

## Between Two Opinions

JUDAH DAVID EISENSTEIN

Translated by ROBERT L. SAMUELS

### EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

*Controversy is no stranger to the American Jewish community. The article reprinted below, filled as it is with acid comments on the Reform and Conservative movements (particularly the latter), reflects the Kulturkampf which raged in American Jewish life during the 1880's and whose echoes have not entirely died away even today. The last half of the nineteenth century was a period of revolutionary change in American society, and America's growing Jewish community shared in all the tensions and conflicts of those tumultuous years. Externally, American Jewry found itself confronted by a significant rise in anti-Semitism, a phenomenon arising, in large part at least, from the threat which America's burgeoning new industrialism and urbanization posed to the older "aristocracy," the farmers, and the laboring classes. Internally, the community was rent by a bitter struggle between the three major ideological "camps" that were taking shape on the American Jewish scene — Reform, Conservatism, and Orthodoxy. The age was consequently one of polemics, and among the competing polemicists none were more militant in defense of a treasured standpoint than Judah David Eisenstein (1854–1956).*

*Born in Miedzyrzec, Russian Poland, to a family which claimed descent from the great medieval Franco-Jewish scholar, Rashi, Eisenstein emigrated to the United States in 1872. Initially he became a clothing manufacturer in New York, but the business world utterly failed to challenge the intellectual vigor and curiosity of the matmid — the prototypical East European Jewish scholar — that Eisenstein was, and he devoted a good deal more of his energies to scholarship than to business — or, for that matter, to his family. Married at nineteen, Eisenstein fathered eight children, but never allowed them to enfeeble his lust for learning and travel or the cacoëthes scribendi that held him in its sway. A list of his writings would be truly formidable. In addition to pieces*

*for numerous Jewish periodicals, he contributed more than 150 articles to The Jewish Encyclopedia and seven articles to Murray's Illustrated Bible Dictionary; he edited and published a ten-volume Hebrew encyclopedia entitled Ozar Yisrael, a two-volume homiletical compendium entitled Ozar Midrashim, a Passover Haggadah, a volume of travels, a biblical concordance, a thesaurus of polemics, and a host of other works on Talmud, Bible, Jewish laws and customs, and Jewish literature. In 1929, he published his autobiographical Ozar Zikronotai. At his death in 1956, he left sixteen works in manuscript. To be sure, Eisenstein was hardly a scientific or critical scholar, but his achievements were all the more remarkable in view of his "formal" education which consisted entirely of the instruction in Russian, German, and elementary science that he had received in Miedzyrzec from a Christian teacher.*

*Eisenstein remained a proponent of Orthodoxy throughout his entire life. Regarding departures from the traditional pattern as deformations of the Jewish spirit, he had scant respect for Reform and deplored the nascent Conservative movement. History, however, is filled with nothing if not ironies — or was it perhaps that Eisenstein lived too long to maintain his prejudices in all their pristine acerbity? When the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, whose founding had aroused only his scorn in the 1880's, offered him an honorary doctorate in 1952, Eisenstein did not disdain the kavod; and, asked two years later whether he would accept a similar honor from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, he replied that he would. As if to cap the irony, his grandson, Ira Eisenstein, was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary and subsequently became a highly distinguished leader of the Reconstructionist movement, hardly an exemplar of the "Torah-true" Orthodoxy espoused by Judah David Eisenstein in the article reprinted below. Tempora mutantur et nos in illis mutamur!*

*The Hebrew article translated below — originally it was entitled "The Founding of the New Seminary" — first appeared in 1886 in the ultra-Orthodox New Yorker Jüdische Zeitung, published by Rabbi Morris Wechsler. Notable more for its verve than for its elegance, Eisenstein's Hebrew style abounded in grammatical and idiomatic vagaries, and the editors of the American Jewish Archives as well as the translator are greatly indebted to Dr. Elias L. Epstein, Professor of Hebrew Language and Literature at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish*

*Institute of Religion, for aiding their efforts to effect a satisfactory translation.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Before I turn my attention to the rabbinical seminary which the Conservatives intend to establish in New York City, in addition to the seminary which the Radicals have founded in Cincinnati under the leadership of Dr. [Isaac Mayer] Wise, let me offer some preliminary comments — to serve as a preface. I propose through this means to afford my readers an adequate general survey of Judaism in America and to enable them to arrive at a more judicious understanding of the two *yeshivot* [academies]. They may then decide for themselves whether both institutions are worthy or not, or perhaps the reverse is true — that only one of them is worthy, and which is it?

