

Ludwig Lewisohn: The Years of Becoming

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Werde der du bist — Become
what you essentially are!
— Nietzsche

THE HEART OF THE CHILD

The characteristic modes of thought and feeling of the North German and those of the Jew who has discarded his archaic Orientalism are profoundly alike. Both have the same earnestness in the conduct of life, the same strong family sense, the hard, practical intelligence — the capacity, too, of producing now and then individuals of the finest artistic sensitiveness and power . . .¹

What Ludwig Lewisohn wrote as a professor of German at Ohio State University in 1916 would have found a response in the hearts of any number of Jews in the Germany of the 1880's, and, as he wrote, he may very well have had in mind his own family in Berlin.

To Jacques Lewisohn and to his first cousin, Minna Eloesser, living in the capital of the newly formed *Kaiserreich* in the 1880's, Judaism was and remained little more indeed than an "archaic Orientalism" which they were at pains to discard — this despite the fact that Minna's father, Isidore Leonard Eloesser, had "performed rabbinical functions to scattered congregations in East Prussia," whence after her father's death she had come to Berlin at the age of twelve. Jacques and Minna felt, as apparently did all

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This essay, lacking a few recent revisions, took first prize in the annual Jewish Book Month contest sponsored by the New Haven (Conn.) Jewish Community Center Library in November, 1957.

All references to *Up Stream* in the essay are to the Modern Library edition, published in 1926. For many of the details in this account, the writer is indebted to Ludwig Lewisohn's widow, Mrs. Louise Wolk Lewisohn, of Cambridge, Mass., and to Lewisohn's cousin, Cora H. (Mrs. J. H.) Evans, of Atlanta, Ga.

¹ Georg Hirschfeld, *The Mothers*, translated and with an introduction by Ludwig Lewisohn (Garden City, N. Y., 1916), p. xiii.

the Lewisohns, that "they were Germans first and Jews afterwards." It was a sentiment shared by a large proportion of the Jewry of the *Kaiserreich*, and Jacques and Minna transmitted the feeling to their son and only child Ludwig, born to them in Berlin on the 30th of May, 1883.²

It was never hidden from Ludwig that he was a Jew, but his exposure to Judaism went scarcely further. In later years, he was to recall that a Christmas tree "was native and familiar to the heart of the child that [he] was," while Yom Kippur, on the one occasion that he was witness to it, seemed "wonderful and solemn," but evoked in him no sense of participation, no feeling of identity with the worshippers or the worship. It was, and for him it would for forty years remain, "a little weird and terrifying and alien."

If, however, in those early years in Berlin, Ludwig's Jewish education was neglected, such was not the case with regard to his general education. For the Lewisohns, as indeed for the entire society within which they lived, "it was an absolutely foregone conclusion that a liberal education was the necessary foundation of right and noble living," and at the age of six Ludwig was admitted to the *Vorschule* of a Gymnasium. Even before his entrance into the *Vorschule*, however, Ludwig had discovered the world of letters. Grandmother Doris Eloesser had taught him to read at the age of four, and thus, as he would observe in later years, his "real life began."³

Those appear to have been happy years for the child Ludwig. His mother, never capable of easy adjustment to the rigid middle-class mores of her environment and sustaining in her marriage to Jacques more than her share of frustrations, poured "into the channel of her maternal love . . . all her passionate ideality, all her deep yearning, all her half-articulate ambitions, all the splendor of her frustrate hopes." It was she who inspired in Ludwig the passion for

² Ludwig Lewisohn, *Up Stream: An American Chronicle* (New York: Modern Library, 1926), pp. 8, 11; Lewisohn's widow believes that Isidore Eloesser "was the first Reform rabbi in Königsberg . . . and so emancipated that he did not cover his head!" (Louise [Mrs. Ludwig] Lewisohn, Cambridge, Mass., to Stanley F. Chyet, Cincinnati, August 11, 1958).

³ Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, pp. 12-13, 21, 24.

learning that was never to depart from him. It was from her that he first learned the scholarly discipline which characterized his work in later years, and from her that he first heard the German *Lieder* which he came to love so well.⁴

AN AMERICAN, A SOUTHERNER, AND A CHRISTIAN

Jacques's father had been something of a ne'er-do-well, and Jacques's own attempts at business were singularly ill-fated. He, too, like Minna, was frustrated in the uncongenial middle-class atmosphere of a Berlin which was as much the "peculiar Prussian city" as it was "the great art-centre and imperial capital." Of all this, however, spellbound by his own *Maerchenwald* and insulated by Minna's maternalism, Ludwig was unaware. It must have come as a rude shock to the child when, in 1889, Jacques dissipated his inheritance in a foolish business venture and fell into a depression that seemed beyond relief. A letter from Siegfried Eloesser, Minna's youngest brother who had emigrated to South Carolina some years earlier and "was said to have prospered moderately there," set the Lewisohns to thinking of America, and in the fall of 1890 they took ship for the United States. The "moderate" extent to which Siegfried had prospered became immediately and bitterly apparent on their arrival in St. Matthews, the "squalid village" in the South Carolina interior that was Siegfried Eloesser's home. These fastidious and "enlightened" Berliners seem to have objected particularly to Siegfried's wife, Fannie Redlich Eloesser, formerly of Charleston. In later years, influenced probably by the disdain with which his parents had looked upon her, Ludwig Lewisohn described his aunt unsympathetically as "a Jewess of the Eastern tradition, narrow-minded, given over to the clattering ritual of pots and pans — 'meaty' and 'milky' — and very ignorant."⁵

