitionists he lumps together radicalism in religion and radicalism in politics, and says: "Radicalism will not do in any province of human activity . . . Radicalism will not do in politics because there are historical rights which will not yield to theories . . . this same radicalism deprives a man of his religion."⁴

Einhorn, on the other hand, was an Abolitionist, who, soon after the outbreak of hostilities, found it advisable to leave Baltimore because of his anti-slavery preachments. Not alone was Einhorn a revolutionary in religion, but, consistent with prevailing German anti-slavery opinion in the North, he was a liberal in politics, too. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that throughout the Civil War period Wise was strongly critical of the North, particularly with regard to the alleged anti-Semitism in the North. The fact that he consistently printed sermons and letters-to-the-editor which are anti-North seems to convey the impression that he was decidedly more anti-abolitionist than anti-secessionist. He even went so far as to publish prayers for a Confederate victory.⁵

With reference to geo-political forces that had their impact upon

Wise, it should be remembered, too, that in the 1850's Cincinnati, the Queen City of the West, was at the height of an industrial boom and had dreams of challenging the industrial supremacy of the East.⁶ The West was not going to "take orders" from the East. It may be that this feeling of independence and sectional pride was reflected in the fact that Wise assumed leadership in American Israel. This may also be a clue to his insistence upon Cincinnati as the center of American Judaism. In this connection it would be well for us to note a generalization oftentimes made by historians: "Cincinnati has ever been one of the most conservative bodies in the Union."⁷ It is not unlikely, then, that this was the reason why abolitionist activities as well as radicalism in religion were frowned upon by Wise.

THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Although there had been from time to time rumblings by Wise against radical reform, the schism between East and West actually received its impetus with Einhorn's arrival in the United States. From the very beginning, Wise had been unenthusiastic about Samuel Holdheim and his radical proposals. "The Berlin pattern means no religion."⁸ While Wise bitterly opposed splinter groups and sectarianism in Jewish life and envisioned the development of a united American Judaism, Einhorn was quoted as saying: "I have nothing to do with the large majority. . . . I am working for the few enlightened."⁹ As a leading German reformer, Einhorn was bent on transplanting *German Reform Judaism* to America, without reckoning with the peculiarities of the American situation. It is for this reason that Wise continually dubbed the Einhorn approach, "a second edition of Holdheim's."¹⁰

Wise was impatient with those who would make of American Reform Judaism "another Protestant sect." It was precisely this sectarianism, this divorce from the main current of Judaism, which ultimately was responsible for the lack of success of German religious reform. Wise repeatedly demonstrated that the German Reformers failed to capture the imagination of the masses because their motivation was that of convenience instead of consideration of the demands of historical Judaism. This emphasis upon moderate Reform and a developing American tradition, rooted in historical Judaism, remained with Wise throughout. Long after the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was founded, he rejected the reckless sloughing off of ritual and ceremony. "Abolish this, abolish that, is called reform . . . they will never tell you what they believe, they will always tell you what they believe not."¹¹

This theme of moderate Reform is the very core of Wise's theology. He constantly cautions his colleagues to introduce only such reforms

as are legal and within the pale of Judaism. From the outset he expressed his disgust with the chaos that prevailed in Jewish life and set for himself the task of bringing some order into the community. To this end he dedicated his ministry and his weekly journal, *The Israelite*.

REFORM JUDAISM AND THE TALMUD

The controversy with regard to reform within the periphery of traditional Judaism constituted the opening wedge in the struggle between Wise and Einhorn. In 1855 Wise called together a conference of rabbis and laymen in Cleveland for the purpose of creating a synod to legalize the various changes and, thereby, to arrest the tendency towards reckless reform on the part of individual congregations. In order to assuage the fears of the Orthodox group dominated by Rabbi Isaac Leeser of Philadelphia, Wise proposed that the Talmud serve as the legal basis for all changes. He regarded the very existence of the Talmud, itself the result of legal development, as concrete evidence that Reform and progress were part of Jewish tradition.¹² He was prepared to utilize the same legal techniques as were used by the rabbis in all ages when introducing innovations. For him all reforms had to derive their validity from a developing *halachah* ("law"), on the ground of the historical development of our religion. The progressive spirit of the Talmud should be continued in order to abolish meaningless forms and to introduce new practices.

It was to Wise's proposals for legal reform, based on Jewish law, that Einhorn responded violently, calling it: "The foul peace of Cleveland according to which all Israelites must believe in the infallible exegesis of the Talmud."¹³ Particularly apprehensive was Einhorn of Wise's schemes for a synod in whose power it would be to pass upon all reforms. Einhorn saw in the Talmud and the synod the possibility of the development of a hierarchical system in American Judaism. Evidently Einhorn remembered only too well the experiences he had had in Europe, where the conferences were strongly influenced by the Orthodox-minded rabbis because of their overwhelming numbers. He feared that Wise's procedure would stifle the progress of Reform in America. Moreover, the fact that Einhorn's area of operations was the East, where Orthodoxy, dominated by such eminent figures as Leeser and Rabbi Samuel M. Isaacs of New York, was strongly entrenched, made him a fighting reformer who went to the other extreme. Wise, however, was nearer the frontier, in a city where Orthodoxy had not attained a strong foothold, where religious life was more fluid, and hence the people were more amenable to change. Here in the West, Wise was not challenged by a foe of equal stature, hence his approach was more conciliatory. To Wise's credit it must be

said that his insistence upon reform by legitimate authority remained constantly at the core of his struggle with the East. As late as 1870 we still find him exhorting his foes to create a Union so that "progress and reform are legitimate."¹⁴ In fact, it is this constructive philosophy of Judaism which dominated the deliberations of the newly organized Union of American Hebrew Congregations as long as Wise was actually in control.