## JEWISH FACTIONS IN AMERICA

Judaism in America is divided into three factions or parties: Orthodox, Conservative, and Radical; that is to say, those who believe in the old tradition, those who steer a middle course, and those who take an extreme position. These, their variants excluded, are the main divisions. Judaism in general resembles the ladder which Jacob saw in his dream, planted in the earth but with its top extending into the very heavens. Those who take hold of it go up and down its innumerable rungs one above the other, and if I tried to discuss each variant separately, there would be no end to the matter. I shall address myself, therefore, to the major groupings.

Those who believe in the old dispensation walk in the paths of their fathers who imparted to them what they had received from their fathers and the fathers of their fathers all the way back to the masters of the *halakah* [traditional rabbinic teaching]. The decisions of the halakic sages serve as their criteria; their *torah* [doctrine] is a lamp unto their feet, and they deviate neither to the right nor to the left. To be sure, these believers possess an authority upon

which to rely — the *Shulhan Aruk* [the sixteenth-century rabbinic compendium of Joseph Caro and his associates].

At the other extreme are the Radicals, who do just as they please, accepting such Jewish beliefs as appeal to them, and scrapping the rest.

The Conservatives have achieved a compromise between these two viewpoints. They form the third major party and seek to strike a balance between the two extremes. Actually, they are like the antelope and the badger which the rabbis could not decide whether to categorize as wild or as domesticated beasts.

### THE ORTHODOX

It is impossible to investigate the Orthodox position, for whatever question the investigator might ask would be answered in terms of "Faith" and that great authority, the *Shulhan Aruk*. The sage might pose a philosophical problem, "How did the world come into being?" But a child attending his first day of school will account for the world in terms of the Bible [and not in terms of philosophy]. Darwin searched all his life to discover [finally] the evolution of man from the monkey, but the youngest among the Orthodox will answer him unhesitatingly that from a piece of dust was man created and from one of his ribs did God fashion his wife. Scientists and astronomers wonder at the marvels in the heavens and the earth. They ask, "How did all this come about? Who created these?" The answer of the Orthodox is God. "And how do you know this?" "My Faith." Now, is there an answer shorter and more positive than this? The Orthodox doctrine is shared by the mature and the immature alike, by the wise and the ignorant alike. Their rabbis are as "lawyers" teaching the *halakah* in accordance with their authority, the *Shulhan Aruk*. But they do not act as judges deciding every matter by themselves. Indeed, any conscientious student who studies the law can interpret the codes and is as competent to render decisions as his rabbi or as the most authoritative scholar, so that any Jew may depend on him [for correct judgment].

There are large communities in Russia and Poland which, though lacking a rabbi for many years, are able nonetheless to conduct

their affairs according to Jewish law [*din torah*], since every man versed in the *Shulhan Aruk* is able to interpret the *halakah* and render judicial decisions, even if he is not a rabbi. I remember from my youth that once the cantor began by error to chant [the dirge] *Av Ha-Rahamim* in a heart-rending voice on a Sabbath on which it is not [properly] recited. Even the rabbi who was praying there neglected to silence him, but suddenly a shrill voice, the voice of a twelve-year-old boy, was heard from the far side of the synagogue. Pounding the table, the boy called out and warned the cantor that he had to stop. He proceeded to point out in his prayer book the [*Shulhan Aruk's*] ruling that *Av Ha-Rahamim* was not to be recited on that Sabbath. Instantly they all fell silent and did not complete the *Av Ha-Rahamim*. Is this not clear and decisive proof that even a minor, armed with the authority of the *Shulhan Aruk*, is more powerful than rabbis and adults who act in violation of this authority? Does this not prove that, were *all* the rabbis placed on one balance of a scale and the little [volume known as the] *Shulhan Aruk* on the other, it would outweigh them all?