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁵ Hirschfeld, p. xii; Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, pp. 29, 36, 41. Lewisohn's cousin, a daughter of Siegfried and Fannie Eloesser, has written to me that "his [Lewisohn's] description . . . [in *Up Stream*] of his arrival [in St. Matthews, S. C.] was all wrong, and my father resented [it] and wrote Ludwig of his feelings. Ludwig never replied. I personally feel it was Uncle Jacques's mind at work as Ludwig was too young to recall all of this"

It was a new and rude world, this Southland into which the Lewisohns had ventured. To Minna, in particular, the contrast between the lordly, triumphant Berlin of 1890 and the South of 1890, its shame of Appomattox and the Reconstruction days still very much in living, painful memory, must have been dispiriting, for in any intellectual or cultural terms, as the Lewisohns were soon to discover, the South in 1890 was a virtual *cul de sac*. All this was by no means to be blamed on the Civil War and the subsequent Reconstruction period, in the course of which, in fact, South Carolina first acquired a modern free school system. The old, ante-bellum South had not been notably stronger in intellectual culture, but, as the late Wilbur Joseph Cash, himself a native South Carolinian, wrote, "the intellectual and aesthetic culture of the Old South was a superficial and jejune thing, borrowed from without and worn as a political armor and a badge of rank; and hence . . . not a true culture at all." But lack of intellectual culture was not all that the Lewisohns — and especially Ludwig — would have to contend against in this South in which Jews "were usually thought of as aliens even when their fathers had fought in the Confederate armies."⁶

Neither Ludwig nor Jacques, however, was much troubled by the Southern demonology, less apparent in St. Matthews than elsewhere, or by the lack of intellectual culture which Minna undertook in her own right to remedy for her son. She herself resumed Ludwig's education which had been interrupted in Germany. Jacques, for his part, rapidly revived in the leisurely and, as it seemed to him, democratic atmosphere of St. Matthews. During the two years that they remained in the village, however, Ludwig's Jewish identity grew steadily weaker, largely through the efforts of his own parents, who are reported to have "discouraged any form or discussion of [the] Jewish Religion." He was permitted to attend a local Methodist Sunday school, and it was not long before

(Cora H. Evans, Atlanta, Ga., to Stanley F. Chyet, Cincinnati, June, 1958). Jacques Lewisohn, Mrs. Evans writes, "resented Judaism and that my mother kept up the traditions, lighting Friday night candles, Passover, High Holidays, etc." (Cora H. Evans to Stanley F. Chyet, August 3, 1958).

⁶ Wilbur Joseph Cash, *The Mind of the South* (Garden City, N. Y., 1954), pp. 105, 300.

he came to accept "the Gospel story and the obvious implications of Pauline Christianity without question." Nor did his parents object when he withdrew — "insensibly almost" — from the other Jewish children in St. Matthews and found his chief playmates among Gentile children.⁷

It was regretfully that, in 1892, the Lewisohns took their leave of St. Matthews after Jacques had again squandered their resources in an unwise business scheme. They moved to Charleston, where finally they were confronted with the mores of the South in their most hurtful and haunting terms. The fact that Charleston was so evidently "a city of very rigid social groups," generally denominational in character and insular in quality, such that the Lewisohns could hope to make few social contacts among them, could not prevail on Jacques and Minna to seek Jewish or German friends in the city. As in Berlin, so in Charleston, they refrained from "associating with North German peasants turned grocers" or "with rather ignorant, semi-orthodox Jews from Posen." The result was that they were committed to "a state of solitariness which would have broken stronger and better-balanced natures." Most of all, of course, Ludwig would suffer, and the succeeding years in Charleston deepened in him the strain of melancholy which was in any case, as he has written, "the badge of all our tribe." Little wonder that, in later years, he would dwell on the "element of pathos" which distinguished a Charleston whose aristocratic airs were falling into decay. Little wonder that, already at the age of ten, Ludwig could sustain "a sense, shadowy and inarticulate, but deep enough, of our homelessness in the universe, of our terrible helplessness before it."⁸

Ludwig's "real life" continued in Charleston, as it had begun in Berlin, to consist of books, but no longer of the German fairy tales

⁷ Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, pp. 53-54; Cora H. Evans to Stanley F. Chyet, June, 1958. In the same letter, Mrs. Evans writes of Jacques and Minna Lewisohn that "they had no Jewish contacts and scorned at the Jewish religion, and on all occasions as Passover, New Year, etc., they would not join our family. We kids naturally didn't understand, and my parents would make one excuse after another." Mrs. Evans also reports that his parents "immediately put Ludwig in [the] Methodist Sunday School."