Einhorn's opposition to the Talmud and to reform within the framework of Jewish law was consistent with the radical line he set for himself in his first American sermon in 1855. He is quoted as saying: "Only the Ten Commandments are the testimony of the covenant, while all other biblical laws are signs of the covenant and may be changed, amended, or abolished . . . only such commandments which are axioms of the human mind are obligatory . . . doctrines which are no axioms of the mind are no longer [required] according to the teachings of obligatory Judaism."¹⁵

This radical departure from organic Judaism aroused Wise's indignation, so much so that he advised his adversary to join the Unitarian Church. After Einhorn published his article setting forth his radical orientation to religion, Wise called him "a Deist, a Unitarian and a Sadducee and an Apostle of deistical rationalism. . . . Einhorn, you should not have so far forgotten that your father was a Jew . . . reclaim publicly your false representations of Judaism and your slanders of the Jew . . . as long as you remain an enemy of the Jews and Judaism, I shall not enter into public controversy with you."¹⁶ In fairness to Einhorn it must be stated, for the record, that the documents to which Wise reacted so violently were never published in full in *The Israelite*. Hence, we glean Einhorn's views only as Wise saw them in his editorials and in infrequent letters to the editor. There are even extended periods during which Wise applied to Einhorn the well-known newspaper technique of "the silent treatment," as, for example, the period between September, 1856, and the end of 1857. However, though Wise repeatedly attacked Einhorn personally, it should be noted that he did not descend to the same level of abuse against the other radical reformers, Adler of New York and Hirsch of Philadelphia. There must have been attacks of an extremely personal nature in Einhorn's publication to have brought forth such an outpouring of wrath on Wise's part. The issue which aroused these personal assaults was radical Reform versus moderate Reform.

Although in later years his philosophy of religion came close to the "axioms of the mind"¹⁷ taught by Einhorn, in practice Wise consistently used the gauge of historical Judaism to determine the validity of specific reforms. As we saw, he viewed changes as legitimate only when they were based upon a developing *halachah* ("law").

For him progress could be effected not by reckless abolition but by constructive growth. Throughout the years we find Wise taking the East to task for what he calls "Negative or Radical Reform": "Reform must be doing something for the common cause of Judaism and not only for the minority. Reform can not be disconnected with the historical development of Judaism."¹⁸

On many occasions we find Wise painstakingly illustrating how a developing *halachah* might be deduced from the classical sources of Jewish law and imploring his contemporaries to use the same techniques:

Elijah's sacrifice on Mount Carmel, when the Bible permits sacrifices only in the central place of worship, Hillel's *prozbul* (circumvention of the year of release), polygamy, and slavery in the Bible show that there are Mosaic laws which were only provisional . . . so the Rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud understood the words of Moses and the prophets . . . so the Spanish, French, Italian, and German philosophers and theologians in Israel, the greatest expounders of the law, understood the Bible and the tradition . . . therefore progress must be the principal law. . . .¹⁹

This demonstrates that it was Wise's aim to unite American Israel by introducing only such reforms as were considered legal and were based upon a developing tradition. The progressive reforms of one section of Judaism must not go so far as to separate it from the main body of Israel, Wise preached. By moderate reform, by obtaining all desirable changes in the legal historical way, the bonds of union in Israel will not be dissolved. Wise looked upon the teachings of the moderate reformers as "the great mission of the center." Their sacred task it was to be the connecting link in the American synagogue "so that we break not into sects."²⁰ It was the negative emphasis in radical reform that constantly infuriated Wise. Reform must have a positive program which serves as a handmaid to liberal theology: "Long enough reform has been negative, saying what we do not believe, what should be abolished and changed . . . the community is tired of that everlasting spirit of negation . . . we need now positive teaching, what we do believe. . . ." ²¹

The theme of positive, progressive reform based upon historical Judaism constitutes the motivating force of Wise's theology during the period covered by this study. His principal objection to the otherwise sound measures adopted by the Philadelphia Conference of 1869, in whose deliberations Einhorn and the East were the dominant figures, was the negative language in which they were couched. Incidentally, Wise participated in this conference too, but his positive program was buried in committee. It was precisely to the assertion

that "they will always tell you what they believe not" that Wise took exception. Wise asked very pointedly: what would have become of American Judaism had we adopted "deformation instead of reformation"?:

What would have become of Judaism had we like [the talmudic heretic] Acher abrogated the whole law and thrown ourselves headlong into the embrace of the supposed spirit of our age and country . . . ? The Jewish spirit in the body of modern Gentile forms is as farcical a deformation as it was eighteen centuries ago, and looks as foreign as it did then to the honest contemplative mind . . . all reforms with the tendency merely to abolish, to ape the style or fashion, or to innovate for innovation's sake, have met and shall always meet with our honest and efficient opposition.²²