#### THE RADICALS

At the other extreme are the Radicals, for whom no doctrine is authoritative. They take from the Law of Moses only that which, in their view, is compatible with the civilization and the century in which they live. Through the years, as [secular] culture and civilization have assumed increased importance for them, the significance of the commandments in the Law of Moses has accordingly diminished in their estimate. They do have a faith, inasmuch as the law of the nation in which they live is their authority, and so long as the Christian churches are not abolished, their synagogues, too, will not close. They call themselves Jews [only] because the world is not yet cosmopolitan enough to discern the irrelevance of a man's origin or place of birth, for are not all of us brothers, the children of one Father, and why should one man be raised over his fellow men? Civilization, however, has not yet attained so great a height, with the result, consequently, that the English are given to self-adulation in their land while the French exalt themselves over them; the

Germans esteem themselves greater than the Italians; and so on — not because of the manner in which they have lived their lives, but merely because they happened to have been born in that land. Writers call it “nationalism,” but I title it “egotism,” the self-love rooted in the heart of a man made of clay. Therefore, these Jews, too, call themselves Israelites, because it is *their* “nationalism.”

In truth, there is no difference whatsoever between these Jews and the Christians. They do not merit the name “Jews” [simply] because they believe in one God, for Moslems also believe in one God. [They do not merit it because they] believe in the immortality of the soul, for so do the Christians. Acting righteously and justly is not the duty of the Jew alone, but is rather a general obligation, the obligation of every human being. Are their synagogues different from Christian churches? No! In the [synagogue] structure itself there is not the slightest difference. The sermons of their preachers are exactly the same as those of Christian preachers, except that sometimes perhaps they will replace the name of the son with the name of the Father — but that is all. In other ways they are like the Christians. Like them, they do not believe in our righteous Messiah or in the resurrection of the dead. Like them, they do not circumcise the flesh of their foreskin. They eat forbidden food, permit their daughters to marry non-Jews, and in every respect are guided by the practices of the Gentiles. How, then, are they different from the Christians and why do they bear the name Jew? It is as I have said — their “nationalism” leads them astray.

#### THE CONSERVATIVES

Those who are called Conservatives, or “middle of the roaders,” wish to go in both directions. They have not decided on either direction, but are neither here nor there. The opinions of their rabbis contrast with one another as sharply as the [various] plagues [mentioned in the Bible] or as carnival masks made of a mixture of small pieces from different garments. Everyone builds a platform for himself and fashions for himself a *Shulhan Aruk* according to his own will and desire and as seems right in his eyes without anyone to challenge him. While some are partial to [New York City’s]

Portuguese synagogue, the Shearith Israel Congregation, because the order of its [worship] service conforms to the *Shulhan Aruk*, with men and women sitting apart, the fact remains that, in the homes of many of its members, not a hint of Judaism is discernible. They eat every kind of unkosher food and mix meat and milk. Many profane the Sabbath immediately following the prayer service and go from the synagogue directly to their places of business. Perhaps *this* is the teaching of the Conservatives — that one observes the religion of Israel only in the house of prayer and, departing from there, becomes free from all the divine commandments. Perhaps, too, this is the meaning of Dr. [David] Einhorn's statement that "the God of the house of prayer is our God, and not the God of the dining room and kitchen." Even though in his generation Dr. Einhorn was a Radical, the generation of Dr. [Kaufmann] Kohler, his son-in-law, considered him to be a Conservative *tzadik* [saint].

We cannot judge a Conservative congregation by its name alone, for often the name covers the actuality as the words of diplomats cover their thoughts. There are congregations whose names are pleasant, but whose doings are the reverse. Nor are we able to judge the congregation by the rabbi or preacher who occupies its pulpit, for the ideas of the rabbi are often different from those of the congregants, and sometimes, too, the rabbi's deeds deviate from his own opinions. [New York's] Congregation Ahawat Chesed, for example, had as its preacher the late Dr. [Adolph] Huebsch, who was known to all as a Radical, and led his congregation in the radical spirit. When he died, [the Conservative] Dr. [Alexander] Kohut was chosen in his place. Instantly, while standing on one foot, the congregation changed to the Conservative movement, though it changed neither its ways nor its prayer service at all. In the prayer service, the congregation had omitted certain prayers referring to the sacrifices and had dropped the prayers concerning the redemption by the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead. Dr. Kohut, however, neither reproached it on this account, nor altered the congregation's traditions as they had been established by Dr. Huebsch. Yet we know that Dr. Kohut was a learned man, a magnificent preacher, an expert in Hebrew literature; [we know this by] his

book *Aruch Ha-Shalem*. Therefore, we consider him to be a Conservative.