⁸ Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, pp. 11, 61-63, 68, and *The Broken Snare* (New York, 1908), p. 140.

of his early childhood. It was Addison and Byron, Dickens and Scott, that he read now, and during the four years — 1893 to 1897 — that he spent at the high school of Charleston he laid “the foundations of a sound and permanent knowledge of Latin and French” as well as of “the poetry of the English tongue” — this last becoming “the one thing in the world [he] cared for supremely.” It was at the high school, too, that Ludwig had a taste of Southern xenophobia, when he “was taunted with being a foreigner and a Jew.” Yet, far from appealing to his discarded Jewish identity, the prejudices which he encountered served only to strengthen his resolve to “forget his Jewish and his German past.” He came to disdain all things German, “abandoned the German books of [his] childhood,” and “stopped speaking German even at home.” By his last year at the high school, his “Americanization was complete,” and he felt himself “an American, a Southerner, and a Christian.” He paid for all this, to be sure, with the “wretched conviction of sin” which imposed itself on him as a result of the conflict between his growing awareness of sex and the Methodist faith and morality which he had accepted.⁹

TWO DEGREES, A NAME, AND A FACE

In 1897, Lewisohn entered the College of Charleston, where he soon came under the influence of Lancelot Minor Harris, a young Virginian aristocrat who filled the chair of English. Dr. Harris undertook to teach his protégé “how to train [himself] to write,” and Lewisohn came to love him. Unfortunately, “with his unconquerable tribal self,” Harris “always loved something else — a quiet manner, reserve of speech, an aristocratic nose — a little better than he loved truth or beauty.” Lewisohn learned from him, but was hurt by him — and not by him alone. Successful as his college career was and pleasant as his relations with his classmates were, “there always came a point at which [Lewisohn] felt excluded.” “Pan-Angle of the purest type” though he aspired to be, in his senior year his classmates “gathered to form the first chapter of a Greek letter fraternity at [the] college and — left [him] out.” Lewisohn never really

⁹ Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, pp. 70-71, 76, 80-81, 84, 86; Adolph Gillis, *Ludwig Lewisohn: The Artist and His Message* (New York, 1933), pp. 6-7.

recovered from this slight, though he convinced himself at the time that "the incident was local, exceptional, unrepresentative, and un-American," and he began to weary of his Methodist friends and their professions. At his father's behest, he took up John Fiske's *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* and went on to Huxley, Darwin, Draper, and Lecky. Yet even though he found the picture of the universe represented by science "overwhelmingly and evidently nearer the truth than that represented by Christian doctrine," he persisted in holding "very fast to [his] faith in God and immortality" and declined to "doubt the correctness and elevation of that system of Christian morals under which we live."¹⁰

Specializing in English literature, particularly of the eighteenth-century variety, during his last two years at the College, Lewisohn was able to complete a year's graduate work while still an undergraduate and came seriously to entertain "the academic profession" as a desirable career; he would be "a teacher of the English language and literature." It was at this time that he entered into his enthusiasm for Matthew Arnold; he chose Arnold's writings as the subject of his master's thesis, published in part in the *Sewanee Review* of October, 1901.¹¹

In 1901, Lewisohn graduated from the College of Charleston with two degrees, a bachelor's and a master's. When, however, a board of Episcopal clergymen elected him to the chair of English in a local academy, "the aged clergyman to whom the school really belonged arose from a bed of illness and removed the trustees he had himself appointed for electing a person distasteful to him. He used this expression quite openly in a letter" to the *Charleston News and Courier*. It did not matter that Lewisohn "was passionately Anglo-American in all [his] sympathies [and] wanted above all things to be a poet in the English tongue." He was, and he was made to remain, the little German from Berlin with a name and a face "characteristically Jewish." But the worst was yet to come, for when Harris advised him to register with several teachers' agencies, no position was forthcoming, and when in 1902, after a year of study and

¹⁰ Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, pp. 91-92, 98-101, 103.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

preparation, Lewisohn applied for fellowships to Harvard and Columbia, he found no aid available to him. It became bitterly evident that, if he were to pursue graduate studies, he would be forced to do so without benefit of scholarship aid. In the fall of 1902, having borrowed a scarcely adequate sum, he left Charleston for New York and Columbia University.¹²

A SENSE OF LIBERATION

New York "seemed brutal, ferocious, stark" to Lewisohn, who was utterly demoralized by its cacophony and frenetic pace, and his first weeks in the metropolis were a "grinding misery" of loneliness and homesickness. The gloom was relieved in some measure by his meeting with William Peterfield Trent, the kindly as well as "scholarly and poetic" Virginian who was a professor of English literature at Columbia. Lewisohn also found a friend in Calvin Thomas, Gebhard Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures. Finally there was his classmate, William Ellery Leonard, an aspiring and quixotic New England poet who was to become Lewisohn's "friend of friends . . . *animae dimidium meae*." Neither Trent nor Thomas nor even Leonard, however, was quite adequate to the great need which had brought Lewisohn to New York.¹³

As always, Lewisohn turned to books to satisfy his hunger, but these "books that changed the whole tenor of [his] inner life" were different from those which he had read in Charleston, where he had been almost wholly absorbed in English literature. Now, in freer, wider, more cosmopolitan New York, he came upon "certain modern German plays and poems and novels" that had not been available to him in the South, where in any case all things German had only evoked in him distaste, and he read these new German books "with joy, with a sense of liberation, with a feeling that no other books in the world had ever given" him. All that he had read and known paled in the face of these modern German writers — Nietzsche, Liliencron, Holz, Hauptmann, Hoffmannsthal, Schnitzler, Frenssen,

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 118.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-21, 123, 125.

