

# The *Ark*: An Early Twentieth-Century Periodical

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The *Ark*, a monthly illustrated magazine for American Jewish children that appeared from 1911 to 1923, has heretofore been an unexplored source for social historians. Yet, an analysis of its contents adds to our knowledge of the American Jewish experience. Like a slice of everyday life, it illustrates the realities confronting the Jews of that time within both the Jewish community and the larger American society.

The *Ark*, however, was more than the passive observer of Jewish life. While it kept tabs on multiple forces that were constantly changing Jewish development, it actively preached a fixed message. The message, a veritable creed imparted to its young readers, was three-pronged. First, the *Ark* taught that a code of universal ethics underlay the progress of civilization. Mandating the proper behavior of the individual and of human society at large, the *Ark* held that immutable ethical truths constituted the legacy bequeathed to mankind by the ancient Hebrews that were later incorporated into secular democratic law. Social justice and goodness conformed to fixed ethical precepts, and social evils stemmed from a rejection of morality. Second, the *Ark* insisted on the preservation of the Jewish heritage. How that heritage was preserved was less important, and ethical precepts aside, the journal's editors accepted pluralism within Judaism. Writers and readers told of different customs and beliefs that made it impossible to speak of uniformity on matters of religious observance or sense of peoplehood within the daily life of American Jews. No matter, the *Ark* said. Although initially sponsored by the Reform movement, and although it made a discernible pitch for Reform, its contents accepted the multiple forms of Jewish religious behavior of those years so long as they bespoke a commitment to Judaism and Jewish identity. Third, the *Ark* expressed an unchanging love and reverence for the United States. Extolling the wonders of America for Jews, the periodical repeatedly

stressed the compatibility of Americanism and Judaism while it endorsed the overarching constant Jewish aim for full integration within the American community. Upon Jews lay the obligation, the journal taught, to accommodate to the ideas and behavior of Christian America, certainly as long as that behavior did not conflict with Jewish religious observances or identity.

To be sure, the three focal points occasionally exposed conflicts or issues not covered by the magazine. But within those broad parameters the *Ark* set out its philosophy for Jewish youth.

## The Ark Until World War I

In November 1911 the *Ark*, a monthly journal of some eighty pages, made its debut. Meant for Jewish children and young teenagers, its contents included fiction, poems and plays, short articles, and letters from readers. A central motif of this particular issue was the approaching Hanukkah holiday, and included were an account of the traditional story of the Maccabees, another story about how Hanukkah was celebrated in Russia, and two Hanukkah plays for the use of religious schools. Although some contributions were reprinted from other periodicals, and although some contributors were not Jewish, it was abundantly clear at the outset that the magazine's overriding purpose was to cultivate among its young readers a strong Jewish identity, a commitment to biblical ethics, and an appreciation of Jewish education. For example, the *Ark* admonished the children at Hanukkah time to behave as loyally to Judaism as the Maccabees had — “live your lives so that all Israel will be honored in your living!... For the mantle of the Maccabees has fallen upon you, and yours is the duty to keep the lights aflame with the devotion that is due your faith.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Ark* was not the first magazine for American Jewish children. That distinction belongs to the *Sabbath Visitor*, a journal founded by Rabbi Max Lilienthal in 1874. The *Ark*'s immediate predecessor was *Young Israel*, a periodical that lasted for only three years. A project undertaken by the Reform movement, *Young Israel* was sponsored by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and over half of its board of editors were Reform rabbis. For our purposes, both the

*Sabbath Visitor* and *Young Israel* are important insofar as they provided models for later periodicals.

By 1874, Reform leaders had recognized the paucity of literature in English for American Jewish children, and they aimed to spread Reform's message among the youth as part of an effort to stem the alarming drift away from Reform temples. A relatively long-lived magazine, the *Ark* adopted the exact format of *Young Israel* and continued a pattern of diversified materials. In an attempt, however, to broaden its appeal to non-Reformers, it made no mention of its Reform affiliation nor of a Reform editorial board. Reform rabbis contributed stories and poems to the *Ark*, and, as discussed below, the magazine had a distinctive Reform tone. The journal's target audience, however, was broader. A statement of purpose explained:

There are journals in plenty for the American Jew – there is no lack of magazines for the American child – but the American Jewish child has either to read what was written for adult eyes and understanding, or else find in his browsings [*sic*] in the juvenile magazines all life interpreted from a Christian standpoint. Because our readers are young Jews, we shall endeavor to have all the pages of “The Ark” reflect a Jewish atmosphere. We shall try to interest the Jewish child from the vantage point of every phase of life that touches him. We shall try to inculcate in him a love and understanding of all things Jewish *without a thought as to the religious affiliation of his parents; we shall have no care as to any shade of belief, or special interest*, of the elders of the House of Israel—but the Jewish child, if he is to dwell within the House, must feel himself one with Judaism, the eternal principles of which are changeless and dear to every Jew. (Emphasis added.)

The *Ark* preached that the Jewish child was no less an American for being a Jew. Since the child absorbed Americanism from the very air he breathed, the magazine insisted that he or she also appreciate the riches of a Jewish heritage.<sup>2</sup>

The *Ark*, like *Young Israel*, was published in Cincinnati by Simon Bacharach. When Bacharach died in 1923, one writer testified that he had been the *Ark*'s guide and inspiration.<sup>3</sup> For its entire existence, the *Ark* was under the managing editorship of Isabella R. Hess (Hess as a young child had been a reader of the *Sabbath Visitor*).<sup>4</sup> She was a frequent contributor to the magazine — almost every issue carried at

least one story or poem she had written — and besides other original contributions, she drew material from printed books, journals, and newspapers. Some of the pieces carried the name of the writer and their original source; others appeared anonymously, and for the most part no evidence existed that Hess obtained permission from the original publishers to include a specific story or article. The contributors were past or contemporary men and women writers, some famous and others not. Many had made their name in the Jewish world: Sholom Asch, Sholom Aleichem, I. L. Peretz, Emma Lazarus, Israel Zangwill, and Reform rabbis Gustav Gottheil, Emil Hirsch, and Jonah Wise. Some non-Jewish contributions — a story by Thomas Mann, another by L. M. Montgomery, and poems by Lord Byron (“Jephtha’s Daughter”), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (“A Child’s Thought of God”), and Rudyard Kipling (“Hymn Before Action”) — dealt with Jewish or non-denominational material.<sup>5</sup> A source providing numerous pieces by non-Jews in the first volumes of the *Ark* was George Alexander Kohut’s *A Hebrew Anthology*, a collection of poems on biblical themes in English literature by famous Christians from the Elizabethan age to the present.

The *Ark* usually followed the calendar. The motif of a typical issue concerned the holiday celebrated that month; for example, the focus in the February issue was usually on Washington and Lincoln, in March on Purim, in April on Pesach, in July on Independence Day, and in September on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Explanations of the holidays along with poems and stories of appreciation were the usual fare. To many children of that time the *Ark* likely was their first exposure to minor Jewish holidays like Purim,<sup>6</sup> Lag b’Omer, or Tisha b’Av, or to customs like *tashlich* on Rosh Hashanah. In some instances Orthodox holiday practices were described, but more often the way to mark a Jewish holiday bore the stamp of Reform, notably the movement’s toleration of deviations from tradition. Certain constants did obtain: virtuous behavior outranked ritual, and all holidays demanded that Jews remember the less fortunate. After all, as one writer reminded his readers, the Hebrew word for charity really meant justice.<sup>7</sup> Where parallels could be found between American and Jewish history (e.g., Sukkoth marked the ancient Jewish equivalent

of Thanksgiving; the struggle for liberty in the Passover story was identical with the search for freedom in the American Revolution; Judah the Maccabee ranked with the Pilgrims who sought religious liberty), so much the better. “Surely,” the *Ark* said, “Jewish Americans may well and fittingly observe both [Sukkoth and the American Thanksgiving]. Both are their own.”<sup>8</sup>

The material in the journal noted variations in observance even among Reform-affiliated Jews. Still greater proof of a variety of American Jews and “Judaisms” appeared in the *Ark*’s letter box. Run by a “Cousin Judah,” this letters-to-the-editor department was a favorite of the readers. The younger “cousins” reported to Cousin Judah from farms, towns, cities, orphanages, and private houses throughout the country. From Clarksburg (W. Va.), Albia (Iowa), Natchitoches (La.), Kiefer (Okla.), Trinidad (Colo.), Chehalis (Wash.), and countless other places came accounts of the number of Jews and synagogues in a town or school, how religious services were conducted, and the activities of the children’s schools and clubs. Sometimes the writer was the only Jew in a school or class and was therefore, as one child put it, especially appreciative of the *Ark*.<sup>9</sup> The letters also offered descriptions of Jewish experiences in little-known communities. The writer from Natchitoches, for example, explained that in order to get the very small number of Jewish children confirmed, a few women organized a Sabbath school and arranged with the rabbi of a nearby town to come once each month to prepare them.<sup>10</sup> The letters not only revealed different Jewish customs, but in some cases they provided examples of Jewish horizontal mobility, as well as the surprisingly high level of the children’s reading and writing abilities. Cousin Judah answered each letter; picking up the holiday theme, he also wrote a monthly essay to the cousins, usually on virtuous living, the importance of education, and loyalty to Judaism. In a style that some children called “sermony,” he effectively preached on the behavior of a proper American Jewish child.