Thus the Conservative, like the Radical, has no authority, since he does not rely on the *Shulhan Aruk* except for a small fraction of his ministry. If one may take the position that there are certain errors to be found in the *Shulhan Aruk*, it is also possible to infer that it is full of errors from the beginning to the end. For who is able to distinguish between the laws once the principle of revelation is gone? Can the Conservative rabbis? Are they authorities? For does not your bondsman himself require a bondsman? And if we must choose between our teacher, Joseph Caro [compiler of the *Shulhan Aruk*], who exemplified the [rabbinic] teaching that "a man should immerse himself in the Torah (even to the point of death)," and between a Conservative rabbi who makes the Torah a business and harvests from it several thousand dollars annually, we do better to trust in the integrity of the former than in the deceitfulness of the latter, about whom it is said in Scripture, "He is a trader, the balance of deceit is in his hands." (*Hosea* 12:8)

The Torah of the Orthodox is like the fortified wall which the Chinese erected about their capital at Peking. They had closed it off, and no European was allowed to enter the city. Many days it was closed, and no one came out or entered until [European] civilization succeeded at length in penetrating and opening its gates. Once Europeans were allowed to penetrate, what did it matter whether they entered by one door or a hundred doors? Were the situation carried to its logical conclusion, there could be entrances enough so that all could enter at one time. The availability of only one entrance would, of course, appreciably extend the time that it would take for all to enter, while through many entrances all could rush in much more rapidly. Yet, in the final analysis, even with only one entrance, all could enter, each individual making his entry successfully. The difference would lie only in the amount of time needed to complete a total penetration.

The authority of the *Shulhan Aruk* is Judaism's wall against

\* Marcus Jastrow, *Talmudic Dictionary* (New York: Pardes Publishing House, 1950), p. 1111. Commenting on ערבא, he on whom you rely might himself be neglectful.

those who would break away from established rules or destroy them from within. When that wall of authority is removed or even but one opening made in it, let that opening be only as tiny as the hole in a fine needle, the resulting cleavage to the wall will assume the proportions of an entry into a hall. Once its restrictions are removed — behold, [Judaism] is like an open [i. e., unfortified] city, and whoever wishes may enter and do as he pleases.

The Greeks personified the deity of faith by a statue of an innocent young girl with tightly closed eyes. For the believer is required to shut his eyes so as not to see. If, however, he opens his eyes, what difference does it make whether he sees with one eye or with both? To me it seems that both the Conservatives and the Radicals are moving in the same direction. The only difference between them is the time element. The Radical runs a fast race; he wants to implement his desires speedily. The Conservative moves more deliberately and is slower in arriving at his goal; he is an out-and-out hypocrite, doing just as the Radical does, but reluctant to uncover his actions for all to see. His justification for this hypocrisy is that the time is not yet propitious. The Radical, on the other hand, does everything publicly and unashamedly.

#### THE EIGHT ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF THE RADICAL RABBIS

When the Radical rabbis convened at Pittsburgh in 1885 under the leadership of Dr. Wise and Dr. Kohler, they passed several resolutions concerning the Jewish religion:

First, God is not corporeal and is not to be understood in corporeal terms.

Second, the Jews have been chosen as priests of the Lord to teach the unity of the Lord, the way of faith and morality, to all who dwell on earth. The books of the Bible are not contrary to scientific findings in our own day, but were written according to the spirit of their own time and according to what was known then. Sometimes they embellish their words with wonderful stories, with miracles and miraculous events, employing them to make known the providence of the Creator and His justice toward the children of men.

Third, there are many ordinances in the Law of Moses which

were established in response to the need of the time when the children of Israel lived in their own land. These ordinances were intended to train them and prepare them for their mission, which is to spread faith among the peoples of the earth. Now, however, we need only the ethical commandments, and it is incumbent upon us to maintain only those laws through which our souls will be exalted and sanctified. We should, therefore, abandon that which is in opposition to the thoughts and ways of modern civilization.

Fourth, the laws of unkosher meat, ritual cleanliness, and apparel made of mixed wool and linen belong to a time which has passed; they are ideas which are strange to our own time. Since they are no longer of any use to us, they place a stumbling block on our moral and spiritual paths.

Fifth, the mission of Israel, the establishment on earth of the kingdom of truth, justice, and righteousness, is closely connected with the Diaspora. We are not a people, but a religious community. Therefore, we hope neither to return to Jerusalem, nor to offer sacrifices through the Aaronic priesthood, nor to maintain laws which are dependent upon and associated with the Land of Israel.