Mann, and a host of others — in whose work he found “a noble sentiment . . . grown inevitably from the sweat and tears, the yearning and the aspiration of our mortal fate . . . [but] never set down because it was a correct sentiment to which human nature must be made to conform.” It was a far cry, this new German literature, from the contemporary Anglo-American literature subjected in that era of the Gilded Age to the “conventions of an outmoded past symbolized by the two terms which later became quaintly synonymous, Puritanism and Victorianism.” Something of what Lewisohn had given up to become a Southern Christian Gentleman returned to him in those days on Morningside Heights.¹⁴

At the end of his first year in New York, Lewisohn took his second master's degree and again applied for a fellowship, but again in vain. Despite his demonstrated proficiency and Trent's championship of him, there was no fellowship for him, although he was led to believe that he would be recommended for one the following year. Disappointed as he was, Lewisohn placed his trust in the future and, in the fall of 1903, began his second year at Columbia. It was during that year that he met Georg Sylvester Viereck, the German-American poet-novelist who was to become in later years so notorious and controversial a figure. Viereck was at the time still an undergraduate student at the City College of New York, but Lewisohn recognized the boy's talent and in 1904 wrote a perceptive “Appreciation” to Viereck's limited edition of his *Gedichte* — yet another testimonial to the decline of the anti-German feelings which Lewisohn's Charleston experience had inspired in him. If, in later years, it was said of Lewisohn that his “being a Jew” seemed “only to be an accident” in his life and that he was only “nominally a Jew” while “indubitably a German,” the criticism was true enough of Lewisohn's years at Columbia. New York had not awakened in him his Jewishness as it had awakened his Germanism. It was, nevertheless, as a Jew that he was to suffer.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 125, 129–30, 132; Harlan Hatcher, *Creating the Modern American Novel* (New York, 1935), p. 10.

¹⁵ Despite Viereck's alleged Nazi sympathies and connections, Lewisohn appears to have maintained a lifelong friendship with him. Lewisohn's widow insists that Viereck is not, and was not, a Nazi despite all popular belief to the contrary (Conversation with Mrs.

TRIBAL INSTINCTS

Lewisohn had at this time no better friend than Professor Trent, who in 1904 engaged his young protégé to write a fairly extensive introduction to an edition of J. Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* which Trent was bringing out. Rising to the occasion, Lewisohn composed an essay on Crèvecoeur that was as readable as it was erudite. It was, of course, no small distinction to share the title page of a book with a scholar as well-known and as highly esteemed as William Peterfield Trent, and in view of the professor's sponsorship, Lewisohn must have thought his future career assured. The spring of 1904 passed, however, and neither recommendations nor fellowships were forthcoming. In something very like a panic of anguish, frustration, and despair, Lewisohn sent a letter to Professor George Rice Carpenter, the Labrador-born and Harvard-bred secretary of the English department at Columbia. This New Englander, described by Lewisohn as "pale, hesitant, chill-eyed . . . with a thin strain of rhetorical skill and literary taste," had never been sympathetic to the ardent young Carolinian, and Lewisohn wrote of him in later years that, "excessively mediocre as he was, [he] had a very keen tribal instinct of the self-protective sort and felt in [Lewisohn] . . . the implacable foe of the New England dominance over our national life."¹⁶

Carpenter replied to Lewisohn's letter, not perhaps with intentional hurtfulness,

It is very sensible of you to look so carefully into your plans at this juncture, because I do not at all believe in the wisdom of your scheme. A recent experience has shown me how terribly hard it is for a man of Jewish birth to get a good position. I had always suspected that it was a matter worth considering, but I had not known how wide-spread and strong it was.

Lewisohn at her residence in Cambridge, Mass., August 30, 1956), and, in a letter to me, has spoken of Viereck as "an old, old friend" (Louise Lewisohn, Waltham, Mass., to Stanley F. Chyet, Cincinnati, January 18, 1957). Viereck himself has written to me that "Ludwig Lewisohn was [his] life-long friend" (Georg Sylvester Viereck, New York, to Stanley F. Chyet, Cincinnati, September 14, 1956). Jacob Zeitlin, "The Case of Mr. Lewisohn," *The Menorah Journal*, VIII (June, 1922), 191; Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, pp. 140, 188.

¹⁶ Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, pp. 123, 140.

While we shall be glad to do anything we can for you, therefore, I cannot help feeling that the chances are going to be greatly against you.