In a typical issue of the *Ark*, fiction, poetry, and plays took precedence over nonfiction. While the journal printed short articles on diverse subjects such as nail-biting, jujitsu, and the special boats needed

to sail on the Chesapeake Bay,<sup>11</sup> current events were largely ignored until World War I. Where the Anglo-Jewish and Yiddish press focused on subjects like progressivism and socialism, the fight over immigration restriction, the Galveston movement, the Mendel Beilis case, Zionism, and new Conservative and Orthodox institutions, the *Ark* kept quiet. (In some measure, the Cincinnati-based *Ark* may have been mirroring the isolationist bent of the Midwest.) To be sure, one department in the journal called “Items of Interest,” which ran a piece on the German army’s new uniform,<sup>12</sup> filled some gaps, but letters from the children indicated that their knowledge of current events far surpassed what the magazine supplied. For example, Russian discrimination against American Jewish passport holders, which developed into a cause *célèbre*, was first mentioned in a letter to Cousin Judah,<sup>13</sup> and so were different views on women’s suffrage. The items themselves were one or two paragraphs on a wide range of subjects, from nature and geography to technology and foreign dignitaries. In the same issue, the pitfalls of not using leisure time properly could be one subject, and the spelling policy at Wellesley College another.<sup>14</sup> Again, in this section the journal showed a recognition of the multiplicity of customs within the Jewish and secular worlds. Anecdotal material, like the health regime of Harvard’s seventy-year-old president Charles Eliot,<sup>15</sup> and jokes, puzzles, and occasional book reviews rounded out most issues.

The Jewish component in the *Ark*’s stories was usually tied to an emphasis on virtuous living. A common theme was that of a Jewish girl or boy, the only Jew or identifying Jew, in a class/boarding school/camp, who was snubbed socially by his more affluent or acculturated Jewish or non-Jewish peers. The hero possessed admirable traits; he was modest and hardworking, responsible and scrupulously honest, charitable, and sensitive to others. But not until he performed bravely or risked his own life or good name on behalf of his tormentors did he gain acceptance. Similarly, the hero who never hid his Jewish identity or ritual practices won respect for his religion by his unselfish deeds.

Numerous stories, especially before 1917, followed that general pattern. For example, one tells of Ruth, the only Jewish girl in a boarding school, who suffers the antisemitic taunts of her schoolmates and is barred from a sorority because of her religion. Falsely accused

of stealing examination papers, she nevertheless remains silent in order to show that she can be “one of the girls.” After the true culprit finally confesses, the sorority recognizes Ruth’s merits and invites her to join. In a following installment, Ruth refuses to participate in the sorority’s sewing circle that meets on a Saturday. The sorority’s guest that day is a prominent Protestant bishop who, on learning of her absence, publically praises Ruth for her refusal to desecrate her Sabbath.<sup>16</sup> Another example concerned a Jewish boy looking for a job in order to care for his sick mother. His search is unsuccessful because he openly admits that he won’t work on the Sabbath. At long last, his luck changes. When he tells the interviewer how proud he was to be a Jew, he is hired on the spot for his principled behavior and “spunk.”<sup>17</sup> The Horatio Alger twist of good fortune accompanying virtuous living is even more pronounced in other stories. One is of an immigrant boy suffering from trachoma who is barred from landing on Ellis Island but secures the patronage of a kind doctor and becomes a great physician; another is of a poor girl burdened by the care of her family who returns a wallet thrown from a train and is subsequently rewarded for her honesty by the wealthy owner.<sup>18</sup>

The virtuous Jew is also the subject of numerous stories set in foreign countries in Europe and Asia during biblical and medieval times. In those, a common motif is the Jew who does a favor for the ruler. Offered the choice of a reward, he often requests that his people be spared persecution or expulsion. Never does he agree to convert in order to save himself. In most cases the characters are all good or all evil. Overwhelmingly, the stories, often saccharine-sweet, end happily on an optimistic note.

The same righteous heroes and the same emphasis on virtuous living appeared in stories reprinted from non-Jewish sources, usually children’s magazines like *East and West* and *The Classmate*, featuring non-Jewish heroes. Here too the tone is upbeat. One poem from *The Classmate* reads:

Don’t hunt after trouble, but look for success/  
You’ll find what you look for; don’t look for distress/  
If you see but your shadow, remember I pray, that  
the sun is still shining, but *you’re* in the way!<sup>19</sup>

Virtue too was readily preached. In a serialized story of a struggling and upstanding young artist who finally succeeds, the author wrote about the hero:

But however high he may climb, however far he may go, I do not think he will change materially from the true-hearted lad we have known in these chapters. I think he will rejoice in the joy of his friends, and grieve with their sorrows. He will always be ready to share all he has with those who need. His anger will always be quick for evil, but his forgiveness will also be gentle.<sup>20</sup>

The lesson from the Jewish and non-Jewish sources was simple — a code of absolute values grounded in Jewish ethics applied to all humanity. In the case of the Jews, however, there was another dimension. Irrespective of where and when the Jew lived, his righteous behavior negated the age-old derogatory stereotypes leveled against Jews as a group.

In sum, the righteous Jew bore a heavy burden. As Max Raisin, rabbi and prolific writer, charged the young readers:

Remember that to be a true Jew means to be a true and complete man. Therefore let your Judaism dominate all your thoughts and actions. He who allows himself to become estranged from his people, he who severs his connections with the congregation and synagogue, he who goes so far as to marry out of the fold of his people can only be classed as a renegade from the camp of Israel. We are not large in numbers, therefore not even the least of us can be spared from assisting in the heavenly work before us...This means you as it means everyone else in Israel. Will you not enlist in the holy army to battle in behalf of the Lord of Hosts?<sup>21</sup>

Raisin's piece succinctly illustrated the philosophy and tone of the *Ark*. Whether the eight-to-sixteen year-olds understood the message or took it to heart was quite another matter.

Stories as well as short accounts of events in the lives of famous Jews, like statesman Benjamin Disraeli, philanthropist Judith Montefiore, and artist Boris Schatz, taught Jewish history along with virtue to readers of the *Ark*.<sup>22</sup> Material from biblical and rabbinic texts underlay pieces about figures of ancient times and about the physical landscape of Judea and Babylonia. In a long serialized story about a young warrior of the tribe of Menasseh, Rabbi Jonah Wise discussed the customs of the original tribes of Israel;<sup>23</sup> another long story dealt with Hiram of Tyre and the building of Solomon's Temple.<sup>24</sup> For the medieval period the *Ark* relied on other types of sources, including folktales, legends, and even fairy tales that were translated from Hebrew, Yiddish, German, or Russian. One reader, a young teenager from Reading, Pennsylvania, contributed many translations of his own from the Hebrew. Such pieces described Jewish social, cultural, and religious practices in pre-modern Europe and Asia. How rulers treated Jews in the Middle Ages as well as specific episodes of persecution, like the story of a young Marrano girl martyred during the Spanish Inquisition,<sup>25</sup> were also included. Throughout the issues sayings from the Talmud — e.g., “It is no trouble to find excuses for the sins we cherish” and “Without a rich heart wealth is an ugly beggar” — peppered the journal's pages. The prominent educator and author, George Alexander Kohut, added fictional accounts of the rabbinic period in a series he called *Told By The Rabbis*, and so did Rabbi Jacob Raisin in his *Tales From The Talmud*.<sup>26</sup> Modern Jewish history, except for that of American Jews, was less fully covered, but some lacunae were filled by obituaries of famous Jews or by one or two paragraphs on people and places in the “Items of Interest.”