Sixth, the Jewish religion cannot secure its own footing unless it keeps in step with the development of science. It is necessary for us to preserve the memory of the generations and events of our past history. The Christian and Moslem religions, which are sisters to the Jewish religion, will aid it to spread knowledge of the Lord and the moral law. Let the spirit of love for the human race which beats in the hearts of this generation beat within our hearts, too, and cause us to stretch forth the hand of brotherhood, peace, and friendship to all who would help us to establish the kingdom of truth and righteousness for all the inhabitants of the earth.

Seventh, we believe in the immortality of the soul, but deny the resurrection of the dead [and the existence of] paradise and hell.

Eighth, the laws of Moses concerning the poor and the rich are good. Our constant duty is to strive through them for a just and righteous solution to these problems and to remove the evils which are planted and rooted in our contemporary society.

The Conservatives have thundered forth against these resolutions, and writers who speak as Conservatives have sounded loud and

furious blasts on their journalistic shofars. They have declared war on these Reformers and have moved into combat. [They argue] that these Reformers have no portion in Judaism, and insist on regarding them as having been severed from any connection with "the inheritance of the Lord" [*I Samuel* 26:19]. Let us, however, examine each of the resolutions and see if they are in opposition to the [actual] deeds of those who call themselves Conservatives.

The first and the last resolutions are acceptable to the Orthodox as well. The second resolution, denying belief in miracles and wonders, is a matter of personal conviction. It appears to me that the Conservatives, too, would deny the belief that Aaron's staff turned into a real snake or that the Lord opened the mouth of [Balaam's] ass to speak as men do. In any case, not one of these rabbis has ever publicly admitted such beliefs.

The third resolution is a puzzle to me. I am not sure to which of the commandments its words allude. If [they allude] to matters which are related to the [Holy] Land, the Orthodox, too, will agree that these commandments are not observed at this time.

The fourth resolution releases them [from observance of the laws regarding] unkosher meat, ritual uncleanness, and apparel made of mixed wool and linen. Many Conservative rabbis, too, are not scrupulous in these matters. If they do not eat swine's flesh and snails when dining in public as the Reform do, they do eat non-kosher food in private. Many of their wives do not purify themselves from their [menstrual] uncleanness [by means of ritual immersion], and they wear shop-made clothes of mixed wool and linen.

The fifth resolution abandons the age-old hope of a return to Zion and the restoration of the sacrificial service [at the Temple] in Jerusalem. Many Conservative congregations, too, make no mention of a return to Zion in their prayers, and one of their leading rabbis, Dr. [Sabato] Morais, has stated publicly that he would not believe in the sacrificial service [even] after the [messianic] redemption.

The Conservatives agree also with the sixth resolution. [They, too, believe in the value of secular knowledge.] With regard to the seventh resolution, the Conservatives, too, do not believe in the resurrection of the dead, but only in the resurrection of the soul. Concerning paradise they hold differing opinions, but in general their

conviction is not very strong, and they are in doubt as to whether [in the hereafter] they will eat the flesh of the Leviathan and the Wild Bull or drink the aged wine from the grapes grown during the six days of creation. Likewise, concerning hell, they claim that it is not so very hot, and they have doubts as to its seven stages.

Certainly, then, there is no difference at all between the Conservatives and the Radicals except that the former are soft-hearted like babes, who hide themselves beneath their mothers' petticoats, and dread stating their opinions publicly. They follow the lead of their rabbis, who declare, "Do as I say, and not as I do." The Radicals, on the other hand, are courageous and candid. They do what they think [right] and make known what they do. Their rabbis publicize their opinions and do what they direct others to do.

The conclusion to be drawn from my words is that there are only two ways: the way of the Orthodox and the way of the Reform. Whoever walks the first path will remain a Jew all his days, firm in his faith and true to his teaching, the *Shulhan Aruk*; but once he removes the yoke of this authority from his shoulders, the only path left for him is that of the Radicals. To the Conservatives I declare: "How long halt ye between two opinions? [*I Kings* 18:21.] If your faith is Orthodox, pursue it! If Reform, pursue it! But operate with my measuring rod. Please do not confuse us by saying with your mouth, 'Our faith is Conservative,' while your heart is far from it."