REFORM JUDAISM AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

This very same stress upon authority in Jewish life, upon positive Reform Judaism, permeated his orientation towards religious observances. A radical theology must of its very nature lead to the sloughing off of all forms and practices for which no rational justification can be found. Radical Reform, Wise thought, gradually leads one away from the Jewish way of life to the point where one mistakenly believes that an ethical creed is enough. Both East and West agreed that the emergence of a healthy, ever-developing Judaism in free, democratic America called for a cutting away of the superstitious forms that had attached themselves to the body of the faith. The difference between the two factions, however, lies in the extent to which and the method in which this operation is to be performed. The continuous attacks upon radical Reform in the pages of *The Israelite* give us the impression that, whereas Wise looked upon religious practice as "an ante-chamber" to a genuine faith, Einhorn and his party consistently "soft-pedaled" the importance of tangible observances. In order more adequately to comprehend Wise's persistence in his pleas for moderation, let us examine the sociological impact of forces from without upon a disorganized American Jewry.

The threat to the preservation of Judaism came not from the more orthodox Christian sects — though the pressure of their missionary activities irked Wise greatly — but primarily from the ultra-liberal groups in Christianity. Nineteenth century liberalism was reflected in America in the flowering of Unitarianism, which had reached its peak just at the time when Reform Judaism was emerging as a potent force in American Jewish life. For a time the Unitarian Church served as a "catch-all" group, a sort of religious melting pot for all those fleeing for one reason or another from the religion of their fathers.

Though not altogether unfriendly to its philosophy of religion, Wise nevertheless was aware of its potential danger to an evolving Liberal Judaism. His opposition to Radical Reform, which indiscriminately sloughed off almost all Jewish ceremonies, was motivated by the fear that it might lead to Unitarianism, a fear incidentally not altogether unjustified when one studies the preachments of some Eastern rabbis. Within his soul there burned an unquenchable fire for the preservation of Judaism. It was for this reason that he frequently invited the radical reformers to join the Unitarian Church.

When the "illegitimate child" of Unitarianism, the Ethical Culture movement, was founded by Felix Adler, the son of Rabbi Samuel Adler, Wise correctly evaluated it as a menace to Judaism. He immediately embarked upon a frontal attack against Unitarianism and Ethical Culture as well as against the general problem of assimilation. In his sundry onslaughts upon Ethical Culture he maintained that it was the heresy to which Radical Reform led. Thus Wise quoted at length from the critique of Reform Judaism in which Adler showed how close Radical Reform was to this new type of Unitarianism:

Many of the festivals and fast days also were struck from the calendar. One of the most distinctive customs of the Jews, the so-called rite of Abraham's Covenant, was boldly attacked, and though the abolition of this ancient custom is still strenuously resisted, there is little doubt that it will ultimately go with the rest. Samuel Holdheim advocated the propriety of inter-marriage between the Jews and Christians.²³

To such outright heresy the general theme of Wise's frequent replies was the following: "It will be beneficial to Judaism when those who do not wish to be Jews will call themselves by any other name . . . we must drop the dead cargo, and the sooner the better."²⁴

SUNDAY SERVICES AND THE SABBATH

Now with the foregoing perspective let us examine Wise's Judaism as a way of life in so far as it differed from Einhorn's. We shall trace the pattern of Wise's development over a period of years and see to what extent his attitude towards religious observances had undergone any change. For this purpose an institution of major significance to Judaism, the Sabbath, has been selected.

From the outset Wise confronted his readers with the ultimatum that no compromise could be made with respect to *Shabbos*. He poured fire and brimstone upon the heads of Holdheim and Einhorn, "who work to abolish the Sabbath and give us the Sunday as a day of rest."²⁵ He carried on an intensive campaign to convince his congregants that they should close their places of business on the Sabbath.



Let truth will triumph

ISAAC MAYER WISE
IN THE DAYS WHEN HE OPPOSED DAVID EINHORN

As a direct result of this intensive effort for Sabbath observance Wise was happy to report sometime later:

There is scarcely any wholesale market on Sabbath . . . for a large number of Jewish houses transact no business on the Sabbath . . . American congregations, you are bodies constituted for the avowed purpose to maintain Judaism; the Sabbath is the cornerstone of practical Judaism.²⁶

The pace of his success was accelerated so that nearly a decade later he could report with justifiable pride that "four-fifths of all members of the Temple do no business on the Sabbath."²⁷ Along with this plea for abstinence from work on the Sabbath, there was always combined the theme of attending Sabbath services with one's entire family. To this end Wise inaugurated the late Friday evening service on October 19, 1866, an innovation which ultimately was responsible for stemming the tide towards Sunday services.