Contemporary fiction in the very first years of the *Ark* dealt primarily with second-or third-generation, middle-class American Jewish children of Central European extraction who lived in small Midwest cities rather than major east coast urban centers. They were highly acculturated, well dressed, and sufficiently prosperous to enjoy boarding schools, summer camps, and household servants; their

pronunciation of common Hebrew words was Germanic. Occasional mention was made of their forebears who, like many nineteenth-century immigrants, had peddled in the South and West. Their religious practices revealed a minimal Jewishness; they were at best affiliated with Reform temples, their Jewish education was limited to Sunday schools or a few hours weekly at religious schools, they ignored traditional observance of the Sabbath and Jewish holidays, and the highlight of their Jewish training was the ceremony of confirmation. Like many of their non-Jewish fellow Americans, they looked down on the more recent East European immigrants and excluded them from their company. “Only a Russian” was the line in one piece referring to the immigrants’ unsavory traits.<sup>27</sup>

Increasingly, readers of the *Ark* met Russian-born children as well. Russians, the stories told, were eager above all to leave their trouble-ridden land for the New World. Just as the *Ark* hailed the United States as the paragon of free government, so did it make Russia the symbol of despotism. Would-be immigrants, therefore, substituted “Next year in America” for the traditional prayer “Next year in Jerusalem.”<sup>28</sup> The stories went on to describe the life of immigrant children. Uniformly poor, they dwelt in squalid tenements, malnourished, sickly, and often orphaned; they spoke ungrammatically and with a heavy Yiddish accent, they were taunted by classmates in the public school, and almost never were they friends of the German Jews. A few were homesick when they first reached America, but that feeling quickly evaporated.

The image of the typical Russian child changed somewhat when he encountered the Germans. Indeed, the Russian immigrants proved the more virtuous in terms of family loyalty, responsibility, ambition, and appreciation of books and education. They displayed a greater love and loyalty for the United States (for example, a special reverence for the flag and for the Fourth of July) as well as a greater commitment to Jewish precepts and observances. They celebrated neither Christmas nor Easter (although surprisingly they did send cards for Valentine’s Day), nor did they distance themselves from the language and customs of their grandparents. The portrayal of the Russians showed how the *Ark* was adjusting to the upwardly mobile masses of pre-World War I immigrants as they made their way from the slums to universities and

professional careers. Like its Reform sponsors, the journal aimed at reducing the mutual antipathy between the Russians and Germans, in part by saying that they are just as good as “we” are.<sup>29</sup> Aware of how second generation Russian immigrants were attracted to the newborn movement of Conservative Judaism, the journal strove for greater unity among American Jews under a Reform banner.

Although the editors of the *Ark* accepted variations of religious observance on the part of American Jews, it was first and foremost a religious journal committed to the belief in the ongoing Jewish mission. That idea, that Israel spread the light of truth throughout the world, was the point of an article by Rabbi Max Raisin: “of all the famous races and nations of antiquity, Israel alone has survived as a universal and invincible religious force, and he alone stands, where he always was, at the topmost height of moral endeavor and spiritual attainment.”<sup>30</sup> From that underlying premise, the *Ark* deplored the widespread ignorance of things Jewish on the part of the youth and their neglect of the Sabbath and holidays, and its stories and articles pressed vigorously for a Jewish education. Jews in Eastern Europe charged that their American brethren lived like “goyyim” — “Who knows what becomes of our husbands in that trefe land?” asked one woman whose husband had left for the New World.<sup>31</sup> Many American Jewish leaders voiced similar concerns. In his memoirs, prominent communal worker David Blaustein contrasted the American observance of Purim with that of his *cheder* in Europe: “Here in America, Purim is a lost day. I dare say many a Jewish boy does not even know in which season of the year Purim falls.”<sup>32</sup>

Nor were Reform loyalties of the magazine much of a question; only once did it run a piece suggesting that some Reform leaders may have carried anti-traditionalism too far.<sup>33</sup> Contributors to the journal, the socio-religious lifestyle of the heroes in prewar contemporary fiction, and even the advertisements (mostly for books by Reform rabbis) testified to its Reform position. An Orthodox journal would hardly have approved, as did the *Ark*, of celebrations of Halloween or Valentine’s Day, or modifications of the dietary laws, or the importance bestowed on “confirmation” in place of the traditional *bar mitzvah*. True, the *Ark* printed an essay by Solomon Schechter, head

of the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary, but the piece was an appreciation of Abraham Lincoln, and hardly an endorsement of Orthodoxy or Conservatism.<sup>34</sup> On occasion the magazine included calls for amity among all Jews including traditionalists, and Cousin Judah objected to ranking Reform above Orthodoxy. Explaining his acceptance of plural forms of Judaism, he wrote: “Since to me Judaism means serving the one eternal God with one’s whole heart, I fail to see how one form can be preferable. Both Orthodox and Reform have saints and sinners in the fold.”<sup>35</sup>

The most striking proof of the *Ark*’s commitment to Reform was its studied indifference to Jewish peoplehood and its opposition to Zionism. Even though not all Reform Jews were anti-Zionists, the magazine, like major Reform institutions before World War I, defined Jews and Judaism in religious terms alone. Palestine had historical associations for Jews, but many, one article explained, eschewed mourning the destruction of the ancient Jewish commonwealths, preferring instead to see exile as a good, proving that God had dispersed the Jews in order to spread His word.<sup>36</sup> The following early poem, which on the surface appeared pro-Zionist, was sooner meant as a hymn to the onset of the Chosen People’s divine mission:

Onward, young brave Hebrew, go  
To thy native land of old  
To the land of prophets great,  
To the land of brave and bold.  
Upward let thy spirits rise  
To thy native heaven bright;  
Where Jehovah’s sunny eye  
Sheds on Israel blessed light.<sup>37</sup>

American Jews had no need of a restored Jewish homeland or temple. We all love Palestine for its history, Cousin Judah once told his young readers in connection with Tisha b’Av, “but I am glad that so many of us are here where we may share equally in the dignity and responsibility of national life! Let us not forget our gratitude for this

haven, our American home.”<sup>38</sup> It should be noted, however, that two of the “cousins” participated in Zionist activities in their towns, showing again the differences of opinion, this time on whether Judaism had a “peoplehood” or national dimension.<sup>39</sup> True, a handful of stories mentioned single Russian Jews desirous of immigration to Palestine, but according to one writer, even in the trouble-ridden czarist domain where pro-Zionist sentiment might seem justified, Jews were primarily loyal to Russia.<sup>40</sup>

The focus on American Jewish living led easily to the matter of interreligious relations. The youngsters read of antisemitism in Europe, particularly in pre-modern days; the charge of deicide is mentioned in one story and that of the blood libel in two others. Still another recounts the old Italian tale on which *The Merchant of Venice* was based; here, although the story hinges on Shylock and his bargain for a pound of Christian flesh, at the end the pope sides with the Jew.<sup>41</sup> But the *Ark* never discussed the problem of American antisemitism *per se*; dislike of the American Jew comes through in stories merely as social discrimination, by Jews as well as Christians, against the individual Jew — sometimes the “yid” or “sheeny” or “kike” — and in derogatory images of the group’s social behavior. When, for example, one later story was critical of “noisy, over-dressed, vulgarly prosperous Jews” at summer resorts, it was tacitly taking the side of those who discriminated.<sup>42</sup> The very problem did not appear to be one of great importance, never involving political discrimination let alone physical danger, and its manifestations were usually erased by the virtuous hero. Sensitive readers might have wondered why *all* Jews were branded by negative stereotypes, but the magazine never addressed that question. Its stock message, that Christians much preferred the self-respecting Jew, implied that self-respect — for example, don’t seek to join a club where Jews are not welcome<sup>43</sup> — and exemplary behavior would win acceptance.