Let us return to our original consideration — the new seminary which the Conservatives plan to found in our city, New York, in addition to the [Reformers' Hebrew Union] College in Cincinnati. Several questions [occur to me]:

- (1) For which group was the College in Cincinnati founded?
- (2) Is this college essential for Judaism in America?
- (3) Will it fulfill the desire of those who have founded it?
- (4) Is it adequate or inadequate to the need?
- (5) If it may be said that it was founded for only one group, is it proper for another group to found another college for itself?
- (6) [If so,] with what changes?

I shall deal with the first matter first and the last, last. The

leading founder of the [Hebrew Union] College is Dr. Isaac Mayer Wise, of Cincinnati, who holds aloft the banner of Reform and desires to introduce reforms into [our] religion by accommodating it to time and place. With the assistance of many rabbis from the Reform group, he founded the Hebrew Union College in the city of Cincinnati in July, 1875, shortly after he had been able to unite some one hundred congregations in America into the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the organization which directs and supports the College and every year supplies it with funds.

Dr. Wise in his letter to me last month (April, 1886) wrote the following (he wrote in German, using Hebrew characters):

Never has such a permanent institution arisen and grown in America in so short a time as has the rabbinical college in Cincinnati. When the idea of establishing it was [first] proposed, everyone laughed mockingly and did not believe that American-born children, who did not then know Judaism and had no desire to learn anything about it and about Hebrew literature, could understand *Mishnah* and *Gemarah* [the Talmud], Codes, *Midrash* [rabbinic homiletics], and philosophy. All thought it to be impossible. "What American would want to be a rabbi?" was heard on all sides. "The Torah has been forgotten in Israel; it has fallen and will not rise again." Many among both the Orthodox and the Reform handed down their severe judgment and were content. Nevertheless, we began. Don't ask how or with what! With one teacher I toiled daily in a dark room in the basement of the Bene Israel synagogue. I carried on my work like the teacher of a youngster who is learning the alphabet. I knocked on the doors of the rich to beg some copies of the Pentateuch and old prayer books to use as texts for [the mishnaic tractate] "The Sayings of the Fathers" and the Psalms. Now, thank God, we have a treasury of books which amounts to some ten thousand volumes and a beautiful and splendid building which is the finest of all the rabbinical seminaries in the world. The first students to have graduated as rabbis are [Joseph] Krauskopf, [Henry] Berkowitz, [David] Philipson, and [Israel] Aaron. From the second class are [Joseph] Stolz, [Joseph] Silverman, [Max] Heller, [Louis] Grossmann, and [Isaac] Rubinstein, who have all found positions for themselves and derive pleasure from their congregations. Students of the College who have studied for a period of eight years acquire for themselves the title of "Doctor." They know more and are better trained than the Doctors who have spent an equivalent amount of time at one of the rabbinical schools in Germany.

[In the following two paragraphs, Eisenstein is very possibly paraphrasing the remainder of Wise's letter. — Ed.]

The cost of the college was \$30,000. The yearly expenditure is \$15,000 for the professors' and teachers' salaries, besides some \$3,000 to support the poorer students and to cover miscellaneous expenses. Added to this are the expenses of the school at Temple Emanu-El in New York, which [school] is like a branch of the College and in which the students are trained and prepared so that they will be qualified for admission to the College. According to the report of 1885, the treasurer had on hand \$8,600, and the pledged obligation against mortgaged property [Eisenstein is not clear as to whether the property in question is College property or property still mortgaged, but eventually to be bequeathed to the College] amounting to some \$20,000.

The College was not founded to serve one party. The congregational union [the Union of American Hebrew Congregations] which supports it includes constituents with divergent religious views, and it is in the power of the majority to influence the direction of the College according to its will and the spirit of Judaism pulsating within it. The aim of the directors of the College is to teach the law of the Jewish faith and Hebrew literature to youngsters in order to make them rabbis and preachers in America, but they do not teach them to be Orthodox, Conservative, or Radical.

[Dr. Wise's] rabbinical seminary is, in my opinion, like a school where business methods are taught, but where no specific trade is forced upon the students. The purpose is to teach only general business principles, and when the student finishes his studies, he may choose whichever business attracts him.