The painful recollection of the bigoted Charleston clergyman who had risen from his sickbed to deny the young Jew any place in his academy must have pierced Lewisohn's mind as he read Carpenter's cold reply, and it is not difficult to imagine how the hurt must have been doubled by his failure to comprehend the forces in American life that militated against him. Eighteen years later, Jacob Zeitlin, an associate professor of English at the University of Illinois, undertook to defend Professor Carpenter and his attitude toward Lewisohn. Zeitlin had "followed close" on Lewisohn in the English department at Columbia and had "encountered substantially the same advice" from Carpenter, but judged it "his duty to acknowledge that he [had been] aware of no personal hostility or racial ill feeling behind this advice, which he [had] ascribed rather to a praiseworthy candor in facing things as they were." Possessed of a good deal more *sang-froid* and a good deal less sensitivity than Lewisohn, Zeitlin naturally found the obstacles which both he and Lewisohn encountered less formidable. The fact remains that, if Carpenter's antagonism to Lewisohn was founded on "racial" grounds, he represented more than himself and was operating within a larger context.¹⁷

VICTIMS OF A REVOLUTION

According to Joseph Herzog, "by 1875, the role of the large capitalists included such names as Rockefeller, Gould, Vanderbilt, Huntington, Hill, Harriman, Carnegie, Cooke, Morgan, and Armour." Herzog's list is not exhaustive, but it is of interest to note that only two of these famous "captains of industry" hailed from New England and that none of them centred their activities in New England or had anything but peripheral interests in that area. "The New England dominance over our national life" of which Lewisohn later wrote was already, in 1904, a mere shadow of its former self. Already that dominance was little more than a matter of manners, of aristocratic memories and glories long since past, for

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-43; *Menorah Journal*, VIII, 189.

no longer did New England have *real* power in American life. In the years after the Civil War, as Charles Beard wrote, it was "the New York Stock Exchange [that] raised its economic forum to the position of an all-American Tribunal . . . in the course of time bankers learned that they could in reality become masters of the economic scene . . . it was soon discovered that the weapon of the hour was finance and that the possession of the weapon had passed to the bankers." But the finance was no longer in Boston.¹⁸

The times had changed, and this fact was not lost on the aristocrats of Beacon Hill. For them, as Oscar Handlin has observed, "the changes appeared to be a deterioration of culture and the reaction of that class was fastidiousness in speech and manners." It had not, of course, been substantially otherwise in Charleston. "Fastidiousness in speech and manners" was all that those classes, highbred and once powerful, now in decline, had left to them, and to that vestige they were determined to hold fast. Whoever challenged or threatened the conventions they held dear was *ipso facto* the enemy, and who then was more to be suspected, even had he not been a Jew, than a brash and individualistic young German immigrant? So at least it must have seemed to the New Englander Carpenter.¹⁹

But Ludwig Lewisohn was, after all, also "a man of Jewish birth."

In 1902, the American Hebrew Publishing Company itself did not hesitate to publish a book in which its author found it proper to observe that, "of all the nations, which the world has known, the commercial instinct is strongest and most fully developed in the Jew. He never sacrifices future opportunity for present gain." If a Jewish-sponsored publication could permit itself such a view, we should not be surprised to find that, during the 1890's, "the conception of

¹⁸ Joseph D. Herzog, "The Emergence of the Anti-Jewish Stereotype in the United States" (Unpublished ordination thesis, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1953), p. 6; Charles Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York, 1928), II, 196.

¹⁹ Oscar Handlin, "American Views of the Jew at the Opening of the Twentieth Century," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* [*PAJHS*], XL (June, 1951), 341.



*Courtesy, Louise Wolf (Mrs. Ludwig) Lewisohn,
Cambridge, Mass.*

Dovling, Charleston, S. C.

THE YOUNG LUDWIG LEWISOHN
In his early teens
(about 1900)



Courtesy, Carolina Art Association, Charleston, S. C.

Photo by Louis Schwartz, Charleston, S. C.

A RESIDENTIAL STREET IN CHARLESTON

(about 1900)

Jewish interest in money deepened into the conviction that Jews controlled the great fortunes of the world. Although the Jews are still sometimes [painted as] miserly Shylocks, more often they are princes wielding power through their gold." That Carpenter as the representative of the deteriorating New England tradition could look upon Lewisohn as the representative of "princes wielding power through their gold" — and supplanting the old hegemony of New England — is not, under the circumstances, an unreasonable inference. Carpenter would not have been alone in his estimate of the situation. So it was that, as a discerning critic of the New England tradition has written, Brahmin intellectuals like Henry and Brooks Adams could create "in the Jew a logical villain for the capitalistic society" abuilding on the ruins of their once dominant world; Carpenter only echoed their fixation "on the Jew as the archetype of the loathsome, industrial man of their day."

According to Ellis Rivkin, "any serious student of anti-Semitism in its historical manifestations knows that the false, stupid, and shopworn character of the propaganda is no protection against its effectiveness when a society is undergoing major stresses and strains. Anti-Semitism waxes and wanes in direct relationship to economic *and* social stability." New England society was "undergoing major stresses and strains" at the time, and was suffering a decline.²⁰

In his encounter with Carpenter and his cohorts, as earlier in his encounter with the aged and ill Charleston clergyman, Lewisohn was confronted not by a mere personal antagonism and not by a hostility of strictly literary or "cultural" character, but by a desperate prejudice born of economic and social dissolution. He was willy-nilly and all unknowingly, even as Carpenter himself in his role of the representative of a decaying class, the victim of an economic and social revolution.