Through the years his constant cry with regard to the transfer of the main service to Sunday was: "Who gave those gentlemen the right to abolish the Sabbath?" When Kaufmann Kohler, then rabbi of Sinai Congregation in Chicago, introduced regular Sunday services, a bitter debate commenced in the columns of *The Israelite*. Wise quoted the reaction of a Chicago newspaper to Kohler's innovation: "The Jews of this country are coming near a junction with the Christian faith."²⁸ Reacting vigorously to Wise's stinging broadside, Kohler said that he regarded the Sunday service as a *kind of Shabbos Shayni* ("second Sabbath").²⁹ In this Kohler received the unqualified support of Einhorn, his father-in-law, and the other Eastern Reformers.

Wise met this challenge to the Sabbath forcefully. With unsurpassed vigor he lashed out against the radical reformers with the charge of willful destruction of the faith:

We are possibly called upon to behold a contest, waged by Jews against Jews in defense of the very life and soul of Judaism . . . to abolish Saturday as Sabbath and adopt Sunday for this purpose . . . We must desist from this ruthless work, or expect to look upon the spectacle of "Israel destroyed."³⁰

Editorials on Sabbath observance and resolutions by congregations to this effect now appeared more frequently than heretofore. Conscientiously pursuing his ideal, Wise proposed Sabbath resolutions at the various conventions of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the purpose being twofold: to fortify the centrality of the Sabbath in Jewish life and to protect Jewish businesses which closed on the Sabbath.³¹ Thus through the years Wise adhered to the proposition that the sanctity of the Sabbath is one of the foundation stones of our faith. In 1879, even after the breach between East and West

had been healed, after Wise and Einhorn had "buried the hatchet," Wise continued his struggle against the Sunday service:

No Jewish congregation will succeed in permanently establishing a Sunday service . . . nobody can serve two masters, and the Jews will not replace the Sabbath of the Decalogue . . . all the good that could be attained by a Sunday service can be fully reached by a Friday evening service, strictly within the pale of Judaism and to the satisfaction of all parties.³²

TOWARDS AN AMERICAN WORSHIP SERVICE

One of the major disputes between East and West developed around the issue of a uniform liturgy. Soon after his arrival in America, Wise was empowered by a *beth din* ("rabbinic court") in New York to work on a revision of the prayer-book. When he arrived in New York with the *Minhag America* ("American rite") manuscript in the spring of 1847, he found that the *beth din* "was no more" and he returned to Albany feeling despondent. He was not one of those reformers who believed in editing a separate prayer-book for his congregation. He regarded "Such proceeding as autocratic . . . I do not wish to sever the bond of Synagogal unity."³³ He decided not to publish his ritual until a conference of rabbis would revise and endorse it.

It was not until the Cleveland Conference in 1855 that a committee consisting of Rabbis Isaac M. Wise, Rothenheim, Leo Merzbacher, and Isidor Kalisch was appointed to compile an American version of the prayer-book with Wise's manuscript as the basis. In fact, the publication of *Minhag America* in 1857 was the only tangible achievement of the Cleveland Conference. The use of *Minhag America* soon spread to all sections of the country, but most of the Eastern Reform congregations refused to adopt it on the ground that it was part of "the foul peace of Cleveland," where Wise paid allegiance to the talmudic law.

When Einhorn was appointed rabbi of Adath Jeshurun in New York, he accepted the call upon the condition "that *Mein Gebetbuch* would be adopted in place of *Minhag America*."³⁴ It should be remembered that *Minhag America* had both English and German versions. As far as theological orientation was concerned, there was really little room for dispute between the factions: "In *Minhag America* the prayers for the restoration of sacrifices, the personal messiah, and the restoration of the Davidic dynasty are omitted."³⁵

This struggle continued through the Philadelphia Conference in 1869, at which time Wise's proposal to make *Minhag America* the authorized prayer-book of the Conference was buried in committee. However, in 1870, at a conference in New York, and in 1871, in

Cincinnati, both of which the East boycotted, *Minhag America* did receive rabbinical approval. It functioned as a force for unity in the early American Jewish community, particularly in the South, where it became the principal instrument for bringing the congregations around to Reform.³⁶

USE OF THE GERMAN LANGUAGE IN THE AMERICAN SYNAGOGUE

Perhaps one of the major sources of antagonism in the debate between East and West was the use of the German language in American synagogues. While Einhorn made a fetish out of the German language, consistently refusing to preach in English, Wise threw German overboard and in its place made English the vernacular of the temple. Einhorn's attitude might be compared to that of the Orthodox rabbi who refused to preach in any language but Yiddish. Through the years Wise protested against American synagogues which were hyphenated, such as German-American, Polish-American, Hungarian, etc. He campaigned untiringly for the development of an American synagogue which would "triumph over the Polish-Germanic factions, who stand with one leg in Europe and with the other in dreamland."³⁷ While Einhorn was still offering prayers in German on behalf of his *Vaterland*, Wise was reminding him that his was an American synagogue and that "no other land except America and its institutions should be embraced in our prayers."³⁸ Rarely did Wise miss an opportunity to hold forth against the attempt to "germanize the American synagogue."