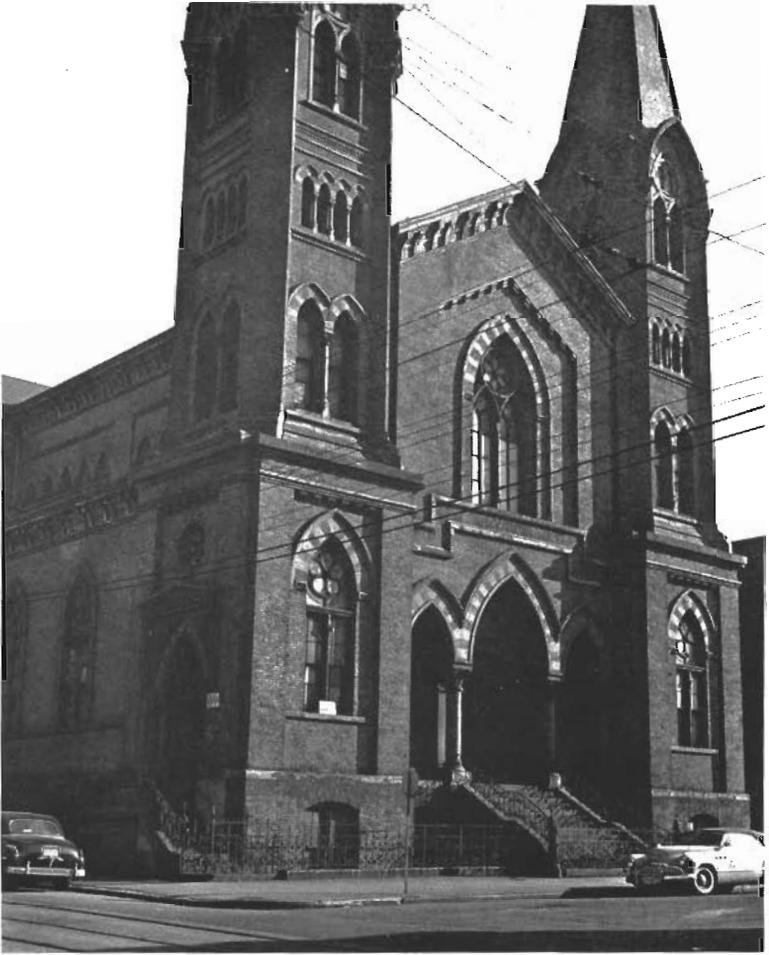
It is not clear from the studies pursued at the College whether the path taken [by a student] will be that of Reform or Orthodoxy. The curriculum includes the Hebrew Bible along with its *targumim* [interpretive renderings into Aramaic]; the *Mishnah* and the *Gemarah* [Talmud] with Rashi's commentary and the *Tosafot* [rabbinical supplements]; *Midrash* [rabbinic homiletics]; [Maimonides'] *Guide to the Perplexed* and the principles of the *Guide*; [Maimonides' codex, the] *Mishneh Torah*; and [Caro's] *Shulhan Aruk*. Can it be said that these books are opposed to the Orthodox position?

It is true that the directors and officials of the rabbinical school [in Cincinnati] are Radicals and imbue the students with their out-



*Courtesy, Rabbi Ira Eisenstein, New York*

A SCHOLAR AT WORK  
Judah David Eisenstein in later years



*Jack Warner Studio, Cincinnati*

CINCINNATI'S MOUND STREET TEMPLE  
The old Bene Israel Temple, where the College was born

look, but are they [the present directors and officials] not chosen by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations? If the influence of the Orthodox congregations [within the Union] grows, others [of an Orthodox standpoint] will be appointed to replace [the present Radical directors].

A rabbinical school is a useful and necessary institution for Judaism in America — for many reasons. First, why should we seek rabbis from other countries if they can be found here? Second, those [rabbis] who come from abroad are strange to the American way of life and unsympathetic to the spirit of our native-born youth. Third, they do not know the language of the country and can speak [with our young people] only in a foreign tongue. Fourth, we cannot know a rabbi's qualifications and worth [before he arrives]; there are many whom we accept as rabbis in large congregations only to discover later that they had previously been converted, sinning wickedly beyond all measure against both man and God. On the other hand, American rabbis are known to us by character and qualities from childhood.

There is no doubt at all that the rabbinical school [in Cincinnati] will fulfill the desires of its founders and realize the wishes of those who are actively supporting it; they will see the fruit of their labors. The College has already produced distinguished rabbis who have been accepted by honored congregations in America and are better than those rabbis who have come from abroad.