Lewisohn probably failed to understand at the time that what had

²⁰ Madison C. Peters, *The Jew as a Patriot* (New York, 1902), p. 192, cited in Handlin, *PAJHS*, XL, 331; Handlin, *PAJHS*, XL, 329; Barbara M. Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. 39; Ellis Rivkin, review of Oscar Handlin's *Adventure in Freedom*, in *American Jewish Archives*, IX (April, 1957), 52-53.

happened to him was to be explained in terms of a larger context. Yet he understood enough to know that "so long as there is discrimination, there is exile. And for the first time in [his] life [his] heart turned with grief and remorse to the thought of [his] brethren in exile all over the world." Unfortunately, he "could take no refuge in the spirit and traditions of [his] own people. [He] knew little of them. [His] psychical life was Aryan through and through." So at least he thought — and persisted in thinking for many years to come. But Lewisohn was proud. His doctoral studies uncompleted, Trent's protests ringing in his ears, he made up his mind with a dry and weary astringency and quit Columbia.²¹

A PROFOUNDLY DISGUSTING STORY

During the next two years, Lewisohn eked out a meager living in New York by doing editorial work and free-lance writing, but these years brought him little more than renewed defeats and deeper griefs, and finally he had to return to Charleston. He did not return alone, however. In 1906, demoralized by the humiliations he had suffered in New York, he married Mrs. Mary Arnold Crocker Childs, an English-born divorcee, some seventeen years his senior and the mother of four children. Mary Childs, who in later years became a poet and playwright of some note under the pseudonym of "Bosworth Crocker," was a non-Jew, but Lewisohn's parents made no objection, and the newlyweds lived for two years in the Lewisohn house. Out of this *mésalliance*, as it proved to be, grew Lewisohn's later preoccupation with problems of modern marriage and sex, the themes which dominated so much of his critical work as well as many of his novels, such as *Don Juan*, *The Case of Mr. Crump*, *Stephen Escott*, and even the recent *In a Summer Season*. Lewisohn could have known none of this at the time. He knew only that personal defeat, frustration, and disillusion had left him in dire need of someone on whom to lean — someone, in fact, like his mother, herself only a few years older than Mary — and Mary Childs must have been sensitive to that need in Lewisohn and able

²¹ Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, pp. 144, 146.

at the time to meet it. It was only after a measure of success and recognition abated his need that Lewisohn found himself a young man in his thirties allied to an already aging woman who was perhaps wounding him in that she still sought to meet a need that was no longer existent.²²

During the two years that he and his wife lived in Charleston, Lewisohn wrote his first novel, *The Broken Snare*, which was published in 1908 under the "sponsorship" of Theodore Dreiser. Lewisohn, who had in the meantime returned with his wife to New York, was all but crushed by the poor reception which the novel's controversial theme of free love tendered it in that Gilded Age in which "emasculat[i]on of material [and] gentility of diction were still the chief traits of American literature." The judgment of the *Charleston News and Courier*, that *The Broken Snare* was "a profoundly disgusting story . . . reeking with the sweat of the vulgarest human passions," was perhaps extreme, but unhappily typical. Lewisohn was once again driven to free-lancing, and in desperation turned finally to his old friends, Professors Trent and Thomas, for help in seeking a university position. Trent and Thomas, and also Leonard, already professor of English at the University of Wisconsin, spared no effort in his behalf, but all in vain. The Universities of Virginia, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin all declined to offer to a Jew a position in their English departments, and even when Lewisohn sought a position in the German department at Princeton, he was refused on the ground that he was a Jew. It was only through Leonard's personal appeal to Professor Alexander Hohlfeld, the head of the German department at the University of Wisconsin, that Lewisohn was finally offered, in 1910, an instructorship in German at that institution.²³

How is one to account for the anti-Jewish feelings which haunted

²² Lewisohn's cousin, Mrs. Evans, writes of Mary Childs Lewisohn: "I had the pleasure of knowing Ludwig's first wife (Molly we called her), a most charming woman and very brilliant, much too old for Ludwig. She was a grandmother when she married Ludwig [who was then] around 26 years of age. Ludwig's parents [were] anything but pleased at the marriage, although they were very fond of Molly" (Cora H. Evans to Stanley F. Chyet, June, 1958).

²³ Gillis, pp. 27-28; Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, pp. 172-74.

the steps of this thoroughly assimilated and exceptionally talented young man? The rebuffs which he sustained from the universities of the South and the Northeast are explicable in terms of the threat that a person of Lewisohn's temperament and background posed to the "old guard" of gentility and aristocracy which dominated those institutions. Yet what of the Midwest? The Midwest at the turn of the century, as today, was the center of American agrarian interests — interests which, in a time of financial contraction, particularly after the depression of 1893, saw their only salvation in monetary reform, "the free coinage of silver in some established relationship with gold."²⁴

When, throughout the 1890's, the efforts of those who agitated for bimetallism were continually frustrated, the reformers "acquired a sense of religious intensity about their cause," as did William Jennings Bryan in his celebrated "Cross of Gold" speech. They came at length to a point where "they could explain their defeats only by the intervention of some external power," and the shadow of those demonic Jewish "princes wielding power through their *gold*" darkened the distraught imagination of the Midwestern farmer as much as it did that of the Boston Brahmin and the Southern planter. The three may have had precious little in common, but all felt themselves imperilled by America's powerfully emergent new industrialism; if they agreed in little else, all three shared a willingness to identify "the Jew with the menace of plutocracy." "The attitude of Western dissidents, socialist or nonsocialist," according to Eric F. Goldman, "was generally hostile toward Jews, in large part because they pictured them as the 'money power.'" The real "money power" saw no advantage in disabusing the suffering farmer of his anti-Jewish demonology, and such a wave of anti-Jewish feeling swept the Western agrarians that a socialist leader could complain that, "in the East, the Socialist Party is run by Jews." Indeed, his study of the period has led Richard Hofstadter to conclude that it was the agrarian radicals — the Populists — who "activated most of what we have of modern popular anti-Semitism in the United States."