So that a healthy American Judaism might evolve, Wise continually confronted the Jewish public with the need for English preaching and English prayers. Hence we get a steady stream of editorials on the need for a theological seminary. In the American-trained rabbi he saw a potent force for the creation of an American Judaism. Always pointing to the language limitations as the chief reason for the failure of German rabbis to reach American youth, he felt that the product of an American culture pattern would stimulate the Jews to respond more enthusiastically to the verities of the Jewish faith: "To Germanize American Judaism . . . they call that reform, we call it retrogression . . . to be understood by the people, at least part of the divine service and the sermon must be in the English language."³⁹

Wise demonstrated that all reforms were worthless if the synagogue did not become Americanized. Even as late as the Philadelphia Conference, in 1869, we find Wise accelerating his campaign to banish German from the temples:

We can not be Germanized, therefore our German preachers could not reach the masses . . . All your prayers, prayer-books, sermons, and publications are local and exercise no influence

whatever outside your circles. . . . They forget that they are no longer in the skeptical Germany of twenty-five years ago, that this present generation expect positive religion, positively spoken and tangibly illustrated.⁴⁰

Thus did Wise carry on a struggle against German in order to make Judaism more attractive to Americans, and in order to break down one of the chief obstacles to Jewish unity in America. "Do it in the language understood by all . . . that is the reformer's business in the American Temple,"⁴¹ pleaded Wise. With his objectives of achieving a uniform liturgy and of producing textbooks which should convey the teachings of Judaism to the younger generation, Wise was compelled to fight the worshippers of German openly. It is, of course, needless to follow this debate any further, for in the end Wise emerged triumphant. English soon replaced German in most so-called German temples. Out of this struggle and strife there finally evolved the American worship service which is today in use in the American Reform synagogue.

USE OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

Another area of conflict between East and West that grew up out of the controversy concerning synagogue ritual was the extent to which the Hebrew language was to be used in the worship service. How much Hebrew, if any, was to be included in the modern prayer-book? Should Hebrew be taught in Reform religious schools? These sound like contemporary problems confronting rabbis today. But already in Wise's time the precise role of the Holy Tongue confounded many a liberal rabbi. After visiting some of the cities in 1857, Wise returned to Cincinnati shocked at the illiteracy of the pupils: "Loudly and vehemently we protest against the unpardonable negligence of Hebrew instruction and the forgetfulness of our national literature. We protest against this new-fangled Christian system because it is pregnant with the ruin of Judaism."⁴²

Again and again Wise emphasized the need for a more comprehensive Jewish education the core of which is the Hebrew language. Inasmuch as his whole approach to Jewish life in America was motivated by the principle of unity, it is not surprising to find Wise laying so much stress on Hebrew. He looked upon the Hebrew language as a unifying force. In criticizing the elimination of Hebrew from the worship service of some Eastern Reform temples, Wise said:

The individual must pray in the language he knows best, but these services must be conducted in Hebrew not merely to maintain the union of Israel in the synagogue, but to maintain the language of the bible in the mouth of Israel. Hymns, prayers, sermon in English, but the main portion of the

divine service must remain in Hebrew, *k'day sheloh tishtakach Torah miYisroel* ("so that the Torah should not be forgotten by the Jewish people").⁴³

Notice how prophetic Wise was in this respect; he saw clearly the correlation between illiteracy and irreligion. When a misguided reformer proudly reported to Wise, through the letters-to-the-editor section, that his congregation was "really reformed" because Hebrew had been completely eliminated from the worship service, Wise wrote: "Take away the Hebrew from the synagogue and school and you take the liberty of conscience from the Israelite . . . this is not the object of reform — not on ignorance, on knowledge the hope of your cause is based."⁴⁴

As time passed by, Wise saw the shadow of ignorance lurking in the congregational religious schools and attributed this situation to the lack of emphasis upon, and even to the complete elimination of, the Hebrew language in the curriculum.

All Hebrew schools in which the pupils are not taught to read and understand the Hebrew Bible are perfectly useless, and we do solemnly protest against their existence. They deceive parents and children alike . . . they rob Israel of the rising generation, and Judaism of its sons and daughters. Catechisms are an assistance to the Bible study or they are nothing. Hebrew schools for religious instruction must enable the pupils to read the Hebrew Bible, or else they are worse than useless.⁴⁵

It was Wise who at every conference pushed through resolutions memorializing the congregations to lay greater stress upon the Hebrew language both in the worship service and in the religious school. A perusal of the minutes of these conferences would easily verify this generalization. Even the Philadelphia Conference, which was completely dominated by Einhorn, was obliged to pass a resolution stressing the importance of Hebrew.⁴⁶ As late as 1875 we still find Wise taking time out from the very important activities which were burdening him at that time to write pro-Hebrew editorials. In reply to his New York correspondent "Maftir," who evidently felt that it was in vogue to characterize Hebrew as "the dead Hebrew which neither attracts nor enlivens," Wise said:

The way he characterizes this tongue is very unbecoming of a writer who seems to have the cause of Judaism at the very heart . . . The Hebrew language is the palladium of our existence as a religious people. And an institution which offers so much life and vigor to Judaism cannot be termed "the dead Hebrew," and we do not alone "still think that this tongue leads to godliness," but we are, by means of good experience, fully convinced that the knowledge of the Hebrew language is the only

“fire and burglar-proof safe” of our holiest and choicest spiritual treasures. Judaism cannot and will not die as long as the knowledge of the Hebrew language lives.⁴⁷

Hence we may conclude that Wise was first and foremost a tenacious fighter for the unity of American Israel. In so far as the Hebrew language served this exalted end, he promoted its retention. One might even go a step further and say that Wise was a staunch friend of the Hebrew language because he was convinced of its preserving qualities and of its capacity to serve as a barrier against assimilation.