On day-to-day encounters between American Jews and Christians, coverage in the *Ark* ranged from descriptions of street brawls to accounts of warm cooperation. The positive theme received greater emphasis. There were stories about Jews and Christians who linked

the lights of Christmas trees with Hanukkah candles or who defended each other publicly. One serialized account told in separate episodes of how a little Jewish boy taught the kindly Irish Catholic policeman on the beat the meaning and wonders of Jewish holidays.<sup>44</sup> Nor did the journal forget to emphasize the unity of Jews and Christians or the “bond of brotherhood”<sup>45</sup> forged in American wars. Nevertheless, despite the inroads made by intermarriage among Jews, the magazine didn’t think that interfaith unity extended that far. Several times stories of mixed couples included the Christian partner’s conversion. In only one story that appeared during the war did the Jew marry a non-Jew, but in the end his Jewish identity triumphed and he repented before an untimely death.<sup>46</sup>

To be sure, the need to accommodate could conflict with Jewish living. If America was inherently Christian, did accommodation dictate the adoption of Christian religious practices? Cousin Judah advised the readers not to attend Christian services until they were secure in their own faith. He added that Jesus may have uttered beautiful words, but they were beautiful because they were in fact Jewish.<sup>47</sup> A recurring question concerned the propriety of marking Christmas. Aside from fictional comparisons of Hanukkah and Christmas — one child tells his non-Jewish classmates that none, not even George Washington, could match the heroism of Judah the Maccabee<sup>48</sup> — the proper Jewish hero in most stories refuses to participate in Christian plays or pageants in school. The subject received more attention in the columns of Cousin Judah, where the usual advice was to abstain from Christmas festivities and not to exchange Christmas gifts with other Jews. Rather surprisingly, however, since Cousin Judah often assumed the role of the guardian of Jewish tradition, he told the cousins that they could join private Christmas celebrations — what he called giving Christians their holiday cheer — so long as they kept them out of their homes.<sup>49</sup> The question persisted and became more difficult for the Jews in 1915, when the prewar Americanization movement was gathering steam. Doubtless succumbing to that pressure, editor Hess in one story told of a teacher who overcame the reluctance of a Jewish boy to participate in the Christmas program. “This is America, the United States,” the teacher’s clinching argument was, “and in our schools we are working

together for the good of all. We try to forget here that we are divided by being Germans or English, Gentile or Jew, Catholic or Protestant. We each wish to try and make this a good land to live in.”<sup>50</sup> Cousin Judah followed suit. Advising his readers against the organization of Jewish clubs in schools, he wrote that all pupils in the schools were American — we have neither Christians nor Jews.<sup>51</sup>

The phrase “it’s everybody’s United States” applied to national as well as religious groups, but the *Ark* was less concerned with ethnic distinctions or stereotypes. One story was exceptional. It tells of an Italian child who is subjected to the taunt of “dago” until she teaches her classmates the sweetness of Italian melodies and thereby replaces the pejorative term with that of “angel.”<sup>52</sup> For the most part, however, the journal not only included the negative stereotypes but by sheer repetition actually *reinforced* them. At a time when cultural pluralism was as yet unknown, ethnic snubs were readily accepted.

The Irish figured most prominently in the fiction, and they usually fit one pattern — poor, manual laborers, hard-drinking, loud, and quarrelsome. To be sure, there were some “good” Irish, like the friendly policeman or the faithful servant, but the wild Irish boys on the block whose misdeeds ranged from truancy to theft vastly outnumbered them.

Black Americans, although less well known to Jewish children, also conformed to fixed images. Conveying a sense of their inferiority, the journal reprinted many jokes from American periodicals, replete with dialect and the name “Rastus,” that highlighted the mental and intellectual shortcomings of blacks. In one story that appeared after the war the heroine was a black girl who saved someone’s job.<sup>53</sup> Another story, written by Zionist Nathan Straus, also broke with the usual pattern. It tells of a Jewish girl and a black girl, both aliens in America, who dream of a homeland of their own where they could enjoy popular respect. According to Straus, Zionist leader Theodor Herzl and black leader Booker T. Washington were visionaries of the same kind.<sup>54</sup>

The social ladder erected by the *Ark* replicated general American opinion almost exactly. Old-stock Americans were on the top, Germans were the best-liked foreign group, Italians and Slavs were way down (here the *Ark* deviated from public opinion by excluding the Jews), and blacks were at the very bottom.

An analysis of Christian juvenile periodicals of this period lies beyond the scope of this article, but one can easily assume from the pieces reprinted in the Jewish journal that their message on morality and faith in God was virtually identical with the *Ark*'s. Indeed, the values preached by the *Ark* were eminently compatible with Americanism. Diligence, honesty, thrift, and sobriety sounded very much like the Puritan creed which was at the core of American beliefs since the colonial era. With respect to the *Ark*'s message on religion and loyalty to one's faith, Americans were also comfortable. They had long tolerated differences in religion, and as long as Jews did not claim a separate nationalism, Judaism and its adherents were quite acceptable. The Reform movement, still officially anti-Zionist and always an ardent exponent of accommodation, looked especially respectable. Thus, just as the *Ark* easily found, and reproduced, stories and poems from secular and even Christian journals<sup>55</sup> similar in outlook to its own, so could the non-Jewish child feel at home with the *Ark*.

Insisting that "you don't have to be Christian to be a good American," the *Ark*'s message of integration and accommodation permeated every issue. Nevertheless, precisely because it spoke for a minority group and a minority faith, the *Ark*, more than any other American journal, felt obliged to hammer home the importance of patriotism. Using the words of Congressman Julius Kahn of California, it reminded its readers that they were "*Jewish Americans*" and not "*American Jews*" (i.e., Americans first and Jews second).<sup>56</sup> In fiction and non-fiction it repeatedly extolled the character of America, hailing the nation which was the defender of liberty, the asylum for the oppressed, and the provider of equal opportunity. For such bounties Jews were indebted, and the journal expressed its gratitude on numerous occasions. February, with the birthdays of Lincoln and Washington, usually evoked paeans of praise for the country — editor Hess waxed eloquent in one poem, "The Heritage," on the two presidents and their contributions to the legacy of freedom<sup>57</sup> — and so did May and Memorial Day, celebrating those who had fought in American wars to safeguard freedom.

At times the material in the journal went further and equated Judaism with Americanism. As mentioned above, the themes of

Passover, Sukkoth, and Hanukkah were seen as identical to the American fight for freedom (American Revolution), the American harvest festival (Thanksgiving), and the Pilgrims' search for religious freedom (like that of Judah the Maccabee). The Jew, one piece stated, shared the destiny of the early American Puritan: "Blest by their prayers/ Made sacred by their tears/ Found this their Canaan/ The long-promised land."<sup>58</sup> Most important, the fundamental law of America, like that of Judaism, rested on the Bible, and the verse from Leviticus inscribed on the Liberty Bell made it "God's Bell."<sup>59</sup>

To hasten the process of Jewish accommodation and integration into American society, the *Ark* also instructed its readers in the nation's history. The Civil War, and the battle of Gettysburg in particular, was a favorite topic, but the journal dealt with trivial subjects too, like the home of Betsy Ross and the hotel in which President Garfield played billiards.<sup>60</sup> Short pieces appeared on a variety of historical facts about the states, the presidents, the army and navy, and occasionally a few paragraphs dealt with distinguished living Americans. The journal's fiction abounded with American symbols — the flag, the picture of Lincoln, Fourth of July pageants. Other nuggets of Americana found their way into the pages of the *Ark*; for example, in a description of the home of Quaker John Greenleaf Whittier, the following explanation was included: "The Quakers were very peaceful people and loved the Indians and were not afraid of them—and the Indians never harmed the Quakers."<sup>61</sup> In such ways, the *Ark* taught that it was the duty of young American Jews to learn, and revel in, the history of their country.

Pointing out the need to integrate, lessons in American Jewish history illustrated how Jews had been part of the American experience from the outset. The *Ark* printed material on the Jewish connection with the voyages of Columbus, on Jewish pioneers in the colonies, and on Jews in the settlement of the continent. Just as American Jews had done since the Revolution, the journal never ceased to recount the military service of American Jews: "Wherever, throughout this broad land, there sleep those who died that our banner might indeed be the Flag of Freedom, there sleeps the Jew."<sup>62</sup> One article, titled "Israel in the American Revolution," tells of individuals like Haym Solomon and David Salisbury Franks, whose patriotism proved that the Jew was not

“an alien parasite.”<sup>63</sup> In a larger sense, patriotism became the means for undoing anti-Jewish imagery and attaining America’s acceptance.