²⁴ Handlin, *PAJHS*, XL, 332.

In short, Ludwig Lewisohn found himself again the victim of an economic and social revolution.²⁵

A THING OF BLOOD AND TEARS

"Convinced now, through experience and reflection, that [his] art product could not . . . commend itself to the strange minds of [his] countrymen," Lewisohn determined to "devote [himself] undividedly" to scholarship in the field of Germanics. After a year in Wisconsin, he moved on to Ohio State University in Columbus, where he remained as a professor of German language and literature from 1911 to 1917. This Columbus interlude was not a happy one for him. The depression into which the banality and philistinism of Columbus society threw him was sharpened by his mother's death in October, 1912. Yet the very solitude which he imposed on himself in provincial Columbus spurred him to creative heights, and he began to make a name for himself in the world of literary criticism. It was in Columbus that he undertook his masterful editorship of the plays of Gerhart Hauptmann, and wrote such critical works as *The Modern Drama*, *The Spirit of Modern German Literature*, and *The Poets of Modern France*. It was in Columbus, too, that he began work, in 1916, on the autobiographical *Up Stream*. His espousal during this period of naturalistic drama and literature, his examination of the problems of sex and marriage in the modern world, and his defense of the free personality served as a fitting prologue to the passionate intensity of *Up Stream* and his later writings. During these years in Columbus, he threw off the shackles of that Victorian cant which had become his *bête noire* and became one of the chief apostles of a modern literature in America.²⁶

Lewisohn began to discover *himself* in these difficult years in Columbus, and discovered in himself a courage which he had not

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 329, 332-33; John Higham, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* [MVHR], XLIII (March, 1957), 572; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York, 1955), p. 80, cited in Higham, MVHR, XLIII, 562; Eric F. Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny* (New York, 1952), p. 59, note 3. Algie Simons was the socialist leader; see Goldman, p. 59.

²⁶ Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, p. 174.

felt before. He learned well from the Hauptmann and the Nietzsche and the Goethe whom he had made his mentors, and it was indeed very much in the Goethean spirit of "magnificent individualism" that, in the anti-German hysteria of 1916 and 1917, he wrote of modern German literature and civilization as embodying "the widest moral and intellectual liberty and tireless spiritual striving." As America went to war, Lewisohn had to face the challenge of his own words: "It is braver to live than to die: more difficult to be than not to be," but the very values which he saw in German civilization — individualism, humanism, love of the true and the beautiful — bade him brave, very much alone and exposed, the winter of war and Germanophobia. Cherishing such sentiments as he did, however, he could not remain in Columbus, and at length found it necessary to return to New York.²⁷

Shortly after Lewisohn's self-exile from Columbus, Jacques Lewisohn died, his mind unbalanced by the wretchedness into which his wife's death had cast him.

In 1919, Oswald Garrison Villard, the editor of the *Nation*, engaged Lewisohn as the magazine's drama editor. Though himself remote from Lewisohn's "moral radicalism," Villard never suppressed or altered a single word from Lewisohn's pen, and Lewisohn found his work on the *Nation* "more satisfying to the mind than any in which [he] had yet engaged." The critical battle for a modern literature in America which Lewisohn had begun in Columbus continued apace in New York as he crossed swords with the idealism and moralistic traditionalism of critics like Stuart Pratt Sherman, Irving Babbitt, and Paul Elmer More, to whom "novelists and poets of discontent" were men "deliberately preying on the intellectual defeat and spiritual dismay of the times, as vultures fatten themselves on carrion."²⁸

Literature Lewisohn looked upon as "a thing of blood and tears"; criticism as "far more necessary to human civilization than steam or

²⁷ Lewisohn, *The Spirit of Modern German Literature* (New York, 1916), pp. 115, 118, and *The Modern Drama* (New York, 1915), p. 97.