UNITY IN AMERICAN ISRAEL

One of the great themes in the East-West conflict was the question of unity in American Israel. Although there had been several attempts to create some form of unity before Wise embarked upon the publication of *The Israelite* — experiments which proved to be premature — the real impetus for union came after 1854. It was Wise's steady hammering away at “Union, Synod, College” that finally brought about the formation of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Einhorn and the East shied away from this idea, for they feared that it would be extremely difficult to promulgate reforms within the framework of such an over-all Union. Einhorn considered a union of all congregations, that is, including Orthodox groups, to be beyond the realm of possibility. Such were the sentiments also of Rabbi Maurice Mayer of Charleston, S. C., an adherent of the Einhorn faction: “We reformers in Charleston still think an independent position (not neutral) preferable. Union is possible only in every party itself, but never between the different parties.”⁴⁸

However, Wise continued to editorialize for a union of *all* American congregations, a view best expressed in the following:

Every congregation has a leader who reforms as he thinks proper. We do not struggle to maintain Judaism. We work to maintain a congregation, each by himself. Each congregation behaves like a distinct sect. They call it free development of religious ideas; we call it anarchy. It is possible for us to lay aside part of our egotism and cement a union of the American congregations.⁴⁹

When he saw that his pleas for union were being ignored by the East after many years of continuous negotiation, Wise proposed a “Union of the congregations of the Mississippi Valley, in order to work here if we can not do it all over the country.”⁵⁰ In fact, after many additional years of fruitless conferences, Wise was compelled to call the first meeting of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations precisely on this basis. In 1873, the following call for a conference went forth to “the West, North, and South-West congregations”:

This call emanated from all the regularly incorporated congregations of Cincinnati, two of which are strictly "orthodox" in their form of divine service . . . it is intended to form a union of all congregations, without interfering with the internal government of any congregation.⁵¹

The delegates from thirty-four congregations met in Cincinnati on July 8, 1873, and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was officially formed. It should be noted that Wise decided to resort to a sectional union only as a temporary maneuver. For immediately following the conference he appealed to all congregations to be represented at Cleveland in 1874 since "this is not a union of congregations of West and South only, it is a union of all . . . inviting all and excluding none."⁵² In reply to the charge by the East that the Union was "a Western affair," Wise fulminated: "You must not offer sectional stupidities for your resistance to Union . . . it is rank rebellion against the House of Israel."⁵³

Wise deliberately used the term *Union* and not *Reform* in devising the names *Union* of American Hebrew Congregations and *Hebrew Union* College to further unity in Jewish life.

Perceiving the success of Wise's union schemes, the East, under the leadership of Einhorn, organized its own congregational conference in June, 1876. Among the congregations whose delegates met at the Y.M.H.A. in New York were such well-known temples as B'nai Jeshurun, Emanu-El, and Beth-El of New York, and Sinai of Chicago. Like its Cincinnati counterpart, this Eastern conference also organized a "Union" and a "Hebrew Theological College." Wise saw in this conference a victory for his own kind of American Judaism, for the idea of unity in Jewish life, and wished the "generous enterprise the best of success."⁵⁴ However, through the good offices of the famous Washington *shtadlan* ("lobbyist") of American Jewry, Simon Wolf, a working agreement was soon reached between East and West. Representing the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, Wolf succeeded in healing the breach between East and West with the following compromise: "The Executive Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations will consist of thirty members, fifteen to be resident in the Western and Southern States and fifteen in the East."⁵⁵

By April, 1878, Wise was able to report that there were over one hundred congregations affiliated with the Union. The final breakdown in Eastern resistance to Union came when Einhorn's Beth-El Temple joined the Union of American Hebrew Congregations on April 26, 1878.⁵⁶ In quick order the outstanding Eastern temples joined the Union, so that Wise could report, upon his return from the Milwaukee conference in July, 1878, "that the Union and College are now secured beyond any peradventure."⁵⁷

The open struggle between East and West for domination in Jewish life was over. Now the conflict was to continue within the framework of the Union. However, this pattern of unity among the congregations had far-reaching effects upon the pattern of community organizations which was soon to emerge. It was this unity achieved in the religious sphere which was, in the next generation, to serve as the pattern for other emerging Jewish religious and secular national organizations. It is this pattern for unity which is, perhaps, Wise's chief contribution to American Jewish life.

SOME POINTS OF AGREEMENT

We have not exhausted all the points of disagreement between East and West. There were, of course, additional areas of dispute, such as the question whether the rabbinical seminary should be located in Cincinnati or in New York, the role of Jewish leadership in the politics of the community-at-large, the question of proper public relations, the attitude towards non-Germanic congregations, etc. As was pointed out above, all controversies stemmed primarily from a basically differing philosophy of Jewish life. Einhorn believed in a kind of sectarian Reform movement; Wise was guided by the exalted vision of a united American Judaism.