Other pieces, like stories and the columns of Cousin Judah, fleshed out the saga of America’s Jews. They spoke of the peddling origins of many Jews and their rise up the economic ladder, of the hardships of immigrant economic life, of the role of women and children in the Jewish family, and of stellar performances by Jewish students in American schools. Local Jewish institutions, like synagogues and other communal organizations, were described in the same sources. Even advertisements could be instructive. In one ad for the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, mention was made of the famous “to bigotry no sanction” letter from George Washington to the Jews of Newport, which the ad called the “first time in the history of the world that the right hand of fellowship was extended by the head of any nation to the Jew.”<sup>64</sup> The historical material taught two lessons — the vibrancy of Jewish creativity in the United States and the contributions that Jews made to the development of the country. America was good to the Jews, and the Jews were good for America.

## The War and Postwar Years

A close reading of the *Ark* reveals major changes that crept into the journal after 1914. To be sure, the same emphasis on virtue, religious observance, and American freedom, and the same kind of stories and legends about ancient and medieval times, still figured prominently. But the very flavor of the periodical was different. Not only did it shrink in size — by 1923 a typical issue was only twenty-five pages — but a much larger percentage of its space was allocated to current events, such as rights for Russian Jews and the appointment of Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court.<sup>65</sup> With more stories, and shorter pieces devoted to wartime and postwar developments, and with the omission of puzzles and fewer pages to the “Letter Box,” the static, even predictable, message of the journal no longer prevailed. Fewer stories ended happily, nor, because of the war, was the pervasive optimistic mood predominant. The *Ark*, which had often seemed to depict a world of sweetness and light bounded by ethical behavior and loyalty to Judaism, now spoke more realistically to American Jewish children living in a pulsating and rapidly changing community. In those ways

it was illustrative of the period that historians have called the “End of American Innocence.”

During the period of American neutrality, August 1914 to April 1917, the *Ark* printed all sorts of pieces on various aspects of the war in Europe — military training and leaders, battles, instances of interreligious cooperation in actual combat, and even spies. At the same time the journal called for Jews, like other Americans, to rally behind the popular campaign of Americanization. It is likely that Cousin Judah’s admonition not to organize Jewish clubs in public schools stemmed in part from a desire for Jewish conformity, i.e., to show the hyper-Americanists that Jews betrayed no ethnic distinctiveness that set them apart from non-Jewish Americans.<sup>66</sup> Pieces on interreligious and interethnic amity served the same purpose.

The dominant theme, however, and one that echoed the loud voice of American isolationism, was pacifism. A poem taken from *Life* magazine captured the prevalent notion of the time that only bankers benefitted during war:

The kings are in the background, issuing commands,  
The queens are in the parlor per etiquette’s demands,  
The bankers in the counting-house are busy multiplying,  
The common people at the front are doing all the dying.<sup>67</sup>

Writers for the *Ark* prayed for world peace and gloried in the fact that the United States was not involved. One short article that appeared in the first month of the war stated: “Today, when most of the flags of Europe are tipped with a crimson hue, the hue of human blood, our own banner flies freely to the wind, unoffended and unoffending.... Peace will throw her mantle of grace upon us and we shall go unafraid about our daily lives.”<sup>68</sup> War meant suffering and heartache; it proved that man had not lived up to the teachings of the Law, Cousin Judah chimed in. A poem from the *Hebrew Standard* even suggested that Israel was now working to make the whole world a Holy Land.<sup>69</sup>

The journal also watched the impact of the war on its European brethren. Since both sides attacked Jews living in the path of the opposing armies, the *Ark* included pleas for the relief of the victims.

At least as important, contributors to the magazine described how Jews worldwide, despite prejudices against them, were ready to do military service for their countries and how they were decorated for heroism. There was hope, therefore, that doubts about Jewish loyalty, long embedded in the beliefs of antisemites, would be laid to rest.

Another theme developed in several stories concerned Jews on the battlefield who fought other Jews within enemy ranks. Meeting in hospitals or prisoner-of-war situations, they discovered that their Jewish background, specifically prayer and the Hebrew language, bound them together. Only one of those stories raised the issue of a conflict of loyalties, such as which took precedence — loyalty to one's country or loyalty to a fellow Jew. In that story, the Jew who captures a spy who is also Jewish does not release his captive to the military authorities.<sup>70</sup>

Like a vast number of American Jews, the *Ark* at first, albeit in not so many words, supported Germany. Czarist Russia, of course, was *the* major consideration. How strange, one writer mused, that the democracies of France and England were allied with a tyrannical regime in the Triple Entente. A month later an article by a German sympathizer, published by Herman Ridder and called "Russia and the Jews," suggested that a German victory might ameliorate the plight of Russian Jewry.<sup>71</sup> Despite Germany's serious propaganda efforts to win American Jewish sympathy, the country's unlimited use of U-boat warfare and the overthrow of the czarist government in March 1917 slowly undermined Germany's appeal. By the time America joined the war, the *Ark* was solidly behind the Allies.

Not unexpectedly, America's entry into the war changed the dominant theme of the *Ark*. Patriotism writ large became the byword. The earlier pacifist message gave way to prayers for peace and a "League of Kindness" to follow an American and Allied victory.<sup>72</sup> Jews, like other Americans, were urged to cheer on the Allies. After all, hadn't France helped the rebel cause during the Revolution?

We seize the chance to pay back France a little of the debt

Our Eagle owes the Fleur de Lys and gallant Lafayette.

So everywhere; sea, land air, to the first line advance

Old Glory and the Stars and Stripes on every breeze in France.<sup>73</sup>

The journal's coverage of the conflict on the various fronts continued, but now the stories and nonfiction emphasized the exploits of American servicemen. Civilians fought too as they bravely bade farewell to sons and brothers or aided soldiers on the homefront. Although most pieces applied equally to Jewish and non-Jewish children — often Jewish names were the only distinguishing mark — some stories linked the war to Jewish themes. A few contributors interpreted the world conflict as a “holy” war, a struggle by the good and the righteous for liberty. One story told about a soldier on guard duty who fantasized that freedom fighters of the past — Washington, Lincoln, Judah the Maccabe, and Mordecai — accompanied him on his rounds.<sup>74</sup> Cousin Judah in particular stressed the Jewish element. Among other things he said that the laws of Moses that underlay civilization were carried by the American army. Since the war itself was caused by a Haman-like spirit, he preached that Jews had to fight in the spirit of Mordecai and Esther.<sup>75</sup> The war also presented an opportunity to preach interreligious unity, and in that spirit the *Ark* proudly hailed the book of Jewish thoughts by England's Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz, which it claimed could bring spiritual comfort to both Christians and Jews.<sup>76</sup>

The *Ark*'s young readers were urged to do their bit for the war effort. While their older brothers were in the service, they could help by planting victory gardens, by contributing to relief drives for American and Allied servicemen, and by praying for an American victory. The children also read of special Jewish relief operations, like the work of the Jewish Welfare Board on behalf of American Jewish soldiers and that of the American Jewish Relief Committee for the Relief of European Jews in the war zones. In more lofty terms the youngsters were told that righteous behavior on their part was a patriotic duty: “The supreme patriotic duty of American girls and boys is to work and play so squarely, to study so earnestly, that they may develop the manhood and womanhood which is the chief glory...of any righteous nation.”<sup>77</sup>

Changes in the *Ark* that began during the war lasted into the postwar era. For one thing, the expanded coverage of current events continued, and readers were kept informed of all sorts of happenings

in the Jewish world, from the ongoing suffering in Russia to the quota system in American universities. News of American Jewish organizations also increased. In addition to Reform institutions mentioned above, reports of the National Farm School, American Jewish Historical Society, United Synagogue (Conservative), Jewish Welfare Board, and Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society were now included. The *Ark* culled such items from the American secular and Anglo-Jewish press; when it began the use of Jewish news agencies, particularly the Jewish Telegraph Agency, it successfully focused the attention of its readers on the condition of world Jewry. Current events were also treated in fiction. One story tells of the efforts of a Russian Jewish boy to enter a *gymnasium* where the number of Jews admitted could not exceed ten percent of the total. In the end, the boy failed the entrance examination because he was unable to multiply fifty-nine by fifty-nine in his head.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps the most dramatic change was the *Ark*'s expanded coverage of the *Yishuv*. The trend had begun during the war, with occasional brief reports on the Jewish settlement in Palestine — harvest time, a Hebrew theater, a medical unit from the United States, plans for a Hebrew University, and General Allenby's military campaign in the Near East.<sup>79</sup> A Zionist poem was also printed in 1917: "He says that he is going to fight/ In the foremost line/ For freedom and for what is right/ And for — Palestine!"<sup>80</sup> Other than items like these, neither attention to, nor endorsement of, Zionism as a political movement ever appeared. Indeed, the journal made only passing mention of the Balfour Declaration, a notable victory for political Zionism.<sup>81</sup>