²⁸ Lewisohn, *Mid-Channel* (New York, 1929), p. 5, and *Up Stream*, p. 278; Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (Garden City, N. Y., 1956), p. 236.

petrol." He understood, as perhaps few did at the time, that no literary reforms could reform literature, that it was "useless to set books free until minds [were] set free." Even Alfred Kazin, hardly to be numbered among his indiscriminating admirers, conceded that, following the War, "in those first great days of liberal criticism Lewisohn was more than a working critic; he was a force for progress."²⁹

THE ETERNAL HERETIC

What Ludwig Lewisohn was, what he had become, is nowhere more evident than in the clash and clamor which echo in the pages of *Up Stream*, published finally after many doubts and hesitations in 1922. In his autobiography, as Lewisohn wrote, he had "chosen to drop the mask." There was to be in this book no disguise, no evasion, and this indeed was the unique and signal quality of *Up Stream* — its clear, unequivocal, undiluted statement of the feeling which his American experience had engendered in him, that "Life among us [was] ugly and mean and, above all things, false in its assumptions and measures," that "the notion of liberty on which the Republic was founded, the spirit of America that animated Emerson and Whitman, [was] vividly alive to-day only in the unassimilated foreigner, in that pathetic pilgrim to a forgotten shrine," in an old Yiddish-speaking, Torah-intoxicated Jew from Southern Russia, in an old Low German grocer from Mecklenburg, in a grimy, garlic-breathed Italian laborer on Staten Island.³⁰

Up Stream was perhaps the first great climax in Lewisohn's life. Certainly it was this book, more than any which had preceded it, that defined his role and his mission in American life and letters. It was in the writing of this book, more urgently than in any other, that Lewisohn discovered "in his own heart the eternal heretic and rebel who has but to arise and to reflect to know that it is the essence of his manhood to be free." It was more than a memoir —

²⁹ Lewisohn, ed., *A Modern Book of Criticism* (New York, 1919), pp. i-ii, 181; Kazin, p. 206.

³⁰ Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, pp. 1, 284-85, 287-89, 298-99.

that book which Stuart Pratt Sherman assailed as representative of "the militant hostility of alien-minded critics towards what they conceive to be the dominant traits of the national character." It was itself, as it were, a relationship of great and compelling urgency, "the measure of [Lewisohn's] love and need" and "the measure of [his] disappointment and indignation."³¹

But *Up Stream* was a purgative, too. "We must master life," he wrote, "or it will end by destroying us. We can master it only by understanding it and we can understand it only by telling each other the quite naked and, if need be, the devastating truth." *Up Stream* was the instrument of his mastery and liberation. Somehow, in this book, he was able to purge himself of all the obstacles which his American experience had placed in the path of his self-realization. All the obstacles but one; the pages of *Up Stream* are conspicuously reticent with regard to Lewisohn's own marriage, a reticence especially curious in view of the emphasis placed in his other writings at the time on problems of the modern woman and modern marriage. The lack was, however, shortly to be made up in the highly autobiographical novel, *Don Juan*, published in 1923. It was in *Don Juan* that Lewisohn may be said to have purged himself, to a large degree at least, of the fear and ache of his unhappy marriage — and, too, of the most immediate obstacles which that match presented to his self-realization.³²

NO LONGER HOMELESS

Minna and Jacques Lewisohn were gone now. Gone, too, were the hungers for Southern Gentlemanhood and Anglo-Americanhood, to which he had looked for nurture and sustenance and in which he had found the bitter brew of the Philistines. These two books, *Up Stream* and *Don Juan*, were essentially nothing less than a rejection of all that unhappy past. After *Up Stream* and *Don Juan*, Lewisohn was free, as never before, to erase "that alienation from [his] own

³¹ Lewisohn, *The Drama and the Stage* (New York, 1922), p. 8, and *Up Stream*, p. 298; Stuart Pratt Sherman, *Americans* (New York, 1922), p. 25.

³² Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, p. 1.

race which [had] been the source to [him] of some good but of more evil.”³³

Neither *Up Stream* nor *Don Juan*, to be sure, was indicative of a surge of Jewish feeling in Lewisohn, nor did they constitute affirmations of his long-discarded Jewish identity. At best Lewisohn could say in *Up Stream* that “slowly, in the course of the years,” he had “discovered traits in [himself] which [he] sometimes call[ed] Jewish. But that interpretation [was] open to grave doubt” — in 1922. In an edition of *Up Stream* appearing in 1926, he could already add that such an interpretation was “no longer” open to doubt. Still, Zeitlin’s remark that *Up Stream* had “little relevance” to Lewisohn’s “character as a Jew” was true only in a literal, not a spiritual, sense, as the next few years would eloquently and abundantly testify.³⁴

“Where thou canst not love — pass by!” Nietzsche had said, and Lewisohn would write little of Jews before 1924. As late as 1922 he believed his “psychical life” to be “Aryan through and through.” Before 1924, he could not love Jews, he knew scarcely anything of them or of their life — and so he passed by. When his will to affirm had at last focused on Jewish life, when the love was there to be grasped and known and realized, he passed by no longer. All this was yet to be, but in 1922, as *Up Stream* was published, Lewisohn was already “near that middle of the road of life at which Dante found himself in the dark forest that was to lead him to his vision.”³⁵

What the writing of *Up Stream*, and the writing of *Don Juan*, too, had achieved was the banishment of those illusions which had prevented him in the past from realizing the Nietzschean dictum much quoted by him: *Werde der du bist* — Become what you essentially are! No longer would he be, to use a phrase from *The Island Within*, homeless and a wanderer without a goal.³⁶

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146; *Menorah Journal*, VIII, 190.

³⁵ Lewisohn, *Up Stream*, p. 146, and *Mid-Channel*, p. 15.

³⁶ Lewisohn, *The Island Within* (New York, 1928), p. 243.