However, deep and profound as these differences were, there were many areas of agreement between the two antagonists. Inasmuch as the two rabbis were sincerely the spokesmen for the newly developing liberal Judaism in America, they sanctioned such reforms as mixed choir, worship with uncovered head, organ in the synagogue, abbreviated Torah reading, deletions from the liturgy of all references to the sacrificial cult and the personal Messiah, omission of all prayers for the resurrection of the body, and the stressing of the doctrine of immortality of the soul, etc. The doctrine of the mission of Israel was then, as it is now, central to Reform Judaism and hence did not constitute an area of conflict between East and West. Both Wise and Einhorn regarded Israel as the "Messiah people" whose chief role in history was to redeem all mankind from the yoke of injustice, war, paganism, and despotism. In fact, Wise had visions of converting the world to Judaism. This ideal of bringing all the nations of the world to the eventual worship of the One God was expressed by Wise in the following terms:

The world is Judaizing, although too proud, too self-conceited, too much prejudiced to see it. The spirit works out its own way. Progressive liberty, justice, education and enlightenment are its heralds and banner. . . . The religious world is ripe to do away with the mistaken ideas of Trinity and its other appendages, and adopt Israel's religion and Israel's Sabbath as a day of rest.⁵⁸

CONCLUSION

The death of Einhorn (1879) brought to a close an era of almost continuous warfare between East and West. In reviewing the personal antagonism between Wise and Einhorn we sought to demonstrate the degree to which the element of personality enters into the molding of new movements in history. Beyond the personal level, which, of course, was a major factor in the conflict, there were real issues which divided American Reform Judaism into two camps.

There was genuine disagreement in the basic approach to Jewish life. Whereas Wise believed that all changes in form had to be determined by their effects upon the unity of Israel, Einhorn was not unwilling to proceed in a manner which might have resulted in the establishment of a new sect within the pale of Judaism. Wise was motivated by "Union" in all areas of Jewish life, by the development of a religious philosophy of life for an over-all American Judaism. Einhorn seemed to be primarily interested in the development of a religious philosophy of life for the intellectuals, for the enlightened, the elite among the Jews. Wise veered away from sectarianism, while Einhorn said openly that he was uninterested in the effect his reforms might have on the main body of Israel. Einhorn is quoted as repeatedly using the theme: "I am working for the few enlightened." Whether Einhorn's personal dislike for Wise drove him into a position from which it was difficult to retreat is open to question. The facts seem to point to the conclusion that Einhorn was a religious radical while still in Europe, and that upon his arrival in America he merely accelerated the pace of his radicalism. In any event, the struggle between East and West was certainly made up of a combination of factors: the personal, historic forces from without, and the political and social changes within the pale of Judaism.

It is not unlikely that Wise, in his insistence upon Cincinnati as the center of American Judaism, was reflecting the sectionalism of the community-at-large. American history demonstrates that sectional allegiances were particularly strong at this time. No doubt Wise's religious and political outlook was influenced by the fact that his "area of operations" was in close proximity to the border. Here on the Ohio River, just north of Kentucky, it would be strange if the pendulum were to swing to either extreme. Hence, Jewish leadership in the Midwest during the Civil War remained more or less neutral. The East became predominantly Abolitionist. This factor of sectionalism is also discernible in the religious differences between East and West. Einhorn's radicalism was an inevitable reaction in the East. As an old established area it was "set in its ways." Orthodoxy was strongly entrenched in the East, and the Reformers had to fight if

they were going to make any progress. In the virgin country of the Midwest, closer to the frontier, where the Orthodox had not obtained a strong foothold, Wise had a freer hand in molding a more enlightened, and less extreme, philosophy of Jewish life. Hence, Einhorn was satisfied to work with a section of the Jewish people, while Wise was bent on creating innovations acceptable to all the people.

What Wise feared most was the possibility that Reform might become another "Protestant" sect in American religious life. Therefore he consistently called for unity in Jewish life. Unity became the prerequisite for the development of an American Judaism. One may see this principle of unity underlying all the areas of conflict between East and West, all the way from Wise's insistence upon moderate reform based upon a developing, commonly accepted *halachah* ("law") to his uncompromising struggle against the Germanization of the American synagogue. It was for this reason that Wise fought against reckless and negative reforms by *individual* congregations and rabbis and called for authorized and legal reforms.

With the organization of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the founding of the Hebrew Union College, Wise's long struggle for unity became a reality. By 1879 the Einhorn-led opposition had spent its force and had become associated with the various agencies for unity organized by Wise. Now at least there was some semblance of union, some semblance of responsibility in Jewish life. By 1879 the American Jewish community had become sufficiently mature to realize that genuine differences could be resolved within the Jewish group. It realized that a degree of discipline was necessary if a healthy American Judaism was to emerge. From then on the ideological struggle between East and West was to be continued within the framework of the Union. On many occasions subsequent to 1879, Wise is known to have compromised some of his earlier ideas with a view towards cementing an even greater unity.