Like American Reform institutions, and like non-Zionists in general, the *Ark* supported building up the land of Palestine along with the physical and social conditions of the *Yishuv*, but it ignored the desire, at least of American Jews, to create a Jewish state. Thus, Zionist accounts of agronomist Aaron Aaronsohn by Henrietta Szold or the one by Jessie Sampter called "A Week in the Galilee" were perfectly legitimate. So too was the piece by Zionist author Maurice Samuel, in which he called Zionism the thread of hope among Jews in Eastern Europe.<sup>82</sup> Although the magazine freely printed pieces from Zionist magazines, and although one poem hailed the visit of

Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann to the United States,<sup>83</sup> the journal remained squarely in the non-Zionist camp. The sole political loyalty of an American Jewish child was to America, and effusive praise of the country continued in the journal as before. When one youngster, a twelve-year-old from Norfolk, Virginia, wrote that she and her parents were leaving shortly to settle in Palestine, Cousin Judah's answer avoided the subject of *aliya* for the creation of a modern Jewish homeland and merely wished her happiness "in the land of our fathers."<sup>84</sup>

The greatness of America did not blind the *Ark* to the widespread antisemitism of the postwar decade. No longer silent on discrimination as it had been in prewar America, it readily pointed out bigots and bigotry. Not only did it take note of the quotas at universities, but it included short pieces on the revived, and now antisemitic, Ku Klux Klan and the poisonous diatribes of Henry Ford and his newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*.<sup>85</sup> It attacked the exclusion of Jews from jobs and social institutions, and it even reported on an antisemitic episode at the Naval Academy in Annapolis that had required the intercession of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, then assistant secretary of the navy.<sup>86</sup> Enlightening its readers on the pervasiveness of Jew-hatred, it also indicted those Jews who discriminated against fellow Jews. While the *Ark* revealed various manifestations of anti-Jewish practices, it omitted serious analyses of the problem or any pat solutions. For example, in only one story does a Jew suggest that intermarriage would end antisemitism.<sup>87</sup>

As they had before the war, contributors to the *Ark* still preached that self-respect was the best response to discrimination. The popular rabbi, Stephen Wise of New York City, explained that the Jew himself might be at fault. Lacking self-respect, Wise said, the Jew preferred to renounce what he thought the world regarded as offensive.<sup>88</sup>

Again, as in prewar years, the *Ark* also taught that the individual's behavior reflected upon the entire group. A young immigrant on his journey to America is cautioned: "And because you are a Jew, your life must be even cleaner, you must try harder always to do right, because here in America the Jew must prove that when any one in the world says the Jew is not righteous, and God-fearing, and self-respecting, that

one lies!”<sup>89</sup> Some writers did find a new weapon against antisemitism, i.e., the record chalked up by Jewish servicemen during the war. One article argued that the war record indisputably laid to rest Henry Ford’s charge that Jews were disloyal. Amplifying that point, a poem on exclusionary policies called “No Hebrews Wanted” bitterly recalled that the policy had not applied to Jewish soldiers: “You see this Croix de Guerre?/ No Hebrew wanted here, they say/ They never said so - there!”<sup>90</sup>

The *Ark*’s news of general American affairs was still sparse, and readers needed other sources to learn about the Senate’s rejection of the League of Nations or Secretary Charles Hughes’ plans for naval disarmament, and even events that very much involved American Jews like the major labor strikes of 1919 and the postwar Red Scare. But through its fiction primarily, the magazine captured much of the popular social mood. To be sure, the familiar themes of the poor but virtuous and God-fearing youngster who rescues his family or friends in modern and premodern times still abounded, but other material showed how much the journal had moved on. For example, the heroes/heroines were not uniformly of high school age; more and more they were found in college, often with the trappings of fur coats and automobiles. Different too were the fictional (and non-fictional) “think” pieces in lieu of simple plots with happy endings. The favorite subjects of that genre dealt with the reconciliation of emotions with reason and the ranking of personal priorities. One can conclude in light of such changes that the typical reader of the *Ark* had grown older and more mature.

Fictional accounts set in the age of the flapper showed how the regnant social mood influenced the American Jewish lifestyle. Young Jewish women left home to attend college or to work in large cities, and some adopted the code of the liberated woman, replete with anti-conventional opinions, wild parties, and sexual license. One story was especially relevant. It tells of Helen, in an apartment of her own, who mingles with the socialist and progressive set of New York’s Greenwich Village. A pure and innocent girl, she dislikes the thought of casual sex and wants men only as friends. On the advice of a friend, however, she decides to throw off her inhibitions. In the end, she is saved from the

“precipice” by a young man who loves and respects her. (Helen remains pure, but clearly her friends do not.)<sup>91</sup> A variation on the flapper theme comes in a story about three college girls after the war. They applaud the candor of the new youth, but they reject the “garish” habits of “rouge, lip-sticks, extremely short skirts and cigarette smoking.”<sup>92</sup> Not all Jews of college age were caught up in the cult of “rebellious youth,” but enough were to warrant an outburst from Rabbi Stephen Wise. Lower standards of conduct, he charged, could be found among the daughters of “nice people”: “overmuch smoking,” “indecent drinking,” “lewd dancing,” “semi-nude dressing,” make-up, and all night-parties. Don’t blame the spirit of the time, he added, but raise the standards.<sup>93</sup>

The theme of licentious youth blended easily with that of the new woman. Before the war, the virtuous Jewish woman in the *Ark*’s fiction was one who fulfilled the duties of caring for a husband and children with modesty, diligence, and self-sacrifice. Adept at the household tasks of cooking, cleaning, and sewing, she found her happiness in the well-being of her family, devotion to God, and charitable work. The role model for her daughters, she accepted the limits on her ambitions and expectations without complaint. The war shattered that all-pervasive image, and the old-fashioned housewife and mother now shared center stage with the new woman. Daughters left home, with or without their parents’ consent, for wartime jobs or college and then post-college careers. In the economic marketplace they were no longer relegated to the ranks of lower school teachers or office workers, and in some stories they were doctors, actors, or artists. Independent and self-sufficient, they could even defend themselves against physical attacks. One story, for example, on the new Jewish woman tells of Betty, alone in an apartment, who courageously brandishes a toy revolver and successfully foils a thief’s attempt to make off with the silverware.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, their religious observance grew weaker, and the number of intermarriages increased. Readers of the *Ark*, however, were not left in doubt as to which image was superior, that of the old-fashioned housewife or that of the newly liberated woman. Mixed marriages usually turned sour, or the new woman, disillusioned or unhappy, mended her ways and returned to her home and/or religion. Although true virtue and morality usually triumphed, one story is an exception.

In *The Old Rose in the New Garden*, a mother who holds fast to the earlier model as did her mother and grandmother favors her son and ignores her daughter's aspirations. The son runs away and amounts to nothing, but when her virtuous daughter returns home after establishing herself as a renowned singer, the mother's mind snaps.<sup>95</sup>

According to the *Ark*, the best response to the erosion of morality and virtuous behavior was a positive affirmation of religious faith. As it had before the war, the journal insisted on loyalty to Judaism. It recognized that in upwardly mobile Jewish circles in some synagogues, as one writer put it, religious observance was not "fashionable"<sup>96</sup> and that Jews, like others, were freethinkers, radicals, and members of the Ethical Culture and Christian Science movements. But the magazine brooked no compromise with Jews who shrugged off their faith. In one story where a Jewish family is divided between Ethical Culture and Christian Science, the hero is the young son who, despite the family's pressure, holds fast to Judaism: "I'm a Jew," he says, "I've enlisted for life." Isabella Hess's contribution was a poem that emphasized the Jewish mission or responsibility for carrying the "torch of Truth" to the world: "O bear it aloft that the world may know/ You, too, are brave and true! ... / That for the Truth you dare live—and die—/ As fitting the name of Jew!"<sup>97</sup> The journal reinforced its preaching with repeated admonitions from rabbis and laymen on the need to read religious, especially Jewish, books in a secular age.