The College is a spacious institution, and its yearly graduating classes will suffice to meet the needs of the increasing number of congregations in America. As a matter of fact, it is foreseeable that in the future there will be more rabbis than congregations by a ratio of seven to one just as the number of physicians will overtake the number of the sick. The only difference between them is that the physicians know what faces them and can increase the number of their patients, while rabbis have no way of increasing the number of congregations.

Regarding the questions as to whether, if it may be said that the College [in Cincinnati] was established for only one party, it would be proper for another party to found another college for itself, and [if so] with what changes, my answer is: if the Radicals alone had,

in fact, founded the College and their aim consistently was to train only Radical rabbis, and if the Conservatives lacked the power to assume the leadership of the College in order to change it according to their viewpoint and spirit — if, in truth, this were the case — then certainly they should erect a new seminary for the preparation of Conservative and Orthodox rabbis.

In my opinion, however, it would be necessary for them to institute a number of changes:

- (1) They should legislate against accepting Radical congregations into their association lest, in a matter of time when the Radicals increase, they overturn the [Conservative] platter!
- (2) The leaders and teachers of the [new] seminary should be strictly observant in their practice of the Conservative faith and should not transgress even one of the minor commandments in the Torah.
- (3) They should study with covered heads, and the curriculum itself should be in strict accord with the *Shulhan Aruk*.
- (4) They should accept only very young students, six to eight years of age, and the language of instruction at the seminary should be English so that there would be no necessity for the students to attend a public school, where [so far as their rabbinical studies were concerned] they would waste the greater part of the day. [If they attended public school,] after using up an hour or two for eating and for rest, there would remain only a short amount of time for them to study to become Conservative rabbis.

If the reader should ask why this [short amount of] time suffices the Radical rabbinical students, the answer is that there is a world of difference between the Radical and the Conservative students; the Torah that the Radical studies is superficial in comparison with the Torah of a Conservative rabbinical student. To the Radical, secular knowledge is paramount, and Jewish theological studies are of secondary importance. For him it is most necessary to know Latin and Greek and the theology and mythology of various peoples, while he regards Hebrew literature as only the seasoning in the broth.

For the Conservative, however, the case is quite otherwise (or at least it should be), since he looks upon Hebrew literature as of first importance and constantly immerses himself in it, while secular studies are subsidiary and to be pursued [only] an hour or two a day. If the founders [of the Conservative seminary] do not institute these changes, there will be no difference whatsoever between the seminary which they contemplate establishing and the College in Cincinnati.

I have reflected upon the matter, however, and let me state my opinion that they [the Conservatives] will not depart from the pattern set by Dr. Wise. The proof is that they accept as their associates any who will join them and take money from anyone who gives, never asking whether he is Conservative or Orthodox. In addition, they have adopted the rule that every society or congregation which gives \$25 annually may send one delegate to represent its point of view in making policy for the [Conservative] college. For every additional \$25 they have the right to send another delegate, so that for every \$25 they may increase their influence. This being the case, figure it out for yourself, intelligent reader: if there are forty Orthodox congregations and each must obligate itself to give \$25, at most they will give \$1,000 and send forty men to represent their viewpoint. But one wealthy Radical congregation alone which has donated \$1,500 is entitled to send sixty delegates, who would be able to nullify the intentions of the traditionalists simply by their majority and could easily compel the minority to do whatever the majority wished. This is demonstrated by the fact that members of the Radical rabbinate, rabbis whose outlook does not conform to Conservatism, have already been elected to leadership in the association and will undoubtedly appoint directors of similar viewpoint. And if this is so, what have the [Conservative] sages accomplished by their promotion [of a new seminary]?

At this writing there remains considerable doubt as to whether they will be able to establish a new rabbinical school and whether they will be able at length to overcome all the stumbling blocks and accomplish their aim. If they make no attempt to introduce the innovations which I have listed above, their institution will not differ

from the College in Cincinnati to the slightest degree. Let me prophesy at the very outset that from the vine planted in this vineyard in which they hope to grow grapes — that is, Conservative rabbis — they will reap wild, unripe fruit — that is, Radicals devoted to the other extreme.

May the day come when all of them will understand what faces them and when they will cease to halt between the two different opinions!

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