However, with its rising influence, the East was soon to wrest control of the Union and the College from the West, from the hands of the more moderate reformers. When Wise died in 1900 the East was so strongly entrenched in the higher councils of Reform that it was able to select its own man as Wise's successor. Under the leadership of Kaufmann Kohler and Julian Morgenstern, the Hebrew Union College reflected, in considerable measure, the "Eastern" philosophy of Jewish life.

Unfortunately, the established Reform Jewish group failed to realize the importance of integrating into its fold the hundreds of thousands of East European newcomers who streamed to these shores after 1881. With the establishment of the Jewish Institute of Religion in 1922, Stephen S. Wise — no relative of Isaac M. Wise — erected a

center for Jewish religious liberals with East European sympathies. Thus a new East-West conflict between the two Reform groups re-emerged and continued until 1950. Now, however, with the merging of the Jewish Institute of Religion and the Hebrew Union College, and with the election of Dr. Nelson Glueck as president of the combined seminaries, a new era in American Jewish life is about to emerge. Once again Isaac M. Wise's vision of unity has been realized. Glueck's continued emphasis upon *K'lal Yisroel* ("the entirety of Jewry") is an echo of Isaac M. Wise's clarion call for Union. It is by no means improbable that the pattern for unity envisioned by Isaac M. Wise will now be implemented, and that the Reform Movement will again be in the vanguard of those forces which seek to establish an American Judaism.

NOTES

- ¹*The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Wise, Isaac Mayer." Wise, Isaac M., *Reminiscences*, p. 20.
- ²Kohtler, K., *David Einhorn*, p. 18.
- ³*The Israelite*, II, Jan 23, 1856, p. 237.
- ⁴VII, Jan. 11, 1861, p. 220.
- ⁵VIII, Feb. 28, 1862, p. 262.
- ⁶DeChambrun, C. L., *Cincinnati, Story of the Queen City*, pp. 189ff.
- ⁷*Ibid.*, p. 212.
- ⁸*The Israelite*, Nov. 23, 1855, p. 164.
- ⁹II, March 7, 1856, p. 285.
- ¹⁰II, Dec. 14, 1855, p. 188.
- ¹¹XXXVII, Nov. 10, 1876, p. 4.
- ¹²II, Nov. 23, 1855, p. 164.
- ¹³II, Nov. 16, 1855, p. 157.
- ¹⁴XVI, May 13, 1870, p. 8.
- ¹⁵III, Aug. 29, 1856, p. 60.
- ¹⁶II, Feb. 15, 1856, p. 1.
- ¹⁷X, June 1, 1866, p. 380.
- ¹⁸II, May 9, 1856, p. 356.
- ¹⁹X, Oct. 13, 1865, p. 116.
- ²⁰V, Oct. 22, 1858, p. 124.
- ²¹V, April 29, 1859, p. 340.
- ²²XVI, Feb. 11, 1870, p. 8.
- ²³XXXVI, Sept. 7, 1877, p. 5.
- ²⁴XXVIII, March 2, 1877, p. 4.
- ²⁵II, Dec. 28, 1855, p. 205.
- ²⁶VII, Oct. 28, 1859, p. 132.
- ²⁷XIII, Jan. 11, 1867, p. 4.
- ²⁸XXII, April 3, 1874, p. 5.
- ²⁹XXII, May 1, 1874, p. 4.
- ³⁰XXIII, July 24, 1874, p. 4.
- ³¹XXXVII, July 21, 1876, p. 4.
- ³²XXXIII, Aug. 8, 1879, p. 4.
- ³³Wise, Isaac M., *Reminiscences*, p. 55.
- ³⁴*The Israelite*, XII, June 22, 1866, p. 405.
- ³⁵XIV, March 1, 1867, p. 4.
- ³⁶XIV, Feb. 21, 1868, p. 8.
- ³⁷XXVI, June 9, 1876, p. 4.
- ³⁸IV, Aug. 27, 1858, p. 62.
- ³⁹IV, Aug. 27, 1858, p. 62.
- ⁴⁰XVI, May 6, 1870, p. 8.
- ⁴¹XVII, Jan. 13, 1871, p. 8.
- ⁴²II, April 24, 1857, p. 333.
- ⁴³IX, Nov. 14, 1862, p. 148.
- ⁴⁴XI, Nov. 4, 1864, p. 148.
- ⁴⁵XIV, Aug. 30, 1867, p. 4.
- ⁴⁶XVII, April 20, 1870, p. 8.
- ⁴⁷XXIV, Jan. 1, 1875, p. 4.
- ⁴⁸II, Feb. 8, 1856, p. 253.
- ⁴⁹IX, Jan. 30, 1863, p. 236.
- ⁵⁰X, Aug. 14, 1863, p. 52.
- ⁵¹XX, May 30, 1873, p. 5.
- ⁵²XXI, July 18, 1873, p. 4.
- ⁵³XXXIII, July 31, 1874, p. 4.
- ⁵⁴XXVI, June 9, 1876, p. 4.
- ⁵⁵XXXIX, July 20, 1877, p. 4.
- ⁵⁶XXX, April 26, 1878, p. 2.
- ⁵⁷XXXI, July 12, 1878, p. 8.
- ⁵⁸XXIX, Sept. 7, 1877, p. 4.