During the postwar era the *Ark* took greater cognizance of the Jewish skeptic and the nonbeliever and often preached to the individual just as it had to the group. Cousin Judah, for example, told the individual that he could find comfort in religion; living up to the Jewish ideal, he said, and not the label of Reform or Orthodoxy, was the Jew's real concern.<sup>98</sup> Another writer advised the individual not to fear the obligations of Judaism, that Judaism was a joy and delight and not a burden. Lines from a poem taken from the *Sunday School Times* summed up the benefits of religion for the individual: "He that believeth shall walk serene/ With ordered stepplings and leisured mien/ He dwells in the midst of eternities,/ And the timeless ages of God are his."<sup>99</sup> But whether speaking to the group or to the individual, the *Ark* found the postwar setting even less congenial than the prewar years to an emphasis on traditional religion.

The most striking change in the fiction dealing with the contemporary scene was the portrayal of the first-and second-generation prewar immigrants from Eastern Europe. Replacing the earlier stratum of German Jews as the center of attention, the East Europeans were no longer the pitiful tenement dwellers (although tenements still housed many, particularly those in stories about postwar immigrants) to be admired for their noble virtues, religious devotion, and patriotic zeal. An exception was a learned and studious emigrant from Lithuania who falls in with the wrong crowd and becomes a drunkard and a gambler and subjects his family to extreme poverty.<sup>100</sup> Rather, those who had rapidly advanced on the economic and social ladders predominated. Most, who had built up their businesses from pushcart peddling or a hole-in-the-wall ghetto store, had profited from wartime production and holdings in real estate. They lived well, they employed servants, and they sent their children to college. Vertical mobility was matched by horizontal mobility, as increasing numbers of Jews left the first areas of settlement for more expensive neighborhoods. In sum, they were well equipped to enjoy America's decade of prosperity.

But, as a large proportion of the stories concerning the successful Jewish entrepreneur recounted, the attendant results of socioeconomic advances were far from admirable. In many of the "think" pieces, the *arrivistes* were a vulgar and distasteful lot — their speech was ungrammatical and heavily accented, they flaunted their wealth in flashy clothes and jewels, they gambled excessively at cards, and they raced to keep up with the Joneses. They distanced themselves from old-fashioned religious observances, they laughed at Orthodox fellow Jews, and they even preferred appearance over substance in the choice of a rabbi.<sup>101</sup> Ironically, the picture that many Jewish writers drew in the *Ark* was one that non-Jewish antisemites had held since the nineteenth century.

More than before, the *Ark's* fiction saw rapid acculturation as the driving force in the life of the Jewish postwar as well as prewar immigrant. One girl succinctly spelled it out to her friend: "Don't never talk Yiddish. We're Yankee now."<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, acculturation had its tragic side too. Renouncing Yiddish was often followed by a

renunciation of things Jewish and, if nothing equivalent filled the void, the immigrant stripped of his heritage remained, as in Oscar Handlin's classic analysis, "uprooted." At the same time, the push for acculturation, especially if accompanied by material success, widened the generation gap. Stories told of children who were ashamed of their parents and homes that appeared too Jewish. An unusual twist comes in one story where the heroine blames her father, a radical, for not having instructed her in Judaism.<sup>103</sup> Grasping for more freedom, the children cut their ties to their elders and to their siblings in order to create a different and totally independent way of life. For example, one story is of a Jewish millionaire and philanthropist who breaks with his son when the latter marries a non-Jew. Only his wife's deathbed request leads him to invite his son and daughter-in-law to the mother's funeral.<sup>104</sup> Another story, called *Apples of Sodom*, is of two brothers raised in the tenements, one a poor and unsuccessful poet and the second a wealthy man who indulges in high society and high living. Inevitably, the two drift away from their parents and from each other.<sup>105</sup> The reader of such tales can readily understand how the image of strong family loyalties among Jews, an image long touted by non-Jews as well as by Jews, was undermined.

## Conclusion

The *Ark* ceased publication with the issue of December 1923. It neither announced that it was going out of business, nor did it give any other indication of its intentions. Doubtless the death of its publisher, Simon Bacharach, in November was the immediate determinant. A hands-on publisher, Bacharach not only guided the journal, but in light of the unusually low prices for the books and magazines advertised in its pages (often in conjunction with a subscription to the *Ark*), it is not unlikely that he contributed financially as well.

Another reason may have been an inability to elicit a sufficient number of original contributions. Indeed, in the journal's later years more and more material was reprinted from outside sources. To be sure, it could frequently, as it had, use pieces from rabbis and students at the Reform and Conservative rabbinical seminaries, and it had unlimited access to ancient and medieval Jewish texts. But some of

its popular writers, including Isabella Hess, were also publishing their stories in other journals.

Still a third explanation is suggested by the changed focus of the journal. During the war and postwar years, more and more pieces — items from the news agencies, the “think” pieces, the tragedies that followed in the wake of rapid acculturation — were unsuitable for children below high school age. Like the heroes and heroines in the fiction, the readers had grown up. A few seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds wrote that they continued to read the *Ark* after graduating high school, but encouraging as that was, the magazine had drifted from its original purpose of reaching a younger group. Another publication of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the *Union Home Study Magazine*, for young adults only partially filled the void. The name changed in 1921 to *Young Israel*, but that periodical had no connection with the *Young Israel* that had immediately preceded the *Ark*.

For twelve full years the *Ark*, one of the oldest and longest-lived journals for American Jewish children, preached its three-fold message — absolute morality, a primary loyalty to the United States, and a commitment to Judaism. Its attempts to guide young readers along those lines were, in the main, impressive. Most issues were well balanced, mixing fiction and nonfiction, historical and contemporary material, and information on places and personalities. How well the *Ark* succeeded in influencing its young readers to accept its prescriptions for proper Jewish living cannot be proved, but thanks to the testimony of countless letters to Cousin Judah, we do know that it gained the commendation of a wide readership.

The *Ark*'s three cardinal tenets boiled down to one central thesis: America was *the* Promised Land for the Jews. As we have seen, the journal tended to ignore manifestations of American antisemitism, and even in the 1920s it refused to treat discrimination as a major problem. Upon the Jews, however, rested the obligation to conform to American beliefs and tastes. It wasn't a difficult task according to the journal; it compromised neither ethical beliefs nor Jewish identity. After all, as the journal assumed, the proper American was expected to be as virtuous, patriotic, and God-fearing as was the ideal Jew. The *Ark*'s tone often

sounded apologetic, especially when it discussed Jewish contributions to America. Apologia, like attempts to transmit a reverence for things American and efforts to emphasize similarities between American and Jewish traditions, were calculated to prove the compatibility of Judaism and Americanism. If, for example, the higher law of America rested on the Bible, or if Sukkoth was the same as Thanksgiving and the exodus from Egypt the same as the journey of the Pilgrims to the New World, the American heritage was very much akin to the Jewish. The *Ark*'s use of fiction and nonfiction from secular sources can also be seen as a way of proving that Jews read and appreciated the same classical and contemporary literature that all Americans did. As discussed above, even the Judaism it preached was that of a religion, unencumbered by ethnic loyalties and supportive of acculturation. In all dimensions, therefore, the virtuous and loyal Jew was eminently acceptable to Christian America.

Although loyalty to America required no concrete duties of Jews other than those imposed on all citizens, commitment to Judaism did. Pride in a Jewish identity and self-respect as a Jew, the *Ark* taught, rested on a foundation of knowledge and observance. Well aware of the religious conditions in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, when observance of Jewish law and ritual continued to wane, and when a growing percentage of Jewish children received little or no formal Jewish education, the *Ark* strove to revitalize both knowledge of Jewish history and observance of religious ceremonies. While it insisted on the importance of Jewish studies, it also took on for itself the role of teacher. It gave the young reader a glimpse of Jewish life and thought in ancient and medieval times; it taught the rituals of the Sabbath and of Jewish holidays; and its stories, set in the past and the present, illustrated the rewards of living according to Jewish values. Supplementing its instruction, the *Ark* encouraged youngsters to read books, not only on Jewish heritage but on the need of religion in general. Nevertheless, evidence from the journal's fiction suggests that its efforts were largely futile. Before the war, confirmation was the high point, and end point, of a Jewish education; after the war, neither the ceremony of confirmation nor *bar mitzvah* appeared.

Some pieces in the journal suggest that the quest for a vibrant Jewish religion may have been illusionary. In the first place, the pluralists, or those accepting of different varieties of Judaism, had opened the door to all sorts of syncretistic combinations. Secondly, doubtless realizing that they were swimming against the tide of popular practice, others suggested compromises with standard ritual — less-stringent observance of the dietary laws, the usual period of mourning, and the observance of holidays. Thus, like American religion generally, Jewish practice rested not only on the individual congregation but on the individual Jew.

For the social historian and the historian of immigration, the *Ark* is a valuable source of information on the daily lives of American Jews in the early twentieth century. The fiction and the readers' letters in particular provide details on what Jews ate, how they dressed, where they lived and worked, the schools to which they sent their children, their family structure, their voluntary associations, what they believed, and how they related to other Americans. It is from relatively unknown sources like the *Ark* that standard interpretations of the course of American Jewish history can be amplified, criticized, or emended.

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## *Notes*

Notes are used only for direct quotations from the *Ark* and for the mention of singular instances. My thanks to Esther Green, Adina Feldstern and Yael Rosen for their assistance and encouragement.

<sup>1</sup> *Ark* I (November 1911): 567.

<sup>2</sup> Front material in *Ark* II (January 1912). For a while the journal promoted the Menorah League, a national network of the *Ark*'s readers "who, in their devotion to Judaism and to the ideals of their country will stand proudly amongst their fellows." Front material in *Ark* II (April 1912); see also *Ark* I (November 1911): 570–71.

<sup>3</sup> *Ark* XIII (December 1923): 334.

<sup>4</sup> A letter from Isabella Hess of Troy, New York, to the editor, in *Sabbath Visitor*, July 10, 1885, 371.

<sup>5</sup> Non-Jewish contributors can be found in the following issues: *Ark* I (December 1911): 713; II (January, March 1912): 53–56, 237 and seq., 252; IV (August 1914): 436.

<sup>6</sup> *Ark* also sold Purim plays adapted for Jewish religious schools.

<sup>7</sup> *Ark* IV (May 1914): 307.

<sup>8</sup> *Ark* IV (November 1914): 627.

<sup>9</sup> *Ark* V (June 1915): 308.

<sup>10</sup> *Ark* V (January 1915): 37–38.

<sup>11</sup> Although this section concentrates on the period prior to 1917, a few references are to the years 1917–1923. *Ark* III (January, July 1913): 6–8, 428; V (June 1915): 280–82.

<sup>12</sup> *Ark* V (January 1915): 32.

<sup>13</sup> *Ark* III (December 1913): 745.

<sup>14</sup> *Ark* II (January 1912): 64–67.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>16</sup> *Ark* I (December 1914): 706–10; II (January 1912): 9–13. A description of a Jewish girl who doesn't fit in appears in one episode: "She's loud-mouthed, bragging, conceited, over-dressed, and of course, in the swaggerest [*sic*] style." II (July 1912): 571.

<sup>17</sup> *Ark* I (December 1911): 715.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 686; IX (September 1919): 231–40.

<sup>19</sup> *Ark* IV (August 1914): 466.

<sup>20</sup> *Ark* II (January 1912): 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ark* III (October 1913): 656.

<sup>22</sup> *Ark* III (August 1913): 512; IV (April, November 1914): 195, 621–23.

<sup>23</sup> Begins in the *Ark* I (November 1911): 572.

<sup>24</sup> Begins in the *Ark* IV (July 1914): 405.

<sup>25</sup> *Ark* II (June 1912): 550.

<sup>26</sup> Kohut began in *Ark* II (January 1912): 14–16; Raisin began in IV (June 1914): 367.

<sup>27</sup> *Ark* II (August 1912): 690.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 667.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 690.

- <sup>30</sup> *Ark* III (November 1913): 686.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ark* II (October 1912): 642; II (August 1912): 667.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ark* II (February 1914): 79-80.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ark* III (July 1913): 447.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ark* V (March 1915): 140.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ark* III (February 1913): 92 and seq.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ark* II (July 1912): 569.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ark* II (September 1912): 813.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ark* IV (July 1914): 420.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ark* IV (February, May 1914): 115, 309.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ark* IV (July 1914): 422.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ark* III (September, December 1913): 549, 751; IV (May 1914): 289-94; XIII (January 1923): 3. The *Ark* printed excerpts from Rabbi Emil Hirsch's sermon on "The Ancient Anti-Semite and his Modern Successors," but the sermon was beyond the comprehension of the youngsters. I (November 1911): 579. Two other pieces discussed Charles Dickens's Fagin and tried to depict the author as someone friendly to Jews. II (January 1912): 16, VIII (May 1918): 142 and seq.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ark* IX (January 1919). In a story set in Europe, the writer explained that Jewish faults were caused by Christian prejudice. III (December 1913): 751 and seq.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ark* VII (April 1917): 122.
- <sup>44</sup> For example, see the *Ark* V (December 1915): 580 and seq. One unusual story is of an Irish Catholic boy who accepted the anti-Jewish stereotypes but nonetheless wanted to be Jewish. See IX (February 1919): 37-42.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ark* IV (June 1914): 322.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ark* VIII (June 1918): 177 and seq.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ark* IX (September 1919): 247.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ark* II (November 1912): 961.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ark* II (December 1912): 1049.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ark* V (December 1915): 588.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ark* VI (February 1916): 82-83.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ark* II (April 1912): 391-92.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ark* IX (December 1919): 326.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ark* VII (January 1917): 3-6.
- <sup>55</sup> One poem was taken from the *Christian Advocate*. See the *Ark* VI (September 1916): 418.

- <sup>56</sup> *Ark* V (December 1915): 605.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ark* II (February 1912): 104.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ark* V (November 1915): 522. A similar theme was developed in a long poem reprinted from *Lippincott's*. See III (December 1913): 766–67.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ark* VI (July 1916): 291.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ark* VII (June 1917): 177; II (April 1912): 319.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ark* II (February 1912): 176.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ark* III (May 1913): 310.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ark* II (July 1912): 580ff.
- <sup>64</sup> Those who purchased a copy of the encyclopedia received a copy of the letter. See the ads in the front material in volume II of the *Ark's* first issues.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ark* IV (December 1914): 677; VI (March 1916): 128–29; VII (November 1917): 326.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ark* VI (February 1916): 83.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ark* VI (June 1916): 279.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ark* IV (August 1914): 444.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ark* VI (April, June 1916): 169, 272.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ark* IV (December 1914): 699.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ark* IV (August, September 1914): 464, 507–9.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ark* VIII (August 1918): 240.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ark* VIII (January 1918): 12.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ark* VIII (February 1918): 43.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 58; VIII (March 1918): 92.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ark* VIII (May 1918): 141.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ark* VII (June 1917): 184.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ark* XIII (September 1923): 244–48.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ark* VII (December 1917): 368; VIII (September, November 1918): 280; VIII, 339; IX (March 1919): 78.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ark* VII (November 1917): 334.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ark* VIII (August 1918): 239.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ark* IX (July 1919): 171; X (November 1920): 287; XII (March 1922): 67.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ark* XII (March 1922): 81.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ark* IX (October 1919): 276.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ark* XII (January, December 1922): 23, 329.

<sup>86</sup> *Ark* XII (July 1922): 185.

<sup>87</sup> *Ark* XIII (February 1923): 31 and seq.

<sup>88</sup> *Ark* XIII (April 1923): 105.

<sup>89</sup> *Ark* XI (May, September 1921): 134; XI, 250.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>91</sup> *Ark* IX (April 1918): 92-96.

<sup>92</sup> *Ark* XII (August 1922): 215-18.

<sup>93</sup> *Ark* XI (May 1921): 127.

<sup>94</sup> *Ark* XIII (January 1923): 22-26. In one earlier instance a woman is an archeologist. See volume II (June 1912): 491 and seq.

<sup>95</sup> *Ark* XII (June 1922): 157 and seq.

<sup>96</sup> *Ark* IX (January 1919): 23-25.

<sup>97</sup> *Ark* XII (March, May 1922): 58, 118 and seq.

<sup>98</sup> *Ark* IX (August 1919): 217; (October 1919): 275.

<sup>99</sup> *Ark* X (August, September 1920): 208, 228-29.

<sup>100</sup> *Ark* XII (July 1922): 171-83.

<sup>101</sup> *Ark* XII (December 1922): 323 and seq.; see also two stories on the modern rabbi in X (November 1920).

<sup>102</sup> *Ark* X (July 1920): 184.

<sup>103</sup> *Ark* XII (August 1922): 215-18.

<sup>104</sup> *Ark* XII (June 1922): 153ff.

<sup>105</sup> *Ark* XII (September 1922): 232 and seq.